



11 2007

THE BROADSHEET OF THE AUCKLAND BRANCH OF THE NEW ZEALAND INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS

BLOCK

The Despoiler

Block's own Witness For The Defence courts the environment

A recent trip to the recycling yard bought me rather unexpectedly into the battle lines of coastal land development and revealed yet again what confusing times we live in. The recycling yard is one of those compounds behind chain link fencing, with signs telling you where the cardboard goes, where the bottles and the domestic rubbish go, and the whole deal overseen by someone dwelling in a kitted out shipping container with a booming recovered stereo and an oversized Rastafarian beret. It was obvious I was an out of town, a weekender at best, but possibly one of the enemy and as I backed up to the marked out drop zone I was given a friendly but pointed shakedown by the proprietor standing resolutely in front of a large banner calling all to arms in defence of the local sandspit.

Since graduating I have been acutely aware of the role architects play as the shocktroops of change; my first couple of years live in memory as a series of uncomfortable home invasions in which I intruded on families destined to be moved on by the tide of gentrification that swept across Grey Lynn in the 1980s. With tape and clipboard in hand I lent over circles of mute tuvaevae exponents sizing up where the application of a Housing Corp loan would best be applied in the flashing up of yet another villa. I was of course just the latest of agents of a system which had created this scenario; the country's post war industrialisation and the need for cheap labour, urbanisation and the desire of many baby boomers to forsake the new suburbs in favour of character housing and councils' nascent regeneration of the inner city suburbs. Yet for all of that I was the first manifestation of change in the tenants' lives and it remains an uncomfortable memory.

I was rather pleased to be able to explain to my inquisitor that indeed I knew of the sandspit project and, probably too sanctimoniously, revealed that I had refused any part of a commission offered for the project, though in truth my demurring was born as much of a fear of retribution in the nearby surf as it was the result of a thorough understanding of the risk to the ecology or the sensitivities of local iwi. After making a contribution to the fighting fund I headed back to the big smoke feeling only slightly self righteous, knowing that I was soon off to the Environment Court to appear in favour of the development of another bit of coastal land.

Where arguments in the recycling yard were pretty unequivocal those in the Environment Court were anything but, perhaps resulting from the somewhat lesser sensitivities of the subject land but more likely resulting from the complex peregrinations the cast of consultants were able to indulge in under the big top of the RMA. It was a performance in which most of the players and nuances of coastal land development were in play: the offshore owner trying to restore land ravaged by a previous owner, the adjacent landowner claiming kaitiakitanga over the subject land and the Environmental Defence Society fighting to protect a Pacific to Tasman ecology corridor. Each argument had its proponents, a

phalanx of hired hands, ecologists, Maori consultants, planners, archaeologists, landscapers and, sandwiched in the middle, a hapless architect adrift in a sea of RMA clauses and Coastal Policy Statements. I felt an intruder, this was a band of performers all of whom knew each other well and who had seemed to cross swords in a score of previous cases, each referred to in shorthand and each seemingly playing out a similar script as each case inexorably refines our understanding of coastal land use.

On such a stage I was happy to explain how one might go about building on the land using all the tricks of our and the landscapers' trade to make the few buildings retreat into the shadows but these were of only passing interest. Like most architects I have railed against the RMA's assumption that all building is, a priori, a despoliation of the natural landscape and secretly hoped the opportunity would come for me to leap from the witness stand and deliver an oration on the delights of architecture of such compelling force that architects would, in future, be free of the strictures of the RMA for ever more. Well that didn't happen and while there was a bit of inexplicable to and fro over handrails the real action lay in a two or three day examination of the nature of the coastal condition - could anything in this neck of the wood really be construed as 'natural' given the history of extensive farming and, if it is agreed that all land outside of, say, Fiordland is modified, what then is the appropriate measure of intrusion? Keen as I was to have my say in this regard, thoughts of the Cinque Terre coast to the fore, this is the stuff of landscapers, or whatever profession it is that those once versed in latin names and soil types have become under the RMA.



The Caitlins and Riomaggiore - competing for your heartstrings

I feel deeply for the developers of this project whose modest goals of land repair and reforestation with low density occupation begot such an expensive and intrusive production yet it is in just such debate that we are developing the framework of coastal occupation. If there is a shortcoming in such a self conscious re evaluation of our actions it is that the debate is invariably framed in the context of district schemes founded on the scattered low density occupation of land. I fear it will be a long time before Riomaggiore comes to Northland. PC

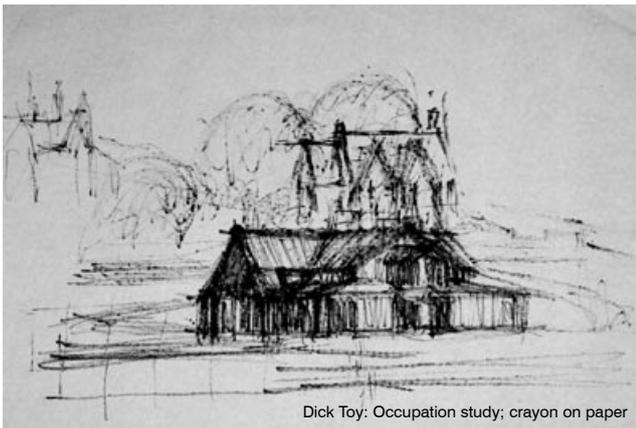
Nice Enough?

Humanism 101: the final lectures of Peggy Deamer and Dick Toy

Architecture Week's penultimate event featured Peggy Deamer discussing Dick Toy's last lecture in front of a small and select audience. The talk coincided with the end of crit week up the road and so the audience was largely made up of academics, including a charter flight of Wellingtonians.

From the outset, Deamer expressed her reticence with the notion of 'delivering' Toy's lecture as she had only the sparest of notes to work from. She therefore proposed to firstly outline Toy's talk and secondly consider the relevance of the lecture's content to Auckland architecture, before reflecting upon the contribution that Toy made to the architectural scene.

Toy's lecture was originally delivered in 1989 and was entitled "Talk about Architectural Structures: Pavilions, Squares, Bays". The lecture includes much of the content of Toy's paper 'Water City of the South Pacific' originally published in 1977 and subsequently republished in Lloyd Jenkins' 'New Dreamland' (2005). The consistent theme to the lecture and the paper is the importance of an alignment between topography and the act of dwelling. In Auckland, this means that the form and growth of the city should be responsive to the city's defining characteristic – it is naturally endowed with bays. An alignment between the structure of the city and the form of the topography is proposed to encourage more meaningful settlement and a more vivid experience of living and working together.



Dick Toy: Occupation study; crayon on paper

Reflecting upon the lecture, Deamer asked herself what Toy's gift to New Zealand architecture was and then what Auckland's gift to the architectural world at large is. In both cases, her conclusion tended towards a profound sense of humanity. Deamer proposed that Toy was fundamentally a humanist because he believed that "when forms are presented to us correctly, they heal our spirit." And as for Auckland architects, Deamer similarly marked us with the humanist brush because we care for those who live in and pass through our city.

Following the talk, the discussion amongst the younger architects tended towards the youthful fear of being tarnished by humanism. Is our caring side all that we've got? Is being nice enough? Or, do we not really understand this humanist concept? After all, it had its heyday a few generations ago. In this light, it seemed that a few brief notes to introduce the concept of humanist architecture would not go amiss for the graduate brigade.

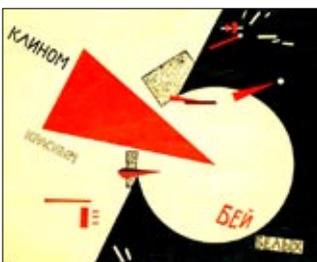
In the context of Toy's lecture, the sense of care that Deamer identified is apparent in the architect's commitment to set on paper an observation (the city is comprised of bays) and an understanding (occupying the bays would be meaningful) that contributes to a richer life. The humanist architect is marked by a sense of duty to improve the situation or, as the humanist hero Alvar Aalto remarked, to make sure that "the human being is growing up in some good way."

The idea of fulfilling a duty was also central to the thesis Geoffrey Scott outlined in *The Architecture of Humanism* (1924). On one level the book was a justification for neo-Renaissance architecture, but on another it anticipated the criticisms levelled against the Modern movement; criticisms that formed central tenets of the humanist architecture of the mid-20th century.

Scott proposed that humanist architecture is grounded in the fulfilment of primitive necessities in a delightful manner. He therefore believed that Roman architecture represented the model humanist work. It was an architecture of constraint that exhibited a calmness and coherence in its use of forms to shape the world as humans desired it. By contrast, Gothic architecture delved into the 'cult of the strange,' and though characterised by an exquisite inventiveness, it was "entangled in a web of idle thoughts in which humanity has ceased to be the centre." Under Scott's tutelage therefore, humanist architects were to be weary of excessive logic that bears little relevance to humans and the act of dwelling. In his eyes, the delightful accommodation of primitive necessities was considered grounds enough for architecture, a worthy challenge, and a duty for architects to fulfil. SF



PRINT DESIGN CLASSICS



Beat the Whites with the Red wedge. El Lissitzky. 1919.

During the Bolshevik Revolution one of the most influential and innovative designers of the time, Lazar Mordukovich Lissitzky, created this famous propaganda poster making dynamic use of geometric shapes and carefully arranged simplified Cyrillic script (considered more accessible to the largely illiterate workforce) to encourage the viewer to strive for revolution. He was part of the Suprematist artistic movement, in development since 1915, rejecting the imitation of natural shapes in favour of the creation of distinct geometric forms. The civil war was mainly fought between the 'Reds', who were the communists and revolutionaries, and the 'Whites' who were the monarchists,

conservatives, liberals and socialists who opposed the Bolshevik Revolution.

Red appears prominently to the left representing the political colour and position of the communists, while the wedge is a Suprematist symbol of something new. The Russian text 'Klinom krasnim' translates as 'with Red wedge'.

White was a standard colour of the anti-revolutionary forces while the circle was a Suprematist symbol for unchangeable. 'Bey Belych' means 'Beat Whites'.

The appearance of the piece is often regarded as alluding to the similar shapes used on military maps.



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The Fine Print

Excerpts from the reports to NZIA Auckland Branch meeting held Nov. 6th, 2007.

BRANCH CHAIR'S REPORT: Pete Bossley

Architecture Week Auckland '07

Congratulations to all those who worked very hard to make this another successful week. From the organisation of the space, to co-ordinating the many speakers, arranging insurances, licenses, dealing with sponsors, cajoling architects to take part, organising tours and exhibitions, co-ordinating students and the supporting consultants, there was a huge amount of work and it all went very smoothly.

There were varying levels of attendance at the sessions, with some very successful and others less well patronised. Sessions generally achieved 50+ numbers, although a couple were almost without audience. Once again the Pavilion proved itself to be a marginal facility in a great location. (It won't be there by next year, so we will need to find a good alternative).

The culmination on Friday evening was a great night - from the afternoon affordability lecture, leading on to Peggy Deamer delivery of her interpretation of Dick Toy's last lecture, the Urban Spoiler performances and speeches, and then back into the Pavilion for Pecha Kucha, with around 1,500 people attending the various events.

The sponsors all seemed happy, and media interest was extremely high, with maximum coverage in a wide range of media, all organised with the assistance of Dock Street Group. These included:

Radio: Various architects interviewed on Radio NZ, Kiwi FM, George FM

TV: Interviews on TV One Breakfast, and TV3 Sunrise

Print: Articles and interviews in the New Zealand Herald Viva and Canvas, Listener, Metro, Sunday Star Times, National Business Review, Architecture New Zealand, and many local newspapers.

Online: Over 40 websites covered the events and carried interviews or items about aspects of the Week.

Congratulations and thanks are due to Pauline and Sarah of Dock Street Group as they needed to overcome significant resistance (Rugby World Cup, following on too close from last year, architects are arrogant and difficult to deal with, too parochial, etc.) early on to get the momentum they eventually achieved.

Attendances at the events were not all recorded, but we estimate the following: Steven Ehrlich, 350; launch evening, 250+; sixteen lectures including those on sustainability and affordability, 1,000+; the closing evening including Peggy Deamer's lecture, the Urban Spoiler party and Pecha Kucha Night, 1,500+. As well as the above, daily visitors viewed the student installations and the various exhibitions in the Pavilion.

Once again thanks are due to John Balasoglou for the incredible effort he contributed well beyond the call of duty. I'm not sure why he does it, but we should all be very grateful he does!

I hosted a wrap-up session last week and we made a number of comments as to what worked well, what could be done better, and issues for future years. Additional comments from the wider committee would be appreciated. Please email them to me and they will be included in the commentary.

As you know, the idea is to make it a Biennale from now on, but

we may host a few events next year which carry the Architecture Week 'brand' and link from this year to 2009.

Public Relations

AWA07 has become our major vehicle for publicity, but as we have discussed there are potential areas in which we could publish Auckland architecture more aggressively. This would need to be done in conjunction with the directions and strategies for national publicity.

If you remember we proposed a line item in the next budget, and Gary Lawson has expressed interest in running such a portfolio.

Future Auckland Leaders/ Committee for Auckland

I attended the preliminary presentation by the three selected groups who had developed projects based on assistance for immigrants, furthering the acceptance and understanding of different sub-cultures within the workplace, and furthering an understanding of Auckland through local mythologies.

All three groups were very impressive, had covered much ground with philosophy and research, and had achieved significant results including assistance with employment, and having a book accepted for publication.

Stephen Martin's contribution was highly appreciated and the Committee for Auckland is keen that we nominate a replacement for next year. I have discussed possibilities for next year's nominee with various members and I propose to nominate Gary Lawson for the post. Gary is keen and will be an enthusiastic contributor. I believe this needs to be confirmed by the end of November.

I am keen to be the representative on the Committee for Auckland once my stint as Chair is finished, if appropriate.

TECHNICAL ISSUES PORTFOLIO: Michael Middlebrook

Building Code Review

We are awaiting a date for a meeting with the new Minister of Building and Construction, Shane Jones, to discuss NZIA concerns with the Building Code Review and with the concept of prescriptive performance requirements. We will discuss the interfaces between designers, the building consent officials and the DBH. We will look particularly at the concerns being addressed by the proposed clause changes and better means of achieving these ends. We hope to develop an ongoing relationship with the Minister so that we can be actively included in the assessment of the review.

HERITAGE PORTFOLIO: Adam Wild

NZIA Heritage

No update on the President of the NZIA's wish that the NZIA is permanently represented on the Board of the New Zealand Historic Places Trust.

The Rotherham House, 1950

The concept is to secure the Rotherham House as an architectural centre for the promotion and debate of all things architectural in Auckland. If you are interested in supporting the project please contact Adam Wild on (09) 9666 940.

Architecture Week

The heritage component of AWA'07 has again been met with

Calder  Stewart
Roofing



great interest and positive feedback. The “sermon” at All Saints, Ponsonby, the Radio NZ nine-to-noon interview, and Peggy Deamer’s interpretation of Toy’s last lecture provided good leverage to get people talking about architecture and our architectural heritage. Special thanks to Veronica Cassin for her commitment to the project and to Archifact Ltd. for supporting us at AWA’07.

The Christchurch Branch Heritage Group

Heather Gallavin and the Canterbury Branch’s heritage sub-committee is proposing a set of guidelines to assist in the development of heritage buildings and sites in Canterbury, in particular to the Arts Centre. This is in response to the growing debate in Christchurch about how historic buildings are developed or adapted over their life time. The Canterbury Branch want to be proactive and involved in the decisions affecting the city fabric and believe that a set of guidelines/objectives would be a positive way forward to address the issues. The Canterbury Branch are keen to know if this has been addressed in the other centres by the NZIA branches and, if so, in what manner.

In responding to Heather I have voiced solidarity with the issues and concerns voiced by the Canterbury Branch and have copied them relevant papers and the draft heritage policy promoted by the NZIA Heritage Task Group before it was “relinquished”.

PUBLICITY PORTFOLIO: Kerry Avery

Greetings all. Firstly a quick report on the setup and application of the www.architectureweek.co.nz website used to provide information for the recent Architecture Week. This was constructed and hosted on our behalf. We progressively added relevant information on all events and in the last week generated a newsletter style update to those that had registered. It achieved quite a lot of traffic with 3,604 hits to date, 15,738 page views and an average three minutes on site. Incidentally, they came in from 57 countries. Of real value was the number of direct questions from our membership and public (around five per day) which were able to be easily answered. I believe we should continue with the site, update it to provide a retrospective wrap up and have it available for any subsequent year’s event. This will be relatively inexpensive (say \$1,000 per annum including hosting) and will enable its earliest setup and therefore usefulness in

the future. Secondly: The nature of this portfolio is really about communication mostly for the benefit of our membership and not really to the public. As demonstrated by Dock Street Group, the real publicity and PR was very well handled by the experts engaged for Architecture Week. The nature of this unique event creates newsworthy stories that can be publicised as more publicly orientated and less self-serving. I think such a change in title and definition will enable the portfolio holder to better devise the agenda and appropriate actions to support the Branch activities.

COMMITTEE FOR AKL / FAL PORTFOLIO: Stephen Martin

The Skills for Auckland team are meeting at least weekly and more frequently this month as we prepare our final presentation and report for the FAL graduation function at the end of November. Our first presentation to selected Committee for Auckland members at Water Care Services went very well. Thank you to Pete for attending and for submitting some insightful observations to the three FAL project teams.

We have also had our final discussion session for Rod Oram. Rod thanked the group for focusing his thinking at the time he was finishing off his book manuscript for Reinventing Paradise, a collection of columns and interviews concerning New Zealand’s place in the global economy.

From the BLOCK Inbox:

The President’s wish for a permanent NZIA rep on the Historic Places Trust Board is too late. The HPT Act was amended last year after years of agonising revision. The Board was changed and shrunk down to nine members: three elected by the members, three Maori appointed by the Gumnt, and three others appointed by Gumnt. Speaking from six years (2000-2006) on the HPT Board as elected member for the Northern region, we would do much better to press for a senior architect on the Head Office staff in Wellington. The senior staff are the people who really run the show. The Board has now been subjected to a full dose of Governance Theory and is only allowed to handle policy, whatever that is. The last time I looked there were no architects in the Head Office, and they certainly need one, even if they don’t want one. *Denys Oldham*



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