

# Learnings from Mapping Architectural History Perspectives from SAHANZ Through the Decades 1984–2024

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# Learnings from Mapping Architectural History Perspectives from SAHANZ Through the Decades 1984–2024

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From the outset, annual conferences have been the mainstay activity of the Society of Architectural Historians Australia and New Zealand (SAHANZ), often accompanied by architectural tours. Already in 2004, Julia Gatley reflected on the “role of the Society [as] generating a body of knowledge, in raising standards of scholarship, in raising the profile of the research undertaken by members and in facilitating networks and collegiality.”<sup>1</sup> Forty years of output is worthy of celebration, but also of interrogation. Since the formation of SAHANZ in 1984, the architectural history and theory that SAHANZ members have written has evolved, and been revised, critiqued and variously reviewed; as have methodological approaches to the subject matter. The research, scholarship and writings have led to understandings of place that reflect both the local nature of architecture in Australia and New Zealand and more widely its regional and overseas connections. Our research has collated the hundreds of papers presented at SAHANZ conferences. We have also devised an original mapping approach to create a critical visual representation of SAHANZ’s diverse knowledge output, grounded in the social, historical and theoretical context in which it was initially presented.

This research acknowledges and draws on the work of Julia Gatley in “SAHANZ: The First 20 Years, 1984–2004”;<sup>2</sup> Andrew Leach, Antony Moulis, and Nicole Sully (eds), in *Shifting Views: Selected Essays on the Architectural History of Australia and New Zealand* (2008),<sup>3</sup> and Macarena de La Vega de Leon in the paper “The last 15 Years,”<sup>4</sup> which was published in 2021 as part of the 2020 SAHANZ Conference proceedings. The paper considers these writings together to map the broader themes and positions of knowledge across SAHANZ’s forty years, specifically to name clusters, or islands, of knowledge that can be identified as relating to particular contextual environments.

The language and thought of the established SAHANZ discourse, in particular the titles of the Society’s journal, *Fabrications*, and the volume of collected essays, *Shifting Views*, are indicative of the creative, reflective, innovative, and critical approach to researching and writing history that has characterised the work fostered by SAHANZ.

Understanding history as an imaginative and narrative process, as described by Hayden White in his 1973 *Metanarrative*,<sup>5</sup> this research traces intertwined and changing positionings within SAHANZ,

1.

Julia Gatley “SAHANZ: The First 20 Years, 1984–2004,” *Fabrications* 13, no. 2 (2004), 63–87.

2.

Gatley, “SAHANZ: The First 20 Years,” 63–87.

3.

Andrew Leach, Antony Moulis and Nicole Sully, eds., *Shifting Views: Selected Essays on the Society of Architectural Historians Australia and New Zealand* (University of Queensland Press, 2008).

4.

Macarena de la Vega de León, “SAHANZ: The Last 15 Years, 2004–2019,” in *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians Australia and New Zealand: 37, What If? What Next? Speculations on History’s Futures*, ed. Kate Hislop and Hannah Lewi (SAHANZ, 2021), 394–401.

5.

Hayden White, *Metahistory: This Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (John Hopkins University Press, 1973), 1.

often revealing, as Deborah van der Plaats writes, “a desire to move beyond pure critique to build new histories.”<sup>6</sup> In particular, this paper draws on White’s process of “chronicling and story”<sup>7</sup> to create an historical narrative that traces themes across SAHANZ’s conferences. White explains in *Metanarrative* that while the process of chronicling allows us to arrange the historical data into a sequential linear format, it does not provide insights into a beginning or an end – instead, it positions history as an infinite continuum.<sup>8</sup> “Here,” as Leach et al note, “is the paradox that lies at the core of SAHANZ and of history-writing itself, that continuity of the discipline is dependent on change and a process of perpetual renewal through vigorous debate.”<sup>9</sup>

While White engages with the historical metanarrative through literary analysis, this research builds on his established methodology through visually mapping the data over almost forty years. This process allows for the conference papers to be positioned and tracked en masse, and also allows “story arcs” to be selectively lifted from this overarching contextual representation. This visual mapping provides a record of the papers and themes surrounding a story arc, for

example the exploration of landscape, while ensuring it is anchored within its academic and literary context.

The mapping plots conference papers from 1984 to 2024, locating the works of authors who have presented more than five times along time, on the x-axis, and within the research contexts, on the y-axis. This represents the work of SAHANZ members in a specifically architectural manner, plotting key works and drafting connecting lines between authors, revealing intersections that occur between and across the contextual themes within the SAHANZ conferences.

This paper highlights the diverse nature of the research produced and the varied and cross-disciplinary interests that the conference participants have held across the history of SAHANZ. It captures something of the complex trajectories of the careers of the selected architectural historians and theorists, and reflects the shifting membership of SAHANZ itself. The richness of inquiry and the proliferation of production – ranging across multiple fields and interests – is evident in the historical, creative, and critical impulse of the architectural writing across the forty years of SAHANZ.

6. \_\_\_\_\_  
Deborah van der Plaats, “Review of Shifting Views: Selected Essays on the Architectural History of Australia and New Zealand,” *Fabrications* 18, no. 2 (2008), 122–124.

7. \_\_\_\_\_  
White, *Metanarrative*, 5.

8. \_\_\_\_\_  
White, *Metanarrative*, 5–6.

9. \_\_\_\_\_  
Leach, et al, *Shifting Views*, xvi–xvii.