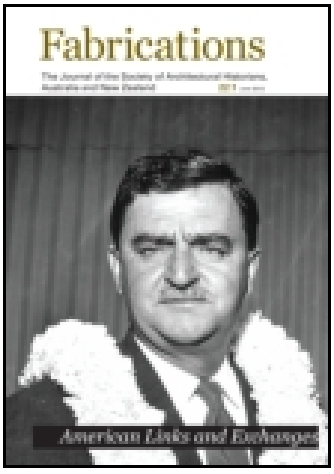

Fabrications: The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rfab20

The Co-construction of Spatial Memory

Jesse Adams Stein

Published online: 12 Nov 2014.

To cite this article: Jesse Adams Stein (2014) The Co-construction of Spatial Memory, Fabrications: The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand, 24:2, 178-197, DOI: 10.1080/10331867.2014.961222

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10331867.2014.961222

Figure 1: NSW Government Printing Office, Harris Street, Ultimo, 1967.
Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 2 – 37773.

The Co-construction of Spatial Memory

Enriching Architectural Histories of "Ordinary" Buildings

Jesse Adams Stein

Abstract
While the disciplines of oral history and architectural history are beginning to engage with the expansive possibilities of oral testimony in relation to architecture, the question of how spatial memory operates in an interview is yet to receive thorough attention. Earlier approaches combining oral history and architecture tended to focus on interviewing architects. This research takes a different tack, interviewing workers about their experiences of working life and, in the process, discovering that these narratives often have strong spatial and architectural specificity. Interviews with former print workers about their memories of the NSW Government Printing Office in Sydney uncovered a wealth of spatial and architectural content embedded within the workers' recollections. The interview is also a site where meaning is made. Accordingly, this paper explores how, through oral history, a co-construction of spatial memory is produced between the interviewer and the interviewee, resulting in a mnemonic spatial reconstruction of architectural space. The results recover detailed accounts of much-loved fig trees, painted-on doors and dysfunctional woodblock floors, to name but a few. This method of charting architectural memories has important implications for how we interpret the architectural histories of oft-ignored institutional buildings, and it highlights disparities between "official" concepts related to modernist factory buildings and the lived experiences of workers.

Introduction

This is a call for attention to the richness of content contained within factory workers' memories of the buildings in which they worked. While the disciplines of oral history and architectural history are beginning to engage with the expansive possibilities for cross-disciplinary interaction, the question of how spatial memory operates in the interview context is yet to receive thorough attention. Earlier approaches to the mingling of oral history with architecture tended to focus on interviewing architects.[1] This research takes a different tack, interviewing workers about their experiences of working life and, through this process, recovering architectural information.

In the process of interviewing former print workers about their memories of working life, this research uncovered a wealth of spatial and architectural content about a particular factory building. This process enables us to see how architectural history can operate on multiple levels: through more traditional analysis of built

Fabrications, 2014
Vol. 24, No. 2, 178–197, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10331867.2014.961222

form, archival materials, plans and photographs, as well as through the development of a mnemonic spatial projection, which is emergent through the oral history process. The interview is also a site where meaning is made.[2] This paper outlines how, through oral history, a co-construction of spatial memory is produced between the interviewer and the interviewee. Oral history enables something approximating a collective spatial memory to develop, and through conversation the interviewer and interviewee move around the building, between levels and along corridors, reconstructing the built environment as they speak. In my research, this process led to the drawing and mapping of memories: both by the interviewer and interviewees.

The building in question for this research was the former NSW Government Printing Office (colloquially known as the "Gov" – a term I will use hereafter) (Fig 1). Designed in the 1940s under the supervision of NSW Government Architect Cobden Parkes, the Gov was a purpose-built printing factory, completed in 1959. It still stands at 390–422 Harris Street, in the inner-city Sydney suburb of Ultimo. From 1959 to 1989, this building was the workplace of up to 1,000 print workers: compositors, bookbinders, press machinists and other public servants. As part of the NSW Government Printing Office Oral History Project, I interviewed thirty-one former workers (twenty-five men, six women) about their memories of technological change and working life.[3]

This research did not commence with the aim of uncovering architectural details. It was part of a broader historical study; architecture was but one of several themes that emerged.[4] One unexpected outcome was that the interviews contained frequent references to architectural features and delineated sections in the building. It became apparent that the Gov's building continues to exist and transform through memory, reminding us how memories of work can be closely tied to space, architecture and location. It also became apparent that despite the Gov's building being designed along "rational" lines as a modernist factory building, workers' memories often pointed to more dysfunctional aspects of the building's design.

In 1998, heritage consultants Graham Books & Associates made this assessment:

> The [NSW Government Printing Office] building has a low degree of historical significance as the first Printing Office building in which every phase of activities could be maintained. In terms of aesthetic quality it is considered to have low significance as a discrete item … It has limited scientific significance, given that it utilises typical forms of conventional structure and materials. … The retention of the building is optional, demolition is acceptable.[5]

In fact, the building was never demolished. Designed during a time of postwar steel shortage, the Gov is not a steel-frame structure, despite being a large-scale modernist design. Postwar material shortages were a significant hindrance on

public works in Australian cities in the late 1940s and early 1950s.[6] The Gov is a veritable bunker made of reinforced precast concrete. It takes up the entire length of the block on Harris Street, and its bulk has made demolition less viable.

This paper offers an alternative avenue for understanding and interpreting "low significance" architecture. While the architecture of the Gov might easily be dismissed as an unremarkable or compromised example of postwar government architecture, this research reveals the wealth and diversity of information and meaning that can be gleaned through speaking to workers about their former workplace, indicating that the Gov is a place of cultural significance for Sydney's industrial and governmental history. It is important to note that this reconstruction of spatial and architectural history occurred not through oral history alone, but through an integration of archives, oral histories and photographs.

This paper will first establish the theoretical terrain surrounding space and memory, before providing background historical detail pertaining to the Gov's building, enriched by the details of workers' recollections. It will then explore the existence of "architectural rumour", gleaned through the oral history process. Finally, the paper gathers together multiple oral histories to produce a collective reconstruction of workers' recollections, pulled together in a speculative section rendering a vision of the Gov co-produced by the interviewer and interviewees.

Space, Memory and Oral History

While the idea of remembered domestic space ("memory house") has been established in philosophy and architectural theory, what use can be made of the multiplicity of spatial memories that are produced within a large institutional building?[7] This question began to emerge throughout the interview process. French philosophical theorists Maurice Halbwachs, Gaston Bachelard and Paul Ricœur each established that memory is, among other things, a spatial phenomenon.[8] The experience of memory is imbued with spatial information. As an architectural structure, the Gov functioned as a signifier, as well as a physical vessel, simultaneously containing and symbolising the Gov to its employees and clients. It helps to think of the Gov's building both in terms of its reality as a built structure, but also as what design theorists Joyce Malnar and Frank Vodvarka call a "spatio-sensory construct" – a building that functions powerfully through remembered embodied experiences, as well as through photographs.[9]

Architect Juhani Pallasmaa has elucidated the deep connection between memory and architecture, explaining how "we understand and remember who we are through our constructions, both material and mental" and "our recollections are situational and spatialised memories".[10] This understanding of memory as embodied, sensory and, crucially, spatial, recalls Halbwachs' earlier writing on collective memory.[11] Halbwachs described the relationship between memory and space as one that is often thought to be so obvious that it is not worth observing.

His arguments formed an important part of refuting the notion that the act of memory is something that transports us outside of space and outside of our bodies.[12] Rather, we are kept solidly on the ground – *in* physical space, not outside of it.

Ricœur similarly explained how the "corporeal and environmental spatiality [was] inherent to the evocation of a memory".[13] He linked this spatialised and mnemonic phenomena with multiple types of space – lived space, geometric space and inhabited space – and associated history as "narrated time" with the way space is "constructed".[14] Space is constructed both through memory and in a literal, physical sense.[15] Pallasmaa also reminds us of the projected nature of spatial memory, explaining that "remembering is not only a mental event; it is also an act of embodiment and projection".[16] This points towards a way to talk about the Gov's building as both a physical, geometric (modernist) space and as a continually evolving mental space, a site of narrative construction.

In identifying the constructed nature of mnemonic narratives, we are also engaging with the complexities of contemporary oral history practice. Since the 1960s, historians and sociologists have debated the merits of interviews and oral history testimony.[17] More recently, oral recollections have become a more accepted source for historical analysis; however, this does not mean that interpreting oral testimony is unproblematic or straightforward, and much of the literature on oral history in recent decades provides a framework for engaging with the methodological complexities of oral source material.[18] First, we must acknowledge how oral history constructs and generates meaning on a number of levels.[19] This includes the more obvious factors: the vagaries of memory and the passage of time. But the interview process itself is also a site where meaning is co-constructed by the interviewer and oral history participant, and the act of getting a person to talk is a delicate and sometimes highly strategic matter.[20] Later on, the act of listening to and transcribing oral histories also conveys new understandings and interpretations.

In the past, these multiplying subjectivities were often pointed out as oral history's weakness. In more recent years, however, oral history scholars have focused less on the need to justify oral history itself; instead, the approach has shifted to what historians and social scientists can potentially do with the remarkable attitudinal and subjective content contained within such interviews.[21] While historian John Shields argues that it is "incumbent on the historian to seek and recognise … distortions in oral memory", oral historian Alistair Thomson reformulated this task by stating that so-called "unreliable memories" can be redefined as a "resource, not a problem".[22] Oral history does not, strictly speaking, always tell us exactly what happened. Rather, oral histories tell us about how people construct narratives about what happened and, importantly, how people *place themselves* in relation to the past. A critical understanding that the spoken word and written transcript are rich historical resources enables us to begin to identify thematic and linguistic patterns, such as how participants tell stories in

relation to structured architectural space. In this research, the cumulative study of interviews pointed to the fact that it is not only language that works to construct meaning about the past; what is articulated in oral history also draws upon visual, material and spatial factors.

Historical Background

Appreciating the striking modernity of the Gov in 1959 necessitates some understanding of the structures that came before it. From 1841, the Government Printing Office was located at Phillip and Bent streets in Sydney. New premises were constructed on this site in 1856, and this building was later renovated and extended.[23] Nineteenth-century accounts of the Gov describe an institution that was almost always in need of more space.[24] The character of the old printing office was of a hodgepodge accrual of materials over time: exposed light bulbs hung low, ceilings were equipped with chains and pulleys and the floors were covered with a patchwork of surfaces. The interview participant George Larden, a press machinist who worked at the printing office from 1936, described machinery as being "scattered all over the place".[25] Victor Gunther, who commenced there in 1946, emphasised that the printing office was the "number one fire risk" in Sydney. He added, "smoking was not allowed, but the toilet was very popular for a quick puff".[26] Multiple interviewees referred to one section of the factory as "Siberia", because it was so far away.[27]

From 1908, the Government Printing Office began making plans for relocation to improved premises, but the outbreak of World War I, the Depression and then World War II understandably slowed this process.[28] During the Depression, the NSW Department of Public Works' energy went into the creation of more affordable public buildings to generate employment, such as schools and hospitals. In his memoirs, Cobden Parkes described the harried state of affairs for government building design during the Depression:

> The Depression suddenly settled over the [Government Architect's] Office … almost overnight the emphasis was for plans to permit immediate employment rather than the normal work of proper design and working drawings … In the decision to build … often the foundations were excavated and the footings poured from original sketch plans, and the working drawings would follow … It was development at its very worst, but it was clearly recognised that the scheme to provide employment was paramount.[29]

This description goes some way to explaining the slow completion of the printing office building and provides insight into other Public Works decisions in the 1930s.

In 1944, a site in Ultimo was finally selected for the new printing factory.[30] For most of the twentieth century, Ultimo and its neighbouring suburb Pyrmont were industrial, inner-city slum areas. One interview participant, George Bryant,

grew up on the Pyrmont-Ultimo borderline and worked as a despatch offsider at the Gov from 1959. He witnessed the construction of the new printing office. The following passage took place when George was pointing to a photograph of Ultimo (Fig 2).

> Right there was the hugest Morton Bay fig [tree] you've ever seen. < pause > Oh it's enormous! You can see the pub across here, the Wentworth Park Hotel, and the roots of it went into the [pub] site. < pause > The first thing I see was: they moved these big packing cases in. … and everyone was, "what's goin' on?," you know? … It was the talk of the place. Everyone used to say, "what's in them packing crates?," you know? … We used to come up here to get the tram. There was no busses, and I used to get the tram. And everyone used to head for there because there was shade under the fig tree. < pause > None of the other stops had shade … everyone was really cheesed off about losing that tree! Oh, that was a talkin' part of the district for ages. You know, that was the only shade we had.[31]

The first sod of earth was turned at the site in 1950, and the fig trees were removed.[32] Construction did not commence until 1955. For five years, the Ultimo community missed the desirable shade provided by the fig tree and the ostensible reason for its removal remained unclear to them. Development approval for the new Government Printing Office building was "inadvertently not sought", with approval finally given in 1956.[33] Continuing building material shortages hampered progress, and there were engineering problems – a deep fissure was discovered in the subsoil. Finally, in November 1958, staff began to move into the new building.

The new printing office building was designed under the supervision of Parkes, known for his relatively conservative style and interest in the Dutch architect

Figure 2: Site of the new Government Printing Office, Ultimo, 1950.
Courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 1 – 07729.

Willem Marinus Dudok.[34] The Harris Street façade features vertical concrete fins and a rounded corner clad in slate blue ceramic tiles. The fins were intended to provide sun protection and the tiles were purely for "aesthetic relief", although arguably neither feature was entirely successful.[35] Former press machinist Ray Utick experienced the move in 1958, from the city factory to Harris Street:

> First time we saw it < pause > it felt big. Like, everything was new. < pause > … They gradually brought everything over to Ultimo. … It's < pause > cleaner. Um < pause > it was more laid out correctly, nice and meticulously laid out. Like, all the big machines on one side of the building, the smaller machines on the other side. … It was like heaven, then, the new one, compared to the old one.[36]

The new building was officially opened by Premier John Cahill in February 1959, more than fifty years after calls for a new building were first made (Fig 3).[37] At first, the renewed printing office was seen as a modern marvel: it could boast of spacious, organised and hygienic workspaces.[38]

The contrast between the new Government Printing Office and other factory spaces in Sydney was stark. Alan Leishman, apprenticed in photo-etching and engraving in 1955, remembered the new building in the early 1960s:

> It was seen as being very modern … the place was built like a World War II bunker. It's not steel frame … the ceilings were enormously high in some sections … I think for what it was originally it worked well. It was solid. It stood up well. Had good lighting. It had good facilities … Compared to what we'd worked in … it was bliss![39]

Figure 3: Premier J. J. Cahill and Government Printer Victor Charles Nathaniel Blight inspect the newly opened Government Printing Office building, 23 February 1959.
Courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 2 – 13274.

Alan holds himself at an interpretive distance from other attitudes to the Gov, using terms such as "seen as", but he makes it clear that the reassuring solidity of the building was significant. Not all workers were quite so impressed by the building, as we shall see further on.

Order and Memory

In the mid-twentieth century, factory labour structure – and its palpable architectural expression – was still very much about the hierarchical organisation of discrete components. Workers were seen to be either single-skilled (they had one trade) or unskilled (they had one repetitive menial task), and they needed to be corralled in triangulated central arrangements. Such hierarchical systems were also to be expressed spatially. The design of the building was intended to allow a flow of activities from the top (fifth) floor, down through the building, to despatch.[40] Accordingly, the top floor held the Government Printer's office and administrative sections. The fourth floor was dedicated to the hot-metal composition process and housed the reading room. Level three was dedicated to letterpress machining and hand-compositing. Folding and bookbinding was located on the second floor. The first floor held lithography, the photographic section and manufactured stationery. The ground floor contained the entrances, shop and despatch. The levels of the building essentially replicated the printing process – a spatial system that was intended to promote productivity and efficiency.

The spatial organisation of the Gov regularly weaved its way into the interviews. In fact, direct questions about architecture tended to yield less interesting results: this sometimes took the form of a mundane listing of what was on each floor. What is significant, however, is the way in which interviewees, when recounting the building, appeared to be mentally travelling through the space as they spoke. The interview with former linotype operator Bob Law offers one example (of many similar statements):

> Goin' round the building: opposite the reading room was the stereotype room, where they used to get images and cast them and put them on wooden blocks. That was a pretty highly technical department to be in, but one of the first ones to disappear … There was that < pause > I'm going down the corridor. Next to that was the Parliamentary room, I think, which was a composing room, but it also had its own printing presses in there. On the other side of the corridor was the confidential room, where all the ballot papers were done, all the < pause > what else < pause > … And the further down you got < pause > oh, they had all sorts of printing rooms down there, and … the very last room on the other side was the engineers … But that was just on my floor.[41]

The compartmentalisation of the Gov represented the starkly delineated printing trades, which, because of industrial demarcation, were strictly separated with the aim of protecting jobs.

The spatial nature of interviewees' stories often emerged without specific prompting. As with Bob's recollections of the building, former camera operator Terry Hagenhofer also took the listener on a journey through the building, recounting an altercation with another apprentice:

> The guys used to play table-tennis on the [imposition] slab (that's where you set it, where you used to lock all the jobs up) – so, morning teatime, one of the big apprentices, big giant of a bloke, came up to me one day and he give me this money and he says,
> "While you're over at the shop, can you get me a pie."
> And I'm goin', "I'm not goin' over to the shop!"
> And he says, "While you're over at the shop, can you get me a pie."
> I was p'd-off with that, thinkin', "Oh, these buggers are making me go over."
> So I've come back, and they're playing a game of table tennis and I've put his pie right in the middle of the game. Anyway, this other guy I'd never met, ended up being Geoff Hawes, he says,
> "Oh good on ya, you bloody little smart ass."
> Then I said something to him, and he says,
> "Mate, I oughta kick you fair up the ass."
> And I said, "Yeah if you can catch me!" 'cos he was a pretty big bloke, but I fancied myself as pretty nippy. Well, he's come at me, and I've taken off through the Composing Room, and he's chased me through the Press Room, and he's behind me all the way, and I couldn't get away. And I've run into the Font Room thinking I'm safe, and he's got hold of me – nothing rough < trails off > . Anyway, I disliked him for years. … then five or six years later, we used to see each other in traffic on the way home on the Hume Highway. We were just chattin' one day, and he says, "Do you wanna get a car-pool goin'?" He ended up being the nicest bloke.[42]

Terry's story is not only about the process of growing up, it also navigates the listener through the third floor at morning teatime. The act of recollection is not only a reliving of particular memories, it also manifests itself as a reconstruction of space through memory. These interviews were peppered with exchanges such as "which floor was that on?" and "you know that bit at the back of the building" – there are far too many instances to quote them here in full. As an interviewer, I began developing my own projected image of the Gov. This meant that I, too, became invested in understanding this history, both spatially and architecturally, prompting further questions, as well as further examination of archives and photographs.

The spatial divisions within this large building also resulted in a labyrinthine quality. Several interviewees used the term "rabbit-warren" to describe the Gov, notwithstanding the fact that it was designed as an organised, modern structure. Sandra Elizabeth Stringer, who worked in Graphic Reproduction, described the building as a place in flux:

> It was a funny place, a bit of a rabbit-warren. Different places, different rooms … you're ducking down little funny sets of stairs and corridors … things had been tacked on, so it changed a lot. Different rooms'd spring up all the time … You were

> able to work out where [the overseer] would be waiting for you, and go in a different lift … and end up coming down from the fifth floor. He'd always be left wondering what on Earth was going on. < laughs > [43]

Former compositor Philip James described similar hideaway areas, indicating an exploratory attitude that some workers took to their workplace:

> There were other floors above, with myriad small rooms, water storage areas, nooks and crannies, lift shafts with iron ladders reaching up to more small rooms with windows, some with sweeping views of the city skyline. Out on the roof area itself, there were iron ladders leading up to small areas right on top of the lift shafts, where you could go to have lunch, sunbathe, or just hide away. You couldn't be seen by anyone up there.[44]

Despite the Gov being designed along functional lines, there were many elements in its design that were rather dysfunctional and made work physically difficult. Oral testimony suggests (and archival evidence confirms) that the westerly aspect of the building made it very hot in the afternoons, and the concrete fins and venetian blinds offered little reprieve.[45] Monotype operator Lindsay Somerville recalled:

> They didn't air-condition the place. But it got really hot in summer, it was unbelievably hot. Especially in the Mono – in the casting room, where they're casting molten lead, and in the Lino room. It was just incredibly stifling.[46]

Letterpress printer Norm Rigney explained that the intake ducts for the air-cooling system were on the eastern side of the building, adjacent to the Darling Harbour Goods Yard. He cheerfully explained that the soot was sucked into the building:

> The air-conditioning, of course, it used to suck in all of the "fresh air" < sarcasm > from the back of the building, and there was an air-conditioning room in the ground floor, which was up in the top corner. And it used to suck it all in, but down the back was Darling Harbour Railway Goods Yard, and the steam engines used to *phht pphht phht phht* past, and all the smoke used to get sucked up through the intakes. And of course you'd get the smell of the steam engines. It never ever bothered me, because I loved trains.[47]

The meanings attached to the Gov are fluid. In the late 1950s and 1960s, this solid, chunky building was celebrated by the government and the media for its technological displays of trustworthiness and authority. Workers were not always convinced, however, and they relished recounting stories of what things were wrong with the building.

Bouncing on Woodblock Floors

Pallasmaa has noted the significance of the horizontal plane on architectural memory, noting that the floor is the "most potent element of architecture".[48] In calling for attention to the lived experience of architecture, Pallasmaa suggests we attend to "primary architectural experiences", such as the "floorness" of the floor, the "roofness" of the roof.[49] The "floorness" of the floor was certainly something

that drew the attention of the Gov's employees. The floors were endgrain woodblock, covering over 18,581 square metres, at the time reported as "probably largest area of endgrain wood block flooring of any building in Australia".[50] The sheer quantity of endgrain woodblocks must have been remarkable to observe, particularly in the early years. Alan Leishman enthused:

> The floors were the amazing things. Those wooden block floors. They were made out of < pause > what's the timber? Very soft timber. Yellowy soft timber. They'd be stuck down with things and there'd be a bloke working around the room all day with a tarpot, a boiling tarpot, dipping these in and putting 'em down. Then they'd sand it, then they'd varnish it. The floors were the thing that really caught my attention.[51]

Later on, the woodblocks became discoloured, dented from dropped chases, stained with ink, swelled and buckled from water spills. The problem-prone nature of expanding woodblocks was regularly described. Lithographic dot-etcher Graeme Murray took this approach:

> One point in the building design, which wasn't good: all the floors were done in wooden blocks, like bricks. It was beautifully laid out. … but the problem was that the water and bricks don't mix … if we had sinks overflow all the bricks would swell up, so you'd have a sort of mound, the floor would go up. And they'd have to take all the bricks up and relay them.[52]

Press machinist Norm Rigney launched into a lengthy story about similar problems with the flooring. His story is quoted at length, because of the way in which it interweaves aspects of working life, apprentice experience, material culture and the experience of play at work:

> One night, now it must have been about 1968, I think. Friday night. … He [Government Printer VCN Blight] come in showing some of his Mason cronies around the place, and they got to the first floor, and they're wandering around having a look at everything, and one of the guys apparently was sick. He went over and he hurked[53] in a basin … and he turned a tap on to allow everything to go down the drain, but what happened was – we used to have a flat bit of rubber, you know a rubber stereo, that we used to cut to make a plug, because the plugs'd go missing everywhere. Anyway, this plug, floated over and blocked the drain. This guy was so drunk, he left the tap running. So – over the course of the weekend, this tap kept running, it overflowed the basin, and it flooded the first floor … The floor was made up of wooden blocks, Oregon wooden blocks, which would take the weight and the movement and everything, and it would stop the reverberation and everything that would go on in the place. But water – they were set in tar – so this water flooded the manufactured stationery section … It flooded that. The photo section was next door. It flooded the photo section. These blocks swelled in the flood. I went in – I was very privileged you know – I went in. The floor was floatin' and you could jump around on the floor like a trampoline, it was waves of wooden blocks, and where the wooden blocks had come to a stop, they pyramided. They were pyramided six foot high! There were machines tipped, there were rolls of paper that had soaked up the water. They

> were ruined! … It got to the basement. It ruined paper rolls – big reels of paper! … I came to work on the Monday morning, and I'm walking along Harris Street … and there was water drippin' out of the building …. Anyway, we got up into the ground floor, and there, you know, everything is < gestures with arms to show hills of wooden blocks > so we got off at the first floor, and … we were bouncing through! Oh, it was terrific. Billy Bright was there, he was the superintendent. And he was runnin' around saying, "Get outta here you kids! Get outta here! I don't want anyone in here!"[54]

Norm is a natural storyteller and his interview was filled with anecdotes similar to this one. The story may well have been embellished over the years, but it is Norm's sense of pride and the acknowledgement of "privilege" that is particularly meaningful. For Norm, access to the Gov was something to cherish. In addition, we can see how this tale traces a path spatially through the Gov. The smooth, assuring solidity of the modern building had been disrupted overnight, transformed into an undulating, pyramiding landscape of technical dysfunction – a space where the apprentices (who were, after all, teenagers) could temporarily transform their workplace into a site of diversion and exploration.

Architecture and Rumour

One piece of information that I frequently encountered in these interviews (expressed in a slightly different manner each time) was that the Gov's building was originally based on plans for a hospital. Seven interview participants discussed the hospital idea, although the matter was consigned to rumour and conjecture. Former compositor Neil Lewis said: "I believe it was designed as a hospital";[55] while designer George Woods was more specific, stating: "They wanted a quick plan, so they took it off the dental hospital."[56] Former Government Printer Don West narrated the story further:

> It had been designed as a hospital. … I only know this from reading some records of the Printing Office I found in the place. Public Works pulled out a drawer, found a building that had enough floor space, which turned out to be a hospital, and put it up on that site.[57]

Notwithstanding this anecdotal evidence, official documentation and media reports related to the Gov always describe the building as being purpose-built as a printing factory designed by Parkes.[58]

There may still be some merit to the hospital rumour. There are obvious formal connections with European modernist institutional design, including the use of strip windows, high ceilings, central corridors and the provision of light and air. My archival research has uncovered that in 1938, while Parkes was in hospital recovering from a hernia operation, he read in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that the Minister for Health, Lt. Herbert Fitzsimons, would be undertaking a world tour to study hospital development and that he, as Government Architect, would accompany him to study hospital design and construction.[59] In July 1939, Parkes

and Fitzsimons left Australia on the maiden voyage of the *RMS Orcades*, and their (badly timed) grand tour covered France, the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland, Scandinavia, Holland, Belgium, Germany and North America, visiting hospitals in major cities.[60] As a result of the tour, a publication was produced, featuring Parkes' architectural drawings of European and American hospitals.[61] These modern buildings had novel amenities, such as fluorescent lighting, sparse and spacious interiors, large glass windows, easy-to-clean skirting boards and wide corridors. Spaces were compartmentalised and separated, with rooms leading off large central corridors. Rooms were open and bright, with internal windows spanning the upper half of the corridor walls.

Archival research did not turn up any conclusive evidence that the Gov was a direct copy of any particular European hospital.[62] It can be said that the 1939 tour was influential in a number of NSW Public Works' postwar buildings in Sydney, such as the NSW Maritime Services Board building at Circular Quay. Other tours were taken by relevant authorities after the Second World War, to specifically examine modern printing establishments in the United Kingdom and the United States, so it may be unhelpful to overemphasise the influence of hospital design on the Gov.[63] What is more significant is the way in which the same principles of cleanliness, efficiency, transparency and compartmentalisation applied equally to health as to industry in the postwar period.

Moreover, it is worth observing how notions such as "it was a hospital" can circulate in oral history participants' spoken recollections: these are architectural rumours, embellished and oft-repeated, gaining and losing complexity with the passing of time. The hospital concept has become embedded in the mnemonic spatial projections and workplace folklore at the Gov. This rumour, in and of itself, is arguably just as integral to the history of the printing office building as are other, more factually assured aspects about it.

Mapping Factory Stories

During the research process, I developed my own fragmentary mental snapshots of the building between the years of 1959 and 1989. I can see the hanging fluorescent lights, the large glass windows and the load-bearing pillars. Building upon the stories I have been told, I imagine that the base of the lift wells in this building might still be filled with pieces of metal type: the result of many accidents where "galley trucks" hit a bump on the way out of the lift. An upturned galley truck resulted in smashed up formes all over the floor, destroying the made-up pages and sending metal slugs and individual letters tumbling down the lift well. I can see how the afternoon sun from the west cast parallel lines of light through the venetian blinds in the main pressroom. In the bookbinding section on the second floor, I see large tables stacked with law books bound in cream and red "half-calf" leather and the gleaming edges of new guillotines.

All this is to say that in my mind's eye I see the Gov in section, and I became aware that many of the oral history participants had a similar way of expressing their spatial memories of the Gov. Polish sociologist Radoslaw Poczykowski uses Alfred Schutz's concept of *lebenswelt* (lifeworld) to discuss how people can reconstruct their lifeworld on paper, in "graphic equivalents to oral history".[64] Without being asked, former linotype operator Bob Law felt compelled to draw, from memory, a plan of the linotype room (Fig 4). Likewise, former compositor George Woods[65] picked up a pencil during our interview. In describing the Gov, he found it useful to sketch a section drawing of it. George's sketch (Fig 5) details how the trade zones are specifically delineated. In both of these examples, memories of working at the Gov are articulated in a manner that is thoroughly, and almost systematically, spatial. Within this spatial system, the former workers remember and reconstruct their own zone in immense detail. Again, it is important to reiterate that their memories are not lofty, airy things that take place outside of space and three-dimensionality; just as Halbwachs observed in the mid-twentieth century, their recollections are grounded: deeply connected to the embodied experience of space and architecture.

This notion of a mnemonic spatial projection – well described by Pallasmaa and informed by the earlier spatial memory theories of Halbwachs, Bachelard and Ricœur – eventually led me to produce my own "mnemonic" architectural drawings. Figure 6 is a speculative representation of the Gov in section. It is a

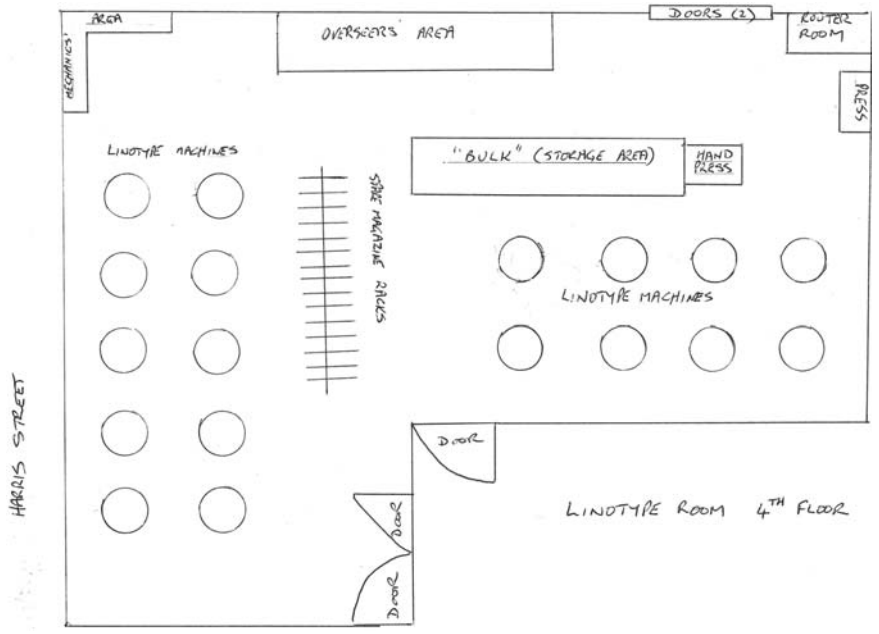

Figure 4: Bob Law, plan of the linotype room, drawn from memory, 2013.
Courtesy of Bob Law, reproduced with permission.

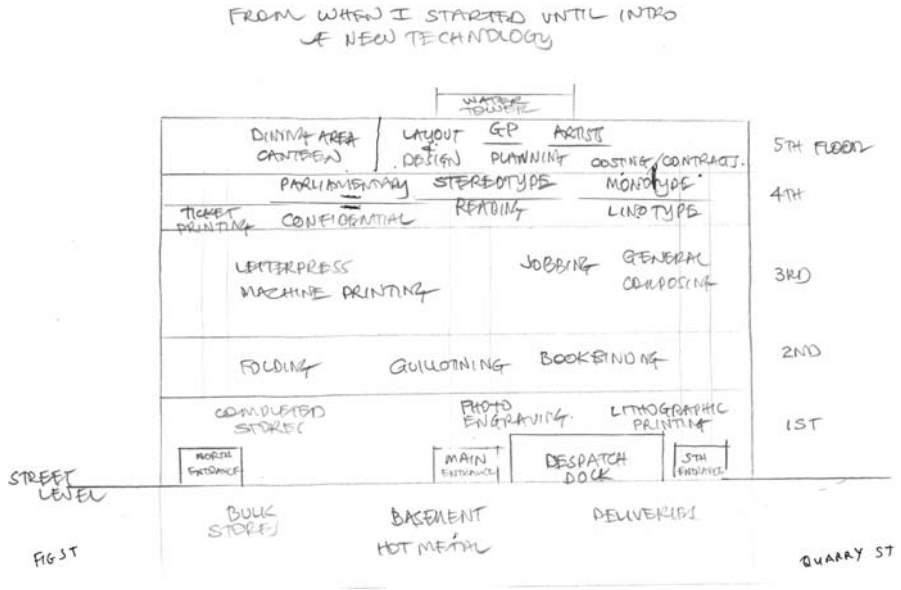

Figure 5: ***From When I Started Until Intro of New Technology*****, 2012, section sketch of the Gov drawn during an oral history interview.**
Courtesy of George Woods, reproduced with permission.

synthesis of oral histories and archival photographs, demonstrating a way of pulling together stories into a spatial system – an illustrative rendering of oral histories. The illustration compiles a variety of anecdotal and historical details that emerged from interviews and photographs. For example, I have marked out where you climb

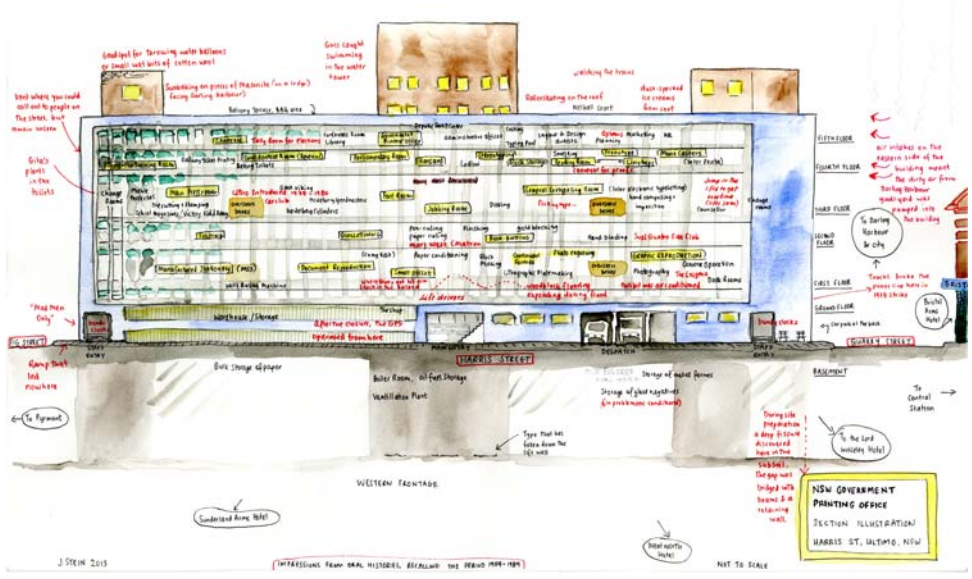

Figure 6: ***Impressions from Oral Histories*****, section illustration of the NSW Government Printing Office, 2013, watercolour on paper, 29.7cm × 42cm.**
Drawing by Jesse Stein Adams.

onto the roof and sunbake on slabs of Masonite or crouch above the BBQ deck area and throw little wet pieces of cotton wool onto the administrative staff while they are gathered for a function. I have indicated the water tanks on the roof, the scandalous location where, in the 1960s, some young women went swimming. I have marked out the original lithographic area, where "Bluey" (Graham Smith) got his arm stuck in a press. When the Darling Harbour Goods Yard was still operating, if you stood out on the roof with an ice-cream, it would become speckled with black soot. While my drawing is a subjective interpretation of oral history stories, it attempts to provide some visual indication of the spatial situatedness of many of the narratives that emerged through interviews. This, in turn, lends a more nuanced understanding of the history of this industrial-office hybrid building.

Conclusion

After the closure of the Gov in 1989, the building temporarily became a "modern ruin". Following a period of disuse, the building was refurbished and it is now a "cloud computing" centre run by the data management company Global Switch. In 2012, I was taken on a tour through the building. Inside, I found very little that recognisably connected to the Gov. Whole rooms are filled with servers and cables, whirring with digital activity, and workers are scarce. Nevertheless, there is some continuity in the building's use as a repository for information, except information is no longer held in formes of metal type and rows of bound volumes. Rather, information exists as ungraspable digital data in computer servers.

This paper demonstrates some of the ways in which memories of working life persist in spatial and architectural terms. Noticing these patterns requires an awareness of how details can be reconstructed and co-constructed through discursive interaction in the interview process and through the interpretation of transcripts, photographs and sketches made during interviews. There is a great deal more to be said about so-called ordinary buildings when we shift away from purely aesthetic or technical interpretations, moving toward a position that takes into account social, labour and embodied experiences. The extensive refurbishment means that much of the built heritage of the Gov is concealed and mute. Oral histories, photographs and archives are the chief sources through which a rich understanding of the spatial and architectural elements of working life at the Gov can emerge. The recollections provided in this paper indicate that the Gov's employees' experience at work was not merely a technological or social matter, it was experienced through space and architecture, and they continued to map their experiences as they spoke. Here, we can see how the building's foibles came to be seen as the embodiment of the Gov's dysfunction, but also its appeal. There was a paradoxical relationship that these workers had with their institution: their workplace was the subject of derision, and so was the building. The Gov's walls enclosed a world of complaint and discontent, yet the Gov was also home. This building was deeply embedded in the workers' identities

and everyday experiences. The institution, and the bulky modernist building that housed it, were one and the same.

NOTES

1. See, for example, John Peter, *The Oral History of Modern Architecture: Interviews with the Greatest Architects of the Twentieth Century* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1994); Robert Proctor, "The Architect's Intention: Interpreting Post-War Modernism through the Architect Interview," *Journal of Design History* 19, no. 4 (2006): 295–307.

2. Arlene Oak, "Particularising the Past: Persuasion and Value in Oral History Interviews and Design Critiques," *Journal of Design History* 19, no. 4 (2006): 345–56.

3. UTS HREC Approval Ref No. 2011–285A. Between 2011 and 2013 I interviewed thirty-one former employees of the Gov, who had worked there from 1932 to 1989. While oral history conventions once stipulated that interviews ought to take place in quiet, neutral surroundings, my participants often preferred locations that were not so quiet or sterile. This included pubs with a proximity to the Gov's building – namely, the Lord Wolseley Hotel, Ultimo. When interviewing at the Lord Wolseley, the proximity of their former workplace gave those particular interviews a sense of spatial connectedness that enlivened particular recollections. Although it falls outside the scope of this article, the analysis of gender relations was a key part of the broader research project that I was engaged in. As a tertiary-educated younger woman, I found that some participants – particularly older men – would occasionally address me in a manner that might be construed as patronising or withheld details in deference to my gender. Throughout the duration of an interview, however, participants sometimes relaxed and became more open, once it became apparent that I was knowledgeable about the printing trade, their workplace and the building they had worked in. Sharing my knowledge of the names of places, people and technologies was a key part of earning the participants' trust.

4. The building at 390–422 Harris Street housed the NSW Government Printing Office from 1959 until 1989. This article has emerged from a broader research and oral history project entitled "Precarious Printers", undertaken between 2011 and 2014. The project focused on technological change and the culture of working life at the Government Printing Office between 1959 and 1989: a period of significant transformation and difficulty, both politically and technologically. From the late 1970s, hot-metal typesetting and letterpress began to be replaced by computerised phototypesetting and offset-lithography. The industrial interiors changed markedly, some becoming more like offices. In mid-1989, the institution was suddenly abolished, with only four weeks' notice – a decision made by the NSW Government under Premier Nick Greiner. Over 700 workers lost their jobs. The findings of "Precarious Printers" included a demonstration of the significance of material culture and spatial dynamics in developing insights into workers' creative and adaptive responses to technological change and workplace upheaval.

5. Graham Brooks & Associates, *Heritage Assessment: Government Printing Office and AML&F Site* (Sydney: City West Development Corporation, 1998), 35–36.

6. Cobden Parkes, "Unpublished Memoirs" (State Library of NSW, Sydney, MLMSS 8622 Box 1, 1973), 192; "Modern Government Printing Office Nearing Completion," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 January 1958, 11. The problem was so acute that Parkes travelled to the United Kingdom in 1950 to research alternative building materials.

7. Gaston Bachelard, *La Poétique de l'Espace* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994 [1958]), 3–7; also quoted in Joyce M. Malnar and Frank Vodvarka, "Spatial Constructs," in *Sensory Design* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 15–18.

8. Maurice Halbwachs, *Space and the Collective Memory*, trans. F. J. Ditter Jr. & V. Y. Ditter (New York: Harper & Row, 1980 [1950]). 128–56; Paul Ricœur, "The Documentary Phase: Archived Memory," in *Memory, History and Forgetting* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 147–53; Bachelard, *La Poétique de l'Espace*, 3–10.

9. Malnar and Vodvarka, "Spatial Constructs," 3.

10. Juhani Pallasmaa, "Space, Place, Memory and Imagination: The Temporal Dimension of Existential Space," in *Spatial Recall: Memory in Architecture and Landscape*, ed. Marc Treib (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), 17.

11. Halbwachs, *Space and the Collective Memory*.

12. Halbwachs, *Space and the Collective* Memory, 140.

13. Ricœur, "The Documentary Phase," 148–53.

14. Ricœur, "The Documentary Phase," 150–53.

15. Ricœur, "The Documentary Phase," 150–53.

16. Pallasmaa, "Space, Place, Memory and Imagination," 27.

17. Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 2nd ed. (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1988 [1978]), 68.

18. Paula Hamilton, "The Knife Edge: Debates About Memory and History," in *Memory and History in Twentieth Century Australia*, eds. Kate Darian Smith and Paula Hamilton (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994), 14–15.

19. Oak, "Particularising the Past," 345–56; Linda Sandino, "Oral Histories and Design: Objects and Subjects," *Journal of Design History* 19, no. 4 (2006): 279; Ralph Samuel, "Perils of the Transcript," in *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London: Routledge, 1998), 389–92; John Shields, "Working Life and the Voice of Memory: An Introduction," in *All Our Labours: Oral Histories of Working Life in Twentieth Century Sydney*, ed. John Shields (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1992), 3.

20. Siobhan McHugh, "The Aerobic Art of Interviewing," *Asia Pacific Media Educator* 18 (2007): 147–54.

21. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, *The Oral History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998), 3–4.

22. Shields, "Working Life and the Voice of Memory," 3; Alistair Thomson, "Fifty Years On: An International Perspective on Oral History," *Journal of American History* 85, no. 2 (1998): 584.

23. Richard C. Peck, *NSW Government Printers and Inspectors of Stamps* (Sydney: self-published, 2001), 9, 23; G. Powell, "Tickets by the Hundred Million," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 June 1958, 7; William Applegate Gullick, *History of the Government Printing Office* (Sydney: New South Wales Government Printing Office, 1916), 3–5; Anon., "The Old Government Printing Office," *Staff Journal* 1, no. 1 (1947): 3.

24. Gullick, *History of the Government Printing Office*, 3–5; "Government Printing Office – Inadequate and Ill-ventilated," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 September 1911, 5.

25. George Larden, interview by author, 14 March 2013.

26. Victor Gunther, interview by author, 15 August 2012.

27. Victor Gunther, interview by author, 15 August 2012; Ray Utick, interview by author, 13 November 2012; George Larden, interview by author, 14 March 2013.

28. Peck, *NSW Government Printers*, 43, 47; "Government Printing Office – Inadequate and Ill-ventilated," 5; NSW Government Printing Office, *Annual Reports to the Public Service Board* (NSW State Records, GPO General Correspondence Files, 18/2051, 1949–59); Victor C. N. Blight, "Address at the Opening of the NSW Government Printing Office," *Staff Journal* 12, no. 1 (March 1959): 4–6.

29. Parkes, 'Unpublished Memoirs,' 150.

30. Casey & Lowe Associates, *Archaeological Assessment: GPO/AML&F Sites, Harris & Pyrmont Streets, Ultimo* (Sydney: City West Development Corporation, 1998), 13.

31. George Bryant, interview by author, 28 September 2012.

32. Arthur H. Pettifer, *New Government Printing Office New South Wales* (promotional pamphlet) (Sydney: NSW Government Printing Office, 1957); Peck, *NSW Government Printers*, 43, 47.

33. City of Sydney Archives: 390–422 Harris St Ultimo, File no. 0034/51; Letter from C. E. Jenkins to the County Clerk, Cumberland City Council (City of Sydney Archives, 390–422 Harris St Ultimo, file no. 337/56, 26 April 1956).

34. Pettifer, *New Government Printing Office*, 8; "New Printing Office Cost £2.5m," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 February 1959, 25; Peter Tyler, "Building for the Future," in *Humble and Obedient Servants: The Administration of New South Wales, Vol. 2 1901–1960* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press and NSW State Records, 2006), 202; Peter Reynolds "Parkes, Cobden (1892–1978)," in *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Canberra: National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, 2000), visited 26 June 2012, http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/parkes-cobden-11342/text20257. As Government Architect, Parkes was also known to give free reign to staff architect E. H. Rembert. It remains unclear who exactly designed the building; collaborative work and anonymity was the lot of a government architect.

35. "Ceramic Veneer Facing," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 February 1959, 25.

36. Ray Utick, interview by author, 13 November 2012.

37. Government Printer VCN Blight wrote to the Secretary of Public Works complaining that the building was, in fact, still incomplete (NSW State Records B Files, Series 4351, Item B1596/3, file no. 10/3030, 3 May 1960).

38. "Premier Opens Printing Office," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 February 1959, 11; "New Printing Office Cost £2.5m," 25; "Office is 118 Years Old," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 February 1959, 27; "Service for Citizen's Lifetime," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 February 1959, 26; "No Hitches in Big Removal," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 February 1959, 26; "New Plant Cuts Costs," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 February 1959, 26.

39. Alan Leishman, interview by author, 28 October 2011.

40. "New Printing Office Cost £2.5m," 25.

41. Bob Law, interview by author, 27 February 2012.

42. Terry Hagenhofer, interview by author, 5 December 2011.

43. Sandra Elizabeth Stringer, interview by author, 17 October 2012.

44. Philip James, personal communication with author, 1 October 2013.

45. Letter from R. A. Johnson, Printing Industry Employees' Union of Australia (PIEUA), to the Under Secretary and Comptroller of Accounts, NSW Treasury, 30 November 1959, NSW State Records, B Files, Series 4351, item B1596/3, File no. 10/3030.

46. Lindsay Somerville, interview by author, 15 December 2011.

47. Norm Rigney, interview by author, 30 January 2012.

48. Pallasmaa, "Space, Place, Memory and Imagination," 28.

49. Pallasmaa, "Space, Place, Memory and Imagination," 36.

50. "Printers' Office Paved in Blocks," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 September 1958, 39.

51. Alan Leishman, interview by author, 28 October 2011.

52. Graeme Murray, interview by author, 9 September 2011.

53. Hurked: slang for vomited.

54. Norm Rigney, interview by author, 30 January 2012.

55. Neil Lewis, interview by author, 17 January 2012.

56. George Woods, interview by author, 21 February 2012.

57. Don West, interview by author, 12 September 2012.

58. Pettifer, *New Government Printing Office*; "Sydney Improved, says Government Architect," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 August 1958, 5.

59. Parkes, 'Unpublished Memoirs,' 162; "NSW Minister's Tour," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 December 1938, 11; "To Investigate Hospitals Abroad, NSW Health Minister on Way to London," *The Advertiser*, 3 March 1939, 26.

60. Parkes and Fitzsimons visited Hamburg, Berlin, Potsdam and Dresden in 1939, shortly before the outbreak of World War II.

61. Herbert P. Fitzsimons, *Report of Inquiries and Investigations Made into Health and Hospital Administration During a Visit to the United Kingdom, Europe, Canada and the United States of America* (Sydney: NSW Ministry for Health, 1940).

62. The plans of the Government Printing Office building are available on microfilm with the NSW Department of Finance and Services.

63. NSW Government Printing Office, *Annual Report to the Public Service Board* (NSW State Records, NSW GPO General Correspondence Files, 18/2051, 1947).

64. Radoslaw Poczykowski, "Hand-drawn Memory – How to Read a Mental Map?" in *Cartographies of Culture: Memory, Space, Representation*, eds. Wojciech Kalaga and Marzena Kubisz (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2010), 42–45; Peter Gould and Rodney White, "The Images of Places," in *Mental Maps* (Middlesex and Baltimore: Pelican Books, 1974), 15–50. The process of mapping memories has also been used in indigenous oral histories, see Maria Nugent, "Mapping Memories: Oral History in Aboriginal Cultural Heritage in New South Wales, Australia," in *Oral History and Public Memories*, eds. Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 47–64.

65. Pseudonym.