CITIES IN A CHANGING WORLD: QUESTIONS OF CULTURE, CLIMATE AND DESIGN

• Paper / Proposal Title:

PLACE-MAKING or CLAIM-STAKING: sustaining the illusion of participation in Australia’s New World City

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• Abstract (300 words):

In early 2020, before Coronavirus consumed the world’s attention, catastrophic bushfires were sweeping across Australia. As things turned biblical, so too did politicians, with evangelical backbenchers in the Federal Parliament declaring that the world was in the grips of a “climate cult”. Battling against oppressive heat and blankets of smoke, people took to streets around the country to demand accountability and action. Governments in NSW and Victoria moved swiftly to declare climate emergencies. However, in the state of Queensland, home to the world’s largest prospective coal mine, legislators responded with a new law – criminalising peaceful demonstration.

Drawn from original participatory action research, this paper examines recent activist movements in Brisbane, the state capital of Queensland and largest single municipality in Australia. A former penal colony, governance in Brisbane is founded upon a culture of coercion and denial in which overt criticality is kept in check through a careful curation of urban space by municipal authorities. Central to this are the architects and planners whose imaginative renderings help to sell an idealised vision of the New World City, Brisbane City Council’s ubiquitous marketing slogan. In response, the city’s counter-
cultural organisers seek to prompt debate through so-called ‘creative occupations’ of public space – events that offer an alternative vision of the New World City as a place of radical and plural democracy. Situating these creative practices within the recent history of subaltern spatial politics and socially engaged art, a distinction is drawn between processes of ‘place-making’ and ‘claim-staking’ in order to interrogate conflicting approaches to urban development. Of central interest is the role of creative expertise in defining the terms of public debate, calling into question the political responsibilities of design: How does architectural expertise guide the actions of the powerful clients we serve? How can we use this position to shift the values of deeply entrenched institutions? And most importantly, how can we do it quickly enough to halt progress towards economic and ecological collapse?

**Author(s) Biography (200 words each):**

Shane is an architectural designer, researcher, and community organiser from Dublin, Ireland. He studied architecture in Dublin and architectural acoustics in London, practicing as an engineering consultant and a freelance arts producer in the UK and Australia before returning to studies at the University of Cambridge in 2018. As a core member of Brisbane-based design collective [Unqualified Design Studio](#) he has led the creation of large-scale installations at events around the world, including Vivid Sydney and Burning Man. His work explores the potential of experimental participatory design to trigger altered relationships between people and place, promoting more inclusive and sustainable approaches to city-making. Passionate about issues of spatial justice, he has played an active role in recent years at the intersection of sub-cultural arts movements and grassroots political organizing in Brisbane. He is a co-founder of [BURN Arts Inc](#), a non-profit community organisation promoting participatory arts and culture in southeast Queensland, and has been a Visiting Academic and Design Tutor at the University of Queensland School of Architecture. He currently lives in Dublin where he spends quiet evenings investigating an unfounded conspiracy involving hippies, big tech, fire-based rituals and the Irish property market.