

BUSINESS/CULTURE

MARTIN KORNBERGER

We are swiftly moving at present from an era when business was our culture into an era when culture will be our business.¹

MARSHALL MCLUHAN

Whoever speaks of culture speaks of administration as well, whether it is his intention or not.²

ADORNO

URBAN/ISLAND

As Rem Koolhaas notes in his essay *Junkspace*,³ there is a new wave of oxymorons that transgress any old-fashioned concerns for incompatibility between concepts. The recently united oppositions include life/style, reality/TV, museum/store, food/court, waiting/lounge etc; the concept of urban/island might be one of the latest additions to this list of unlikely alliances. In fact, one might argue that urban islands are rather strange entities. Let me explain.

In his highly entertaining trilogy entitled *Spheres*⁴ the German philosopher Sloterdijk reconstructs history as an ongoing yet incessantly failing effort to create an 'inside' in which humans can survive. In this perspective culture is the creation of stories about places that are exclusively ours. From the biblical Arc Noah to

the omnipresent air conditioning, culture is an effort to create a more liveable, less hostile inside that protects us from a hostile outside. Globalisation is but the latest move in this game of creating an inside that no longer faces an exterior.

Given this ontological and epistemological condition, islands have always exercised a magical yet ambiguous power over our collective imagination. Think of Kant's description of our faculty of reason as an island in the stormy ocean of darkness and chaos.⁵ Think of Robinson Crusoe and his spiritual enlightenment that could only take place with maximum distance from the urban chaos⁶. Remember what Percy Bysshe Shelley said about London: "Hell is much like London, a populous and smoky city."⁷ In this and other stories, islands are utopias in which mankind is able to travel back to its destiny and unveils its reason d'être. Simultaneously such islands are a critique of those chaotic, all-including and transforming engine rooms called cities. In fact, cities become dangerous oceans themselves, as Balzac writes in *Pere Goriot* about Paris:

Paris is indeed an ocean. Sound it: you will never touch bottom. Survey it, report on it! However scrupulous your surveys and reports, however numerous and persistent the explorers of this sea may be, there will always remain virgin places, undiscovered caverns, flowers, pearls, monsters – there will always be something extraordinary, missed by the literary diver.⁸

In *The 100 Mile City*, Sudjic arrives a century later at the same conclusion:

The city is a complex organism, never entirely comfortable, always a place with its dark corners and suffering. But it is precisely that edge of danger and instability that makes the city such an extraordinarily powerful force. ... it is in its role as an engine for change that the city is most alive.⁹

The fact that cities are about intensity, about interference and about change makes them both a powerful force and a dangerous organism. Not surprisingly, the inhabitants of such 'virgin places,' 'undiscovered caverns,' 'flowers,' 'pearls,' and 'monsters' will find themselves transformed as well. Simmel speculated that the psychological basis of the metropolitan individuality consists in the

"...intensification of nervous stimulation,"¹⁰ turning the city dweller into a neurotic homo metropolis. The good news is that, beside other things, cultural production might be a function of this intensification of nervous stimulation. In their *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels are in praise of the bourgeoisie society and its cities that "rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life."¹¹ However, their optimism and praise for the bourgeoisie society's city policies was not always shared. For a long time in history it was not evident that cities would be a sustainable sphere for human habitation. As Louis Wirth put it, up until the 20th century cities had higher death rates than birth rates and were dependant on migration from the country.¹² Only relatively recently have cities become net producers, not net consumers of people. For Wirth, a city "is like poetry: it compresses all life, all races and breeds, into a small island and adds music and the accompaniment of internal engines."¹²

Cities have turned into islands themselves; but rather than offering a portal to a pre-societal, utopian order they are rhizomatic zones of maximum intensification. Hence, urban islands constitute a paradox: islands defy the intensity that distinguishes the urban. And almost by definition cities extinguish the solitude and the purity of an island. Cities are heterotopias; islands are utopias.

PRODUCTION/CONSUMPTION

Luhmann's systems theory tells us that a paradox is nothing other than a subtle hint that our trusted ways of connecting things and making sense of them might not work any more.¹³ The point we want to make is simple: urban islands must appear paradoxical if we conceptualise them as urban + island. Borrowing from Deleuze and Guattari we could argue that both concepts change when brought in proximity to each other.¹⁴ It's a story of becoming in which one part frees up particles of the other and changes them. Think of Kafka's transformations where humans become animals, but at the same time animals become human, creating something new, monstrous and unheard of.¹⁵ An urban island that moves beyond the admittedly boring paradox of utopia vs. heterotopia will have to do exactly this: create a new intensity, a new zone, an in-between in which elements of both collide in order to transform each other.

Cities are places of deterritorialization and exchange; intersections of streams of people, money and ideas; monsters that have turned from net consumer to net producer. As per definition, an island is what is not connected and where exchange is made impossible. We speculate that an urban island is a space in which both logics are intensified, cumulating in a simple yet compelling formula: production = consumption. What do we mean by that? The traditional division of labour between production and consumption is breaking down. People that were meant to passively consume suddenly turn into producers that author and edit their own realities. Linux makes you a programmer; ebay.com transforms you into an entrepreneurial selling-buying agent, etc. Behind these examples there is a new and powerful driving force: people become involved in the creation of value. This might well be the most important news for a while since it questions the established capitalistic idea that institutions produce and people consume.

In an intensified urban island scenario this tendency might be pushed even further. Our new economy mainly produces cultural goods, i.e. meaning, symbols and discourse. The point is that these 'products' only exist and in fact are created during the act of consuming. In fact, the act of consuming gives these cultural products meaning. Think of the value of a film, a book or a piece of design: it is only the act of consuming, reading, feeling, seeing, touching, interpreting it, that brings it alive and makes it valuable. Simultaneously, consumers create their identity through the very act of consuming. Historically, identities were defined through what people do and what they produce: you are a blacksmith, working class or a creative person. Today, identity is defined through what one consumes: I consume therefore I am. Our society is glued together by the individual choices one makes that constitute one as consumer and therefore member of our society.¹⁶ One's social status is defined through the levels of consumption one can maintain. In this context, consumption becomes inextricably intertwined with production; we are what we consume; and while we consume we engage in production.

This challenges the traditional view that cultural production has to happen outside the sphere of administration and business. Rather, we'd argue that cultural production and consumption become key economic drivers. As we have said with Adorno, "whoever speaks of culture speaks of administration as well, whether

it is his intention or not."¹⁷ Culture and administration, business and creativity, production and consumption might collapse into each other. As Adorno suggests, the commercial character of culture causes the difference between culture and practical life to disappear. Of course, 'commercial' means that everything is a currency that can be exchanged and consumed. When production = consumption everything becomes commercial. This also means that culture and business are no longer opposites. Le Corbusier was simply wrong when he complained: "Business! What a dilemma! If you try to please people, you become corrupt and sell yourself; if you do what you feel you must do, you cause displeasure and create a void around yourself."¹⁸ We would rather argue with Adorno that cultural production never happened outside of business or administration. Business is the very means by which a message is multiplied and a powerful effect can be created. In the context of an urban island, this would mean integrating business with cultural production as much as possible. This might be pushed to the point where the difference between both starts to blur and business becomes a form of expressing symbols and meanings. One could say that this is already happening: think of branding as a new universal system of signs that refer to each other, can be read by most people and that denotes nothing but itself. In this perspective, an urban island is an experiment; it's not a location but an event, an experience where intensity and connectivity are increased to a maximum.

Three final remarks follow. The collapse of business and culture might create a new and exciting aesthetic language. Umberto Eco suggested that there are two conflicting aesthetics – an aesthetic of provocation and one of consumption.¹⁹ We are not sure on which side this new experiment would occur. It might well be that it produces an aesthetic that is similar to the beauty of endless rows of suburban houses – something we are only able to understand when we see it in the safe environment of a gallery through the eyes of an Ed Ruscha painting.

Such an experience might also give rise to new experiences of who we are. Robert Park listed *reporter, bartender, stockbroker, shopgirl, police officer, etc* as "...characteristic products of the conditions of city life."²⁰ Urban islands might produce a different kind of personae – traders of cultural and symbolic capital; experience engineers; designers of systems and entire organizations; etc.

In his book *The Shape of Things: A Philosophy of Design*, Vilém Flusser argued that the modern human being isn't a homo faber but a homo ludens.²¹ Life is no longer a drama but a performance; it's about sensations, not actions; and programs have replaced things and problems. Speaking critically (again with Adorno), such a cultural industry is always in danger of breeding conformity and replacing conflict and debate with shock and sensation.

In any case, the new will always look monstrous as Derrida remarked.²² An urban island might be the perfect opportunity to start experimenting.

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, RE has undertaken a wide range of performances, installations and projects.
ork attempts to bring together many factors to trigger settings ('responsive
onments') that undergo continuous transfiguration. www.buildinglandscape.com
www.responsiveenvironment.com

CUTTINGS

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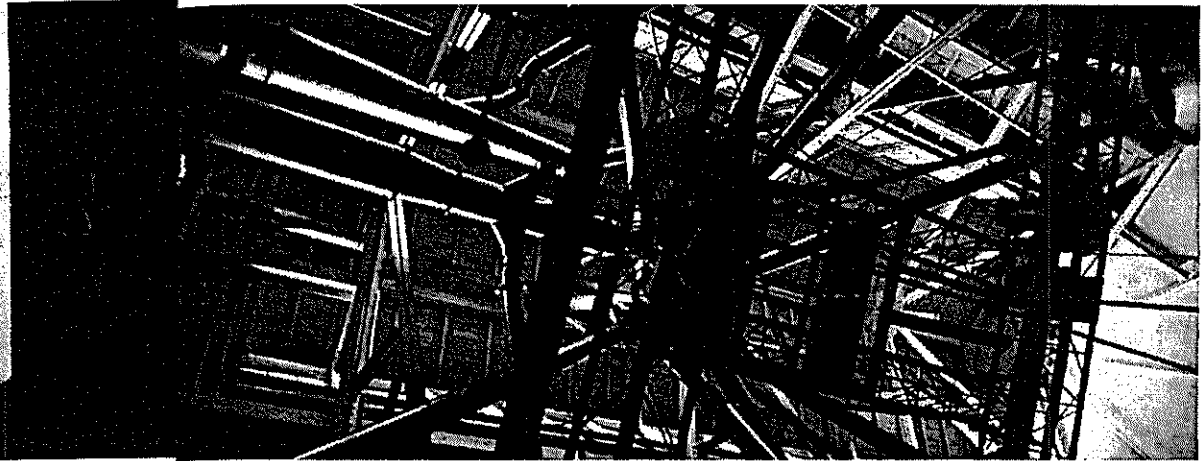
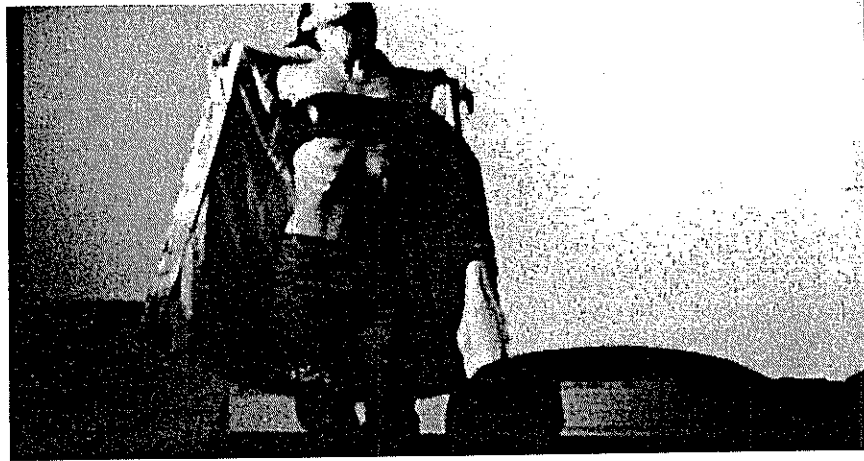
Shifting economies leave post-industrial cities with dormant sites that are physically and culturally vacant. These urban islands are simultaneously iconic ruins of the bygone industrial era, and idle infrastructures awaiting innovative modes of inhabitation.

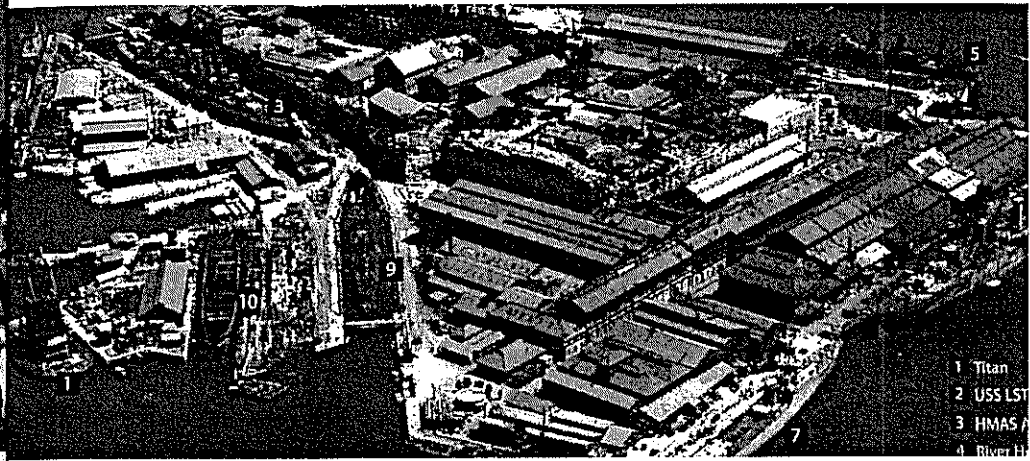
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JAKO

Urban Island (n):
a post industrial site devoid of program or inhabitants;
a blind spot in the contemporary city;
an iconic ruin;
dormant infrastructure awaiting cultural inhabitation.

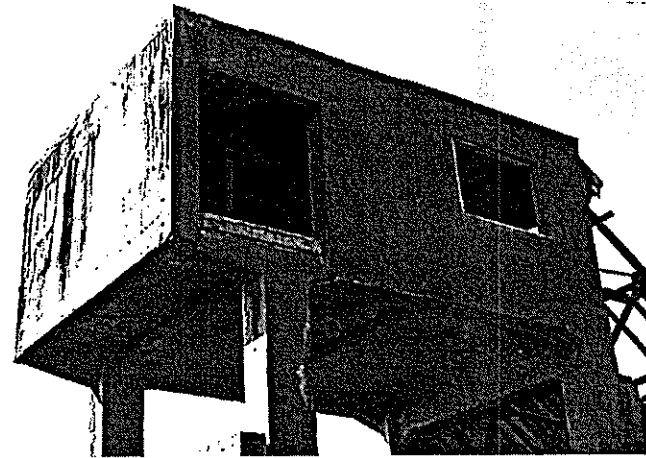
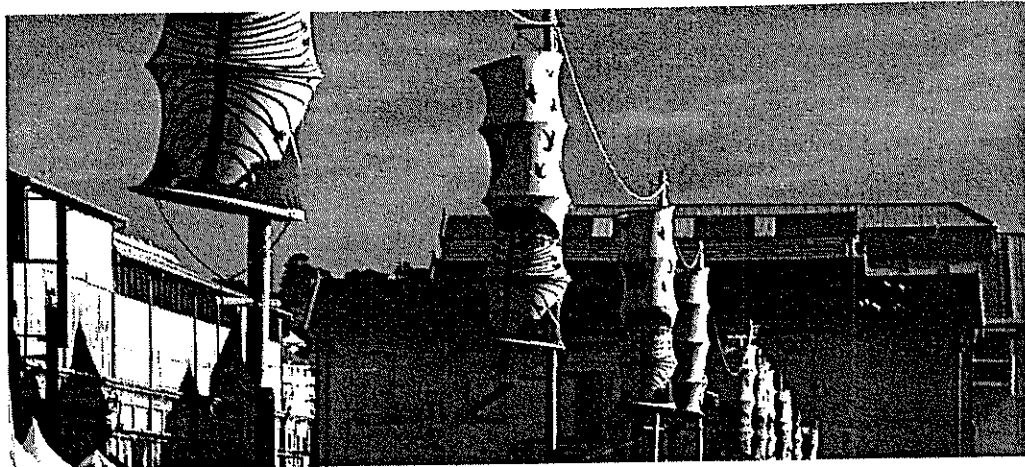


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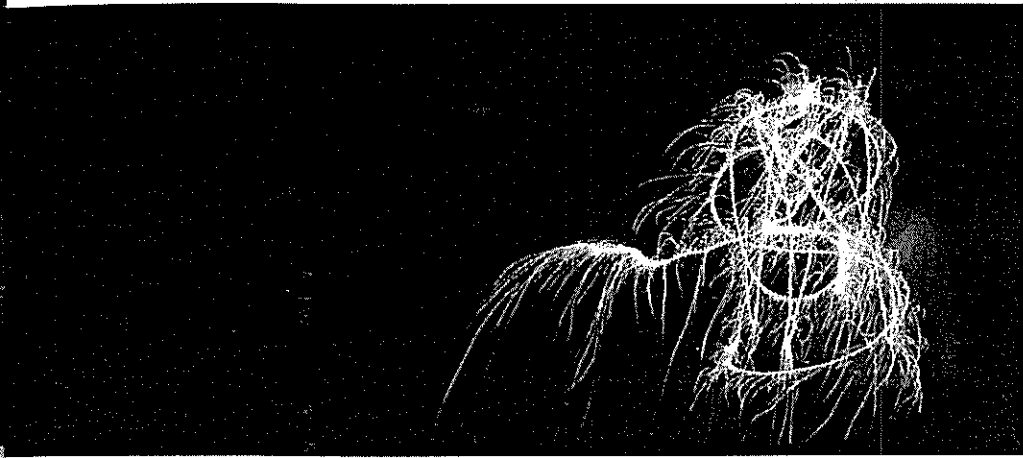
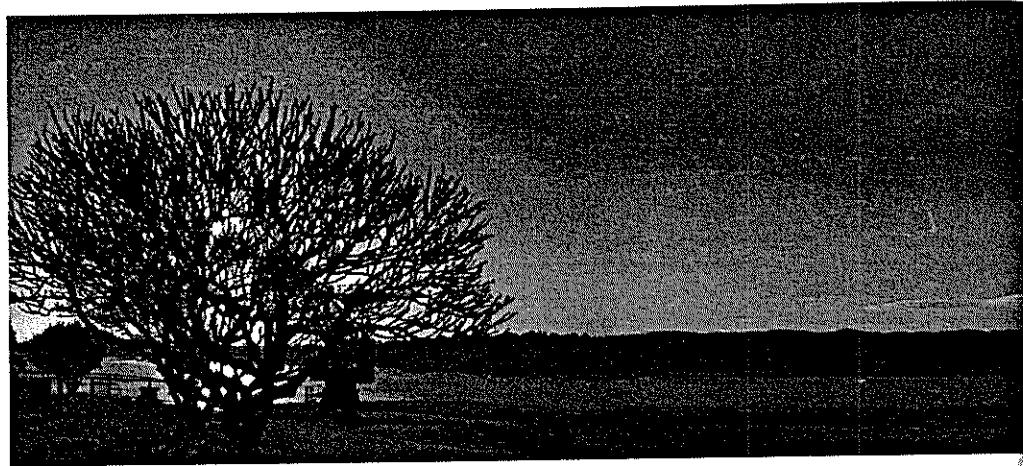




- 1 Titan
- 2 USS LST
- 3 HMAS
- 4 River H







URBAN ISLANDS vol 1 : *CUTTINGS*

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CUTTINGS
URBAN ISLANDS vol 1

EDITED BY JOANNE JAKOVICH



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PREFACE

Describing Cockatoo Island as a post-industrial site is a little like examining a Joseph Cornell box and not noticing its contents. Without taking the analogy too far, for many Cockatoo Island stands as an empty shell, an echoing reminder of old uses, whether as a convict prison or shipbuilding yard.

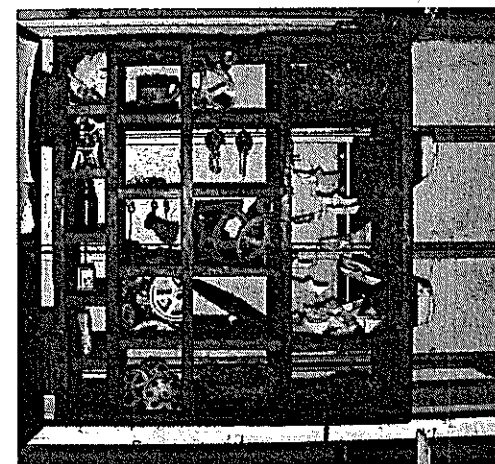
Take a look inside the box and your imagination takes flight.

Cockatoo Island is all the things described in the Trust's comprehensive plan: Sydney Harbour's largest island, formed by natural forces long ago, occupied by Aboriginal people for thousands of years and over the past two centuries dramatically adapted by the colonial masters of New South Wales and later the Commonwealth Government.

The history of the island is undoubtedly part of its attraction. A more potent force in imagining its future is the possibility of creating something truly unique.

What's the goal? Nothing less than a site as emblematic of the city as the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Opera House. Being an island in one of the world's great inhabited harbours is a good start. What else? Free public access is a must. So too an eclectic array of businesses from maritime operations to artists' studios to form the island's population base. And people, tours and events daily to sweep the aprons, docks and precincts with colour and life. Park benches. Camping. Night life. Stories. Noise.

The glue, however, is the indefinable, unorchestrated collaboration between what's there and what's in people's heads; the interplay between expectations and experience exceeding expectations. A day at work and a day full of surprises.



A SMALL BOX OF CURIOSITIES FOUND ON COCKATOO ISLAND SUGGESTS THE CREATIVE PASTIMES OF ITS SHIPPING WORKERS

The Trust's plan for Cockatoo Island refers to step by step re-occupation. This is simply good sense and wise management. There are limited resources with which to upgrade infrastructure and remediate the building stock. At the same time, there is scope for risk taking and trial and error; the opportunity to seed exciting initiatives in business and the arts; to explore partnerships with the city's cultural institutions; to think big and to think under the radar.

The research articles and design projects in this book consider how post-industrial sites may be used as templates for new ways of energising cities with cultural activity. The Urban Islands Project on Cockatoo Island is a pointer to the possibilities.

GEOFF BAILEY

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, SYDNEY HARBOUR FEDERATION TRUST

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INTRODUCTION

The world turns...and leaves a rusting, empty swing in the shadow of a smokestack.

Shifting economies have left the world's post-industrial cities with abandoned sites that are both functionally and culturally vacant. These brownfields are typically dislocated, contaminated, and often construed as a danger to be made safe or an economic burden to be made profitable. They exist within the urban fabric, though through disuse or disconnection, they exist distinct from that fabric.

They are Urban Islands.

In a climate of increasingly interconnected homogeneity, Urban Islands present new challenges and opportunities for the cities in which they exist. The unique conditions of these sites, relics from previous modes of production and distribution, demand responses that are more expansive and more flexible than conventional practices of urban redevelopment and regeneration.

Cockatoo Island, a contemporary ruin within the city of Sydney, is one such Urban Island requiring an innovative approach. Its formal complexity reveals its diverse uses over time: convict prison, girls' reformatory, city jail, boys' training facility, a naval and commercial shipbuilding site and, during these times, a work place of thousands of ship workers and administrators. Few sites in Australia have hosted such a diverse and intense range of functions as Cockatoo.

In addition to this heritage, surrounded by the waters of the Sydney Harbour, this place is geographically special - it is, after all, an *island*. Ominously, this

has made it an especially valuable piece of real estate, tagged with all the right commercial clichés: harbour views, water access, dress circle position, and more. In 1992, Cockatoo Island's industrial operations ceased and for some time its future was unclear - was there a viable alternative to sale for private development? Abandoned and derelict until now, the Island is under the stewardship of the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust, a Federal Government agency created in 2001 (after much public campaigning) to rehabilitate and make public a number of disused naval sites around the Sydney Harbour. The Trust is dedicated to injecting Cockatoo Island with ideas, events and uses that uphold and extend its inherent magic.

The inaugural Urban Islands Studio on Cockatoo Island was conceived with these strategies in mind: to mesh making and reflecting, performing and installing; to interact with the island's political, physical and ideological context, and to establish a continuity with the site and context outside the short life of the Design Studio. International guests from Costa Rica, Germany, Japan, Switzerland and the United States were invited to bring global knowledge and debate to this local context. Within the 12-day intensive studio period, participants were to inhabit the island, and within that time and space, develop real projects there. As it emerged, Cockatoo Island was an ideal host for a model of trial and error: interventions were immediate and the outcomes were impressive, low-impact and temporary. The diverse schemes produced were all at once possible and viable. Rather than a series of proposals for the same site, they were fragments, or cuttings, of a greater collage for inhabiting Cockatoo.

In parallel, we observed that the notion of *cutting* was a recurrent theme in Cockatoo's past, not only evident in its diverse functions, but also in its physical form. Its sandstone core is a sculptural record of the impact of each era on its shape, cut and hewn to over time according to the requirements of program.

Cockatoo, stripped of activity, appears like a stone vessel of sheer sided sandstone, with a low-lying almost water-level apron surrounding it. It is a place of cutting. Cutting down to form the dry docks lying nose to nose. Cutting down to form a battery of silos deep within the body of the stone.

Cutting through to form tunnels. Cutting to form slipways and housings for heavy machinery. Cutting down the sides of the natural contours to form cliffs, like fortress (or gaol) walls, and spilling out beyond its old high watermark to form its promenades.²

REFLECTIONS ON A MARITIME CITY

But beyond a formal quality, the collation of *cuttings of program* is a responsive strategy for inhabiting Urban Islands. This book brings together ideas, research and designs that assemble a confederation of cuttings for Urban Islands, with Cockatoo Island as the experimental subject.

The first Part of the book addresses urban islands as a typology of the post-industrial city, and the following two Parts address Cockatoo Island specifically.



Above: the crown, sheer-sided walls and apron of Cockatoo Island. By Richard Lepplatrier.¹

¹ Reflections on a Maritime City: An appreciation of the Trust lands on Sydney Harbour, published by Interim Sydney Harbour Federation Trust, 2000.

² www.urbanislands.info; Collaborations and proposals welcome.

All contributions are original research and represent an important step in developing academic and design discourse on Urban Islands in Sydney and around the globe. Part I presents theoretical approaches to conceiving new modes of planning, commerce and design for Urban Islands and urban dimensions of commerce and culture are reframed through themes of paradox, branding and 'soft' architecture. Part II presents theoretical and poetic reflections on the past and future of Cockatoo Island, portraying the complex state of intrigue that surrounds Cockatoo currently. Part III presents pedagogical critiques and design works from the Urban Islands Studio and situates the embedded urban studio as a model of urban intervention and social contribution.

One work that highlights the nature of the Urban Islands Studio is the temporary installation *Soft Inversions* that transformed the vast Turbine Hall on Cockatoo Island into a kaleidoscope of refracted light, sound and animated structures. Its immersive, ephemeral experience was just the first flickering of many such temporary 'cuttings', intended to bring forth from this ruin a vibrant, animated Urban Island.

Beyond Cockatoo, the Urban Islands Project² is an innovative framework for dialogue, experimentation and participation in the remaking of cities. It is dedicated to exploring strategies of engagement with sites and cities across cultures and around the globe. From Mumbai to Tokyo, Bogotá to Berlin, Sydney to San Jose, Urban Islands collaborators are engaging with the conditions and contents of shifting cityscapes, facing the challenges of urbanism in an increasingly connected world.

Welcome to Urban Islands.

JOANNE JAKOVICH, OLIVIA HYDE & THOMAS RIVARD
URBAN ISLANDS PROJECT