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Beyond Starlight

Considerations of the Gold Coast's architectural heritage tend to privilege the signification of those building materials widely used during the city's post-war boom. This paper reflects on the breeze block as a material that opens debate on the relation of the city's image to its reality and its past. It offers a reflection on a moment of suburban expansion in which the tenets of high modernism were distilled into the architectural language of mid-century Australia. Despite its history as a low-cost material used primarily in the construction of load-bearing walls, the industrialised production of imitative rockface and decorative breeze blocks in the twentieth century marked an important shift in its role in American (and then an Austerican) domestic architecture. With the block's recalibration from structure to decoration, substance to skin, and with its widespread suburban uptake, the material engages with the longstanding role assigned the Gold Coast (from Robin Boyd onwards) as an accentuated moment among Australian cities and for Australian architecture. Common practices and manoeuvres therein find an extreme expression now informing disproportionate claims upon the specificity of their cultural significance. Offering a brief description of the breeze block's twentieth century turn to the pattern screen, this paper opens out on to instances where the image of the breezeblock within contemporary Australian art concerned with the Gold Coast (directly or otherwise) has served to emphasise this notion of breeze block as surface. In doing so, this paper positions research into the Gold Coast breeze block in light of 'official' efforts to align such other materials as fibro-cement with the city's collective memory (*Fibro Coast*, Arts Centre Gold Coast and Gold Coast Heritage, 2013-14) thereby fostering an institutionalised nostalgia - anchored to a fixed image of the city's architectural and urban history - that the breezeblock serves here to undermine.

“Bernard: We have to write for ourselves as children. You know, when innocence was legal. When summers seemed to go on forever. [. . .]

Manny: When you could play in your back yard with any old thing. All I needed was a . . . was a breeze block. And . . . and a bit of an old bone.

Bernard: I bet you could make whole worlds with just those.

Manny: Oh, I could! One minute I'd be laying siege to a castle with a bit of an old bone on the top there and the next minute I'd be setting sail on a Spanish galleon towards a breeze block.”

—*Black Books*, “Elephants and Hens”¹

The idea that architectural materials have cultural content is hardly new, and the cultural relationship between modernism (modernity) and concrete is as clear as that between marble and the Florentine Renaissance. In one of the first instances in which the architecture of modernism was subject to historicisation, Sigfried Giedion placed the wholesale turn to iron and reinforced cement as a natural fulfilment of his modernist teleology—an expression of the mentality of an age in materials and the architectonic consequences of their composition. If *Bauen in Frankreich* (1928) laid bare the coincidence of modernity and modernism in these newly embraced materials, then Adrian Forty consolidated its claim by exploring concrete's broader import.² *Concrete and Culture* (2012) extends Giedion by figuring the material into the histories of labour, representation, society and other dimensions of culture, historical and contemporary, thereby casting it as the medium of a complex modern era. The subject of this paper is rather more mundane than that of either Giedion's or Forty's books, but its aims are not entirely at odds with these works, seeking as it does to understand how the image and the reality of a contemporary city and its culture interact to account for a building material that otherwise passes under the historiographical radar, even as it finds its way back into fashion in some circles. This paper concerns the processes by which a material mediates – inadvertently and otherwise – a city's relationship with its past. Our specific concern is with the relationship between the material heritage of Queensland's Gold Coast and the image it makes of that material, against which the city measures itself, the relationship, that is, between the city as found and the city as it would wish to be. The largely unassuming breeze block serves as our test, offering a view on to the persistence of an idea anchored to a moment of suburban expansion in which the tenets of high modernism were distilled into the architectural language of Australia's mid-century middle class boom and its relationship with modernism's trajectories elsewhere.³

1 “Elephants and Hens,” *Black Books*, season 3, ep. 2, dir. Martin Dennis (Assembly, 2004).

2 Adrian Forty, *Concrete and Culture: A Material History* (London: Reaktion, 2012); and Sigfried Giedion, *Bauen in Frankreich, Bauen in Eisen, Bauen in Eisenbeton* (Leipzig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1928).

3 Research on this paper is supported by the Australian Research Council (FT120100883), the Griffith University Summer Research Scholarship scheme, a funding initiative of the office of the Dean (Academic), Griffith Sciences, and the Griffith Honours College.

Modern Architecture and the Concrete Block

The increased accommodation of forms of modern architecture and modernist thought in post-war North America allowed for a decisive shift in the nature of the suburban American house. The famous efforts of John Entenza and the Case Study Houses project of *Arts & Architecture* magazine offered a high-end demonstration of modernism's availability for the masses, originating, as this project did, with the activation of modernism's engagement with industrial materials and processes in the housing crisis posed by the return of a generation of military personnel from active duty. The suburban acceptance of the tenets of a rarefied interwar modernism registered across many different levels from the expression of modernist style to the industrialisation of housing production within a dated idiom. The broad-based deployment of modernism's lessons gave rise to what Mark Jarzombek has called "Good-Life Modernism"; the amelioration of the aesthetic and technological gains of a mid-century canon through their absorption into the appearance, planning and construction of the middle-class suburban home.⁴ The processes by which this amelioration took place in the United States have been prominently treated in contemporary historiography. So, too, has the Australian parallel, exercised as it was through such vehicles as the Small Homes Service and the efforts of numerous individuals to educate a post-war population on the advantages of modern architecture - and especially the clear criticism offered by Robin Boyd of the Victorian domestic model and the bright path he offered back to the modern movement.⁵

The lessons found by Australian modernism in such southern American states as California, Arizona and Florida have long been recognised on the grounds of comparative environmental qualities as much as on the basis of the shared economic and demographic booms experienced by the two countries that called for similar patterns in suburban development in the 1950s and 60s. The prevalence of the open-planned house with provision for external entertaining spaces and car-ports arrived with a growing taste for pared back surfaces and - if not a rejection of ornamentation - a sense of restraint in the incorporation of superfluous or frivolous details not widely shared with the Victorian and Edwardian chapters in the history of Australian architecture and housing. In its humility, the breeze block is caught up in this change in popular taste. Hollow concrete blocks had been in use in Australia since the middle of the nineteenth century, with their production increasingly mechanised after the turn of the twentieth. The establishment of Australian factories to produce lightweight hollow cinder, or breeze blocks from the middle of the 1950s - breeze being a synonym of cinder or ash rather than an environmental descriptor - allowed for a shift in their role from being primarily structural elements in various scales of building activity (low cost, pragmatic building materials) to also serving as decorative elements: external and internal with respect of the

4 Mark Jarzombek, "'Good Life Modernism' and Beyond: The American House in the 1950s and 1960s, A Commentary," *Cornell Journal of Architecture* 4 (1991): 76-93.

5 Robin Boyd, *Victorian Modern* ([1947] Melbourne: Robin Boyd Foundation, 2012). On the American situation, consider *Cold War Hothouses: Inventing Postwar Culture, from Cockpit to Playboy*, ed. Beatriz Colomina, Anmarie Brennan and Jeannie Kim (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004).

fabric of the house, as stand-alone screens as well as features within load bearing structures, in fences, walls, garages, car ports, and beyond the domestic realm, in service blocks, car parks, bus stops, and so forth.⁶ Across the decade and a half from its immediate uptake following the widespread local industrialisation of the manufacture to its fall from fashion grace, the breeze block enjoyed a ubiquity of sorts in its application across buildings scales and its incorporation in building works from high art to the most mundane. In Australia, as in New Zealand and across the Pacific, the decorative (hollow, patterned) breeze block can be found practically anywhere one cares to look for it.

The proliferation of a number of standard block profiles across different regions and countries reflects both importation practices and the Australian replication, after 1954, of American designs. The proliferation of breeze blocks in moments of public architecture and the Australian suburbs not only, by these means, connects Australian architecture of the 1950s and -60s to the transnational moment of a good-life modernism, but it also formed a mass produced basis for a mode of ornamented modernism (or, equally, a kind of modern, industrialized ornament) hovering between private and generic registers. The block's mass-production is immediately conveyed in both the structure and patterning of any composition in which it is used: in its repetition across a screen wall, in which the square or rectangular profile of the block renders it a single cell in a structure; and in those patterns composed across four or nine block groups, wherein individual pattern cells can become more difficult to distinguish from the screen as a whole. (The circle-based Starlight pattern, to which we will return, even resists this capacity for isolation to the extent that it does not allow for any combination to be terminated without the pattern being truncated, there being no natural edge to the pattern cell.) By exercising a little individual flair in constructing the front fence, the mid-century Australian homeowner engaged a moment in the history of modern architecture - but a moment that remains at odds with the whole.

The Tastelessness of the Middle Class

In the world centres of breeze block production and consumption that Phoenix, Arizona, surely leads,⁷ alongside the Californian hotspots of Palm Springs and Los Angeles, manufacturers refined a number of standard profiles that were taken up and produced by concrete factories around the world. In its reproducibility, the breeze block traded, if not completely, regional variants for the

6 Miles Lewis, *Australian Building: A Cultural Investigation*, online at www.mileslewis.net/australian-building/ (accessed February 7, 2014), 7.06 "Blocks" and esp. 7.06f ("later concrete blocks"), g ("mechanisation") and h ("breeze blocks"); as well as *200 Years of Concrete in Australia* ed. Miles Lewis (North Sydney: Concrete Institute of Australia, 1988), and therein, esp., Diane Hutchison, "The Post-War Cement Industry," 118-21. Hutchison writes that the "establishment of the Besser Vibrapac plant in Adelaide in 1954 marked the introduction of the modern hollow core concrete block By 1966 there were 49 modern plants producing a range of products, colours and finishes, and in that year the concrete masonry producers formed their own association" - 119. Elsewhere in this book Lewis also treats early instances of coke breeze blocks in passing (in "Early Lime and Cement," 4), although his interest in the concrete block appears limited to its applications in the realm of construction technology rather than the decorative use of patterned hollow blocks.

7 Taz Loomans, "How Superlite Shaped Phoenix into the Block Capital of America," *Modern Phoenix*, 2011, online at www.modernphoenix.net/superlitecapital.htm (accessed January 13, 2014).

proliferation of a relatively small number of patterns common across different states and countries. Some pattern variations appear to have been more popular in some areas and largely absent from others, such as the large circle-in-square pattern produced by Superlite as the Haver profile - the design of which was attributed to Ralph Haver of the Phoenix-based architecture firm Haver and Nunn. But among the pattern profiles that were standard fare in the heyday of the American and Australian breeze block were the square-in-square design named Majestic in Australian company Besser's range (a variation on another Superlite product), and Starlight, which in the hands of Florida's Al Block Corporation was catalogued as number 377. In Australia, the names of block profiles called upon the same kind of cultural imaginary that populated the sales brochures of sedans, mobile homes, barbeques and caravans: Calypso, Paddington, El Rancho, Bellevue and Fantasy, to cite a few examples. Even though the breeze block had served, to an extent, to mediate the suburban march of modernism - "Brasilia" presumably pandered directly to an architectural specifying public - the compatibility of these permeable screening elements with the state of modernist thought was not widely appreciated and remains under the surface of Australian architectural history. There is, predictably, no mention of breeze blocks in the final chapter of Freeland's *Architecture in Australia* (1968), nor any in Jennifer Taylor's *Australian Architecture since 1960* (1986), and beyond hitting the easy target of naming those landmark histories that fail to account for idiosyncratic preoccupations of the present, the point can yet be made that attending to this material in post-war Australian architecture opens up a new perspective on an old problem.⁸



Fig. 1. Stuart Pharmaceutical Co., Pasadena, Calif., by Edward Durrell Stone, 1956. Photograph by Robert Skolmen. Wikimedia Commons.

In the trade of Portland cement for slag and cinder, function for decoration and abandonment of truth to materials, the concrete block - decorated in imitation of other materials or in patterned profile - lost any hope of widespread acceptance among a generation of architects who held a strict idea of modernism and its effects close in mind. Ada Louise Huxtable regarded the early incarnations of these blocks as indicative of the "tastelessness of the middle class" and Frank

⁸ J. M. Freeland, *Architecture in Australia: A History* (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1968); Jennifer Taylor, *Australian Architecture since 1960* (Sydney: Law Book Company, 1986).

Lloyd Wright observed that “every form it undertook soon relegated it to the back yard of aesthetic oblivion.”⁹ v

Enter the Gold Coast. The arrival of the breeze block marks a moment of modernism’s incursion into the architecture of the middle class, and as a marker is in part distinct for its persistence and longevity as a material that straddles the greasy line between fashion and regret. If the breeze block was a ubiquitous feature of the post-war Australian suburb, then the overabundance of the normal and the mundane that allowed the Gold Coast to serve up in excess the cultural mores that were common in the rest of the country sets up a curious relationship, here, between material and city that was not tempered, as elsewhere, by the reflective lethargy afforded by a city with a past. The population growth that underpinned the planning of the inner suburbs and canal estates caught a specific moment the history of a city prone to rapid change, which later became referential to the identity, character and image of that same city (now barely recognizable as such). If the breeze block were to be a conscious element of that identity, it would be in the Californian-Polynesian popular modernism (Cali-Poly-Pop-Mod?) that would put the Kapu-Kai Bowling Alley and Restaurant (Rancho Cucamonga, Calif., by Talley Guevara Associates, 1962-94) into conversation with the comparative restraint of the Chevron Hotel and Paradise Bowl (Surfers Paradise, by David Bell, 1957-89 and 1962-89, resp.) and the incursion of its aesthetics into proprietor Stanley Korman’s own dwelling (Chevron Island, completed 1959): a conversation enacted on equivalent social and cultural terms between countries, fostering the proliferation of a taste treated as regrettable by cultured souls on both sides of the Pacific.¹⁰

Around the Block

When Boyd wrote of the Australian “ugliness” he threw the *rôle* of the veneer into relief. He famously begins with a clarification that becomes operative in defining the book’s core problem. “The ugliness I mean is skin deep,” he writes, and “skin is as important as its admirers like to make of it,” but “Australians make much of it”, to the extent that one’s regard for the surface and its status “is bound up with the collective character of the Australian people.” When Boyd concludes by observing that the “Australian ugliness begins with fear of reality”, he points to the anxieties bound up in the absorption of the American streetscape into the Australian suburb and the false materiality of their respective buildings: what he describes from the very first pages as “the surfeit of colour, the love of advertisements, the dreadful language, the ladylike euphemisms outside lavatory doors” - those

9 Both cited in Pamela Simpson, *Cheap, Quick & Easy: Imitative Architectural Materials 1870-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 27-29. One might only consider the appearance of the US Embassy in New Delhi by Edward Durrell Stone, completed 1954 in Starlight and the fall from favour experienced by its architect, as documented by Tom Wolfe in “The Fate of Apostasy,” *Age Monthly Review* 1, no. 9 (February 1982): 11-14, esp. 11.

10 See *The Kapu-Kai*, dir. Colin Sato (2013), online at www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ag92sA4Gk_Y (accessed 2 February 2014); Katherine Rickard, “Run to Paradise: The Chevron Hotel, Gold Coast, from Foundation to Renaissance,” in *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand* 30, *Open*, ed. Alexandra Brown and Andrew Leach (Gold Coast, Qld: SAHANZ, 2013), vol. 1, 57-66; “The House that Korman Built,” *Sunday Mail* (Brisbane), 22 December 1963, 16.

tendencies that coalesce around Austerianism and the featurism to which the Australian city had become problematically susceptible.¹¹ There is little to distinguish the images that disturb Boyd's summer holidays from those conjured up some years later by Joan Didion in "How Can I Tell Them There's Nothing Left" as she recounts a drive through Rancho Cucamonga.¹² Just as there is little to distinguish the San Bernadino Valley from the towns and cities of Australia's own Pacific coast, Boyd and Didion share the observation that the acculturated surface - the stuff of the neo-realist apprehension of the city that fuelled the most famous of its analyses - bears the weight of that culture's anxieties, and in this sense, and this setting, the skin has substance. To be a little more pointed; with the recalibration of the concrete block from structure to decoration, from substance to skin, and with its widespread uptake in Australia's suburbs, the breeze block is arguably a material that bears the load of that anxiety (in theory), if little else (in practice).

Indeed, it is absent except in trace from codification of the Gold Coast's heritage character, which privileges moments of informality and innocence and their trade for the brashness of the developer boom. The suburbs and their materiality have little room in this story, even though Philip Goad's authoritative contribution to the *Gold Coast Urban Heritage & Character Study* (1997) clearly marked out their place.¹³ Alexandra Teague's analysis of the Gold Coast's "immaterial" heritage privileges the inherently impermanent timber structures clad in asbestos cement ("fibrolite") that once defined the architecture of the beach edge and which now survive only in pockets, largely towards the southern end of the city in such settlements as Palm Beach and Tugun. They are at once a "symbol of Australian identity" and representation "of a simpler age." And while this material offers "a tangible benchmark for measuring the phenomenal change that has occurred in the built environment", asbestos cement plays a curious role in the city's official nostalgia for an image of the Gold Coast that is decisively of a past to which any return is impossible.¹⁴ (The Gold Coast Arts Centre show *Fibro Coast* demonstrates this in its proliferation of images and soundscapes, but with a marked absence of both the material itself and of the dark consequences for those who contracted asbestosis by making or using it.¹⁵) The breeze block, on the other hand, remains in production and in use, and its purchase on a Gold Coast nostalgia is thus more heavily mediated by contemporary taste, (economic) value and the implications of its dispersal patterns throughout the city.¹⁶ It is a heritage materiality that one can choose to like or not to like, since its proper subject is the

11 Boyd, *The Australian Ugliness*, 1-2, 255.

12 Joan Didion, "How can I tell them there's nothing left," *Saturday Evening Post*, May 7, 1966, 38-49.

13 Philip Goad, "The Gold Coast: Architecture and Planning" in Allom Lovell Marquis-Kyle, et al., *Gold Coast Urban Heritage & Character Study*, Gold Coast City Council, 1997, 37-41.

14 Alexandra Teague, "Materialising the Immaterial: Social Value and the Conservation of Recent Everyday Places," PhD diss., University of Melbourne, 2004, 258-60.

15 *Fibro Coast, Arts Centre Gold Coast*, 15 February - 25 March 2014, online presence at www.fibrocoast.net (accessed 15 February 2014). *Fibro sheeting in Australia has excluded asbestos since 1981: Robert Coutes, "A Review of Australian Research into Natural Fibre Cement Composites," Cement and Concrete Composites 27, no. 5 (2005): 518-26.*

16 Besser is currently the only national supplier of breeze block in Australia, thus raising the material's unit price (approximately A\$13/block).

suburbs, which remain largely inert in the city's imagination of itself - as, indeed, they are inert in the maintenance of the heritage identity of all Australian cities. The breeze block may have gained a certain *caché* in recent years, but they are back just as they left us.¹⁷ As the *raison d'être* of the metre maid was lost with the introduction of paper ticketing, the image invoked by the fibro shack speaks to an image lodged firmly in the past. Its materiality cannot actively mediate the relationship between history and heritage, the past and its image, as can the breeze block, which therefore functions historiologically as a fragment, with all that this implies.



Fig. 2. *Breezeblock Longboard*, by Mike Taylor, 2007.
Photograph by Andrew Leach, 2014.

Something of these issues is played out in the status accorded to Mike Taylor's *Breezeblock Longboard*. Included in the 2003 programme of Sydney's *Sculpture by the Sea*, it speaks to the particular endurance of Australia's reconciliation of surf and suburb, offering "a glimpse back to beach culture in a lucky country."¹⁸ Originally installed near the Bondi Baths, a copy was commissioned by the Gold Coast City Council in 2007 and sited near the Mowbray Park Surf Life Saving Club at Burleigh Heads - a part of the Gold Coast that has accommodated mid-level high rise developments while actively maintaining the architectural fabric of the 1950s, -60s and -70s (fig. 2). That fabric still includes large numbers of well maintained breeze block screens that continue to serve their buildings both decoratively and functionally, and in which, therefore, the breeze block remains present in the architectural character of that settlement. There is something of a reclamation of an image in this instance of public art, in which the work is normalized as part of a counter-image of the Gold Coast in which Burleigh Heads and the adjacent suburbs of Mermaid Beach and Palm Beach serve as a confirmation that the nostalgia directed towards the Gold Coast's "historical centre" rests on a kind of facticity bound to the mid-century boom - less a celebration of a moment of lost innocence than of a coming of age. Those parts of the city in which we now find concentrations of expressive breeze blocks - where block screens play a part in the composition of the street facade or in articulation of the form of a tall building - are also those parts of the Gold Coast that were largely excluded from the development of the 1980s, -90s and 2000s that wiped out

17 A good number of *Pinterest* accounts are dedicated to the breeze block and breeze block enthusiasts of all kinds, from straight-up concrete fanciers to the hipster element, and numerous recent projects profiled on *archdaily.com* have made good use of the material.

18 The artist cited at www.flickr.com/photos/displace/127865304 (accessed 12 February 2014).

the fibro shack (figs. 3 and 4). Burleigh Heads becomes, then, one of the enclaves against which the city entire can check the bases of its nostalgia, choosing, as it might, to project what it finds there back upon those parts of the city that once shared the character of the southern Gold Coast, but left it behind in the face of development (fig. 5). In *Breezeblock Longboard*, therefore, we can locate an instance of material and artistic appropriation in the name of identity in which the commonplace is rendered specific and instrumental - if not by the artist, then certainly by its owner and an unwitting public.



Fig. 3. Goodwin Towers, Burleigh Heads.
Photograph by Andrew Leach, 2014.



Fig. 4. Park Towers (foreground), Burleigh Heads.
Photograph by Andrew Leach, 2014.

Surface and Substance

There is something of this substance in the representation of breeze blocks in contemporary art concerned with the Gold Coast subject, in which depiction of the breeze block is also actively disconnected from the reality of the material. Its deployment belies a broader fixation on the block as a surface condition - and on the surface of Gold Coast culture. The image of the breeze block privileges repetition and the spectacle of the patterned surface over materiality. Regularly depicted as a two-dimensional surface or possessing very limited depth - as, for example, with *Breezeblock Longboard*, which combines the surface effects of the block with the form of the board - the breeze block is deployed in these situations purely as decoration. While Taylor engages with the "cast concrete" nature of the breeze block, the erosion of the individual block at the edges of

this sculpture reveals his identification of the breeze block with the patterned screen rather than the materiality in all its substance. Even when depicting a patterned breeze block screen in situ, as Anna Carey does in *Corridor* (2010) or Robert Brownhall in *Man on a Roof, Kirra* (2007), the block is flattened, maintained as surface. Fibre cement again, here, offers a useful point of comparison. In the danger inherent to the materiality of the surface, it defines volumes housing a local nostalgia - the insubstantial and problematic becomes, therefore, substantial (and resolved) as a volume. The breeze block, on the other hand, is structure and pattern finish combined, and the level of visibility the breeze block wall afford either to “negative” space or a view beyond plays into this reduction of the material to surface. As evidence that this surface indeed bears the weight of anxiety, these depictions of the breeze block as pattern alone sees this surface scaled-up to exacerbate the geometric games of which the material is capable - surfaces larger than one finds in reality, patterned walls projected into an urban fabric from which they have long been removed.¹⁹



Fig. 5. Pavilion, Broadwater Parklands, Southport, by WhiteArchitecture, completed 2010. Photograph by Andrew Leach, 2014.

Carey and Taylor both depict Starlight, a design that is contained by and exceeds the frame of the individual block, relegating its square outline to another layer of the hypothetically infinite pattern. As the name suggests, this block pattern consists of a four-pointed starburst form. Yet the profile can also be read as four quarter-circles each centred on the square’s vertices. When repeated, this gives the effect of a series of repeated starbursts, or, alternatively, a matrix of circles intersected by crosses. As a result, the Starlight block screen wall can never be properly “finished” at its edges. As Ross Gibson has observed of the pattern in Debra Dawes’ *Starlite* (1993): “If you stand in front of [it] for a few seconds, long enough to give it some play, it starts to play *you*.” The interaction of the “black” background with the “crisp and undeniable claim for attention” of the white of the block, “after which the black will ooze back to offer solace for your retina even as the white pulses hotly again.” Neither foreground nor background wins the contest of planes. “Should you home in on a square, a diamond presently insists itself. Focus on a diamond, and your peripheral vision is stippled with a starburst of protuberant rings. Try to see all the circles at once ... now a square presses its claim.” (fig. 6) As Margaret Davies observes of Gibson’s analysis of Starlight within *Starlite*, what

19 Alexandra Brown and Andrew Leach, “Neither Here Nor Elsewhere,” in *Anna Carey* (Brisbane: Queensland Centre for Photography, 2012).

first appears as a preponderance of “formal simplicity” quickly works at the boundaries in order to destabilise the relationships and substance that accrues to the simplicity of the image.²⁰



Fig. 6. Debra Dawes, *Starlite* 1993, oil on board, 240cm x 390cm.
Courtesy Debra Dawes.

Turning attention to the breeze block in the architectural history of the Gold Coast (or, equally, Australia) can have a similar effect, breaking open new relationships on the basis of popular taste, manufacturing and design, and, overall, the links maintained with those middle decades of the twentieth century when much that came to constitute contemporary Australian culture - and, within it, the cultural and (sub)urban identity of the Gold Coast - entered into play. This material now indexes a problem in which we find a disjunction between the (upheld) image and (documentary) reality of the city that demands more work on the part of architectural history to account for the past and its standing in the present.

²⁰ Margaret Davies, *Asking the Law Question* (Sydney: Law Book Company, 1994), 19, also citing from Ross Gibson, “Debra Dawes’ *Starlite*: A Constellation of Options,” exhib. cat. (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1993). In her doctoral thesis, Dawes discusses *Starlite* as both “[o]ne large painting” and a series of “104 small panels”, explaining that “*Starlite* is literally a wall of permutations of shifts between the structures that constitute the painting as well as the conceptual parameters of the painting.” Debra Dawes, “Painting the Lines of Connection Between Time, Space and Memory” (PhD diss., University of Wollongong, 1999), 32.