Opening exhibition panel (image by Jillian Walliss, 2023).

Digital media and the design project: new creative research methods for landscape architecture

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Practice and academia exist in parallel worlds. Universities, with their priorities guided by government research metrics and competitive funding schemes, encourage academics to present research through refereed journals (often behind paywalls) or at international conferences to academic audiences. Conversely, practice works at speed, offering minimal time for critical reflection before moving on to the next project. The design project connects these two worlds. It is here that the conceptual collides with the material, and theory meets practice. While both academia and practice recognise the importance of design precedents and case studies, we argue neither is yet to fully capitalise on the tacit knowledge of the designer in advancing landscape architecture knowledge. Through a critical reflection on the research processes and creative methods underpinning the *Landscape Architects as Changemakers* project, in this paper we discuss the potential of the reflective practitioner, along with the research possibilities afforded by digital media, in developing more complex and precise understandings of design practice. Drawing a contrast with repeatable and predetermined research methodologies, we highlight the value of flexible and creative research approaches that can transform and respond to unfolding knowledge and evolving opportunities for funding and dissemination emerging during a research project.

The limits of language

In 2020, we published *The Big Asian Book of Landscape Architecture* (Rahmann and Walliss, 2020), which has been acknowledged for its comprehensive engagement with Asian landscape architecture (Lu, 2021). While developing the book, we were acutely aware of the limitations of image and text in presenting the culturally diverse work of Asian landscape architecture. The book showcases over 80 projects, representing each of them with three to six images and a 500-word description. Longer essays, for which we encouraged the authors to fold project discussions directly within their work, place the projects in cultural, ecological and political contexts.

What is largely missing from the book is the direct voice of the designer. In one section, we invited three landscape practices from China (Z+T Studio), Japan (Earthscape) and Korea (PARKKIM) to develop short reflective essays on how their respective cultural traditions inform their contemporary practice. While these essays offer invaluable insight, they also demonstrate the difficulties that follow from asking non-English-speaking cultures to present their work in English. Translation diminishes cultural complexity and nuances.

The *Landscape Architects as Changemakers* project emerged out of this problematic question of translation. Our successful grant application to the Toshiba International Foundation proposed that a shift from printed text to audiovisual media could deliver a deeper understanding of how Japanese designers work within their own complex economic, social and urban conditions to achieve positive outcomes. Importantly this project would be bilingual, meaning designers could speak in Japanese and a skilled translator would offer English translation. Outcomes would be communicated in both languages. Working with RMIT University's School of Media and Communication, we developed interviewing skills and strategies for recording design projects, alongside technical knowledge on sound and digital media. In November 2022, accompanied by our translator Saran Kim (who also assisted in filming), we packed our gimbals, smartphones,

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a DSLR camera, tripods, portable light, and audio equipment and set out for Japan. Over almost four weeks, we interviewed four Japanese landscape architects and filmed their projects. In addition, we interviewed a further eight landscape architects on broader issues facing the profession such as gender diversity and professional identity.

As this paper discusses, in its evolution from an initial focus on Japan to a more complex cross-cultural perspective, our project offers valuable insight into qualitative research methods that focus on design. These methods include working with the tacit knowledge of designers and culturally comparative research along with harnessing the potential of digital media, exhibitions and websites as creative research tools and far-reaching modes of dissemination.

Repositioning the case study as tacit knowledge

More than 50 years ago, Hungarian intellectual Michael Polanyi proposed the idea of 'tacit knowledge' premised on the concept that 'we can know more than we can tell' (Seiler et al, 2021, p 2). Drawing on the earlier work of Gilbert Rye, Polanyi highlighted the limitations of philosophical and scientific approaches to knowledge that ignore what cannot be codified or quantified. In response, he advocated for the importance of 'context-dependency and the embodied aspects of knowledge and understanding' (Schrijver, 2021, p 7).

Tacit knowledge has been adopted in design, particularly in architecture, as a way of bridging the gap between practice and academia. This separation, observes Leon van Schaik (2019), resulted in research 'about the history, sociology, and environmental science of architecture, rather than research grounded in the mediums of practice' (p 40). Tacit knowledge is increasingly recognised for its value in understanding 'the entanglements between the built environment, cultural habits, and the impact on the natural environment', revealing knowledge beyond the limitations of rational thinking (Schrijver, 2021, pp 7–8).

Yet within landscape architecture, the value of tacit knowledge is not recognised to the same extent. While the profession in general accepts 'research for design' and 'research-on-design', it is hesitant to recognise 'research-by-design or research through design' where the act of designing is seen as the research method (Lenzholzer, Duchhart and Koh, 2013, p 121). Deming and Swaffield (2011) consider this approach to be subjective and point to limits to its value in advancing new academic knowledge. More recently, Beza and colleagues (2022) question the value of critical reflection on a designer's existing body of work, claiming that it:

> potentially lacks critical insight, because in practice or consultancy (where these reflective pieces are commonly drawn from) one does not usually commence works with a specific research agenda in mind. (p 691)

In contrast, Lenzholzer and colleagues (2013) highlight 'the value and potentials of designing as a constitutive part of academic research processes' (p 121), adopting Crewell's framework to demonstrate its methodological value. Similarly, Kathryn Moore (2019) argues for a more flexible approach to landscape research:

> If we have the confidence to move away from the central hard core of scientific assumption and methodology, there is a real chance to develop new approaches, make connections across and between disciplines, and erase rigidly drawn boundaries delineating and distinguishing practice from theory. (p 321)

The research methods applied in the *Landscape Architects as Changemakers* project can be considered a hybrid approach, mixing characteristics of 'research-on-design' and the creative practice of 'research through design'. For example, we use interview and film to move beyond general understanding of landscape architecture practice to uncover the depth and insight offered by the tacit knowledge of the designer. But at the same time the production of the films and subsequent exhibition can be considered creative practice outcomes.

Strategically, interviews and films focused on a single project for each designer (which featured previously in *The Big Asian Book of Landscape Architecture*). All the designers were experienced and well respected. This targeted focus on a project offered the potential for unravelling and revealing knowledge and experiences that would far exceed the standard project descriptions found on websites and in journals. To achieve this, the discussions needed to occur between designers. Given most of the interviews were in Japanese, the role of the translator was critical. Fortunately, our translator was a recent architecture graduate from the University of Melbourne who had an interest in landscape architecture and was originally from Japan.

Initial questions established the pragmatics of the project. Then the interviews moved to open-ended questions to encourage deeper reflections by, for example, discussing challenges and failures, lessons learnt and the positioning of the project in a broader lineage of design practice (personal and professional). Given three out of the four projects had been completed over 10 years ago, the interviews uncovered valuable long-term reflections on how the project has been transformed and accepted over time. Questions were provided beforehand in Japanese. The designers took the interview very seriously, coming prepared with many notes. These interviews were filmed in their offices, with our research team responsible for one task each (audio, filming or interviewing). Three cameras were used: two smartphones and a DSLR.

Interviewing involves cultural considerations. Our RMIT advisors encouraged us to take control of the interview environment, for instance by moving furniture and objects to establish appropriate visual backgrounds and controlling sound. However, these instructions did not translate culturally or physically to Japan where offices are extremely small and where tight time-constraints (often allowing only two hours in total for an interview, including equipment set-up) limited control. Our initial plans had been to travel to Japan twice: first to visit offices and sites to understand the context; and second to film and interview. However, COVID-19 reduced our travel to only one visit, meaning that we just had to make things work – technically and intellectually.

While we had extensive prior experience of interviewing designers, filming projects was a completely new research technique to us. As high-quality digital media becomes more accessible and user-friendly, researchers from critical geography, anthropology and visual culture are increasingly exploring the potential of film as both a field of representation and as a research method. Geographer Jessica Jacobs (2015) observes that 'film is a better fit in the body of research methods that are multi-sensorial, multi-modal, practice-based and targeted towards how we experience our lived environment' (p 481). Documentary film-making is now being recognised as a creative practice and a research method. For example, Fitzgerald and Lowe (2020) adopt Guba and Lincoln's quality criteria to highlight the value of documentary as a qualitative methodology. Offering an extension of the accepted research paradigm of ethnography, they argue that documentary film offers 'a research lens for seeing, knowing, showing and making sense of lived experiences under study' (p 2).

Critical visual research methods in architecture and landscape architecture, however, remain poorly defined. Christophe Girot's Medialab at ETH offered some early explorations, including the 2013 publication *Landscript 2: Filmic Mapping: Documentary Film and the Visual Culture of Landscape Architecture* edited by Fred Truniger. More recently *Visual Research Methods in Architecture*, edited by Igea Troiani and Suzanne Ewing (2021), documents the generative, analytical and culturally situated practices of visual research methods, highlighting the potential of 'drawing, photographing, filming or more experimental visual modes and media' to surface emergent design knowledge (p 27).

In conceiving the project films, we aimed to use digital media as a mode for revealing the designer's tacit knowledge. Before leaving Melbourne, we had extensive discussions with RMIT University's School of Media and Communication to establish the best types of footage and filming strategies to match the design knowledge embedded in each project. Strategies, therefore, differed for each project. Following the storytelling advice of

'showing rather than telling', the projects were filmed to reflect the design thinking of the landscape architect, as well as to capture the dynamic aspects of landscapes that defy the still image. The films were shot entirely on smartphones, aided by gimbals with their stabilisation, tracking and panning tools. Site sound was also recorded using a shotgun microphone. We planned for two days of shooting for each project, which accounted for different light conditions and changing weather conditions. Some designers were interviewed directly in their completed projects.

The advantages of digital media over still images quickly became apparent. For example, digital media more adeptly captured a human-scale experience moving through the landscape, along with dynamic atmospheric conditions such as sound, temporality, light and moisture. This shift in media is aligned with what Giuliana Bruno describes 'as a theoretical move from the optic to the haptic and from sight to site' and establishes a 'reciprocal contact between the world and us' (Farsø and Peterson, 2015, p 3). For landscape architecture, the immersive qualities of film present a major shift from dominant design representations such as plans, maps and the increasing use of drone footage. All of these representations act to disconnect the body from space, as well as offering the capability to fluidly shift scales from the broader context to the detail.

Film as thick descriptions

Returning to Australia, we carefully curated hours of footage and interviews to reveal a design-focused narrative. The final bilingual films, each between 8 and 12 minutes long, offer a qualitative research response to a design project that differs significantly from more common approaches to case studies, which tend to prioritise quantifiable outcomes. Four major differences are evident.

First, in most case studies the designer's voice is minimal. While interviews may inform the research, the researcher controls the narrative, language and message. In our process, the project is presented entirely through the voice of the designer, and the native language (Japanese) is respected to maintain accuracy and cultural knowledge.

Second, our approach is highly reflective. Case studies and post-occupancy evaluations tend to emphasise quantifiable and comparable criteria. For example, one of the most influential case study projects is the Landscape Performance series developed by the Landscape Architecture Foundation. This series has now been adopted in Australia and conceived to support research teams to 'develop methods to quantify the environmental, social, and economic benefits' of nominated projects (Landscape Foundation of Australia, 2023). As the name suggests, the focus is performance, aiming to 'identify valid, defensible, and replicable metrics and methods that can be used elsewhere by non-experts' (ibid). In contrast, our looser, more open-ended approach to revealing knowledge gives agency to the designer, rather than to the preconceived criteria of the researcher.

A third difference is the temporality of critical reflection. As stated, three of our four projects had been completed over 10 years ago. Interestingly, the Landscape Performance case studies series does not recommend using projects completed more than 10 years ago given 'landscape performance should be measured against the project's design goals and intent, and over time this information is often lost and/or the built project is modified' (ibid). For our project, the age of the project facilitated a deeper reflection from the designer, along with offering the opportunity to film a project at a greater level of maturity.

Finally of note is the shift in the media. Most case studies are presented through a combination of text, tables, images and plans. These formats are the language of science. Producing a film narrated by the designer offers direct links between concepts, ideas and design outcomes. This was further heightened when the designer was interviewed directly in their project. Materiality, systems, experience, planting, use and maintenance come alive in the film. Critically, the design was also deeply situated in its specific cultural and ecological context. Given this highly contextualised approach, it is possible to consider each film as a digital media representation of Geertz's concept of a 'thick' description.

In *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973; cited in Ponterotto, 2006), North American anthropologist Clifford Geertz argued that the best way of understanding culture was not through rules, patterns or laws but instead as webs of significance. Interestingly, Geertz's ideas were inspired by Gilbert Rye, who as mentioned influenced Polanyi's concept of tacit knowledge. Thick descriptions are accepted as a form of qualitative research across a range of disciplines, and are broadly understood as offering 'an interpretive characteristic of description rather than detail' integrating 'meanings, intentions, strategies and motivations' (Ponterotto, 2006, p 540).

On many levels the films meet these criteria, embedding the knowledge of design as expressed by the designer's voice directly into the specifics of time, place and culture. The combination of narration and precise film editing makes visible connections, interactions and experiences, revealing explicit and original design knowledge. This film process shares similarities with research approaches as highlighted by Fitzgerald and Lowe (2020). For instance, they have similarities in 'identifying a question to explore, planning the design approach, use of similar data collection techniques (e.g. observations, interviews), and analyzing narratives as a way of sense making using both systematic processes and creative interpretations' (p 3).

Importantly the films present landscape architecture as an embedded cultural practice. This aspect can be lost with the current emphasis on problem-solving, which tends to push landscape practice towards science (Weller and Hands, 2022). The value of culture was heightened even further in the second phase of our research project, which was shaped by an Australia–Japan Foundation grant.

Cultural juxtaposition

The Toshiba International Foundation grant committed us to complete four short films, record broader thematic conversations with other Japanese designers and present this work on a project website. However, additional funding from an Australia–Japan Foundation grant highlighted the value in shifting the project scope significantly, transforming the focus on Japan into a cross-cultural engagement with Australian landscape architecture, including cultural exchange. This grant was developed in partnership with the Japanese Landscape Architecture Union and also featured a commitment from the Melbourne School of Design at the University of Melbourne to fund a significant exhibition to coincide with Melbourne Design Week.

Reframing the initial research project involved matching the four Japanese designers with four Australian designers, along with introducing an exhibition as a major research outcome. In an interesting twist that reflects the speed of this project, it was only near the end of our month in Japan that we began to consider which Australian projects to feature. With our minds deep in Japan, dominant framings of Australian landscape architecture (urban, infrastructural, nation-building and climate change) were dislodged and we began to see the Australian work with fresh eyes. The extreme cultural juxtaposition between Australia and Japan established a way of engaging with culture that was very different from our previous experience in developing *The Big Asian Book of Landscape Architecture*. Here, we adopted the idea of inter-referencing, also known as 'asia as method', which has its origins in the work of Japanese philosopher Yoshimi Takeuchi.

Speaking in 1960, Takeuchi warned that it was unproductive for Japan to look to North America or Europe to understand its own history. He observed, 'If one went to Europe or the United States, there would be a sense that the people there are superior to or better than oneself' (Takeuchi, 2005, p 150). Instead, Takeuchi suggested 'inter-referencing places' that share similar historical experiences to produce grounded knowledge. This framing presented an intellectual agenda that 'enables research to be placed in its specific historical context without the epistemological and ontological burden of catching up with the West' (de Kloet, Chow and Chong, 2019, p 4). In structuring *The Big Asian Book of Landscape Architecture*, we adopted inter-referencing as a method for diminishing the influence of western typologies and theories. Inter-referencing design practice within similar cultural contexts enables us to escape the generalisations inherent

in nationalism and globalisation to reveal specific processes, theories and philosophies influential in design.

However, in the second iteration of the *Landscape Architects as Changemakers* project, it was now necessary to conceive of methods for engaging two cultures and contexts that had little similarity. Rather than adopt a common lens such as sustainability or climate change to shape an enquiry, we used the experience of the Japanese projects to productively unsettle the familiar narratives of Australian landscape architecture. For this reason, the sequence of the project driven by grant requirements unexpectedly shaped the research trajectory. Here we see how flexibility and serendipity can have a positive impact on research, particularly in terms of its originality. In describing what makes a skilled researcher, Moore (2019) states it involves:

> Being brave enough to reconceptualize basic beliefs again and again, to work things out without having a preconceived idea as to what the results are going to be. Having the insight to bring to bear new ideas and understandings that can enlighten and inform. (p 320)

This shift in the scope required a fast and brave conceptual repositioning. We began by thinking about pairings. Each Japanese project offered a particular provocation to guide the selection of an Australian project. In some cases, the pairings were driven by similarities; at other times, by contrast. The Japanese experience inspired us to consider regional projects. There is a tendency in Australia to focus on urban work, whereas only one Japanese project was in a highly urbanised context. Interviews with the Japanese designers that revealed a precision in discussing materiality, form and designed experiences also directed us to focus on more 'pure' landscape approaches. This meant moving away from multidisciplinary design outcomes or national typologies such as botanic gardens to find projects that would encourage Australian designers to reflect on their personal design approaches as distinct from other external project drivers such as government motivations or general ideas of climate change and sustainability.

Final influences were time and money. As we had only three months to complete the Australian content, we strategically limited our work to Victoria and New South Wales. With the clock ticking, we needed to simultaneously design the exhibition, travel to film the Australian designs, complete eight Japanese and Australian films, and develop a feature digital piece for the exhibition documenting perspectives from 18 landscape architects.

Exhibition as research

Developing an exhibition through digital media was exciting but challenging. It offered new possibilities for designing immersive landscape-driven gallery experiences while at the same time presenting technical challenges such as maintaining projection qualities in varying light conditions and managing multiple sound outputs. After a month of prototyping and testing, the exhibition opened with a soft launch on 28 April followed by the official launch on 18 May as part of the Melbourne Design Week 2023. The exhibition was conceived around six key moments.

Stop One: Scales of inhabitation. Visitors enter through an immersive projection of a Japanese pine forest complete with a soundscape. Featuring the Okutama Forest Therapy Trail and the Grampians Peak Trail walk, this opening content introduces the multi-scaler thinking of the landscape architect, shifting between the expansive landscape experience (using immersive and drone footage) and detailed design presented through floor-to-ceiling construction drawings. Digital clips of the designers discussing materiality and construction processes support the drawings (figure 1).

(a)
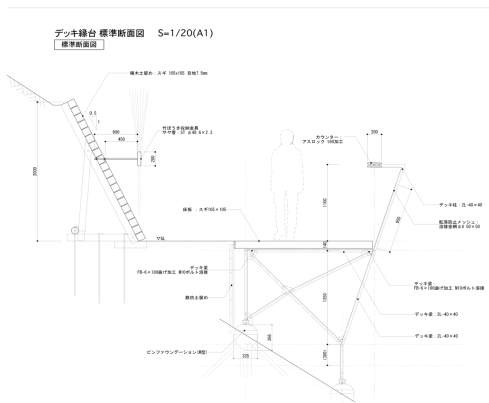
(b)
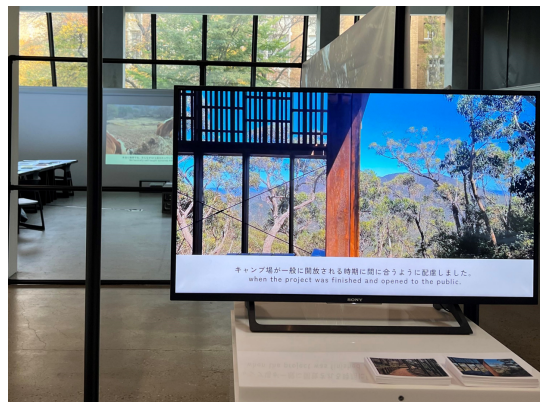
(c)

Figure 1. Stop One: **(a)** immersive projection of the Okutama forest therapy trail (image by Jillian Walliss, 2023); **(b)** detail of terrace and retaining wall (image with permission from Studio on Site); **(c)** digital clip explaining the materiality of the Grampians wilderness walk (image by Jillian Walliss, 2023).

Stop Two: Spatial and cultural disparities. Two significant differences between Australia and Japan shape the landscape architecture of each country. Specifically, most Australian practice is orientated towards the public and conceived for a multicultural society whereas Japanese society lacks cultural diversity and the concept of public space is relatively new. This disparity is highlighted in the exhibition. At one end of the gallery, three screens showcase the extraordinary water landscape and exquisite detailing of Hoshinoya Karuizawa, a resort where urban-based visitors come to experience a diversity of landscapes. Yet, as the designer explains, this privately owned development operates within a unique Japanese framing of public and private space. Contrasting with this position is Melbourne's Prahran Square – a new civic space conceived as a hybrid typology that merges attributes of a park and a square. Here the designer discusses the complexity of balancing the diverse needs of a multicultural society with the need to allow ideas of civic to emerge from ongoing community use.

　　Stop Three: The urban garden. The Japanese respect for the garden encouraged us to look more closely for Australian examples. In this pairing, the rooftop Nihombashi Garden designed on top of a 100-year-old department store in Tokyo is matched by Sydney's Paddington Reservoir where a Victorian-inspired garden offers a subterranean retreat in post-industrial infrastructure. Despite contrasting spatialities of above and

below and differing concepts of heritage, both of these urban gardens offer a physical and imaginative retreat from the busy city. Sections of the project films are contrasted by two large-scale, black-and-white aerial photos of the cities (figure 2).
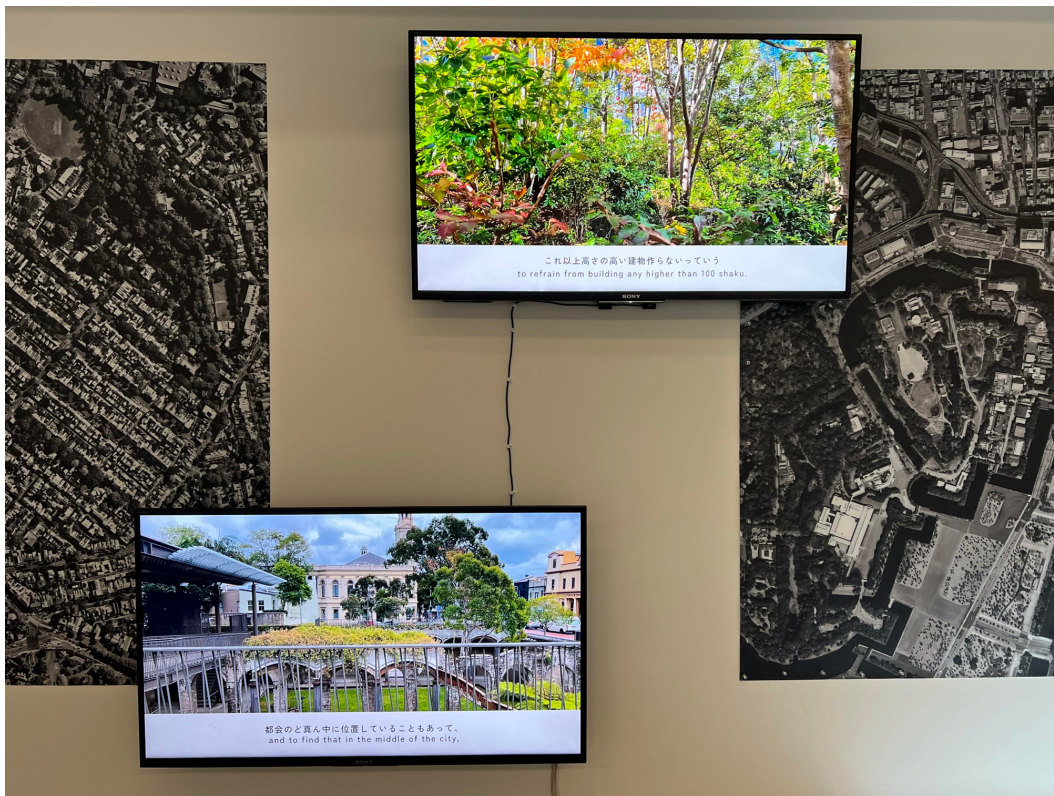

Figure 2. Stop Three: The digital films of the two gardens juxtaposed against the aerial photos of Tokyo and Sydney (image by Jillian Walliss, 2023).

Figure 3. Visitors watch two full-length films from the tatami mat platform (image by Jillian Walliss, 2023).

Stop Four: A philosophy of place. A visit to the extraordinary project Queen's Meadow Country House in Japan's Tono region inspired us to think about regional projects that engage with larger philosophical concepts for living in and caring for landscapes. At Tono, a group of like-minded professionals has transformed an abandoned property into a living experiment that explores ways to develop a more sustainable and meaningful lifestyle. In contrast, Forest Edge garden is an expansive bush garden on the edge of a national park in New South Wales, where the designer, the client and a bush regenerator collaborated to shape the gardens and landscape surrounding the house over time into landscapes of co-inhabitation. Exhibited side by side, these two films are the only ones in the exhibition shown at their full length (12 minutes each). A platform covered in tatami mats invites visitors to sit and be immersed in these expansive regional landscapes and hear about slow cultural and ecological practices (figure 3).

Stop Five: The conversation pieces. Crossing academia, practice, research and government, this collection of observations and comments from 18 Japanese and Australian landscape architects displayed on two digital screens offers a snapshot of where landscape architecture is positioned in 2023 (figure 4). At times, the disciplinary strength of one country is identified as a weakness of the other. For instance, the evolution of Australian landscape architecture into a dynamic and adaptable discipline with strong female leadership contrasts with a discipline in Japan that is constrained by weak governance structures and continuing issues of gender diversity. On the other hand, Japanese designers' attention to detail, access to skilled craftsmen and acceptance of slow design practices are the envy of Australian designers, who must work increasingly quickly in a web of procurement processes and value management.

Stop Six: A table of books. A collection of 30 books presents a mix of landscape practice and theory from Australia and Japan. Visitors are encouraged to sit at the table and peruse the books at their leisure.

Figure 4. A screenshot of the conversation piece addressing the thematic of practice strength (image by Jillian Walliss, 2023).

Figure 5. A view of the exhibition in the Dulux Gallery, Melbourne School of Design, University of Melbourne (image by Saran Kim, 2023).

In addition to supporting the exhibition, the Australia–Japan Foundation grant provided funds for cultural exchange between design practitioners. For three days inclusive of the official opening night, three Japanese landscape architects visited Melbourne for talks, presentations and informal Australian socialising. An afternoon event held at RMIT's iconic Storey Hall featured discussions between Japanese and Australian landscape architects. These conversations were carefully curated to encourage reflection rather than formal presentations as well as to ensure the Japanese visitors were comfortable speaking in English or using a translator. In front of an audience of about 200 people, conversations flowed around new professional opportunities and ways to expand skills and diversify practice, before moving to reflections on what it means to be Japanese and work in Australia. In November 2023, these discussions will continue in Japan, when the exhibition is relocated to Tokyo's Kudan House accompanied by Australian designers.

The exhibition and supporting talks were extremely well received. However, beyond popularity, how can creative practice be judged for its contribution and quality? In the case of *Landscape Architects as Changemakers*, multiple layers of peer review have examined its quality and impact. First, the project was funded by two competitive grants that required the researchers to identify its significance, research methodologies and impact. The Toshiba International Foundation, whose grant funded the films and website, required a detailed discussion of the value and methodologies underlying the shift to digital media. Similarly, as a condition of providing its grant focused on cultural exchange, the Australia–Japan Foundation asked for strategies of exchange, engagement and dissemination. Significantly, this peer review occurred *before* the creative work was produced.

A second period of review occurred in the process of making the competitive applications required for the work to be accepted for exhibition in the Dulux Gallery (and Kudan House) (figure 5) and included in the Melbourne Design Week programme. Each application had to outline the work's significance, audience and contribution.

Three published peer reviews of the completed exhibition provide a third layer. In her review for *Landscape Architecture Australia*, Naomi Barun (2023) highlights the value of the shift away from conventional static and reductive representation of practice, commenting that 'the beauty of this exhibition was clearly in its orality'. She further writes:

> The text that accompanied each of the projects enabled the viewer to understand the strategies employed and the impact made; however, it was the additional layer of conversational audio-visual information that provided a greater depth of understanding.

The power of this representational shift is reinforced in Terren Shi's (2023) review for *World Landscape Architecture*. This exhibition approach, states Shi:

> allows visitors to grasp the transformative nature of landscape architecture and appreciate the ongoing processes that shape and redefine our surroundings. By combining various mediums, the exhibition effectively conveys the dynamic and ever-changing nature of landscape architecture, showcasing the intricate relationship between design, time, and the environment.

Shi also emphasises the value of the cultural comparisons, commenting '*Landscape Architects as Changemakers* sets a trajectory for landscape architecture that crosses the national boundaries.'

Writing on the absence of landscape architecture content in the Melbourne Design Week 2023 programme, Olivia O'Donnell (2023) highlights the significance of the exhibition in presenting landscape architecture practice to a wider community. Despite the Melbourne Design Week programme's 'clear interest in landscapes and living systems', O'Donnell observes, only two of the 200 participants addressed landscape architecture practice. In a further acknowledgement of the success of *Landscape Architects as Changemakers* in communicating to an audience beyond the profession, Barun (2023) concludes in her review:

> At its core, the exhibition created a space for conversation and knowledge-sharing, one that enabled designers to hear from industry leaders and learn about their methods of practice. It also enabled a conversation with a broader community, helping landscape architects demonstrate how considered design moves can create places for humans that help them to connect to the surrounding world.

While the exhibition was only open for a month, the website www.laxchangemakers.com offers an enduring documentation of the project. The bilingual site features the eight full films and the conversation pieces, along with a digital scan of the Melbourne exhibition. In this mode, the research escapes the confines of academic journals and conferences and remains freely accessible from anywhere in the world for use by academics, practitioners and the wider community. From April to July 2023, the website attracted over 1,000 views: 600 from Australia, 300 from Japan and the remainder from 15 other countries. This level of interest arose without any formal promotion of the website, which we plan to do after completing the Tokyo exhibition in November.

This paper itself represents a final form of review. Its critical reflection on the theory, research methods, innovation and contribution underpinning the work has been accepted following academic peer review.

Research that fires the imagination

The *Landscape Architects as Changemakers* project has been logistically and intellectually challenging, requiring a flexible approach to research, collaboration and organisation across two very different cultures. But the ability to work creatively through digital media, exhibitions and a comprehensive website reveals new ways of thinking about academic research, its links to practice and modes of dissemination. The project helps to advance landscape architecture research methods in three clear ways.

First, in its broadest sense, this project demonstrates the value of understanding landscape architecture as a cultural practice of design. Direct links between the tacit knowledge of the designer and the design outcome are made possible through the combination of interview and film. Further, these understandings are embedded in specific ecological and cultural contexts, producing thick descriptions of a project that contribute original knowledge of design practice. Already affirming the value of the films in communicating knowledge, the climate change working group of the International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA) Asia Pacific region has nominated the film on

Queen's Meadow Country House as one of its submissions to the IFLA knowledge-sharing platform, which documents project knowledge from around the world.

Second, the project highlights the power of cultural comparison and cultural exchange to generate new knowledge. Organisations such as IFLA and the Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture, along with academia, tend to diminish cultural differences by assuming commonalities such as climate change and place-making. While this strategy may mobilise a collective approach, it misses the productive value inherent in acknowledging cultural differences. Importantly, this research project respects the language of designers with the aim of avoiding the diminishing of cultural ideas and concepts that arises through requiring them to adopt English. Further, when translation occurs in this project, it is through a skilled bilingual translator.

Finally, the shift to digital media in combination with an exhibition and website has the potential to disseminate research to a wider and more diverse audience. Around 1,000 people spanning academia, the general public, landscape architects and allied built-environment professionals, many of them in younger generations, visited the exhibition. As we prepare to transform the exhibition to take it to Tokyo in November 2023, we are being approached to exhibit in other places and consider other content. If the role of research is to have an impact, then this project exceeds all our work to date in both speed and outreach. For both researchers and audience, it is evident that *Landscape Architects as Changemakers* is a project that, to quote Moore (2019), 'fires the imagination' (p 320).

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