

Archis  
[www.archis.org](http://www.archis.org)

Architecture  
City  
Visual Culture

#6 2002

Per issue  
€ 13,75  
**D** € 15,00  
**I** € 15,00  
**F** € 15,00



# ARCHIS

## 112



hopelessness. Clarke would have us believe that the Tasmanian wilderness was a place to inspire the most bestial of all human behaviours: 'he was so horribly un-human ... in his slaving mouth, his slowly grinding jaws, his restless fingers, and his bloodshot, wandering eyes, there lurked a hint of some terror more awful than [sic] the terror of starvation – a memory of a tragedy played out in the gloomy depths of that forest which had vomited him forth again; and the shadow of an unknown horror, clinging to him, repelled and disgusted, as though he bore about with him the reek of the shambles.' Cannibalism is the most horrifying of crimes, and one that peppered the stories and legends of convict escapes in Australia.

The story of the Australian wilderness is thus from the very beginning one of idealism and debasement, a dual theme repeated in later literary examples such as Patrick White's *Voss*, Peter Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda*, and Richard Flanagan's *The Death of a River Guide*. Living on the edge of this wilderness, seeing ever-increasing streams of fascinated tourists lured to it like moths to a light bulb, reading how some die of exposure each year through failing to acknowledge the dark and brooding reality of an indifferent nature, inspires a belief that somehow this garden is more than just an attractive view; it has become a compelling aspect of our modern condition. To call such places 'gardens' is no exaggeration since they are managed and cultivated like any other garden. Management plans centre on rites of exclusion – on distinguishing the weed from the legitimate species, on deciding who should be let in and who should not.

During the 1970s, Australia's smallest and only island state – Tasmania – sprang to world prominence because its perceived international wilderness value was threatened by plans to construct more hydroelectric dams similar to the one that had resulted in the disastrous flooding of Lake Pedder. The fight to save what was left of the southwest Tasmanian wilderness centred on a deliberately constructed image of wilderness perhaps best typified by Peter Dombovskis' *Rock Island Bend* that sketched a primeval scene undisturbed by modernity, an unpopulated and remote solitude. It is these kinds of scenes that international tourists now flock to see, assisted in their experience by structures like the Tahune Forest AirWalk located south of the island's capital Hobart and on the edge of the southwest wilderness park.

A modern world staked its claim on the scenery of the Tasmanian southwest wilderness in the 1970s and excluded from it other more traditional stakeholders – primarily the indigenous populations who had inhabited the area prior to colonization and two centuries of timber harvesters and fishermen. They and their artefacts were henceforth regarded as weeds in an otherwise idyllic wilderness scene. Their weeding-out is further evidence of the garden quality of contemporary wilderness ideals.

The world has shrunk considerably since that day in 1625 when Bacon penned his essay 'On Gardens'. It is now perhaps conceivable to imagine previously remote places such as Tasmania's southwest wilderness in terms of his tripartite image, a kind of modern equivalent of the long tradition of the garden-as-cosmic-model. One in which the very presence of the possibility of wilderness is essential to our ever more expansive modern world view.

*Richard Blythe teaches at the School of Architecture, University of Tasmania and is a founding member of the architectural practice Terroir.*

# On Wilderness

---

Richard Blythe



*Left.* The Tahune AirWalk located in a wilderness area south of the Tasmanian capital Hobart. Architect: Jacob Allom and Wade; Engineer: Thompson and Brett. Client: Forestry Tasmania, a public-private body responsible for managing Tasmania's forests.

*Right.* The airwalk passes through a section of old-growth Sclerophyll forest characterized by a rainforest understorey and a Eucalypt canopy.

In 1625 Sir Francis Bacon wrote an essay 'On Gardens' that established a tripartite model (crudely summarized as lawn, pleasure garden, wilderness) that resonated throughout the ensuing two-hundred-year development of *le jardin anglais* and spread its influence across the globe. The tripartite model was pervasive simply because it gave a landscape form to the modern condition, one that we continue to struggle to come to terms with.

This gardening concept spread its influence as far afield as the Antipodes where its bearers projected it onto an ancient landscape. The 'discovery' and colonization of *Terra Australis Incognita*, the missing continent, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries filled a conceptual hole in a modern mind-map of the world and fuelled the imagining of this place as a paradise. Its strange flora and fauna, which included weird animals like the platypus (initially regarded as a hoax in England), inspired visions of an antediluvian nature. Indeed, images of Australian scenes, particularly of giant ferns, became something of a fetish in Europe. Large collections were assembled in England and in France. In these primeval scenes lingered a new kind of possibility for the wilderness garden – one discovered through the colonization of remote shores.

The fundamental principle of the penal law that sent convicts to this newly discovered land (apart from conveniently removing villains from one's own backyard) was the belief that exposure to an uncorrupted natural environment, coupled with hard labour, could somehow transform even the most notorious criminal. Even today wilderness experience is credited with restorative qualities. Those who had actually lived in colonial Australia were not as convinced. Marcus Clarke was certainly of a different view and in Australia's first novel, *For the Term of His Natural Life*, Clarke's leading character, the wrongly accused Rufus Dawes, is condemned to an ever-spiralling

**Contents Archis #6**

- 2 **Archis alphabet**
- 4 **Editorial**

**Further**

- 21 **Toolkits**
- 119 **The diary of:**  
Wim Derksen
- 120 **In and beyond the Netherlands**
- 128 **Credits**

**A.-Dos.  
Dossier**

- 68 **68 The architecture of mobile capital. ING House by Van Meyer & Van Schooten**  
Allard Jolles

**A.-Res.  
Research**

A great many people on this planet are trying to escape: from their surroundings, from their circumstances, from themselves. This escapism with all its spatial consequences seems to be of a transitory nature, an ephemeral and ultimately undesirable phenomenon. But is it really so? On escapism as an all-too-human condition.

- 10 **Escapade**  
Ole Bouman
- 15 **Island continent**  
Leon van Schaik
- 23 **Box men  
Homeless in Japan**  
Kurt Handlbauer
- 32 **The Antipodean relation**  
Charles Rice

- 44 **Escapism**  
Yi-Fu Tuan
- 51 **On wilderness**  
Richard Blythe

**A.-Inn.  
Innovation**

- 82 **Urban realism**  
Richard H. Carson
- 84 **Detail und verbrechen.  
The revival of architectural detail**  
Eric Slotboom

**A.-Pol.  
Politics**

- 58 **Listening to the city  
Futures for Lower Manhattan**  
Els Verbakel
- 62 **Report from New York**  
Laura Kurgan
- 65 **Spatial plan for the Netherlands  
RPB launched**  
Ole Bouman

**A.-Rev.  
Review**

- 90 **Room for rent in the Tower of Babel**  
Robert Silke
- 98 **The architecture of celebrity.  
The paintings of Dexter Dalwood**  
Robert Wilson
- 100 **Next**  
Hanno Rauberberg
- 104 **Post-socialist countryside.  
In search of patina in East Germany**  
Koos Bosma
- 111 **Books**

Tear the flyer out and free the prisoners!