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What, if anything, can be made of the Gold Coast Urban Design Awards?

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The notion upon which this discussion about urban design awards at the Gold Coast starts, parallels Neville Quarry's thoughts about architecture awards. Quarry saw awards as a body of work accepted by the establishment as representing best practice (a canon) and that they are based upon published criteria. Certainly there are published criteria for the Gold Coast Urban Design Awards. Also present are leading respected figures of the professions and community (the establishment) who exercise judgement when selecting awards that are deemed to represent best practice, the canon. But an analysis of the awards since their inception in 1998 suggests that there are several further layers to the discourse beyond canon and criteria. Closer scrutiny presents questions about the politics of urban design, about urban design theory and practice and broadly about the maturity of the discipline. Gold Coast Urban Design Award projects and the Australia Award for Urban Design projects appear to recognise different aspects of the built environment, giving different messages to the respective audiences. The Gold Coast awards range across more project types than the Australia awards but only two national awards from the professions have gone to Gold Coast projects and none from the Australia Awards regime; possibly supporting a conclusion that at the Gold Coast, urban design is practiced more as an ordinary field of professional design work than as a discipline with recognised "canon." This paper explores these themes as open questions under the banner of: what, if anything can be made of the Gold Coast Urban Design Awards? With apologies to the late Tom Heath's title What, if anything, is an Architect?[1]

1. T. Heath, *What, if anything, is an Architect?* (Melbourne: Architecture Media Australia, 1991)

At first glance the Gold Coast Urban Design Awards, which commenced in 1998, do not appear to be very different from other urban design and built environment awards in terms of their intent to recognise excellence or in their process. The Gold Coast Urban Design Awards are open to wide ranging project types and submissions from any person, notwithstanding their profession and in this respect they parallel the Lower Hunter Urban Design Awards, which commenced in 2011, and the Randwick Urban Design Awards, commenced in 2006. All three parallel the Australia Urban Design Awards, commenced in 1996, and all four are different from profession-based urban design awards which are restricted by category and to members of the professional body. Because of similarity and age the Gold Coast Awards will be compared with the Australia Awards.

The intent of the Gold Coast Awards is expressed in the Gold Coast City Council publicity:

> The Awards have become our city's most prestigious platform for recognition of design, liveability and sustainability. As a community we should all show a commitment in the future development of our city and promote excellence in design so that we can encourage social, economic and cultural prosperity in our region.[2]

By comparison, the Australia Urban Design Award

> was established to recognise recent urban design projects of high quality in Australia and to encourage cities, towns and emerging settlements of all sizes to strive for similar improvement. It acknowledges the critical role of good urban design in the development of our cities and towns.[3]

Like the Australia Awards, the Gold Coast Awards have guidelines that spell out eligibility and conditions, submission requirements, award categories, judging criteria and panel membership, and publication rights. Of particular interest are the judging criteria and judging processes. Criteria imply the existence of an underpinning body of knowledge of relevance to the field. The judging panel composition, typically includes senior figures in the professions, is established to give credibility to the process and outcome. Criteria and process are explored together with award outcomes.

2. Gold Coast City Council, *Gold Coast Urban Design Awards: Guidelines for Entry 2011* (Gold Coast City Council, 2011).

3. Planning Institute of Australia, 'Australia Award for Urban Design 2012 Nomination Kit' http://www.planning.org.au/whatson/australia-award-for-urban-design (accessed September 11, 2012)

Assessing Built Environment Design Quality

Within a dearth of discussion about what actually goes on during jury panel evaluations, and notwithstanding published criteria for urban design awards which imply objectivity, we may turn to architecture's assessment culture for some insights about assessing design quality, ranging from the philosophical to practical. The editorial of a recent publication devoted to exploring the question "What is Good Architecture?" explains that it is mostly about judging and persuading.

> Architecture, after all, belongs to the public realm, and if only for that reason places the challenges, commissions and projects against a backdrop of multiple horizons in relation to which design choices have to be made and the architectural object judged, experienced and perceived. Every design and every text written about this is based on assumptions about architectural qualities and relies inevitably on a capacity to judge . . .. The human facility of judgement, which forms the foundation of the design process and that of architectural criticism or theory, is an extension of . . . political ability . . . the ability to judge and make decisions at the right moment, whereby the point is therefore not to establish an incontrovertible "truth" but to "persuade" those present, the public.[4]

Also accommodating of the need for professional judgement are the structured criteria-based design assessment processes, typified by Bob Gidding's research at Northumbria University related to evaluating design proposals for residential sheltered housing.[5] Here, a division between amenity attributes and performance attributes is made based on the capacity to objectively measure both. The so-called amenity aspects including ambience, character, image, symbolic significance and are seen as impressionistic and requiring judgements. Volker calls these "intangible" elements.[6] While performance aspects including temperature, ventilation, illuminance, and sound and energy utilisation are categorised as measurable and capable of being assessed against standards which Vermer calls "tangible" elements. Both aspects are incorporated in a summary chart with weighted percentages allocated, of itself a process of exercising judgement that involves all of the parties in agreement, a political endeavour no doubt involving persuasion.

4. C. van Gerrewey, V. Patteeuw, H. Teerds (eds.), "What is Good Architecture?" special issue, *Oase* 90 (2013), 4.

5. B. Giddings, M. Sharma, P. Jones, P. Jensen, "An Evaluation Tool as a Means of Improving Architectural Design Quality: The Results," *Proceedings of the CIB World Congress: Construction and Society*, ed. M. Manley & S. Kajewski (Brisbane: Angus and Roberson, 2013).

6. L. Volker, *Deciding about Design Quality* (Leiden: Sidestone Press, 2010).

Neville Quarry added further to the roles of judgement and the politics of persuasion in his book *Award Winning Australian Architecture*.[7] Quarry acknowledges the role, even right, for people with no knowledge of architecture to express their opinion about buildings. But he places this within a spectrum of significance of the knowledge that is brought, ranging "in order of ascending significance, from gossip, anecdote, opinion, and discourse through to the critique."[8] Greater significance is placed on discourse which engages

with cause and effects, sources, influences and implications, and on critique which is a discourse which makes comparisons, draws deliberate conclusions and provides a rationale. Discourse and critique lead to understanding . . . comparing the particular subject with a set of theoretical principles (authoritative criteria), or an exemplary model (a paradigm), or a body of work accepted by the establishment as representing best practice (a canon).[9]

Quarry positioned the Australian Institute of Architects Awards as being in the category of a canon, based on published criteria. He saw the published criteria as useful in communicating architecture's domain and values to the wider world and in guiding panel discussion, but not strictly as criteria because of the lack of embodiment of a standard, in Volker's terms "tangible" elements. The judging criteria provide no scale for measurement differentiation; indeed some criteria cannot be calibrated (Volker's "intangible" elements), so the jury relies upon its ingrained professional judgement, recognising that calibration is not necessary for informed commentary. Quarry argues against a checklist approach "which required a numerical score against each item . . . even if by some miracle the percentage weighting of each separate criterion was acceptable."[10] He suggests that jurors

resort to remembered sensory experiences of architecture, to concepts, criteria, paradigms and to the canon of previous award winners. This is a hybrid process based on peer review, combining criteria referencing with comparative and normative evaluation.[11]

This is a combining of the intangible together with the tangible, except that intangible elements tend to not be actually measured against standards, but remain subject to expert judgement as to relationships to the canon, where aspects recognisably build on the work of others.

12. Australian Government, National Capital Authority, *Design Quality Manual* (Canberra: National Capital Authority, 2012), 5.

The National Capital Authority is quite explicit that "design quality can't be measured against a checklist, but it can be evaluated through experienced and skilled design review."[12] While their focus is on assessing project design proposals against good design principles rather than on completed projects, the Authority's point is well communicated through built project examples. The National Capital Authority's document, *Design Quality Manual*, is seen as typical of its type across other cities in that design principles are provided to guide designers and developers as well as to form the basis for focused dialogue and judgements to be made by both designers and the assessing authorities.

Guiding Principles for Urban Design

13. E. Mumford, "The Emergence of Urban Design in the Breakup of CIAM," *Harvard Design Magazine* 24 (Spring/Summer 2006), 11.

14. A. Cuthbert (ed.) *Designing Cities* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 10.

Urban design is a term that was first used in 1953 by Jose Lluis Sert at Harvard University,[13] however the actual process of making urban places dates to the first human settlements, as put by Alexander Cuthbert: "urban design is deeply embedded in social practice that societies have valued from time immemorial, and therein lays its value."[14] Sert idealistically envisioned urban design as the domain bridging the key built environment disciplines of architecture, planning and landscape architecture, but also inclusive of aspects of engineering, property development, social and economic fields. He saw the future as being well served through educating architects, planners and landscape architects together and grounded in common theory and practice methodologies. Unfortunately, the professions tend to work independently, swayed by their own discipline-based theories and approaches. Nevertheless, there are also many examples of successful collaborations and these are made possible or enhanced by the common adoption across the disciplines of shared urban design principles.

Urban design principles tend to be positivist statements that can be traced to a wide range of underlying theories. The abundance of theories discussed or used in urban design is one of its distinguishing characteristics that equip practitioners with ways to move forward on any project. Higher priority given to one theory or principle over another will largely be the judgement decision of the design team that results in unique outcomes. In this pluralistic design-decision world, when presented for consideration for an award, each project must be considered on its

merits when being assessed against so called "criteria," with the judges deciding on the weightings and perceived significance of the criteria.

Pluralism of urban design theory is seen by some critics as an inherent weakness that needs to be addressed through a unifying theory, for example Alexander, Lynch, Rapoport, Lang and Cuthbert all explore unifying theories.[15] While others interpret the diversity as urban design's uniqueness that needs to be understood, this idea is well expressed by Vermer:

> urban design's positioning between science and design suggests preference for "low theory" over "high theory." Low theory is contingent, nuanced and incomplete and has a precarious relationship with its subject-matter. High theory covets certitude and law-like propositions and ends up reducing its subject matter so that it is devoid of emotive content.[16]

As they stand urban design awards are judged by experts who with an eye to the judging criteria, which as Quarry points out are not actually criteria, bring their best judgement and experience to bear within the context of the process and comparatively; where concepts, paradigms and canon all play a part, all underpinned by the broad body of knowledge.

However, the jury-room and project site inspections is where the perceptions and biases (weighting importance of criteria) of judges are engaged to find common ground across the panel, no doubt informed by the stated purpose of awards. In such circumstances it is not surprising that two urban design award systems don't align, as will be seen in the next part of this paper.

Awards Classification

While there have been many definitions for "urban design," most commonly there is agreement that urban design concerns itself with the quality of the public realm—this being public space, as well as the interface of public space with private buildings.[17] Strictly, public space is the kind of space that does not require permission or invitation to enter. But this is a somewhat overly clear-cut definition, whereas it can be argued that public space may be inclusive of private space that may be deemed "semi-public." In recognition of the reality of how urban space is used,

15. C. Alexander, *A New Theory for Urban Design* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); K. Lynch, *A Theory of Good City Form* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981); A. Rapoport, *Human Aspects of Urban Form: Toward a Man-Environment Approach to Urban Form and Design* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1977); J. Lang, *Urban Design: The American Experience* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1994); A. Cuthbert, "Urban Design: Requiem for an Era: Review and Critique of the Last 50 Years," *Urban Design International* 12 (2007): 177-223.

16. N. Vermer, "Urban Design An Incomplete Theorized Project," *Companion to Urban Design,* ed. T. Banerjee and A. Loukaitou-Sideris (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 67.

17. Report by the Prime Minister's Urban Design Task Force (John Mant, Convenor) *Urban Design in Australia* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1994), 5.

a gradient concept is adopted to classify projects, which ranges across a spectrum from "highly private," such as a building or space that has controlled entry, to "highly public" that is a freely accessible space.

18. R. Trancik, *Finding Lost Space: Theories of Urban Design* (New Jersey: Wiley, 1986).

The adoption of a gradient in depicting buildings and urban space has precedent in the original Nolli map of Rome.[18] Rome's urban character is expressed as a combination of detached as well as connected buildings, within a context of public space. The Nolli map represents buildings in black-hatching tone, while public space is shown as white, sometimes with monuments and fountains drawn in. But there is another level of communication—what we may refer to as semi-public space. These are the churches, palace courtyards and basilica, all strictly private but accessible to the public by degrees. Such spaces receive some level of detail drawing attention in the Nolli map (refer fig. 1), by showing columns and internal walls and the relationship between inside and outside, between buildings and their context that contribute to a dynamic city-making vocabulary.

Australia-wide and Gold Coast urban design projects receiving awards, including commendations, since 2001 have been identified from public records available on websites and classified in two ways: first by locating the project across a simple spectrum from "highly-private" to "highly-public," with "semi-public" in between. And second, by grouping the awards into four: group one being highly public spaces such as parks, foreshores, squares, bridges; group two being public buildings; group three being campuses; and, group four being private developments such as residential and commercial buildings (refer fig. 2).

Figure 1. Nolli Map of Rome 1748—showing public space white, private buildings hatched tone and semi-public space within buildings and courtyards with some level of detail.

Highly-public projects unambiguously identify themselves. Semi-public projects are also reasonably uncontentious, such as an arcade off a main street but with some access restrictions. Projects such as a university campus, which is strictly private but generally open to the public, are also located in the "semi-public" category. The challenge is where to classify projects that while highly-private, such as a residential apartment building, have interfaces with the public realm which may positively contribute to urban design. Such projects may also exhibit at least some of the Australia Urban Design Award, or Gold Coast Urban Design Awards judging criteria.

Acknowledging that every built environment project has some impact on the public realm, positively or negatively, the decision was made to classify projects that clearly are private in nature, basically having controlled access at all times, at the "highly private" end of the spectrum. Those that are "semi-public" but also private because of controlled access, such as a stadium, are located in the "semi-public" category. It is recognised that the chart could be further fine-tuned; possibly through involving experienced urban designers in exercising judgements across the private-public spectrum. But this is unlikely to significantly alter the big-picture message from the chart, being that the Australian Awards bunch at the highly public end and the Gold Coast awards are widely spread with approximately equal bunching at both the "highly-private" and "highly-public" ends and in the "semi-public" category.

Australia Urban Design Award

The Prime Minister's Taskforce of 1994 set the scene for nation-wide higher consciousness about the quality of the urban domain of towns and cities. The report focused on

generating debate about the role of good urban design in providing livable, equitable and sustainable places to live and work; to identify practical and cost-effective changes in industry, government and education across Australia; and, to suggest specific ways in which the Commonwealth can act to encourage good urban design.[19]

19. Report by the Prime Minister's Urban Design Task Force, 3.

High at number three, on the nineteen-point list of recommendations in the "Immediate steps" to be taken, is the establishment of the Australia Prize in Urban Design, to reward best achievement and to build a national body of knowledge. This resulted in a program of two annual prizes: one for built work and one for plans and ideas, a practice that has continued, although on numerous occasions more than one prize in each category has been made. The progeny document *National Urban Design Education Strategy*,[20] published in 1996, the year of the first Australian Urban Design Awards, reinforced the need for awards as one of the high priority programs to educate and communicate the importance and scope of urban design.

20. Sinclair Knight Merz, et al., *National Urban Design Education Strategy* (Melbourne: Australian Council of Building Design Professionals, 1996).

The first few cycles of the Australia Awards were vexed with uncertainty over which body would organise and lead the process. The first awards, known as the Australian Award for Urban Design, were the initiative of the Australian Government Department of Transport and Regional Development,[21] however, with a change of government in 1997, the awards were withdrawn. The Urban Design Forum stepped in and conducted the 1997 awards with the same name as in the previous year. This was followed in 1998 by organisation from the Council of Building Design Professionals, who selected from the state award winners in the urban design category, of BDP member associations.[22] From 1998 to 2001 the awards were known as the BDP Urban Design in Australia Awards. And in 2002 they were the PIA/UDF Australia Award for Urban Design Excellence.[23] This name remained in 2003, organised by the Planning Institute of Australia in collaboration with other professional institutes, with entries made directly to PIA. From 2004 to the present the awards reverted to the Australia Award for Urban Design. The categories changed to four, one each for large and small scale built projects and one each for large and small scale programs and concepts. The current awards are organised by PIA in collaboration with: Urban Design Forum; Australian Institute of Architects; Australian Institute of Landscape Architects; Consult Australia; Property Council of Australia; and the Green Building Council of Australia.[24]

21. B. Chandler (ed.) ,*Urban Design Forum* 34 (July 1996), 1.

22. B. Chandler (ed.), *Urban Design Forum* 44 (December 1998), 1.

23. Planning Institute of Australia, *2002 Australia Awards for Urban Design Excellence,* http://www.planning.org.au/whatson/australia-award-for-urban-design (accessed September 11, 2012)

24. Planning Institute of Australia. *Australia Award for Urban Design 2012 Nomination Kit.*

Typical Australia Urban Design Awards panel composition included senior leaders of the built environment professions, (often National Presidents or nominees) of Architecture, Planning, Landscape Architecture as well as a senior Urban Designer and one or two prominent lay people of influence, often a journalist, comentator or writer.

The award citations very rarely explicitly cross-refer to the judging criteria and when they do it is only in part. Rather, they tend to briefly discuss the essence of the project, its attributes and what the judging panel perceives to be outstanding aspects, expressed in what could be viewed as vague language to a lay person, but familiar to design professionals.

Since 1996, there have been fifteen award cycles and each has presented on average four awards each year, ranging from three to seven, for a total of fifty-five awards. Twenty-one (35%) of these have been made to studies/policies/programs/publications, with the remaining thirty-four made to built projects. The chart in Figure 2 shows that all of the Australia Awards given to built projects are in the "highly-public" to "semi-public" range, with 80% classified as "highly-public." No awards have gone to "highly-private" projects. This bunching of awards at the 'highly-public' end of the chart may be interpreted as reinforcement of the serious, perceived more significant end of the spectrum of knowledge that is brought to bear; in Quarry's terms, the canon, that guards the "public realm" test for urban design.

Gold Coast Urban Design Awards

The Gold Coast City Urban Design Awards were approved by the Gold Coast City Council in 1997, to commence in 1998, conceived by Tory Jones, the Council's Senior Strategic Planner.

An overview of the context of the awards was given by Philip Follent in 2006, on receipt of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects' (Qld) Presidents Award on behalf of the Gold Coast City Council, for its on-going commitment to high quality architecture and urban design.

> City Architect, Philip Follent, said Council had first established an Urban Design Advisory Group 10 years ago, to educate and encourage quality in the city's built environment, be it private development or public infrastructure. This was followed by the introduction of the Urban Design Awards and Council's endorsement in September 1997, of the Guiding Principles for Urban Design. Other initiatives followed through the Urban Design Education Strategy, which aims to foster an understanding of the common-sense principles of good urban design. Whether it be a major high-rise development, a new house, a government office building or a new bridge,

every development project can make a positive contribution to our lives. Good design will create places that are welcoming and safe and provide easy access and comfort. They will be inviting places to live, work and enjoy life, and they will minimise their impact on the environment. The aim of these initiatives has been to ensure everyone involved is aware of what makes good urban places and how these can be achieved."[25]

25. Gold Coast City Council, Media Release. 6 October 2006. *Architects award to Council for Quality Design.* http://healthnow.com.au/i-cms?page=8595 (accessed February 16, 2013)

The awards are approaching their sixteenth year and ninth iteration. They commenced in 1998 with the intention of being an annual event, but following the low number of entries in 1999 it was decided to conduct the awards biannually thereafter.

The 1998 and 1999 awards panels were given a set of seven criteria,[26] which asked of each entry:

26. Gold Coast City Council, *1998 Gold Coast Urban Design Awards.*

Is it an exemplar of sustainability and environmental responsibility?

Does it demonstrate inter-disciplinary collaboration?

Was there community involvement and benefit?

Was innovation and creativity evident?

Did the product reflect the Gold Coast environment and character?

Were there positive outcomes, measured against popular practice?

Did the project display general competency in its execution?

It is observed that, being of a very general nature, this set of criteria could equally apply to other built environment disciplines ranging from engineering, planning, architecture and landscape architecture to even include product design. Nevertheless, it is known from personal experience of the early awards that in exercising judgement, panels acted in similar manner to what Quarry described.

Focusing on urban issues the panels relied on ingrained professional judgement, experience and knowledge of principles, concepts and paradigms. And the panel discussed and debated the merits of aspects of particular projects, with some members persuading others to their judgement. The judging panels released public statements about the awards generally as well as comments related to the award winners.

The current judging criteria (introduced in 2003) for the Gold Coast Awards are more focused on explicit urban design criteria. The Awards are now judged against the Council's "15 Qualities of Good Urban Places,"[27] the headings being: variety, public and private sides, adaptability and versatility, human scale and richness, qualities of edges, connectivity, sustainability, urban "green-space," safety, space and space-making, access, community enhancement, comprehendibility, environment and sensitivity, and human needs.

27. Gold Coast City Council, *Gold Coast Urban Design Awards Guidelines for Entry 2011.*

Similar to the composition of Australia Awards Judging Panels, the composition for the Gold Coast Awards scopes across representation from the main disciplines involved in urban design, including a recognised urban design expert but also people with urban design experience from architecture, planning, landscape architecture and engineering, and representation from the property sector, quantity-surveying or heritage. Panels have also included a lay-person, often a public figure involved in built environment discourse, such as the radio personality David Saunders, in 1999.

Similar to the Australia Awards, the Gold Coast Awards citations generally avoid the language of the judging criteria, favouring simple project descriptions, mixed with 'design-speak' superlatives, that encourage one to view the images or visit the project.

Since 2001, each award cycle has made on average eleven awards biannually, ranging from ten to fourteen, including specific 'named' awards as well as commendations. Each cycle has included an education category, directed at high-school and university student projects. Seventy awards have been made to built projects. Additionally, one scholarly study was awarded in 2001, with student projects collectively accounting for eight awards. Of the built projects, two-thirds are classified as public in nature ranging across semi-public to highly-public. Typically these are accessible places including foreshores, streetscapes and parks as well as public buildings such as libraries. The remaining examples are classed as ranging from highly-private to semi-private in nature.

It is considered that up to half of the projects may not clearly fit into an urban design awards environment, but rather would have been better judged within one or more of the professions of architecture, planning, or landscape architecture but not necessarily falling within any of those professions' urban design category.

Many of these cases are buildings, landscapes or subdivision plans. Indeed, many in this group had been submitted for awards within professional bodies where several of them received state (five) and national (one) awards.

Of note, in 2005 an award was given for the design of an open space system within a gated residential community. Gated communities were discussed by earlier jury panels (1998 and 1999) and were ruled out of consideration as a matter of principal because it was interpreted that inherent in good urban design is that developments should be accessible to the wider community and contribute to the betterment of their urban context. Notwithstanding recognisable high quality design in their execution, because of their inherent nature in turning their back to the public realm, gated communities were seen as not falling within urban design's defining inseparability from engagement with the public realm. It is further noted that many apartment and commercial tower buildings have received awards. These could also be considered as gated communities that also do not comply, although in some cases their edge treatments engage the public realm, especially where there are active edges, typically shops and restaurants. Edge treatments for gated communities tend to be long high fences with landscape treatment but with no potential for active engagement by passers-by.

What, if anything—Discussion and Conclusion

The Gold Coast Urban Design Awards are the first city-based such awards in Australia. They were, initiated close in time to the Australia Urban Design Awards, which may be interpreted as the city appropriating the energy of a national changing sentiment that placed greater emphasis on the quality of cities. The Awards may also be seen as a step toward the city seeking legitimacy. The Gold Coast has long been Australia's playground, a place to visit for fun, but with a general perception held that the place was not to be taken very seriously, especially by observers from outside of the Coast. However not only does the Coast have 11 million visitors per year but over 500,000 people live there. Both visitors and residents increasingly have expectations of the city to not only provide fun but "real- city" spaces, places and culture. A degree of "seriousness" is wanted.

Early Gold Coast development, while not strictly laissez-faire, has a history of allowing (if not encouraging) adventurous architecture and place-making, unfortunately too much of which has been poor quality. Increasing constraints, including urban design guidelines, are dampening the escapade, replacing it with more predictable solutions. The Urban Design Awards may be seen as part of this process of change toward better quality and earnestness. A sentiment expressed by His Excellency Michael Bryce at a recent speech to the

Australian Institute of Architects awards sums this up: "While Surfers began as a fun place, it now wants to be taken seriously."[28]

28. M. Bryce, "30th Anniversary of Architecture Oscars Regional Awards," transcript of public speech, Main Beach, April 20, 2013.

As steps toward legitimacy, Gold Coast City was the first city in Queensland to appoint a City Architect (1995) and an Urban Design Advisory Committee. It established and embedded urban design criteria into the city plan and development control processes. Also of significance are the Urban Design Seminars series and the biannual International Urban Design Conference series, during which the Gold Coast Urban Design Awards are announced. Clearly the city has been active in communicating the value of good urban design and in educating (persuading) the residential community of the importance in creating inviting places to live, work and enjoy life that also minimise their impact on the environment (refer Philip Follent above).

Within this context, the Gold Coast Awards provide the opportunity for the city to highlight what it considers to be good urban design and to identify the desired measures of quality to developers and designers as well as to educate the community to higher expectations. The community is actively engaged in the Awards through the People's Choice Award category. This invites people to cast a vote for their preferred project from the submissions received and interestingly on all but two occasions this award has gone to projects that were also premiated by the judging panel. Is this coincidence or more generously can it be interpreted as an informed public exercising judgement ability that generally aligns with the discourse, critique and canon of experts? If the latter, then perhaps we may conclude that communication-persuasion endeavours are bearing fruit. One of the People's Choice exceptions was in 2005 when the award was made to the popular radio station 102.9 Hot Tomato . . . it is Gold Coast after all . . . not to be taken seriously!

The Gold Coast Awards draw from one city's recent projects stock, while the Australia Awards draw from all towns and cities across the country. This matter of scale, type and number of projects contributes to the submissions in each jurisdiction, with the Australian Awards attracting many public projects and the Gold Coast attracting fewer because of the limited opportunities for this category in one city. Overall the numbers of awards given for built projects at the Gold Coast are double that of the Australia Awards. The Gold Coast is motivated to generally raise the local level of design awareness and design quality and consequently seeks to fuel many conversations, including in the private realm.

On the other hand the Australia Awards appear to consciously focus on a narrower interpretation of the public realm and on what urban design is or should be, more closely aligned with the field's "pure" values and body of knowledge.

Clearly the Gold Coast awards range across more project types than the Australia awards and many more awards have been given to projects. Only two national awards from the professions have gone to Gold Coast projects and none from the Australia Awards. While the judging criteria are different between the two award regimes, this is mainly in detail rather than in principle. Assuming equal judging competency across the two awards, a conclusion is implied that at the Gold Coast urban design is interpreted as a worthy field of professional activity. Through celebrating examples, designers and developers across a broad spectrum of public and private project types are encouraged to higher quality. Publicity from receiving awards is good for business. By comparison, in the Australia Awards, urban design conveys a more mature and defined discipline that is focused on public space and on growing a national body of examples, knowledge and precedents that may shape what happens next. It is tempting to interpret this as ambition to become recognised canon.

The national urban design news press, *Urban Design Forum*, throughout its history, has ignored the Gold Coast Urban Design Awards, perhaps a lingering expression of 'can't take the place seriously' syndrome. Of note though is the inclusion in the recent Urban Design Forum book *Urban Voices: Celebrating Design in Australia* of a chapter by Philip Follent titled "The Gold Coast's Urban Design Journey."[29] This may be belated acknowledgement that the Coast has urban design examples worthy of discussion. Nevertheless the Awards are highly visible and cherished by both professional and lay communities at the Coast, evidenced by recurring strong submission numbers and the high people's choice award voting. The time-test of witnessing improving quality of the built environment at the Gold Coast also supports the conclusion that the Awards serve an essential purpose in lifting design awareness and quality, albeit in a different way to the Australia Urban Design Awards.

Are awards in urban design part of "canon" building as suggested by Quarry for architecture? Or, lingering as an "open" question, is urban design's pluralistic theoretical domain and its practice diversity, as expressed through awards, destined to maintain its 'worthy-field' status? A longer history may reveal.

29. J. Byrne, B. Chandler, B. Echberg (eds), *Urban Voices: Celebrating Urban Design in Australia* (Melbourne: Urban Design Forum, 2013).