

# FORM

DESIGNING INNOVATION

## ARCHITECTURE OF LYONS

A short fiction from Juliana Engberg introduces the architecture of Lyons in a new monograph from Thames and Hudson.



**SOMEBODY DREW THAT**  
Even the most mundane objects began life as a drawing of somebody's idea

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**ALL IN THE MIND**  
Style and research: celebrating the Melbourne Brain Centre in Parkville

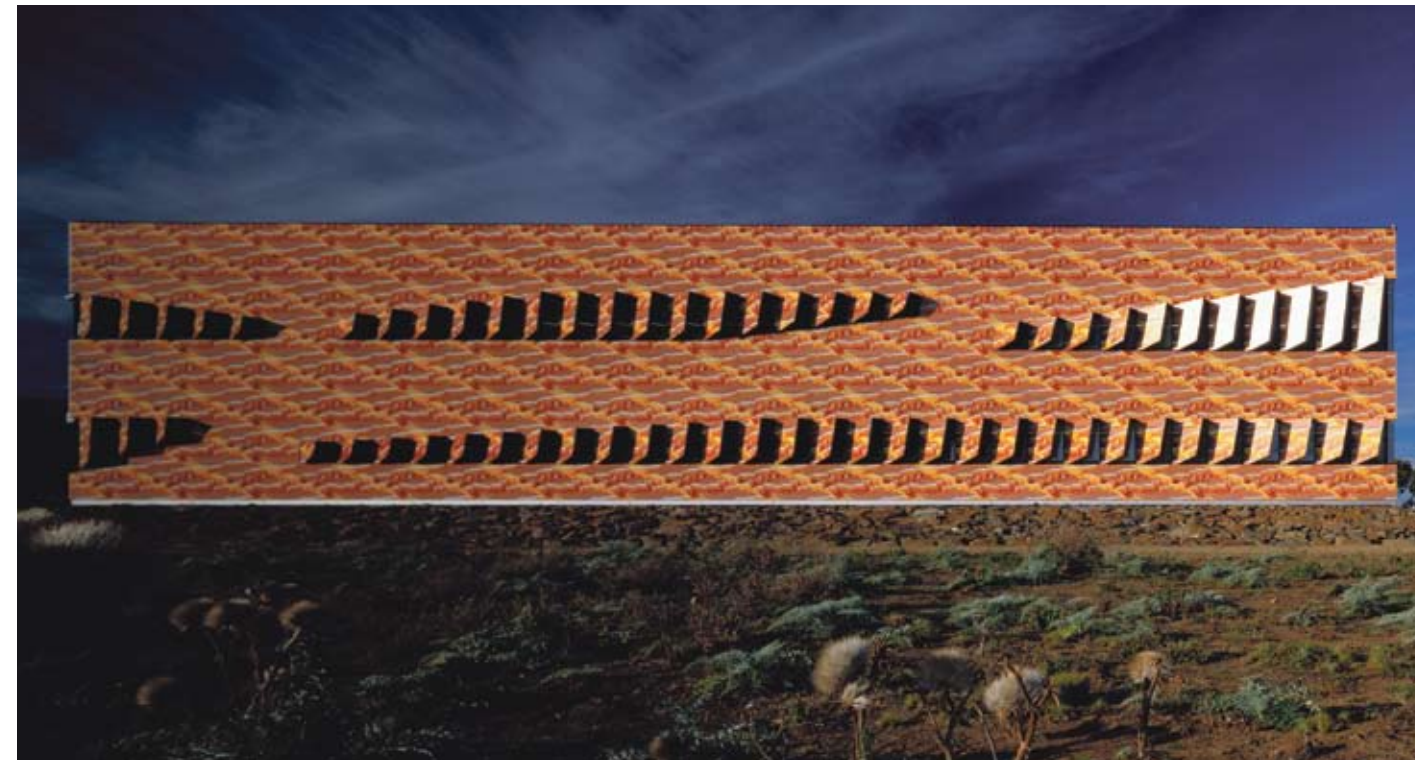
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Online Training Centre, Victoria University.

## GUMSHOE INVESTIGATION

Juliana Engberg

It was one of those Walter Withers kinds of days. Blue sky. Grey green gum leaves hanging down lugubriously from grey brown limbs of tall trees. Motley shade and dappled sunlight between the thickets. Australian pastoral. Banal. Yet not ordinary, because that was, after all, the great misrecognition about the Australian landscape: the sheer banality of it made you downright edgy. Bloomfield always felt that uneasiness when he travelled out of the city. It made him itch and rub his eyes.

"That'll be it," motioned Manningham, who had been following the route on the GPS. Bloomfield pulled the car over and they looked between the trees to a building that looked like a structural zebra. All horizontality and striations, it twisted the eyes out of shape because you had to reconcile the verticality of the trees with its chimerical structure.

"Weird place."  
"Yeah."  
...

It pissed Manningham off that they had travelled all the way to bloody Goulburn and this Professor Streeton geezer had decided that he couldn't be fussed waiting for them, and had instead gone to some joint in Ellinbank.

"Wanker," he said as he reset the navigator. Ellinbank was nowhere near Goulburn.  
"Typical."  
...

Again they found a structure, framed by trees.

This time the hues were red and the trees more barky. The ground rough and clayish. The dusk was more Heysen than Withers. But the trees were more like Davies than Heysen. The building hiding behind the sinuous trunks looked like it might have been a square spaceship. Steel and glass.

"Looks like a metallic rodeo cow," offered Manningham.

Bloomfield thought Manningham was a slice short of a loaf, but said mmmmm instead.

"No, really," insisted Manningham.

"It's got like udders and is kind of patterned like a cow, don't you think?"

"I think we've been driving too long."  
Still, Bloomfield thought, it actually could be a kind of robotic cow.

"What's this guy do again?"  
"Milk research, or something like that."  
"Told ya."  
....

"I've been thinking about these buildings," Manningham said out of the blue. "And that one out at Victoria University, and the hospital at Sunshine we were at last week. Yeah, and the joint in Ballarat."

"Could you think about driving?"  
"Seriously, though. They're kinda interesting, don't you think? I mean, they have this sort of

mirage effect or something. Like they're a trick of the eye. I think they are about driving in a sort of way. The way you see them depends upon speed and the eye being unsuspecting. And we all do a lot of driving. We're a driving culture. Anyhow. They remind me of the paintings of that guy who lives in Tuscany now."

"Tuscany."

"Yeah. Smart, I think. Yeah, Smart. Lives in Tuscany now, but you know, he's an Australian painter. I remember when I was at school we went to the gallery and I saw his painting of a shed. It was like corrugated iron and had been painted with industrial colours. I think it was intended to be a kind of contradiction. City versus country, urban versus rural kind of thing. OR..." Manningham was on a roll ... "OR, a bit like a billboard, you know, which just ... bang ... interrupts the expected view ... except it's peeling a bit."

"I think your brain might be peeling."  
"... and a bit like a shed, you know, like a modern industrial shed that's just put down, plonk, in the landscape ... like some alien structure that is from some other culture ..."

"Like Tuscany?"  
"Or Germany?"  
"Been to Germany, have you?"  
"No."  
...

"I found this book at home. See what I mean about this Smart thing? Look at this one, Container Train in a Landscape ... don't you reckon those buildings have something in common with that?"

"Your point?"  
"It's vernacular architecture, but with a twist."

"And what would the twist be, pray tell?"  
"Well like it's a reference, it's not a real thing, it's a quote or something, but ... I dunno ... it's

vernacular."  
"With a twist."  
"With a twist."  
...

"I saw that painting last night."  
"The train thing?"  
"Exactly. The missus and I had to go to some school concert do at the Arts Centre, and there the bloody thing was. It's huge, you know. And bugger me. It looks just like one of those buildings, I reckon. Anyway, it got me thinking about how the buildings look like that on the outer side, but on the inner side, you know, away from the road, they do something completely different."

"You don't say."  
"I do. And you know what else?"  
"No, but I'm sure you'll tell me."  
"I think it's deliberate!"  
...

"You know how the wife's a bit cultural ... well, we went to this thing called the Housemuseum on the weekend. Have you heard of that?"  
"Here we go."

"Anyway ... it's wacky, you know, but I sort of liked it ... it's got contemporary art in it but people live there ... anyhow, that's not the point, the point is as I was looking at the housestuff and so forth, I had this strange idea that I was looking at some of those buildings we've been at lately. You know how they sort of jut out in spots like they've got a stiff elbow, and how inside they often have those staircases and such that seem to bend back on themselves like they are made from the same long bit, but then folded back ... like a ribbon ... and round light wells and skylights and ply ... I think ply, maybe some other kind of wood, but ordinary and laminex, something like that ... a lot of that, and orange ... anyhow, that's what this joint was like, and so I said to the bloke who runs the place ... this museum thing reminds me of some places I've been to of late ... and I told him where ... and guess what!?"

"Just tell me."  
"Just he is part of the practice that designed them, isn't he ... SO ... I told him about the idea I had about the Smart painting and the cow and billboards and he laughed and said I should look up my Venturi ... Ever heard of that? ... Me neither ... but I went on the internet ... and guess what?! ... Seriously, you won't believe this ..."  
"Try me."

"This Venturi guy, well, actually it's a sheila and two guys, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour, and this Robert Venturi bloke ... the Google search came up with something called the 'Decorated Shed!!!'  
"Meaning?"

"Like I said the other day, they're like sheds, but not like sheds ... they're ducks!"

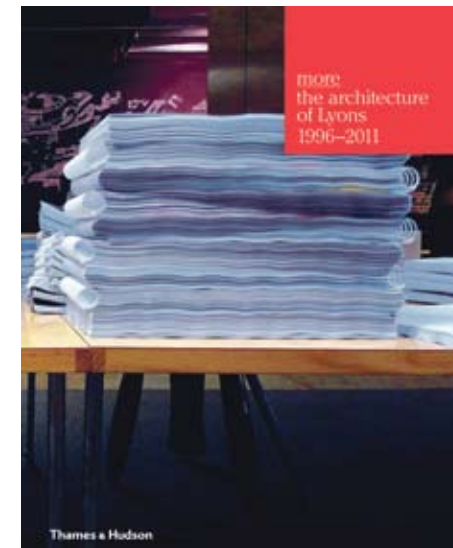
"You didn't say anything about ducks, you moron."

"You need to read the article. Anyway, you should go to this Housemuseum place ... it's good ... and the art kind of makes sense with the architecture, you know."  
"Fascinating."

"It is ... For instance, it's got this whole, mural-



Department of Primary Industries, Ellinbank.



Thames & Hudson



Lyon Housemuseum Howard Arkley's Fabricated Rooms.

like thing that's a painting of a living room, but all sorts of chairs and angles and curtains and patterns and stuff ... airbrushed ... pretty skilled ... and it wraps around the top floor like it's real, but flat ... you know ... like the buildings, the ways they seem to flatten and warp space and structure ... well, this picture is the same. That made sense to me. And there's this set of mirrored screens. Like drive-in movie screens but smallish ... they've got holes busted through them so that you have this kind of double-take vision ... I think that's like the buildings too. Works made from mirrors, works about cars and a kind of neon work on a wall that's painted with black and white

zigzags ... bit like the joint in Goulburn ..."

"Do you think we could get going?"

"Where are we off to?"

"To see some botanist to see if they can identify this seed."

...

"You know what I'm gonna say don't you?"

Manningham was standing in front of the Botany Building, looking up at the lozenge coloured windows that stretched and bent their way along the building as if they were wrapping around the tree in the forecourt. "Same blokes."

"Do you reckon they designed the whole of Melbourne?"

"Possibly. But I don't think they're responsible for the red sticks on the freeway ... if they were, they would have been orange!"

"OK, genius. If these guys were crims, what would be their MO?"

"Kinky."

"Kinky?"

"Yeah, all their buildings have kinks."

...

## Idea Building

An exhibition of Lyons' work will be held at the Wunderlich Gallery, Architecture Building, University of Melbourne, from June 25 to July 20, as part of the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning's (APB) Alumni Retrospective Series. The series celebrates the work of ABP alumni and aims to highlight the extraordinary range and contribution they make to design culture and the built environment. Wunderlich Gallery Ground Floor, Architecture Building, University of Melbourne  
Open: Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm  
msd.unimelb.edu.au/events/other/lyons-ideabuilding

"I've been thinking."  
"Now we're in trouble."  
"What are we doing in this book?"  
"Beats me ... you're ugly, and I'm ordinary ... I don't think we've got any business here at all."  
"Perhaps we are heroic, and original."  
"Dunno ... doubt it."

### INFORMATION

This is an extract from the monograph *More, The Architecture of Lyons, 1906-2011*, published by Thames & Hudson.

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lyonsarch.com.au  
accaonline.org.au

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