

[un]disciplined¹

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Abstract: *Despite significant variation in regional approaches to interior design² nomenclature, regulation accreditation and research, there is global agreement about the contested and problematic nature of the identity of interior design. Even the name of the discipline's peak international body, IFI, displays the difficulties of identity offering a selection of options in its title – International Federation of Interior Architects/Designers – and struggles to represent the diverse characteristics of its regional member institutions. In recognition of this, IFI initiated a Roundtable discussion to initiate an international discussion on the identity of interior design. The paradigms presented at the Roundtable provide an opportunity to position interior design in Australia in an international context. The Roundtable discussions also provide a useful basis for analysis of interior design as a 'field' encompassing professional practice, education and academic theory and research in Australia at the current time.*

Keywords: *interior design, interior architecture, discipline*

The grace of time

Interior design is evolving as a discipline. In relation to other established creative fields such as architecture or visual art, interior design is only just emerging. Recent thinking about both theoretical and practice-based concepts of the discipline (Attiwill, 2004 and Zamberlan, 2006) indicates that interior design is in a formative state. In her discussion of what a history of interior design might be Attiwill proposes that 'An interior history is, at this stage, a concept that is in the process of taking shape' (p. 1) and in relation to practice, Zamberlan makes reference to '...the recent professionalisation of the interior design discipline...' (p. 6). Yet the identity and substance of the interior discipline or field encompassing the profession and education; its practice and theory, do not appear to be developing in accord across the globe. Possibly in acknowledgement of these differences, which are in some cases fundamental, the peak representative body, The International Federation of Interior Architects/Designers (IFI), hosted an international *Roundtable* discussion in June 2006 to consider '...the state of the profession as it is perceived today...and to formulate a directive opinion to fuel the world-wide debate on the position of the profession' (Lester, 2006). Invited speakers and participants at the Roundtable included representatives from the various professional and educational organisations that comprise IFI's membership³.

IFI selected a paper entitled *Interspace* by Norwegian academic Ellen Klingenberg (2005) as the positioning paper for the *Roundtable*. In her paper, Klingenberg identifies the need to consider interior architecture⁴ as a field of study – not as discreet entities of academia or practice. ‘The professional interior architects’ definition of their field tells us what the interior architects **can do**...but not what interior architecture **is**...I see a strong need for this distinction, in order to investigate the field of interior architecture as such, not as a synonym for the profession’ (p. 4). Apart from exposing one of the reasons for the lack of identity of interior design, Klingenberg’s observation also foreshadows the professional blight that has affected some established disciplines whereby the definition of a professional field is little more than a list of the functional characteristics of the particular occupation itself. In terms of her discussion of professional identity, Klingenberg’s paper aligns with the seminal work of Johnson (1972), *Professions and Power*, and his rejection of professional models that offer lists of descriptive characteristics and proposes an alternative model which allows for the differing cultures of professions that may take into account theoretical and conceptual knowledge as contributors to the identity of a particular field.

At the Roundtable, invited speakers were asked to respond to Klingenberg’s paper from the perspective of their own region. These regional accounts of the interior discipline were as varied conceptually as they were geographically. The broad range of positions represented at the *Roundtable* exposed the complex intersections of issues that dominate the discipline, with unsurprising yet revealing emphasis on identity, nomenclature, practice, education, research and theory. Possibly the only consistency that linked the speaker presentations was the constant reference to interior design as a ‘new’ or ‘emerging’ field. As noted by one participant, ‘We are young as a discipline and that is why we are struggling to define it. It will only be through the grace of time that we can see these issues clearly’⁵. The international paradigms presented at the *Roundtable* provide an important context for analysis of interior design in Australia in its current stage and can assist in proposing the future of the discipline – as a profession and field of study – in this country.

Restrictive practice and expansive thinking

Regional positions represented at the *Roundtable* ranged from the long established and highly regulatory condition of North America where use of the title ‘interior designer’ is extensively protected by title and practice legislation acts; through to the expansive proposition from the Korean speaker from KOSID who suggested a new name and identity for the discipline ‘inter_space design’.

In the United States and Canada, 40 states and provinces have some form of regulation, most commonly in the form of title acts which restrict the use of title to those who have fulfilled the requirements to be registered to use the title and licensed to practice (American Society of Interior Designers, 2006, p. 2). At the *Roundtable*, speakers and delegates from the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID), and the International Interior Designers Association (IIDA), described the criteria that must be met for interior design registration and licensing including completion of an accredited tertiary interior design program, with the responsibility for accreditation largely attributed to the Council for Interior Design Accreditation (previously FIDER) which sets educational standards for interior design degree programs. Approximately half of the degree programs in North America that are eligible for accreditation (minimum 4 year degree programs) have been accredited by the Council for Interior Design Accreditation (or its antecedent organisation, FIDER) (Hansen, 2006, p. 15). These accreditation standards include detailed, prescriptive content for interior design curricula and the required demonstrable student outcomes. Upon graduation and a minimum amount of graduate practice experience, registration and licensing may be achieved by successful completion of a practice examination; a process administered by the National Council for Interior Design Qualification (NCIDQ). Despite this established tradition of regulation that has existed in the US since the 1960s, the ASID representative, Sashi Caan described the rise of the problem of illegal practice which has created what is perceived as a significant threat to the discipline (and the public) from unqualified practitioners. In addition, Caan characterised the interior design profession in the US as having '...an identity crisis...a severe lack of esteem' (Caan, 2006, p. 41). The North American speakers also described their recognised body of interior design theory and research, a jointly funded project of the five North American professional and education organisations⁶. The project was undertaken by Martin and Guerin, academics from the University of Minnesota, who have formalised *The Interior Design Profession's Body of Knowledge* (IDBOK) (2005) with an extensive literature search of publications within and related to interior design. The listing is predominantly comprised of quantitative scientific and behavioural research publications that justify the public importance of interior design as a regulated and protected profession. Not surprisingly, this document is contentious amongst interior design academics in North America.

The *Roundtable's* invited speaker from the Asia Pacific Space Designers Association (APSDA), Ronnie Choong, described a move towards professional legislation that is currently taking place in Malaysia. It is interesting that interior design in Malaysia appears to be following North America's regulatory example in an attempt to solve the same problem that interior design in North America is now suffering from. 'Over the years due to the

non-regulation by the government, the interior design profession has acquired a poor reputation due to poor practices by people who, without proper training or education in Interior Design, are misleading the public by posing as Interior Designers' (Choong, 2006, p. 47). Incomprehensibly, the perceived solution is one initiated not by the profession's own organisation, the Malaysian Society of Interior Designers (MSID), but a proposal for the legislation of the interior design profession by the Board of Architects of Malaysia (LAM). Further, it was revealed that 'There was no dialogue covering this proposed legislation and to date MSID is not sure how this legislation will affect the industry and to what extent it will benefit Interior Designers' (Choong, 2006, p. 48).

In contrast to these two highly regulatory paradigms, the Korean speaker representing the Korean Society of Interior Designers (KOSID), Joo Yun Kim, presented an expansive attempt to identify what interior design is as a discipline and in doing so, proposed an alternative identity for the field that moved beyond descriptions of occupational function and towards a spatial concept he described as 'inter_space design'. Kim began his presentation by showing images of the work of international designers who were invited to design hotel room interiors for exhibition at the 2002 Milan Furniture Fair. None of the invited practitioners were interior designers, but were mostly architects and industrial designers.⁷ In response, Kim asked the question: 'Where are the interior designers?' The question was provocative and was devised to lead into his discussion of 'What is interior design?' Which, in direct reference to Klingenberg's *Interspace* paper, he expanded beyond interior space to '...an enormous circle able to include new hybrid space related design fields that may appear in the future' (Kim, 2006, p. 29).

Philosophically located between these oppositional paradigms of restrictive and expansive practice at the *Roundtable*, was Klingenberg's presentation of her positioning paper *Interspace*. Klingenberg's paper is one of a number of recent publications (for example Attiwill, 2004 and O'Brien, 2003) that identify interior architecture as occupying a position that extends beyond the boundaries of physical architectural enclosure. Like Kim, Klingenberg explains interior architecture as 'space design' (2005, p. 1) and claims that it '...is about more than the physical environment – it concerns storytelling and ceremonies that take place inside the architecture' (p. 2). She further extrapolates to propose two fundamental considerations for the field – one which relates to the physical space; and the other which relates to '...the abstract space – the storytelling, or the action space, the undefinable aspects that deal with the user's perceptions of the environment' (p. 3).

Having established the need to regard interior architecture as a field in its practical and conceptual entirety, Klingenberg calls for the development and dissemination of theory for

the discipline that is generated by, and applicable to, both academia and practice alike. Klingenberg identifies that much of the knowledge that does exist in the field is 'silent'; undocumented, unwritten and unpublished (p. 5). Again, Klingenberg's argument may be aligned with Johnson's professional typologies (1972, p. 45) in which he identifies professions under the control of patronage as those in which knowledge development is aligned with the competitive advantage of the client (or patron) and not always disseminated within, or regarded as a contribution to, the field, thus reducing significance in the importance of research communication. For Klingenberg, the development of interior design knowledge is necessary and inextricably linked to the development of the field itself. 'Knowledge of the field – both theoretical and in practice – is fundamental...If the theory has been written/ formulated, the knowledge can be more precise and it gives the interior architect a better tool for deeper understanding of and reflection. Deeper reflection opens up for debate and important criticism, which in turn builds a stronger basis for our field' (p. 5). The type of discussion and debate called for by Klingenberg philosophically, conceptually and territorially extends beyond the content of IDBOK, identified in North America as the research and theoretical collateral of the field.

As convenor of the *Roundtable*, IFI provided the setting for what has possibly been the most expansive and candid discussion of interior design amongst practitioners and educators from around the world. Conscious perhaps of its own mandate as representative of interior designers world-wide; its board composition of both academic and practitioner members; the non-specific nomenclature of its organisational title (interior architects/designers); and its formal definition of interior architecture/design as a description of function (what interior designers **do**), rather than a description of the field (what interior design **is**), IFI took the initiative to open dialogue that was bound to include complex and possibly irreconcilable concepts of nomenclature, identity, regulation and the seemingly eternal disconnection between theory and practice.

All of these issues were debated, although not necessarily with any final consensus, at the *Roundtable*. If nothing else, however, analysis of the varying paradigms presented does allow us to position the development of interior design in Australia in an international context and consider its future direction.

Silence and invisibility

In Australia, interior design practice is unregulated and interior design education is unaccredited. A result of this is unique acceptance of dual terminology within the country (interior architecture and interior design) to describe the field. This appears to be peculiar to

Australia, unlike the regional specificity of titles elsewhere, such as *interior architecture* in Europe and interior design in North America⁸. Over the last decade, interior architecture has become accepted nomenclature despite Architects Act legislation in most States of Australia rendering it illegal for anyone other than a Registered Architect to use the title Architect or its derivatives (including architecture and architectural). The gradual adoption of the term interior architecture has been encouraged by some tertiary institutions who, in an attempt to distinguish their programs from interior decoration and design qualifications offered by the TAFE sector, have either established new Bachelor Degree programs in Interior Architecture (for example, University of New South Wales and Monash University) or have changed their previously named Bachelor of Interior Design degrees to Bachelor of Interior Architecture (for example, Curtin University and University of South Australia). In 2006, four of the nine university programs in the country use the term interior architecture in the title of their degree and five use interior design. Seemingly satisfied with the universities' assurances that prospective and enrolled students are clearly informed of the restrictions on use of title legislated by Architects Act and that completion of an Interior Architecture degree does not confer qualifications in Architecture, the state-based Architects Registration Boards have left the education providers to their own devices and appear content to pursue unregistered practitioners who advertise themselves under the 'architects' section of the yellow pages telephone directory⁹. Both professional organisations, the Design Institute of Australia (the professional body that represents interior designers) and the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA) have been silent on the issue of nomenclature. The RAIA's silence is not surprising considering the Productivity Commission's 2000 *Review of Legislation Regulating the Architectural Profession* recommendations to repeal the Architects Act legislation in each state, a recommendation that to date remains unimplemented.

In her proposed approach to the history of the field, 'Towards an interior history', Australian academic Suzie Attiwill (2004) views the issue of nomenclature as integral to her consideration of what the field is (and *what* a history of the field might be – a history that she identifies as 'inter-story'). For her, 'The use of the term 'interior design' is deliberate and not interchangeable with interior architecture. A distinction is made here to indicate that the design of interiors is not to be limited to inside the built form. This is vital to the ability to apprehend emerging forces' (2004, p. 3). By making this distinction, it could be interpreted that Attiwill is referring the term 'architecture' as a legislated title, to describe the activity of Registered Architects, a discipline concerned only with built enclosure and not as the *illegal* form that is increasingly being adopted by various fields to describe deliberate creation. Attiwill further extends the position of the field beyond architectural enclosure and suggests

that 'In many ways, temporality is emerging as a defining element of current practice...this offers much to consider and rather than interior as always already inside something – inside a container – it suggests an interior as produced through the spacialisation of matter by time: an event' (p. 6). This expansion may be aligned with the thinking (and practice) of another Australian academic Darragh O'Brien (2003) who considers the potency of the void as a spatial design generator (albeit of architectural space) over tangible elements. The work of both Attiwill and O'Brien can also be associated internationally with Klingenberg's concept of the abstract or action space (2005, p. 3) and also with Kim's hybrid space design (2006, p. 29).

The notion of moving beyond the discipline has also been considered by Australian academics Franz and Lehmann in the education context of their collaborative interior design and architecture undergraduate studio teaching where they employed Nicolescu's concept of 'transdisciplinary' practice as being '...at once *between* the disciplines, across the disciplines, and *beyond* all discipline' (Nicolescu, 1997 cited in Franz & Lehmann, 2004). Moving *beyond* discipline is an attractive option for interior design, a field that is overshadowed by the rigorously disciplined discipline of architecture. Linder suggests a possible reason when he explains transdisciplinarity as a '...move of survival...[involving]...the formulation of knowledges that require our disciplinary scholarship and technique but demand that we abandon disciplinary mastery and surveillance' (2005, p. 13).

Another view of the identity of the discipline is presented by Zamberlan who, like Klingenberg, attempts to include consideration of academia and practice as equally fundamental components of the field. Rather than looking out (or forward) towards emerging forces, Zamberlan concentrates her study on what she perceives as missing from theoretical and researched discussion of interior design. Locating interior design practice '...at the intersection between the volumetric manipulation of a space and the articulation of the surfaces within' (2006, p.1), Zamberlan asserts that one undeniable aspect of interior design practice is the creation of 'fashionable' outcomes, an aspect that has been largely ignored within 'the education or the academic discourse within the discipline... The notion of appearances in the design industry, the built environment in particular still refers to the adornment of a functional object as a separate component, an after thought, to the design process' (pp. 4–5). While Zamberlan explains this lack of practice-focussed publication as a result of interior design's existence 'in a critical no man's land between architectural catch up and maintaining a high moral ground with regard to decoration' (2006, p. 8), it is undeniable that there has been a severe lack of academic publication relating to interior design practice.

In Australia there is one academic journal for interior design¹⁰, the *IDEA Journal*, published annually by IDEA. A survey of the sixty-one articles published in the journal's six issues to date reveal only one reference to the work of an interior designer¹¹. Academia's often expressed frustration with the stylistic and fashion-driven outcomes of interior design practice is not helped by the fact that the majority of academics are not actually *from* the discipline and as a result, may have no fundamental professional allegiance to it, no personal practice experience of it and no personal educational experience within it. On another level, the increasing research-focus of the tertiary education sector and the scientific bias it has taken to date does not recognise professional journals¹² as forums for academic research publication. Unfortunately these are exactly the types of publications where practice-based or practice-led discussion is most likely to take place. This is an unhelpful situation for any field that is in emergence, let alone a visual, creative discipline such as interior design.

Following his recent call for expressions of interest to write on the area of current commercial workplace design, the editor of one professional interior architecture and design journal was surprised to receive responses from a number of architectural academics, but no response from interior design academics. This prompted the editor to question the relationship between interior design theory and practice and ask 'Is interior design being taught as it is being practiced?' (Bruhn, 2006) or indeed, perhaps a more important question to ask from an academic point of view would be 'Is it being practiced as it is being taught?'

Of the full-time continuing academics who teach and research in eight of the nine university interior design programs in Australia that are members of the Interior Design/Interior Architecture Educators Association (IDEA)¹³, less than half (39%) have qualifications in interior design. 50% have qualifications in architecture and the remaining 11% have qualifications in other disciplines, predominantly industrial design and the visual arts (Interior Design/Interior Architecture Educators Association, 2006). Charles Rice who is arguably Australia's most published and respected academic in the field of interiors has undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications in architecture, a position in the architecture department at UTS and an important body of work that focuses on the significance of the domestic interior in the 19th Century. In *Constructing the Interior – Introduction*, Rice and his co-author, Barbara Penner, propose '...a new field of enquiry into the interior, one that is of particular relevance to historians, theorists and architects concerned with the positioning of domesticity within contemporary culture' (2004, p. 5). Who the authors consider their work relevant to reveals the continuing dominance of the architecture discipline and its resulting impact on the development of interior design. When considered in relation to Attiwill's expansive positioning

of the interior design discipline, it is no wonder that interior design's desire for identity, gravity and relevance is taking it outside of its enclosing architectural realm.

Loaded

And what of practice? At what stage is the development of interior design practice in Australia? What is the profession's contribution to the field of interior design, and therefore to the body of theory for the discipline? Is it grounded, creative and experimental enough to contribute to an expansive and cultural discourse of the field as identified by Klingenberg?

One way of identifying examples of interior design work for discussion that best represents the direction of contemporary practice in Australia is to look to Australia's annual Interior Design Awards program (IDA). In his survey and account of the re-judging of the Victorian RAlA awards, Philip Goad, although recognising that the reading of such a history is 'loaded' (2003, p. 49), justifies the significance of the record of peer judged professional awards. 'Instead of a history written long after the fact, the awards, when collected together as a document, form an instantaneous record of contemporary peer recognition. They tell us what, at a particular moment in time, a certain group of people believed might embody excellence...' (p.11). The DIA's, peer judged Australian Interior Design Awards were established in 2004 and include a variety of categories for commercial and residential interior design. As well as awards bestowed in each category, there is an annual overall award for 'Excellence and Innovation' that is selected by the judges from the award recipients in each of the primary categories. The projects receiving the overall 'Excellence and Innovation' award from the 2005 and 2006 IDA programs have been selected for discussion here as well as the awarded practice for the 2006 'Emerging Interior Design Practice' category which provides a controversial and revealing case study.

In 2006, architectural practice Terroir received the IDA award for 'Emerging Interior Design Practice' on the strength of a suite of their projects. Terroir describe their work as covering '...all aspects of architectural practice including teaching, writing, architectural, urban and interior design and project management and procurement' (Terroir, 2006). Across all of the IDA categories, entry of interior projects by architectural practices who, like Terroir, regard interior design as an aspect of architectural practice is not uncommon. In these cases, although the IDA entry form requires entrants to identify the project's interior designer by name, this section of the form is typically left blank or filled with the name of an architect in the practice. IDA judging is conducted anonymously so judges do not know the authorship of entered projects. From one point of view, Terroir's award for 'Emerging Interior Design Practice' may be questioned in line with Kim's suggested invisibility of interior designers in

contemporary design practice. From another position, the award can be seen as an overall strength of a professional award program that (uniquely) allows recognition of excellence in the design of interior space, regardless of authorship. This award result in many ways encapsulates the problematic nature of the identity of the interior design field.

In 2005, Multiplicity in association with Mel Ogden received the IDA's overall award for 'Excellence and Innovation', following their award in the 'Residential Design' category for their *Church Conversion* project. Again, the openness of the awards entry criteria is significant as interior design practice Multiplicity and landscape sculptor Mel Ogden were able to enter the IDAs as equal co-authors of the project. The strong transdisciplinary nature of the project resulted in an unconventional and highly experimental residential conversion. Multi-disciplinary collaboration between Multiplicity's interior design and architect team members and Mel Ogden moved the authors beyond their own disciplines into a space where they were influenced by the creative thinking of their collaborators; possibly into an 'inter' space.

The IDA 2006 award for 'Excellence and Innovation' was awarded to the *Solivoid* project by the Monash University Faculty of Art & Design Spatial Research Group. *Solivoid* was a temporary hospitality space designed for the 2005 DesignEX interior design exhibition at the Melbourne Exhibition Centre. *Solivoid* incorporated inflatable, digital and multi-media technologies to create an exhibitory installation that questions the role of the interior environment and the boundaries between inside and outside (O'Brien, 2006, p. 1). One of the designers from the Spatial Research Group, Darragh O'Brien is the author of 'Absolute zero – revealing the void', previously referenced in this paper. The connection between practice and theory in this project is indivisible and undoubtedly one of the reasons for its success as a provocative and experimental work that challenges conventional understanding of interior space. *Solivoid* is a potent example of expansive practice that, importantly, was selected by a panel of practitioners as representing excellence and innovation in the discipline.

Inter[ior]

Despite the ever present dominance of architecture, or perhaps because of it, interior design in Australia is more closely aligned with a European conceptual view (as presented by Klingenberg at the IFI Roundtable) of what interior design is as a discipline. If understanding of the discipline is taken to necessarily include practice and academia, which in an ideal situation intermesh and enrich each other to the benefit of the entire culture of the field, then interior design in Australia is indeed still very much in development.

It could be argued that interior design has always been an outward looking, expansive discipline, one that emerged in the first place from transdisciplinary desire and unconventional spatial opportunity. In both practice and research, interior design in Australia demonstrates a need to escape, or move beyond, the dominance of architecture that permeates practice, just as it does academia, and move on to a space where perhaps 'inter' becomes the potent prefix, rather than interior. Perhaps the two, still quite discreet, components of the field are equally advanced in this regard, but appear to have not yet connected in a significant or continuous way where each can inform the other.

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Endnotes

- ¹ The author acknowledges the theme of a recent issue of the Berlage Institute's *Hunch* publication as influence for the title of this paper.
- ² The term interior design is used generally by the author throughout this paper as the name for the discipline that is referred to as interior design or interior architecture in different parts of the world. When regionally specific positions are discussed, the author uses the relevant term for that region.
- ³ Professional organisations represented at the roundtable included the US International Interior Design Association (IIDA), American Society of Interior Designers (ASID), European Council of Interior Architects (ECIA), Asia Pacific Space Designers Association (APSDA), Korean Society of Interior Architects/Designers (KOSID) and the Design Institute of Australia (DIA). Educational institutions represented included the National Academy of Arts Oslo Norway, University of South Australia, Hong IK University Seoul, Design Centre Johannesburg South Africa, Interior Design/Interior Architecture Educators Association (IDEA) Australia and New Zealand, Temesek Polytechnic Singapore and CEPT College of Interior Design India.
- ⁴ *Interior architecture* is recognised Norwegian nomenclature for the discipline that is the topic of this paper.
- ⁵ Zamberlan, L. comment made at the IFI Roundtable, June 24, 2006, Singapore.
- ⁶ The five organisations are ASID, IIDA, NCIDQ, Interior Designers of Canada (IDC) and the Foundation for Interior Design Education Research (FIDER).
- ⁷ The images shown included interiors by industrial designer Ron Arad, furniture designer Gelano Pesce and architects Zaha Hadid and Toyo Ito.
- ⁸ In North America, the term Interior Architect '...whilst not forbidden is not a popular title that is used.' (Hansen, 2006, p. 15).
- ⁹ It is revealing that the Architects Registration Boards also ignore the use of the title architect in employment advertisements for positions such as 'information architect', 'web architect' and 'Java architect'.
- ¹⁰ To the author's knowledge, there are in fact only two academic journals for interior design worldwide, the other being the *Journal of Interior Design*, published by the North American Interior Design Educator's Council (IDEC).
- ¹¹ This was an analysis of a domestic space by Australian interior designer Nik Karalis in Lawrence, J. & Hurst, R. (2003) *The Nourishing Art*. *IDEA Journal*, 2003, 35–46. It is of significance that Karalis, arguably one of Australia's leading interior designers, became a registered Architect in 2006 through the Architects Accreditation Council of Australia (AACA) National Program of Assessment. To explain his reasons for doing this, Karalis stated 'I had several buildings built without being registered and, in order to be taken seriously by the profession, I felt formal registration was a necessity.' (Karalis, 2006, p. 69). Although Karalis does not mention which profession he is referring to, one can only assume that he means the *architecture* profession.
- ¹² Professional Australian interior design journals include *Artichoke*, *Indesign* and *(inside)*.
- ¹³ These universities are Curtin, Monash, RMIT, Swinburne, UniSA, UNSW, QUT and UTS.