

# Chapter 5

## Redirecting the City?



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**Abstract** In framing the inaugural Seoul Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism, Co-Curators Hyungmin Pai and Alejandro Zaera-Polo suggest “the cities of the world stand at a crossroads.” Calling for a new urban cosmology within which to think through the distribution of the “emerging commons” they suggest are imperative to fairly organise and distribute to avoid inequality and environmental decay. This call comes from an acute awareness of the incapacity of current political and economic systems to address fundamental risks to the planet such as climate change and ever-increasing inequity among its inhabitants. Debate rages between the assertion that engaging in current political and economic frameworks can only result in the reproduction of the inequities upon which they are based, and the alternate view that perhaps these current structures might be re-appropriated to different ends.

The discipline of architecture can surely be called upon as a key instrument in this project, but for two conceptual barriers – a resolution on the matter of engagement with existing structures, and a rethinking of the discipline that might trigger new professional formations more suitable to this task than the profession of architecture as it is currently constituted. I will explore, by example, a specific apparatus that attempts to navigate the disciplinary and governmental impasse that sits before us. The context for thinking through the opportunities for and limitations of this apparatus is foregrounded by bodies of scholarship across two separate but interrelated themes: the replacement of politics by management (Ranciere, Zizek, Morton etc); and a consideration of the professional anxieties of the discipline of architecture as it pertains to this political condition (Harvey, Cunningham, Swyendouw, Lahiji, Deamer et al.).

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## 5.1 Introduction

In framing the inaugural Seoul Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism, Co-Curators Hyungmin Pai and Alejandro Zaera-Polo suggest “the cities of the world stand at a crossroads.” Calling for a new urban cosmology within which to think through the distribution of the “emerging commons” they suggest are imperative to fairly organise and distribute to avoid inequality and environmental decay. In accepting Aureli’s duality (Aureli 2008) that a political project is a spatial one and a spatial project a political one, it follows that a new cosmology and cosmopolitics (Zaera-Polo 2016) cannot be bought into existence without significant rethinking of access to and sharing of the commons, fundamental to which is their spatial organisation and distribution.

The call for new cosmological/cosmopolitical frameworks comes from an acute awareness of the incapacity of current political and economic systems to address fundamental risks to the planet such as climate change and ever-increasing inequity among its inhabitants. The discipline of architecture can surely be called upon as a key instrument in this project, but for two conceptual barriers. Firstly, a rethinking of the discipline is required which must then trigger new professional formations more suitable to this task than the profession of architecture as it is currently constituted. Simultaneously, a context within which redirection of the city and its commons must be found.

This second point is a matter of some complexity and debate. Erik Swyngedouw (2016) suggests that, regardless of the professional formation, architecture can only spatialise, reproduce and distribute current inequities, unless it engages in a “set of affective and sequential acts that. . . inaugurate an equal, solidarity-based and free socio-spatial order that abolishes what exists.” His view is based upon the assessment that the design of current managerial practices to ensure the evacuation of the political from the work of the spatial disciplines. Challenging this, Harvey (2010) cautions that one should be careful not to demolish the current structures that capitalism has produced when the possibility remains that this machinery might be re-appropriated to different ends (Cunningham 2014).

I will suggest that the concept of autonomy – understood in architecture as pertaining to the autonomy of an object from external forces, and the idea of a subsequent archipelago of “autonomous objects” as having the potential to resist external political or economic forces, should be rethought. I propose instead that the conception of the object in architecture as the after-effect of relations (Benjamin 2016) gives us a mechanism whereby we might reconsider the autonomy of the object itself. If we were to replace “object” with “city”, we start to consider the reorganization of relations at a larger scale where the redirection of existing systems might counter the current political hegemony where flows of capital have been excised from the political as a locus of contestation.

This reformulation leads to the search for an appropriate means of engagement for such a project. I will explore, by example, a specific apparatus that attempts to navigate the disciplinary and governmental impasse that sits before us. The context

for thinking through the opportunities for and limitations of this apparatus is foregrounded by bodies of scholarship across two separate but interrelated themes: the replacement of politics by management (Ranciere, Žizek, Morton etc); and a consideration of the professional anxieties of the discipline of architecture as it pertains to this political condition (Harvey, Cunningham, Swyendouw, Lahiji, Deamer et al.).

## 5.2 Post Politics, the Domination of flows and the Individual Versus the Multitude

“The ultimate sign of ‘post-politics’ in all western countries [is] the growth of a managerial approach to government: government is reconceived as a managerial function, deprived of its properly political dimension.” (Žižek 2002)

Slavoj Žižek (2009), Jacques Ranciere (2007) and others have proclaimed this the era of the post-political, a condition where the political subject is de-subjectivised by the onslaught of an exclusionary market and the absence of any real choices for those within it. The post-political, according to Žizek, exists now that “the political sphere is discarded as a sphere of mobilization and politics is reduced to a social-pragmatic exercise in implementing and managing developments that are regarded as inevitable (BAVO 2007)”.

Another way of understanding this situation is as a political condition where capital is excised from the locus of contestation and debate such that all possible alternatives assume at their centre that the market rules. Choices or options exist on the basis that there are none that will fundamentally challenge or contest the prevailing conditions. New waves of privatization and deregulation meet little opposition, property speculation continues to restructure access to the city and its “commons” and (as starkly described by Thomas Piketty (2014) intergenerational wealth now re-emerges as the most significant determinant of an individual’s future opportunity.

The complexity of politics as an ideological contest has been replaced by the rhetoric of self-organization and emergent systems that work to minimize resistance to the continuity and optimisation of flows. The management of flows – of capital and of those with capital – is the key preoccupation of contemporary governance practices, mirroring in the core ambitions of successful businesses to subvert all decisions to the improvement of efficiency, lowering of costs and increase in profit.” (LeCavalier 2016). Jesse LeCavalier has described this in spatial terms as having seeded a dominant culture of logistics, a culture that strips back understandings of national borders, trade across these border and the labour laws negotiating modes of production within them as nothing more than obstacles to ambition” (LeCavalier 2016).

Assisting in this reshaping of this political and economic landscape has been the rise of a specific language that magnifies the critical distance between political decisions and their impacts, presenting a world where the compromises in these decisions are explained away through a series of questionable claims such as the “cohesive city”, or “sustainable practice” (Morton 2013). These part-paradoxes exist not

only in marketing but underpin significant and well-respected developments in architecture, landscape and urban design. For example, a new frontline in the negotiation of spatial disciplines, ecology and the city is known as “ecological urbanism” – a concept described by Lahiji in fairly extreme terms as based on “the preposterous claim that the most effective way to attenuate climate change is through large-scale, privatized, suburban developments.” While many aligned to the ecological turn in urbanism practices may reasonably contest such a brutal critique, the presence of such an impossibly large blind spot exists among many of those undertaking so called “sustainable” practices – that is, the management and regulation of capital flows have similarly been embedded in sustainability practices, where sustainability is understood primarily as the sustainment of the current order (Morton 2013).

Locating this discourse more centrally in the language of the architectural discipline for a moment, we can talk specifically of parametricism as conceived by Patrik Schumaker (2008) of Zaha Hadid Architects. The advent of parametricism formally signalled a new direction in Hadid’s practice – from a designer of buildings as specific, place-based interventions based in a concretization of imaginary flow lines, to one where everything gives way to the relentlessness of free-flowing uninterrupted surfaces. As the practice expanded from the design of individual objects to urban scale tasks, these uninterrupted volumes and surfaces came to describe entire city precincts. The city, for all its complexity and layering, came to be rendered as object – a conceptual position that amplifies fundamental shortfalls in the profession of architecture, outlined later in this chapter. Not only does the object now rule, but the formal gymnastics underpinning the later incarnation of this practice are located in space of increasing abstraction, as opposed to specific places – a conceptual posture that Timothy Morton argues is impossible to maintain given the way in which global warming has reasserted that place most certainly matters. “We humans,” he warns, find ourselves in this era of global “on a very specific planet with a specific biosphere (Morton 2013).” Parametricists dismiss any consideration of place beyond its existence as an abstract field with no logic outside that which can be measured but insist that the discipline should resist the temptation to make any spatial intervention contrary to the desires of market forces as architecture’s accommodation to the existing social order must be absolute: “it is not architecture’s societal function to actively promote or initiate political agendas that are not already thriving in the political arena” (Schumacher 1997).

In the design of cities as uninterrupted flow paths we have reached a moment where the tsunami of capital appears unstoppable as it finds the most advantageous conditions for replication. Yet Cunningham has pointed out that this reliance on maintaining and optimizing flows to perpetuate the current order may be an Achilles heel where the dependence of our urban environments on these flows may be “one of the most vulnerable human arrangements that has ever existed (Cunningham 2010).” Like Cunningham, I question how one might interrupt this “perpetuum mobile” in the interests of greater equity.

### 5.3 Scale and Governance

In any project working to reconfigure and broaden opportunities in the urban realm, the fundamental negotiation is between the individual and the multitude. It is therefore not surprising that in understanding the disadvantage that an individual can face in this paradigm of unstoppable flows, renewed interest has emerged in how to effect resistance or redirection. A key variable here is the scale at which relative ideological independence may be exercised. For example, small-scale groups readily form in protest against large-scale development, loss of heritage, major transport projects and so on and become elevated to political organizations. Yet, the single-issue focus of these communities eventually reveals a lack of universalizing aspirations and ultimately of instrumentality in a broader sense. (Cunningham) This failure to exercise agency beyond specific protests is considered an integral part of the post-political paradigm, where such “acting out” of protest is accounted for and even invited as a desubjectification tool. Ultimately, the inability to reach beyond specific concerns and mobilise a larger spectrum has led to Žižek, Swyngedouw and others characterising these groups as a hysterical acting-out of politics that is “not truly political because of the restricted nature of the constituency (Marchart 2007).”

The current impasse around climate change is an obvious example, where individuals can make symbolic acts “whether at the level of personal recycling or corporate-led “carbon trading,” but, as Morton (2013), Lahiji (2014) and others have noted, a full coordinated response is beyond the reach of any collective political body existing or imagined. The argument is made that even if it were possible to imagine exactly what form such a body might take concerns immediately appear regarding “what forms of “authoritarian” power it might have to possess (Cunningham 2014).” This hesitancy leads us to the broader question of what conceptual transformation in the configuration and form of the state might take us beyond the post-political condition. As Harvey bluntly frames this dilemma, while revolution is quite properly opposed to prevailing notions of the republic of property, the presumption that the world’s six and a half billion people can be fed, warmed, clothed, housed and cleaned without any hierarchical form of governance and outside the reach of monetization and markets is dubious in the extreme (Harvey 2010).

This impasse – between the highly visible but low impact protest group, and our failure at planetary scale to make even marginal adjustments to account for planetary-scale problems – can in part explain the rise of the city as the poster child for urban and societal transformation. Concerns regarding the capacity of government to effectively allocate, create or redirect resources in the age of neo-liberal managerialism –led to a focus on city-scale governance as perhaps the most viable arena for consequential action. We have seen this in operation recently in the United States, as the Trump presidency has found resistance from city administrators and Mayors who suggest they will openly resist his administration’s policies in regard to climate change or other matters.

Sassen and others have argued that the emergence of some “new geography” of global processes could, in itself, provide an opening for the articulation of new forms of “citizenship,” not least on the part of architectural practice, whereby the “de-nationalising of urban space and the formation of new claims by international actors, raises anew the perennial question, ‘Whose city is it?’ (Sassen 2007). The need to reform the entire political and management apparatus is based on the premise that “spatialised policies (planning, architecture, urban policies, etc.) are among the core dispositifs of such post-politicizing governing (Swyngedouw 2016) and the key mechanisms through which fundamental conflicts are avoided. At present, when political conflicts are revealed, they are dismissed as a form of extremism and not in the spirit of appropriate “dialogue” and “deliberation” organised around the logic that no real choices, nor real opportunities for proposing serious alternatives, actually exists? (Cunningham 2014).

The question remains as to whether, in a post-political-reality where consensus has been built around the inevitability of state-backed capitalism as an economic system architecture can “state its own claim and interrupt the police order?” (Lahiji 2014) Cunningham cautions that, in considering a reform in the way architects work and the “relative potential of larger scale strategic work and the inevitable intersection of this work with government,” (Cunningham 2016) we cannot succeed without the political strategies at stake within it being extended “to the entire complex of institutions, and not only those involving architecture and building” (Cunningham 2014). Libero suggests that such an intervention should embrace “legal, political, and financial” matters and the attention to “cooperative arrangements like community development corporations and land trusts” (Deamer 2014).

Defining the city as the realm of re-politicization requires us to be more specific about distinguishing between its physical and nonphysical parameters. The physical environment is the structural basis, the three-dimensional frame of the socio-political sphere. However, analysing the political potential in a dense urban context places the emphasis not on the production of architecture, but rather on the production of space (Lahiji 2014). The question then, is whether autonomy at the scale of city might provide a breakthrough in where and how we challenge contemporary conditions.

## 5.4 Professional Anxieties

At the risk of a significant jump-cut in the argument, I am going to suggest that the impossibility of a global compact regarding equity of resources and collective responsibility for issues such as climate change – and a parallel questioning in the architectural discipline about agency – might come together in a consideration of how we understand the appropriate context and apparatus that may contribute to urban transformation.

We have seen how the desubjectification of the individual that defines this post-political age has impacted in disciplinary terms (with ecological urbanism exam-

ple). At the same time, a trajectory of fragmentation in the profession over the last two decades was accelerated by the 2008 Global Financial Crisis and the anxieties it highlighted in regard to the economic sustainability of practice models. The ever-diminishing role and stature of the architectural profession – in both the processes that underpin building production (being replaced in traditional roles by numerous new consultant types and minimal participation in large-scale decision-making (planning, urban design and strategy) led to concerns about the relevance of the architectural profession to society.

Thus, the post-political condition is that which binds the internal questioning within the discipline (relevance) and the seeming impossibility of the profession regaining any agency. Peggy Deamer (2015) and others have suggested that the only response is to decouple the business model which underpins the profession of architecture from the object, given the impossibility that she sees it that anyone in practice “might think past a client-driven practice and put their spatial expertise toward thwarting private development” (Deamer 2015). Deamer’s position is thus not motivated by a disinterest in form and materiality but as a means of breaking the object-based contract the profession has made with capital: “We get published by the object, we are motivated by the object, we staff up and organise our offices around the client’s objects” (Deamer 2015).

Thus a transformation of the profession to enable better conditions for the engagement of the discipline with capital is both imperative and yet remains unlikely until the profession’s self image can be shifted – from a focus and measurement of success based on the production of objects to spatial engagement at a scale larger than the individual building. Linking the internal and external worlds of the profession is the client-driven nature of professional practice as a service industry, a condition that requires a different engagement with capital. Externally, the question remains of what form of the state (or organising body) might take and how any new form of urban governance is structured and deployed.

Conflating both the professional and larger societal questions, Ross Exo Adams (2014) asks how we make a stand for architecture, to “have a political dimension or role and if so, to what extent, and how might this be understood in the context of the disciplinary and professional formations?” Or, in reverse, in what way is architecture relevant to the discourse of the political? If we accept the generalisation that society is now built on inequality and “politics is normally called by the name ‘management’ to sustain and perpetuate the same order” (Lahiji 2014) then we must make a stand for the discipline of architecture by making a stand against the current formulation of the profession of architecture.

We are left with two questions: first, where and how might impact be possible on the future organisation of the world and the sharing of commons within it and, secondly, how might the spatial disciplines and principally architecture participate in the reorganisation of the city to effect more equitable outcomes driven by a logic other than the market? I suggest that a shifting of horizons is required to overcome dilemmas inherent in the formation and focus of the profession in contemporary society, a shift that would ideally dovetail into the larger societal and political questions with which the chapter started.

The field of potential responses can be bracketed by two polarisations: the insurgent architect and the idea of autonomy. Firstly to the idea of the insurgent architect, a concept that has gained currency through the work of Harvey, Swygendouw, Schneider/Till and others as they attempt to formulate the idea of a resistant or emancipatory posture via which the discipline might exert political influence. Insurgency has – through their work– been given tangible form as one who works through apparently radical or resistant acts, interventions, exhibitions and other “bottom-up” actions and events that start to loosen current understandings of the discipline and profession. However, this acting out of resistance is predicated upon clear boundaries within which it can occur, thus mirroring the fragmentation of the collective into single-issue pseudo-political groups that also have clear operational boundaries. For these reasons, the critique of Williams and Srnicek to groups such as Occupy could equally apply here – a sort of architectural incarnation of “folk politics” (Srnicek and Williams 2015) which lacks the agency required to have any impact beyond that of the immediate event. The authors argue that the fetishisation of immediate results leads to an empty pragmatism that struggles to maintain the present balance of power, rather than seeking to change structural conditions.

While it can be acknowledged that moments of insurgency may have value as part of a constellation of redirective measures, it is argued that such acts, by themselves, are “incapable of articulating or building a new world,” (Srnicek and Williams 2015) and simply form a sort of smokescreen that enables the neoliberal project: “these practices of performative reconfiguration/displacement ultimately support what they intend to subvert, since the very fields of such ‘transgressions’ are already taken into account, even engendered by the hegemonic form” (Žižek 1999). In the discipline specifically, Aureli echoes this with the assertion that “the activist and participatory practices that are so popular today are the latest iteration of a reformist syndrome whose pathology is to preserve social and political conditions as they are” (Aureli 2013).” In short, the focus of the spatial discipline (architecture) on the sites and scales of least agency has resulted in the solidification of the view that the discipline is incapable of effecting meaningful change and is doomed to operate as a secondary instrument deploying the logic of an all-prevailing market.

Aureli’s critique of this theoretical dead-end has led to his focus on the concept of “autonomy”. Aureli’s thesis, staked out in *The Project of Autonomy, Politics and Architecture within and against Capitalism*, makes a claim for the autonomy of the architectural discipline through an analysis of the Italian *Autonomia* movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Aureli’s claim for autonomy is based on a rejection of centralised planning in favour of an approach for the city based in the idea of the autonomous object or archipelago – an object that in its formal organization might somehow encapsulate political agendas. A series of internal contradictions and conceptual simplifications reveal the impossibility of this position and its inward focus which brings the risk, as Tafuri famously suggested, that architecture simply works through the confirmation of its “sublime uselessness” caught in the confusion induced by “an utter alienation mistaken for independence” (Tafuri 1980). Libero Andreotti, writing in response to the question of whether architecture can be an emancipatory project, even suggests that the recourse to autonomy as a conceptual



position is a “redundant pleonasm designed to uselessly prolong the debate” (Andreotti and Lahiji 2016).

The potential for agency is thus self limited, for in not accepting the impossibility of current conditions, we find solace in polarisations that might by definition have very limited agency and, at worst, can be understood as an integral part of the desubjectification machine so integral to the post-political condition. A more centrist approach has permeated recent writing on the need to redefine the profession, through, for example, reflection on the lack of commitment to planning since the late nineteenth century and the suggestion that, by extension, a new relevance may come from reigniting this engagement. David Cunningham is one of a growing chorus who emphasise the necessity for the discipline to focus on a different scale, suggesting that on a planet housing seven billion people, “forms of mediation, abstraction and impersonality are not only ineliminable but necessary to the construction of new social relations and modes of collective transformation of our increasingly urbanised world” (Cunningham 2014). In short, we need “to rethink architecture’s relationship to wider issues of planning” (Cunningham 2014).

A conceptual wormhole through this terrain is provided by philosopher Andrew Benjamin and his work on relationality. Benjamin suggests that buildings should not be considered individually but rather through their incorporation within a network of relations: “The consequence of such a description is that it then allows any one object – the building as object – to be an after-effect of the relations that pertain within a given conjunction. In other words, any singularity is always an after-effect of a network of relations. Transformation therefore is the process of a coming-into-relation (Benjamin 2016).

The “object to network” repositioning suggested by Benjamin is not to diminish the importance of the object, but rather relocates it. Thinking through relationality is to understand the discipline’s specific contribution is the consideration of relations in the broadest possible sense but their reorganisation specifically in spatial terms. Acknowledging relational thinking as a core disciplinary expertise would lead to a new understanding of the architect as someone who works simultaneously across scales and where the outcome of the work is not automatically a single built object. These scales might range from that of the particular (the study of specific spatial arrangements as the after effect of relations) an understanding of how this particularity works in place (the impact of these specific occurrences on the context in which they occur, as the after effect or counter measure to existing conditions) and an awareness of how this particularity relates to, resists or reorganises global flows in a specific place. This conceptual reorientation of the discipline prepares the ground for working at organizational problems at a larger scale than the object through a relational architectural practice. Subsequently, the potential exists for an alignment between the logic of city-based redirection and reorganization and a professional re-formation.

On the professional front, the move from the object to relations brings with it a change in the relation to capital from an object-based exchange to a broader services-based model. If we are to accept this expansion of professional modes we might clarify a disciplinary skillset and language that would redirect our focus toward

questions of complex spatial relations. One consolidated profession might be replaced by a multitude of actors from the discipline of architecture working on a diverse set of problems.

## 5.5 Case Study: Relationality and the Spatial Framework

“In most of critical urban theoretical apparatuses, the political is usually assumed to emerge from what might broadly be called a ‘socio-spatial’ analysis. Put simply, a critical theory of the ‘social’ is considered to be the foundational basis from which an emancipatory urban politics can (or will) emerge, both theoretically and practically. It is the socio-spatial condition and the excavation of the procedures of its production that opens up and charts the terrain of political intervention and animates the politicizing subject”. (Swyngedouw 2015)

We are presented then with world where a politics without contestation appears resistant to intervention in the system of unimpeded flows upon which it depends. This inability to intervene is compounded by problems of scale, exemplified by our failure to address planetary problems at a planetary scale. Meanwhile, the discipline of architecture – which might see itself as an actor in the spatial reorganisation of the city – is constrained by a professional formation that privileges the design of individual objects. But what if we approached the city as a viable entity in which to intervene and as we did so, thought of the architecture as relational in nature and thus able to inform new conceptions of the architect?

A key question that appears is that of the relation between the architect and the state. Given this, an increasing focus on the concept of the “city architect” is unsurprising. For example, the Seoul Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism (mentioned at the start of the chapter) places its focus on an urban commons alongside the emerging role of the city architect through a series of exhibitions and symposia surrounding the event. Despite this new focus, the role of city architect remains unaddressed in most theory on the city and the imperative in challenging current forms of management bureaucracy so central to the critiques of the post-political.

In this context, the “city architect” in Sydney, Australia is notable given that the role has existed uninterrupted since March 1816, when the convict architect Francis Greenway was appointed. Since then, the cities and towns of New South Wales had all major public institutions designed by the “Government Architect” as the role came to be called. In 2015 the role was shifted from one focussed on the design and delivery of buildings and public spaces, to that of a strategic design advisor that produced frameworks and policies. The focus on the object, which organises the profession, was now replaced by a focus on relational thinking and the potential of that thinking to impact on political processes.

This new approach brought several benefits, the most importantly of which in the context of this argument is the removal of the Government Architect from the risk of conflicts of interest. While inevitably working in the context of the Government of the day, the role promotes the delivery of advice that has no direct relation to

exchanges of capital (as cautioned by Deamer) and possesses the disciplinary skillset and political leverage to effect change.

The question then turns to how the disciplinary skillset is utilised. A specific apparatus is being developed in Sydney in a unique collaboration between the Government Architect and a core group of professionals. This apparatus has emerged from the development of a design-led methodology for place-based spatial strategies that organize people, resources and space at the scale of the precinct. A key opportunity of the work is the embedding of these strategies and resultant logics into political processes and planning systems through a document known as a Spatial Framework (Fig. 5.1).

The Spatial Framework emerges from the realisation that the development of large city precincts (or smaller areas within a precinct) still relies on the coordination of Government and non-Government contributions, even in, and ironically because of neo-liberal development practices. In most cases, the Government's role and contributions to a precinct must be coordinated prior to the involvement of the private sector if Government is to actively determine the parameters for success, even if in purely financial terms. This requires the coordination of and integration with multiple Government Departments that often have competing or contrary objectives for success. This moment, and this need to coordinate across Government as it organises itself around a project, has been identified as a gap or portal where significant re-directive opportunities exist (Figs. 5.2 and 5.3).

The importance of this gap lies in its opening to a series of readjustments outlined in this chapter and upon which some form of agency in the post-political world depends. Firstly, the project itself is often not completely determined when an opportunity is identified. This creates an opening that allows for a widening of a project's potential in the moment of its clarification. Secondly, the scale of operation of the precinct is large enough to bring together actors from State and City government and their respective aims and objectives, but small enough to avoid the impossibility of large scale consensus building as described earlier. Finally, the terrain to be traversed through this gap or portal has led to a model where the Government Architect works collaboratively in this gap with actors from the private sector – architects who have developed expertise in this field and can act as foil to the Government Architect, as government actor, in the negotiations required to execute the work.

The Spatial Framework has been developed as a tool that works within this gap through a design-led methodology for place-based, spatial strategies that operate at precinct scale. The Spatial Framework does this through a process which effects a synthesis between spatial intelligence and substantial engagement processes across the political and bureaucratic realms. Thus the potential of a Spatial Framework lies in its ability to facilitate the coordination of cross-Departmental input and the implications of this on how resources or commons are coordinated in this context and in a specific site, or place. The model acts through the reorganisation of relations that, through the confluence of a specific project and place, precinct by precinct, start to enact a new cosmopolitics. The political agency of the Spatial Framework exists not



Fig. 5.1 Circular Quay, Sydney. (image: Transport for NSW)



Fig. 5.2 Parramatta. (image: TBC)



Fig. 5.3 White Bay Power Station. (image: Skyview)

only in its directions, but in the after-effects of the change in political and spatial relations that occur in undergoing the process itself.

The insertion of this tool in gaps that appear at the start of precinct-scale redevelopment means that the tool is not a single protocol but rather talks of a process that in each case emerges into a customised document particular to the question and place where it has been deployed. This focus on customisation within a broadly

understood process becomes part of the armament it deploys in convincing each government department “client” as a contingent and specific output that appears to be “ideology free” while at the same time building familiarity with its techniques and processes which promote acceptance of the technique in the bureaucracy.

#### Key Elements of a Spatial Framework.

Regardless of the specifics of a precinct or question that the Strategic Framework is asked to address, three key elements or platforms are common to the process of creating a framework and modified in detail and emphasis depending on the potential application.

The first of these research and mapping. Given that many of the precincts selected for the Strategic Framework process are important places in the city, there has often been significant research undertaken already and which, despite the specifics of a new project often contain research and analysis that is not only still relevant but which is known to the agencies involved. Thus, the mapping process upon which later analysis occurs has a familiarity which lubricates its political agency but which does not necessarily restrict new propositions. This double-edged sword is exercised through a process of identifying gaps in existing material that in turn provokes fresh analysis. This folding together of existing and new research and insights results in a set of spatial representations, the mode of which is also modified from project to project depending on the actors, the task or the intended audience (Fig. 5.4).

The potential to achieve a level of coordination within and across Government agencies is one of the most powerful aspects of the Strategic Framework process and this forms the second platform. It is also the platform that most effectively utilises the dual-collaboration between Government and external architects, given the nuance of the multiple negotiations necessary to effect. Working on multiple fronts, the Government Architect and their external consultant work in concert at different points in the process, or sometimes simultaneously but on different fronts, to enable specific discussions to occur and/or to achieve specific outcomes (Fig. 5.5).

The process of engagement occurs in multiple layers with key members of Government agencies relevant to decisions required in the precinct and, given the significance of many of the precincts studied, participants tend to be senior bureaucrats with oversight and/or involvement in policy development. Forms of engagement may vary subject to the purpose or context of a Strategic Framework but tend to incorporate up to three phases of engagement. These include: Stakeholder consultation “1 on 1” (a series of meetings with relevant stakeholders that emphasise speaking “off the record” in the interests of gathering intelligence on the various actors); Major Stakeholder Workshops (events that take 1–2 days and engage with representatives from multiple agencies in a collaborative design-led mode where participants are invited to articulating issues, options and possible solutions for a precinct); and Final Stakeholder Review of findings prior to completion of the Framework. The result of this engagement process is a series of Values that identify a collective ambition for each precinct. While single-word values emerge from the initial briefings, workshops and reviews, their detailed articulation is the task of the Government Architect and their external consultants. The precise articulation of



Fig. 5.4 Analysis of circular Quay. (image: Terroir)



**Fig. 5.5** Enquiry by design workshop. (images: Michael Ford)

these values, which occurs as the result of a workshop process but elaborated upon after it, enables the opportunity for significant clarification of intent that ultimately informs policy (Figs. 5.6 and 5.7).

Given that Strategic Frameworks precede a potential Precinct Plan, Master Plan or individual projects, it is necessary to articulate the Spatial Principles that the Government has agreed in a clear manner and so this is the third platform. Specific spatial principles are developed that build upon the Mappings and Values such that a clear logic for future precinct development, implicit in which is a position on the “distribution of commons”. The Principles and Values are of course related and can work together as an assessment tool to control or guide future development propos-





### M01 Maintain Heritage Viewsheds

White Bay Power Station is a major industrial landmark and icon of the Bays Precinct. Any development proposed in the vicinity of the White Bay Power Station must therefore carefully consider its bulk, scale and placement in order to respect the visibility and prominence of the power station as a harbourside landmark. To clarify this requirement, six key viewsheds have been determined as being of critical importance in terms of

the connection of White Bay Power Station with local neighbourhoods and the greater city. At the scale of the site itself, significant internal views are also present. Each viewshed therefore has different characteristics, in terms of elevation, width and distance from the White Bay Power Station that affect the extent to which each viewshed prohibits development. Each viewshed is explained in detail on the following pages.

**Minimum Deliverables**  
Provide a built form plan overlay with maximum RLs indicated onto the maximum above ground development envelope indicated at D01.

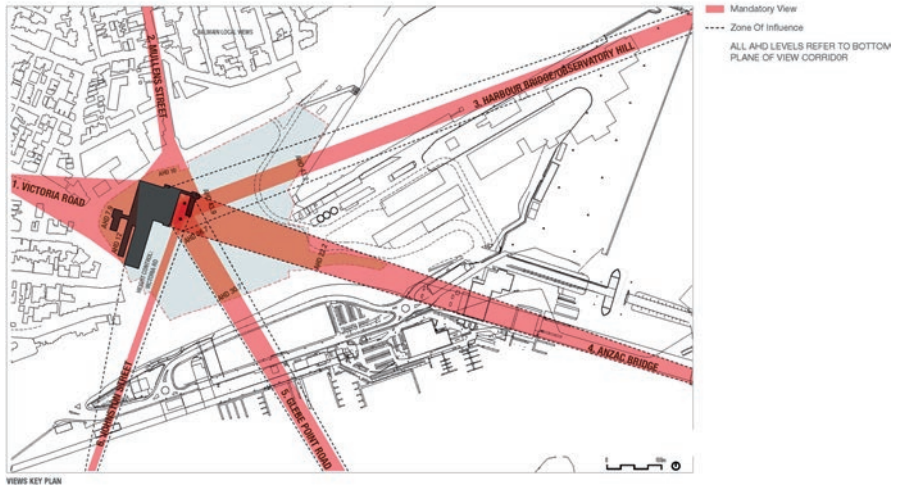


Fig. 5.8 White Bay power station urban design framework, viewsheds diagram. (image: Terroir)

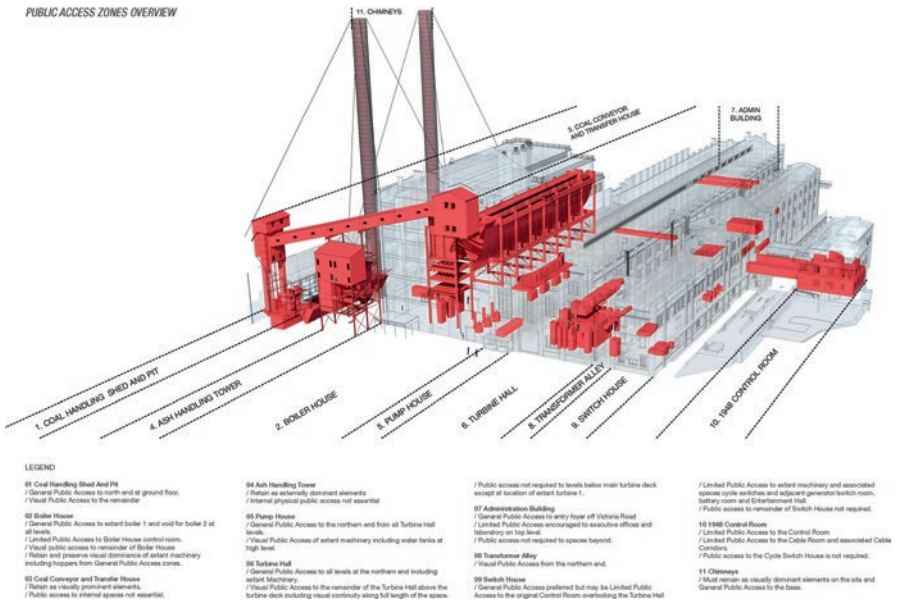


Fig. 5.9 White Bay power station urban design framework, heritage diagram. (image: Terroir)

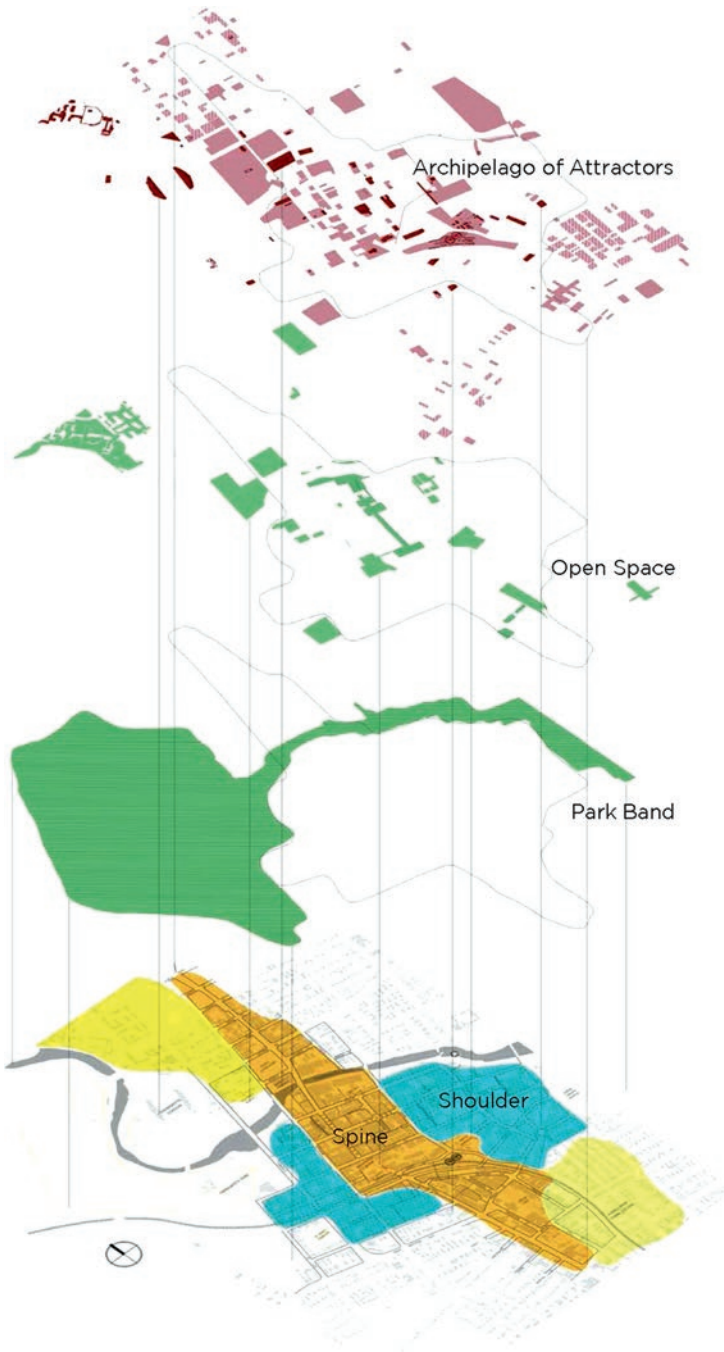


Fig. 5.10 Parramatta strategic framework, principles diagram. (image: Terroir)



**Fig. 5.11** Model of Parramatta strategic framework, principles diagram, exhibited at Seoul Biennale. (Model: Make Models; image: Kim Ohrstrom)

## 5.6 Conclusion

The argument has persisted in architecture that involvement in the market at any level is to operate without agency, given the all encompassing nature of the neo-liberal hegemony and the impossibility in this post-political era of impacting on it, its insistence on the unchallenged logic of capital and the uninterrupted flows of that capital. This argument still holds almost universally, given the focus of the spatial discipline (architecture) on the production of specific objects that can only reinforce the logic of the market.



Fig. 5.12 Current politics

In examining the multiple scales at which we organise ourself, the city has emerged as the optimum entity at which new forms of governance may form and which can exist with at least partial independence from national or transnational systems that have been demonstrated to have little agency in addressing major concerns. To intervene in these systems, the architectural profession must be rethought as a relational practice as opposed to the object-based practice which defines it currently and which has resulted in engagements with capital that have stripped the profession of agency.

The specific example of the Government Architect in Sydney, New South Wales provides one example of a possible future practice. The Government Architect exploits temporal and organizational gaps in precinct renewal processes and, through the relative independence of the position, can give advice that is free of the conflicts of interest that trouble architects operating through the market. In understanding the potential of architecture as a relational practice, the Government Architect focuses not on specific objects but the creation of platforms, controls and constraints that negotiate the multiple forces of the market, multiple government actors and greater city objectives and strategies. The result is a framework that remains open for private capital and their consultants but where key matters have already been addressed, thus limiting the opportunity for uninhibited development driven only by the logics of the market.

This role of Government Architect is yet to be theorized sufficiently in the debates regarding the future of the discipline of architecture and the profession that acts in its name, while the Strategic Frameworks produced in New South Wales are too recent to be fully evaluated in terms of their impact. However, early signs are promising given a range of decisions made recently in Sydney regarding controls on inappropriate development, allocation of cultural and community facilities and protection of the public domain as the direct result of these actors and the documents they produce.

What is possible is that in political and professional conditions, which have been abandoned theoretically as without agency in a post-political world, this example opens up a new front. The logics of governance and city scale, impact on the precinct scale, and a reconfigured understanding of the architect in these conditions (both in

terms of their relation to the state but also a focus on architecture itself as a relational practice) all deserve further exploration in the discourse around the development of our cities for a more just redistribution of resources, access, opportunities – the commons – that is so important if we are to insist on a more equitable society.

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