Pop-up Hub Melbourne

A story about ‘making/materialisation’ + participation

Ammon Beyerle with Here Studio

March 2010 - October 2010
Title: Pop-up Hub Melbourne / Hub Melbourne Incubator

Scope: Design, placemaking and fitout of a coworking space in a heritage listed building (kitchen, meeting room, lounge, shared workspace)

Budget: $45k design and build (including $12k fees)

Location: Donkey Wheel House, 673 Bourke Street, Melbourne

Client(s): Hub Melbourne Pty Ltd

Participants:
* Here Studio (transitioned from Urban Village Melbourne);
- Friends;
- Hub Melbourne staff and volunteers [pseudonyms used];
- Hub Melbourne community members (potential customers);
- Contractors;
- Suppliers;
- City of Melbourne;
- Heritage Victoria;
- The landlord - Donkey Wheel Charitable Trust;
- Social media followers; and
- The general public

Date: March 2010 - October 2010 (stage one of the project)

Participatory Propositions

Key modes of practice in RED

Communication
Event
Governance
Making
Material
Process
Space (occupation)
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[This booklet exhibits a collection of images from the second case study project – Pop-up Hub Melbourne, together with supporting captions and summaries in three parts.]

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1. Aim of participation in Pop-up Hub Melbourne

Context of Pop-up Hub Melbourne

Concurrent to the 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, Melbourne is abuzz with dreams of environmental and social sustainability, and, just a year after the Global Financial Crisis, one conversation is about new business models. “Bottom-up”, “Social Enterprise” and “Corporate Social Responsibility” circle key themes of “connection”, “(positive) social change”, and “collaboration”. Cities need new workplaces to incubate ideas.

Donkey Wheel Charitable Trust is calling for expressions of interest from local community organisations and individuals, to take up residency in the 1891 Venetian Gothic Melbourne Tramway and Omnibus Company headquarters. One organisation is our Urban Village Melbourne (UVM) practice, an interdisciplinary social enterprise attempting to set up a shared workspace, another is a concept for Hub Melbourne: part of an international network of coworking spaces.

After submitting a business case, Hub Melbourne negotiates a lease for the 3rd-floor, and Here Studio – out of UVM – negotiates a partnership for the fit-out through design and placemaking. The “Pop-up” stage covers about 200m².

Tensions in Pop-up Hub Melbourne

Underlying Hub Melbourne is a battle between practices of business innovation and community art. Proponents of each viewpoint hold fundamentally different values, and thus different uses for a coworking space. One, the “social innovators”, purpose the Hub as a place for networking, new business and ideas; where the “activist artists” want to gather, express ideals and develop a political movement. One interests itself in the profitable accumulation of wealth; the other, the critical redistribution of power. These two vectors create diverse capacities and contradictions, implying different expectations as to membership fees, personal contributions, and working principles.
For some the general excitement about ideas, intentions and connecting, produces words and talk, but little measurable action. Those attracted to the buzz listen and interact, yet are at odds with people who want to get on and build something, speak and make. Meanwhile, the start-up business harvests the resulting ambiguity to accumulate capital; effectively members are at once volunteers investing in the community, and prospective paying customers.

Ambiguous roles and responsibilities affect the relationships between people. Low finances and high expectations require a team in close, personal and often full-time contact. For the Core Team this is a particularly heavy burden, exacerbated by passions, varying degrees of expertise and limited remuneration. Different concepts of project ownership overlap and clash. The architects – the most hands-on in the community and just-starting their professional practice Here Studio – must juggle to provide project expertise, facilitate others’ participation, and demonstrate principles of community leadership.

Opportunities to work through participation

The first opportunity: attraction, recognises that participation can be a means to draw people to the project and activate it. Inviting people to participate helps to market a new business, whereupon that activity generates ever-increasing social interest and commitment. Participation of community members builds social meaning, and in this context, a sense of place that is meaningful to its members. The function of gathering not only is promotional – people are attracted to people – but it may possess social value for both business and community interests.

Second: discovery, recognises the value of learning together and that the process produces subsequent ways to participate. Here participants – including the architect – discover, develop and share new concepts of business/community that incorporate their own principles (i.e. experiment, participation, inclusivity, diversity, openness). One may also learn how to communicate with others.

The third opportunity: materialisation, recognises how the making process can bring people together, and instead of mere buzz, manifest new assets, physical places and tools. A placemaking process can connect people to the materials and spaces they inhabit. Through temporary, previsionary and incremental (participatory) moments – pop-ups and prototypes – people can move beyond words, incubate new ideas, test, take action and find the best (sustainable) fit.

Overall trajectory of Pop-up Hub Melbourne

Throughout the Pop-up, loose ideas and passions become numerous learnings, close relationships and an iconic aesthetic. Despite this materialisation – that tensions between personal roles, volunteers and expertise will find little resolution – begs an awareness of how governance structures can (still) develop.
1. Donkey Wheel Charitable Foundation bought a building in 2008 with the intention to gather and support community organisations. Looking for a home, UVM visited the space in late 2009. The ground floor and heavy basement had already been used over the years for a wine appreciation club, art events, exhibitions and parties. The building has a strong physical and social presence.

2. Donkey Wheel House is a prominent, 3-storey red brick Venetian-Gothic building in the Melbourne central activity district. It was built as a showcase for the Tramway and Omnibus Company in 1891 when Melbourne’s tram system was developing. Presenting one – ornate with tiles and balconies, and another plain with windows – characteristic façade, it is the last multi-
storey building on the eastern side of Bourke St, just before Southern Cross Train Station – Melbourne’s regional transport hub. The building details give a strong feel of history and, apart from roof leaks and some flaking wall paint; it is in good repair.

3. Inside, the top floor walls are two-tone faded mint and dull panzer-tank-green with a four foot-high thin separating black band, and tall, peanut butter orange skirts and deep-set window architraves on both the facade and the internal stairwell sides. Detailed corners and arched openings are features. Long brittle-white-plastic 1950s office-suite fluorescent light fittings hang from chains throughout the space, obscuring views of the tall, stepped ceiling and ornate ceiling roses. The floor is polished timber with few holes.

4. The space for Pop-up Hub Melbourne is about 210m², roughly broken into three spaces: 110m², 60m² and 40m² respectively. Roughly, the larger space runs East-West, and the medium space North-South. Coinciding with the start of Here Studio’s contract to Hub Melbourne, the landlord constructed a white-plaster bathroom and kitchenette in the smallest space with minimal consultation.
5. The first business plan conceives Hub Melbourne as a private business led by our client who provided a majority of finance for the startup. The original concept intends for closely intertwined executive governance and ownership structures with few private investors, and a share available to Core Team members/staff that contribute to the project. The intention is to deliver positive social and environmental impacts, as well as a financial return in a close-to-commercial context (including close-to-commercial rent).

6. As architects, we participate in these early discussions, conceiving, arguing, diagramming, graphic designing and laying out the business plan, page by page. The final report writes us in as leading the design project, and effectively, establishing a methodology: ‘placemaking’.
7. Those that had experienced established Hubs abroad readily share precedent images, plans and videos showing what a Hub might look like. These images feature large, often adaptive reuse spaces with custom, iconic furniture, a convivial atmosphere with raw materials, bright colour touches, indoor plants and mess. Most show an everyday, very human aesthetic.

8. The first meetings include 30-40 people, in a large circle, buzz words and many conversations about ‘innovation’, ‘community’, ‘social networks’ and ‘sustainability’. People show great enthusiasm to get involved, yet also ask hard questions about profits, ownership and governance. At the end of one meeting participants split into independent working groups focussed on different themes.

9. Early in the project, as part of the small Core Team we offer a demonstration coinciding with Melbourne Open House. Visitors to Donkey Wheel House are able to immediately see our little “Hub 1.0” – five people with laptops sitting around a table, networking, face-to-face amongst pictures of other international Hubs, here in the prospective home of Hub Melbourne.
What is the explicit concept and what elements were implicit?

The explicit concept of the project is materialisation – Here Studio expressed this as ‘placemaking’ – and together the community would actually explore what that meant. For the architects, this means that the space and the community develop together. For the community, this focuses on building a home ‘place’. It is somewhat abstract and difficult to grasp, yet discursive and ever-changing from person to person. Placemaking implies a clear valuation of process, many steps, and ever-developing. Emphasising the action not the object, anyone and everyone takes part in the community and by contributing to it they become a part in it.

As a comprehensive project the implicit elements are those that could most (productively) resist resolution and instead interconnect. Here Studio will regularly imbue the first: communication – forms, tones, style and brand. The community will establish a new business/movement and as such a new, shared language is its affirmation, with event rituals, patterns of words used by insiders. With its focus on meanings and pronouncements, communication becomes a point of tension with the technical imperative of architectural process, to design and build something. Communication is another space for people to connect and inhabit.

The second implicit element: governance, is how decisions are made. People can meet and explicate the concept of a purposeful business/community and agree on its principles, but if they are to refuse the concept of a meaningful application, it would remain secondary to the imperatives of revenue and organisational structures. The implicit character of governance also highlights the disjunction between business and community ethics, one about a form of (profitable) separation, the latter about empathy.
Process
Here Studio manifest the concept of making/materialisation in various processes. Our proposition is to build membership and the design in parallel, and that participation is the means for coinciding and contradicting at specific milestones. In action we employ a process of clarifying brief, structure and aspirations with people – using text, diagrams and precedents. This allows our architectural process legitimacy and thus scope and authority to work through a particular methodology and direction. When faced with early consensus, we encourage conflicts to appear, different perspectives and testing – not just talk.

Event
Event provides high value to the Hub, to introduce, ‘get to know you’, discuss and make. Here Studio conceives a ‘tea party’ as a fun alternative to a meeting, evoking an atmosphere for participation – conviviality, conversation, and exchange; but also through the tone of invitations – food, and expectations for participants to bring something; and attention to the room layout – sitting in a circle or around a table, face-to-face. ‘Open days’ ritualise inviting others in, and ‘make days’ share stories. A typical event includes a theme, facilitator, ‘check-in question’, activities, ‘parking lot’, ‘check-out question’ and detailed minutes.

Making
Here Studio conceives making as both imperative and event. “Make days” – experiences for participants start to finish through design and build processes and principles – prove the possibility of the project coming to being. One legacy is artefacts that will embody stories of people collaboratively working things out. We emphasise the heuristic nature of making, “let’s try this”, “what if we …”, using prototypes, testing and eliciting feedback before manufacturing full sets (i.e. furniture, painting all the walls). We design how something is made into the aesthetic itself, “in what way does its making bring people together?” “where do the materials come from?” and “who can (re)make this?”

Space (occupation)
In order to imbue meaning and understanding of the site, Here Studio practices ‘occupation’. We work with the community and contractors to build fixtures and run a variety of events on-site, some peripheral to the project (i.e. Climate Redesign, and Melbourne Transport Complaints Choir). We encourage tacit knowledge of the space, a feel for its dimensions, sounds, shapes, security, light patterns, colours, details, and personal attractions; through activities in which participants dream, walk out and nest ideas or everyday rituals. In all communications Here Studio attempts to mention the space and (often in conflict) bring it into conversation so that it might come alive.
10. Here Studio splits a process diagram into two parts to depict the two main tasks of opening the doors: signing up members and constructing the fit out. We design it to present to meetings and events; and include a sliding scale with the number of weeks remaining, bars for lead-times and for what we had already achieved. Regarding community and members, we imagine a gradual increase in numbers, with events increasing in significance. Below this we break the tasks down to internal (architect only) – planning, visualisation, admin – and external roles – furniture (build), technology infrastructure, and furniture (purchase).

11. We carefully plan meetings to focus people’s attention on the areas in which we wanted participation, and cover off the areas that could potentially send us off track. Up front we spend some time establishing the design process – “welcome” (what are we doing and why?), “process placement” (where are we?, what is a design process?) “introduction/information” (what is a hub, what is a pop-up hub?), and “QandA” (questions and answer session) – then move onto the main parts of the meeting. In this meeting example we present what we had done (a series of scenarios, a resultant brief, models and pictures of the space, and then our concept) before opening up discussion towards our next decisions.

Our strategy is to contextualise every discussion in process-time and upon everyone’s in-depth preparations. The final activity explores bigger questions like the difference between what is needed and wanted, and what balance to strike between people bringing their own furniture, different expectations and capacity. The final point leads to events – items that others may lead themselves.

12. Here Studio’s initial process diagram imagines two streams – user group formation, and design. In design we schedule
**Proposition 1: Process**

A series of workshops with an “iteration” between each one, and beneath, gradually increasing bars for prototypes and engaging a builder, with a long bar for materialisation. Below we provide a glossary. From left to right we outline what we had achieved, strategies for user group formation, what happens in design workshops and what happens in an iteration. This simplified diagram is designed to give an overall picture and, as a poster, to explain key concepts of the process.

13. Early in the process participants are quick to offer especially material ideas for the space, almost too early and usually out of context. Here Studio decides to form and publish a brief, in some ways to push back and give ourselves some space to think, and to create some criteria for discussion and judgement. This we title “our aspirational design brief”, with three parts - “our process brief”, “our construction brief” and “our environmental brief”. For each item we highlight a key term.

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**User group formation strategies**
- attended design ex
- brief development
- formed core team
- formed preliminary user group
- ODH design negotiations
- ODH lease negotiations

**What happens in a design workshop?**
- describe
- outcomes
- blog
- marketing package
- membership incentives
- lessons/communication
- competitions

**What happens in an iteration?**
- collate
- blog/communicate
- detailed development
- testing
- regulation/standards
- contacting suppliers

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**Our aspirational design brief**

**Our process brief**
The pop-up Hub is an opportunity for the community of Hub Melbourne to grow incrementally and design a collaborative place together.
- Encourages the GROWTH of community through the process
- Maximum DIVERSITY and participants
- ‘MAKE BUILD DAYS’ involves community in construction
- Iterative testing and PROTOTYPEING during the pop-up Hub phase
- Invites multiple designer INPUT (students, local artists and architects)
- PLACEMAKING and welcoming processes to get to know the place
- Records, celebrates and tells the STORIES of making real time

**Our construction brief**
The pop-up Hub gives us the time to build a Hub that is environmentally respectful and an example of innovative space in local heritage buildings.
- ‘SLOW ARCHITECTURE’ built incrementally with local materials
- Uses as many RECYCLED materials as possible
- LOW-VOC and materials for healthy air and healthy people
- Active and communicative AWARENESS of environmental impact
- Retains and celebrate the existing HERITAGE building design

**Our environmental brief**
The pop-up Hub is the first step to build a fascinating, beautiful, social space, like a living laboratory-landscape, colourful, gentle, surprisingly innovative and human.
- Feels FLEXIBLE and malleable - “if you walk into a space that you don’t feel like you can change then how can you be creative?”
- COLOURFUL palettes that have local indigenous and cultural meaning
- Air and light which is FRESH and uplifting, natural and comfortable
- Indoor plants and GREENERY for interest, respite and alive eyes
- Shapes and furniture clusters to enable and encourage COLLABORATION
- High QUALITY, comfortable furniture and professional workstations
- Spaces for PRIVACY and intimate communication
- Comfortable and appropriate SECURITY
- A living social enterprise MARKET of people and products
14. To set the tone and invite people to formally participate Here Studio devises the ‘tea party’, a meeting of sorts that was convivial, fun and also serious. “Why have meetings - when you can have a tea party!” To designate it as a special event, we make a branded flyer with date and time and send it out via email before each meeting. Its blurb includes three parts: the story so far, theoretical ideas we want to explore and what we will be doing. This poster re-introduces placemaking as a continuous process. A tea party implies conversation, hot tea and maybe biscuits.
Proposition 2: Event

15. For our first meeting we make honeyjoys and choc-chip cookies, and set chairs around a small kitchen table. It is the evening in the medium-sized 60m² space. In order to set the scene for the design process, we ask people to think about their day and their favourite space they had been in, and to describe how it felt and what it looks like. People share personal stories and snippets of their everyday life, face-to-face.

Introducing the process we are all about to embark upon, we begin by articulating the importance of personal input, the inclusion of both conflict and consensus, and the tension between making ideas, and progress. Near the end of the meeting we ask people to slowly walk around the space, imagine (and feel) what it might be like. We type detailed minutes from the meeting and post them on a blog.

16. In a typical Core Team meeting, food, coffee, paper, recharging phones and laptops litter the scene. This meeting lasts for several hours, flowing from one topic to another, sitting close together around a single table with butchers paper on the wall behind us. Together we write lists, draw diagrams to think through things, and form a ‘parking lot’ for ideas and questions that do not quite fit at the current stage. Individuals take it in turns to facilitate different discussions.
17. It’s Saturday 2nd of October, 13 days before the participatorially-designed project, the Hub Melbourne (incubator) is meant to open and I’m feeling a bit stressed.

Michelle, Sudhir and I have arrived an hour early to set up, move tools, position tables. We decide to construct two working areas in the centre of the room, relatively close together so that people can be near one another. We hesitate to spread them out thinking about noisy power tools but the centre of the room also allows us to keep the dust away from our ebay-chesterfield sofa, my brother’s flat screen TV and Tom’s amplifier called Wang Wang. We make a negotiated deliberative decision between the three of us and move on. We deliver the room on time.

People start arriving and want to know what to do. Nicole drops by for 10 minutes to leave her architect’s-for-peace jigsaw, Julian is here with his big kit of parts and 5-star jigsaw “I’m only here for an hour or so ... “, James, his wife Melanie and 2 year-old Ava rocks up, Katya arrives with food, (KATYA) “We’re just going to prepare the food in the kitchen if that’s OK? I know we aren’t officially meant to be in here yet, but ... ” “Yeah, I agree, we have to move in, go for it.” I’m sitting at the first table, with all the paper, pens, pencils, crayons, scissors, French curves and compasses trying to calmly think things through. Sudhir arrives with Alef (SUDHIR) “Hi Ammon, I’d like you to meet my son Alef.” “Wow, thanks for coming, it’s a real pleasure to meet you, thanks for being here on a Saturday.”

and Sally is phoning me to see if we have the trailer so she can move house with Adrian but Tom still has it, collecting his last bits and pieces from his house to gift to the Hub. He
Proposition 3: Making
calls me, he is downstairs, he wants hands to carry things upstairs .... PHEW! ..... Something for all these people to do!
I try to sit and think the day through again, Michelle and I finally get a moment to touch base and re-speak the course of action, her spirits are high, which is a big saviour. We really want this to be a super-productive day. It’s Make-day #2, and although Make-day #1 was a big success in terms of social connections, fun, bonding, conversation, we didn’t really arrive at a finished design or do much of the knitting we had planned.

18. We’re meeting Melanie and Ava properly for the first time, so I want to give them some attention. Drawing! We’ve got all the tools so Ava is set to work. James comes back and forth, he is champing at the bit in his work clothes to cut something, build something, break something. I am scanning the scene to make sure everyone is ok, Tom’s things go in the right spot, answer questions along the way and pay attention to Julian who I haven’t been able to spend much time with. Sudhir comes over and shows us the drawings he made yesterday
(SUDHIR) “I’ve worked it out, it’s all based around the golden mean, I read this great book by ...
“I’m going to start cutting...” (He’s really positive too, but wants to get going)
OK, I think, but know we really have to do the prototyping, and I’m still not quite feeling 100% about the final design.
(ME) ‘I’m thinking let’s do this one (the symmetrical one) “I’m going to see if we can work out this other one.”
(It’s a longer conversation) he explains how they are designed around the core diameter of the metal swivel-office-chair feet he got for $12 dollars each. All in golden mean ratios. Centre to centre, two different diameters. Lyn, our bright active core/peripheral one-woman community-instigator social-network show arrives with a handful of pretty crappy metal legs from hard rubbish, she’s excited and keen to give everyone love and inspiration. Last week she came up with having the petal table 350mm off the ground so you could sit on the floor. Sudhir and James start arranging a big sheet of thin MDF, they’ve lost my attention so they decide on their own, I go over and find his drawings again so I can sit back down and nut out the second table-top shape with Katya and Michelle, and finalise the DNA of the first.
People are getting nervous, Tom is back from moving things (I help carry the last load) and he helps to distract people with conversation, there are at least 4 men who want to break out the power tools and just cut things and all I can offer is setting up work benches, tracing shapes, cutting paper and at best, jigsawing prototypes from 2 thin pieces of MDF. Our materials are limited but it seems
like everything has a use, the free, thin MDF was left over from packing the 7-hour plywood trailer delivery Sudhir and I did only days before. We bought BB Radiata pine from New Zealand in Bayswater. It was the most local, environmentally friendly plywood we could find (tick brief!) and Julian’s CD grade was a bit too rough for table-tops, although his tips about what to buy were invaluable, we even had him on the phone just before purchasing. I also liked that it was bright, honey coloured and would reflect the light in the centre of the room.

Yes; it is a 10 week project but it was only 13 days before opening, and I want to cut it too.

... 19. So they set up the thin prototype on a bunch of stools, 7 people around the table. Katya had come up with a great little shape after I’d managed to stress that we needed to brainstorm ideas, she sat diligently for half an hour coming up with a shape of two different circles, one big and one very small. In the end it turned out a good idea in principle, they tested it 1:1 in cardboard, but its dimensions were a bit too small to be practicable. There were quite a few constraints around the project and it wasn’t just beauty and interaction. The tables should be reconfigured easily, not take up too much room, allow many people to work on them privately and collaboratively at the same time in different configurations, (eventually 50 people in 200m2) and be able to stack away efficiently to clear the space completely. We also had an aspirational environmental-material brief and a tight budget.

20. Paul arrives, Michelle and he have talked through building windows at benches. We are both aware that we had originally discussed with him the making of the petal table and were sensitive but needed to just move on. Besides, ... the petal table was a key central piece, as first image crucial to the Hub’s legitimacy and it presented the best opportunity for maximum participation. Paul is a very high quality furniture maker, his pieces in the Hub are beautifully mitre-joined with 4mm French oak veneer on ply. We share some ideas and come up with a
folding piece which when folded down would present a face to the central space. He does some measuring and leaves. Plans to come back and work Sunday afternoon alone.

21. I realise we still haven’t got our shapes and I’m getting anxious that people might leave. I try to encourage everyone to rigorously test out the first prototype by doing a role play. They are resisting being told what to do, and just want to chat, come up with harebrained ideas and have fun. They think they have worked it out already. I’m getting stressed but no-one understands why.

(ME) “We don’t need anymore new ideas! Stop the ideas! we have to delve into them and test

“OK, so pretend you are working, get out your laptop!

“James, how about you have a three-way meeting with Katya and Lyn? talk …

“Alef, can you hear them? Do you feel distracted, Lyn, are you all too close to one another around that circle? Is the other more comfortable?”

I figure out with Michelle and Sudhir that the table should have at least one straight edge. I’m not sure if it was Katya or perhaps Melanie, or Xin (a design student who arrived) or a synthesis of conversations and noise into a collective consciousness but it seems a clear hypothesis to move from. It is established.

I keep wanting to solve the second table, whilst refining the first, I’m looking for a DNA. I get out my computer, AutoCAD, I have to start up the windows side of my MAC. I keep getting interrupted. James and Michelle notice I’m quite stressed and first try to console me, then try to discuss it through with me with conversation. It’s not working, we just have to make it.

(ME) “Trust me!” I’m saying to everyone, “We need to test, make it at different scales, draw it, eventually make a 1:1 version to test. “It’s not talking, but making!”

I obviously have a very clear design process in my mind!!
James helps for 10 minutes, comes up with a great bio-mimicry adapted idea from honeycomb hexagons (I think, oh, it’s like 1st year architecture student geometry projects, but the more I let it settle the more I see a logic in the logic). He cuts a few in paper at 1:10 then gives up, job’s done, solved! He thinks.

But I wanted 10 ideas! How else are we meant to get synthesise hybridise, compromise, distinguish, adapt, negotiate, vote, manipulate?

He leaves, has to go watch the grand final the second time, Julian has to attend to his family and even Katya leaves.
The transformative comes from first principles and a whole lot of experience (aka testing and mistakes). Michelle and I sit to work it through and we’ve got legitimacy talking it through with Alef, the last minutes of community on the table prototype saying the bump and groove is nice but not the most comfortable, deep conversation with Sudhir again, a bit of James’s hexagon project, Lyn’s concise conclusion on the meeting circumference and Katya’s shape, —to finally come to something. It is two relating circles based around the DNA of the plywood 1200mm width, spaced at one golden ratio centres, on one side they are connected with a straight tangent, on every odd table the opposite side is a concave tangent of the 1200mm circle.

Integration.
Consensus!
24. As community members too, Here Studio has an interest and understands the need for the space. Having the responsibility of the architectural project is a good excuse to keep the keys and arrange various on-site community events, meetings, team workshops, storage of materials, and building works. We call this method of on-site activity ‘occupation’ – a way to get to know the site intimately, and, to start to activate it into life by spending as much time there as possible. We envisage the various occupations as placemaking opportunities for stories to be made and social connections to be forged in the context of a site.

The first “occupation” we facilitate is Climate Redesign, a full-day workshop event as part of the Sustainable Living Festival. Over the day we set up both large group circle discussions and un-conference–style gatherings – programming 20-40 minute slots in 4-8 different areas, run by the participants themselves. A number of the participants will stay in contact and take part in the Hub Melbourne design and construction, one key person we meet on the day, Nirvana, is the main builder of the Pop-Up phase, and will co-design the petal tables.

25. Over the day we post the outputs – paper notes, minutes and diagrams – on the walls for everyone to see. They will remain in the space until we complete the fit-out works.

26. Another small “occupation” is a rehearsal for the Melbourne Public Transport Complaints Choir. This choir is a flashmob, singing on a (positive) political message at train stations and political events, to
Proposition 4: Space
(occupation)

improve public transport in Melbourne.
30-40 volunteers meet in the ballroom of Donkey Wheel House to rehearse the 4-voice Edwardian-style chorus. The ballroom resonates, and we can see Southern Cross Train Station from the South-West windows. I am in the bass section and Michelle in the soprano. After rehearsal we all walk down the grand staircase to the train station for a full dress rehearsal singing on the platform.

27. We gain a familiarity with the details of the space that are particular to its character – the multicoloured fireplace, arches and heavy walls, the tall cathedral-like windows framing red brick buildings outside, the pale-coloured light shafts from above, and, more generally the presence of the exterior windows against what is a dimly lit interior environment.

28. Our various on-site meetings and other occupations, began to present and repeat overlapping ideas of how the space could be used. We drew these on a plan in colours designating different activities and furnitures – window seat, communal table, lounge, printing, booths, host, meeting. Patterns emerged. We insisted on on-site meetings with collaborators – we walked through the space with the landscape architect, pointing out how different areas may be programmed, and, opportunities for indoor plants to work with the walls, windows and ledges.
3. Occupations and reflections in Pop-up Hub Melbourne

How was it occupied?

The Pop-up was hard work, fun, and a chore. Working towards bigger aims – developing a purposeful, bottom-up, social change community – many of the architect’s best laid strategies failed, whilst others flourished outside our control. Objectively we delivered the project on time and budget, but the participation experience was challenging. The occupation of our participatory modes reiterated many of the original divisions and distributions of power. The ‘activist-artists’ (including ourselves) participated the most in the design and build: hands on, many hours, making decisions in the moment and solving problems on the fly. The ‘social entrepreneurs’ tended to keep back: only participating in strategic-level meetings or iconic public events. Consequently, this division undermined what legitimacy and effect participatory decisions and materialisations could have. The Hub Melbourne community started to limit the breadth and depth of participation – who got involved, and to what extent was that participation meaningful.
**Process**

Managing the process, was Here Studio’s most consuming activity. Feeling a lack of confidence to bring our architectural approach to all parts of the start-up process, we developed unlimited relationships to the client and the community – we were partners, founders, co-directors, and full-time community members. From continuously renovating our process to using repetition and simplified communication we struggled to maintain the overall vision. Few of our processes were made ritual. When time was short we took a more autocratic tone – to the Core Team’s relief – and led using instructions, demonstrations, or completing the work ourselves (and dangerously-long hours).

**Event**

Two divergent occupations of event demonstrated the inherent tensions materialising the start-up. First, the mode of event became a key offering; marketing the business the Core Team emphasised “people, space —and events” rather than “people, places, ideas”. Events were the main opportunity to meet new people, socialise, tell stories and impart culture. Second, event was effective to schedule progress but often would not get things done; sometimes attendance was low, focus wavered, and volunteers unreliable. How people were invited and welcomed, became the key theme.

**Making**

Actually materialising things – finished artefacts – brought forward the reality of the start-up community. We often found ourselves alone or with our own friends, working on-site to get it done through nights and weekends, debating and problem-solving details on-the-fly. One result of this was expedient governance: those that did the work made the decisions. Another: the resultant aesthetic was narrower and met only some expectations. It was approachable, carried a strict palette of colours and materials and demonstrated everyday making processes, but a few members did not perceive it as ‘professional’.

**Space (occupation)**

The resultant space offered suite of characteristic zones, each a well-nested atmosphere working within shapes, details and environmental aspects of the building. It felt spacious because there were many choices and experiences. In the morning one could tap away on a laptop along a string of petal tables in one room, in the afternoon read cosily on a couch in another then repurpose a small nook to hold a meeting. Initially, member numbers were dangerously low, exacerbated by some who found the coworking atmosphere difficult (they wanted “anchor” desks). For the Hub to work, people had to participate – be flexible and negotiate with others. This required an authority of the architect.
It was late in the process, with only a week to go till opening, and many items were incomplete. We still only had access to the ballroom, and therefore a very narrow window between completing furniture and setting up for opening on Monday morning. As architects we felt an intense pressure to do it all ourselves, despite many of the Core Team offering assistance and a few volunteer afternoons.

Despite the best of our preparations, planned work had not been completed, even when community members were paid to take responsibility. So, in the ballroom, at our last core morning meeting before opening, clearing a table of materials, fixings, screws and bolts we found a quiet moment—"You guys can be the architects. You’ve done a great job getting people involved, but now it’s time for orders – it’s OK, just tell us what to do!…”—And so we did: by planning everyone’s time task by task.

We managed a spreadsheet of items, lists for pickups at the hardware store, dozens of phonecalls, controlling everything from a table, laptop and mobile phone and narrow scope for people to make decisions. We juggled manpower, time and cost — and shifted expectations anew for items after opening. We colour-coded our spreadsheet according to progress ("purchased & delivered", "secured but not yet delivered", "in good progress" and red: "bit more work to go"); separated into rowed-sections ("purchase", "scavenge", "make", "miscellaneous" and "non-design"); columns to manage cost of items ("best case", "worst..."
case”, “actual cost”), from whom items were originating (“from”), what finishing work was needed (“labour”), and who would do it (“by”). We communicated progress to people involved in the final push via a shared cloud document, but ostensibly it was for information only, and non-negotiable.

30. All of the bits and pieces were delivered, made and stored in the ballroom. Everyone could see first-hand what was complete, the quality and character of built items and what remained to complete. The space also meant shared space for socialising, eating together, getting distracted, seeing others working and finding support. In the final days the architects visited people working, both encouraging people and providing critical input – this included problem-solving, demonstrating work quality and processes, and reminding people to rest, eat and work safely!
31. It was three weeks before the planned opening. Amidst squalid professional conditions – late nights, underpay, hours and hours of volunteer work, an inadequate budget – and an entanglement of emotional relationships and ambitions, a number of members in the Core Team considered stopping work in protest. The tension centred around relationships, and expectations for business equity and governance – particularly focussed between Here Studio and the client, and concepts of sweat equity/social capital. After months of work the Core Team was about to open a space, and invite in a community, however was yet to formalise a board, nor document equity in the business. We realised how valuable we were (but maybe not for long). An external facilitator was appointed for two days of workshops. They focussed on principles and purpose, and the relationships between people.

The Core Team sat in a circle, faced each other, drew pictures, took notes in turn, and, also, spoke with one another in private, one-to-one. People got things off their chest. Body language was tense. At the end the relief was a shared decision to step into trust, a revaluation of (social) relationship-building, and a promise to resolve the issue of equity immediately after the imminent opening.

32. A collection of “important” never-to-be-read again colourful workshop notes, drawings and diagrams were arranged on a table.
33. Faced with a sense that works will be finished just-in-time, the Core Team decided to have an intimate, opening dinner one week before the larger, official opening party. The expectations for an opening spectacular event were dropped; we decided for something gentle.

Michelle and I were exhausted, after finishing 1:30AM on the final touches to the space for a Friday soft opening. The tenor of the night was celebration and personal achievement, sharing together as the main participants that made it happen together. For a moment we tried to put aside tensions and unresolved negotiations. We ignored for a moment all the rational whys and wherefores, considered ourselves a close-nit circle and swapped funny gifts. Instead of booking a restaurant, we decided to gather around the large communal table, it seated 12-14 people at once. We lit candles and reminisced, sharing stories and getting to know each other and our personal lives. We had been in such a hurry of late. I was quiet.

34. Late, the candles have melted and someone plugged an iPod into WangWang (the portable amplifier). People danced, shook, laughed and acted silly. We all got quite drunk and headed out on the town, leaving behind a mess of half eaten food, empty wine glasses and dirty dishes.
35. Early on, there were dreams of super meeting-room-come-spaceships, but the final reality was a series of movable, single plywood screens with an iconic pattern. One active participant had a series of CAD-CAM–routed screens left over from a community garden project in the Docklands, less than a kilometre away. This was the answer. The sculpted pattern evoked indigenous paintings and local water creatures. Together we designed simple struts with wheels that allowed the screens to both stack and stand alone, but, as all the fixing details were exposed, it was a boring, fiddly job to construct the full set, and required paid labour.

The detailed painting job was so slow and time-consuming there was an opportunity (and need) for many participants to paint them at the same time. It was a job that required little explanation, and the random patterning of colour allowed people to make their own decisions, as well as negotiate with others. (I still wandered around to check up on the line quality.) For an afternoon a handful of people came and went, and painted the holes, talked to each other side to side as they did it, and got to know one another a bit better.

36. I found it helpful to complete sample building tasks myself then demonstrate to others. I also worked out the methodology to make the task more efficient, and was able to demonstrate the quality that we were aiming for. I too learned building skills from other participants, how to properly use tools and other tricks of the trade. This informed subsequent designs and processes, and gave Here Studio the opportunity to run further events wherein other people could gain skills.
37. With a large open space in a heritage building, 21st century power requirements for laptops and recharging phones posed a challenge in terms of cabling. One early concept was to embrace the issue and make the cords a feature by knitting them by hand. The idea sparked the imagination, enthusiasm and love of a member, whose Chilean family, it seemed, were knitting experts. She suggested we knit chairs and other things, and could teach others. Having struggled thus far to get active participation of others and delegate tasks, as architects we were quite excited and excitedly handed over the chair cover design to the knitting member to lead. At once, more women began to actively participate, however, we soon learnt that her home aesthetic was not what everyone had in mind. We had to curate it hands on. Inspired by orange and reddish silverbeet we recently ate with a community member, and Mark Rothko paintings, Michelle made a coloured pencil drawing of the full set of chairs around the large communal table. She prototyped and knitted a number of the chairs, side by side with the knitting member, and discovered a new hobby: crocheting.

38. Here Studio assisted with the colours.
39. Aiming to produce participatory architecture we tried to communicate the design process such that it appeared easy to get involved in. We also participated in all aspects of the startup project, events, risk planning, sales, budgeting, communications, organisational design and training as full participants of the Core Team. To many participants, our expertise in planning and design became less clear. Our authority to make decisions was too precarious, yet some big decisions had to be made using a rigorous, reliable, formulated plan. Despite our intuitive methods, and many experiences of getting to know the site through occupation, our authority seemed too equal to other participants.

We produced a three-dimensional digital survey model, and then developed a series of scenarios studies at different scales — “XL” programme of the whole third floor; then “L” zonings of the front 210m² space, “M” plans of different furniture fitouts, and “S”, piece by piece studies of how major elements could fit in different places. The studies brought forward patterns and provided proofs to make shared decisions. “We’ve tested that idea, see here?” It seemed ironic but no participants studied the drawings. However, having produced the plans we sensed more authority in our role. The tone shifted.

40. Our final concept plan allowed different arrangements with slight changes depending on the time of the day and different events — large and small, single and multiple. Almost everything was on wheels, no fixed walls were required, but for a few large heavy furnitures. It showed that the plan was sufficiently flexible and manipulable and at the same time, had the capacity for atmosphere — but whether it would be actively manipulated by community members was another question. So, in the first months of opening we regularly moved the furniture around in order to keep people from forming habits of stagnation. We sought to encourage a community that felt empowered to change its environment, set up new encounters, and “change” the norm.
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