

Adaptive re-use : The Heritage and histories of Kurilpa ? Dr. Charles Zuber

Architects involved in heritage buildings and conservation use the term *adaptive re-use* which relates, in general, to the preservation of heritage listed buildings. There is a recognition that, in order to keep alive culturally significant architecture, there must be some key policies in place. One of the most practical of these is the recognition that industrial sites, religious buildings, community centres, etc. need to be occupied and used in order to be maintained.

Many industries change and church going is not as popular as it once was, and there is a dialectical process at work and adaptive re-use is a way of accommodating for the changes in cultural practices. If we, as a society, wish to maintain key buildings that are socially significant, and aesthetically pleasing, adaptive re use needs to allow buildings to become, amongst other things, homes and offices.

So, to make a specific point, the Powerhouse in Brisbane could only function as its designated role if the trams still ran in Brisbane. But it has enjoyed a successful adaption to a cultural centre, well suited for various forms of cultural activity whilst retaining much of its existing structure - both internally and externally. In addition to the structural preservations of the Powerhouse, there was also a decision to include another history- or histories- by the preservation of graffiti on the exterior walls and ,more significantly, throughout the interior spaces. The period in which the Powerhouse lost its role in life is traced in part by the walls inside and the inscriptions upon them.

For some in the community the presence of tags and graffiti is not art, but now attitudes to street art and graffiti are changing, and most visitors to the Powerhouse relish the layers of historical scribing which mark the period between the trams and the cultural industries.

What then can be adapted and reused from the existing industrial structures in the Kurilpa precinct? And how can Brisbane tell its stories of the past without a mapping of the architectural and industrial details of Kurilpa? It might well be that there is not one iconic building or structure that is so well suited to adaptive re-use as the Powerhouse, but there will be many architectural details that might well serve as chapters in the narrative that is Kurilpa.

It would be naïve to think that all buildings, and their owners, would be looking for an afterlife, but heritage issues should take a significant role in the master planning. Often, owners of buildings see heritage listing as the death knell on their potential profits, instead of the heritage council and architects as their partners. Working with the citizens and developers of Brisbane, and “educating” them into the positive benefits that can accrue from adapting and re-using existing structures, should be a priority in the development of Kurilpa. Good design means the integration of a historical narrative into the new developments that will inevitably take place in Kurilpa. Celebrating the narratives contained with the warehouses and industrial structures should be of critical concern.