Abstract
The design of the urban environment is a challenging and complex exercise. The way people experience and use public open spaces is a valuable source of information for planning our cities. Indeed, understanding how these urban spaces are used and perceived by their occupants can provide a platform for learning and testing their adequacy and success. Based on research conducted in downtown Auckland – at the Chancery Square project – this paper investigates the way urban compositions influence our perceptions of space, and the effects spatial elements have psychologically on their occupants. The paper identifies urban aspects that stimulate the use and perception of such open spaces; in particular, enclosure, the outdoor room, datum lines, here and there, compression, release, deflection of sightlines and occupied territory.

Introduction
"A town is a large enough artefact to embrace a host of opposites," proposes Peter F. Smith in his book The Dynamics of Urbanism. He continues, "It should be a place of security and peace as well as exciting teleological, exploratory and problem-solving drives."1

Constructed over twenty years ago, Chancery Square, in and of itself, is arguably unremarkable compared to its counterparts in the perpetually developing city of Auckland. Yet it is the unpresumptuous nature of the square that diversifies the landscape, enabling a complex environment to eventuate.

In the 1840s, the narrow alleyways of the Chancery Square area were not a welcome addition to Auckland city's fabric, as the close proximity of the buildings enabled an environment afflicted with overcrowding and prostitution.2 Auckland's street pattern, although originally designed in concentric rings, in reality resulted in a more traditional orthogonal grid pattern as it would allow less complications when subdividing.3 In doing so, during the first land sales in April 1841, the less desired land of Chancery Street was seized up by speculators for the sole purpose of subdividing into lots as little as 3m wide4 while the land on the main streets of Shortland...
Crescent (now Street) and Queen Street permitted better living conditions. Presently, Chancery Square remains set back far enough from the main streets that its narrow paths do not result in crowding and allows for the square to continue to benefit the surrounding environment.

Chancery Square boasts urban aspects unlike those featured in the surrounding built environment; aspects such as enclosure and the idea of ‘the outdoor room,’ as well as varying datum lines, a deflection of sightlines, and an interplay between compression and release. The combination of these architectural features amalgamates into a unique set of characteristics that juxtapose the urban attributes of its surroundings and thus contribute to a diverse architectural environment within downtown Auckland.

Based on studies by Smith, Cullen and Del Rio, this paper investigates and discusses the spatial qualities of this peculiar urban environment. Through the production of serial vision drawings – as part of an observer-participant experience exercise – its urban aspects are presented and analysed, illustrating the diverse morphology generated by the Chancery Square project.

**Enclosure and the ‘Outdoor Room’**

Chancery Square resides within Auckland City between two spaces clear of a built environment; Albert Park inhabits the rise to the southeast of Chancery Square while Freyberg Place occupies the opening to the west. Chancery Square links the two spaces, instigating a relationship between the exposure of the two spaces void of buildings and the enclosure of the square itself.

Hand in hand with the experience of an exposed place is the subjection to the noise and speed of other inhabitants. It may be observed that Chancery Square, alternatively, provides a haven from the exposure of the two expanses, as upon entering the square the user is funnelled through a closed vista between two turrets (Figure 1). The function of the closed vista both establishes a clear entrance into the square and, more actively, controls the path of the occupants so that the movement within the square appears more orderly and therefore facilitates an environment that is more peaceful than the disorder outside the enclosure of the square.

Gordon Cullen, in his book *The Concise Townscape*, raises a corollary to that of enclosure that establishes the term ‘outdoor room,’5 which illustrates the nature of Chancery Square. Due to the proximity of the buildings that enclose the square, the storefronts appear as interior walls and fabricate an area that is utilised in a manner reminiscent of that of an indoor room. Cullen states that “the people who [colonise the outdoors] will attempt to humanise the landscape in just the same way they do for the interiors.”6

Both the comparative enclosure and humanisation of an ‘outdoor room’ go to prove that Chancery Square diversifies its urban environment by providing intimacy and security that are able to balance the exposure of its surroundings. Enclosure is not without its downfalls, however, as an enclosed space has only limited space and thus a maximum occupation. Hence, if Chancery Square existed closer to the populated streets of Auckland, such as Queen Street, the encompassing shop faces would diminish the effect of the square and turn it into a space likely to feel more claustrophobic and unable to fulfil its function. In this regard, Chancery Square is not designed to support a mass of occupants and has thus failed at becoming a noteworthy location with the ability to draw occupants in.

**Datum Lines**

The topographical context of Chancery Square continues to enhance the sense of security and intimacy felt within the square through its varying datum lines. Upon entering the square from Freyberg Place, the occupant is yet to be subjected to a change in ground level that would have any effect on how they would position themselves on a vertical axis. Continuing further into the square, however, the steps towards Albert Park become visually apparent,

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6. Ibid.
Here and There, Compression and Release

The enclosed nature of Chancery Square designates that anywhere outside the perimeter of the square is immediately a different space, unrelated to the confines of the square. As we postulate both a 'here' in Chancery Square and a 'there' beyond its borders, it becomes clear that the urban landscape is benefited by the drama of the manipulation of these two spatial concepts (Figure 3).

Inside of the square, a pressure forms that is generated by the close proximity of the buildings enveloping the square. Gordon Cullen and Vicente del Rio have contrasting ideas on the effect of the space. Cullen’s take is that the narrowness between buildings would have a “definite effect on the pedestrian inducing a sense of unaccustomed constriction and pressure,” yet del Rio, in his article “Urbanity, the Flâneur, and the Visual Qualities of Urban Design: A Walk in Lisbon, Portugal,” would argue that it would produce a psychological effect of comfort due to the instinctively defensive human mind. This paper argues that the narrowness of the laneway results in a combination of both ideas: an unaccustomed constriction that may have the psychological effect of comfort.

The set of steps towards Albert Park acts as a division between the ‘here’ of Chancery Square and the ‘there’ of Albert Park. It establishes an impending exit that can be verified from within the square without permitting for the hereness’ of the space to leak away into the distance.

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7. Cullen, The Concise Townscape, 177.
8. Ibid, 175.
9. Ibid, 45.
As the view is obscured by the set of steps, emerging from Chancery Square exhibits a stronger sense of revelation and release, all the while keeping the sanctity of the hereness within the square. It is only once the rise has been traversed that the concealed view is revealed in its fullness. The square that you emerge from and the place beyond into which you emerge each have a unique ambience that transforms between the two spaces: one of compressive ambience and a second ambience that emanates release.

This sense of release is only amplified by the stark juxtaposition between the heavy use of man-made materials within the square and the thick vegetation of the park. The use of manufactured materials is commonplace in the urban environment, but does allow the greenery and vegetation of the park to provide an experience that confronts you with the unexpected, therefore stimulating the senses while diversifying the urban landscape.

**Deflection of Sightlines**

In a typically orthogonal built environment, Chancery Square not only differentiates from the grid-like fashion of the surrounding buildings by creating laneways that do not follow the established axis of the city but also introduces unprecedented curvature into its plan. In his article, Vicente del Rio asserts that this kind of “Visual stimulation caused by unpredictable, complex, and surprising urban morphologies is more engaging, aesthetically pleasing, and essential for urbanity.”

Breaking away from the orthogonal building shape benefits Chancery Square not only by creating stimulation and a more engaging experience but also by driving the movement of its occupants. The curvature of the path generates a deflection of sightlines which in turn produces a sense of anticipation as the path must, therefore, be sought after.

In Auckland’s typical urban landscape, buildings are positioned at right angles to the main axis of the city due to the demand for ease in building and subdivision of the land in the 1840s; this traditional grid can still be seen in Auckland’s urban fabric today. The effect that this pattern has begins to create enclosed spaces that are visually complete. As a contrast, Chancery Square diverges from

the main Auckland axis (Figure 4). The terminal building is positioned at an angle that implies a space that is present yet unseen. Spatial qualities such as these produce a response that can stimulate the eyes and the mind of the viewer, which can consequently drive movement and “motivate exploration,” which Peter F. Smith maintains in his book *The Dynamics of Urbanism* to be an indicator of a “creative townscape”:

**Creative townscape, that is, environment which stimulates the mind by extending its schema of urban events, generating images and motivating exploration, is not simply a matter of imaginative architecture. It is something much more subtle and complex, involving deployment of spaces, contours, solids and voids, the building-up of a host of stimulating tensions.**

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boast an environment that is perpetually occupied, a more
dynamic inhabitation occurs where a periodic occupation is
woven into the nightly routine of the square. Chancery
Square sees an increase in occupation during the evenings,
when the bars and restaurants open for the night, drawing
in a number of patrons and generating an atmosphere that
Freyberg Place and Albert Park lack.

Consequently, even during the day, when Chancery Square
returns to a quiet, intimate space, the restaurant chairs and
tables populate the laneways as what Gordon Cullen terms
“furniture of possession.”

In this way Chancery Square is always filled with potential
occupation. Regardless of this, until night falls, potential
occupation is all Chancery Square can claim.

Conclusion
Chancery Square demonstrates the way urban compositions
influence our perceptions of space and the effects these
urban aspects may have psychologically on their occupants.
It is a meaningful location due to its range of fundamental
visual urban design qualities that permit engagement and
interest, and are beneficial to downtown Auckland.

In piquing interest through engaging urban qualities,
Chancery Square facilitates an environment that is both
memorable and noteworthy, hidden amongst the relative
monotony of its surroundings. As day turns to night, the
humble cobblestone laneways evolve into a charming
atmospheric courtyard separate from the clamour of the
busier neighbouring streets, thus producing a thriving
square that acts as an intimate location for occupants to
connect and relax.

In an increasingly impersonal city, it can be proposed that
Chancery Square provides a space that incites feelings
of comfort, protection and control of our surroundings.
A procession through the square becomes a journey of
experiencing a sequence of exposures and, thus, enclosures;
of heres and thers; of constraints and releases. A sequence
that stimulates the occupant and establishes a complex
architectural environment unique to Chancery Square.

Occupied Territory
As much as Chancery Square generates interest and
diversifies the architectural landscape of downtown
Auckland, it contends with Freyberg Place and Albert
Park for static occupation. Causes of possession in an
environment stem mainly from the human need for shade,
safety and amenities, all of which Chancery Square
successfully provides. But Chancery Square lacks,
however, is the public seating and aesthetics that make
static occupation enjoyable. During the day, Chancery
Square serves mainly as a convenient linkage between
destinations, as Freyberg Place boasts more public seating
and a vantage point that creates a more appealing view
than that which Chancery Square provides.

Chancery Square does deliver a variety of stores that prevent
it from becoming a purely transitional space, yet as the stores
are situated within the buildings, the perceived occupation
of the square is less than the reality. This is ultimately the
undoing of Chancery Square. People are drawn to places
with a human presence and, without this, Chancery Square
loses its appeal due to the lack of character.

In saying this, while Chancery Square cannot claim to

15. Ibid.
Authors

Alyssa Haley

Alyssa Haley is a student in the Bachelor of Architectural Studies programme at Unitec New Zealand. As part of the programme she has been provided ample opportunity to learn from and study the architecture of her local community with a more critical eye. She hopes to further her education in architecture by commencing her Master of Architecture (Professional) in 2021.

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6320-4391

Dr Cesar Wagner

Dr Cesar Wagner is an architect and urbanist, with an MA in Housing and Urbanism from the Architectural Association School of Architecture, London, and a PhD in Urban and Regional Planning from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. He lectures on urban design at the School of Architecture, Unitec New Zealand, and researches and writes on issues of sustainability in urban development and housing policies.

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7212-916X

Bibliography


