Transitions and thresholds in the urban environment: activating space and identifying place

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Personal transport and communication technology have contributed significantly to the erosion of quality urban space. Together they have weakened the relationships between people within neighbourhoods through their ability to connect people over short or long distances with limited public interaction. This isolated lifestyle has been reinforced by the sculptural forms of modern architecture deteriorating the connection between public and private space.

This project attempts to identify what defines an urban environment that provides a stimulating and memorable pedestrian experience; then, with that knowledge, analyse an existing urban environment and provide an architectural intervention that reinforces existing qualities while providing increased density and enhancing the sense of place and connection within the neighbourhood.

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INTRODUCTION

“A distinctive and legible environment not only offers security but also heightens the potential depth and intensity of human experience. Although life is far from impossible in the visual chaos of the modern city, the same daily action could take on new meaning if carried out in a more vivid setting.”

Objectives

The aim of the project is to understand the relationships of the elements that define the urban environment and their influence on the sense of place. Through architectural interventions, build on and strengthen the character of the area. Any new elements and relationships should be defined by how it is revealed; how it relates to its surroundings. "The ramps and staircases, the gateways and corners are so important, because in them we feel the weight, shape and size of the city.”

Transitions and Thresholds

A transition is a change from one state to another. A transition is a section of a journey, a space that is passed through. Transition spaces can also be places, a space that is passed through in the journey to a destination, as well as being a destination itself.

Threshold is entrance, starting point or point at which something begins to take effect.

A threshold is an opening in the boundary of a space. A door frame forms a threshold in a wall, a gate forms a threshold in a fence; it is the line that is crossed between one space and another. A threshold can be implied by a corner, or the relationship of two buildings, or where a change occurs in the form of the environment defining the urban space.

Transitions and thresholds define how our environment is revealed as we move through it. “Much of the delight of a place lies in how one gets to it.” The experience and impact of a space, or object, in the environment is influenced by how it is revealed; how it relates to its surroundings. “The ramps and staircases, the gateways and corners are so important, because in them we feel the weight, shape and size of the city.”

Research Question

How can “Transitions and Thresholds” be used as a design strategy to enhance and develop the quality of places, creating greater sense of journey and a more vivid setting within an existing urban environment?

Location

Ponsonby, in Auckland, has been chosen because it continues to evolve, with pressure from the community to maintain and protect its historic buildings and unique character, yet respond to the pressures of a growing city and the need for a more sustainable future through densification.

Ponsonby is recognised as a successful and desirable area, concerned with preserving its heritage and sense of community. The area has undergone huge shifts in demographics, developing and evolving into its current popular form of the environment defining the urban space. “Much of the delight of a place lies in how one gets to it.” The apparently chaotic variety in scale and density of buildings and planting defines the existing spatial experience. The individual elements are not chaotic, it is the collective effect of elements and how they relate to each other within the changing scale and density of buildings that generates apparent chaos.

\[1\] Jenny Carlyon and Druce Marnew, Urban Village: The Story of Ponsonby, Freemans Bay and St Marys Bay, (Foxthorne Marketing Limited, March 1982)


Understanding the Urban Environment

Before any intervention can be made, the characteristics and elements that generate the existing environment must be understood so that its unique qualities can be identified then developed to reinforce the existing and create a more vivid setting. “To operate on the skin of the city is to constantly attend to the way things are, and to question about which things need adding, removing or modifying, or how better to rearrange them.” Any insertion of new ideas must take into consideration their relationships beyond the site and immediate neighbours to ensure a positive impact on the identity of the surrounding area and journeys through it.

“There is an art of relationship just as there is an art of architecture.” It is the art of relationship that defines the transitions and thresholds within the urban environment. Architecture is a key element that must recognize its position within the urban scene: spatial contrast, status contrast, use contrast, relative age, or comparisons of cleanliness or of landscaping. Elements and attributes became remarkable in terms of their setting in the whole. The setting within the site, block, street, neighbourhood, district and city are interconnected in one’s journey of place.

The proportions and density of buildings that form the boundary of street space, as well as points of difference and change within the boundary, influence the experience of place within a street and the journey along the street. Long blocks (figure 2 A) can be negative in the way they contain space because they can appear monotonic and limit connection to the surroundings. As the block is reduced in length (figure 2 B) a rhythm is created within the street and connection is made to the surrounding area through the openings, but this rhythm can also become monotonous. Through the introduction of an element of different proportions (figure 2 C) a point of juxtaposition is created. This point of difference identifies a location, breaking the monotony of form, creating a transition and threshold. With an increase in buildings of various proportions (figure 2 D and E) the point of juxtaposition is lost within diversity, creating a new form of monotony.

The use of sculptural forms can increase the point of difference (figure 2 F and G). As the forms become the norm, rather than the exception, (figure 2 H and I) there is a point where the sense of place created by the juxtaposition of form is lost. The insertion of a basic form within the sculptural monotony again provides a point of difference (figure 2 J). “Landmarks become more easily identifiable, more likely to be chosen as significant, if they have clear form; if they contrast with their background; and if there is some prominence of spatial location.”

The relationship of planting works in the same way as the relationships of built elements. Planting and buildings also work together to generate memorable places. Trees can be used as a point of difference (figure 2 J), to identify a place (figure 3 A) within an urban environment; they can form a monotonous background (figure 3 C), or provide a background to a built, or spatial, point of difference (figure 3 D).
Without a background there can be no point of difference. The background can take many forms; it is the points of juxtaposition, or change, in background that generates memorable places and a more vivid urban environment. “The special, immaculate collision, in which building or landscape pieces come sharply up against one another without loss of their individual identities or spirit; is especially important in the making of memorable places.”

Change in the environment stimulates observation of our surroundings and reinforces our sense of place. “Urbanity is articulation, complexity and difference... the materials and the relations between the materials are what counts: distances, rhythms, continuities, sequences, conflicts.”

The clarity of transitions and thresholds reinforces the definition of urban spaces. They reveal the city to us, allowing us to more easily build a vivid understanding and relationship with our environment.

Confinement can provide a sense of security. The threshold between a confined space and an open space can be used to create impact, enhancing the experience of the environment through the creation of a journey that reveals our surroundings and objects within the environment in definable stages. “The greatest physical impressions in a city spring from these space sensations, and, when strong, they can have very powerful emotional effects.”


Scale of Transition and Threshold

Every element and its relationship to the environment has a part to play in the urban journey and sense of place. “Building in the city calls for a delicate balance between urban fabric and building, between common substance and special objects, between rule and exception.” Identifying the elements and configurations that define transitions and thresholds at various scales provides an understanding of the structure of the existing environment. This allows an analysis of where and how any insertions or modifications could impact on the experience of the greater area by weakening or strengthening places and connections within urban journeys. The area a background typology covers influences the success of a point of juxtaposition within that environment; where the background typology changes it forms a boundary, defining the scale of an identifiable area. If a boundary is too close to an object of juxtaposition it will weaken the experience of each other. The sense of place within the greater area can be lost within an environment of regularly changing background typologies.

The elements of juxtaposition within the environment and changes in spatial syntax create transitions and thresholds. These elements are experienced in different ways, influenced by the type and speed of travel. A journey travelled by vehicle requires the changes in configuration of elements to be identifiable at greater scales than for a journey on foot; this is because speed of travel affects our awareness of changes in the environment. A juxtaposed building within a street can create a threshold for a person travelling by car; whilst a pedestrian is more likely to experience the building as a transition in their journey. “A building cannot be a human building unless it is a complex of small all definable stages. “The greatest physical impressions in a city spring from these space sensations, and, when strong, they can have very powerful emotional effects.”

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ENTRY, CONNECTION AND POINT OF DIFFERENCE

Buildings that define transitions and thresholds in the urban environment provide points of entry that represent their status, connections through to destinations, as well as being destinations in themselves, and form a point of difference relative to their environment.

Galleria Vittorio Emanuele is a glass vaulted, double arcade between streets in the east-west direction and connecting Piazza del Duomo and Piazza della Scala in the north-south direction. The main entries are located at the piazzas, facilitating excellent pedestrian activation of the space and generating a vibrant atmosphere by providing a path between two destinations as well as being a destination in itself. The connection between inside and out is an arched opening in the end wall, it rises only a little over half the height of the arcade, allowing the wall to define the arcade while providing a glimpse of the piazza beyond. From the piazza the entry is well defined in relation to the rest of the façade, while still being secondary to the grandeur of the Cathedral of Milan.
Burlington Arcade, London, England 1918

Burlington Arcade was the first shopping arcade in Britain, connecting Piccadilly and Bond Streets. The length of the space is divided at regular intervals by arched portals. The bay windows each side of the shop doors create a rhythm through the space, displaying merchandise and defining a transition space between pedestrian path and shop door threshold. The scale and configuration of the entries, from both Piccadilly and Bond Streets, create a point of difference within the street façade, indicating the connection through the building. The retail spaces are identifiable elements in contrast with the street façade; they are contained within the façade opening, leading one into the arcade before entering the retail space.
The Strand Arcade, Auckland 1910

The Strand Arcade is one of the oldest arcades in Auckland, providing a pedestrian connection between Queen and Elliot Streets. It has many characteristics similar to Burlington Arcade with bay windows creating a rhythm and defining threshold space (Figure 10 C). The thresholds at the exits contain the space within the arcade more effectively than the Burlington Arcade. In a similar way to the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele, the opening is in a wall (Figure 10 B). The Elliot Street entry has some limited definition in relation to the street façade with the arched verandah (Figure 10 E) and the opening defined by columns and an arch (Figure 10 D). The Queen Street entry is lost in the large glass shop fronts and signage with nothing but a glazed opening (Figure 10 A). The first retail spaces accessed from the arcade are well inside, past the side windows of the shops fronting onto Queen Street.

Figure 10: The Strand Arcade, Auckland
Parnell Village, Auckland, 1970’s

Parnell Village was designed around the preservation of the historic cottages that were under threat of demolition. The Village is a unique environment, with a series of small alleys and lanes that branch off Parnell Rise, creating a series of meandering pedestrian spaces. The narrow connections off Parnell rise do not attract the casual visitor into the space. There is no reason to pass through because it is not a route to another destination. An intention to visit specific premises is what draws people into the space. This is a destination environment with little connection to the surrounding area.
Along the main street of Masterton “any point along it - in the middle, or towards the end - could have been anywhere within it.” Centrepoint was a retail complex that created a point of difference within the environment. The twenty metre high tower marked its location within the street and town. As a pedestrian “the whole development was an essay in the art of transition; even at the street frontages, there is little abruptness of boundary, the line is broken, the scale is broken down.”

The tower is successful in marking a place within the street, but the place is chaotic. Everything is broken; the constantly changing environment is overwhelming and does not provide any point of rest. “It’s a mini townscape of its own,” the scale is too small. It works as an object in the landscape, but not as an extension of the urban environment. The variety and small scaled forms become a jumble of parts that do not come together as a cohesive whole.
The integration of the Iron Bank building into the Karangahape Road façade works well, taking its lines and openings from the surrounding buildings (Figures 14 A and 15).

As a pedestrian the continuous, frameless, glass façade does little to define individual shops (Figure 14 B). The entry to the pedestrian lane (Figure 14 C) that connects Karangahape Road and Cross Street through the building is more clearly identifiable when the gate is closed. As a connection to the parking building in Cross Street the lane works well, but to draw the casual pedestrian into the space it is not as successful (Figure 14 D). As with the Queen Street entry to The Strand Arcade, the entry is only a gap in the glass façade with a sign that is lost in the array of marking on the street.
ELEMENTS OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Figure 16: Bridging of streets in the towns and cities of Italy

Shadow and Light

Closure and openness, shadow and light cannot be used to best effect where vehicles dominate the space. Roads dominated by vehicles limit the variety of spatial variation that can be used to create stimulating pedestrian journeys.

The buildings that bridge the lanes in Italian hill towns create a journey, taking one through a series of spaces within the lane (figure 16 C and E) from contained to open, from shadow to light. Shadow and light create a rhythm within the street and an opportunity to pause before moving on to the next space. Thresholds are created at the change from shadow to light and light to shadow.

The smaller bridging elements (figure 16 A and D) create thresholds within the lanes, or between adjoining spaces. These thresholds define space by limiting the view of what is beyond and creating anticipation. They also contain space allowing one’s attention to focus on the immediate surroundings before moving on to the next stage of the journey.
Street Configuration

Figure 17 F – Stepping the buildings in plan leads the pedestrian to the right. The sun on the ground suggests an open space around the corner, while the buildings beyond indicate that the path continues. The stepping provides closure of the space and a destination point along the path, creating a staged pedestrian journey that suggests what lies ahead.

Figure 17 E – The steps divide the narrow alley into small sections, creating a series of spaces, staging the journey to the space beyond indicated by the light.

Figure 17 D – The curve in the street draws the pedestrian around the corner, revealing the street in small sections.

Figure 17 C – The vista down the street brings the surrounding environment into the urban space, providing a connection to nature without lining the street with trees.

Figure 17 B – The building at the end of the street contains the space and creates a pedestrian destination. The characteristics of the building are different to the others that define the space, creating a point of difference that draws the pedestrian towards it.

Figure 17 A – Even without people the space is still alive. The seat and planting suggest a space that is used by the people who live there, the scooter parked in the street suggests that someone is home, the steps rising up to a door connect the street to the upper level. The windows looking over the street penetrate the mass of the buildings providing connection between inside and outside, a sense that someone could be watching. The varying roof heights reduce the confinement of the narrow street and divide the length of the space creating a pedestrian scaled environment that takes one through the space.

The angle of the building also adds to the point of difference, containing the street space while gently inviting the pedestrian around the corner.

All of these spaces are defined by buildings that reveal the environment in pedestrian scaled stages through the use of closure and openness, shadow and light.
Squares and Piazzas

Squares and piazzas are pedestrian priority spaces that create a sense of place and community. They provide locations for people to meet and gather daily or for special events. Piazza Del Campo in Siena, Italy (Figure 18) is recognised as an exemplar of public urban space. The spatial experience is enhanced through the piazza’s contrast to the confined streets that are negotiated in the approach. The space is awe inspiring as the threshold between street and piazza is crossed, instantly revealing the well-defined spatial volume.

There are many other smaller spaces within the streets of Siena that do not have the grandeur of Piazza San Marco, but they still provide identifiable places within the network of streets where people can meet. Often these spaces contain fountains or statues, providing points of interest and markers of place. These small spaces are transitions and thresholds within the journey through the streets.

When public squares become too large they look and feel deserted. “Dimensions in the order of 32m are intimate. Up to 25m is still an easy human scale. Most of the successful enclosed squares of the past have not exceeded 140m in the smaller dimension.” There are exceptions like Piazza San Marco and Trafalgar Square, which are great town centres, teeming with people.

“The height of the principal building, taken once, can be declared to be roughly the minimum dimension for a plaza; the absolute maximum that still gives a good effect being double that height.”

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19 Alexander, A Pattern Language, 311.

Figure 18: Piazza Del Campo, Siena, Italy
Building Height

Where streets are long and straight, varying building heights create individuality. This articulation of individual buildings creates a sense of activity within the urban space through an increased awareness of the number of premises and possibility of people occupying them. The height differences reduce the sense of being drawn quickly along the street; they create secondary pause points within the street space identifiable at a pedestrian scale.

“Do not let your buildings deviate more than one story from surrounding buildings.”21 This rule of thumb ensures the urban space is well defined, while ensuring potential monolithic monotony of form is broken.

Figure 19: Variation in building height

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21 Alexander, A Pattern Language. 97.
Doors and Windows

Doors and windows are the threshold between public and private space. The door and its surround identify the entry point, providing connection between outside and inside. "The most important place on the house façade is the front door." Entry doors in many modern buildings are lost in the form or materiality. An identifiable door can be welcoming, while still providing security. Windows in a wall are like eyes watching, providing greater security to people in the street.

Modern glass façade (figure 20 B) have eroded the relationship between public and private space. They have a similar impact and relationship to the urban environment as a blank wall; the windows and doors that penetrate the mass of the building, creating connection, have been removed. The glass façade provides limited privacy for the occupants of the building. The window in a wall provides a greater level of privacy by allowing the occupant to move away from the window and not be seen. Doors and windows that are openings in a wall provide a better relationship to the street because they are an identifiable threshold between inside and outside.

The number of doors accessing a public space affects the security of the space. An apartment block serviced by only one access onto the street activates the space through the number of people using the door, but when no one is coming or going a single door offers no indication of the number of people using it. Multiple doors indicate a larger number of people potentially using the space. The more doors that access a public space the greater the sense that people could emerge from the door, providing activation and security in the space.

Bloomer and Moore, Body, Memory, and Architecture, 2.

Figure 20: Window relationship to the skin of the building

Figure 21: Doors of Italy
Planting

“For planting trees, a design in harmony with the architectonic surroundings is of basic importance, and this demands first of all that the trees should not hide from view architecture or sculpture of articulate value, such as portals, niches, niche-figures, façade mosaics, etc.”

Trees that are not effectively marking a place, or defining space, weaken the experience of the urban environment. Individual or groups of trees in a built environment are identifiable as a marker of a place, as is an object or building in a forest environment. As the regularity of trees increase, their strength as a marker diminishes until the trees become part of the background environment. Green spaces bordered by roads are less attractive places than those that have activated boundaries defined by the built environment. “None of these large garden areas should be open to the street, but instead ought to be surrounded by buildings.” A portal between the street and garden environments can heighten the experience of arrival and sense of place, while providing sanctuary from and also connection to the street. These contained green spaces can be as small as a courtyard garden (figure A), or a piazza full of trees (figure D).

“All tree lined streets are tedious, but no city can do completely without them.” They can provide beautiful spatial experiences within the urban landscape, defining paths, connectng places, creating “a magnificent perspective approach” to buildings and public spaces. These types of streets must lead to something; the experience is enhanced by the revealing of, and arrival at, a destination. “Coming out of a narrow slot into a broad expanse is a strong effect.” The destination becomes more vivid if it is a well-defined contrasting space or object; a place where one can dwell before continuing on to the next stage of a journey. A simple line of trees can lead one through a space, defining a path between two places (figure 22 B). A balcony full of flowers, (figure 22 C) creates a point of difference within the built environment. Planting provides a connection to nature within the urban environment. That connection to nature must be integrated with the built environment to define space or mark place, ensuring the planting does not weaken the spatial experience of the urban environment and there is a harmonious relationship between building and planting.

Figure 22: Planting in the urban environment

21 Site, City Planning, 175. 21 Mul, 128. 22 Ibid., 176. 23 Ibid., 128. 25 Ibid., 176. 26 Ibid., 176. 27 Lynch, Site Planning, 162.
CONFIGURATION OF ELEMENTS

The individual elements work together to define the urban space and create points of difference within the environment, generating memorable journeys and places.

More than a Door

Carlo Scarpa’s entry portal to dell’Università a Santa Marta in Venice is a transitional experience generated through his treatment of a wall. The approach reveals compositions within compositions, from the insertion in the wall (Figure 22 F), down to the detail within the door (Figure 22 D and E). A journey of discovery is created from a distance to the crossing of the door threshold.
Between Public and Private

The Strozzi Palace in Florence is a good example of a series of transitions and thresholds creating a vivid journey from the public environment into private space.

The mass of the building defines the street space and windows penetrate the surface (Figure 24 A). The entry is clearly identifiable within the mass of the building (Figure 24 B). The door is distinguished by the surround and arched stonework above (Figure 24 C). On moving through the arched entry a confined foyer is revealed. This space seems dimly lit in contrast to the bright sunlight outside. The exit of the foyer is defined by the moulding around the arched opening (Figure 24 D), the light from the cloister ahead leads one into a gallery space. The gallery edge is defined by columns with planter boxes controlling the position of entry into the cloister. The cloister space is flooded with sunlight (Figure 24 E). Stepping between the columns into the cloister the space reaches to the sky (Figure 24 F).

This short path is an experience of transitions and thresholds that contain, hint and reveal; from openness, to containment, to semi-contained through to semi-open; from light, to dark and back to light. These same sensory experiences can, and should, be used in the New Zealand environment to enhance the urban experience.

Figure 24: Strozzi Palace, Florence, Italy
Spatial Experience in New Zealand

“The sensuous experience of place is first a spatial one, a perception of the volume of air that surrounds the observer.”28 The spatial experiences found in the urban environments of streets and piazzas in Italy can be found in the New Zealand bush and landscape. They are created through transitions and thresholds that define and reveal space and light.

The parting of the trees reveals a vista across the landscape (Figure 26 A). A wide path parts the tree canopy, with the hint of a clearing ahead created by the sunlit ground (Figure 26 B). The path becomes shaded and contained as the dense canopy closes overhead (Figure 26 C). The scale of the canopy bowering overhead creates grandeur, and light filters through the leaves (Figure 26 D). A man-made object is juxtaposed against the bush environment (Figure 25 C). A lake in the dense bush creates a well-defined open space in contrast to the confined path and reveals Mt Ruapehu beyond, creating a focal point (Figure 25 A) like a church or temple in the boundary of an Italian piazza (Figure 18 B). Nature also creates points of juxtaposition, with individual trees growing in unexpected places (Figure 25 B).

Many urban regeneration schemes rely heavily on planting to enhance the environment, but it is not the green of the planting that makes our landscape beautiful. It is the spatial relationships and play of light, revealing spaces and objects within the environment that delights us and engages us with our surroundings; it is the relationship of the object or space to its environment. Planting provides a connection to nature and so forms an important element in the configuration of the urban environment.

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Figure 25: Space and objects in the New Zealand natural environment

Figure 26: Spatial experience in New Zealand bush
Planting in the natural environment evolves with change and adapts to its surrounding conditions. The clump of planting becomes an object through its small scale and relationship to the boundary and mass of similar dense planting. It is the spatial relationship that creates a point of difference, not its form or materiality.

The dead tree, different in form to its immediate surroundings, stands alone, perched on the edge, looking out. Even in decay the tree has a sense of place and strength. This sense is generated through its form and position in the environment.

Figure 27: 'Regeneration', Ohakune Mountain Road

Figure 28: 'The hairpin', Ohakune Mountain Road
relationship to greater auckland

the Ponsonby area has a unique relationship to the central city with its proximity and multiple access routes. the construction and opening of the harbour bridge and motorway in 1959 interrupted this connection, but it still has possibly the best access to the city of any residential area in Auckland with multiple access routes for pedestrians and vehicles. Ponsonby Road is a principal transport route, connecting traffic from Ponsonby, Grey Lynn and Westmere, with four distribution points into the city. College Hill takes traffic to the lower and mid-city areas, Franklin Road to mid-city, Picton Street to the middle-upper city and Hopetoun Street to the upper city. Ponsonby Road also provides a link from Herne Bay and St Marys Bay to Karangahape Road and the Northwestern motorway. the area has good access to greater Auckland making it a desirable location in which to live, work and shop.

there are many different configurations of elements defining the urban space along Ponsonby Road. the density of activity and built boundary varies considerably along the length and from one side to the other. the varying scale, density and relationships of defining elements create an apparently chaotic environment.

this raises the question of what elements can be removed, added or rearranged along the road to strengthen the spatial experiences, better defining locations and relationships, creating a greater sense of journey through a more void environment.

within the chaos there are underlying forces that suggest appropriate locations for densification and reinforcement of existing environments. these must be identified before any interventions can be made.
Configuration of Surroundings

The road network in the area has many different configurations and relationships to Ponsonby Road (Figure 31).

The eastern side has fewer connecting streets than the western. These streets tend to be feeder roads, collecting from side streets and providing connection to Ponsonby Road and the central city. The western side has multiple connections. From Three Lamps to Richmond Road long blocks of housing stretch away behind the commercial premises that front onto Ponsonby Road. Three of these blocks are in excess of five hundred metres long, reaching from Ponsonby Road to John Street, with no connection between the streets.

From Richmond Road to Great North Road the blocks are broken into a grid pattern with sizes from approximately seventy-five by ninety metres to two hundred and fifty by ninety metres. This is a more permeable street configuration, providing greater connectivity and variety of path.

Connection of Surroundings

The nature of transition between the residential areas and commercial areas of Ponsonby Road varies from side to side and along its length. The tree lined streets provide a path between the commercial activity fronting Ponsonby Road and the residential environment (Figure 32). The trees create a bridge across the rear service areas and side walls of the commercial buildings. The smaller streets interrupt the rows of shops and have a less desirable transition between the residential and commercial activities.

The larger block sizes on the city side of Ponsonby Road reduce the number of streets linking the residential areas to the commercial premises on Ponsonby Road. The commercial premises gather at a higher density around the areas of greatest connection to the residential areas. Two commercial hubs, one at Three Lamps and the other between Franklin Road and Hepburn Street, are the locations which have the greatest connection to the surrounding community.
Identifying the various types and scales of journey to and through an area identifies points of gathering and dispersal. Gathering points are natural locations for commercial hubs because they have the highest volume of potential customers passing by.

Figure 33 represents the density of traffic flow through Ponsonby. There are strong connections through the area to the city along Jervois Road and College Hill (Richmond and Franklin Roads), Williamson Avenue and Hopetoun Street. These traffic movements reinforce the location of the existing higher density areas along Ponsonby Road.

There is a large variety of street types that connect to Ponsonby Road, each with their own unique character. The different width of streets and the configuration of defining elements create varying levels of connection to the immediate neighbourhood, to the surrounding areas and beyond, both visually and spatially (Figure 34).

Built form and trees screen, frame views, create paths and define connecting spaces between Ponsonby Road and the surrounding community. Figure 34 represents the spatial containment along and branching off Ponsonby Road, as well as the visual connection to the surroundings. This diagram shows an array of types and levels of connection, with more strongly defined transition spaces between the commercial and residential activities on the western side. On the eastern side the spaces are less transitional and lead away.
The city views on the eastern side of Ponsonby Road vary from a wide vista down Anglesea Street (figure 35) to a contained view framed by trees down Pember Reeves Street (figure 36). Most of the side streets currently have a visual connection to the central city. Some of the streets will lose their view and become more strongly defined spaces as the tree lined streets form a canopy as in Franklin Road.
Franklin Road (Figure 38) and Picton Street have densely tree lined edges that form a canopy over the road, giving strong spatial qualities. The spatial change between the containment of the street and the relative openness of Ponsonby Road provide a clear threshold between the two (Figure 37). If Ponsonby Road was also densely lined with trees the transition would lose much of its drama and the threshold would not be as clear. The change in the urban spatial boundary materiality and configuration enhance the sense of arrival. The weakness of these tree lined streets is that they are paths not places, their strength lies in the arrival at the end destination.
Most of the smaller streets on the western side of Ponsonby Road are marked by trees at their connection to Ponsonby Road, but they work more as a screen to hide the space between the commercial buildings and to bridge the gap between the buildings created by the street (Figure 39 B). These trees define the commercial street space and emphasise the journey along the length of Ponsonby Road. They create more separation from than connection to the surrounding residential areas (figure 40).

The views down the streets, beyond the trees (Figure 39 A and C), vary from vistas to framed views of the Waitakere Ranges in the distance, with green suburban sprawl in the foreground. Glimpses of water can be seen down Tole Street and Ponsonby Terrace. Many of the side street spaces are contained in length by a bend, or trees that form portals and gateways across the road. This stages the journey along the side street, creating a connection between the commercial and residential activities, revealing spaces in stages. There is a stronger sense of place, rather than the rhythm of movement created by the alleys of trees.
Activity Along Ponsonby Road

Ponsonby Road has two retail hubs; at Three Lamps from College Hill to Russell Street and from Franklin Road to Hepburn Street (figure 41). These areas have a higher density of buildings containing a variety of activities; with accommodation, retail, office and hospitality establishments fronting onto both sides of the road.

The distance of approximately six hundred and fifty metres between the two hubs comprises the same mix of activities as the hubs, with the addition of places of worship, but the scale and density of buildings and their relationship to the road is different. There is also a different configuration from one side of the road to the other.

The western side between the retail hubs has a mixture of types and ages of buildings; some on the road boundary and others set back. Most of the new buildings have no proportional relationship to the old and car parks have been located at the road boundary of some properties, separating the buildings from the street and reducing pedestrian comfort along the footpath.

The city side has a mainly residential scale with villas and old boarding houses; many have been converted into accommodation, shops, offices and professional services. Trees line both sides of the street along this section; on the eastern side providing a defining boundary with a fairly consistent rhythm and on the western side buildings on the street boundary interrupt the line of trees.

The two commercial hubs are located at the highest traffic areas (figure 33). The Three Lamps hub is located on the Jeronimo Road / College Hill connection to the city centre. Richmond Road feeds onto Ponsonby Road between the Franklin Road and Hopetoun Street connections to the city centre where the second commercial hub is located.

The western side has far more connection to the surrounding residential areas, with sixteen streets connecting to Ponsonby Road, while the city side has only nine (figure 42). This could explain why the area on the western side between the commercial hubs has a higher density of commercial activity than the city side which has maintained much of its original character. The long residential streets on the western side have few cross streets, generating greater pedestrian traffic and a closer customer base for the businesses gathered at the corners. The density of food-related businesses close to these corners is amongst the highest in Ponsonby Road. The premises in the middle of the larger blocks through this area are set back with car parks fronting the road.

The western side between the hubs has a high percentage of cafes and take away shops clustered around the connections of the long residential streets. Where the block sizes get larger, increasing the distance between connecting streets, the food establishments tend to be concentrated at the extremities with commercial premises between.

The areas of greatest diversity and density on Ponsonby Road are located at the points of maximum connection to the surrounding community. The access points at the commercial hubs connect the immediate residents as well as residents from neighbouring suburbs.

Figure 41: Ponsonby Road activity and density

Figure 42: Street connections to Ponsonby Road
The Rhythm of Ponsonby Road

The rhythms and transitions along Ponsonby Road must be understood at different scales: the entirety of the road, the areas of density and their configuration, the block, the site and the building.

Entirety of Road Scale

From an overall scale the bends in Ponsonby Road form the first scale of spatial breakdowns, creating four spaces within the length of the road (figure 43). These bends, at the intersection of Richmond and Ponsonby Roads and at the intersection of Pompallier Terrace and Ponsonby Road, form strong transitions and thresholds between the spaces. The buildings work with the bend in the road to close one space and reveal another in the transition around the corner. Within the area between Richmond Road and Pompallier Terrace there is another subtle bend at Vermont Street that is reinforced as a transition by the dip in contour along Ponsonby Road between Richmond and Franklin Roads.

These four spaces possibly form enough division of the road for a vehicle journey; but for a pedestrian the scale of the spaces defined by the bends is too large.

Figure 43: Road defined transitions and thresholds
Areas of Density and Configuration

There are four zones along Ponsonby Road identifiable by their individual configuration and relationship to the surrounding area. These zones are defined by their density, scale of buildings, setback of buildings, and relationship of one side of the street to the other (Figure 44).

Zone One, between Krangahape and Williamson Avenue, has a strongly defined western boundary and a poorly defined eastern boundary. The eastern boundary is mainly tree lined, with Western Park being the dominant element within the zone. Western Park forms an integral part of the Ponsonby environment, but its current relationship weakens the sense of place of both the park and this zone.

Zone Two, between Williamson Avenue and Vermont Street, is generally defined by dense boundaries on both sides. This zone is divided into two spaces (zone one A and B) by the bend in the road at Richmond Road.

Zone Three, between Vermont and Cowan Streets, is defined by a more open environment. The buildings are generally individual free standing structures, set back from the street boundary.

Zone Four, between Cowan Street and Jervois Road, is defined by dense well defined boundaries on both sides. This zone is divided into two spaces (zone four A and B) by the bend in the road at Pompallier Terrace.
Activity and Zone Scale

A scale comparison of the zone four retail hub to shopping malls shows it to cover a similar area to Henderson square and St Lukes mall. The commercial hub of zone two is a similar length to Sylvia Park shopping mall.

The urban spaces of Piazza Navona, Piazza Del Campo and the Piazza in front of the Pantheon show the scale of successful spaces in relation to the sizes of the poorly defined spaces of Ponsonby Road (Figure 46).
Between Public and Private

The Ponsonby villa has a strong relationship with the street, while still providing privacy for its occupants. The low fence on the boundary, with a well-defined gate, marks the threshold between public and private space and point of entry. The short path defines a journey from the gate to the base of the stairs (figure 47).

The stairs bridge the gap from the path up onto the verandah, across the threshold defined by the garden on each side. The verandah posts and balustrade form another layer of separation that contains the verandah space, while still allowing connection to the street. The verandah provides an in-between space, not inside or out. This journey leads to the front door, which defines the final stage into the privacy of the house.

The short distance from the street to the house crosses a total of four thresholds and passes through three transition spaces. These transitions and thresholds work together to provide connection as well as separation between the street and house.

The modern architectural interpretation of the villa has little interaction with the street. The building is all form and closed off from the street. At ground level a double garage door presents itself to the street, a concrete driveway sprawls across the ground, merging with the footpath, almost removing any definition of the site boundary (figure 48).

The gate / front door, that ‘welcomes’ visitors into the private realm, is concealed behind a small patch of planting. The architectural form has consumed the human connection between public and private space.

PONSONBY ELEMENT CONFIGURATION

Amongst the chaos of Ponsonby Road are configurations similar to the ones found in the towns and cities of Italy. Journeys that conceal and reveal create a heightened sense of one’s surroundings and appreciation of the environment.

Figure 47: Traditional bay villa

Figure 48: Modern interpretation of villa
More than a Door

Similar to Carlo Scarpa’s entry portal (page 32) compositions can be found in the doors and windows of the colonial buildings of Ponsonby. The entry into the Ponsonby Medical Centre in Vermont Street, for example, provides a series of compositions as it is approached. A grouping of two windows and a door opening are linked by a moulding running along the length of the wall, linking the common detailing over the openings together (Figure 49A) and along the wall to Ponsonby Road (Figure 49F). The door is set back in the wall opening, with steps creating a transition between the street and door (Figure 49C). The side window and paneling below and within the door create a composition within the recess (Figure 49D) and then the door is another composition before the viewer crosses the threshold into the building.

Figure 49: Composition within wall, Ponsonby Medical Centre
Between Public and Private

The staging and revealing of entry as in the Strozzi Palace (page 34) can be found in the colonial buildings of Ponsonby at a much less grand scale. The entry to Two Hands Tattoo, at 127a Ponsonby Road, is a single door but the visible transitions and thresholds that form the journey from the street to the first floor premises take you deep into the building before you step inside (Figure 50 B), hinting at what will be revealed.

The sandwich board on the footpath marks the entry (Figure 50 A). The door is open into a long narrow hallway, in the hall a line of lights hang low, drawing your eye to the far end of the space (Figure 50 F). An arch defines the end of the space (Figure 50 D), marking the threshold between the hall and stair space beyond (Figure 50 C). The stair balustrade indicates the next stage of the journey within the building.

The definition of transitions and thresholds creates identifiable goals along the path.** Being able to identify the extent of a space and see that there is something beyond reduces the sense of danger of the unknown, but still facilitates anticipation within a journey of discovery.

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**Alexander, A Pattern Language, 187.
Door and Window Thresholds

Permeable boundaries activate space by ensuring they are safe, inviting environments. Doors are a connection between private and public space that provide physical and passive activation. Physical, through people entering and leaving and passive, through the possibility that someone could arrive or leave. Therefore, the more doors the higher the activation of the public space. “Any transition, especially a doorway, is a place to linger and talk. One can be in two domains at once, able to enter either one at will.”30

Windows are a visual threshold between public and private space (figure 51 D and E). They provide passive activation of the public space through the possibility that someone could be looking out. Windows up to two levels above the street can also provide physical activation because they allow communication between the private and public space.

Windows and doors in most modern buildings have lost much of their role as passive activators of public space. They have become camouflaged within the materials of the building, blended in a wall of glass or cladding, so that they do not distract from architectural form (figure 52).

The expression of doors and windows provides an important role in the activation of public space. They offer a pedestrian scaled journey of transition and threshold between public and private space. A pedestrian approaching a building can best appreciate its form from a distance. Often the footpath is covered by a verandah, so the building form has minimal impact on the pedestrian experience of transitions and thresholds. The articulation of doors and windows creates the transitions and thresholds for the pedestrian.
The modern, frameless glass shop façade conceals the entry and displays the contents of the space without entering. The detail of construction is stripped back to the simplest hinges and door handles to allow "connection" between inside and out, to blur the boundary. As a pedestrian the architecture of the building becomes irrelevant, the journey between inside and out is removed and there is little sense of discovery on entering the space.
As a pedestrian this shop front reveals scales of detail; from the overall composition with display windows each side of a clearly defined door to the lead light glazing above.
The recessed door creates a spatial change in the pedestrian journey identifying the entry into the retail space. The recess also creates another display window that allows products to be seen from greater angles on approach.
In the sea of window displays and sandwich boards the plants each side of the entry create a point of difference, identifying the retail entry from a greater distance and enhancing the spatial change created by the recess. If all the entries used the same idea its success would be lost.
Influence of Planting on Ponsonby Road

In summer the greenery of the trees impacts more greatly on the spatial experience of Ponsonby Road than the leafless branches of winter (figure 63 and 64).

The configuration of planting reinforces a linear journey along Ponsonby Road. Trees have been planted at every opportunity with limited apparent consideration for the built environment, screening what should be architectural points of difference and sitting uncomfortably against the built environment (figure 65). The trees at many of the street junctions bridge the space created between buildings, reducing connection to the surroundings and reinforcing a linear journey.

The tree lined alleys on the streets connecting to Ponsonby Road provide paths that lead people through the surrounding suburbia to the commercial area of Ponsonby (figure 66), but the arrival is weak because of the spatial definition and poor configuration of elements.

In the New Zealand urban environment most modern buildings and planning compete for individual attention. “How can there result an artistically harmonious plaza when each architect is self-consciously trying to eclipse the works of his colleagues?”31 The relationship of the planting and built environment in many situations is in conflict.

Within the New Zealand urban environment trees are seldom used architecturally to create space or mark a place, they are used as decoration. The regular use of trees as decoration has resulted in them becoming part of the general environment. They lose their effectiveness as objects in a built environment that can create stimulating and memorable urban journeys and places. The type and amount of tree decoration must be carefully considered for its impact on the definition of space and identification of place.

31 SECC, City Planning, 166.
The tree in front of Glengarry Wines (Figure 67) sits uncomfortably in the environment, the verandah holding it around the neck while the wall pushes against its head. As a pedestrian the trunk of the tree forms an inconvenient column in the footpath (Figure 67 B), the crown of the tree provides no shelter from the sun because there is a verandah roof (Figure 67 D). The visual appreciation of the natural greenery can only be had from the other side of the road where it is blocking the view of the architecture (Figure 67 A).

A similar situation is found at The Whisky Bar in Ponsonby Road (Figure 65).

Figure 67: Glengarry Wines and the lone tree, Ponsonby Road
The spire of the church at 229 Ponsonby Road marks its location from a considerable distance along Ponsonby Road, but on arrival the architecture is screened from the road by the street planting (figure 68 A). All Saints Anglican church is consumed by trees (figure 68 B), which could work as a point of difference if the road was not lined with trees.

A successful tree that provides a lot more than greenery in the urban environment is located in the courtyard of Prego Restaurant (figure 68 D). It marks a location, reaching over the wall suggesting there is a garden space beyond. Within the courtyard the tree provides shelter from the sun for alfresco diners, creating a roof that defines a resting space only metres from the road. It is positioned far enough away from the buildings to not appear uncomfortable, while contrasting with its built environment.

Within some of the side streets of Ponsonby Road clusters of trees form gateways along their length (figure 68 C). These trees divide the street, defining a series of spaces that reveal the street one section at a time, creating a journey.
AN APPROACH TO PONSONBY ROAD

A space the length of Ponsonby Road would create a monotonous journey as a continuous environment. To create a journey along Ponsonby Road the transitions and thresholds need to be considered at the scale of the vehicle and the pedestrian.

The existing elements that define the urban space of Ponsonby Road between the bends form another level of transitions and thresholds in their length. These transitions and thresholds are not easily identified because the thresholds are blurred. Through identifying the existing elements and the ways they are used to define space, and the ways they are being used that weakens space, allows an analysis of how they could be arranged to strengthen the clarity of urban spaces. The enhancement of the existing spaces and rhythms of the road strengthens its existing characteristics and enhances the experience of journey along the length of the road.

The road becomes a series of identifiable transitions and thresholds, creating journeys at the scale of the vehicle and the pedestrian. The pedestrian transitions and thresholds are at a sub scale to the vehicle transitions and thresholds. At the scale of the vehicle the scale of space must encourage a reduced speed that is desired through the area.

Roads carry vehicles that constantly move through a space. Large volumes of vehicles are provided for by wider roads. These wider roads weaken the ability to create pedestrian paths that widen to provide places for staying. “Streets should be for staying in and not just for moving through…”

Creating pedestrian priority spaces, with activated edges, in the side streets provides an area for people to stay. This space is a common widening in the pedestrian paths of Ponsonby Road and the proposed pedestrian lane creating connection and crossover of environments.

Proposed Zone Definition of Ponsonby Road

The elements and configuration of each zone must be identified to ensure the unique characteristics reinforce the definition of the transitions and thresholds in the journey along Ponsonby Road.
Zone One

In zone one the relationship between Western Park and Ponsonby Road is the weakest point. The boundary of Western Park fills the entire block between Hopeburn Street and Hepburn Street and blends into the street space of Ponsonby Road. The road and vehicle traffic form the transition and threshold between the park and the other activities of the street. This boundary could be strengthened by creating an activated, well-defined transition and threshold between the park and the road, defining the street space and revealing the park, creating a journey through transitions and across thresholds.

An architectural intervention at each corner of Western Park on Ponsonby Road could define an entry to the park and provide an activated boundary for the road and park. Increasing the activities within the block would attract a greater diversity of people, providing greater activation of the block beyond its existing single use as a green space. By continuing the existing rhythm of activities along and across the road, greater activation of the road boundary is achieved, enticing a greater number of people across the road and into the block.

A boulevard of trees is the defining element of zone one, with a densely built boundary on each side of the road. The four lanes of vehicles are divided down the middle by a row of trees. This reduces the existing openness, creating a more confined and well-defined space on each side, helping slow vehicle speed.

With a grand entry into Western Park and buildings each side, creating transitions and thresholds between the road and the park and further defining the boulevard space, the trees become a marker of the park within the length of Ponsonby Road.

The boulevard of trees ending at Hepburn Street defines the first vehicle threshold between zones one and two. The spatial definition changes from the containment of the trees, to the relative openness of the road width defined by the buildings lining the boundary on each side. This spatial change is the vehicle equivalent of the pedestrian experience entering Piazza Del Campo from the confined streets of Siena.
Western Park is an oasis in the hustle and bustle of Ponsonby Road. A sense of sanctuary can be found within the park, with sun, shade and views of the city found within the tree-lined valley. But the openness to the road requires moving further into the space to discover this environment. Vehicles intrude on the space with roads on three sides. The entry to Western Park was once flanked by buildings on each corner forming a more strongly defined edge and greater connection to the activities of Ponsonby Road, while also providing shelter from vehicle noise.
Zone One Section A

The proposed configuration of this section of road remains unchanged. This area is a major traffic distribution point, with vehicles building up at the intersection of Ponsonby, Karangahape, Newton and Great North Roads. The difference proposed in this area is a view of the Pohutukawa trees in the middle of the road on entering Ponsonby Road.
Zone One Section B

The proposed configuration of this section of road remains unchanged. The change from the trees lining the side of the road, in section A, to the built environment on both sides of the road builds towards the proposed changes ahead.
Zone One Section C

The existing configuration of this section of road forms a weak urban space, defined by buildings on one side and open green space of Western Park on the other. The road separates the park from the commercial activity and also intrudes on the atmosphere of the park. The proposed configuration uses the park space adversely affected by the road to increase density and activity in the area, rebuilding where buildings once stood. The proposed built form defines the street space, providing a gateway to and separation from Ponsonby Road for Western Park. The Pohutukawa trees proposed down the centre of the road reflect Western Park into the well-defined urban street space, identifying a location of importance within the road. These trees form an identifiable area within the road at a pedestrian scale and a gateway at a vehicle scale. The vehicle gateway helps in slowing vehicles by creating a strong spatial change in the journey, heightening one’s awareness of the surroundings, with containment on entering and then opening into a larger space.
Zone Two

Densely built boundaries with trees and objects marking places define the commercial hub of zone two, which is divided into two sub spaces by the bend in Ponsonby Road at the intersection of Richmond Road. An architectural insertion on the North West corner of the intersection would create a marker enhancing the transition and threshold at the bend.

The rows of trees extending from selected street squares into Ponsonby Road mark the location of the public spaces and create another level of threshold in the vehicle journey.

Zone two has two sub zones created by the bend in Ponsonby Road at the intersection of Richmond Road. This bend is significant because it contains the urban space as the corner is approached and reveals the next space as the transition is made around the corner. The blocks on each side of Richmond Road are the masses that contain the urban spaces. Neither of these blocks clearly define the urban space or the transition between spaces. An architectural intervention on the block to the south of Richmond Road would replace the Mini Garage and work with the existing heritage building on the corner to enhance the street space and better define the bend in the road.
Rear courtyards are found on the eastern side of Ponsonby Road along the length of zone two. These areas are small, contained café garden sanctuaries, tucked away from the hustle and bustle of the road. They provide an alternative location to sidewalk dining. Part of their allure is their contrast to the street environment, the transition from one place to another.
A main transition point is located in the centre of this zone; the intersection of Richmond and Ponsonby Roads. This location should be a key point in the journey that is defined by more than the bend in the road because it is also a major point of connection to the surrounding area and the centre of a commercial hub. The approach heading north is dominated by two large billboards, where a defining space or object should stand. Many of the places where key points of arrival should be defined by architectural objects or space, are dominated by billboards across the city.

Figure 80: Key transition point of ponsonby Road
The public seating provided, just off Ponsonby Road, within the start of some of the side streets is uninspiring because of its positioning facing the road and lack of containment. The seats put the user on display, when they should create a space for people to retreat and observe the activities and views around them. The seating in Anglesea Street faces, and is open to, the traffic of the intersection, while the view of the central city is screened from view by trees, the vista being best appreciated from the road.
Zone Two Section D

The existing configuration through this area works to define the urban space. The proposed configuration refines the tree positioning to emphasize the connection of the commercial activities on the side streets, while providing greenery within Ponsonby Road through extending a line of trees along the side streets into the road space.
Zone Two Section E

The existing configuration has a strong two level built boundary on the eastern side and a varying height built boundary to the west. Some of the planting grows through the verandah and sits uncomfortably against the building. The proposed configuration increases densification by building over, or replacing, the lower structures to more strongly define the boundary of the street space. Trees are restricted to the frequent side streets, but extend into the Ponsonby Road space providing stronger connection to the surrounding area and greening in the main road, as in Section D.
Zone Three

Zone three is defined by its low density buildings and a row of trees along its length. The buildings on the city side are separated and set back from the road boundary in most instances, whereas the western boundary has been more densely developed. To ensure the density of buildings on the road boundary of the western side does not continue to increase, preferably encourage a decrease, the implementation of a setback and small parks with activated edges could be created.

A row of trees along the footpath on the city side provides a sheltered pedestrian environment within the openness of the space and provides a regular pattern within the diversity of the zone.

Trees on both sides of the road between Pompallier Tce and Cowan Streets mark the church and define the transition and threshold into zone four.

Zone three has a lower density built environment with more green space and trees lining both sides of the street. Any architectural intervention would need to reinforce this environment to enhance its different spatial quality and definition as a transitional space between the two commercial hubs.

The sites with carparks fronting Ponsonby Road would allow for the creation of small public squares, parking being relocated behind and under an architectural intervention. Three sides of the square would have permeable edges, ensuring activation of the space, with the fourth side opening onto Ponsonby Road. This would increase the density of buildings, while still maintaining the spatial quality of the zone.
The eastern side of zone three has two key points of difference, the Anglican Church (Figure 87 B) and the More FM building (Figure 87 E). These points of difference work to best effect from a vehicle in the winter because the trees have lost their leaves, allowing a visual connection. In the summer the trees screen the view. As a pedestrian they work in both summer and winter, possibly better in the winter because of the screening effect of the trees.

The More FM building is a large mass against the boundary in contrast to the smaller individual buildings set back from the boundary (Figure 87 C and D). The church also works in contrast to its surroundings, but the spire can be seen from a considerable distance along the road (Figure 86 B), hinting at what is ahead. Unfortunately, on arrival the church is uninviting, separated by a fence and surrounded by car parking. The street trees should part at these points of difference, reinforcing their place within the road.
The pedestrian journey along the western side of zone three is predominantly a collection of food premises (Figure A and C) mixed in with car parks fronting the road (Figure 88 B). The cafes and bars are located close to the long streets that stretch back into the residential areas, providing a supply of customers. The cafe seating on the footpath generates activity bringing the area to life (Figure 88 D). The clusters of cafe seating create engaging points in the pedestrian journey.
Zone Three Section F

The existing configuration is relatively open. Most of the buildings on the eastern side set back from the road boundary and are free standing structures. On the western side the buildings that are set back have car parks fronting the road.

The proposed configuration maintains the open environment, but relocates the onsite parking to under the buildings and creates pedestrian spaces. These pedestrian squares can vary in type and configuration along the road; full of trees, open grassed, or paved, areas with sculptures, a children’s playground. The pedestrian space would be densely developed on three sides and remain open to Ponsonby Road on the third, connecting the buildings around the space to the road and maintaining the openness of the Ponsonby Road space.
Within Zone three there are buildings on the western side that come up to the road boundary, creating points of difference in the open environment. The proposed configuration emphasises these points of difference, ensuring that no new building is built up to the road boundary. The historic buildings would be identified and protected to form the points of difference along the western boundary; the redevelopment of any other site would then require that a pedestrian square be provided.
Zone Four

Zone four, the second commercial hub, is defined by its densely built boundaries and a regular pattern of trees. This is a small zone divided into two sub-spaces by the bend in the road, so does not require any further elements to define the environment.

Zone four is made up of two urban spaces created by the bend in Ponsonby Road at the intersection of Pompallier Terrace. The weakest site in this zone is the single level building between Cowan Street and Pompallier Terrace. The scale of the building is lower than all the surrounding buildings so it does a poor job of containing the urban space of Ponsonby Road.
Zone Four Section H

The existing configuration of this urban space is relatively strong. The proposed configuration would extend some of the existing tree clusters and provide public or café seating beneath. Some of the single level buildings have the potential to be redeveloped at a height that better defines the spatial boundary.
Rhythms and Patterns

A basic repetitive form can be used to create an identifiable cohesive rhythm within the boundary of the urban space. Individuality is created through the insertion of unique elements into the base form, while maintaining the underlying rhythm.

This can be seen in many of the residential streets of Ponsonby. Often the colonial villas that line the streets are in groups of the same type. The three bay villas in Richmond Road (figure 96) create a rhythm with their common mass, roof pitch, verandah and bay window, but they are all unique, with different treatments of the bay window and bay roof.
Façade Rhythms and Patterns

The rhythms and patterns of the façade are the textures on the mass of the block that reduce the scale of an overpowering mass. They work in the same way as the proportions and mass that define the street (see Understanding the urban environment, page 4) but at the scale of the block and building. Identifiable regular rhythms and patterns are as important as the points of juxtaposition, there can be no point of difference without regularity.

A regular pattern (figure 97 A) becomes monotonous when it is repeated too many times. By introducing difference within a regular pattern (figure 97 B) points of difference are created. A form extruded along a length with regular elements wrapping over creates a regular rhythm (figure 97 C). By making each wrapping element unique individuality is created within the underlying rhythm.

Reinterpreting the bay villa (figure 98) the rhythm and form of the bay and entry steps are used to create a rhythm and pattern for the block. The elements of the entry porch, verandah and balcony have been applied in different configurations to create individuality within the overall rhythm and pattern of the building. This provides two scales of recognition: the overall, identifiable when travelling in a vehicle, and the individual, recognisable to a pedestrian.
Transition Space

The configuration of transition space can influence movement through the space. A transition space defined by buildings of the same proportions on each side (figure 99 A) creates a sense of here and there, with little sense of place within the space. A row of trees through the space (figure 99 B) provides a sense of distance and connection between here and there, taking you on a journey through the space. In contrast a row of trees across the space (figure 99 C) creates a threshold that contains the space and defines a place. The trees separate the here and there, suggesting possible paths also exist to the left and right beyond the buildings. A stronger sense of entering and leaving the space is created with a change in level (figure 99 D) or a line of elements (figure 99 E) that clearly define the thresholds.

The position and form of the buildings beyond the space extend the space when aligned (figure 99 F) and contain the space when stepped in (figure 99 G) defining an end. The positioning of the buildings and configuration of the roofs can alter movement through the space, suggesting alternative possibilities for the journey beyond. Equal projections create a central gateway that leads out of the space. This is reinforced by roofs sloping towards the opening (figure 99 H). Turning up the roof on each side of the opening (figure 99 I) creates the sense of a gate, slowing movement through and allowing greater exploration of the space. Offsetting the opening (figure 99 J) slows the sense of movement through and better contains the space, by creating a small step in the line of buildings on the left would contain the space more effectively. The kicked up roof on one side only (figure 99 K) creates a stronger sense of a possible alternative path to the right.

This shows that the configuration and definition of thresholds can be used to great effect to slow a journey, facilitating an enhanced experience of the immediate space and the one following as it is revealed.

Through Building Transition and Threshold

Existing access to the rear of the commercial premises from Ponsonby Road is either through small uninviting alleys or via the side streets. Seven explorations of the threshold opening proportions and surrounding form of the building was made (figure 100) resulting in two of the seven openings being identified as more desirable (figures 100 F and G). See Appendix B for full analysis.

Figure 99: Sketch analysis of through transition space

Figure 100: Model analysis of through building transition and thresholds

Figure 100: Model analysis of through building transition and thresholds
Steps provide both connection and separation of space. They are a point in a journey that creates a pause as the destination is considered before the climb. They can create a sense of arrival. The positioning of the flights of stairs influences the experience of arrival.

The stairs contained within the transition space defined by the buildings (Figure 101 A and B) create a strong sense of separation. The combination of a full flight of stairs and contained space create a less attractive transition than the stairs that project from the space (Figure 101 C). Through splitting the flight into two (Figure 101 D and E) the height of the flight is less daunting and a space is defined by the landing. The landing becomes a transition into the confined space and the steps at the end lead out of the space. By dividing the path between the street and courtyard into a series of transitions and thresholds the journey can be taken in a series of comfortable stages that can be identifiable before the first step is taken.

Level Change Transition and Threshold

Figure 101: Model analysis of level change transition and threshold
Site Considerations

“To generate exuberant diversity in a city’s streets and districts, four conditions are indispensable; the district and its parts must serve more than one primary function; most blocks must be short; there must be a mix of buildings that vary in age and condition; and a dense connection of people.”

Commercial hubs at the heart of a residential area enjoy a larger population base within walking distance. As commercial strip sprawl grows, distances become less walkable increasing the likelihood that people will use cars. Therefore, commercial strip sprawl, unlike hubs, is a condition that encourages the use of the car and works against the development of walkable communities.

“A mixture of uses, if it is to be sufficiently complex to sustain city safety, public contact and cross-use, needs an enormous diversity of ingredients.”

Active urban space is not generated by a single activity destination. It is also activated by the people who move through places in their journeys within and through the neighbourhood. To increase the activation of an urban space it must have multiple elements of activation. Urban spaces are enhanced by being more than a destination; multiple paths transitioning through activate the space; multiple thresholds around their edges activate the space. It is the combination of multiple transitions and thresholds at all scales of analysis that activates a place and a space.

Location within Ponsonby Road

As a result of the analysis of Ponsonby, four distinct zones were identified including two commercial hubs. It was also apparent that the zones and hubs varied in character and that it was not possible to apply the same solution to each. An architectural intervention could be made in any of the identified zones to reinforce its identified defining characteristics.

Zone two has been selected because of its characteristics as a dense hub and the pressure for it to expand. The importance of developing an architectural solution to the expansion of this zone is to ensure that it does not generate continued commercial strip sprawl along Ponsonby Road, adversely affecting the scale of the zones and, therefore, the intervals of thresholds in the journey along its length.
Influence on Zone Two Configuration

There are many possibilities around the relationship of pedestrian and road space on Ponsonby Road. Increasing footpath widths, creating planting strips along the centre of the road that could be occupied by diners and restricting or stopping vehicle traffic are strategies that have been used in New Zealand and elsewhere.

The smaller streets that interrupt the line of shops and connect the residential to the commercial area are points of weakness in Ponsonby. They impact negatively on the retail experience as vehicles take precedence, frequently interrupting the pedestrian journey.

Pedestrianising Ponsonby Road

Pedestrianising a section of Ponsonby Road would be detrimental to traffic flow and surrounding residential areas because the surrounding streets are narrow and not well linked, limiting alternative routes. Any alternative routes that could effectively deal with the volume of traffic would require substantial detours. The width of the road would also impact on the quality of any pedestrian space created on it. The number of shoppers who currently provide a lively bustle on the footpath would appear lost and lonely in the width of the street.

Increasing the width of the footpath would have similar effects, but to a lesser degree, to pedestrianising a section of road. The increase in footpath width would need to be taken from the traffic lanes, or by the removal of parked cars. Removal of lanes would be detrimental to traffic flow and the removal of parked cars would be detrimental to the pedestrian environment because there would no longer be a layer of protection from moving traffic.

Reinforcement of Existing

The streets on the western side of Ponsonby Road in zone two provide an opportunity to strengthen the existing transition to the residential area and also provide connection to a possible mixed road use pedestrian lane through the service areas between the rear of the commercial buildings and residential buildings. “Shopping centres depend on access: they need locations near major traffic arteries. However the shoppers themselves don’t benefit from traffic: they need quiet, comfort, and convenience, and access from the pedestrian paths in the surrounding area.”

The pedestrian lane provides a transition from street to street, providing an alternative path along a section of Ponsonby Road away from vehicle traffic. The small block size provides regular spatial release from the containment of the lane. The streets provide regular connections to Ponsonby Road, maintaining a relationship with the existing commercial premises. Transforming the street space between Ponsonby Road and the residential buildings into a pedestrian priority zone creates a public space that connects multiple areas. The space becomes activated by multiple potential journeys: along Ponsonby Road, crossing the end of the space, exiting one lane and entering the next, between the lanes and Ponsonby Road and between the residential area and Ponsonby Road.

The pedestrian priority street spaces become small public squares, creating places in the journey along Ponsonby Road and connecting the lane and residential areas through a common space.

Alexander, A Pattern Language, 175.
The short blocks allow a meandering journey between the pedestrian lane and Ponsonby Road through the street spaces. This connection reduces the possibility of the pedestrian lane becoming separated from the existing retail experience of Ponsonby Road. The street space is also passed through on a journey along either Ponsonby Road or the lanes, maintaining a connection between them.

If the distance between pedestrian priority street spaces becomes too great the connection of the lane to Ponsonby Road is diminished and becomes separated from the existing commercial environment. The street space is also passed through on a journey along either Ponsonby Road or the lanes, maintaining a connection between them.

A pedestrian lane in the block on the city side of Ponsonby Road between Picton Street and Anglesea Street becomes too long because it does not have enough connection to the existing commercial environment. Any connections made through the existing buildings are not as effective as the street connections because they are a single use space only, being activated by a single journey between the lane and Ponsonby Road; they would not have the increased activation provided by the connection to the residential area that the streets have. If a connection through the existing buildings was extended to the residential area of Paget Street the benefits would be limited because there are only a small number of dwellings there.

Through being a transition space between two destinations, as well as being a destination in itself, the space has more than one use and so has a greater level of activation. Enhancing the existing transition space between Ponsonby Road and the residential areas and using it to access the new pedestrian lane increases pedestrian movement through the space. The space can be further enhanced by making it a destination, activating its edges by providing access to commercial activities within the buildings defining the space.
Location of Architectural Intervention

The rear yards and service areas of the commercial buildings provide an opportunity to develop another environment based on the existing characteristics of the area. Like the café rear garden spaces providing an environment in contrast to Ponsonby Road, the pedestrian lane would provide another place to be discovered and experienced. The environment would express the currently concealed beauty that exists along the rear of the heritage buildings.

Building on what already exists is a way of protecting the heritage buildings and at the same time providing alternative development opportunities. Ponsonby has an opportunity to develop this concept in its own unique way through its potential connection to the existing commercial activity on Ponsonby Road. The frequency of side streets provides easy access through regular connection between the pedestrian lane, Ponsonby Road and residential areas. The transition space between these activities is also a space that is passed through when journeying along the lane or road, providing connection and greater awareness of the wider environment.

Integrating with the existing Ponsonby Road environment through transitional spaces, linked to the pedestrian lane at regular intervals, gives the pedestrian choice. “A long straight road has little impact because the initial view is soon digested and becomes monotonous.” A meandering path reveals the environment through transitions and across thresholds, creating a more stimulating and memorable pedestrian journey. A changing level of containment and proportions, using arcades, lanes, courtyards, squares, sidewalks and verandahs, can work together to enhance individual spaces as well as the overall experience of a place through the transitions and thresholds that link the spaces together.

Cullen, The Concise Townscape, 9.
Planting within Zone Two

Most of the trees in the public space from Brown Street to Norfolk Street (figure 107) have a purpose beyond greening and decoration. The exceptions being two trees planted on the footpath.

A short distance down Brown and Norfolk Streets the trees planted on each side of the road (figure 107), at the chicanes to slow vehicle traffic, create a threshold in the journey between the residential and commercial areas.

The trees at the intersections of the side streets with Ponsonby Road mark the locations of vehicle movement, screen the side walls of the commercial buildings and reinforce the linear journey of the commercial strip.

By removing the trees from the footpath and reconfiguring the plan in the streets (figure 108) transitions and thresholds are created, more clearly defining a series of spaces that generate a journey and connection of places.

The row of trees parallel with Ponsonby Road connect the proposed pedestrian lane across Douglas Street, while creating a threshold between the residential and commercial areas that defines the edge of the pedestrian priority square in the side street.

The thresholds created by the trees define pedestrian scaled space within a journey along Ponsonby Road. Rather than passing the end of a row of trees, it is stepped through, providing a threshold that differentiates pedestrian scaled sections of the journey. The pedestrian is more engaged by the act of passing through an opening than passing an object, making the row of trees more identifiable as a place marker than individual trees long the footpath.

The configuration of trees draws the eye along its line, creating connection with the space and activities within the side street. It also creates a more pedestrian friendly connection between the residential area and the commercial premises.
The Street Square

The transitions and thresholds created within and by these pedestrian priority squares define the connection between the different activities within the area; from commercial to residential and existing to new. Through articulating the transitions and thresholds the separation of activities is reduced, bringing the neighbourhood and community together.

The square is divided into three sub-spaces by the positioning of a line of trees (figure 110). The row of trees provides the key transition and threshold dividing and linking the spaces; extending from the Ponsonby Road kerb line to the centre of the square and beyond (figure 111). The trees create a threshold in the pedestrian journey along Ponsonby Road.

Multiple journeys transition through the space (figure 112) ensuring a good level of activation. These journeys are between: the housing and Ponsonby Road, housing and lane, Ponsonby Road and lane, along Ponsonby Road and along the series of lanes.
The Path of the Lane

The blocks separating Brown, Douglas and Norfolk Streets contain many types and ages of building.

Pedestrian Lane Transitions and Thresholds

The transitions and thresholds in the journey along the lane are more frequent than along Ponsonby Road because they are not influenced by the vehicle traffic, so they can be designed specifically for the pedestrian experience. The three ‘street squares’ are points of openness along the journey, in contrast to the containment of the lane.

The first lane exploration between the squares (figure 113 A) has a straight path between Douglas and Norfolk Streets. This path is only a link between two spaces; it suggests continual movement through and does not provide any sense of journey. The bend in the path between Brown and Douglas Streets slows the sense of movement through the space; revealing a series of spaces within the journey, but the spaces still suggest continuous movement. There needs to be destination points along the journey between the squares to ensure that the lanes are more than just a connection.

The second lane exploration between the squares (figure 113 B) works with the limited space to create pause points. The space created at the bend in the path between Brown and Douglas Streets becomes a secondary destination, providing a pause in the journey. The bend in the path between Douglas and Norfolk Streets needs to be further developed to ensure it also becomes a pause point; this could possibly be done through the configuration of the buildings.
The service areas of the block between Brown and Douglas Streets do not connect across the backs of the commercial premises, so the proposed pedestrian lane must pass through an existing building. The configuration of the buildings blocking the lane allow for a partial redevelopment affecting only one tenant, allowing most of the existing premises to remain undisturbed.

Early Settler Furniture occupies a series of three buildings that have been connected through openings between them. One of these buildings connects Brown Street to the rear car park of Video Ezy. This building will be separated and redeveloped as part of the project.

The existing building is only eleven metres wide providing a narrow space to create an activated lane. The activity on each side of the lane needs to be small, so a permanent market would be an ideal use because stalls can vary in size, providing diversity within the space and creating a lively environment.

Brown to Douglas Street Connection

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The existing building is only eleven metres wide providing a narrow space to create an activated lane. The activity on each side of the lane needs to be small, so a permanent market would be an ideal use because stalls can vary in size, providing diversity within the space and creating a lively environment.
The journey between Brown and Douglas Streets becomes a series of transitions and thresholds with varying degrees of openness and containment. The entry to a market space leads from a square in Brown Street (Figure 117 A), through the contained market space (Figure 117 B) exiting into a small space, open to the sky, then along a short alley (Figure 117 C) before opening out into another square at Douglas Street.

The architecture of the building is intended to express the connection between the streets through using the same identifiable form and texture at each end, enabling a person who has only glanced down the side streets off Ponsonby Road to realise that there is a rear lane connection and be encouraged to explore the space without apprehension. This initial design provides a spatial journey through transitions and across thresholds, but is not reinforcing the experience. The building is a modern floating form that is extruded from one street to the next, reducing the quality of the transition and thresholds because its pattern has a consistent rhythm that reinforces movement along the path.

Through adjusting the scale of the texture through the building (Figure 118) an attempt was made to change the rhythm of the space, creating locations that allow people to slow and rest in the space. Two of the patterns (Figure 118 A and C) did change the rhythm of the texture on the surface of the form, but the form still dominates the spaces. The form of the building needs to be broken up so it helps define the spaces, rather than dominate them. Also the mass has no relationship to, or respect for its neighbouring residential buildings.
The market space has a rapid sense of movement directly out of the other end that needs to be slowed to create a meandering environment. Creating a series of thresholds to divide the journey into sub-spaces slows down the sense of movement through the space. The insertion of wing walls (figure 119 A) accelerated the sense of movement because they emphasise the ceiling pattern and extruded form from one end to the other.Lintels linking the wing walls (figure 119 D) break the ceiling pattern and extruded form, but the openings in the walls still draw movement through the building. The change of opening shape (figure 119 B and C) does nothing to eliminate the problem.

Through offsetting the openings the rush through the building is slowed, allowing movement through while being able to pause within the spaces. Articulating the detailing of the opening (figure 120) accentuates the threshold. This could be developed using the tectonics of the structure in a more sophisticated way to further express the opening. Expressing the surround of the opening reinforces the threshold; whereas an opening simply cut in a wall frames what is beyond accentuating the next space, detracting from the immediate surroundings.

The journey through the market should be one of discovery; a space should be experienced without being detracted from by views of the next. The threshold between must separate as well as connect.
Form and Mass Rescaling

Drawing from the neighbouring residential buildings form and scale; the mass is articulated in a series of interconnected roofs on masses of various sizes. The initial form (figure 121) is an eclectic jumble with no cohesion or hierarchy, the mass of the building floats above the ground.

Further development of this concept (figure 122) focused on creating a hierarchy of roofs and masses that emphasised areas of the building while articulating a series of spaces around the building. The form became grounded through the hierarchy of roofs cascading down in mass and height to the ground.
Examining the existing environment at the rear of the colonial buildings the configuration of parapets and detailing at the gutter provided inspiration for a reinterpretation of the relationship between the mass forms.

Many of the parapets project beyond the corner of the building, but not as a wing wall down to the ground. The wall wraps around the corner and the parapet projects past at the gutter level. The projection is stepped, or sloped, back to the wall, like a bracket supporting the parapet. This detail marks and contains the corner, stalling the movement of the eye as one scans the surroundings.

Articulation and Relationship of Elements
The parapet detailing of the existing colonial buildings is reinterpreted (figure 124); the scale enlarged to create a habitable space within the form. By changing the scale the element becomes separated from the mass of the building it is attached to; they become two objects that meet. The original element is a detail that articulates the edge of the building; providing an end to the gutter, visually securing it to the building. Adjusting the scale of an element, turning it into something it is not, weakens the understanding and comfort of the space.

This investigation zoomed in too close and took an element that provided a detail on the mass of the building and turned it into the mass. The detail was removed and became form with no detail.
Re-examining the existing environment at the rear of the colonial buildings at a larger scale; there is a collection of varying scaled masses cascading down the rear of the commercial buildings, creating a transition in scale, eroding the mass of the building into a series of smaller solids and voids.

The facades of the heritage commercial buildings facing Ponsonby Road do not hint at the environment that exists at the rear. At the rear of the buildings, lean-to extensions of various sizes cascade down between parapets that extend above the roofs and beyond the walls, forming corbel type projections, recesses and nooks. Little alleys are formed between the lean-tos where they extend from the mass of the building various distances.
Figure 126: Sketch analysis of lean-to form

Stripping the building back to its base masses (figure 126 A), the form cascades down and connects with the ground, anchoring the main mass and creating a series of intimate spaces.

By adding parapet detailing (figure 126 B) the connection to the ground is reinforced and the masses are held by the walls. The journey past is divided into smaller, more strongly defined stages, slowing the sense of movement along the mass. The parapet and wing walls begin to interfere with the form, creating a layering effect that slices the mass and space. This layering gives a sense of hiding what is around the corner.

With the parapets only extended at the gutter level (figure 126 C) the sense of hiding around the corner is reduced. The parapet becomes a detail on the mass that the eye can pause on, instead of an element that cuts through the mass.

Lifting the lean-to off the ground (figure 126 D and E) eliminates the cascading effect and reduces the scaling down of the main mass of the building. They become elements that hang from the main mass, instead of a series of masses nested alongside. The proportions of the hanging mass are too large in relation to the main mass, so become uncomfortable and need connection to the ground.
An exploration of the integration of new masses into the existing form of a building along the proposed pedestrian lane (Figure 127) shows some potential impacts on the present spatial environment and journey past the building.

The existing form (Figure 127 A) becomes secondary to masses that project forward and above (Figure 127 B). Masses of the same height pushed back from the existing line (Figure 127 C), creates a balance between the existing and new. They could be independent or connected inside, the recesses could form entry bays as seen in many old shop fronts (see page 74).

The simple flush front with a stepped up insertion (Figure 127 F) creates a long wall, but the stepping relieves the length and stages the journey along. The bridging and cantilevering masses (Figure 127 G and H) have a different language to the cascading lean-tos.
Figure 129: Sketch exploration of openings in mass.

Initial attempts to add windows and doors to the insertion mass produced objects closely related to the cantilever masses in figure 127 G and also the oversized parapet details (page 154). These objects do not sit well in, or enhance, the character of the existing environment. The mass needs to be integrated and contain detail, not be an object in the environment.
The use of large areas of glass with light folded skins (figure 130 A and B) creates another type of object in contrast to the surroundings.

The use of similar materials and openings in the skin of the form (figure 130 C) sits more harmoniously into the environment.

Figure 130: Detailed analysis of openings and form
The use of detail on the soffits and around the openings (Figure 131 and 132) provides pedestrian-scaled elements. The form of the public space defined by the buildings and the detailing on the buildings are of greatest importance at the pedestrian scale within the narrow lane.

Large sculptural forms have limited impact within the lane because they cannot be fully appreciated from the confinement of the lane. The mass of buildings and their formal relationship must be considered in relation to their impact on the pedestrian spatial experience of the lane.
An object defines a point of difference within the length of the road and a point of arrival at the connection of Richmond Road and Picton Street to Ponsonby Road.

The initial planting configuration across Douglas Street along the lane is replaced by a scaled down version of the object, located at the entry and exits of the pedestrian lanes within all the side streets. These points of difference within the environment mark a path that has the potential to be recognised by someone walking along Ponsonby Road. Through seeing these common objects down the side streets there is the potential for an individual to identify the connection between them and be drawn into the space to discover an alternative journey along the pedestrian lane.
The spatial experience of the pedestrian lane is a series of varying levels of containment and openness, shadow and light, separation from and connection to Ponsonby Road.
Journey of Spatial Change

The approach to the lane, heading north along Ponsonby Road, at Richmond Road is framed by two objects, the main Ponsonby Road point of difference on the corner and a secondary building that sits in the public space beside Richmond Road. These objects frame the access, defining a space that takes one from the openness of Ponsonby Road to the containment of the arcade. The arcade expands in the middle, creating a spatial pause point in the journey. The arcade exits into the open space of a pedestrian priority square in Brown Street. A line of trees reaches into Ponsonby Road and the buildings on the other side define the end of the square, creating a spatial overlap and a strong connection between spaces. The laneway continues into a series of fully contained spaces, the boundary of the path defined by market stalls on each side. The market releases into a pause point, a small open space flooded with natural light, before narrowing into a short lane that expands into the Douglas Street pedestrian priority square. Because of the narrowness of Douglas Street the length of the space is contained by a row of trees along Ponsonby Road to define the volume and proportions. The space tapers into the next lane, with a bridged section that opens into a pause point before continuing along a narrow lane that releases into the pedestrian priority square in Norfolk Street, with a similar configuration to the Brown Street square.
Planting Impact on Space

The planting reconfiguration has altered the spatial experience of both the vehicle and pedestrian journeys along Ponsonby Road by defining more vivid spatial changes.

The reinforcement of the linear journey along Ponsonby Road, by the trees bridging the gaps between buildings, has been interrupted through extending a structured line of trees from the street space into the road space at Norfolk and Brown Streets. The extension of trees narrows the spatial width of the road forming a threshold in the journey along Ponsonby Road. The threshold helps to slow vehicle traffic through the spatial change defined by the extension of trees in contrast to the built environment and also marks the location of the pedestrian priority squares. It also forms a gateway in the pedestrian journey as the line of trees must be passed through in the journey along Ponsonby Road.

The line of trees across Douglas Street, along Ponsonby Road, forms a threshold in the vehicle journey. Pedestrians cannot avoid interacting with the street square as they move past the line of trees that define the edge of the space. The sense of entering the space is stronger than in Norfolk and Brown Streets because of the closeness of the defining boundary and the asymmetrical threshold between the corner of the building and the end of the line of trees.

Figure 138: Plan of planting configuration

Figure 139: View od insertion from Norfolk Street and Brown St

Richmond Rd
Norfolk St
Douglas St
Brown St
Ponsonby Road
Anglesea St
Dense to Low Density Boundary

The building forms a transition in building scale from twelve and a half metre high commercial structures to single level residential villas. The new insertion must acknowledge the scale of the villas and have as small an impact on people’s living environment as possible. The building must act as a transition in the change of scale between the villas and commercial buildings.

The mixed-use built boundary forms a dense edge against the low density of individual residential dwellings. The dominance of the built mass is reduced by its variations in plan and height; but the height of the dense, mixed-use buildings are pushed close to the boundary between densities because of the limited space within the zone (figures 141 and 142). To achieve a good transition of height within the dense mixed-use environment requires the boundary of the zone to be moved one or two properties into the residential area (figures 140 and 143).
This is a trade-off between the varying spatial experience along Ponsonby Road and the shortening of the residential street. The spatial qualities defined by the varying densities identified in the journey along Ponsonby Road are part of what defines the environment, so to increase the density along the length of the road would be detrimental to its character. The individual buildings that define the low density areas along Ponsonby Road have as much historic value as the first one or two houses in the side streets and are more visible to the public.

An insertion in the middle of the street would impact on the environment. Whereas shortening the side street residential zone does not affect the environment of the street.

This would allow greater densification of the area and a suitable transition between the mixed-use and residential zones, while maintaining the spatial and historical environments of the area.
The Southern Approach

The view of the point of difference within the road and the two objects beyond suggests the possibility of access between without the need for much exploration. The eye is quickly drawn past the activity of the environment of the road to what is beyond (figure 144).

With only one object visible beyond the main point of difference, the lane connection becomes less obvious at first glance. But this configuration allows for a greater sense of discovery, through the revealing of the objects down each side street from Ponsonby Road and the piecing together in the mind of an alternative journey (figure 145).

The line of trees extending into the road has a more comfortable relationship to the built environment. The configuration has a greater sense of connection and journey around the corner, rather than over the building to the space beyond.

The higher built boundary creates greater containment of the street space, reducing the chaos of the environment and allowing a revealing of space and elements.
The object marks the entry to the pedestrian lane, but the forms of the buildings that define the path to the entry also need to reinforce a connection between Ponsonby Road and the lane.

The flat roofs create a series of individual objects defined only by scale. Movement through the space is sudden, from one block to another; whereas the sloping roofs lead the eye in a direction towards, or away from, an object or into a space (Figure 146 A).

The roof sloping up towards the entry makes the path width appear narrower and pushes the object beyond away, making the journey appear longer and less inviting. It has a sense of needing to go down an alley behind the building to get there (Figure 146 B).

The roofs each side of the path slope inwards, leading the eye into the space. The small flat area at the base of the roof slope stalls the eye and pauses on the object beyond before moving into the access space. The mass of the wall facing the street acts as a barrier, encouraging movement into the pedestrian lane rather than along the street (Figure 146 C).


Windows in the Mass Forms

Where entire masses are glazed (pop-out form figure 148 B) or entire walls are glazed (fig148 C), the building acquires a sculptural quality that emphasizes its form. The relationship between inside and out is limited; the boundary is either open or closed. The connection between inside and outside is not through the skin, but under or around a form. These configurations can be used to great effect, but they increase the distance of physical connection between inside and outside.

When openings become more sculptural and integrated in proportion and scale to the mass, the window becomes an object in itself, inserted in the mass (pop-out form figure 149 C), or the opening defines the form (figure 148 C). These types of windows articulate the form of the window and the mass, but do not provide the same sense of connection between inside and outside that an opening in a wall provides.

A plain opening in a wall penetrates the skin of a mass, but can still have a sculptural quality about it depending on its proportions in relation to the mass (figure 149 A). It is only when detail is added to the window that a strong sense of connection between inside and out is created. A border enhances the opening, creating a connection that holds the opening in the skin of the mass.

The mass forms work well at a vehicle scale, but the lane needs the windows in the skin of the masses to provide connection at a pedestrian scale.
The pause point in the arcade between Richmond Road and Brown Street expands the spatial experience of the path in height, as well as width, the space being full of natural light from the glazed roof (figure 150). Through the short, contained space is a glimpse of the market entry across the Brown Street square.

The Brown Street square (figure 151) provides a green environment, with the rise of trees reaching deep into the space and the end, to the residential area, which is contained by dense planting. The points of difference over the lane entries create a connection across the square, clearly identifying the path of the lane through the space.
The Douglas Street square has a built environment, with trees containing each end (Figure 152). The points of difference provide structured greenery within the space. The floating point of difference (Figure 152 A) sits uncomfortably within the space, disconnected from the environment. Taking the form to the ground (Figure 152 B) integrates the object into the environment, more strongly containing the square space and creating a glimpse of the street trees beyond. Placing the object on an open base (Figure 152 C) allows public habitation of the space and maintains the containment of the square space, but the object needs greater connection to the ground.

The entry to the lane from Douglas to Norfolk Street (Figure 153) is a recess in the boundary of the square. The object sits against the wall within the recess and beyond an opening through to a space flooded with sunlight, leading one through the shady recess. As with the object in the square, the object in the recess needs to be grounded.
From the Norfolk Street square looking along the lane towards Douglas Street (figure 154) the space appears wider, with the two-three level buildings set back and the single level lean-to structures stepping forward to define the edge of the path. The object sits in the middle of the space, but again needs to be grounded so it does not float in space with no relationship to its surroundings.

Figure 154: Lane entry, Norfolk to Douglas Street
From Public to Private

The passive activation of the lane is increased by premises on the upper floors having individual access, providing multiple door thresholds to the public space.

Individual access requires individual vertical circulation that could potentially reduce usable floor area. By using a double helix configuration the area used by two stairs can be reduced to one. This also enhances the circulation experience within the building, using the same ideas of containment and openness, shadow and light used in the pedestrian lane to define transitions and thresholds within the building.

The confinement on entering the building opens into the first floor home office, or living space, with a vertical timber screen that filters light into the stair well and reveals the space as one ascends the stairs. The flight to the second floor is within a contained space with light coming from the head of the stair, creating an environment that a visitor would enter with hesitation of the unknown, creating separation between the office and private dwelling space above.
SUMMARY

The intention was to create a pedestrian scaled sense of place and connection within a vehicle dominated urban environment. This was achieved through the pedestrian priority street squares, which connected the Ponsonby Road commercial activity with the residential area and the pedestrian lane. The squares provide pedestrian scaled places, at regular intervals along Ponsonby Road, breaking the existing linear, mono-cultural, vehicle driven environment.

The size of the block contributes to the success of the design, allowing regular connection to the surrounding environment and spatial release from the containment of the lane.

The weakness lies in the lack of pedestrian connection across Ponsonby Road, the apparent unbreakable flow of vehicle movement divides the environment.

The point of difference should be more than an object in the urban environment, it should be a focal point of the community. Today’s society does not have the same sense of community or religious beliefs to bring them together at the town hall or church, which historically have formed the point of difference. The question remains, what is the activity that brings a community together in today’s society that can form the architectural focal point of the urban environment?

It is the creation of journeys, the transition between spaces and the revealing of objects within the environment, which generates a memorable sense of place.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


This initial site selection and design was discarded because it became an environment within itself, inserted into Ponsonby. The building was inward looking, focused on a court yard, with limited connections to the immediate surroundings and no relationship to the wider community.

Site Selection

The bend in Ponsonby Road at the intersection of Richmond Road is a focal point of the road and a major connection to the greater area. It represents a transition and threshold in the journey along the road as well as a major connection to the greater area.

It provides the opportunity for movement into and through the site, not just past the site.

It represents a transition point along the length of the road, forming an end and focal point of the street space between Williamson and Richmond Roads.

The perimeter of the site encounters varied urban conditions in relation to the scale of buildings and streets. This provides the opportunity to explore and develop a variety of transitions and thresholds in the surrounding streets, between the street and site as well as within the various activities of the building.
Site Analysis

Each boundary of the site has a different spatial environment. The relationship of the surrounding buildings to the site is varied on and along each boundary.

The northern boundary along Brown Street is lined with low level residential buildings. With single level commercial buildings at the Ponsonby Road end, but this could change in the future as the building does not have any historical value.

The eastern boundary is Ponsonby Road in an area of dense commercial activity at the centre of one of the two commercial hubs.

The southern boundary fronts Richmond Road. The Ponsonby Road corner looks along the road towards K Road and at a historic brick building on the corner. Along Richmond Road behind the commercial building the residential bay villas sit elevated above the road by the contour of the land.

The western boundary faces Brown reserve, an eighty meter wide landscaped area with a walkway through providing a pedestrian link between Richmond Road and Brown Street, separating the residential activity from the site.

The site provides the opportunity to create a pedestrian environment that is separated from vehicle traffic while still having a strong connection to Ponsonby Road.

This design is trying to take the character of an Italian Piazza and insert it into an environment of a different character. The Ponsonby area is considered desirable as it is, so to change the character of the place is detrimental to the area, the design needs to enhance the existing character. I was trying to fit a square peg in a round hole.
The particular chaos of the road is part of its unique character; this needs to be added to, not removed. The proposal for this site does provide the opportunity for a public courtyard and pedestrian lane that are connected to the environment of Ponsonby Road, but the concept does not fit with the existing character of the area. This design could be inserted into any urban environment as an independent object creating its own contained spaces, like a shopping mall, that do not relate to their surroundings.

The transition between Ponsonby Road and the courtyard space does not provide a journey of discovery that fits with the character of the area. The visual connection along the road into the courtyard does not provide a strong enough relationship to the area to fulfill the aims of the brief. The courtyard forms the heart of this proposal but has no connection to the surrounding residential community. The only transitions are within the boundary of the site and have insufficient interaction with the surrounding community.

Through exploring the area in more depth and by approaching it from different perspectives I believe the character of the area is in its diversity of buildings and activity. There is no other building on Ponsonby Road that provides for the types of occupation that the space created by this building does. To remove the building would reduce the diversity of the area impacting detrimentally on its character. Any removal or additions to the area should not be at the expense of a unique element within the existing environment.
APPENDIX B– Through Building Thresholds

The bulk of the commercial premises in the Ponsonby area front onto Ponsonby Road creating a linear journey that is more car orientated than pedestrian. "A strip does not have the characteristics which pedestrian areas need." Christopher Alexander says: "To be convenient for traffic, and convenient for people walking, and connected to the fabric of the surrounding town, the shops must be arranged along a street, itself pedestrian, but opening off a major traffic artery, perhaps two, with parking behind, or underneath, to keep the cars from isolating the shops from the surrounding areas."

This configuration does not fit into the existing environment of Ponsonby's commercial area that has expanded in a car orientated fashion. Ponsonby Road is a major traffic artery that would be difficult to redirect, allowing it to become a pedestrian space.

Exploration of transition between spaces on each side of building

The transition explorations use the common parameters of a three metre wide opening in a twelve metre high and eleven metre deep building to ensure the effects of the changes could be more clearly analysed.

The equal proportions of height to width in transition A create a tight tunnel space. The height at double the width reduces the tightness of the space, but it still has a tunnel quality. The length of transition A would need to be reduced to make it a comfortable transition space. Transition A would need to be very short; or only a threshold opening through a wall directly into a larger space.

With a gap created between two buildings, transition C, the space becomes narrower. The walls are compressing the space; by increasing the width to height ratio to one to two the uncomfortable compression of the space disappears.

Transition D places a series of bridges in the space of transition C. The bridges reduce the compression of the walls by varying the height of the space dividing it into a series of transitions and thresholds.

Transitions E, F and G all create tight tunnel spaces as in transition A, but the threshold between the street space and the transition space are more successful. The threshold of transition A is poorly defined in the mass of the building and could more easily be ignored when walking along the street than the thresholds of transitions E, F and G. The thresholds of transitions F and G are the most successful at identifying the transition space within the mass of the building.

The projection above the top of the building mass in transition F clearly identifies a point of difference and the setback indicates the turning of a corner into a space or through an opening; this configuration would be more effective from a distance, across the road or from a car, than walking beside the building. The threshold of transition G masks the tight space by transitioning from a width to height ratio of one to two on the face of the building to one to one over a distance of two metres. Pedestrians are lead into the space by the chamfered corners. The softening of the transition across the threshold makes this more successful in leading pedestrians into the space.
APPENDIX C– Building Precedent

The Willis Street Village, Wellington, 1979

Willis Street Village is designed around the idea of a village square. It is unfortunately more of a cul-de-sac than a square, with the main access off Willis Street and a small passageway to a car park at the side. The main access is of a generous size and provides a welcoming entry, but the square becomes a destination environment so does not have the benefit of people casually passing through and increasing the activation of the space.

Squares are a gathering point within the community, a place that is passed through on a journey perhaps to visit a friend who lives on the other side, they should never be a destination only.
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