Cockatoo: DÉrive as Program
Matias Echanove

Cockatoo is an ancient shipyard, genesis of all travels, point of departure to possible worlds; floating island or bateau ivre drifting away. Embarking and disembarking, the multitude determines haphazardly its direction. Utopia is the risky destination of this magnificent journey.

Cockatoo is a space of contradiction where incompatible worlds meet: backpackers, tourists, hipsters, friends, families, picnickers, dog keepers, nudists, hippies, astrologists, naturalists, researchers, architects, conservationists, experimentalists, individualists, collectivists... The juxtaposition of different worlds creates hybrid forms. In this sense, Cockatoo is a laboratory and a heaven for creators. This estranged island is every traveller’s home.

Time also collapses onto itself in Cockatoo. Old industrial machines are reinvented as futuristic structures. The future is divined from the rocks and projected onto the cliffs. But the time that predominates over all others is the present moment. Cockatoo is a natural space for temporary events such as festivals, circuses and parties.

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Australia is now a symbol of hope and freedom for migrant populations, and Cockatoo embodies the dreams of Sydney’s bohemians. From the vast world to Sydney, Sydney to Cockatoo, and Cockatoo back to the world, this small island has enormous liberating potential, being at the same time in the city and altogether elsewhere.

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J’ai vu des archipels sidéraux ! et des îles
Dont les cieux délirants sont ouverts au vogueur :
- Est-ce en ces nuits sans fond que tu dors et t’exiles,
Million d’oiseaux d’or, ô future vigueur ? -

Arthur Rimbaud
Cockatoo can only be accessed by sea. The waters around it give it a special autonomy from Sydney. At the same time in and out, it is a space of compensation where the city’s fantasies can be lived up. Cockatoo escapes the mainstream. It is a disconnected location for people to free their crazy geniuses. Cockatoo is far out.

This heterotopian island is tremendously healthy for the city. It is the valve through which the pressure of everyday-life can be released and the fertile ground from which new forms can emerge. What appears to be a disorganized playground actually functions as social stabilizer and economic incubator.

Gathering together a heterogeneous mix of people in one space and time generates cross-encounters and horizontal linkages. Cockatoo is a rare space for interaction across the whole social spectrum at a time when many cities are suffering from privatization, ghettoization, and sectarianism. Cockatoo is the exact opposite of a gated community since its purpose is to be open to all. Cockatoo is an island and an ocean.

On Cockatoo people all share the same exceptional condition. Together elsewhere they are no strangers to each other. As in the psychedelic TV-series, The Prisoner, in which fellow inmates of the prison-island greet each other with the phrase “Be seeing you,” reminding each other constantly of their shared condition, visitors on Cockatoo are ‘all in the same boat’. The same samba boat.

Like the Carnival, Cockatoo simultaneous includes all segments of society and excludes social conventions and expectations, liberating individuals from the stress to conform and fit in. Spaces of decompression allow a temporary dissolution of social boundaries; so the white schoolboy can hear stories from an aboriginal grandmother, the business man can get drunk with a punk girl, and the Japanese surfer can practice English with a Lebanese drag queen. The experience of diversity is an important act of socialization and the key to the world.

Cockatoo is a school of thought for soul adventurers, a spirit guiding wanderers to otherness, towards the discovery of lost multiverses. Cockatoo spreads its dreams back to the world, nurturing new grounds and generating reality. Zion or Babylon, Cockatoo belongs to all.

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BILOELA DESIGN COMPETITION COCKATOO ISLAND SYDNEY AUSTRALIA

A competition designed and promoted by the students of Landscape Architecture with the School of Landscape Architecture at the University of New South Wales, in conjunction with THE BIG SKY: LANDSCAPE ON THE PACIFIC EDGE conference September 27 to 30 1995, Graphic design, layout and content by Christopher Welsh and Sack Coles with kind help from Marian Macken, Leigh Treviss and Catherine Dung. We wish to thank The School of Landscape Architecture and The Faculty of the Built Environment for their continued support; Philip Cox Richardson Taylor and Partners Pty Ltd and the Central Mapping Authority for supplying some of the images; The Student Guild and The College of Fine Arts for the use of their computers and the financial assistance from the following sponsors:

Please send entries and direct any enquiries regarding this competition or the conference to:

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FIGURE 1A: BACK OF BILOELA COMPETITION BRIEF