

Women Writing Architectural (Hi) Stories in Australia and New Zealand

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Women Writing Architectural (Hi)Stories in Australia and New Zealand

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Intergenerational conversations have the potential to shape disciplines. This paper presents findings of a research project on oral histories of architectural history, through interviews with architectural historians in Australia and New Zealand. In the interviews, the seven women and six men narrated the main milestones of their scholarly careers; in this paper, I amplify the stories of the women: Anoma Pieris, Julia Gatley, Deidre Brown, Duanfang Lu, Hannah Lewi, Julie Willis, and Karen Burns. Their careers have been shaped not only by the influence of their predecessors, but also by their involvement in the training of new generations of architects and historians. These intergenerational encounters range from short conversations of unimaginable impact to almost long-life dialogues and can be organised around the three main topics of migration, networks, and disciplinarity.

1.

Duanfang Lu, interviewed by the author at The University of Sydney, March 5, 2020.

2.

Anoma Pieris, interviewed by the author at The University of Melbourne, February 21, 2020.

3.

Pieris, interviewed by the author.

4.

Julia Gatley, interviewed by the author at The University of Auckland, February 27, 2020.

5.

Gatley, interviewed by the author.

6.

Deidre Brown, interviewed by the author at The University of Auckland, February 27, 2020.

7.

Hannah Lewi, interviewed by the author via Zoom, April 20, 2020.

Berkeley in 1996, at a time that she referred to as its golden age, with superstars Nezar Alsayyad and Dell Upton.¹ Pieris also started her PhD at UC Berkeley, in 1998. In 2014, Pieris and Lu presented SAUH-Asia as a “transnational network conceived for our Asia-Pacific neighbourhood.”² Together they materialised what Julie Willis once said to Pieris: “You have to make the space you want to occupy.”³ Julia Gatley’s story was also shaped by migration – across the Tasman Sea – and was motivated by an interaction with Willis, who literally grabbed her by the arm and took Gatley to the office of The University of Melbourne to pick up the forms for her PhD application.⁴ Gatley spent seven years in Australia studying and working before she moved back, “homesick,”⁵ to New Zealand.

Deidre Brown found in SAHANZ a community of scholars interested in indigeneity and recalled meeting Paul Memmott as a turning point.⁶ In *Fabrications* and with Hannah Lewi she gained editorial experience. International networks have also been key in the development of Lewi’s academic career, in her case partly developed in the UK. In SAHANZ she found a “fantastic way of building networks that then we

called on for shared ARC projects.”⁷ Willis’s work is exemplary of the legacy of empirical architectural history of The University of Melbourne, and different from that of Karen Burns, informed by interdisciplinarity, by bringing methodologies of other disciplines to introduce theory and to deterritorialise architecture.⁸ Willis remains concerned for the state of the discipline, saddened by the fact that people do not find their own backyard – the history of Australian architecture – interesting, but this has given her license to pursue her projects.⁹ Their stories exemplify the divide between empiricist documentary and theoretically informed approaches to architectural history present since the inception of SAHANZ.¹⁰

Membership societies of scholars like SAHANZ, and the changing ways of collecting their materials, also influence the writing of architectural history. Promoted by SAHANZ, scholars have produced historical research, which they have collected as voluntary conference convenors and members of executive committees, and which is now a source of further analysis in the region. These interviews with those writing architectural history in Australia and New Zealand will

also be archived. Methodologically, the paper builds on the investigation of the use of oral history to study the writing of architectural history through the entangled subjectivities of the narrators who talk, the researcher who listens, and the people and institutions who care about what is said. Thus, the interview becomes a co-creation. This intergenerational dialogue seems particularly appropriate to overcome the institutional uncertainty of emerging scholars, and to increase the sense of belonging to the discipline. By presenting these contextualised fragments of stories, the aim is to encourage multiple meaningful interpretations that can help navigate a generational shift characterised by the urgency of precarity in academia.

8.

Karen Burns, interviewed by the author via Zoom, October 19, 2020.

9.

Julie Willis, interviewed by the author via Zoom, May 21, 2020.

10.

Julia Gatley, “SAHANZ: The First 20 Years, 1984–2004,” *Fabrications* 13, 2 (2004): 72–73, doi:10.1080/10331867.2004.10525184.