

Built Form

Towards the end of 2020, in the midst of the pandemic (but within one of those brief windows between lockdowns), Melbourne City Council in collaboration with MPavillion opened up the top floor of the Parkade Carpark in Little Collins Street as an “open air” event space. I was fortunate to have been invited to listen to the acclaimed architect Peter McIntyre give an extraordinary talk on his seven-decade long practice which coincidentally included the wonderful Parkade Carpark where our small group were sitting. It was a fascinating talk where McIntyre reflected not only on the successes but also the failures of previous projects, especially those that included large scale public works that involved social or public planning.

One of the great luxuries, I imagine, of growing older is the benefit of hindsight. McIntyre, who is now in his mid 90s and continues to maintain his practice, has the opportunity to look back at particular projects and see how they operated in real time, sometimes over many decades. He spoke with such clarity of his successes but interestingly also spoke about the mistakes made over previous decades in public planning and how, looking back, these failures could have been addressed at the time. The wealth of experience he had gained over all those years and the honesty in which he spoke, made the talk memorable.

I remember sitting in that large, brutal, concrete Carpark which was totally devoid of cars and thinking how perfect the setting was for a mid-pandemic talk. I was also able to seize the opportunity and take several photographs of the cleared spaces, especially the lower levels of the Carpark that were completely deserted. It was a wonderful opportunity to actually see and focus on the uncluttered forms within the structure. I was impressed by the concrete support columns, in particular their distinctive shape, with that wonderful angled top, designed to support an enormous load and the way they appeared to stand, perfectly spaced, like silent sentinels throughout the empty voids.

Physical space appeared to shift throughout the city during the pandemic. Without people and traffic blocking the streets physical space seemed so much bigger with objects/things often distorted and appearing much further away. Tolarno's project space which faces directly across from the Parkade Carpark offered an opportunity to amplify this connection across both physical structures

Looking back at those photographs of the Carpark from 2020, especially the columns, post pandemic, they offer a completely different perspective for me. When I see these images now, I reflect upon those often-difficult times that we all shared. This column sculpture partly reflects upon that time of isolation, dislocation and loneliness. More importantly however, It is also a personal love letter to one of Melbourne's classic, brutalist structures - and to Peter McIntyre, one of Melbourne's most revered modernist architects.

Peter Atkins, 2024