



INVESTMENT IN OUR SIXTH SENSE

Our practice sees this domestic object as a conceptual model for the design of infrastructure. Let me explain...

Firstly, the image is of an eleventh-century Chinese ceramic pillow. On top, the curved headrest has the outline of a cloud, a traditional form denoting the presence of a heavenly body. Below, the sleeper's head is supported by a temple built on high ground. A man, perhaps a scholar-gentleman, stands waiting at the opened door. He may be responding to the prompt of an approaching guest; or is keeping watch for the sleeper-in-residence; or perhaps being the sleeper himself, is close to moving beyond the conscious realm into the land of dreams and immortal souls...

The scholar and the open door suggest the ceramic pillow is a supporting structure enriched with psychological depth and human dimensions, at once personal, familial and environmental. The pillow has a clear function yet is also a vehicle for social relations and travels of the imagination. The pillow might initially appear cold, hard and inflexible yet is softened and opened by its poetic sensibility and warm regard for the human condition.

Our practice's experience working on infrastructure projects in New Zealand is an unworldly contrast to this pillow. The engineers we come up against do not design with such empathy. Instead, their focus is confined to a number of technical issues which are resolved by separating them from everyday life. The solutions are almost always a brutal imposition on people and the receiving environment.

Our practice strategically chooses to enter this narrow worldview and challenge its mind-set in order to incorporate other dimensions for the project. We begin our work by immersing ourselves in a sensual and spatial engagement with the site which always seems to redefine and expand the problems to be solved. Over time, we come to understand our sensory experience could be the *raison d'être* for the project and we use all our skills to develop its potential for the city. This often leads to a fundamental re-configuration of the proposed infrastructure and the incorporation of much wider objectives and initiatives.

The position of the body in the formation of our ideas is primary. We need to orient ourselves on site and navigate the surroundings in order to gauge the relationships and conditions that exist between and within each space. In scientific and creative terms, our sensory engagement utilises the 'sixth sense'. An intimate awareness of the body's sensitivity towards its surroundings helps construct positive and reciprocal relationships between community, environment and infrastructure.

Accepting the co-existence and fluidity of these different positions and relationships enables us to create a permeable infrastructure and rich performative environment; a value exchange proposition which the city senses is wise, worthy and healthy to invest in. The quality of both the infrastructure and city changes to reflect a more open engagement with the world and affirmative support for our lives.