



REVERSE

PROJECT  
IONS

# CONTEMPORARY SITE INVESTIGATIONS

## Campbell Drake

Synonymous with both historical and contemporary Melbourne, Flinders Street Station is nothing less than an icon of Melbourne's urban landscape. Acting as both a meeting and a transit point, Flinders Street Station sees over 100,000 people daily, firmly planting this *old dame* in the collective conscious of local Victorians. Built at the turn of the century and spanning over 4.7 hectares, the station has seen many eras and transformations. In recent years, following the debacle of privatising public transport, almost half the complex has been cordoned off and left to deteriorate. Amongst the disused spaces of historical significance are a gymnasium, a billiards room, a mailroom and a ballroom.

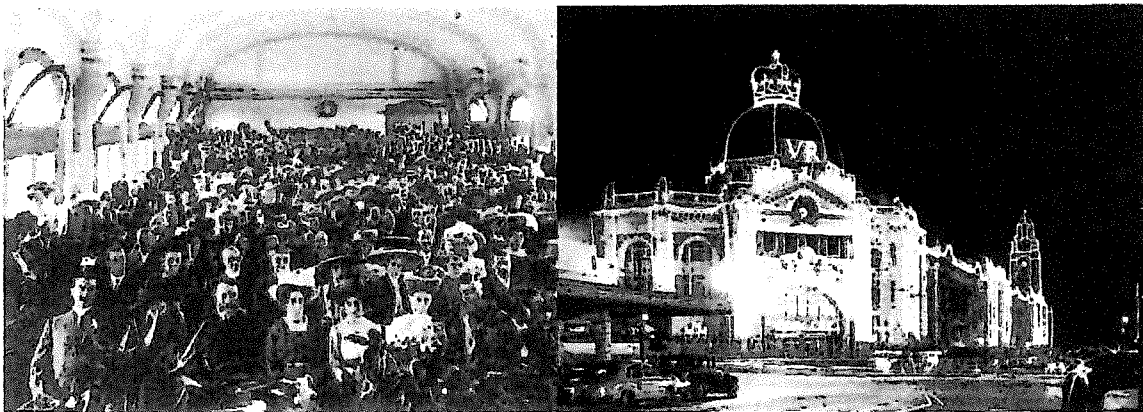


Fig. 1.  
Flinders Street  
Ballroom \_ VRI  
Members at the  
Official Opening

Fig. 2.  
Flinders Street  
Station 1954

In November 2011, the Victorian Premier Ted Baillieu announced an international design competition to "breathe new life into a Melbourne landmark" stating; "We are looking for the world's best ideas to restore and reinvigorate the Flinders Street Station precinct, including the station concourse, platforms and historic administration building." Placing the landmark station under the spotlight of renewed media, political and public attention brought about a timely opportunity with which to re-implement creative programming within the complex.

Seizing this timely opportunity, artists collective; *Contemporary Site Investigations* or CSI, were commissioned by the City of Melbourne Public Arts Program to create a series of site and situation specific investigations derived from and implemented into the fabric of Flinders Street Station.

Drawing on a diverse range of creative backgrounds, *Contemporary Site Investigations* include sculptors, architects, composers, musicians and video artists. Since 2007, CSI artists have collectively undertaken a series of contemporary art projects situated across a variety of sites, spaces and locations in and around Melbourne. Consistent to each of the projects is a mode of site responsive practise in which predetermined outcomes are suspended in preference of arts works and performances derived from and of the site.

*Contemporary Site Investigations : Flinders Street Station* kicked off in September 2012, with a five-week investigative residency. Each of the contributing artists gravitated to a specific room or space of interest in which to develop site and situation responsive works. Equipped with nothing but a loose working methodology which preferred a rendering of immaterial qualities by

Fig. 3.  
James Carey,  
Domestic  
Occupation, Fl  
Street Station  
Mailroom

means of reordering existing spatial conditions, CSI engaged with “the dynamic, hence temporal, nature of space”<sup>1</sup> suggesting “that spatial production must be understood as part of an evolving sequence, with no fixed start or finish, and that multiple actors contribute at various stages.”<sup>2</sup>

Due to occupational health and safety concerns of Metro officials, it was understood from the outset that the general public would not be granted access to off limits areas within the station complex. The task at hand became how to develop engaging public art works situated outside the public domain. Such a constraint within the context of a public art provoked careful consideration and collaborative debate in how to develop works that engage a diverse public audience without experiencing the works first hand.

A variety of questions emerged from within the apparent paradigm: how could Interiority become externalized? What is the performative potential of architecture within public art? How could a building be turned inside out? Harnessing the potential of such explicit contradictions, the CSI collective developed a strategy of multiple public outcomes or *Reverse Projections* in which the public could encounter the interior spaces without actually entering them.

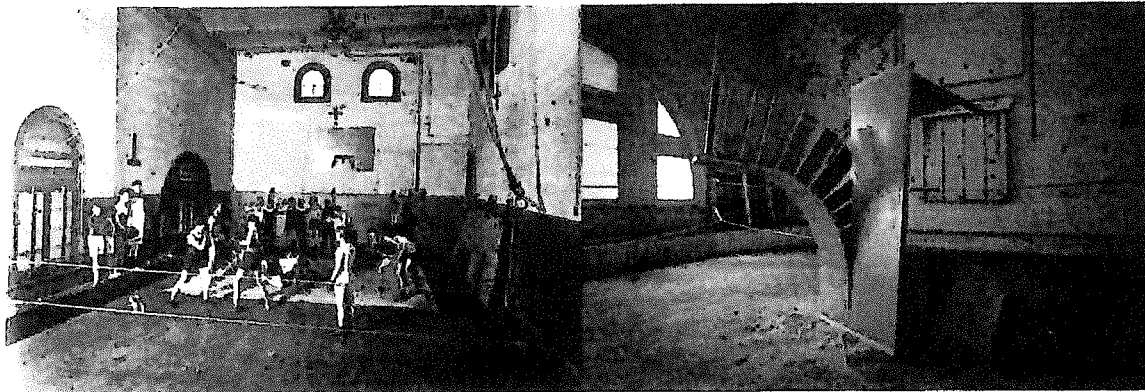
Setting up a base camp in the bottom of the clock tower, Cam Robbins developed a series of works through out the tower and surrounding rooftop. Working under the title of *Metronomic*, Robbins commenced with the upper most habitable floor, installing a high-powered light, transforming the tower into a beacon. Reminiscent of a lighthouse and immediately visible from the surrounding city, the revolving beam of light signaled the first creative occupation of the station in over 30 years.

Second to Robbins repertoire was the implementation of a wind drawing machine that “involves the interaction with natural forces and dynamic energies”. Installed on a landing outside the clock tower, the machine harnesses the shifting energy of the immediate environment, translated to paper by means of a series of interconnected sculptural arms.

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During the residency, Robbins discovered the clock mechanism within the tower was the loudest in Melbourne. Recording and amplifying the clock, Robbins invited Melbourne drumming icon Alan Brown for an impromptu performance that involved a salvaged bass drum from the former railway band, Robbins on Clarinet with the timing provided by the ticking clock tower at the heart of Melbourne.



Titled *From the Left Corner*, sculptor Robbie Rowlands chose to reactivate the former gymnasium. Finding the room full of discarded railway paraphernalia and office furniture, Rowlands first cleared the space and with the assistance of a historical photograph, reconstructed the boxing ring. Once reconstructed, Rowlands went about creating a series of performative sculptural interventions upon discarded furniture items reminiscent of bodies entwined in wrestling embrace.

Paired with the former mallroom, James Careys produced a large-scale intervention titled *Domestic Occupation*. Previous to Carey's intervention, the mallroom had been used as a storage facility for discarded items. Over 30 years, the room took on the appearance of a compulsive collector. Carey's process involved a painstaking categorization of all the discarded objects. Carey writes: "Through this practice, the room folds past histories into an ambiguous environment that reflects the reciprocal relations of originals and transformations, history as matter, and the artist as archaeologist of the present." Once cleared and catalogued, Carey proceeded to trace the immaterial qualities of the room, first light and then dust creating a series of dust paintings.

Of all the off limits spaces within Flinders Street Station, the ballroom draws an incomparable public fascination. Since its conception as a concert hall in 1910 this space has hosted lectures, meetings, drama, opera, orchestra and dance. Purpose built for performance, the ballroom contains a vaulted ceiling and double glazed windows providing excellent acoustic qualities in which musical investigation titled *Duration* took place.

Placing two grand pianos in amongst the peeling paint and crumbling plaster, pianists Elizabeth Drake, Caroline Almonte and Vanessa Tomlinson explored the spatial qualities of the ballroom through performances of Simeon ten Holt's *Canto Ostinato* and Steve Reich's *Plano Phase*. Broadcast live onto the platforms and the concourse via the station's Intercom, 'Duration' embodied the nature of Reverse Projection via means of projecting material and immaterial spatial qualities laden with historical context and acoustic specificity from the ballroom to the public areas of the station.

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Fig 8.  
Elizabeth D  
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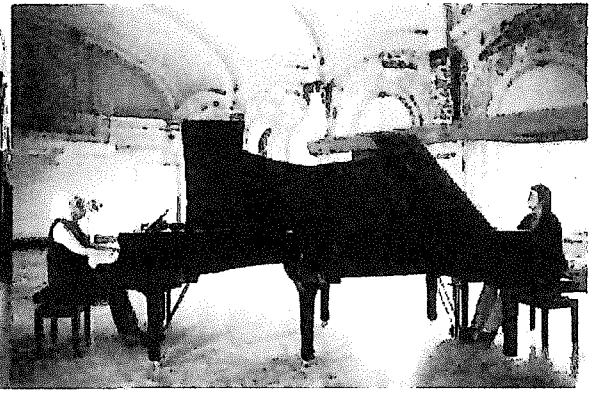
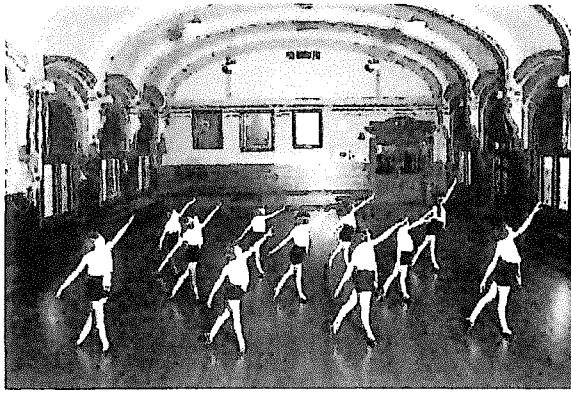
Fig. 5.  
Flinders Street  
Station Gymnasium

Fig. 6.  
Robbie Rowlands,  
From the Left  
Corner, Flinders St  
Station  
Gymnasium

Fig 9.  
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Extending upon the entangled spatial relations of history, architecture and the public, Campbell Drake's contribution was an attempt to render visible the connection between the past through the present. Locating an iconic 1964 photograph of a paperboy Michael Binney, Drake restaged the image 50 years later with Michael Binney once again centre stage on the Flinders Street Mall. Titled *Past and Present*, the recreation pays careful attention to all details captured in the photograph such as Michael's clothes and facial expression, his powder blue socks, his fist full of pennies, the quality of light and the woman's dress illuminated in the background.

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11.  
ell Drake,  
*Past and Present*,  
s Street  
1 Steps

*Contemporary Site Investigations*, Flinders Street Station, culminated on the evening of the 19th of October. Assembled on the steps of Flinders Street, paperboy Michael Binney and three boys including Michael's grandson, all dressed identically, handed out the CSI newspaper catalogue to passing commuters. Harnessing the potential of peak hour traffic, "the audience, previously conceived as a viewer or beholder, is now repositioned as a co-producer or participant."<sup>3</sup> Claire Bishop states, "participatory engagement tends to be expressed most forcefully in the live encounter between embodied actors in particular contexts."<sup>4</sup> Taking this context as the station, the actors as the paper boys and the public, *Past and Present* sought to produce what Henri Lefebvre refers to as a *moment* defined as "a fleeting, intensely euphoric sensation which appeared as a point of rupture which revealed the totality of possibilities of daily existence"<sup>5</sup> Within this fleeting moment, the historical reenactment of the paper boys sought to bring the past and future into focus with the present suggesting a temporal collapse of space and time.

Once the papers were distributed, attention focused across the street to the Federation Square screen. Projected live from the Ballroom, Elizabeth Drake and Caroline Almonte performed Simeon Ten Holts 90 minute performance of *Canto Ostinato*. Simultaneously broadcast live to web and via audio relay to the concourse and platforms, the visual proximity of Flinders Street Station adjacent to the screen, ensured a tangible connectivity to the *Reverse Projection* from the ballroom.

According to Claire Bishops writings on participatory art and the politics of spectatorship, "Collective projects are more difficult to market than works by individual artists, and less likely to be 'works' than a fragmented array of social events, publications or performances."<sup>6</sup> CSI\_Flinders St Station celebrates the potential of such cohesive fragmentation, suggesting the value of collective practice is reliant on the discursive potential between the works in combination with the multiple outcomes realised through reverse projection of video, publication, lighting installation, sound and historical re-enactment.

Whilst temporal, the site and situation responsive artworks and performances produced during CSI's occupation suggest artworks produced in heritage and redundant spaces can have long lasting affects, as these projects operate on collective memory in tandem with the built environment. In the fleeting space between building and renewal, these interventions establish new relationships between the public and the urban fabric allowing for direct public input and influence upon the art works and performances that are produced.

*Contemporary Site Investigations Flinders Street Station* combines the performative potential of 'hidden spaces' with contemporary art practice with the aim of placing "pressure on conventional modes of artistic production and consumption."<sup>7</sup> Situated at the centre of the project is an iconic public building suggesting the impact and value of such projects is tied to the performativity of architecture to reveal moments of social, cultural and political significance.

"Conceived less as an individual producer of discrete objects than as a collaborator and producer of situations,"<sup>8</sup> *Contemporary Site Investigations* operate within a mode of public art that seeks to move beyond traditional expectations of object/spectator relations, in which the public are encouraged to explore and make newfound connections between the existing architectural environment, the site specific investigations and between the public themselves.