

2019

Edmond & Corrigan as an Architectural Dialect: A Genealogy from Melbourne to Original Field of Architecture [OFA] in Oxford

Troiani, I

<http://hdl.handle.net/10026.1/16462>

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I N F L U E N C E

EDMOND & CORRIGAN +
PETER CORRIGAN

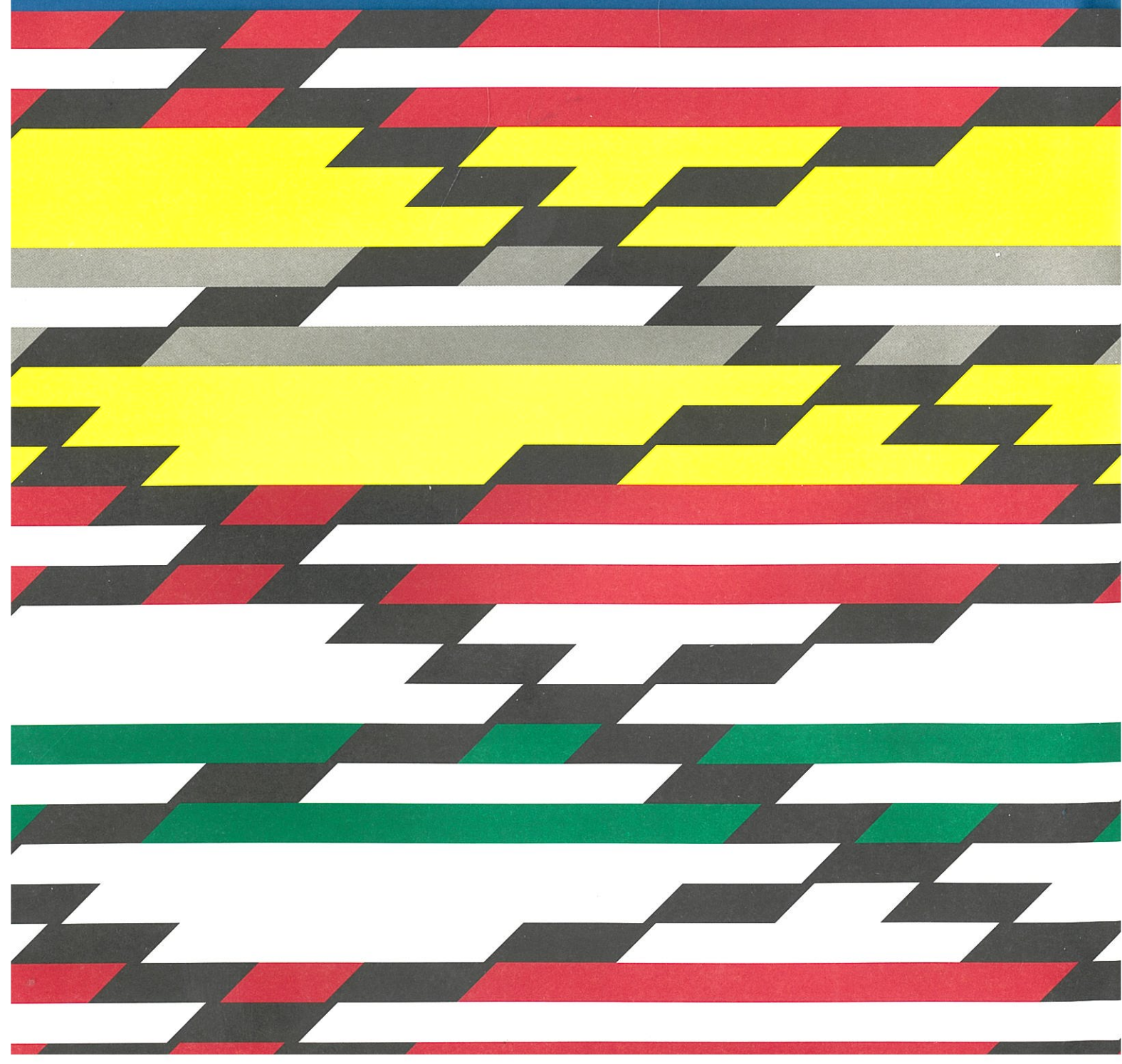
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ROBERT LUXFORD



Opening image – Tram Number 567, Melbourne by Edmond & Corrigan (1978): original colour scheme, at night.
Photo: John Gollings.

Closing image – 'Mother Knows' mural in the RMIT Design Hub by Sean Godsell Architects in association with Peddle Thorp Architects (2018)—in reference to Tram Number 567, Melbourne (1978) by Edmond & Corrigan. Photo: Kevin Francke. The RMIT Design Hub is currently the home base for RMIT Architecture as well as the School of Architecture & Urban Design.

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Influence: Edmond & Corrigan + Peter Corrigan

First published in 2019
by Uro Publications, Melbourne, Australia
uropublications.com

Contributions by Mauro Baracco, Nigel Bertram and Marika Neustupny, Peter Brew, Emily Davies, Andrew Dawson and Igea Troiani, Simon Drysdale and Robert Luxford, Maggie Edmond, Harriet Edquist, Paul Fox, Senesios Frangos, Eli Giannini and Catherine Ranger, Philip Goad, John Gollings, Conrad Hamann, Paul van Herk, Philip Hunter, Emma Jackson, Ian McDougall, Patrick Macasaet, Vivian Mitsogianni, Vera Möller, Barry Moran, Paul Morgan, Christine Phillips, Mark Raggatt, Leon van Schaik, Dan Schulz, Michael Spooner, Kerstin Thompson, and Eleanor Tullock.

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Printed in China

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ISBN : 9780648435501

Distributed in Australia by Books at Manic and internationally by Idea Books.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the National Library of Australia.

We would like to acknowledge and thank the following people, who devoted their ideas, time, energy and resources in support of this publication...

Maggie Edmond and Matthew Corrigan;
John Gollings and Sue Shanahan;
RMIT School of Architecture and Urban Design;

The contributors to the Influence event and this book—
Mauro Baracco, Nigel Bertram and Marika Neustupny,
Peter Brew, Emily Davies, Simon Drysdale and
Robert Luxford, Leona Dusanovic, Harriet Edquist,
Paul Fox, Senesios Frangos, Lauren Garner, Eli Giannini
and Catherine Ranger, Philip Goad, Conrad Hamann,
Paul van Herk, Vera Möller on behalf of Philip Hunter,
Emma Jackson, Ian McDougall, Vivian Mitsogianni,
Vera Möller, Paul Morgan, Thomas Muratore,
Christine Phillips, Mark Raggatt, Leon van Schaik,
Dan Schulz, Laura Szyman, Michael Spooner,
Kerstin Thompson, Igea Troiani and Andrew Dawson,
Eleanor Tullock; Influence Event Steering Group—
Professor Vivian Mitsogianni, Emeritus Professor
Leon van Schaik AO, Associate Professor Conrad Hamann,
Dr Christine Phillips, Dr Michael Spooner, Dr Peter Brew,
Patrick Macasaet and Julius Egan; The RMIT Design
Archives: Professor Harriet Edquist, Simone Rule and
Rickie-Lee Robbie; Professor Martyn Hook, Dean,
School of Architecture and Urban Design; RMIT Library
and Tristan Badham; Photographer: Kevin Francke;
Uro Publications and Maitiú Ward.

ANDREW & IGEA

EDMOND & CORRIGAN AS AN ARCHITECTURAL DIALECT: A GENEALOGY FROM MELBOURNE TO ORIGINAL FIELD OF ARCHITECTURE [OFA] IN OXFORD

'The impression of Peter's architecture [...] is of lower middle class suburban domestic imagery, richly coloured, cheaply constructed and matter-of-factly detailed. It has received mixed reactions, and is often seen as vulgar, brash, garish in appearance and arbitrary and fragmented in design. It is also seen as provocative, fresh and widely original and is valued highly for this.' (1)

'It is known to be informed by fiercely held beliefs about the nature of contemporary Australia and the value in developing a regional culture and an architecture appropriate to it. Nevertheless, there is more to this body of work than suburbia, and more to it than contemporary Australian references.' (2)

ANDREW DAWSON We started our architectural education at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT), Brisbane, a strong vernacular school, however we were seeking something more challenging and more exciting architecturally. Both Igea and I left QUT and went to Melbourne, where we tried to enrol in RMIT, and after two [...] application attempts], we were successful. **IGEA TROIANI** And who was on the [interview] panel that rejected you Andrew, the first time?

AD It was Mr Corrigan. He interviewed me. He asked me which architects was I interested in in Melbourne and I said 'Daryl Jackson'. And I didn't get in. [IT giggles.]

1, 2. G Missingham, 'Peter Corrigan's Architecture: A Kind of Exposition', *Transition* Vol. 2. no. 1, March 1981, p14.

Six months later, after doing a bridging history and theory subject, Doug Evans interviewed me and he let me in straightaway. [Pause. Addressing Igea.]

Why did you go to Melbourne?

IT I thought architecture could be something more than what I was experiencing.

AD And how did you find RMIT?

IT I found it very, very difficult. RMIT was very competitive; it was extremely demanding but it was also extremely enriching.

Why do I think Edmond & Corrigan are important?

They started to demand that architecture have more of an ethical, social and political conscience and I don't think I'd studied somewhere with those kinds of interests.

AD Corrigan was a big figure at RMIT. We were both apprehensive and overwhelmed a little bit by RMIT so we didn't do his studio.

I think the earliest recollection was we walked past the Kay Street house, or terrace houses, because we lived around the corner and initially I didn't really understand them.

IT The other thing about this sort of architecture is it's never finished into a fixed style. It has a look to it, but it can change.

AD It's a lot easier having a practice here [in Oxford, UK] than it was in Brisbane and I think a lot of it is down to what I can get away with. In particular, as an Australian, people will allow you to be crass, to say what you think and that sort of translates somewhat into the architecture.

IT The thing about Keble College in Oxford [a project that OFA are currently working on] is that it was



1A



1B



1C



2A



3A



3B



This page — Sequence of stills from the documentary, *Edmond & Corrigan as an Architectural Dialect* (2017).
1A to 1C — Mixed use development, Cowley Road, Oxford, 2013 by OFA. 2A — Residential Extension, Badswell Lane, Appleton, 2014 by OFA. 3A, 3B — Magdalen College School Multi-function Hall, Oxford, 2012 by OFA.

considered one of the more ordinary colleges, as it was made of brickwork. But for us the work of Butterfield is quite fascinating, because it too is an expressive piece of architecture. Oxford's full of buildings that are quirky. I mean, it's so lovely to walk along and see something that you've never seen before that is just odd. People love that in architecture, so why don't they love it now in architecture? You know it's fine to admire it in more traditional buildings, particularly in the Oxford colleges. And if you think of Keble and Butterfield's detailing, it's fascinating, you could look at it for ages and uncover something more unique, but I think people are [...] fearful of [...] expressive contemporary architecture in the UK, less so in Australia].

AD I have always been attracted to buildings that are quite awkward. Frank Furness—the library building, some of their inner city office buildings—and then you follow the lineage through to Venturi. There is something about awkwardness; it's the juxtaposition and relationship of colours, material and so forth. So there's this jarring but then when you see it as a familiar object, which has an interplay with something that is quite original, then it becomes incredibly beautiful. I don't mean that in a beauty way, I mean it in an ugly way.

IT Something about Corrigan was that he was interested in different kinds of [architectural beauties related to different kinds of] classes. Ok, that comes from Venturi as well, or an aligned discourse, if we want to call it that. But I think for us that was interesting, that architecture wasn't always elite. And it's different to Corbusier—it's a very different kind of ordinariness that they were interested in and that I think we can be connected with...

AD It's about inclusivity rather than exclusivity, both in the act of creating architecture and the end product.

IT I think Corrigan knew a lot about architecture. I think the people who taught us knew a lot about architecture. And so because of that you developed a kind of intellectual understanding of it, which I think was far richer. It made it not a superficial [...] profession]

to participate in, and I think that criticality has carried with us. Not to the same degree, but I think the idea that you understand architecture and you understand the context—the intellectual context I'm talking about—and then how you can contribute to that. I like that idea of architecture not being about nothing, but it's more than just aesthetics. There are questions about materials, users, engagement with people that go well beyond what a building looks [...] like.

AD I think Edmond & Corrigan, within the context of RMIT, they made you challenge and question everything you did. You became possibly, on occasions, unfairly critical of other architects, which means you sit within a profession uncomfortably, especially when you're not surrounded by likeminded people. I think we've struggled a little bit as outsiders wherever we go. We went to Melbourne as outsiders, and we came to Oxford as outsiders, and I think we kind of enjoy the challenges of that. It kind of makes it quite difficult in some ways; perhaps you stand out, perhaps the buildings that we do in Oxford stand out, for what they're worth.

In doing this exercise, it became quite reflective on work we've done. In particular, visiting buildings I hadn't really thought about for some time and in reference to Corrigan and this [...] reflection on his influence], it became apparent that in some ways Corrigan is probably more preserved [in our work in Oxford] than possibly what is being done in Melbourne now. It's a little bit like an immigrant having a dialect and then leaving the country and then they're set at that particular date and carry forward where they've left.

When news of Peter Corrigan's passing reached us we were deeply saddened. His death forced us to reflect on the influence of Edmond & Corrigan and RMIT on our architecture. Edmond & Corrigan have had a profound affect on our architectural philosophy, teaching, criticality and on our practice, Original Field of Architecture.

Viva the 'vulgar, brash, cheap, garish' in architecture! ∞

ANDREW DAWSON and IGEA TROIANI founded Original Field of Architecture in 2008. They have lived in the United Kingdom since 2005, having formerly worked in practice in Melbourne and Münster, Germany and in practice and education in Brisbane and Oxford.

“ I cannot stress the learning process of colour and line.

It is not a world of

I ■ ■ U S T R ▲ T I O N .

It is a world of

INFORM ▲ TION . ”

Peter Corrigan quote, collected by JULIUS EGAN (then RMIT Architecture student) during the Barney Curley: Patience RMIT Master of Architecture design studio (2014) Led by Professor Peter Corrigan.