Casa Fratelli Gudiotti, by Luigi
Snozzi, Monte Carrasso, 1991

In the Ticino 'happiness writes
white…' as in the vernacular, and
in the works of Luigi Snozzi

(1987), Casa Morisoli Natalino (1988), Casa Morisoli Giorgio (a conversion, 1989), an apartment building (unrealised, 1999), a housing estate (1990–1996), Casa fratelli Guidotti (1991), Casa d'Andrea (1994), Casa Gudotti Antonio (1995) and Casa Guidoti Massimo (unbuilt, 1995). The five projects by other architects are all houses built between 1990 and 1993.

Wandering through the town, the observer does not, however, encounter a Snozzi-ville. It takes time to winkle out these projects, so seamlessly do their uncompromising singularities of material tie in with the stone vernacular of the pre-existing settlement; tied to the aerial route flying past are the larger urban pieces. Photographed in isolation, the works that are scattered around the old convent and down the laneways and alongside the vineyards of the town look powerfully like part of an Aldo Rossi toy block set; jumbled and rolled across the

valley floor. But seen in situ, they are in place as securely as any granite boulder that may have rolled down the mountainside and settled aeons ago in the flatter pastures.

The phenomenon is – aesthetically – the consequence of intense inhabitation of a place. The commissioning of the public and civic works certainly has the pattern of local patronage complained of by outsiders, but the houses tell a story of the 'family architect' analogous to that of the family doctor, cited by *Quaderns* when that journal sought to explain the extraordinary depth of good-quality architecture in and around Barcelona.[23] The pattern of commissioning of private houses is very similar to that which pertains to practitioners who locate themselves firmly in a regional district, be it Apulia[24] or Wales.[25] The former is described in *Mastering Architecture* (2005). In Wales, architect Roger Clive-Powell has a practice motto, 'Design for this Land'. He writes:

> Through good design, careful detailing and a keen awareness of the landscape and its buildings, my practice aims are: to share and regenerate the hidden architectural treasures of Wales through discovery and expert refurbishment, and to ensure they continue to have a worthwhile use in our own times. To design new buildings for rural Wales which enhance the landscape and benefit its communities. I believe in the humanising and civilising effects of good craftsmanship…[26]

This is the language of a family architect. In Wales, Apulia and Ticino, commissions spread by word of mouth, by experience, just as do the reputations of local general practitioners.
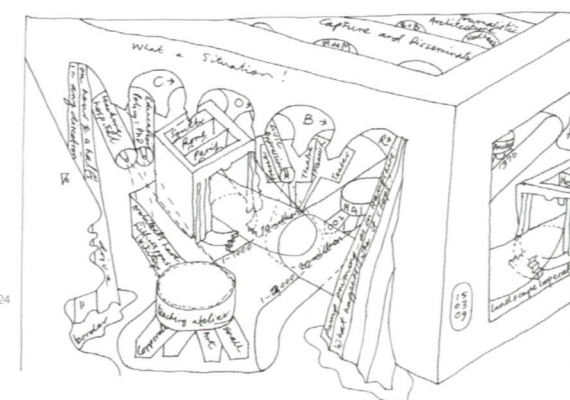
Belgium

Extreme situations can starkly reveal fundamentals that more benign conditions mask. The small kingdom of Belgium – in which an hour and a half's drive in any direction from the capital Brussels takes you to a border – has ten million people and eleven thousand architects. The Netherlands to the north (uncannily similar in these respects to Australia) has double the population but the same number of architects (or fewer). Wars raged across these borders, leaving the northern state divided between Catholics predominant in its south, and Protestants predominant in its north. The wars left Belgium in an uneasy divide between Flemish speakers to the north and French-speaking Walloons to the south, united in the common capital, but so evenly divided as to have spent many years in this decade without a politically elected government.

Belgium was a centre of innovation in architecture during the Art Nouveau period (Victor Horta, 1861–1947, of whose works four are UNESCO World Heritage listed, including Maison and Atelier Horta, 1898, now the Horta Museum), and both Belgium and the Netherlands were early adopters of the modern movement in architecture: famously so with large tracts of pioneering housing at the Hook of Holland and in Rotterdam (Johannes Jacobus Pieter Oud, 1924 and 1925) in the latter; delightfully and surprisingly so with delicate single family

Brussels Office for Architecture
(BOA), Koninklijke Vlaamse
Schouburg – Flemish State
Theatre (1883, redeveloped
2001–2004)

Pavement sign linking the Flemish
theatre (Theater) and the French
theatre (Theatre)

houses in the former (see Glazen Huis, Jules Lejeunestraat 69, Paul Amaury Michel, 1935, and the studio and dwelling of stained glass artist Fernand Crickx, Lenoirstraat 96, c. 1930). After World War II avant-garde movements in art and urbanism swept along this coastal terrain from Copenhagen, through Amsterdam to Brussels in COBRA, from Paris through Brussels and the Netherlands, to Copenhagen with the Situationists.[27]

Innovative architecture came to the fore in the Netherlands once again in the 1980s and 1990s, with the Rotterdam–Amsterdam nexus of Randstad supplanting Barcelona as the 'hot' Design City in popular consciousness. This well-documented phenomenon[28] was presaged by a pattern of migration from journalism to architecture by talented individuals who became interested in architecture through writing about it.[29] Dissatisfied with the state of affairs that they observed, they resolved to do better and enrolled at the AA School of Architecture in London, coming to combine rhetorical skills with a determination to outdo their modern forebears. Their graduation coincided with a period of state intervention in support of innovation in architecture through generous funding of the Netherlands Architecture Institute (NAI) – which gained a new building and (importing the formidable Kristin Feireiss, one of the founders of Aedes Gallery in Berlin, a supporter of new architecture since 1970) established a pioneering exhibition and publication program.

Towns, universities and districts in this uniquely manmade country vied with each other to commission new works by the new generation of architects, and the rest is history. Dutch architects who travelled abroad were aggressively promoted by the Dutch cultural attachés; the state was determined to capitalise on this moment in the sun for Dutch design. Then, however, the political climate shifted towards conservatism, and – aside from the perennial imperatives of the landscape – patronage for innovation dried up somewhat. Observing this from London, some critics pointed to a similar moment in the history of Hampshire County Council, during which there was benevolent if controlling patronage and a series of award-winning schools were built. This, too, came to an end without a continuing impact on architectural culture, once the guiding hands were removed.

Official patronage for architecture in Belgium follows different paths, being motivated by the competing drives to civic expression of the Flemish and the Walloons. There is even a separate Government Architect for the Flemish community, which – within EU guidelines – promotes good architecture, selecting from shortlists of five that always include one external architect and one aged under forty. In a Walloon district – Commune de Schaerbeek – Mayor Bernard Clerfayt (who, when Deputy Mayor, had responsibilities in this area) established a policy for commissioning architects that respects innovation and contemporary form. His successor is pursuing this with less gusto. This duality in politics plays out very clearly in Brussels. The redevelopment of the Flemish State Theatre

MDMA, De Bronks Children's
Theater, (2009) street elevation
which aligns with existing facades
by sinking some accommodation
below street level. The rehearsal
hall is raised above street level as if
it is a stage

(Koninklijke Vlaamse Schouwburg, 1883) by Flemish architects BOA (Brussels Office for Architecture, 2001–2004) is paralleled by the building near by of a new French-language theatre. This, the Theatre National de la Communauté Wallonie-Bruxelles (2004), was designed by young French architect Olivier Bastin in association with locals Marc Lacour, Sabine Leribaux, Denis Triviere, Muriel Desmedt and Pierre Van Asshe, and here lies the rub: ambition in Flanders rewards Flemish innovation, Walloon ambition favours the French connection. The two theatres are linked by stencils on the pavement and signposts that read, with arrows in the requisite directions: 'Theater/Theatre'. Expressly existing to address ethnic identity of a northwards tendency is the Netherlands and Flanders 'Huis de Buren' (House of Neighbours), a cultural institution, founded in

2004 as – according to its director Dorian Van Der Brempt – a centre for debate and reflection. An ambitious design for the centre has been commissioned from RAUW, and this awaits funding. As Martine de Maeseneer[30] points out, to grow up in Belgium is to grow up in the slippages between languages: Flemish, French and English, sometimes German as well. This conditions the mental space of Belgians, balancing them between many cultures, and presenting them with the gift of marginality – that enduring instigator of intellectual change. This in between-ness colours their architecture too. But in the case of the Walloons, the pull of Paris to the south is difficult to resist, and the political dynamic affords opportunities to young architects from France perhaps even more than it does to those from southern Belgium.

Marcel van Goethem, The National
Bank of Belgium (1947–1957)

The thinness of the architectural environment in Flanders,
consequent on the large numbers of practitioners, is directly
the result of Belgian legislation that makes architects fully
responsible for the design and construction process of all
building projects. Some theorists believe that professions
are at their best in competitive environments, and certainly
there is remarkably inventive work to be found here. There
has, however, been the familiar emergence of a polarisation
between a number of large practices that service corporate
and state clients, and a plethora of small practices.[31] Of the
current wave of curtain wall office buildings little positive can
be said once their LED illumination is discounted, this despite
the fact that an earlier generation working in the downtown
financial district managed some very fine segues between old
and new (see, for example, the National Bank of Belgium by
Marcel van Goethem, 1947–57).

Olivier Bastin, Theatre National
de la Communaute Wallonie-
Bruxelles (2004)

For small practices, despite the legislation, work is hard to
come by, and extreme ingenuity is characteristic among those
who survive. Many are, also typically, intensely innovative, not
only in their designs but in how they generate their work.
Martine De Maeseneer and her partner Dirk Van Den Brande[32]
have fought a twelve-year battle for their De Bronks Children's
Theater in Brussels (2009), struggling to get funding allocated,
and to keep politicians to their promises, camping out in the
street to raise signatures to keep the funding when the more
prestigious Flemish Theatre went over budget and threatened
to suck up all the cultural spending in the city, fighting to get a
site, designing for one, and then redesigning for another. The
building has traces of the struggle in the gravitas of its street
façade which captures the heavy aesthetic of the nineteenth-
century milieu with a finned façade to the foyer reception
area, twisting with the flow of the street, floating however
above the glass wall of the street-level rehearsal hall, which is
viewable from the pavement. The internal circulation winds
up between this space and the theatre behind and affords a
view forward to the street as well as high above the theatre
and across a rear alley towards the spires and domes of the city.
These celebratory champagne terraces reveal the joy behind
the determination.

The thinness of the situation seems to drive others to an
architecture of extreme etiolation. In Antwerp, Joris van

MDMA, De Bronks Children's
Theater (2009). The main theatre
which has large windows at high
level is located at the rear of the
site. The plan splays out towards
the stage area taking advantage
of the irregular shape of the site

Reusel of Import.Export Architecture has worked with
engineer Guy Mouton to establish, in 'Fragile Lab', an insertion
into a neoclassical terrace in the retail heart of the city, an
architecture of thin planes held apart by thin angled skewers
– an armature that is then glazed.[33] He and his partners,
thinking up work for themselves, approached the City of
Antwerp with the suggestion that the sewers be opened to
tourists, proposing a 1.6-kilometre trail. The city was captivated
by the idea, and the firm has designed an entrance and an
exit pavilion, stepping stones and walkways in the sewers, and
opened up top-light vents into the sewers wherever possible
– a supremely elegant design that exemplifies the ingenuity
that characterises so much new Belgian work. Allied perhaps to
this approach is the work of Tomas Nollet and Hilde Huyghe,[34]
whose enigmatic designs shelter distillations of Flemish
domestic well-being already captured centuries ago by painter
Pieter de Hooch (1629–84). Another architect, a partner in
RAUW, persuaded a client that they could afford a large house
because he could source its steel fabrication in East Europe
and ship it to Belgium up canals on barges. Emblematic of
this etiolation is the entry to Sint-Katelijne metro in Brussels by
architect Oliver Noterman.

Others, always with an eye on the avant-garde ambitions of
the Situationists and of COBRA, collaborate with artists to
create provocative works, some of which (especially those
with Jan de Cock, who has triumphed at Tate Modern) reach

Olivier Notermans, Sint Katelijne
Metro station entrance
(2006–2007). An example of the
etiolation that appeals to many
Belgian architects.

an international public. Among these RAUW stands out, with
numerous provocative installations that hover in size and
complexity between architecture and installation work, and
which always challenge orthodoxies of health and safety. In
self-professed Dionysian opposition to these endeavours is
Ghent-based architect Johan van den Berg. His work is almost
wilfully perverse, with spaces designed so that ceilings, walls
and floors are to our perception at least interchangeable.
Elements are toyed with in a Picasso-like playfulness, but with a
Flemish bluntness and frankness of purpose.

These architects are in a hothouse but they cannot be stood
in for each other. Together they and their colleagues flesh
out a distinctive, unreplicable Belgian mental space. And, of
course, these practitioners also teach. Everywhere schools of
architecture that employ practitioners as studio masters on
a part-time basis bolster innovative architecture. Or, we must
now say, they used to teach. There has been a well-meaning
but catastrophic shift in education policy in Belgium. Aiming to
upgrade teaching, it has been decreed that no one without a
PhD may teach at university level. And equally damaging, in the
interests of professionalising teaching, it has been decreed that
possible conflicts of interest between practice and teaching
be resolved by disallowing practice to teachers – except for
medicos, who are exempt because they 'practice' in 'teaching

hospitals'. Attempting to deal with this devilish problem, St Lucas in Brussels has launched a practice-based PhD program, which is nursing cohorts of twenty or so teaching practitioners towards a PhD. This effort is, in 2009, three cohorts deep, but as yet none of the candidates have been accepted as fully fledged PhD researchers by a research committee dominated by an old-fashioned humanities conception of scholarship – historical, sociological, scientific but never design.

Head of School Dr Johan Verbeke, a mathematician, laments this dichotomy – which after all does not pertain in his own discipline. He wishes he could establish a 'teaching hospital' model for architecture. What usually comes to mind in these circumstances is an academy-based architectural practice. Such things exist – they are the norm in China. At Tsinghua University in Shanghai, PhD students are all promising graduates who enter the university-based practices of their PhD supervisors, and whose PhDs are conducted by serving time designing and documenting the projects which their Professor is engaged in. This is not a system noted for supporting innovation or intellectual change. Pondering this in Belgium, Verbeke wonders whether an academy-based architectural practice could justify itself by conducting 'de bono' work alone. The idea is tantalising, but it collapses when the 'thin' context is taken into consideration. Such an academy-based practice would inevitably be seen to have taxpayer-funded subsidies, and to be making a difficult environment for innovation even more diabolical for practising architects.

At RMIT we are proposing an alternative model for the architectural version of the 'teaching hospital' by partnering research and teaching with practices, importing research, exporting teaching. Already we offer four levels of reflective research into practice: a base level for those leaving the academy who wish to advance their portfolio of theoretical works and special skills; an invitation to reflect on peer-acknowledged mastery after ten years of practice or less; a 'by publication' mode of reflection based on seminal works conducted in the following ten or so years of practice; and a capping, higher doctorate for those who are at the peak

of accomplishment, and can capture this and disseminate it to the next generation. Currently this is an invitation to keep practising, but to also engage in research and teaching in the academy. At RMIT we are working on a model where the academy is shifted into the ateliers of the practices. In Melbourne we are also coupling this with the practices themselves running teaching studios in their own offices in parallel to the four-tier research structure with which their own staff are engaged. This is therefore a 'teaching atelier' co-located with practice-based research in the heart of the actual working situation of the profession. Naturally this could be replicated in any civil service architecture department, were such to exist.[35]

Whether this model is transferable or not, for the sake of future architecture the Belgian desire to bridge the gap between practice and academy needs to succeed. Academies peopled by those who research but do not practice are doomed to become esoteric and remote from any ability to influence what happens in the architecting of our built environment. Commencing in November 2009, St Lucas now hosts the RMIT Design Practice research program initiated by Leon van Schaik from 1987.

Styria and Slovenia

The power of architecture has not been much in doubt in the territories once in the Holy Roman Empire, and later in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Romans transported their culture partly through the imposition of the standard plans of the Castrum, that early mark of their civilisation on new territories, later joined by their monuments (arenas, baths, temples and major villas). Later, cathedrals, monasteries and castles imparted the meaning that lay behind the organising principles of society. The Counter-Reformation attested to the power of architecture, causing all around the Alps the remodelling into bulbous baroque of the Gothic and

therefore northern and Protestant churches. And Vienna, seat of the eastern rump of the empire, used baroque classicism to a height of six to eight floors across its concentrically planned urban core to house the ministries that governed its empire and to assert a metropolitan authority over the assemblage of diverse regions and territories, each centred on its own provincial capital, that made up that pre-nationalist conglomeration of duchies.

Graz, today surrounded by a sprawl of housing and industrial estates, was a small, exquisite city located in the Austrian State of Styria, a province within the Roman limes, site of successive settlements and border skirmishes involving 'Illyrians, Celts, Slavs, Germanic tribes, Magyars and Turks'.[36] In ancient times architectural ideas travelled along trade routes – the hipped transepts of the cathedrals, exemplified at Orceval, stretch across the Massif Central in France, revealing a route from the south-east to the north-west. In modern times (as we have seen in the study of the Ticino), architectural ideas have slipped up and down the route from Milan to Zurich and back. The city of Graz was formed in the neoclassical idiom that flooded such routes from the Renaissance forward. In the 1960s 'as Austria was regaining its sovereignty',[37] something sparked by contemporary information flows began to ferment in this Province of what was once the Austro-Hungarian Empire. That entity, a remnant of the 'Holy Roman Empire', had been bound together in the universalising spirit of Christendom, and later derived much architectural energy from the Counter-Reformation (1560–1648).

As nationalism took hold in central Europe, the idea that held this conglomerate together lost its adhesive powers. In his masterpiece,[38] written as a reflection on the collapse of the empire, Robert Musil conceived of a character, Diotima, who had been commissioned with the task of finding a new idea that could bind the disparate provinces of the empire together. Here the novelist describes a regional archetype that found a new manifestation when a number of writers whose work set out to capture the authentic 'now' in the province drove Styria out of its post-war slumber. Perhaps
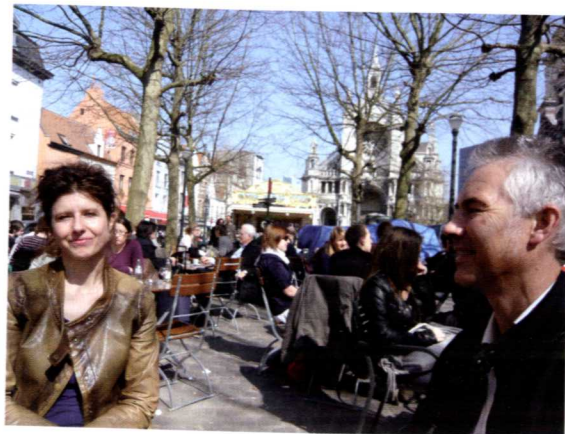
Mok Wei Wei and Richard Hassell, pictured with the Singapore manifestations of their Aedes exhibitions.

Martine de Maeseneer with Richard Blythe in Brussels, April 2009.

Andrew Hrausky in the stairwell of the Library of the National University, Joze Plecnik (1936–1941) Ljubljana, 2009.

Kate Heron, convener of evaluation seminars, pictured in the architecture studios at the University of Westminster, 2009.

Jay Chatterjee, former Dean of Architecture at the University of Cincinnati, pointing to the join between the pre-existing building and Eisenman's extension to DAAP that set the university on its new procurement path.(2007)

Granite column marking the contributions to the landscaping of the surface car park that formerly divided the campus: Hargreaves, Dale and Gerri McGirr, Carol and Joe Steger. (2007)

reconstituted a history that dissolved the isolated factures of modernism back into a continuum with an underlying architectural reality of the region, and that empowered a generation of practitioners devoted to their region. In Belgium, architectural ambition in the thinnest of economic environments and in a highly polarised and linguistically layered society has driven architectures that survive through intense local engagement and innovation. In Graz, a generation fought to achieve a breakthrough, and found that model wanting. In Ljubljana – building on rich local precedence for regarding architecture as of vital import for the local culture – political circumstance was seized upon by an individual, and a peer support and review engine was constructed at the core of independent practice, such that Slovenia can demonstrate a deeper penetration of innovative, locally effective, works than most city regions in the world. London, a world city, has 'provincialised' itself through the insight of individuals and has curated constellations of local architecture that have inspired others in ways that its metropolitan efforts have failed to do since the Festival of Britain. [1]

In the USA, an idea planted in the remote Midwest has 'infected' a family and become an engine by which a small city has created a unique culture of commissioning innovative architecture. In Los Angeles, long campaigns in which

some individuals convinced of the importance of great and local architecture have played key roles have slowly turned around the downtown. At the University of Cincinnati, by happy coincidence, a Dean of Architecture determined to demonstrate what good innovative architecture could do for a university found the ear of a President and a CEO who grasped that he was giving them the tools with which to transform the reputation of that university. And counterfactually, at the best of the old universities a confusion of novelty with innovation thwarted the development of the locally integrated practice of architecture.

enabled innovative architectural responses to the political situations that evolved. In the Ticino, a determined theorist

In Western Australia, we observe the unfolding of the Government Architect program much as in Barcelona we watched the unfolding of the original plan for the city extension: a process of designing a program, reasoning for