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# “And Everywhere Those Strange Polygonal Igloos”

## Framing a History of Australian Countercultural Architecture

*Lee Stickells*

*University of Sydney*

*From student strikes to ecological design theory, from video art installations to community design collectives—Australian architecture’s interaction with the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s was diverse. The discipline advanced, tested and gave image to countercultural ideals of communal living, independence from institutions and utilities, appeals to individual creative expression, and the rejection of conventional social forms. At the same time, countercultural questioning of existing societal power structures, cultural mores, and attitudes to technology and environment, prompted reassessment and transformation within the discipline.*

*Exploration of that dynamic between architecture and the counterculture offers the possibility to meaningfully reshape understandings of a whole period of Australian architectural history. However, undertaking such a history involves confronting a number of historiographical issues. These include making sense of the ongoing reconceptualisations of the counterculture, querying its accepted geographies, and interrogating architecture’s internal narrativisation of the period’s transformations. This paper will explore those issues in order to prepare the ground for a history of Australian countercultural architecture, one that could also contribute a better understanding of peripheral, radical architectural endeavours outside the familiar European and North American milieus.*



And everywhere  
 Those strange polygonal igloos,  
 Subjects of such long debates,  
 Domes whose theory fascinates  
 (and leads to such vague ballyhoo),  
 appear in groups, or one's and two's –  
 the dream of every half-stoned guru.  
 To prove we can both think *and* do,  
 The Geodesic Word is made bamboo.<sup>1</sup>

—Mark O'Connor, "What Happened at Nimbin."

1. Excerpt from "What happened at Nimbin,"  
 Mark O'Connor, *Reef Poems*, (St Lucia:  
 University of Queensland Press, 1976), 58.

One of the enduring impressions of the 1973 Aquarius Festival is the assortment of plastic inflatables, tree huts, wurlies, tee pees, adobes and domes that ranged across the fields and valleys around the town of Nimbin, in northern New South Wales. The crowd of approximately 10 000 people that converged on the ailing dairy town for a ten-day gathering constructed an amazing array of accommodation. As the above excerpt from Mark O'Connor's poem "What happened at Nimbin" suggests, the scores of geodesic domes amongst that assembly have become particularly resonant of the festival's defining countercultural status. Built from materials such as bamboo, dowel, polythene, parachute silk, and cardboard, the domes sheltered not only bodies but also radical ideas. The Aquarius Festival remains a potent cultural landmark—symbolising the local manifestation of an international blossoming in the 1960s and '70s of beliefs and practices questioning existing societal structures and cultural norms, and experimenting with alternative ways of living.<sup>2</sup>

2. Margaret Smith and David Crossleys, eds.,  
*The Way Out: Radical Alternatives in Australia*  
 (Melbourne: Lansdowne Press, 1975).

The festival's array of unconventional structures, many built by architecture students, also signalled ways in which architecture was being rethought during the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>3</sup> The spatial and material experimentation that forms such as the geodesic dome made easily accessible keyed in to desires for creating groovy spaces and non-conformist enclaves, concerns for reshaping architecture to better empower people in the design and construction of their everyday living environments, and the exploration of ecological design modes.<sup>4</sup> The popularity of dome building amongst the intentional communities that later sprung up in the region was directly linked to their perceived spiritual power and the possibility of "human evolution in a space that reflects the major space of the universe."<sup>5</sup> Students, the most radicalised group in the profession, looked towards a wholesale reconsideration of what architecture could be and do; and the profusion of experimental shelter

3. The 1973 National Architecture Student Congress was incorporated into the Aquarius Festival.

4. Lee Stickells, "Other Australian Architecture: Excavating alternative practices of the 1960s and 1970s," *Fabulation: Myth, Nature, Heritage: The 29th Annual Conference of the Society of Architectural Historians Australia and New Zealand*, University of Tasmania, Launceston, Tasmania, 5-8 July 2012; Alastair Gordon, *Spaced Out: Radical Environments of the Psychedelic Sixties* (New York: Rizzoli, 2008); Felicity D Scott, *Ant Farm: Living Archive 7* (Barcelona: Actar, 2008).

5. Peter Cock, *Alternative Australia*  
 (Melbourne: Quartet Books, 1979), 99-100.



Figure 1. Peter Derrett, Shelter at the Aquarius Festival, 1973 (courtesy of Peter Derrett)

6. Lee Stickells, "Hand Made: The Ecology of a Countercultural Architecture," in Kezia Geddes, ed, *Not Quite Square: The Story of Northern Rivers Architecture* (Lismore: Lismore Regional Gallery, 2013), 17-22.

7. Byron Kinnaird and Barnaby Bennett, eds, *Congress Book V1.0* (Melbourne: Freerange Press, 2011).

8. Constance M. Lewallen, *Ant Farm 1968 - 1978, illustrated edition*. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004).

9. Glen Hill, "Hippie House: Australia's First Intentional 'Autonomous' Architecture," *Fabulation: Myth, Nature, Heritage*, 29th Annual Conference of the Society of Architectural Historians Australia & New Zealand, 5-8 July 2012.

10. Stickells, "Other Australian Architecture"; Stickells "Hand Made: The Ecology of a Countercultural Architecture"; Lee Stickells, "Designing Way Out: Shay Gap and the 'living laboratory' of the 1970s," in *Out of Place (Gwalia)*, ed. Philip Goldswain, Nicole Sully and William Taylor (Nedlands, University of Western Australia Publishing, forthcoming 2013).

at the festival points to the critical role architecture played in the counterculture—creating atmospheres and memorable images around which identities could be constructed, and as a technique for envisioning alternative life styles.<sup>6</sup>

How did such interaction with the counterculture during the 1960s and 1970s transform Australian architecture? A thorough account of the ways in which alternative architectures advanced, tested and gave image to countercultural ideals is currently absent. Similarly, the ways in which countercultural questioning of existing society affected the discipline's knowledge base, pedagogical structures, and its representational and practice forms, remain largely unexplored. Even a preliminary survey makes it clear that a diverse set of experimental and subversive architectural projects, conceptual work, pedagogical initiatives, exhibitions and publications can be connected to the countercultural radicalism of the 1960s and 1970s. For example, beginning in the mid-1960s, architecture students staged alternative congresses that drew cult architectural heroes and bigger crowds than the profession's official conference.<sup>7</sup> The US-based countercultural practice Ant Farm developed projects in Australia such as the Dolphin Embassy.<sup>8</sup> The Autonomous House project at the University of Sydney explored Appropriate Technologies and alternative living forms.<sup>9</sup> The Sydney collective ARCHANON developed participatory and collaborative design approaches.<sup>10</sup> Idiosyncratic architects, such



as Wallace Greenham in Western Australia, developed proto-ecological design approaches.<sup>11</sup> The Tasmanian College of Advanced Education (TCAE) created an experimental Department of Environmental Design, where students set their own programs and learning aims, and permaculture was conceived.<sup>12</sup> Even though it is cursory, this sample points to an array of activity that has yet to be thoroughly incorporated into understandings of Australian architectural history. Powerful indications of such social, cultural, political and economic questioning even surfaced in the profession's journal of record—for example, a 1974 student-edited issue of *Architecture in Australia* featured strident (sometimes scatological) criticisms of architecture's social and environmental impacts.<sup>13</sup> The ways in which countercultural challenges to existing society affected the discipline's knowledge base, pedagogical structures, and its representational and practice forms, remain largely unexplored. While I have begun to explore aspects of that history within my own recent work, it is not the intention here to provide any detailed account of the type of activity discussed above. Rather, the focus within this paper is the outlining of the intellectual context and development of a productive framework to structure such explorations.

Undertaking such a history would involve confronting a number of historiographical issues. These include making sense of the ongoing reconceptualisations of the counterculture, querying accepted geographies, and interrogating architecture's internal narrativisation of the period's transformations. This paper will explore those issues in order to prepare the ground for a history of Australian countercultural architecture, one that could also contribute a better understanding of peripheral, radical architectural endeavours outside the familiar European and North American Milieus. Given that aim, the majority of the paper surveys and reflects on recent countercultural histories, in order to identify productive understandings of the term and the kinds of intellectual framework that could also structure an architectural history. It is less about the specifics of an Australian countercultural architecture history than understanding what kind of history it might be.

### **Recurrence, Persistence and Evolution**

Taking the tricky question of definition first, the shifting, often-hesitant understanding of the term counterculture (sometimes counter-culture) reflects the perpetual revision of the char-

11. Leonie Matthews, "From the Architecture Building... with Love: The 40th Anniversary of the Opening of the Curtin University Architecture Building 201," Curtin University of Technology, 2011.

12. Bill Mollison and David Holmgren, *Permaculture One: A Perennial Agriculture for Human Settlements* (Melbourne: Transworld, 1978).

13. *Architecture in Australia* 63, no. 1. (February 1974).

14. Peter Stansill and David Zane Mairowitz, eds., *BAMN: Outlaw Manifestos and Ephemera, 1965-70* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), 13.

15. J. Milton Yinger, "Contraculture and Subculture," *American Sociological Review* 25, no. 5 (1960), 629.

16. Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (reissue) (London: Routledge, 1991).

17. Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and its Youthful Opposition* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1969).

18. Roszack, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, 5.

19. Roszack, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, 5.

20. Roszack, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, 5.

21. As an example of the range of literature: William S. McConnell, *The Counterculture Movement of the 1960s* (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2004); Elizabeth A. Swingrover, *The Counterculture Reader* (New York: Pearson/Longman, 2004); Ken Goffman (aka R.U. Sirius) and Dan Joy, *Counterculture Through the Ages: From Abraham to Acid House* (New York: Villard Books, 2004); Christopher Dunn, *Brutality Garden: Tropicália and the Emergence of a Brazilian Counterculture* (University of North Carolina Press Books, 2001); Eric Zolov, *Reframed Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

acterisation and positioning of its 1960s and 1970s manifestation. Stansill and Mairowitz have gone as far as to assert that events "between 1965 and 1970 [are] clearly not a 'movement,' although full of interior motion."<sup>14</sup> Still, the term "counterculture" itself emerged and was popularised during that period. The sociologist J. Milton Yinger had used a similar term—*contraculture*—in a 1960 essay, to describe group behaviour in which the normative system of a group contains "as a primary element, a theme of conflict with the values of the total society."<sup>15</sup> This was in distinction to *subculture*, a form of group behaviour with internal norms that were largely neutral in respect to those of dominant society (for example a professional association). Contracultures were distinctive as oppositional movements that sought to fundamentally transform the norms and values of dominant society. In developing this differentiation Yinger was drawing on Talcott Parson's brief use of the term *counterculture* in his 1951 study of subcultures: *The Social System*.<sup>16</sup> However, it was Theodore Roszak's 1969 study *The making of a Counterculture: Reflections on the technocratic Society and its Youthful Opposition* that popularized the term—becoming a best seller and providing a (contested) blueprint of the countercultural ethos.<sup>17</sup>

Roszak saw the counterculture as "radically disaffiliated" from the mainstream norms and values of society.<sup>18</sup> He argued it was more than simply a political movement; rather, it was a "cultural movement" that "strikes beyond ideology to the level of consciousness seeking to transform our deepest sense of the self, the other, the environment."<sup>19</sup> The aspiration of the counterculture was to "alter the total cultural context within which our daily politics take place."<sup>20</sup> Following Roszack, the term has come to be commonly used as shorthand for the various protest movements, aesthetic and cultural practices, activist groups, and associated philosophies that sought to transform society during the 1960s; in North and South America, and Western Europe, but also countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Japan.<sup>21</sup> While there was no precise beginning or end point, centred around the late 1960s was a conspicuous surge of young people seeking to reject a "greed-driven," "technocratic" and "emotionally-isolated" society in order to create forms of living that were more sharing, mutually caring and open.

Ongoing scholarship on the counterculture has had to address questions of recurrence, persistence and evolution: is the counterculture a periodic phenomenon? What aspects of the constellation of liberatory movements around race, gender and sexuality, the



explosion of intentional communities, radical environmentalism, New Left politics and socio-cultural experimentation of the 1960s and '70s remain with us? For some, the counterculture of that time represents a recurrent phenomenon throughout history—a re-flowering of Dionysian culture or a transhistorical “spirit” poised between radical democratisation and nonconformist individualism.<sup>22</sup> Yet the 1960s eruption of contestation, activism, energy and experimentation also appears singular in its powerful social, political and cultural impacts and, particularly, its global reach. It is a potent and enduring component of our collective imaginary; as Julie Stephens has put it: “there is something about the decade that continues to trouble and allure.”<sup>23</sup>

That troubling quality, and continual reassessment, of the sixties seems to derive notably from the counterculture’s contested legacy. In their introduction to an important reassessment of sixties cultural radicalism, *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s*, Braunstein and Doyle describe the way an “Iliad-like narrative” has been pervasive; one that reduces the counterculture to a series of “big moments” that typically include things like Albert Hoffman’s discovery of LSD, San Francisco’s “Summer of Love” and the Altamont concert disaster.<sup>24</sup> The narrative typically traces an arc from youthful optimism and exuberance to self-indulgent excess, violence and regret, to embarrassment, co-option and commodification. Julie Stephens is equally critical of the complacent “death-of-the-sixties” narrative. In her book *Anti-Disciplinary Protest: Sixties Radicalism and Postmodernism* (1998) she denounces the way sixties radicalism has been formulated in so many of the retrospective accounts of the decade; where “a trajectory moves from the emancipatory promises of the sixties to the apparent end of all possibility of a transformative politics.”<sup>25</sup> In distinction to the finality of those sweeping portrayals of failure and disillusionment there is also a growing literature that considers a multiplicity of aftermaths to the countercultural activity of the 1960s and '70s. This more recent scholarship also tends to view the counterculture as far less ineffectual than is typically assumed.<sup>26</sup> As suggested, the importance of addressing the complex, perplexing phenomenon of the counterculture lies in the very way that the 1960s has an enduring hold on the imagination of the present. Despite the difficulties in pinning down counterculture as a meaningful term for categorising social action it still lives on in social and cultural theory, as well as a popular and vernacular contexts.<sup>27</sup> This means that, even if we follow Braunstein and Doyle in regarding the counterculture less as a movement and

22. Frank Musgrove, *Ecstasy and Holiness: Counterculture and the Open Society* (London: Methuen, 1973), 196; Goffman and Joy, *Counterculture Through the Ages*.

23. Julie Stephens, *Anti-disciplinary Protest: Sixties Radicalism and Postmodernism* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), viii.

24. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s* (London: Routledge, 2002), 7. In the US, the political importance of the sixties is highly significant—politicians continue to be called to account for their activities during the period and connections to its cultural ferment (e.g. Bill Clinton’s marijuana smoking, John Kerry’s Vietnam War service).

25. Julie Stephens, *Anti-disciplinary Protest* vii.

26. For example: Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Sam Binkley, *Getting Loose: Lifestyle Consumption in the 1970s* (Durham and London, Duke University Press: 2007); Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter, *Nation of Rebels: Why Counterculture Became Consumer Culture* (New York, Harper Business: 2004).

27. Andy Bennett, “Réévaluer la contre-culture,” *Volume!* 9, no. 1, 2012. [trans. “Reappraising Counter-Culture”]; Andy Bennett (ed.), *Remembering Woodstock* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012); Ken Gelder, *Subcultures: Cultural Histories and Social Practice* (London: Routledge, 2007).

more as “an inherently unstable collection of attitudes, tendencies, postures, gestures, lifestyles, ideals, visions, hedonistic pleasures, moralisms, negation and affirmations,”<sup>28</sup> it is still a valuable area of enquiry. It becomes productive to view ongoing revisionary scholarship on the counterculture as contributing more broadly to deepening collective understanding of the dramatic social, political, economic, cultural shifts borne of the 1960s.<sup>29</sup> Architecture was affected and implicated in those shifts, and so the contention here is that histories of countercultural architecture may play a similar role in deepening understanding of the discipline’s transformations during the late twentieth century.

To put it more directly, the historical potential this paper points to is manifested in recent scholarship on the 1960s and 1970s that exposes ways in which the counterculture’s impacts have been more pervasive than previously assumed. The nuanced attentiveness to continuities has deconstructed some hardened counterculture mythologies, and a historiographic arc that had solidified via dozens of mainstream history books. A supposed distrust of science and technology is just one common countercultural history trope; perhaps originating in Theodore Roszak’s contention—in *The Making of a Counterculture*—that the 1960s youth movement’s revolt against technocracy was grounded in a rejection of modern science itself. However, a growing literature by historians of science and technology has challenged that simplistic characterisation.<sup>30</sup> That revisionary tendency itself sits within a broader recalibration: from Fred Turner’s work on Stewart Brand and the countercultural roots of personal computing to Julie Stephens’ excavation of an anti-disciplinary politics, important aspects of contemporary attitudes to technology and knowledge, relationships with the environment, media, consumption, and cultural politics, have been traced to concepts and practices forged in the countercultural experimentation of that earlier period.<sup>31</sup>

This primarily North American scholarship has worked to displace dominant (often complacent) historical narratives of failed communes and sell-out hippies. It also suggests the considerable potential—drawing on similar shifts in the more specific arena of architectural history—for productively rethinking established narratives of Australian architectural history. A 2010 issue of the architectural journal *Volume* (themed “Counterculture”) has identified just such an opportunity. Drawing specifically on some of the scholarship noted above (particularly, Fred Turner’s *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*), the issue’s overall thrust is that

28. Braunstein and Doyle, *Imagine Nation*, 10.

29. David R. Farber and Beth L. Bailey (eds.), *The Columbia Guide to America in the 1960s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

30. Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*; Eric J. Vettel, *Biotech: The Countercultural Origins of an Industry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Andrew Pickering, *The Cybernetic Brain: Sketches of Another Future* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Timothy Moy, “Culture, Technology, and the Cult of Tech in the 1970s,” in Beth Bailey and David Farber, eds., *America in the Seventies* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004); John Markoff, *What the Dormouse Said: How the Sixties Counterculture Shaped the Personal Computer Industry* (New York: Penguin, 2005).

31. Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*; Andrew Kirk, *Counterculture Green: The Whole Earth Catalog and American Environmentalism* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2007); Markoff, *What the Dormouse Said*; Braunstein and Doyle, *Imagine Nation*; Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Heath and Potter, *Nation of Rebels*; Binkley, *Getting Loose*; Elissa Auther and Adam Lerner (ed.), *West of Center: Art and the Counterculture Experiment in America, 1965–1977* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press 2011); Braunstein and Doyle, *Imagine Nation*; Julie Stephens, *Anti-disciplinary Protest*.





architecture needs to rethink the “codification” of certain counter-cultural ideals within contemporary practice. Jeffrey Inaba’s editorial suggests:

Because it is embedded in what we as architects are assumed to do, it is important to look closer into what the counterculture is purported to be [...] Its sensibility is assumed in the basic responsibilities we have as designers: we are supposed to thoroughly process the latest technical knowledge in our field, design buildings that are environmentally conscious and form a sense of community around our projects.<sup>32</sup>

32. Jeffrey Inaba, “Counterculture?” Volume 24, *Counterculture* (2010), 4.

While we might view with some scepticism Inaba’s contention that the 1960s and 1970s American counterculture has produced some kind of constricting “ethos of positivity” for architecture, the underlying proposition is worth taking up: the counterculture’s legacy within architecture—beyond clichés of psychedelic design, communal dome building and utopian dreamers—is an important question. Recognising that the editorial discussion makes the usual conflation of “counterculture” with “North American counterculture,” we might also add that an attention to the differential experience and consequences of the counterculture internationally is similarly important. Hence, the emergence of new understandings of countercultural practices and their legacies (as outlined above), and more nuanced frameworks for understanding architecture’s interactions with the counterculture, provide an important impetus for a renewed history of Australian architecture in that period. What local interactions occurred between architecture and the counterculture? What were their effects and legacies? How were they different from what occurred elsewhere?

### **Simultaneity and Disjunction**

Historians such as Stansil and Mairowitz, and Braunstein and Doyle, have seen the 1960s and 1970s counterculture as diverse—or even incoherent—in its ideals and manifestations. However, apart from the identified difficulties in adequately synthesising a clear definition of the North American counterculture, we should be attentive to other matters of differentiation. A clear example is the primacy of North America in the countercultural imaginary. This is revealed most obviously in the limited geography of activism that structures so many historical accounts (moving, say, from San Francisco’s liberating Summer of Love

to the bad-trip nightmare of Altamont). It is also present in the tendency, when addressing international dimensions of the counterculture, to ascribe an overwhelming primacy to the American experience. In Australia itself, the local counterculture has often been characterised as largely ersatz. The sociologist and gay-activist Dennis Altman suggested in 1977: “In many ways the counter-culture was a product of the United States, and it was exported to countries like Australia much as are other cultural phenomena.”<sup>33</sup> Subsequent Australian scholarship seems to have largely maintained this disposition. For example, Robin Gerster and Jan Bassett, in *Seizures of Youth: The Sixties and Australia*, assessed the underground and student literature of the 1960s as almost entirely imitative and trivial.<sup>34</sup> Verity Burgmann does not address the counterculture at all in her politically-focused history and analysis of social movements in Australia since the 1960s. She suggests that those who see a significant cultural shift in that period have simply been “dazzled by the shining political moment of the 1960s and early 1970s.”<sup>35</sup>

However, the cultural historian George McKay has pointed out the complexity of those international exchanges, noting that while the American disposition toward an alternative future was profoundly influential, at the same time: American consumerism could be passionately opposed, Europe provided its own compelling influences (the Dutch “Provos” for example), and Australians like Richard Neville and Germaine Greer supplied Britain’s counterculture with “personalities, energy and attitude.”<sup>36</sup> American liberatory models of youth and culture were extremely influential, while its military-industrial programs were decried and its consumerist culture resisted; America was the place where it was at, even while “Amerika” was engaged simultaneously in an imperial campaign of destruction. This ambiguity is critical for considering the issues of continuity and disjunction that have just been outlined. With respect to Australian architecture’s interactions with the counterculture, we then need to be attentive to similarly complex exchanges—the circulation of people, objects and ideas that produced a distinctive local condition.

As well as illuminating those issues of international influence, exchange and divergence, there is also a need to question conventional understandings of the import, across the counterculture, of particular moments in its established chronology. Dominant versions of “Sixties” or “Counterculture” histories tend to reduce the heterodox, hybrid nature of the period’s radicalism, especially

33. Dennis Altman, “The Counter-Culture: Nostalgia or Prophecy?” in *Australian Society: A Sociological Introduction*, ed. A. F. Davies, et al. (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1977), 332.

34. Robin Gerster and Jan Bassett, *Seizures of Youth: The Sixties and Australia* (South Yarra: Hyland House Publishing Pty Limited, 1991).

35. Verity Burgmann, *Power and Protest: Movements for Change in Australian Society* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1993), 3.

36. George McKay, “The Social and (Counter) Cultural 1960s in the USA, Transatlantically,” in *Summer of Love: Psychedelic Art, Social Crisis and Counterculture in the 1960s*, ed. Jonathan Harris and Christoph Grunenberg (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press + Tate Liverpool, 2005).



the attempts to rethink the meaning and character of political involvement. A multiplicity of aftermaths is consistently reduced to a scenario of failure. This is especially problematic for consideration of aspects such as the early women's liberation movement, which—in distinction to the over determining trajectory of the New Left—grew and flourished into the seventies.<sup>37</sup> Such complications of periodisation can also be extended to considering the discontinuities across international experiences of the counterculture. In Australia, for instance (and for various reasons), the intentional communities and hand made homes of the country's "new settlers" flourished in the 1970s, when a similar wave of countercultural living experiments in the US had peaked.<sup>38</sup>

The importance of the American counterculture's visioning of alternative futures cannot be ignored. However, the powerful liberatory ideologies and practices associated with the USA of the 1960s and 1970s—civil rights, feminism, radical environmentalism, gay rights, disability activism—were not simply exported, nor was the North American experience necessarily coincident with others worldwide. To give just one example of that multi-faceted interchange; the globally influential "interdisciplinary earth science" of permaculture emerged during the 1970s in Tasmania.<sup>39</sup> Permaculture's founders, Bill Mollison and David Holmgren, developed its philosophy and systems within Tasmania's recently established Environmental Design School (a radical education experiment, led by Hobart architect and educator, Barry McNeil), where Mollison was a lecturer in environmental psychology.<sup>40</sup> The intellectual tools of "Whole systems thinking" and "design thinking," as promoted by the countercultural staple *The Whole Earth Catalog*, were an important catalyst; but permaculture developed as a distinctive and significant international ecological design movement rather than simply an outpost of West Coast USA's "Back-to-the-Land" phenomenon.<sup>41</sup> Any countercultural history needs to be cognisant of its complex, intertwined set of global practices, discourses and styles of liberation.

## Architectural History and the Counterculture

Turning to focus more directly on architecture's interactions with the counterculture, we find a less substantial field of enquiry. While, as discussed, in recent histories of science, technology, art, environment and culture, we can find revised assessments of the counterculture's interactions and legacy, in architecture such

37. Alice Echols, "We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Notes Towards Remapping the Sixties," *Socialist Review* 22, no. 2, (April/June 1992) 9-33; Julie Stephens, *Anti-Disciplinary Protest* esp. Chapter 6, "Genealogies."

38. Timothy Miller, "The Sixties-Era Communes," in Braunstein and Doyle, *Imagine Nation*; Meredith Fletcher, "Ferals and Their Muddies: Making a Home in the Bush," *History Australia* 2, no. 1 (2011): 8.1-8.16.

39. Bill Mollison and David Holmgren,

*Permaculture 1: A Perennial Agricultural System for Human Settlements* (Melbourne: Corgi Books, 1978).

40. Russ Grayson and Steve Payne, "Tasmanian Roots," *New Internationalist*, 402 (July 2007)

41. David Holmgren, "The Essence of Permaculture," Holmgren Design Services, 2006.

re-evaluation has been limited. An interest in radical work of the two decades between 1960 and 1980 has certainly grown during the early twenty first century; however, it has tended toward coverage of aesthetic avant-garde theory and practices. Yet, the transformations of the Sixties were felt by a generation of young architects who saw a widening gap between the changing circumstances of contemporary societies and the architectural discipline's awareness of those changes. There were extreme, conspicuous instances of student revolt and radicalism in architecture schools across the world—strikes, riots, and fundamentally restructured curricula—but subsequent decline in such extreme, palpable action has often been taken for a failure of effect.<sup>42</sup> However, beginning in the same period were less sensational, but more foundational, shifts in the discipline's configuration; for example, the 1960s and 1970s also saw growth in the percentage of female students in schools of architecture and organisational initiatives to address the profession's lack of diversity.<sup>43</sup> Despite this, the generational shift has been mainly portrayed, in the discipline's self-periodisation, as an internal discursive debate. Countercultural architectural experiments largely failed to displace conventional practices and structures, and their unorthodoxy tended to make them invisible to the traditional lenses of architectural history—the plethora of activist architectural groups that formed in the period, such as The Architects' Resistance (TAR) at Columbia University, the Architecture Radicals, Students and Educators (ARSE) in England, the radical atelier UP6 at the Beaux Arts in Paris, ARCHANON in Sydney are rarely recalled. Historical perspectives on architecture for the period that take in technological, cultural, political, and especially social revolutions have been limited.<sup>44</sup>

Exceptions to the silence on countercultural architecture have appeared—such as Dolores Hayden's account of architectural experiments in communal living *Seven American Utopias: The Architecture of Communitarian Socialism*—but, in general, the attention given has been limited: major general histories by figures such as Benevolo, Frampton and Curtis make no mention of the counterculture.<sup>45</sup> Influential anthologies of architectural theory that take the 1960s' re-examination of architecture as a starting point have been similarly mute.<sup>46</sup> A telling indicator of this disregard is the inclusion of a section on "Alternatives" (covering the dome building and alternative technology exploration of the counterculture) in the first edition of Charles Jencks' *Architecture Today* (1982), but its complete excision from

42. On student activism see for example: Tony Schuman, "Form and Counterform: Architecture in a Non-Heroic Age," *Journal of Architectural Education* 35, no.1 (Fall 1981), 2-4; George Baird, "1968 and its Aftermath: The Loss of Moral Confidence in Architectural Practice and Education" in *Reflections on Architectural Practices in the Nineties*, ed. William S. Saunders, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996); Eve Blau, *Architecture or Revolution: Charles Moore and Yale in the Late 1960s*, exhibition catalogue (New Haven: Yale University School of Architecture, 2001).

43. The American Institute of Architects, *Affirmative Action Plan for the Integration of Women in the Architectural Profession* (Washington DC: AIA, 1975); Gill Matthewson, "Take it to the Limit: Women and the Architectural Profession," in *Limits*, ed. Harriet Edquist & Hélène Frichtot (Melbourne: SAHIANZ, 2004), 319-25.

44. The work of Simon Sadler in positioning radical architectural practices of that time in a fuller social, cultural, political and economic context stands out. *Archigram: Architecture Without Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005); "An Architecture of the Whole," *Journal of Architectural Education* 4, no. 61 (2008), 108-29. See also, for example, Larry Busbea, *Topologies: The Urban Utopia in France, 1960-1970* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2012).

45. Dolores Hayden, *Seven American Utopias: The Architecture of Communitarian Socialism, 1790-1975* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1979); Leonardo Benevolo, *History of Modern Architecture*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1977); Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1980); William Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900*, 3rd ed. (London: Phaidon, 1992).

46. Kate Nesbitt, ed., *Theorising A New Agenda for Architecture: An Anthology of Architectural Theory 1965-1995* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996); K. Michael Hays, *Architecture Theory since 1968* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998).



subsequent editions.<sup>47</sup> The scholarly neglect has been somewhat corrected in recent years, as a range of publications have contributed to a more rigorous, critical analysis of the intersections between architecture and the counterculture. There has been, for example, Margaret Crawford's consideration of countercultural architects' commercial initiatives; Simon Sadler's explication of the idea of a countercultural design ethos; Felicity Scott's significant work on the countercultural influence on architecture's disciplinary boundaries; Macy and Bonnemaïson's analysis of counterculture architecture and its relationships with landscape; and Alastair Gordon's investigation into the 1960's flourishing of psychedelic environments.<sup>48</sup> Caroline Manniaque-Benton's 2012 book *French Encounters with the American Counterculture* is particularly noteworthy in this context—its investigation of the

47. Charles Jencks and William Chaitkin, *Architecture Today* (New York: Abrams, 1982); then, for example: Charles Jencks, *Architecture Today*, 2nd ed. (New York: Abrams, 1988).

48. Margaret Crawford, "Alternative Shelter: Counterculture Architecture in Northern California," in *Reading California: Art, Image, and Identity, 1900-2000*, ed. Stéphanie Barron, Sheri Bernstein, and Ilene Susan Fort (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Simon Sadler, "An Architecture of the Whole"; Felicity D. Scott, *Architecture or Techno-utopia: Politics after Modernism*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007); Christine Macy and Sarah Bonnemaïson, *Architecture and Nature: Creating the American Landscape* (London: Routledge, 2003); Alastair Gordon, *Spaced Out*.



Figure 2. Lee Stickells, 1970s geodesic dome awaiting restoration in northern New South Wales.

49. Caroline Maniaque-Benton, *French Encounters with the American Counterculture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011)

50. J. M. Freeland, *Architecture in Australia: A History* (Ringwood, Vic: Penguin Books, 1972)

51. Student Congresses across Australia during the period often obtained larger attendances than the Institute's official gatherings. The student events featured very different (and far more ambitious) agendas, and speakers including Buckminster Fuller, Cedric Price, Tony Gwilliam, Gio Ponte, Aldo van Eyck and Paul Ritter. On the history of the Australian student congresses, see Kinnaird and Bennett (eds), *Congress Book VI.0*.

52. Jennifer Taylor, *Australian Architecture Since 1960*, 2nd ed. (Red Hill: Royal Australian Institute of Architects, 1990).

53. Philip Goad and Julie Willis, *The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

54. Harry Margalit, "Modernism Sundered: Intellectual Currents in Architecture in 1950s Sydney," *Architectural Theory Review* 8, no. 2, (2003): 113-123; Doug Evans, "The Changing of the Guard: the social and cultural reflection of Community in 1970s Melbourne architecture," *Fabrications* 15, no. 1 (July 2005); Ann Stephen, Andrew McNamara and Phillip Goad, *Modernism & Australia: Documents on Art, Design and Architecture 1917-1967* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Publishing, 2006) see, for instance, Leigh Woolley's entry on Hobart architect and educator Barry McNeill.

French countercultural experience opens up the history of countercultural architecture to a number of the concerns outlined in this paper.<sup>49</sup>

The scholarly gap is even starker in relation to specifically Australian architectural history. The only attempt at a comprehensive history of Australian architecture—J.M. Freeland's *Architecture in Australia: A History* (1968)—concludes its account in 1967.<sup>50</sup> It provided the grave forecast of an increasing corporatisation of professional practice just as alternative trajectories were surfacing—partly in response to the very conditions Freeland identified (the very successful student congresses of the late 1960s to early 1970s are a prominent example).<sup>51</sup> Perhaps the most comprehensive local history that does deal with the 1960s and 1970s is Jennifer Taylor's *Australian Architecture Since 1960* (first published in 1986). However, countercultural architectural endeavours are almost entirely absent from Taylor's book. The conception of architectural practice at work within the history tends to bracket out activities and figures that might be of interest to a history of countercultural architecture. Where these appear (for example in the work of Morrice Shaw), they are often reduced to a minor reference by an emphasis on aesthetic impact and formal lineage.<sup>52</sup> Further, as Philip Goad and Julie Willis have noted, from the 1980s onwards the history of Australian architecture has been discussed in smaller and smaller pieces, albeit more critically.<sup>53</sup> That multiplying scholarship has still not tended to investigate Australian architecture via the kinds of questioning that drive the work on counterculture cited above. Traces of countercultural ideals and activities can be found in more recent scholarship but rarely are they considered through the lens of countercultural activity, nor are relations to local and international networks often charted.<sup>54</sup> However, if we turn, for example, to questions of disciplinary boundaries articulated through experimental practices, and the potential for social and political engagement held in radical pedagogical initiatives, we would bring an alternative set of historical projects, events and figures into focus.

## Conclusion

A systematic account of countercultural architectural experimentation in Australia during the 1960s and 1970s is yet to appear. What has been suggested here is that an exploration of that experimentation—focused on the interaction between architecture and the counterculture—could recast a whole period of Australian



architectural history. In addition, through an attention to the specificities of the local scene, it could work towards an understanding of the ways in which countercultural architecture outside the USA intertwined the American experience with national and international characteristics. The other implication is that accounting for such ‘marginal’ activity has important ramifications. While direct participation in the counterculture was numerically small (historian Arthur Marwick suggests “considerably less than 0.1 percent of the total American population” were part of the hippie counterculture) it was much more broadly alluring and influential.<sup>55</sup> We might think about it in terms of those who “tuned in,” “turned on,” or “dropped out”—engagement and influence ranged from buying a psychedelic record and having some moral certainties challenged, to protesting and reading up on Buddhism, to leaving a salaried job and joining a communitarian experiment. The recent spate of books on the counterculture has further shown that the counterculture should not simply be seen as a hedonistic interlude or an exhausted set of rebellious postures—its forms and ideas have persisted in complex ways. This is true within architecture as well as wider society.

55. Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c. 1958-1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 480.

To undertake a history of Australian architecture’s interactions with the counterculture would involve rethinking narratives of the period’s transformations, the relationships and character of different movements, events, people and ideas; addressing the ongoing reconceptualisation of the counterculture and its accepted geographies; as well as confronting questions of convergence and distinction in relation to the American experience. The central argument here is that a history of Australian countercultural architecture would contribute to better understanding of the local discipline’s transformations and its relationship to broader Australian society. As a final point though: in doing so, such a history could also contribute to moving countercultural history beyond a focus on the local actions and self-perceptions of American radicals to a more complex picture of countercultural architecture—one that would see America as a focal point within a larger transcontinental movement of activists, ideas, images, practices, technologies and cultural forms. “The world students are the world revolutionaries”, Buckminster Fuller argued in his 1965 “World Science Decade” proposal for “re-tooling” architectural education, and we should look more closely at the extent to which he was right.<sup>56</sup>

56. R. Buckminster Fuller, *World Design Science Decade 1965-1975 Phase I (1965)*, Document 3: *Comprehensive Thinking*, ed. John McHale (Carbondale, Ill. Southern Illinois University: World Resources Inventory, 1965), 93 [emphasis in the original].