

## Trespass: Exhibition of works created by 3<sup>rd</sup> Year Interior Architecture students at Curtin University, Western Australia in 2008.

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**Abstract:** During a recent visit to Perth, Charles Landry described our gloriously sunny and beachy city as ‘a symphony of blandness [... with] buildings that throw their deadness back at you’<sup>1</sup>. In response to Landry’s provocation the trespass studio of 30 Interior Architecture students from Curtin University speculated on a series of occupations of abandoned interior lanes in the heart of Perth. The approach was interdisciplinary, re-deploying design strategies of Interior Architecture, fashion and set design to the context of gritty urban culture, politics, society and micro-economics. Together with a screening of Peter Greenaway’s film *The Cook the Thief His Wife and Her Lover*, readings on urban space by theorists including Iain Borden, Jane Rendell, Steve Pile, Martyn Hook, Jane Jacobs and Diana Balmori informed and inspired the students. Selected vignettes included ‘La Donna é: Agoraphobia, Women and Urban Space’, ‘Crime’, ‘Borders’, ‘Female Fetish and Urban Form’, ‘Case Study: New Babylon’, ‘We Deserve a City that Fires up the Imagination’, ‘CCTV’, ‘Crime’, ‘Skateboarding’, ‘Graffiti’, and ‘I’ll Take the Recycled, Light-Green One Please’. For students of Interior Architecture, working with inner city laneways was a surprise requiring a lateral application of their developing design strategies. They were assisted by guest tutors from disciplines including economic development, crime, theatre, fashion, urban design and architecture who encouraged lateral vision and diverse, exciting possibilities for developing the projects while at the same time providing challenging feedback on the work produced. As this paper will discuss, the trespass studio and the subsequent public exhibitions demonstrate the influence of a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach.

### Trespass

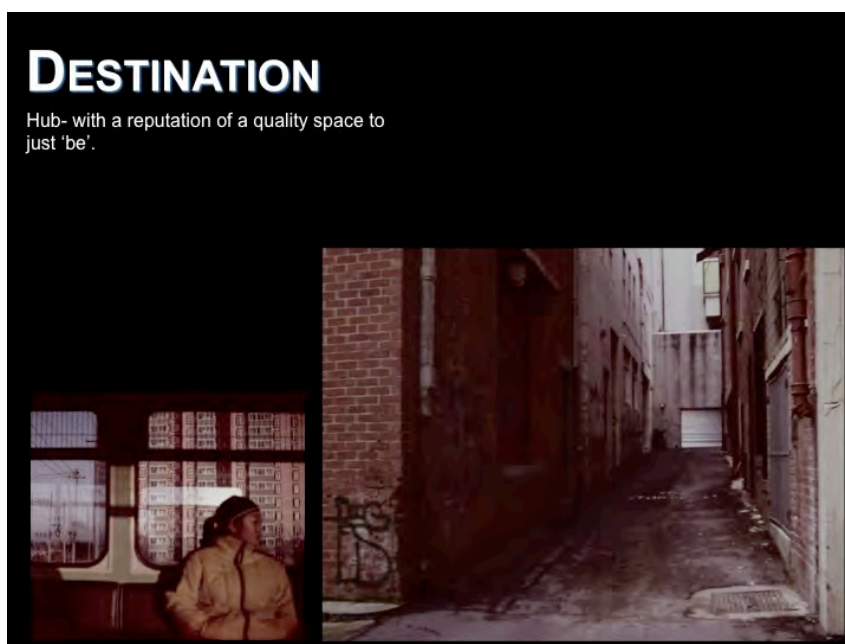


Figure 1: Howard Lane, Perth. Photo: Kylie Frost

There is something Freudian, even thrilling about being in close proximity to death which it seems we are, here in Perth, at least in terms of the city's vibe because during his recent visit Charles Landry described our city as 'a symphony of blandness [... with] buildings that throw their deadness back at you'<sup>2</sup> Creative practitioners, the City of Perth and sections of the public have gasped at the Landry diagnosis and grasped at his recommendations. After all, who aspires to the brand 'bland' and 'dead' especially given the economic consequences: how does a city isolated on the south western edge of the continent of Australia attract the best people to maximise the economic opportunities of this naturally well-endowed mining-boom state when, aside from the weather, the beach, the river and the people, the city has been judged as lacking cultural and social richness and diversity? One of several proposed strategies towards vivification is to work from the inside out, to seed richness and diversity within the city's leftover slivers of the interior laneways currently used almost exclusively for access, deliveries, refuse collection, prostitution, drug use and graffiti. Although in the anatomy of Perth, these places are rarely considered attractive, elsewhere laneway activation has proved highly successful, for example, in the city of Melbourne a dense network of lanes offers alternative idiosyncratic places with intimate ambiances distinct from the experiences of the city's larger, main streets dominated by trams and cars. Perth's physical and psychological position however is quite distinct from that of Melbourne. The hotter, smaller, more remote city with shallow blocks and fewer lanes has always been, since established in 1829, unlikely to ever morph into a replica of Melbourne.<sup>3</sup> The places we construct, the city we create, tells us something particular about where and who we are. The truth is, the problem for Perth is not a lack of artists, musicians, amazing chefs and thinkers, on the contrary. Rather it is that their presence is not felt when wandering the streets of Perth. Other, less pleasure-oriented forces have dictated that experience. This paper examines a series of imaginings of what Perth could be. It looks at works produced by third year Curtin University Interior Architecture students in the 'trespass' studio who have responded to Landry's provocation that Perth is 'dullsville'<sup>4</sup>. The works speculate on transforming and reactivating three inner city abandoned laneways, while questioning re-invigoration strategies in relation to appropriation, territory, ownership, economics and exclusion.

Charles Landry is one of several advisors introduced to Perth by FORM, an independent organisation working to build creative, cultural and social capacity in Western Australia through championing research projects, by bringing international thought leaders and strategists to Perth and by facilitating lively collaborations across a range of projects, people and organisations. Landry who is an urban strategist and founder of COMEDIA, an international urban and cultural planning organisation, was FORM's inaugural Specialist in Residence during 2006 and 2007. He quickly stimulated Perth's imagination by expressing the obvious, that 'there is a lot of money sloshing about'<sup>5</sup> (in Perth) which makes now the ideal moment to invest in the future: in cultural, social and economic sustainability. He invited the people of Perth to consider the Spanish examples: 'Barcelona's idea of "conviviality" – their desire to create a city of gathering places. As Barcelona planned its transformation, the project leaders asked: "Does it bring people together?" The result is small places interwoven throughout the city, acting as urban breathing spaces rather than acres of uniform grass.'<sup>6</sup> (This is a reference to the controversy over the vast areas of grass separating the length of Perth's city from its river.) Bilbao, Landry's second Spanish exemplar, strikes at the heart of Perth's sense of self because unlike Perth, Bilbao asks 'is this good enough for our city?' As visitors to Bilbao will find, both the Guggenheim and the Bilbao airport are incredibly sensuous, beautiful, pleasurable buildings to be experienced firstly as objects within the

landscape, and then to move around, towards and within. Landry's Spanish examples remind the people of Perth there is more to who and where we are than mining and as we imagine the city we are becoming, now is the time to question how we live and work and the spaces we construct.

In 2009, the residential population of Perth's Central Business District was approximately 13,000 while demographic growth projections estimate 30,000 living in the city by 2030. Currently, the city's daily workforce is under 130,000 and there are 2 million visitors annually. The broader metropolitan area of Perth has a population of 1.6 million. While, by international comparison, Perth has a small population, the bullish economic environment has consumed all the city's available commercial, retail and residential space despite the very high prices being demanded by owners and leasing agents. Retail space, for example, was being leased at an annual rate of up to AU\$5000 per square metre during 2008. (Although, of course the 2009 international economic down turn has impacted on this.) However, despite Perth being fully occupied between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday, outside these hours the place is desolate. This is a consequence of Perth as a city, understanding itself in the most pragmatic sense, as a Central Business District, as a place of work. Sadly, pleasure has been overlooked.

In a recent publication, 'Forgotten Spaces: Revitalising Perth's Laneways Episode 1'<sup>7</sup>, the City of Perth attempted to address the problem of 'emptiness' after dark, that at 6pm the city drains of life. Learning from Melbourne, Perth has begun to consider a collaborative seeding approach that re-considers licensing constraints, enables micro-economic development, encourages young creative ventures and re-visits leftover and abandoned spaces. When Melbourne was in recession in the early 1990s, a number of strategies were successfully deployed to create spaces generating new life and energy. These included capital works programs to physically upgrade the laneways, the modification of liquor licenses to encourage small bar licenses, incentives offered to developers to encourage them to recycle old buildings making low rent space available, the deregulation of shopping hours and gearing small business grants towards young innovative talent.<sup>8</sup> Together these moves attracted and facilitated young creative people who then became the catalysts of change in the development of alternative and diverse laneway cultures. However, while the logic and structure of these moves have obvious virtue, when considering Perth's adaptation of the Melbourne strategy, questions of site specificity, 'gentrification' and over sanitisation were raised as concerns by the trespass studio. What (of value and to whom) pre-exists in these long overlooked, misused access routes? When the City of Perth wrote 'an acknowledgement that an element of the "grit" should be retained'<sup>9</sup>, a seed of doubt is planted as to whether these words reflect a deep understanding of the pre-existing value of those spaces? While safety and accessibility of interesting inner city spaces is to some extent necessary to attract more productive people to Perth, such caution raises alarm.

As the trespass studio discovered, the value of theorists such as Iain Borden lies in the surprise of other points of view, finding other positions from which to read and respond to city space. Occasionally this may be anti-social, violent and criminal, which after all, is to some extent the thrilling allure of laneways. To extend their sense of boundary, the Interior Architecture students were introduced to series of readings on urban space by theorists including Iain Borden, Jane Rendell, Steve Pile, Martyn Hook, Jane Jacobs and Diana Balmori who were chosen to inspire a lateral approach to imagining how laneways may flex and transform, adding contrast and diversity to the mainstream city streets. Selected vignettes cut

across topics such as 'CCTV'<sup>10</sup>, 'Skateboarding'<sup>11</sup>, 'La Donna é: Agoraphobia, Women and Urban Space'<sup>12</sup>, 'Crime'<sup>13</sup>, 'Borders'<sup>14</sup>, 'Female Fetish and Urban Form'<sup>15</sup>, 'Case Study: New Babylon'<sup>16</sup>, 'We Deserve a City the Fires up the Imagination'<sup>17</sup>, 'Graffiti'<sup>18</sup>, and 'I'll Take the Recycled, Light-Green One Please'<sup>19</sup>. The approach to the work was interdisciplinary, re-deploying design strategies of Interior Architecture to explore the context of gritty urban culture, politics, society and economics. For students of Interior Architecture, this re-location of their project focus from interior spaces within buildings to inner city laneways was unexpected, requiring a lateral application of their developing position in creative practice. From the beginning, the students familiarised themselves with the particular pre-existing spatial and material qualities of these overlooked, hidden spaces, becoming aware of the politics of ownership and access, governance and collaboration. Students were encouraged to spend time in the laneways, day and night, through rain and fine weather, during the week as well as on the weekend (and often, as mentioned earlier, Perth is completely empty of well-intentioned people during these times). Consequently, ways in which these spaces are currently used, sometimes illegally and by disenfranchised citizens, served to inspire the students' designs and economic strategies.

A screening of Peter Greenaway's film *The Cook the Thief His Wife and Her Lover*<sup>20</sup> launched the 'trespass' studio. Those who have managed to sit through the Greenaway film would empathise: the audience pays dearly from the interior of one's own body for every single fragment of an idea or moment of beauty that the film may offer. It is possible to be aware of the stench of roasted human flesh for days after watching the film and then there is the lingering image of steam and juices bursting from the human crackling as the carving knife breaks its seal. Despite, or perhaps because of those feelings of nausea, disgust and terror, the main character's vulgar and violent behaviour, the fear, and the fact that although viewers could never have imagined the fate that would eventually come to the beautiful boy – a young blonde kitchen-hand with the ethereal soprano voice – and that we always knew there would be something hideous, the film completely captivates attention no matter what. It dictates over a striking relationship with the audience. The eating, the sex and the violence affect the audience through all the body's senses. But it is the way the film seems to laterally section a dramatic series of rooms that is so compelling: the blackness of the alley where the delivery van laden with rotting meat and fish is parked, starving stray dogs await scraps of food and thugs inflict cruel punishment; the greenish hues of the enormous archaic looking kitchen where exotic delights are always in various phases of preparation and where food stores become places where the wife (whose stunning wardrobe was designed by Jean Paul Gaultier) and her lover have sex while her husband, the thief and owner of the restaurant eats in the next room, a lavish blood-red banquet room. At the centre of the banquet room is the 'thief's' table, where nightly, he, his wife and his vulgar cohort loudly devour gastronomic delights. The final room is the bathroom – stark white and highly reflective of sound – serves as another of the lovers' meeting places. Taken by the camera sliding laterally between these distinctive opulent spaces the audience experience is one of voyeurism, being exposed to ongoing performances of the fundamental human instinctive drives: to have sex, to create, to eat, to shit and to be destructive. These rooms display the harsh, un-sanitised reality of one thing living off another. Compared to the example offered by Melbourne, this film offers the student in the 'trespass' studio a less tame, more sensual way of imagining Perth's laneways, their diurnal, seasonal and annual transformations as well as ideas about transition, ways in which thresholds, boundaries and openings into interior spaces beyond the laneway may be experienced. What is it about this fabulously gripping film that Perth lacks?

For some students, the 'trespass' studio itself proved to be an inspiring, hilarious, sometimes terrifying, disruptive and stressful experience because the underlying philosophy was to dislodge them from their comfort zone, to provide the students with various ideas and positions in order to move forward. Ultimately, the students were required to find an understanding of their own position albeit probably temporary and still emerging in the design of the built environment of the future. Therefore, throughout the semester, a series of creative practitioners from various fields including theatre design, architecture and fashion, were engaged for short blocks of time as tutors and lecturers. In addition, there was an ongoing collaboration with City of Perth's micro-economic strategists and urban designers who, although their approach to the laneways project is comparatively conservative, supported the students by enabling introductions to three sites as well as to interiors of buildings within the laneways. As a result, the developing work was fed and critiqued from various positions. The theatre designer proved to be particularly effective because his view of the work always referred back to how the audience would experience the space. Thinking of how the space would be used in terms of an 'audience' creates a new tension for the designer because we all know that when participating as a member of an audience, most of us are far more demanding and discerning of our experiences than when we are moving through city space. In the theatre, we are unlikely to accept 'ordinariness'. As an audience, we expect a new experience, something that will affect us in some way, inspiring some new insight, a sense of elevation or perhaps reflection. The architecture of Perth has rarely if ever performed such feats and the designers of the city, of the uninspired, cautious buildings and tame spaces between are clearly not thinking about those who experience the spaces as a discerning audience with expectations that somehow, the experience of the constructed spaces of the city will enrich their lives individually and collectively!

The trespass studio's first event was 'the two minute pitch', based on the students spending days and nights in the laneways, their readings and from their viewing of *The Cook the Thief His Wife and Her Lover*. Within two minutes, each student was to use electronic images and any kind of sound to 'pitch' their occupation of the laneway, their theoretical position and their vision for future transformations of the space. Films, cartoons, poems, dances, paintings and diagrams were produced to engage the audience in the qualities and potential of the other world of the abandoned lane. Next, the students devised a series of transformations through which the laneways would flex across time, altering spatial qualities and programming, often exploring the value of the existing fabric and degradation, colour, texture, aging and innovative mis-use. Ways were devised to transform walls and other surfaces into distractions or functional elements that may catch people, having purchased a takeaway coffee somewhere else to stop here in the winter sun for a moment on the way to work or to prop themselves on a foldaway stool to listen to the morning's speech from the soapbox. One project transformed a laneway into a musical instrument similar to a continuous bamboo wind chime that could be played by numerous people at the same time as they walked down the 400 metre lane. Another project looking at voyeurism created a series of glazed portals within the laneway's existing brick and concrete edges and then strategically positioned individual seats in relation to the new views into the interior where lovers fight and make love, others shower and groom themselves, and elsewhere food is prepared for guests who are unaware of the cockroaches free to roam and multiply. Another project looked at the body moving through space in relation to music and several were concerned with capturing and projection of electronic images in derivations of Dan Grahams' 1970s video art and the more recent extensive use of CCTV

cameras in public spaces. These works explore the lingering presence of occupation created by various media across a range of experiences of human condition from desire, to pleasure and menace and are always mindful of a sound micro-economic strategy. Opulence, the politics of food, desire of the undesirable and the complexity of the relationship between interior and exterior informed the transformations and new occupations of the laneways.

Kylie Frost's 'trespass' strategy for her occupation of Howard Lane stemmed from an intriguing position: desiring the undesirable, lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy and pride. Taking over an abandoned basement of a building housing solicitors rooms on the floors above, Frost was interested in developing a perplexing link to the existing decaying rawness of the laneway outside which she trimmed with lacy industrial fencing.<sup>21</sup> Individual rooms within the basement have been converted to a banquet room, a kitchen, a bar, burlesque performance space, private leisure spaces, dressing room with its viewing lounge and manager's office. These rooms lead progressively from the dark passages of the laneway through gluttony, pride, lust, sloth, wrath, envy and up to greed at the stair leading up to the legal chambers thus linking the irascible to appetite and the intellect, in ways that recreate a potent space harkening Christian thoughts and art dating back to Pope Gregory the Great, 590AD. For Frost, sin, as it manifests in each room, informs the design.

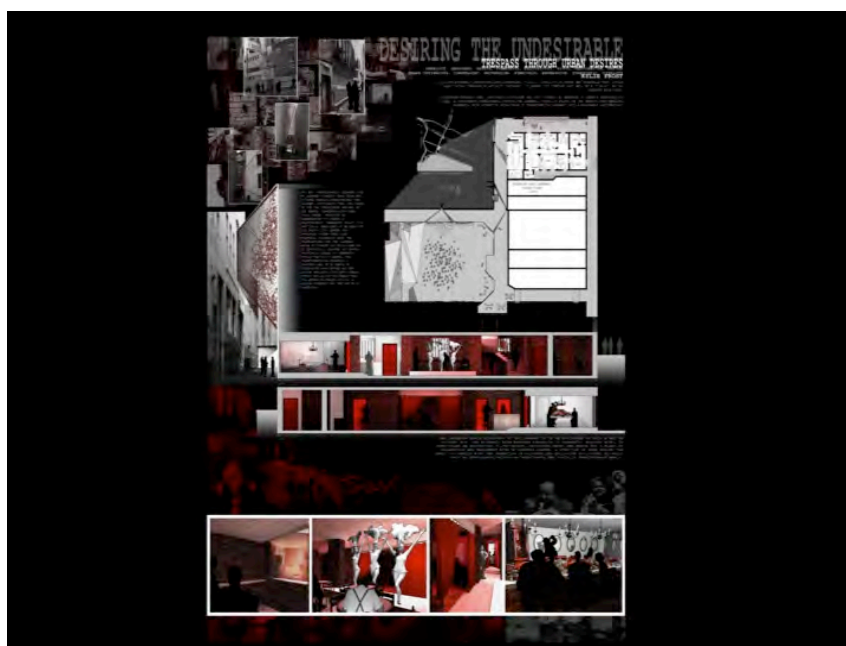


Figure 2: Desiring the Undesirable. Drawing and concept: Kylie Frost

The skateboarder read the city differently, as hard edges, angles and gaps and their trip, downstairs or across benches, is different. They ride the streets reading the materiality in ways unintended, experiencing terror and pleasure through unplanned, unconventional misuse of the city fabric. Emily Durkin's 'trespass' proposition tested 'misuse' as a means to convert an existing laneway and a connected building into places where the human body would climb, perch and view other aspects of the city from behind and through narrow cracks, encounter sensations of height and move through passages awkwardly. Durkin's intention was to generate sensations of heightened bodily awareness by inducing intrigue, confusion, risk, skill and danger to create a thrilling connection between the body and space. First, she transformed the space of the laneway by casting objects she found abandoned there,

misusing them by implying new functions as possible obstacles, linkages, places to perch, spy or speed and objects that created new sounds. Next, Durkin re-read the intended function of the interior of the three-storey building. By mis-using the original stair and removing much of the flooring, new, unexpected ways of moving through the spaces were designed, creating new viewing platforms perching in the void and the stairs have been re-cast as a long-bar and as retail display. What is so potent about Durkin's embrace of skateboarding as a design strategy is the appropriation and effective translation of a significant aspect of youth culture. Rather than attempting to re-locate or banish skateboarding, this scheme expands its possibilities.

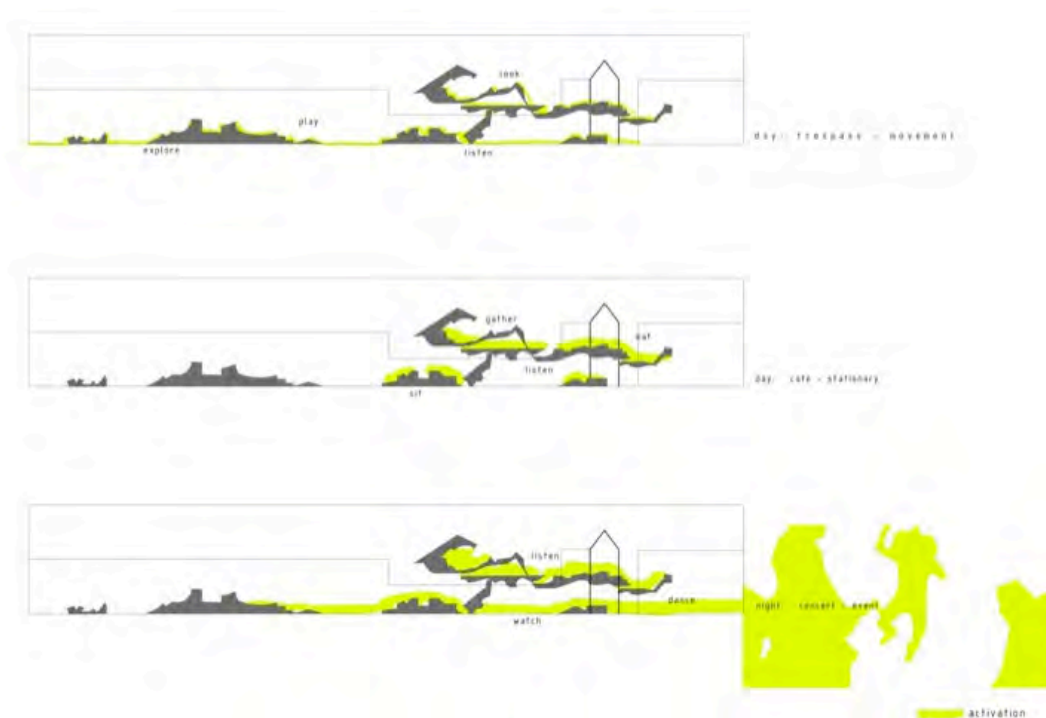


Figure 3: Movement and MIs-Use. Drawing and concept: Emily Durkin

Rachael Carter's theoretical position, formed under the influence of the Situationists, led to a design approach that was a mixture of reckless disregard, pleasure and freedom while at the same time the work was a serious, critical review of Perth. Working from her newly devised (psycho-geographic) map of the city, one she constructed by taking the existing map and cutting it up with scissors and then randomly sticking the pieces back together, Carter then turned to her site, the old Gasworks building in McLean Lane where she set about carving new access routes and functions according to her newly devised map. New pathways were created to scale the vertical edges of the laneway and the sides of buildings and their rooftops were transformed into new places for unintended experiences of the city. These city-views and distractions had not been designed by the city planners. Carter converted the Gasworks into a library, where books stacked to the ceiling of a four storey high void are reached only by climbing the precarious stairs, which are a separate entity to the walls. The beautiful sculpture that is the stair winds its way up through the building in amongst the book stacks. For Carter, reading the city is analogous to reading a book: there are moments of connection, entrance and exit, skipping, loss of focus and heightened awareness.



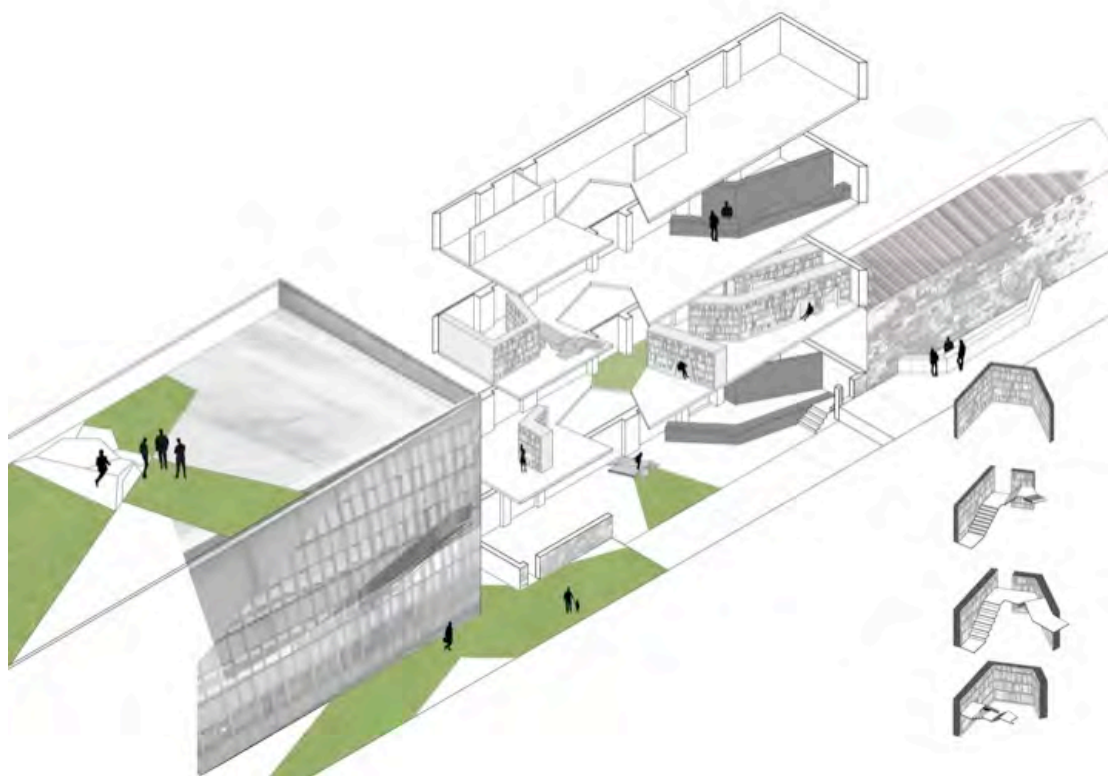


Figure 4: Peripheral Distractions. Drawing and concept: Rachael Carter

Everything is forever in atrophy, evolution and revival. Distinctive cyclical rhythms of the city may be compared to those of the body: we grow, develop, learn and then plateau, begin to shrink, regress and forget. Our fascination with the far quicker revolutions of the changing ways in which to dress our bodies is at the heart of Ebony Marshall's response to the Landry provocation: that Perth is a 'tired, ugly city in desperate need of a facelift'. That so many of us derive great pleasure and disappointment from spending considerable energy investing in changing our clothing, adorning ourselves in relation to our own sense of self and also our social and physical environment, inspired Marshall's bare-boned approach to her laneway and the adjacent three-storey interior space. Her design and economic strategy was to embed flexible functional elements within the edges, the roof and the ground of the laneway with the intention of sometimes converting the space to a catwalk and viewing platforms for fashion exhibitions, and then at other times, alternative conversions would create spaces for recycled clothing markets. Marshall's design affects our awareness of self and the spaces we inhabit and shows us 'impermanence' is a way of heightening the experience. To this end her work is deliberately temporary, the interior of the three-storey building, programmed as a clothing designer's studio and retail outlet, is stripped back to a bulging rib-like carcass. Throughout production of the clothing, as the number of pieces increase, they form skin-like layers across the carcass. Then as the pieces are sold, the skin thins. New pieces, responding to seasonal changes, shifts in colours and preferences for trousers, long skirts or minis create different weights, textures and forms within this shedding and replenishing action of the skin that at times is pared back to the bare bones of the building, thus heightening the aesthetic in relation to time and place.



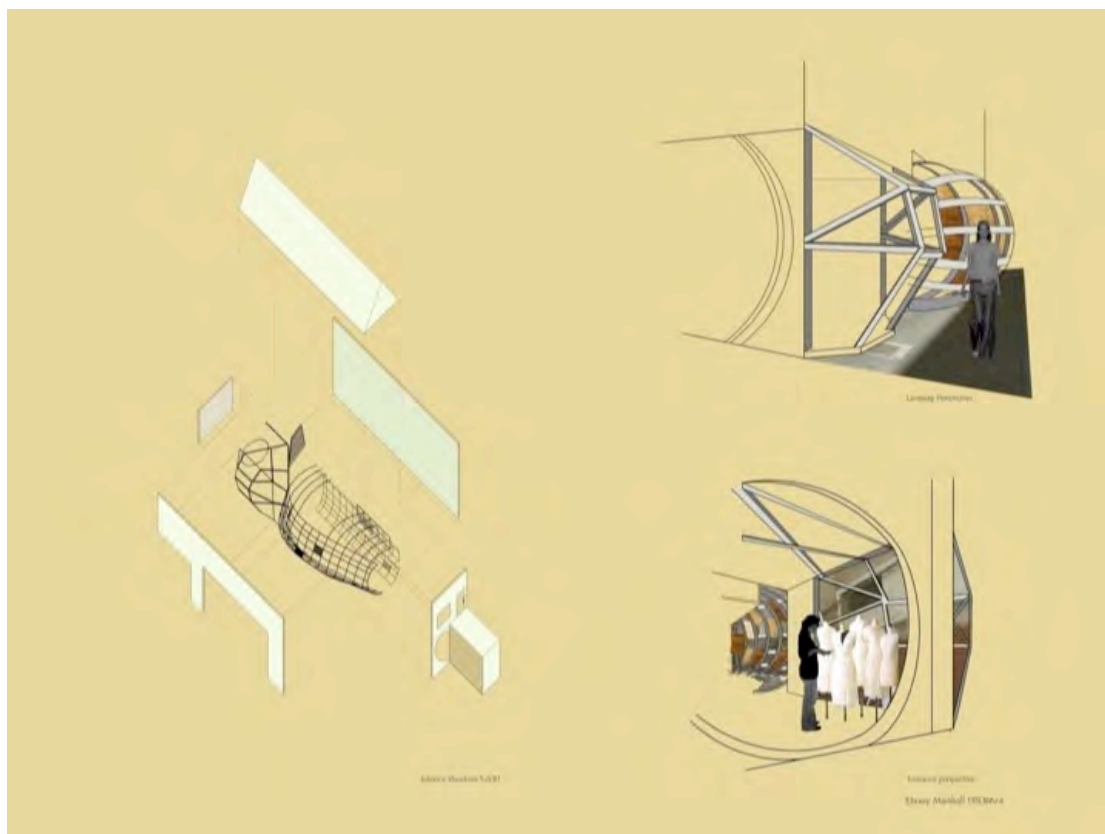


Figure 5: Impermanence. Drawing and concept: Ebony Marshall

Deploying the design strategies of Interior Architects to imagine the city morphing into a more diverse and interesting series of adaptive re-use spaces was fundamental to the 'trespass' studio and so the work was necessarily speculative, informed by critiquing the context of the problem of Perth's perceived 'CBDness', by an understanding of site specificity and by expanding the theoretical inquiry. Importantly, the students were engaged in a real problem at a time when government policy was being developed by FORM and the City of Perth. The City has been keen to see the students' responses and we wondered whether or not the studio may be of influence. Throughout the semester, the developing work attracted attention and benefited from visits by City of Perth officers, local architects and designers and then ultimately in November and December of 2008, the work was shown two public exhibitions. As has been discussed in this paper, the work delves into ideas about how people live in cities, how spaces within cities are used and mis-used and ways in which a city speaks of its people. It speculates on beautiful, desirable, sensuous, exciting, believable propositions, easily imagined as existing within the streets of Barcelona, for example. For now, however, in reality and waiting on the City of Perth's next move in this incredibly slow revolution we wonder about Landry's question: 'Is this good enough for Perth?'<sup>22</sup> and whether this question could be 'Is this beautiful and sensuous enough for Perth?' We wonder whether such questions would ever arise when and where it really matters. We wonder about the strictures of the conservative vision for Perth, perhaps held hostage by the collective's super ego, that the likelihood is that the laneways of the future may more closely and oddly mimic the safety, orderliness and cleanliness of (well behaved) retail arcades. Meanwhile, each of the works discussed above, Frost's, Durkin's, Carter's and Marshall's, seed intrigue, surprise, sensuousness and

intelligence across Perth's CBD. Imagine an event where students critiqued the work of the City's urban design team.

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### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Landry, (2007) 'We Deserve a City that Fires Up the Imagination.'
- <sup>2</sup> Landry, (2007) 'We Deserve a City that Fires Up the Imagination.'
- <sup>3</sup> A study undertaken by the City of Perth which compares 100ha in central Perth and 100 ha in central Melbourne, revealed Perth has 34 laneways that are predominantly privately owned, therefore making collaborative revitalisation strategies time consuming and more complicated whereas Melbourne has 138 laneways mostly owned by the City of Melbourne. Sydney has 21 laneways mostly owned by the city of Sydney. Increasing public ownership of the laneways eliminates the complication of working with a group of disparate private owners whose priorities lie elsewhere. Public ownership is able to streamline projects by raising awareness of the public and private benefit and building enthusiasm towards development activation possibilities. The question is: how adventurous are urban designers in the public realm?
- <sup>4</sup> Landry, (2007) 'Come On Perth, Make It Happen.'
- <sup>5</sup> Landry (2007) 'Should Perth Be Future Proofed?'
- <sup>6</sup> Landry (2007) 'Should Perth Be Future Proofed?'
- <sup>7</sup> Laneways Project Team. (2008) *Forgotten Spaces: Revitalising Perth's Laneways Episode 1*.
- <sup>8</sup> Laneways Project Team. (2008) *Forgotten Spaces: Revitalising Perth's Laneways Episode 1*. p9.
- <sup>9</sup> Laneways Project Team. (2008) *Forgotten Spaces: Revitalising Perth's Laneways Episode 1*. p13.
- <sup>10</sup> Borden, (2000) 'CCTV,' pp. 35-36.
- <sup>11</sup> Borden, (2000) 'Skateboarding,' pp. 227-228.
- <sup>12</sup> Da Costa Meyer, (1996) 'La Donna é Mobile: Agoraphobia, Women and Urban Space,' 141-156.
- <sup>13</sup> McLaughlin, (2000) 'Crime,' pp. 49-50.
- <sup>14</sup> King, (2000) 'Borders,' pp. 19-20.
- <sup>15</sup> Bergren, (1996) 'Female Fetish and Urban Form,' pp. 77-96.
- <sup>16</sup> Ball, (1995) 'Case Study: New Babylon,' 194-199.
- <sup>17</sup> Landry, (2007) 'We Deserve a City that Fires Up the Imagination.'
- <sup>18</sup> Smith, (2000) 'Graffiti', pp. 86-89.
- <sup>19</sup> Hook, M & Watson, F. (2007). 'I'll take the recycled, light-green one please', *FUEL\$ARTS.com Global Marketing Tools and Ideas*, Retrieved July 14, 2008.
- <sup>20</sup> Greenaway, P *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*
- <sup>21</sup> Frost's work with industrial fencing in the laneway drew from the work of artist, Demakersvan.
- <sup>20</sup> Landry, (2007) 'We Deserve a City that Fires Up the Imagination.'

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