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**Function:** Teaching and Research

## **NEW ALLIANCE FRANCAISE BUILDING, SYDNEY**

Counter-project for the design of the new Alliance Francaise Building, 257 Clarence Street, Sydney  
Images & story published in *Lino* magazine (Issue No.17, 2007)

This project is a personal initiative and a counter-project.

Being an Architect, French and living in Sydney, it would be difficult not to have the desire to develop a design for the Alliance Française in Sydney even though this new building has been designed by renown architect Harry Seidler.

How does one live a language, a language which, in all its manifestations, represents a common denominator and entry point into the depths of a culture? The guiding concept for this project was to enable a language to be physically experienced: a walk through its depths, into the layers of knowledge and through the folds of memory. Roland Barthes wrote that language appears as an explosion, as dissemination and that it is a path as well as a crossing. It is this vein that the project was conceptualized.

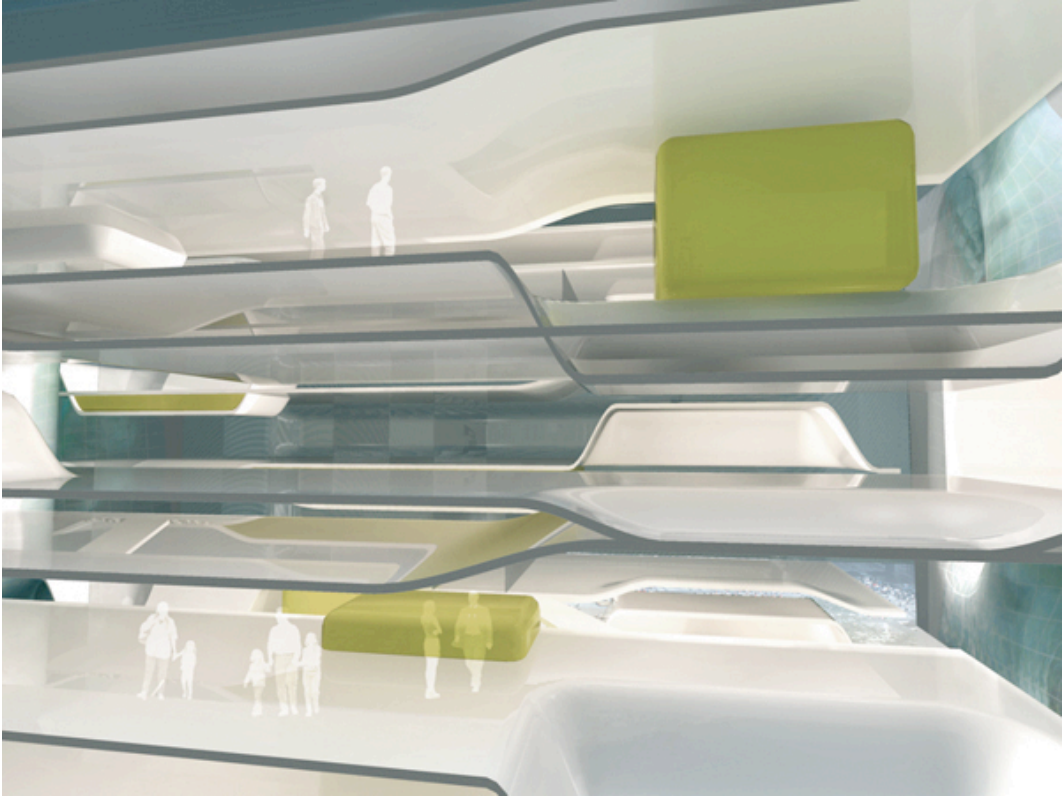
Rather than presenting a reassuring image of a mechanical language, the idea was to materialise its complexity: rules, syntax, articulation, exceptions, nuances, meaning, signs, figures of speech, interpretation, trope, poetry, ambiguity, quotation, echo, disappearance, alteration, compression etc.

Using these linguistic devices, it is therefore possible to reconstruct an architectural topology that aims to establish links between the voluntarily disseminated elements. This constructed environment is thus a network of links that enables a multitude of entry points and paths for the public. The building IS language enveloped in language.

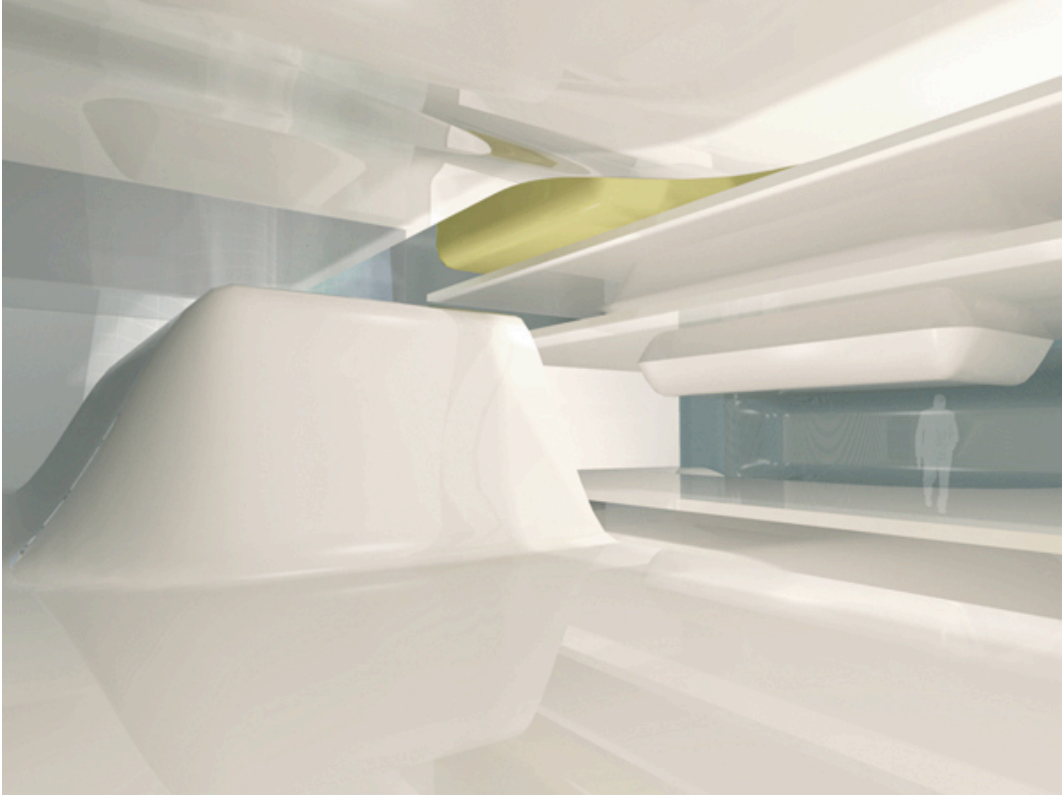
# SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

Counter-project designed by Frank Minnaert

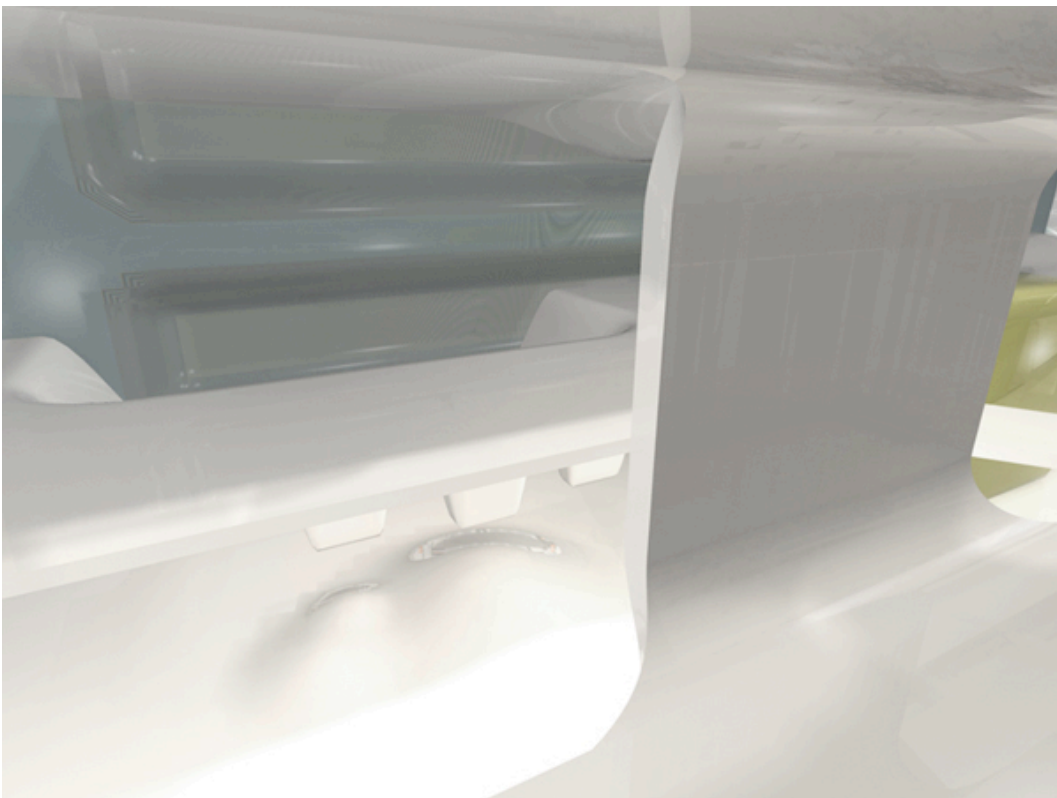
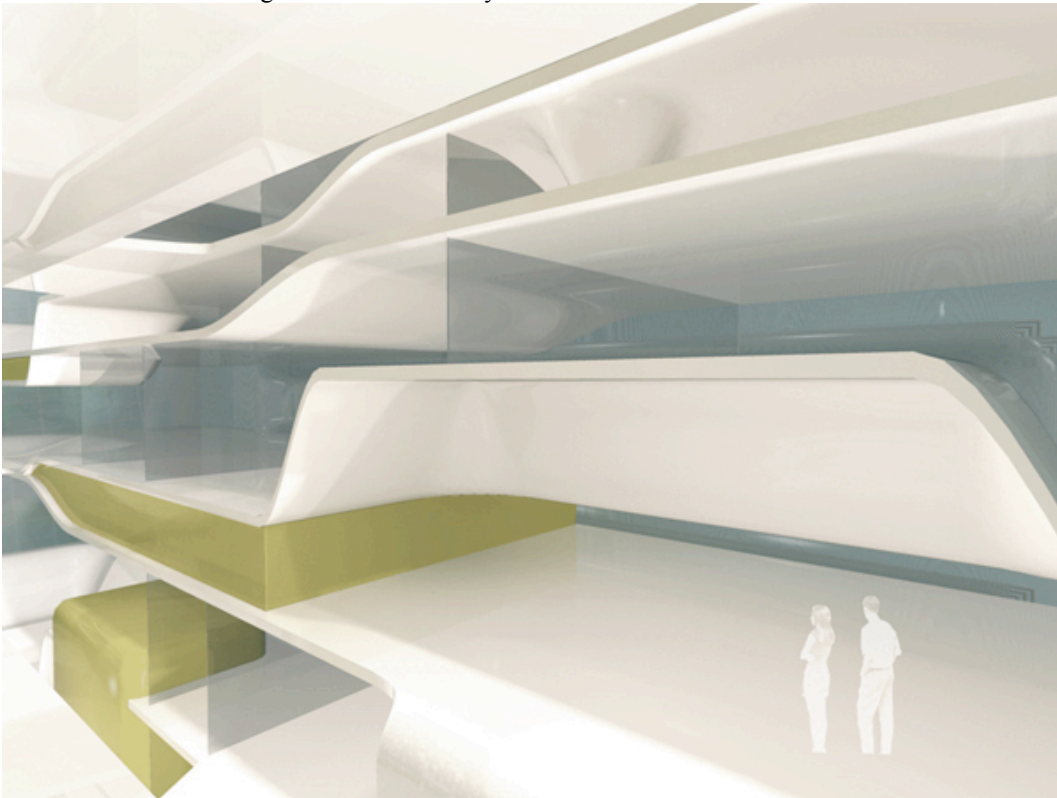
A section through the depth of language:



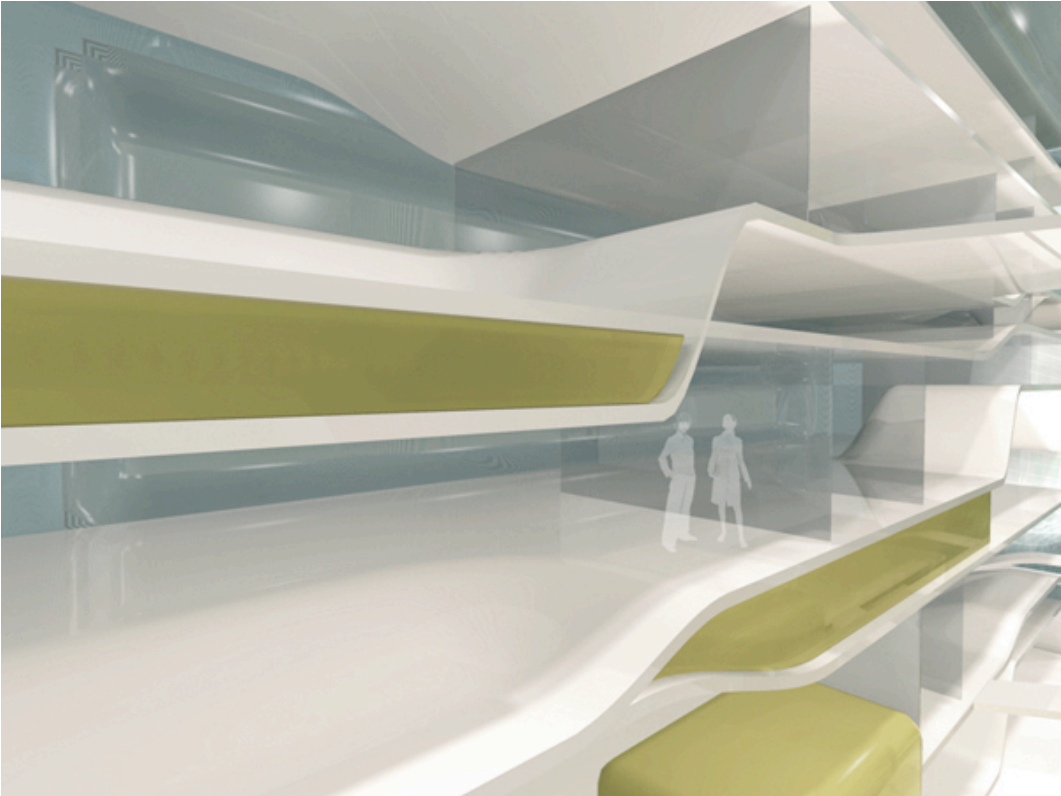
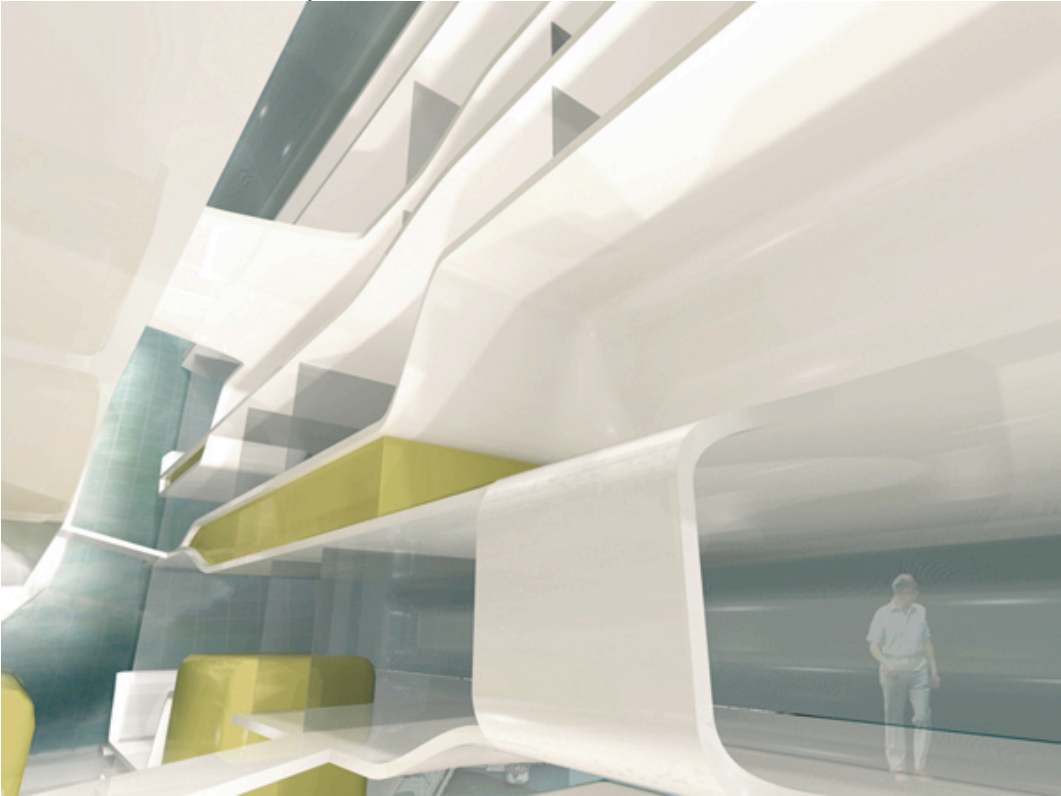
Architectural topography:



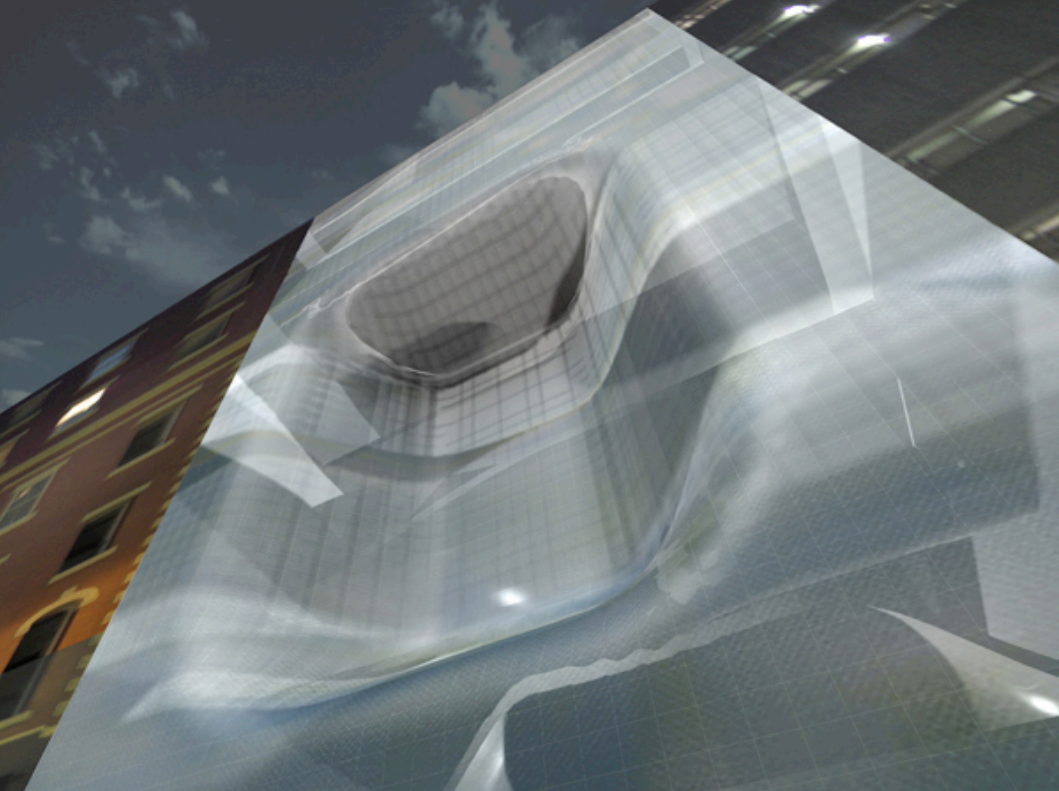
The central void showing the folds of memory



Links between the voluntarily disseminated elements.



Façade on Clarence St, Sydney



Press:

LINO #17 (2007) p.48-49 "My way"

# LINO

AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND'S PREMIER DESIGN LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE  
4th Anniversary - ISSUE No.17 2007



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The guiding concept for this project was to enable a language to be physically experienced: a walk through its depths, into the layers of knowledge and through the folds of memory. Roland Barthes<sup>1</sup> wrote that language appears as an explosion, as dissemination and that it is a path as well as a crossing. It is in this vein that the project was conceptualised.

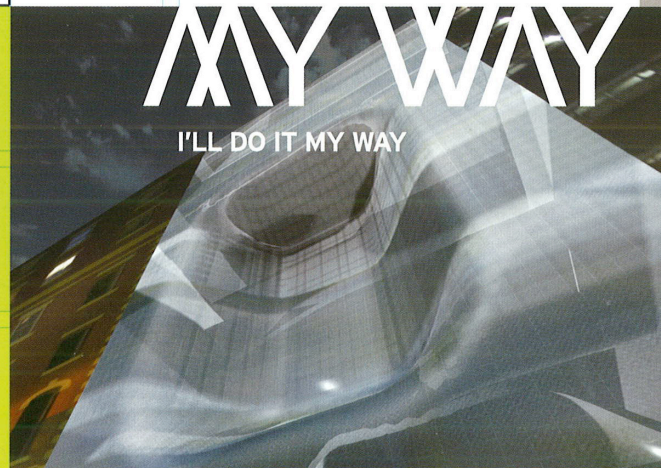
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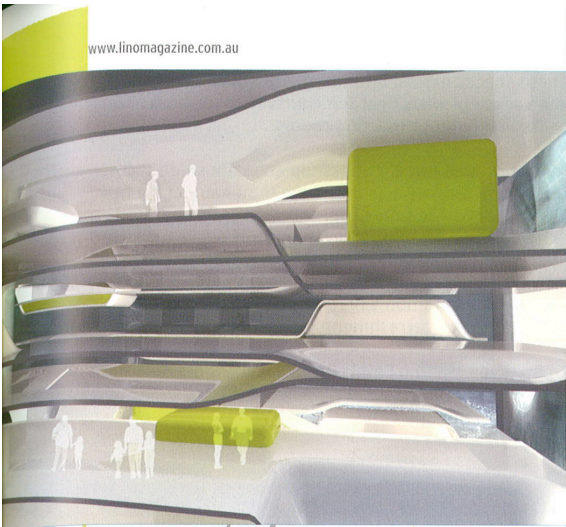
It is evident that the Alliance Française in Sydney is not only a language school. It is also a living shop-front for French culture. My project also aims to radicalise and integrate this aspect. Spatial and programmatic sequences create an opportunity for the various disciplinary fields and activities to intersect, to merge and to contaminate each other while being supported by physical and intellectual connections.

Although the new Alliance Française building at 257 Clarence Street in Sydney has already been designed by Harry Seidler, as an Architect, and a Frenchman living in Sydney, I found it difficult not to come up with my own concept design for this site. To clarify further, this initiative comes from my own willingness to play around with the ideas and forms related to the French language and culture. (This project was conceived after Seidler's office had been assigned the project)

My idea was to produce a concept design rather than a fully completed and operational project. This concept may be resumed by posing the following question: How does one live a language, a language which, in all its manifestations, represents a common denominator and entry point into the depths of a culture?

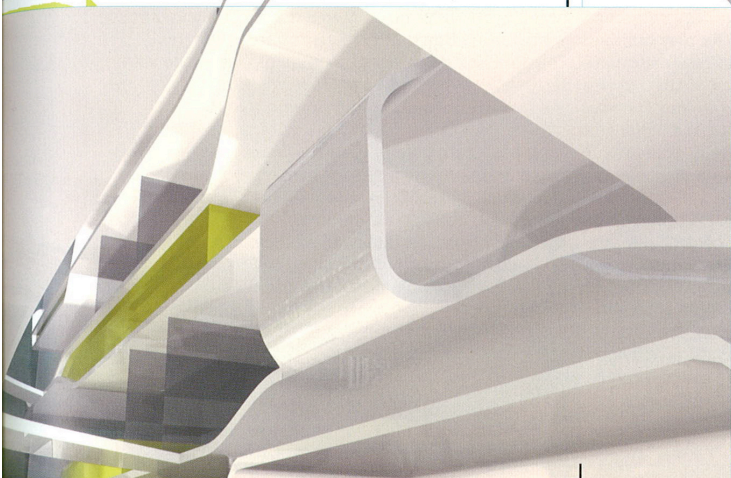


Story\_Frank Minnaërt



**Project:**

Partly convex or concave, the front of the Alliance Française building becomes a glass interface, deformed in such a way as to create a dioptric effect between two environments and to create an interpretative surface through which we can observe the world or even a text. The external glass surface is continuous with the inside of the building, forming an internal envelope of translucent, plastic material covering all the lateral surfaces and the ceiling. This envelope acts to diffuse the natural (from the roof) and artificial light (laterally) homogeneously. The deformation of a continuous, white surface generates different spaces and functions such as floors, walls, ceilings, podiums, shells, shelters, bridges, amphitheatres and tiers. This topological transformation / manipulation naturally changes, not only the geometry and dimensions of the various spaces but also, the potential programmatic relationship between them: an amphitheatre opening onto a central space, an intimate space connected to an exhibition space, etc. The technical or service areas are either created by the folding surfaces or are 'inserted' volumes, both of which are highlighted through the use of one colour.

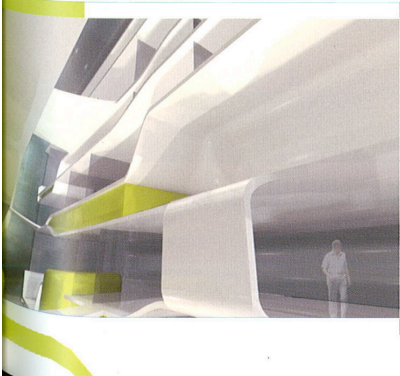
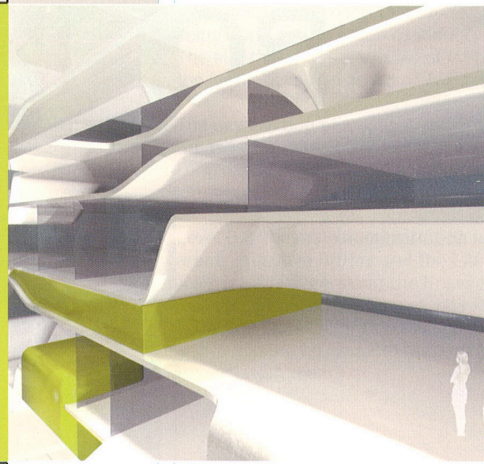


The folding, unfolding and deformed nature of the surfaces, create porosity between the physical and mental spaces and aim to generate fructuous collisions. These spaces, which have supple and ambiguous boundaries, favour the core exchanges that are fundamental to a language. The works of French thinkers and creators would also be innately associated with the Alliance Française as they too are manifestations and catalysts for a language.

This project equally represents the opportunity to display the intellectual foundations of the French language: a place for debate, reflection, cultural multiplicity... a contrast to a straight-forward, normative and reassuring way of thinking.

Frank Minnaërt was the winner of the Concept category of the 2006 IDEA Awards. The (inside) Design Excellence Awards (IDEA Awards) are a national multi-category awards series, aimed at promoting and rewarding recent works in interior, architecture, product design and concept design by Australian practices. [DHJ](#)

<sup>1</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1986.



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Our Autumn issue shows the work of internationally known South African artist, Norman Catherine. This work, 'Banzi!' (detail) was part of his most recent exhibition in South Africa. Read more about this artist on pages 92 - 97.

# LINO

AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND'S PREMIER DESIGN LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE  
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