ULTRA

Positions and Polarities Beyond Crisis

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Campus Crisis: Materiality and the Institutional Identity of Australia's Universities

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Abstract

In the current century the extreme or 'ultra' position on the university campus has been to argue for its dissolution or abolition. University leaders and campus planners in Australia have mostly been unmoved by that position and ploughed on with expansive capital works campaigns and ambitious reformulations of existing campuses. The pandemic, however, provided ideal conditions for an unplanned but thoroughgoing experiment in operating universities without the need for a campus. Consequently, the extreme prospect of universities after the era of the modern campus now seems more likely than ever. In this paper we raise the question of the dematerialised or fully digital campus, by drawing attention to the traditional dependence of universities on material and architectural identities. We ask, what is the nature of that dependence? And consider how the current uncertainties about the status of buildings and grounds for tertiary education are driving new campus models.

Using material monikers to categorise groups of universities is something of a commonplace. There is the American Ivy League, which refers to the ritualised planting of ivy at elite colleges in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The English have long referred to their "red brick" universities and to a later generation as the "plate glass" universities. In Australia, the older universities developed in the colonial era came to be known as the "sandstones" to distinguish them from the large group of new universities developed in the postwar decades. While some of the latter possess what are commonly called bush campuses. If nothing else, this tendency to categorise places of higher learning by planting and building materials indicates that the identity of institutions is bound up with their materiality.

The paper is in two parts. It first sketches out the material history of the Australian university in the twentieth century, before examining an exemplary recent project that reflects some of the architectural and material uncertainties of the present moment in campus development. This prompts a series of reflections on the problem of institutional trust and brand value in a possible future without buildings.

Introduction

In 2020 university campuses around the world were temporarily abandoned due to the global pandemic. Yet teaching and learning, as well as most research activities, continued without them. Almost without warning, the physical settings for university life were rendered obsolete. A rapidly devised experiment in digital pedagogy and the campus-less university was proof positive for many that tertiary education could and should principally exist in the online environment. What had been the extreme or 'ultra' position on the campus, complete digital dissolution, was suddenly a reality.

Tech companies quickly adopted an aggressive stance. Cisco and Optus collaborated on a piece of research, widely publicised in the Australian media, that purported to show that tertiary institutions needed to move rapidly to become digital first. "(S)tudents will start to differentiate institutions", they warned, "on the quality of their digital services and engagement, perhaps more than the quality of buildings".[1] Real estate capital also circled. In a piece for *Commercial Real Estate*, one industry player noted that there are two significant opportunities for private capital interested in university assets. "It can work with universities to develop smarter, more sustainable and more strategically located campuses, and it can provide the capital required to redevelop land no longer needed by universities."[2] In other words, private asset owners can benefit from the downsizing and sell-off of existing campuses as cash strapped institutions seek new sources of income that enables them to reinvest in digital technology and reduce their overall stock of fixed capital.

The message being driven by real estate and digital tech are not, of course, entirely new propositions for the higher ed sector. In the middle part of the last decade the drumbeat of edX and other online providers was resonating in chancelleries and causing comment in the pages of newspapers and magazines. In 2014 the *New Yorker* reported on a debate held at Columbia University around the proposition, 'More Clicks Fewer Bricks: The lecture hall is obsolete'.[3] The evangelists from the tech sector, strongly represented in that debate, were not alone in foreseeing big changes for education and for the college and university campus. In 2016 architect and campus planning consultant Michael Haggans warned universities that their estates were headed the same way as those of the English gentry in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries if they didn't embrace digital transformation. Haggans' mantra is simple. Acknowledging that reports of the death of the university have been exaggerated, he nevertheless asserts unequivocally that "institutions over-invested in obsolete bricks and mortar will be at a competitive disadvantage."[4]

As architectural historians we have great sympathy with the architecture and landscape qualities of Australian campuses and those in other parts of the world. But this paper is not a plea for the campus as such. Rather it sets out to understand the various cultural investments of Australian tertiary institutions in bricks and mortar and other materials. We do this to understand the current predicament of tertiary institutions with respect to architecture and campus planning and the very real material obstacles to dissolving the campuses. There is abundant evidence that

1. "The Future for Campuses is Digital First", *Campus Morning Mail*, 21 February, 2021, https://campusmorningmail.com.au/news/the-future-for-campuses-is-digital-first/ Accessed 21 June, 2021; full report is Vector Consulting, "The Tipping Point for Digitisation of Education Campuses", https://www.cisco.com/c/dam/global/en_au/solutions/industries/resources/education/the_tipping_point_for_digitisation_of_education_and_campuses.pdf Accessed 21 June, 2021.

2. Sue Williams, "Universities and Schools look to their Property Portfolios to Restore Cashflow after the Pandemic", *Commercial Real Estate*, June 7, 2021, Accessed June 21, 2021 https://www.commercialrealestate.com.au/news/universities-look-to-redevelop-campuses-as-means-to-restore-cashflow-after-the-pandemic-1061484/

3. Michael Guerriero, "Are College Campuses Obsolete?", *New Yorker*, April 22, 2014, https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/are-college-campuses-obsolete, Accessed June 20, 2021.

4. Michael Haggans, "The 21st Century Campus", *Planning for Higher Education*, 44:3, April-June 2016, 1.

tertiary institutions continue to derive great value from their estates even as they represent a significant ongoing cost. As such, universities seem likely to go on investing in new buildings and campus landscapes even as the profile of the estates change in both character and their tenure status.

The paper explores this issue in two main parts. First by briefly attempting to synthesise the material history of Australian university campuses across the twentieth century. And second, by exploring the complex set of forces driving new campus developments and alternative models of tertiary teaching and academic research.

The Sandstones - UWA Renaissance

The term 'campus' was first used in reference to a field in a military context, and later adapted to the higher education context, with Princeton first perhaps the first to designate a section of the college site as a campus in the late 19th century. As Stefan Muthesius and Paul Venable Turner have both pointed out, 'campus' was therefore attributed to, initially, the defining of a location, but then became interchangeable in meaning with the physical entity of the whole University institution itself. Campus planning, in its modern sense as opposed to the more organic Ox-bridge English college model, is a largely American tradition that becomes more expansive from 1900 onwards. It defines a consciously located, planned, designed and mostly unified ensemble of buildings in careful relationship to one another, and typically takes the form of a distribution of built form and open gardened spaces through multi-axiality in either Beaux Arts or later Modernist modes.[5]

5. Stefan Muthesius, *The Postwar University: Utopianist Campus and College, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000; Paul Venable Turner, Campus: An American Planning Tradition*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1984.

The rate of campus building slowed in the U.S. and elsewhere between the two world wars, with a focus more on the building of smaller colleges. However, it was during this period of the 1920s to '40s that we witness a growth in university campus planning in Australia. After the inauguration and evolution of the oldest 19th century campuses — University of Sydney, University of Melbourne, and Adelaide University — it is the universities of Western Australia and Queensland that pick up and run with the American-inspired campus model. This is not to say that either institution drew directly on a particular American model, only that the campus idea was viewed as the best . Funding shortages, however, slowed the rate of development at both UQ and UWA in a the early years. The material moniker, sandstone campus also first appeared around the same time.[6]

6. Turner, *Campus,* p.37-42; note withheld to maintain the anonymity of the paper.

In Perth the siting for the new University on the Swan River in Crawley in 1914 —which was located adjacent to existing Western suburbs and Kings Park but slightly apart from and the river's edge — would become one of the campus's defining characteristics. An international design competition for the initial campus plan, which called for a central grouping of faculty buildings, residential colleges and sporting and ceremonial amenities, was won by Melbourne-based architect Harold Desbrowe-Annear. This elegant plan of radiating axes was revised in the 1920s by the Public Works Department, and then again heavily modified to cater for a higher density of buildings by Leslie Wilkinson with the consolidation of a clear spine and open spaces for ovals and gardens.

The scheme was expanded by the British planner Gordon Stephenson's Radburn-style, functional plan in 1954. The campus, under Stephenson, further defined its relationship to river and city, and consolidated the language, style and palette of its early suite of buildings which will be examined in a little more detail.[7]

Designed by architect Rodney Alsop, Hackett Memorial buildings were completed in 1932 and comprise Winthrop Hall, Hackett Hall and the administration building. Built from a local Tamala limestone and dressed with Donnybrook stone – these ancient masonry materials invested an immediate sensibility of natural 'age-value' (to adapt Riegl's term) to the campus architecture, along with their Mediterranean palette of terracotta tile, jarrah timber and eclectic historical styles.[8] These anchoring elements on the Crawley campus included covered colonnaded walkways, gardened cloisters, a gateway and turrets likened to a pylon structure from ancient Egypt or Tudor Ox-bridge.[9] At the opening of this first small step in the building of the UWA campus Alsop said of his historical sources of inspiration: "Italy, Spain, Greece, England, the Stockholm Town Hall – we have learnt from them all … 'Renaissance' is the only definite term that can be given as the style of the Hackett Buildings — and the Renaissance began in Italy."[10] He then charted the progress of this Renaissance (in a roundabout narrative of nationalism akin to explanations of Palladian style being adopted in 18th century England) through Europe and England to the colonies of Tasmania and NSW, and then finally to the campus of Crawley, where it was "found necessary" to return to the style's sunnier Italian roots so as to better suit Perth's equally strong Mediterranean light.

7. Gordon Stephenson, *Planning for the University of Western Australia 1914-1970: a review of past plans and future prospects*, Nedlands WA: Langham Press, 1986.

8. Alois Riegl, "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and its Origins", trans. K. Foster and D. Ghirado, Oppositions 25 (Fall 1982): 21-51.

9. Christine Shervington, Frank Roberts and Matthew Wallwork, *A Walk through the University of Western Australia*; Nedlands, W.A.: University of Western Australia, 1991, p.5

10. Women's University College Fund Committee, *The University of Western Australia,* Nedlands, W.A.: University of Western Australia, 1947, P. 4.

Winthrop Hall, University of Western Australia, 1932. Architect Rodney Alsop. Photograph by Michal Lewi

Winthrop Hall, which defined the ceremonial heart of the campus, replete with 50 metre clock tower and glazed terracotta frieze copied from a 5th century Greek work at Persepolis, amplified the allusion to a Mediterranean 'townscape' of higher learning. The marble mosaic floor by Napier Waller sourced from various European locations created an instant patina of age, while the commemorative and war memorial plaques and church-like interior with pipe organ and Rose Window, take on an air of reverence. Amongst all these classical allusions — including a bust of Socrates (Paul Montford, 1932) —the ceiling decoration of the hall by George Benson depicts Aboriginal motifs.[11]

The administration building (also featuring mosaic artwork by Napier Waller), the Hackett and Winthrop Halls, an undercroft that was used as a gathering and gallery space for many years, ceremonial reflection pool, outdoor amphitheatre and sunken gardens comprise other key

11. Shervington et al, *A Walk through the University of Western Australia*, P.6.

architectural and landscaped areas in this initial ensemble of the 1930s. Together they would create an enduring identity for the Perth campus, with later highlights including the Mediterranean-style Arts building (Marshall Clifton); the Economics and Commerce buildings (Clifton, Stephenson and Johnston); and the Law School (Gus Ferguson) all completed in the 1960s. Ferguson would go on to craft a robust Modern and Mediterranean-inspired idiom on campus for the rest of the 20th century translated into off-form and block concrete, terracotta and copper.

Concrete and Clinkers in the Bush

Ferguson thus translated the original set of architectural cues at UWA, with their overt historical references and sense of material refinement, into a modern idiom that spoke directly to the natural setting. As Ferguson realised these buildings at UWA, he and others were also planning and designing a new generation of university buildings and campuses around the country that were funded and developed following the release of the landmark Murray Report (1957) on Australian universities.[12] While some of the new campuses, such as Monash University, strove to convey a sense of industrial modernity and technical refinement in their early buildings, typically the expansion era campuses were unabashed in their material embrace of rawness. They were developed on peripheral sites in outer suburbia or at the edge of regional centres, cultivated native landscaped settings often in an informal manner, and adopted a basic approach to materials, most commonly using unpainted brick and raw concrete.[13]

12. Committee on Australian Universities (CAU), *Report of the Committee on Australian Universities* [Murray Report], Government Printer, Canberra, 1957.

13. Philip Goad, 'Moderate modernism', in P. Goad (ed.), Bates Smart: *150 Years of Australian Architecture*, Thames & Hudson, Melbourne, 2004, pp. 157–158; Susan Holden and Cameron Logan 'Core, courtyard, grid: civic form and the (late) modern campus in Australia'. *Australasian Urban History Planning History Conference*, Melbourne, VIC, Australia, 31 January - 2 February 2018. Melbourne, VIC, Australia: RMIT Centre for Urban Research, 295-302.

The University of Newcastle (UoN) and Macquarie University were exemplary of this trend. UoN exploited and developed its natural bushland setting on the lands of the Pambalong Clan of the Awabakal people at Shortland (later Callaghan). At the time the campus site was at the north-western edge of suburban Newcastle. The masterplan by Laurie and Heath (1963) emphasised the retention of existing forested areas on the site and focused on enhancing the strong presence of the native landscape. This approach to developing the new campus was so successful that it became a cornerstone of the institution's identity. A history of the university's development, published in 1994, was called *Bushland Campus*.[14] Similar approaches to site and setting were pursued at Griffith and for a series of technical colleges in NSW, the best known of which is the Kuring-gai College of Advanced Education (KCAE).

14. University of Newcastle, *Bushland Campus: A History of the Natural Ecology and the Human Development of the Grounds of The University of Newcastle*, University of Newcastle and The Friends of the University of Newcastle: Newcastle, 1994.

Macquarie University, sited on the other side of the Lane Cove River Valley from KCAE, acquired a slightly different environmental character to UoN and the other so-called bush campuses. But, its architect-planner Walter (Wally) Abraham nevertheless adopted an approach to materials and campus quality that was also quite raw, or at least deliberately unrefined. The ensemble of key buildings that surrounded and constituted the campus core, known as the Central Courtyard — the Library (NSW Department of Public Works, Peter Hall Project Architect, 1967-71), the Council Building (Edwards Madigan Torzillo, 1972), and the Union (Ancher Mortlock, Murray and Woolley, 1969) — was treated uniformly as a composition of off-form and precast concrete buildings that were intentionally monumental. While clearly

distinguished from the more, utilitarian surrounding academic buildings, which were predominantly dark brown face brick, they did share an ethic of materials-as-found that was formative for the character of the campus.[15]

15. Holden and Logan 'Core, courtyard, grid'. *Australasian Urban History Planning History Conference*, 295-302.

Off-form or board concrete and brick used for the academic buildings at Macquarie University. One of the former Arts buildings,W5, now demolished, c.1967-1971. Architect: NSW Govt Architect. Photograph by Cameron Logan

Board-marked concrete and native bush landscapes stand in for a whole generation of tertiary institutions in Australia — those developed in the 1960s and 1970s —just as the American-derived campus settings of the interwar decades and sandstone quadrangles of the Victorian era are institutional emblems for earlier waves of university life. But the image of languid eucalypts, brick and concrete is not one that enjoys great sympathy among the current crop of university leaders. Latrobe, Macquarie, Monash and other expansion-era universities have recently invested significant resources in renewal programs at their campuses to align their institutions with the latest campus development trends. Unfortunately for those institutions, many of the trends in higher ed, those that have shaped campuses in current century, are anathema to the expansion era campuses. UoN, for example, is now more likely to highlight its NUspace building (2017), designed by Lyons Architecture to house its law school among other things, and centrally located on Hunter Street, than its bushland campus when promoting the institution. The expansion era universities once sought to create civic gestures and associations in their suburban and bushy settings – new theatres, public spaces and recreational facilities – using the tools of late modern architecture and campus planning. But today tertiary institutions are more likely to seek existing public amenity and civic quality in established urban settings rather than invest in the slow and uncertain process of carving out public places on the urban periphery.[16]

16. University of Newcastle, https://architectureau.com/articles/plans-for-third-vertical-campus-for-western-sydney-university-revealed/ Accessed 222 June 2021.

One of the key objectives of the city campus development trend of recent decades has been to integrate teaching and research activities

into the economic and social life of the host city- town and gown concordant - rather than envisaging universities as places apart.[17] With central cities struggling to overcome the impact of the pandemic and inner urban land use trends in flux it may appear as risky or even a mistake. But if we look beyond the pandemic, the city campus idea might be viewed instead as a single step on the path to the fully dissolved campus. The latest developments in Australia all point to some version of this desire to shed the traditional spatial models and to some extent the distinctness of the campus itself. Western Sydney University is divesting itself of some of its traditional campuses and focusing its activities in high-rise buildings in the Parramatta and Bankstown CBDs. While maintaining its major campus Bedford Park, Flinders has redirected its estate development efforts into a reused Mitsubishi Factory at nearby Tonsley. The former factory site is supposed to be a kind of tech incubator and the host for a range of start-ups, while also housing traditional teaching and research functions of the university's engineering and computer science schools.[18]

The institutional tendency to diminish the distinctiveness of the university campus and make it more porous with surrounding urban environments has had equivocal architectural results thus far. In fact, there are some signs that the uncertainty about the nature of the institutions and their physical presence is leading to a confused and confusing architectural response. While the mantra of management thinking is that every crisis is an opportunity, the initial evidence suggests that for campus development the opportunity is a rather confused experiment.

Identity Crisis on the Campus: Melbourne Connect

One of the latest major developments adjacent to the University of Melbourne to come to fruition, despite Pandemic-related setbacks, is the opening of Melbourne Connect. Designed by a large team of Woods Bagot, Hassell, Hayball and Architectus, and facilitated through a consortium led by Lendlease and smaller industry startups, it is described as the University's "newest purpose-built innovation precinct".[19] The collection of buildings and street level open spaces, occupies the site of the former Royal Women's Hospital in Carlton across a main thoroughfare and to the south of the University of Melbourne campus proper. After some serious consideration as a candidate for adaptive reuse of the former medical buildings — and despite sustainability credentialing — they were demolished in 2017 and completely replaced by the new development. (There is still promise of a heritage interpretation plan to evoke the history of the hospital.) Taking its cue from recent biomedical facilities built on wealthy international campuses, the precinct provides a new home for the Faculty of Engineering & Information Technology, plus the Melbourne Entrepreneurial Centre, various data hubs and digital design start-ups. Along with flexible, open plan works spaces of various configurations, the site includes purpose-built accommodation for over 500 postgraduates.[20]

The project is consolidating the university's gradual southward drift that is bringing its activities closer to the Melbourne CBD and RMIT and away

17. Hannah Lewi and Andrew Murray, "'Town and Gown Concordat?" Notre Dame and the remaking of the City of Fremantle ' 14th Australasian Urban History Planning History Conference, 31 January-2 February 2018, Australasian Urban History, Planning History Group: Melbourne, 2018, 284-294

18. ArchitectureAu, 'Plans for third vertical campus of Western Sydney University Revealed', 13 November 2019, Accessed 22 June, 2021.

19. Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology Welcome Pack (University of Melbourne), Melbourne Connect document, April 2021.

20. Sandra Kaji-O'Grady, Chris Smith and Russell Hughes, *Laboratory Lifestyles: the construction of scientific fictions*, MIT Press, 2018.

from Parkville and the residential colleges. In doing so the the university is underlining the purpose and drive of Melbourne Connect that is oriented more towards industry than the formal campus. This reflects much broader shifts in higher education in Australia over the last decade or more.

Detail of the 'digital brick' at the entrance to Melbourne Connect, University of Melbourne, Carlton, Vic. 2019. Photograph by Hannah Lewi

At ground level, the various ten or so storey buildings congregate to form a street frontage on the prominent corner of Swanston and Grattan Streets. Here visitors will be able to experience the Science Gallery as "a cultural anchor", which at the moment is a fairly flexible, generic and empty white gallery space.[21] A member of the Global Science Gallery network, its purpose is to showcase and render visible to the broader public, new work. It's mission seems strangely reminiscent of the 18th and 19th-century mode of demonstrating scientific knowledge to the public through public collections, lectures, and exhibitions like early demonstrations of Boyle's air pump at the Royal Society London.[22] And it is part of a recent trend in developing museums, laboratories and galleries for the interdisciplinary exploration and demonstration of the "intersections between art, science, history, philosophy, media, music and culture,"[23] and the visualisation of science and technology. For example, current pop-up installations ask audiences to reimagine waste, to experience an experiment around blood, or to view an expression of perfection in physics. The building of dedicated campus galleries, as a functional type, reinforces the belief that universities should be accessible and profound places of cultural and critical engagement with knowledge. They can, of course, also be very useful in attracting attract media attention, sponsorship and philanthropic support.

Also at ground level, the central focal outdoor space formed by the building footprints – and represented in the sketchy logo of Melbourne Connect as emblematic of connection – is the Womin-djerring (meaning Come together) plaza. Access to this sparsely landscaped plaza is

21. Melbourne Connect official website: https://melbconnect.com.au/place/the-superfloor/ Accessed, 20th June 2021

22. Shapin, Steven & Simon Schaffer *Leviathan and the Air-pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985.

23. 'Macquarie University Art Gallery About Us', online at: https://www.mq.edu.au/about/campus-services-and-facilities/museums-and-collections/macquarie-university-art-gallery/about-us, accessed 22 June 2019.

via four simulated laneways named natongerambi kalk way (birthing tree); ngang-gak djerring walk (listening together); yagila-djerring walk (learning / searching together); and toom-djerring walk (speaking together), complete with a thin veneer of red brick and urban grit.[24] This introduction of Indigenous naming and presence on Australian campuses is again emblematic of a wider shift in recognition and often vaguely articulated aspiration to 'decolonise' the campus, as seen in the support for First Nations artists to work on campuses and the design of new campus plans that recognise the former occupation and symbolic attachment to campus places. However tokenistic, their instigation represents a potentially promising desire for universities to become places that promote contested or shared thinking and learning between formal academic traditions and Indigenous knowledges.

With a nod to the trend for city campuses that have come to inhabit existing buildings in urban centres, and consequently abandon former conceptions of isolated bush campuses, (perhaps harking back to the 'red brick' and 'plate glass' technical campuses of Australia and the UK), at ground level the red brick laneway language of Melbourne Connect transitions above to modulated glass and panelled facades with a terracotta-inspired colour palette. Functionally, the precinct also provides for the colocation of residential accommodation, flexible working spaces, catering facilities, cultural amenities and even an early learning centre – again stimulating or perhaps simulating the urban vibrancy that is one of the key drivers of the city campus idea.

Despite prominent aims to 'activate' campus living, working and studying through the buildings' design, students are not anticipated as playing any major role in this activation and inhabitation, as they largely cannot gain access to any of the building's facilities other than ground level and the first level 'Superfloor'. As we have become accustomed to in landmark university precincts, the expansive open plan space of the Superfloor, designed by Woods Bagot, aims to impress by setting "a new global benchmark for innovation, community curation and partner amenity."[25] Following new tech-sector facilities, defined within the Superfloor is the "Launch Pad,'" a dynamic space that can be used for "creating, prototyping, pitching and testing."[26] The minimal teaching spaces that are included are fully flexible, flat floor areas that can double up as dining or event spaces. While the upper floors are designed around the now ubiquitous mix of open plan, flexible configurations, glazed cubicles, meeting rooms, lavish communal kitchens and prominent circulation spaces for enabling 'chance' encounters. Visible tech displays and exposed servicing add to the Silicon Valley vibe, along with small windowless rooms on each floor, earmarked as wellness spaces. Unfortunately, they more resemble smoking rooms in airports than say Google or Amazon's enticing wellness amenities.

Melbourne Connect attempts to physically shape and thereby represent what 'work' looks like in the hybrid corporate, knowledge sector campus. We are all 'curators' and 'connectors' now, and our work is promised to be made visible, and thereby presumably more accountable through 'activations' and events, 'pitches', 'demo-days', 'hackathons', and launches.[27] Other kinds of work that campuses used to support, at least pre-pandemic, like teaching and administration have been designed out of this vision, and consigned to take place elsewhere in existing ad hoc

24. Melbourne Connect official website: https://melbconnect.com.au/place/the-superfloor/ Accessed, 20th June 2021.

25. Melbourne Connect official website: https://melbconnect.com.au/place/the-superfloor/ Accessed, 20th June 2021.

26. Melbourne Connect official website: https://melbconnect.com.au/place/the-superfloor/ Accessed, 20th June 2021.

27. Michael Bhaskar, *Curation: the power of selection in a world of excess*, Piatkis, London, 2016.

spaces on the campus proper. This is in stark contrast to how campus architecture was articulated through evolving conceptions of pedagogy, ceremony and research over the course of the 20th century: the raked lecture theatre, the library, the atomised tutorial spaces, laboratories and individual offices for academics. While unprogrammed open, landscaped spaces including agoras, forums and secluded gardened courtyards have now been enveloped into precincts that exercise real or implicit control over entry and exit and function as spill over spaces for cafes and student accommodation.

Big on ambition, but perhaps unfortunate in timing, Melbourne Connect arguably encapsulates the current identity crisis apparent on Australian campuses. Although admittedly steeped in inevitable, self-conscious marketing and branding spin, the rhetoric accompanying the precinct's opening is indicative of where campus design and management has landed in 2021. This new campus conception, now admittedly eerily empty in Melbourne in mid-2021, is envisaged far less as a "University" and more as part start-up, innovation hub, part speculative office transaction, with commercially operated student accommodation also adding heft and bulk to the eastern side of the development facing into neighbouring Carlton. And it is the corporate that comes out on top of this mess of aspirations and identities.

Conclusion

While the rapid dissolution or abandonment of traditional campus estates seems unlikely in Australia, it would be foolhardy to assume their ongoing centrality for higher learning. This moment of crisis provides us then with an opportunity to denaturalise them and at the same time to see their function and meaning in stark relief. It affords, in other words, an opportunity for the historian to see the campus and its designed spaces, buildings and precincts with some clarity. The clear sense of what the campus has been in a material sense, however, arguably does not help illuminate the question of where it is going and why universities are building and developing as they are today. If one was to try and understand what it is universities want for their students and for the society as a whole from looking carefully at Melbourne Connect, one is left puzzled. In another moment the multiple things going on at Melbourne Connect might be hailed as complexity or inclusiveness, but in our own moment, unfortunately, it is hard to avoid the conclusion Melbourne Connect represents only an absence of sincere conviction. The salient idea of the university in Australia represented by the sandstone campus and bushland campus respectively, do not seem likely to be replaced by whatever it is that Melbourne Connect represents. While undoubtedly a real material ensemble, Melbourne Connect gestures toward the primacy of the digital in our current situation. But somehow it seems to be caught between the 'ultra' proposition of digital dissolution and the durable material identity of the nineteenth and twentieth century campuses.