

# ULTRA

## Positions and Polarities Beyond Crisis

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Image: Michaelmore, Roeger & Russell, *Chester House*, Belair 1966, State Library of South Australia BRG 346/28/6/2.

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# Provocation, Ultra-Resistance and Representation: A Case Study-Based Research Course & the Student Exhibition 'Re-Presented'

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## Keywords

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Heritage  
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## Abstract

The core premise of the paper focuses on approaching a specific case study as the subject and the object of an architectural research heritage course, in this case, the UQ Union complex (UQU). During the summer semester 2020 – 2021, thirteen students in the M. Arch program at the University of Queensland (UQ) studied and interpreted the tangible and intangible heritages of the UQU. Once an award-winning project back in the 1960s, the entire complex faced the threat of demolition by the university's proposed master plan in 2017. There is no doubt that the demolition proposal was an 'Ultra' decision. The process followed an 'Ultra' reaction in the form of a campaign for saving UQU, supported by hundreds of activists, UQ staff, students, and alumni. Therefore, an 'Ultra' synthesis emerged from this dialectic. Besides the pedagogical approaches of the course, the site's rich history shaped an important section of the paper. Given the spirit of the recent period, the 'ultra-temporal' and uncertain times caused by the COVID-19 pandemic created an ambiguous situation, and there is a major pause for the demolition proposal. The new response from the UQ administration was also briefly discussed at the end of the paper.

Within the course, the curiosity to have an in-depth understanding of a built environment transformed and evolved. Thus, the outcome was two exhibitions titled 're-Presented' as a result of this collective work. The course created the opportunity for students to think critically about the role of the UQU Complex within the new master plan and re-image its position in the university's future by their provocative proposals. These innovative and creative exhibition pieces went beyond conventional methods of documentation. The paper focuses on the students' journey and how they unpacked the site's history. It explains how their ideas re-presented a daily built environment that has dispatched from its past and alienated among its users. In summary, an 'Ultra' perspective, such as the one exemplified by the described course, comes back in a full circle.

## Pedagogical Methods and Utilised Materials for the Course

1. Ashraf M. A. Salama, and eBooks Corporation. *Spatial Design Education New Directions for Pedagogy in Architecture and Beyond*. (Burlington: Ashgate, 2015), 47.

The main focus of the course relies on critical thinking and creative representation. In order to achieve these goals, the structure of the lectures was oriented on fundamental arguments, such as 'collective memory', 'heritage', 'seeing things differently', 'interpretation' and 'reproduction'. Architecture as a discipline and a profession experiences a continuous process of transformation.<sup>1</sup> Architects are involved in diverse disciplines varying from engineering to different fields in art. With the emergence of new approaches and technologies, there is also a crucial rise for interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary fields related to architecture. From curating exhibitions to Computer Generated Imagery (CGI) and Virtual Reality (VR), from engineering to artistic works, architectural students are more involved in various fields that create the opportunity to be active in different professions. Division of labour and tendencies for professionalism also catalyses this process. Thus, this question comes to mind: What is the agenda of architectural education and how it is responding to all these changes? Did Architectural schools align their curriculums and programs with the recent transformations?

2. AR editos, "Radical Pedagogies in Architectural Education", 28 September 2012, <https://www.architectural-review.com/today/radical-pedagogies-in-architectural-education>

The offered course addresses the 'radical' approach as its principal agenda and guideline. Going back to its origin in Latin *radice*, the term refers to the root and reaches the foundations of the elements.<sup>2</sup>

3. Ashraf M. A. Salama, and eBooks Corporation. *Spatial Design Education New Directions for Pedagogy in Architecture and Beyond*. (Burlington: Ashgate, 2015), 265.

Therefore, students were challenged by thinking about the roots of terminologies at every stage of the course. Indeed, the radical approach empowered the students to have a critical perspective on the materials related to the course subject. In addition to the radical approach, active learning was also the other core tool. It raised the student engagements during the lecture and tutorial sessions. The dynamic nature of discussions catalysed the conversations and created the opportunity for students to share their ideas in a non-judgmental and open environment at every stage of the course. Generally, discussions started in paired groups and ended with a more extensive conversation among the whole cohort. These discussions included materials from course readings, short debates on keywords and terminologies, commenting and exploring tasks and ideas.<sup>3</sup> Terms such as 'heritage', 'collective memory', 'place vs space', 'abstraction', 'self-representation', 'alienation' were among these examples.

4. Ashraf M. A. Salama, and eBooks Corporation. *Spatial Design Education New Directions for Pedagogy in Architecture and Beyond*. (Burlington: Ashgate, 2015), 265.

During the process, the instructor used to take the role of the facilitator for catalysing discussions. Active learning is one of the most effective alternatives regarding the one-way transfer of knowledge. In the case of lecturing, the amount of retained information starts to decline after ten minutes.<sup>4</sup> However, active learning develops a higher order of thinking in analysing, synthesising, and evaluating a broad spectrum of topics.<sup>5</sup> The high level of engagement and involvement resembles the famous quote from Confucius saying, "Tell me and I will forget, show me, and I may remember; involve me, and I will understand." The experimental nature of this pedagogical approach extended and resulted in dynamic and various outcomes for every lecture and tutorial session. Therefore, it created alternative methods in approaching the subject of the course in every student that developed their own unique idea and methodology in studying the case study. These readings of the UQU Complex depended on internal and external factors circulating during the course. It influenced the students' understanding of the case study as the subject and object of the course.

5. Ashraf M. A. Salama, and eBooks Corporation. *Spatial Design Education New Directions for Pedagogy in Architecture and Beyond*. (Burlington: Ashgate, 2015), 265.

## Theoretical Backgrounds

6. Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). 1 – 34.

7. Cuarón, Alfonso, director. 2018, *Roma*, Netflix.

8. Michel Foucault. *The Order of Things: an Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. (London ; New York: Routledge, 2002), 3 – 18.

The course starts with the question of ‘what is memory?’, ‘how we remember the past?’, ‘what is the role of collectivity in human memory?’. All questions are followed by paired conversations in the classroom and finalised by a group discussion. The main goal is creating awareness about ‘collective memory’ from Halbwach’s point of view that human memory can only function within a collective context. It is always selective, and every different group can have their narratives from various incidents.<sup>6</sup> It is followed by making sense and connecting with the built environment and spatial mechanisms to form the memory. Later on, different approaches in restoration and conservation using some of the recent examples are covered. Using cinematography as a powerful tool to demonstrate the memory, students are asked to watch the movie *Roma*<sup>7</sup> and reflect their interpretation in any medium possible as their first warm-up activity. The second lecture, titled “Interpretation with Visual Materials”, gives a brief history of photography and discusses representation tools by referring the Flusser’s ideas about the image and imagination. The third and last lecture, titled “Abstraction and Self-Representation”, explores thought-provoking approaches and how to challenge the observers’ preconditioned perceptions of reality. This part finishes with a group discussion on the first chapter of “The Order of Things”<sup>8</sup> on *Las Meninas* by Michel Foucault.

9. Charles Merewether. *The Archive*. (London : Cambridge, Mass.: Whitechapel ; MIT Press, 2006)

10. Dr Jeffrey Rickertt is a librarian at UQ Fryer library.

As part of the active learning process within the second half of the course, all students are meant to cover one chapter of the book titled “The Archive, Documents of Contemporary Art”<sup>9</sup>, edited by Charles Merewether. Students share their interpretation and understanding of each chapter and get familiar with working on archives. Everyone takes the role of sharing the summary of the dedicated chapter, including the instructor himself. The later section highlights the importance of the case study regarding its tangible and intangible heritage, followed by two site visits and a lecture by the expert on the field. The guest lecturer, Dr Jeffrey Rickertt, also launched the Save UQU Complex campaign and lodged the heritage application of UQU Complex at Queensland Heritage Council.<sup>10</sup>

## Significance of the Case Study – An Overview

11. Alice Hampson, Janina Gosseye, “Healthy Minds in Healthy Bodies”, in *Hot Modernism Queensland Architecture 1945 – 1975*, ed. John Macarthur, Deborah van der Plaats, Janina Gosseye, Andrew Wilson (London: Artifice Books on Architecture, 2015), 239.

During the 1960s, University campuses in Australia were primarily the byproduct of a more national plan for ‘educating the masses’. As Hampson and Gosseye highlighted, this campaign relied on expanding two ‘new’ architectural typologies: the university campus and the public lending library.<sup>11</sup> Within the same period, the UQ Student Union (UQU) Complex was one of the few major developments on the St Lucia campus located outside the original Great Court, prefacing the eastern expansion of the campus (Fig.1). Designed in the 1960s by Queensland architect Stephen Trotter, the UQ Student Union Complex is characteristic of prevailing attitudes to the environment, equity and access, an exemplar of modernism at the same time as it integrated regional elements associated with the subtropical climate in South-East Queensland. The UQU Complex was highly regarded as a showpiece of a forward-thinking university, drawing the following compliment from the Vice-Chancellor of the time, Sir Fred Schonell: “We think it is a

12. Professor F.J. Schonell, letter to Messrs. Fulton, Collin & Partners, August 30, 1961.

13. Robinson, Clare. "Architecture in Support of Citizenry: Vernon DeMars and the Berkeley Student Union." *Journal of Architectural Education*, 70, no. 2 (2016): 236–46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10464883.2016.1197677>.

magnificent building, both functionally and aesthetically, and we never tire of showing it to visitors from all over the world."<sup>12</sup> (Fig.2)

One of the most significant influences of the UQU Complex was transforming the concept of public space in Brisbane. These transformations occurred in other parts of the world within the university campuses as well, especially American universities. Spatialisation of politics in the public spaces was inevitable. UC Berkeley campus was a clear example. For the project architects DeMars, Hardison, and Halprin, the UC Berkeley campus was a combination of long-standing ideas about social education with the latest innovations concerning urbanism and civic participation.<sup>13</sup>



Figure 1: Student Union Complex under construction c 1959 (Source: UQ Archives, s909 p116a)

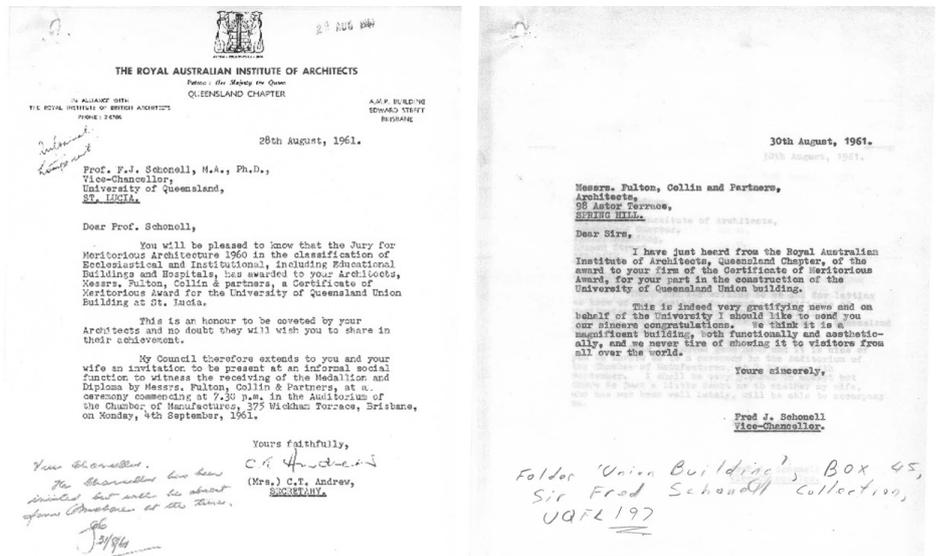


Figure 1: The letter of Royal Australian Institute of Architects to the Vice-Chancellor of time, Sir Fred Schonell, and his letter to the project's architect. (Source: "Folder' Union Building', Box 45, Schonell, F. Sir Fred J. Schonell Papers, 1941." Ide

14. Robinson, Clare. "Architecture in Support of Citizenry: Vernon DeMars and the Berkeley Student Union." *Journal of Architectural Education*, 70, no. 2 (2016): 236–46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10464883.2016.1197677>

As Robinson framed for the UC Berkeley: "The distinction between cultural and political citizenship was important because the variety of "urban" spaces central to the architects' design concept allowed for spontaneous and spirited student citizenship that included both normative (cultural) as well as undesirable (political) student activities."<sup>14</sup> The same concept was applicable to the UQU complex.

The complex established a platform for mutual respect, where students from all races, classes, ideologies and ethnic groups could expect to be treated with dignity. This was a utopian dream for those at the time who were fighting for equality. Students could gather to practise freedom of speech and exercise their right to freely debate ideas, ideally, without judgement. The flexible character of the space enabled students to transform indoor and liminal spaces according to their needs. In its original format, the central space was open and flexible, creating a space suitable for gatherings. Later inclusion of fixed tables handicapped this type of activity. The whole complex, including the relaxation blocks, the refectory, music rooms and, more importantly, the Schonell Theatre, were pioneering approaches to leisure activities at the time for an Australian University campus. For generations, these experiences became memorable associations for UQ staff, students and alumni. (Fig.3)



Figure 3: Student Union Complex Ground Floor Plan (Source: Fryer Library Collection: Architect's Drawings & Plans, Folder 204, UQFL194)

15. For more information and details refer to: Anne Richards, *Book of Doors*, Toombul, Queensland: AndAlso Books, 2020.

16. Ali Rad Yousefnia, Kelly Greenop, Carroll Go-Sam, Chris Landorf, Mark Jones, "History of the UQ Student Union Complex (Indigenous perspective)", unpublished report, May 2021.

17. A suggested early name for the radio station was 4UM-FM, that is Forum FM, possibly in reference to the UQ Union Forum.

In addition to leisure and entertainment, the UQ Student Union Complex has strong associations with significant protests and political demonstrations in the 1960s and 1970s (Fig 4), especially resistance against racism toward Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The history of organised protests at the UQ Student Union Complex goes back to the 1960s. Although Joh Bjelke-Peterson's Country/National Party State government tried to limit marches and protests by imposing strict rules for permits, student groups and associations, such as the Vietnam Action Committee and the leaders of the Civil Liberties March at UQ successfully managed large gatherings at the UQ Student Union Complex and its Forum area.<sup>15</sup> On many occasions, these large gatherings marched from the St Lucia campus along Coronation Drive to Roma Street Forum in the city. Along with the anti-war demonstrations, such as the moratorium march in 1970, racial justice activities and resistance to racism became an inseparable part of the history of the UQ Student Union Complex.<sup>16</sup> One of the influential occupants of the UQ Student Union Complex was the radio station 4ZZZ,<sup>17</sup> which took the University of Queensland's students to a broad audience across Brisbane. With new FM radio technology,

18. Sinnamon, Myles, 2015. "Brisbane Radio Station 4ZZZ – 40th Anniversary." John Oxley Library blog, <https://www.slq.qld.gov.au/blog/brisbane-radio-station-4zzz-40th-anniversary>, viewed 2 June 2021.

19. Radical Times, 2021. "History of 4ZZZ"; <http://radicaltimes.info/PDF/4ZZZhistory.pdf>, viewed 2 June 2021.

4ZZZ created opportunities for simultaneous interaction with listeners during live programs. Since the first broadcast on December 8th 1975, 4ZZZ has fostered alternative music and provided a voice for cultural minorities and independent journalism.<sup>18</sup> The 4ZZZ agenda was reactive rather than prescriptive, responding to requests and supporting the development of unique and nationally significant band culture in Brisbane.<sup>19</sup>



Figure 4: Student Protest outside the UQ Student Union Complex in 1969 (Source: UQ Archives, UQA S177 p1390b)

## Results and Outcomes

### - Exhibitions

The alternative approach of the course vis a vis the offered methodological tools resulted in creative and, in some cases, new modes of representation for the students' final submissions. Compared to the conventional architectural drawings and representations, these new modes explored and experienced new and creative methods. Two exhibitions can be highlighted as the main outcomes of the course during the summer semester 2020 – 2021. On January 27th, 2021, the main exhibition of the course opened at the UQ school of architecture, Zelman Cowen building titled "UQ Union Complex: re- Presented". The exhibition's title was proposed and selected by anonymous voting among the students themselves. Each student was asked to describe their work in one paragraph presented as a didactic next to their exhibition pieces.

Although it is not possible to cover all works in this paper, some of the selected works are covered briefly. Fraser Galloway uses two different modes of representation and focuses on specific façade elements as a strategic tool for design principles of the UQ Union complex by the projects' architect. (Fig.5)

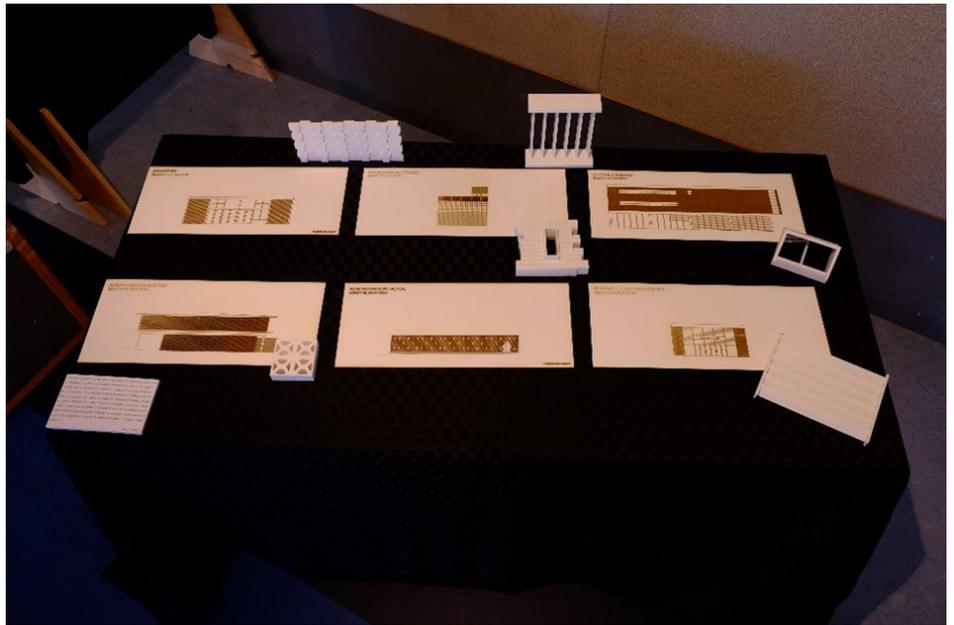


Figure 5: Façade elements of the UQ Union Complex. (Image by the author)

Galloway describes his work as “the following work examines the heritage of the UQ Union Complex through an investigation of the unique facade elements designed by the architect, Stephen Trotter. This particular aspect of tangible heritage was chosen as it forms the identity of the building, which holds great significance within the history of the university. Trotter’s approach to climate-specific design provided a well-functioning building within Brisbane’s sub-tropical climate and gave the Union complex a strong identity which contributed to the strength of the UQ Student Union. By displaying each 3D facade element alongside its elevation, it is clear how the parts work within the whole in the context of Trotter’s design principles.”

Another critical component for both exhibitions came from Thomas Webster. Webster used sound files from 444Z’s archives in order to highlight the essential role of the radio station during its broadcasting time from the UQ Union Complex. ‘Extending the Reach of Place’ is described as an “...exhibition piece consist(ing) of various audio recordings from the period in which the 4ZZZ radio studio broadcast from the UQ Union Complex. It demonstrates the effectiveness of audio broadcast in recreating the feeling of place, despite dislocation from the physical spaces. The arrangement of speakers correlates to particular social issues at the time or to particular places within the Union Complex. The overlapping and constantly changing sounds recreate an audio environment that someone would experience when moving through the various spaces of the Union Complex, and one feels like culturally and socially they are within that place.”



Figure 6: Dr Anne Richards, the author of 'A Book of Doors' visiting the Exhibition on Opening day with Thomas Webster and Adele Mammone (Image by the author)

20. The video played during the SAHANZ 38th annual conference as part of the author's presentation at day two, room three, Design Education and Practice session. Refer to conference website and recorded presentations for further information. <https://www.sahanz2021.com/>

As one of the most influential locations for protests and social demonstrations, the forum area was covered by several students as their focal point. YuJing (Shirley) Zhang illustrated the changes within the Forum area by using animation techniques and mixing different types of archival materials such as images, videos, maps, sound files for showing the structural vis a vis socio-cultural transformations happening around the UQ Union building.<sup>20</sup> She described her work as "This collage animation illustrates how the UQ Union Complex has evolved throughout the years as well as the history and student culture that comes with it. It demonstrates that the physical changes of the place had a significant impact on the activities of the Forum and why its days of glory did not carry through to today. Narration by an Aboriginal leader and activist Sam Watson, and Past student Di Zetlin. WARNING: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are warned that the following audio recording contains the name and voice of a deceased person."



Figure 7: Exhibition space and some of the student's works focusing on Schonell Theatre. (Image by the author)

Another critical location within the UQU Complex was the Schonell Theatre. The theatre was reflected in several exhibition pieces (Fig.7). In terms of its tangible heritage and architectural values, Lachlan Kennedy came up with a sectional model in order to focus on the spatial organisation of the theatre's interior elements. (Fig.8) He also used the exterior of the sectional model to show the posters of the events that took place in the Schonell Theatres' history. Kennedy describes his work as "the aim of this exhibition piece is to showcase the elaborate architecture found within the building's interior; where angled timber ceiling panels and arched brick colonnades to the side aisles contrast with the rectilinear external form of the building. In addition, original posters for productions, stage plays and musicals that have been held at The Schonell have been applied to the lower façade of the model and represent the rich cultural heritage of the site. Through layering this intangible heritage with the Stephen Trotter designed architecture, it is hoped that this exhibition piece will provoke a greater appreciation for both the building and its cultural significance."



Figure 8: Schonell Theatre Section 1:100. (Image by the author)

In another exhibition piece and student submission, Damien Baptiste focused on the intangible heritage and historical background of the Schonell theatre and juxtaposed it with the theatres' architectural elements. He titled his work 'The theatre of Memory' and described it as "...a three-dimensional interactive artwork which represents the tangible and intangible aspects of the Schonell Theatre. The artwork is made up of layers, each featuring manipulated materials representing the theatre. Each layer presents a cutout section of a larger image, and when viewed together, becomes the hero image from the play 'The Bacchoi', which was the opening production at the Schonell Theatre in 1970. The deconstructed photograph celebrates both the individuality of the independent members of the student union, as well as the power of the collective. It is only when the viewer is invited to engage with the work that perspective becomes a critical element in the success of the artwork." (Fig. 9 and 10)



Figures 9 and 10: 'The theatre of Memory'. (Image by the author)r)

#### - Media Impact

21. The full file of the broadcast on 4ZZZ can be found at: "[https://soundcloud.com/ian-curr/the-university-is-a-business-a-very-bad-business?fbclid=IwAR0kpts6cFzC8Od96UI87JKuVVWCZzCU\\_PNT-yfBQ10pxd99ez7krxJeHfQ](https://soundcloud.com/ian-curr/the-university-is-a-business-a-very-bad-business?fbclid=IwAR0kpts6cFzC8Od96UI87JKuVVWCZzCU_PNT-yfBQ10pxd99ez7krxJeHfQ)". Accessed in July 23rd, 2021.

22. Ian Curr, "<https://workersbusstelegraph.com.au/essays-2/analysis/pshift/>" Accessed in July 23rd, 2021.

Similar to the UQU saving campaign, both exhibitions got the attention of the local media. Both exhibitions were reflected in the eyes of the public on various platforms. On February 8th, 2021, Ian Curr interviewed the course coordinator and two students, Thomas Webster and Adele Mammone, for his program 'Paradigm Shift'.<sup>21</sup> 'Paradigm shift' is a radio program broadcasting on community radio 4ZZZ Fm 102 Fridays at noon. The co-host Ian Curr has an immensely active background in UQ Union back in his student years. He is one of the witnesses to all social, cultural, and political transformations taking place around the UQU Complex. The radio program identifies itself as "we challenge the assumptions of current society, to resist oppression and investigate alternative ways of living for a world based on justice, solidarity and sustainability."<sup>22</sup>

Alongside the interviews published on the programs' SoundCloud profile, the course coordinator joined the live broadcast at the radio station and answered the host's questions. At the same time, new discussions were raised through the dynamic nature of the debates. The later discussions about the UQU Complex created lots of uncertainties by continuous updates on related information.



Figures 11: Ian Curr standing next to his image in the Moratorium March of 1970 against Vietnam war used by YuJing (Shirley) Zhang for her project. (Image by the author)

- New approaches of the University towards the UQ Union complex after COVID - 19

23. Meherzad B. Shroff and Julian Worrall. "Building Upon: A Designer's Approach to Adaptive Reuse." In *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians Australia and New Zealand: 37, What If? What Next? Speculations on History's Futures*, edited by Kate Hislop and Hannah Lewi, 500-514. Perth: SAHANZ, 2021.

24. Meherzad B. Shroff and Julian Worrall. "Building Upon: A Designer's Approach to Adaptive Reuse." In *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians Australia and New Zealand: 37, What If? What Next? Speculations on History's Futures*, edited by Kate Hislop and Hannah Lewi, 500-514. Perth: SAHANZ, 2021.

COVID – 19 changed all aspects of life in 2020, challenged previous norms and shifted decision making processes. This process influenced the decisions related to many construction projects. From a heritage and preservation point of view, demolition is mainly considered one of the last options to create a clean slot for a new building. Within a comparative example to University campuses and Union Complexes, Meherzad B. Shroff's doctoral research demonstrates alternatives for redevelopment plans of the Union complex at the University of Adelaide. Shroff frames his work as it "seeks to put forward an alternative approach to those that emphasise a stable understanding of existing buildings as material artefact."<sup>23</sup> Instead of entirely demolishing the Union Complex, he suggests adaptive reuse. By studying the existing building, his design proposals collect the information from the existing buildings and built environment and conceptualise the possible scenarios within the new proposal.<sup>24</sup>

In the case of UQ, the post-pandemic era forced officials to re-evaluate the university's master plan, which was proposed in 2017. The previous plan included the demolition of the whole building for the UQU Complex at the St Lucia campus. UQ's new Vice-Chancellor, Professor Deborah Terry, went on air for an interview with ABC Radio Brisbane on July 8th, 2021. The host opened the conversation by saying, "Guess what happened? After years of campaigning to save the University of Queensland's Schonell Theatre, a decision has been made to preserve it. A controversial redevelopment proposal for the redevelopment of UQ Union complex at St Lucia campus looks like it has been scrapped and not it is back to the drawing board for the University of Queensland's administration." The host directly opened the conversation by asking the

question “what persuaded you to change your mind?” from the Vice-Chancellor. The Vice-chancellor mentioned the impacts of the COVID and the uncertainties happening in this period. Later on, she added: “... we took that opportunity to basically freeze our capital expenditure that is on projects that haven’t started, and that was a very appropriate decision to have made. That has allowed us to go back to the first principals. Because obviously, as we come out of this COVID situation, we are looking to welcome our students on the campus as quickly as possible to support them, and making sure that the student complex, which is such an important part of this campus, delivers for our students is something that we are committed to.” For the question of “Will the Schonell Theatre will be preserved?” Vice-Chancellor again highlighted about going back to the first principles and working with all parties especially UQ Union and alumni “to really understand how we should be redeveloping the student complex. It will be redeveloped and what we have committed to is in the redevelopment, and I am not going to pre-end now what it will end up looking like because we are not nearly at that stage. But we have committed to obviously that space will include the Schonell Theatre. It will include a drama studio. It will include facilities and spaces for UQ Union, which they will manage and control and of course, we are committing to ensuring that there is space like the Forum that is designed and works in a way that brings our students together.” Compared to the previous redevelopment plan in 2017, the early stages of the new decisions renders a probably better design proposal, and the later statements sound promising. It shows a significant shift within the university administration that all derived from the fast-changing nature of the circumstances in the post-pandemic era. It also shows that the new management started to value the local history by considering the tangible and intangible heritage of the UQU complex, which was the principal subject of the course examined by the students and manifested in two different exhibitions.

## **Conclusion**

The paper focuses on the student's journey and how they unpacked the site's history, how they came up with creative ideas in terms of representing a daily built environment that dispatched from its past and alienated among its users. The circumstances resulting from a worldwide pandemic were inevitable, and university management had to make a vital decision regarding the new norms and conditions of the post-pandemic era. Prior to the new Vice-chancellor's announcement, the course created an active learning space through the tangible and intangible heritage of the site. It enabled students to document the UQ Union building and complex in creative methods and raised awareness about the built environment. It also offered an experimental platform for the students to go back to the foundations of the norms, facts and terminologies and redefine them by having a radical approach. The 'Ultra' thesis of demolishing the UQ Union Building faced an 'Ultra' anti-thesis of saving the UQU complex campaign. Their clash opened the discussion for 'Ultra' and provocative synthesis for debates, which the offered course was part of it. Finally, it comes back in a full circle as new decisions are made by the new Vice-Chancellor and new hopes and promises about saving (even maybe partly) the UQU Complex and acknowledging its importance within the history of Brisbane and the University of Queensland.