


Designing Appropriately

Design projects to examine how contemporary civic buildings can be distinguishable in suburban and regional Australia.



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Masters of Architecture by Project
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2007

RMIT University

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Appropriate Durable Record

Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since July 2003; and, any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged.

Stuart Harrison
17.09.2007

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Modern Ways of Making Civic Architecture

TEXT/CONTEXT OBJECT

This illustrated chapter is a written and illustrated context to the masters by project. The chapter addresses the question of civic image and quality in historical examples from Australia and overseas. The projects here form a selective post-war chronological survey of some key approaches to civic architecture, providing a context for my own three design projects.

This chapter will investigate several strategies used in mainly post-war and contemporary work to suggest the civic nature of buildings. These are organised into five broad strategies – the use of Arches and Arcading, Using Classicism, Borrowing from the Corporate, Ingraining Pattern and the use of Text as Facade.

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Chapter 1

Introduction to the Research

Title of Research:

Designing Appropriately:
Design projects to examine
how contemporary
civic buildings can be
distinguishable in suburban
and regional Australia.

Research Question:

How can architectural design
projects embody qualities
of civic presence in an
undistinguished, typically
suburban landscape?

This research investigates contemporary architecture's difficulty in distinguishing new civic buildings from commercial and other non-public building types. Historically, the desire to create a clear typological distinction for the civic has come and gone through periods of time and key practitioners. Through projects, the masters attempts to formulate strategies to speak of the civic in the contemporary condition. The research aims to consider architectural language and its use in the context of new public buildings to establish a sense of difference from dominant urban typologies, and be grounded within a contemporary reading of the civic.

This project-based research features three principal resolved design projects – a Civic Centre in Mildura; Council Offices for the City of Hume, Broadmeadows; and a new 'civic school' in the Melbourne outer suburb of Mill Park. The design process undertaken for each project is subject to investigation of selected precedents, both contemporary and historical, and these are explored through an illustrated written chapter.

Key selected examples and case studies are extensively discussed in Chapter 3 which contextualises the research. This is not an exhaustive survey but an examination of civic strategies which have been encountered during the research, and to varying degrees absorbed and extracted from the design projects. This to an fro role of this chapter is reflected in its location within the middle of the document.

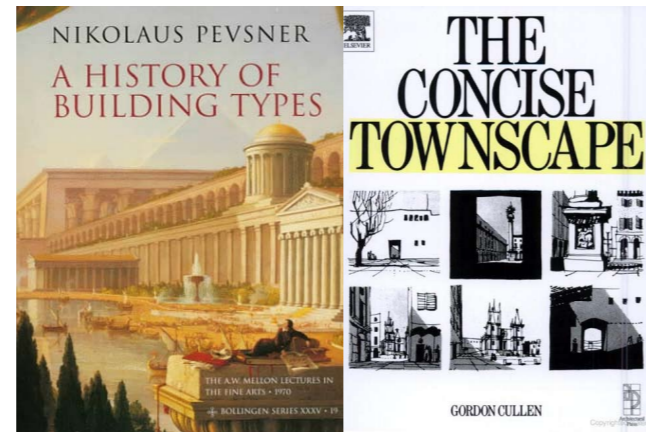
The projects reflect the importance of urban design, study of appropriate precedent and engineering in the design task. Each one tackles the problem of civic language in a different context and with a different set of parameters, the third project attempting to 'learn' from the first two. The research has also been informed by case studies of recent projects with similar goals, writing and conference papers delivered over the last four years.

This document will focus on the processes undertaken to complete the three projects – the use of precedent, brief, site, architectural language, and association and sets up the projects as a series of possible solutions to the problem of both distinguishing the civic and developing an understanding of an appropriate civic. My aim is for this research to be of use in real-world projects that demand distinctive (but not iconic) civic buildings in suburban and regional Australian locations.

The research sits among wider architectural questions – the role of sustainability and environmental ethics in architectural expression, and the zeitgeist of the digital. Both areas of concern affect architectural discourse and practice now and in the future. Rather than investigate sustainability or digitisation, the masters focuses on context – the architectural question of how to make new buildings appropriate for their (public) program and physical site. At the same time, this research draws upon digital techniques alongside traditional architectural methods of development and representation, and continually addresses and incorporates environmentally sustainable design.

The key assumption of the masters is that the lack of contemporary language to describe the civic is a problem in itself; for some, a lack of distinct typological expression is one of the great triumphs of the 20th century – it suggests that all works can be great works, and not restricted by dogma. This lack of distinction in building types became a problem in the post-war period, when Modernism itself became a dogma that genuinely destroyed systems of identification and place. I will look at the way Modernism ended a system of building types and the subsequent crisis created within its system of urbanism.

The concepts of townscape, decorum and typology are the key architectural and urban design frameworks used to describe the civic merit and presence of buildings. The masters is in response to a wider question of the how civic buildings can (and have been) distinguishable from other building types. I have assumed that the expanded suburban environment lacking in meaningful places of assembly, identification and civility is caused by an absence in architectural language, rather than a failing in social fabric. An architectural with architectural solutions. The history of architectural appropriateness is relevant here, through the work of Dr. Peter Kohane and other key authors of the topic such as Nikolaus Pevsner (in relation to typology) and Gordon Cullen on townscape. It is from these texts that I develop the notion that urban design is a field of endeavour that discusses appropriateness of architectural language and appearance of buildings, topics often not explored in architectural texts. The design and published work of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown also forms an over-arching context to my work; and was pivotal in the rejection of Modernist abstraction from the late 1960s onwards.



Peter Kohane's investigation into Decorum provides an introductory context to the area of concern. His 'Decorum' is the study of the appropriate role buildings take relative to each other. This idea is principally made through the paper 'The eclipse of a commonplace idea: decorum in architectural theory' and lectures he has given on the topic, in which he describes a pre-Modern sensibility of appropriate architectural treatments based on urban locations and the relative importance of 'civic hierarchy of individual buildings'. He states,

The rejection of decorum was part of a general rejection of the past, something especially justified following the disasters of the First World War. Little could be salvaged from what was thought to be the West's decadent cultural traditions, least of all its systems of courtesy – it was best to start anew.

and furthermore concludes,

The core of the idea of decorum remains valuable, illuminating the relations of social ideals and overall urban form, and providing a model of the way buildings 'speak' to their audience and other buildings, comprising a permanent display of utterances that contribute to the making of self-awareness of the public realm.¹

Kohane places the problem of legible civic architecture within our time, and makes apparent the role of the citizen in this discussion of civility.

¹ Kohane, P, Kohane, P & Hill, M, 'The eclipse of a commonplace idea: decorum in architectural theory', ARQ: Architectural Research Quarterly 2001, v.5, n.1, p73



Federation Square, Melbourne, Lab Architecture Studio, 2002

Kohane has also observed that in the current cultural and urban context a basic system of decorum is not only long gone, but also reversed.² He has stated that new private citizen's houses, which under a decorous system would be 'simple' edifices, have become the most refined and detailed architectural projects that are published and written about. Recently it has become apparent that one of the main architectural techniques traditionally used to establish a building's importance, that of the level of classicism, reflects Kohane's theory on decorum reversal. New public buildings are often abstracted and 'simple' whereas new mass suburban houses are configured as symmetrical classical buildings, or what has become popularly known as 'McMansions'.

This of course is not always the case in relation to public buildings – the other major trend rather than abstraction is unique expression, which does distinguish a building from its context, but then from all other buildings – its success is dependant on this uniqueness. This is the cult of the author – a tendency that perhaps always operated, seen in Modern projects such as the Sydney Opera House. This trend for unique public works is best demonstrated internationally by Frank O. Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, and locally in projects such as Federation Square and Minifie Nixon's VCA Centre for Ideas. Indeed, the idea of deliberately producing a work that is not unique but has associations with other works and particular programs is a idea seen as thoroughly dated and abandoned. The last time this idea was revisited was in the 1980s Post Modern architectural movement, where association and typology were given a new lease of life. The legacy of this approach still exists within some Australian architecture practices.³

Following a path that navigates the mute and the unique, this masters attempts through three design projects, and a text/context written chapter, to explore and develop possibilities for a legible contemporary civic architecture.

² Kohane, P, Decorum (lecture), given at RMIT Architecture, July 2004.

³ Various practices are discussed within the document that employ this approach. The City of Wanneroo offices (pictured) is an example.



Wagga Wagga Civic Centre, NSW, Garner Davis, 1999



Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Frank Gehry, 1997



VCA Centre for Ideas, Southbank, Minifie Nixon, 2003



City of Wanneroo Administration Centre & Council Chamber, WA, Woodhead International BDH & Hocking Planning & Architecture, 2000

civ·ic

Function: adjective

: of or relating to a citizen, a city, citizenship, or civil affairs

Source: Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of Law, © 1996 Merriam-Webster, Inc.

civic

adj 1: of or relating or belonging to a city; "civic centre"; "civic problems" 2: of or relating to or befitting citizens as individuals; "civil rights"; "civil liberty"; "civic duties"; "civic pride" [syn: civil]

Source: WordNet ® 2.0, © 2003 Princeton University

townscape

–noun

1. a scene or view, either pictorial or natural, of a town or city.
2. the planning and building of structures in a town or city, with special concern for aesthetically pleasing results.

Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1), Based on the Random House Unabridged Dictionary

town•scape

n.

1. The appearance of a town or city; an urban scene: "The high school . . . once dominated American townscapes the way the cathedral dominated medieval European cities" (Dennis A. Williams).
2. A depiction of an urban scene.

The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition

decorum

–noun

1. dignified propriety of behaviour, speech, dress, etc.
2. the quality or state of being decorous; orderliness; regularity.
3. Usually, decorums. an observance or requirement of polite society.

[Origin: 1560–70; < L *decōrum*, n. use of neut. of *decōrus decorous*]

—Synonyms 1. politeness, manners, dignity. See etiquette.

Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1) Based on the Random House Unabridged Dictionary

decorum

n.

1. Appropriateness of behaviour or conduct; propriety: "In the Ireland of the 1940's ... the stolidity of a long, empty, grave face was thought to be the height of decorum and profundity" (John McGahern).
2. Decorums. The conventions or requirements of polite behaviour: the formalities and decorums of a military funeral.
3. The appropriateness of an element of an artistic or literary work, such as style or tone, to its particular circumstance or to the composition as a whole.

[Latin *decōrum*, from *decōrus*, becoming, handsome; see decorous.]

The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition

appropriate

–adjective

1. suitable or fitting for a particular purpose, person, occasion, etc.: an appropriate example; an appropriate dress.
2. belonging to or peculiar to a person; proper: Each played his appropriate part.

–verb (used with object)

3. to set apart, authorize, or legislate for some specific purpose or use: The legislature appropriated funds for the university.
4. to take to or for oneself; take possession of.
5. to take without permission or consent; seize; expropriate: "He appropriated the trust funds for himself."
6. to steal, esp. to commit petty theft.

Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1), Based on the Random House Unabridged Dictionary

Major References, Annotated

Boyer, Christine, *The City of Collective Memory*, MIT Press, 1996

Boyer's work discussed typology at several key moments, particularly through the work of Aldo Rossi.

Broadbent, Geoffrey, *Emerging Concepts in Urban Space Design*, Spoon Press, 1990

Broadbent's often person based summary of the key ideas in urban design deals extensively with 1980's Post Modern urbanism. It also discusses townscape and architecture through urban terms.

Cullen, Gordon, *The Concise Townscape*, Architectural Press

The source text on townscape, and ideas clearly explained with diagrams and photographs of 'good' urban form. He states townscape as,

the art of giving visual coherence and organisation to the jumble of buildings, streets and spaces that make up the urban environment ...

the reason being to

take all the elements that go to create the environment ... and weave them together in such a way that drama is released.

Examination of existing urban configurations is to be used in new work and to create a 'sense of place'.

de Botton, Alain, *The Architecture of Happiness*, Pantheon Books, 2006

Alain de Botton is a popular philosopher and in this book he attempts to discuss the reason for an absence of beauty in the modern city. His argument suggests balance and harmony are important criteria. He attempts to decode the reasons for architectural expression.

Goldhagen, Sarah Williams, *Louis Kahn's Situation Modernism*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2001.

This comprehensive book dispels several myths regarding the work of Kahn, and makes clear his interest in the intellectual context (as opposed to sole genius) and desire to produce new civic form,

Like other space frames, City Tower symbolically re-enacted the hidden order underlying nature, and because the project was based on geometries found in

organic and inorganic form, it would be more universally accessible than the Beaux-Arts city hall nearby, which relied on cultural precedents and so implied a more restricted audience that was familiar with them. In its realization the project would manifest the aesthetic of authenticity; in its symbolism and planning, it would set forth a civic idiom for all by representing the commonality of humanity in nature, from microcosm to macrocosm.

Pevsner, Nikolaus, *History of Building Types*, Princeton, 1976

The key text on typology, the large book's conclusion features the line 'My own answer is this: every building creates associations in the mind of the beholder – whether the architect likes it or not.'

Kohane, P & Hill, M, 'The eclipse of a commonplace idea: decorum in architectural theory', *ARQ: Architectural Research Quarterly* 2001, v.5, n.1

In this paper the authors describe a pre-Modern sensibility of appropriate architectural treatments based on urban locations and the relative importance of 'civic hierarchy of individual buildings'. From the paper,

the rejection of decorum was part of a general rejection of the past, something especially justified following the disasters of the First World War. Little could be salvaged from what as thought to be the West' decadent cultural traditions, least of all its systems of courtesy – it was best to start anew.

... the core of the idea of decorum remains valuable, illuminating the relations of social ideals and overall urban form, and providing a model of the way buildings 'speak' to their audience and other buildings, comprising a permanent display of utterances that contribute to the making of self-awareness of the public realm.

Architectural Design, editions in 1980s, such as AD50 Post-Modern Classicism, - The New Synthesis AD58 The New Classicism, AD52 Free-Style Classicism, AD63 Paternoster Square and the New Classical Tradition, and AD Profiles 18:Rob & Leon Krier

The 1980s editions of AD catalogue – the shifting into critical popularity of Post Modern classicism, and then Deconstruction. Charles Jencks and the Krier brothers are dominant contributors.

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Bergdoll, Barry, B. *European Architecture 1750–1890*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000

Cavalcanti, Lauro, 'Oscar Niemeyer and Brazilian Modernism', *Oscar Niemeyer – A Legend of Modernism*, Birkhauser, Basel, 2003

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Forty, Adrian, *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture*, Thames & Hudson, New York, 2000

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Hoppen, Donald W., *The Seven Ages of Frank Lloyd Wright*, Dover, Mineola NY, 1993

Kohane, Peter, 'Decorum' (lecture), given at RMIT Architecture, July 2004.

Kostof, Spiro, *A History of Architecture: Settings and Rituals*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985

Levine, Neil, 'The Romantic Idea of Architectural Legibility: Henri Labrouste and the Neo-Grec', *The Architecture of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts*, Drexler (ed), MOMA, New York, 1977

Markham, Michael, 'Marion Made?' *Architectural Review Australia* 78 (Summer 2001/02):

McCarthy, Robert, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, Phaidon, London, 1999

Niemeyer, Oscar, 'My Architecture', *Oscar Niemeyer – A Legend of Modernism*, Birkhauser, Basel, 2003

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Reed, Justin, 'Alternative Functions: Oscar Niemeyer and the Poetics of Modernity' *Modernism / Modernity*, Vol 12, Number 2, John Hopkins University Press, 2005

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Summerson, John, 'The Case for a Theory of Modern Architecture', *The Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, London, June 1957

Venturi, Scott-Brown, Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*, revised edition, MIT Press, Boston, 1977

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websites:
www.architecture.com.au
www.osarchitects.com
www.vsba.com



Chapter 2

Civic Projects Designed for Mildura and Hume



First Project Mildura Civic Centre



State Library and the Bunnings Warehouse



Mildura, Victoria – aerial photograph showing site, town and the River Murray

The Mildura project reworked an entry for the RAI A Polyflor Haddon Scholarship in 2002. This quickly designed scheme attempted to fuse the temple-fronted classical civic building (such as the State Library of Victoria) with the 'Bunnings Warehouse' hardware supershed – a common building type in the suburbs of Australian cities that employs simple formalism and constant colour scheme (green) to distinguish itself from other buildings. Interestingly, the Bunnings Warehouse also employs a temple-fronted portico to mark the entry point. This double image, the classical library and Bunnings, in many ways describes the context and intentions of this research: the desire to capture the civic presence of the classical library and use that presence in the contemporary context of the Bunnings Warehouse.



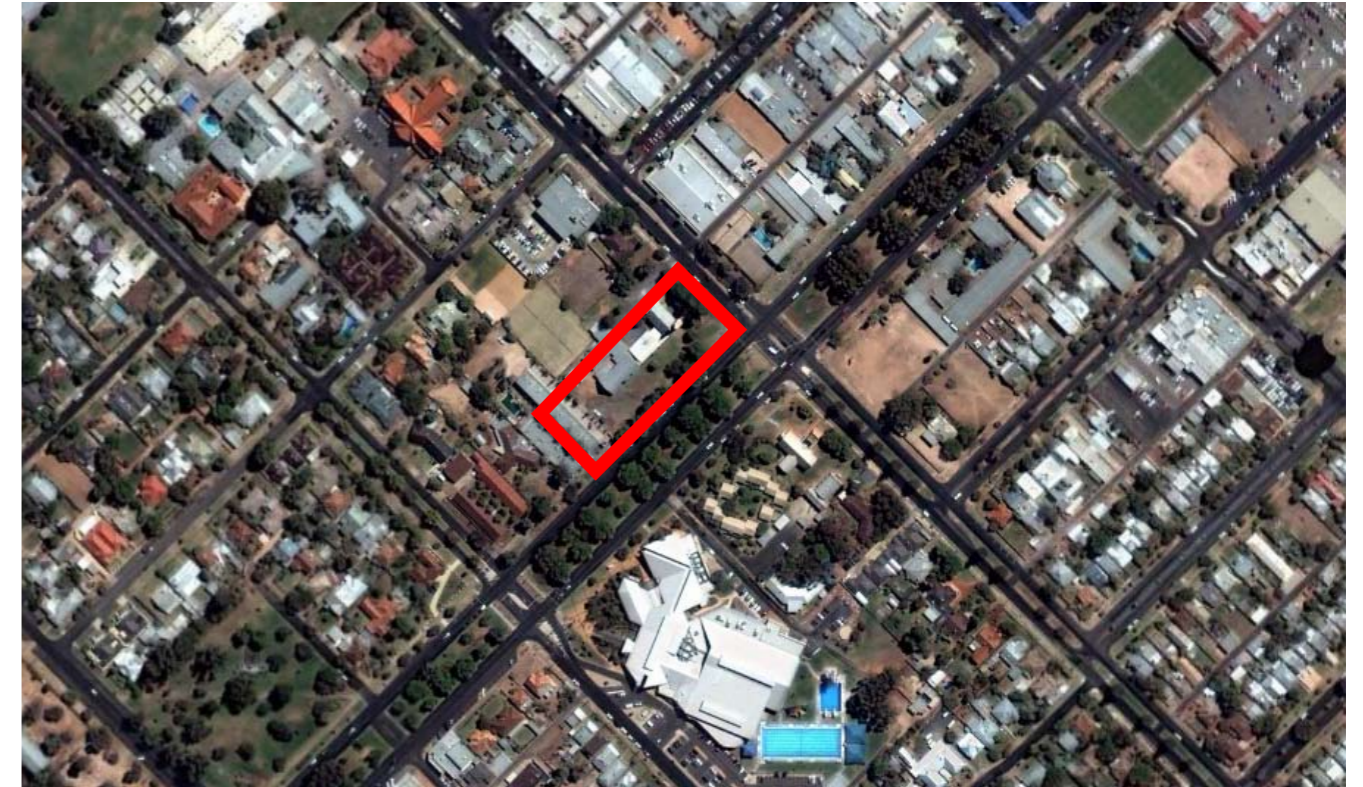
A typical Bunnings Warehouse from the air

The Haddon scheme attempted a simple enlargement of the temple front into a more linear expression that is subtracted rather than added from the steel clad box (right).

Upon commencement of the masters in 2003, it was decided to rework the Mildura scheme using the same brief and to address issues raised by the interest in making a legible civic building. This involved closer examination of the urban context in the town, and visiting the site in central Victoria.



Deakin Avenue, Mildura

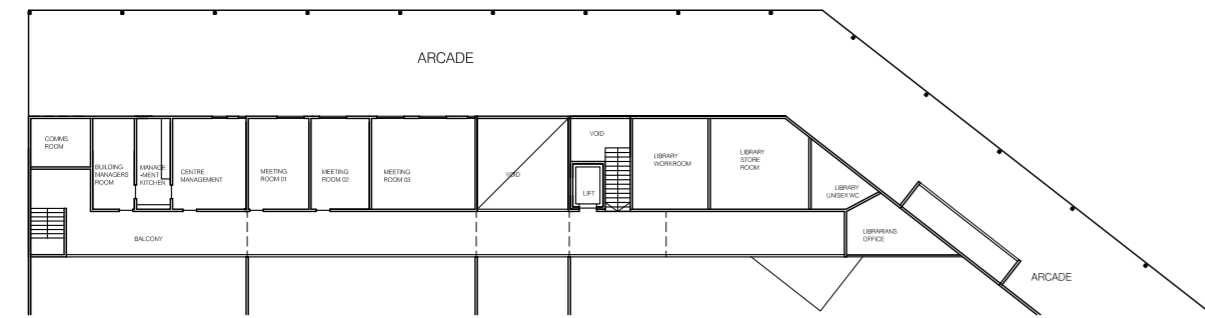


Mildura, Victoria – aerial photograph showing site and Alfred Deakin Sports Centre opposite

RAIA/POLYFLOR HADDON SCHOLARSHIP 2002







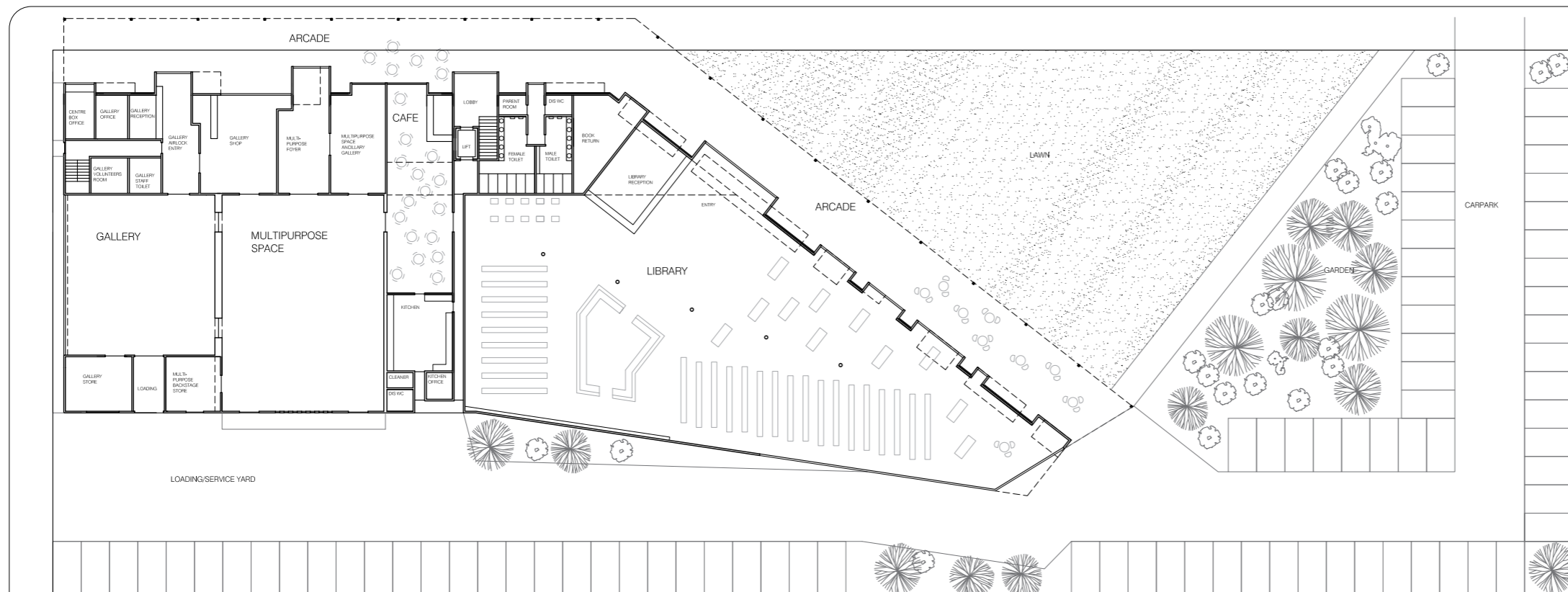
FIRST FLOOR PLAN 1:500



Mildura: Town plan showing project and Deakin Avenue

The brief was a collection of traditional public programs, centred around a suggested reworking of the Mechanic's Institute. This included a multi-function hall, gallery, cafe, library and meeting rooms. In the initial scheme these programs were serviced by a large foyer typical of a building 'complex'. In the reworking it was decided to externalise the circulation space to make it into genuine (sheltered) public space. This became the key move in the redesign in terms of planning and urban design. The plan also developed a crank that suggests a mediation from the more dense (old) town to the wider city of larger titles and a less urban configuration. In this way, the revised plan with its linear public space reads as both a large scale verandah that encloses the footpath and a portico in front of a lawn area, as per such traditional civic edifices such as the State Library, Melbourne.

DEAKIN AVENUE



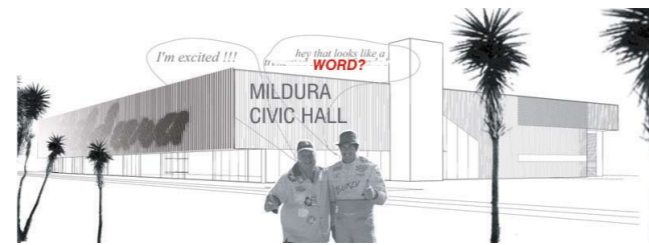
GROUND FLOOR PLAN 1:500

ELEVENTH ST

It was the intention in this first project to extend the question of the nature of a contemporary civic building, which had begun with the Haddon Scholarship. In addition to reworking of the planning of the project, a new strategy was developed for the facade treatment. This was aimed at developing the direct and simple big portico. While reworking the project I developed a key interest in the use of large text or words on building facades – and old tradition that had been given contemporary life by the Marion Cultural Centre in Adelaide by Ashton Raggatt McDougall (ARM) in 2002. This building became the immediate precedent for the project.

The words 'MILDURA' and 'CIVIC CENTRE' were built into the project – in two parallel streams along the arcade; a linear public space. 'MILDURA', is cast in an urban graffiti font called 'Brooklyn Kid' – to be built from a system of horizontal louvres spanning between minimal posts; effectively forming a screen. The words 'CIVIC CENTRE', set in 'Gyr Falcon' type became the actual external wall, and was modulated to structure openings and doorways into the different programs. This font choice suggested its use for openings that were not complex and had a underlying sense of Brutalism and solidity which would contrast with the more lightweight and arch-like type used for the edge screen on the other layer. This followed testing with many different font choices, and initial studies into cursive handwriting. In this way, the role of editing/selection is important, and partially decides the language or 'feel' the architectural outcome is to have, in a way fonts are used for different tasks in publishing. In this project vertical louvres are used for both transparency to the main facade, so the words 'MILDURA' and 'CIVIC CENTRE' are layered, and for its connection back to the local Murray town tradition of screened footpaths.

The strategy aimed to create a space that had both the qualities of fragmented legibility, but ultimately was underscored by an aim to create a space that was literally arcade-like, in that it was composed from arches, or arch-like forms.



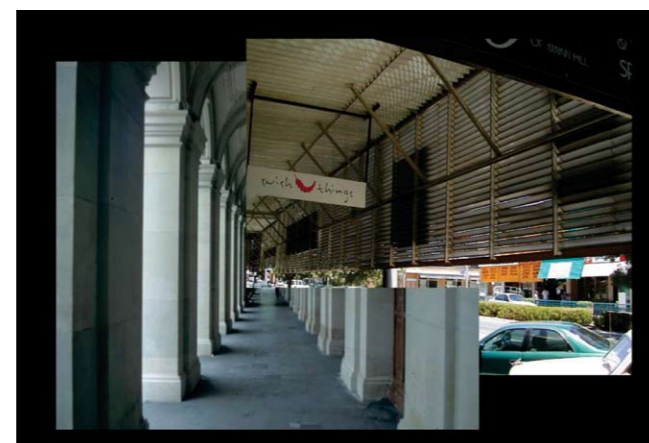
Reworked Haddon Scholarship collage – from temple front to giant word



Marion Cultural Centre, Ashton Raggatt McDougall, 2002



Santa Monica Place, Frank Gehry, 1980, Carpark screen - behind the mesh lettering



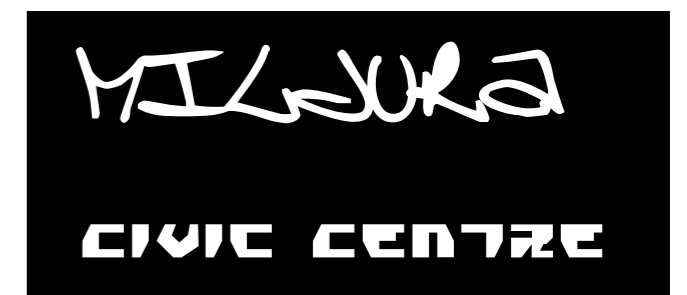
Linear, sheltering public space collage: Melbourne GPO (Johnson, 1867) and shops/footpath screening in Swan Hill

The proposal differs from the Marion precedent in that it attempts to forge a connection with its local condition in a different way, and to engage with the nature of the street and the ability for it to be a space of interaction. The potential of screened space behind giant lettering is also suggested by the space between the chain mesh screen of Gehry's Santa Monica Place carpark and the edge of the carpark.

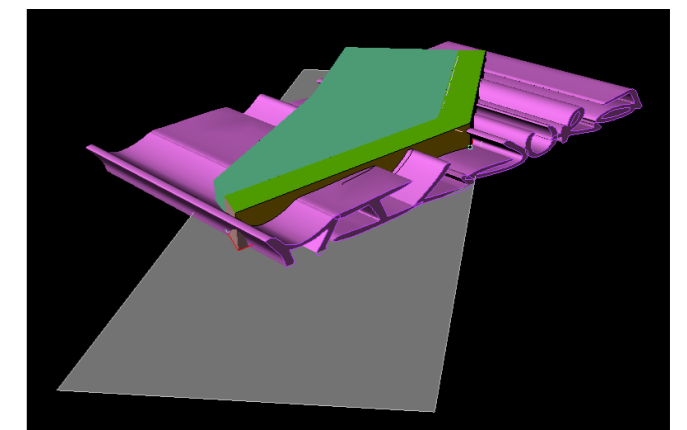
Hajer & Reijndorp's book, *In Search of New Public Domain*, makes the suggestion that public spaces can be outside of squares, and that a liminal space of connection such as proposed here is a valid public space. The book makes clear that public space is free; that the public domain is a shared experience; and interaction is needed.¹ This reading of contemporary public space becomes critical in forming part of successful civic building.



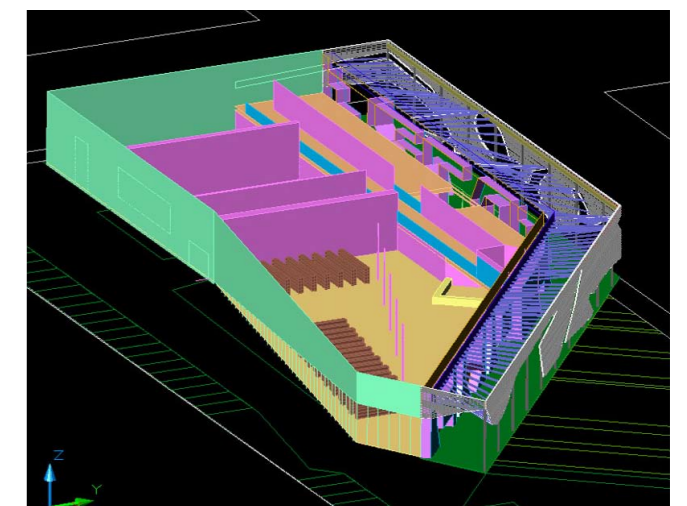
Font work: handwriting across unfolded elevation (top), multiple font choices below



Lettering used in Mildura project facade and screening

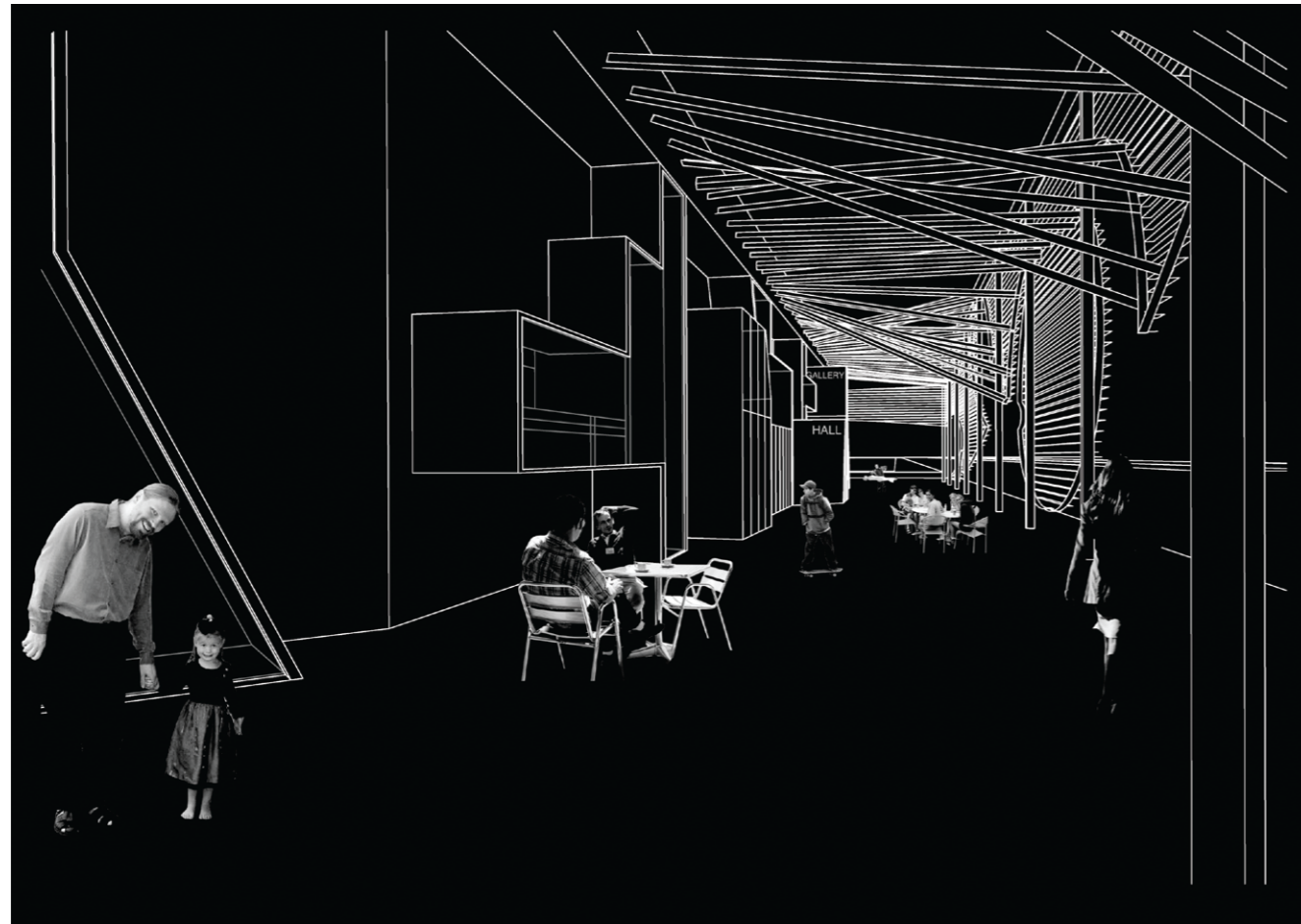


Text extruded through new building form



Cut-away axonometric showing arcade and library interior

¹ Marteen Hajer & Arnold Reijndorp, *In Search of New Public Domain*, NAI Publishers, 2002



View of arcade (parallel to street) – entries to library, hall and gallery

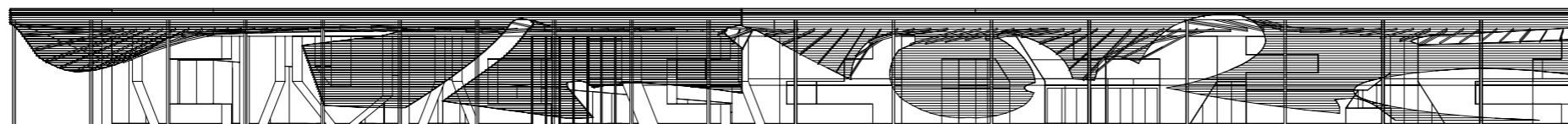
Opposite the site is an existing, relatively recent, civic complex of sports and other facilities. The language used here one of white steel, loosely derived from the sports architecture of Philip Cox. This building's lack of typological specificity is systematic of the main issue of the masters and demonstrates a lack of engagement with the two main aims of my Mildura project; to provide a sheltered, free and used public space of character and to make a legible civic work that can engaged by the local population.



Alfred Deakin Sports Centre, Peddle Thorp, 1997



Marion Cultural Centre, arcades



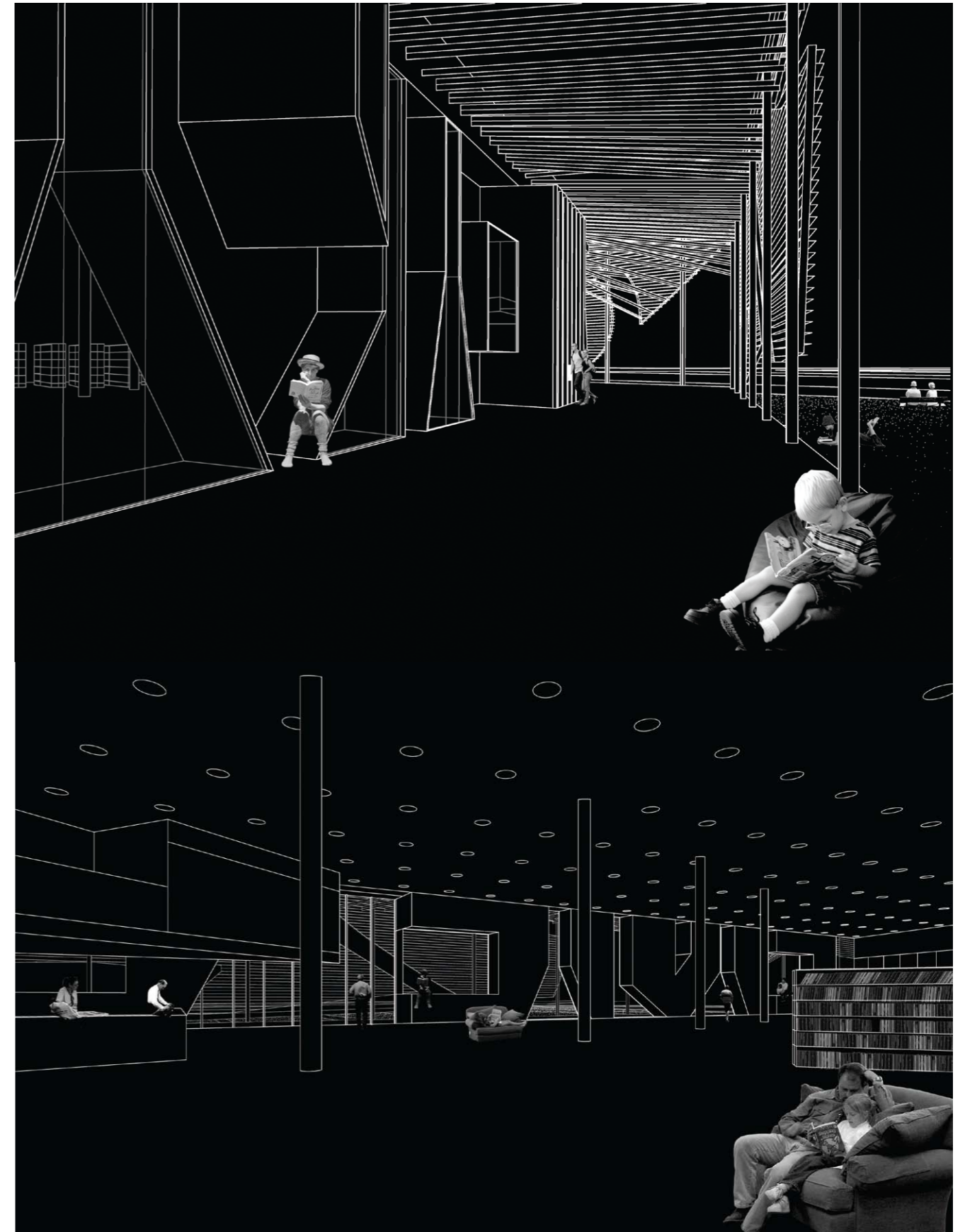
STREET ELEVATION 1:200



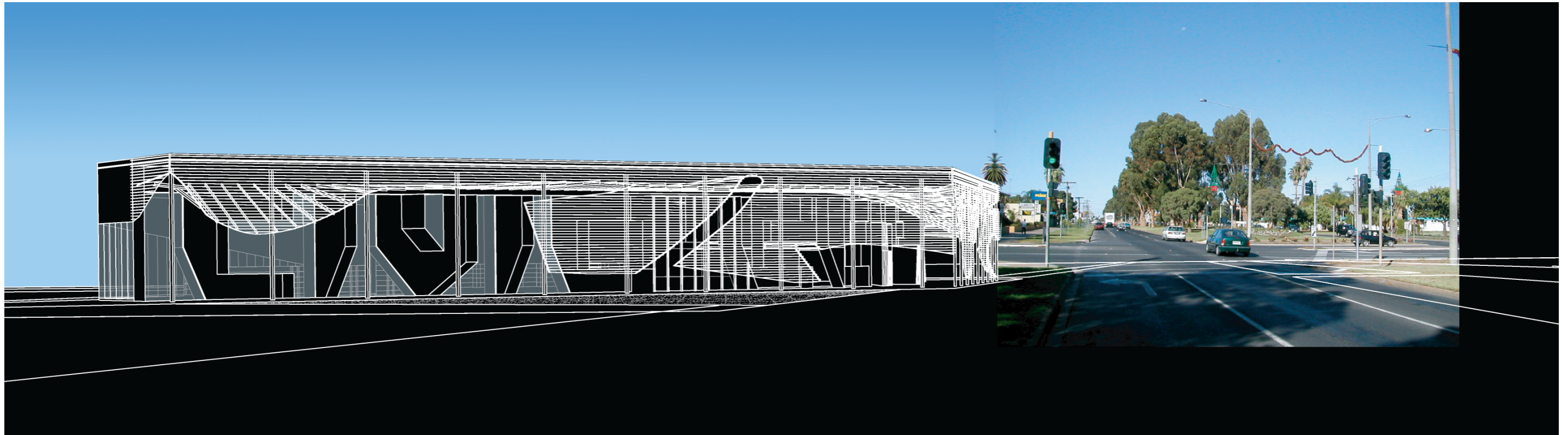
CROSS SECTION 1:200



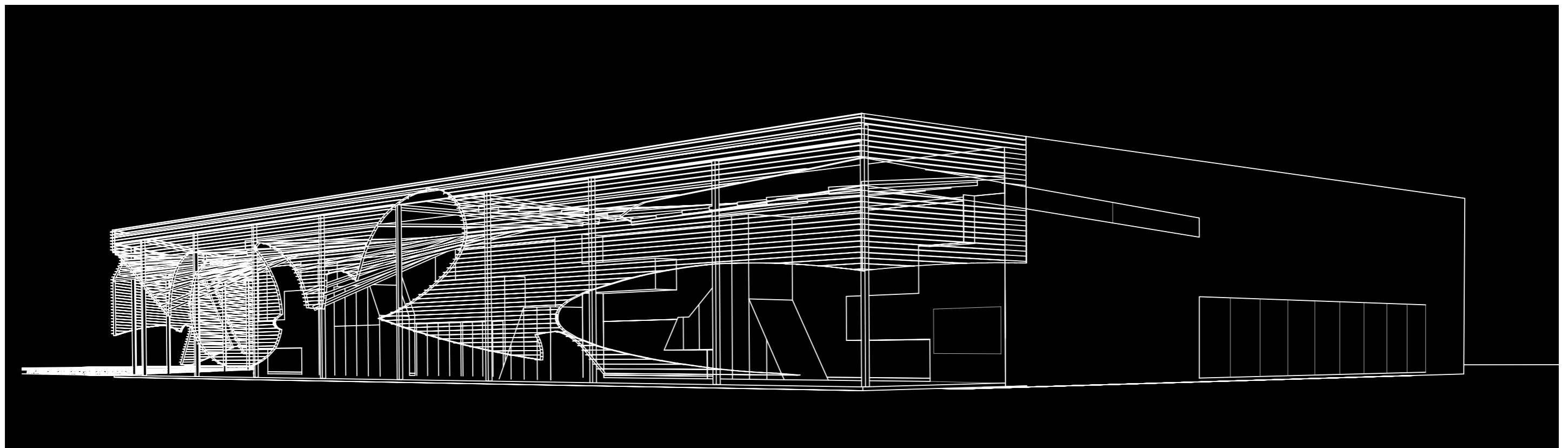
Aerial views of the project. Top: showing the heart of Mildura to the right; the project location on the edge of the wider city; the Alfred Deakin Sports Centre (Peddle Thorp) in the foreground, and set back from the street. Below: the arcade to the street and lawn.



The library. Top: outdoor reading area in arcade. Bottom: interior looking through the exterior wall to the arcade's screening (the word CIVIC readable in reverse).



View looking down Deakin Avenue towards centre of town

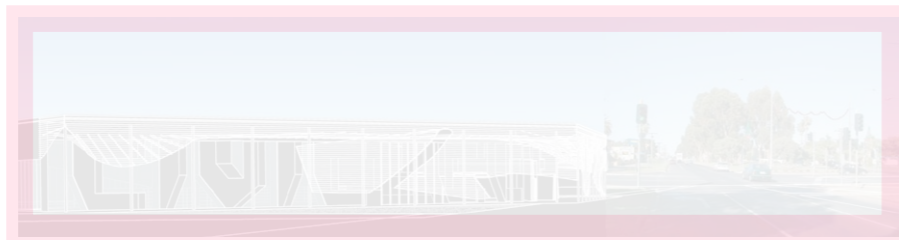


View showing arcade layering, through 'MILDURA' to 'CIVIC CENTRE'

2



1



3



Second Project

Hume Council Offices, Broadmeadows



Broadmeadows town site, 2001

In 2004 the second project commenced using a real project brief. This called for new council offices in the centre of Broadmeadows, a marginalised northern outer suburb of Melbourne. The expression of interest document was used as the provisional brief, and further briefing was obtained by following the real project.

This site and surroundings are subject to a Transit City masterplan completed by Haskell Dick Architects for both the Hume City Council and Victorian Department of Sustainability and the Environment (DSE). The opening work on my project looked at an alternate masterplan that would propose a different location for the proposed council offices building. This masterplan's key aerial image (bottom right) became a useful aid when presenting the subject of the masters. It prompts the question – which one of these proposed new buildings is the Council Offices (the civic building)? The proposed building is the one central to the image, the language of which is not distinguished from the ones around it. Interestingly, the building in the image which is slightly different – the curved front building with some gold treatment – is on the site chosen in my alternative masterplan for the Council Offices.

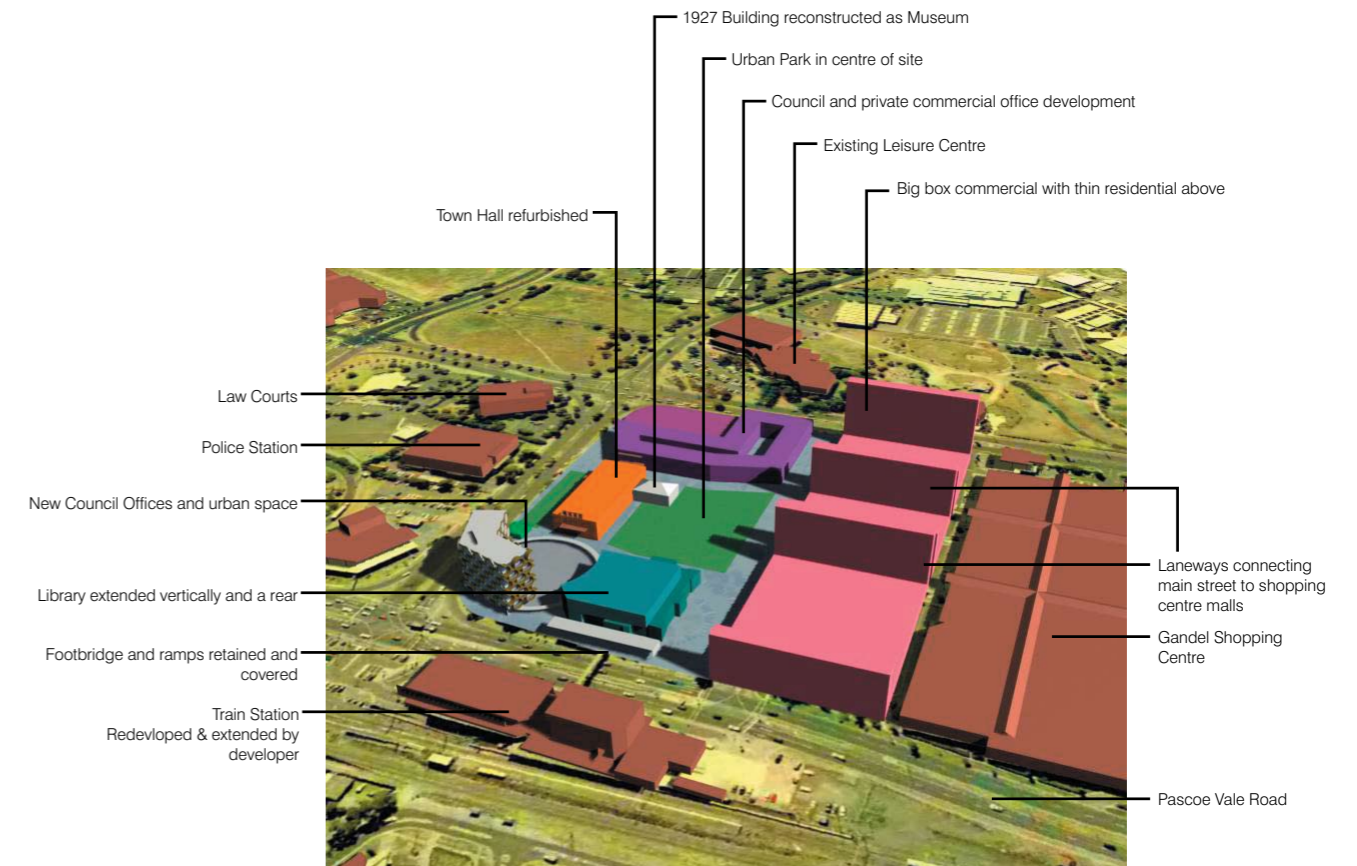


Aerial detail of south east corner of Broadmeadows civic precinct, 2001 and 2003

The Broadmeadows civic precinct sits to the south of the large Gandel Shopping Centre (named Broadmeadows Town Centre), and to the west of the 1980s train station redevelopment. The two circular carparks (left) were an attempt in the 1960s to register civicness with the generic form of the carpark. This configuration makes them allude to a plaza, and creates a forecourt to the post-war town hall and adjoining council offices. The northern circular carpark was removed in 2003 for the new Library building (Hume Global Learning Centre), designed by the Melbourne office of Peddle Thorp. This building fronts onto Main Street to the north.

Alternative Masterplan:

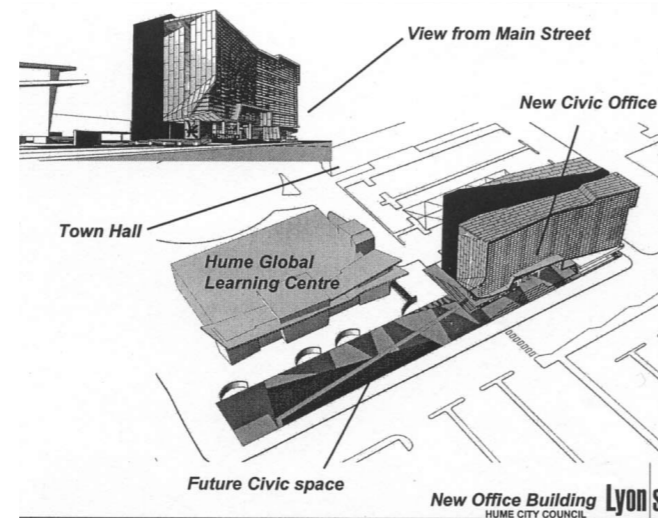
The alternative masterplan (top right) accepts the existing conditions as both historically configured and suitable for adaptation in a newly focused centre. It rejects the Council's (Haskell Dick) masterplan's (right) desire to create a high density centre, but accepts the need for density around the main civic centre site. New commercial and high density is proposed for the southern end of the Gandel site, and there is no need for compulsory acquisition of land by the Council for the main street (as per Council masterplan). Development around the site can take the form as suggested in the Council masterplan, including tower developments on the train station site and housing occupation of the under-used western park.



Alternate masterplan (above), original masterplan by Haskell Dick (below)



Lyons Architects won the short-listed competition for the real project in late 2004. Their scheme fits within the Haskell Dick Transit City Masterplan and is six storeys. Sun louvres to the north suggest the building is larger than it is, with five horizontal fins per level. This scale manipulation and the variation of depth of certain louvres to spell out the word 'HUME' on the north are the main strategies for suggesting this as a civic building – a strategy similar to that of both the Marion Project by ARM and my own first project for Mildura. The giant word was removed from the scheme sometime after Lyons were appointed architects for the project. This is simultaneous with my undertaking to employ another strategy for this second project – different to the use of large words used on the first. It was sensed that the large text strategy was exhausted and only one potential way of addressing the issue of making a place significant. The Lyons experience demonstrated the fragility of the 'giant word' approach, that it was disposable if not ingrained into the building's structure – especially in the case of moderate budget project.



Hume Council Offices, Lyons Architects, 2004, Competition Entry

This becomes a key hinge point in my project with its parallel to a real project. The images below left show the built project. The removal of the word 'HUME' increased reliance on the louvre system, which in turn was deleted from the rear elevation. This rear side faces back to the city and is visible on approach to the site along major roads and freeways. My own project for the Council Offices became increasingly defined by how it was different to the Lyons project – exploring architectural expression that was not able to be removed and that faced the key roads and intersection to the south.



Hume Council Offices, Lyons Architects, under construction March 2007



The idea of my next civic project exploring a different strategy is developed; and as with the first project a key precedent is used. This time however, an 'enduring' precedent is chosen – Council House in Perth designed by Howlett & Bailey, completed 1963. When Council House was finished it captured a young modern regional city completely – a building that is both new and suggests its civicness through its intensified facade treatment. As council offices it is a programmatic precedent, but its enduring legacy seems to have been its ability to be both civic and modern – it is both a modernist slab block, a symbol of the new, and something more intensively treated and sited than typical modernist slab blocks. This is achieved through the offset and repeating 'Ts' which prevent the building being read clearly horizontally or vertically. Its linear form is like the Perth centre itself, and the building is clearly visible in the streetscape, becoming one of most prominent buildings. Set in Stirling Gardens on Perth's St Georges Terrace, Council House is set back from the street.

As a successful modern civic building, Council House's endurance and survival from demolition in the 1990s validates the approach taken by the architects originally. A building that is both contemporary, visible and distinct to the current day. Harry Seidler was part of the competition jury that awarded the project. When the project faced demolition he publicly supported the building and its retention. In 2007, the building was chosen as one of the Australian modern buildings to be featured on four special edition postage stamps issued by Australia Post – joining the Sydney Opera House, Academy of Sciences, Canberra and ICI House, Melbourne.



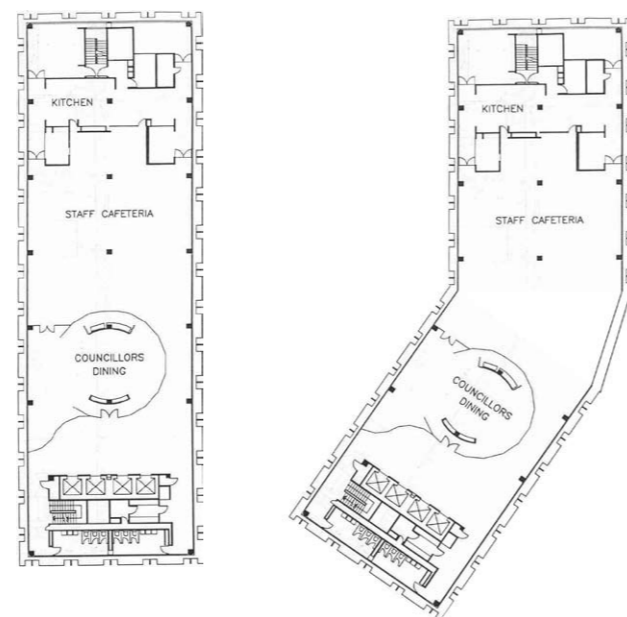
Council House, Howlett & Bailey, 1963, original photographs

Council House: photographed 1994, as the building is stripped internally and scheduled for demolition. The facade treatment of repeating 'Ts' both closes and opens the facade depending on view, and provides horizontal and vertical sun shading. The treatment is undifferentiated on all sides however – it does not account for orientation of the sun. The 'Ts' are a combination of an irregular slab edge (and therefore integrated into the structure) and non-structural vertical fins, all clad in white mosaic tile.

The 'T' can be read in the Council House floor plans, and this further 'locks in' the system into the project. The plan's ability to be simply manipulated was tested, to see if Council House could become a model that could be adapted to another site.



Council House, photographed in 1994 as the being is scheduled and prepared from demolition.



Left: Council House, level 10 floor plan. Right: Distorted floor plan - the first move in the use of project as an operative precedent, cranked to suit a different site.

The south-east corner of the Broadmeadows civic precinct site was marked with an angled sign board advertising the opening of the Hume Global Learning Centre (right). This library building does not address this corner, and the least designed side of the building can be seen behind this board. The initial form for the new office building, a simple cranked linear form comes from this board, which registers the curved edge to the site and the circular nature of the carpark behind.

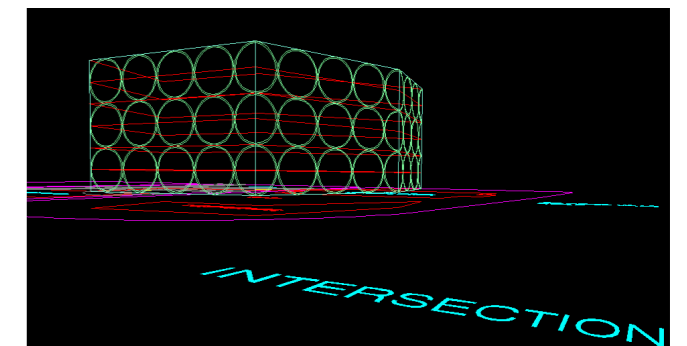
The early sketch image (right) is from the opposite corner of this intersection. Circle elements are proposed as a version of the Council House 'T', but draws on Kahn and Wright's use of the circular motif to register the civic.

The site is not devoid of existing civic buildings. The former Broadmeadows Town Hall (1964, K.Murray Forster & Walsh) is disused and it was decided by Council to retain the building. It is a well considered building, the finest on the site. The use of flattened arches in the entry canopy demonstrates a moment of historical reference in this clearly modernist building. The entry faces onto the remaining circular carpark.

The original building on the site from 1927 is buried between the Town Hall and existing council offices annex, and faces onto a service yard and staff carpark. By far the oldest building on the site, its retention does not seem to have been considered with the current masterplan. This building records the relocation of the centre of Broadmeadows to the site from what is now Westmeadows in late 1920s. I propose to retain it as part of general approach of keeping existing buildings were possible, to build on existing character. This is opposed to inserting an entirely new and potentially generic system into the site; appropriate for this site that clearly has an existing fabric and spatiality that can be drawn from.



SE corner of precinct site showing sign board for new library



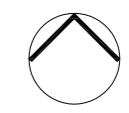
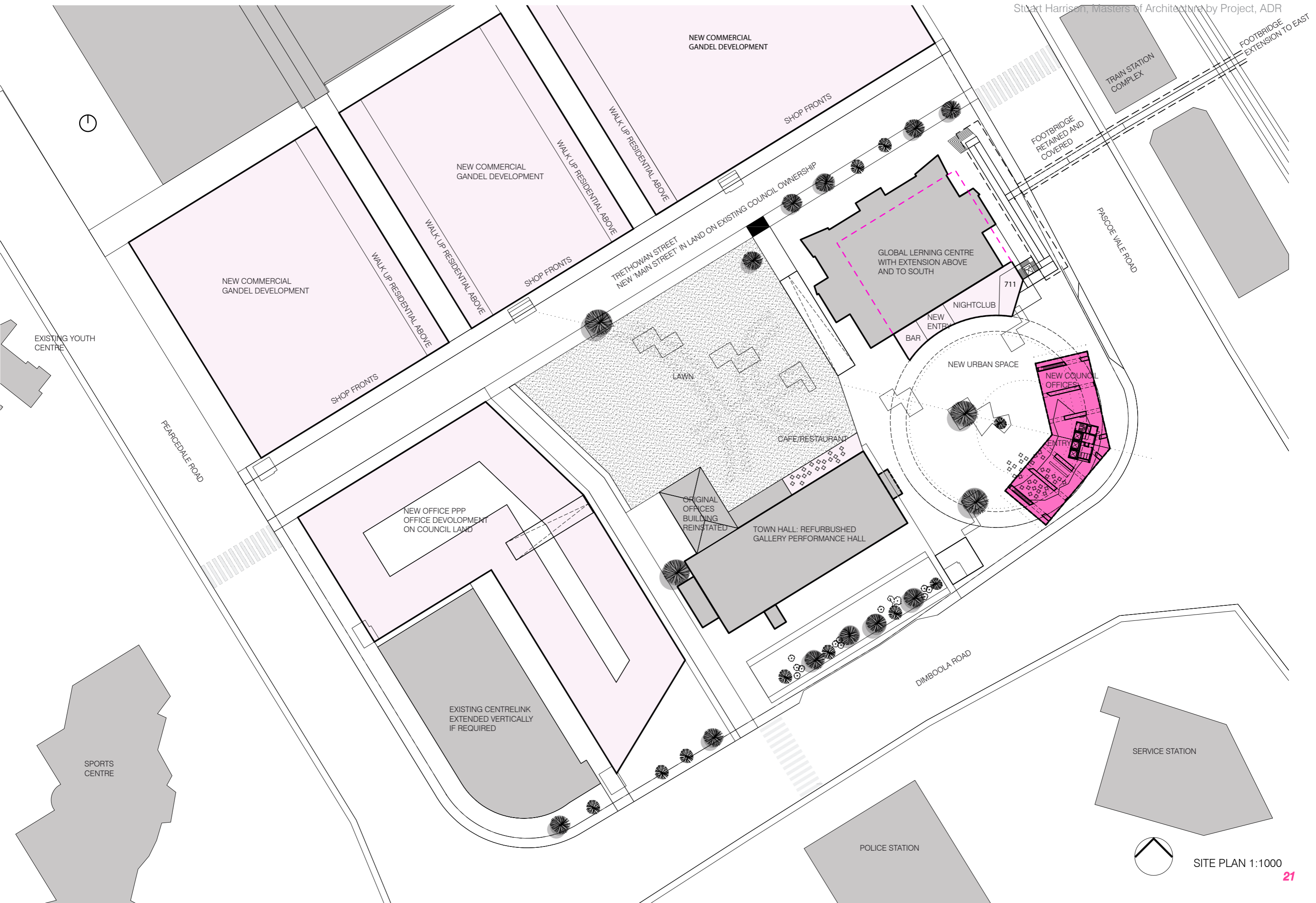
Early sketch on south east corner of site using (unstaggered) rings



Broadmeadows Town Hall, K.Murray Forster & Walsh, 1964

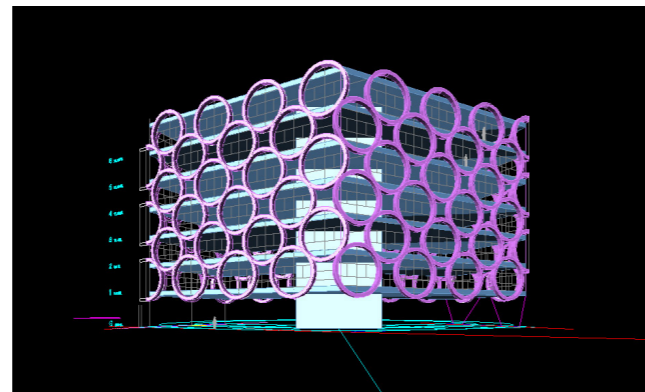


Original Council Offices built 1927 and now service yard

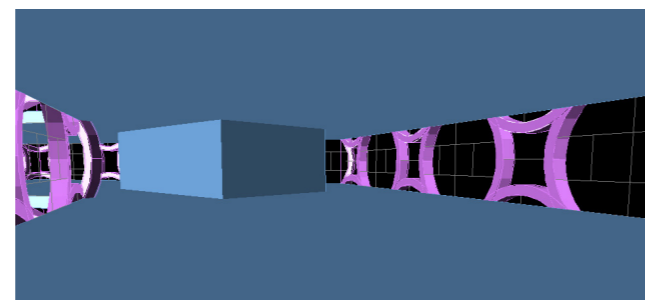


In this second design project the design is developed to ensure the circles become part of the primary structure of the building, to avoid them being considered as applique. Steel rings both provide column-like vertical compressive paths and lateral bracing to the frame. A concrete slab structure (Hollowcore) is proposed for floors, as well as for the central service core; to provide thermal mass. The steel rings are intended to be boxed to different depths to account for orientation, and to provide effective shading of the interior, and illuminate the need for air-conditioning. Here, the architect is to become re-involved with engineering and mechanical services as part of the architectural intent. The rings are staggered like Council House, shifting visual direction across the facade.

The rings act as columns through the load paths as shown below, without appearing as such. The success of the Hume project seemed to rely in part of the structural rings that were both image and structure.



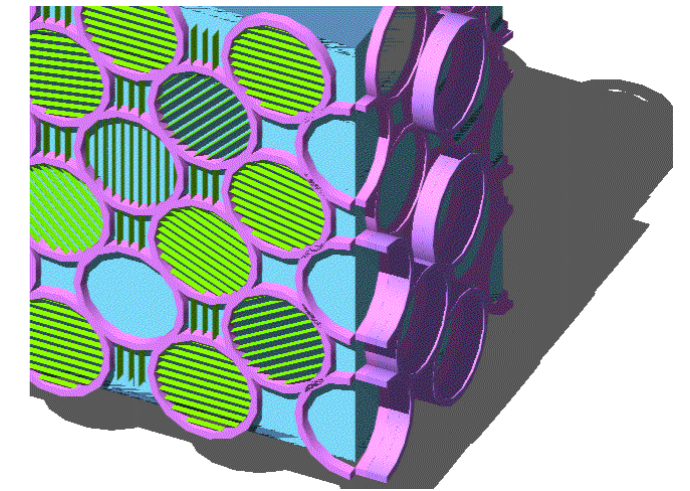
View of structural frame – rings, slabs, core. Ground floor columns not shown.



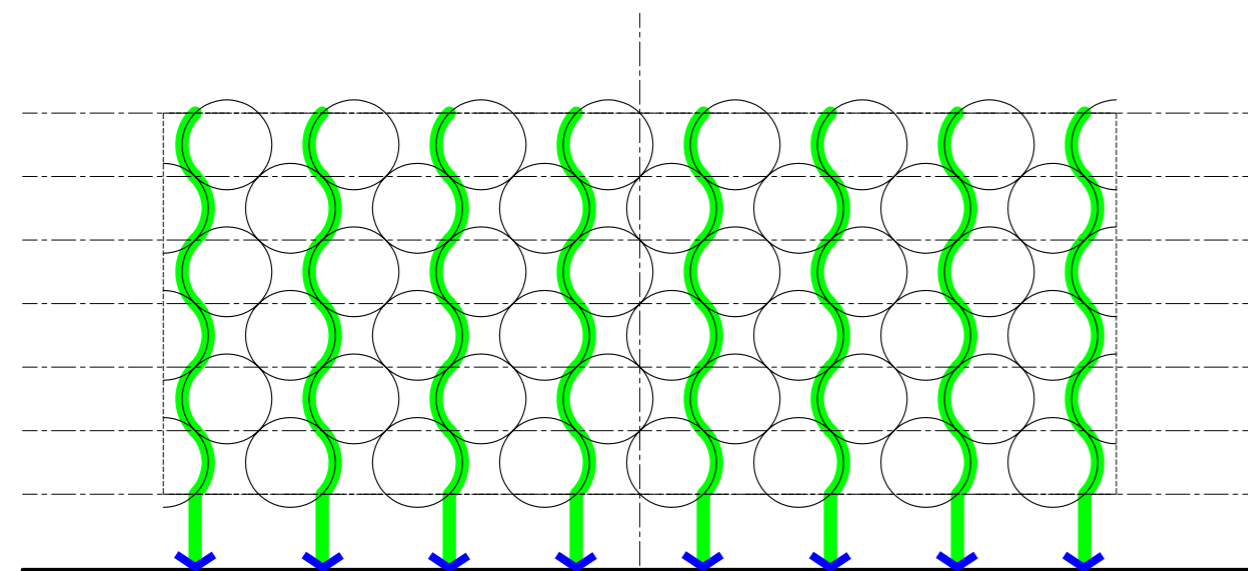
Interior view, showing how rings are edited by floor slabs.

Council House's use of screening 'Ts provided some sun protection to the glass behind – but do not account for orientation. On the Hume project, the east and west rings increase their depth in order to provide shade and balconies within them. On the north side, further investigation resulted in a series of fins being inserted to provide shading.

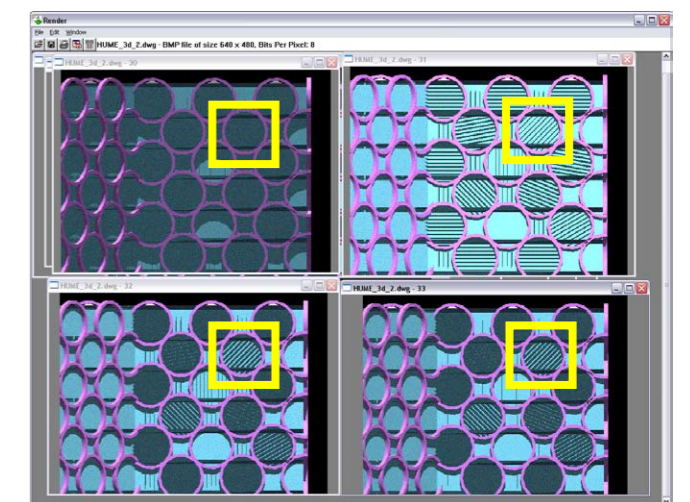
Facade shadow studies were made to establish which rotation the fins spanning across the rings would need to take in order to obtain optimal shading conditions. Both North East and North West facades favoured 45 degree fins, in opposing directions. The screens assist in eliminating the need for air conditioning.



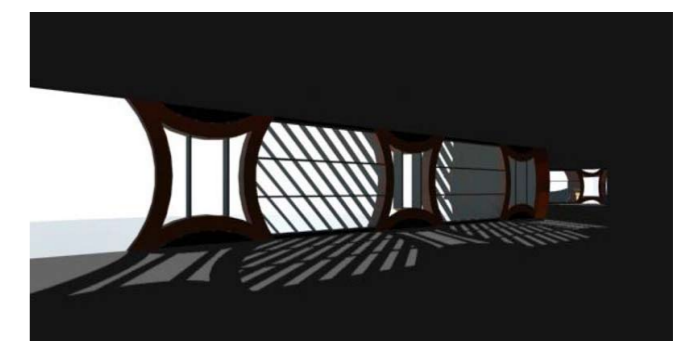
Axonometric view showing different rotations of fins within circles, to establish best fixed location for them



Structural Elevation Diagram showing compressive load paths



Elevation studies of different fin rotations for different seasons. This (3pm) selection reveals the highlighted 45 degree systems are the most effective: top left in summer (completely shaded), top right winter (unshaded), bottom left spring and bottom right autumn (both 50% shaded).



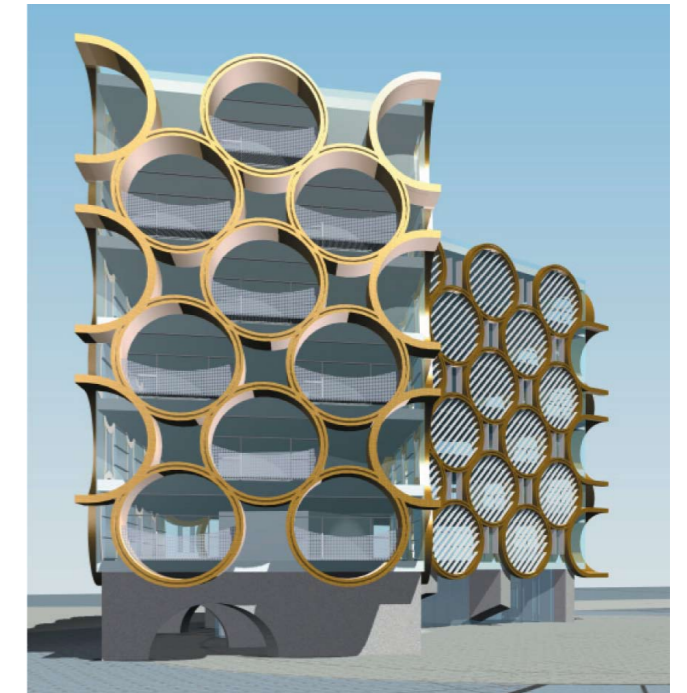
Interior view showing mid-season sunlight penetration



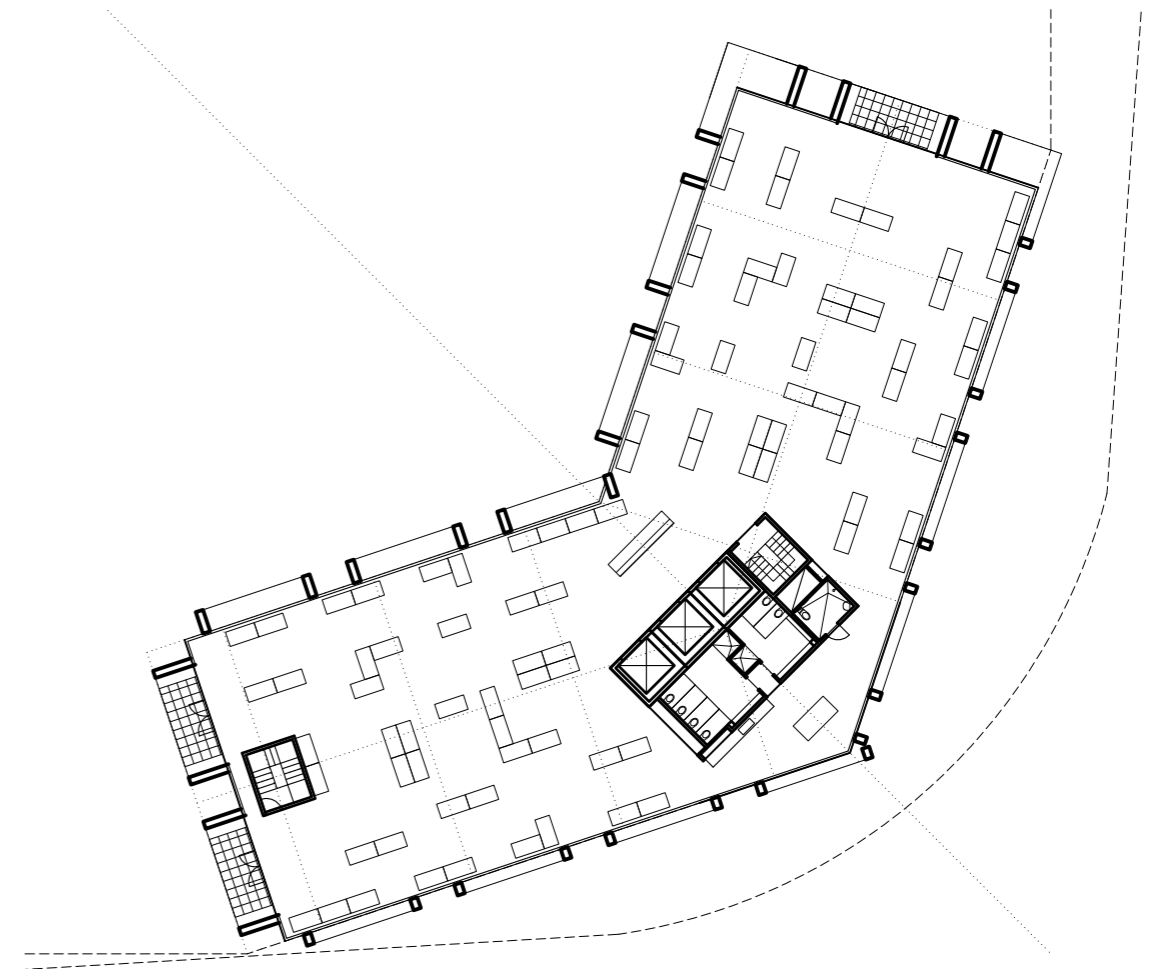
Night view from south-east, the common approach to site for motorists and train users.



The site from the SE corner – without and with building.



View showing deep rings to eastern end and shading to north



TYPICAL FLOOR PLAN 1:500

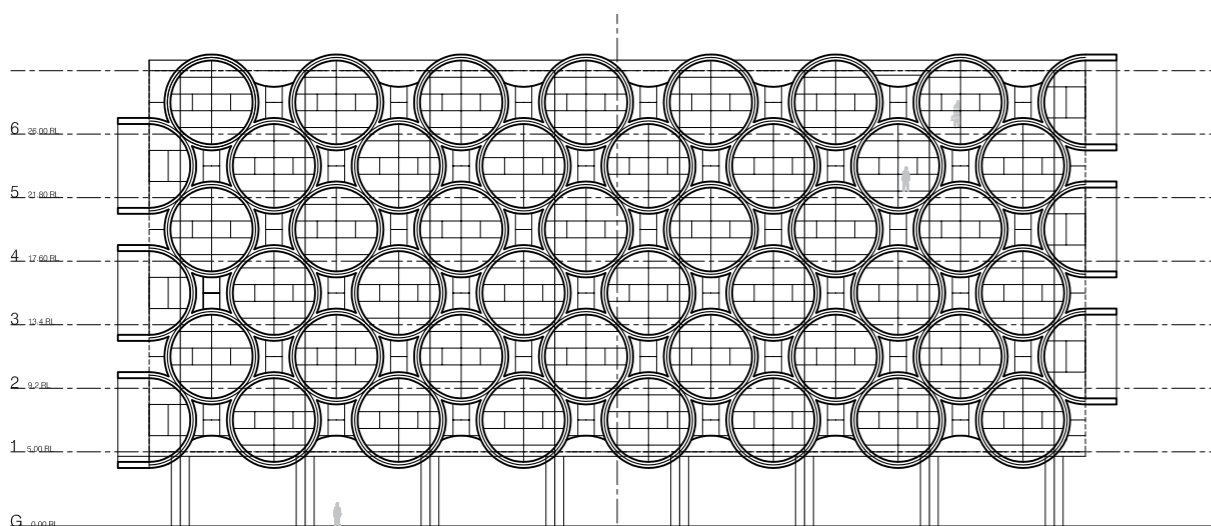
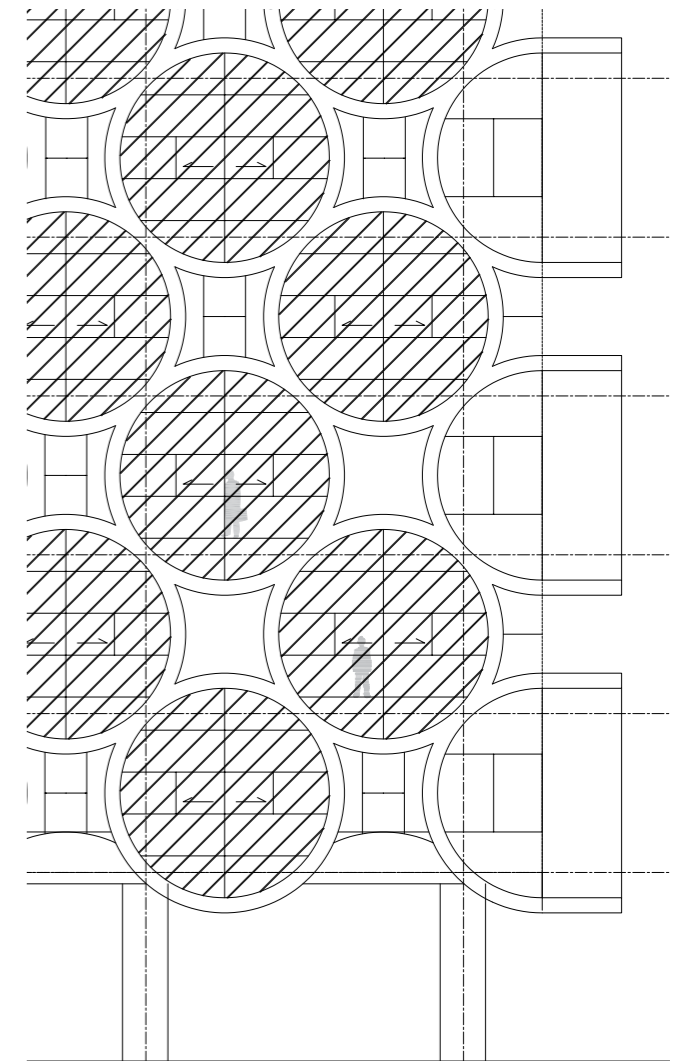




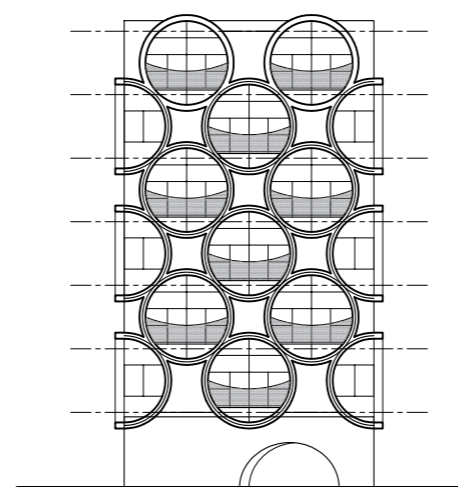
View from central lawn area looking toward south-east showing new Council Offices and plaza. Building to the left is the Hume Global Learning centre, with proposed 'piggy back' extension; to the right the former Town Hall – reconditioned as an Arts Centre and with new north facing cafe fronting onto lawn. New single level underground carpark underneath this area.

Like Council House, the bottom level is undercroft to be semi-open with a public foyer in the new urban space. Loads from structure to the first floor are transferred onto piloti-walls that form the ground level space, in a manner similar to Council House. The floor-to-floor distance is proposed as 4.2m, and will result in taller naturally cooled office spaces, with air extraction. The rings have differing depths for orientation for east and west – 2.1m deep and become balcony spaces. All windows are to be openable.

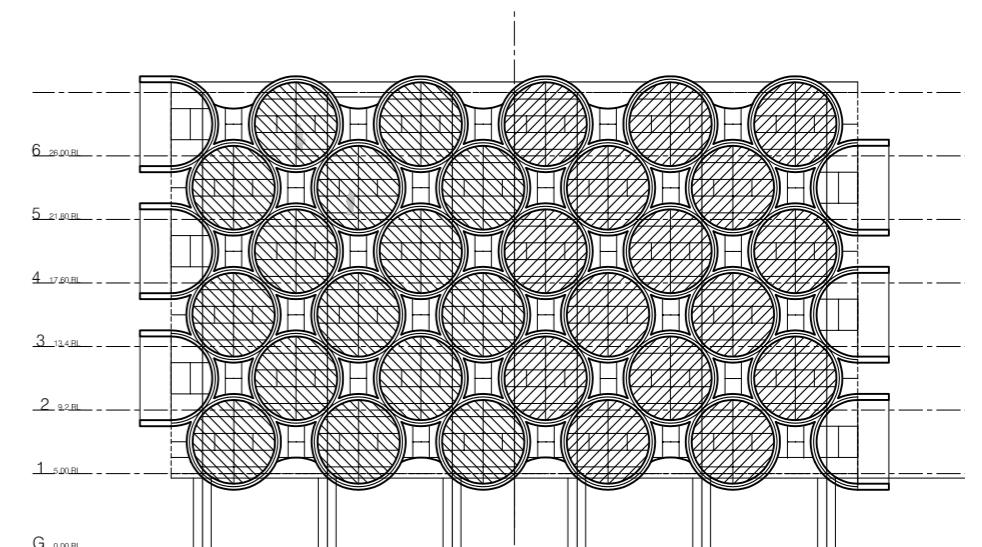
ELEVATION DETAIL 1:100



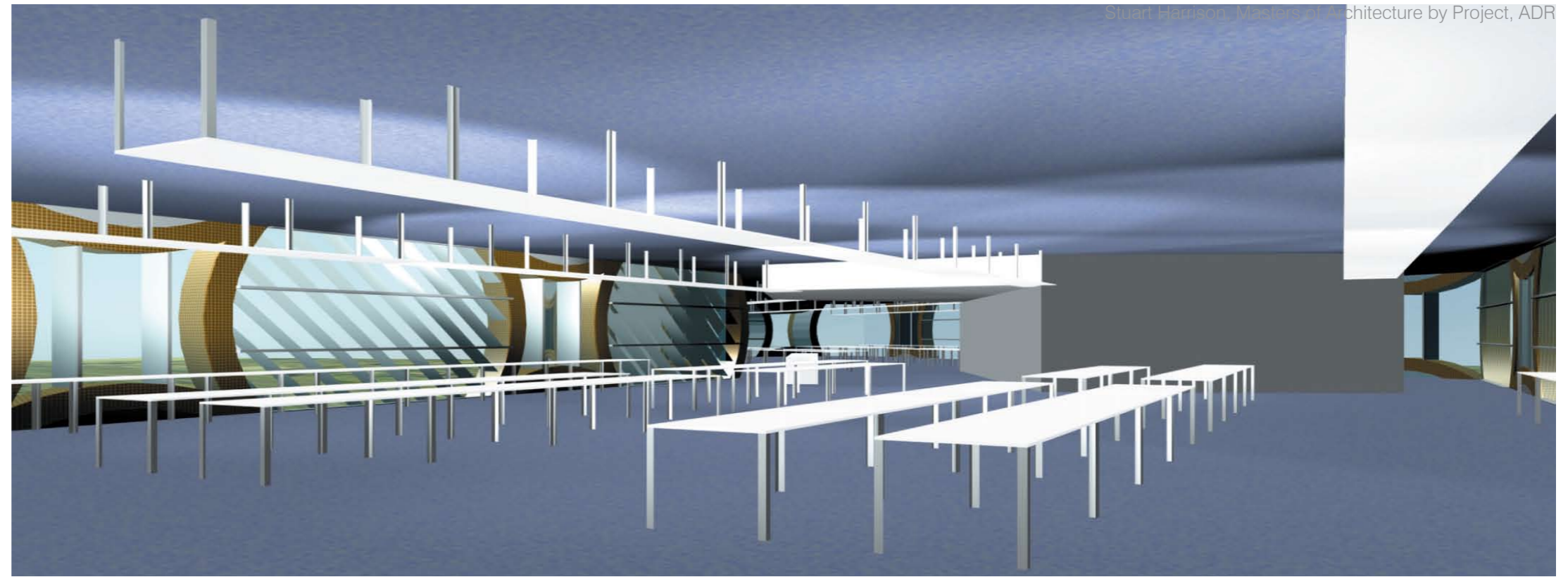
South Elevation, 1:500



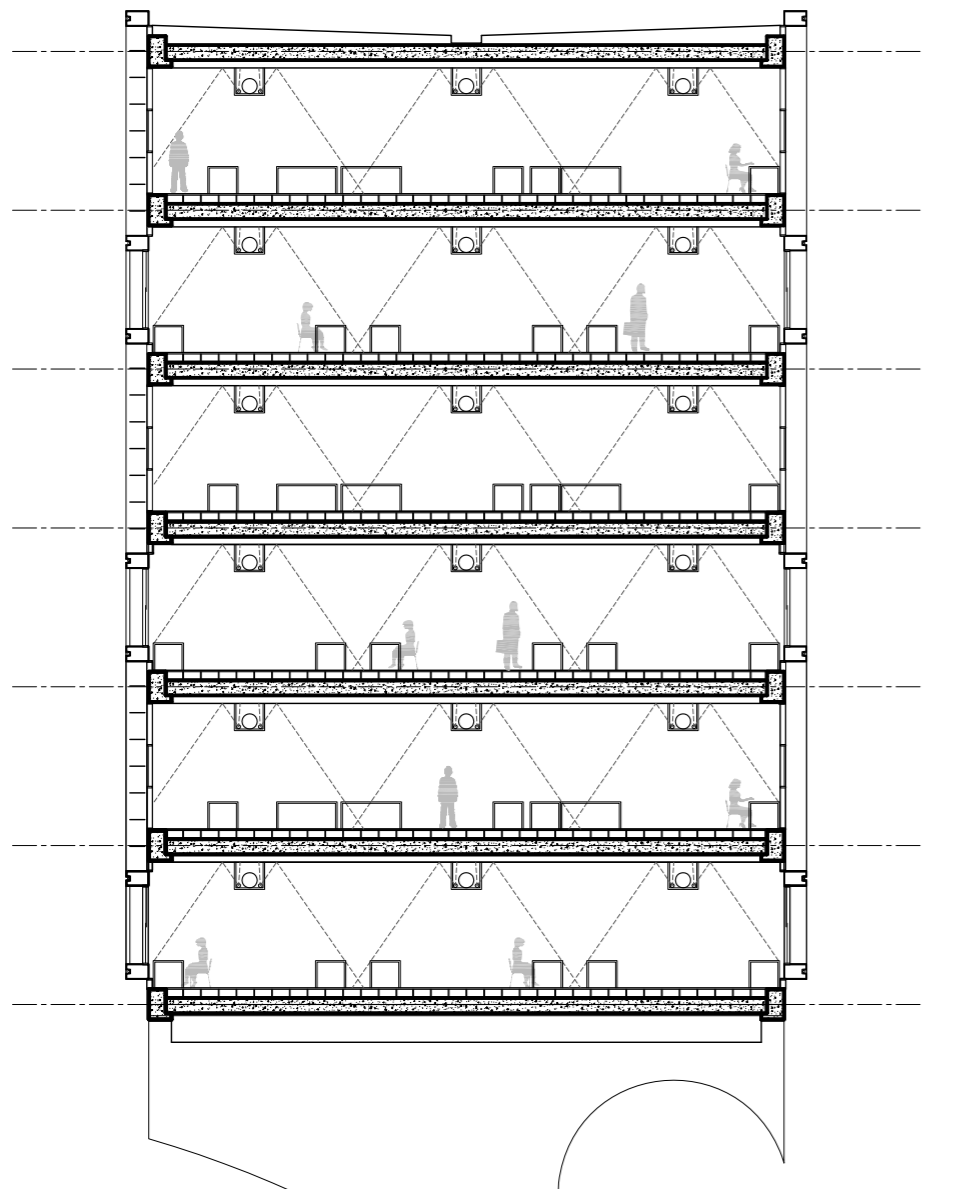
West Elevation, 1:500



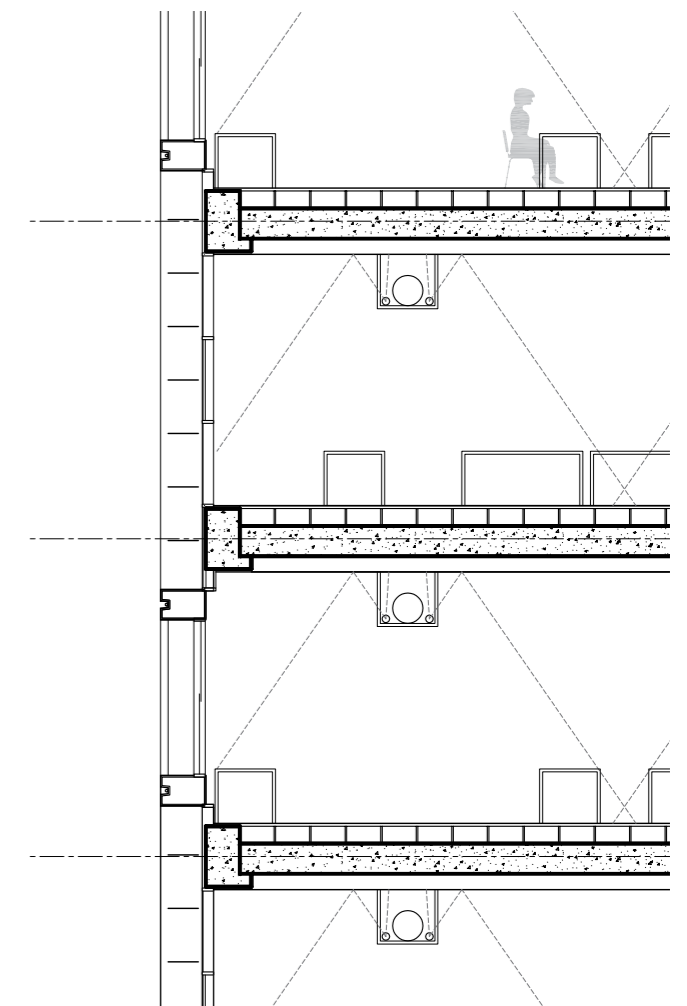
North Elevation, 1:500



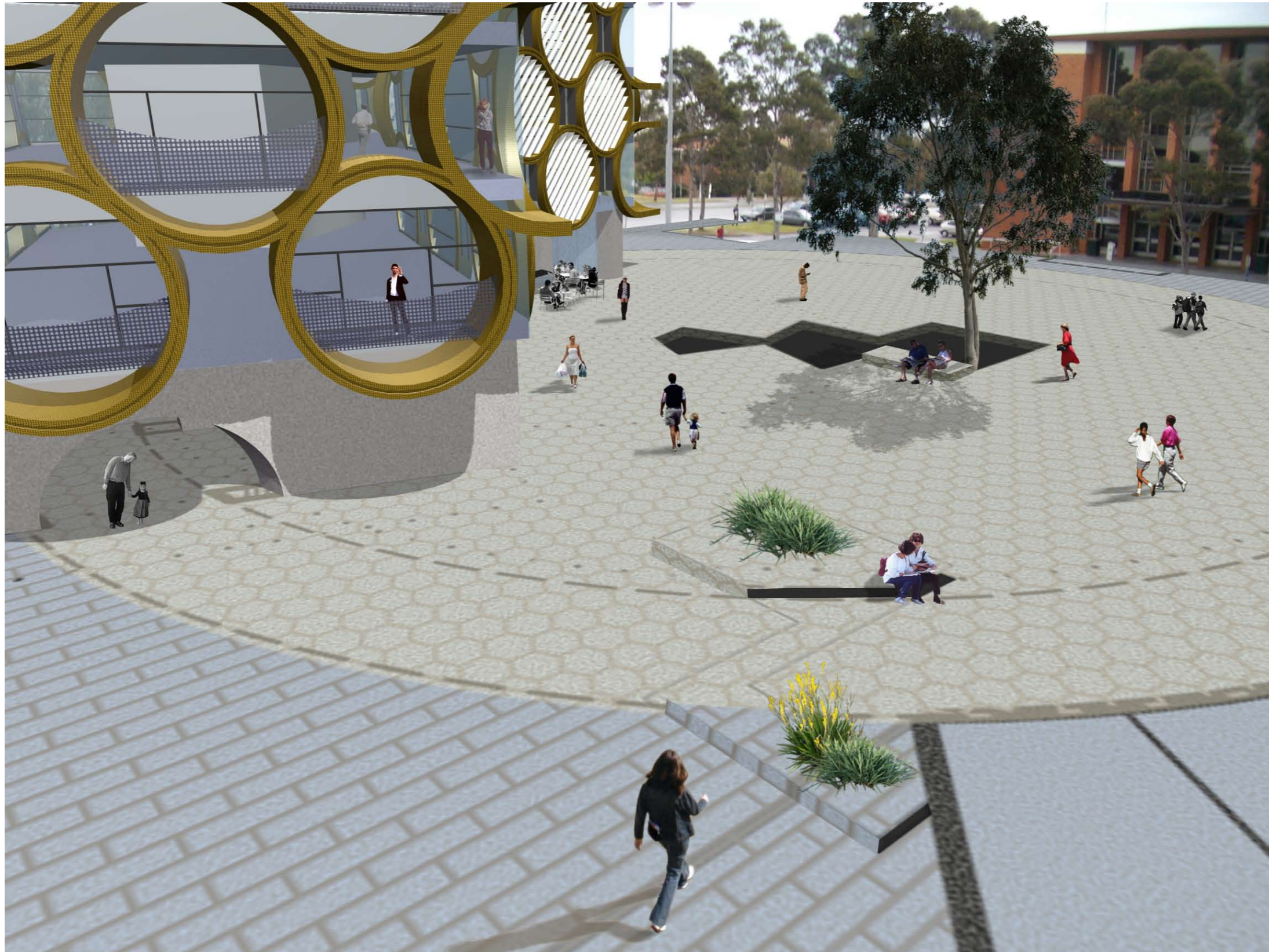
Interior view of typical floor: horizontal symmetry



CROSS SECTION 1:200



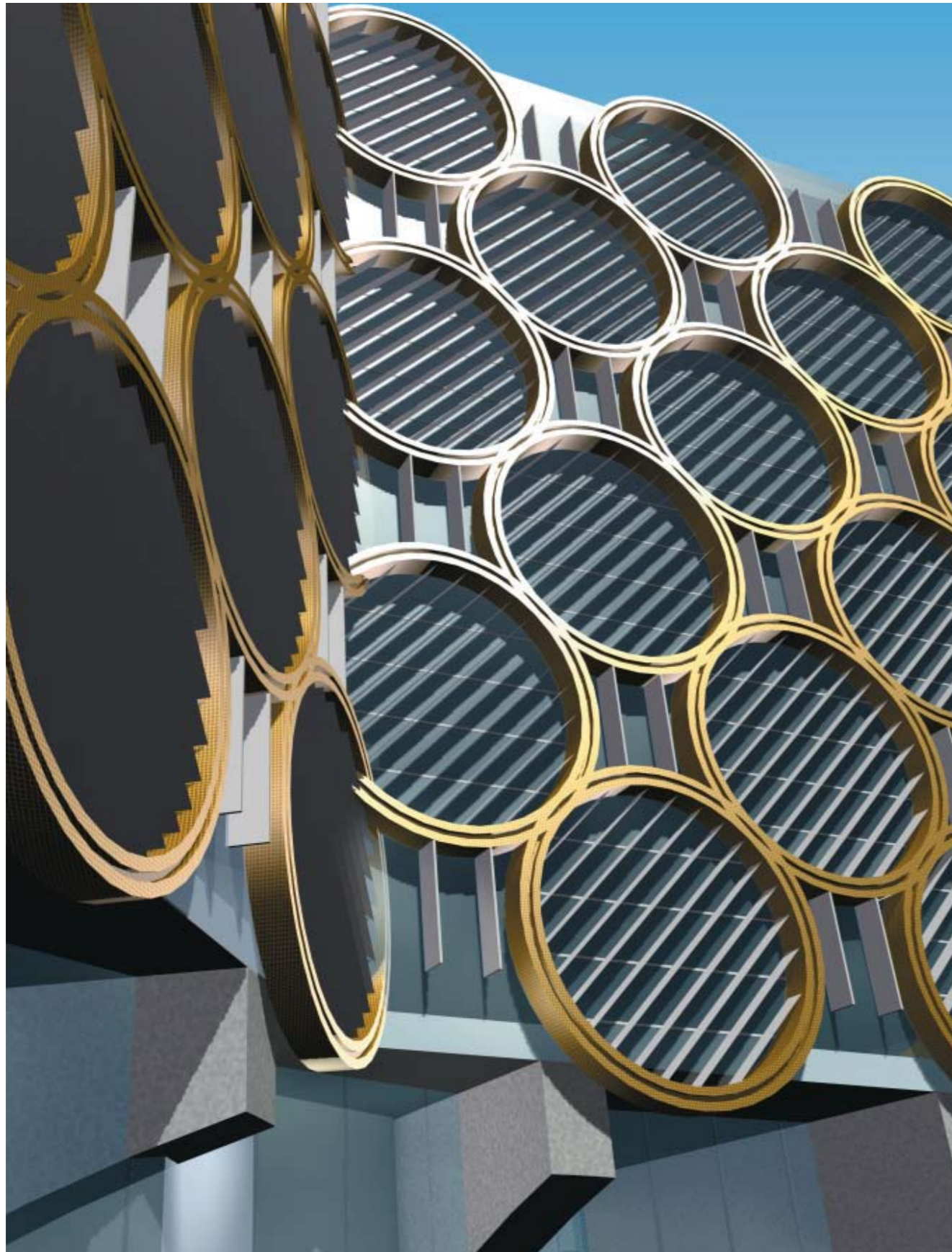
TYPICAL WALL SECTION 1:50



View from existing footbridge looking down to new plaza



Existing circular carpark as seen from existing footbridge (to be retained)



View looking up toward rings from plaza, showing gold mosaic tiles around structurally rings

The Hume project proposed an essentially glazed building with the rings clad in gold mosaic tiles, and sun shading fins within.

Mosaic tiles are the finish on the Perth Council House 'Ts, and have proved to be a durable cladding system that has a quality of a changing appearance at different distances (as per the Sydney Opera House). The Canberra Civic Offices and Square (Yunken Freeman, 1961) features gold mosaic tiling to the colonnade. This assists in distinguishing the modest modern buildings from the axial and nationally-focused federal works, and the surrounding commercial buildings.

My work at the Broadmeadows sought to re-configure and critique the existing masterplan, and to provide a design for the Council Offices as per the brief of the commissioned real project. By relocating the project to the south east corner of the site and relocated proposed urban spaces and circulation around the site, this project was involved at a urban design/ master-planning level that expanded the role of the Architect from the first project. The Lyons project, which accepted the site given in the Council masterplan, is ultimately judged by its ability to work at an urban level. While I recognise that within this real project (and other ones), the ability for the commissioned architect to critique the masterplan they are to work within is limited, it does perhaps suggest this is an important part of the process of making a legible civic work.

A way of addressing this issue would to be to involve a design focused architectural project at the master-planning stage.

If urban design and site planning considerations were one key area addressed in the Hume project, the other was the engagement with engineering and the structure of the proposed building. This sought to ingrain the architectural idea, to prevent its removal from the project, either during the design phase or after its eventual construction.



Detail of Council House 'Ts, cladding in white mosaic tiles



Canberra Civic Offices and Square, Yunken Freeman, 1961 uses gold mosaic tiling to the colonnade to distinguish itself from other modernist buildings in Canberra.

Chapter 3

Modern Ways of Making Civic Architecture

This chapter is a written and illustrated context to the masters by project. The chapter addresses the question of civic image and quality through examples from Australia and overseas. The projects here form a selective post-war chronological survey of some key approaches to civic architecture, providing a context for my own three design projects.

This chapter will investigate several strategies used in mainly post-war and contemporary work to suggest the civic nature of buildings. This chapter is organised into five broad strategies – the use of Arches and Arcading, Using Classicism, Borrowing from the Corporate, Ingraining Pattern and the use of Text as Facade.

Making New Arches and Arcading

Frank Lloyd Wright's late work, normally associated with the Guggenheim Museum in New York, showed a change of direction in his long and distinguished career. The Marin County Civic Center (1957–70), California, called for Wright to design a civic component for the expanding post-war American city. It is the clearest built example of Wright's shift in imagery and language in the later years. Completed in two stages, both after his death, Marin County Civic Center alludes to the repetitive arches of a Roman viaduct. Twenty minutes after arriving at the site, Wright said to his associate Aaron Green, "I'll bridge these hills with graceful arches."¹

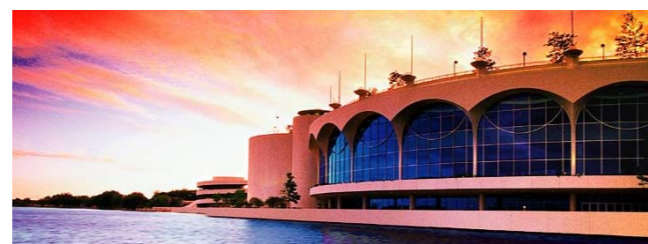
The use of the arch had occurred before in Wright's work – the V.C. Morris Store, San Francisco (1948) used a single Syrian derived arch. Yet the repetition of arches represents a shift, this is apparent to a lesser extent in the Wauwatosa Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church scheme that ran concurrently to Marin County, the church design commenced one year earlier in 1956. Another telling example of Wright's move towards arches in his late work is the Monona Terrace Civic Center in Madison, Wisconsin, commenced by Wright in 1938, revised in 1957 and remarkably not built until 1997. Wright's revision of Monona Terrace in 1957² (as he started the design of Marin County) developed an arching facade treatment – the project mutated from a large bridge-like series of terraces with three large domes in 1938, into a singular building with a curved front with grand arches. These arches are in-filled with



Arcaded edges to the Melbourn and Sydney Buildings, Canberra (John Sulman, 1924)



Marin County Civic Center, California, Frank Lloyd Wright, 1957–70



Monona Terrace Civic Center, Madison, Wisconsin, Frank Lloyd Wright, 1938–97

glass, as are those of the Greek Orthodox Church, so form a solid edge to the building rather than a sheltered arcade. Importantly, the Monona project revisions represent Wright's evolved approach to designing a civic centre.

At Marin County, the allusion to a load-bearing Roman viaduct or aqueduct is perhaps informed by the site and large-scale nature of the project. The system of arches used on Marin County exhibit an underlying classical vertical system (of decreasing weight with height), where the larger spanning arches occupy the lower levels, and then decrease in size up the facade. The top series of arches is continuous to form circular profiles, in a point of departure from the allusion to a Roman viaduct.

Wright's operations on these arches, however, reveal a move away from the load-bearing traditional arch; the main body of arches is not structural and is supported out from the main concrete construction. This is similar to a contemporary curtain wall system – evacuating the structural role of the arches, making them into screen and signalling devices. Wright makes no attempt to suggest that they are thick – built as a stucco cladding on a steel frame. In addition the junction between the arches are almost point-like and seem to hang from the building, inverting the structural logic of the Roman viaduct. This subversion of a Roman series of arches and lightness of the system explains the building's simultaneous classicism and futurism (it was included in two popular science fiction films).

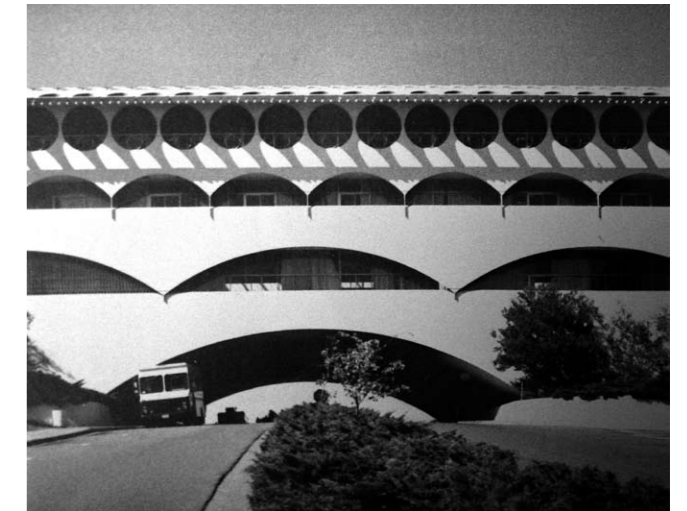
Detractors of Wright's late work suggest his remoteness to the project and large practice workload account for the thinness of the building and its lack of detail, unlike in his early work. Robert McCarther is typical in this view:

*Like many of Wright's late works, this design for the Marin County Civic Center seems to have developed without any significant constraints, limitations or even goals, and is merely an exercise in unfettered imagination.*³

Another account for Wright's change of direction in this late work is possibly a search for a way to demonstrate the civic; rather than a lack of constraints or goals as suggested by McCarther.⁴ In fact, the project was constrained and limited by a tight budget and I would argue Wright's goal was to find a language for a contemporary civic building. The Marin County Civic Center was surprisingly one of Wright's few built civic

³ Robert McCarther, Frank Lloyd Wright, Phaidon, London, 1999, pp. 325

⁴ McCarther, Frank Lloyd Wright, p. 325



Marin County Civic Center, arches altering in size



Marin County Civic Center, arches under construction

¹ Aaron Green, An Architecture for Democracy: Frank Lloyd Wright The Marin County Civic Center, Walsworth Press, Marceline, Missouri, 1990, p 21.

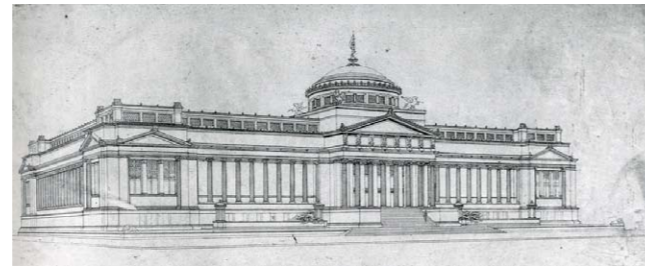
² Donald W. Hoppen, The Seven Ages of Frank Lloyd Wright, Dover, Mineola NY, 1993

projects for a government. Despite his enormous body of work, Wright was principally an architect for private clients, both houses and businesses.

In order for the building's function to be successfully communicated, residents needed to decode arches, particularly in a serialised form as denoting a building of some civic nature. It is hard to say whether the population of Marin County was immediately aware of the building's civic purpose, however there is little doubt that the building was distinguished in its context.

In 1893 Wright entered the Milwaukee Library Competition (his closest previous project of this type), with a symmetrically composed classical scheme, featuring a central dome above a temple portico. The Marin building can be read as a radical reworking of this scheme, with a dome in the middle. Elements of association and repetition are used in both schemes, to give them a grandness of vision that is transferable from the pre-modern to the modern. Wright does not develop an architectural language for the civic until 1957.

Sir Roy Grounds' Academy of Sciences in Canberra is a more three dimensional example of the use of arcading in a public building. This was Grounds' first major commission, designed in 1957 and completed in 1959.⁵ Grounds' biggest works before 1957 were multi-residential flats so designing a new institutional building represented a major typological leap. The pure low-slung dome of the academy shows a simultaneous development with the domical forms in Oscar Niemeyer's Congresso in Brasilia, designed at the same time (1956–8). However Niemeyer's use of arcades is restricted to orthogonal buildings, whereas Grounds was able to produce an arcaded edge to the base of the copper-clad concrete dome. Like Niemeyer's Ministry of Justice and Itamaraty Palace, also in Brasilia, Grounds used water around the perimeter of the building, in an interaction with the arcade. For the Academy of Sciences this also provides a water collection point from the copper roof and animates reflected light onto the vertical perimeter glass wall and into the spaces inside. The continuous circular arcade opens and closes to the surroundings with the flow of the complex curved arch, the depth of which changes in relation to the user. As a result, there is a changing quality of enclosure around the edge. This, coupled with the reflective consequences of water and glass, make this arcade an unexpectedly dynamic and public



Milwaukee Library Competition, Frank Lloyd Wright, 1893



Academy of Sciences, Canberra, 1959



Ministry of Justice and Itamaraty Palace, Oscar Niemeyer, 1957–62

space, given the purity and mass of the form.

The Academy of Sciences has been dubbed for many years the 'Martian Embassy', which tells of the building's science fiction-like qualities, similar to that of the Marin County Civic Center. Grounds' design was selected from a competition as the most radical. At the same time it utilises traditional forms such as the arch, symmetry and moat. Like Niemeyer's public buildings in Brasilia, the effect of deep arcades and colonnades around the building is the creation of deep shadowed facades, also suggesting a difference from generic building types.

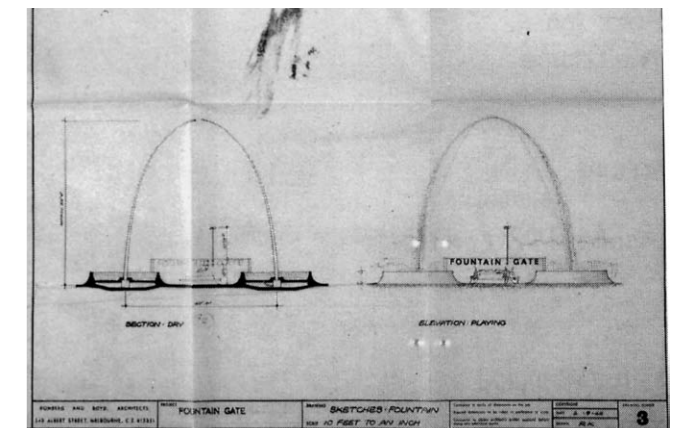
Precedent for Grounds' use of arches or arcades is not immediately apparent, as Niemeyer's work in Brasilia was simultaneous. The Academy is Grounds' first use of the arch, and can be seen as a prototype to the monumental National Gallery of Victoria completed in 1968. Normally regarded as a massive enlargement of Grounds' own (experimental) house in Hill Street, Toorak, Melbourne (1952–53), the National Gallery is different to this house via the use of the central arch (forming a single arch arcade) rather than conventional doorway on the house. The common denominator between Academy of Sciences and National Gallery, as public buildings, is the use of an archway – suggesting Grounds is using it as a civic device.

The reworking of the arch and arcade is a strategy that does not require pure invention in architectural language, but re-configuration of an existing language still alive in the consciousness of often classically trained architects. For a general population that sees civic buildings as pre-modern, and modern architecture as the style of reconstruction – mass housing, industry and commerce; the arch can understandably signify the civic. This proposition, whether true or not, seems to be the assumption on which certain architects practicing in the 1950s (Grounds, Niemeyer and Wright) relied when designing institutional and civic projects. But the arch in the pre-modern period was not an exceptional device, it featured on many types of buildings. Only with the onslaught of Modernism did the arch gain this new civic meaning, only once it was no longer widely used in civic or utilitarian buildings.

The 50s projects examined here use repeating arches, often to form arcades, rather than singular arch openings. Repetition is a key tenet of modernism, as is the use of new materials and technologies. These projects all show a major departure from the universality and non-referential quality of the 'International Style' or Modernism generally, as they all attempt to distinguish their new civic buildings from the post-war city that is becoming dominated by Modernism itself, as it became



National Gallery of Victoria, Sir Roy Grounds, 1968



Sketches for Fountain Gate Arch, Romberg and Boyd, 1968

⁵ Conrad Hamann, 'Roy Grounds 1905–, Frederick Romberg 1913– and Robin Boyd 1919–1971' in Architects of Australia, Macmillan, Melbourne, 1981

the default architectural style.

This historical survey of the use of arch has formed the context for a number of my own projects, dating back to 1998. My own work has used the arch as a civic device on several occasions, from my undergraduate thesis project, Welcome to Fountain Gate (1998), to the 2005 Seaford Life Saving Club Competition and a competition entry for the Federation Arch competition, Melbourne (2000). My own text from the published catalogue describes the use of the arch at Fountain Gate:

The second investigation involved a study into the use of the arch as a civic device, an extraction from international and local. This was also inspired by Romberg and Boyd's Fountain Gate Arch, close to the site, which announces the beginnings of the experimental Fountain Gate suburb, which Boyd worked on the masterplan for and designed one of the architectural show homes built there.

The two principle elevations of the project were designed unfolded – overlaid onto them were four different arch systems; borrowing from Niemeyer, Wright, Grounds and Boyd.⁶

The Federation Arch entry used repeated vertical members forming an arch; this is a technique of Federation Architecture, but also refers to an unfinished construction.

A supporting project, drawing on my research into the arch/arcade, is the Seaford Life Saving Club Competition (designed with Marcus White and Nano Langenhiem). This used a sun protecting stretched dome over a main building. Subtractions from this material dome create a sheltered and elevated arcade,

The main structure uses conventional construction techniques and is covered in a translucent material canopy providing a deck sheltered from rain, sun, glare and wind. This covered area of tempered light provides for a variety of community needs including passive beach surveillance, sheltered outdoor activities for the club and just a place to eat your fish and chips from the local store.⁷

To a large extent, these three supporting projects were attempts to use the arch as an associative device in different ways; as layered system, as singular form described in a contemporary manner, and as three-dimensional form creating a usable sheltered space.

The study of Wright, Niemeyer and Grounds' work of the 1950s forms a history of a particular aspect of my design practice. In the 1950s the use of the arch



Welcome to Fountain Gate, 1998



Federation Arch, 2000



Seaford Life Saving Club, 2005

was not generally accepted, as is the case in recent years. This historical survey informed these supporting projects, which in turn have acted as a catalyst for the three main projects of the masters.

Using Classicism

Traditionally a building's civic importance was measured by its level of classical treatment – important civic buildings were clearly defined classical structures, dominant in their streetscape, with clear classical elements (such as porticos) and enjoying a setback relationship to the street.⁸

During the 1980s, architectural Post Modernism became dominant in a neo-classical manner. This period is perhaps best catalogued in the 80s editions of *Architectural Design* magazine (AD), which has and continues to run a mode-based framework for contemporary work. Editions from the 80s typically feature content by Charles Jencks and the Krier Brothers, key promoters of this particular brand of Post Modernism. Many civic projects during this period reflect the key principals of 80s Post Modernism, successfully or not. It is interesting to examine the aims and strategies used in such projects to see what relevance they have to a contemporary study of the civic.

Historical Study: Mississauga City Hall, Toronto, Canada, Jones & Kirkland Architects, 1982–1988

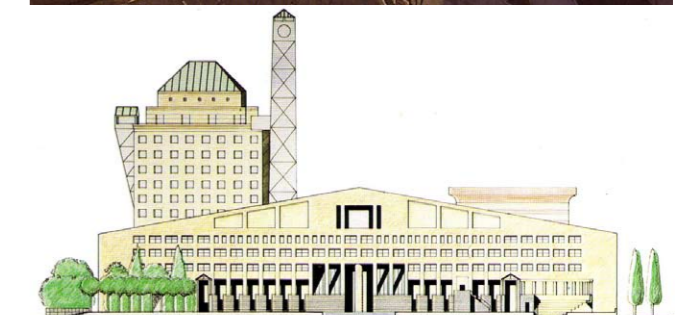
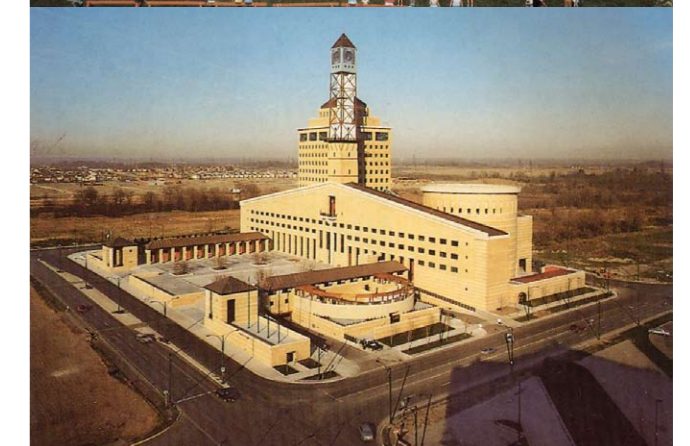
This project was the result of a 1982 architectural competition for a new civic complex set in outer-suburban Toronto, a new City Hall and supporting functions were requested. The Mississauga City Hall project was published in a 1988 edition of *AD*, it describes the project's context and agenda,

The competition for the new City Hall at Mississauga presented the challenge of creating a piece of civic architecture for an, as yet, featureless urban landscape. The initial sketches were made before the completion conditions were known and tackled the problem of making a 'somewhere of a nowhere location'.

The historical use of a grand scale, a Beaux-Arts composition and durable materials clearly distinguished the civic from private buildings ... Jones and Kirkland have returned to these issues in a building that is recognisably civic.⁹

Twenty-five years since the design of this project, it is

⁸ Kohane, Decorum (lecture), RMIT Architecture, July 2004
⁹ *Architectural Design*, Vol. 58 No 1/2, 1988, p. 35



Mississauga City Hall, Toronto, Jones & Kirkland, 1988



Haddon Scholarship, 2002

⁶ Harrison, et al, *Eclipse: RMIT Major Projects, 1998–99*, RMIT Department of Architecture, 1999
⁷ From the competition submission

apparent the aims have been achieved by the use of a particular manner of architecture – derived entirely from a simple classicism, and most notably the super-scaled pediment. Despite the massive increase of the scale of a conventional pediment, the building still reads clearly in a traditional way, particularly in elevation. When seen from an angle, the thinness of the large pediment building becomes apparent, and reads as something between a wall and slab block. The project assumes classicism signifies a civic quality. The project however has dated architecturally, perhaps unavoidably, thus reducing the successful reading of the project as civic.

The use of stretched classical portico was a key element in my own Haddon Scholarship scheme for a Civic Hall in Mildura (this formed the initial work on the first main design project for the masters). This project draws upon associative architectural form, particularly from the work of Robert Venturi, before my own discovery of the Mississauga project. The Haddon project attempted to merge this formal gesture with that of the generic Bunnings Warehouse portal frame shed, a typical 'landmark' building in the Australian outer suburb. Although there are similarities in the overall intent of my research and those stated with the Mississauga project, my own reading of the contemporary Australian town or suburb is not as a 'featureless' landscape – more of a difficult landscape that is in fact full of features that are attempting to be recognised, typically through signage and volume.

Case Study: Mill Park Library, Oaten Stanistreet, 2002

This Library is a project near the site of the third design project in this masters and speaks of intents that are similar to my design projects. The outcome however can be seen as failing to achieve the sense of a contemporary civic building that works well within its site and context. It relies on a classical organisation to establish its pedigree as library, but typologically ends up possibly closer to a contemporary car showroom. It was not a particularly cheap building either – \$5m in 2002. The project has an engaging plan; a reworking of a domed reading room type. The decision to set the building back from the street, in a classical manner often associated with making a building seem more important, seems to have backfired. Surrounded by properties, view-lines to the building are not strong, especially when driving past the building on the busy Plenty Road.

The following is an edited version of a text on the architect's website regarding the project:



Mill Park Library, Oaten Stanistreet view from road

OATEN STANISTREET ARCHITECTS

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Mill Park Public Library
Plenty Road, Mill Park
City of Whittlesea

Suburban Library's Dramatic Form Inspires Civic Pride

Melbourne architects Oaten Stanistreet have set a new standard for community buildings with the Mill Park Library, a structure whose grand proportions belie its relatively small scale.

The design brief from the City of Whittlesea was for a landmark building that would appeal to the broad multi-cultural cross-section of the community. The architects responded with an inspiring steel structure that derives its impact from its simplicity.

A classical colonnade was updated with raking angles and adapted to the Australian context by merging it into a large veranda portico. The tilted, curved roof imposes a commanding presence on the suburban landscape while providing visitors with a grand and welcoming entrance. Inside, the roof gradually lowers to more intimate areas at the rear of the 1800 square metre open-plan interior.

The steel roof decking, was also given an unconventional treatment. The ribs run the length of the hump-backed roof, with the sheets curving across their width. The roofing material is Colorbond Metallic steel with "Cortex" direction-oriented coating, chosen because the building demanded a prestige finish and a neutral colour that wouldn't date.

Walls were tilted at 'rounder' angles to balance the design and enhance the sculptural quality of the massive roof. The building can be easily identified from any angle and its curves follow the curve of the road that runs around the site.

The structure comprises a series of raking portal frames, large at the front and smaller at the rear, supporting 'curved' purlins, square and curved in Sydney and transported to Melbourne.

Services are contained under the roof and enter the building through raking "tulip" columns that help support the roof.

Although the structural concept is simple, the realisation was challenging. There are virtually no parallel lines in the building and every section had to be dimensioned individually. For example, none of the curved roof purlins has the same radius. The shop drawings took two months to complete and could not have been created economically without the aid of a computer.

Some 180 tonnes of steel was used in the structure, plus the purlins. During construction, the raking portals looked so unusual that a building worker passing by thought the steelwork was falling down and reported the site to the union as unsafe.

Public interest in construction progress was so strong that on the opening day 6000 local residents visited. Since then the library has been enthusiastically embraced by the community. Not only does its uplifting form embody a sense of aspiration in harmony with the ideals of the public library system. And the economical sculptural form sets an example for local authorities everywhere of how to achieve a landmark building on time and within a reasonable budget.

Mill Park Library from Oaten Stanistreet website

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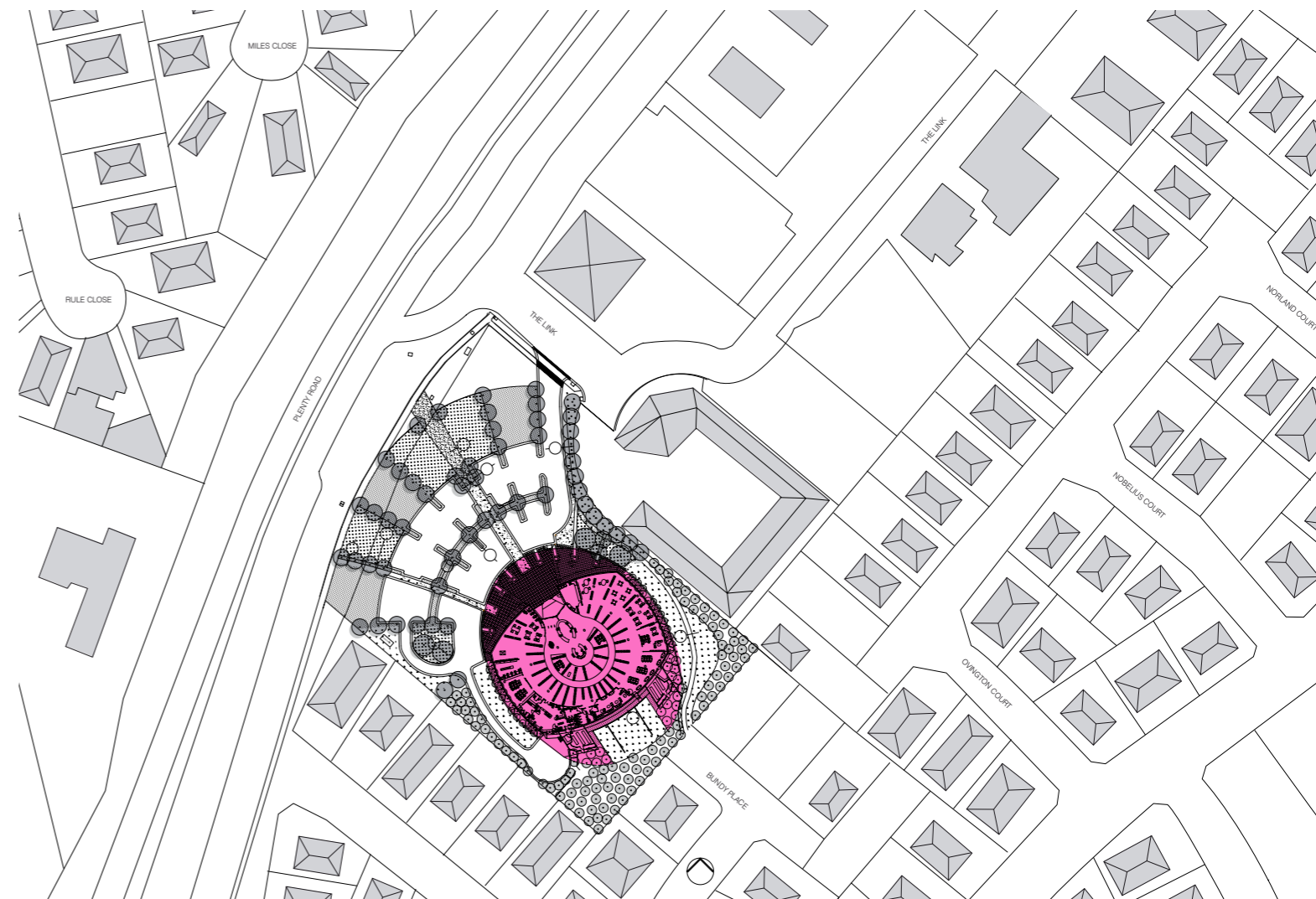
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The Mill Park Library fails to provide 'a commanding presence on the suburban landscape', as its visibility is poor and it is unclear as to the building's function. Its claims to have inspired civic pride are also dubious, its reflective glass and carpark forecourt more typical of suburban alienation.



MILL PARK LIBRARY, SITE PLAN 1:2000

Borrowing from the Corporate

Case Study: Carnegie Library, Melbourne, Perrott Lyon Mathieson, 2005

A survey of recent entries in the RAIA Victorian Architecture Awards revealed this project, which was unsuccessful in obtaining award but clearly stated intentions to create a legible civic building in a suburban context. This new library in the middle Melbourne suburb of Carnegie is located behind a strip of street shopping, with a thin plaza in front connecting to the 'main' street. The building has aims to be a 'showcase building' and in this way it is clear that the project is both designed to be seen and have a readable presence. The architect's statement for its 2005 entry in the Victorian Architecture Awards is a good summary of intentions of the project,

*The Carnegie Library and Community Centre is an example of urban renewal and is situated in adjacency to a suburban strip shopping centre. The Client's objectives were to provide impetus to the regeneration of a local commercial centre and deliver quality community services from a lively iconic local government building. Situated in the interface between commercial and residential planning zones, the building achieves sensitivity in siting and in building form. The architecture responds to each zone. Cost effectiveness has been achieved within the context of a contemporary design and the environmentally responsive nature of the project. Design layout, materials selection, accessibility, construction methods and management of the project have all made a significant contribution to a showcase building and to an outcome within the targeted budget. Various design initiatives including functional and efficient spacial planning have been adopted which achieve a user-friendly environment, and a sound environmental performance of the built form and for the longer term efficiencies in the operations of the complex.*¹¹

From an urban design perspective, the project is well considered – the result of a separate urban design / masterplan exercise. The building acts as the focus of the plaza, and has a measurable presence to the rear residential street. This however puts more pressure on the architectural language used, which clearly attempts a strong formal gesture to the main street side (the large canopy); with typically understood ideas of transparency and openness. The building entirely fails to read as a civic project however. It suggests the corporate or commercial office building. The centrepiece, the double-height full glazed foyer, is a mishandled version of a corporate foyer without the same level of activity. The project is lacking a suitable architectural language to tie together the program mix,



Carnegie Library, approach photographs



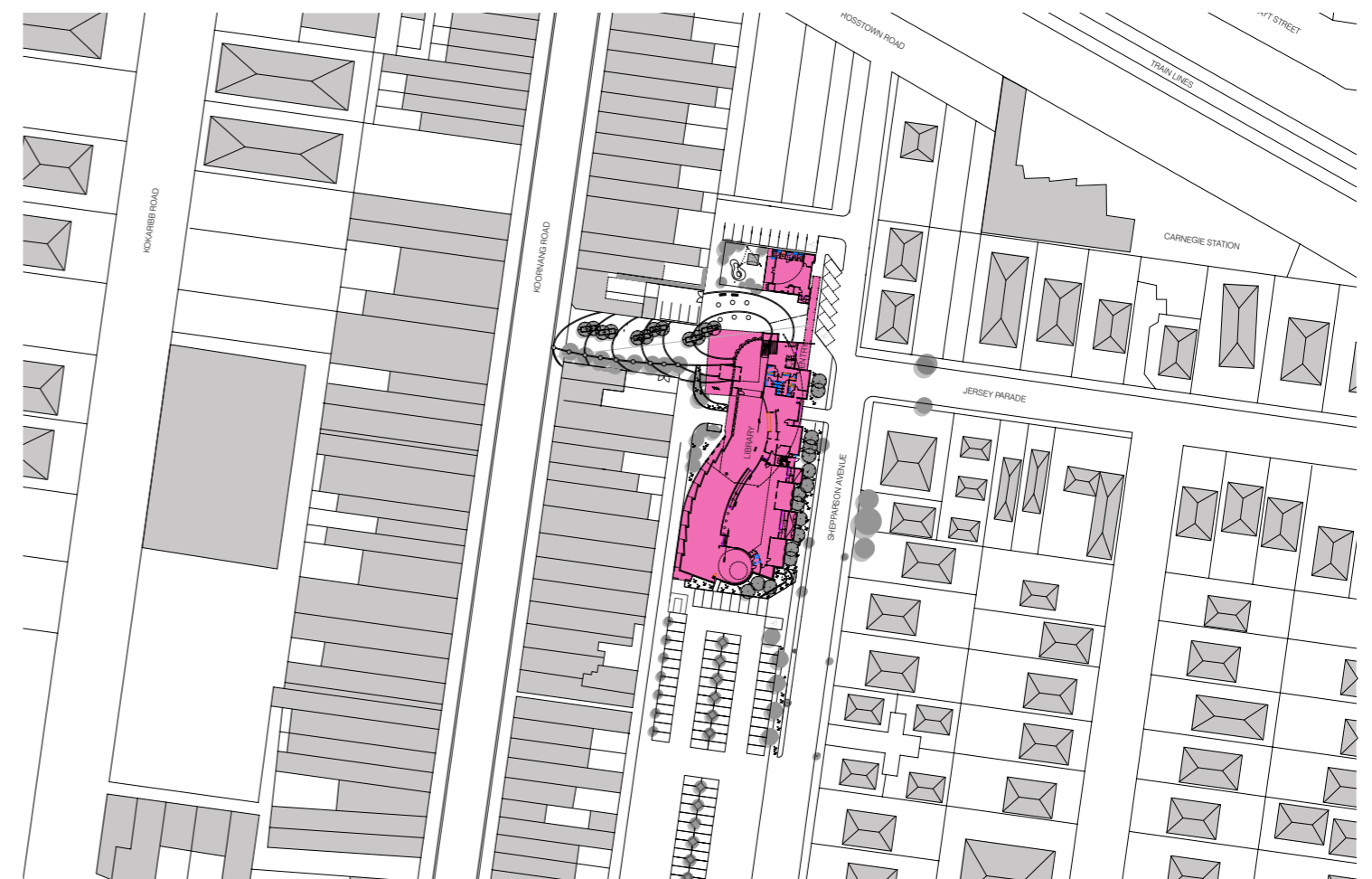
Carnegie Library, foyer looking back toward plaza and street

urban design, and covered walkways. This may be due to a lack of design investigation and contradictory aims – attempting to be both 'sensitive in siting and building form', and a 'showcase building'. Integrated colonnades to one edge of the project provide a sheltered link from the carpark to the main entry space.

The Carnegie Library is perhaps typical of an approach to new civic buildings where urban issues are well handled, discussed and consider in plan and building volume, but with a lack of legible strategy to denote the function of the building. As with the Mill Park Library project (Oaten Stanistreet), glass is used for its apparent transparency and modernity. This however is not successful, as glass during the day often blocks views into the interior when used over a large area, and in fact implies a controlled view out from within to the space in front.



Carnegie Library, covered walkway from carpark to entry; rear elevation facing residential area



CARNEGIE LIBRARY, SITE PLAN 1:2000

¹¹ RAIA Awards entry text, 2005. Available from RAIA website www.architecture.com.au

Ingraining Pattern

Case Study: Templestowe Park Primary, McBride Charles Ryan, 2005

This recent and modest-budget project in suburban Templestowe aims to celebrate memory and schooling, and provide a civic face to an existing school. A new assembly hall with kiosk, backstage and toilet facilities, it has become the image, entry and conceptual heart to this otherwise undistinguished but solid 70s primary school.

The principal facade, in painted panellised fibre cement sheet, faces onto the sports field and the entry side of the school. The distinctive pattern, based on one of the 'Olympic Stripe' exercise books, forms a potent memory creating experience in primary schooling. Colour is also used effectively on both tall Robin Boyd-like walkway columns and inside the hall and support rooms.

The design goes beyond the main facade, and is sited and planned intelligently. An entry path into the school passes under the new curved roof walkway canopy that twists and splinters from the new main roof. This path passes the entry to the hall, which is surrounded by a sample of institutional brickwork, which in turn is surrounded in translucent plastic sheeting. The simple curved black steel roof is mannered by the non-rectilinear plan shape, and comes into the view from the elevated main school building.

The hall interior is a broad carpeted assembly space with a wide stage. Doors to the rear of the stage open to create a flexible configuration. A bright orange side stage room enables stage productions and houses a ramp for the stage. The hall interior exposes and conceals the steel frame structure, demonstrating both economy and also locating within a tradition of sports halls as flexible spaces.

The building's use of a legible pattern gives the building a public role that addressed the use of the hall by the public. This was achieved at a budget level often below that of many houses.

However, what happens when the FC sheet cladding is painted beige – can an architectural strategy survive this? It is this limitation that suggests key expression, if possible needs to be resilient over time. Templestowe Park Primary is not just decorated shed – the vaulted roof form in black is embodied into the project, but the key gesture is a pattern not ingrained into the building.



Templestowe Park Primary, McBride Charles Ryan, 2005



Templestowe Park Primary – rear sides and roofs are black roof decking, also visible in aerial photograph below



Templestowe Park Primary, manipulated image to show FC sheet painted beige. In this scenario, the black roof sheeting would be maintained, and like the Lyons Hume Council Offices, a black rear elevation would remain as the device to distinguish the building.



Case Study: Automotive Centre for Excellence, Melbourne Docklands, Lyons, 2006

Melbourne practice Lyons completed this new educational project with civic intent on a prominent site in the Melbourne Docklands that is both a gateway to a large area of vacant land into which the TAFE-based Automotive Centre for Excellence (ACE) campus will expand, and sits on the edge of the old town.

Lyons' work has often been linked to Robert Venturi's potent notion of the decorated shed – a conventionally organised and simply formed building that was highly patterned and decorated in a flat way, in the millimetres of the facade. This dense and robust new project by Lyons is one of a series that has moved more towards form and surface as the key strategies. Their Victoria University Plumbing School (2001) in Melbourne's western suburb of Sunshine is a steel frame shed with blue and white cladding that strongly suggests clouds on a blue sky; and is a clear example of the firm's earlier approach. That project is also a 'hands-on' workshop style learning building, and in this way is similar to the recreated factory floor approach for the Automotive Centre for Excellence.

As a new education building, it seems the task for the architects was how to successfully make it more significant, or more civic, than the other numerous new, often larger, buildings at the Melbourne Docklands. Partly the siting strategy gives the building prominence – this helps but only if the building's language is strong. A project like this draws from a combination of program and context to inform its language of form, surface and type. The allure of cars – detailing, spray painting and panel beating is what is to be taught in this building; and the project picks up on colours and patterns associated with a culture of the car. The contextual cues are the Docks sheds that used to occupy the area; like the one demolished for this building – an engagement with the roof form and perhaps the horizontal nature of the shed. This could be read as in opposition to the culture of residential towers and multi-level commercial buildings at Docklands. Tying together context and program is the formation of an automotive precinct here – opposite the new building is a brick warehouse which has housed for some years transportation magnate Lindsay Fox's collection of cars, and was a catalyst for the siting of the project here. A ground level boutique workshop in the new building which faces the Fox collection will service these cars, and allow direct viewing into this shop front-like facility.

The building is both shed-like and not; an expressed



Automotive Centre for Excellence, Lyons, 2006



Victoria University Plumbing School, Sunshine, Lyons 2001

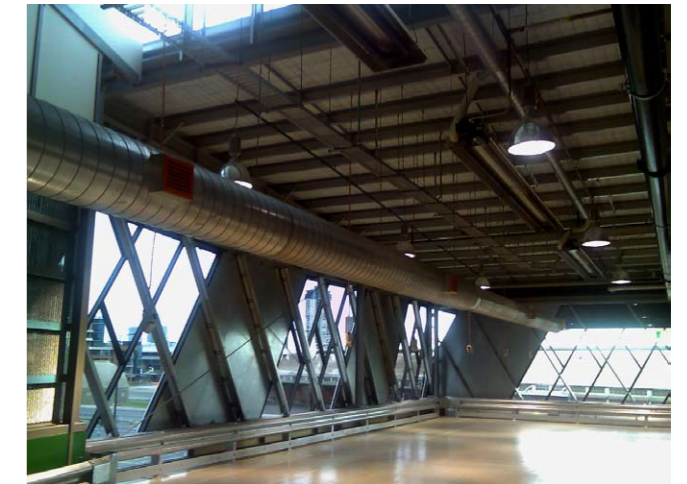


Automotive Centre for Excellence: context – Fox Car Museum, apartment towers

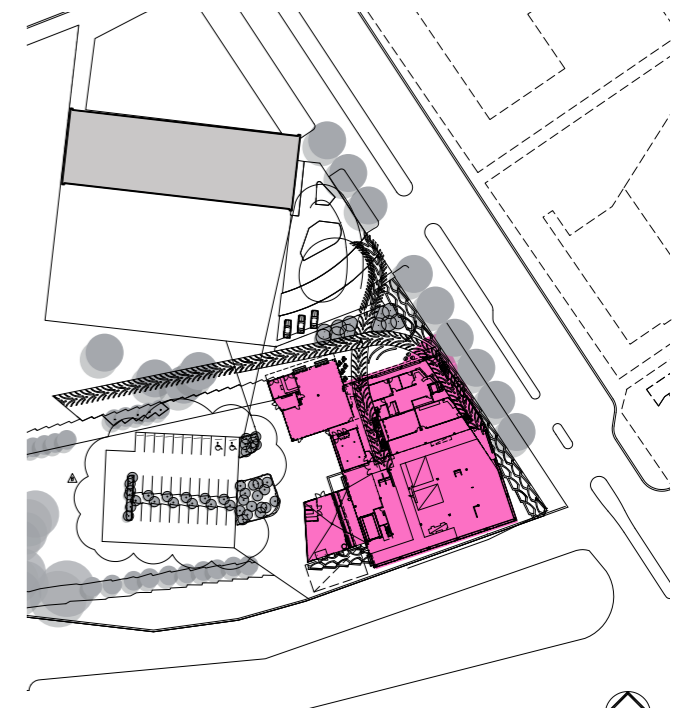
raw steel construction internally and large open factory-type spaces, a shallow pitched roof and overall horizontality suggest this – but the building's form, particularly of the north side is jagged and cranking, and not simple. The building has two halves, the north side addresses the civic side of the project, the south side the busy road and adjacent road bridge ramp. The northern half houses the teaching spaces, circulation, and offices; the larger south half is essentially two factory floors stacked upon each other. The facade treatment is different on the two parts also; large chevron-like emblems diagonally cross the facade on the southern half, alternating between solid cladding and glass. The primary structure here of steel columns is vertical, however both cladding/glazing and secondary structure of girts are inclined. The diamond-like pattern is ingrained into the building's structure and not just appliqué.

The northern half of the building uses a large glazed wall facing east to illuminate the tall stairwell space – this wraps on the northern elevation where deep set strip windows slip over the glass wall. The western face is metal deck sheeting in a flat continuation of chevron pattern, and is the side from which the campus will expand. The black roof becomes a unifying element over the project and overhangs on the north-east entry corner to form a sharp super-canopy for entry; this corner addressing both the street and the future plaza space to the north of the building. This entry takes you into the high stairwell, which forms part of a footpath-like public spine that comes into the building and escorts you to the workshops and mezzanine levels. In this space angled steel braces fix the glass wall system back to the main structure, optimising steel and suggesting racing cars.

The project's main colour from the outside is black, formed through painted Exotec cladding. Both the building's blackness and the viewing space around the building distinguish it from its surrounds, making it read as 'special'. Lyons' have a clear desire to form a civic face for this flagship campus building, and one that is not technically a civic building programmatically. This is part of an intent to make a legible public work for all of Docklands, and does this by ingraining a clear pattern into the building.



Automotive Centre for Excellence, interior – behind chevron pattern/walling



Automotive Centre for Excellence, SITE PLAN 1:2000

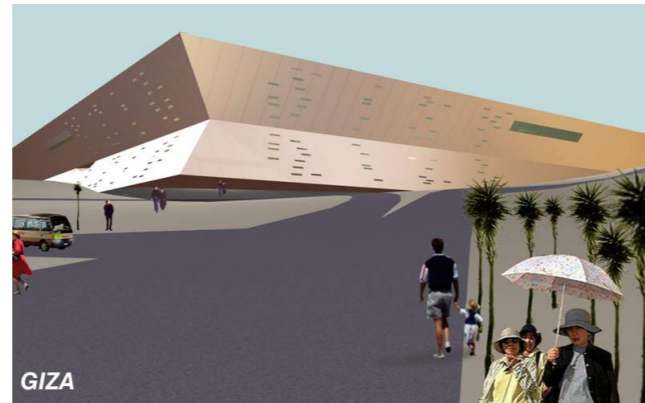


Automotive Centre for Excellence, Batman Drive Elevation

Text as Facade

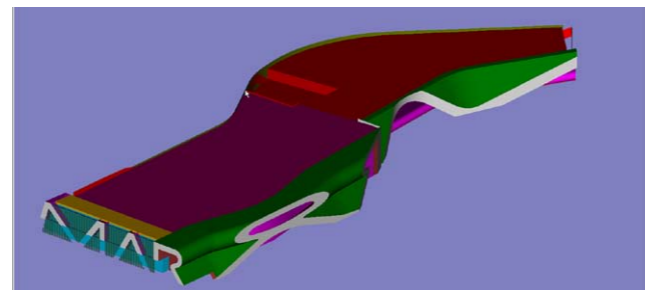
The use of text, or large lettering on buildings, is a key strategy used in several civic architectural projects. The use of text to engage the civic will be examined through case studies and my own design work.

The Giza project, the Grand Egyptian Museum, was an entry into a 2002 international competition. The enormous civic project was a large land-based building, like an other-worldly golden vessel landed in the sand. On the entry corner the word 'GIZA' is cast into the facade. This is cryptically spelt in rectangular window openings, and then mirrored. The textual window pattern is somewhere between English lettering and hieroglyphics.



GIZA
Grand Egyptian Museum, 2002

Ashton Raggatt McDougall's (ARM) Marion Cultural Centre, in suburban Adelaide, uses letters as figured double columns and arches. The text begins on the building and extends into the surrounding landscape. The choice of word 'MARION' seems obvious, but it intelligently forms a contextual link to the commercial and public buildings of the area. Several of the local civic buildings use the word 'Marion' in relatively large letters to locate themselves in a generic late modern architecture. Commercial signage dominates the road-scape of suburban Adelaide, a city without freeways. ARM are engaging with this suburban condition, taking on board the retail vernacular of the large shopping centre and making it exceptional and generous, the intention to make it public.



Marion Cultural Centre: rendering showing letter extrusion

The Marion building is sited as a gateway to the very large Westfield Shopping Centre. Positioned between the main shopping centre building and the main road that services it, the single-level Marion building is far smaller than the shopping centre, which is over several floor levels. The building takes advantage of its proximity to the road, ensuring passers-by can read the word 'MARION'. The word can be read in a drive-by experience, but is perhaps more visible when drivers turn into the service road and the building directly introduces itself in a sweeping manner. Michael Markham succinctly summarises the architects' parti,



*They have made a landmark out of the city's own name, as the designers of roadside buildings have so unselfconsciously done for half a century now. But this isn't a dumb box (to quote the most original architectural thinker of the last 50 years) with a sign out front, or on top; it's the one pushed into the other.*¹²



Marion Cultural Centre: 'MAR' letters on front elevation, arcade formed through the 'R' extrusion

Only three letters of the word 'MARION' are however on the building, the 'MAR'. The 'ION' is made from landscape features – the 'I' a tall sculpture, the 'O' an oval planter bed and the 'N' another sculpture.

It is the 'R' that is the most important in forming a spatial condition and associative language for the project. The 'R' is last letter that is part of the building; it is in-between the building and landscaping. It extrudes down the entire primary side of the building and forms the main entry into the building and an arcade. The 'R' is conceptually extruded along a curved path running down this edge of the project, but the treatment to the edge is not consistent as the extrusion is cut in plan. This truncation results in a mirrored cut 'R' and two adjoining arcade spaces. This space is arcade-esque, as the form of the enclosure is effectively arched.

The question of whether the word is readable is of interest here. Like Leo's Restaurant, St Kilda, proximity to the word makes it harder to read. In the case of Marion, one can occupy the word, and within here a tension exists between the sensuous form and materiality (of copper and painted timber battens) and the sense of being within a letter – seeing an R or A around you. When just outside them, like on the footpath outside Leo's, the attention is on the tectonic and materiality of the building; the lapped copper cladding sheets or the orange painted steel fins; there is nothing to read when at the facade, only when away from it or within it.

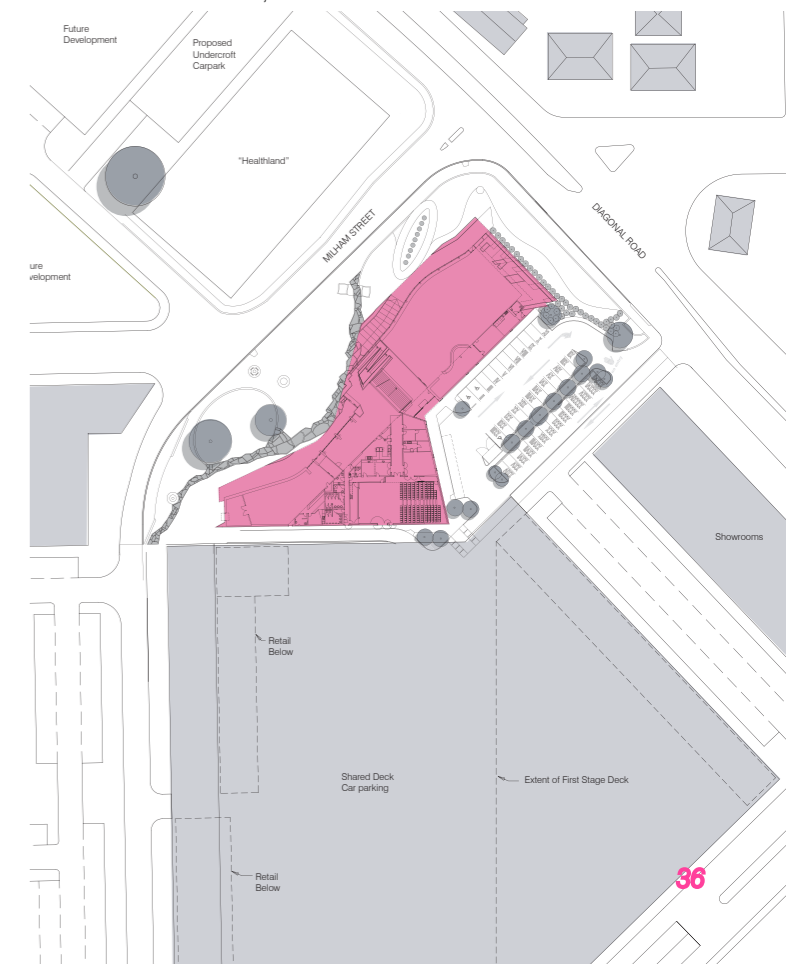
Unlike Leo's however, the viewer always approaches the Marion building from a distance, as it is sited in the middle of a corner lot – that of the busy Diagonal Road and one of the main entry points to the retail park that includes the dominant Marion Westfield Shopping Centre. The word is readable as the architectural language is intensified – the use of bright orange painted steel and copper cladding presents the building as significant.

If the Marion building had used the language of classicism, the same sense of readable significance would not occur; (historical) classicism is not employed for public buildings in the current climate – it is now the domain of large residential work. Classicism is therefore associated with either old public institutions, like the State Library of Victoria, or suburban track housing; one borrowing from the other. That is, unless the language underwent the sort of manipulation we see in Venturi's Seattle Art Museum and the context was more traditionally urban.



Leo's Restaurant, St Kilda

Marion Cultural Centre, SITE PLAN 1:2000



12 Michael Markham, 'Marion Made?' Architectural Review Australia 78 (Summer 2001/02): 52-61.

Architects who tend to use text or words are generally interested in a local condition or expression. This is true for ARM and the early work of Frank Gehry; and in the work of Venturi & Scott Brown. These same architects also use other devices to denote the local – a particular (local) vernacular for example.

This can be said of the Marion building. The vernacular of the shopping centre building is taken and then exaggerated. The black precast concrete walling around the main rear facade of the building uses the same construction system as most shopping centre perimeters. Instead of making the wall a 'natural' colour (typically beige) the choice of off-black inverts this tradition but still uses the language. A bright undulating orange stripe is painted into the precast which is also a large 'M' character, 'M' for Marion. The inset cut into the precast concrete is also a feature of more recent precast walling for shopping centres – in those cases a token horizontal cut is used to 'break-up' the scale of the often imposing blank walls that dominate the landscape of shopping centre exteriors and car parks. The Marion project is located within this context – it playfully satisfies the need for a public building within the domain of a large privately owned shopping centre.

The identification of place is important here, it is part of an intention to make a project local. The text 'Marion' creates a sense of place in an area where many architects and urbanists would feel that this was difficult. Ian McDougall, speaking about the building at the Victorian RAIA in 2002, talked of affiliating the building with the suburban Adelaide he had grown up in.¹³ This sense of place is not akin to that of Norberg-Schultz in an essentialist way, it more readily accepts the qualities of place and attempts to make those significant and public. For example, the carpark at Marion is like many car parks, but its attention to the graphic and spatial layout that makes it different to the generic, and I would argue better than the generic mould.

ARM's Marion building uses text, as part of a suite of language at their disposal, to create a readable public building that is situated in an urban context in which it is not the dominant member. The building uses a dominant architectural vernacular, new technology and words to make it open conceptually; and therefore establish a public role. This is opposed to a physical openness or transparency – often manifest as large glazed walls in public buildings.

¹³ Marion Cultural Centre (The New Institution – Part 1), A talk presented by, Ian McDougall, 8th July 2002, RAIA, Victorian Chapter. From the event flyer: 'A life spent driving has granted us Australians with an experience of public space that is visual and endless.'



Venturi's Seattle Art Museum, 1991



Marion Cultural Centre, carpark

The original scheme (1957) for the ETA factory by Grounds Romberg & Boyd (with Fredrick Romberg acknowledged as primary author) shows the acronym ETA integrated into the building, the letters sitting within the infill spaces between the building's steel frame. Here the letters are flush with the facade, and do not sit clearly proud of it as in the final (built) scheme. As the first scheme was not developed to the level of construction systems it is not possible to determine how far the characters would have been integrated into the walling, but the renderings clearly suggest that there was little formal or material separation between them and the structural frame. The built scheme features large lightweight letters that have a strong and distinctive relationship to the main building. Helen Stuckey suggests that the building was one of the first to use supergraphics in Melbourne.¹⁴ It is likely the large letters were the intention of the architect, as they appear integrated in the original scheme.

The structural bracing is another 'character' on the ETA facade – it was coloured metallic gold; the 'ETA' letters were bright red. Both elements were clearly brighter than the main facade, together forming something like '> ETA', where '>' is the structural cross bracing. The curtain wall facade represents modernity, the mass produced, suitable for a new post-war factory and offices. The bracing and text elements communicate both the name of the company and create a strong link to the road, acknowledging that viewers will pass by at speed due to its adjacency to the highway. Here, the text is used to extend the intentions of the project. By March 2007, the former ETA building had lost all but its primary structure, columns and bracing.

These projects featured use large-scale letters to make apparent the intention of the architect; and this is often to expand the building into a clearly public role. Text is used to create a sense of identification with the location and public ownership, to denote a particular local vernacular and to create a readable public building within an urban context.

¹⁴ Stuckey, Helen, 'ETA Foods Factory', *Frederick Romberg: The Architecture of Migration 1938–75*, RMIT University Press, 2000



ETA factory, original scheme, Fredrick Romberg, 1957



ETA factory, Fredrick Romberg



ETA factory, photographed in 1998 and 2007

Ways and Means

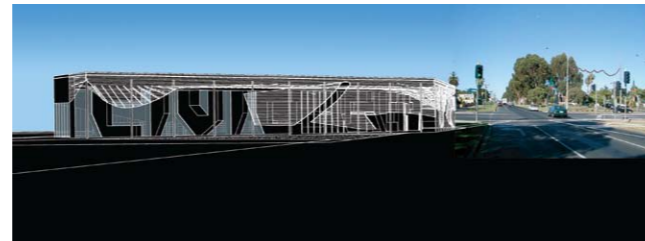
Of the strategies examined in this chapter to assist in the reading of a building as civic some are more successful than others. This selective survey draws from several papers that have investigated such techniques as well as examples that have arisen through the undertaking of project work. The two most deeply explored strategies; Text as Facade and Arches/Arcading were used together in the first main design project undertaken as part of this masters, a civic centre in Mildura.

The strategy of using arches and arcading captured two concerns within the examples examined – the desire to associate through the form of the arch, and to appear modern at the same time, by either the repetition and/or the abstraction of the arch into a simple edifice. My own layering of arch systems in the 'Welcome to Fountain Gate' project attempted to repeat systems of abstraction on top of each other, to intensify the treatment and to create a new language from this altered one.

The use of 'Text as Facade' is a technique that perhaps extends well back into the twentieth century, with large lettering use in Art Deco and Moderne buildings, through to Modernism (such as the ETA Factory) but perhaps is most overt in Post Modernism, with early projects such as Venturi's Thousand Oaks (1969) scheme and Gehry's Santa Monica Place carpark (1980). It remains a strategy with currency amongst Australian firms such as ARM and Lyons and is perhaps the most direct and legible method a making a symbol from a word, a form of literal identification.

The case studies examined here that fall under the category of 'Ingraining Pattern'; Lyons' Automotive Centre for Excellence, and McBride Charles Ryan's Templestowe Park Primary School attempt in different ways to embody a pattern system in the facade of the project, and in the case of the Lyons' building, in the secondary framing. Council House, Perth, examined in relation to the second design project (the new Council Offices for Hume in Broadmeadows), also successfully ingrains its pattern systems of staggered 'Ts' into its structure. This key technique was learnt from and extended in the Hume project, which sought to embody the architectural use of circles into the primary structure of project - it would not stand up without them.

This chapter only featured one example under the 'Borrowing from the Corporate', but this is perhaps the most widely drawn from strategy used by many



Mildura Civic Centre



Ingraining Pattern: Council House, Perth, Howlett & Bailey, 1963



Hume Council Offices



Text as Facade: Marion Cultural Centre: under construction, with construction board, legibility and reading

architects. PLM's Carnegie Library was chosen as a recent example of a project entered in the RAIA Awards, following a survey of entries into the Institutional category in recent years (the Mill Park Library was also discovered in this process). This strategy can also be seen at Broadmeadows in the Hume Global Learning Centre by Peddle Thorp architects, and is discussed as part of the second project. At the heart of borrowing from the corporate is either the architect's inability to use or develop a civic language, or a view that 'pride' or meaning can be borrowed from corporate buildings that carry social kudos in a capital based society.



Using Classicism :State Library of Victoria and Bunnings Warehouse



Borrowing from the Corporate: Carnegie Library, Melbourne, Perrot Lyon Mathieson, 2005



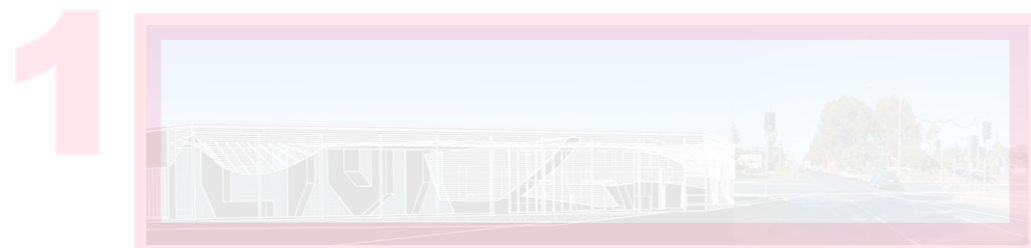
Making new arches and arcades: Chadstone Shopping Centre, Melbourne – wireframe arcade which has survived several shopping centre upgrades.



Santa Monica Place, Los Angeles, 1980 (photographed 2000). The words 'SANTA MONICA PLACE' across facade

Chapter 4

A New Civic Type



Third Project

Civic School, Mill Park, Melbourne



Mill Park Lakes, circle around school site



Mill Park Civic School, original architectural strategy

The third project (commenced at the start of 2006) tackles a new school and community facilities building in Mill Park, and outer suburb of Melbourne. The site is within 'Mill Park Lakes' a still to be completed suburban subdivision with no significant buildings. This project attempts to provide a civic presence for the school and an urban sensibility by embracing the street, an old straight country road as a public armature. In addition, it became the aim of this project to develop a new civic type, firstly at the level of program and one that built on the architectural work of the first two design projects of the masters.

In a manner similar to the first project (Mildura), this third 'civic school' project had an initial scheme produced in a short period of time, and then was extensively reworked over far longer period. In a strategy used on the second (Hume) project, an enduring modern precedent was initially selected and used for this 'first pass'. This was the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Pool, by McIntyre, Borland, Murphy & Murphy, with engineering by Bill Irwin. It was this project's direct engagement with structure that was reason for its selection, rather than as a direct programmatic precedent. The building does however enjoy a continuing architectural presence in its context.

The Mill Park project commenced with a real 'P9' school (preschool to Year 9) brief for a project that was in the planning stages. It was decided early however to separate the program of the new school into two sections: the joint-use school and community programs to be contained in a large, single volume, and classrooms to run at a lower height in a linear strip. This is one key way in which the project becomes 'civic'; in that the school's facilities are used by the wider community.

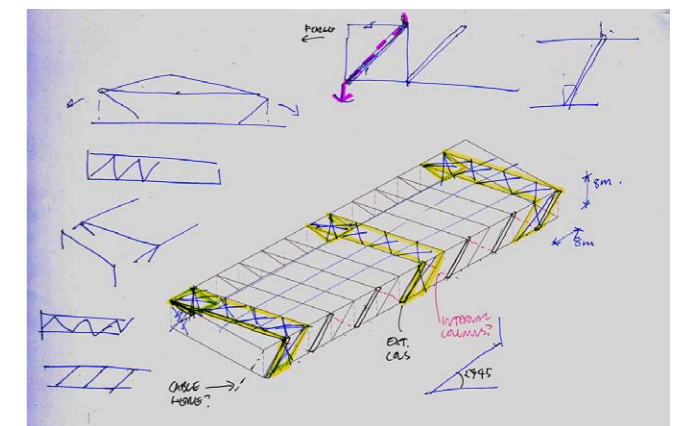
The single volume nature of the public program developed the interest in the Olympic Pool project, which like Perth Council House had endured through the post-war period and had recently been restored to something close to its original condition. The principle of 'balancing forces' is central to the 1956 building.¹ This principle sees the two long ends of the shed leaning away from each other and tied together by a diamond truss.

The original 'first pass' scheme sought to use the embedded structural logic of the Olympic Pool with the pattern and identity of the Templestowe Park Primary, which had recently won the RAIA Victorian Architectural Medal. It involved a golden raking structural frame, with alternate coloured metal deck cladding as walling.

¹ As stated by Peter McIntyre at a RMIT Architecture visit to his house and office (Kew), April 2002.



Melbourne Olympic Pool, by McIntyre, Borland, Murphy & Murphy, 1956



Structural principle sketches, first Mill Park scheme



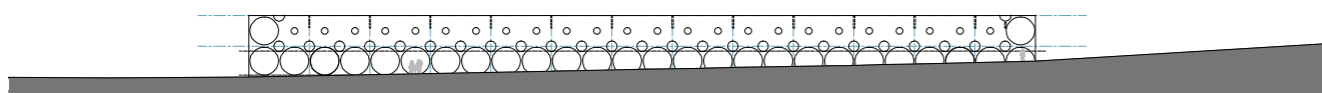
Templestowe Park Primary, McBride Charles Ryan, 2004



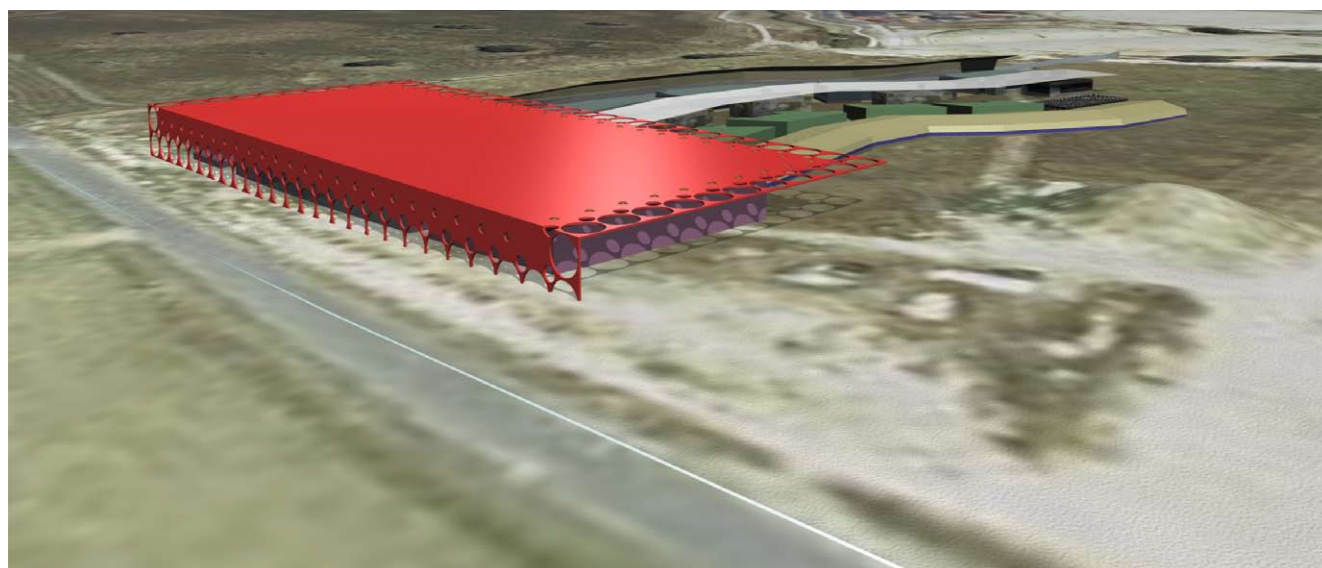
Night view from Gordon's Road of original Mill Park scheme



Aerial view from east looking over project



Street Elevation 1:1000



Aerial view from north east

Gold glass inserts along the side of the raking columns suggested a pattern akin to that of school tie. As the scheme developed later (left) it began to open its facade to the street, until this design was rejected, as it failed to satisfy the criteria of a legible civic building.

A new design approach for the jointly used community/school 'box' was undertaken. It had become apparent this was to be the more visible part of the two-part schema, with its street address and direct civic role. The remaining dedicated school programs would extend from the back of this volume across the site, as a series of parallel 'tentacles'.

The use of circles in this project extends to their application in the Hume project. It continues a long interest in the work of Louis Kahn, and parts of the Assembly Building in Dhaka, Bangladesh are particularly clear in the creation of a partial circle arcade. Multiple studies into the framing/facade system examine different systems of interlocking circles – some drawing from the Venetian Gothic and some from honeycomb structures. The relationship to the level change on the site (not exploited in the first version of this scheme) became critical in developing a system that would allow people to pass through.

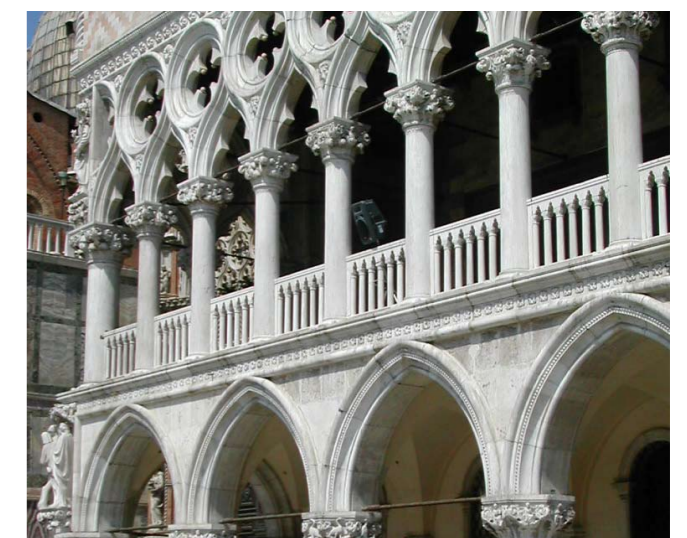
A series of circular openings along the ground has an altering relationship with the ground level as it rises from south to north. This results in full circular openings on the southern end, which graduates through partial circular openings (as in the Kahn example) to a semi-circular arch opening on the north. The partial arch openings trace a further connection to Chinese restaurant arches, which in many suburban shopping centres achieve distinction through their embedment into a building's facade, whereas other shops and outlets retain conventional shop fronts.



Dhaka Hospital arcade, Louis Kahn



Sun Seng Chinese Restaurant, Woodvale, WA

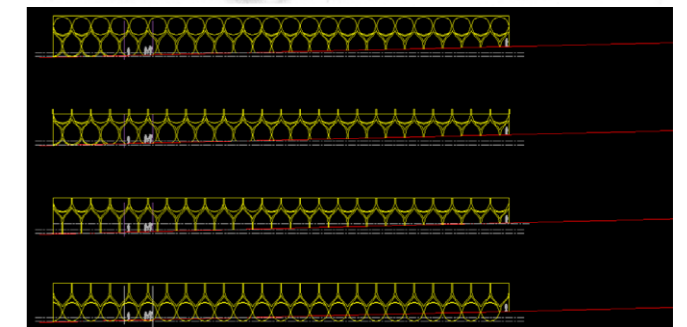
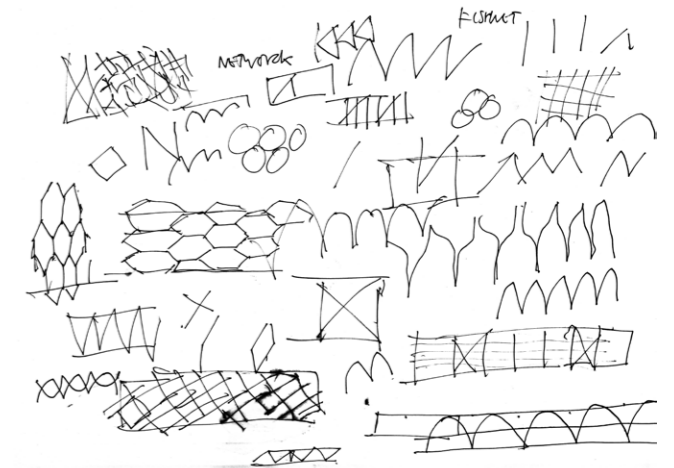


Doge's Palace, Venice

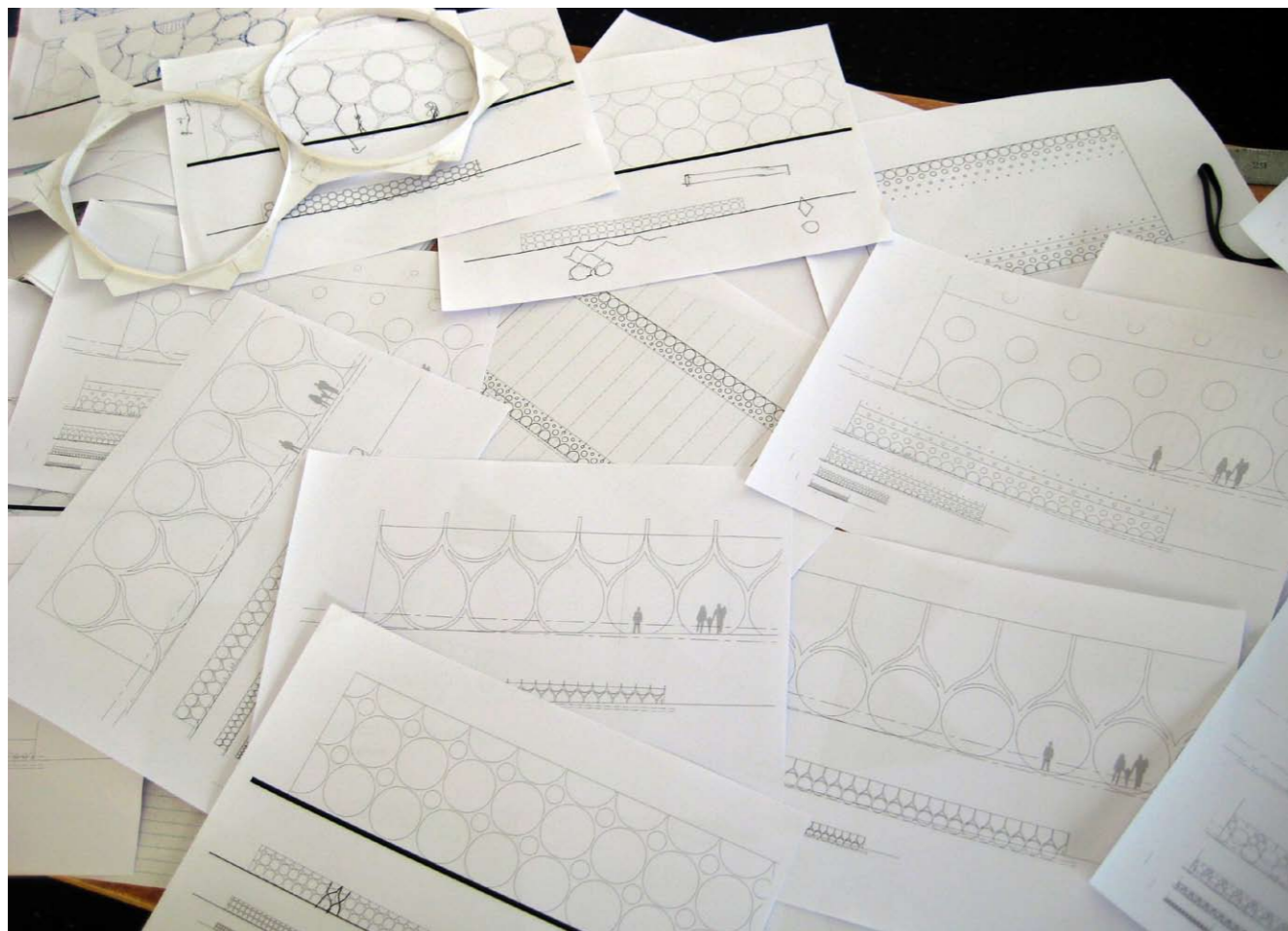


Aerial view south west

The formal *parti* of a large red surface, clad in Colorbond metal roof decking, achieved several key things. Along the eastern edge, the street facade forms an arcade to enclose the footpath and school drop-off zone, as well as form a linear public space. The other side, on the western edge, the same treatment acts horizontally to form a canopy and allow the dedicated school program to 'tuck in' under the encompassing roof. The outdoor space underneath is the major outdoor play and assembly space for the school – this opens into the main indoor hall which is used both by the school and the community. Along the short north and south sides of the red box the roof extends as a large eave which to the south shelters the first part of the public walkway across the site and to the north a covered area adjacent the carpark.



Elevation Studies



Models and drawings of options for elevation/roof plane

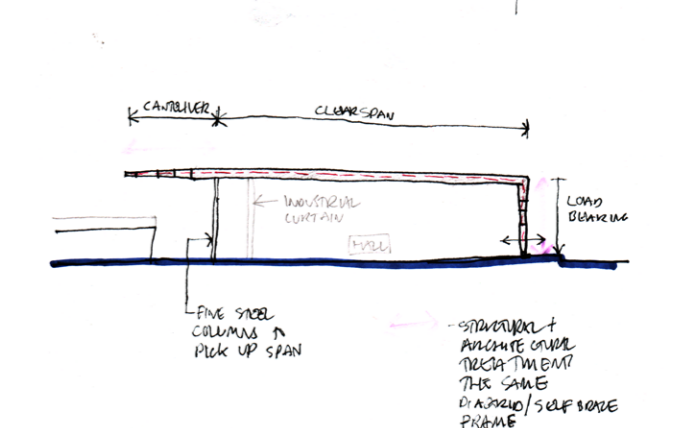
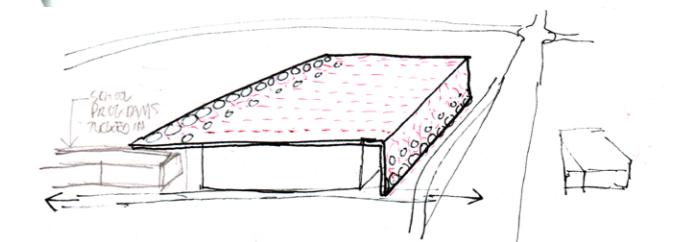
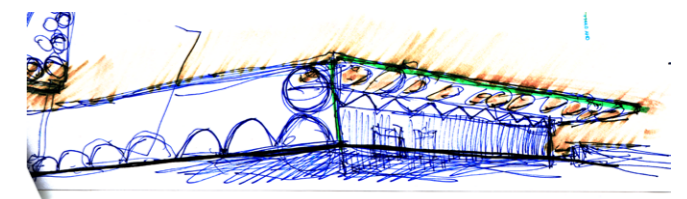
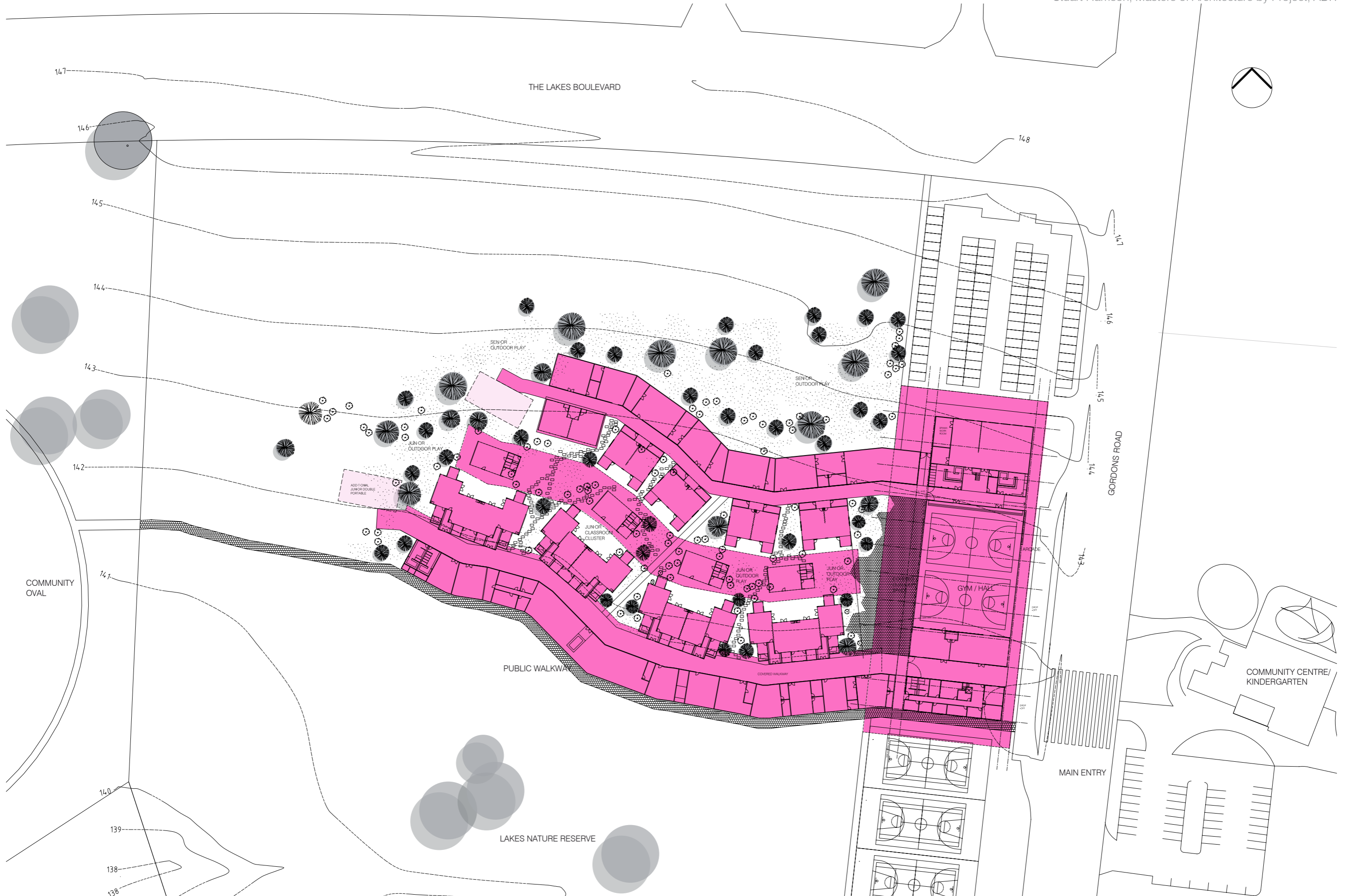


Diagram explaining folded roof plan idea

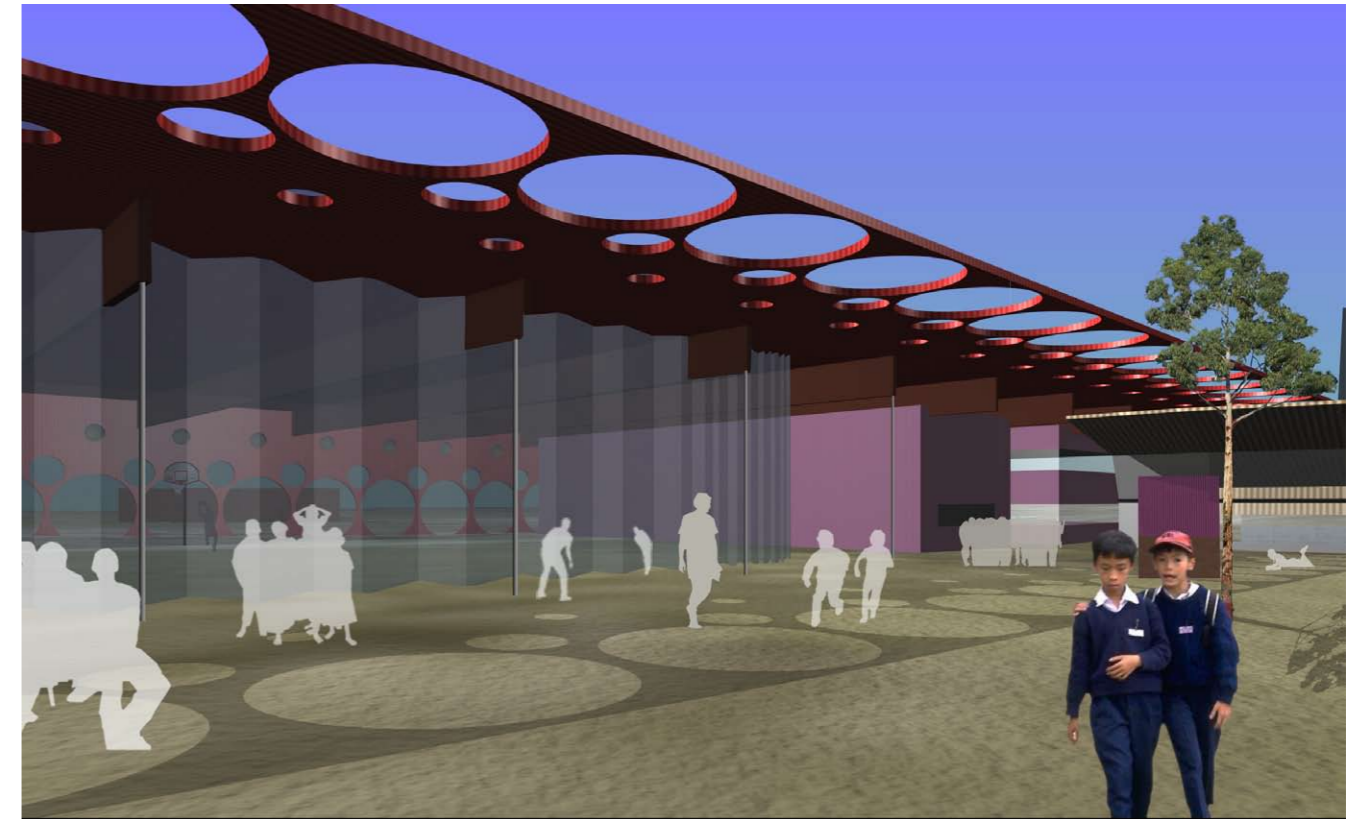
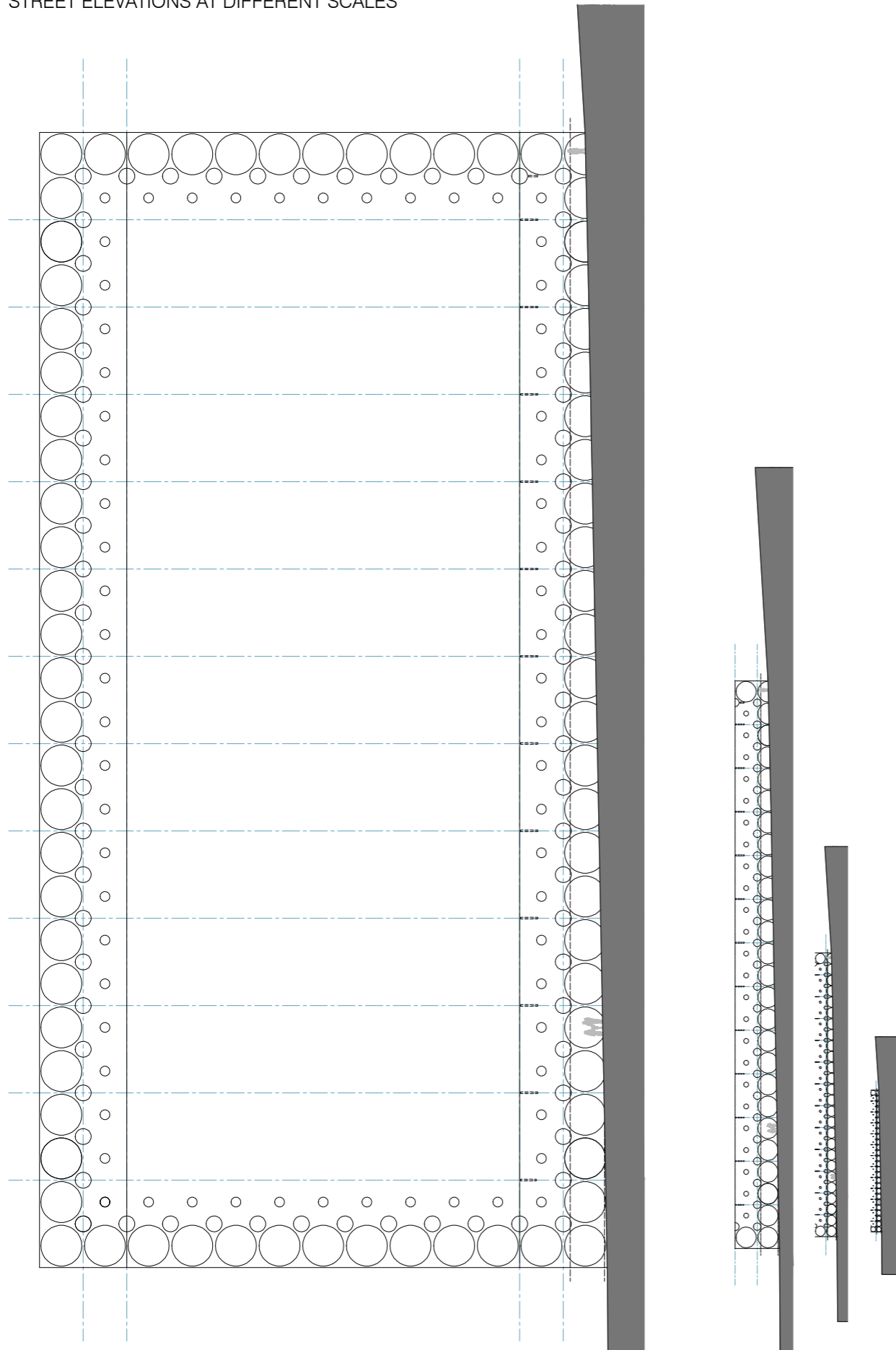


MILL PARK CIVIC SCHOOL SITE PLAN 1:1000

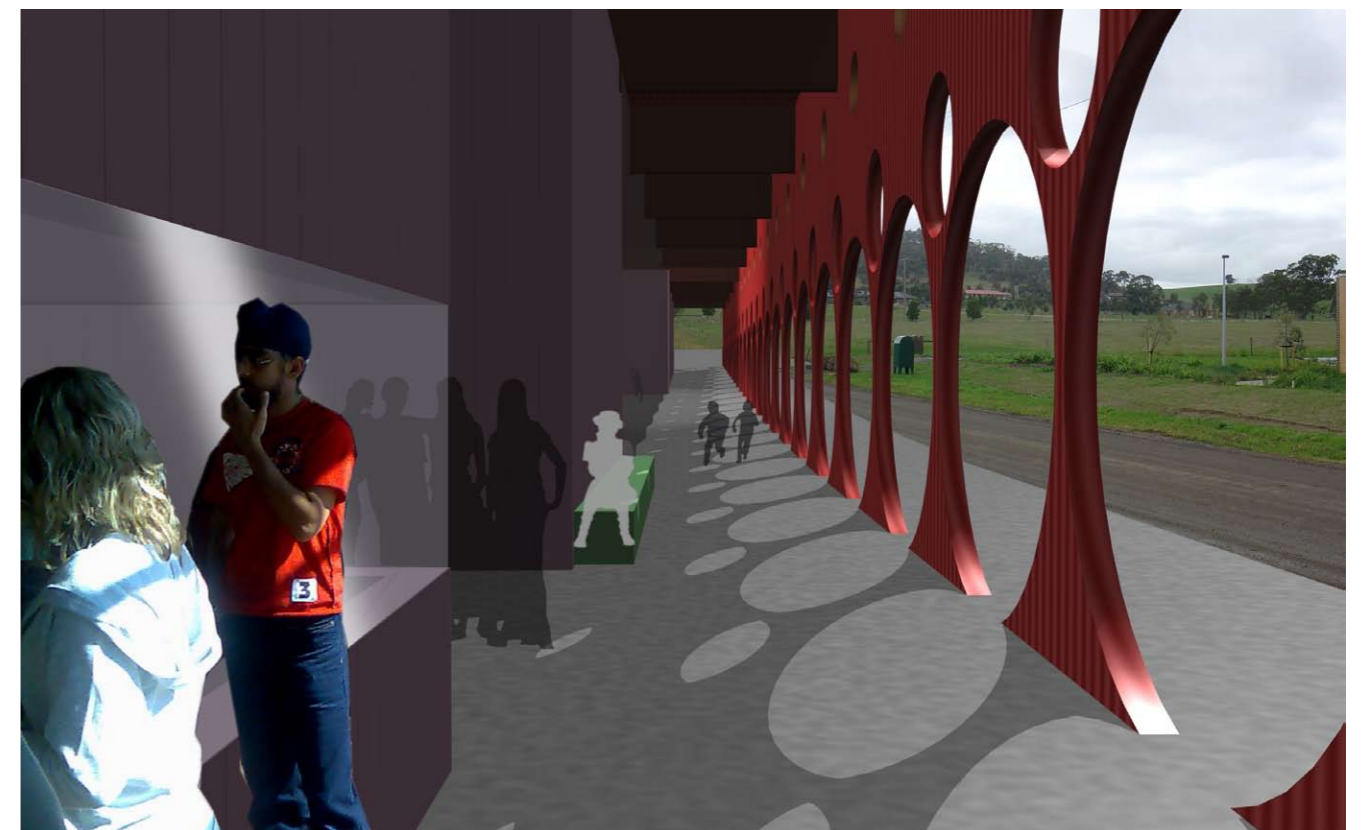


View of revised scheme from Gordons Road. The existing community centre can be seen opposite.

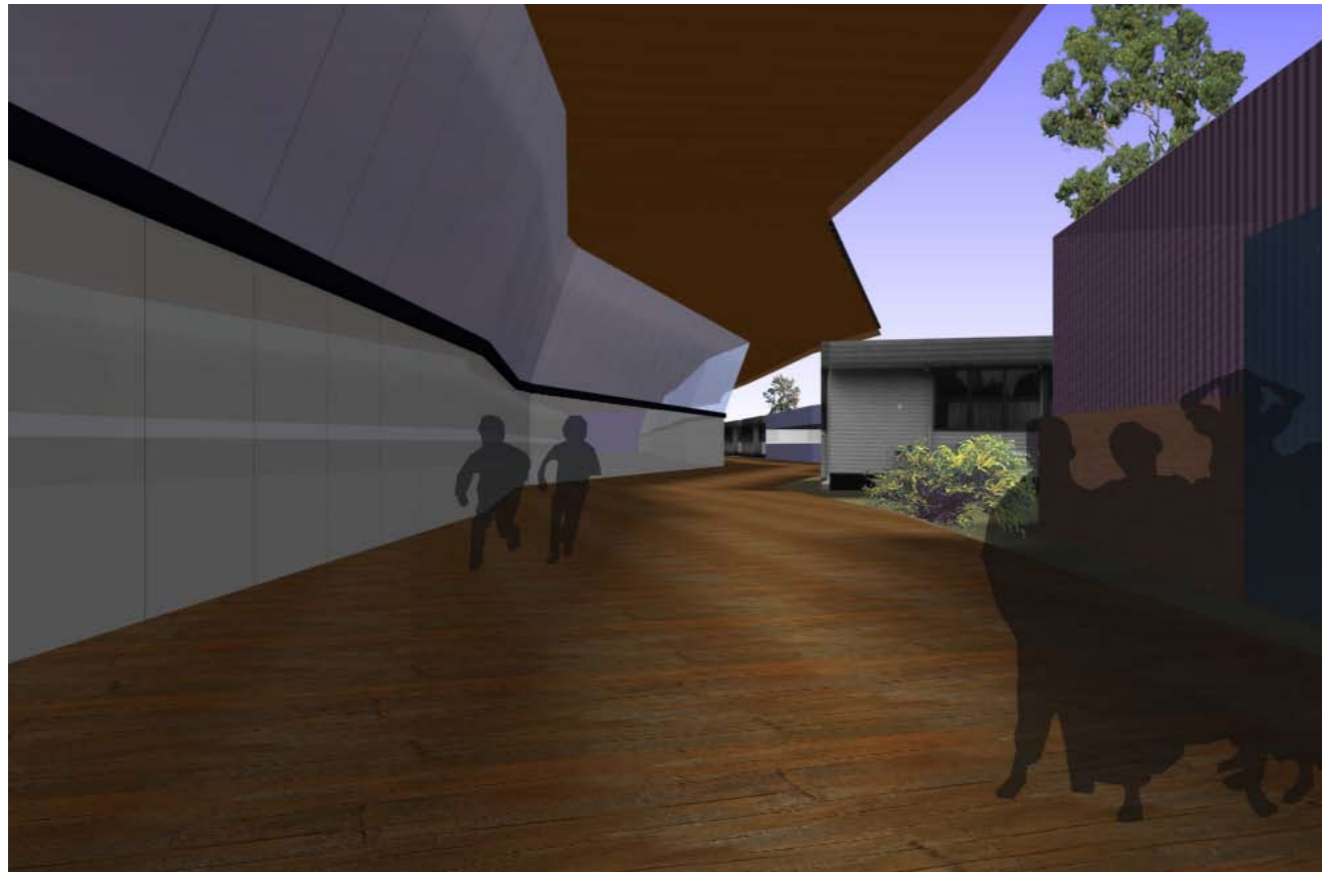
UNFOLDED ROOF PLAN/ELEVATION 1:500 with STREET ELEVATIONS AT DIFFERENT SCALES



View of primary school external play area, partially covered by red roof



Street facing arcade space, drop-off point and entry for school and joint use facilities

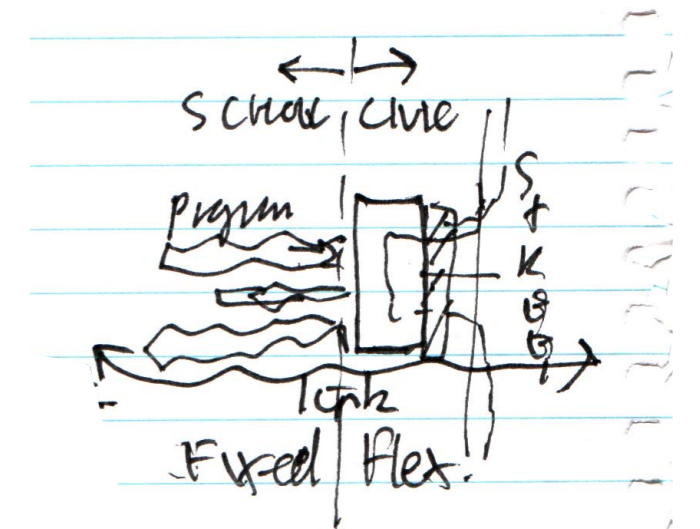


Southern covered walkway

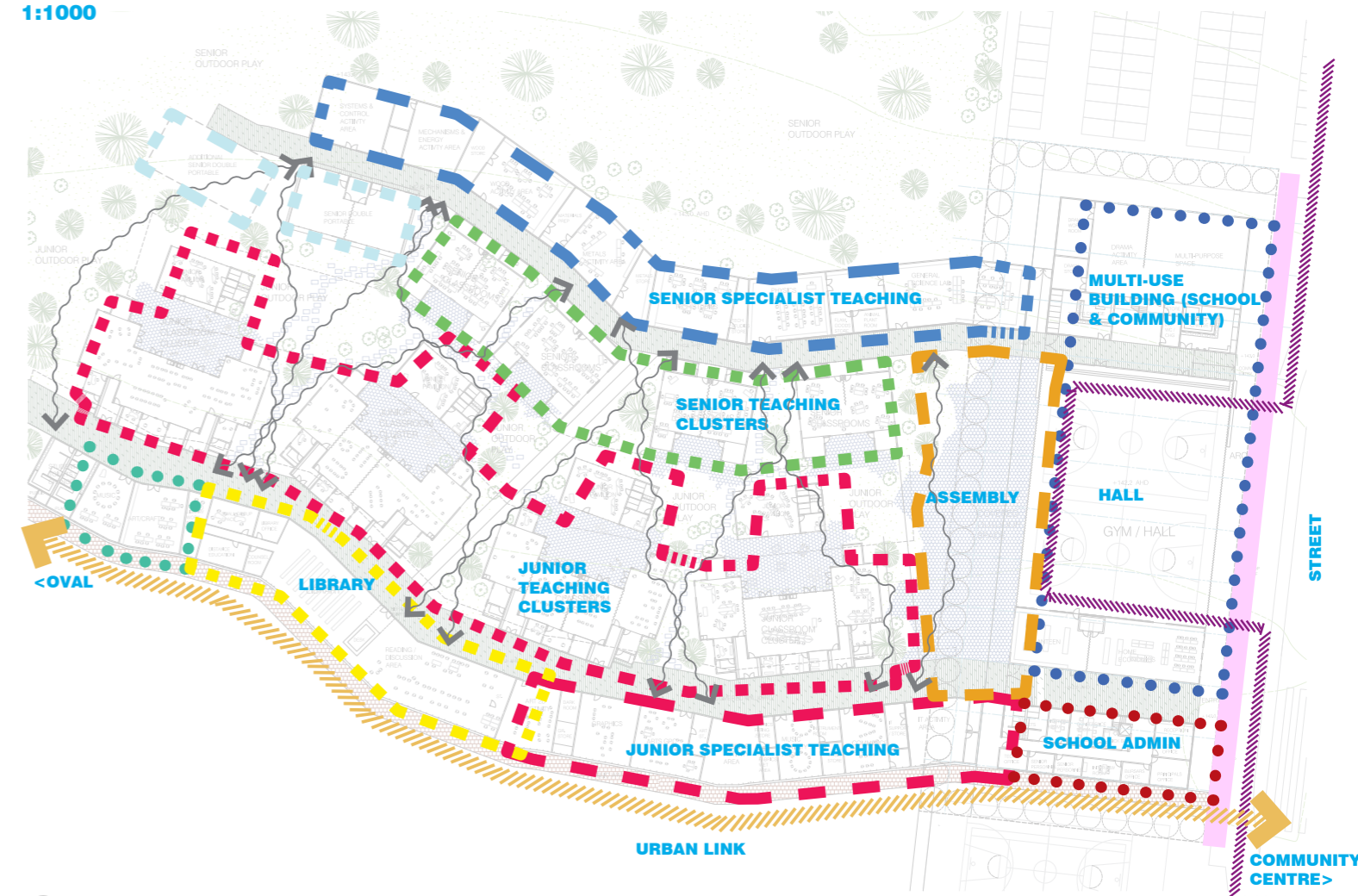


The western side of the project is the area dedicated to school use and this follows a different formal system. As opposed to the 'red box' of joint use facilities, the dedicated school program is a series of single story building strips or 'tentacles' following contour lines that extend east-west across the site, and tuck under the canopy roof of the red box.

A series of cranking covered walkways provide external circulation to teaching and library spaces. These have a continuous linear building on one side, and a series of discrete classroom clusters on the other, with garden and walk paths between them. As per the Mildura project, the primary circulation is externalised and sheltered both from wind, rain and summer sun.



PROGRAM ZONES
1:1000

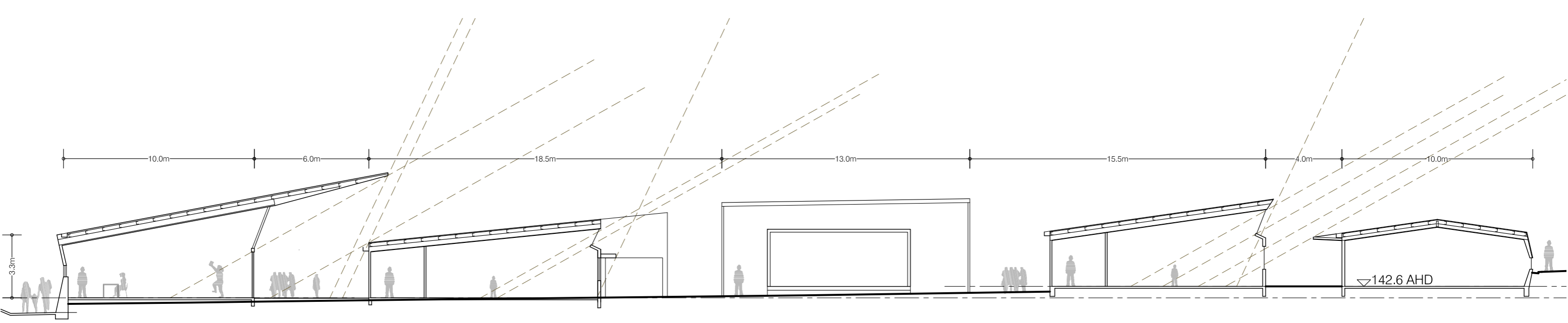




MILL PARK LAKES SCHOOL
FLOOR PLAN 1:50C

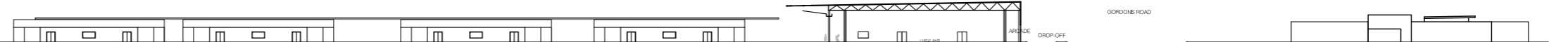
Drainage Creek Reserve > Public Walkway SCHOOL School Playing Area Lakes Boulevard

NORTH-SOUTH SITE SECTION 1:1000

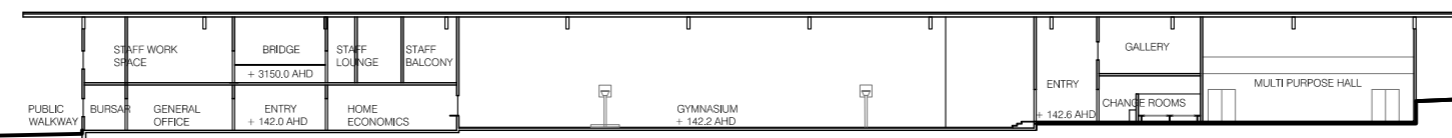


TYPICAL CROSS SECTION, TEACHING AREAS, 1:200

OVAL



EAST-WEST SITE SECTION 1:1000



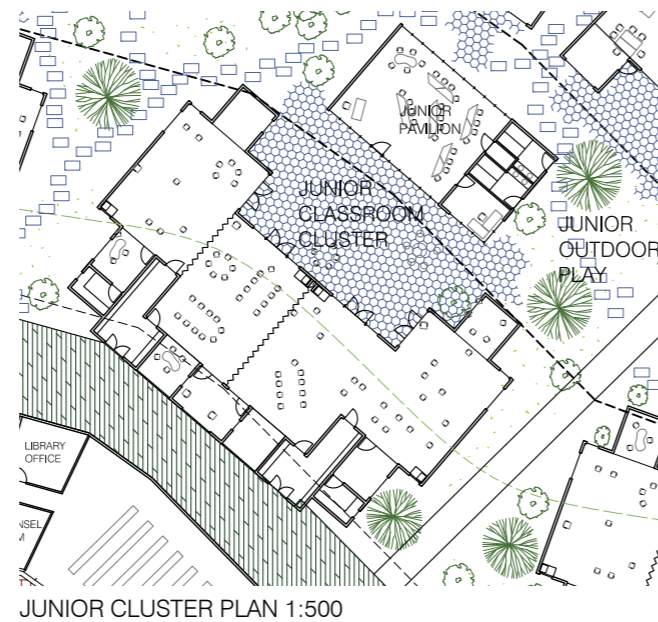
SECTION THROUGH PUBLIC/SCHOOL PROGRAM BOX, 1:500

The planning of the school uses a P9 brief from the Victorian Department of Education. The key programmatic move was to extract program areas from the brief that could be used by the community as well as the school. This extended a trend with existing schools to hire out their hall/gymnasium for public use. Typically, however, buildings of this nature do not have a good relationship to the street. It is usually within the school, and next to the oval. The Mill Park project proposed to enlarge the school hall/gym in size – to contain two basketball courts; and to locate this immediately adjacent to the arcade and street.

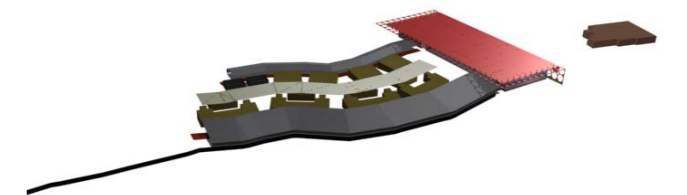
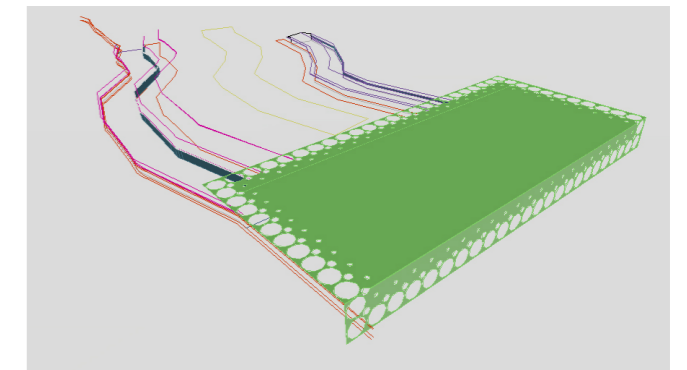
In addition, the commercial level kitchen required for teaching cooking was placed adjacent to the school canteen and is within the shared use 'red box' building. This is also immediately adjacent to the hall and can be used to serve functions in the main hall space. Two merged canteen/kitchen spaces can also be used for community night-class programs. The same principle is applied to drama teaching spaces, which are also extracted from the main body of the school. These can be used for day time school teaching and after hours learning for the wider community, creating a capacity for life-long learning initiatives. The drama facilities can also form a backstage area for large drama productions staged in the hall.

The remaining dedicated teaching spaces are organised as junior specialist teaching in the south strip building; seniors specialist teaching in the partially submerged north strip; and teaching cluster modules in between and adjacent to their respective areas. Multiple links through pathways occur between these teaching clusters. The junior teaching cluster organises four teaching spaces into a single building, with required offices, stores and retreat spaces. Each teaching space has access to a wind-sheltered outdoor teaching area. The four teaching spaces are divided by acoustic accordion doors that can merge the spaces together. Different configurations include four separate spaces, two double spaces, one large space, etc.

The dedicated teaching areas, or 'strips' and 'clusters' play an understated role in the architectural expression. The simple cranking geometry is based on the principle contour running through the main walkway, which is then offset to form key governing lines. This is seen against the clear orthogonal perimeter of the jointly used 'red-box'. The 'strips' and 'clusters' are organised in section to allow north light into teaching areas and walkways, to reduce the need for artificial lighting and heating, and minimise air-conditioning requirements.



The material and colour palette for the dedicated teaching areas is also relatively mute, using a combination of shaded glass to the north, timber decking for external school walkways, low level brick for the teaching clusters, walling of the clusters in metal roof decking and the same for the large raking roofs and upper wall sections as seen below. The lower section of the south wall and the public walkway across the site is built from local bluestone. As the wall continues past the building, it becomes the fence to the southern boundary. The subtle cranking in plan is registered in the view through the canopy edge, mildly representing the landscape, also seen in the view below. This final image also shows the full circular openings of the red entry wall, the civic face of the project on the eastern side.

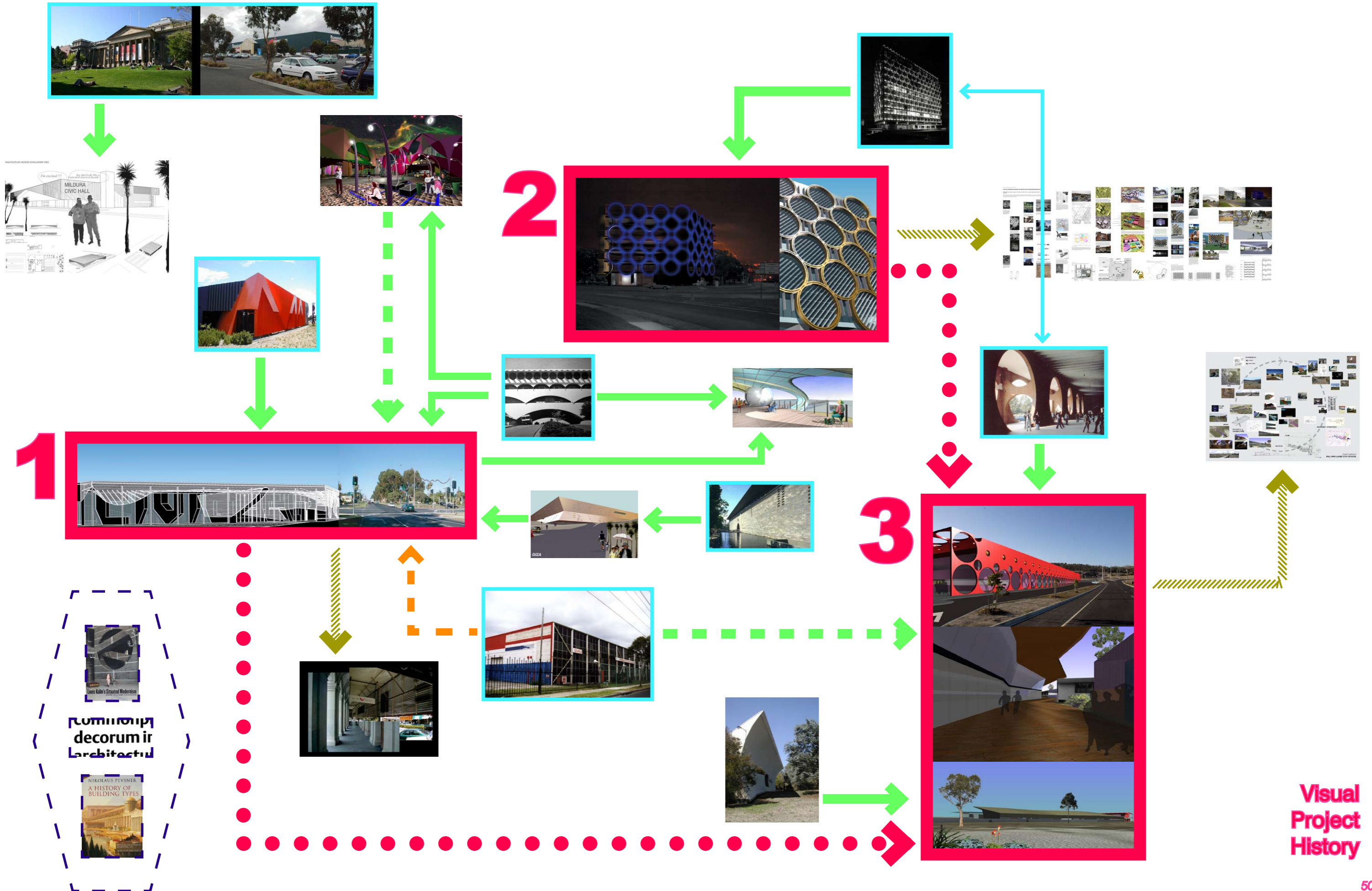


Form diagrams – clear box form with linear forms based on a contour extending out and across the site



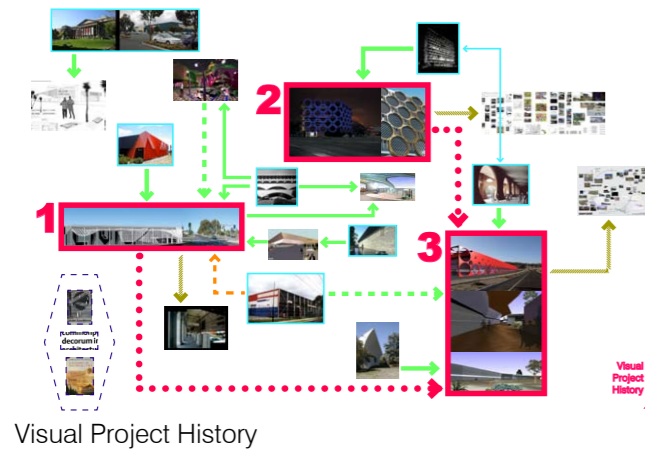
Eye level view from South looking at south wall of teaching areas from reserve

Chapter 5



Conclusions

Evaluation and reflection on the research



In concluding the research undertaken in this masters, I will summarise some of reflective operations completed, and summarise design areas that have become significant in the work.

Diagrams

The diagram to the left and on the previous page is a 'Visual Project History'. This locates the three design projects in relation to each other and in relation to key precedents and supporting projects. It demonstrates the process of influence is non-linear and combines both intended precedent and reflected precedent acting upon a project.

This diagram also acts as a history of the masters, as it forms a basic chronology from left to right. One key hinge-point in the research is the change of architectural strategy from project 1 to 2, the change from the use of 'text as facade' to the repeating circles. The diagram in turn shows the key influences for project 3 come from project 1 and 2, that it is the product of these two projects. The change of direction results in project 1 not flowing to project 2.

This diagram built on attempts undertaken at the completion of the Hume and Mildura projects to map and reflect on the forces within those particular projects. The first of these (top right) for the Hume project was a 'wide linear' movement starting with the initial precedent and site analysis/history, through to masterplanning, form studies, planning, elevations studies, object views and materiality precedents, contemporary precedents and concludes with views in context and detail sections. In this way, the project process has an order, which takes inputs along the way. This became the presentation format for this project, in the form of a 3m long drawing.

Developing on from this, during the 'first pass' at the Mill Park project an attempt was made to draw/record/chart the design directions I went through to get towards a project outcome. This diagram (bottom right) attempts to chart that 'cycle' which is a repeating iteration with continued referral to the testing shown in the centre. This was presented as a website with clickable images for a non-linear presentation and discussion. In this way, this diagram is continually referred back to as it is the 'menu' for describing the project. The format concentrates less on the outcomes (normally shown with context-based views) and tried to demonstrate the influences in a project.



Hume project 3m long drawing – attempt to demonstrate process from start to finish. Final images only a component of the work. The drawing, whilst telling the story of a single project, attempts to capture the context of the research.

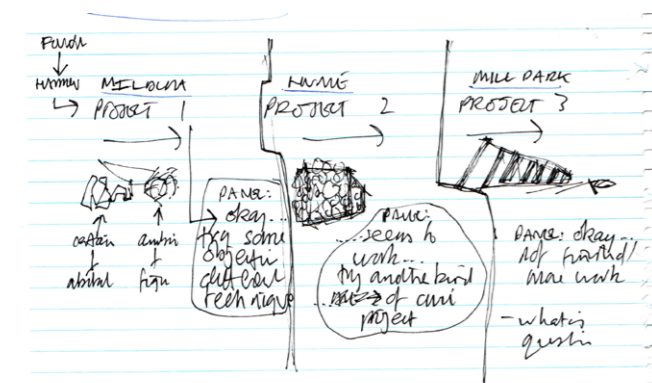
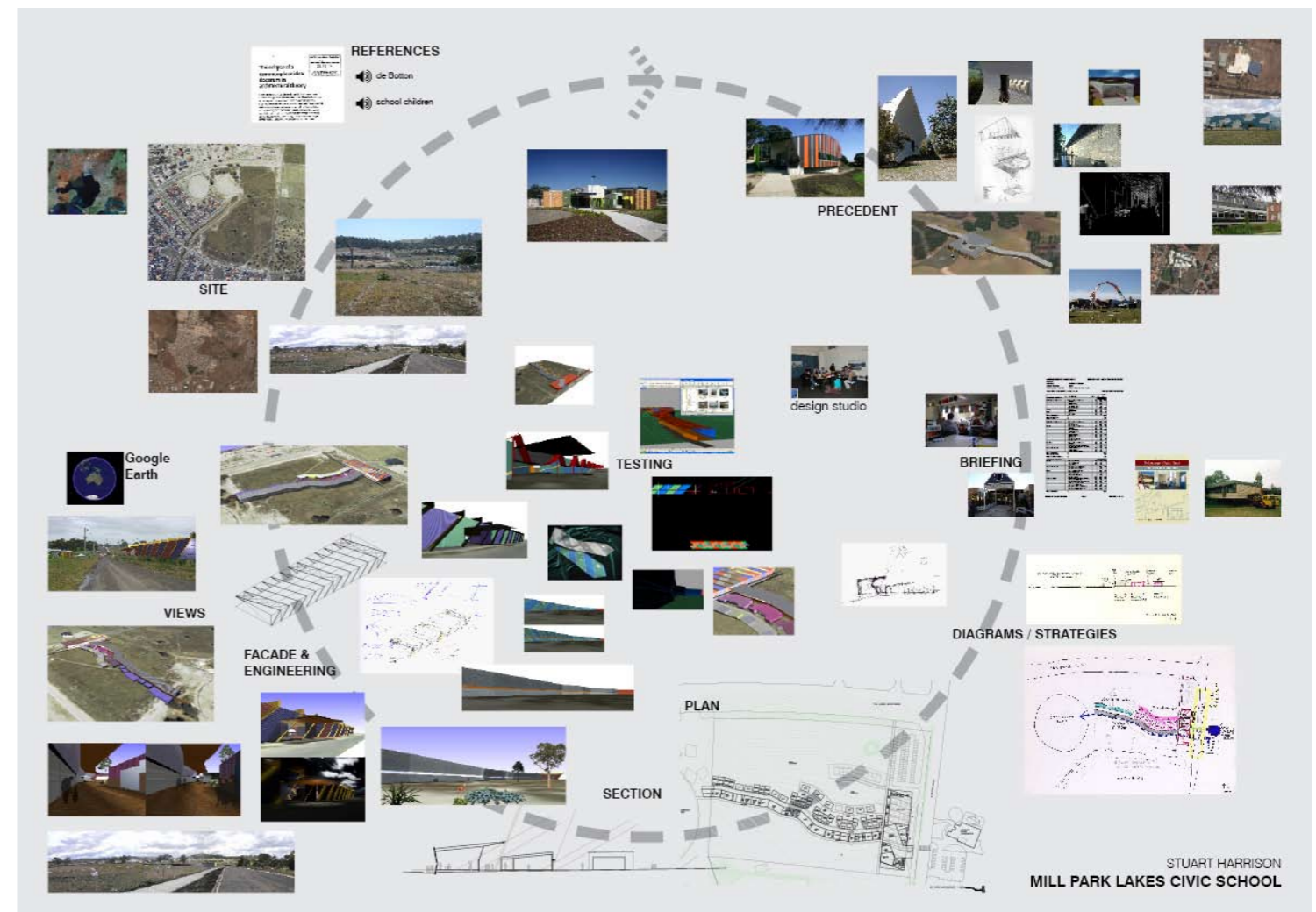


Diagram charting key feedback from projects after presentation of first scheme for Mill Park



Mill Park project – first scheme cycle based diagram/drawing

The subsequent revision of this project continues the same interests, with a new outcome. This extended the process of re-doing a project as a way of reflecting upon it, the need for the designer to evaluate through redesign. The task of editing projects for further presentation also forms a process of reflection, and this can be seen to the right.

Re-Presenting

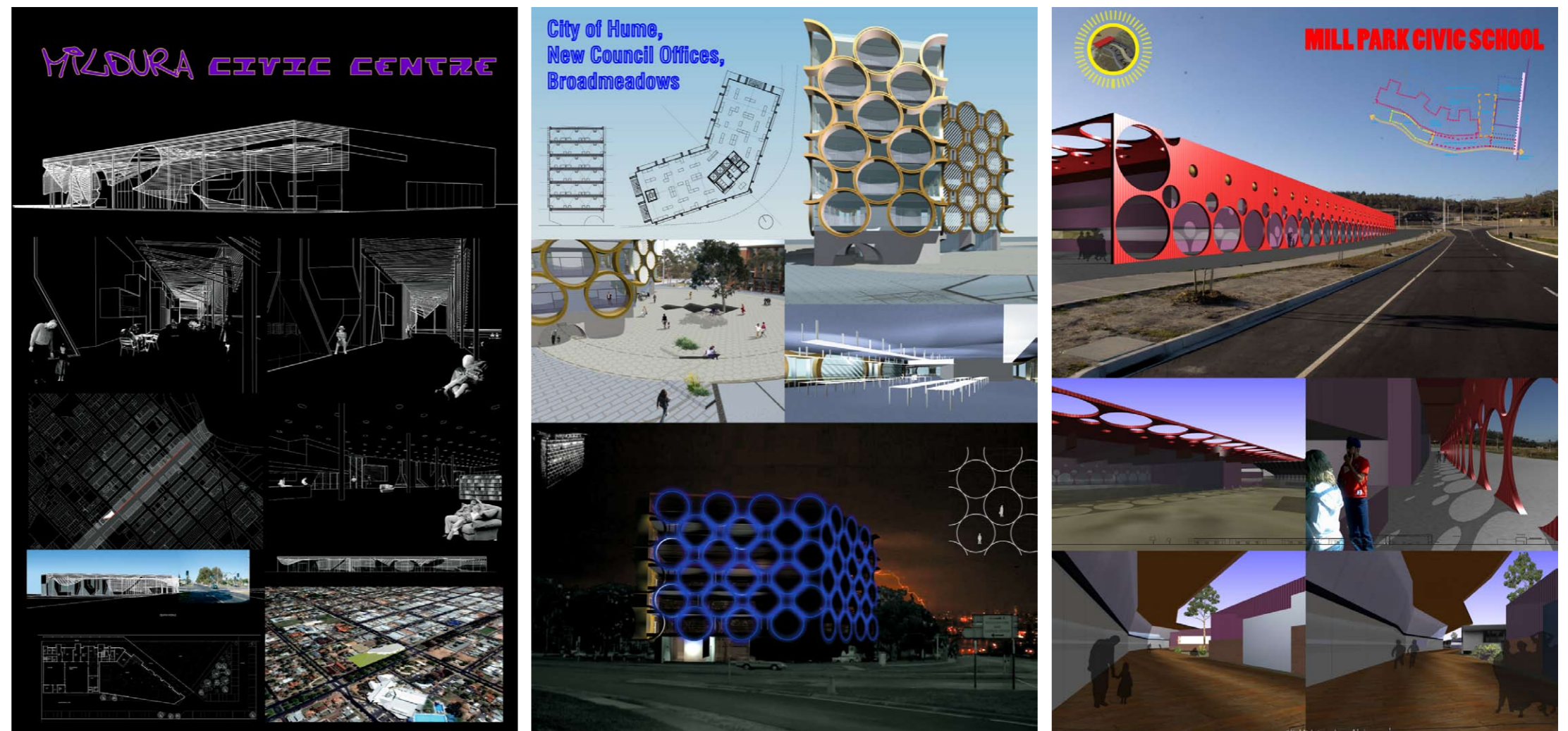
As part of a process of reflection on all three design projects, it was decided to enter all three in the 2007 Architecture Australia Prize for Unbuilt Work. Each was submitted as a single A2 poster, the required paper size (reductions shown right). No text was included on the sheets, except the name of the project. This was an attempt to have the projects assessed as pure outcomes to establish their relative merit. None of the three projects received acknowledgement. The exercise of editing down the project to a single sheet establishes the enduring images from each project.

Language

Architectural language was more frequently discussed in the period of architectural Post Modernism, lead by such figures as the Krier brothers. This now unfashionable work has become urban design mainstream, but remains engaging not only in its rejection of Modernist principles but its attempt to re-engage with association and image – what buildings look like and whether that carries any meaning – typology. To an extent this can be seen as having had some success in the 'PoMo' period, however having issues of enduring legacy – it becomes dated. This is perhaps best typified from the examples studied in the masters by the clearly Post Modern Mississauga City Hall compared with the enduring regional Modernism of Council House, Perth. Much of the contemporary architectural discourse's avoidance of the subject of typology, association and language appears to have arisen from the rejection of the work and period of Post-Modernism. This may ultimately be a question of taste – the intentions can be separated from the outcomes. It has become the work of this thesis to provide enduring outcomes for the intentions clearly present in much Post Modern work and those same intentions operated at a more discreet level in the work of post-war Modern architects.

Colour

The role of colour has become increasingly important in the projects; the Mildura scheme was drawn in black and white only (both the original quick scheme and the reworked scheme); the Hume project had elements of colour – the gold mosaic-clad rings, which glow enigmatically blue at night. The third project is the most colour-based – the shared program 'red box' makes the building immediately delineated, starting the process of recognition. In this way, this final project perhaps learns one of the key lessons of the Bunnings Warehouse – which uses green steel cladding extensively. The first quick version of the Mildura scheme, the Haddon Scholarship entry, aimed at learning from Bunnings, but did not acknowledge the importance of colour. A similar recognition is achieved by Officeworks retail shed that uses blue effectively.



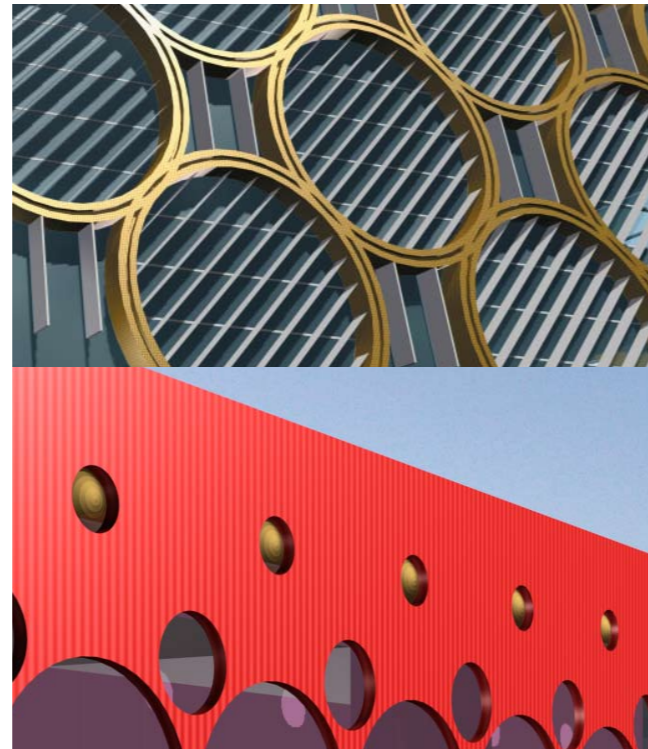
Three A2 posters of the design projects, outcome focused.

Materiality

While the first project (Mildura) did not consider materials, the second (Hume) project proposed mosaic tiles as a way of both achieving a hardy surface treatment and sense of speciality. The third project (Mill Park) was proposed in hardened (baked-on) painted steel (such as Colorbond), which is both durable, not commonly susceptible to repaint and is cost-effective, given the large areas of it proposed.

Public Space

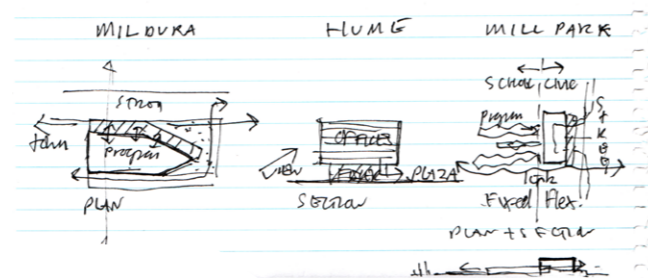
Two emerging themes seem to have come out from the projects undertaken – one is the image – the architectural language used or readings contained within; and the provision of shelter as key civic gesture – sheltered free and accessible public space that engages with the street, urban space and context. The three projects attempt this to varying degrees – the Mildura project attempts both directly (big text, big footpath); the Hume project attempts image more directly but in a more abstracted way (the large rings) and an extension of a plaza in a modernist way; and the Mill Park project is a return to the idea of street aligned arcade type space that is sheltered, provides multiple entry points to the facility and is intrinsically part of the 'image' of the scheme.



Material detail – gold mosaic tiles on Hume, red metal deck roofing as cladding at Mill Park.

Organisation

The plan/section diagram (bottom left) was a reflection on the organisational systems for the projects. It reveals the Mildura schemes arcade/building relationship is clearly shown in plan; that Hume is organised vertically and shown in section and that the Mill Park tripartite organisation (school/facilities/arcade) was also plan based, but read clearly in section as well. The Mill Park project is the most complex in terms of organisation, program and circulation, with the need to separate school areas, a public link through the site, common public/school areas; street and carpark interfaces.



Organisation of projects in plan and section

Repetition

Both the Hume and Mill Park projects make use of repetition in finding an appropriate language for the contemporary civic. This idea developed clearly in between the Mildura and Hume projects; as a response to the figuration of the giant text system employed in this first project, and the desire to pursue another

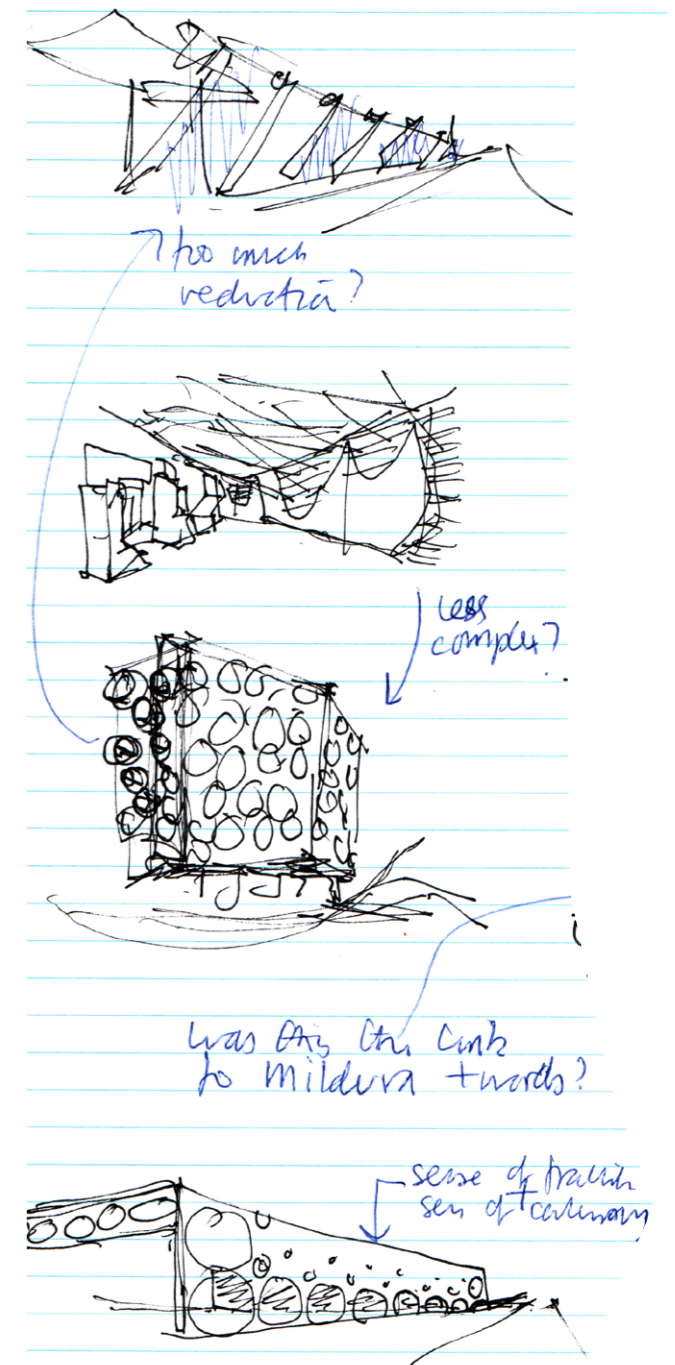
strategy that drew from Modernist examples, such as those examined in my own conference paper on arches in 1950s work, and that discussed in chapter 3. This was a moment of crisis in modernity – when architects such as Niemeyer, Wright and Gropius employed associative forms in a modern way. This modernity was fundamentally through both abstracted elements, but also fundamentally through repetition – systematically described repetition that would speak of mass production. The enduring success of projects such as Wright's Marin County Civic Center and Howlett's Council House lies in their ability to create uniqueness through repetition.

Redrawing

The four sketches (right) were drawn after the second design for the Mill Park project. It attempted to sketch quickly, in the same hand and in one sitting, the key views of each project; a form of editing through economy of means, time and memory. The sketch at top and bottom are the two versions of the main facade treatment for the Mill Park project, and was an attempt to assess if the new 'circles' design (bottom) was more effective than the '45 degree' original. The sketches also track a general reduction in complexity (or increase in simplicity) from Mildura to Hume to the first Mill Park scheme. It is perhaps this trend, along with a reconsideration of the importance of the arcade in the Mildura project that leads to the reworked Mill Park scheme.

The arcade view for Mildura sketch suggests the space is fundamental, both the literal reading of the text systems, but also as this space as the most important, the linear public space for people to gather, circulate and be civil. The Mildura project was ultimately limited by its comparison to its precedent, the Marion Cultural Centre. On reflection the Marion scheme works better at the role of legibility and the use of colour; however it can be argued that the Mildura scheme used the arcade sheltered space at a wider urban level, acting as circulation for the building and attempting to engage both the street and the wider system of footpath connecting into the older denser part of town. The interior of the Library in the Mildura project makes legible the word 'CIVIC' more clearly in reverse; something not achieved at Marion. In this way, this inverts the readability of the letters of Marion.

If the success of the Mildura project was set against the measured success of ARM's Marion building (it has won several awards), the same logic should be applied



Quick sketches of projects

to the Hume project and its precedent, Council House. The building has similar organisation, a slab block with feature facade on piloti – with the Ts becoming Os. The abstracted nature of the Hume system however makes the buildings considerably different – perhaps this is also due to the age of Council House, as opposed to the contemporary nature of the Marion Building.

Urban Design

In searching for contemporary material on the civic; on architectural language and typology, it became apparent that with the exception of a few texts, urban design writing more often discussed what buildings looked like rather than architectural texts. This combined with an engagement with wider site issues that all of the projects increasingly required has brought urban design (at an immediate context around the site) as one of the key areas of study in the masters.

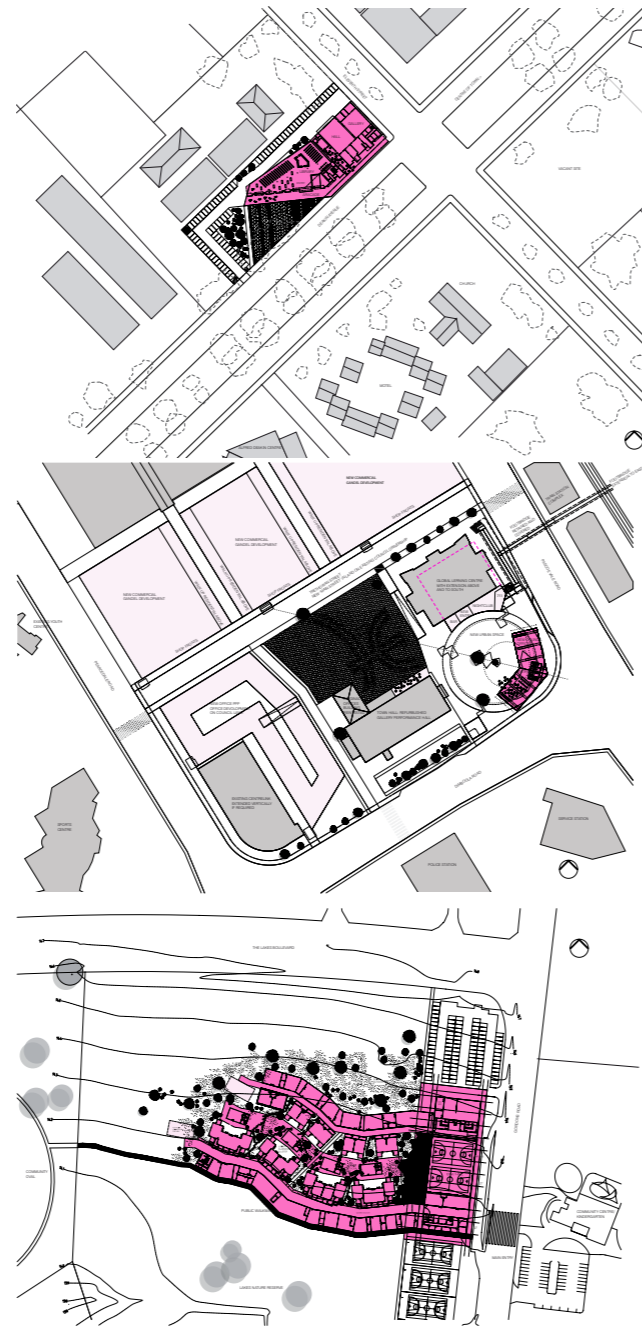
Architectural reviews typically do not discuss the typological relationships a project has to others around it. Wider urban issues are not discussed as this is seen as another discipline, that of masterplanning or urban design. This is typically in turn a discussion dominated by building envelopes, density, zoning and linkages; as opposed to the nature of the language used for different building types.

Engineering

Another key hinge-point in the research was the undertaking that architectural expression should, where possible, be locked into the structural engineering of a project. This consideration centred around several key precedents – the highly successful Templestowe Park project revealed the fragile nature of a solution that relies on paint colours; this coupled with the study of Council House encouraged an interest in embodying the architectural idea in engineering. This was an unexpected area of investigation, and represents a rejection of the Venturi position to some extent. The separation of architecture and engineering is perhaps the product of the way the disciplines often practice in separate locations, and a result of engineers being brought into a design process at a later stage.

Precedent

The role of precedent has been central to the work undertaken, and this is a key aspect of my design



Site plans for the three design projects – Mildura Civic Centre, Hume Council Offices and Mill Park Civic School.

practice. At the commencement of a design project, the use of a precedent provides a starting device – Marion Cultural Centre and Perth Council House being the key precedents for the first two projects. My aim was to build on the inherent success as civic buildings of these projects. A series of other precedents has been of constant reference. In the final project, the initial key operative precedent was the Melbourne Olympic Pool, but after the design was revised this precedent was less directly used, although the idea of ingrained architectural idea into structure was retained. The work of Louis Kahn, a long-standing interest, came to the fore in the third project as the project attempted to fuse the resonant qualities of Kahn with the suburban presence and economy achieved in the Bunnings Warehouse. The green Bunnings 'shed' had been a precedent that transverse the masters from the initial work taken on the Haddon Scholarship scheme through to the final Mill Park project. The final project uses, as the Visual Project History diagram suggests, the first two projects as precedent for it; as the work attempts to build on itself. This is a key point of maturity of the work and the benefit of a three project model.

Not Types nor Icons

It has been the case that the original research question has transformed and focused to acknowledge the limitations of the research. The projects undertaken are all particular responses to the context the research sets up, despite the ongoing interest in typology, they are not buildings to be replicated – nor are they 'icons' that engage only at the idea of being unique. It has not been the aim of this research to recreate as system of types as existed in the pre-Modern era.

The research question asks 'How can architectural design projects embody qualities of civic presence in an undistinguished, typically suburban landscape?' It has become apparent no cohesive answer can exist in a time where no decorous system of architectural expression exists, and nor does it need to be recreated. Too often in architectural works the need to be 'different' creating a desire for the 'icon'. The solutions of type and icon occupy different ends of a spectrum – buildings that are all the same verses buildings that are all different. The answer perhaps lies in the balance – buildings that form enough association of significance to carry meaning, but that are immediately clear in their context, but at the same time inviting. The latter is achieved in the projects undertaken here by a permeable interface that encourages movement in, and use of the buildings and their shared public edges.



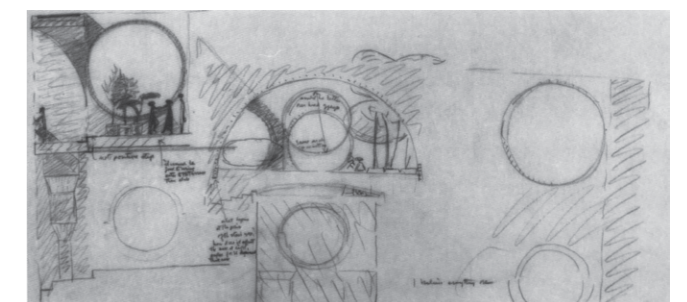
Templestowe Park Primary, McBride Charles Ryan, 2004



Marion Cultural Centre, ARM, 2003



Council House, Perth, Howlett and Bailey, 1963



Louis Kahn, studies for circular openings, Dhaka



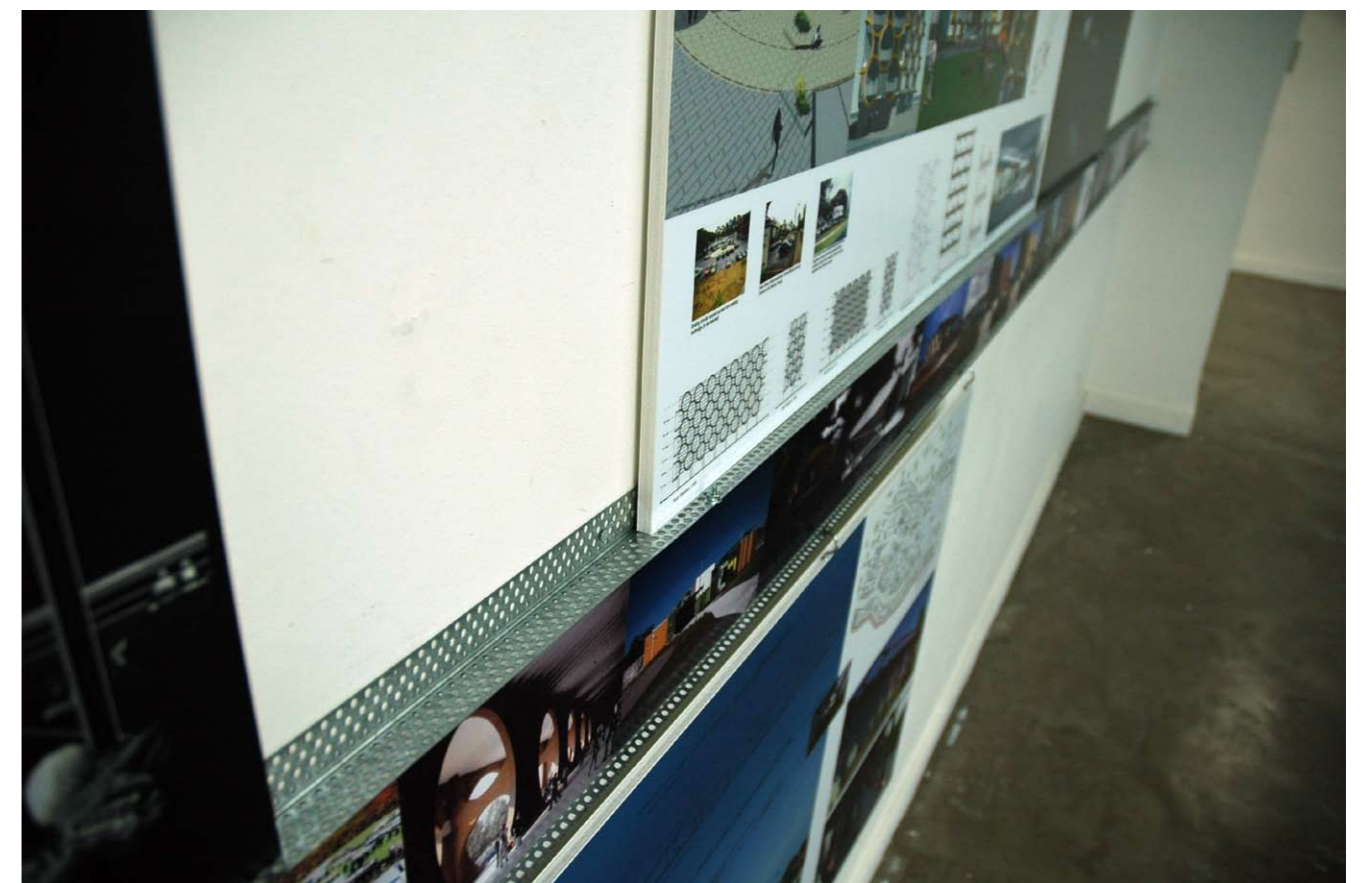
State Library of Victoria and a Bunnings Warehouse

Making Civic

The resolved design projects of this masters are outcomes for particular sites that have formed the view discussed above, and are not global solutions to the nature of the civic building. The work undertaken here demonstrates the need for careful consideration of all aspects of a project in its design.

It has been the case that the work of the masters, through projects and writing, has to some extent been an attempt to make legible that which is appears not to be. My own attraction to legible works has been translated into a desire to make buildings that are civic through being legible, and this ultimately forms my understanding of the civic. In other words, the way of being civic is one for me of work being understood and of communication, and my use of terms such as 'language' and 'image' stems from this.

The research title deals with the appropriate, and this in term asks for whom is it being appropriate - the limitations of any research that works through my design practice restricts this to being appropriate for me. This however does not limit the ambition of the work; and the work that has influenced it, from attempting a broader social goal of forming a clear contemporary understanding of the civic and the city.



Photographs from the Exhibition. Examination was conducted on 18th October 2007.

Whilst the overall aim of the masters has been to investigate how the contemporary civic building may be registered, I have selected below an area of research or innovation perhaps worthy of record from each project.

Civic Complex Planning – the Mildura Civic Centre project's brief was for a single complex containing several different 'civic' functions. This determines an internal circulation system and foyer space that is loses a sense of the (open) public and is unnecessary. This circulation was externalised and merged with the footpath to become a covered linear public space that both provided circulation to separate components, and created an area of free shelter that did not require entry into the building – the notion of the 'complex' was removed, and the street edge was promoted.

Solar Protection – the Hume office building sun shading studies revealed that 45 degree blade shading (as seen in elevation) was more effective in the general protection from sun at key times of the day. The shading studies were completed using rendered elevation studies, as opposed to conventional plan or section studies, which do not lend themselves to the consideration of angled sun shades.

Educational Planning – The Mill Park school project involved the development of a 'house' type of clustered teaching spaces that can be either used as traditional classroom spaces, partially open to each other or completely open for a large gathering or assembly. All four teaching spaces opened onto an outdoor teaching area, a sheltered the courtyard-like deck. This accommodated current Victorian trends and featured withdrawal spaces and adjacent staff offices.

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