

Alice Springs Public Art: threats and opportunities

Alice Springs has a poor record of delivering quality design, landscaping and art in the public domain. Very often experienced planners, architects and designers are skipped in the process or else they are imported and bring with them a depth of experience forged elsewhere [...]. Too often, originality and quality are compromised by a political or 'community arts' agenda in favour of safe / vandal proof but ultimately forgettable 'place-making' or public art projects.

Equally damaging are the myriad small-scale actions of bureaucrats - referred to in urban design circles as "death by a thousand cuts". In recent months roundabouts have been filled with concrete. And clay brick pavers are extending across the CAD (CBD) giving the town an unfortunate uniformity and blurring, instead of highlighting the differences between retail, civic and heritage 'precincts' [...]. This failure to draw on creative skills within our community must change if urban design and public art are going to truly benefit Alice Springs and make the town distinctive and 'competitive'. In practical terms we live in an isolated regional centre, engaged in a daily bid to encourage locals to stay, newcomers to settle and tourists to visit.

Client trust in the integrity of designers would vastly improve this town's ability to match the highest standards of public art and design being achieved across the nation. While we flippantly bestow the phrase 'world class' to all manner of projects, this standard will never be achieved if governments seek to control and micro manage artists and the content of public art projects. Small town committees and politics need to be set aside in favour of peer review and expert jury panels. Finally, the best practitioners need support from others: educators, engineers, architects and community leaders to bring the project to fruition and provide the social balance, quality and accountability expected in the public domain [...].

Originality, beauty and function (including integration with commercial enterprises) are critical if the town is going to offer a richness of experience that will draw people into Parsons Street over and over [...]. High value public spaces are renowned as economic multipliers and small business, at its best, offers constant re-investment in the street and a level of stewardship that governments are clearly unable to match.

Concept Outline: Parsons Street

Preamble

I was commissioned to provide creative direction for the eastern end of Parsons Street from the 'ancient red gum' to the Todd River, a distance of approximately 150 metres. While the expanded (7.8m) pedestrian zone proposed for the southern side of the street is the report's focus I am compelled to also mention the section of Parsons Street between the red gum and Hartley Street. To my mind these 'mirror' sections of Parsons Street read as a definable and balanced entity with the red gum as a natural pivot point. The western portion has better amenity overall (anchored by two heritage buildings on opposite corner sites) and enjoys greater use by residents. In time this pedestrian traffic is likely to flow into the eastern end of Parsons Street as amenity improves and purpose returns to the street.

While this 'directions' document does not detail the northern side of Parsons street (a much narrower pedestrian zone) there is an obvious need to integrate landscaping treatments across the street. Westwards from the ancient red-gum, the Stuart Highway beckons and the potential for this northern edge of Parsons Street to provide a dedicated bike / walking path needs investigation.

Less obvious but more critical is the need to reinstate the blocked sightline from the Todd River in the east to foothill and range features on the western horizon at distances of approx. 3.5 and 9 km. respectively. Sightlines to and from these distant landmarks allow the built environment of Alice Springs and its inhabitants to connect to the broader desert setting, to expand and to breathe. They secure our memories in places where even heritage buildings cannot be regarded with any sense of permanence. In the example of Parsons Street they connect us to song-lines and sacred sites that form a cultural map of national significance. Rocky features of importance to euro and caterpillar ancestors float on the horizon but this valuable sightline only exists because Clark Rubber is a single storey structure!

Public art and design projects of the scale envisaged for Parsons Street provide a rare, perhaps once in a generation, opportunity to define our sense of identity and place [...]. Decision makers should not hold to a status quo that is failing our community in Parsons Street but look instead to the future [...].

EXTRACTS FROM PAPER TO THE NORTHERN TERRITORY GOVERNMENT.

REVEALING THE SPIRIT OF PARSONS STREET

Concept outline intended to shape pedestrian amenity and create balance in the culutral order of the street.

Alice Springs • Mparntwe

Aims and Overview

- Develop a sublime refuge that protects and highlights the fundamentals of place and builds cross-cultural knowledge and respect. Seek balance in the cultural order in preference to one culture being treated as an addendum of the other.

- Seamless integration between ground plane, aerial and subterranean spaces expressed through water harvesting, landscaping, furniture, educational aids and artworks to support storytellers and parents.

- Acknowledge the authority of the natural landscape, the imperatives of biodiversity and the custodianship of sacred sites by Arrernte people. These elements link contemporary Alice Springs with the earliest human occupation and responses to this landscape.

- Find the essence, the history and truth of this place but don't overwhelm and burden the site with stories that are better told elsewhere. Highlight the existence of common ground and our hopes for the future.

- Reinstate the diminished sightline that extends along Parsons St. and upgrade the pedestrian link to the Todd River. By extension, enhance and highlight orientation, visual and physical connections between Todd Mall and the river.

- Infuse Parsons Street with spirit, beauty and purpose so that more LOCAL people return to the area and retailers have some reason to be optimistic about the future...Reinstate the primacy of the local population and its everyday recreational and commercial needs. Reduce the predominance of tourist-focused venues by more careful mixing of local/visitor facilities.

- Create a gentler egalitarian space where 'parallel communities' are encouraged to interact and hopefully overcome their ignorance and distrust of one another but where large groups are unable to assert dominance at the exclusion of the wider community. Carefully establish permeable yet firm boundaries between diverse uses and user groups which provides both security and autonomy of use and shared occupation.

Geography and climate of the street

A width of 7.8 metres has been set aside for a linear pedestrian zone on the southern side of Parsons Street (extending from the Mall to Leichardt Tce.).

The total length of this zone is approximately (145m) viz: Leichardt to the Mall (100m), full width of the Mall + distance to the ancient red gum (45m). Note: the distance from the red gum to Hartley Street is similar (approx. 120 m.)

Parsons Street is aligned east-west but in reality it's closer to 25 degrees north of west, that is west-northwest, 295 deg; this is reflective of the CAD grid generally. While the grid is imperfectly aligned in terms of optimal building orientation, there are some unintended benefits:

- For instance, this alignment allows spectacular penetration of the last rays of sunlight during and after the winter solstice (refer to image taken on 5th July). In contrast the harsh summer sun sets further south and is occluded at sunset.

- Despite some overshadowing of the south side by 3 storey buildings opposite The Residency, the eastern end of Parsons Street in particular offers the rare luxury of winter sun and protection from prevailing cold winds. Such benefits are not available in the Mall or for that matter, the most popular café precincts of Melbourne.

Note: Arcades within the CAD (CBD) are mostly a legacy of the post war period when customers were looking for shade and a cold drink to escape the summer heat. With the advent of air-conditioned shopping centers, arcades lost much of their popularity. Their market position has been further eroded in recent decades by another cultural shift: the growing popularity of early morning coffee. For many struggling cafes, protection from cold winds and an abundance of winter sunlight would make a dramatic difference to profitability and encourage more investment in the social life of the street.

- Being on an east-west plane with a fall to the Todd River, the ground surface of Parsons Street might be remodeled with stepped/terraced pavement sections reflecting and accentuating this 'natural' gradient to the river.

[...] The Parsons Street pedestrian zone that forms the basis of this document is flood prone and facilities, street furniture, sculptures and landscaping should acknowledge this fact.

Salinity levels within the CAD (CBD) are rising and planting schemes adopted for Parsons Street should not contribute further to this long-term hazard.

Cultural Order

Song-lines and sacred sites unify the physical space including the limits of the 9km east-west sightline, the pivotal ancient gum tree and Lhere Mparntwe, Todd River – the town's spiritual heart. The Alice Springs town area is rich in sacred sites that remain under the protection of Arrernte custodians who were awarded native title to crown land in 2000.

Historically, valuable and enduring partnerships between Europeans and Aborigines were forged along the banks of the Todd River extending from the Telegraph Station (refer: Francis Gillen) to Olive Pink Botanic Gardens (Olive Muriel Pink and Johnny Jampijinpa Yannarli) and the sculpture gardens at Pitchi Ritchi, south of Heavtree Gap (Leo Corbett and William Ricketts were informed and inspired by their Pitjantjatjara and Arrernte networks).

The river is also the backdrop to catastrophic alcohol consumption, desperate violence, all too frequent loss of life and a deep despair that touches many families, especially but not only Aboriginal. Management of the river at almost every level and the quality of built and engineered structures that contact or intersect with it mostly fail to reflect its iconic importance as a sacred or natural landscape.

[...] Parsons Street features prominently in the early administration history of Stuart / Alice Springs and was named in honour of J. Langdon Parsons.

- Hon. J. L. Parsons served as Government Resident in Darwin from 1884-90. His appointment coincides with the massacres of Aboriginal people during 'punitive expeditions'. Parsons was greatly affected by the brutality of this conflict and changes in his thinking are reflected in his advocacy, albeit unsuccessful, for the establishment of reserves for Aboriginal people and fair payment and conditions for Aborigines in employment [...].

- Francis Gillen, post-master and justice of the peace (1894-1903) is best remembered for his passionate interest in Arrernte culture and for his advocacy on behalf of Aborigines. Gillen is renowned nationally as a 'peace-maker'. In 1891 Gillen, aided by Constable W.G. South, placed Constable Willshire under arrest for his alleged involvement in the killing of two Aboriginal men.

- William Garnet South (police officer in charge) moved to protect red gums in the Todd River in 1888, at a time when Alice Springs was a tiny frontier town and Royal National Park in Sydney had only recently been declared - the second national park in the world! South Terrace, a continuation of Leichardt Tce. on the west bank of the Todd River acknowledges this extraordinary policeman [...].

New Street Name: we should seize the opportunity to submit a new street or place name for the future one-way street / pedestrian thoroughfare to the river

Parsons Street would be defined by the ancient red gum in the east and Stuart Highway in the west. The new place name bounded by the ancient red gum in the west and Leichardt Tce in the east would help to balance the bi-cultural order of the street. Numerous possibilities / combinations exist eg. Lhere Mparntwe, (Todd River); kwatye (water) ingkerreke (everyone) etc. This public use of Arrernte should transcend the accepted 'European' practice of naming the street/place after an individual [...].

Our primary audience is the local community. In the process of creating a beautiful, innovative and reflective public space we expect to attract and intrigue



Red Gum sapling re-shooting as multiple trunks (ref. Parsons Street biodiversity corridor, 'dancing trees').

tourists. Increasingly, tourists are wary of contrived attractions, overtly presented for their consumption.

Interpretive and educational strategies are focussed on reaching people through their children. We must remember however that children need to be nurtured, encouraged and protected. Like adults they also need beauty and hope [...].



Parsons Street sightline to Lhere Mparntwe (Todd River) in the east. Red gums in ANZ carpark serve as a vital stepping point. Gums in Todd River corridor spot lit by setting sun.

Strategic issues

The effectiveness of planning controls in the immediate surrounds, particularly on the northern side of Parsons Street have a great capacity to value or conversely, to diminish the amenity of a re-imagined Parsons Street.

- The former QC Restaurant building is critically important to the future of the street. Restaurant and café uses would interface perfectly with the street and benefit from outdoor seating and winter sunlight. Incentives eg. rate relief could be offered to give an appropriate new venture time to establish. In stark contrast, office uses would turn the building inwards during day light hours and negate pedestrian activity after 5 pm.



The Parsons Street biodiversity corridor proposes 5 groups of clumped red gums, 'dancing trees' as sculptural forms that lead towards the river.

- Strategic planning and staging should allow the space to develop and mature in its own time. Beyond the ribbon cutting ceremony some funding must be held in reserve for up to two years to allow progressive 'tweaking' and refinement of the project.

- Protect existing mature red gums including those in the carpark behind ANZ. Visually these provide a vital stepping point in the sightline between the ancient red gum and the red gum community in the Todd River.

- Maintain winter sunlight that currently falls on the southern side of Parsons Street at all costs: exclude taller buildings on the northern side and compensate owners with transferable development rights, rate rebates or equivalent.

- Consider and plan for the probability that cafes with outdoor seating are likely to gradually displace some of the existing retailers on the south side of Parsons Street.

- Promote multi-functionality so every element; retaining wall, step, street-light or bollard has two or more uses that would add amenity, innovation and purpose to the street.

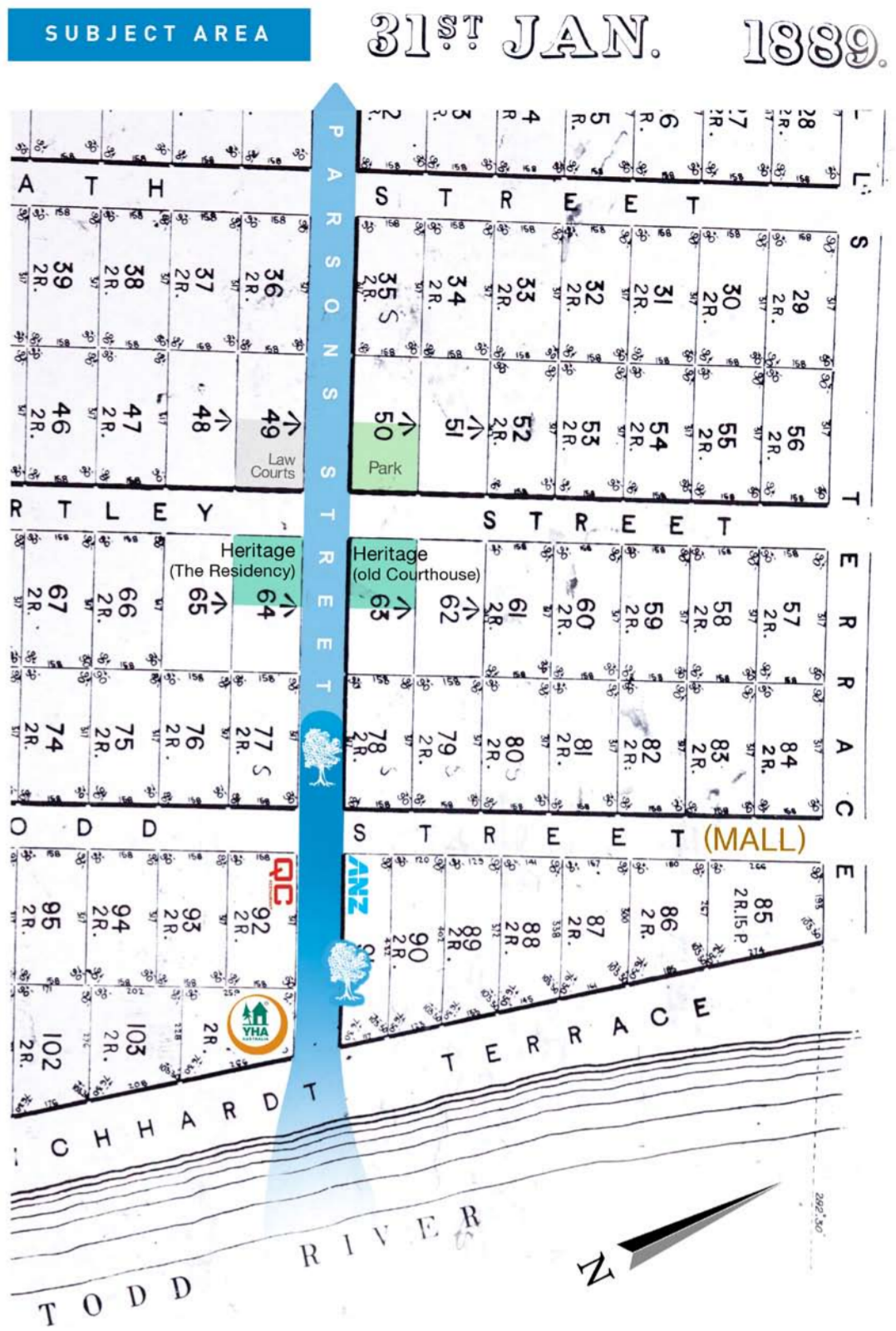
Community reference

- Engage the community at each new stage of the project from brief writing and design development right through to construction and ongoing monitoring and evaluation processes.

- Project development / art workshop could be located on site. For instance the deserted shop fronts of the former QC Restaurant and Commonwealth Bank may be available for a nominal rental.

- Storyboards / graphics on the street, media kits and web updates are some of the cost effective options to keep the wider community informed.

- The process of developing Parsons Street



provides opportunities for artistic collaboration, bi-cultural partnerships, mentoring, community development and the complementary integration of public spaces with neighbouring enterprises.

- Community Service Provider status should be sought to enable offenders on youth diversion programmes to be involved in the project.

- A dedication ceremony, based on bi-cultural respect is strongly recommended for the public opening of this space. This should involve Arrernte custodians and a number of community representatives (including clergy) who work tirelessly building cross-cultural bridges in Mparntwe – Alice Springs.

Budgets and value adding

- De-clutter, simplify and open up the ground plane and make better use of skylines, adjacent buildings, sub-surface and over-head layers that will visually extend the public domain.

- Identify simple and cost-effective actions such as painting the walls of adjacent commercial buildings or defining lane-way entries through strategic placement of decorative arches or by adding corner detailing to opposing walls.

- Seek support from owners to use rooftop on QC building for a solar array to run kinetic features and install gutters on adjacent buildings to collect rainwater. There is obvious scope to capture and clean stormwater using biological filtration while providing water features to enhance heritage properties. Stored underground this water reserve can be piped over covered walkways as required.

- Encourage project partners eg. neighbouring businesses to dove-tail with the project. Cost sharing of simple exterior panels fitted to the western wall of the YHA dorm could provide enhanced sun-screening for the building while providing a rhythmic and interspaced line of 'street canvasses' in the adjacent laneway.

- Utilise existing infrastructure wherever possible shows respect for public money and the efforts of those who came before us. Exploring such possibilities costs little and might just present options that enrich the site in unexpected ways.





Magpie Lark, Teye-teye, Rteye-teye (Eastern and Central Arnerrite). A common visitor to outdoor eating areas in the Alice Springs CAD (CBD).



Native fig, Ficus platypoda, utyerke.



Parsons Street sightline, west-northwest (295 deg), with a distant mountain at 9km and mid range feature at 3.5 km. These natural landmarks are associated with highly significant Arnerrite song-lines and sacred sites. This critical sightline should be extended and reinstated east-southeast to the banks of Lhere Mparntwe, the Todd River. Setting winter sun (July 2011).

Scope of the biodiversity corridor

- Incorporating but not in any particular order:
- landscaping elements inspired by desert ecology / arid design, water harvesting and conservation.
- riparian plants selected for biological and cultural values.
- landscaping and design features to attract birds and butterflies.
- Wind generator/sculpture and revolving information tower.
- Light beam from setting sun passed through a simple prism to split wave-lengths.
- Early childhood discovery path, exploratory devices, cryptic and kinetic sculptures.
- Covered walkway with silhouettes, clustered shade and lighting.
- Sculptural fissure and water feature uniting elements of the walkway.
- Soundscape incorporating Arnerrite – English alphabet, wildlife vocalizations etc.
- Refurbished accent lighting.

Every feature from the pavement to sub-surface drains and overhead cables, every piece of nondescript infrastructure should be re-imagined and re-assembled to showcase arid zone innovation, elegance and beauty.

Artistic and design briefs should maximize opportunities for designers and arts practitioners who reside in Central Australia. This must be balanced by peer review and may also require pairing local artists with highly experienced 'outsiders' who can help with the development of ideas and ensure rigorous artistic practice.

Strategic landscaping features e.g. water points and 'perching' trees will benefit, attract and 'retain' wildlife (eg. butterflies and birds) within the pedestrian zone.

Median planting and raised garden beds form a discontinuous buffer between traffic on the north side of Parsons Street and pedestrians on the south.

Dancing trees as 'clumps' eg. river red gums (tightly grouped + trained) become the dominant sculptural forms in the pedestrian zone. I feel the magic number of clumps might be 5...

Day night cycles would be highlighted in the design of furniture, lighting and landscaping. For several months butterflies and moths 'activate' the Capparis spinosa plantings. Hawk-moths are drawn to the spectacular white flowers that open at night, and after sunrise the moths are replaced by clouds of butterflies.

Water harvesting evokes and connects the visual, sensory, cultural, creative and scientific dimensions of this public space. Existing buildings and the covered walkway are connected by a system of roof gutters. Storm-water is intercepted, stored, filtered and then used for display and irrigating gardens.

Water forms a narrow thread that carries the memories of this place and takes us from the ancient red gum on a walk of discovery to the river...

Water is integrated with the soundscape media that will carry spoken language and incorporate water and water life-forms as part of the bi-lingual alphabet.

The ground plane... expressed simply through the use of widely spaced expansion joints to convey a bold abstract design. Integration with the fracture zone/water feature and fringe planting is critical.

Outdoor education elements would aim to encourage and inform teachers and parents through a process of helping young children to make discoveries. Hence the importance of making it possible to stop and have a comfortable impromptu talk to 30 children [...].

Cryptic animals, kinetic features and simple/robust exploratory devices would amplify the sense of place, reveal extraordinary elements of biodiversity and encourage every person to take a closer look at desert rivers, search for clues, peer down drains or contemplate distant mountains.

Semi transparent sheeting could be used to provide a covered walkway that would unify the pedestrian walkway linking the existing pitched verandah of QC and extending the length of Parsons Street towards the river.

Blue danpalon would 'pull down' the sky and provide a perfect semi transparent 'backdrop' for elements set above and below. With the right design and choices of material, nesting birds could be encouraged to occupy the underside of the roofing structure and add interest and movement to the space.

Organic elements such as snake vines could be grown on underside cables and further enhanced with simple silhouettes of vine/leaves, occasional dragonflies, moths etc made from recycled metal sheeting or plywood and placed on the roof above. During the day these clustered shade shapes/ textures would provide patches of 100% shade and with simple backlighting would add soft silhouettes at night. (This minimises the need to clean organic material from roofing sheets used for harvesting rainwater). Snake vine sheds its leaves thereby providing additional penetration of sunlight during cold winter months.

Potential outdoor gallery walls exist on both sides of the lane-way behind YHA [...]. Examples of historical and contemporary literature are another option that would work well as a 'side-bar' in this lane-way. A curator would be needed to create an over-arching interpretive context and to review and select the best works... There are many possibilities including the dramatic use of variable scale and visible weight to layer some of these writings...

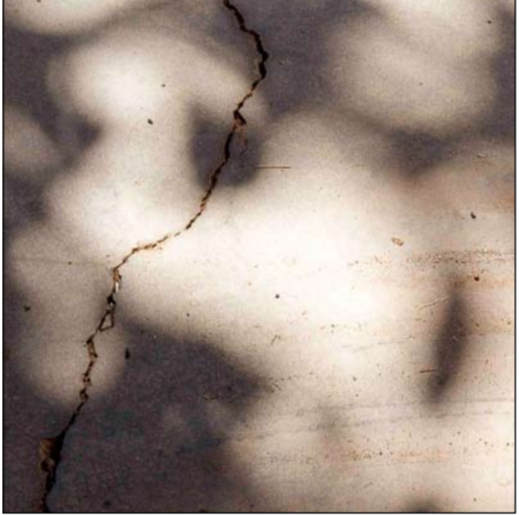
A wind driven 'drum' turbine / sculpture / public directory could be placed as a revolving centerpiece on the southern edge of the 'cross-roads'. Commercial and home-made turbines using half drum shaped 'blades' provide slower rotations that are readily attenuated. Additional power could be generated by the actions of people turning the tower and in fact it could be designed as an object of 'exploration and play'...

The last rays of light during mid winter bathe Parsons Street in spectacular light and spotlight red gums on the banks of the Todd River. This predictable light provides a sunset focus in Parsons Street during the mid winter months, probably extending from June – August. Certainly I've observed the street for 6 weeks spanning June/July but the 'shoulder months' need to be verified.

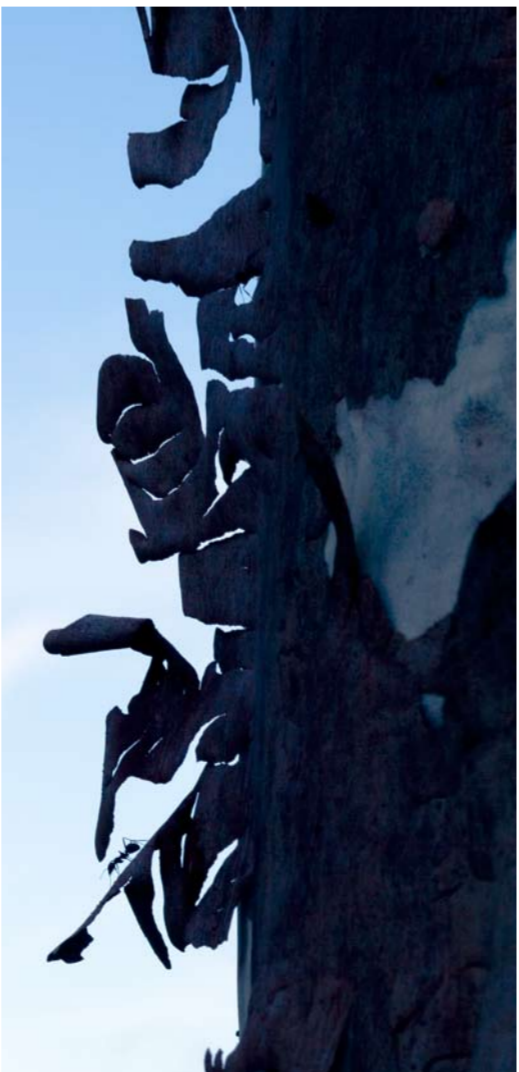
Light rays could be used (innovatively and inexpensively) in a variety of ways including the basic demonstration of passing white light through a glass prism or block to split the light into a 'rainbow' of red, green and blue wave-lengths.

Note: Because this section of the street will provide outdoor seating and a possible future venue for cafes, a weatherproof roof sheeting with some transparency and good thermal insulation is recommended. Blue danpalon with its subtle fluting is expensive but would work well as a 'stepped' linear structure to reflect the occasional downward terracing of pedestrian surfaces (refer: p.14).

The pavement crack as symbol and metaphor



Based on moulds taken from pavement cracks and dramatically up-scaled to form a linear sculpture and water feature, the proposed 'fracture' reads as a subtle uplift that changes in response to unseen forces. Opposing sides create a linear duality and friction in the pavement, variously narrow and wide, occasionally level but more often assuming alternating high-low positions.



Bark peeling away from Eucalyptus thozetiana provides a complex surface where meat ants (ankkerke) forage for insects.

Connecting some 40 metres of walkway elements, this narrow fracture line contracts and expands from a minimum diameter of just 12 mm to a maximum of 100mm. Water emerges from a single source and enters the fracture, travelling down-slope through a series of small basins before disappearing and returning via submersible pump to the starting point. At times the tendril of water is pumped to gain height and occasionally it disappears altogether and reappears further 'down-stream'.

A broad independent 'channel' hidden below the surface of the ground plane carries the flow of water that is visible through the narrow concrete fracture, not contained by it. This subsurface channel would incorporate various major shifts in direction and be sufficiently deep and wide to 'overlap' the degrees of movement required by the pavement fracture directly above.

This sculpture and water feature should not be branded with a single message but rather it will be up to those who use this place to decide what it means to them. Over time different interpretations will be applied to this space. It may be helpful however to list some that occurred to me.

- this fracture or minor fault line connects the ground plane to an implied presence and force beneath the street.

- it could acknowledge a dynamic rift in racial and community relationships that will ebb and flow over time. The fracture charts these possibilities. At times the two sides separate widely but occasionally they meet on level ground and the crack disappears for a while.

- for some, the glistening tendril of water may evoke the pulse of tears (a mixture of joy or sadness) coursing across a weathered landscape.

- finally, the fissure celebrates the humble pavement crack, so often viewed as a failure of design; indicator of an invasive tree root, uplift, subsidence and fatigue; a feature more powerful and intriguing to small children than adults.

Note: This simple, glistening, moving feature unifies the special features of the site and guides people along the biodiversity pathway and bi-lingual soundscape. While the fracture will need to be executed in a bold, elaborate and flawless way it should not be gilt edged and architecturally transported beyond the humble character and form of a gigantic, zigzagging, rising and falling, pavement crack.

Hopefully it will evoke a mix of familiarity, intrigue and uncertainty among locals and visitors alike and some people may even believe it is a badly damaged pavement in need of repair.

The fracture is further accentuated with 'sculptural' plantings, primarily sedges and other fringing vegetation that allow close inspection of the fissure while preventing people from tripping over it. These linear plantings contained within a permeable substrate bed also act as eyelashes and catch some of the pavement dust and detritus that would otherwise enter the body of flowing water.

Intermittent grates will provide regular pedestrian cross-overs and occasionally the fracture, water feature and fringe plantings will completely disappear from view returning the footpath to a normal walking surface.

The 'surface fracture' overlies a much wider subsurface channel and is structurally independent of it. The in-ground 'channel' needs to possess sufficient gradient, width and depth to resist accidental blockage and enable occasional access from intermittent 'grates' or strategically placed 'basins'. The use of gradient, basins, shade and reduced surface area will assist water conservation, minimize algal growth, optimize bird drinking points and ensure that the system is largely self cleaning.

As a linear and intermittent feature, the fracture can incorporate a diversity of artistic responses as opposed to a rigorously recurring 'style'. The source point/s of water entering the fracture, basin features and the 'end point' of the water feature provide discreet opportunities for individual creative commissions [...].

A sculpture in its own right this water feature is intended to carry the bi-lingual soundscape as an artery carries a pulse.

The bi-lingual alphabet and soundscape

[...] A rich and variable soundscape will not seem repetitive to those who use the space frequently. Periodic partial refreshment of content is proposed.

There are many options for creating a soundscape that includes low cost high tech equipment such as bat detectors and re-configured components from durable off the shelf technology such as burglar alarms.

A subtle soundscape layering and or 'switching' between central Arnerrite and English will focus on early childhood development through the use of natural and cultural elements, arid zone plantings and a modest array of cryptic and kinetic sculptures.

The use of language could be integrated with relevant bird, bat and frog calls, contrasting sounds of flight etc. Ideally, interaction with the soundscape would be personal and intimate, requiring close attention.

The use of a 'bat detector' attached to a high point and 'focused' onto an existing street-light would greatly amplify the complex calls of foraging bats and provide an 'interpretive station' where a naturalist presenter could plug in a laptop and display the contrasting signatures of different species and even provide thermal imaging. These presentations would have a ready audience among the young backpackers staying at the YHA.

The bi-lingual alphabet is primarily intended to raise awareness and appreciation for the richness, purpose and beauty of our unique regional language. Some familiar Arnerrite words, already embedded in our daily language (eg. Yeperenyne) are combined with others that mimic bird song or allow us to better understand the sacred landscape that is all around us.

The bi-lingual soundscape is a community tool that may help to soften barriers built upon ignorance, assumptions and shyness. This is not seen as a means of teaching the general or tourist population to say hello in Arnerrite.

Use of language may foster interactions between Alice Springs locals who currently exist in parallel worlds. It might encourage our language students of the future and could even assist English literacy among indigenous children.

Words allow us to compare colours and textures, shared feelings such as smiling or crying, laughter or sorrow; creation ancestors, elements found in nature...and conceptual contrasts that sometimes exist between English language (visual cues) and Arnerrite (aural cues) used to describe/name birds.

Finally, a gentle voice in language will help to calm down the immediate area, a positive counterpoint to groups of people shouting and generally alarming others who share this public space.

[...] I imagine the exploration of words would mostly take place in discreet clusters so that sounds don't invade adjoining spaces. These cluster points are designated by occasional basins/pools of water that are part of the cleaning system of the fracture or rift.

Refurbished accent lighting: a case study

Metamorphosis, represented by a caper white butterfly crystalis, a common, natural element of the street's landscaping, provides inspiration for the design of a lighting filament used in led street lamps.

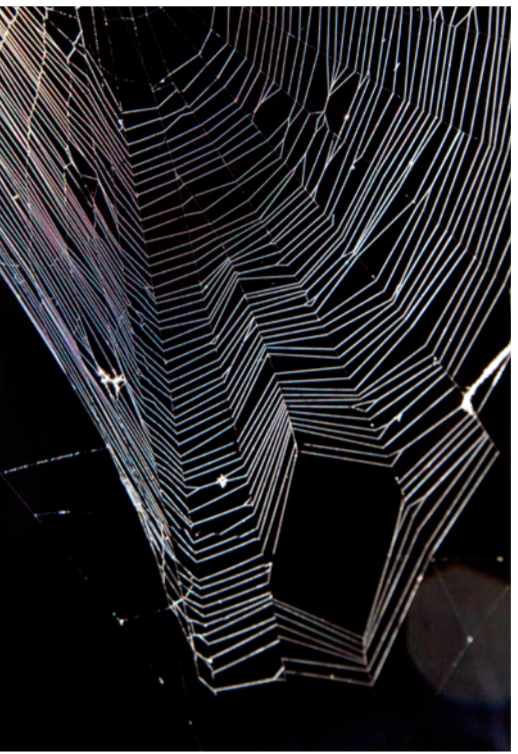
While much clutter needs to be removed from this site there are some assets that could be upgraded and refurbished with a few deft moves. For instance, 4 pairs of faux heritage streetlights are well placed and could be re-shaped with ease to become much more graceful, beautiful and timeless. We can cost effectively re-use the poles and the power supply and create site specific and contemporary lighting that enriches regional design.

The Capparis fruiting stem provides the upper form of the pole. The crystalis can be used for ...lighting rails or preferably singly ie. ref. the flower bud on Capparis as the curved post and crystalis on the end using the bud's ribbed characteristics to contain the delicate lantern and create a reflective top.

Imagine the sides cut out of the larger metal 'bud' allowing us to create a 3D crystalis (the filament) inside a generous cavity with all the essential delicacy of a lantern but with hardened acrylic outer 'lenses' and acrylic ribs on the external 'bud' to protect it from damage. The existing posts carry multiple lights and it would be good to use 1 or 2 secondary stems (smaller and lighter) to carry unopened bud/s but positioned lower down. These become more detailed sculptural elements that add interest to the lighting pole during daylight hours.



Caper White Butterflies (intelyapelyape) are commonly associated with native passionfruit, Capparis spinosa (arrutnenge) and wild orange, C. mitchelli (atwakeye).



Web detail of unidentified spider, nurie, impe (Eastern and Central Arnerrite).

Conceptually one 'sectioned' bud of the Capparis spinosa holds the pupa of the actual butterfly that lives on this plant while the other buds represent the ribbed unopened fruit of the plant. The design of night lighting therefore reinforces the actual daytime 'walk' from the 'ancient red gum' to the Todd River where we pass through clouds of living caper whites and other butterflies.

Following Parsons Street to the river, native passionfruit plants would provide spectacular white flowers (that open at night) and during the day (a few months a year) the 'accent' is provided by actual butterflies marking the path to the river. We don't have to slavishly re-create the crystalis/pupa or fruiting stems of their Capparis host plant but rather we can reference these life-forms to create breath-taking contemporary lanterns.

Confidential Discussion

[...] With subtlety, grace and respect and without fanfare or signage Alice Springs could take a lead in this process. I firmly believe we have to recognize and describe this rift and even give it physical form if our country is ever going to rise above its violent past. Mparntwe / Alice Springs is one of the cultural touchstones of this continent and we will always be measured by our efforts to unify black and white. Ultimately, whatever the opposition, difficulty and delays, this is our destiny.

[...] important to articulate this part of the history of the Northern Territory ... in the hope that one day the appropriate words will settle on this sculpture and place. A sculptural fracture or rift in Parsons Street would serve as a memorial to those who were swept aside by ignorance, fear and greed. It would also allow us to celebrate the heroic few on all sides who intervened to prevent conflict ... And in the process a great psychological weight might be lifted off our community. © Mike Gillam (2011)



Night flowering native passionfruit, Capparis spinosa (arrutnenge).



Native passionfruit, Capparis spinosa (arrutnenge), fruiting stem and un-opened flower, evokes contemporary street lightning.



Chrysalis of the caper white butterfly (Irrarrie), provides inspiration for a 'filament' that uses LEDs, and decorative lantern building techniques to create elegant contemporary lighting.