

CarriageWorks

Luke Bacon

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Technology Sydney

“Eveleigh had a ‘heart and soul’. She forged friendships that would last a lifetime for the men and women who served there. To these everyday Aussies, she was an inspiration for another day; a gentle giant who, under her old wrought iron roof, sheltered and protected as well as united, men from all walks of life, including the hundreds of overseas migrants who came to our shores. She integrated them into a new way of life, and gave them life!

She provided the fabric to be creative; to make a ‘man from a boy’; to give men strength to allow them to give, in turn, to others less fortunate. Her long alley ways, disappearing into a void or mist and the warmth from her forge fires warmed the heart. Whether in depression or war, in an age when ‘Steam was King’, that expendable energy, like white shivery ghost, could do work and turned the wheels of not only steam trains but industry itself...

Long live Eveleigh Railway Workshops!” –Richard K. Butcher (Butcher, 2004, pg.vii) (worked at the site through the mid 20th century)

The Eveleigh Railway Workshops closed in 1996 after a long decline in use. What was once a vast symbol of churning modernity in Australia is now gone; its overcrowded, steaming rooms emptied. CarriageWorks, a multi-functional contemporary arts centre, now stretches down Wilson St, where the Railway Workshops stood beside Redfern Station. Art viewers and young urban families now stroll hushed corridors and galleries where oil faced workers once passed through clouds of steam like morning fog on their way between great black locomotives. This changing use of the CarriageWorks site over time reflects a wider shift in society; a shift between the prevalence of the ideas of modernity, and, now in our present time, the reaction to these ideas, post-modernity.

In *The Painter of Modern Life* (1863) Baudelaire wrote that “Modernity is the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; it is the one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immutable” (Harvey, 1990, pg. 10). Modernity, this spirit of fleeting change and constant renewal, dominated Western thinking from around the beginning of the 19th Century, right up until around the late 1970s. The whirlwind of change was underpinned by the Enlightenment idea that humans could pull themselves out of a perceived “barbarism” (Kant, 1784, pg. 3) and push forth to establish “objective science” and “universal morality and law” (Habermas, 1983, pg. 9) through rational, empirical thought. The Enlightenment established a dogmatic, immovable belief in progress and the advancement of ‘man’ though this continual rationalization and disconnection with the past. This supposed ‘progress’ has often been destructive, Berman writes that it “pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish” (Berman, 1982, pg. 15). The concept of discoverable, rational ‘truth’ was the “eternal”, “immutable” eye of the

storm around which modernity's enormous, often destructive transformation and change revolved.

The development of the steam locomotive is emblematic of modernity in the 19th Century because of its importance in the process of modernization and industrialization, two important products of Enlightenment's 'progress'. Trains suddenly allowed the rapid and efficient spread of new technologies, goods and ideas across vast frontiers like never before. Habermas believed that modernization was a-

“-Mutually reinforcing process: the formation of capital and the mobilization of resources; the development of production and productivity; the establishment of centralized political power and the formation of national identities” (He Ping, 2002, pg. 119).

The development of the locomotive fits easily into this formula as an advancement in the efficient transportation of goods and labour. Not only did it greatly increase productivity through the efficient mobilization of resources, but also strengthen the power of centralized governments by increasing the speed of communication. Reducing the obstacle of distance, this new technology was essential in the growth new nations in the Americas and the colonies, allowing colonizers to push inland and remain connected to their solid coastal bases. The locomotive reduced the sense of distance between disconnected peoples, helping develop the sense of 'togetherness' that Ernest (1882) believed connected a nation.

In Australia, The Eveleigh Railway Workshops were constructed between 1882 and 1989 on what was then farmland. It functioned for over 100 years, employed over 3000 workers at its peak and was the biggest railway workshop complex in the southern-hemisphere (Heritage Group DPWS, 1999, pg. 19). NSW's (and much of wider Australia's) locomotive fleet were erected and maintained at the workshops that had a reputation for skilled craftsmanship, particularly carpentry. Many of Australia's rail workers had they're apprenticeships at Eveleigh working on wide range of trains, from luxury carriages to freights, and developing new rail technologies in the laboratories.

The Workshops were an important part of bringing modernity to Australia, and facilitated the explosive urban growth of Sydney by providing infrastructure for new commercial development and migration from rural to urban areas. The building of the Workshops is a strong example of the role of the colonial government in the project of modernization and industrialization in Sydney in the late 19th Century. In Europe and American, these processes evolved from the abundance of private capital and will to produce ever-greater profits, and resulted in the drastic transformation of cities during the 19th Century. In the recently colonized Australia on the other hand, there was no such abundance. In 1955, after a series of failed attempts by the privately owned Sydney Railway Company, the colonial NSW Government established the first state owned railway in the British Empire (Heritage Group DPWS, 1999, pg. 19).

Richard Butcher's description of The Workshops (2004, pg.vii) as a guiding, churning heart of industry is an accurate metaphor for their importance in the shaping of an industrialized Sydney. Land in the areas around the site, Chippendale and Erskineville in particular, was chopped up into small plots, now thin terraces, to house working men and their families (Heritage Group DPWS, 1999, pg. 22). Butcher goes on to describes The Workshops as initiating Australians into this new industrialized way of living. In his reminiscence he talks

with great nostalgia for the 'simple,' working-class life that men had there. He describes the humor of the yards, teaching boys the lessons of life, often "the hard way," (pg. 153) rituals that can be related to the macho initiation tests or 'hazing' that takes place amongst young, male army recruits. These of type events are reflective of the male dominance in modernity thinking, in which *masculinity* is associated with *industry* (and therefore strength and progress) and is favored over *femininity* which is associated with the *domestic* (and therefore fragility and tradition).

Feminist Belinda Probert (1994, pg. 161) explains that in pre-Industrial Revolution Europe and in unindustrialized societies, the household was the most important economic unit and accordingly there was no real distinction between what is now termed 'domestic work' and productive work. Because of their crucial role in the household economy, women held a large amount of power with the family. The rise of the factory (and *workshop*), through industrialization shifted the majority of economic production away from the home. The resulted in a change in the sexual division of labour.

"In leaving home to go to work, men entered the public world of industry, commerce and politics. By remaining in the home, women were confined to a private world of cleaning, nurturing and emotional labour, for which they were not paid" (Probert, 1994, pg. 161).

Probert goes on to explain that because women's wages were lower (a reflection of political inequality), they were competition with men and a threat to their ability to earn a living and therefore their power within the family.

"Men's response to this threat was to organize ways to exclude women from well-paid work, and to confine them to a narrow range of jobs which came to be identified as women's jobs" (Probert, 1994, pg. 162)

When Butcher writes that the Eveleigh Workshops could, " - make a 'man from a boy' ... give men strength to allow them to give, in turn, to others less fortunate." He is describing and perpetuating the importance of masculinity to modernity thinking, which contributed to the ongoing segregation of jobs by sex and the repression of women. This repression is just one contradiction between the Enlightenment's belief in 'freedom through rational thought' and the practice of modernity.

By 1950 The Eveleigh Workshops that had been built on a drive for 'progress,' were gradually becoming a victim to its perpetual desire for further advancement. From the 1940s, as steel replaced timber, electricity replaced steam and trains became larger, more and more work was outsourced to private companies in outer Sydney. The steam locomotive no longer stood for the power of industry over nature and the conquering of new lands, it had become like the horse draw carriage, just another 'traditional', out-dated technology. Production slowed through the 1970s and 80s, until in 1996, the Workshops were finally closed to use. Instead of being revitalized and updated, what was once a bustling hive of activity had become cold and empty, a vast, rusting museum. Through its late demise and abandonment, The Eveleigh Workshop site had become a massively inefficient waste of inner-city space, created by ever rationalizing 'advancement'.

The life and death of the Eveleigh Workshops reflect the "maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal" that Berman (1982, pg. 15) describes. David Harvey writes that

because of its unhesitant, continual break from even its own past, modernity “-is characterized by a never-ending process of internal ruptures and fragmentations within itself” (1990, pg. 12). This destructive fragmentation reflects one of the key contradictions within Modernity; that its practices in no way reflect the rationality it strives for. Berstien summarizes Max Weber’s attack on modernity:

“-When unmasked and understood, the legacy of the Enlightenment was the triumph of... purposive-instrumental rationality. The growth of [purposive-instrumental rationality] does not lead to the concrete realization of universal freedom but to the creation of an ‘iron cage’ of bureaucratic rationality from which there is no escape.” (Berstien, 1985, pg. 5)

Instead of demolishing the buildings of the Eveleigh complex and building some kind of new complex in response to industry’s latest need, a heritage assessment was carried out by the NSW Heritage Group. Suddenly planners were looking back, assessing what cultural value could be found in the past. The result of the assessment and almost fifty million dollars from the Arts NSW, is CarriageWorks, a new multifunctional contemporary arts centre opened in January 2007. The architecture of CarriageWorks inhabits and celebrates the sites rich industrial heritage, leaving the original buildings intact. Walls have been left raw and uncovered showing their hundred years of industrial service, and the huge maintenance halls are undivided, drawing attention to the enormity and importance of their past use. The renovation of the CarriageWorks space within the original Railway Workshop buildings reflects a post-modern attitude towards urban planning.

It is important to understand Post-modern architecture and planning as a break from post-war, High Modern architecture represented by Le Corbusier (Jencks, 1975, pg. 1). David Harvey describes post-war Modern planning:

“The trend was everywhere to look to the war-time experience of mass production and planning as means to launch upon a vast programme of reconstruction and reorganization. It was almost as if a new and revived version of the Enlightenment project sprang, phoenix-like, out of the death and destruction of global conflict. The reconstruction, re-shaping and renewal of the urban fabric became an essential ingredient within this project.” (Harvey, 1990, pg. 68)

We can see evidence of this trend in the Brutalist style housing estates that were built in near by Waterloo. Post-war modernist planning made full use of the bulldozer to ‘renew’ troubled inner-city areas and rationalise and organise urban space. “High modernism is thus credited with the destruction of the fabric of the traditional city and its older neighbourhood culture [through the] radical disjunction of the new Utopian high-modernist building from its surrounding context,” (Jameson, 1984, pg. 3). Post-modern planning rejects these methods as a way of producing healthy spaces for cultural development. Instead it searches for new ways to express the complex and diverse fabric of traditional urban areas. Rather than embracing a policy of urban renewal, enforcing a new, rationalised function on a space, it tries to understand how an area has developed organically over time, how different buildings are

connected and why these functions do or don't promote a community's identity. Rob Krier, a post-modern architect from Luxembourg, describes this attitude-:

“Scale in architecture should be adjusted to the size of the human body and its patterns of behaviour, perception and sensitivity. It should not be orientated to technical or structural principles or to economic considerations only... Any new planning in a city should be such that it fits into the general order and offers a formal response to existing spatial patterns... Our new cities consist of collections of individual buildings. Five thousand years of urban history show that the complex structures of streets and squares are necessary as communication zones and centres of identity.” (Krier, 1982, pg. 5)

The development of the CarriageWorks site, is the turning of the Southern Hemisphere's biggest railway complex into a multifunctional series of studios which are now used to house a number of arts organisations, including Reel Dance and Playwriting Australia, studios for music, dance and art events as well as an organic food market on Saturdays. These functions are constantly changing and interlinking within the site, reflecting post-modernism's de-rationalisation of the functions of urban space. This change in usage is deeply emblematic of the breaking of modernity's grip on urban planning. It reflects no grand drive towards advancement, but a faith in natural complexity of human perception over time. This shift, from a site having one focused purpose, in this case industrialisation, to having many possibly contradicting aims and projects, reflects the post-modern disdain for the 'grand-narratives' developed under modernity.

A landmark theorist of Post-Modernist planning, Charles Jencks condemns modernity's urban renewal schemes turning its own 'civilised' rhetoric back on itself:

“The bulldozer is the most barbaric instrument planners have at their disposal. Civilized people don't rubble their ancestors, they dig them up... If we did this for cities, we'd live in a time skyscraper, a memory box and as we descended to street level we'd go back to the past. There is no real economic or structural reason for destroying any building – just the commitment to harmony, the clean slate, and the bulldozer ethic.” (Jencks, 1975, pg. 9)

This excerpt displays the seemingly contradictory aims of post-modernism. How can urban planning both overturn the stubbornness of modernity in favour of diversity and complexity, whilst attempting to access and experience an industrial past? Considering this and CarriageWorks, it becomes clear that while it seemingly celebrates the “exceptional cultural value” (Heritage Group DPWS, 1999, pg. 211) of the site's industrial heritage, the very act of placing 'value' in this past defies modernity's abhorrence for tradition which unpins its initial creation. It accesses the Eveleigh Workshop's working-class past on its own, gentrified, contemporary terms, producing new contradictions and questions where these contexts meet. Would Richard Butcher appreciate the contemporary dance studios or the roller disco? Would the many women who work at CarriageWorks accept the masculine “inspiration for another day” (Butcher, 2004, pg vii)?

Nancy can help explain the Post-Modern thinking that informs the contradictions that are manifest and seemingly embraced in the architecture of CarriageWorks, writing that:

“As long as the world was essentially in relation to other (that is, another world or an author of the world), it could *have* a sense. But the end of the world is that there is no longer this essential relation, and that there is no longer essentially (that is, existentially) anything but the world "itself." Thus, the world *no longer has* a sense, but it *is* sense.” (Nacny, 1997, pg 8)

Post-Modern thinking embraces contradiction, interested in the collaged surface of societies fragments, and their endless relationships, rather than establishing some new method for advancement. The CarriageWorks space is an architectural collage of conflicting ideas, times and values. This complexity reflects the reality of wider society throughout time as chaotic and unstuck from the absolute dominance of any movement such as modernity (Latour, 1997).

Despite these contradictions, the changing use of space by urban planners and developers overtime still seems deeply linked to the trends in thinking. During the 19th Century, The Eveleigh Railway Workshops were an example of how the ideas of the Enlightenment were infused in the expansion of industry in far away colonial Australia, the ‘maelstrom’ of modernity pushing modernization forward through the locomotive. As the Workshops closed, the problems of modernity, experienced across the world during the 20th Century, are exposed. The redevelopment of the site into CarriageWorks reflects the popularity of post-modernist ideas, but also undermines the supposed aims of Arts NSW’s heritage assessment. The contradiction between Arts NSW’s commitment to celebrating modernity and the actual experience of CarriageWorks, gives away a deeper, failing reliance on rationalism. While the planners who design the centre seem committed to post-modern collage, contemporary governments are still drawn somewhere between a pre-enlightenment celebration of tradition, modernity’s rationalism, and a fascination with post-modern aesthetics.

References

- Berman, M (1982) All that is solid melts into air: The experience of modernity, Simon and Schuster, New York.
- Berstein, R ed. (1985) Habermas and Modernity, MIT Press, Oxford
- Butch, R. K (2004) The Great Eveleigh Railway Workshops, National Library of Australia cataloguing-in-publication entry, 1st edition, Australia
- Cassirer, E (1932) translated by Pettegrove (1951), Princeton University Press, USA.
- Castree, N et al (2006) David Harvey: A Critical Reader, Blackwell, USA
- Cromley, E. C et al (1995) Gender, Class, and Shelter: Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, V, The University of Tennessee Press, USA
- Ferber, S et al (1994) Beasts of Suburbia: Reinterpreting Cultures in Australian Suburbs, Melbourne University Press, Australia
- Gibson, K et al (1994) Metropolis Now, Pluto Press, Australia
- Habermas, J (1983) Modernity: an incomplete project, In H. Foster (1985), London

- Hartman, C (1984) *The Transformation of San Francisco*, Rowan & Allanheld, USA
- Harvey, D (1990) *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Blackwell, USA
- Heritage Group, Department of Public Works and Services [DPWS] (1999) *Eveleigh Carriage Workshops: Conservation Analysis*, HG Report no. 99/19, Australia
- Jameson, F (1984) *Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism*, in *New Left Review*, 146, London
- Jencks, C (1975) *The Rise of Post Modern Architecture*, in *Architectural Association Quarterly*, Vol. 7 No. 4 Oct/Dec 1975, London
- Kant, I (1784) *An Answer to the Question: "what is Enlightenment?"*, *Berlinische Monatsschrift (Berlin Monthly)*, Germany.
- Krier, R (1982) *Rob Krier on Architecture*, Academy Editions, Great Britain
- Latour, B (1993) *We Have Never Been Modern* pages 29 – 39 , Harvard University Press, Cambridge
- Merivale, H (1839) 'Lecture XVIII Policy of Colonial Governments Towards Native Tribes', in Merivale, H, *Lectures on Colonization and Colonies (1861)*, Frank Cass and Co. pp.487-502, London
- Nancy, J. L (1997) *The Sense of the World*, University of Minnesota Press, USA
- Olds, K (2001) *Globalisation and Urban Change*, Oxford University Press, UK
- Ping, H (2002) *China's Search for Modernity*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York
- Probert, B (1994) 'Women's Working Lives', in Hughes, K. P ed. (1994) *Contemporary Australian Feminism*, Longman Cheshire, Australia
- Renan, E (1882) 'What is a Nation' in Bhaba, Homi (1990) (ed.) *Nation and Narration*, London: Routledge. pp. 8-22.
- Spearritt, P (2000) *Sydney's Century: A History*, UNSW Press, Australia
- Smith, M. P (2001) *Transnational Urbanisation*, Blackwell, USA