



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

BLOCK

Multiplicity

Poly-Modernism and the Skip-Bin of Extraordinary Ideas: the Conclusion of a Two-Part Essay

Not seventy years ago the global superstars of Modernism were renowned for shaking an architectural solution out of their sleeve - even if they ensured said sleeve was well stuffed before any such shaking might take place. A great portion of Frank Lloyd Wright's oeuvre is purported to have been designed whilst his clients waited in the lobby or were caught in a series of forestalling conversations instigated by back-peddling staff. When least confident, he might perhaps get started when word was received that the clients had left home and were now trundling Wright's way in the Buick.

The arrival in Cheshire's Auckland office of Andrew Barrie from the Tokyo studio of Toyo Ito made the issue of multiplicity personal. Accustomed to a standard 100-hour office week, Andrew made models by the dozen overnight, every night. Still bearing the influence of a minute Tokyo office, they were united by scale, if not content: a house might afford him a generous 1:1000, a bedroom - its bed resplendent with paper pillows and quilt - a more luxurious 1:500. His models manifested an expansive approach to whatever problem was at hand; he would model the obvious solutions first, and then evolve these in a non-linear sequence with increasingly extra-ordinary results.

Andrew carried home with him from Tokyo a protocol of multiplicity that is still being spliced with that of Pip's own 'Poly-Modernism'. What is going on here? How did the process become the subject? And why can't anyone make up their minds on their own anymore?

There are some obvious answers to cover first, but they will all be found wanting: yes, the profession now has the technology to rapid-prototype multiple options at little expense, but the models of SANAA and H&deM are little bits of card and plastic stuck together with PVA by human staff; yes, those studios have endless lists of kids desperately keen to spend an unpaid month cutting out bits of paper for a superstar, but even the architects on the payroll are doing the same; yes, the studios operate inhuman hours, but the century-old letters of Le Corbusier also reveal an architect exhilarating in exhaustion; yes, the stars' fees are enormous (100% for an OMA house anyone?), but almost all worked like this before their fame entitled them to demand such; yes, the clients are demanding, but most of the models never get further than the workbench. The enormous labour costs of this approach - and the fact that its products dwell in the bowels of these practices rather than the glossy board tables of their clients - suggests that this is neither luxury nor affectation: the process of multiplicity is at the core of these practices' operational ideologies.



Multiplicity in action: Models at OMA's "Content" Exhibition at Mies van der Rohe's Neue National Galerie, Berlin 2003

The great progenitor of West Coast minimalist art, Robert Irwin, gives us one clue as to why. Irwin asserts that contemporary revolutions of culture are manifested in urgent, crude work that ruthlessly destroys constraint and opens up new freedoms. However as those revolutions bed-in to their host cultures - and those freedoms are explored more thoroughly - the work must become increasingly refined. The zealous urgency Irwin refers to is evident equally in Le Corbusier's *La Tourette* as it is in Malevich's *Black Square* and *White on White*; each is a world-breaking event, each is a cracked and crumbling slab of plastic form, crafted in the most immediate fashion. Everywhere these two world-breakers turned was new territory, freed from the brown-grey torpor of Historicism. Decisions were made quickly and confidently and almost all were radical - and radically successful. Half a century after Malevich, Ad Reihardt's black squares were so painstakingly refined we cannot even detect a human presence in their manufacture, and by the end of the century Tadao Ando's staff would spend weeks composing the form-ties for a Church of the Light. Today Herzog & de Meuron's white-on-white church of luxury consumption at Aoyama Prada is but the final hyper-refined by-product of a process that produced a thousand catalogued alternatives.

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Irwin's maxim may not however be as clear as it first appears. Despite Wright's reputation as a doodle-on-the-napkin designer, his oeuvre is overflowing with radical ideals to which he wholeheartedly committed and rigorously pursued and evolved before moving on to the next - the triangle period, the Usonian, the Prairie, the pentangles, the concrete blocks, the wood sidings, and Falling Water – an invented, evolved, and resolved category in itself. Corbusier is at least as diverse, and Malevich managed to operate Suprematism in both figuration and abstraction. Perhaps it is only the show that has changed? Perhaps this praxis of multiplicity is in fact a constant, fundamental to invention and the extraordinary in a Modernist practice that demands freedom from the security blanket of historical precedent?

Whilst Rem Koolhaas professes to reject Modernism *per se* - embracing instead 'modernization' – he, Hadid, Ito, Sejima, H&deM et al are in fact the leading – and outer - edge of that same revolution, a revolution now more than a Century old. Le Corbusier, the most coherent of the Modern polemicists, expounded Modernism's tenets in a string of epithets: that a house ought to be a machine for living, that the aesthetic of the engineer be subsumed, and so on. The machines have got smarter and the engineers have exploited them to extraordinary new ends, but it is these same Modern ideas that our contemporary gods of architecture are stretching. Consider the seaweed columns of Ito's Sendai Mediatheque, the structural fishnet skin of H&deM's Prada Aoyama, or Zaha's tsunami of swooshes and wiggles (oh, how I miss the Tectons!) – these studios are taking Modernism at its word, and running headlong at issues like structural and systems engineering as if they were all that ever mattered.

By contrast ours appears a nation largely held-up by its fixation on ever-more refined visions of a post-Venturi Crump-inflected Neo-Neutran Utopia. Malcolm Walker's cartoons have parodied it so mercilessly one need elaborate no further. Neutra was by all measures a virtuoso, but by the time he and his West Coast chums were done with Modernism it had changed; the bloated International Style had absorbed the radicalism of its preliminary trajectories and disseminated instead an aesthetic with global currency.

We appear drunk on this aesthetic, but aesthetics is a mode of study, not of operation – Barnett Newman quips most eloquently that aesthetics is to artists what ornithology is to birds. It is not the aesthetic that matters here, but the ideology that propelled that aesthetic into being, and that carries with it the capacity to continue Modernism's trajectory. We are now drowning in multivalent contemporary constructions in which Neutra's silver-painted wooden joinery is finally delivered as intended, adorned in so many inverted PFC fascias and sliding-glass walls. This sort of mimesis – albeit filtered through the eyes of a Good Keen (Wo)Man or a sensitive weather-watcher – is only useful for getting our bearings. Thereafter, we ought have the taste of fond contempt in our mouths, and our eyes glazed with images of the future extraordinary.

For several years the Cheshire office has run a design paper at the University's Architecture School. The goal has been to teach our students to make in multiples. It is a strategy direct at breaking down the linear process of concept-text-concept model-scale model-drawings that dominates the design approach of the School. We think this is a process that limits what you make to what you know, and as such inhibits discovery. Instead we urge our students to arrive each week buried in work; that only in work will the extraordinary be revealed. We suggest to them that if at least a half of that work is not ungainly or ugly, they are not trying hard enough – the sublime, we think, sits closer to the awful than it does the accomplished.

During the birth of Modernism a commitment to profound ideological change fueled radical work that opened up vast new freedoms. Now, in what looks to be Modernism's zenith, the confluence of new technology and the focusing of enormous investigative energies on the same broad ideological issues is empowering practices to exploit that newly-rediscovered freedom. The boundaries of Modernist practice are being pushed so far from its Corbusian core, and in so many discrete directions, that Modernism's new leading edge may be considered fragmented. To work here is to commit to multiplicity. It is also to believe that there is no longer one Modernism, but many. If the neo-Neutras of the New Zealand (architectural) landscape are the past, the Poly-Modernists are its future and multiplicity their prototype tool. *Nat Cheshire*

The AGM of the Auckland Branch of the NZIA is coming...

24 March, 5:30 for 6pm start. Suite 1.5 at D72 72 Dominion Road Mt Eden. The speaker is yet to be confirmed. Book it in.

And Now....

A Word for Our Sponsor

BLOCK is delighted to be associated with and sponsored by COPYBOOK COPYCENTRE - those people who somehow turn a CD on your reception desk or an over-stuffed email in your outbox into drawings and tender documents before you've even noticed they've gone. They have served the architecture community throughout Auckland for well over twenty-two years and are proud of the relationships they have built up with many of the practices throughout the city.

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Mac Robson, who owns COPYBOOK along with his wife, Julie, says sponsoring BLOCK was the perfect opportunity to give something back to the architecture community - it takes enormous energy to put together a publication even as small as this humble two-sheeter, and BLOCK is truly grateful to have them on board.

COPYBOOK have not just provided valuable sponsorship, but have also contributed a 'Print Design Classics' serial as part of their advertising - which has covered everything from El Lissitzky through the *Jaws* poster - and helped BLOCK find papers and printing solutions that meet the needs and aspirations of the broadsheet without blowing its budget. We hope you're enjoying your new full-colour front page and refined creamy paper stock.

COPYBOOK are in the Chamber of Commerce Building on the corner of Greys Avenue and Mayoral Drive. For more information on the full range of services they offer go to www.copybook.co.nz



Communiqué '09

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John Chapman (jb.chapman@auckland.ac.nz / 3737 599 x84680)
<http://www.creative.auckland.ac.nz>

TUESDAY 10 MARCH - PONTUS KYANDER
Manager Public Art, Auckland City Council

Moving targets; Strategies for public art
Art critic, editor of FORMAT, a contemporary arts program for Swedish Television (SVT), independent curator and guest professor at EWAH University, Seoul, Pontus Kyander was appointed to the new role of Manager Public Art for Auckland City last year. "Public art" is in itself a contentious term and Pontus will discuss how public art is addressed and challenged today.

TUESDAY 17 MARCH - NAOMI CARMON
Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies at the Faculty of Architecture and Town Planning, Technion; Israel Institute of Technology

Social Mix in Residential Areas: Why and How?
Urban planners around the world support the policy of socially mixed residential areas, mixed by tenure and/or income level and/or ethnic origin. The paper discusses the rationale behind this policy, presents findings from evaluation studies in several countries that tried to assess the success of such projects, and concludes with the story of a relatively successful case. This case suggests a kind of compromise between those who support a free market of housing, in which most people choose to live among others "of their kind", and those who favor planned social mix that is designed to promote diversity and equity.

Carmon is an urban planner and a sociologist. Recently, she has completed her tenure as President of Israel Sociological Society. Her areas of teaching and research are related to social aspects of planning and evaluation of urban and regional plans, with an emphasis on housing and urban regeneration, on quality of life of minorities and immigrants. In addition, she studies sustainable development issues, especially water-sensitive planning.

TUESDAY 24 MARCH - JACQUI CLARKE
Phd. Candidate, The University of Auckland

Simultopia: syncretic ecology and liquid perception in urban space
'Simultopia' is a portmanteau term combining the meanings of the Latin prefix 'simul-'; meaning 'together' and 'at the same time'; and '-topia' meaning place. Simultopia is in the first instance an idea, a perception, an urban design concept, or an 'ecology of mind', before it is a specific locality or a tangible urban materiality. The idea of simultopia is the forming of a perception of environment. It is minds and bodies that inhabit space (not just governments, planners and developers) and in doing so give them not only form but also meaning. Thus a simultopia is created via the experiential phenomena of context, ie. by the imprint of our own embodied perceptions both interpreting and forming the spaces and places in which we breathe, play, transit, talk, work and rest.

TUESDAY 31 MARCH - PROFESSOR SCOTT CHAMBERLIN
University of Colorado at Boulder

A Garden Odyssey
This presentation is an account of a sculptor's experience learning about what one might call the "sculpted garden". Chamberlin was inspired by topiary sculpture in England when he taught at the Camberwell School of Art in London. One of the topiary

gardens he found mesmerizing was Levens Hall in the north of England. In 2002, during a period studying gardens in Portugal, he began sculpting boxwood hedges on a property in the north of Portugal, the Casa de Juste. This led him to designing a large topiary garden for the property. The garden has four large spaces enclosed by sculpted hedges. Each space contains sculpted forms made from many materials. Scott Chamberlin is currently working on a large public art project in the north of Portugal titled Rota do Romanico (The Romanesque Road), a project with eleven international artists. The project will bring contemporary art to twenty-one Romanesque sites. Chamberlin is currently a Visiting Professor making sculpture during a residency at Unitec in Auckland.

TUESDAY 28 APRIL - HUGH BYRD
Architect, Pacific Environments NZ Ltd.

The Yellow Tree-house Project
It's not often that a commission to design a tree-house is offered, especially one to be used for a 'reality' TV advert, that operates as an off-the-wall functioning restaurant. So Pacific Environments jumped at the opportunity! The tree-house concept is reminiscent of childhood dreams and playtime, fairy stories of enchantment and imagination. It's inspired through many forms found in nature; the chrysalis/cocoon protecting the emerging butterfly/moth, perhaps an onion/garlic clove form hung out to dry. It is also seen as a lantern, a beacon at night that simply glows yet during the day it might be a semi camouflaged growth, or a tree fort that provides an outlook and that offers refuge. The plan form has loose similarities to a sea-shell, with the open ends spiralling to the centre. The concept is driven by the 'enchanted' site which is raised above an open meadow and meandering stream on the edge of the woods. It's the tree-house we all dreamed of as children but could only build as an adult. Hugh will talk about the people, processes, challenges and fun in the few weeks it took from commissioning the design to completing the building.

TUESDAY 5 MAY - ALEXANDRA-JAYEUN LEE
Architect and co-founder of the Auckland Chapter of Architecture for Humanity

Architecture for Humanity
This presentation will introduce and discuss the emerging success of Architecture for Humanity, a charitable organization founded in 1999 to promote architectural and design solutions to global, social and humanitarian crises. The role of the contemporary architect continues to evolve and Architecture for Humanity was established to bridge the gap between Humanitarian Aid and Architecture. Through competitions, workshops, educational forums, partnership with aid organizations and other activities, Architecture for Humanity creates opportunities for architects and designers from around the world to help communities in need. Where resources and expertise are scarce, innovative, sustainable and collaborative design can make a difference. Since its inception, dozens of autonomous local chapters have sprouted all over the world to bring designers to volunteer their time and skills to support their own communities. Alexandra will reflect upon her involvement with the Auckland Chapter and its current projects. Architecture for Humanity websites:
<http://www.architectureforhumanity.org> & <http://afh-auckland.org>

Alexandra-Jayeun Lee is the co-founder and managing director of the Auckland Chapter of Architecture for Humanity, which has been in operation since mid-2007. She is a graduate of The University of Auckland School of Architecture, where she studied abroad at the University of California, Berkeley. During her studies Alexandra discovered her passion for humanitarian work via architecture. She is currently practicing architecture at Babbage Consultants Ltd. and tutors design at her alma mater, where she runs a parallel design studio with Cameron Sinclair (executive

director of Architecture for Humanity HQ) and Nathaniel Corum, at the University of Southern California.

TUESDAY 12 MAY - FIONA JACK

Artist, Lecturer, Elam School of Fine Arts
National Institute of Creative Arts and Industries, The University of Auckland

Two recent collaborations

Fiona Jack works across many media to investigate the conceptual, geographical and political definitions of shared space - a space that includes linguistic, physical, social and historical contexts. By calling attention to things as diverse as a list of the nationalities excluded from a dictionary, to the barriers constructed along borders around the world since 9/11 in the name of 'National Security', Jack questions the terms and structures that shape our lives.

In this lecture Fiona will discuss two recent collaborations with Ngati Whatua o Orakei. Kohimaramara is a billboard project, commissioned by Artspace Auckland, about an island that used to exist where the Tamaki Yacht Club now stands. Palisade is a reconstruction of a palisade fence that was built by volunteers around the original papakainga of Ngati Whatua o Orakei in Okahu Bay.

Fiona Jack graduated with an MFA from CalArts in Los Angeles in 2005 and has since exhibited in London, Chile, Australia, USA and New Zealand. She is a Lecturer at the University of Auckland and lives in New Zealand.

TUESDAY 19 MAY - DR ALEX MONTEITH

Artist, Lecturer, Elam School of Fine Arts
National Institute of Creative Arts and Industries, The University of Auckland
www.alexmonteith.com

Alex is a new media artist and academic whose work incorporates sound, performance, photography, film, video, kinetic and network components, while her practice explores the politics, freedoms and limits of consumer technology. This presentation will discuss recent large scale multi-channel video installations that involve participants from the wider community including, Lloyd Bishop, a third generation championship dog-trialist from Taranaki and Shaun Harris, Isle of ManTT motorcycle champion.

Alex Monteith was born in Belfast and lives in New Zealand. She recently won an Arts Foundation of New Zealand New Generation Award.

Spaceness

Continued from back cover...

But what does Rhowbotham desire when he argues for a material space? What could that materiality comprise? Could the molecule be a starting point? We know that the implied residuum is in fact filled with moisture, with human flesh, with dirt and sound and that these elements are compressions and expansions of molecular structures. So we could conceive of space as a molecular continuum of insides and outsides that flow together in much the same way as the early modernist architects and later landscape architects saw modernist space. The question then becomes how do we "read" space in this way? How do we as designers work with media which are currently below our thresholds of perception? How do we, as designers, develop strategies for working dynamically? Possibly this kind of understanding of space is much more in alignment with contemporary ideas of sustainability so the body of all material with which we deal - both mass and space is understood as one fluid interactive presence.
Larry Lightbulb

The Fine Print

Notes on the Economic Climate

CHAIR'S REPORT: Christina van Bohemen

Auckland Branch Committee is aware of the change in the economic climate and ensuing pressure upon individual members and practices. The following list has been sent to the NZIA CEO and President for further discussion. The Practice Issue Group will explore the issues further and on 7 April there will be a presentation or talk addressing some aspect below. Most importantly, we urge members to stay in touch and to keep attending events CPD etc. Please ensure that email addresses are updated - email Rosemary Gear: rgeard@nzia.co.nz

1. Importance of staying connected: retain membership and encourage change of email addresses for NZIA broadcasts where jobs are lost.

2. Importance of pressing ahead with the Communications Strategy: what changes to the brief (if any) given the economic climate and forecast. Are there any early release strategies that can be promoted? See strategic/governmental point below.

3. Strategies for survival: practice-wide and individual. Exploration of options that employers might consider to retain staff, benefits of different approaches. (eg 4 day weeks vs 5 days, contracts - issues for employers and employees). Exploration of how individual architects might lever their skills into new work in non-traditional working relationships. Maybe this might be put forward as an idea at PIG?

3. Encourage CPD: Branch issues groups and talks are a way to stay connected as well as contributing to CPD.

4. Support graduates: Encourage GDP membership. Does the GDP need to broaden scope to engage graduates (although they should also be encouraged to attend general CPD and branch events)?

5. Professional Support: Encourage members to seek advice on financial support and stress management. Should CPD opportunities include sessions on this, or direct/propose useful contacts? Also remember benefits of collegial support, as well as the benefits of an objective point of view from "outside" the profession.

6. Fees/Scope of Service: Avoid fee slashing. Consider ways to retain services, but packaged in a way to allow clients to elect to have different levels of service. This highlights the need for clarity of all fee agreements. It also raises issues about risk that need discussion - to what extent does the architect remain liable?

7. Potential Work: Reports are that there is work out there, particularly in health, education and housing - follow up. What about physical infrastructure, civil engineering projects, landscape etc? Promotion of the importance of a broad definition of infrastructure.

8. Strategic/governmental level: Keep pushing for the appointment of a Government Architect, and in the meantime, promotion of the profession's services to the likes of Ministry of Education, where it is felt that existing procurement practices may exclude architects.

9. Up-skilling: educational opportunities and also competitions should be considered as ways for extending personal and practice knowledge.

Each Block is laid by a dedicated editorial team, all of whom happen to work at Cheshire Architects.
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Spaceness

BLOCK's Occasional Summer Correspondent Reflects on a Summer of Music

We were brought up on space. I was a teenager in the 60s when space was the new frontier - when we would soon be spending our summer holidays not at Hahei or Spirits Bay but on the moon. By the end of the decade I had entered a School of Architecture and the word space had new resonances as we argued raggedly about Buckminster Fuller's theories or admired the mathematical rigour of Keith Critchelow's *Order in Space*. It was always talked about. It was the ubiquitous medium of modern architecture. It was, as they say in mathematics, a given.

This belief in space as the medium of architecture is, however, a relatively recent phenomenon in the history of the discipline. When Viollet-le-Duc wrote his masterwork *Entiens sur l'architecture* in 1872 he did not once use the word in the modern sense. The 1894 publication *The Essence of Architectural Creation* by August Schmarsow, however, gave prime position to the idea of space. Informed, amongst other things, by theories from modern theoretical physics and Cubist aesthetics Sigfried Giedion produced his seminal *Space, Time and Architecture* in 1941 and that was it - game, set and match! It's actually a lot more complicated than my abbreviated summary via Kenneth Frampton but you have to do a heap of reading and that's better done in winter!

So it was with interest that I was recently reading a publication by English architect and educator Kevin Rhowbotham in which he remarks;

Although space is commonly held to be a definitive characteristic of architecture, the very stuff of its production, it seems nevertheless to be difficult if not impossible to define. When architects refer to the quality space they do so invariably as an insinuated quality, as a kind of residuum, as an excess, as a left over within and between objects.....This assumed immateriality of space may be one reason why there is no generic theory of architectural space *sui generis*, which might deal with spaceness explicitly and directly.

So I got to thinking - which is the sort of thing you do when you are summer correspondent. How might we, on the basis of two music festivals (summer correspondent stuff), derive an explicit and direct theory of architectural spaceness?

The Parihaka International Peace Festival is a very special kind of event. First presented in 2006, it was set up to celebrate the non-violent active resistance strategies of Te Whiti O Rongomai and Tohu Kaakahi. It is a music festival but includes an Eco forum, poetry, films, art events and a vital speakers' forum canvassing issues of human rights, race relations and political strategy. The festival is, in my opinion, the cradle of a visionary Aotearoa, New Zealand. But back to the im/material substance of space. Set on the plains at the foot of (Mount)Taranaki the festival site was swept by a cold south-west wind. This unsummery blast drove the dry Taranaki earth into our faces. The deeply affecting experience of this flow across the site suggested that maybe spaceness or the quality of architectural space could be understood and even theorised as a flow of energy. To maintain the experience there must be ebb as well as flow, a breathing, a call and response. The quality of space determined by the flow of energy reduces the privileging of sight as the primary means for experiencing space. So you close your eyes and listen to the music, locate its source, the reverberant effects of its reflection, its dissipation. You feel the warmth of the sun on your bare skin - though not for too long! Your body heats up and returns warmth to the space but there is room between you. The wind cools you. The sweat moistens the band of your cap. You clap.



The wonderful stench of the BDO (L) and cool breezes of the Parihaka International Peace Festival (R)

The Big Day Out is a very different event. Urban - where Parihaka is rural. Predominantly European - where Parihaka is strongly Maori. Unabashedly commercial - where Parihaka is visionary. Littered with rubbish - where Parihaka maintains a responsible tidiness. Forty five thousand people at a football ground - where Parihaka has twelve thousand people on twenty hectares steeped in the visionary politics of Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kaakahi. Your body heats up and returns warmth to the space. The wind cools you but the crush and the proximity of bodies overrides this singular mechanism. The pungent sweat of dancers escaping from the mosh pit assails your nostrils. Their shoulders, drenched with that salty liquid, leave a trail on your T-shirt as they squeeze past. Their skin is smooth with drench. Your ears are noisy and hollow.

At these festivals energy is given, energy taken and energy dissipated. There are physical phenomena; sun, wind, rain, sound and smell that act and produce reaction. There is performance as bodies move through the field of these phenomena. Performances and phenomena are operating at different scales from the individual to the whole field of the event. It is an engaging, multi-dimensional matrix.

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YEARS
SERVICE



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