

# **para architectures**

An Investigation of Contemporary Urban Dwelling

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Diplom Ingenieurs

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## ABSTRACT

My Thesis, titled 'Para-Architectures' explores how urban forms of contemporary dwelling inform being.

Non-instituted spaces are scarce in modern cities, spaces where citizens can experience unique encounters. Para-architecture, architecture that lays beside or beyond architecture, offers places in spaces that have been declared without potential, use or relevance to the city. Through the use of para-architectural prototypes this project seeks to study the non-instituted architectural dwellings urban users seek to encounter- and why. As such it recognises the urban dweller as a pivotal agent in the organisation and construction of place.

By means of four case studies this investigation will give insight to how each of the cases has informed each other and how they affected my practices.



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## INTRODUCTION

"Places are spaces that you can remember, that you can care about and make a part of your life. Much of what is built now is too tepid to be remembered. The spaces with which we are surrounded are so seldom memorable that they mean little to us."

Charles W. Moore, *Donlyn Lyndon: Chambers for a Memory Palace*



## MY PARA-ARCHITECTURAL PRINCIPLES

Firstly seek spaces you can't find yet.

2. Respect the history of a place.
3. Always build inside the borders of public property and your project will last at least three weeks of council meetings.
4. Design your installation well so it can be removed without damage to the site. Make it sometimes hard to remove though, it can't be that easy.
5. Make sure your installation is constructed well, but don't make it too safe. Handrails are boring!
6. Allow people to communicate with you. What's nicer than a city of places that you can actually talk with?
7. Enjoy if people change and reinvent the installation. There is nothing better than giving the piece a life of its own.
8. Document your work well so we can learn from it.
9. Get a neighbour involved and the project will be a success.
10. Don't show your identity; it makes things a lot more theirs. Why? Because they found it!
11. Choose materials that relate to the place, it will be a surprise.
12. When installing, dress up like a local worker and you will have plenty of time to finish your installation.
13. Installing is not enough, it does need maintenance.
14. Don't be disappointed if it gets removed, that's part of the game.
15. Never make 10 Points; make at least 15. This is not a bible.....15

# PARA ARCHITECTURE

## An Investigation of Contemporary Urban Dwelling

The contemporary megalopolis, identified by mass, speed, technology, consumption and transformation, offers its polis a regulated and instituted urban environment in which to work, reside, shop, study and enjoy entertainment. All the larger cities of the world assure occupants national or state museums, hospitals, libraries, schools, stadiums and sports clubs, parks and gardens, infrastructure and services, monuments and council buildings, churches, markets, stores and manufacturers. They also assure streets and passageways, transport and security, toilets and mobile communications, burial sites, child care, recreation and entertainment. Such things are the necessary ingredients for a location to be considered a "city" where trade, innovation, resources and skills are concentrated, regulated and accessible. Urban planning manages, coordinates and designs all these in such a way that business, traffic, pollution, property, government, population and security can be best preserved and developed. However, amongst these designed and designated sites, or rather between and beside them, exist stadion; "an intervening space or interval."<sup>1</sup> Stadion, in Latin a spatium, is a distance between places, areas that are not defined as sites of specificity. Such spaces become transient sites, momentary places, whose presencing is determined in the moment and manner by which an urban dweller occupies them. Stadion are, in effect, the unregulated and uninstituted blind-spots of the contemporary megalopolis; they are lost or missing spaces on the city map of destinations and attractions. It is to these stadion within the contemporary urban fabric that this project turns. According to Heidegger "ich bin, du bist means: I dwell, you dwell,"<sup>2</sup> through the etymology of bauen.

"To build", for Heidegger, means "being" in a certain place, "dwelling" in and amongst things. "The manner in which we dwell is the manner in which we are, we exist, on the face of the earth - as an extension of our identity, of who we are."<sup>3</sup>

If dwelling relates to how and who we are, our "being-in-the world", then problems with dwelling should also be considered problems with building. For Heidegger this meant a careful analysis of sites and styles of dwelling, and those that are not typical dwelling places, for example "bridges and hangars, stadiums and power stations..., railway stations and highways, dams and market halls."<sup>4</sup> But he continues with the recognition that a "truck driver is at home on the highway", "the working woman is at home in the spinning mill"; who we are, including our occupations, relationships, our roles and responsibilities, all contribute to direct our 'dwelling'. The spaces and places we inhabit and comport ourselves to are accomplices to who we are both as individuals within society and as members of a community. The instituted and regulated places organised by urban planning have the power to arrange our instituted and regulated 'dwelling' ("being"); stadium are the spaces that have the power to bestow individualised 'dwelling', dwelling that in its temporary, fleeting and ephemeral nature supports the necessary semblance of independence.

It is therefore important to architecture, in any attempt to understand the contemporary dweller, to consider and reconsider the spaces we inhabit, build and dwell in within the contemporary urban environment. And it would seem particularly important to research urban stadion for their growing influence, intrigue and occupation point to an architectural critique of contemporary building, dwelling and thinking.

One such study is currently underway conducted by a number of autonomous researchers around the world and is titled Post-It City.<sup>5</sup> Their thesis involves the use of "numerous para-architectural artefacts, for they enable reflection on urban experience".<sup>6</sup> For Giovanni la Varra, the man who coined the 'Post-It City', the interest is in alternatives to traditional and official uses of public space that somehow facilitate non-conventional relations between citizens. So far the posts have been urban interventions, photographic or video graphic exposures, essays, market stalls, tents, and lighting features.<sup>7</sup>

This study deviates from these projects in one main respect; it seeks to understand the fundamental and necessary connection between contemporary dwelling and the urban fascination for these para-architectures and the spaces that host them, stadion. As such it recognises the urban dweller as a pivotal agent in the organisation and construction of place.

Para-architectures lay beside or beyond architecture; they inhabit public spaces and are often transient.

The para-architectures that are found in stadion, unlike the more common structures that interest Giovanni la Varra, are limited for they do not include vendor stalls, markets or tents.

The para-architectures that exist temporarily in stadion are not for profit, they're not bill boards to advertise or display anything, and they tend not to be obviously functional such that one might remove them for personal use. Para-architectures found in stadion might best be considered architectural graffiti.

They are situated within the (in)visible spaces of our cities, spaces that are not recognised by citizens for their value until the para-architecture is in place.

And they often conform to similar modes of erection, voice and critique as graffiti. Or, as Banksy professes in his work: "We can't do anything to change the world until capitalism crumbles. In the meantime we should all go shopping to console ourselves."<sup>8</sup> Stadion offer the architectural arts sites to engage and participate in a dialogue with individuals beyond or beside instituted and regulated states of 'being'.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Heidegger: Poetry, Language, Thought. Building, Dwelling, Thinking, New York 1975 (p.155)

<sup>2</sup> ibid ( p.147)

<sup>3</sup> <http://culturalstudiesnow.blogspot.com/2011/05/martin-heidegger-building-dwelling.html> (viewed 20.05.2011)

<sup>4</sup> Heidegger 1975 (p.145)

<sup>5</sup> See this article about the phenomenon 'Post-It City'  
Giovanni de la Varra: Mutations, Barcelona 2001 (p.427-431)

<sup>6</sup> Post it City: Online: <http://www.ciutatsocasionals.net/englishEXPOCOWEB/homepage.htm> (viewed 21.07.2011)

<sup>7</sup> See 'Post-It City': Archive Projects. Online: <http://www.ciutatsocasionals.net/englishEXPOCOWEB/proyectos.htm> (viewed 21.07.2011)

<sup>8</sup> Banksy, Wall and Piece, London 2006 (p. 204)

## AN APPROPRIATE CITY TO STAGE THIS INVESTIGATION: Melbourne, Australia

Melbourne is Australia's second largest city with over 4 million inhabitants; almost 100,000 of them live within the city municipality and over four times as many enter the central business district to work there. As far as being a large contemporary Western city, Melbourne fulfils a number of normalising statistics. It enjoys a moderate population density of 1566 people per square kilometre, unlike cities in China, Indonesia and India. It has a good standard of living, being ranked 18th in the world (Vienna is ranked 1st ), has good standing for longevity of its populace (ranked 5th, Austria is ranked 16th), and provides good education (ranked 6th in the PISA study). It is a model Western democratic city but Melbourne also offers something exceptional to this project. It is a city with a history of para-architectural prototypes, prototypes that have become archetypes and they remain visible within the urban fabric.

Melbourne was settled in 1835 but officially founded two years later with the establishment of Robert Hoddle's city grid. The grid quickly imposed a standardisation to the area and welcomed developments in traffic, trade and population increases; it still serves the city today. Governor Gipps, in charge at the time, required allotments he could sell quickly but he made no concessions for public squares or parks as he was "convinced that they only encouraged democracy."<sup>1</sup> The grid, with its large streets and generous blocks, does not reveal the second dimension to Melbourne's passages, passages that grew out of necessity between the allotments. Although Melbourne's face may be found on the planned boulevards with their shopping strips, municipal buildings, theatres, cafes, university and libraries all kept clean and maintained, the cultural heart of Melbourne can only be found in its "unplanned"<sup>2</sup> lanes.



Although some of the lanes have disappeared during Melbourne's maturity into a megacity the identity and character of Melbourne is built on lanes, smaller transitory spaces that are sites for major street art, small bars, artist studios and galleries. From this approach Melbourne has produced two cities, an instituted and a non-instituted one. Some lanes are entirely covered with street art, others have lanes branching off them with odd bars as their anchors. Some lanes have become tourist destinations in themselves, and others still maintain their rough character. Melbourne is one of the rare gridded cities that have evolved with organic input from its citizens.

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<sup>1</sup> Hoddle Grid: Online: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hoddle\\_Grid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hoddle_Grid) (viewed 27.06.2011)

<sup>2</sup> Weston Bate: Essential but Unplanned. The Story of Melbourne's Lanes. State Library of Victoria, Melbourne 1994 (p.11)

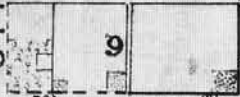
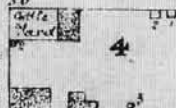
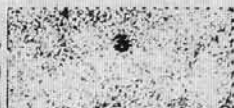
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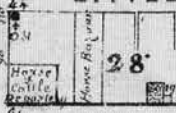
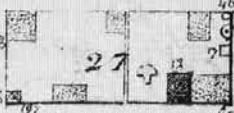
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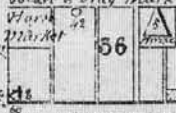
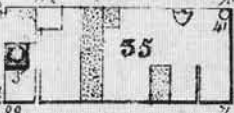
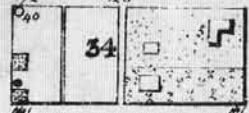
STREET



L O N S D A L E



B O U R K E



N C E R

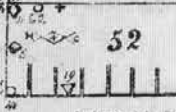
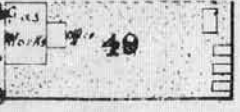
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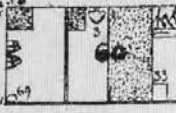


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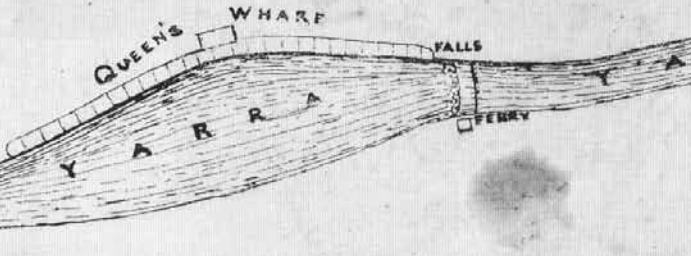
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F L I N D E R S

← WEST



Road to Beardots Beach and

Richard Hill





Figure 1: Plan of laneways

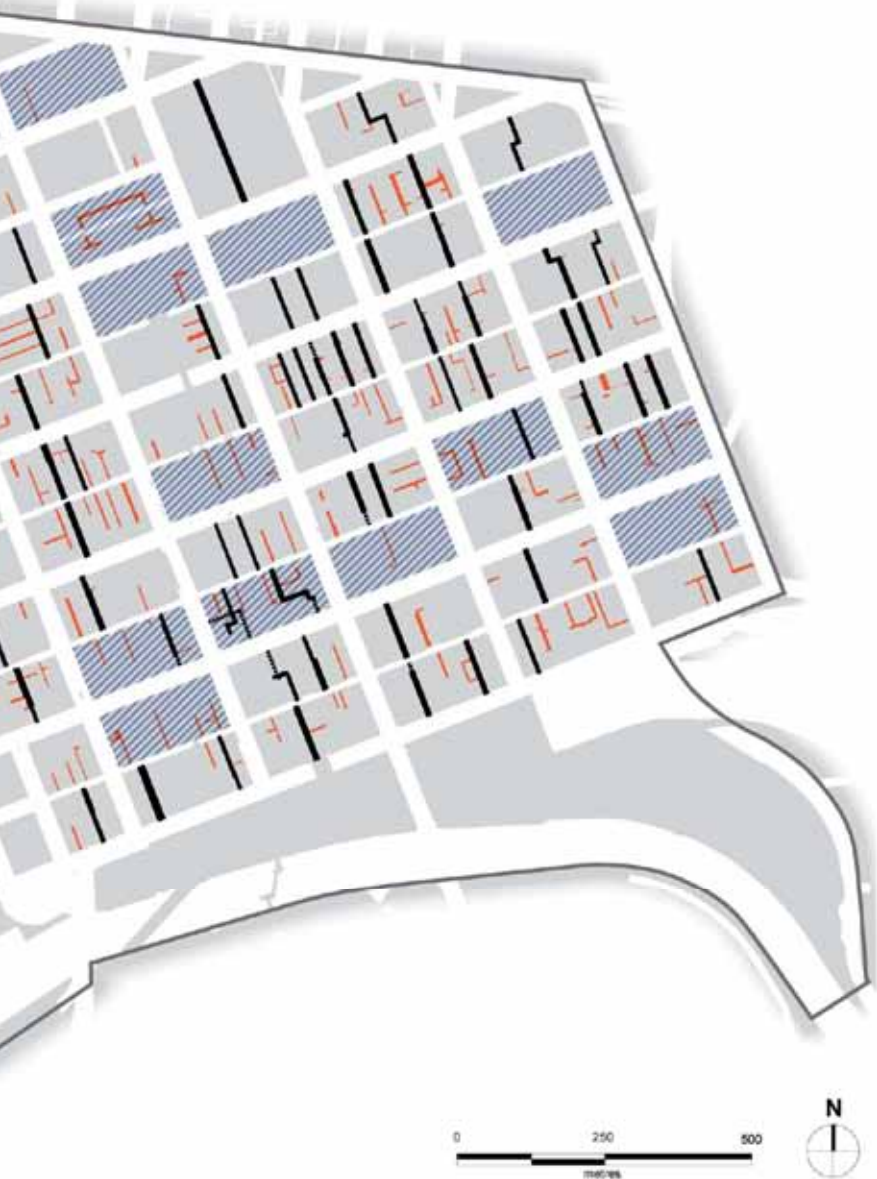




Figure 2: Bourke Street Mall



Figure 3: Swanston Street



Figure 4: Laneway Galleries



Figure 5: Laneway Bar







# CASE STUDIES

1. Abstact House
2. StepoSit
3. PlayMobil
4. Collabs Gallery





# CASE 1

NAME: IMAGINARY HOUSE

AUDIENCE: Park Users, Passing People

LOCATION: Exhibition Street, CBD Melbourne

CREATIVE(S): City Leaks Team

SPACE: An Imaginary House

TIME/DATE: 5th March 2011

LASTED: 8 hours



# IMAGINARY HOUSE

Imaginary House explores imaginative dwelling in an urban park. The figure of the dreamer suggests a design with a sense of fleeting moments. How can methods of framing inform a space without having to change its arrangement?



Google Maps 15th June 2011

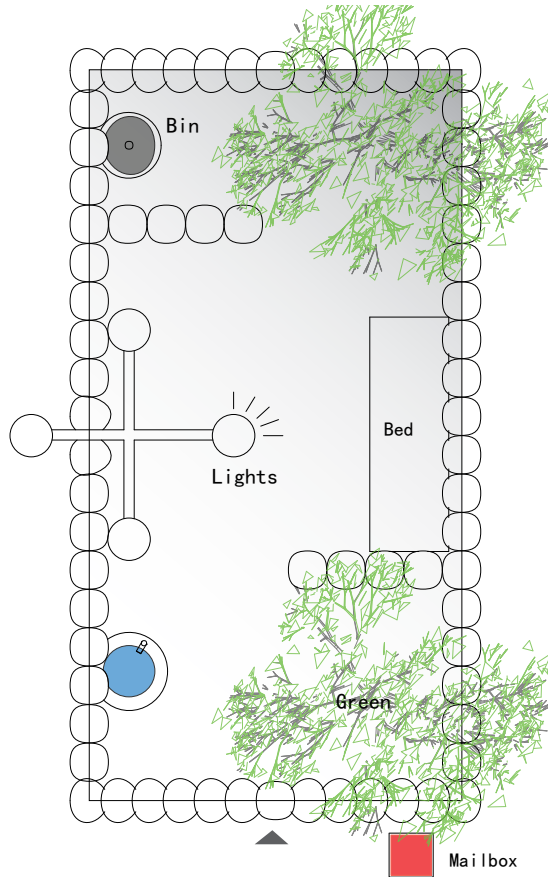
03\_2011 | 37° 48'48.34"S 144°58'14.65" E elev 61 m

## CHOOSING A SITE

I have known this little urban park for many years and was always intrigued by its multilayeredness and beauty. It is situated on the corner of Exhibition and Collins streets at the "Paris End" of Melbourne's Central Business District (CBD). The park features unrendered brick buildings, trees, and provides its users generous bench areas, bins, water and light during night time. Depending on the time of day a diverse array of visitors occupy the park including business people, shoppers, some homeless rambblers, elderly who wish to take a break, people passing through the short cut it provides, late-night bar goers prolonging going home etc. During the night a couple of homeless people sleep on the benches but disappear in the morning. There are also teenagers who meet each other there, especially on the weekends, due to its proximity to cinemas, restaurants and bars. Considering all these different aspects the park brings this corner of Collins Street alive, and is obviously appealing to a large cross-section of urban users.



Urban Park, Exhibition Street



The design uses the existing setting of the park. A water fountain, a bin, lights, a bench and trees are embraced by the design. An array of balloons forms the shape of a house. 4 mm metal rodss frame an area of 3x6 m. Strings attach to the frame in a distance of 30cm. Helium filled balloons carry the weight of the strings and form the exterior and interior walls. Two cut outs mark a door and a window.

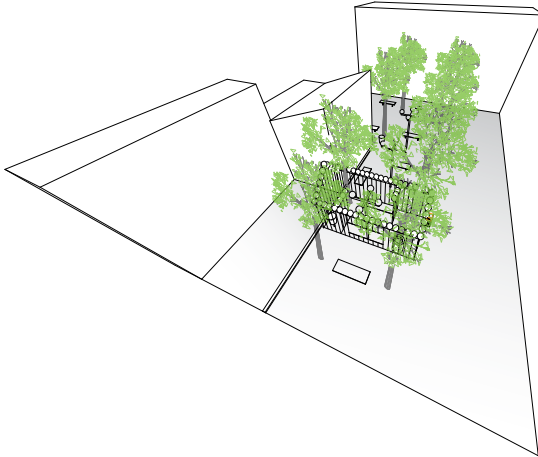


## DESIGN IMPLEMENTATION

When considering how one 'dwells' in the city the homeless people inspired the question "how does one find a 'home' or 'home' in the urban fabric?" According to Gaston Bachelard, "the house shelters day-dreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace."<sup>1</sup> The amenities in the park, when viewed most basically, provided the rudimentary ingredients to suggest a house.

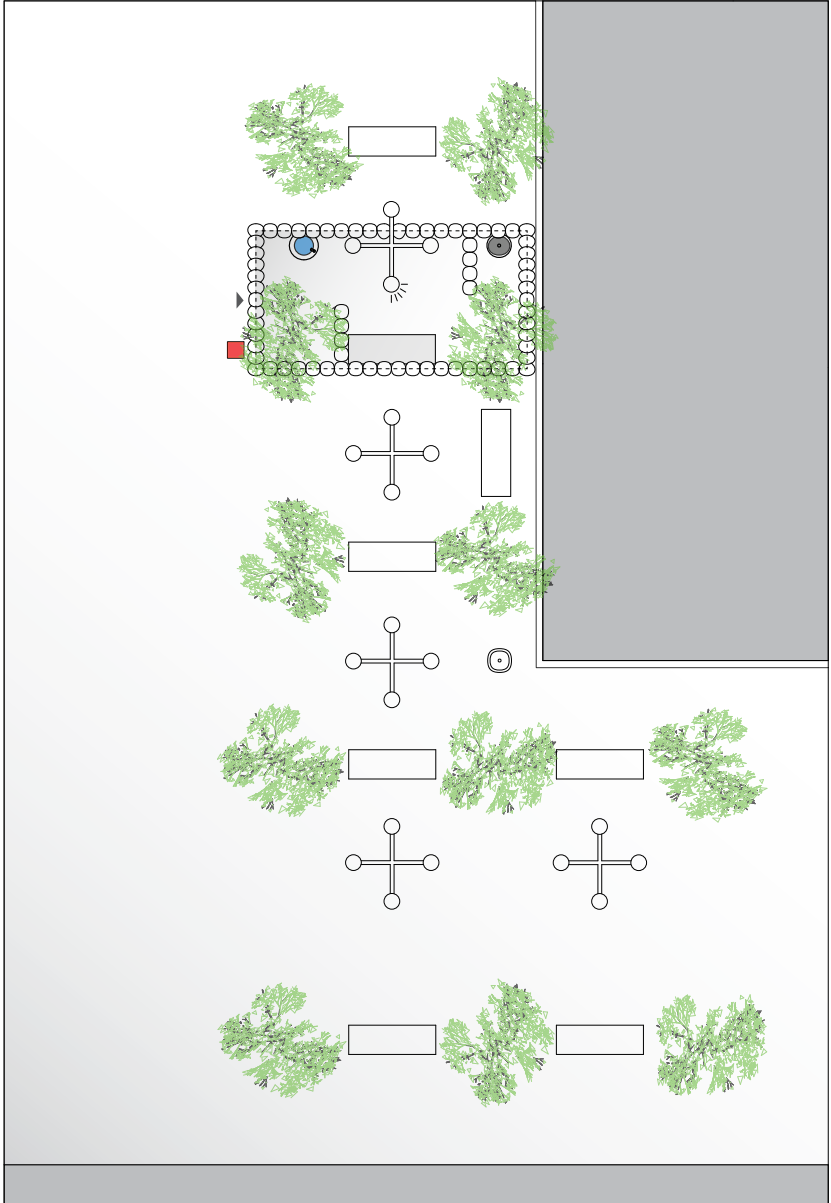
The idea was to frame a house, a dwelling, a 'place' that resembles a 'home' as a most basic suggestion. In a particular area there exists a bench, a water fountain, a bin, lights and a tree all in close proximity.

The figure of the dreamer suggested a design with a sense of a fleeting, imaginary, the momentary. This informed by choice to use light and thin materials. To frame and anchor the area I used 4mm metal rods on the ground demarking a 3m x 6m site. Black strings, the same often found as decoration on wrapped presents, connected helium balloons to the rods in such a way as to announce walls, doors and windows. The final touch is a mailbox in front.

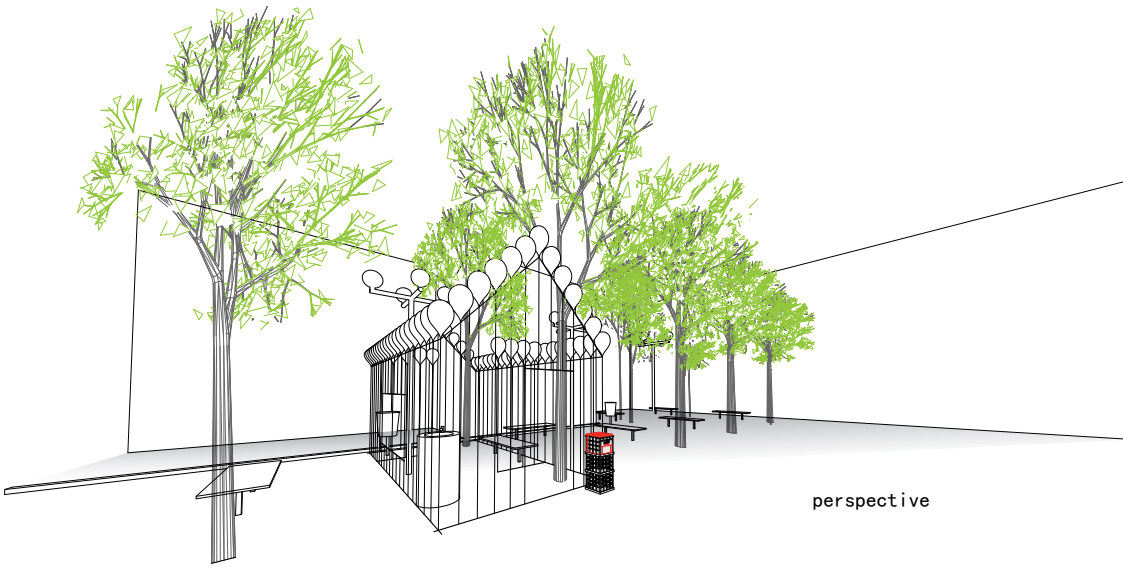


<sup>1</sup>

Gaston Bachelard: *The Poetics of Space*. Massachusetts 1994 (p.6)



plan



perspective



section





## INSTALLING

I install the helium balloon house with a friend on Saturday midmorning. I chose Saturday so not as to attract trouble from the high number of business people but not to miss out on the cross-section of Saturday city goers and night time partiers.

We are equipped with a gas bottle, the metal rods cut and marked to size, hundreds of white balloons and their strings all measured and packed neatly to aid installation. The balloons are blown up one at a time and, not withstanding some interruption from the wind, everything works well and we are finished in 3 hours.

## OBSERVATIONS

While we're installing people stopped to look at what was going on. Some ask: "what is this all about?" Some keep walking after watching from a distance for a while. As we get halfway through setting it up people start to pose and take photos in front of it. Most seem rather inquisitive but reserved about getting involved. They are, however, most respectful to move carefully around or through the space. Many approach us wondering what it's all about, why do this, and what it is for. I would answer their questions with: "this is a house, it has been here all time you just hadn't seen it. The balloons just make it visible." Most of the people look at me slightly confused but slowly come to relate the park structures to things that might be found in a home... "ah, yeah! I think I get it! Nice!"

For observation purposes I decide to step aside and watch from a short distance.

There are more people taking photos. Although it obviously enticing people seem to be not quite sure if they could go inside. It is the children who make the first step. Some of them lay down on the bench as if it is a bed; some of them are sitting or jumping around while parents are photographing their activities. Of all the people I see at the site 2 in 3 children and 1 in 3 adults enter the installation. The adults seem to enjoy their children playing and take many photos. There is no tendency towards male or female. Besides the children, most people spent more time examining the balloon house from the outside, regarding it as if it were a piece of art. Some photograph it as if it is a magical display that will soon disappear, others wait as if expecting actors or models are soon to arrive - as if it were a set where something is yet to happen.

The red mailbox in front invites many to stop. For the adults it seems to comfort them to have something that announces how to interact with it. I had prepared letters that encouraged people to offer their own ideas for future projects. It asks: "next suggestion?"

I received one saying: "A Sydney harbour bridge made from balloons!" Another said: "A house made of Tea Cups." Other suggestions were not as ambitious as these, and most responses simply applauded the idea.

The day is fading and the balloons start to glow with the lamps while the evening is getting dark. It is beautiful to watch how the wind forms clouds of light balls only to let them take the initial positions a few moments later. I decide to leave to get something to eat and return a few hours later.

The streets are getting busier and the Saturday nightlife enters the city. As I come back to the site again I see the balloons in disarray. As I come closer it is obvious that someone has actively destroyed the balloon house. A third of the balloons are missing and most of the metal rods have been bent. The house is broken, the dream ends. In my regret for having left it I forget to document its demise. I secure the mailbox and start back to the studio. On my way the security guard from the adjacent office building who is out smoking a cigarette says: "I liked your installation; I was watching it from the building. That is what Melbourne is like on the weekends." I respond: "I was expecting some damage but that was faster than I anticipated. No one is to blame. It wouldn't have been damaged if it wasn't there."

I leave the site after an exciting day...







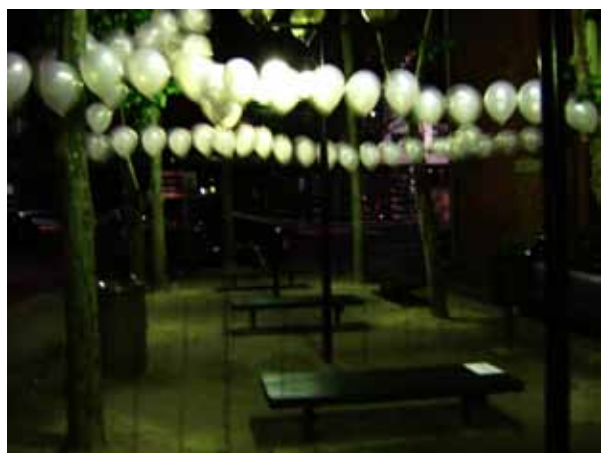












THE BEAUTY OF THE PROJECT, ITS AM-  
BIGUITY AND FRAGILITY WERE AT THE  
SAME TIME ITS WEAKNESS.

Design: City Leaks  
Construction: City\_Leaks Team  
Photos: City Leaks  
03/2011



## CONCLUSION

Imaginary House was a poetic project, ephemeral and visually pleasurable. As a para-architectural intervention it gave me a lot to think about.

The installation attracted many curious people who took photos and interacted with it. Most the feedback was great and it gave me the opportunity to engage in open discussion with random urban dwellers about the premise of my thesis. It helped clarify and focus my concerns, agenda and modes of presentation and communication.

The beauty of the project, its ambiguity and fragility were at the same time its weakness. An installation like this required a safer and more hospitable environment; safer with regard to weather (wind) and security (destruction) issues. Its meaning wasn't self-explanatory and required perhaps a little too much imagination from a random crowd. It lacked the formal architectural cues, materials familiar to their form, and assumed its audience would be able to make the poetic leap. Instead they treated it like an exhibit in a gallery, something to be seen and not touched, regarded visually but where's the sign to prompt deeper contemplation? Children didn't care about such things. They were where they were; and the more attention they got the better. To that end the project had some success. The adults entered the work through the children and I realised I needed to consider the audience my work might attract or speak to further. I didn't want them to vicariously consider the project, it requires that they compulsively and autonomously 'dwell'. But it also raised the question, where did their imagination go? By what process does the childhood ability of turning a mop into horse evacuate the mind?<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the destruction had something to do with this.

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1

Ernst Hans Gombrich: *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and other essays on the theory of art*, New York 1965.



# Milk Crates





Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Random milk crates assembles



## MILK CRATES

After having made Imaginary House I needed to rethink strategies in terms of materiality. Helium filled balloons look intriguing but they have a very limited life span. The weather resistance was another issue I had to consider, but most importantly the building material needed to relate to Melbourne and its citizens more specifically.

Walking in Melbourne's lanes brought my attention to the many milk crates that lay out after hours. They inspired me to consider them as material for all my further projects in Melbourne.

Melbourne really likes its many bars and cafes. As a city it takes particular pride in its cafes, restaurants and nightlife. The sheer number and variety keeps the industry thriving, but there's one thing they all have in common: They need milk!

The milk gets delivered to every bar, restaurant or coffee place in milk crates. They are often delivered very early in the morning so the venues put the crates in the laneways for the delivery people to pick up and reuse. From there the independent life of milk crates began.



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

## In Search for a Para-Architectural material

On further research I found that they have been used for other ulterior purposes already. They have been used as seats, beds, wardrobes and even assembled for sculptural purposes.

What I hadn't found was any evidence of their use as an architectural material. Besides their structural integrity they are also very light, modular and can be found nearly everywhere in Melbourne's Lanes.

This was the start for the next project...

Milk crates are a para-architectural material. They are para-architectural because their value also lays beside or beyond their designated purpose. A material that has been made available through industrial excess has found another life for urban use, and they embody both the consumer desires of Melbournians and their debris of those desires.





# CASE 2

NAME: StepoSit

AUDIENCE: Passing People

LOCATION: Punch Lane, CBD Melbourne

CREATIVE(S): City Leaks Team

SPACE: A Viewing Platform

TIME/DATE: 10th March 2011

LASTED: 10 hours

StepoSit reinvents neglected leftover spaces, generated by the contemporary city. It suggests inventive ways of using overhanging roof structures that occupy large areas of Melbourne.



# STEPO SIT



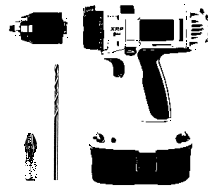
## TOOLS



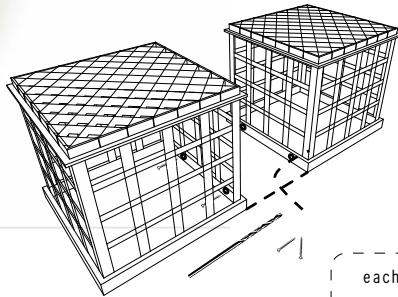
30 mm Screws



Cable Ties 370mm x 7.6 mm



## JOINING

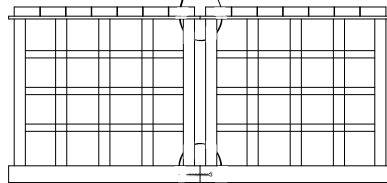


each joint needs

2 x 4 x



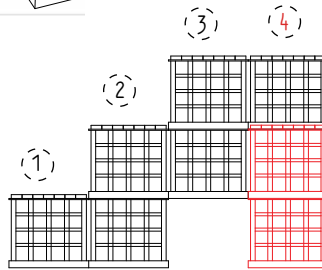
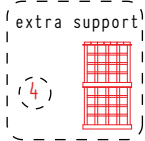
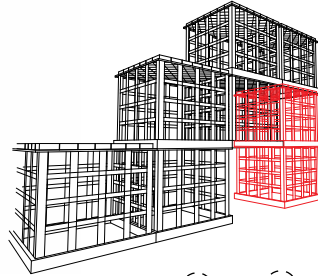
2 x Cable Ties



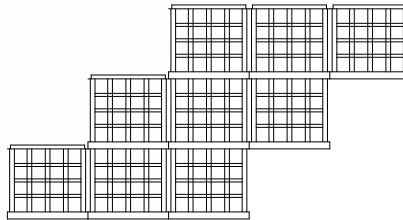
ONLY NEEDED IF STRUCTURAL !  
2 x 30 mm Wood Screw

2 x Cable Ties

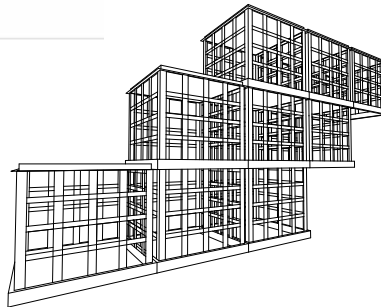
Option1

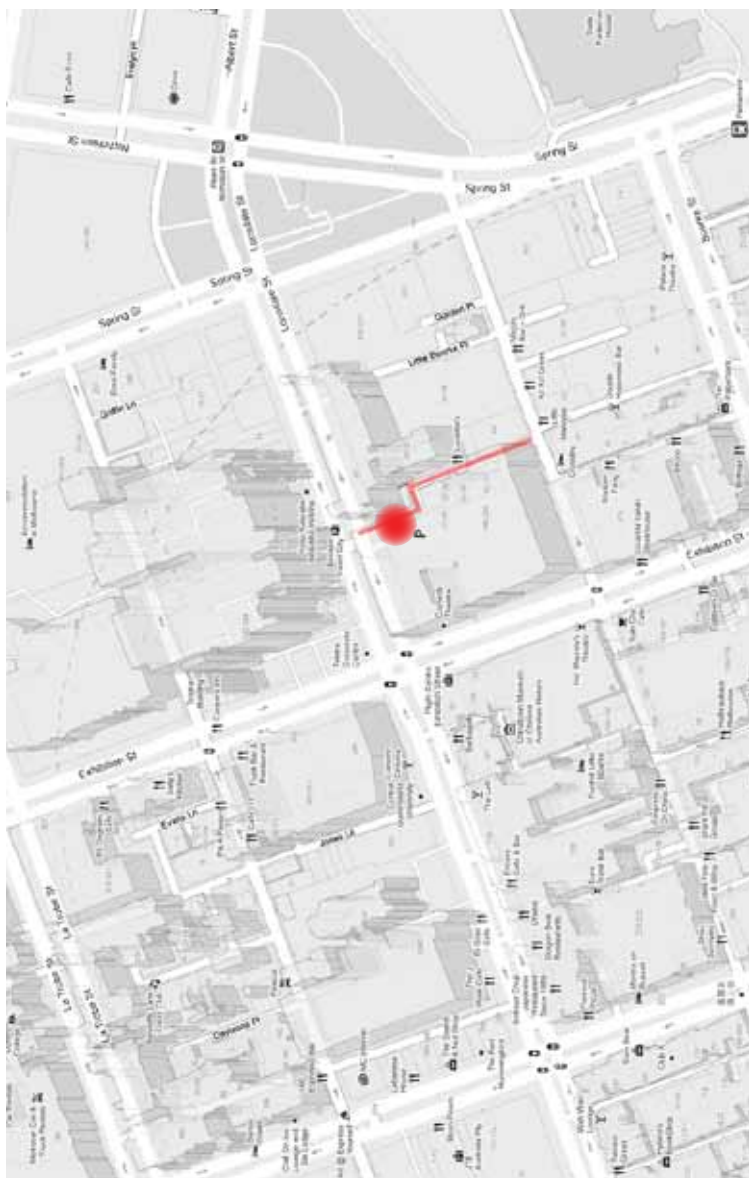


Option2



Doesn't need  
extra support!





Google Maps 15th June 2011

03\_2011 | 37° 48'36.22"S 144° 58'14.16" E elev 39 m

## CHOOSING A SITE

Punch Lane is a lane that connects a major street, through a residential square, to a smaller street. It is an irregular lane because it begins as a pedestrian only access route on an upward slope, opens into a cul-de-sac court and finishes with both a sidewalk and a driveway. It is one of the more frequented lanes because it provides a shortcut through the block and offers many desirable destinations on the way. From the Lonsdale street access (the pedestrian end) there are a couple of cafes that use the wide stairs as seating areas.

I am particularly interested in the intersection of Punch Lane and Lonsdale Street where an awning wraps around the building into the laneway.

Melbourne covers a lot of its walkways with roof structures, mainly to extend the commercial area but also shelter consumers from the often inclement weather.<sup>1</sup> In this case the roof continues from the main street into the Lane, albeit not as wide. It is not quite clear why they built this roof, especially since the building doesn't obviously require it.

The roof creates a nice irregularity in this Lane which caught my attention. The lane slopes slightly upwards from the main street to the little square which brings the horizontal roof closer to the ground. The shelters are in general structurally sound and built like a balcony, only they don't have handrails. I was compelled to explore the potential these spaces make available.

---

<sup>1</sup>

Average annual number of clear days = 49, Average annual number of days of rain = 146, Average annual number of cloudy days = 179.  
See Online: <http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/AboutMelbourne/Statistics/Pages/MelbourneSnapshot.aspx> (viewed 20.06.2011)



Punch Lane, Melbourne CBD

## DESIGN APPROACH

My attention to attached roofs has changed the way I moved through the city. In search of possible para()sites my view has shifted from spaces on the ground to spaces above eye level. Roofs are structures generated by the contemporary city to ensure an uncompromised shopping experience. They allow for convenient shop window promenades and extend the service area of bars and cafes onto the sidewalks. They also provide stores the opportunity to expand their stores into public space covered both for the merchandise and shoppers.

However the Punch lane roof is not for shopping nor does it shade or cover the cafe's activities; it is a rather obscure exception from the rule.

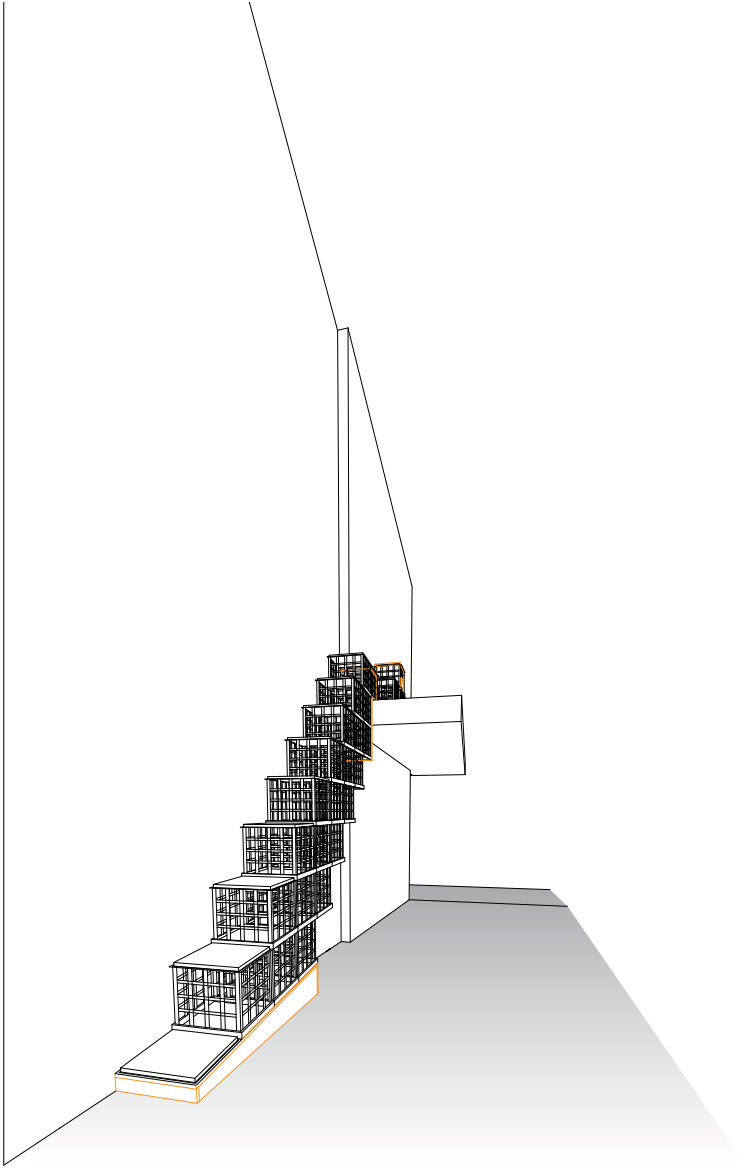
There are many spaces borne of the contemporary city awaiting possible urban inhabitation and intervention. These roof spaces are part of the city's blind-spots, part of the "commonwealth of horizontal surfaces on which any number of objects, including the human fundament, can be parked."<sup>2</sup>

StepoSit is an exemplary intervention that shows only one possibility of how these spaces might be used.

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<sup>2</sup>

Nigel Whiteley, Reyner Banham: Historian of the Immediate Future, Massachusetts 2003. (p. 354)



perspective

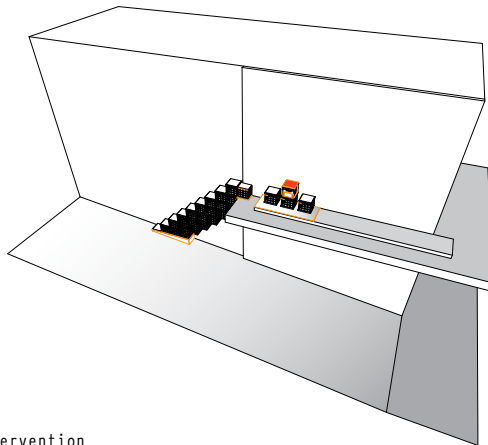


## DESIGN IPLEMENTATION

The design intends to give access to the overhanging roof space in Punch lane by assembling milk crates into a staircase. It is suggests using the roof as a viewing platform for two people to sit and chat. The mailbox that appears in all the projects also acts as a small table between the seats.

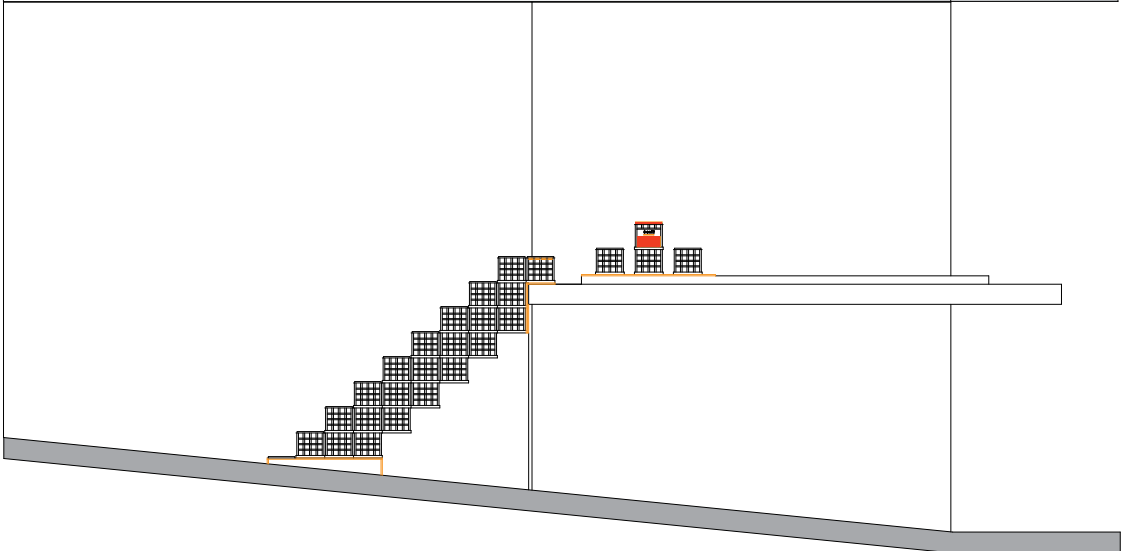
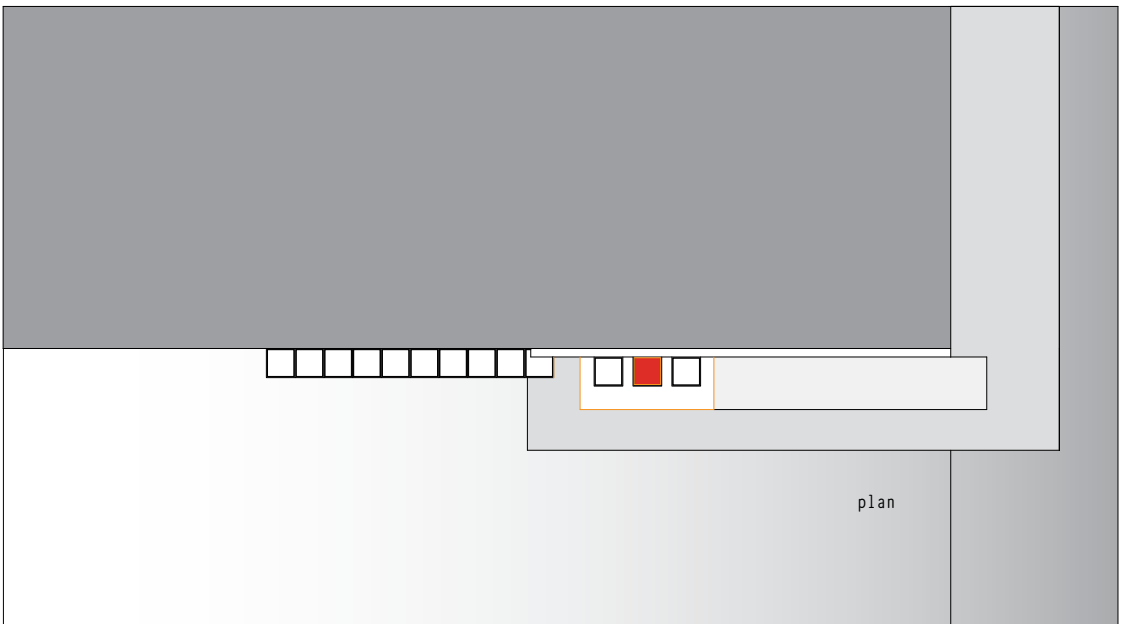
The milk crates echo the existing coffee culture in the lane. This project also serves to test the structural limits of the crates, employing them for all structural parts with the exception of the wooden landing used for levelling the sloping ground.

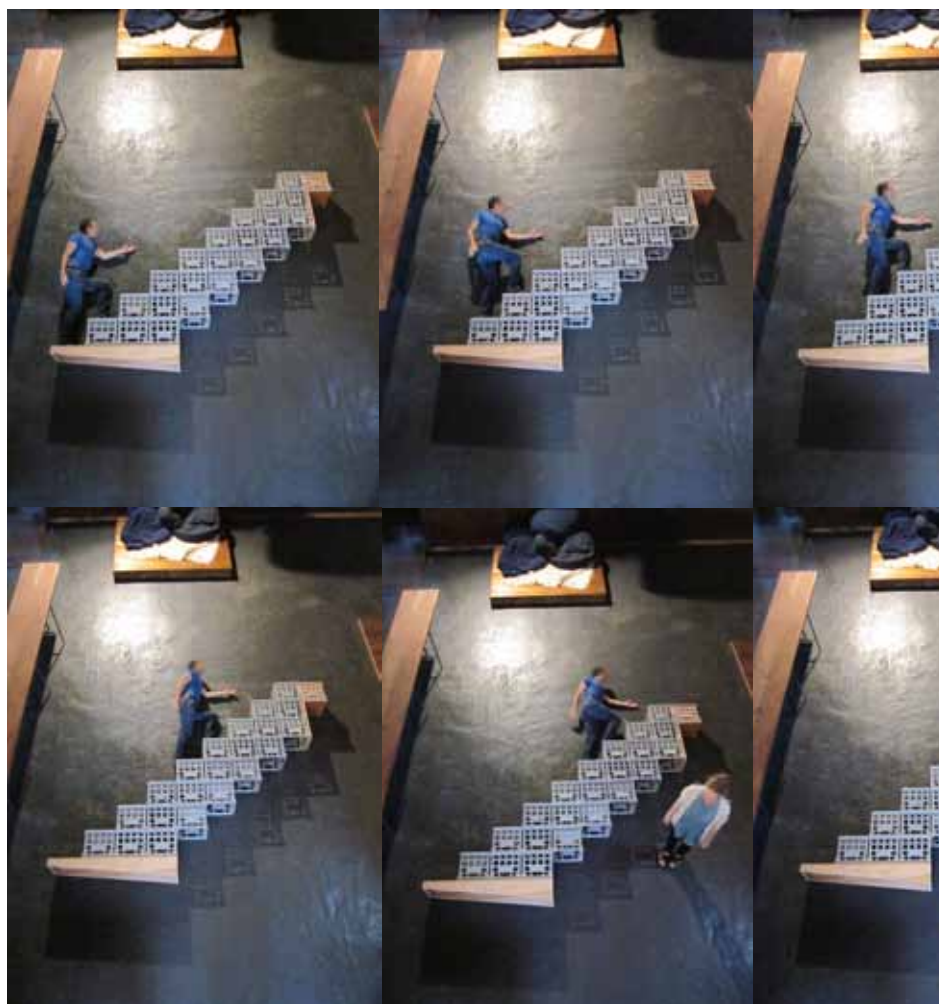
Tests revealed that it requires three crates in a horizontal row, joined by cable ties and screws at strategic points, to ensure not only static durability but also the necessary rigidity for a comfortable climb. Finally, StepoSit is an experiment into how people engage with and place their trust in structures that are obviously not to public building

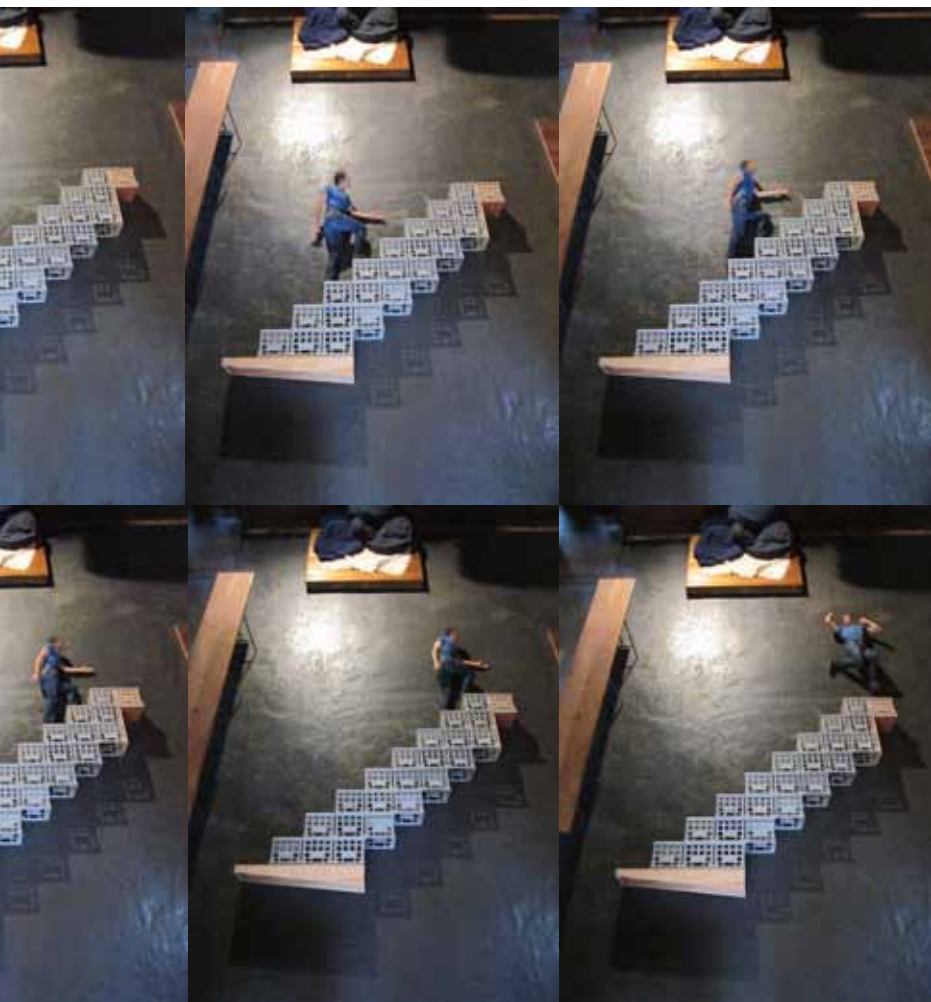


Proposed Intervention









Testing in Homegrounds



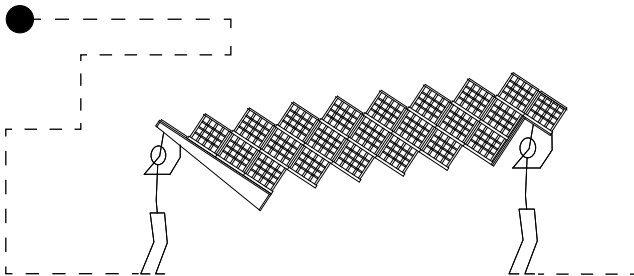
## INSTALLING

It is a group of three people who deposit StepoSit on site. Everything is pre-assembled and the stairs come in one piece.

The site is only a few minutes' walk from the studio so we carry it by hand. We walk through the streets with 22 assembled crates. It is a clear Thursday night in March.

We are not quite sure what people might think about us walking with this massive piece of milk crates but continue with determination and purpose. Everything comes together without a hitch. The stairs are attached to the platform with liquid nails, because of the slope they're wedged in and can't move in any direction.

We take the stairs to the roof and are rewarded with the view.







## OBSERVATIONS

The process of installing is easier than expected. There are no complications. It's not long before we receive a response from passing people. It is a group of young girls with their mother. When they notice what we are doing they stop and smile. We have already positioned the stairs but are still working on the platform to install the seats and the mailbox. They seem fascinated to find an urban intervention in progress and take out their cameras to capture the event. They ask if they can come up to the platform. "Of course", and we curiously watch them take the stairs one at a time. They walk up and proudly document their unexpected adventure. They ask: "what is the red box for?"

"It's a mailbox that lets you communicate with places in the city, and us." I give each of them a deposit card which I had prepared. Since it seemed hard for people to respond with a new project idea at Imaginary House, it simply said: "comment! Your opinion:..." They all wrote something and deposited it in the mailbox. The card came in two parts; one for depositing, the other to keep as a receipt. In this way a trace is left behind, whilst a reminder stays with the visitor. The part they keep has, month, year and geographical data on it:

"03\_2011 | 37° 48'36.22"S 144° 58'14.16" E elev. 39 m."

It also provides visitors with a link to the Facebook site; 'City\_Leaks', so they can follow or participate in future projects.

I spent a couple of hours on the platform chatting with passersby before I left. The spatial and visual qualities on the roof were stunning.

I wake up in the morning and post the images to the Facebook site.

15 minutes later I received a comment from a stranger: "I really like your installation in Punch lane. Great work guys! Unfortunately the contractor of the building had to remove it this morning."

Wow, firstly that was a quick response. Secondly and sadly a very short life span. I had expected it to be removed over the next few days but not the very next morning. When I returned to the site everything was gone, even the mailbox with all the comments, that was the saddest thing.

I still have a lot to learn...









STEPOSIT IS AN EXEMPLARY INTERVENTION  
THAT SHOWS ONLY ONE POSSIBILITY OF  
HOW THESE SPACES COULD BE USED.

Design: City Leaks  
Construction: City\_Leaks Team  
Photos: City Leaks  
03/2011



## CONCLUSION

StepoSit had improved from its forerunner project Imaginary House. It certainly wouldn't have been destroyed by vandals and it gave people clear direction on how to engage with it. Its architectural qualities were developed and the use of the milk crates proved effective both in terms of structural performance and exhibition value. Also, the installation was not self centric, about itself as the object of experience, rather it was about the para-architectural experience it gave access to.

What hadn't improved was its life span. The reason for its removal was very clear. The intervention breached the commercial border that separates public property from private liability. The land, structure and liability belonged to the car park. Because of these security issues there was very little life expectancy for this project, even if the contractor had liked the project.



Nonetheless, I think people who had the chance to see it received a few enjoyable moments.

What I learned from this project is that choosing a site needs to be done with a lot of care and foresight.

Search  Home Profile Find friends Account ▾

## City\_Leaks

Society/Culture · [Edit info](#)

### Basic Information

About	An Urban Investigation of Inventive Dwelling
Description	<p>City_Leaks is a platform that seeks to inspire urban dwellers to explore moments, spaces and places that one can deposit themselves in. The challenge is to reconsider how we inhabit our cities. Why do we leave the identity of our cities solely in the hands of politicians, governments, developers and investors? Why don't we start creating, inventing and changing the cities ourselves?</p> <p>City_Leaks acts as a hub for like minded people to address and share ideas as well as organize and coordinate urban Interventions. We are also interested in how urban dwellers inhabit and use our interventions, so documenting the work is essential for our research...</p> <p>There are many ways of contributing to City_Leaks. These are three of them:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Follow our activities and interventions.</li> <li>2) Deposit your ideas - you might see them come true...</li> <li>3) Make your own project, send it to us and we consider publishing it on City_Leaks platform</li> </ol> <p>However you are spreading City_Leaks ideas, we look forward to your inspired minds!</p>
Email	City_Leaks Team <a href="mailto:cityleaks@gmail.com">cityleaks@gmail.com</a>
Website	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/CityLeaks">http://www.facebook.com/CityLeaks</a>



## CITY\_LEAKS

The social network platform Facebook is an important tool for the communication, documentation and dialogue of my para-architectural activities.

Firstly it works as an archive for the work.

Secondly it provides people the possibility to connect with the project beyond the physical experience. It is useful to integrate their real experience with the virtual both for promotional purposes (letting more people know about the projects) but also for reflecting on their experiences.

Thirdly it affords some insight as to how people respond to the work. The statistical data helped to understand over time who and how people engaged with the interventions. The most active protagonists ranged in the age between 25-34 years of age. Generally there are more male than female visitors even though it is the women who are more active at spreading the words with external blog entries and responses on the site. Surprisingly there are more 55+ people than below 17 year olds visiting the projects and the facebook site.

















I was contacted by numerous bloggers and print reporters seeking information about the project through the site. I enjoyed how the discussions of and around the project self assembled on the site and fed further interest.

Amongst the responses I received invites for other collaborations and was able to invite others to contribute to the project; it gave the project the illusion of a larger organisation, a site hosting an organised or organic community of para-architectural designers.

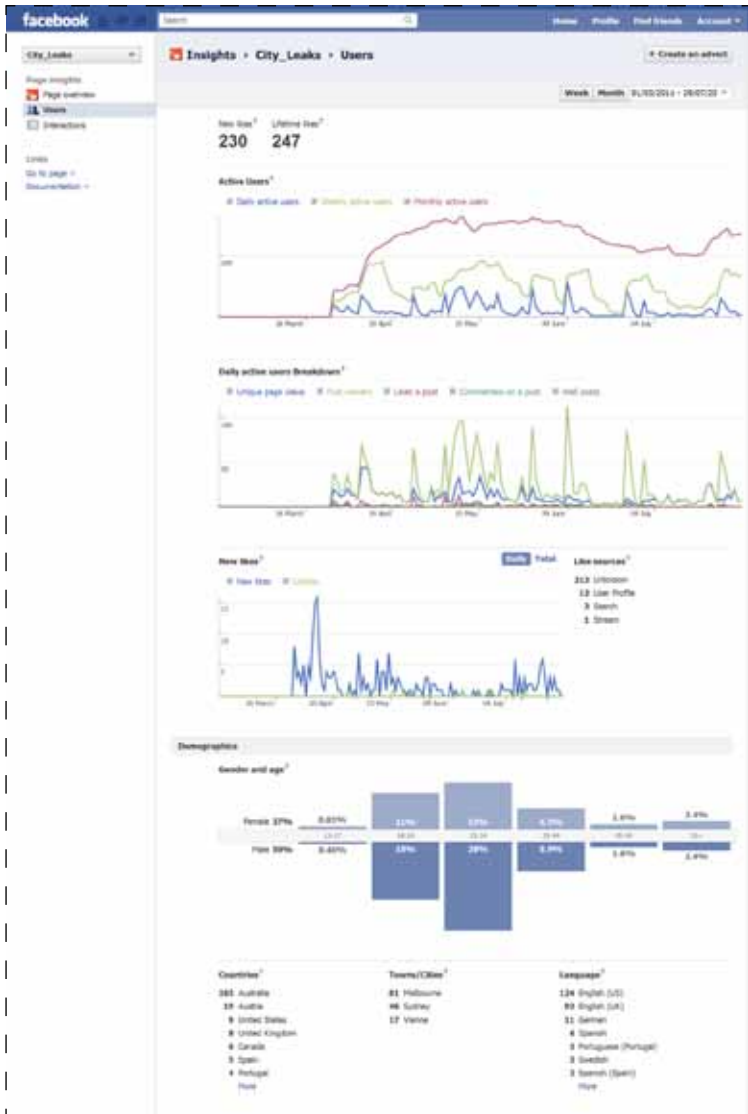
facebook  Home Profile Find Friends Account

### Albums

By City\_Leaks

			
<b>Wall Photos</b> 3 photos	<b>PlayMo Update</b> 24 photos	<b>Net of getting crowded</b> 4 photos	<b>Hotel Update "Cubain Gallery"</b> 13 photos
			
<b>PlayMo Death</b> 3 photos	<b>Hotel Facebook</b> 3 photos	<b>Cubain Gallery</b> 15 photos	<b>BepoRit</b> 22 photos
			
<b>PlayMo</b> 23 photos	<b>Mallam House</b> 60 photos	<b>BepoRit_in Use</b> 16 photos	<b>City_Leaks_Cubain Place</b> 27 photos
			
<b>City_Leaks_Evans Lane</b> 17 photos	<b>BepoRit_Scherbe</b> 8 photos	<b>BepoRit_Sulambakar</b> 12 photos	<b>Profile pictures</b> 1 photo

Posted entries by City\_Leaks



Statistical Data/Interaction  
City\_Leaks Facebook screenshots 25th July 2011



Deposit a wish!

## THE MAILBOX



### City\_Leaks Platform

by City\_Leaks on Wednesday, 09 March 2011 at 17:32

The mailbox supports an ongoing thought we pursue in all our projects with City\_Leaks. To inhabit space requires that we dwell, and therefore have a means to deposit our thoughts and a place to leave things behind. We believe that leaving something behind, leaving a trace, creates a bond with that place and makes them memorable. Having places in the city that we can talk with, exchange inspiring concerns or just post silly ideas, gives rise for unknown potential.

City\_Leaks provides a platform for the exchange of these ideas. There is an idea that gets thrown in the deposit box addressed to the City\_Leaks team. This idea is may be a great suggestion that could become realized, or it is a nice thought that will have feedback on our facebook site or even in the place where you deposited it.

City\_Leaks works both ways. It is a vessel that collects information but it is also a platform that spreads and makes this information available to a larger audience.

If our work evokes a thought, don't hesitate- DEPOSIT!







## CASE 3

NAME: PlayMo

AUDIENCE: All inspired Urban dwellers

LOCATION: Drewery Alley, CBD Melbourne

CREATIVE(S): City Leaks Team

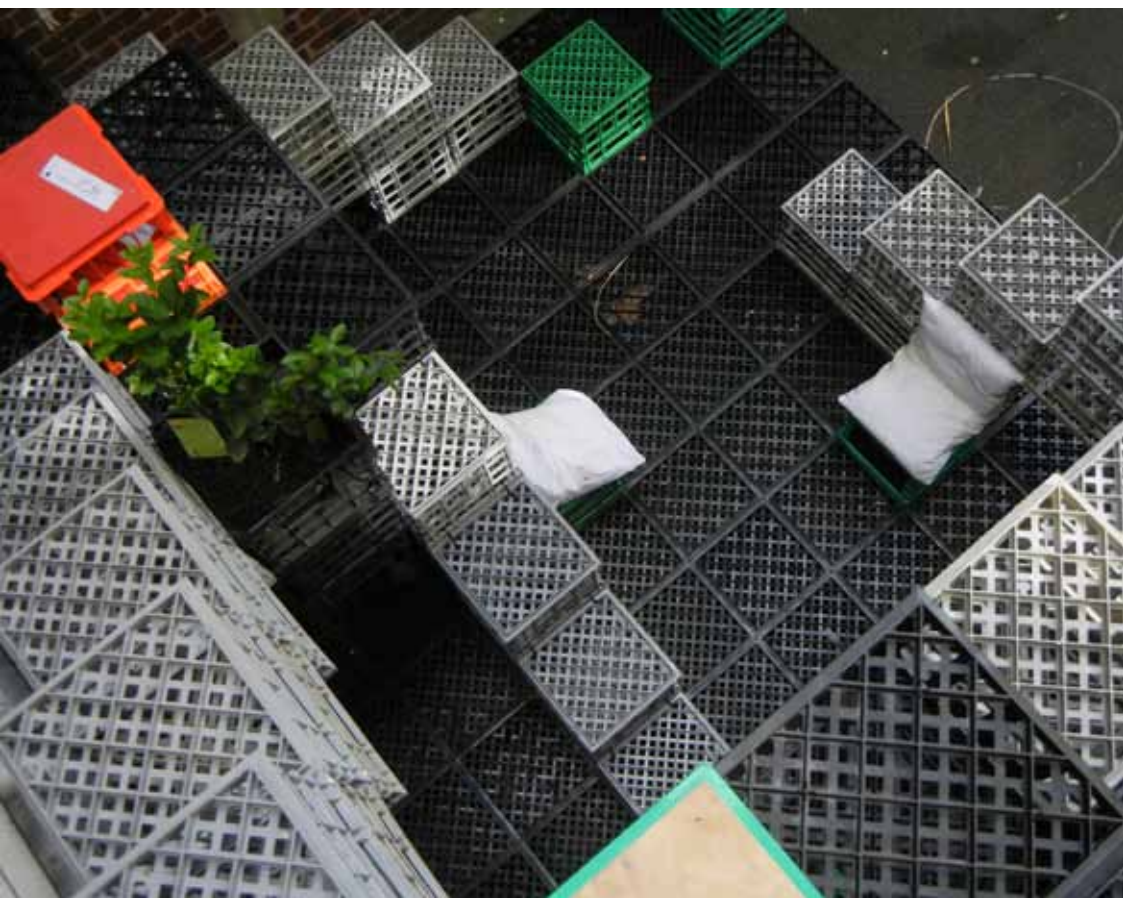
SPACE: A Playground for Urban Dwellers

TIME/DATE: 3rd April 2011

LASTED:: 6 Weeks

PlayMo is an urban Intervention that allows for growth and adapttion contributed by its visitors. It tests if para-architectures can provide non-instituted forms of urban dwelling.

# PLAY MO(BIL)





## SITE CONTEXT

Lane-ways in the city contribute to Melbourne's reputation as a place for art, subcultures and non-instituted forms of social dialogue. As mentioned in the introduction to Melbourne, lanes play an influential role in the history of Melbourne. Their genesis was not planned; they kept changing and still are.<sup>1</sup>

Some lanes have been lost to major department stores and Melbourne Council sanitation policies. More recently shopping malls that had previously devoured them are re-instituting them as part of their interior design.<sup>2</sup>

The previous projects Imaginary House and StepoSit employed a small public square and the pedestrian section of a lane for the qualities they naturally presented. PlayMo sought a space in a dead-end laneway that benefits from seclusion but also side-lane traffic and embeddedness in the urban context.

Melbourne's laneways have cultured a hide and seek movement that encourages people to explore them. People expect them to change and therefore come looking for new surprises.

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<sup>1</sup> Hoddle Grid: Built from a review 2011. Online: <http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/AboutCouncil/Meetings/Lists/CouncilMeetingAgendaItems/Attachments/8865/5.1A.pdf> (viewed 25.06.2011) (p.31)

<sup>2</sup> see Melbourne Central redesign and Queen Victoria shopping malls as examples.



Drewery Alley, Melbourne CBD

## CHOOSING A SITE

Finding and selecting a site is a sensitive process. The lifespan of a project is highly dependent on how and where it is placed. Pondering the expected impact of the installation includes observing the space during different times of the day, documenting changes, measuring the topography, considering the neighbourhood and privacy issues.

It is also useful to consider access for delivery and installation.

In one of my repeated exploratory drifts# through the city I found a lane that was actually a lane off of a lane, Drewery Alley.

Drewery Alley is a dead end lane, situated off Little Lonsdale street in a busy and diverse area of Melbourne next to the State Library, Melbourne Central shopping mall, Central train station, a large office tower, residential apartments, cinemas and RMIT University. It is a big find, a quiet blindspot amidst so many city destinations.

Adjacent to the lane I find an empty building, opposite it is a car park with access to the start of the lane. The car park is the base for a 1940's art-deco residential apartment building. At the end of the lane there is a large graffiti wall poster of a man lighting a cigar. The image invites visual interest in the lane for those passing by and provides it with artistic warmth and character.

I choose this site for our next intervention.

## DESIGN APPROACH

I reflect on what is beneficial from the previous projects. I am dedicated to using milk crates as the main material due to their structural possibilities and their associations to Melbourne's laneway culture.

From the countless observations I made of the site I considered what possible interactions I could design for with the project. I wanted it to be robust and secure but also inactive and playful. The intention was to encourage as much interaction from the diverse range of passersby and users as I could. I sought a framework that allows for fixed and loose parts, but also to grow and evolve with time; a space where people could invest themselves, make contributions and compose it for themselves.

I end up suggesting a Playground for Urban Dwellers. Using milk crates feels like playing with big Lego pieces anyway.



Proposed Intervention



## DESIGN IMPLEMENTATION

PlayMo(bil) sits at the end of the lane just below the friendly man with the cigar. I make sure not to interfere with any borders of private property. This way I ensure a longer lifespan because it is in public space and has to go at least through two council meetings, a meeting of report and a round of decision making. I am also careful not to block any access or emergency exits.

The installation therefore responds to an exit from the residential building, though one that does not show signs of use. I design a cut out in the base platform to provide enough space for access and egress.

The total design volume is 48m<sup>3</sup> (3m deep, 4m wide and 4m high).

The design features a two mezzanines and a number of unique spaces joined by stairs, making use of both the horizontal and vertical planes. Each platform has two access routes allowing people to experience different ways when coming or going.

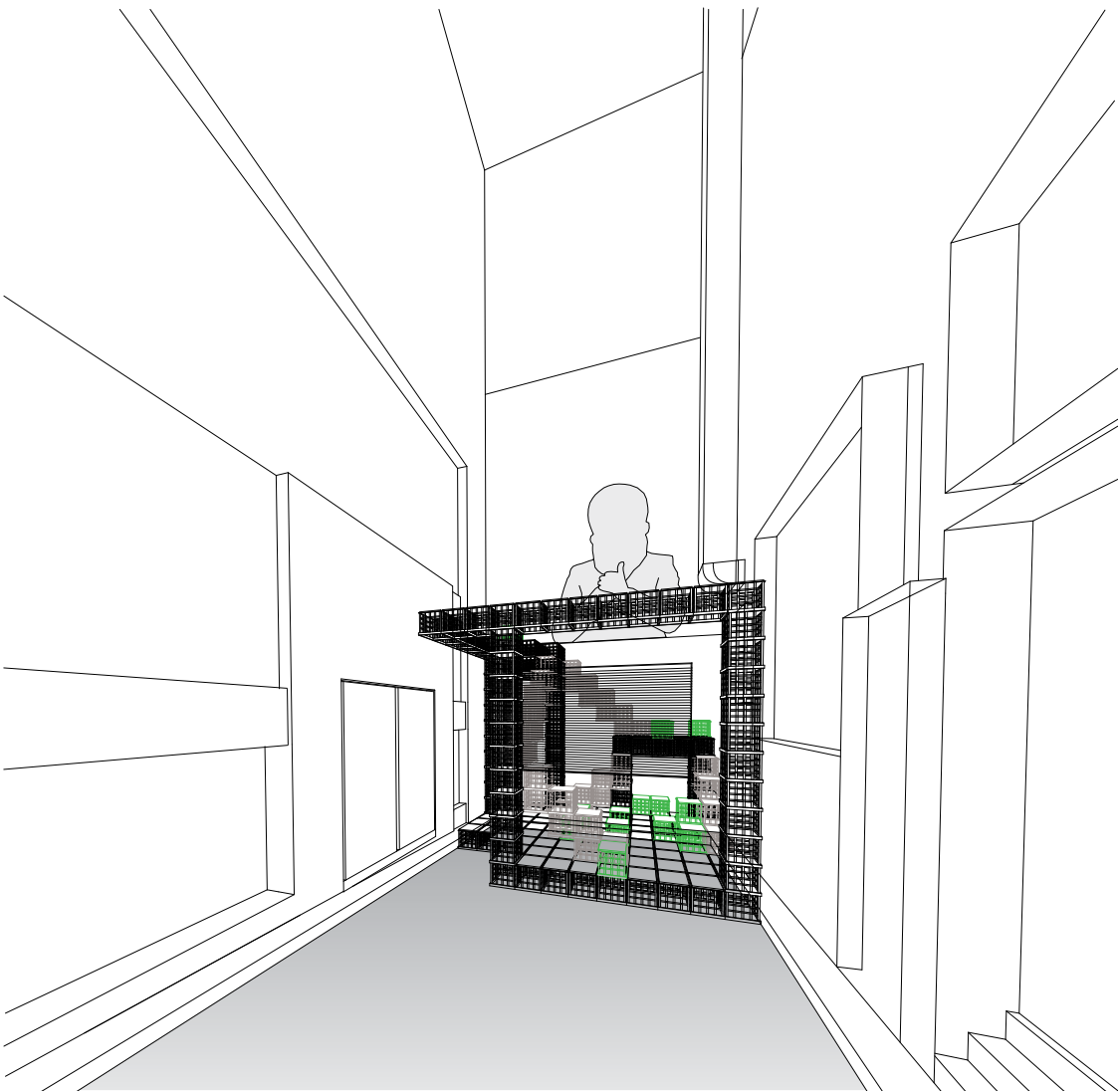
On top of the lower platform people find the red City\_Leaks Mailbox.

PlayMo has a stable structure and moving elements that can be rearranged within or upon it. Platforms (black crates) and stairs (grey crates) represent the structural fixed parts, whilst the green crates indicate movable elements. They have no defined place and can function as seats, tables or other assemblages. Some of them have wooden tops for seating comfort but still can be stacked and arranged for other uses.

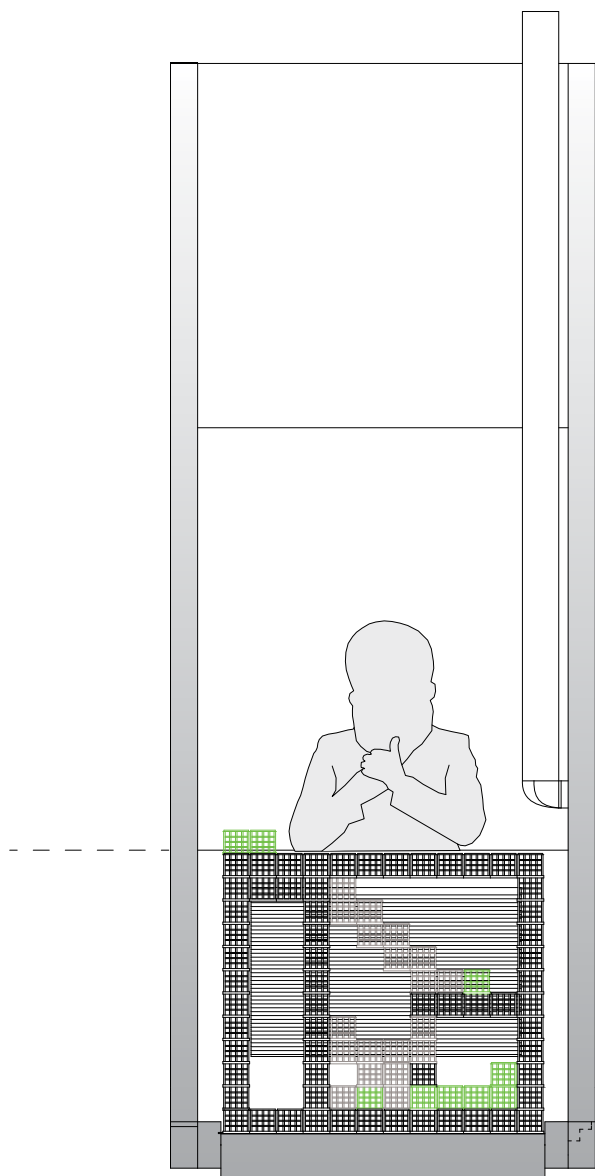
The bounded playfulness is indented to encourage visitors to add things on their own, to arrange it for themselves, to occupy, deposit and dwell such that it becomes 'their' place rather than 'a' space.

PlayMo's aspiration is to become a Playground for Urban dwellers, a place where people meet, play, hang out, return and invite their friends to join them.

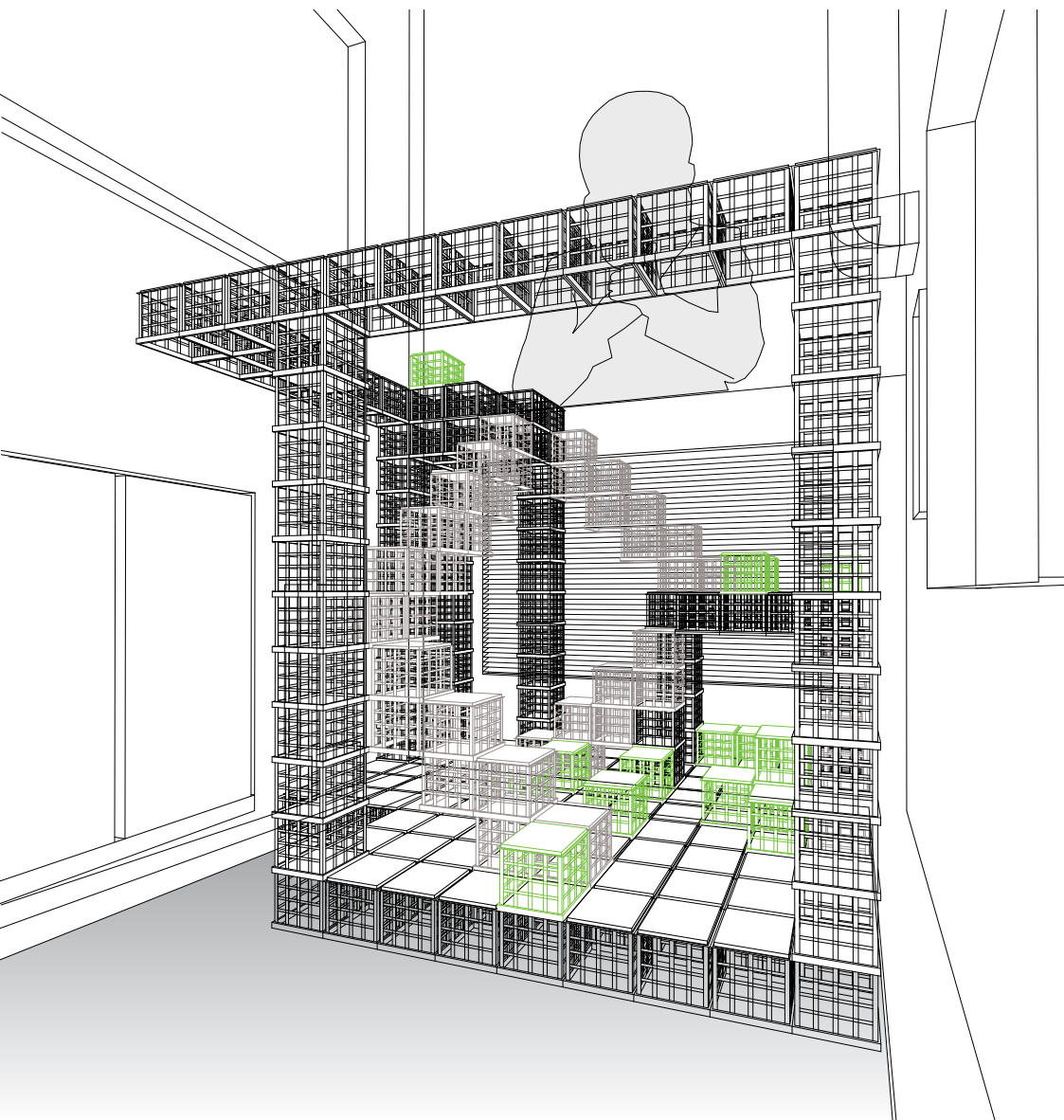




Proposed Intervention



section



perspective



## INSTALLING

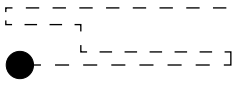
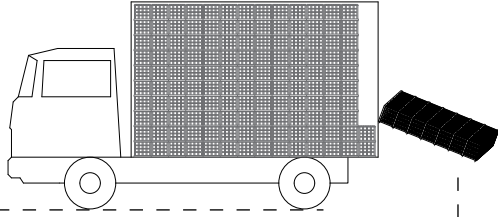
Over a few weeks more than 270 crates are collected to realise the project. I build a prototype at my studio to test before installing it on site.

PlayMo gets installed by a team of 4 people on a Sunday night. Everything is prepared. All the parts are pre-made and fit into a one ton hire truck. We arrive at the site at 9 pm. It starts off troublesome; a car is parked at the intersection of the lanes. We have to leave.

We come back at 11 pm and now everything is clear to back the truck in. The truck provides us visual protection while we start unloading. The base comes in two parts and gets joined together along the side. We use cable ties and screws to join the parts. The street is uneven with 10-15cm of variation from one side to the other. We level it with wooden blocks and put it in place. I check it carefully for stability. We continue with the stairs and platforms. It takes us one and a half hours to complete the construction.

Finally we spread the green crates randomly and explore the construction ourselves. Although one of team is apprehensive about the height (it doesn't have balustrades) I am satisfied with the result.

We leave the site and wonder how long it will last.







INDEPENDENT LIFE OF PLAYMO...

## OBSERVATIONS

The preparation and testing of all the parts makes it a lot smoother to install than the previous projects. I am glad to have had the opportunity to test both the structure and process of manufacture in the studio.

The first contact with other people came just after we had settled the base. One of the neighbours from the first level above the installation, who I was most anxious about when I planned the intervention, was most inquisitive. He asked "what are you doing?" I responded vaguely: "it is a student project. It'll only be here temporarily. We just need to take some photos and document it." He looks at me not quite convinced. "How long is it going to stay?" he asked. One of us answers: "as long as it can", revealing our intentions.

The installation reaches 1.2 meters below his balcony. It's perhaps a little close considering its proximity to his window. We are 3/4 through when the neighbour appears again, this time not from the window but in person on the ground. He looks sceptical but then smiles. I think to myself, "is this is a lucky moment?" He seems to grasp what we are doing here and inquires whether he can be of any help. We confide in him the truth about the project. He says he really likes the idea of 'A Playground for Urban Dwellers' and he thinks it's looking great so far. He even helps in finishing the construction.

I am relieved beyond expectation; his name is Mike. There are some other young people looking behind the curtain provided by the truck, they all smile and observe our activities. After some test climbs we thank Mike for his support and leave the site. He says he doesn't think it will survive tomorrow but hopes for the best.

I publish the work on the city\_leaks site in the morning and leave to the actual site. It is still there and a few letters have gone into the mailbox already.

One of them says: "Fantastic! We live in this Alley and were pleasantly surprised when we woke up and saw it. Good work! Captn Cheese"

Another: "Unreal installation! Well done."

Another: "Wow! Great how these plastic crates join and become so strong! Fantastic! Very good use of space!"

There are a lot more similar ones, but I am surprised that there are no complains at all.

The installation survived its first day and it will survive at least a few more...

**Mike**  
 I'm afraid a very unpleasant person (from the council) visited drewery lane this morning.. He asked if the work was mine and I said no, but it looks good doesn't it? He responded that 'its very dangerous - it's a fire risk' and I asked him how a milk crate catches on fire... (your tax money at work ladies/gentleman). He took a couple of photo's but when I asked him to wait a sec so I could get my camera and take a photo he took off like a flash..

Alas, I think the milk crates have a very limited life expectancy..  
 Love your work guys - I estimate approx 500 visitors this week...

April 7 at 1:38am · Like · Comment

2 people like this.

**City\_Leaks** Thanks Mike for your great support. We think you made a good impression on him. It's nice to hear that he was only worried about fire risk, we really haven't thought about it (smile). Keep us updated!  
 April 7 at 12:58pm · Like

**Megan Evans** What a pity! Perhaps a facebook flash mob could save it... Fire risk sounds like a catch word for destroying anything they've not thought of or commissioned themselves! I think it's totally Melbourne! We're such a coffee culture and milkcrates are stashed in alleys all over! What's the big problem when they're arranged so nicely- puts most of their "public art" in shadows...  
 April 7 at 3:25pm · Like · 2 people

Write a comment...

City\_Leaks Facebook screenshots 20th July 2011



Deposits City\_Leaks Mailbox

WEEK ONE

## WEEK ONE

PlayMo endures a whole week! I received more than 50 letters in the mailbox and the facebook community is growing. The site is even a facebook 'destination' where people can "check in". Many people post comments and images on both the city-leaks site and their own, clicking 'I like' as they do so. And Mike turns out to be a big fan.

Other neighbours write to us in the box or tell us via Mike how pleasantly amused by the new life of Brewery Alley it has encouraged.

The green milk crates seem to communicate their purpose, I find them often in new places. I am surprised that they're not stolen, something i had expected. On the contrary some people have added artworks, hand drawings showing slightly obscurely naked women in different landscapes. On the fifth day we have a facebook post by Mike saying that the council has discovered the place.

We don't now yet what that means...



## INDEPENDENT LIFE OF PLAYMO



THURSDAY, APRIL 7, 2011

### Life in the Slow Lane

There was the sound of a truck reversing down in the alley. Then there was some banging, and voices. Always the busybody, I looked over my balcony to see what was causing the racket.

People were unloading plastic crates and arranging them in what seemed to be a well-planned operation. After they left I tried to work out what the structure they'd built was, but it was too dark.

By daylight the next morning, this is what I saw:



BLOGGING

Moving Crates



WEEK ONE

City\_Leaks Facebook screenshots 20th July 2011



Artwork



**John M. Wickham**

Great work, folds up pretty well. Hoping to return for more photos before it's removed.



03 April at 17:53 · Lillie · Comment



**Phillip Underdunk**

Brewery here is still going strong!

03 April at 04:46 · Lillie · Comment

INDEPENDENT LIFE OF PLAYMO



also join us on facebook "city\_leaks"  
 deposit a wish... 

deposit!  
 city\_leaks comment on our wall  
 Your Opinion  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
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 receipt!  
 comment on facebook, send to "city\_leaks"  
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deposit!  
 city\_leaks comment on our wall  
 Your Opinion  
 THIS IS  
 FANTASTIC!!  
 we still enjoyed  
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deposit!  
 city\_leaks comment on our wall  
 Your Opinion  
 Epic, would love  
 to see more  
 of this.  
 You are a 3D Banking  
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Deposits City\_Leaks Mailbox

WEEK TWO



## WEEK TWO

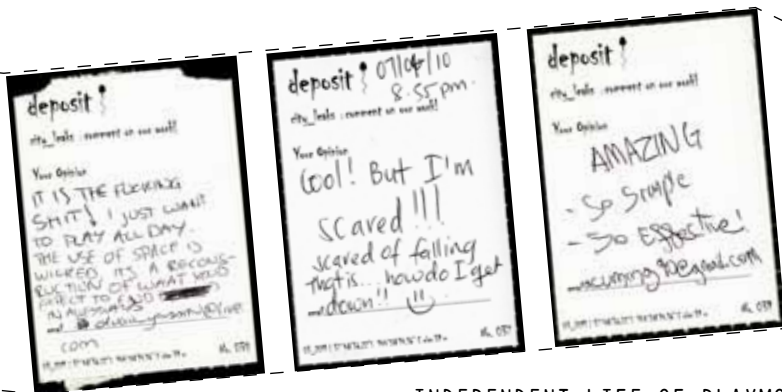
It is Monday and the council hasn't shown any attempts to remove it yet.

I am receiving more and more letters and the facebook site keeps getting increasingly populated. More private bloggers are becoming active and the space is evolving.

I give some inspiration by adding some plants, a lime tree at the lower platform and mint plant at the top.

It doesn't take long for the new things to arrive. Someone adds pillows, a flashing light appears next to the lime tree. The place is coming into its own.

Mike goes so far as to install a web-cam for documentation. More and more people discover it. It survives a second week.



## INDEPENDENT LIFE OF PLAYMO

## more mystery milk crates

April 12, 2011

Yesterday the City Leaks milk crates were still there. I love that the structure is looking more homely. It now has potted herbs, pillow seating, a citrus tree, and some artwork. What will appear next?



After so much rain, I'm sure it will look different again this afternoon...

Stung by after work tonight – indeed as some newspapers, fast food debris and drink cans left by this afternoon's visitors, and noticed that someone has rigged up a flashing light in the citrus tree. Very pretty...



BLOGGING

PILLOWS



**Yvette Crozier**

Loving the evolution of this space, and the people I meet within it... Today I added some things.



I'm enjoying the Playlo crate installation, and chatting with other people using the space.

April 12 at 9:33am · Like · Comment · Retweet



**Claire Miller**

I picked this site to study for my masters of architecture. It's this, great evolution of a fascinating but neglected laneway. Thanks.

April 15 at 8:02am via iPhone · Like · Comment

WEEK TWO

City\_Leaks Facebook screenshots 20th July 2011



PLANTS



Jon McLeod

Just heard about this - thanks to Meggy - don't let the city bureaucrats hear it down until I get back from overseas next week! This is just the kind of whimsical, idiosyncratic stuff that makes Melbourne tick. The antithesis of the form filled "Major Events" (see Patterson apparatus gittern!!) in State Gov and MCC.

13 April at 07:03 · Like · Comment



Deyar Mose

great work guys I love it, its a regular there now!!

April 12 at 10:29am · Like · Comment

INDEPENDENT LIFE OF PLAYMO



deposit !  
 city\_leaks : comment on our wall!  
 Your Opinion  
 awesome! i love the  
 lack of signage  
 + "per chance"  
 location  
 i bet what is  
 city leaks?  
 -esopie to jordan  
 @jordan10.com  
 11/11/12 11:55 AM PST  
 K. 097

deposit !  
 city\_leaks : comment on our wall!  
 Your Opinion  
 Cool !!  
 Very playful!  
 we're not just for girls & leaning  
 neighbor with heels  
 hahah!  
 your  
 -lester@wagmail.com  
 11/11/12 11:55 AM PST  
 K. 097

Deposits City\_Leaks Mailbox

WEEK THREE





Photos by Eleven (Artist/Illustrator)

BLOGGING

Michael Souvathalaith  
 clever crates  
 craze castles  
 doublecraze.tumblr.com  
 craze castles  
 April 18 at 6:32am · Like · Comment · Retweet

Phyx Melbourne  
 The more things to climb the better!  
 Thanks for the fun!  
 April 22 at 9:15am · Like · Comment

Phillip Underdunk  
 URBAN INTERVENT  
 April 17 at 1:30pm

City\_Leaks Facebook screenshots 20th July 2011

WEEK THREE



## BLOGGING



**David Falckh**

Like you work. Keep it up!

April 18 at 5:46am · Like · Comment



**Cristina Carnevali**

Love(d) it!  
You're sooooo coooooool!!!! Keep it up :D

April 15 at 8:35am · Like · Comment



**James Wilson**

Its heaps cool; we need more of these throughout the city

April 18 at 12:54pm · Like · Comment

## INDEPENDENT LIFE OF PLAYMO



WEEK 2-5





INDEPENDENT LIFE OF PLAYMO



deposit !  
My kids comment on our wall!  
Your Opinion  
This is awesome!  
our best work !!  
made of granite  
\_\_\_\_\_

deposit !  
My kids comment on our wall!  
You comment is nice  
AWESOME!!  
Please continue to  
create these  
hide-outs throughout  
the city!!  
\_\_\_\_\_

Deposits City Leaks Mailbox

WEEK FOUR-FIVE

## WEEK FOUR-FIVE

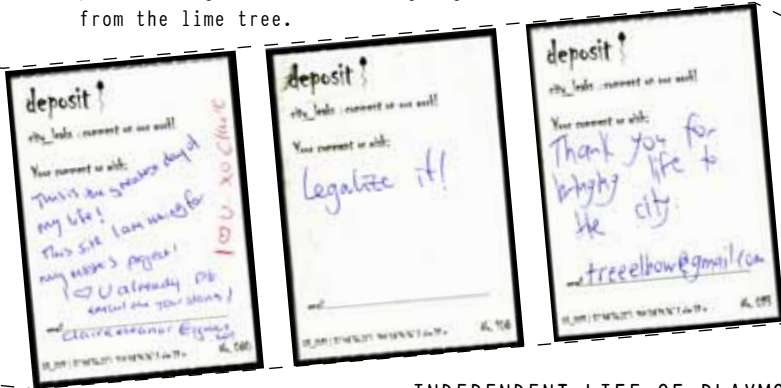
The interaction on the social network site is wanning but the letters are still arriving in the red post box. From what I can tell on the videos there are regulars that are come almost every day.

There are some little add-ons like toys, and little hanging trinkets and nick-nacks. There is also an increase tag style graffiti on the wall next to the man with the cigar. They range from little stickers to some short notes and signatures. Mike says that he is a little worried about people climbing up to his window. That is a problem indeed, I agreed, but convinced him not to put up any signs.

PlayMo has survived a full four weeks; it seems like the installation is becoming permanent.

I am away for a week but get back to Melbourne at the end of the fifth week.

Mike doesn't have any special occasion to report. As I get to the site it is still there. Everything looks all right from a distance but on closer inspection I see messier detail. There are paper boxes, cans and various packaging people have left behind. The place has lost a little of its freshness as I recognize signs of decay and neglect. It is also the first time that things have gone missing. Some green creates have disappeared along with the flashing light from the lime tree.



## INDEPENDENT LIFE OF PLAYMO



WEEK SIX

City\_Leaks Facebook screenshots 20th July 2011

## WEEK SIX

For this week I decide not to pre-make deposit cards anymore as I want to test if people would still write letters to us. The result being some but not nearly as many.

The web-cam still shows very active use by the regulars and a few new inquisitive visitors. After the clean up last week the place maintains its status.

It is the 14th of May when Mike wakes me in the morning. The council is preparing to remove PlayMo.

It came much later than I had expected but the moment seemed no less sudden.

I watch it being removed on the web-cam while Mike spoke to the council workers. They complemented its sturdy manufacture and Mike smiles with a quip about German engineering. One of them says he feels sorry to have to remove it because he enjoyed watching people interacting with it on it on his way to work.

Finally Mike gets to keep the red mailbox as a souvenir and I watch as the truck drives away with all the crates.



"Subversive architecture doesn't just break the rules - it challenges them and thereby makes us question what the rules are meant to achieve."

Robert Kronenburg: Subversive Architecture. "How to Construct and Argument - Architecture in the Margins of the City", vol. 9, no. 2, New York 2006.



... HAVING SEEN THE EVOLUTION OF  
PLAYMO AND THE PARTICIPATION AND  
ENGAGEMENT OF SO MANY PEOPLE, THE  
JOY AND CARE THEY HAD TOWARD THE  
PLACE AND THE BONDS THEY MADE WITH  
IT, HAS REVEALED VITAL PROCESSES  
PARA-ARCHITECTURES CAN HAVE IN A  
CITY.

Design: City Leaks  
Construction: City\_Leaks Team  
Photos: City Leaks  
04/2011



## CONCLUSION

PlayMo has taken a long journey from its planning phase to its final removal. This project has been an important step in my para-architectural research.

To give a short review of what has happened over the past six weeks I start with my initial premises.

I was searching for a site that is central but feels like an intimate hide away.

I was suggesting 'A Playground for Urban Dwellers' that has the ability to grow, adapt and allow people's own interventions.

I proposed that this installation will turn the neglected space in Brewery Alley into a place where people can build, dwell and be, with relation to Heidegger's exploration of building, dwelling and thinking.

I stated that modern cities lack non-instituted spaces that can allow for individual experiences within the city.

I claimed that para-architecture can create such destinations in the city. Para-architecture lays beside or beyond architecture and has the power to invent places in spaces that are not declared to have potential, use or relevance.

I do think, having seen the evolution of PlayMo and the participation and engagement of so many people, the joy and care they had toward the place and the bonds they made with it, has revealed vital processes para-architecture can have in city.

But most importantly PlayMo was successful because it was temporary, because it was not forever; it was meant to constantly change, evolve, and disappear. These parasites have a limited life, their beauty and power are dependent on the possibility of them not being there tomorrow. Somehow when things last a little too long they can be taken for granted, as such they tend to require maintenance.

Besides that I think PlayMo has left some memorable traces in people's minds...





# CASE 4

NAME: Collabs Gallery

AUDIENCE: Passing People

LOCATION: Punt Road Bridge, East Melbourne

CREATIVE(S): City Leaks Team

SPACE: An Interactive Gallery Space

TIME/DATE: 9th May 2011

LASTED: 6 weeks

Collabs Gallery explores different forms of communication as a means to examine how it informs our sense of being. The installation invites viewers to playfully contribute to the work and develop its meaning.

# COLLABS GALLERY

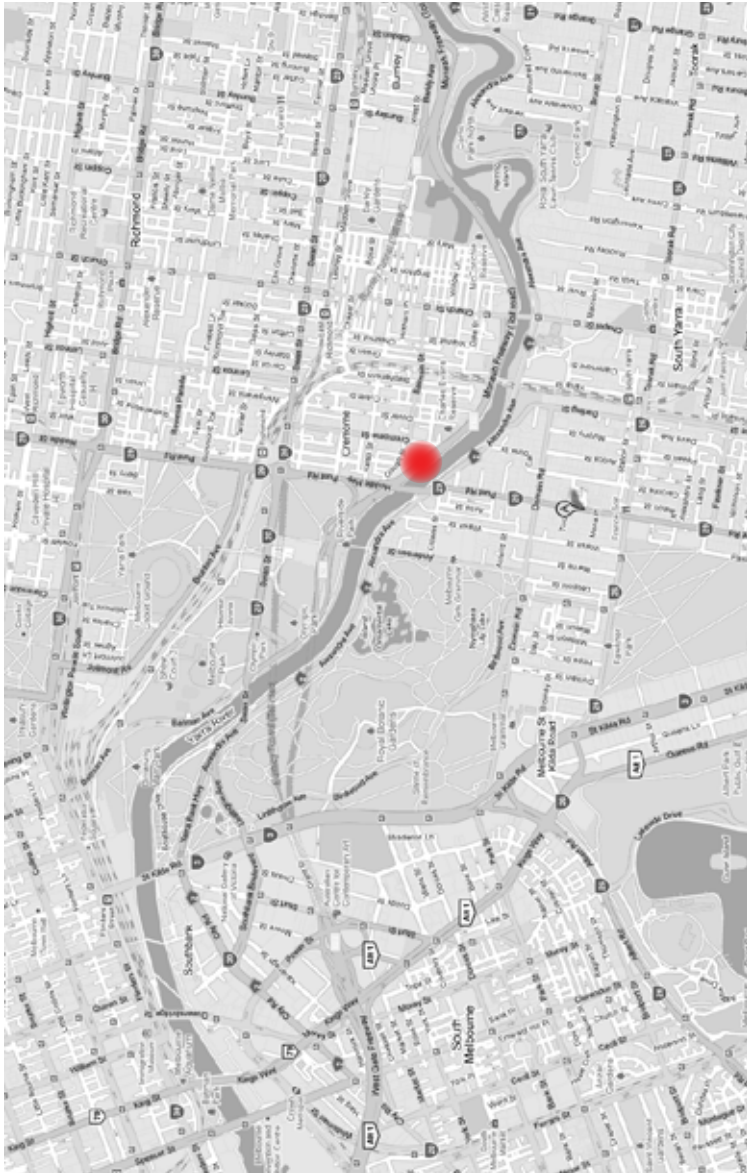




## PREFACE AND REFLECTIONS ON PLAYMO

A project after having done an installation like PlayMo requires well considered strategies to keep exploring new para-architectural practices. PlayMo marks a kind of endpoint in a development that started with Imaginary House and StepoSit. It was possible to implement para-architecture in the city by choosing a suitable site and materials with reference to Melbourne's laneway cultures. It was also possible to reach an audience with interest in para-architectural moments. Melbourne's lanes have turned out to be a fertile ground for urban experiments. They host audiences that seek experiences that deviate from norm provided by the contemporary urban fabric.

I was compelled to test how para-architecture can be implemented in a less urban condition. I was interested in how an audience in a different urban environment would respond to para-architectures.



05\_2011 | 49°48'49.97"S 144°59'21.04" E elev 10 m



## CHOOSING A SITE

My next intervention will leave the CBD and move toward the eastern suburbs of Melbourne.

I am running on a bike ride beside the Yarra River. I travel east. I choose the bike path on the north side of the river. The cycling path is highly frequented by cyclists who are going home from work, joggers and people who taking a walk.

When I approach the second bridge at Punt road from the St. Kilda road turn off in the city, the cycling path maintains the level of the river but becomes briefly overshadowed by the upcoming highway next to it. The highway acts like a border on the city side, dominated by roads and traffic, whilst the southern side is green and picturesque. Across the river are spread highly prized residential buildings and apartments.

About 100 meters after the Punt road bridge the cycling path makes a small turn and leads onto a floating platform hugging the bank. At exactly this turn I notice a large space in-between the highway and the cycling path. The space is completely empty and tagged with some graffiti. It's an offer wanting to be taken further.

I stop and jump over the handrails and walk over to the door. It is unlocked. The space spans a length of 40 meters subdivided by columns every eight meters. It is 2 meters deep and decreases in height from left to right. Between the cycling path and the space is a distance of 3 meters, the height difference measures the same.

The space is intriguing. It is framed by the columns and appears almost like a stage. The 3 meter height difference to the cycling platform lifts the space from the river and makes it distinctively visible from the other side of the river.

The next para()site had been discovered.

## DESIGN APPROACH

There were two conditions that influenced this project from the start. The first was that I received a lot of feedback and interest from the previous installations. The second was that my schedule afforded me only 4 weeks before I had to leave the country. Due to the short time frame I was concerned about how to document and develop the work.

I decided to make a call for a collaborative project run through the social network platform City\_Leaks. 3 design teams responded to the call. All three teams included recently graduated architects and architecturally involved designers. My role is to guide them as a curator, providing them with an overall concept and framework.

The site poses a few challenges.

- The scale of the space is relatively large with reference to the previous projects
- It is difficult to enter the space because it requires jumping over handrails and traversing a small platform.
- There is a gap between the cycling path and the space where the river runs, i.e. it is filled with flowing water.

The site is already subdivided into five parts by the columns; the fifth unit is too low to enter. The installations will use only four of them. Although the space offers enjoyable views from inside out it is too dangerous to invite people to inhabit it physically. Hence I challenge the design teams to find ways to communicate with their audience beyond the gap.

The design teams coordinate meetings to discuss the potential of the project, their commitment and

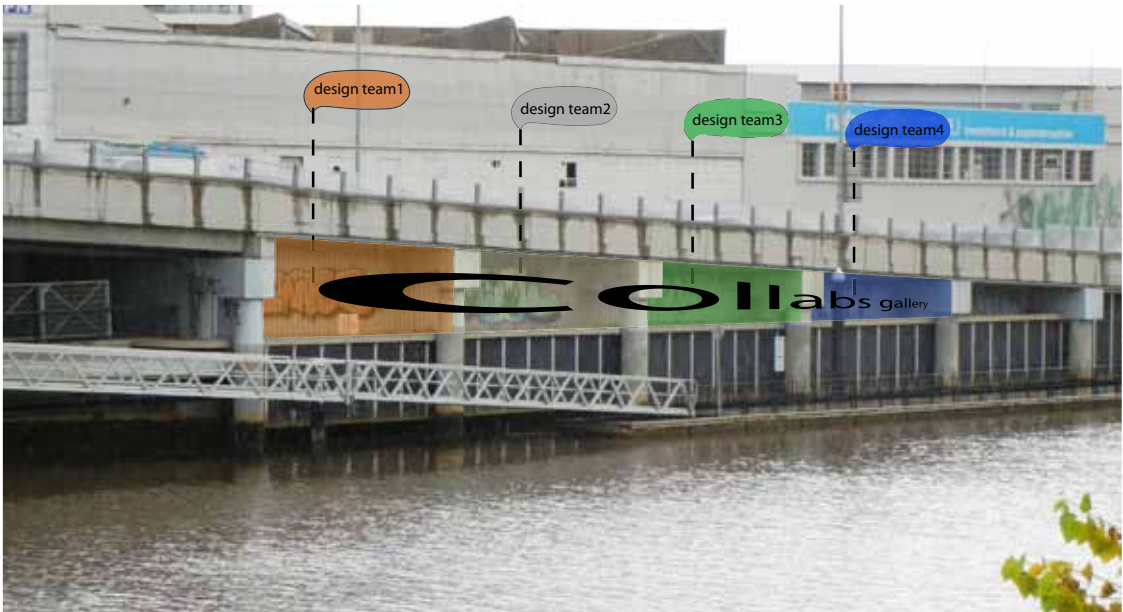
involvement, and what they can do with respect to the parts their relationship to the whole of the project.

In other words, what their contribution to the overriding City\_Leaks project might be. The big challenge they discuss facing is how to engage and invite the passers into their space, into their creations, across the gap that separates them from the public. Its content needed to be inhabitable but physical entry was too dangerous to invite the public inside.

I name the space a gallery; 'Collabs Gallery'



Batmans Avenue/ next to Punt Road Bridge



Designated site for Collabs Gallery

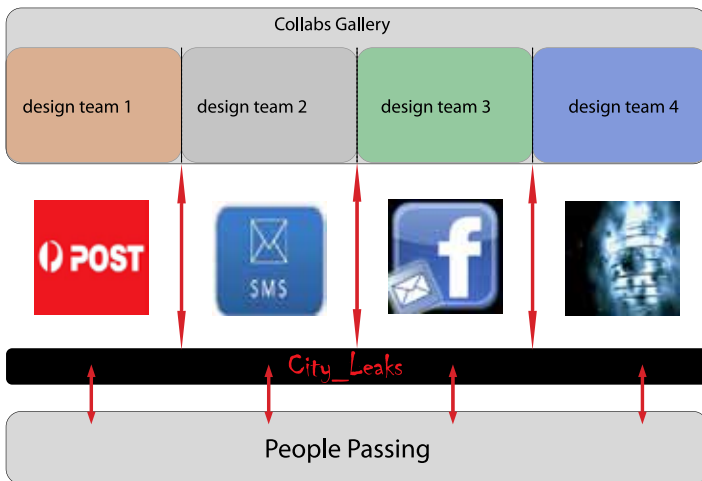


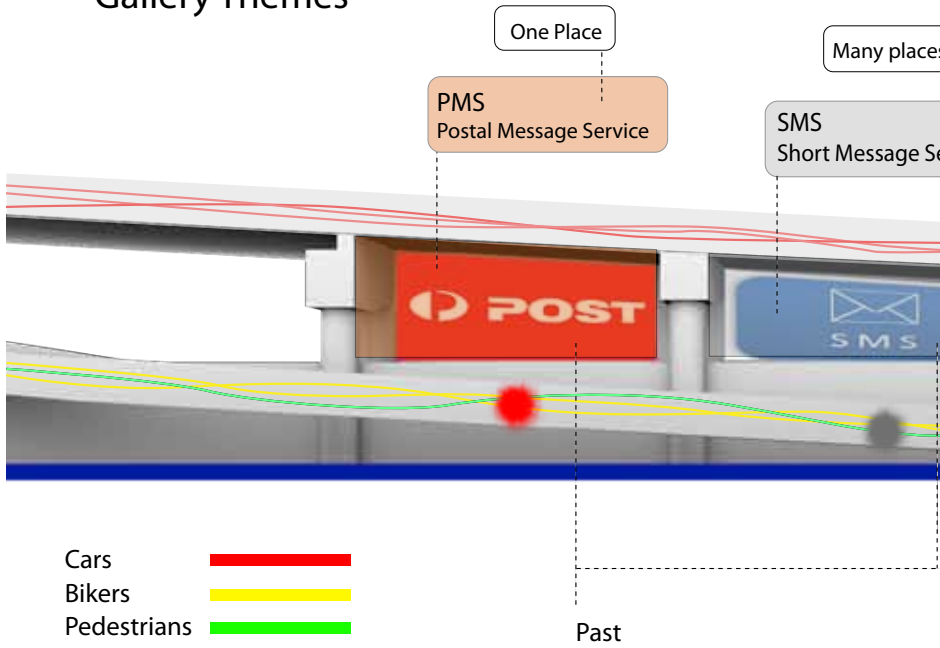
Diagram explaining the structure of organisation. Design teams (Creatives), City\_Leaks (Curator), Passing People (Audience)

## GALLERY PROPOSAL

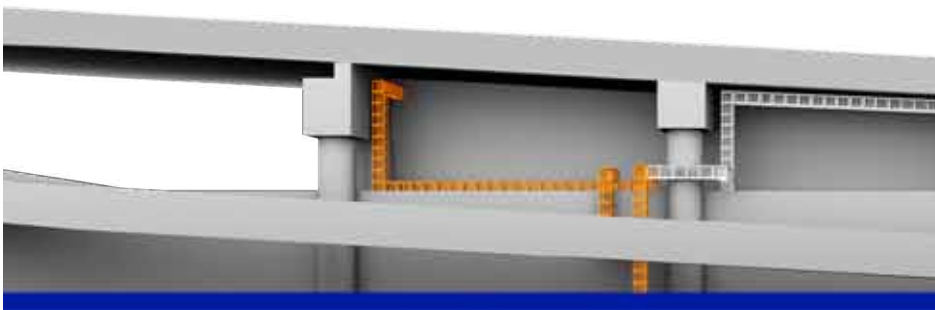
How do we identify ourselves in the city and further, how does the city identify us? Collabs Gallery explores different forms of communication as a means to examine how it informs our sense of being. The installation invites viewers to playfully contribute to the work and develop its meaning.

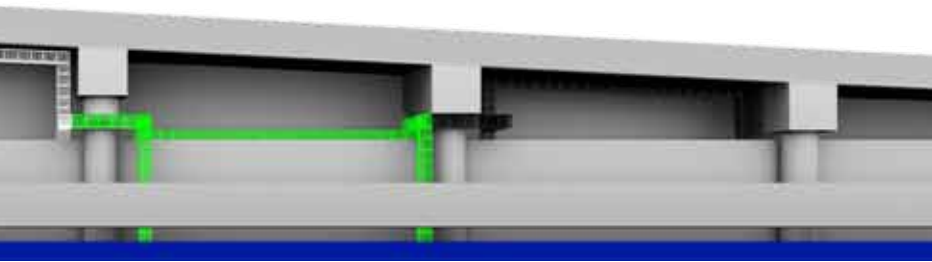
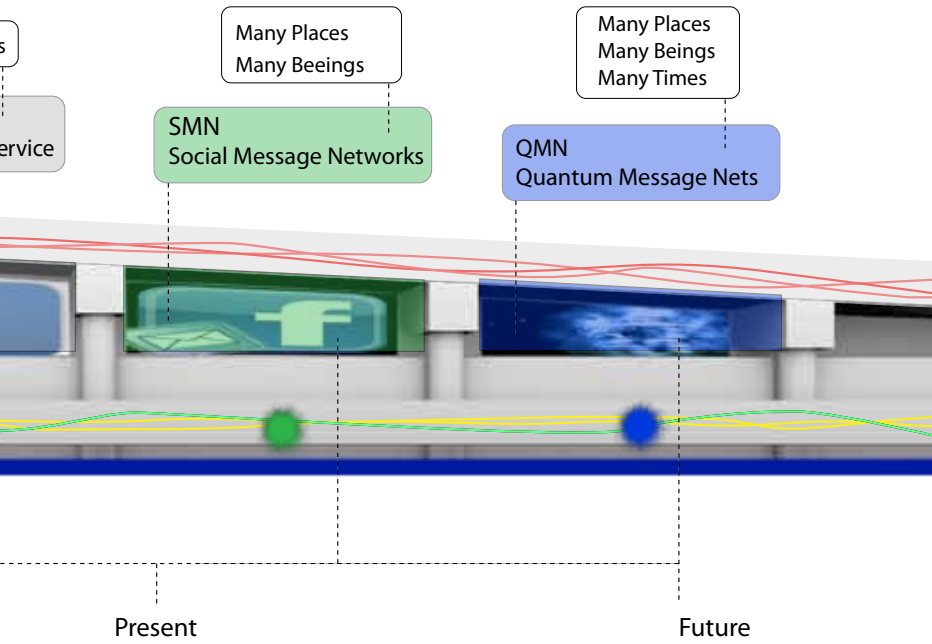
Three independent design teams design three unique gallery exhibits. Each team was given a communicative tool to examine and design for. The first is the postal service, the second team elects short messaging service (SMS), and the third team takes the web based social networks (Facebook). The communicative methods are a framework for each team to invite visitors to contribute in their own way. Simply by having an address, having a telephone (land line or mobile), sending SMS's or through using facebook, we inhabit the social and cultural space of the general public. But through these communications we also inhabit urban space, the city recognises us. Through leaving an address, sending a SMS or uploading an image one not only identifies with the Collabs Gallery, one is also identified by the gallery. How much we communicate correlates to how much our cities recognise us, which correlates to how much we dwell in our cities, in our societies and their cultures.

# Communication Gallery Themes



## Crates Band-joining Structure









## GALLERY SPACE 1

### DIORAMA CITY- Post

Things we identify as part of city life assemble in Diorama City in one gallery space.

A high-rise building, a tram, a plane, a shopping basket, a bike...

These aspects of city life appear in Collabs Gallery as anonymous blank fields. Every visitor is encouraged to make them alive and colorful.

How does it work?

People leave their address at Collabs Gallery.

People receive a package with a city shape. (e.g. a bike)


People decorate and color them as they wish.

People send them back to Collabs Gallery.

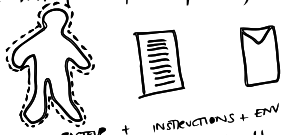
The city shape will appear in Collabs Gallery.

Angela Woda  
Jade Cantwell

Hello!

We'd like you to help us decorate our diorama!  
Fill in the stub of your post card + slip it into our  
post box  stub

In return, we will post you a package containing...



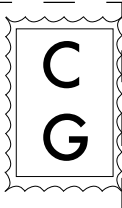
<sup>PASTEUP + INSTRUCTIONS + ENV</sup>  
The more people that get involved, the more vivid our  
city will become! Returned packages will be put on  
display in the collabs gallery

Return the package to us when you have finished following  
the instructions. Your pasteup will be placed in the  
Collabs gallery along with others that have also  
participated! The more people that contribute, the more  
vivid our cityscape will become!

Look forward to hearing from you,  
xx Collabs gallery



SUBMIT THIS SIDE

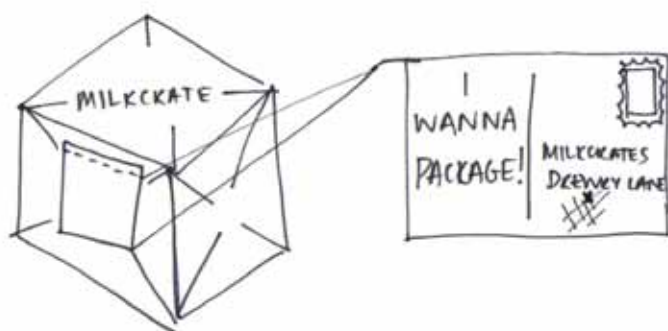


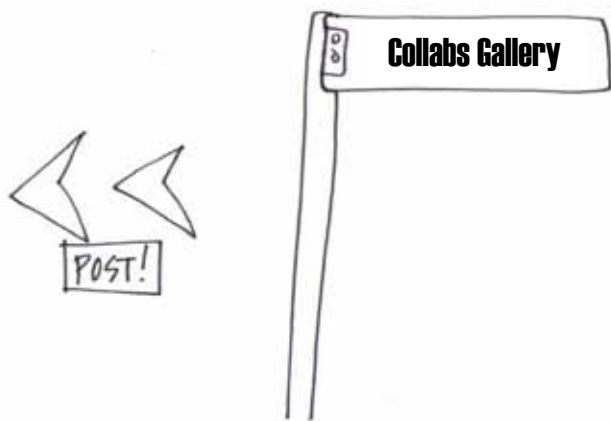
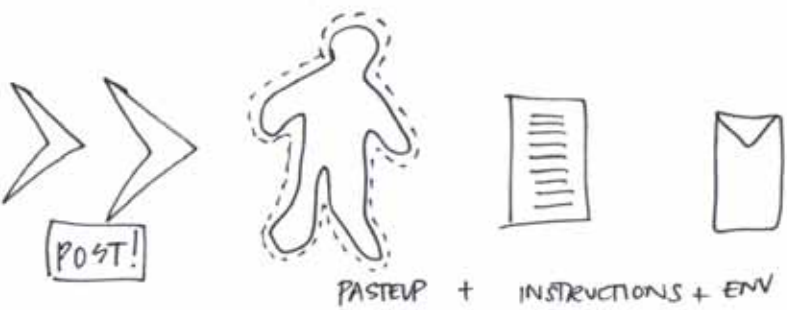
# DIORAMA CITY

Postcard: leave your address

POSTAL  
ADDRESS  
HERE







Manual: How to make Diorama City alive...





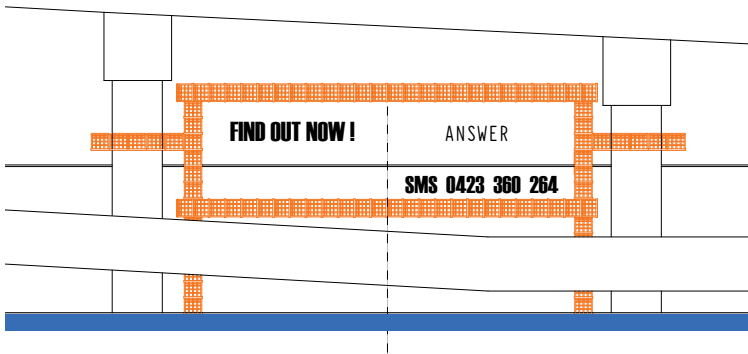
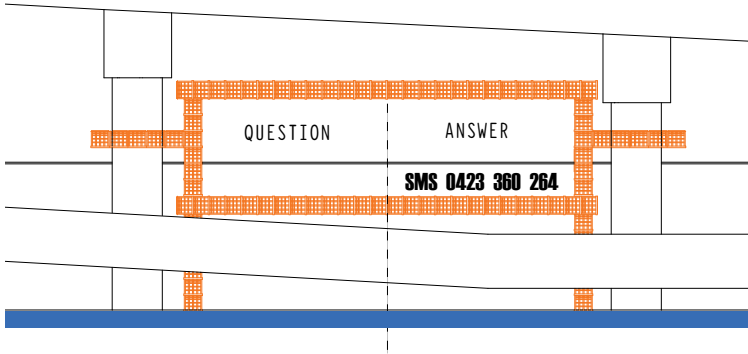
Proposal for Diorama City alive







Diorama City waiting for colours...



Collabs Gallery says:...!?! What do you say?

## GALLERY SPACE 2

### SMS CITY

It lets you communicate with your city. Question and Answer. Statement or Statement.

How does it work?

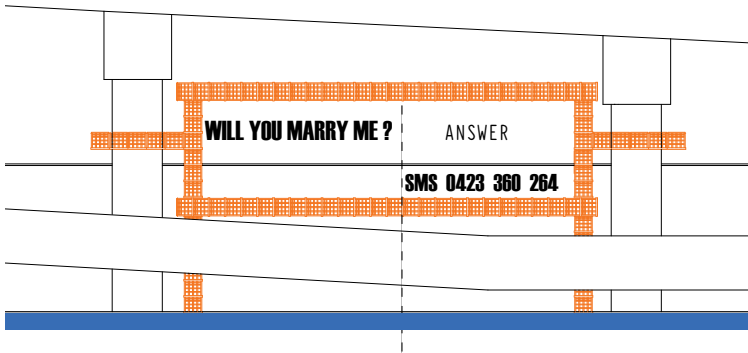
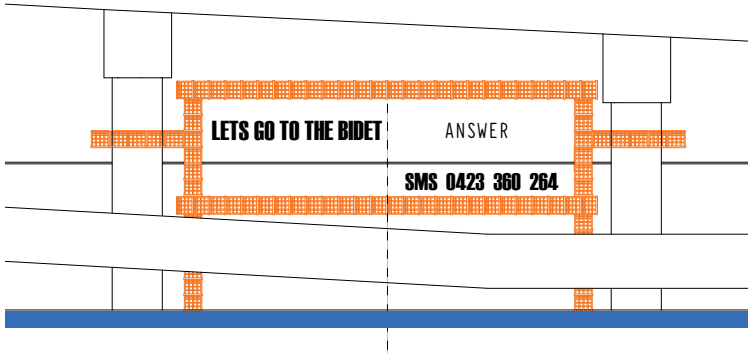
Collabs Gallery makes a statement

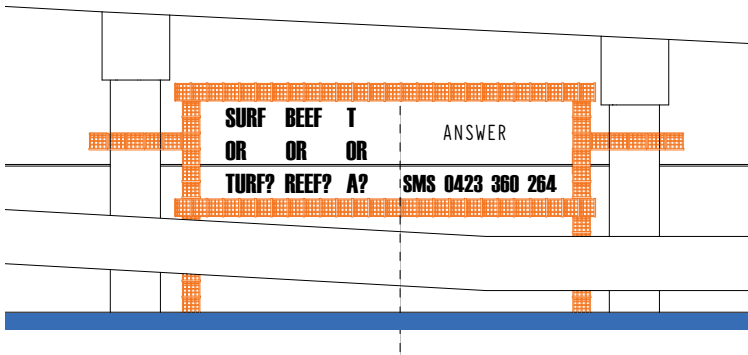
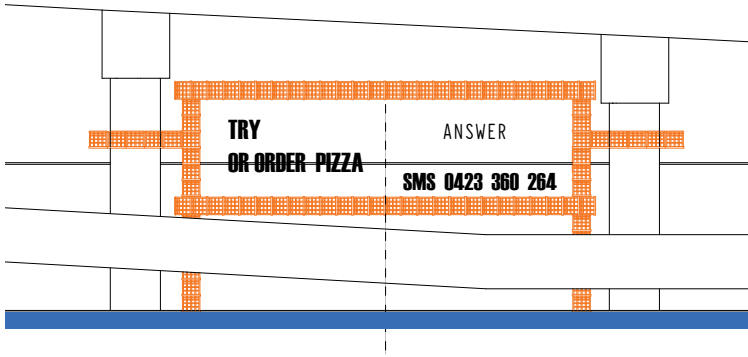
Collabs Gallery receives your Answer or statement

Collabs Gallery posts your statement and will add a response to your question

Over time we will have a dialogue or more?

Phillip Burns  
Bill Anderson





Collabs Gallery says:...!?! What do you say?





SMS CITY: FIND OUT NOW!

# Hotel Facebook CHECK IN

## FOLLOW THE STEPS

1



Facebook

2



3

Like



4

Take a Photo



5

Upload your  
Image



6

Request a  
room No.



select your room No. next page



**ENJOY YOUR STAY !**

CHECK IN!



## GALLERY SPACE 3

### HOTEL CITY - Social Network

Hotel City makes room for you. Inhabit Collabs Gallery.  
Check in at the Hotel and find yourself a room.

How does it work?

You login to your Facebook account

You go to City\_Leaks platform

You upload an image of yourself

You select a room number

You are checked in!

Enjoy your stay!

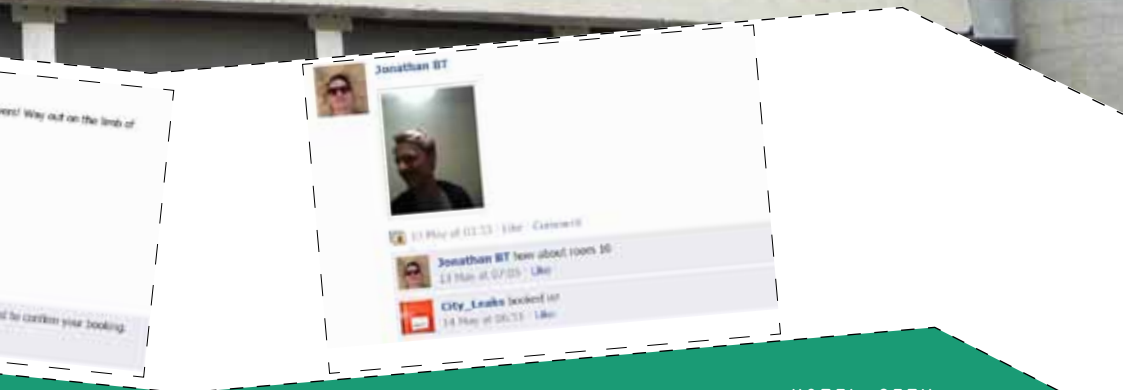
Ana Jankovic  
Andre Bonnice







City\_Leaks Facebook screenshots 20th July 2011



## HOTEL CITY



more things to find out...



not quite finished but alive...

## INSTALLING

It is one week before I leave when we install the gallery. Yellow 'trade' clothes make me look more official. For the SMS exhibit the first attempt to place the structure in the water fails badly.

The riverbed is not appropriate to hold up our structure, we have to redesign the frame quickly. The single day installation schedule also requires reconsideration; it takes the whole weekend.

By Sunday evening Collabs Gallery is in place. I am proud of all the contributions given by the design teams and eagerly await what happens.



another way to move into your room...





## OBSERVATIONS

The Gallery sits underneath a highway bridge. It is clearly discernible from the other side of the river. I watch some cyclists stop and look at it for a while. During the limited time I could observe the space I witnessed a diverse image of stop and go; many continue on their way looking at it in passing, others stop to contemplate it, photograph it, and take information on how to engage with it.

The first gallery space, post, is aesthetically convincing and intriguing. It has a cardboard diorama that asks participants to "paint their town." Through the use of the postal service visitors send a postcard and in return receive one of the shapes to paint and return. The returned painted figures are then reinserted into the diorama and the 'town' is 'painted'.

The second gallery space, SMS, is a billboard screen with big red cardboard letters spelling out: "Find out now!" with a mobile telephone number to send a response.

The third gallery space, facebook, receives most the attention and interaction. People seem to immediately grasp how to communicate and engage with it. The "Facebook Hotel" allows people to select a room and check in. After a few days their facebook uploaded image is inserted into their chosen box/room.

Over the next few weeks I observe a lot of activity on the facebook site. When Collabs Gallery finally gets locked with a padlock by CityLink (the road company that is liable for the area) it is those who had checked into the hotel that respond the most.

The teams are unable to enter the gallery space again. We contacted the road company and they politely brought the liability problem to our attention and respectfully dismantled the gallery.

The installation lasted six weeks.



### City\_Leaks

The council locked us out from Collabs Gallery with a padlock!  
Any ideas? Anybody able to open these things?



### Wall Photos

1,688 Impressions · 0.36% feedback

 09 June at 14:36 · Like · Comment · Share



**City\_Leaks** what about adding our own lock. that would be 'draw'. close, closer...

09 June at 14:45 · Like



**Ethel Craptackulosa** Hacksaw & bike combo lock.

09 June at 15:13 · Like



**Mike Becker** Have they removed the gallery?

09 June at 18:42 · Like



**City\_Leaks** No, still there yet, just a blocked entry

09 June at 18:57 · Like



**Ethel Craptackulosa** Part of the it has blown over also. Everyone here should ring the council (Yarra?) and ask them to fix it.

10 June at 01:06 · Like



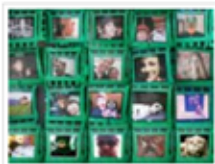
**David Young** Really guys, you should have expected this. What, with the enormous risk you posed to society with those criminally dangerous milk crates. Think of the children! The council has without a doubt saved lives through this righteous act of locking.

11 June at 12:38 · Like



### City\_Leaks

Dear Collabs Goers, Contributors and Participants. Collabs Gallery has been removed by City Link last week. There was nothing we could do about it. Nonetheless we really enjoyed seeing this installation evolve and having your participation, so thanks to everyone. Your feedback and your support encourage us for our future projects. In the coming months you will see our work mostly in Europe, possibly in Berlin. If you happen to be around check it out. If you have a project yourself, please contact us so we can publish it for you. We are looking forward to any new contributions. Thanks a lot. Stay with us, it's been inCrateable so far...



### Wall Photos

1,190 Impressions · 0.76% feedback

 27 June at 01:53 · [Like](#) · [Comment](#) · [Share](#)

 8 people like this.



**Jade Cantwell** really disappointing...

01 July at 11:45 · [Like](#)

Design: City Leaks  
Construction: City\_Leaks Team  
Photos: City Leaks  
05/2011

## CONCLUSION

The means through which we communicate with each other is also the means through which institutions and the city recognise us. One requires an address to get a licence, go to school or university, have insurance, buy a car...

Telephones are ubiquitous, especially mobile phones. Any moment we use them we can be traced, recorded, remembered, tracked. And Facebook is as much a social networking tool as it is a tool for stalking, direct marketing, and identifying, with as much detail as the user is willing, the individual. Each means of communication relates to how, where, when and even with whom we dwell.

Communication also marks the architecture and planning of contemporary cities. It is in itself a form of para-architecture, but more pervasively it informs how one engages and depends upon the urban environment, the social system that regulates it, and the institutions that order it.



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MOOLAN  
Specialist in Remodeling



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MOOLAN  
Specialist in Remodeling









## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Many Thanks to all who have supported these ventures...

In particular I would like to thank Megan Evans, my contact person in Melbourne, for her indispensable contributions to this work.

Thanks to RMIT University, Melbourne and Technische Universität Graz for cooperating and funding my Diploma Thesis of 'Para-Architectures'.

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### Figure 1: Plan of the laneways

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### Figure 2: Burke Street Mall

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### Figure 3: Swanston Street

[http://lh4.ggpht.com/-PTh31171A90/SyRvsP97b\\_I/AAAAAAAAAdQ/mHvtJXGkFxQ/IMG\\_3387.JPG](http://lh4.ggpht.com/-PTh31171A90/SyRvsP97b_I/AAAAAAAAAdQ/mHvtJXGkFxQ/IMG_3387.JPG) (viewed 20.07.2011)

### Figure 4: Laneway Galleries

[http://lh6.ggpht.com/-wUKILnco1iU/TQGCY4FBUI/AAAAAABFh4/Tuk\\_-KEKOM/s1024/IMG\\_1832.JPG](http://lh6.ggpht.com/-wUKILnco1iU/TQGCY4FBUI/AAAAAABFh4/Tuk_-KEKOM/s1024/IMG_1832.JPG) (viewed 20.07.2011)

### Figure 5: Laneway Bar

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### Figure 6:

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### Figure 8:

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### Figure 9:

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### Figure 10:

[http://3.bp.blogspot.com/\\_zIjpxeHKnKM/S9Z7yrpA5fI/AAAAAAAQzA/JmAwP-Dr91iY/s1600/DSC\\_5725+1003.jpg](http://3.bp.blogspot.com/_zIjpxeHKnKM/S9Z7yrpA5fI/AAAAAAAQzA/JmAwP-Dr91iY/s1600/DSC_5725+1003.jpg) (viewed 20.07.2011)

