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

BLOCK

Thoughts from a Conversation with Jun Aoki

Sean Flanagan met with Japanese architect Jun Aoki, who presented a lecture in Auckland last month, and was unsettled by Aoki's ambivalence

Completed in late 2007, Jun Aoki's N-House is located in a new residential area in a Tokyo suburb. The design, a disturbing admixture of a gable-roof frontage teetering on the edge of a rectilinear podium, is an attempt to engage with a suburb marked by a hankering for Yankee splendour. Like similar suburbs in New Zealand, this area is filled with design-build houses that have little connection to their site or environment, but instead trade upon the Americanised image of home. Aoki has responded to this strange context and its rules with a house whose street frontage captures the ideal image of home (think of the elevation outlined in Play School's opening credits), whilst to the rear a subterranean podium allows life to unfold in a more contemporary manner. In section, the building strikes a periscope-pose, suggesting a militaristic occupation. Firmly entrenched, the residents always have an eye out for suburbia's approach.

When discussing the N-house with Aoki, he makes the point that each time he visits the project he experiences it in different light. He has mixed feelings about it and is unsure whether it is good or bad - intelligent and humorous, or predictable and kitsch. This kind of ambivalence does not immediately strike the Kiwi architectural mind as meritorious. Instead, one might expect a leading architect to exude an unwavering conviction in their work, but Aoki's ambivalence is underpinned by his belief that architecture is experienced in many ways aside from those intended by the architect. He describes how when he designs a house he tries to keep in mind that the husband will see it differently to the wife, who will experience it differently to the children, who will again see it in a different light to the family pet - hence the amusing dog's-eye-view video shown during the lecture. By assigning the viewer a canine stature, Aoki creates an awareness of the many ways in which architecture can be seen and conveys something of the limits to the architect's command. The audience's laughter at the movie was arguably a nervous acknowledgment of this limit.

N-house was designed and administered by an assistant working a four-year apprenticeship under Aoki's supervision. As a condition of employment, Aoki's young staff members must commit themselves to the office for this term, during which they will act as project architect for the design and realisation of a building. Aoki explained that during this time the apprentice is responsible for all facets of the project's design and documentation. And at the end of the four years and with the building complete, Aoki expects his young charges to leave the atelier and start their own practice. Indeed, he said he was suspicious of staff members who wanted to stay on after their term, as if their willingness to stay in some way indicated a lack of initiative.

Discussing the office routines, Aoki said that he was the first to arrive each morning (typically around 8am) with staff members expected in by 10am. He tends to leave about 6pm, but expressly declared a desire not to know what time his staff went home. This passing remark raised an interesting point about the different experiences of making architecture. Aoki is plainly aware that his staff work long and hard on their individual projects. For example, for four years the architect of the N-house was likely consumed by their aspirations for the project. But this sense of aspiration contrasts significantly with Aoki's later ambivalence towards the building. It is striking to think that one of his staff members invested a considerable amount of their life in a work that he later declares himself to have mixed feelings about. But this is not to chastise Aoki for being ambivalent, for this ambivalence is connected to his idea of a work of architecture being a repository for mixed feelings. Instead, it is to recognise the markedly different experiences had of architecture at any one time in a single office. It is an acknowledgement that just as there are a number of ways of experiencing a work of architecture, the experience of making architecture is equally as varied. One imagines that Aoki must tread carefully when moving between his various projects in order to encourage staff members with their particular interests whilst shaping his own career across multiple projects. *SF*



The bi-polar exterior and interior of Aoki's N-House

Pitched Roof of the Month

KFTA's 1963 Holy Family Catholic Church, sitting in deepest suburbia - 94 Taikata Road, Te Atatu Peninsula. Pay your respects.



NZIA Conference and CPD session 2008

When: 22 – 23 May and CPD session on 24 May 2008
 Where: SKYCITY Auckland Convention Centre, Auckland

The Conference theme, *Stand and Deliver: Concept and Detail*, explores current and future directions in architecture, encompassing both new technologies and traditional techniques for design and delivery of projects. Speakers will address a variety of topics including digital design, collaboration, consultation, methods of design and methods of practice.

Confirmed speakers are Gregg Pasquarelli, Brett Steele, Chris Bosse and Peggy Deamer who will be joined by New Zealand architect colleagues.

For further information please contact:
 Forum Meeting Planners Ltd
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Communiqué '08 Lunchtime Seminar Series

Tuesdays, 1-2pm

University of Auckland
School of Architecture and Planning
Design Theatre at 22 Symonds Street

The School of Architecture and Planning at the University of Auckland has begun a series of lunchtime seminars. Entitled *Communiqué '08*, the series includes presentations by academic staff from around the Auckland region, all working in the fields of art, design, architecture, and planning.

For more information contact Kathy Waghorn
k.waghorn@auckland.ac.nz or (09)3737 599 x89150

13 May

Charmaine Ilaiu

Tutor in Design at NICAI, University of Auckland
Persistence of the Fale Tonga

20 May

Dr. Julia Gatley

Historian and Lecturer at NICAI, University of Auckland
The DOCOMOMO book

27 May

Marilyn Higgins and Emilia Kabzamalova

Emilia and Marilyn both teach at the University of Auckland School of Architecture and Planning - Emilia is a Senior Tutor and Marilyn is Deputy Head of School
Urban Design and Planning in New Zealand: Land of the Long White Cloud or Long Red Tape?

Balls of Wool

Fred Sandback in New Zealand

Fred Sandback was one of the major progenitors of American Minimalism in the nineteen-sixties, and several of his extraordinary works will be installed at Jensen Gallery in Auckland over the next couple of months. This is work that deals directly with the shaping and manipulating of space; it plays a major role in the development of Western art, is held in the collections of DIA, MoMA, et al, and it would be a great shame to miss it while it's here...

Jensen Gallery is on the corner of Mccoll & Roxburgh Streets, Newmarket (10-5 Tuesday-Friday; Saturdays 11-2)



Fred Sandback *Untitled 2001*



Vector Arena

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The Fine Print

Excerpts from the reports to NZIA Auckland Branch meeting held April 1st, 2008.

TECHNICAL ISSUES PORTFOLIO: Michael Middlebrook

Building Code Review

Following discussions with DBH, our understanding is that the changes proposed in the BC Review will be integrated into the current Building Code rather than in to a new Code. The extent of the proposed changes will be modified to reduce compliance costs but there is no certainty in this until after the elections. The current Building Code continues to undergo review and because of the large team at DBH will result in major changes over the next couple of years.

The current Building Code does not adequately consider the specific design requirements of apartments and medium-density housing and this is exacerbated by the slow reaction of planners to tackle issues that the Building Code has not considered. These include minimum spatial dimensions, noise, access to light, awareness of the outdoors and internal environment. Where planners have changed the rules, these are not retrospective and developments already having Resource Consents can proceed as they were. There are drafts of several revised clause sections to the Building Code currently in the review loop and one of these is G4 Ventilation: The current G4 Acceptable solution for natural ventilation excludes buildings with openings only on one face from using the solution. This is because adequate cross ventilation cannot be achieved. An alternative solution based on AS1668.2 which fails to exclude one faced solutions still has the same flaw. The proposed changes to G4/AS1 provide for stack ventilators and trickle ventilators and though submissions have closed consultation is continuing.

Building Consent Issues

The Minister, Shane Jones, has announced several new initiatives over the past month. These include:

- Nationwide multiple use consents for identical dwellings. These would still need to be assessed for planning issues for individual sites.
- Starter home design competition which will result in a Building Compliance Document that includes design rules, standards details, services and structure. If followed this would be assessed in a more simplified consent process.
- Regional Building Product Registers managed by BCA's
- Self certification for building work for competent builders (all LBP's)
- Feasibility study for nationwide on-line consenting process
- Regional consent processing for complex buildings i.e. Auckland wide.

Technical Issues Group Changes

Both Alex Shaw and John Sutherland have changed careers with Alex joining Masterspec and John, Connell Wagner. They will continue to share their valuable input with the group but we need more involvement from practising architects. We have therefore asked a few of the bigger architectural firms to nominate a member to join the group so that we are able to tackle a wider range of issues. Encouragingly, there has been an excellent response and our first meeting as the bigger group is at Jasmax on 3 April.

ACE Secondment News

My secondment to ACE is going well and it has been interesting to see the positive effect of changes as a result of accreditation. The keys for architects wanting an easy consent are: to have clear documentation, a job specific specification, product acceptance by the BCA for claddings and membranes (talk to the BCA early), sufficient detail to build everything where proving compliance is required, design information such as spray zones, wind pressures, calculations for H1 compliance. Also consider toilet and accessibility reports for complex designs. All alternative solutions (any variation from the AS's) need to be documented to show why they should be accepted.

FUTURE AUCKLAND LEADERS PORTFOLIO: Gary Lawson

The 2008 Future Auckland Leaders programme kicked off in mid-February with an opening weekend spent on the Orakei Marae. It was a fantastic weekend getting to know the 27 other participants, having great discussions surrounding present and future Auckland, and hearing inspiring talks from the likes of Sir Ron Carter, Rod Oram and Lester Levy. A rewarding, informative and social three days was enjoyed by all.

March has seen the beginnings of establishing a web site for current and past members for discussion, contact and information sharing.

March also included a visit to Watercare services in Mangere. We received very interesting and informative presentations from three Watercare representatives and a tour around the newly completed state-of-the-art, world-leading waste water treatment plant.

This was a stimulating visit to one of the world's top 20 most sustainable companies, the first in the FAL 'Getting to know Auckland' series.

I would like to thank the NZIA Auckland Branch for my nomination, and sponsoring my involvement in the programme – which has already proven to be an amazing opportunity.

ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP: Carolyn Savage

While the meeting in March was poorly supported, the presentation by guest speaker Paul Jones (of ECO-Block NZ Ltd in Tauranga) was excellent, with many questions answered. Don McRae chaired and recorded the minutes - a brief excerpt is included below:

"'Eco-Block' construction is basically in situ reinforced concrete walls with or without pillars and between 100 and 600mm thick. Pours can be up to 6m high. 'Eco-Block' is permanent formwork comprising 65mm thick closed cell polystyrene ... tongue and grooved slabs 1,219mm long ... The slabs are tied together with plastic strips at about 150mm crs horizontally and about 220mm vertically. These locate accurately the horizontal bars alternatively to each side of the wall which in turn locates the vertical steel..."

For further information see: www.eco-blocknz.co.nz

Upcoming meetings:

13th May: Alex Reiche of GreenBuild will be speaking on GreenBuild and the NZGBC.

5:45pm at D72, 72 Dominion Road

10th June: Site meeting, Landcare. Speaker to be confirmed.

4:00pm, Tamaki, 231 Morrin Road, St Johns, Auckland

Calder  Stewart
Roofing



Battling the Waka of Knowledge

Pip Cheshire argues for a bit more straight talk from architects

Judging awards and competitions is good stuff; you get to travel round with some pretty interesting people and see some pretty interesting places while arguing about the art and business of architecture. There is a price to pay though, and in this trade it's having to wade through the dire texts that are submitted for consideration. One might excuse a little roughness of composition - the odd misplaced gerund or floating participle - we are after all graphically inclined, more at home with the vector and the mark than the slippery norms of our cobbled-together mother tongue. No, its not bum grammar that we endure during judging but metaphors, damned metaphors - if I have to read about another kete of knowledge I'll go batty.

Bill McKay, in a robust review of the recent monograph on Ted McCoy, refers to the inherent contradiction between letting a building speak for itself and the need for explanation implicit in the public outing of a project. This is as true of an award program as it is of publication. In the former, experience suggests that the more explicit presentations will get a better hearing - if you make the effort to enter, then you need to strut your stuff.

I don't know about the rest of you, but the terror of the blank sheet of paper still pops up like an unwelcome guest in the studio. I have learnt to delay that moment of nail-biting anxiety through a rote process of information gathering, assembly of site data, brief writing, checking town planning, assembling the project team, and so forth. These tactics are not unlike my careful preparations for university exams when a student, invariably involving avoidance strategies like house cleaning and polishing the brass - not unnecessary but hardly on the critical path.

At the midnight hour when the page is still blank and the waste basket full, you've spent tens of hours at the monitor and it still doesn't look as good as a Hugh Ferriss bulk and location sketch, then casting around for a metaphor can provide a useful prop to get you through the night - I mean if you have no other ideas in play then why not a little word play? The difficulty is that a metaphor can never be much more than a one-shot idea, and buildings generally require a richer discussion than a single idea can offer.

That might be a little tough; thinking about, say, a library as a basket of knowledge can help round up some of the complexities of contemporary libraries. There are, though, an awful lot of other ideas about buildings that might - actually, should - be explored, and which will offer far more grist for the creative mill than a metaphor. Metaphors are really best kept to oneself, played with in the solitude of one's own studio but never shared, never seen in public, and certainly never articulated in the descriptions of projects attached to award entries.

I suspect that airing one's metaphors in public is an affliction affecting only those of a certain age - those cast into the deep end

of an academe in thrall of French linguists, post-structuralists and others in search of literary meaning from bricks and mortar. If so it's an unfortunate legacy - a building considered as a basket is on its own but a noble description for the idea of gathering together books. Awards, however, are not about reviewing the idea of the idea, but about the idea of the building. It is, after all, not as if buildings are mute sentinels; they burst with ideas, sometimes whether we want them to or not. Too often employment of a metaphor is at the expense of a more thorough, and rewarding, description of the building.

Some few sublime buildings offer reflections of, and meditations on, some of life's more complex mysteries, yet it is enough that a building has an idea about itself. Indeed it is a prerequisite of architecture, and certainly of an award program entrant, that they do. Let us hear these ideas, then; how the structural approach has been determined, the strategies for servicing, attitudes to the environment, site, context and so on.

There is inevitably a raft of constraints squeezing the creative synapses; fiercely deterministic conditions about which the hapless architect has little if any control, including site selection, the weirdness of planning rules, the appropriateness of the budget for the task at hand and the esoteric machinations of client demands. For all of that a building is made, a compilation of - one hopes - carefully-weighted decisions setting grids, determining materials, and teasing out details. When you are next assembling an award entry, consider we judges confronted with seventy or eighty florid texts - hold the metaphors and share the real workings of the project with us. *PC*

Coming next month...SPECIAL ISSUE!

BLOCK's in-house doctor has been refining his geneology of New Zealand architecture over the last year or so, and it's almost ready for its first airing.

Following hot on the heels of his extraordinary geneology of Japanese architecture, it traces, for example, KRTA back to Peter Behrens via Plischke, and highlights the fundamental role of the great teacher-architects like David Mitchell in the development of the nation's most acclaimed architects.

BLOCK will bring you a special fold-out, architect-friendly-A1 first edition of the geneology, and you can set-to plotting your own place in the tree, and generally attacking the thing with red pen as you would a poor graduate CAD-monkey's details. Be warned, though - it's pretty busy even when restricted to national award winners, so Pip is the only Block staffer likely to make an appearance this year...

PRINT DESIGN CLASSICS #7



Black Mask Detective. Norman Saunders. Nov. 1950.

American pulp magazines, "pulp fiction" or "the pulps" published between the 1920s and 50s covered a range of genres from detective and mystery to sci-fi, adventure, horror and the occult, western, war, sport and romance.

Cheap (wood pulp) paper, printing and cover charge led to ferocious newsstand competition - publishers pushing the boundaries of accepted taste, depicting starlets in distress (and not much else), brawling gangsters, leering freaks and menacing aliens.

Although many of the pulp artists had fine art backgrounds, to make a living during hard times they worked under blunt constraints. Red and yellow were believed to entice men, so artists ladled

those colours onto many men's titles, while romance magazines went with green and blue for the ladies. In this example the action drifts into inert shadow or flat colour to allow space for titles "Five O'Clock Shroud" and "Hell Is What You Make It". Under brutal deadlines, artists boiled the cover story down to one sensationalist eye-grabbing scene.

Many of the artists refused to sign their work, considering it art for hire. Still, these artists were consummate professionals, and often painted beautiful passages despite time and creative limits.

Other famous pulp artists of the time included Frank R. Paul, Virgil Finlay, Edd Cartier, Margaret Brundage and Rafael DeSoto.



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