Sixty years ago Mircea Eliade claimed that the European rediscovery of the cognitive value of the symbol was paving the way towards a deeper understanding of non-European values. The inherently polysemous nature of symbols facilitated the identification of crosscultural interests and commonalities that eluded a narrowly exercised communicative reason. In this seminar I reflect on the implications of these claims for crosscultural placemaking in contemporary Australia. The proposition is that the recognition of the role symbolic economies play in creating senses of place offers a practical tool for resisting the generally dispiriting and destructive techniques of urban renewal associated with conventional planning authority. Symbolic forms, especially when embedded in mythopoetic accounts of coming into being at that place, describe traditions in their generative aspect (under the aegis of change). As templates for analogous inventions they make possible the emergence of ‘meeting places’ whose governance is inscribed in their performativity.

Biography

Paul Carter is a writer and artist, who is currently a Visiting Fellow at the HRC, ANU. His recent publications include a book (Meeting Place: the human encounter and the challenge of coexistence, University of Minnesota Press, 2013) and a book of poems (Ecstacies and Elegies, University of Western Australia Publishing, 2013). He is currently engaged on the design and programming of a new civic project in Perth (Yagan Square). He is Professor of Design (Urbanism), RMIT University.

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