

editorial / ANDREW DOUGLAS

The turn of beginnings

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Fig. 1 Albrecht Dürer (circa 1496). Man with an auger [Drawing, Musée Bonnat, Bayonne, Wikimedia Commons]

This issue of *Interstices*, having adjourned specific thematic guidance for the first time since 1990, assembles about an open call. Yet attending, if not constraining this opening, we suggested an auxiliary or piloting prompt—*return to origin*. Like all *auxilia*, it sought to “aid, help, support”—in this case, the thinking of possible contributors (Auxiliary, n.d.). We hoped that thinking *return* and *origin* might offer a point of dehiscence in an otherwise open contributory field, indeed a means of opening productively the ‘open’ itself. If augmenting mechanisms, for which dehiscence (particularly in its botanical sense) can be thought emblematic, ambition a certain acceleration and surity in fertility or growth, they no doubt resonate etymologically with the older term *augere*—an *augur* being, in the context of ancient Rome, the dispenser of ritual and the interpreter of omen associated with events at their inception or origin, whether that be in the planting of crops or in the founding of cities (Dehiscence & Augur, n.d.). The augur wills prosperity by listening and looking in on the original murmur and lie of things, and then interjecting a catalysing break that sets up everything that comes to be as *after*. Arjun Appadurai, thinking about the role of inaugurating ritual in the context of a society’s ongoing commitment to the mitigation of risk and contingency, emphasises its “retro-performative” action in which *wholes* are established after the fact out of *dividual*, ready-to-hand parts or facets (2016: 116). As an anxiety-diffusing action, the “backwardation” of ritual must necessarily manage the inherent instability of the dividual components it calls on in the production of determinant social wholes—hence the need for a repeated turn to beginnings (116).

A homophone with different etymological affiliation and meaning, the term *auger* offers a further way into this issue’s *auxilium*: to the extent that the term names a device for hole boring—particularly a hole for the hub of a wheel—it foregrounds an agency that lies with a particular type of turning. The spiral screw of the auger, in fact, enacts a resting turn that voids or subtracts by passing an opening through or into. In contrast to the centrifugal character of *augere*—its expanding, productivist motivation—the tooling effect of the auger is to centre, literally to spear or pierce into the wheel a nave or passage suitable for a restraining axle (Nave, n.d.). Implicated in this notion of centrality is of course the word *navel* and, with it, the umbilicus that draws on the Greek term *omphalos*—a



Fig. 2 Anonymous (n.d.). Augur
[Engraving, Nordisk familjebok
PNG—2005, Wikimedia commons]

world-turning navel as Zeus in Greek mythology is said to have enacted at Delphi in his appropriation of chthonic forces from on high (Vernant, 2006: 179, Leatherbarrow, 2004: 124).

The call in this issue, opened in accordance with a *return to origin*, carries then a complex range of orientating possibilities. As editors, we were concerned to instigate, too, a reorientation or return to an earlier cluster of motivations founding *Interstices* itself—a principal one being the publication of student works (see Jenner, 1990: 2). “The Spaces Between”, as *Interstices*’ first introduction titled itself, saw in the intersecting of academic and professional practices a reorientation of architectural thought, one that would eschew the overly prevalent commercial justifications in favour of an undertaking that would risk, in the context of an absence of “centre and origin” in architecture generally—and with scarcely an architecture culture locally—“speaking into the void” (2). The gap or interstices between things and ideas offered, as Hubert Damisch was said to have observed in Viollet-le-Duc, a protean “space between” the matter and form of architecture where ‘truth’ and its styles of appearing might arise (2).

Rising up, out of the in-between, is a gesture that draws close to the work of both *augere* and the auger. As Tom Conley suggests in relation to cartographic practices emerging in the European Renaissance, origination finds a potent marker in the protuberance/void that is the human navel, being as it is an anatomical and analogical figure for corporeal beginnings, of centering, of maternal loss, and appropriative self-making or auto-inauguration (1996: 9). As covered “blind alley”, “one-eyed hole”, or “anti-abyss”, it marks before and after—a time-before-(self)knowing, but also the point from which a cardinalization or relational

orientation of the subject becomes imaginable (9-10). No less, it leaves traces of maternal hospitality and its absolute hosting—a hosting which, while irrevocably departed from, persists as a site for return that ultimately leaves the question of origin as such unthinkable.

Reviewed papers

Simon Weir, in the essay, “On the Origin of the architect: Architects and *xenia* in the ancient Greek theatre”, not coincidentally locates the origins of early Greek understandings of the architect in the demands for hosting and hospitality, associated particularly with religious festivities. As he argues, the term *xenia*—complexly drawing together entities as diverse as “host, donor, guest, friend, stranger, mercenary, and simply man”—exceeds any simple English equivalent; yet it is key to a cluster of material and ethical factors accompanying the emerging role of the architect (p. 10). To the extent that hosting is inseparable from a making space for strangers, and from the structures that shelter such spaces, architects were held to guide and lead groups towards the common good, to select sites for the sanctuary and placement of guests, and materialise these places publically, not just privately.

Sean Pickersgill’s contribution titled, “*Super Architects* and dream factories”, proposes that origins be understood as a point of not yet realised complexity, and that a will towards world-making in graduating architecture students—particularly as exhibited on the website *Super Architects*—presents a notable form of origin myth for contemporary architectural practice. While the heterogeneous profusion of worlds brought into being by graduating students in culminating studio/thesis projects may demonstrate motivations other than work-ready ones for some, Pickersgill suggests that they might better be understood as extending a tradition of the *Grande rhétorique* in architecture—of which the French Beaux Art system of architectural education is but one strand. On the other hand, a mobilisation of these projects today via sites like *Super Architects* points to a new democratisation of an old motivation, “an experimental relationship to orthodox practice” (p. 18). Considering the utopian underpinnings of such experimentation, the paper proposes an initial schematization of the facets exhibited by such countering projects.

Sarah Treadwell, in “Working with Cixous: The cleaner’s grey drawings”, brings together a series of “drawn paintings” and “word pictures” that meditate on the labour of domestic cleaning (p. 32). Reminiscing on acts of house cleaning via the words of Hélène Cixous, the paper captures the complex folding of past and future that arise when looking back on beginnings. Concomitantly, the paper charts little-considered acts and persons that sustain home and homeliness: drawing, as prop and prompt that drops away in the effecting of architecture, but also cleaners, as in-between occupants who maintain and sustain, without full admittance into home life as such. Extending Cixous’ question asking “what is a painter?”, and the answer that she/he is a “bird-catcher of instances”, Treadwell posits the cleaner herself as a painter, whose surface attentions to interior residues effects a parallel productive economy of attention (p. 38). Drawings, in sequence with the writing, build out of swabs and rubbings spanning the range between the abject and the affectionate.

Jeremy Treadwell’s paper, titled “The rua whetu joint: Detail in origin”, notes a

tendency to counter the uncertainty of contemporaneity by pursuing questions of origin given historically—a phenomenon consistent with Appadurai’s consideration of *backwardation*. His paper proposes a variant route—an engagement with an architectural detail that carries with it a macro-scale and cosmological significance. Considering the shifting nature of the junction between the poupou (wall posts) and the heke (rafters) of wharenuī (large, nineteenth-century Māori meeting houses), a noteworthy convergence of technical and cultural elements is shown to evolve with what is known as the waha paepae and rua whetu joints. More complex geometrically than the Western mortise and tenon correlate, these joints are pivotal in forming the interior volume of the wharenuī, itself a cosmological modelling of mythological and ancestral origins. The paper tracks the implications of a generalised shift towards the rua whetu joint, in line with both the cultural need for housing larger gatherings and the technical demand for the integrity of large structural elements.

In the final paper of the reviewed section, Ashley Mason’s “Craters: Between cleared and constructed, between absent and present” an aerial photograph by J. R. Eyerman of a meteor crater in Arizona (said to have informed the editors or curators of the 1953 London exhibition titled “Parallel of Life and Art”) is drawn into a larger conversation about presence and absence opened up by the site of the exhibition and its place in the bomb-damaged city. Drawing out implications of absence (or clearing) and presence (or construction), the paper mediates on the placement of what is marginal in traces or what amounts to the presence of absences. Navel-like, the crater’s evidencing of a presenced absence and an absent presencing offers, as Mason concludes, a mixed and mixing figure for all inquiry into acts of siting.

Invited contribution

2016, a terribly tumultuous year in multiple ways, was further saddened by the unexpected death of architect, educator, and contributor to *Interstices*, Rewi Thompson. As colleagues and friends, Ross Jenner and Patrick Clifford offer review and reflection on Rewi’s contributions to architecture, education, and life.

Reviewed postgraduate creative design research projects

In this issue, we launch a new peer-reviewed section—the design research of recently completed postgraduate students. In calling for such projects, we offered the same open prompt from which the reviewed papers were selected. To better showcase the collaboration between researchers and their supervisors, submitters were asked to include with their project documentation a synopsis of the research framework and agenda coauthored with a principal supervisor.

Of the four projects featured in this issue, the first is by Rachel Sari-Dewi Murray (with Sam Kebell from Victoria University of Wellington), titled “Wetland square, market pier: Designing for heritage in the New Zealand regional landscape”. The project embodies the notion of return by reasserting the significance, and the collective urban potential, of indigenous wetland and swamp forests, the vast majority of which have been lost in Aotearoa/New Zealand due to agricultural and town reclamation. Working with a site in the Kāpiti Coast District, north of the capital Wellington, the project entails the reconstitution of a threatened

wetland into a new town square and a market pier. Conceived as an archetype for alternative wetland sites, the speculative proposal reasserts indigenous waterway networks and travel routes, ecological resilience, landscape heritage, and colonial settlement forms, all in a quest to rethink the European town square and its societal focusing. The project is remarkable for its nesting of detailed concerns and site specificity within ever-larger scales of critical significance and connection.

The second featured project, Penelope Forlano's "Resurfacing Memories: Mnemonic and tactile representations of family history in the making of new heirlooms" (undertaken with the assistance of Dianne Smith of Curtin University) tracks temporal return at a different scale and with more intimate materials. Depicting a furniture project—a hallway cabinet titled "The Unforgotten"—the project pursues an ecology of persistence by considering the role and nature of heirloom significance and "person-object custodial relations". Wondering how intergenerational attachment might register with furniture in the age of short-term products, Forlano's hallway cabinet draws in (in the sense of containing), and draws from (in the sense of signifying), maternally poignant materials bequeathed by the client's mother—silk lace embroidery, hand-written poetry, newspaper cuttings, and hand-drawn diagrams of embroidery never completed. As both store and signaller of these artefacts, the hallway cabinet itself is shaped and impressed materially with aspects of these artefacts, thereby becoming a salient, invested thing that spans generations and the time in-between, but, critically also, time to come.

Grace Mills', "A new agora: A project(ion) on the sub-centre" (also undertaken with Sam Kebell from Victoria University of Wellington) is the third project in this section. Begun in late 2011, this project addresses the then particularly urgent question of Christchurch's reconfiguration after the earthquakes of 2010 and 2011. With much of the central city damaged and uninhabitable, Mill's project asks, counter to an official will to focus a rebuild on the centre, what can be made of Christchurch's latent polycentrism? Focusing on one sub-centre—the suburb of Sumner—it enacts a two-pronged doubling back on settlement origins: the first being a little-used sports field that had initially been identified, though not enacted, as a central village green for the nineteenth century's community being established there; the second, the festive and trading public communal hearth in Ancient Greece—the agora. Bridging these divergent social forums, the project tests and inserts a series of commonplace forms of public/landscape architecture typical of postcolonial Aotearoa/New Zealand—the sports grandstand and the park pavilion. Exploring the potential synthesis of these forms, and their transformation in response to a raft of intensified programmatic possibilities, the project generates an extraordinary energized public urban architecture, sufficient, Mills hopes, to seed a new Christchurch polycentrism, and to assist architecture with a means back into an essential conversation about the urban possibilities of cities.

The final project in this section is Yasser Megahed's, "Practiceopolis: Journeys through the contemporary architecture field" (with Adam Sharr and Graham Farmer of Newcastle University, UK). In this exceptionally ambitious project, Megahed undertakes nothing less than a map of the entirety of contemporary architecture practice and its affiliations with the building industry. Figured first as a metropolis and then pictured in a broader geopolitical terrain, the project

transports both satirical and idealising wills. As an imaginary city—complete with places and institutions indicative of narratives of practice—centred on the island of Constructopolis, and represented mostly, though not entirely, in overview, it ambitions a complete placement and fixing of professional relations, but also the comic shifting of those relations into urban form—perhaps something like the “concept city” Michel de Certeau (1988) writes of when thinking of cities seen from on high, or what Thomas More conceived of as the in-between, no-place of *Utopia*. Critical to the project as Megahed writes, is the production of a “critical instrumental approach” capable of picturing the “incompatibilities and collisions between technical-rational culture and critical culture” (p. 100). Key with this critical instrumentation is seeing and valuing practices as diversely exhibiting political values irreducible to the technical-rational remaking of culture.

Reviews

A series of reviews draws this issue to a close: Mark Southcombe on Julia Gatley and Paul Walker’s *Vertical living: The architectural centre and the remaking of Wellington* (2014); Michael Milojevic on Mirjana Lozanovska’s *Ethno-Architecture and the politics of migration* (2016); Sarah Treadwell on Mark Dorrian’s *Writing on the image: Architecture, the city and the politics of representation* (2015); and, lastly, Michael Davis on Peggy Deamer’s edited book, *The architect as worker: Immaterial labor, the creative class and the politics of design* (2015).

Overall this issue captures the ranging thoughts of designers, writers, and thinkers opening onto an augmenting call to return to origins—a return, like an auger’s screw, that turns upon itself without ever meeting itself in closure. The vacancy of the auger’s extraction, like the tremulous future-proofing wrestled by augurs from the contingent circumstances of beginnings, and their retro-performative reassertion, suggests something of the unfinishable constructions we assemble over the interminable turn of beginnings.

Lastly, the editors dedicate this issue to Bruce Mitchell Petry whose abrupt and sad departure punctuated its production.



Fig. 3 Sue Gallagher (2016). Bent Auger [Silver jewellery, photo by Cornelius Geraets]

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