

# Introduction

## Gaps between and within Gen-ius and Gen-ealogy

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This issue of *Interstices: Journal of Architecture and Related Arts* provides another occasion to explore small and narrow spaces between apparently solid and secure structures; to pause and to expand openings for thought and practice in architecture and related arts. Interstices (*pl. ĩn-tŭr'stĭ-sĕz', -sĭz*) insert themselves, as man-made, articulated, and unobstructed spaces, into the elements of their surrounding structures. Despite their difference, they remain part of the fabric, as a crevice or crack is a structural part of the overall form of a wall or a rock, or an interval or rupture part of a network's flow of forces.

Seventeen years after the first issue of *Interstices*, it would be an overstatement to reiterate that an architectural culture in New Zealand scarcely exists. Nevertheless, its relationship with the exigencies of practice - to quote from the editorial of the first issue: "the restrictions of immediate commercial appeal" - remains largely unchanged. Such exigencies have also produced gaps in the publication of this journal, disrupting continuity, but also creating a void around which new co-operations could form. This broken lineage gives rise to questions of genealogy. As a way of writing history, genealogy can engage reflexively with the variability and contingency of values. Its defamiliarizing and performative procedures provide degrees of freedom, by exploring questions of subjectivity from alternative, self-critical perspectives. Genealogies, while never universal or external, can clear and open up spaces "by a sense for the possible, ... i.e. for that which might be otherwise" (Saar, 2002: 237). By making room for potentiality, they can give new impetus to questions posed from diverse perspectives, or from different ways of looking at a problem. They can break, what David Owen calls, "aspectival captivity" and disclose extra-ordinary possibilities, purposes and values (2002: 227). Similarly, traversing interstices entails productive tensions capable of unsettling monolithic positions.

Inevitably, genealogy is bound up with questions of subjectivity, and, etymologically, is related to notions of genius. Giorgio Agamben provides an account of the subject-under-*Genius* where the subject is a field of tensions, generated by a dissonance between the "most intimate and personal" (p. 95) and a, potentially frightening, "most impersonal part ... which surpasses and exceeds" the individual (p. 95). A subject's impersonal and pre-individual part does not simply precede individuation. It is not merely a past to be recalled through memory; it is always present as a still unidentified reality, "a zone of non-consciousness" (p. 96). This oscillation, between one's individual self and a power that cannot be owned, amounts to a potentiality of becoming, undoing and generation. From this perspective, writing or designing may entail distancing from Genius, rather than demonstrating genius. To "take possession of Genius, to constrain him to sign in his name, is necessarily destined to fail" (p. 96). To try to reduce Genius to a tolerable size, to act as if the encounter with Genius were a personal privilege, produces "tics and symptoms that are even more impersonal", or, effects that

are “laughable and fatuous” (p. 96). Ideas of individual genius, creativity and inspired personal achievement generated within Romanticist or Enlightenment traditions collide with Indigenous knowledge traditions. Despite many variations, the latter share a number of concepts in which all things are interdependent and related through a common genealogy. Becoming-embodied is a material manifestation of a lineage of a person or an object (*whakapapa* in Maori, or *gafa* in Samoan). The body is connective tissue to the gene-archaeological matter of ancestors, land, community, family (Refiti, 2005: 54). Depending on how they are engaged with, genius and genealogy can stand in complementary and oppositional relationships. In this issue we want to explore the gaps and fissures in all-embracing, genealogical accounts, and the splits and spillages in notions of genius, within architecture and art, practice and theory.

Thomas Mical’s *Genius, Genus, Genealogy: Hejduk’s Potential Angels* prefigures many aspects subsequent contributors engage with. Shuttling between Agamben’s notion of genius and Nietzschean/Foucauldian ideas of genealogy, Mical sketches possible relations between etymologically closely related terms. Genius’ potentiality and genealogy’s contingency interlace to elucidate the individual subject-under-Genius, generic containers of genus, and the play of invisible forces and drives in genealogy. John Hejduk’s angel figures, descending into iconic architectural masques in his later works, challenge the conventions of modern architecture-without-qualities. In an unseen space within the image, they fall from potentiality to contingency, move from architectural thought to image. Luc Deleu’s imagery in *The Unadapted City* project is examined as a discursive undertaking in Guy Châtel’s *Plan Obus* and *Vipcity, as From Father to Son*. *Vipcity* performs a critique of the contemporary city, questioning methods and aims of architecture and urbanism, but eschews questions of authorship. Thus, Le Corbusier’s image evokes a hackneyed ideal of intellectual effort that professes to act as a lever on society, while jealously preserving its freedom. Châtel traces references to Modernism and Le Corbusier which position Deleu as descendant, and his work within a “cunning genealogy”. Re-assembling pieces of Deleu’s giant jigsaw, Châtel endeavours to discover what its genealogical references may hint at. Carl Douglas is similarly interested in the bonds of affirmation and denial that makers maintain with their precursors. In *Latecomers*, he pairs the writings of two theorists with the relationships of two latecomers in architecture to their predecessors. Bloom’s *Anxiety of Influence* (1973) highlights aspects of Adolf Loos’ relationship to Karl Friedrich Schinkel, and Browne’s *Hydriotaphia* (1669) provides comment on genealogical connections between Hadrian and Augustus’ mausoleums. The notion of influence can be deployed to establish intergenerational debt. However, as Douglas shows, the latecomer often thwarts this debt through its very acceptance; genealogy, rather than being passive inheritance, becomes actively antagonistic. Douglas juxtaposes architectural incidents, separated by centuries, with literary notions activated in other periods.

Desley Luscombe in *Constructing the Architect of the Italian Renaissance* closely examines the composition and iconography of two architectural frontispieces. Notions of genius and professionalism, which are intermingled in these allegorical representations, shifted the role of the architect in Italian Renaissance culture beyond that of a designer of buildings, by conferring on him a set of classical, ethical and moral values. His intellectual capacity to form architectural space and imagery congealed with ideas of individual genius, propagated by writers such

as Giorgio Vasari, to suggest that an architect was a remarkable citizen with responsibility for society's visual representations. Claims to genius and worth set architects apart from the mass of citizens. In the Romantic period, notions of individual artistic genius were further elaborated, as design was increasingly regarded as an individual act of creation, rather than a process of mimesis that re-combined pre-existing material. Helene Furján's *Signature Effects: John Soane and The Mark of Genius* examines the implications of this shift through the lens of Soane's work. Soane mobilized complex definitions of genius that had developed during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: aspects of innovation and form-finding; aesthetic theories of atmospherics, moods and effects; politics of aesthetics, culture and nation-state. Furján also reflects on the resonances the period's 'cult of genius' has with today. Despite an increasing theoretical association of 'genius' with processes based on creative codes, notions of individual genius seem to persist in the interest of contemporary architects' in 'signature effects'.

However, Mirjana Lozanovska argues that ideal images of master architects are never the real images of architects. As lenses through which architects are seen, they mediate architects' self-identity. In *Mistresses and Others: The 'body as subject' in (architectural) discourse*, Lozanovska explores the question of who can be an architect. Becoming an architect, today, involves confronting the vision of a transcendental and heroic master. How can those whose bodies are crossed by signs of the female, the black, the migrant, the working class, the peasant ... stage themselves as provisional masters? Lozanovska brings questions of the master/non-master relationship to bear on Zaha Hadid's 1996 presentation of her work at The American University of Beirut.

In *Genius Loci*, Mark Jackson's interest in the body revolves around that which a body is unconscious of, those elements in Agamben's notion of genius that are not spiritual but, rather, unknown powers in our bodies – most personal and most impersonal, closest and most remote. By linking these aspects to two texts by Jacques Lacan, Jackson probes into the possibility of considering architecture's genius loci as a locus of the body's drives. The Lacanian notion of jouissance, understood as a structural place of preserving that is usually forbidden, may alert us to the locus of genius as the primordial, though uncanny, ground of architecture's *genius loci*. Likewise, Laurence Simmons combines selected philosophical perspectives of Kant, Agamben, and Kierkegaard to complicate theories of the subject as a unity with certain innate attributes. Reconsidering the concept of genius with respect to New Zealand painter Colin McCahon (1919-1987), Simmons performs, in "I AM": *Colin McCahon Genius or Apostle?*, a reading of works from McCahon's *Practical Religion* series, which draw upon the texts of The Letter of James. Simmons explores how these works navigate a course between the sacred and the profane, and how McCahon negotiates a position vis-à-vis the texts, which renders his identity as an author problematic.

In this issue of *Interstices* we are very proud to be able to present the first English translation, by Laurence Simmons, of Giorgio Agamben's 2004 essay *Genius*, the very text that provided many contributors with a common platform for their reflections on genius and genealogy.

In the non-refereed part of this issue several contributors bring a shared interest in psychoanalysis to their explorations of architecture and related arts. In *Dreamlikeness*, Steve Appel discusses Freud's dream theory and its potential for thinking about art, specifically with reference to two images by New Zealand artist Julie Firth. Michael Gunder provides, in *Planning's Contradicting Genius*, an insight into the dark side of planning

from a Lacanian point of view. Lucy Holmes, concerned with Lacanian psychoanalysis as well, finds in *The Passion of Ignorance* – also the title of her review of Dany Nobus and Malcolm Quinn’s 2005 book *Knowing Nothing, Staying Stupid: Elements for a Psychoanalytic Epistemology* – an inspiring challenge and an antidote to contemporary tertiary institutions’ rationalization of knowledge in terms of market values.

In his empathetic review of Roger Neich’s 2001 book *Carved Histories: Rotorua Ngati Tarawhai Woodcarving*, Arapata Hakiwai stresses the importance of genealogy for an understanding of the art of Maori carving and its traditional and contemporary practices. Neich’s book is successful partly because of its understanding of the context in which the carvings and carvers it discusses belong. A rather different application of genealogy unfolds in John Walsh’s light hearted *Genius and Genealogy*, which considers the question of lineage in New Zealand architecture through the publications of three New Zealand architectural firms on the occasion of their fiftieth anniversary.

In *Indifference as a Subversive Strategy*, Leonhard Emmerling discusses Theodor W. Adorno’s notion of indifference in the context of his Aesthetic Theory, and relates it to Andy Warhol’s ostensible indifference towards the banal and the non-banal, and his almost capitalist production for the art market. In *landscape / inscape*, Tony Green’s review of Emmerling’s first curated exhibition in New Zealand, at the St Paul Street Gallery, he discusses the curatorial strategy, as well as the advantages and problems, of an outsider’s perspective on New Zealand art.

Moana Nepia concludes this issue with *A Marriage of Convenience?*, an at times whimsical, at times serious review of the 2006 Royal New Zealand Ballet performance *The Wedding*. Based on a story by Witi Ihimaera, the performance was geared towards spectacle. Nepia argues this compromised the potential of Ihimaera’s themes of cultural diversity and interaction, and thus the sense of the possible, the potential to imagine something better was also compromised.

## References

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## Refereed Papers