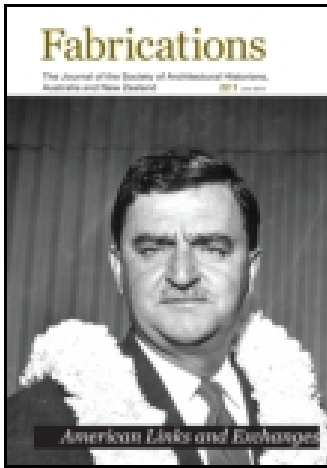


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Divided Loyalties: Peter Hall, Philip Parsons and the Dilemma of Utzon's Return

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Figures 1 and 2: Posters designed and printed by New South Wales Government Architect's Branch architects, early 1967.

Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, gift of Ted Mack; gift of Bill Turner and May Watson.

Divided Loyalties

Peter Hall, Philip Parsons and the Dilemma of Utzon's Return

Anne Watson

Abstract

When Jørn Utzon resigned from the uncompleted Sydney Opera House project in February 1966, his successor Peter Hall was faced with innumerable and inevitably controversial design problems. But one of Hall's greatest dilemmas was not design-related. With Utzon signalling a wish to return to the job in early 1967, Hall found himself entangled in negotiations to pressure the government to reconcile with the original architect. Identified by the self-appointed conciliation strategist, Sydney academic Dr Philip Parsons, as the key intermediary by which negotiations succeeded or failed, Hall was torn between his professional regard for Utzon's claim to the building, doubts over Utzon's professed spirit of compromise and the contradictory advice of colleagues and government officials. Drawing on newly discovered documentation in Parsons' papers, this article explores the ambiguity of allegiances with which Hall was faced during 1967, Utzon's vacillating overtures and the well-intentioned dedication with which Parsons sought to affect a viable reconciliation. A little-known sequel to the much-published 1966 resignation story, the complex interweaving of Utzon's apparently changed attitude in 1967, Hall's divided loyalties and the government's continuing intransigence contribute new layers to the Opera House narrative.

Introduction

Despite the abundance of writing on Utzon and the Opera House, in the forty years since the building opened there has been no detailed study of Hall Todd & Littlemore's contribution to its completion or a comprehensive analysis and assessment of Peter Hall's role as design architect. The polarising effect of Utzon's controversial replacement by Hall and subsequent changes to the building brief generated a culture of exclusion, the literature on which has mostly venerated Utzon and consigned to the margins of history the work of those who succeeded him. It is a serious omission that has, however, been recently questioned or directly challenged by several writers and commentators including Ken Woolley, Peter Webber and Philip Drew.¹ In a 2007 article Drew, a much-published champion of Utzon in the past, went so far as to observe: "The Romantic baggage attached to Utzon and the Opera House obstructs attempts to write a factual account of its history, which would be more fascinating than the myth because it is true."² It was a theme developed by Naomi Stead and Antony Moulis in a 2010 conference paper exploring the mythic dimensions of the Opera House narrative in which the authors refer to its "muddy relationship" between myth and history.³ The current article has developed out of investigations into Peter Hall's work on the Opera House and the potential this research presents to correct the historical imbalance that has generated much of this

myth-making. The article draws substantially on the new revelations about the 1967 Utzon – Hall relationship discovered in the Katharine Brisbane and Philip Parsons papers, a private archive not previously accessed by Opera House writers.

Anniversary Overtures

My only interest in the Sydney Opera House is, and always has been, to finish the building in the perfect way and to the complete satisfaction of the client. While I cannot retract any of my decisions or actions in the past, I am concerned now only with the present circumstances and what is best for the Sydney Opera House. I am therefore willing to discuss with the present architectural panel possible forms of association, co-operation or partnership by which we might all provide architectural services to complete the Sydney Opera House in such a way as to ensure the best possible building for the people of Australia.⁴

So announced Jørn Utzon in early April 1967, a year after his departure from Sydney. Signalling a new conciliatory intent the statement was passed on to Peter Hall on 8 April. Five weeks earlier on 28 February – the first anniversary of his resignation – Utzon had made similar overtures in a newspaper article. While it was a fitting occasion to declare through the media his wish to return to the job, Utzon, or his supporters, may have had a more strategic motive; the anniversary was also the date set by Public Works Minister Davis Hughes for a conference to resolve the debate then raging over the radical auditorium changes recommended by the “Review of Programme”.⁵ A new brief for the internal functions of the Opera House devised largely by Hall with his partners David Littlemore and Lionel Todd in December 1966, the review’s most hotly contested recommendation was its designation of the formerly dual-purpose Major Hall as a concert hall only and the contentious transfer of opera to the Minor Hall. It was a radical recommendation proposed as a solution to the issue that had most contributed to the impasse in which Utzon found himself in late 1965/early 1966 – the impossibility of meeting the 2,800-seat requirement and providing optimum acoustics for both concerts and opera in the main auditorium’s available space. If Utzon had hoped to confound the outcome of the “Review of Programme” conference and Hughes had intended it as a diversion from possible anniversary disruptions, Utzon was the only winner: the conference, which included Peter Hall, was unable to reach consensus on 28 February, but the consequences of Utzon’s appeal in the media on that day were to have traction for another year. When he followed it up with his, as quoted, first direct appeal to Hall in early April, Utzon was to draw Hall into a negotiating minefield that was to beleaguer him throughout much of 1967.

Reactivation of the “Return-Utzon” Campaign

Utzon’s anniversary overtures were published in an article by the young political journalist Mungo MacCallum in *The Australian*, the Rupert Murdoch-owned

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national newspaper that was to provide a sympathetic voice for the “return-Utzon” campaign during 1967. Headed “Utzon: ‘Let me Complete the Job’”, the article cited Utzon’s assertion that he had solved the seating and acoustic problems of a dual-purpose hall and quoted his declaration that he was “prepared to meet the minister’s demands for detailed cost estimates, a firm work schedule, and a panel of architects to examine every item in the plans and report on its cost, feasibility and timing.”⁶ It was no coincidence the same newspaper had recently published three articles attempting to comprehensively unpick the troubled history of the Opera House and calling for a reopening of negotiations with Utzon.⁷ Written jointly by *The Australian’s* drama critic Francis Evers and drama lecturer Dr Philip Parsons, the articles reasonably and coherently put the case for the expediency of bringing Utzon back at a time when opinion about the function of the halls was at deadlock. If Utzon’s advances on 28 February had not been directly engineered by Parsons and Evers, their articles would at the very least have given Utzon considerable encouragement. While Evers was to continue to sporadically support the Utzon negotiations as a journalist, Parsons was to assume the demanding task of chief strategist in the difficult mediating role between Utzon, the government and Hall. In the thick of the emotional rhetoric that polarised participants in the ongoing debate over the rights and wrongs of the Utzon resignation, Parsons’ intercession during 1967 would be a measured and carefully orchestrated attempt to broker a compromise solution that he believed would, ultimately, benefit the building.⁸

With *The Australian’s* publication of Utzon’s appeal to be reinstated on 28 February and a series of clearly partisan articles in subsequent days, the paper’s pro-Utzon allegiances were unambiguous. But while the Murdoch paper was giving generous coverage to Utzon and his supporters, the *Sydney Morning Herald* went straight to the heart of the matter reporting that Premier Askin and Hughes “had no intention of inviting [Utzon] back”: “There has been no approach to me by Mr Utzon and the question of his return does not arise.”⁹ Persuading the *Herald*, Sydney’s most influential newspaper, to support the Utzon cause was to be identified by Parsons as essential if the return-Utzon campaign was to have any impact on the government.¹⁰

Reactivation of the Utzon “issue” in early 1967 was not, however, confined to the media. The New South Wales Government Architect’s Branch, so proactive in the immediate aftermath of Utzon’s resignation in 1966, was once again on the move. Prompted no doubt by Utzon’s overtures, fifty architects and staff petitioned Peter Hall to intercede with the minister on Utzon’s behalf:

We understand that you are deeply committed to the principles of Jørn Utzon’s design for the Opera House and that you accepted your present position in good faith believing that he could not return to the project. Utzon is willing to return and only your negotiations with the Minister can bring this about.”

Marshalling their considerable creative skills, several of the petitioners – architects John Kinstler, Grahame Crocket, Bill Turner and others – had earlier produced silkscreen and letter block-printed “Bring Utzon Back” posters that, as rather drolly reported in a *Herald* article, were covertly pasted up around the city.¹² As will be seen, the Government Architect petitioners were not the only campaigners who believed that Hall’s intercession was their only hope of getting Utzon back.

Enter Peter Hall

Peter Hall’s reaction to his fellow architects’ petition and artful poster protests was not noted in the diary he kept during 1967, but what was recorded was his immediate response to Utzon’s approach to him in early April. Presented with Utzon’s letter by architect Owen Tooth on Saturday 8 April, Hall, according to Tooth’s abbreviated notes, stated that he had “no objection” to Utzon’s return, that he had always thought it would be “desirable” for Utzon to come back and that he “would like to work with [a] man of Utzon’s ability”.¹³ When asked by Tooth if he was willing to attend the forthcoming Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA) meeting to express his support for negotiations with Utzon, Hall was less enthusiastic, questioning the need for haste and remarking that he was “exhausted” from the prolonged controversy over the “Review of Programme”. The conversation then moved on to a pro-Utson article by Francis Evers that had appeared in *The Australian* on 21 March, the day after Cabinet’s final determination on the functions of the auditoria. According to Tooth, Hall disputed Evers’ praise of the capabilities of Utzon’s acoustic consultants Professor Lothar Cremer and Joachim Nutsch and dismissed the article as being “distorted” and a “fabrication”: “I wish the Minister would have [a] royal commission and the public be made truly aware of [the] situation. I have advocated this all along.”¹⁴ Hall concluded by expressing doubts that the government would have Cremer back and that it was unlikely it would change its mind about the single-purpose Concert Hall.

But Hall’s confidence in Tooth’s reliability was to be short-lived. The final page of Tooth’s notes records a subsequent telephone conversation in which a clearly irate Hall tells Tooth he has discovered that the supposed Utzon letter had been written by Philip Parsons, and that he no longer wanted to be associated with the negotiations which he described as “hopeless and time consuming”. Hall’s brief diary entry relating to the telephone call on 15 April records that “O Tooth rang and [I] was very rude to him.”¹⁵ Hall had in fact been told about the original author of the “Utzon” letter some days earlier:

I am informed by Peter Johnson that the document was written by Mr Parsons . . . and sent to Utzon for signature . . . I feel that since this document is addressed to nobody it is not possible to take any notice of it. If he wants anything done Utzon must write to the Partnership in which case I would suggest that we refer his letter to

our client or he must write direct to our client. In any case any decision on whether Utzon is to return to the job must be placed in the hands of the client and we, the architects, should not have to worry about it.¹⁶

As Hall now knew, Utzon's statement was indeed a slightly altered version of a draft included at the end of a long document by Parsons exploring the options for a workable strategy to draw Davis Hughes into negotiations with Utzon. In it Parsons noted that the editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, John Pringle, had been generally supportive of Hall, that Hall and the panel "had expressed no opposition to a suggestion that they might work with Mr Utzon if the Minister is agreeable" and that it was likely the *Herald*, the most strategically valuable ally in the campaign, would thus be sympathetic to Utzon's return "if it did not damage Mr Hall".¹⁷ He optimistically suggested that Hughes could only be induced to change his mind:

...by some manoeuvre which isolates him from his supporters. That is to say, Mr Utzon should make some offer of negotiation calculated to appeal to the Minister's supporters and make a rejection by the Minister seem so unreasonable that his own supporters in the Government, the press and the architectural profession will hesitate to follow him and even press him to negotiate.¹⁸

Parsons conceded that it was important for Utzon to be seen to accept the present architectural organisation, even if later he rejected proposals "which did not give him the necessary authority and responsibility" and that Utzon's approach should be "so vague that it merely opens up the way for discussions – the whole point of the manoeuvre." Parsons concluded:

On all grounds, therefore, the present proposals are urgently commended to Mr Utzon. The idea of association or partnership with the present panel will certainly seem distasteful to him and perhaps quite impractical. *This, however, is no reason to reject the proposal.* The vital aim is simply to institute discussions. The outcome of the discussions will almost certainly differ substantially from the proposals.¹⁹

Utzon, it seems, needed little convincing that Parsons' strategy was logical and practicable, describing it in a letter to his former architect Bill Wheatland as "very clever".²⁰ Significantly one of the few changes he made to the statement drafted by Parsons and presented to Hall was to alter the reference to finishing the building in the "best possible way" to the "perfect way".²¹

Parsons the Strategist

Despite Parsons' no doubt well-intentioned and careful strategising, this very important first step in initiating negotiations had already seriously miscarried. For Hall the whiff of conspiracy and subterfuge surrounding the Parsons/Utzon statement – the lack of transparency about its true source – was just too much on top of the stresses he had endured throughout the "Review of Programme" debate.

Writing to Utzon shortly after Hall's telephone conversation with Owen Tooth, Parsons' perspective on Hall's reaction was revealing:

My assessment of the response to your statement is briefly as follows. Peter Hall would like to take up your proposal but has been persuaded (by [Arup engineer] Mick Lewis, I feel pretty sure) that you do not really mean what you say in your statement, and that it is some kind of trap. Hall is reported to be in a state of near nervous collapse, following the political battle over the major hall At first, incidentally, he was very favourably disposed to your statement, even though he felt he would probably have to resign in your favour.²²

Undeterred by Hall's apparent change of heart Parsons pressed on in his letter to Utzon, suggesting Utzon's best course of action was still to approach Hall and the RAI A and enclosing drafts of letters to each which, he contended, "would be far more effective than your present statement, both in bringing pressure on Hall and the Institute, and in creating a favourable press impression." Sympathetic press coverage was vital, wrote Parsons, because "your image here, I regret to say, is still that of an unreasonable man." Parsons' logic was that the conciliatory tone of the letters would make it difficult for both Hall and the institute to reject Utzon's appeal for discussions without alienating the press and the public. Parsons' gift for conjuring a persuasive turn of phrase was put to good use in the draft letters for Utzon. But if Hall was swayed by references to the "common ground" and the "spirit of honest goodwill" between him and Utzon, it is not recorded, nor is there evidence that the letters were ever sent from Utzon.²³

Five days after Parsons penned his letters, he and Hall met. Hall's "confidential" notes of their meeting and subsequent conversations with others reveal just how labyrinthine his participation in any negotiations with Utzon might become.²⁴ While with Parsons, Hall showed himself amenable to Utzon approaching the Opera House architectural panel, Hall Todd & Littlemore, and to a meeting with *Herald* editor John Pringle to discuss the issue, he seems to have readily acceded to the contrary advice given by those he spoke to afterwards. Mick Lewis believed it would be "most unwise" to enter into discussions with Utzon, advising Hall to "hide behind my partners saying that I would be happy to meet Utzon but that my partners would not agree to it We discussed the need for me to separate myself completely from these politics since politics and design are quite incompatible things."²⁵ Ken Woolley, according to Hall's notes, thought the situation for Hall was "an extremely dangerous one . . . that I could get manoeuvred into a very bad position" and that the government should announce that it did not want discussions with Utzon.²⁶ In fact, as Public Works Director Col Humphrey pointed out in a letter to Davis Hughes about Hall's recent involvement in the Utzon overtures, the government had already stated through the media on 1 March that it did not want Utzon back.²⁷ After also consulting with David Littlemore and Peter Johnson, Hall wrote on 1 May 1967:

I rang Parsons and told him that my partners would not agree to a meeting that included Pringle even though he and I might believe that Pringle could be trusted. Parsons showed himself rather naive by saying that he thought no-one could get hurt by such a meeting as he had suggested with Utzon. I told him that we, the architects, could get very hurt by being used by the Government as the reason to prevent Utzon's return. He then recognised this was a danger.²⁸

Seidler, Giedion and Hall

While Parsons was initiating his Utzon campaign strategy during March and April 1967, momentum was building elsewhere. Architect Harry Seidler, one of the key protagonists in the "Utzon only" protests of 1966, was once again mobilising the international architecture community. On 7 April he wrote to Professor Sigfried Giedion in Zurich, alerting him to Utzon's recent overtures and the decision over the Major Hall, and requesting Giedion to "obtain, urgently, the signatures of some dozen or twenty eminent architects for a statement pressing the Government . . . to investigate Mr Utzon's recent offers to negotiate."²⁹ Seidler helpfully enclosed a draft of this statement "as a suggestion", recommending that it take the form of an open letter to the government. Giedion duly obliged, adding to Seidler's draft his own impassioned plea for the retention of Utzon's vision for the interiors as integral to the building's overall architectural expression. To include the signatures of Alvar Aalto, Walter Gropius, Kenzo Tange and others, the letter ended on an admonishing note:

This is the first time in our period that the architect's intentions – based on the explicit demands of the former client – are changed by another political government . . . something that should deeply offend the architectural profession. The architect has to be regarded as an artist!³⁰

A world-acclaimed, pioneering commentator on modern architecture, it was Giedion who wrote in the 1967 edition of his seminal *Space, Time and Architecture* that "the autonomous right of expression must again assert itself in building, over and above the purely utilitarian."³¹ The context was a new chapter – "Jørn Utzon and the Third Generation" – dedicated specifically to the elucidation of the Sydney Opera House as a key example of a new direction in architecture. For Giedion, Utzon's synthesis of inspirational references to the past with innovative technology to create new sculptural forms that were "above pure function" signalled the arrival of a significant accelerant to the momentum of modernism. As Philip Goad has noted, the Opera House was the "lynchpin" on which Giedion built his case for the emergence of the "third generation" of modernists.³²

Giedion's new chapter was itself an expansion of an article of the same title published in *Zodiac* in 1965.³³ Not appearing in the 1965 article, but a significant addition in the Utzon chapter of the 1967 edition of *Space, Time and Architecture*, was an account of the issues surrounding Utzon's resignation, its "devastating"

effect on the building and its implications for the autonomy of the architect/artist. It was an emotive and damning criticism of events which, according to Giedion, saw “a political party . . . hand over completion of Utzon’s highly individualized building to a committee whose task was to cheapen it and simplify all details.”³⁴ In 1967 the high dudgeon of its tone could only have served to fire the activism of the Utzon campaigners. Although Peter Hall was not mentioned by name, one can only speculate how he reacted to this very public and partisan airing of the Opera House debacle in such a prestigious and influential book, one that championed architects such as Le Corbusier, Aalto and Tange whom he so admired. But worse was to come. In May 1967 Giedion repeated much of his invective in a letter, “Debasement of a Masterpiece”, published in the *Royal Institute of British Architects Journal*. Its penultimate paragraph was an unambiguous condemnation of the new panel of architects: “One must be sorry for any architect who lends his talents to destroy the unity of such a master building The only hope is that the present committee will give up their unfortunate task and that the political situation in Australia will improve.”³⁵

Hall, Utzon and the Meeting That Never Was

Whether or not the sustained invective in the first months of 1967 directly influenced Hall’s attitude to the Utzon/Parsons overtures is not recorded, but with Hall’s month-long work session in the London Arup office in July 1967, negotiations seem to have significantly changed gear. In mid-July Parsons wrote to Utzon advising him that Hall was willing to meet him and discuss his return while he was overseas, but that Utzon must initiate the meeting. Parsons mentioned that Hall had asked him to convey to Utzon that the “difficulties remain formidable and we should not hope for too much.”³⁶ To ensure that Utzon was adequately briefed, Parsons enclosed a six-page analysis of Hall’s character and what he referred to as “Hall’s plan”.³⁷ The latter, according to Parsons, was for Hall to meet with Utzon to decide if collaboration was possible and then to secure the support of his partners to persuade Hughes to “allow negotiations along the lines of your offer of April 4th”.³⁸ Parsons, who seemed to relish the intelligence-gathering challenges of his mediation role, wrote of the “real problem” of Mick Lewis, that Hall “thinks very highly of him” and that it would be essential for Utzon to reconcile with Ove Arup if Lewis’ hostility towards him was to be counteracted.³⁹ If amenable, Parsons suggested, Hall should approach Arup on Utzon’s behalf while he was still in London.

Parsons’ personality profile of Hall was revealing. Unlike his partners Hall was, according to Parsons, a man of “considerable sensitivity and intelligence”.⁴⁰ He was the key man in the partnership and “in a position of very great power . . . the Minister cannot afford to let Hall push any issue to the point of resignation.” While Hall’s partners were:

practical men, simply concerned to finish a building – not your Opera House Hall on the other hand is different He is far more likely to feel a genuine architectural responsibility towards the Opera House It is therefore not impossible that he is sincere in what he has told me – that he would welcome your return to Sydney because he wants the Opera House to be the best possible building It is very possible that Hall, faced with two fairly insensitive partners, would welcome your strength to argue design questions with them and the Minister. I must emphasise, however, that this is mere speculation on my part and that Hall has said nothing of the kind.⁴¹

Parsons continued:

Hall is an intelligent young architect who has made his way from rather humble beginnings. He is highly ambitious, but lacks the ruthless drive that should go with ambition. His manner is sensitive, even diffident, reflecting a basic lack of self-confidence His anxiety to win respect can sometimes take the form of a rather naive vanity – I found him inclined to mention casually the important people he had to meet in connection with his work. He can also be extremely sensitive to personal affronts. In spite of these weaknesses, or maybe because of them, I rather like him

Because Hall wants not only to “succeed” but also to be liked, his position at the Opera House has been pretty painful. Ambition made him accept the job but he is not tough enough to ignore the hostility of your supporters. He was acutely distressed by a letter from architects in the Public Works Department calling on him to resign in your favour He told me he in fact offered his resignation to the Minister⁴²

Parsons went on to suggest that part of Hall’s motive in wanting to meet Utzon was to “justify himself in his own eyes and in yours. He wants to be able to say that he has done everything that could reasonably be asked of him to bring you back.”⁴³ Nonetheless Parsons believed there was some chance of the meeting having a successful outcome as long as Utzon avoided being negative about his relationship with Lewis and the recent changes to the building, that he indicated he was sympathetic to Hall’s position and that he emphasised that Hall “has the power to force negotiations on the Government, since the Government will do almost anything rather than accept his resignation.”⁴⁴

But despite Parsons’ epic efforts the face-to-face meeting between Hall and Utzon was never to eventuate. Hall’s diary records two telephone conversations with Utzon while he was in London, both initiated by Utzon. In the first on 20 July Utzon suggests Hall meets him in Denmark. Indicating that this might be difficult, Hall tells Utzon that he thinks his chances of returning to the job are “pretty remote” but that he himself was “interested” although he could not speak for his partners.⁴⁵ Three days later Utzon again invited Hall to Denmark, Hall responding that it was “absolutely impossible because my itinerary is known in Australia and London” and suggesting instead that Utzon come to London.⁴⁶ According to Hall, Utzon replied



Figure 3: Peter Hall and an on-site glass wall prototype showing the first bronze-capped, concrete mullion scheme, abandoned in late 1967.
Peter Hall Papers.

that he “didn’t have time and . . . thought there wasn’t any need and what he would do would be to write a letter to me after which I could talk to the Minister.” Hall’s response to Utzon’s reassurance that he had no intention of forcing him off the job was that “I thought it was his job and always had been.” Hall’s subsequent call to



Figure 4: Hall Todd & Littlemore study model of Utzon's last northern glass wall scheme, early 1967.

Peter Hall Papers.

Utzon to further negotiations was unanswered.⁴⁷ But it was all to no avail. Arriving back in Sydney on 12 August, Hall telephoned Parsons the next day:

Talked to Parsons about my conversations with Utzon and he told me that Utzon had written a letter to me and a letter to the Minister but that his lawyers refused to let



Figure 5: Study model exploring the new elliptical geometry for the glass walls, late 1967. Peter Hall Papers.

him send it. Parsons also expressed concern for my position in talking with Utzon and I said I would speak to my lawyer about it.⁴⁸

It seems that no one had factored in the legal action then being mounted by Utzon, through his Sydney solicitors Nicholl & Nicholl, to recover fees allegedly owed by the government. As Parsons pointed out in a letter to Utzon about the issue, “to sue a client for fees while at the same time negotiating for re-employment is an unusual situation, to put it mildly.”⁴⁹ In the same letter Parsons wrote of his two-hour conversation with Hall, that Hall was “extremely disappointed, but would still like to find some way of continuing negotiations”, that he was trying to delay decisions on the building and that any further action had to happen very soon.⁵⁰ As indefatigable as ever, Parsons was not about to let a legal obstacle get in the way of the nascent dialogue he had so carefully orchestrated; if neither Utzon nor Hall could make the first formal move then, he maintained, it was a matter of mustering support from Hall’s partners, from Ove Arup, the architectural community and the *Sydney Morning Herald* to put pressure on Hughes. Confident that this could be achieved, Parsons ended his letter to Utzon on an upbeat note: “I am entirely convinced that the chance we have been waiting for has now come. If we do not act whole-heartedly and decisively, I am afraid we shall have lost the chance of bringing about your return.”⁵¹

A Controversial “Affair”

But Utzon’s response was much less optimistic. If he was confident earlier in the year that he would be able to work with the new architectural panel in a spirit of compromise, by late August 1967 he was having grave misgivings about any potential compatibility. One of the sources of his unease was a new book, Michael Baume’s *The Sydney Opera House Affair* and specifically its epilogue by Peter Hall.⁵² Written in January 1967 and titled “Function is not a ‘Dirty’ Word”, Hall’s contribution – described by one reviewer as reasonable and modest⁵³ – was a factual explanation of the unresolved issues faced by the new panel of architects in 1966 and a summary of the main recommendations of the recently released “Review of Programme”.⁵⁴ A purported attempt by Baume, who was financial editor of the *Bulletin*, to present “honest reporting” and an “unbiased” account of what the book’s flyleaf called the “battle of the giants”, *The Sydney Opera House Affair* quotes extensively from original sources and reproduces many documents as appendices. But Baume’s choice of documents and his commentary succumb to the same shortcomings that have beset so much writing on the Opera House; despite his declared intentions, an agenda to vindicate the actions of the government and the position of Arup is inevitably prejudicial to Utzon. Widely criticised when released the book was, however, stirring controversy even before it was published.⁵⁵ After sighting proof copies earlier in the year both Utzon and, ironically, Arup’s Jack Zunz had objected to the inclusion of some material, Utzon threatening legal action if it was not removed⁵⁶ and Zunz, according to Hall, condemning it as “very bad . . . very disjointed . . . it was unfortunate that Baume had not attempted to develop and sustain a point of view.”⁵⁷ How the offending material was accessed by Baume is not clear but it would seem that he had been somewhat tardy in seeking the necessary permissions to reproduce documents, some of them presumably highly sensitive.⁵⁸

Forced to rely on the evidence of records rather than the wildly varying accounts of protagonists in the Opera House history – he wrote in his introduction that “there were as many versions of the same fact as there were people to talk to” – Baume may have been swayed by his own preconceptions, but his summation of the project’s innate problems was incisive: “this is not a story of goodies and baddies; it is a story of bad decisions made for good reasons, of good intentions that went wrong, of personal tensions that built up to a point that made it impossible for the project to go on as it was.”⁵⁹ Peter Hall no doubt agreed and his involvement in the book as contributor and checker of what the acknowledgments termed the text’s “factual accuracy” was presumably in support of Baume’s purported objective to present a balanced account of both sides of the story. That Baume was unsuccessful is testament to his own biases but also to the extraordinary difficulty of disentangling what one review referred to as this “congested and elusive story.”⁶⁰ Ultimately the book appears to have done little to sway public opinion or, by association, to have vindicated Hall and the government’s actions. For Utzon the very fact of Hall’s connection with the book must have been

worrying, but of more concern was his summary of the “Review of Programme’s” recommendations, changes to the functional configuration of the building which, for Utzon, would “destroy completely the architecture of the Sydney Opera House, an architecture which has been based on the flow of people Perhaps Mr Hall understands this as imperative from my side.”⁶¹

Indeed, if Parsons’ subsequent letter to Utzon is accurate, Hall was giving the impression that he understood and sympathised with Utzon’s position. According to Parsons,

the diagrams shown in Baume’s book are *not* trustworthy, and that far from expecting you [Utzon] to return bound hand and foot by a rigid programme determined in your absence, he [Hall] is at present trying to defer major decisions of which he does not approve, and hopes that discussions with you can be initiated quickly.⁶²

The mention of Hall’s attempt to “defer major decisions” was no doubt a reference to his endeavours following his return to Sydney to change the geometry and materials of the glass walls, but it seems there were other revisions being made to the “Review of Programme”. In a telephone call to Utzon arranged by Parsons – now alarmed by Utzon’s waning enthusiasm – Hall was able to reassure him that “the Restaurant was to go back in the Restaurant shells and that the Rehearsal Room was again a Rehearsal Room; that there would be no public circulation in the central passage and that I didn’t like the escalators”.⁶³ Hall’s notes record that Utzon wanted him to ask the minister to settle his fees, to invite him to Australia for discussions and to pay both his fare and a fee:

He said if the Minister would have him back, then the question of who was the Client would have to be quite clear and we would have to be able to work without any publicity at all and just quietly resolve all the problems. He felt sure that given these conditions, he would be well able to collaborate.⁶⁴

Predictably, Hughes was as intractable as ever. Presented with Hall’s notes of the Utzon conversation at a meeting on 20 September, Hughes declared that Utzon’s return under the conditions he had outlined was “absolutely impossible”, that he didn’t believe Utzon’s attitude had changed significantly and that he was sceptical that Arup really wanted Utzon back.⁶⁵ When Hall mentioned Parsons’ belief that there would be political advantage for Hughes in showing “magnanimity” towards Utzon, Hughes’ response, according to Hall’s notes, was that he thought this was “absolute nonsense . . . the Labor Party would say . . . he had made a complete mess of it He could see nothing but disaster for him and his architects”.⁶⁶ For Hall’s part,

. . . at some stage I had thought it might be possible to work out a way of collaborating, but the more these discussions with Utzon had developed and the more I learnt about the job, the less interested I became. I thought that this business of wanting to re-open the whole question of programme was absolutely out . . . I felt that the whole thing

shouldn't be raised again. I said I would ring Wheatland and tell him that this was my feeling after talking with the Minister, and I would also ring Utzon.⁶⁷

An Ending and its Aftermath

The telephone calls to Utzon and Bill Wheatland are not recorded, but for Hall the meeting with Hughes effectively marked the end of negotiations with Utzon. It had been a complicated and frustrating interlude that, in retrospect, was doomed from the start. That this may not have been obvious to Hall is evident from the readiness with which he engaged in the conciliation role that Parsons created for him. But the underlying ambiguity of Hall's allegiances, apparent from the contradictions between Parsons' interpretation of Hall's enthusiasm for negotiations to proceed and, by contrast, Hall's scepticism when in the company of his colleagues and the client, raises questions as to his motives for participating in the Utzon dialogue. It was, arguably, this same uncertainty about where his loyalties lay that, at the outset of his involvement in the project, validated the continuity of the Utzon references in the 1967 designs for the glass walls and the Concert Hall ceiling despite the change in function and materials – the replacement of plywood elements with concrete in both cases. The evolution of radically new design schemes for both areas of the building following the closure of negotiations with Utzon in late September 1967 would suggest that this definitive break may have helped free Hall creatively from the lingering influence of the Utzon legacy and the difficulties of adapting another's contested designs to a changed programme.

In hindsight it is evident that Hall had little to lose and much to gain from participating in the Utzon negotiations, even if this was not clear to him at the time. Most significantly, Utzon's return would have relieved him of the continuing burden of responsibility for an extremely difficult, onerous and ultimately unwinnable task. Secondly, if the negotiations failed, as Hall soon surely knew was likely, the magnanimity shown in his association with the move to return Utzon could help salvage his professional reputation in the light of ongoing condemnation of his role. Lastly, even if Davis Hughes held views contrary to his own and objected to his involvement, Hall must have realised that Hughes was in no position to ask for his resignation: Hughes would not only lose credibility, he would in all likelihood find it impossible to attract a suitable replacement for Hall. Utzon needed Hall to intercede with the government, and Hughes needed Hall to maintain his political advantage. Hall may have felt he needed Utzon at the outset of negotiations, but as he himself became aware, any collaboration would be impossible if Utzon remained unwilling to reconsider his original designs.

While for Hall and the government the Utzon issue had run its course by October 1967, for others it was still very much alive. With state government elections due in 1968, Utzon it seems was optimistically pinning his hopes on the election of the Labor Party and the return of Norman Ryan as Minister for Public

Works.⁶⁸ The prospect of a change to a more sympathetic government was enough to sustain something of the momentum that had built up during the year. Always resourceful, Public Works architects were apprehended attaching “Bring Utzon Back” stickers to the State Office Block building in late October, an act considered mildly subversive by the public servants who reported them,⁶⁹ and on 9 February 1968 a one-page advertisement appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* calling for the “people of New South Wales” to support Utzon’s reinstatement.⁷⁰ However, the culmination of the return-Utton movement was undoubtedly the public rally in the Sydney Town Hall on 19 February. Attended by 1,500 people, the gathering was addressed by Norman Ryan, Elias Duek-Cohen and others, but it was the taped message from Utzon that apparently transfixed the audience.⁷¹ After telling the crowd he believed he had solved the acoustic and seating problems of the hall,⁷² Utzon concluded:

But I stretch my hand forward to you, Mr Davis Hughes . . . and . . . the citizens of Sydney: Have faith in me, have faith in my ideas and methods. I have proof for my ideas and my ability. The proof lies there in front of you in the form of a marvellous building, the proof that I can carry out my ideas to the last detail from the very beginning.⁷³

Parsons did not speak at the rally; nor was he among the “prominent people” on stage. But he had not given up. On the day of the rally the *Sydney Morning Herald* published an article in which Parsons, in one final effort to achieve some level of reconciliation, revealed the “confidential” negotiations between Hall and Utzon of the previous year. It was a poignant last plea for appeasement:

I am now breaking confidence because the public should know that the men who care most deeply about the Opera House are not squabbling about the past. They only want to ensure the very best for the future. It would do a world of good if only those who are most fervently opposed to the present architects or to Mr Utzon would realise that they can best help the Opera House by joining with Mr Hall and Mr Utzon in their generous and constructive concern to give Sydney their best.⁷⁴

With a snap election called for 24 February 1968, the rally was timely indeed. Just three days before polling day Utzon sent a telegram to Premier Askin asking him to “reopen discussion [*sic*] with me regarding SOH without prior conditions either side”.⁷⁵ With the re-election of the state Liberal Country Party, however, the government remained unmoved, responding to Utzon’s plea with the following telegram:

Neither Government nor Panel of Architects need or desire your further participation in SOH. There are no grounds for changing satisfactory relationship established between Panel of Architects and Client. Discussion would serve no purpose.⁷⁶

Writing to former Utzon architect Yuzo Mikami, Peter Hall offered his own perspective on recent events:

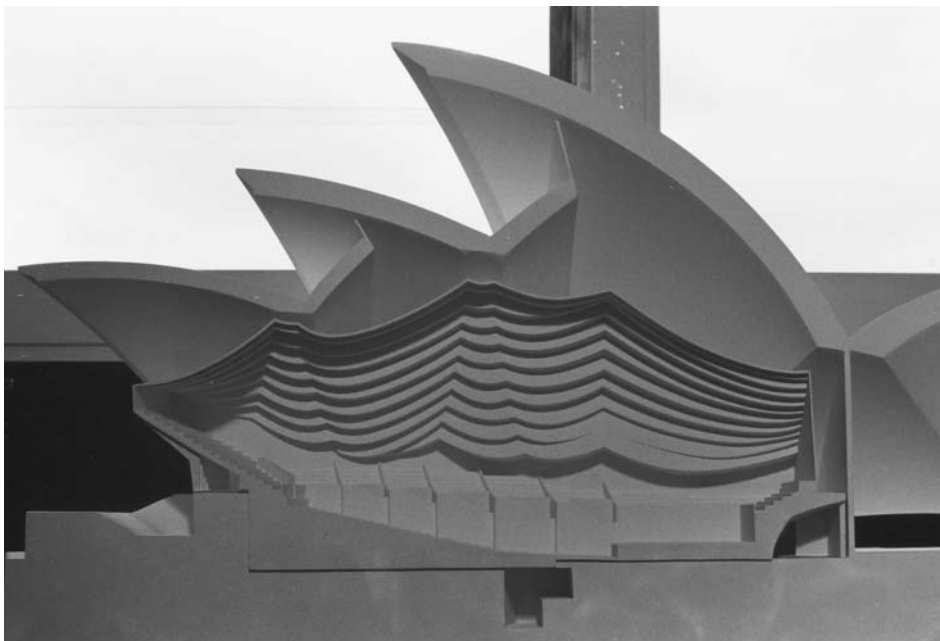


Figure 6: Sectional study model showing the concrete catenary arches proposed as the first Utzon-referenced scheme for the Concert Hall ceiling, mid-1967.
Peter Hall Papers.

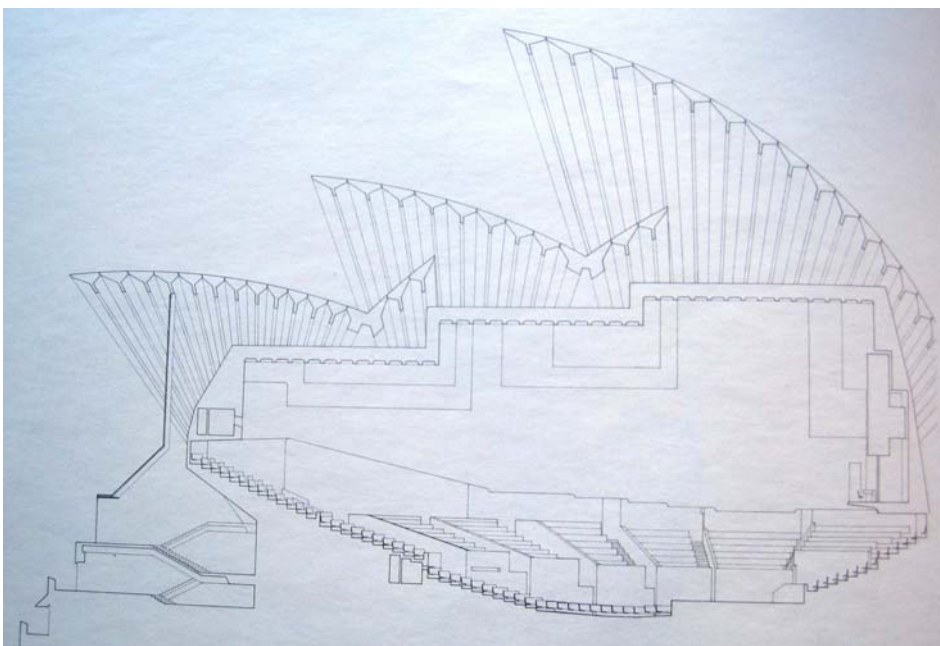


Figure 7: The radically new scheme for the Concert Hall ceiling of early 1968 led to the final design later that year.
Hall Todd & Littlemore, "Sydney Opera House Stage 3" ("White Book"), February 1968.

[Utzon's] supporters have behaved in quite a terrible way for the last few weeks and Utzon himself has made some public appeals which have done him no good. It is now almost certainly absolutely impossible that he have anything further to do with the Opera House.⁷⁷

If Hall had been sympathetic to the idea of Utzon's return in early 1967, the vacillating negotiations of the ensuing months, the sense that Utzon, despite Philip Parsons' best efforts to broker a workable solution, had not substantially moved on from his position of a year earlier, raised misgivings that for Hall made the likelihood of any real reconciliation dubious. With significant progress on the design of the Concert Hall and the glass walls early in 1968, the fate of the building without its original architect was all but sealed. For Philip Parsons the Opera House debacle was a conflict between the forces of radicalism and conservatism – a “failure of conservative bureaucracy to understand Utzon's radical logic”.⁷⁸ Neither conservative nor radical, by Parsons' definition, Peter Hall inhabited the difficult, shifting terrain in between. Reconciling the two polarities was a juggling act that both stretched the consistency of his allegiances during 1967 – and beyond – and shaped his architectural solutions for the building.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

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NOTES

1. Ken Woolley, *Reviewing the Performance: The Design of the Sydney Opera House* (Boorowa: Watermark Press, 2010); Peter Webber, *Peter Hall, Architect* (Boorowa: Watermark Press, 2012); Philip Drew, “Romanticism Revisited: Jørn Utzon's Sydney Opera House,” *Architectural Theory Review* 12, no. 2 (2007): 121–145.
2. Drew, “Romanticism Revisited,” 143.
3. Naomi Stead and Antony Moulis, “Sydney's Prometheus: Myth, Representation and Remediation at Joern Utzon's Sydney Opera House,” in Michael Chapman and Michael Ostwald, eds., *Imagining... Proceedings of the 27th International SAHANZ Conference* (Newcastle: Society of Architectural Historians of Australia and New Zealand, 2010), 407.
4. Jørn Utzon to Peter Hall, 4 April 1967, Peter Hall Papers, private collection.
5. Hall Todd & Littlemore, “Sydney Opera House: Review of Programme,” 12 December 1966.
6. Mungo MacCallum, “Utzon: ‘Let me Finish the Job’,” *The Australian*, February 28, 1967, 1.
7. Francis Evers and Dr Philip Parsons, “The Opera House Crisis,” *The Australian*, February 11, 1967; “The Dream Goes Sour,” *The Australian*, February 13, 1967; and “The Case for Utzon,” *The Australian*, February 14, 1967.
8. Parsons (1926–1993) was senior lecturer in the Drama Department at the University of New South Wales from 1966 to 1987 and highly active in theatrical circles in Sydney for over two decades. In 1971, with his wife, the writer and critic Katharine Brisbane, Parsons established Currency Press to publish the work of emerging Australian playwrights.
9. “Government does not want Utzon Back,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 1, 1967.
10. Philip Parsons, “Proposals to Enable Mr Joern Utzon to Return to the Sydney Opera House,” (n.d. [late March 1967]), 1, Katharine Brisbane and Philip Parsons Papers, private collection.
11. Petition, NSW Government Architect's Branch employees to Hall Todd & Littlemore, 2 March 1967, State Records NSW (SRNSW).

12. "Utzon Underground," *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 6, 1967. According to the article the posters were distributed on 23 February to coincide with a meeting called by Davis Hughes to discuss the future of the Major Hall. This and other Utzon supporters' protest activities during 1966 and 1967 are detailed in Anne Watson, "Bring Utzon Back: The Protest that Divided a Profession," in Anne Watson, ed, *Building a Masterpiece: The Sydney Opera House* (Sydney: Powerhouse Publishing, 2006), 152–67.
13. Owen Tooth, "Free Summary of Conversation, PBH & OT," 8 April 1967, Brisbane/Parsons Papers.
14. According to Tooth's notes, Hall also mentioned at this stage a "confidential document" refuting Evers' article "point by point".
15. Peter Hall, Weekly Diary, 15 April 1967, Hall Papers.
16. Peter Hall, "Notes on Document Signed by Jorn Utzon, 4 April 1967," 10 April 1967, Hall Papers.
17. Parsons, "Proposals," 1.
18. Parsons, "Proposals," 3.
19. Parsons, "Proposals," 6.
20. Jørn Utzon to Bill Wheatland, (n.d. [early April 1967]), Brisbane/Parsons Papers. The letter enclosed three copies of the Parsons statement signed by Utzon.
21. Utzon to Hall, Amended copy of Parsons statement, 4 April 1967, Brisbane/Parsons Papers.
22. Philip Parsons to Jørn Utzon, 23 April 1967, p. 1, Brisbane/Parsons Papers. Michael Lewis was Arup's head of the Opera House project in Sydney. The antagonism between Utzon and Lewis contributed substantially to tensions on the project in the mid-1960s. Hall had spoken to Lewis as recorded in his diary on 15 April 1967.
23. Philip Parsons, draft letters, Jørn Utzon to Peter Hall and to President, RAI, [23 April 1967], Brisbane/Parsons Papers.
24. Hall, insertion in Weekly Diary, "Discussions with Parsons, 28 April 1967," 1 May 1967, Hall Papers.
25. Hall, Diary, 1 May 1967.
26. Hall, Diary, 1 May 1967.
27. J. C. Humphrey to Davis Hughes, 2 May 1967, SRNSW.
28. Hall, Diary, 1 May 1967.
29. Harry Seidler to Sigfried Giedion, 7 April 1967, Harry Seidler Archive, private collection.
30. Harry Seidler / Sigfried Giedion, "An Open Letter to the Premier and Minister for Public Works of New South Wales, Australia," (n.d. [c.12 April 1967: Giedion refers to the open letter when writing to Seidler on 12 April 1967, Harry Seidler Archive]). The letter, a copy of which is in the Brisbane/Parsons Papers, draws from Giedion's writing on Utzon in the 1967 edition of *Space, Time and Architecture*, 687–88.
31. Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*, 5th ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 677.
32. Philip Goad, "An Appeal for Modernism: Sigfried Giedion and the Sydney Opera House," *Fabrications* 8 (July 1997): 130.
33. Sigfried Giedion, "Jørn Utzon and the Third Generation," *Zodiac* 14 (1965): 36–47.
34. Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*, 686.
35. Sigfried Giedion, "Debasement of a Masterpiece," *RIBA J* (May 1967): 170.
36. Philip Parsons to Jørn Utzon, 14 July 1967, Brisbane/Parsons Papers.
37. Philip Parsons, notes "Proposed Meeting with Peter Hall," (n.d. [c.14 July 1967]), Brisbane/Parsons Papers.
38. Parsons, "Proposed Meeting," 1.
39. Parsons, "Proposed Meeting," 2.
40. Parsons, "Proposed Meeting," 4.
41. Parsons, "Proposed Meeting," 5.
42. Parsons, "Proposed Meeting," 5.

43. Parsons, "Proposed Meeting," 6.
44. Parsons, "Proposed Meeting," 6.
45. Hall, Weekly Diary, 20 July 1967.
46. Hall, Weekly Diary, 23 July 1967.
47. Hall, Weekly Diary, 23 July 1967.
48. Hall, Weekly Diary, 13 August 1967.
49. Philip Parsons to Jørn Utzon, 17 August 1967, Brisbane/Parsons Papers.
50. Hall had other reasons to delay progress at this stage: motivated by his talks in Arup's London office, he was arguing for a radical redesign of the glass walls. A moratorium on design, as advocated by Ove Arup, would have given him breathing space to make a case for the revised glass wall scheme.
51. Parsons to Utzon, 17 August 1967.
52. Michael Baume, *The Sydney Opera House Affair* (Sydney: Thomas Nelson, 1967).
53. "Peter Hall... explains, reasonably and modestly, what he and his team are doing". John Carter, review of *The Sydney Opera House Affair*, *RIBAJ* (November 1967): 495. Carter's main criticism of the book was that it failed to "ponder the final puzzle of Utzon's self-destruction".
54. Peter Hall, epilogue, "Function is not a 'Dirty' Word," in Baume, *The Sydney Opera House Affair*, 109–17.
55. Defending the objectivity of his book, Baume described a review by John Power as a "mauling". Baume, "The Utzonites and Me," *Quadrant* (September-October 1967): 5.
56. In his *Quadrant* defence Baume stated that he had unsuccessfully approached Utzon to contribute an epilogue and that after "a letter of warning" from Utzon's solicitor, had removed material that was "highly critical of Utzon": "I still think it is a useful book. It would have been more so had the risk of a libel action not forced us to edit out some of the facts."
57. Hall, Weekly Diary, 6 August 1967, Hall Papers.
58. While Baume had written to the minister seeking publication permission just before Christmas 1966, it seems that consent had not been given by the time the book went to print in February 1967. See Baume / Hughes correspondence, 20 December 1966–13 February 1967, SRNSW.
59. Baume, *The Sydney Opera House Affair*, xii, xi.
60. Carter, review of *The Sydney Opera House Affair*, 495.
61. Jørn Utzon to Philip Parsons, 23 August 1967, Brisbane/Parsons Papers. Utzon's comments suggest that Baume's book was his first confrontation with the new brief and that he was unfamiliar with the "Review of Programme" released in late 1966.
62. Philip Parsons to Jørn Utzon, 1 September 1967, Brisbane/Parsons Papers. Parsons was relating to Utzon the main points of a discussion with Hall and Bill Wheatland the preceding day.
63. Peter Hall, "Notes from Telephone Conversation with Utzon," 14 September 1967, Brisbane/Parsons Papers.
64. Hall, "Notes from Telephone Conversation", Hall Papers.
65. Hall, Weekly Diary insertion, "P. H. Meeting with Hughes," 20 September 1967, Hall Papers.
66. Hall, "P. H. Meeting with Hughes".
67. Hall, "P. H. Meeting with Hughes".
68. "I am relying very much on the possibility of Mr Ryan coming back and this will give me a perfect basis for finishing the Opera House in a correct way because Mr Ryan and I are in complete understanding". Jørn Utzon to Philip Parsons, 23 August 1967, Brisbane/Parsons Papers.
69. Dated 26 October 1967, two reports, with the offending stickers, were filed by Public Works officers, SRNSW.
70. The text of the advertisement was written by Elias Duek-Cohen, Owen Tooth and Elizabeth Price.
71. Programme and transcript of speeches, "Public Meeting in the Sydney Town Hall," 19 February 1968, SRNSW.

72. Utzon had earlier provided data for a dual-purpose hall that included revised seating widths (21 inches), row spacings (34 inches) and seating numbers (concerts – 2800; opera – 1836/2064). “Figures from Jorn Utzon received February 1968,” Brisbane/Parsons Papers. If they have survived, Utzon’s drawings for these new solutions have, to the writer’s knowledge, never been made public.
73. “Transcript of a Tape Recorded Message from Mr Jorn Utzon,” 19 February 1968, Hall Papers.
74. Helen Frizell, “Is Joern Utzon’s Return Truly Impossible?” *Sydney Morning Herald*, February 19, 1968, 6. The article quoted at length Parsons’ description of the preceding year’s negotiations.
75. Telegram, Jørn Utzon to Robert Askin, 21 February 1968, SRNSW.
76. Draft telegram, Davis Hughes to Jørn Utzon, 27 February 1968, SRNSW.
77. Peter Hall to Yuzo Mikami, 27 February 1968, Hall Papers.
78. Philip Parsons, “Radical vs Conservative Architecture: The Ruin of Utzon’s Audacious Vision,” *Meanjin Quarterly* 26, no 3 (September 1967): 344.