Architecture Design Studio as Research Incubator: thresholds, edges, boundaries.

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This paper explores the conceptual and research approach, based in phenomenology, of a Master of Architecture urban design studio conceived and taught by the two authors.

The provocation of the studio brief was ‘On the Verge’. This open-ended statement challenged the students to consider the broad context of ‘threshold’ and ‘edge conditions’ as both physical and psychological barriers, boundaries, and transformational positions determined by materiality, physicality, and perception as creative moves of analogy and metaphor. Similarly, our human potential is always ‘on the verge’ of an action or spatial location and, therefore, we are determined by thresholds.

The given site was the residue of a disused factory located on a cliff-edge facing the ocean in an industrial area of a semi-rural town in Australia. Complimentary to architecture the studio insisted on a definite consideration of the site landscape to be conceptualised and interpreted from a phenomenological method of observation. Because of this complexity and holism, many of the students’ projects have been determined by rigorous site analysis and ecological concerns which then have informed the constructed components of the architectural interventions.

The pedagogical impetus was to use the studio as a research incubator and for the students to take complete responsibility for how they interpret, research, conceive, propose, and present their projects. This method is contained within the theory of
constructivist teaching and learning in which the students take individual responsibility for their education. Therefore, every project is unique adding pedagogical excitement and challenge for the students and teachers.

• Authors Biography (200 words each):
Dr Ross T. Smith is a Senior Lecturer in Architectural Design at Deakin University (Australia). His theoretical focus is phenomenology and experiential learning in architecture research design studios, mainly at Masters level. Smith completed Bachelor and Master’s degrees in New Zealand, a PhD at the University of Melbourne, and was awarded a Post-Doctoral Research Fellowship in Paris. He has lived in and taught architecture in several countries of varying cultures and pedagogical approaches. Smith is also a practicing artist who has been exhibiting internationally for twenty years.

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