The Two Towers

Pōkarekare ana ngā wai o Waihorotiu i Tāmaki Makaurau

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Master of Architecture (Professional)
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School of Future Environments
Auckland University of Technology

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Abstract

The Two Towers is an architectural research project that investigates the symbolic link between Auckland's prominent vertical icon, the Sky Tower, and the hidden horizontal memory of the Waihorotiu Stream beneath the city, aiming to turn this imbalance into a new urban harmony. The project is set in a period after the COVID-19 pandemic, when Auckland's central city has revealed previously overlooked issues, including delayed development, vacant storefronts, and social exhaustion. Once known as "The City of Sails," it is now a city marked by stillness, with the Sky Tower towering over the Waihorotiu Stream. This skyline symbolises the divide between surface appearances and the city's deeper realities, reflecting both ambition and tiredness.

Architecture is positioned within the project not as a form of visual restoration but as a practice of listening and reconciliation. The project asks: Can architecture restore not only the city's image but also the lost flow, memories, and relationships beneath the city? To answer this question, the project employs a number of methodologies, including mapping, section analysis, and design intervention, to reinterpret the Queen Street Valley as a vertical continuum, where the Sky Tower and the Waihorotiu Stream are two towers engaged in conversation, one visible and fatigued, and the other hidden and alive.

The theoretical frameworks employed by the project draw on concepts of immanence, flow, and wicked problems, suggesting that the regeneration of the city should be based on the acknowledgement of its wounds rather than their concealment. By framing drawing as evidence, rather than representation, the project develops an architectural response that is attentive to the city's silence. Ultimately, The Two Towers presents architecture as a vessel for resonance, a slow reflective action that connects the fractured layers of Auckland and awakens the flow that will be inherited by future generations.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements). This work did not employ generative artificial intelligence tools to create or produce content. Limited language-assistance tools were used only for grammar correction and expression refinement, without influencing the intellectual or design content of this submission.

Furthermore, this thesis has not been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or institution of higher learning.

Signed: 

Date: 25/02/2026

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Prologue

The City We Live

Figure 1 Central Auckland city view illustrating the context of population decline in inner suburbs. Source: Tim Marshall / Unsplash, used in Radio New Zealand, 30 May 2024.

As the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically changed our lives, Auckland was confronted with deep-seated issues that had persisted for decades. In the initial stages of the pandemic, the world appeared to stop, and the fragile calmness created by the lockdown bubble allowed us to see things from a new perspective. But when that bubble eventually burst, we were able to see Auckland's exhausted resilience more clearly.

In the early days, Auckland's Central Business District embodied the promise of city living, with domestic and international students, bustling cafes and bars, after-work get-togethers, and the general vitality of a culturally rich and diverse population. Today, the atmosphere feels very different.

Delays in completing major infrastructure projects are evident throughout the footpaths; the number of people sleeping on the streets is increasing, and the number of young adults leaving the region continues to grow. Empty buses are passing through the streets where many shopfronts are still closed, making it extremely difficult to recognise the City Centre as it once was (RNZ, 2024).

Figure 2 Looking south along Queen Street showing the corner of Customs Street (left), 1980s. ©Eric W Young, Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections 1021-0052.

Queen Street is no longer beating like the city's heart. Where vibrancy and urban romance once flowed, only tiredness and inconvenience remain, and the lively scenes that once defined Queen Street are now being replaced by a quiet mockery.

However, this transformation is more than a change in the street's visual appearance. The pandemic revealed long-standing cracks in Auckland and, at the same time, placed the city within the broader historical context of the many transformations humanity has undergone. From pre-colonial territorial arrangements to colonial urban planning, from industrial capitalism to the digital transformation of retail and commerce, each phase has produced a structural transformation in how the city is organised and lived. And it is in those times of structural change that the pace of architecture is most strongly felt. When the world speeds up, architecture stays slow, revealing a different rate of time.

Architecture typically develops at a slower pace than the changes occurring in society and the economy. The years it takes to develop and build a single building can paradoxically become a form of resistance in an accelerating world. That slowness, however, allows me to reflect on Auckland's sense of time. Even simple advances, such as the development of several train stations, can take more than a decade in Auckland. For those who live in the city, these delays are perceived more as a recurring delay in progress without any apparent resolution.

While Sydney's Opera House represents the singular global icon that defines Sydney's identity, Auckland's current ambitions are based on large-scale infrastructure projects that primarily occur out of view. While previous generations celebrated visible monuments that rose above the skyline, today's multi-billion-dollar transformations occur horizontally and are hidden. International comparative studies have recently ranked Auckland near the bottom of cities for pedestrian-friendliness, indicating a disconnection between large-scale investments and the daily experiences of urban residents (1News, 2025). Therefore, the contradiction is not in the absence of ambition, but in the shifting level of visibility associated with that ambition.

To many migrants, Auckland feels less like a destination and more like a backdrop, a city whose identity is developed through quiet negotiations, rather than bold ambitions. Discussions among migrant groups reveal that a common experience of living in Auckland is constant compromise, and that the city's infrastructure requires substantial patience without providing clear evidence of progress.

At times, Auckland appears suspended, neither progressing clearly nor static, and I realise that this perception reflects my position in the city. It is familiar enough to be called home, yet rarely vibrant enough to be the focal point of someone's life.

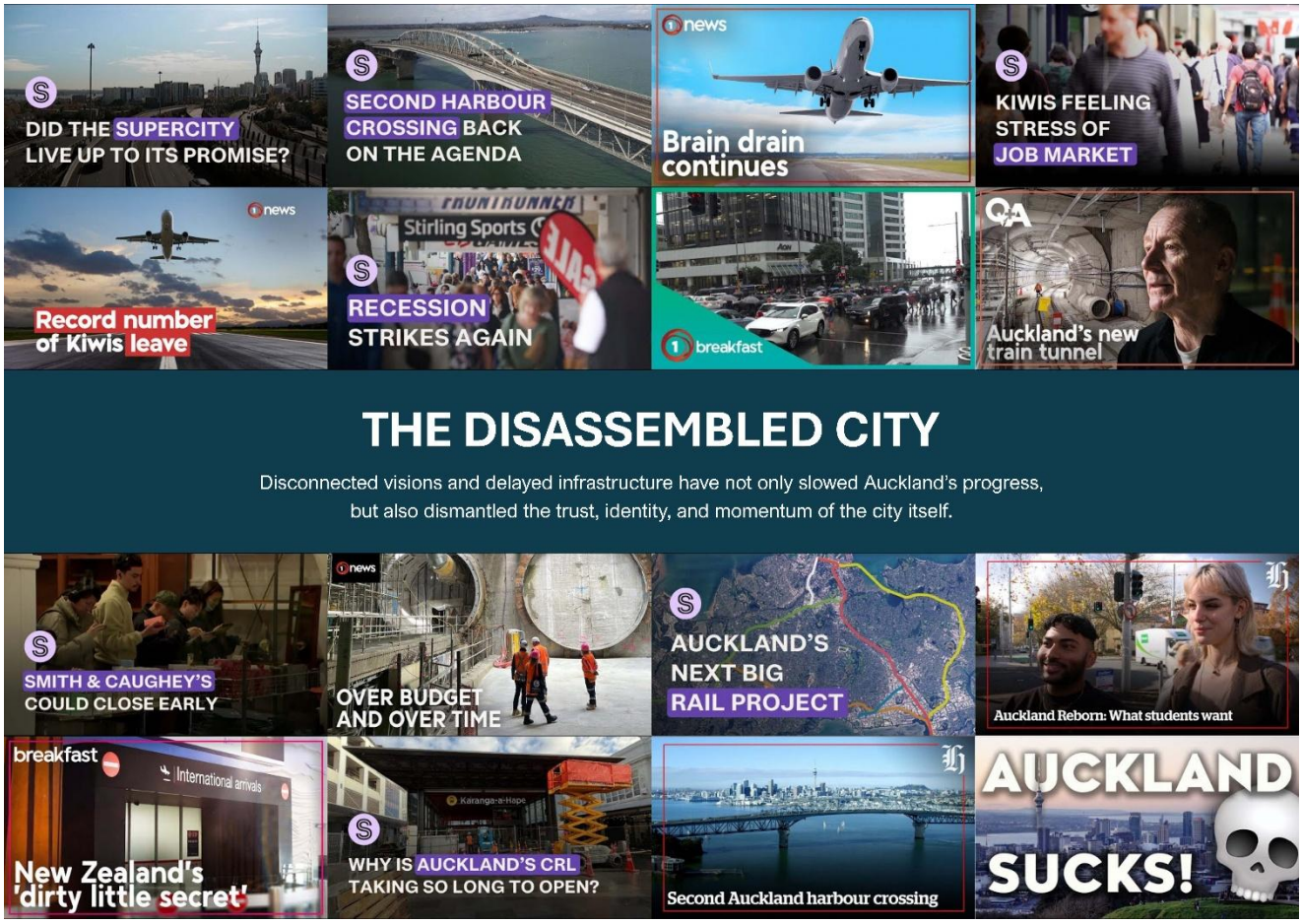


Figure 3 Seong, Jay. Communicating Wicked Problems, Interactive Poster Title Page 'Disassembled City', Semester 2 2025.

Under these conditions, I found myself living in Auckland but not really connected to it. The local tensions and politics felt remote and abstract, and I did not feel I was operating within their day-to-day realities. I moved through Auckland, like many other newcomers, as a temporary presence, operating in the background.

However, time passed differently here. Slowly, and almost without notice, I transitioned into roles as a worker who remained in the city, as a partner who committed to the city, and ultimately as a father to a child whose life would begin in the city.

Auckland was no longer merely a backdrop but had become an important component of what I would inherit and what I would assist in shaping and developing for the next generation. Recognising that, my perspective began to change. What was once a distant and impersonal landmark (the Sky Tower) now reflected hesitation and unrealised aspirations. An echo of an earlier era when height was seen as equivalent to progress.

Like many towers around the world, the Sky Tower serves as both a symbol of aspiration and a commentary on it. As Charles Jencks explains, iconic buildings typically serve as instruments of urban branding in the global competition for visibility (Jencks, 2005). However, such visibility does not necessarily correlate with a city's vitality. The Sky Tower's height signifies not only Auckland's ambitions, but also the scepticism that height alone can represent success.

From those lines, I begin to understand the dissonance that defines Auckland. The conflict between the visible above and the hidden below represents a larger modern phenomenon, the rapid convergence of the virtual and the real. As we momentarily pause during this rapid movement, we reflect on what has been lost and what remains vital. In that pause, I ask whether architecture can respond to these shifts at all, or whether its slowness always situates it outside the tempo of change.

After all, space is layered. A vessel of memories, a stage for the present, and a proposal for the future. Those layers intersect in a city, and Auckland is a city where they intersect. For decades, Auckland has struggled with numerous wicked problems: a stalled infrastructure due to car dependence, inequality resulting from speculative housing practices, and cultural tensions between Maori and Pakeha, between settler and immigrant, and the quiet, tired frustration of younger generations leaving.

The result is a city centre that has lost its vitality, marked by construction hoardings, vacant shops, and incomplete developments. The once-celebrated “City of Sails” now echoes as the “City of Fails” (RNZ, 2025).

However, even in that irony, I pursued to identify potential. These problems are not new; they are old fractures neglected for far too long. Their emergence is not merely a sign of political failure but a symptom of an ageing city; it is a body that can no longer conceal its injuries.

For me, the pandemic represented another type of turning point. Unexpectedly, isolation provided a space for reconnection and prompted me to reconnect with the person with whom I would build a life. As life slowed, I started a family, and the birth of a new life changed my perspective on the city. Auckland, once a place of mere survival, was emerging as a place of responsibility and possibility, a city whose future I would now help define and pass on to the next generation.

I do not intend to create a perfect city. Rather, I wish to create a more authentic city, a city that is willing to expose its injuries. To me, architecture is not simply a decorative element that conceals a city's flaws. It is a language that exposes those flaws, and a method of engaging with what has long been denied.

"Can architecture revive the lost flow, memory and relationships in a city, as well as restore its image?"

"Can the hollow cry of the Sky Tower be transformed into the murmurs of the buried stream?"

Revealing the Waihorotiu Stream is more than restoring it. In cities, restoring hidden streams is not only seen as fixing old infrastructure but also as altering how we conceptualise nature, history, and public spaces. Revealing the Waihorotiu Stream and restoring natural flows to the city will encourage us to rethink its many layers. Revealing the Waihorotiu is a form of architectural reconciliation. It is about more than uncovering an underground stream. It is about revitalising the city's flow, memory, and sense of community.

This exegesis begins with that understanding. Architecture may be slow, but in that slowness lies the capacity to document the fractures of its own time, while preparing for the future as it develops in the present. Living in a city is to inherit both its beauty and burden. Designing in a city is to confront them. Auckland is no longer a city I dislike. Now it is a city I need to accept responsibility for, a city my son will inherit. Through architecture, I do not aim to correct it, but to listen again, and to provide a voice for what the city itself has forgotten.

On a quiet Sunday morning, my family and I walked along K Rd when we entered an old arcade to avoid the smells of alcohol and street odours. Through the glass, we saw the Sky Tower rising in the background, standing silently and distantly. In that moment, the vertical city above and the buried city below overlapped.

Figure 4 Seong, Jay. Sky Tower from St Kevins Arcade

Chapter 1 Listening to the city

1.1 Introduction

Starting with the focus on listening as shifting attention from what is visually obvious to what is beneath, this movement is exemplified in Tāmaki Makaurau through a unique experience inside St Kevins Arcade. Here, the view of the Sky Tower vertically frames the city, and the landscape of Myers Park below recedes on a steeply angled gradient of stairs and soil.

As a result of this comparison, an unintentional yet informative section emerges in which the city's most prominent visual icon is paired with the unobtrusive aspect of its landscape. The section described here does more than simply organise a view. Rather, it combines the two conditions of the city most directly related to the concept of the city itself (i.e., above vs below, architecture vs geography) with the conditions of visibility and invisibility into a single, consistent framework.

The Sky Tower's towering presence is clear and understandable; however, the stream of Waihorotiu under Queen Street is not. By virtue of this contrast, the city can be seen as a complex, multi-layered entity in which its surface expresses one narrative of aspirations for growth and development, while its hidden layers express another narrative of memory loss, land erosion, and urban disconnection.

As a result, listening to the city involves attending to both the monumental verticality that announces and represents civic identity and the horizontal ground plane that contains and silences the city's stories. Therefore, this thesis will listen to these layers of the city by mapping and analysing the geographical history, mythology, sensual materiality and contemporary contradictions that currently define Auckland's situation.

1.2 The Memory of Waihorotiu

The buried stream beneath Queen Street, Waihorotiu, is where Auckland formed long before the roads and the streets were paved over and the riverbanks were sealed. This valley had been carved out by volcanoes and had been a vital ecological, spiritual, and physical conduit connecting land, water, people, and sea into a single cycle of life. Archaeological records indicate that Māori have lived in the Waihorotiu catchment for more than seven hundred years. Many of the fertile banks supported Māori villages, including Ngā Wharau a Tako. The river mouth Te Rou Kai provided the Māori settlers with plenty of food or kai (Auckland City Council, 2008).

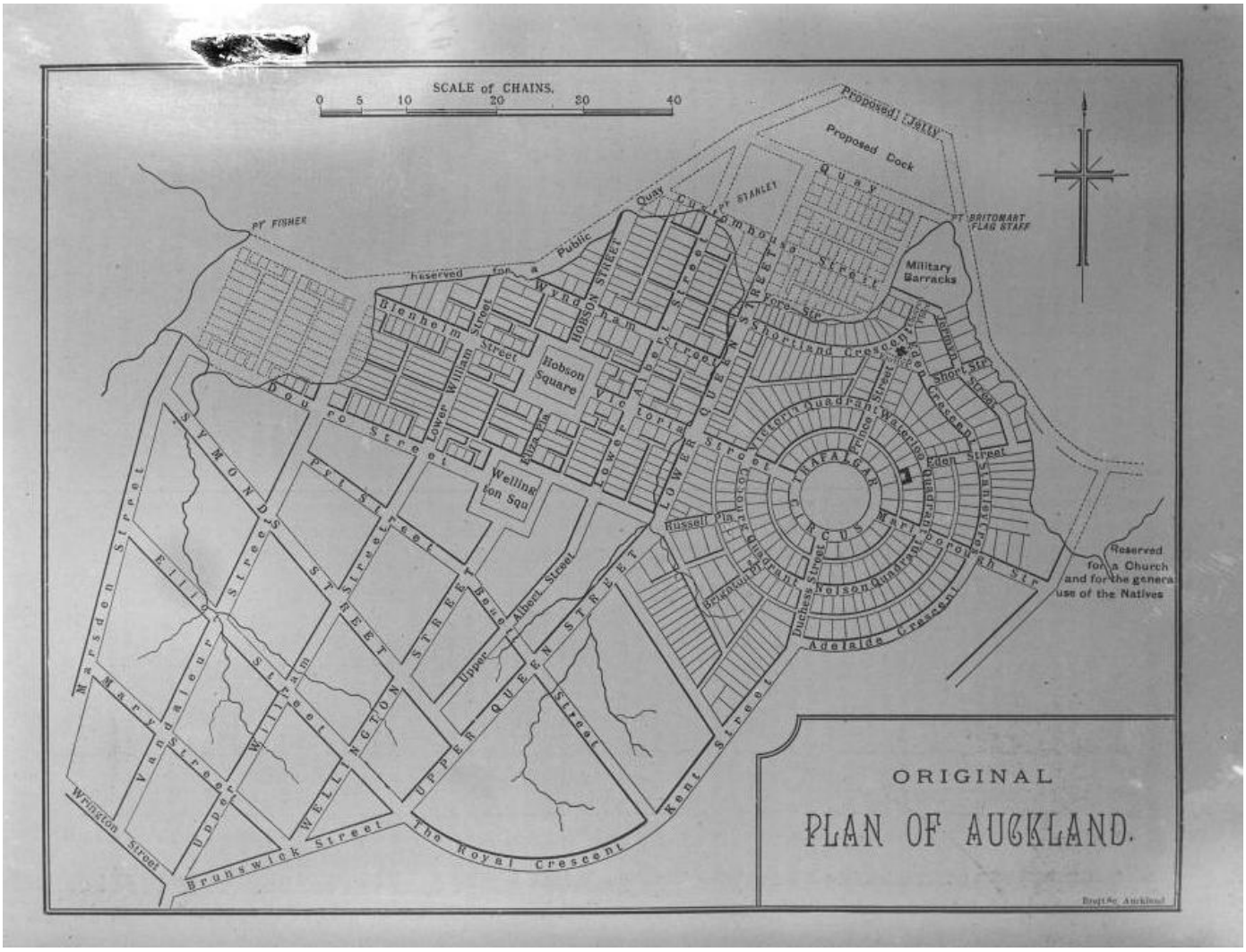


Figure 5 Original plan of Auckland, showing early settlement layout that prefigures the grid imposed over the Waihorotiu Stream valley. (1840)
Source: Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections, Original plan of Auckland, 1840.

Many of the early European explorers also recognised the stream's size and existence. Early colonial accounts compiled by Auckland City Council describe Waihorotiu as being "a considerable tidal creek winding through fern and swamp toward Commercial Bay" (Auckland City Council, 2008). Therefore, these accounts support the fact that Waihorotiu was not a small stream but rather a significant geographical feature of the early days of Auckland.

Figure 6 The Ligar Canal, a drainage channel frequently referenced in relation to the Waihorotiu Stream along Queen Street. (1860)
Source: Photograph by James D. Richardson, Auckland City Libraries, reproduced on Te Ara – the Encyclopedia of New Zealand (Christine Dann, Sewage, water and waste – Dirt and disease, 2010).Libraries

Eventually, the colonial grid would be laid on top of this landscape. In 1843, the Ligar Canal was built, which diverted the stream into an open drain. However, the canal quickly failed due to flooding and pollution. Therefore, this would indicate the early struggle between the valley's natural hydrological flow and the geometry of the city that the colonists would eventually impose on it. With increasing urbanisation, the Waihorotiu was gradually encroached upon, straightened, canalised, and eventually buried under Queen Street.

Although the stream was buried and no longer visible, it does not mean that it has disappeared. As documented by Lisa J. Truttman in her book Buried Waters, Waihorotiu was "most certainly buried and put away from human sight and smell during the first four decades of Auckland's colonial history [but] it has never been forgotten." (Truttman, 2024, p. 101)

The stream continues to exert its influence on the city both physically and culturally. Surface run-off will continue to follow the original path of the stream down Queen Street after heavy rains, thereby indicating the continued presence of the valley beneath the artificial calmness of today's streetscapes (Truttman, 2024, p. 4)

There is also recognition of this continued presence in mana whenua stories. Truttman states that Horotiu, the taniwha associated with the stream, is still recognised as a kaitiaki and has not lost his authority because the stream was buried. In contemporary urban infrastructure debates, representatives of Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei stated that "Horotiu's realm ran from Myers Park to the sea" (Truttman, 2024, p. 105); demonstrating how the taniwha is not viewed as mere symbolic folklore but as an active cultural presence whose domain overlaps with that of the modern city.

Therefore, remembering Waihorotiu is not merely a nostalgic remembrance of the past. Rather, it is an acknowledgement of the city's foundational nature and the multiple layers of authority that exist in relation to water - as a system of ecology, as a cultural ancestor and as a spatial memory. Waihorotiu is a living archive - an archive whose burial represents the point at which the city turned its face away from its hydrological roots; however, the presence of the stream continues to define the city's form and the way in which we experience it.
To hear the city, therefore, is to hear this buried river first.

1.3 Sensuous Place and the Buried Stream

The burial of Waihorotiu was both an attempt to conceal a body of water and to erase a sensory experience of the land that had helped people understand its location. The smells of damp earth, the sounds of running water, and other small signs of the stream's presence were replaced by asphalt, sewer pipes, and sealed surfaces. Therefore, the city lost not only its ability to see the stream but also to sense and feel a connection to the earth beneath the city.

Although the stream was covered and "buried", it is still very much a part of the spatial relationships within the city. When it rains heavily, water consistently follows the path of the original Waihorotiu stream, indicating the limits of the urban area's capacity to retain water and revealing the valley beneath the built surface.

In this context, 'to bury' means to move something rather than remove it. Natural flows are integrated into urban systems but become less visible and less recognised in our everyday lives.

Therefore, we have lost not the water, but our attention towards the water. Today, contemporary Auckland is a city that sees without hearing, focused on the city's visual appearance, while diminishing the atmosphere and materials that previously communicated its identity.

We can view this situation not as a singular event but as one example of a larger spatial dynamic. According to Edward W. Soja, spatial injustices are not singular events, but "the cumulative result of numerous decisions regarding the placement of items in space" (Soja, 2010, pp. 46-47). Therefore, from this perspective, the lack of awareness of Waihorotiu represents the culmination of repeated decisions by the city to create infrastructure that continually prioritises the structural, physical, and relational aspects of the city over the sensorial, ecological, and relational aspects of the land.

Figure 7 Looking north down Queen Street from the vicinity of Shortland Street, showing the site of the future Bank of New Zealand building. (1860)
Source: Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections Online.

Ethical design practices in this context do not involve replicating the past, nor romanticising pre-colonial environments. Ethical design involves looking at what has been ignored or overlooked. Listening is more than a metaphor in this research. It is a deliberate strategy to reconnect buildings with the hydrological, ecological and cultural layers of the land beneath the city's surface.

Listening, as an architectural practice, requires a conscious slowing of the pace of activity. This is achieved by taking walks throughout the valley, noting slight changes in topography, locating areas where water pools, and observing differences in light, shadow, and air. These embodied experiences transform the city from a fixed, two-dimensional surface into a living, three-dimensional landscape shaped by memory and care. Therefore, listening provides an ethical perspective: it acknowledges the buried waters as alive and active components of the city's current life, rather than simply as relics of the past.

Figure 8 Queens Street, Auckland,(1912).
Source: Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections Online

1.4 Resonance of the Present City

The contemporary city above the buried stream provides another form of resonance. At a time when people, culture, and art intermingled with urban vitality, development, and civic pride, the city today is burdened by accumulated civic exhaustion. From the time of the pandemic, the city has been impacted by the silence of Queen Street, stalled construction sites, vacant storefronts, and phases of opening and closing in space have formed a new urban landscape. The problems associated with this landscape are not active or chaotic; they are passive and lack energy. They are characterised by a general sense of exhaustion.

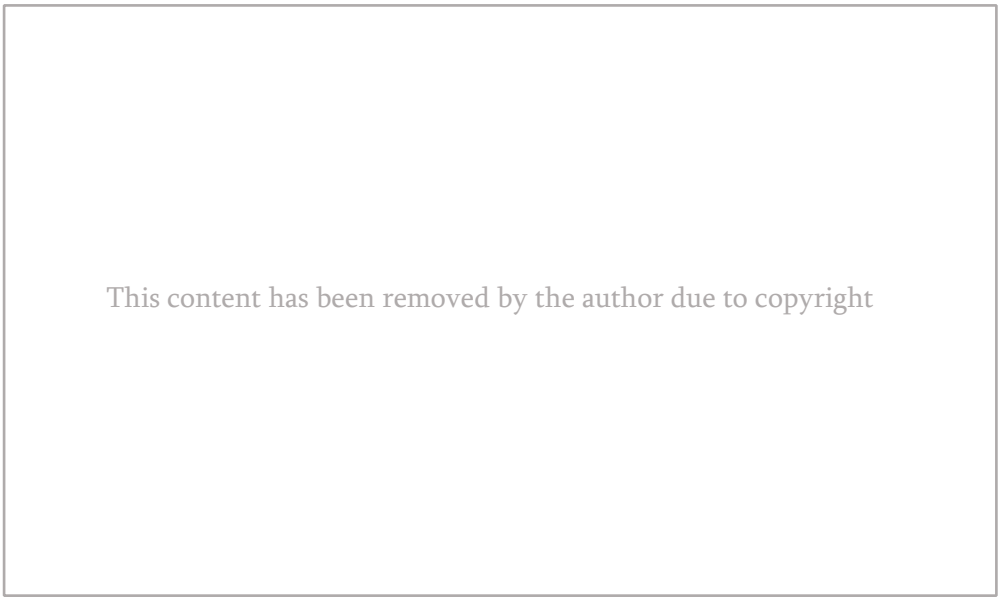


Figure 9 New Zealand at a glance: Public satisfaction and perceptions of national infrastructure. Source: Ipsos (2024). Global Infrastructure Index 2024 – New Zealand Edition, p.3.

This passive and exhausted atmosphere is evident in public sentiment. Only 27% of New Zealanders were satisfied with the country's infrastructure as of 2024; however, 67% believed the country is not meeting their needs (Ipsos, 2024). The large-scale infrastructure projects proposed for over ten years have paradoxically eroded trust in Auckland's ability to deliver and implement them. The data indicate a problem of civic stagnation at the societal level, in addition to mere dissatisfaction.

In Auckland, this stagnation is also visually represented. The CBD is continually perceived as "in the process of being built," yet the experience of the CBD is rarely felt to be truly revitalised. Interventions designed to address transportation, housing, climate adaptability, and economic pressures generally do not resolve underlying issues; they tend to highlight additional structural complexities.

As such, the City Rail Link (CRL) project, which has taken over a decade to plan and build, has demonstrated how horizontal infrastructural interventions can accumulate civic fatigue into everyday urban life. Therefore, in comparison, vertical development completed quickly and operating with little to no disruption to the urban environment may be perceived as a "more manageable" form of urban development. The Sky Tower exemplifies this perception; construction began in 1994 and was completed in 1997. For nearly thirty years, the Sky Tower has maintained a high level of continuity in both a functional and physical sense.

At the intersection of Victoria Street and Queen Street, the Sky Tower remains a significant vertical datum in the visual field of both local and international students and tourists. Architect Mat Brown observes that "you love it or you hate it, the big needle has provided an identity to Auckland," indicating the Sky Tower's influence in creating a recognisable image of the city (Brown, 2024). However, this symbolic potential is largely anchored in earlier national image-making and economic stimulus programs centred around casino, hotel, restaurant, and venue initiatives.

Contemporary interpretations of the value of landmarks place increased emphasis on ecological integration, commonly accepted levels of quality in everyday urban environments, and the capacity to address complex, interconnected urban conditions. In relation to these changing expectations, the Sky Tower is seen less as a modern infrastructural solution capable of addressing structural complexity and more as a single symbolic artefact from a previous era. In this manner, it is perceived as a void rather than a vessel, and as insufficient to support the systemic changes required by national-scale infrastructure such as the Harbour Bridge, the Port of Auckland, or the city's public transportation system.

Therefore, to listen to the city today means attending to the layers of vulnerability present. The silence of the morning workforce, the quiet exodus of younger generations, the stillness created by speculative vacancies, the soft hum of displaced communities, and the faint presence of the buried stream overlap and resonate with one another.

The silence of Waihorotiu is not empty; it is diagnostic. The city continues to oscillate between a desire for reconnection and the inertia produced by long-standing, established infrastructural legacies. Listening is the starting point for understanding the current conditions. As a first step through the city's past images and experiences, in this manner, listening serves as an introductory awareness for the architectural responses identified in Chapter 2.

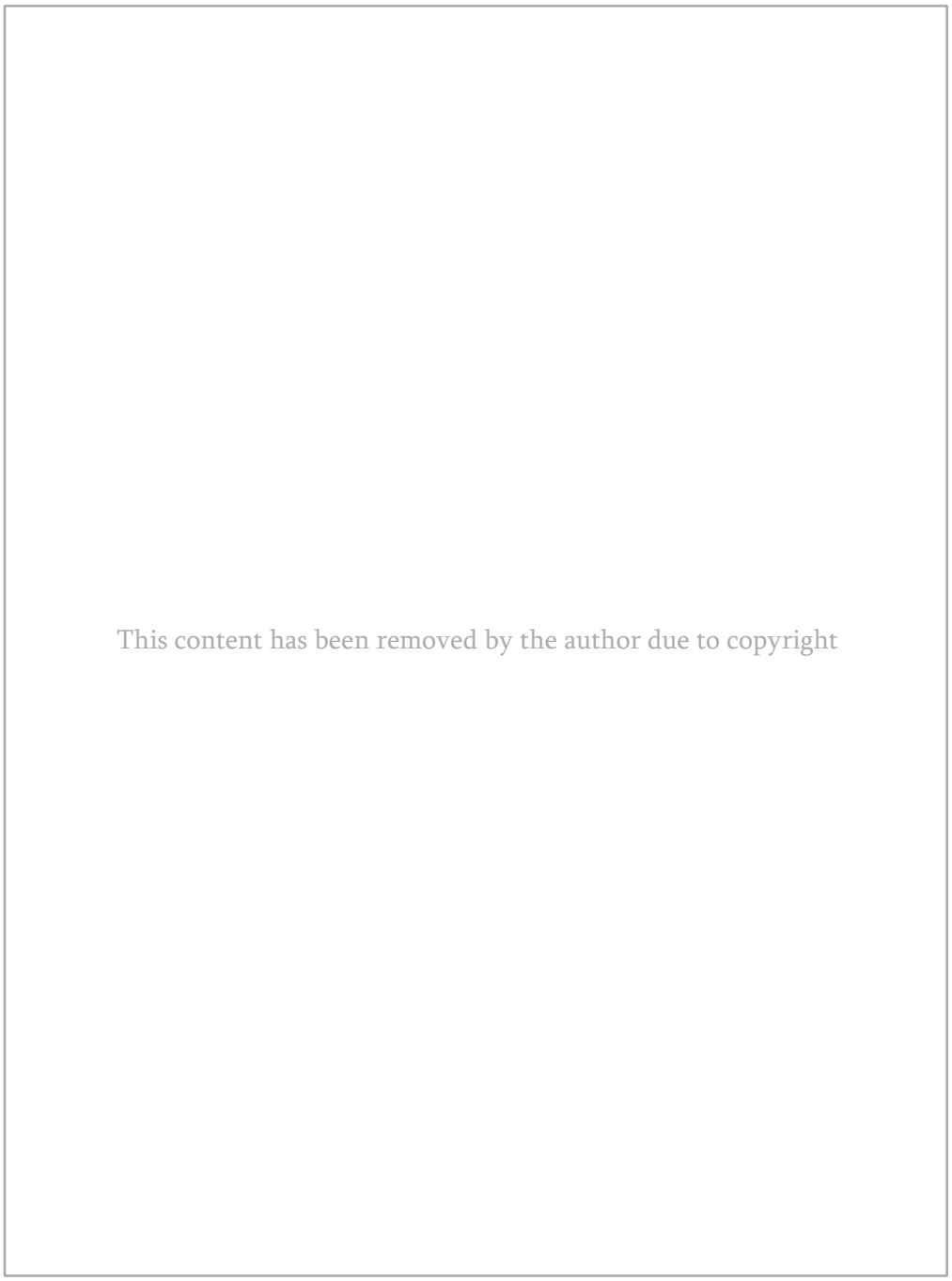


Figure 10 Early conceptual rendering of the Sky Tower precinct.
Source: Stuff.co.nz (2016). https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/87072188/drawing-shines-light-on-what-sky-tower-could-have-been

Figure 11 Seong, Jay. Myers Park walkway

Chapter 2 Responding to the city

2.1 The Wicked Urban Condition

Auckland, like all cities, faces numerous urban challenges. However, these problems cannot be defined simply as being due to technological shortcomings or as failures of administration. Over time, a number of layers of conditions have developed in the city: the historical relationship between Pākehā and iwi; the presence of immigrant communities with diverse cultural, political, and geographical backgrounds; and the cumulative impact of space-related, socially related, and institutionally related decisions. These conditions exist as a state of subtle satisfaction and disinterest in daily life rather than as a source of explicit conflict.

The persistence of such a state defines what are referred to as 'wicked' problems; these are characterised by the absence of a single identifiable origin or cause. When wicked problems arise, it is generally unclear both when and where they began, and their relationships and dependencies continue to evolve. New problems and conditions will continue to emerge from the original wicked problem (Rittel & Webber, 1973).

Auckland's experience with these conditions is best exemplified by the City Rail Link (CRL) project, which has been delayed by more than 10 years. Although the CRL is perceived as a major milestone in Auckland's infrastructure development, it has failed to address fundamental structural problems in the city, such as urban sprawl, rising house prices, and reliance on motor vehicles for travel. Instead, the protracted, incremental process of infrastructure development has created urban fatigue and public disillusionment with government decision-making.

Upon initial inspection, the issues of a public transportation system that is infrequently utilised during non-commuting times, ongoing policy initiatives to reduce automobile usage, and a general urban environment in which it is difficult to identify the effects of interventions are distinct problems. However, in a wicked problem, these conditions work together to amplify each other within the same wicked structure. Thus, efforts to "solve" one problem often create new ones, and, in the process of establishing the problem itself, create an intervention into the city's dense relationships of influence and power.

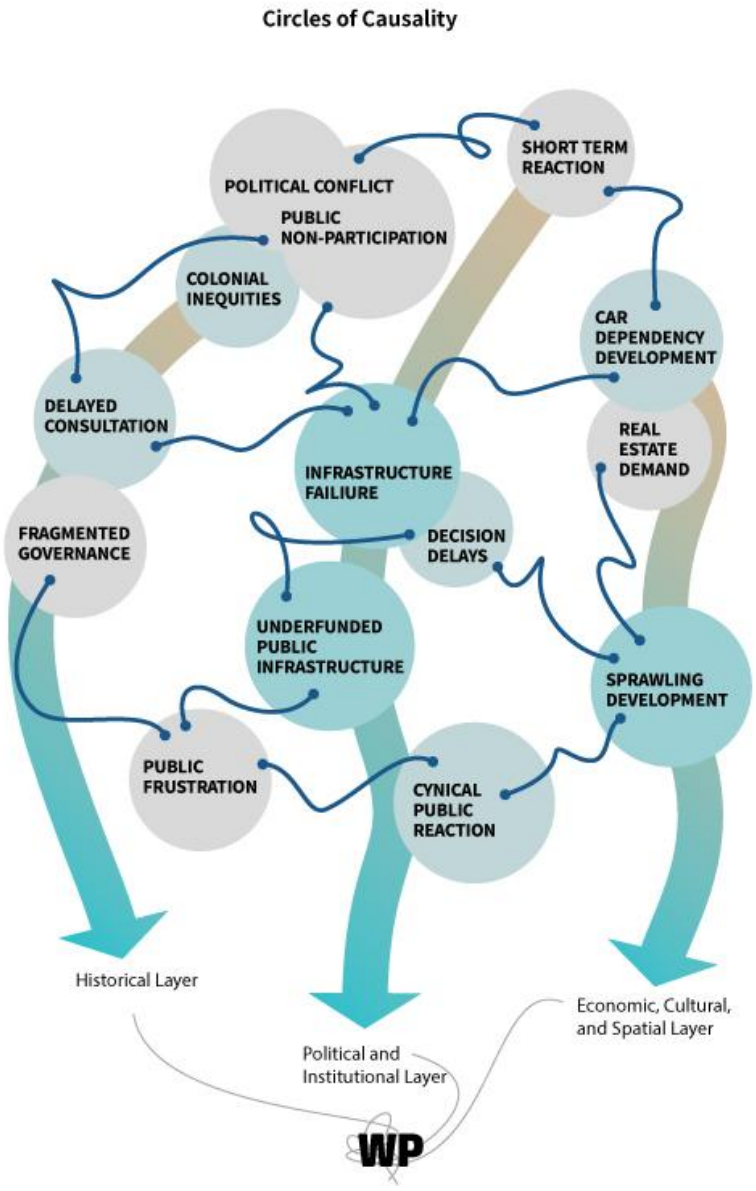


Figure 12 Seong, Jay. 'Circle of Casualty' Diagram, Communicating Wicked Problems, Semester 1 2025.

The systemic nature of the problem is demonstrated using the Circles of Causality Diagram (Fig. 11). This diagram represents how fragmented governance, prolonged consultation periods, insufficiently funded public infrastructure, vehicle-centred development strategies, urban sprawl, and cynical public responses to government actions and policies form part of a self-sustaining cycle of causes and consequences. Unlike a situation in which each reaction leads towards resolving the issue at hand, these cycles establish a condition in which short-term reactions consistently substitute for longer-term changes. Therefore, Figure 11 illustrates that Auckland's challenges are not a result of individual failure, but rather, of a self-sustaining urban condition formed by the interconnectedness of political, institutional and spatial processes.

This complexity is not the sum of urban problems. As stated by Rittel and Webber (1973), wicked problems are characterised by ill-defined problem statements, the absence of definitive solutions, conflicting value systems, and changing contexts. Building on this definition, Dentoni et al (2018) argued that wicked problems should not be viewed as unsolvable problems but rather as conditions that necessitate governmental structures capable of continually adapting to changing circumstances. They describe this type of governance as a "harnessing" process whereby governments continually assess the nature of problems and seek to achieve a temporary synthesis of differing values.

"Harnessing wicked problems would imply having governance processes in MSPs which continuously re-assess and re-address problems over time and seek an acceptable temporary synthesis between conflicting stakeholders' views and values" (Dentoni et al., 2018, p. 336).

In the context of Auckland's urban challenges as ongoing (and never finished) processes of redefinition, wicked problems should not be seen as 'tasks' to be completed but as 'conditions' that are continually redefined. The wicked problem is not an object that exists independently of the city for analysis by outsiders; it is a lived experience that residents, institutions, and spaces must navigate, adapt to, and endure. It is initially experienced as a part of everyday life and spatial experience prior to the formation of policies or the establishment of discursive frames.

The following chapters examine wicked problems that are continually changing and compare them to the unseen stream running beneath Auckland's city centre. Using the body to listen to the forgotten stream is not merely a sentimental act; it provides a means of feeling what the city has allowed to pass through it and what it has blocked.

How do we understand the ways that flows are established and disrupted through the city, and why is the flow of the stream so easily overlooked in our daily lives? To answer these questions, the next few sections will treat listening as a practical method rather than merely a metaphor, with the idea that the city is a flow.

2.2 From K-Road to Britomart

Auckland Central is surrounded by long ridgelines from Hobson Street, K Road, and Symonds Street. These ridgelines form a slope that descends towards the centre of the city, towards Britomart and the Port of Auckland. The slopes encircle the city like a boundary wall, creating a city form resembling a valley or a gorge. The topographical characteristics have limited pedestrian flow and continue to restrict both land development and infrastructure siting in the area. The proposed City Rail Link route is seen to overcome some of the limitations created by the topography by crossing the city diagonally.

Kevin Lynch views the city as a structure of images that people see and remember and believes the legibility of the city is determined by how well paths, nodes, and edges relate to one another.

"The paths, the network of habitual or potential lines of movement through the urban complex, are the most potent means by which the whole can be ordered" (Lynch, 1960, p. 47)

From this perspective, the axis from K-Road to Britomart in Auckland's city centre has been perceived not as a clear path but as a fragmented experience due to topographic variations and slope. Although this city, divided into ridges and valleys, is physically connected, it is not sufficiently imaginable as a continuous path of movement within the pedestrian's sensory experience.

At one time, Queen Street functioned as the city's symbolic central spine, concentrating culture, commerce, logistics, and everyday life. However, over time, this valley-shaped topography has accumulated both a spatial structure that forces linear walking and the physical and psychological burdens produced by sustained slope. As a result, the energy of Britomart and lower Queen Street—relatively flat and infrastructure-intensive—has tended to remain in the lower areas rather than diffusing upward, and this can be interpreted as a condition in which the 'strong path image' Lynch described has failed to form.

In this context, CRL was proposed to supplement the continuity of movement that existing topography did not permit by connecting Britomart, Aotea Square, and K-Road underground and generating new nodes. However, this connection operates by moving urban experience below ground, forming another layer of movement rather than restoring the legibility of visible paths. In other words, CRL is closer to a choice that transfers the mode of reading underground than to a solution that resolves the problem of reading the city that Lynch described.

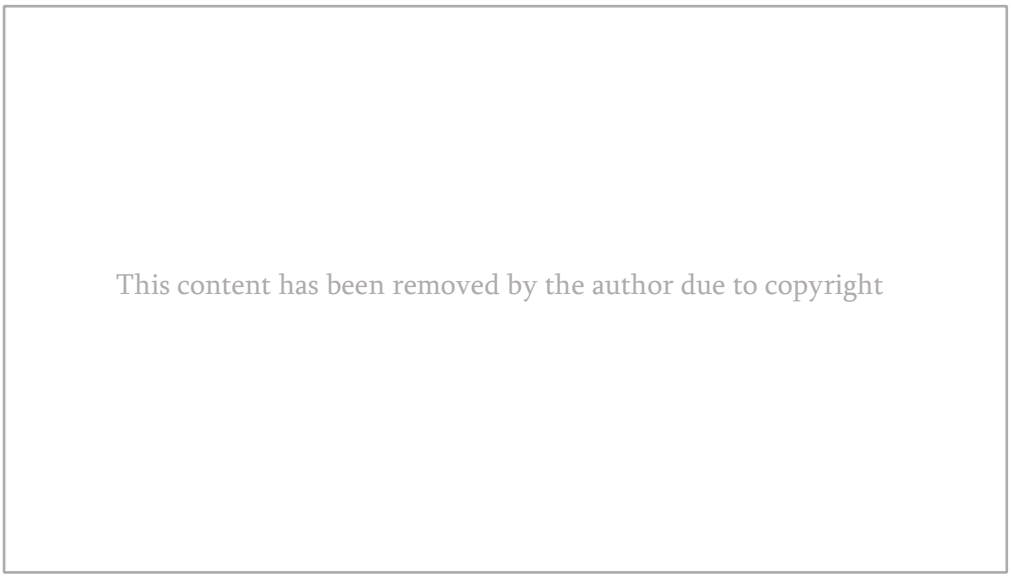
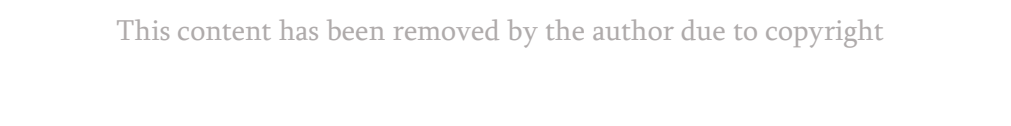


Figure 13 Sectional diagram illustrating the City Rail Link (CRL)
Source: Learnz, Boring tunnels for City Rail Link,
https://www.learnz.org.nz/futurejourneys212/discover/boring-tunnels-for-city-rail-link

This research re-reads this city-centre valley, long perceived only as a topographic inconvenience, not as a defect to overcome but as an urban condition to interpret. In parallel with the progress of a large infrastructure project such as CRL, it explores the possibility of reorganising this area's history and identity by restoring pedestrian-friendly flows and spatially reactivating traces of the buried and erased waterway. This goes beyond making the city 'more readable'; as an attempt to sense and reveal what has not been readable, it positions our experience upon the flow of Waihorotiu.

Figure 14 Night-time exterior render of the City Rail Link (CRL) Waihorotiu Station at Aotea. Source: ProgressAKL, CRL Waihorotiu Station, https://progressakl.co.nz/media/bc4awqh3/crl-waihorotiu-station_low-res.jpg



2.3 Disruption of flow

Every city has places where youth and vitality are condensed. At one time, K-Road was a place that held such a pulse. During the day, cafés and vintage shops, and at night, neon signs and music filled the street; K-Road became a place in Auckland that evokes an atmosphere and sensation simply by hearing its name. This energy seems to expand throughout the city, dispersing along Queen Street, Symonds Street, and Pitt Street.

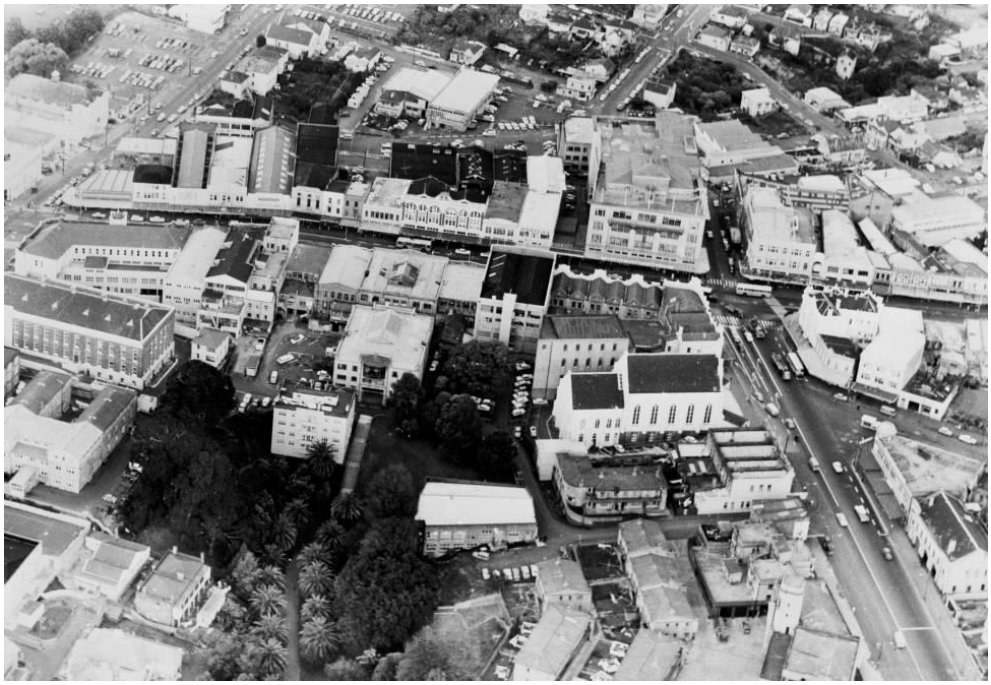


Figure 15 Aerial photograph of Karangahape Road and Myers Park. (1964)
Source: Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections, aerial view of central Auckland, https://kura.aucklandlibraries.govt.nz/digital/collection/photos/id/162294

The flow of Waihorotiu overlaps at this point with the memory of a natural source that descends into Myers Park. The upper edge of Myers Park was once a place that symbolised the stream's origin and generation. The flow that began in the valley, passed through Aotea Square, continued along Queen Street, and reached the port was an invisible backbone that organised the city. Yet today this memory is hardly sensed. The water has been buried, the flow has been sealed, and the place of beginning is no longer recognised as a beginning.

The experience of carrying a pram down the long stairs from K-Road to Myers Park bodily inscribes this disconnection. The descent requires excessive physical effort, and returning to the top is not readily chosen. This hesitation is not simply a matter of slope. It reveals the feeling that the city was not designed on the assumption of movement in this direction—in other words, that this flow has not been organised as part of the city's everyday rhythm.

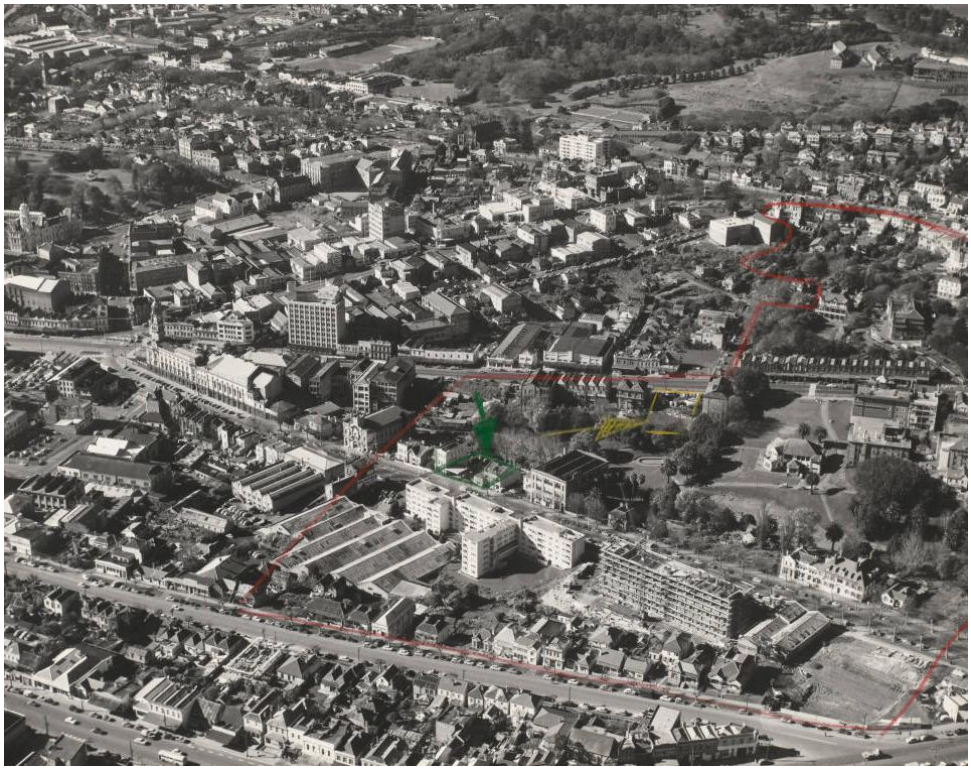


Figure 16 Historic aerial photograph of Myers Park and surroundings. (1957)
Source: Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections, aerial view of central Auckland with annotated stream alignment, https://kura.aucklandlibraries.govt.nz/digital/collection/photos/id/118047

As a result, the youth and cultural energy generated at K-Road can no longer naturally descend at this point. Myers Park functions as a buffer that separates the above and the below, unable to become a place where flows remain and intersect. This place is no longer a 'place of beginning' but is recognised as a void left within the city centre. Physically, it remains as a buried spring; experientially, it remains as a state in which the flows between generations, expression, and spaces are cut off. Although this park is located at the centre of the city, surrounded by Queen Street, K-Road, and Grey's Avenue, it becomes a place that is passed through or avoided without purpose. In a condition in which it is everyone's space but no one's, Myers Park remains between presence and absence.

The European-style sculptures and monuments placed throughout the park may appear as symbols of civilisation, but they also function as substitutes that cover the Indigenous memory that preceded this land.

This disconnection is more pronounced in the lower part of the park. The bridge that crosses Mayoral Drive and the sculptural intervention beneath it can be read as traces of an attempt to connect the flow, but after passing that point, the space shifts again into a car-centred order. The circulation leading to the car parks and the underground car park at Aotea Square disrupts pedestrian continuity, and the flow is further obstructed. The large civic corridor, bounded by City Hall, Aotea Centre, SkyCity, and the St James Theatre, forms a stagnant landscape that fails to produce a rhythm of permanence and diffusion as individual functions decline one by one. This series of spaces is closer to a symptom in which the city's wicked conditions are physically revealed.

"The prime function incumbent upon the socius has always been to codify the flows of desire, to inscribe them, to record them, to see to it that no flow exists that is not properly dammed up, channelled, regulated. When the primitive territorial machine proved inadequate to the task, the despotic machine established an overcoding system. But the capitalist machine finds itself in a totally new situation: it is faced with the task of decoding and deterritorializing the flows." (Deleuze & Guattari, 1977, p. 33)

This phenomenon is clarified by the concept of the flow of desire discussed in Anti-Oedipus. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari understand desire not as lack but as a produced flow and consider that this flow activates society and space when it is connected and organised. In Auckland's city centre, vertical desire—symbolised by the Sky Tower's ascent, view, and consumption—has been efficiently organised, while the city's horizontal origin and memory, and the flow of water, remain blocked and uncaptured.

As a result, K-Road's youth cannot flow downward, Myers Park's beginning-ness is sealed, and Aotea Square's publicness remains an empty symbol. This is not so much the failure of individual spaces as the result of the city having aligned the flows of desire only in a vertical direction. The next section examines how this disconnection hardens into a 'failure of memory to operate,' and the possibility of anchoring the water path as a repeatable directionality and rhythm of staying.

Figure 17 Aerial view of Auckland's city centre and Aotea Square (1990s)
Source: Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections, aerial view of central Auckland, https://kura.aucklandlibraries.govt.nz/digital/collection/photos/id/316307

2.4 Gazing at the city

As soon as you think of Auckland, the Sky Tower is among the first things that come to mind. For many, the Sky Tower represents the city's most legible, recognisable, and iconic visual image. The tower sits at multiple points along Queen St and serves as the point of reference from which Auckland is seen, photographed, and remembered. In terms of visibility, the Sky Tower is immediately apparent.

The Sky Tower provides access to the entire city for a fee, as a short-term experience or event. The city is experienced through a bird's eye view, condensed into a moment of spectacle. The time you spend on the viewing platform does not require the acquisition of layers of visual or historical experience, nor does it require you to engage with the everyday rhythms of the city. The city is experienced at a single glance. In this way, the Sky Tower makes Auckland into an image to be confirmed rather than a place to live.

On the other hand, a second symbolic structure of Auckland exists in the horizontal image of Queen Street. The horizontal image includes rows of street trees, people flowing along the street corridor, and the continuous passage created by buildings on either side of the street and articulates the city's central axis in its most archetypal form. Queen Street has traditionally been an experiential axis of the city, and memory has been accumulated through daily walking, staying, and experiencing the city.

For most of the city's history, Auckland has been shaped by the relationship between two axes: the vertical axis of visual recognition and the horizontal axis of lived experience. However, as the horizontal functions of Queen Street continue to decline, this balance is beginning to break down. The city's vertical image remains intact while the street's experiential potential continues to decline, and visual recognition begins to dominate embodied urban experience.

Beneath the visual urban image lies another level of memory. The Waihorotiu runs underneath SkyWorld Entertainment and the Civic Building, through the central city block and then re-emerges near the Victoria Street – Queen Street intersection and continues along the lower Queen Street valley towards Customs Street. As well as the pre-colonial hydrology, landform, and canalisation, and burial - associated with migration and commerce, the layers of use along this axis have included successions of movements - such as foot traffic, horse-drawn carriages, trams, and cars (Auckland City Council, 2008).

Long before the introduction of motor vehicles, the gentle slope from Queen Street to Aotea Square had provided a conduit for cultural and social movement and exchange. Nevertheless, the Waihorotiu Valley has gradually promoted a growing sense of fatigue. Over time, the surrounding valley topography has contributed to increased pedestrian fatigue due to the need to traverse the city's steep streets. At present, the ability of pedestrians to experience the Queen Street environment is reduced even further by the interaction of the street's canopy and the façade of the surrounding buildings.

Although these canopies provide climate protection, they also reduce the visual link between the street and the buildings and obscure the façades. Limited entry points, the uniformity of carriageways, and street-level retail advertising all contribute to directing pedestrians forward and limiting their opportunity to stop, look, and interact. In such a context, moving replaces dwelling.

Aldo Rossi (1982) writes that "the city itself is the collective memory of its people" and that "the city is the locus of collective memory" (p. 130).

However, under the current conditions on Queen Street, the accumulation of such collective memory is becoming increasingly difficult. Rather than functioning as sites for writing urban memory, building surfaces are now merely functional backgrounds. Facades are continually walked upon yet never acknowledged, and walking beneath canopies that protect the pedestrian from the elements, yet fail to establish relationships and rhythms of dwelling, does not produce a rhythm of dwelling. Although many people walk along Queen Street, the street does not function as a place to dwell and remember, but rather as a series of disconnected experiences.

The Waihorotiu channel exemplifies precisely this situation. Although the stream has not disappeared, its flow is being removed from circuits of repeated walking, dwelling, events, and uses and thus is not being reproduced as a collective experience. This is not the loss of memory itself but the disconnection of the conditions of memory - repetition and use. Waihorotiu is not a lost past; it is a memory still embedded in the city, but it is no longer remembered.

Rossi's concept of urban permanence is not based on the preservation of past form, it is the ability of a structure to support memory through repeated use over time. Therefore, what is required is not the re-enactment of the past but the re-establishment of the flow of the river as a directionality and place for dwelling in order that this horizontal flow may again function as part of a repeatable urban experience.

When the river's flow is once again established as a stable directionality, hydrology, topography, and urban structure can re-emerge as devices that create collective memory. At this time, the invisible flow of the Waihorotiu transforms from being a historical residue to being a lasting device supporting the memory of Auckland’s city centre. This could start to shift the imbalance between vertical image and horizontal experience.

2.5 Design Precedence

Traditionally, river restoration was conceived as an attempt to return the environment to its pre-disruption state. Here, water is not treated as something to be restored but rather as a means by which the city's hidden infrastructure and history become visible. Sites where rainwater, topography and the existing urban structure create shared natural pathways have been identified as urban nodes.

These nodes were then defined as part of Waihorotiu (a new spatial experience), in addition to absorbing the many problems and tensions contained within each node, they also create a new sequential connection. The new spatial experience created by the Waihorotiu sequence does not operate solely as circulation or as a water feature, but rather as an experience through which one can see the city's past and present within a single section.

Each of the four design precedents discussed in this paper, therefore, represents various ways of changing the relationship among water, the city, and public space. In addition to highlighting the successful implementation of each strategy and the potential areas for further development, they provide comparative frameworks for this research to examine whether similar strategies could be translated, adapted, or resisted in the context of Auckland and at its respective scale. Together, they support a broader approach to design thinking for Waihorotiu and its urban environment.

2.5.1 Cheonggyecheon Stream Restoration, Seoul, South Korea

The Cheonggyecheon Stream Restoration in Seoul is best understood not as a simple unveiling of a buried waterway, but as a project that fundamentally reconfigured the urban section and the hierarchy of infrastructure. By removing the elevated highway and road structures above the stream and reintroducing approximately 5.8 kilometres of continuous waterfront pedestrian space through the city centre, the project transformed a car-oriented upper layer into a public realm prioritising walking and occupation. The core significance of the project lies not in the presence of water itself, but in the spatial inversion of infrastructural priority—from vehicular dominance to pedestrian and civic use.

While Cheonggyecheon successfully exposed what the city had long concealed, the stream is not sustained as a self-sufficient natural river. Outside periods of heavy rainfall, its flow relies heavily on artificial pumping and operational management, positioning it as urban water infrastructure rather than a naturally functioning ecosystem. As a result, the historical meaning of the original stream and the layered local histories surrounding former bridges and adjacent neighbourhoods are often criticised as having been subordinated to usability and spectacle.

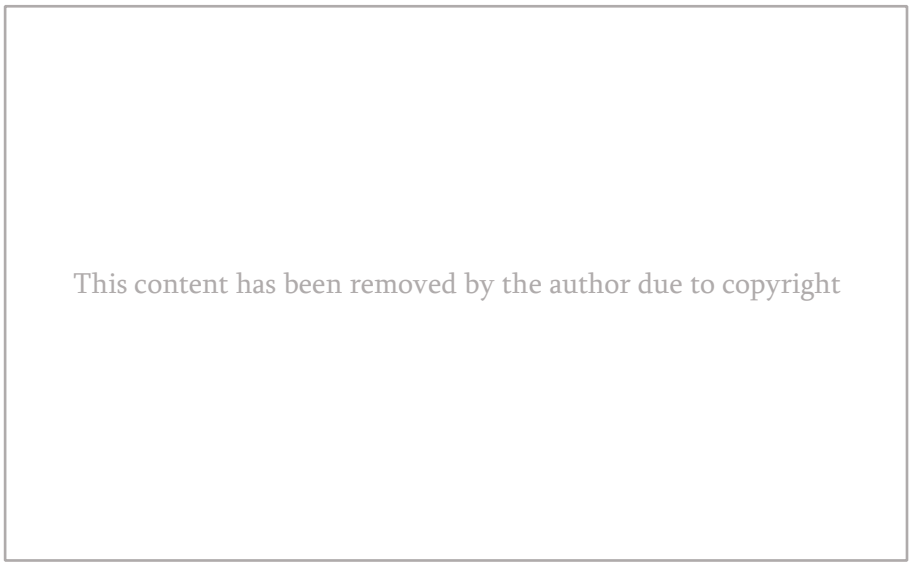


Figure 18 Before-and-after comparison of the Cheonggyecheon corridor in Seoul. Source: Namu Wiki, Cheonggyecheon Restoration Project, https://namu.wiki/w/청계천_복원_사업

Nevertheless, Cheonggyecheon demonstrates that river restoration can operate as more than environmental beautification; it can reorganise urban rhythm, image, accessibility, and the politics of movement. At the same time, it exemplifies how such transformations may trigger gentrification, commercial restructuring, and contested notions of public ownership, rendering the project one in which success and controversy remain inseparable.

As a precedent, Cheonggyecheon is more convincingly read not as a model of complete restoration, but as a sectional device that makes hidden flows impossible for the city to deny**.** Rather than asking whether Waihorotiu should be restored to flow, this project foregrounds how surface hierarchies and mobility priorities along Queen Street might be reconfigured to produce tangible evidence of buried flows.

2.5.2 Bishan–Ang Mo Kio Park, Singapore

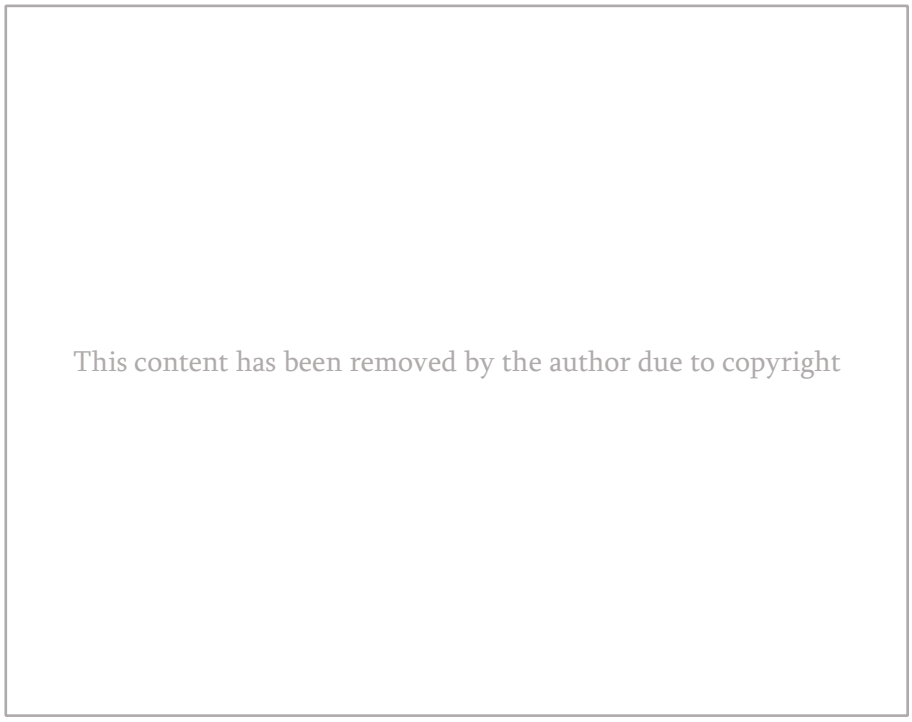


Figure 19 Before-and-after views of the Bishan–Ang Mo Kio Park in Singapore
Source: President's Medals, Bishan–Ang Mo Kio Park, https://www.presidentsmedals.com/Entry-14900

The Bishan – Ang Mo Kio Park is much more than simply a park created from an aesthetic viewpoint from a large section of concrete drainage canal. It is a new paradigm in Urban Water Management as a Public Space. This project has been developed in conjunction with Singapore's wider "City in a Garden" initiative as well as its Park Connector initiative to create approximately 2.7 km of a Naturalized River System where a concrete Canal previously existed. The project successfully balanced flood control with public use.

In most contexts, the river serves as an attractive landscape feature, with planted edges and pedestrian walkways that encourage visitors. During periods of high rainfall, the river becomes a floodplain designed to accommodate excess water flow.

Therefore, the Bishan River does not function as a static waterway but rather as a responsive infrastructure – a flexible spatial system that responds to environmental changes, including rainfall, flooding, and recovery.

Therefore, Architecture is no longer simply about designing a building that will endure through environmental fluctuations, but rather about choreographing the behavior of space through environmental variation.

Bishan demonstrates a new form of Ecological Urbanism that departs from traditional narratives of protection or restoration. The project converts primary urban infrastructure (such as Drainage, Flood Control, and Water Quality) into spaces for public interaction, education, and recreational activities. The project also demonstrates how urban water management can be integrated into civic life, and therefore not simply viewed as a Technical Problem or Tourist Attraction.

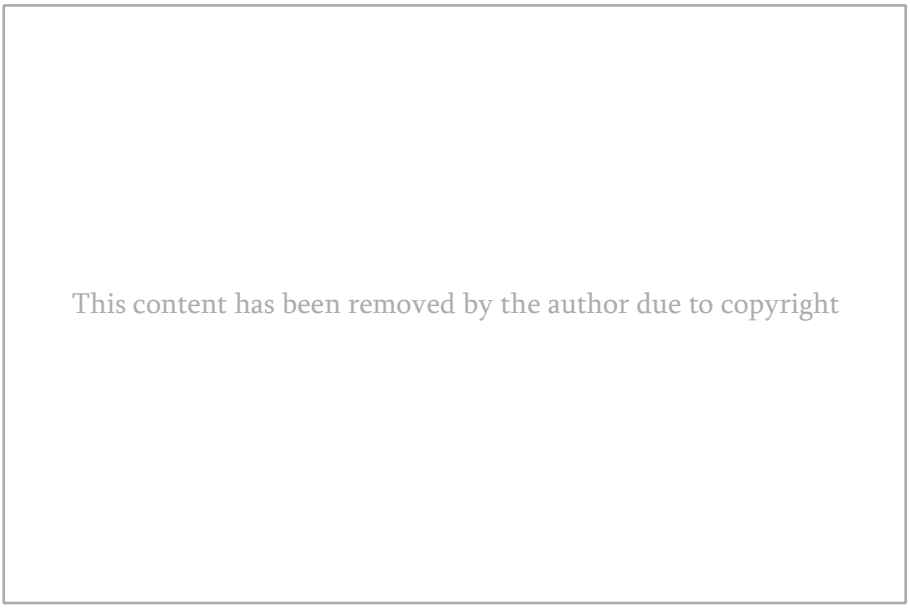


Figure 20 Everyday use of the naturalised Kallang River at Bishan–Ang Mo Kio Park, Source: BlueHealth Tools, Bishan–Ang Mo Kio Park case study image, https://bluehealth.tools/51-2-copy-copy-copy-2-copy-4/

This concept is highly relevant to recent flood events in Auckland, which have highlighted the risk of the Queen Street Valley experiencing extreme rainfall within short time frames. The project at Bishan illustrates how Topography can be utilised to Store, Release and Reuse Water, transforming existing water infrastructure into both a Spatial and Social Asset rather than a Hidden Liability.

2.5.3 The Uncovering of the River Aarhus, Denmark

The Aarhus River Project in Denmark exemplifies a long-term, sequential strategy for locating and exposing a previously submerged river, thereby providing the City with time to adjust. The project was approved in 1992 and progressed through several stages until completion in 2015, at which point the river was reintroduced from the inner-city core to the harbour front.

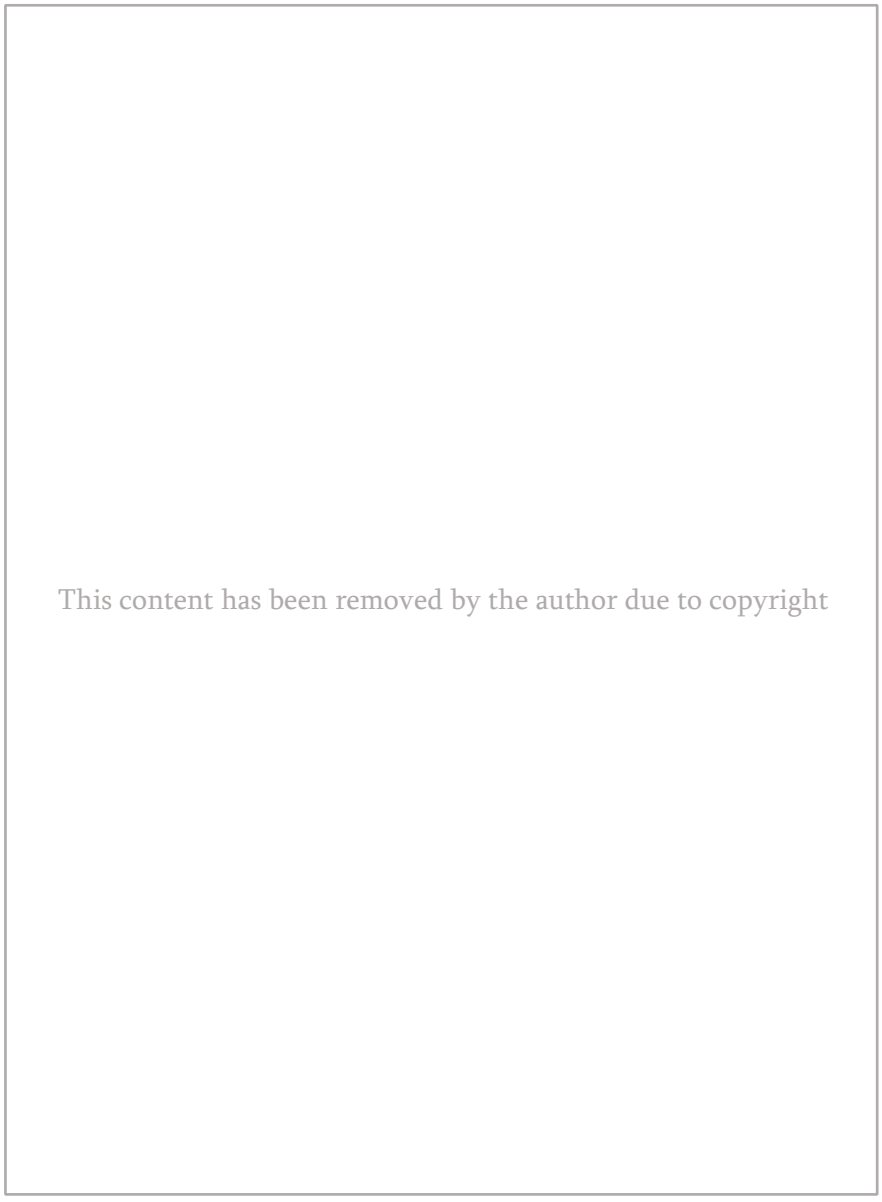


Figure 21 Before-and-after comparison of the Aarhus River in Denmark
Source: Reddit, Uncovering the central river in Aarhus, Denmark, https://www.reddit.com/r/urbanplanning/comments/5uum3b/uncovering_the_central_river_in_aarhus_denmark/

What is most distinctive about this project is not only that it made the river visible again, but also that it changed how people move through their daily lives and the patterns of occupation in the city centre. As the river developed steps, walkways, cafes, and public areas where people could gather, these new features were incorporated into daily routines, transforming the river from a singular event into an integral part of everyday life. This transformation in Aarhus has altered the definition of a landmark; it is no longer defined by a single building or architectural object, but by the experiences and memories associated with walking along the river and encountering it daily.

One of the benefits of this approach is that it provides an alternative to larger-scale, more extensive infrastructural changes to the city, enabling the development of an experiential spine through a series of "nodes" (moments) of interaction with the river. Rather than developing a linear spine along the river, Aarhus's experiential spine unfolds through a series of nodes of pause, connection, viewing, and memory that together define the river and the experience of being in the city. Each node represents a moment in which the river's past is brought forward and meets present-day urban infrastructure, thereby emphasising that urban continuity is created over time through accumulation rather than resolution.

2.5.4 Benthemplein Water Square, Rotterdam, Netherlands

Figure 22 Benthemplein Water Square in Rotterdam
Source: Landezine, Water Square Benthemplein by De Urbanisten, https://landezine.com/water-square-benthemplein-by-de-urbanisten/

Benthemplein Water Square in Rotterdam is not a river restoration project, however, it is a transformation of urban stormwater management from a technical process to a civic spatial program. The square functions as a public plaza and sports area when there is no rain and transforms into a system to collect and temporarily store stormwater during rainfall events. Water can never appear continuously, can never be permanently absent, and will only appear based on the environment around it.

This project is not intended to completely prevent or solve all flooding issues. It enhances the current drainage system's capacity to manage flooding by slowing water flow, allowing it to remain on the ground for a short period (limited by regulations) before being re-released into the drainage system. Functionally, it reduces flood risk; spatially, it exposes the City's public view of its water management practices.

The square is intentionally designed to clearly distinguish between the presence and absence of water, making these two states distinctly recognisable. As a result, the square functions as an infrastructural public space specifically designed to accommodate various urban conditions. Benthemplein serves as a precedent for clearly articulating the collection–retention–release logic at an urban scale, making it manageable and informing the reinterpretation of Waihorotiu as a functional alternative within the current drainage systems rather than as a complete replacement for them. Water doesn't need to be continuously present. Its episodic appearance provides citizens with a tangible experience of the connection between their city and its underlying hydrological processes.

Figure 23 Benthemplein Water Square in Rotterdam sunken basin functioning as a civic gathering and recreational space when dry Source: Regenerative Design World, Benthemplein Water Square, https://regenerativedesign.world/benthemplein/

Chapter 3 Designing to the city

Cities always face complex, wicked problems, and such challenges are difficult to resolve with a single solution. Across the world, cities have sought to mitigate and recalibrate these challenges through administrative, material, and institutional interventions shaped by their particular histories and conditions; yet these processes remain inevitably incomplete and perpetually ongoing. Auckland is no different. Despite its relatively short urban history, this city has developed a distinctive field of tension through the layering of specific topographic conditions, colonial histories, delayed infrastructure, and overlapping identities.

Rather than being motivated by a desire to see a lost nature restored, Waihorotiu's focus encourages consideration of whether this underlying flow embedded in the land could serve as a critique for understanding contemporary urban environments. This inquiry will not attempt to restore or bring back the original flow; instead, it will examine how a forgotten flow might reimagine/reshape contemporary urban inquiries

For some, Auckland is perceived as a land of opportunity: an attractive city where natural beauty and moderate density coexist. At the same time, for locals who experience fatigue and inconvenience from its hilly terrain and the daily frustration of infrastructure delays, it is also a space of continual compromise. Within a city where these contradictory perceptions coexist, this chapter examines the points at which the hidden watercourse intersects with its opposing urban interfaces and investigates their potential through design inquiry.

To do so, this chapter translates the theoretical framework discussed earlier into a design methodology. First, through Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City*, it re-reads how repeatedly travelled paths, points of rupture and discontinuity, administratively delineated districts, concentrated nodes, and city-scale landmarks operate within Auckland's city centre. Building on this analysis, it examines what symbolic meaning the buried flow of Waihorotiu may acquire, and how a past flow might open possibilities in relation to present problems.

Figure 24 Seong, Jay. Concept Image 'Auckland CBD with Waihorotiu Stream'.

It then draws on Deleuze and Guattari's thought to critically examine how current urban arrangements block and order flows. The goal is to imagine what new urban flows could look like by examining how the circulations of urban energy and desires can be reordered through natural water flows and the spatial distribution of rain.

The first part of this chapter (3.1) identifies and diagrams five key areas where different intersecting elements meet one another in the city centre of Auckland. Part two of this chapter (3.2) looks at the vertical urban rhythm that has developed around the Sky Tower and compares it with the horizontal flow of Waihorotiu and proposes how the city's energies can be recirculated. The final part of this chapter (3.3) proposes a means for the city to become an image for future generations by combining urban memory, flow, and personal narrative.

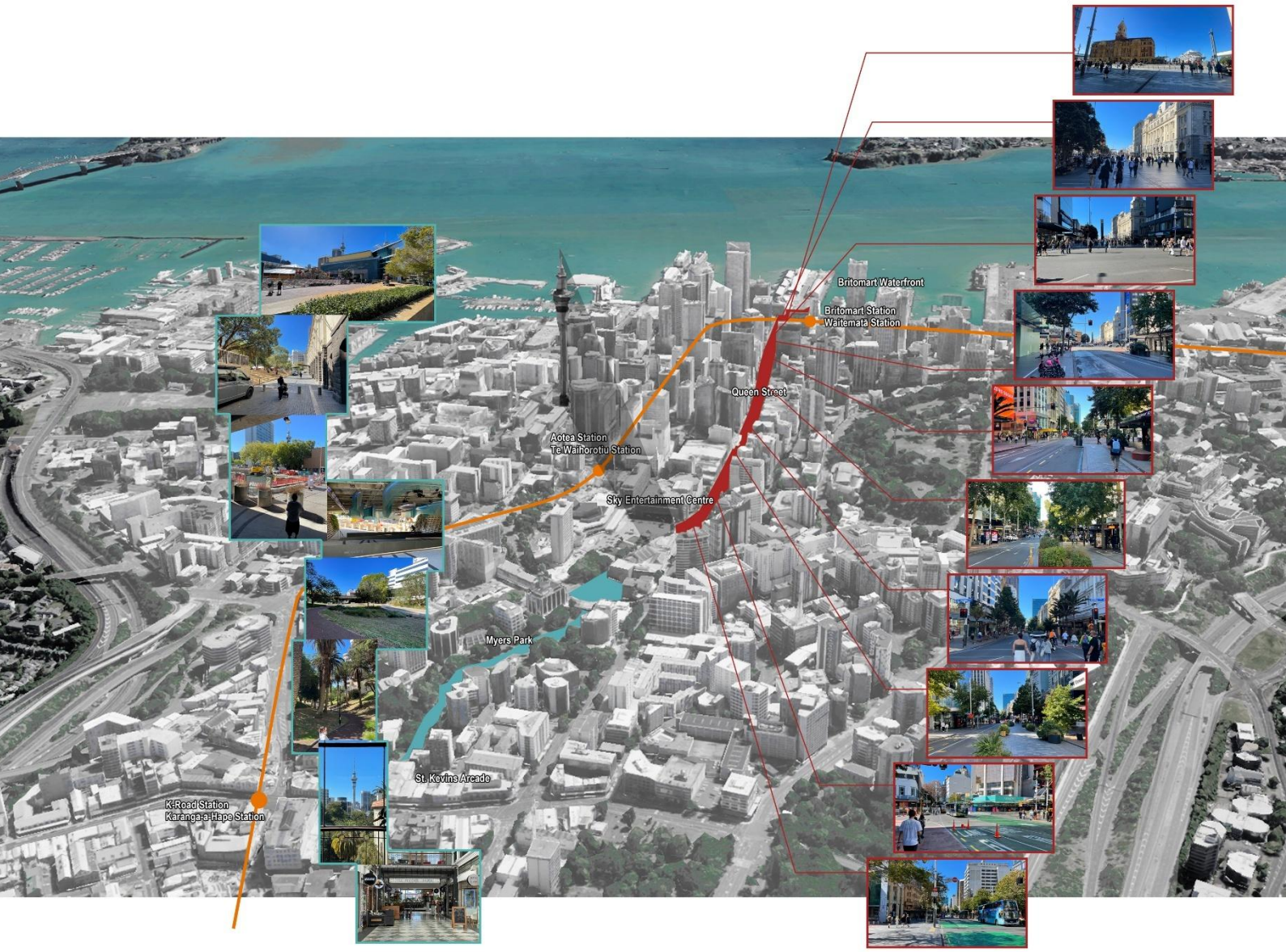


Figure 24 Figure 24 Seong, Jay. Photo footage from St Kevins arcade to Britomart

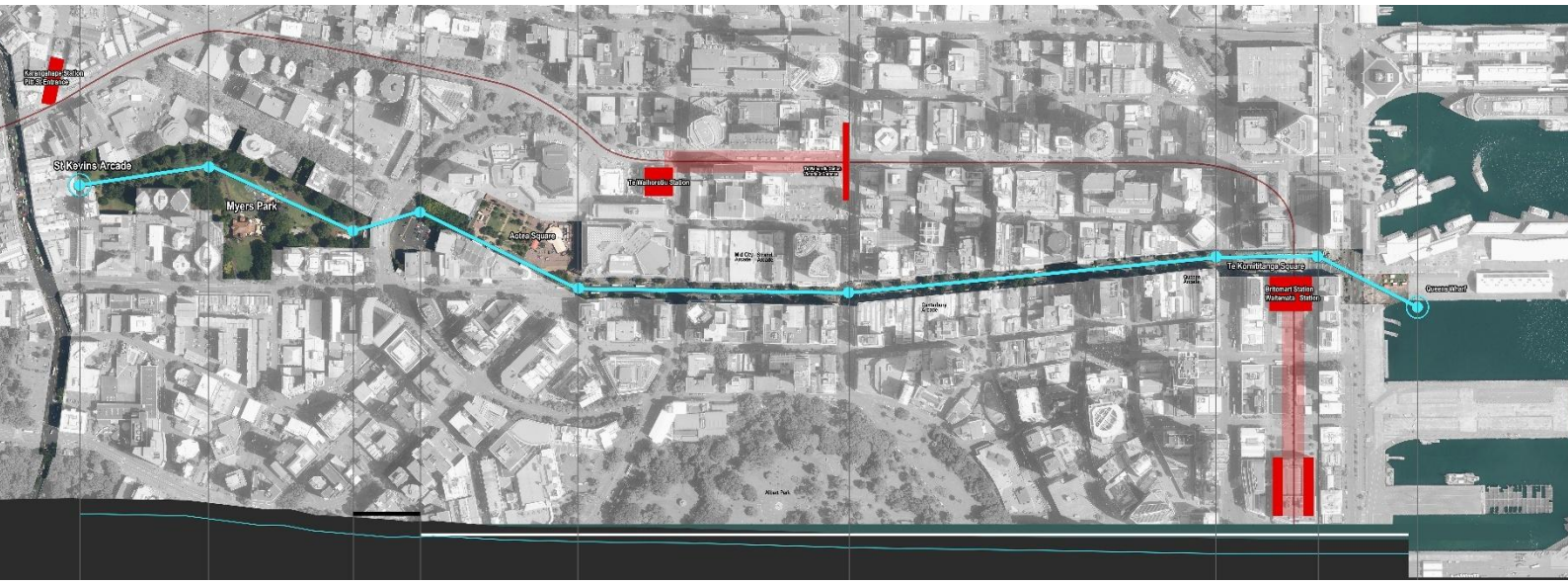


Figure 25 Seong, Jay. Site Plan with key intersection node with CRL development

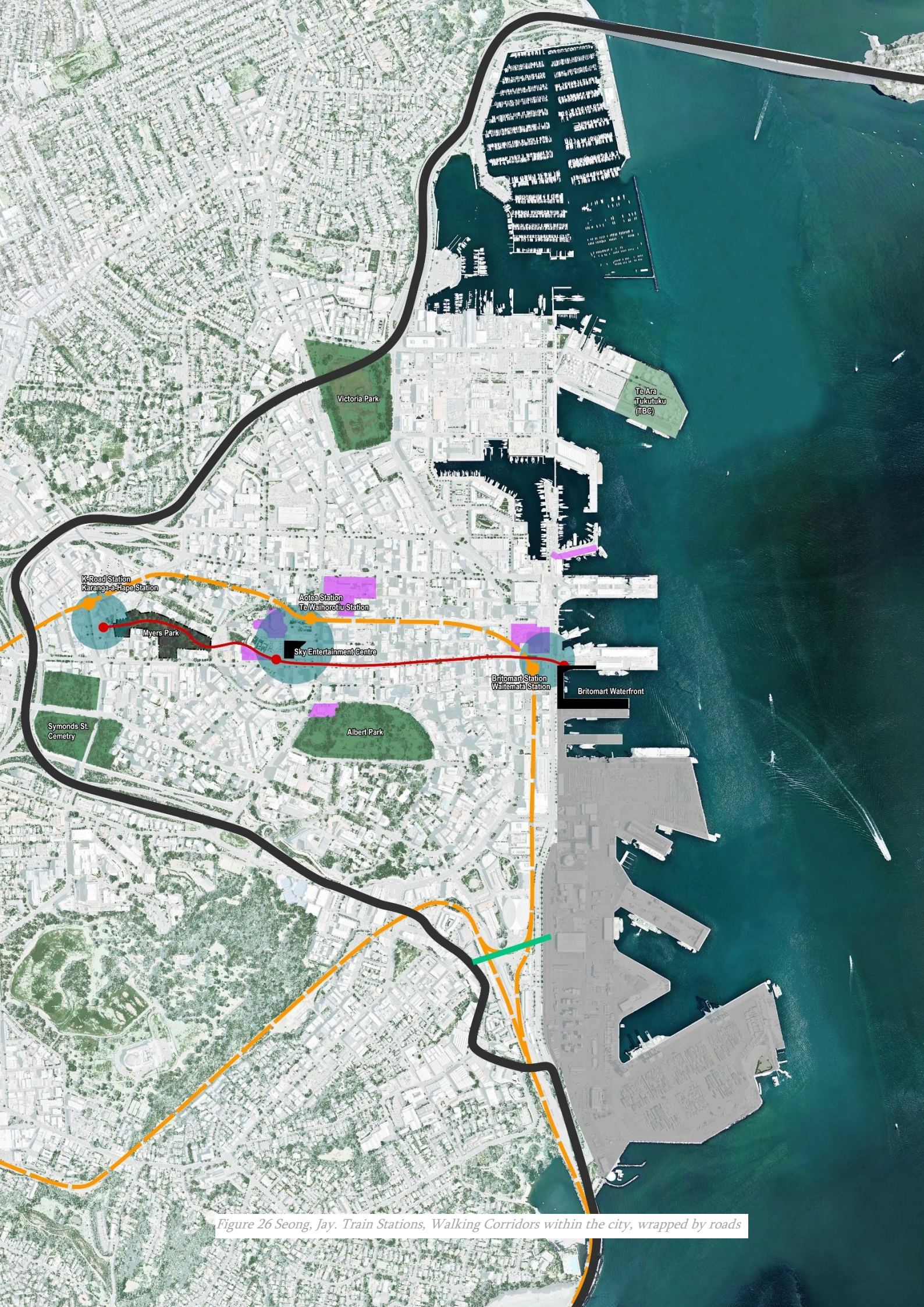


Figure 26 Seong, Jay. Train Stations, Walking Corridors within the city, wrapped by roads

3.1 5 Intersections

The journey of the Waihorotiu Stream demonstrates its route is more than just an uninterrupted straight line however it is a sequence of intersections with increasing significance. Beginning at K Road as it drops into the central city down to Mayoral Dr and Myers Park, continuing on to Aotea Square public open space, Wellesley and Queen Streets, and ending at the lower point of intersection past Victoria St and onto Customs Street, the stream has travelled multiple levels of urban systems and patterns of movement — frequently disrupted and then reconnected. Each location represents a moment of change for the flow of the urban environment and an increase in significance to those who travel through it.

According to Kevin Lynch (1960), intersections are strategic points of connection and decision within the urban path system. The way he described these areas was not only as places where different paths intersect but also as places where people must decide how to continue their journey. This decision-making process increases people's awareness and sense of their surroundings.

"At intersections, where decisions must be made, people tend to be particularly alert and aware of their surroundings. This tendency has been repeatedly observed, and it may therefore be assumed that elements located at intersections acquire special significance simply by virtue of their position." (Lynch, 1960, p. 42)

From this perspective, the intersections along the path of Waihorotiu are not merely physical nodes but sensory thresholds through which the city becomes aware of itself. At these points, flows are momentarily delayed or diverted, and users unconsciously choose directions, interpret spatial cues, and determine their next actions. In other words, intersections are not places where flow simply passes through but moments when flow becomes consciously perceived.

Intersection A: Upper K Road - Myers Park Interface
- Catchment, Arrival of Awa into the valley

In terms of creating a portal to enhance the vibrancy of K Rd and extending it into the city centre, this is one of the best locations. The Myers Park natural environment is located just above the Myers Park–Upper K Rd interface, which marks the transition from an urban culture zone to green zones and therefore has significant potential for flow from the upper city to the lower valley. Currently, the large stairs neither encourage nor facilitate people descending from K Road, significantly limiting the interface's potential. This point, where the flow of the Waihorotiu Stream once began, is reinterpreted as a device that collects and re-visualises rainwater to repair the interrupted flow and re-encourage flow again.

Intersection B: Myers Park - Mayoral Drive Junction
- Transition, Vehicle Infrastructure versus Public Habitat

The separation of the flow of pedestrians at this junction, which connects Myers Park to Aotea Square, is apparent because there is on street parking and the access points to the underground car parks. At this junction, the separation of public space by infrastructure is most visibly demonstrated. Although Myers Park and Aotea Square are physically adjacent to one another, they remain separate and not integrated, and thus confront one another as distinct entities.

Intersection C: Aotea Square–Queen Street
- Disconnection, The Diminished Glory of the Civic Central

This junction, where Aotea Square meets Queen Street, is the single most visually and spatially prominent convergence point for residual routes from Greys Avenue and flows coming from Airedale Street, Wakefield Street, and Rutland Street. This junction serves as the focal point where different flow inclines converge and diverge. While the Waihorotiu stream runs underneath the Sky Entertainment Center at this location, pedestrian flow is directed toward Queen Street, resulting in an intersecting area of multiple types of flow. This area is surrounded by City Hall, the Aotea Centre, the Sky Entertainment Center, and the St James Theater and was intended to be the civic and cultural heart of the city. However, as it exists today, it is an empty void that cannot sustain prolonged activity or use.

Intersection D: Queen Street–Wellesley Street
- Urban Shaft, A Corridor of Compressed Flow

As a primary cross-town corridor, Wellesley Street carries a significant volume of traffic, including from both university precincts and Albert Park, and from Hobson Street and Nelson Street. Although partially restricted to bus-only lanes, this intersection still serves as a clear dividing line that crosses Queen Street from North to South. The failure of the St James Theatre and the Sky Entertainment Centre has made this area an even stronger boundary, where the quality of the urban experience changes dramatically. The high volume of vehicles entering from Wellesley Street and Victoria Street defines this short section as a means of passage and not a place to dwell.

Intersection E: Queen Street–Victoria Street
- Viewing Platform, Where Vertical and Horizontal Axes Converge

The site allows an opportunity for a direct view of the Sky Tower while also being at the confluence of Aotea Square, Lower Queen St and High St in terms of commercial movement. This particular site is located in such a manner that the Waihorotiu flows linearly from Britomart through the modern city and simultaneously experience the Sky Tower's vertical dominance and Queen Street's longitudinal axis. However, due to vehicle oriented movement systems and continuous canopies there is limited ability to visually enter the pedestrian realm and the building facades are seen as the backdrop to consumption rather than as entities in their own right. In addition to this, high vacancy rates has solidified this area as a movement corridor and not a place to remain.

The findings from this research will act as a reference point for designing the crossings. Instead of identifying a single major solution that addresses all the "wicked" issues within Auckland's urban environment, this research identifies a number of spatial interventions that occur where people perceive flows around them as converging, and their perceptions are intensified. These intersections are considered both places of interior experience (similar to the ascent of the Sky Tower) and reorientation experiences.

Whereas an ascent to the Sky Tower takes you vertically from street level to sky level in an elevator, this research proposes a reorientation from street level down to sea level using the trace of Awa, which flows back to the surface.

Therefore, the intersections found in this research can be thought of not just as physical points of connection, but as spatial tools — sites of organising, obstructing, compressing, and redirecting the flow of people over time.
They enable the reversal of the vertical logic of ascension to a horizontal story of continuity.

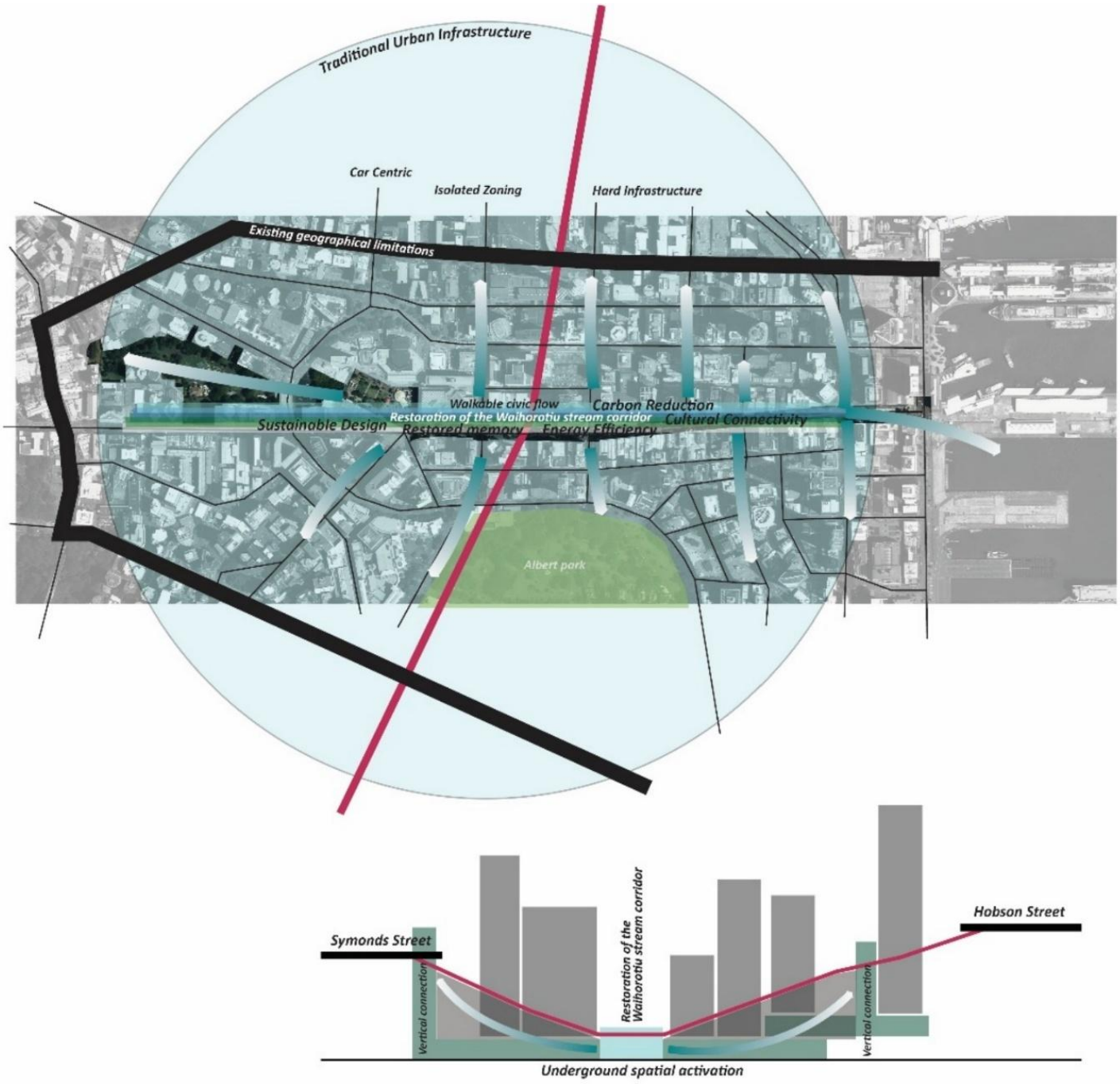


Figure 27 Seong, Jay. Geographic positioning diagram of Queen Street, Waihorotiu

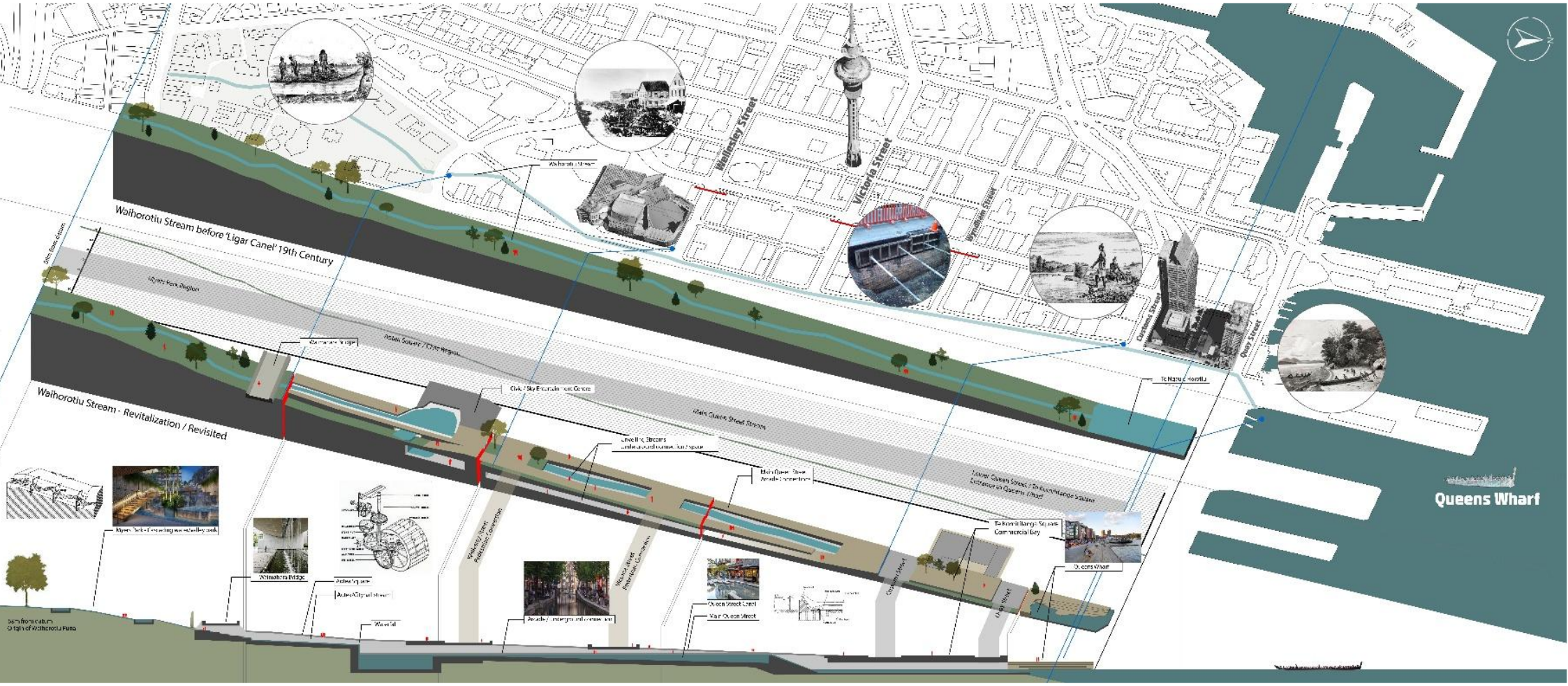


Figure 28 Seong, Jay Topographical gradient study and analysis of water retention concepts.

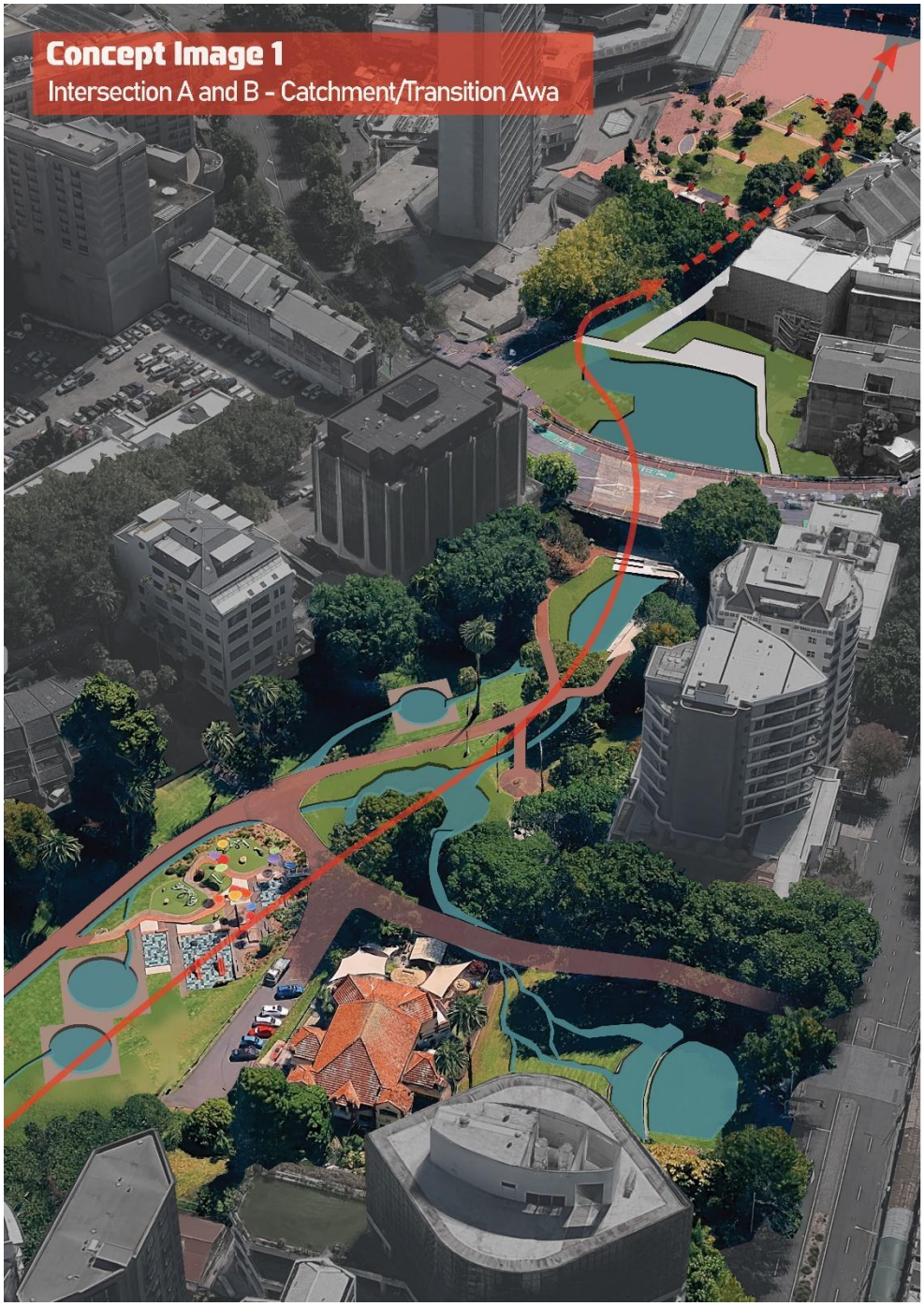


Figure 29 Seong, Jay. Children were able to interact with water on a small pond which existed at Myers Park. The area has been declining as an active use of space. This proposed plan will create a variety of water-based activities in this high location while capturing and controlling water movement from the top down by creating a method for storing and regulating water as it flows. In addition to the creation of a continued spatial and hydrological flow through the park as a waterside public landscape the project will reconnect Myers Park to Aotea Square.

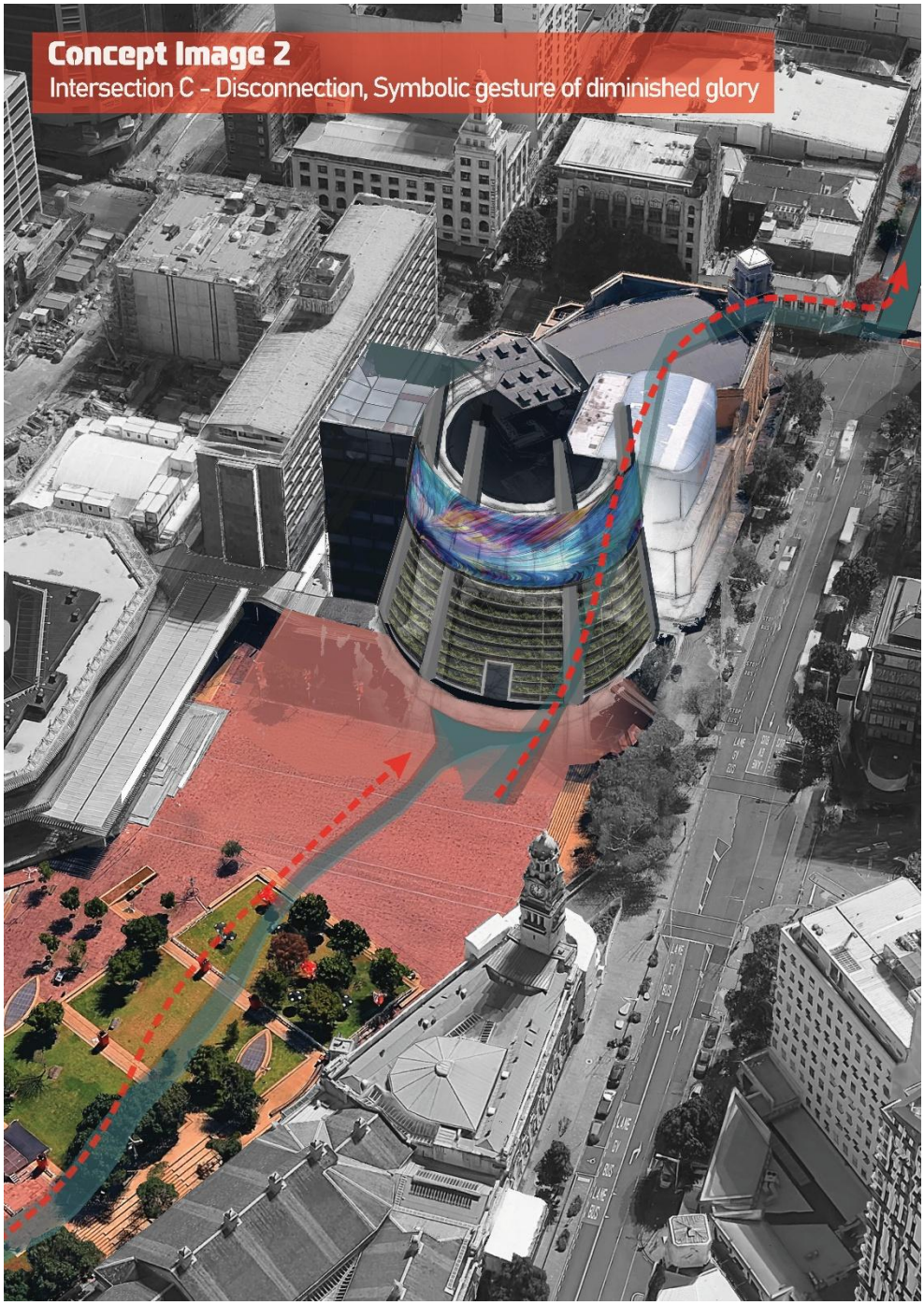


Figure 30 Seong, Jay. Controlled water at Myers Park has created a well-defined watercourse that flows from Myers Park down an inclined channel to the underground car park, then continues beneath Aotea Square. The watercourse in the square features sculptural and architectural access points to the underground watercourse and the watercourse park beneath it. Aotea Square was once the Civic Heart of Auckland; however, today it functions as a fragmented space. This proposal will translate this fragmentation into a topographic representation of controlled water. The continuous flow of water creates a lasting observation experience and thereby provides spatial concentration and re-establishes civic function in Aotea Square.

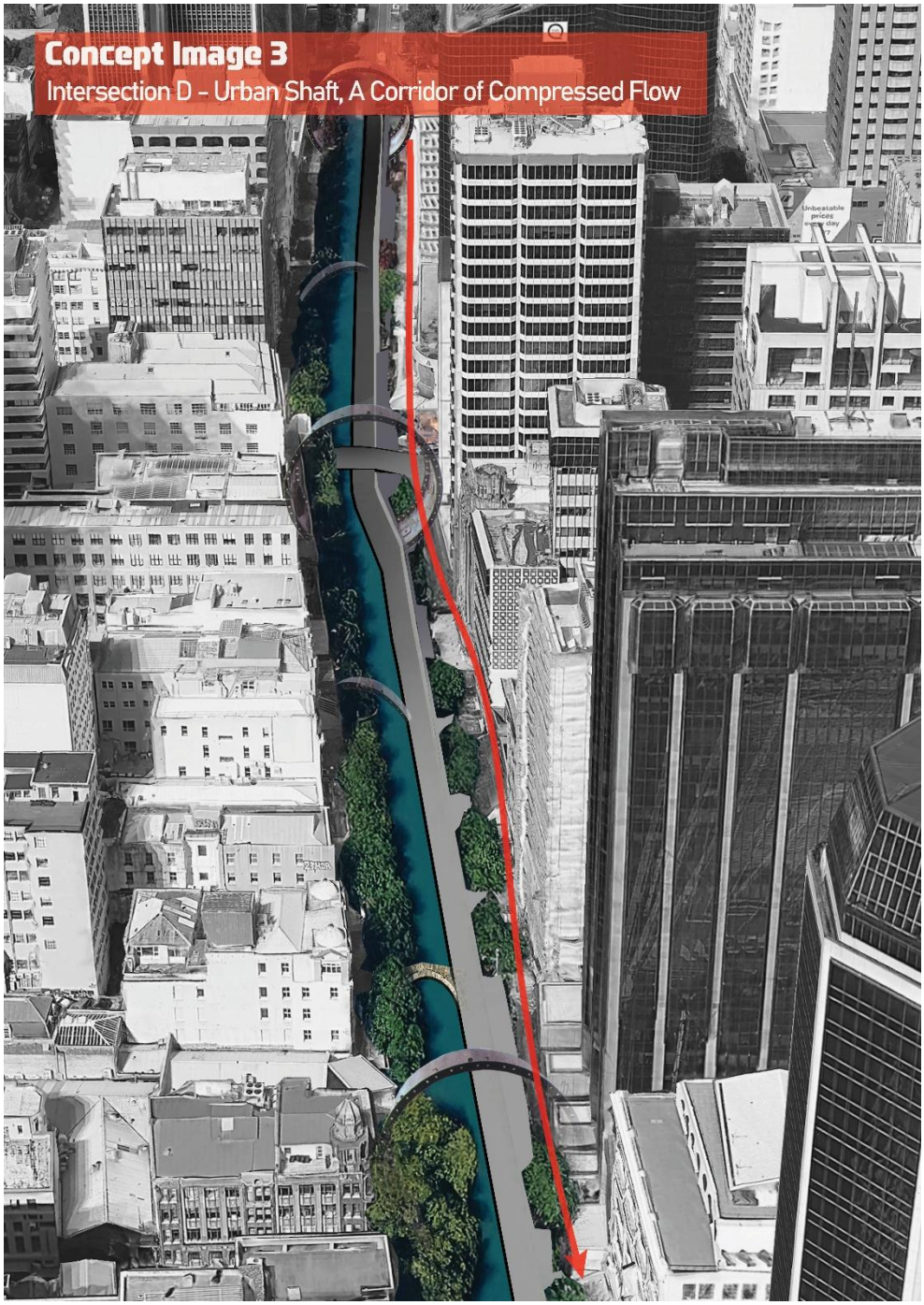


Figure 31 Seong, Jay. The water element functions as a pedestrian path through Queen Street; therefore, the flow of water can be viewed on both sides of the street. Pedestrian pathways and the flow of the water have been designed to function in sync at the centre of Queen Street. Water falling down both sides of the walkway creates a continuous water system and establishes a connection from Myers Park to Britomart. Thus, there is a correlation of movement of people and water, and they work in unison in space. This correlation has created a new form of interiority on the street by the way the intervention creates a reading of the façade as a wall or enclosure, and the towers or tower elements create a form of "furniture" to define a room in the space created along the central water element.

Figure 32 Seong, Jay. Beginning at the intersection of Queen Street and Victoria Street the water flowing into the Myers Park and the rain falling in the area of the valley created by the topography of Auckland City are set against the Sky Tower vertically as the water flows to the sea and can be seen at the same time as a symbol of verticality and a flow horizontally as it moves towards the sea. This waterway extends from Myers Park, so it does much more than simply create a waterfront; it creates a closed-loop water cycle that collects and repurposes water for environmental remediation and for cleaning building facades. When it rains heavily, or during emergencies, the water will be directed under Customs Street, pass through an underground tunnel just beneath Britomart Square, and then be discharged to Queens Wharf.

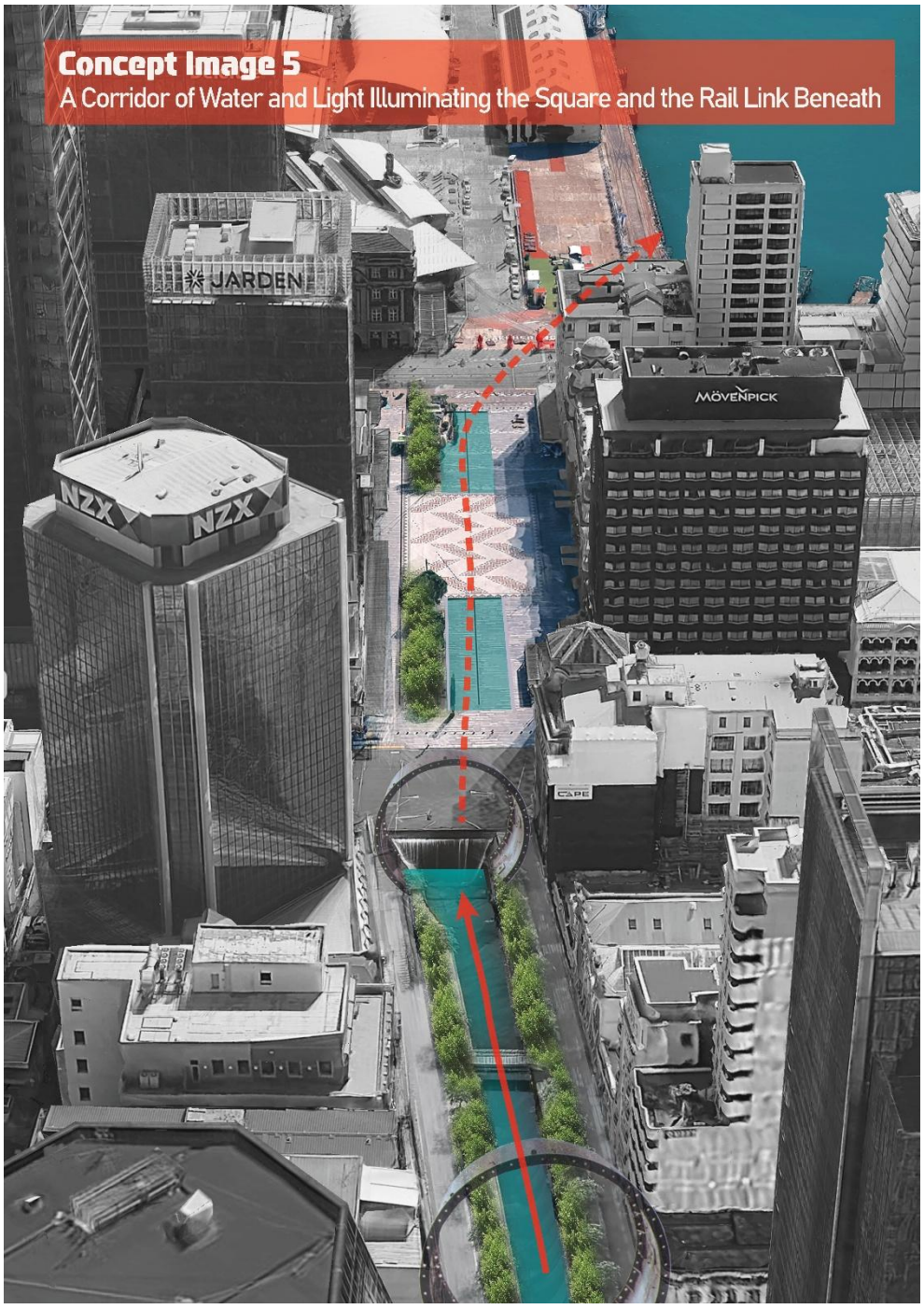


Figure 33 At the point in time where Queen Street intersects with Customs Street, the route of the waterway will pass underneath the street for a brief duration, before continuing as it has been since prior to this development, as the drainage system that currently runs through the middle of the public square. A shallow and expanded water feature is made of reinforced glass, and while it provides an additional layer of illumination into the Waitemata Station via the conduit systems, the water flowing across the square and the light visible from inside the station create a line of sight vertically. The water continues to move as a visual element toward the ocean as well.

3.2 Sky Tower — Vertical Rhythm and Horizontal Rhythm

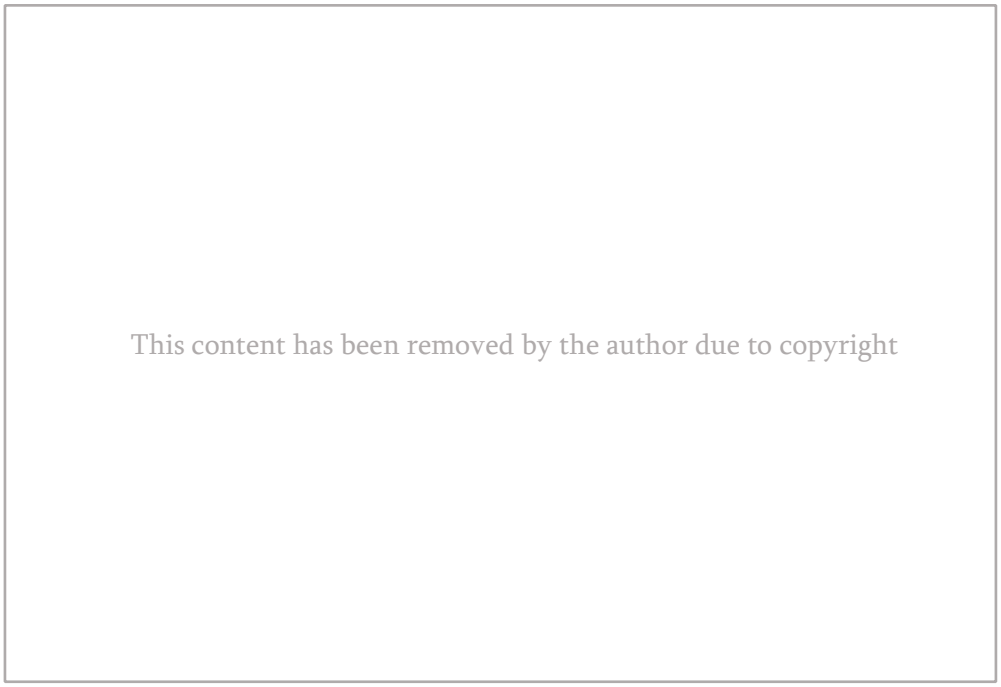


Figure 34 Construction of the SkyCity Casino and Sky Tower foundations. Source: Constructors New Zealand, Sky City Casino and Tower, https://www.constructors.co.nz/sky-city-casino-and-tower/

Alongside the horizontal flow of the Waihorotiu Stream lies the horizontal continuum of the five primary nodes identified previously. It is in these locations where water collected from the upper area of the Waihorotiu Stream's watershed drains down the Myers Park slope, stops for a moment at Aotea Square, before continuing to the lowest point in the Britomart and harbour. Although this pathway follows topography, it is disrupted by urban life: steep staircases, confusing destinations, Myers Park's unstable identity, Aotea Square's decline, and car-centric transit systems. Therefore, this horizontal flow is not experienced as a single continuous flow but as a series of interruptions that accumulate exhaustion.

As Jan Gehl (2011) argues, meaningful urban experience occurs at walking speed, where individuals can perceive detail, register change, and engage with atmosphere.

The horizontal urban rhythm is most clearly evidenced through the pedestrian body. A city does not begin to operate as a city until it is physically experienced on foot. Walking allows pedestrians to see distance, slope, and the opportunity to remain; the quality of the urban environment is not determined by length alone, but by the level of continuity it offers to those who walk through it.

The Waihorotiu's horizontal flow is often disrupted by stairways that disrupt continuity and by automobile-based traffic that predominates throughout the area. The flow is therefore viewed simply as a method of travelling through the space, rather than as an urban rhythm that creates opportunities for dwelling and memory.

The Sky Tower's vertical rhythm is diametrically opposed to the surroundings. Travellers move easily through the interior of Skycity, ascending rapidly to the observation deck via escalators and elevators in a nearly frictionless process. This vertical travel requires little physical exertion and almost no directional input, allowing travellers to view the city from the elevated platform within seconds. From this elevated vantage point, Auckland appears calm and composed; the movement of the sun and the colours of dusk reduce the city's complexities into a single, unified image.

However, this vertically condensed experience is removed from the experiential processes of perceiving and living in the city. Modern architecture and urban design have progressively reduced the urban experience to the visual, relegating other bodily senses (such as touch, hearing, and gravity) to secondary status. The Sky Tower's vertical flow exemplifies this trend in its extreme form: the city is represented not as a place to live, but as an image to consume. In this type of experience, the city's diverse topographies, fragmented flows and the fatigue and resistance they create are eliminated.

"The dominance of vision over the other senses has led to a distancing and detachment from the world. Instead of being a lived, embodied reality, architecture has become an art of the eye, turning us into spectators rather than participants." (Pallasmaa, 2012, p. 22).

Rather than criticising the vertical rhythm, this study views it as an imbalance relative to the horizontal flow. The Sky Tower represents the efficiency with which Auckland's desires have been organised and highlights why horizontal urban experience has so frequently been ignored. The fundamental problem is not the presence of a vertical icon, but the absence of a comparable horizontal rhythm across the city.

From this perspective, the Sky Tower is not a monument, but a vertical mechanism that exemplifies the efficiency of organising desire in Auckland, while simultaneously demonstrating the systematic abandonment of horizontal urban experience.

Therefore, in this research, the Sky Tower is not something that needs to be replaced or negated, but it is an existing urban order that design must respond to. The focus is not the integration of the two rhythms, but the intentional representation of their difference. The city will be able to recognise its own imbalance by allowing the distinction between vertical efficiency and horizontal abandonment of experience to exist as a visible urban condition, provided that the resolution of the two rhythms is maintained rather than resolved.

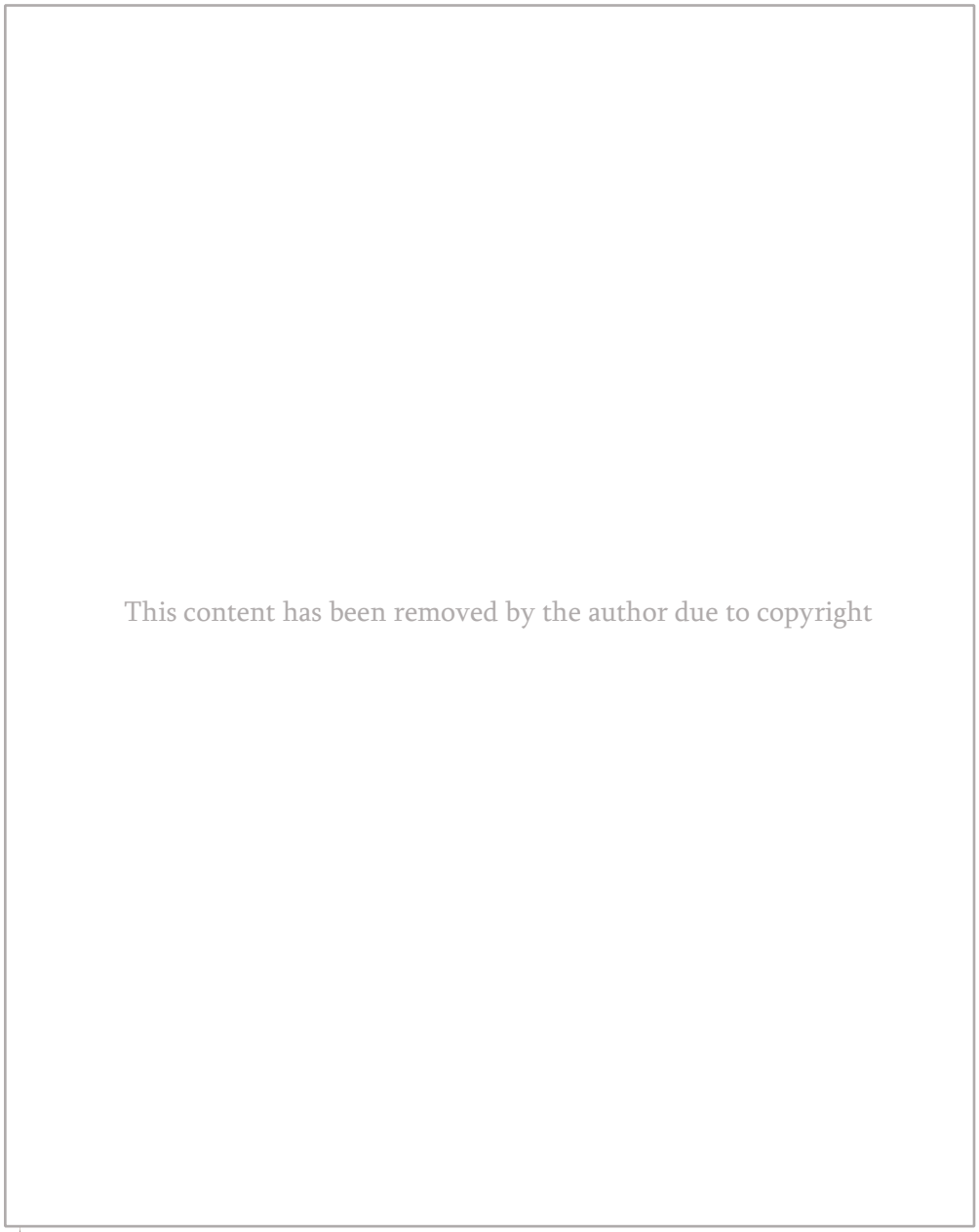


Figure 35 Construction of the Sky Tower shaft during the 1990s.
Source: Stuff (Facebook), historical photograph of Sky Tower construction, https://www.facebook.com/Stuff.co.nz/photos/a.10155625285174268/10155625285509268/

Figure 36 The construction of the Sky Tower's upper structure is the vertical assembly process of Auckland's most prominent landmark. Source: The New Zealand Herald, Sky High (In Depth), https://www.nzherald.co.nz/indepth/news/sky-high/

3.3 Weaving tales

Much like how repeated rainfall slowly shapes land by carving channels, Auckland's valley has been gradually formed through the ongoing interaction of water and terrain, creating a natural flow. Along this flow, settlements developed, people gathered, places were named, and the area came to be known as Waihorotiu, linked to the taniwha, the land's guardian spirit. This origin is more a story of gradual buildup than a single historical event, emerging from the continuous interplay of natural processes and human presence over time. From the beginning, the city was never fully formed or static; rather, it grew incrementally through the flow of water and human habitation.

In a similar way, my own understanding of Auckland has been shaped not as a collection of discrete architectural forms, but as a sequence of experiences repeated across temporal layers of the city. The way cities are remembered is often determined more by experiential traces than by formal precision. People tend not to retain detailed memories of building shapes; instead, they recall where they paused, where they hesitated, and which paths they ultimately chose not to take. Through such repetitions, the city slowly condenses into an image, while memory persists not as a visual impression but as a rhythm of experience. In this sense, memory does not remain at a purely personal or subjective level but can be understood as the structural outcome of flows that the city has permitted and organised over time.

Cities are often identified by iconic architectural forms. Sydney is recalled through its Opera House, Paris through the Eiffel Tower, and, further back, Egypt through its pyramids. These icons serve as powerful visual anchors, fixing cities in the collective imagination. Yet the endurance of such symbols cannot be attributed to form alone. Their significance emerges from the time spent with them and the experiences that accumulate around them. Architecture that carries history does so slowly, and it is precisely this slowness that enables it to record the fractures and tensions of a particular era. Urban memory, therefore, is not produced by form in isolation but through the sustained conditions of dwelling that surround it.

Within this context, the Sky Tower—one of the central components of Auckland's urban image—can be reinterpreted. From the perspective of an immigrant, the Sky Tower once seemed little more than another vertical emblem, like those found in many global cities. Over time, however, the city's wicked problems—such as the persistent underuse of public transport, car-oriented policy structures, housing pressures, and the gradual departure of younger generations—have increasingly manifested themselves within everyday streetscapes and lived experience. The vitality and optimism associated with Auckland in the early 2000s have now shifted toward a more cynical perception of a city that is slow to change.

This shift in perspective is not solely confined to personal opinion. Although I am not native-born to New Zealand, I have a new role to take into consideration when thinking about the next generation that will grow up here; that is my obligation to ensure that Auckland continues to be able to support a structure of history and memory so it can promote the collective pride of its citizens. In addition to restoring a stream to the public, the former Cheonggyecheon in Seoul is another example of how the experience of reading the city horizontally has been rediscovered and of how the city's image has been re-evaluated.

Although this may seem a modest aspiration for someone speaking as an immigrant, the confidence I express here stems from believing that the hidden Waihorotiu should be redefined along with the structural issues of the city and that they should be defined together in terms of a greater effort to redefine the connection between citizens and the city through spatial transformation.

From this perspective, the disappearance of Waihorotiu cannot be understood merely as the burial of a stream. It represents the exclusion of a fundamental water flow from the dwelling structure that once enabled repeated movement, orientation, and the accumulation of memory. The directionality, slope, and possibilities for lingering and return that this flow once generated were simultaneously obstructed.

As a result, Waihorotiu persists as a geographical past while remaining an inoperative memory within contemporary urban experience. Along Queen Street, where the trace of the stream remains embedded beneath the surface, pedestrian movement is increasingly perceived as weary and fragmented, yielding to vehicular priority and reduced to a corridor of consumption beneath continuous canopies. This research seeks to explore whether this condition might be recalibrated, allowing the space to once again mediate water, memory, and urban dwelling, and to restore the spatial right to stay, return, and remember.

Within this narrative framework, personal movement through the city functions not as a marginal tale but as a form of testimony. The decision to descend from K Road into Myers Park, the emptiness encountered there, the dominance of car-oriented environments around Aotea Square, and the experience of moving beneath continuous canopies without registering architectural facades are not merely subjective impressions. They are outcomes of how the city has organised and permitted particular flows. The moving body thus becomes a medium through which abstract urban structures are translated into lived experience.

The five intersections identified earlier reveal points where these conditions become most visible. At present, moments of pause at these sites are defined by traffic signals, inaccessible stairways, or a lack of legible purpose. This research proposes that such moments might instead be reframed as narrative scenes in which experience intensifies. Each intersection may function as a scene or a paragraph, and when linked together, these scenes allow the city to be read not as a structure of disconnection, but as a shared flow of memory through which one may move together.

The act of weaving described in this chapter does not seek to unify disparate elements into a closed narrative. Rather, it involves placing urban memory, the buried flow of water, contemporary disruptions, and personal experience alongside one another in order to preserve the conditions through which the city can read itself again. In this sense, architecture does not impose meaning; it creates the spatial possibility for stories to emerge.

Ultimately, the main concern of this study does not lie in how to simply reconstruct a lost history. This study concerns itself with which urban rhythms will be continued and passed on to the next generation. While architecture offers no solution to all the urban problems, it can reactivate spatial paths through which memory can function again.

If the redevelopment of the Awa can be woven into everyday experiences, the city may move from being a silent surface to one that generates its own stories and fosters long-term urban resilience.

Figure 37 Seong, Jay. Queen Street, Victoria Street Intersection Auckland's vertical symbol, Sky Tower.

Figure 38 Seong, Jay. Queen Street Corridor, horizontal view shaft, looking down towards Britomart.

Chapter 4 The Two Towers

Throughout the preceding research, this thesis has seen Auckland as a city whose two opposing spatial logics — horizontality (Waihorotiu) and verticality (Sky Tower) — have been imbalanced from the start. On the one hand, there is the vertical condition of the Sky Tower, which looms over the rest of the city, visually represents development, and serves as a constant reminder of what has been accomplished—and lost—as a result of that process. On the other hand, the horizontal condition of Waihorotiu is hidden beneath the surface as memory, water, and resistance. While this horizontal condition was once responsible for organising the city's natural patterns of movement and flow, it now exists in a state of separation from the city.

The Two Towers uses this spatial difference as a starting point for illustrating how the city's wicked problems may be understood. Rather than providing a single solution, the project reinterprets Auckland's urban form and lived experience through the latent paths of the Waihorotiu Stream and its intersections with the modern city. In this section, the key moment is when all prior interpretations, previously at the level of theory/observation, are collectively brought into the design as a coherent spatial scene.

As such, the architectural response offered in this section does not seek to bring harmony or closure. Instead, it intentionally sets up the smoothness of vertical movement (the Sky Tower), against the smoothness of horizontal flow inherent in Waihorotiu, and thereby stages the current disconnection of horizontal urban flow as an experiential spatial condition. The tensions created by this disconnection are not considered to be a problem to be solved, but rather, as an architectural mechanism whereby the city can recognize and understand its own imbalance.

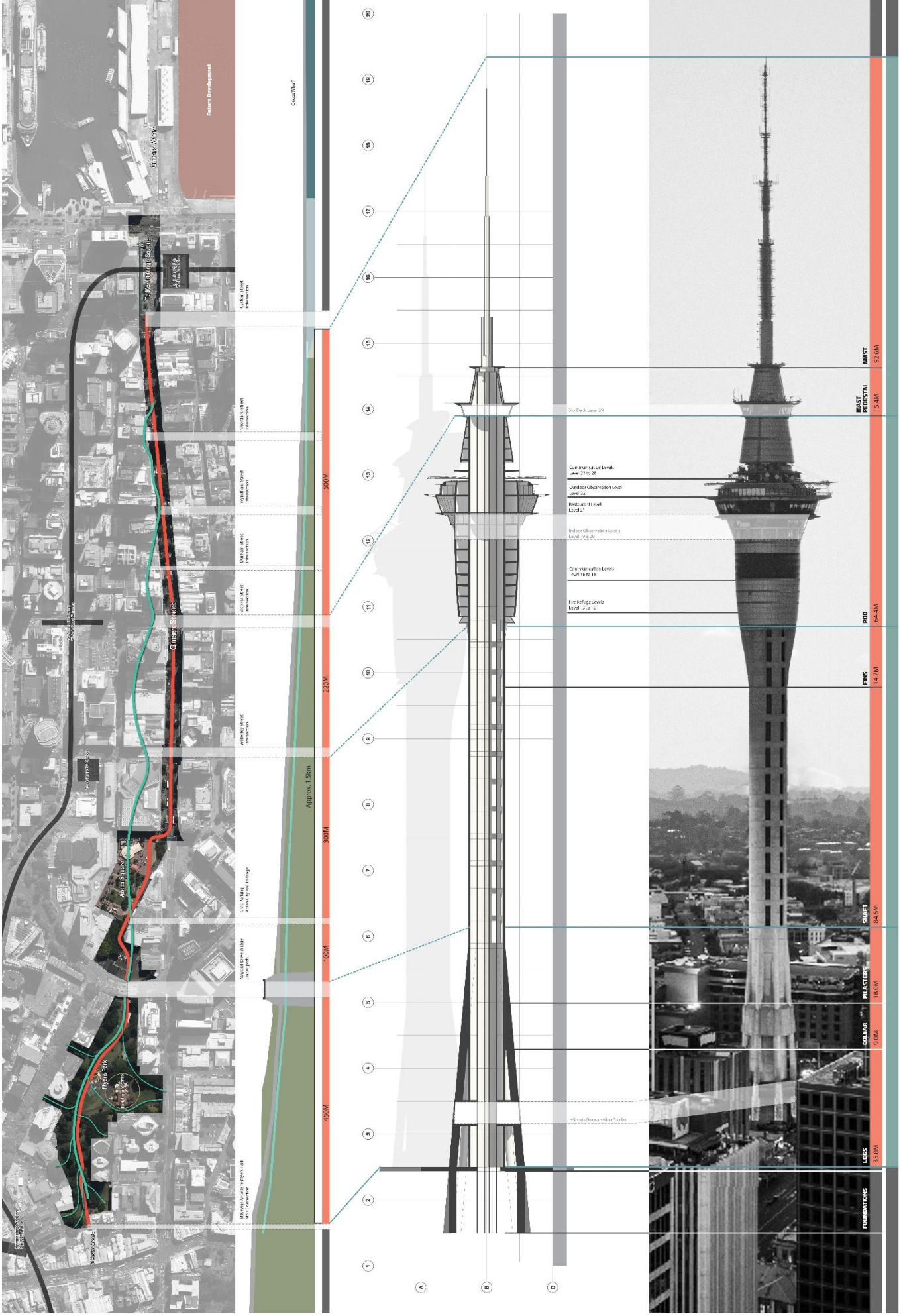


Figure 39 Seong, Jay. A diagram showing the cross-section of vertical symbols and the horizontal flow contrasting with the design

Figure 39.

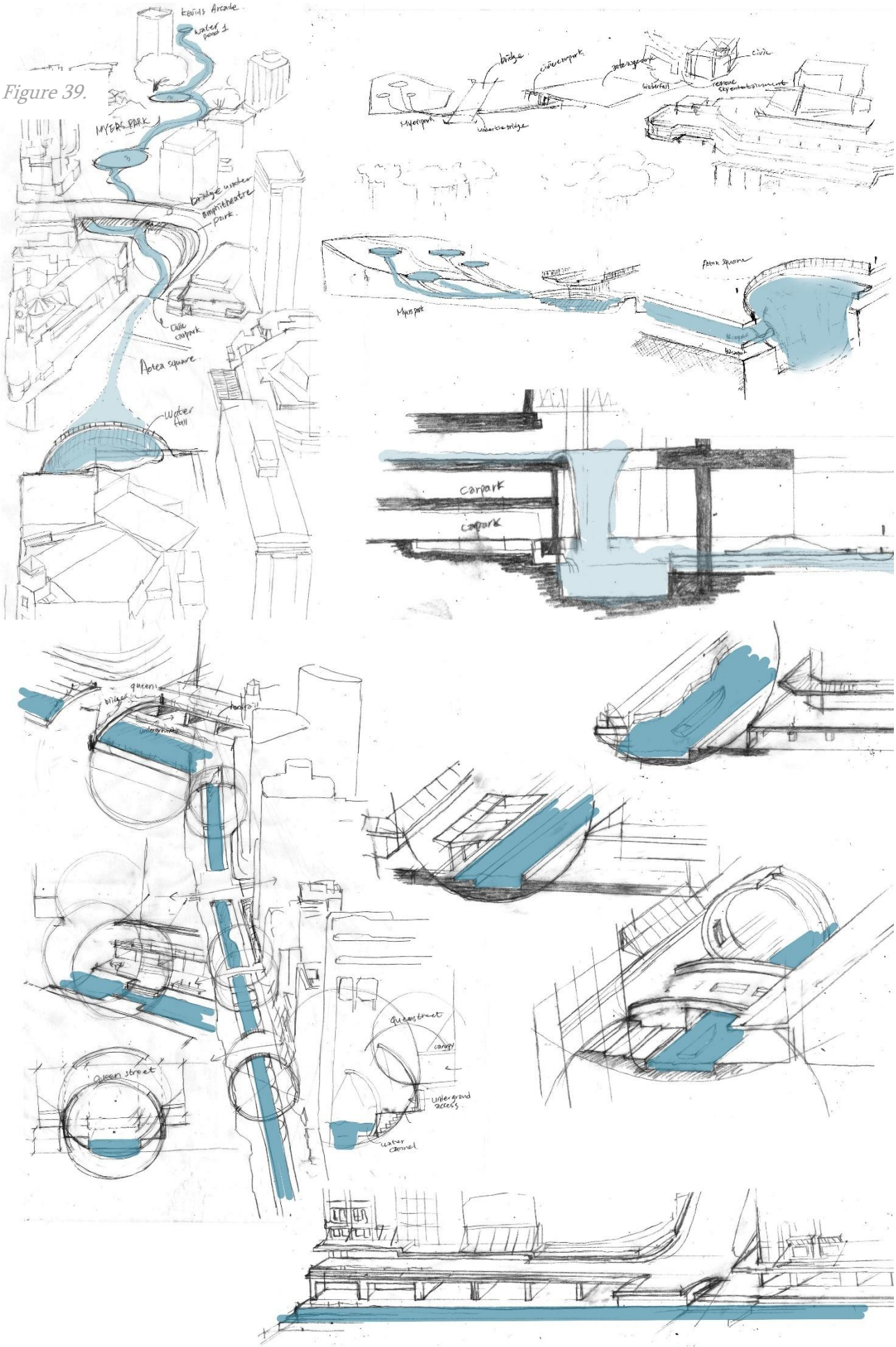


Figure 40

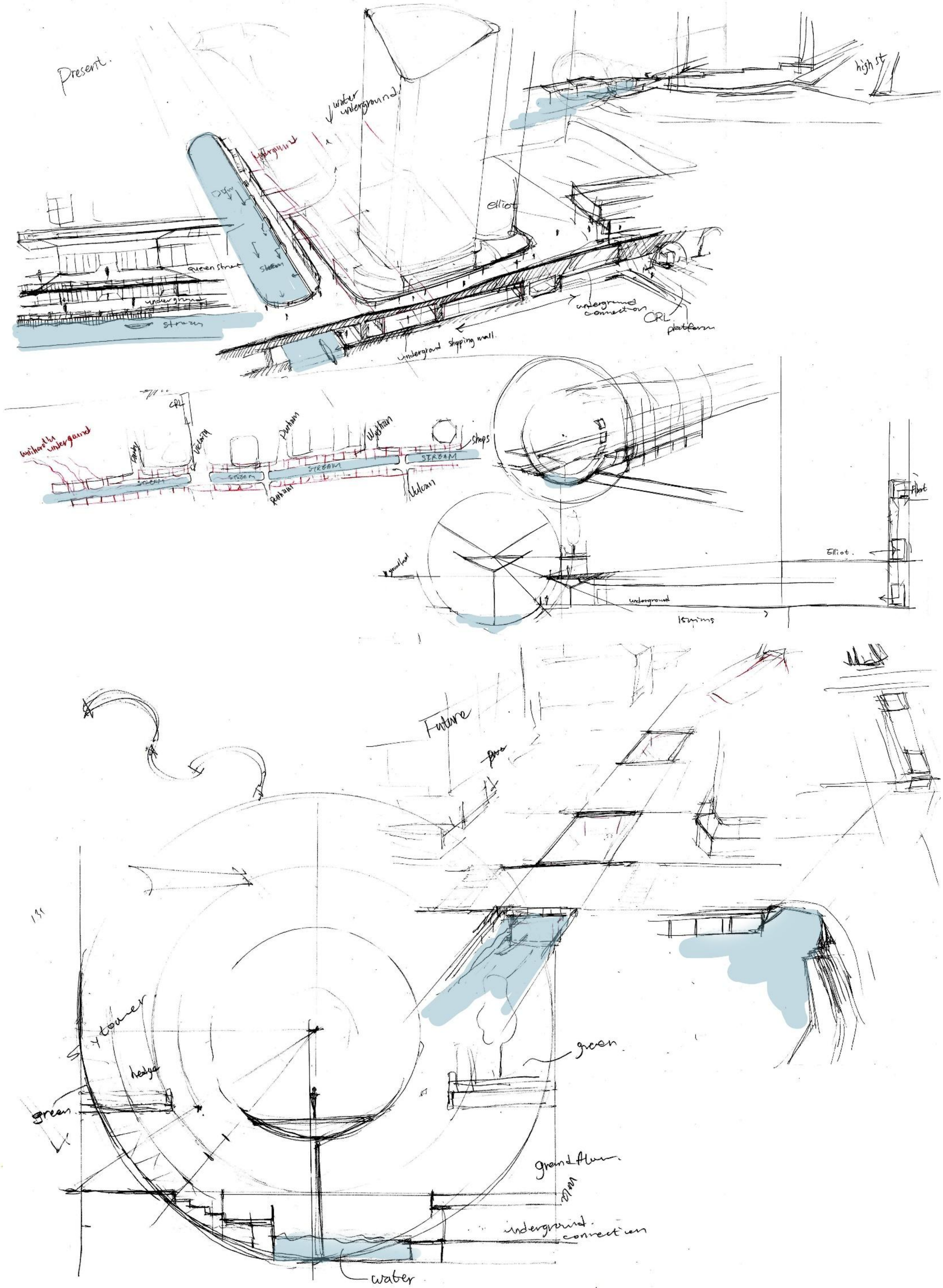

Present.
water underground
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Figure 41

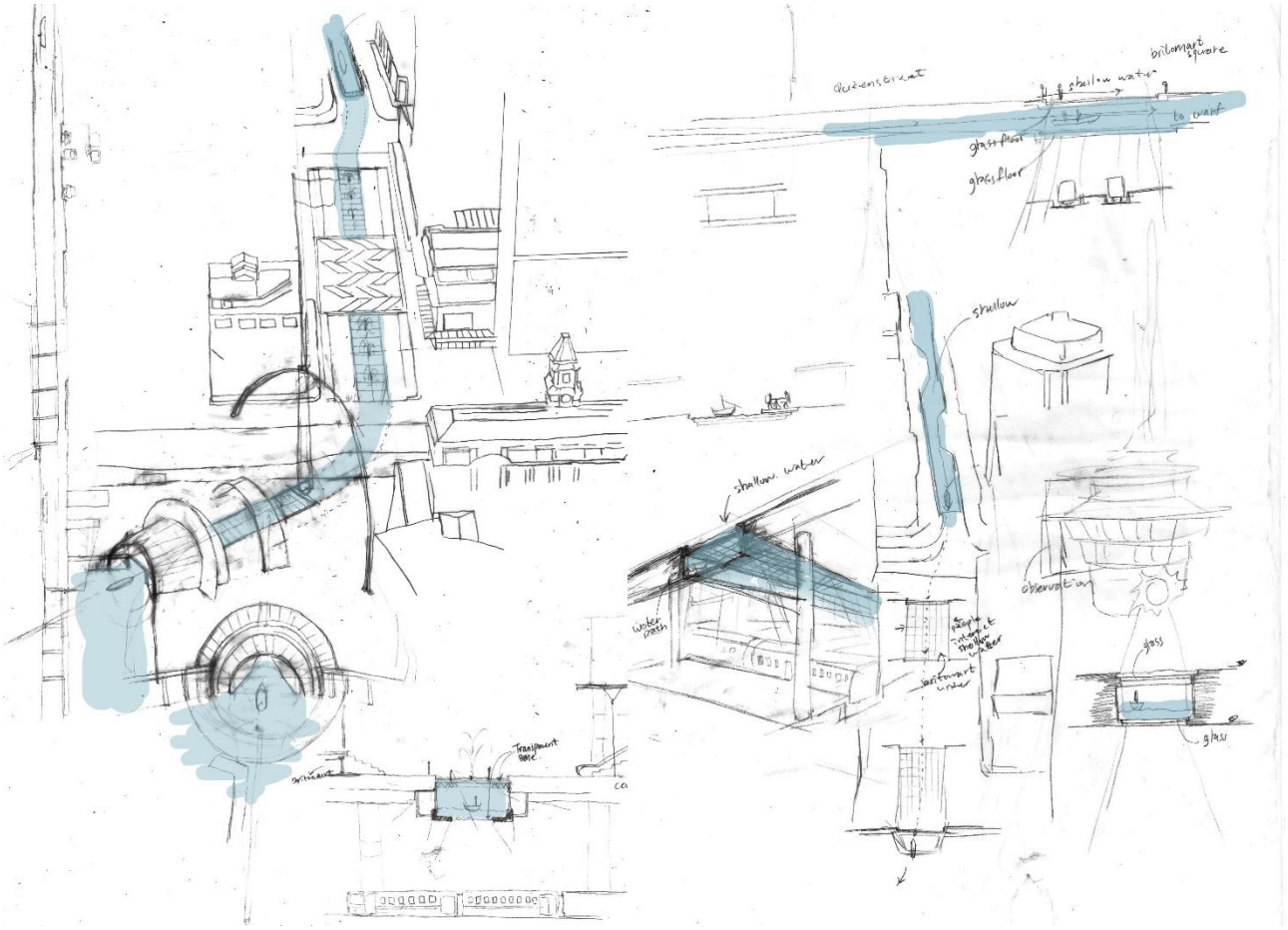

Figure 42 Seong, Jay Concept sketches illustrate the water flow from Retaining Water Myers Park to Aotea Square, including flow studies and the reconnection of water to Queen Street and the surrounding terrain and waterways. Design sketches and flow studies of the road are included to minimise obstruction to water flow. At the intersection of Queen Street and Custom Street, beneath Britomart Square, the operation of the large channel drain is examined, including how it controls water flow and how water drains from Queen Street.

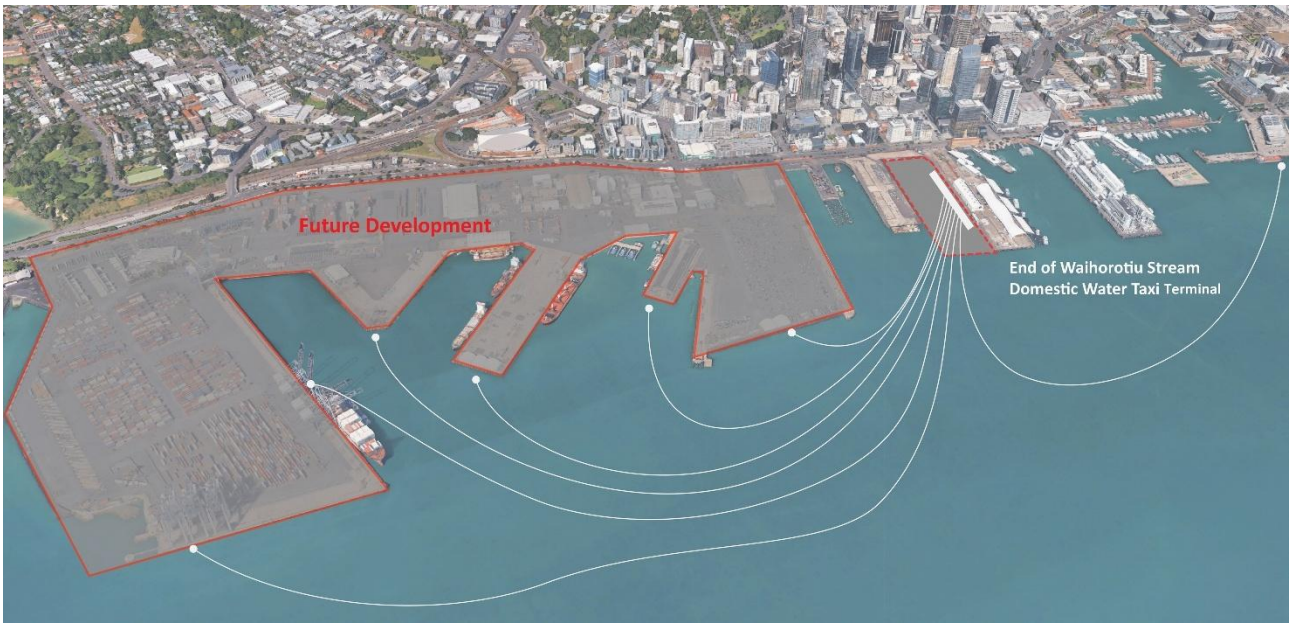

Figure 43 Seong, Jay. Aerial view showing the potential connection between the future development of the POAL site and the waterway

4.1 Design Outcome

Design is initiated by displaying the sectional anatomy of the Sky Tower in relation to the site map, illustrating the former course of the Waihorotiu Stream. By comparing these two illustrations, the Sky Tower's architecturally intended and functionally organised structure, as well as the city's horizontal flow of Waihorotiu, hidden under the city, will be reinterpreted.

The Sky Tower is a vertical system comprising foundation columns that carry structural loads, gathers visitors (paying), a shaft zone that permits movement, offers a glimpse, and the Pod and Mast elements located at the upper part of the tower, cater for a commodified experience, a sweeping view of the city and exclusive space... etc.

Through elevators that ascend through an elongated vertical space with exterior windows, users experience the sensation of rising while viewing the city skyline. The Pod functions as the central element of the tower's programmatic core, organising the most significant operational and public functions (office spaces, amenities, restaurants, cafes, and observatory decks) within the Pod. The upper Mast and mast pedestal constitute the functional apogee of the tower, providing panoramic views and serving as a communications tower.

Each of the five intersections identified in Chapter 3 (and the areas between them) will serve as the unit of design exploration to discover how each area can generate distinct spatial roles and experiences. The sequence is structured around five intersections and five primary segments, employing a correspondence-and-contrast model to compare the Sky Tower's vertical logic with the horizontal flow of Waihorotiu.

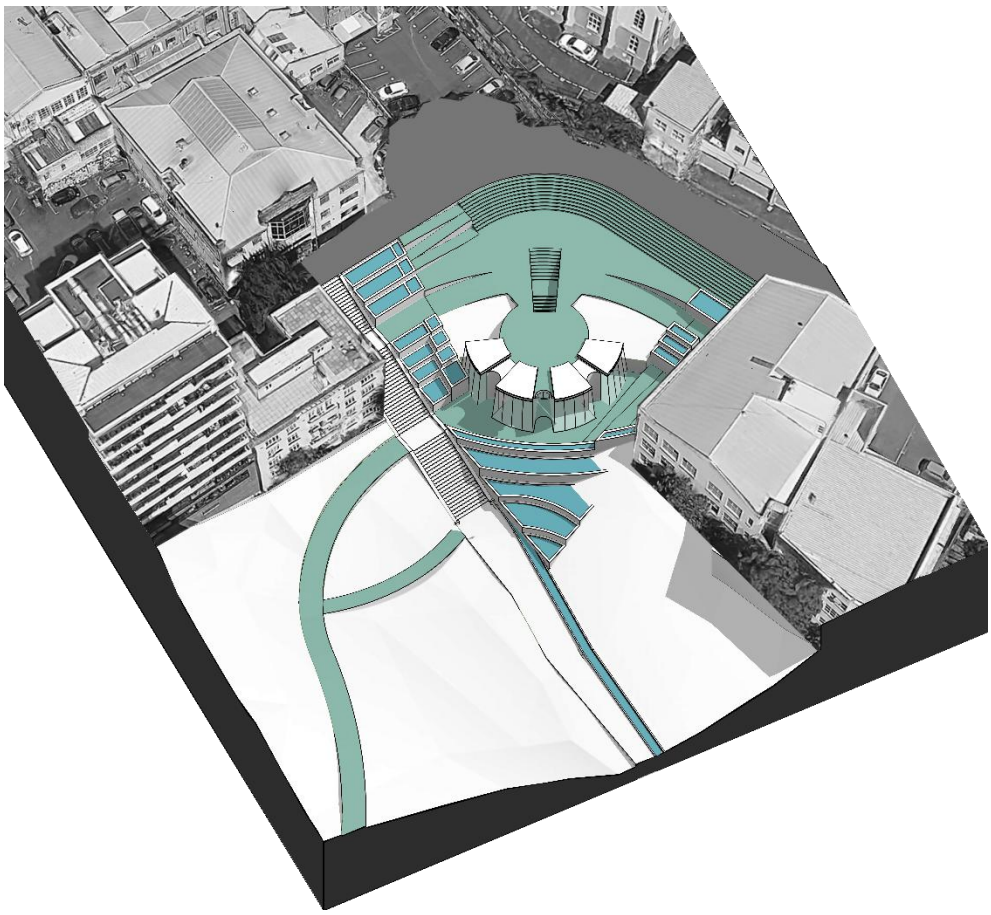

Figure 44 Seong, Jay. Intersection A

Segment 1: Intersection A (K Road/Myers Park)

The first segment, located at Intersection A (where Myers Park intersects with K Road) has the same structural function as the Sky Tower's foundation; however, whereas the tower's foundation is used for support and load distribution the structural function of the foundation of the Sky Tower translates to Myers Park as the source of water which represents both the spiritual and ecological base of the city. Here, what can be easily accessed by paying an entrance fee to enter the tower's foundation zone becomes, in the context of Waihorotiu, a foundation zone, as both the highest point of the topography and the beginning and end of a pedestrian experience.

Intersection A is viewed as a site that will absorb the cultural and social flows of youth as they transition from K Road into Myers Park, and will serve as a foundational level of New Zealand's identity and the relationship between New Zealand's natural and urban green spaces. The design for this site reinterprets it using water retention systems, cascading water features and transforming fragmented staircases and steep grades into a continuous pedestrian ramp system. In this location, the structural foundation of the Sky Tower is visually juxtaposed with the hydrologic source of Waihorotiu, marking the start of the design sequence.

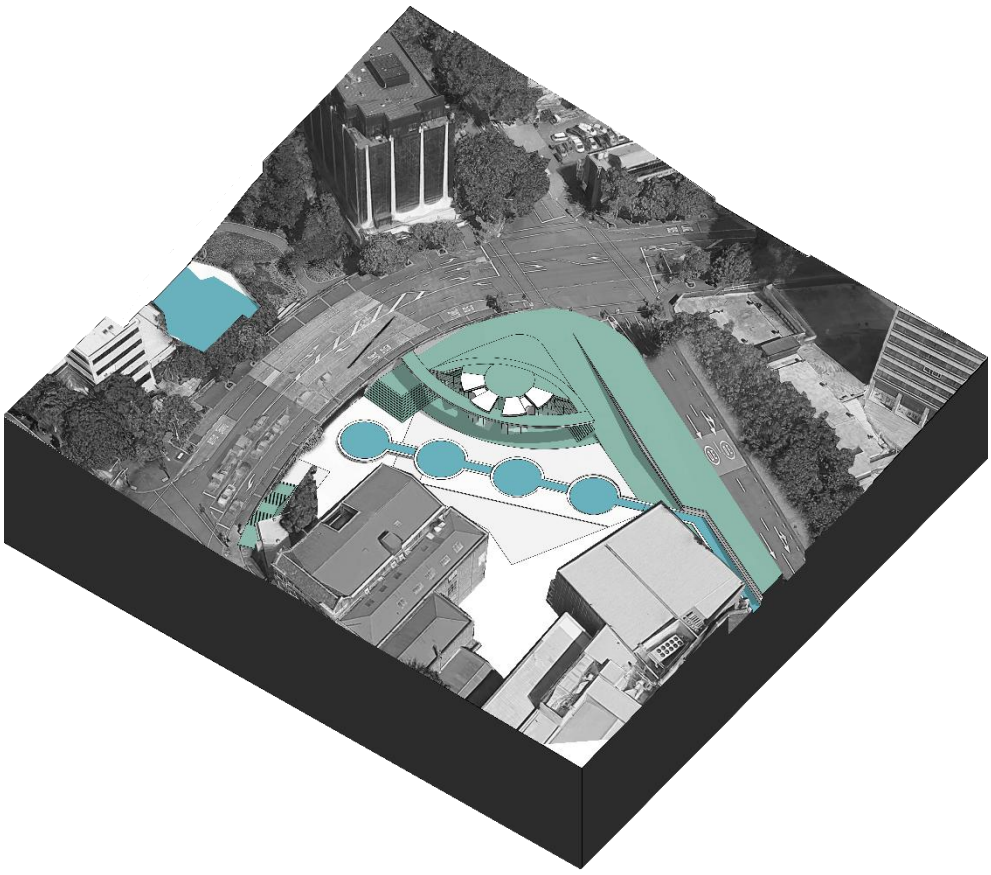

Figure 45 Seong, Jay. Intersection B

Segment 2: Intersection B (Myers Park/Aotea Square)

The second portion is centred around Intersection B and is designed as a waterfront park connecting Lower Myers Park to Aotea Square. As such, car-centric circulation is reduced, and in order to enhance access to Myers Park, part of the terrain will be modified. The upper and lower portions of Myers Park are analogous to the transition zone between the base of the tower and the entry into the shaft, thus creating a horizontal link.

The lower-level waterfront park creates a new definition for the central business district by utilising pedestrian-friendly circulation systems continuously and intuitively, instead of vehicle-friendly circulation systems. This allows the creation of an uninterrupted, pedestrian-friendly flow system that links pedestrian access points from Mayoral Drive to the circulation systems within Aotea Square, thereby repositioning the pedestrian routes entering Aotea Square.

Increasing pedestrian accessibility from Lower Myers Park to Aotea Square enhances the potential of spatially linking the two locations, while also functioning as a mediating device that extends the flow of water into Aotea Square.

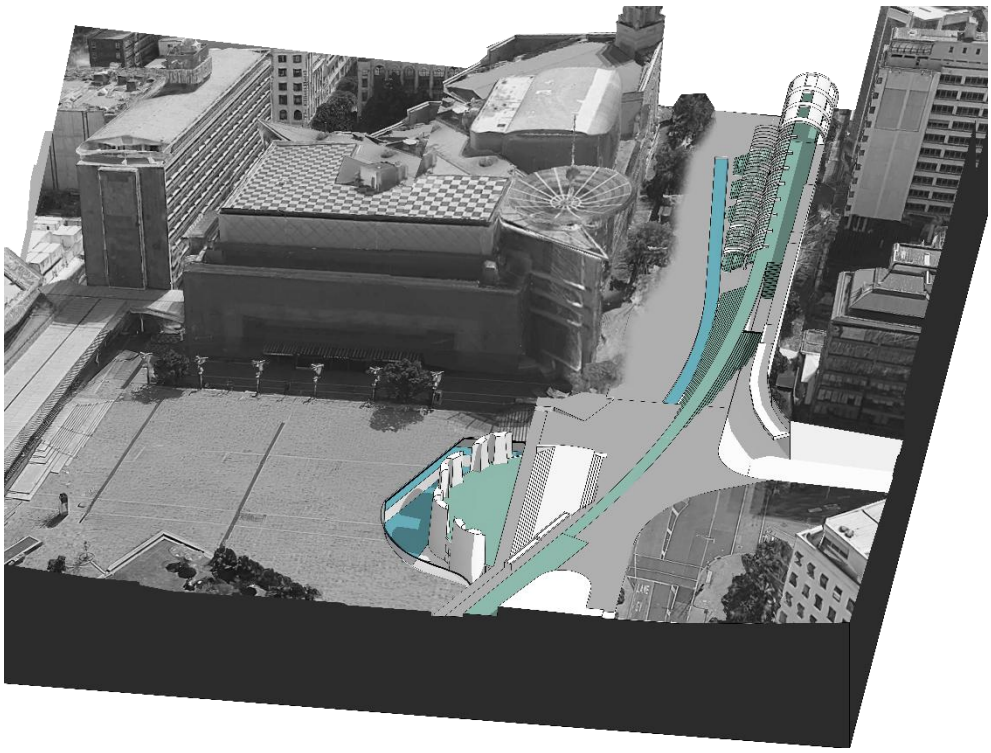

Figure 46 Seong, Jay. Intersection C

Segment 3: Intersection C (Aotea Square/Queen Street)

The third section is located in the middle of the Queen Street incline from Aotea Square, where water flows from Myers Park down to the lower Queen Street Canal. The terrain change creates a controlled drop in water level through gravity. This falling water has two roles: practically, it lowers the water level for canaling further down to lower Queen Street, and symbolically, it represents the disintegration and decay of Aotea Square.

Alongside offering a view of the continuous waterfall, a new observation point has been created across the public space. This spot allows for regular, ongoing viewing of the water and its effects, independent of event programming like concerts and movies, giving visitors another reason to come to the square.

This area is also the starting point of a pedestrian experience that moves above the canopy and travels towards the Queen St/Victoria St intersection. Instead of just being an incline, the pedestrian path provides a flat surface for pedestrians to travel. The pedestrian path starts at the bottom level of Myers Park, passes through the Queen St/Wellesley St intersection and ends at the Queen St/Victoria St intersection, changing the trip into a series of views of building facades and the layers of history of the city.

The third section is positioned to match the Sky Tower's main shaft. In this case, the rapid ascent of the vertical elevator zone of the Sky Tower has been interpreted horizontally as a pedestrian-oriented route.

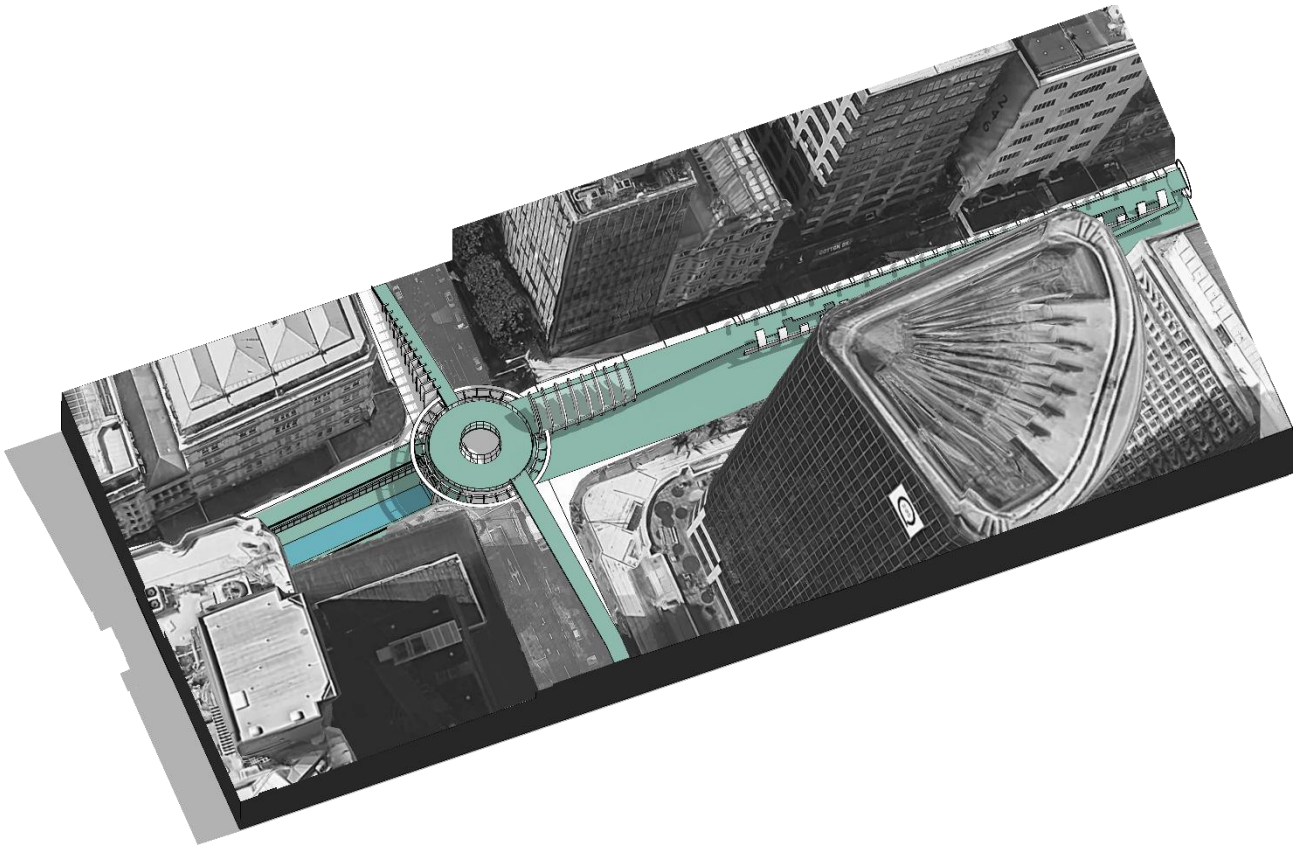

Figure 47 Seong, Jay. Intersection D

Segment 4: Intersection D (Queen Street/Victoria Street)

The fourth segment marks the arrival point of the horizontal platform established above the canopy. There, you are able to see the Sky Tower & Queen Street uninterrupted by cars & road intersections. The Sky Tower's horizontal roof provides a different way of seeing Queen St., the river, and the layering of movement and hydrology.

By being positioned above the canopy, the horizontal platform gives the public a chance to see how the urban facade works as an interior feature of the civic space. Channelling water at an angle on Queen Street makes the street a multi-layered place rather than a single surface, opening up the possibility of utilising underground space for new retail and cultural opportunities.

In this section, the Sky Tower's Main Pod and observation deck are translated into the centre of the city. Instead of the view of the city from Auckland's tallest infrastructure, it is a viewing platform of the city's atmosphere, the facades and the flow of Waihorotiu.

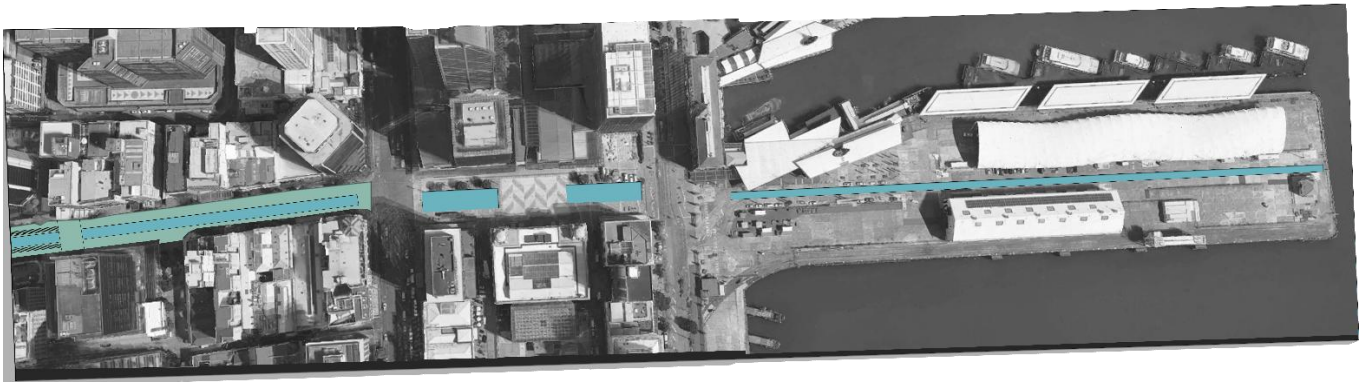

Figure 48 Seong, Jay. Intersection E

Segment 5: Intersection E (Queen Street/Custom Street across Queens Wharf)

The fifth part of the Waihorotiu stream starts from Custom Street, moves to Te Komititanga Square and the Quay Street platforms and ends at Queens Wharf. In this way, it acts as an area which transits horizontally, in correspondence to the symbolic terminal role of the Sky Tower's mast.

This section does not simply make Waihorotiu visually apparent on the surface. Rather, it reinterprets the Waihorotiu pathway through the functional drainage channels and water features within the square. Above the train station beneath the square, a transparent conduit canal allows for natural light to enter, while the flow of water can be viewed from the top, as the light and water interact from underneath. Here we see how the Awa continues towards the Moana through the structural relationship of this section.

Waihorotiu is defined differently here than in the previous segments in terms of its "flow". The flow is seen as a subsurface channel flowing under Custom Street, Te Komititanga Square and Quay Street prior to being discharged at Queens Wharf. As such, this section is considered the hydrological outlet of Waihorotiu where it regulates flood events, rainfall intensity and the amount of water collected from the preceding sections.

Here, the reconnection of Waihorotiu with the sea is evident. Unlike previous sections where the horizontal flow was viewed as a space of habitation, the horizontal flow is now viewed as the last image of release and transition of all of the urban systems.

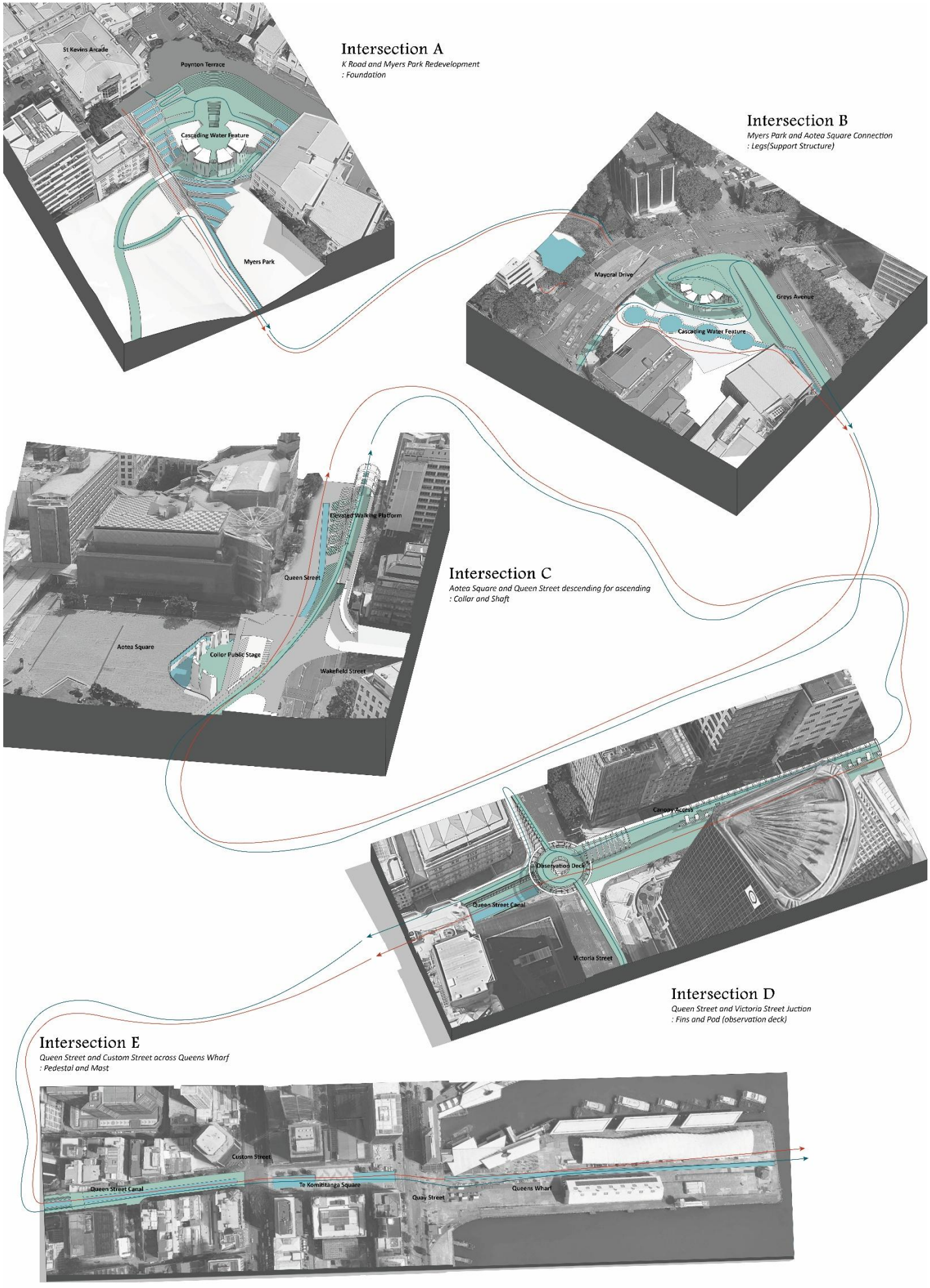

Figure 49 Seong, Jay. Connecting 5 Intersections

4.2 Final Design

Perspective 1

Revisited Observation Deck with Queen Street Canal

Figure 50 Seong, Jay. Queen Street/Victoria Street Intersection Viewing Platform, Artist Impression

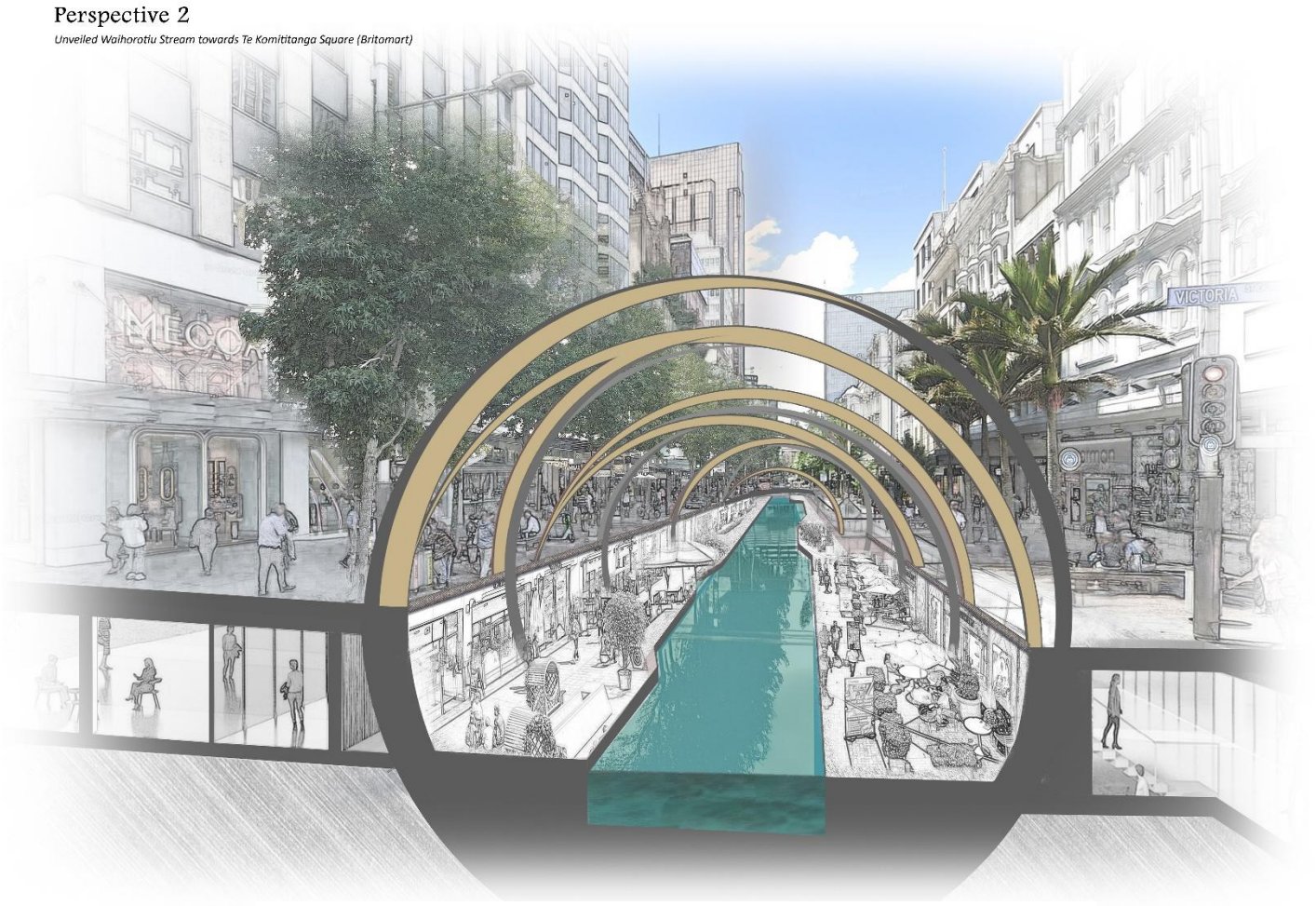

Figure 51 Seong, Jay. Queen Street/Waihorotiu canal development, Artist Impression

Figure 52 Seong, Jay. Lower Queen Street with Waihorotiu Stream Restoration, Artist Impression

Perspective 4

Raised Walkway with Garden Turnnel

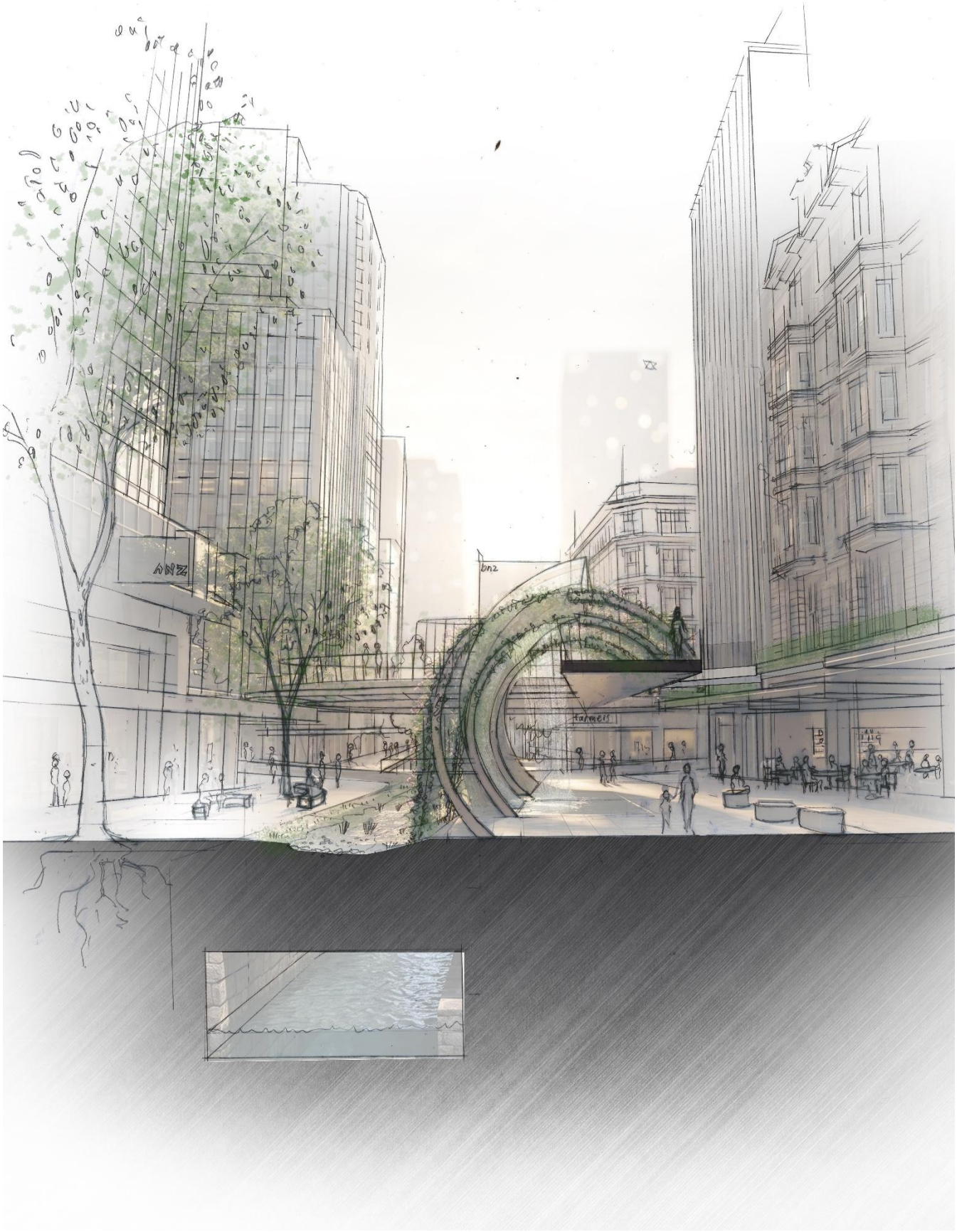

Figure 53 Seong, Jay. Behind the Viewing Platform, Artist Impression

Perspective Section
K-Road + Myers Park + Aotea Square + Queen Street

Contrasting Horizontal Continuity and Vertical Monumentality: Restoring Waihorotiu's Hydrological Flow and Urban Walkability

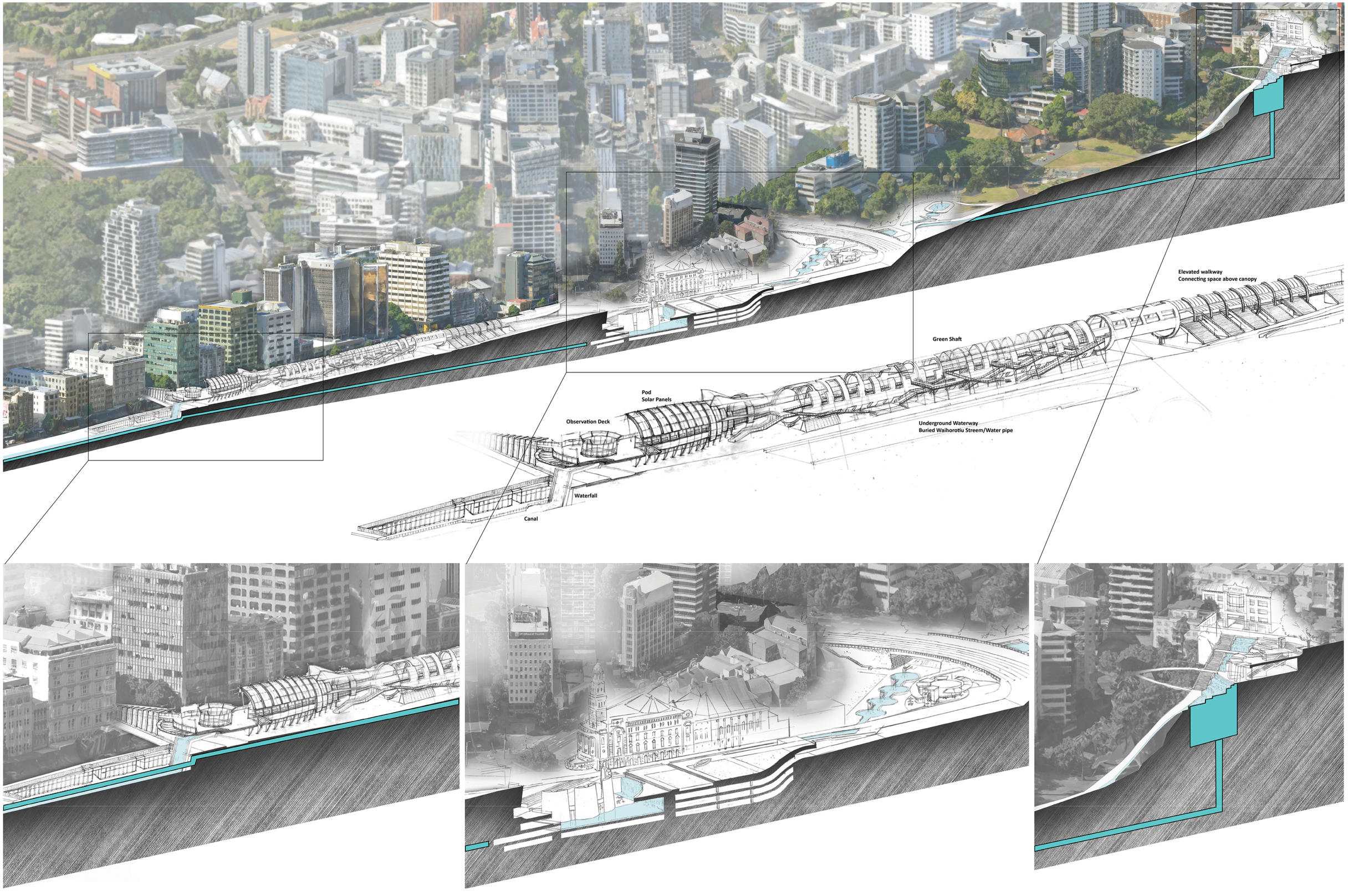

Figure 54 Seong, Jay. Site sectional perspective with platform/water collection/transition design.

Conclusion

This research concedes that there is no singularly defined "ideal" city. Cities are created through the accumulated results of human history (religion, ethnicity, conflict, power struggles and competition), therefore, cities create conflicting desires of different groups, while creating and delaying desires of other groups with their associated memories. A city's image can never be stabilized into a common vision or ultimate form, because a city is always in a state of instability where past events, relationships of power, and layers of memory intersect and collide.

Therefore, cities contain inherently wicked problems of conflict and inequality that are never completely resolved but are continually exposed and reformulated through ongoing interpretation and action. Therefore, within this conceptual framework, the primary objective of this exegesis is to treat Auckland as a condition to be interpreted and rendered visible. The juxtaposition of the symbolic verticality of the Sky Tower and the horizontal flow of the Waihorotiu Stream (which lies beneath the city) serves as a structural device to illustrate the desires that Auckland has emphasised and the memories/experiences that it has suppressed in the background. This juxtaposition reveals a larger divide between how the city presents itself as a visually obvious/legible/comprehensible image that can be consumed and experienced through walking/lounging/repetition.

While this juxtaposition is limited to a single location, it reflects an urban logic that recurs throughout Auckland. For many years, the city has prioritised vertically based symbols/events/destinations, and thus the horizontal experience of moving through the city, the repetitive pedestrian experience, and the gradual accumulation of memory and fatigue have all been marginalised and hidden. As such, the Sky Tower is not an isolated icon, but the most obvious representation of a visually oriented/consumption-based urban logic.

On the contrary, the underground flow of Waihorotiu represents the city's consistent deferral of temporal/horizontal experience/memory. This division persists throughout Auckland's pedestrian paths, public spaces, and broader patterns of urban life.

Rather than providing a solution/blueprint to address these conditions, the speculative design outlined in this research creates the conditions under which the city will become aware of itself. Drawing on Kevin Lynch's concept of urban imageability and Gilles Deleuze's notions of flow and desire, the project examines human movement, repetitive behaviour, and the organisation of desire through space. Ultimately, the project illustrates what the city emphasises/amplifies and what it suppresses/obstructs. In relation to the disconnected/abstract visual experience provided by the Sky Tower, the slow/gradual horizontal flow of Waihorotiu reminds the city of the everyday experiences and memories it has continually ignored.

This reading directly relates to the researcher's own experience. Since immigrating to Auckland in 2006—experiencing periods of transition such as being an international student, adjustment, separation during the pandemic, and ultimately being a parent—the city has changed from a mere way station to a home, and now a home to leave behind for future generations. However, these personal narratives are not simply subjective tales—they provide an interpretive lens through which the city may be perceived and analysed in different ways at each stage of an individual's life. While people generally experience time more quickly than buildings change, cities develop much more slowly. This disparity in the pace of experiencing time and urban development contributes to fatigue, resistance, and emotional frustration throughout the city.

In conclusion, this project is not optimistic about Auckland's potential—it is focused on the barriers that impede Auckland from realising that potential and the conditions necessary to restore it. By emphasising rather than eliminating the tensions between vertical symbolism and horizontal flow, the design encourages memory and awareness, rather than providing definitive resolutions to urban contradictions. Additionally, the design refuses to represent the city as a complete entity, allowing it to remain available for future generations to analyse and re-analyse.

Finally, this research conceives of Auckland's contradictory urban realities as a collective challenge of the current moment, leaving a residue through which the city may continue to be reconsidered in relation to its vertical symbols and horizontal movements.

Epilogue

The City We Inherit

The route begins with a descent down a long staircase that leads to the Myers Park entrance located off K Rd. Along the winding, tree-lined pathway, a subtle awareness of New Zealand's dense natural landscape begins to emerge within the confines of the city. As you begin your gradual journey through Myers Park, a children's play area comes into view, providing a gentle transition to an artistic expression beneath a bridge that separates the urban surroundings from Myers Park.

Beyond the bridge, there are large-scale construction projects and an underground parking garage entrance, which do not look as welcoming as the surrounding park. However, after a short walk, Auckland's largest public square comes into view. The large public square is surrounded by various performance venues, the Aotea Centre, and movie theatres, all beneath the towering presence of the Sky Tower.

Skirting the edges of the public square and continuing downward, you eventually arrive at Queen St., commonly referred to as New Zealand's most prominent commercial corridor. The long, narrow Queen St gently curves, providing a consistent visual axis for all the building facades lining the street.

As you continue walking down Queen St and pass remnants of not many operational shops and a few abandoned storefronts, combined with existing stores filled with history and memory, the decline becomes subtle and passes newly renovated retail buildings and the Britomart Station before ultimately arriving at the historic ferry terminal. The route links the entire city horizontally along a single, continuous axis.

Walking along the axis offers benefits, but it is not continuous. Each intersection with traffic lights and car flow interrupts the rhythm, while the overhead canopy reduces visibility and dulls perception. The empty spaces in front of rented storefronts and the old, cluttered arcades lining the route no longer encourage people to enter or linger. Given the lively energy of travellers and the excitement of markets in other places, which usually draw visitors, one would expect similar vibrancy here. Instead, these arcades are trapped in a cycle of interruptions and progress, failing to foster a welcoming atmosphere.

However, at night, the axis formed during daylight hours takes on an even worse quality. As the daytime crowds dwindle, the long pedestrian corridor is lit only by a handful of expensive retail establishments that can afford the high operating costs of illuminating their storefronts. While some sections of the corridor are lit, the canopy above blocks the light from the streetlights, creating darkened areas for walkers. Myers Park, like many parks, is a very different place at night than it is during the day. At night, Myers Park is filled with the smell of marijuana. It is the same place, but the atmosphere of the space depends on the time of day and how it is used.

These phenomenological experiences describe more than mere urban decay or a safety problem in Auckland; they also reflect conditions in many other cities. More importantly, they reveal the city's chosen flow patterns and the rhythms and sensitivities that were deliberately ignored. The discomfort of walking along the axis, the constant interruptions by traffic signals and vehicles, and the difference between day and night are not random occurrences; they are symptoms of a spatial philosophy developed over decades.

Therefore, the ultimate question remains: what kind of environment will we create for the next generation of citizens? Will the primary focus of our city continue to be efficiency, or will we provide environments in which the pace of walking and the value of pausing become more important? Under the famous Sky Tower, will the long, slow horizontal axis remain a symbol of resistance, or will it be transformed into a daily landscape to be endured, experienced and passed down?

Thus, the short walk we shared on that quiet Sunday morning – walking with the flow of the descending Waihorotiu – was a journey through the unobvious beauty woven into the urban landscape and the subtle unease lurking in the city's corners. At the end, we arrived at the sea, where sunlight created shimmering ripples across the water. Here, in Tāmaki Makaurau.

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Appendices