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

BLOCK

Architects are Actors

Simon Twose and Ordinary Architecture

The everyday act of designing buildings involves so many overlaid criteria and events: clients' wishes, regulatory constraints, market values, council negotiations; even drawing software has its internal economy of spatial resistances. These weird and ordinary events in the design process have a significant influence on how space materialises, and architects are adept at the messy negotiation between them. Any built piece of architecture is a concrete record of the soap opera-like process that preceded it, making for many a war story over the chat list. And yet most of the time, architecture is presented as a pure aesthetic object derived from a concept.

If what architecture looks like, what form it is, and what it represents can be put into soft focus, intentionally misunderstood perhaps, it might allow the less tangible aspects of architecture to come into view. Such as sensuality for instance, which has a satisfyingly difficult relation to form, and forming. Buildings offer direct sensory experience, but there are also a set of sensual relations that occur in the design of a building, be it in the space of drawing, in one-to-one client negotiations, or the branded space of the commercial architectural office. Even affective aspects such as boredom or the fear of pervasive leaks have a strange but direct influence on architecture. These are interesting and tricky and even quite ordinary factors – and allow another story as to why architecture is the way it is.

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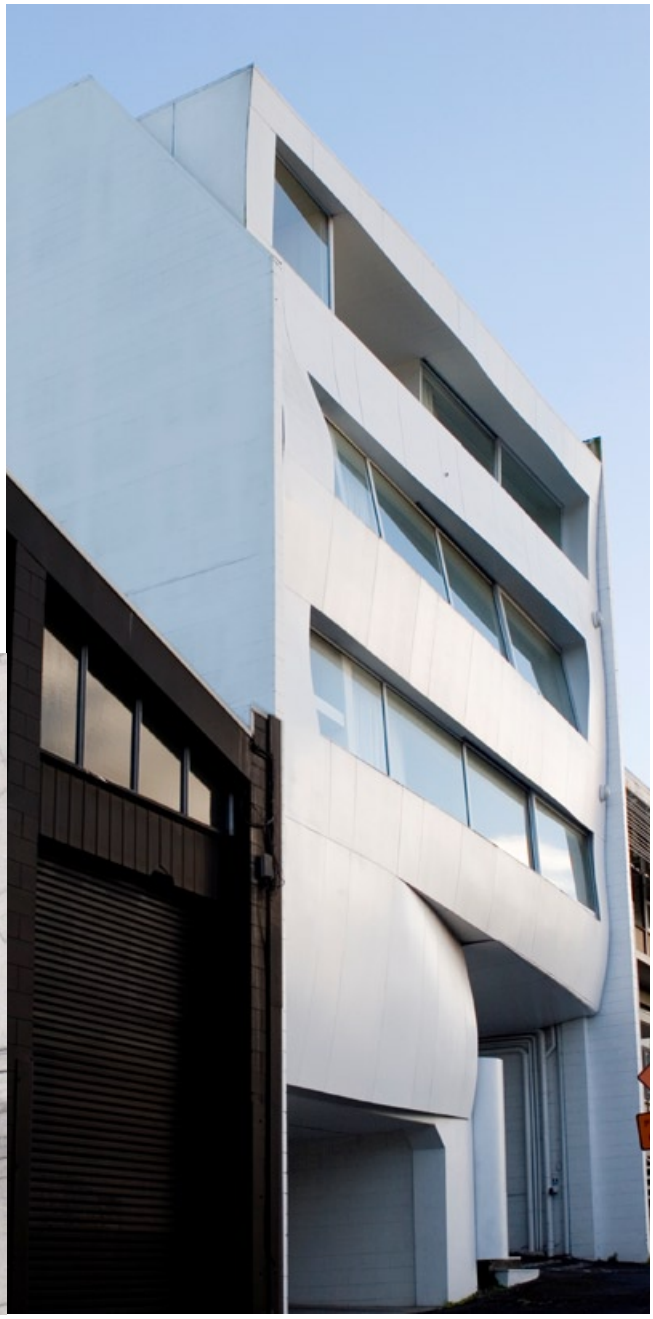
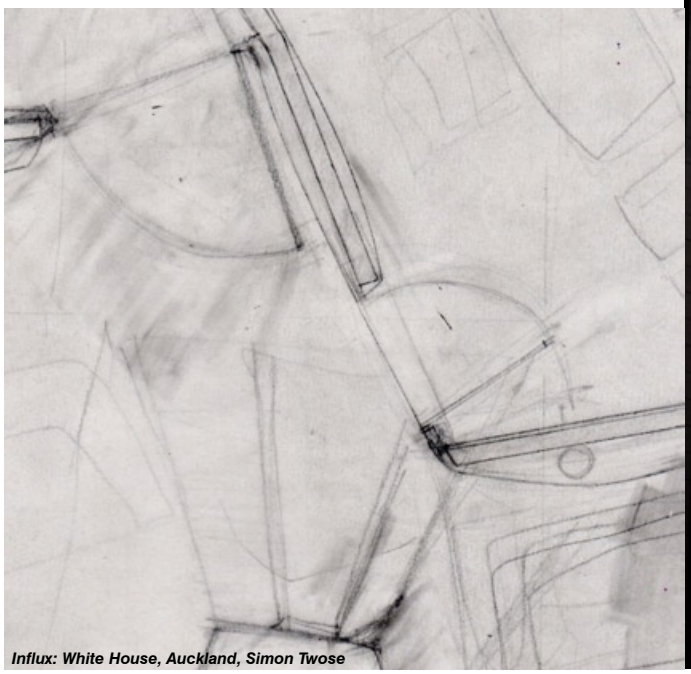




Influx: White House, Auckland, Simon Twose

Architects are Actors *Continued from p.1...*

I have to say that alongside this discussion is a thick wedge of literature. Writers in the humanities are looking to emotion, affect and the sensory to jolt discourse out of the grips of interpretation. They are part of a general shift away from linguistic concerns and towards understandings framed by the body. People such as Harrison, Anderson, Hansen, Thrift, Massumi, Bolt and Barad have spilt a lot of ink on the complexities of this shift and give us a useful lever to work on the fairly resistant shape of architecture. Post critical 'death of theory' arguments in Architecture are a related thread, where practice, production and the market are argued as way to move beyond discourse - as in the work of OMA/AMO or BIG. To me, however, post criticality obscures much of the everyday embodied aspects of practice beneath a 'hoop-la' of production, and does not have the creative potential of the literary approach taken by the humanities.

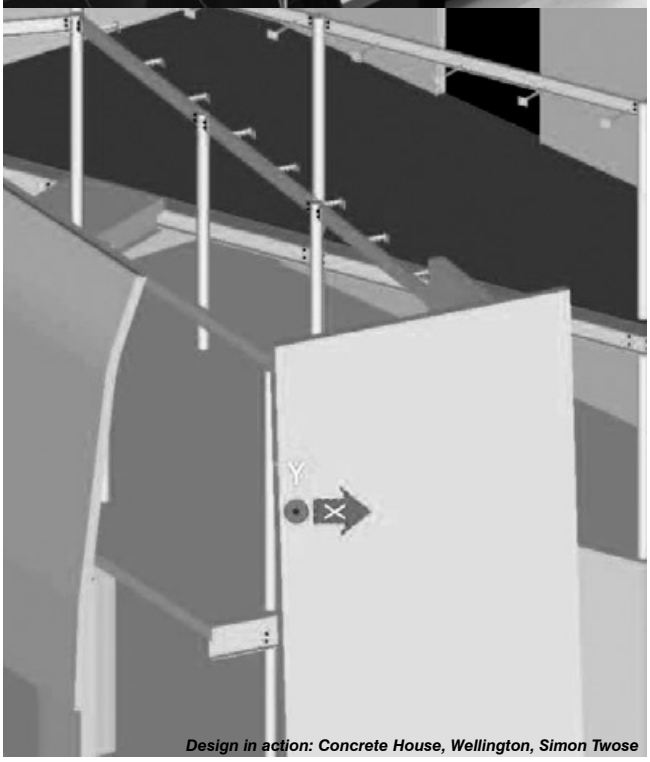
I would like to talk about a couple of projects to dip the toe further into this. Both are buildings that were shaped by actions that occurred in the design process; they did not begin with a predetermined from but evolved in response to 'influences'. The first is the white house in Auckland and the second the concrete house in Kelburn, Wellington.

The white house began with a conceptual agenda but in the process became formed by less identifiable things. It became a record of the negotiation between two actions: the movements of hand drawings and movements in the suburban fabric of the city. Rather than the house and the city being in a representational relationship, the house standing in for the city, sensory aspects of the house related to perceived sensory aspects of the city. These aspects were distilled by the design process, through scruffy drawings that responded to a complex domestic brief. The clients' wishes came to a spatial accommodation on paper through each area of the house having an influence on the area adjacent. The drawings, as in any house commission, negotiated the flux of a domestic brief, and were seen to correspond to similar fluxes in the city. The building ended up as the last step in this process of negotiation and became a house composed of wobbly white 'responsive' surfaces.

The sibling project to the White House was the concrete house, down here in Kelburn, Wellington. The concrete house was similar to the white house in that it was about distilling movements or flux from its context and allowing these to influence the form. In this case the design process was digital, so spatial considerations of hand drawing were not in the mix.

It seemed to me that Wellington produced architecture that was more material, vertically compressed and tectonic than Auckland and the landscape seemed more obviously an actor in the relationship. To respond to this, the house was designed to be a set of heavy concrete elements in a dynamic relationship with the site; elevated, leaning over or cutting into it. The end product was a rather abstract courtyard house crushed into a 250 m^2 site. In this case the house was designed by computer, and the weightlessness of that medium, allowing otherwise heavy concrete elements to glide around in the blackness of the computer screen, was a major influence in the design. The concrete panels appear to have been moved by some kind of force, so conceptually relate to the ominous power lurking below Wellington, but like the white house they also relate to the everyday way in which they were designed; they respond to the sensory conditions of computer space; moving things with frictionless ease. Again the house was not formed by a regulating composition, but was more a record of its design process.

What happens when you look at architecture as a sum of obscure and un-interpretable acts, from commission to building? It is certainly easier to talk about design when it is based on an organising parti, or arranged around a set of axes, but if the whole process is understood from the point of view of bodies in relation to non bodies then things become satisfyingly tricky. Of course, despite this desire to trip up conventional ways of thinking about architecture, there is always the desire to control composition, to ornament, and in the end for buildings to be beautiful. *Simon Twose*



Design in action: Concrete House, Wellington, Simon Twose

Pre-Occupied

Ruminations on Art and Science

What a privilege it is participate in year-ending student reviews, even more so given the chance to critique first year work where the questions of architecture are so fundamental. Each student grapples with the very definition of architecture, trying to grasp what exactly it is they have signed up for. Many struggle – as should be the norm – but a few exude confidence beyond their experience. One student responding to a critic's probing declared that what was before us was a sign of how they "always started their design projects." This conviction, which construed university as a finishing school for innate design abilities, touched on my own anxieties. I had no idea how I always started an architectural design. And if I had no idea about this, did I have any idea about what architecture itself was? Such perplexing issues highlight the beauty of first year work – it prompts one to rehearse answering questions like "What is architecture?"

That idea that architecture is the "art and science of building" is a popular and persistent definition and versions of it feature in authoritative works like the Oxford English Dictionary and Webster's dictionary and also on the popular Wikipedia site. But a telling sign of its popularity is its adaptation by marketeers to explain things other than architecture. 'Business architecture,' a blossoming tertiary course that studies the organisation of an enterprise, is regularly portrayed as "the art and science of building businesses." This adoption into market-speak indicates that architecture as the art and science of building is an idea with wide acceptance. The definition has assumed the status of a truism. It is seemingly uncomplicated and therefore has mass appeal. Construed as a definition beyond question, it supports analogies by not interfering with the marketing drive.

The roots to the art and science definition lie in Vitruvius' *Ten Books of Architecture*, the Classical treatise in which the author looks to compose *"a comprehensive work on the art of building and its methods"*. Vitruvius' *Ten Books* contextualise two of the definition's key ideas. Firstly, that architecture is a broad undertaking, one

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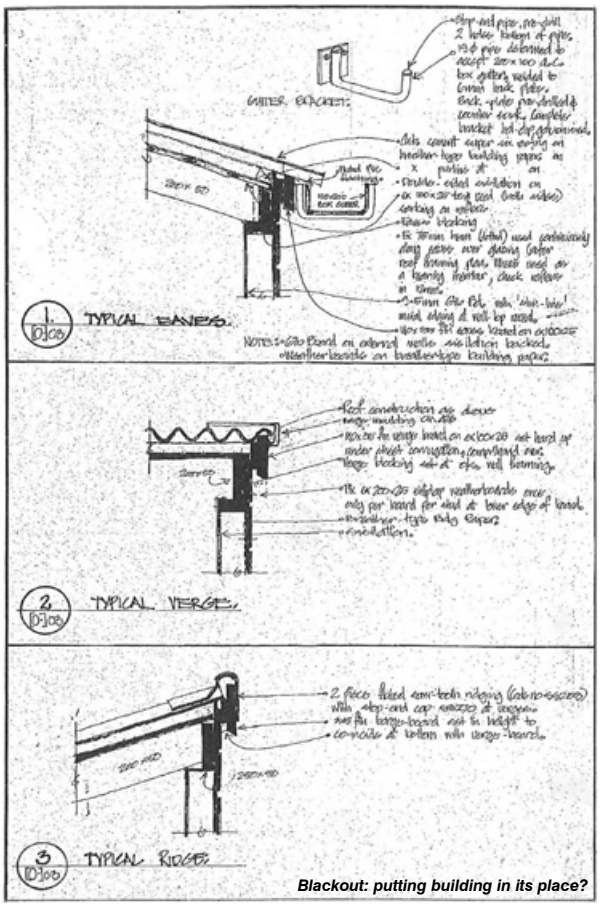

Blackout: putting building in its place?

Pre-Occupied *Continued from p.3...*

born from a breadth of knowledge. Secondly, that this broad knowledge is deployed in the service of building, with 'building' characterised by construction methods and building techniques and technologies.

Vitruvius believed that architecture makes varied demands on its practitioners and consequently the architect's education must be broad ranging. To this end, he proposed an ideal training programme for young architects that involved lengthy schooling in the sciences and humanities. He required that we be skilled writers and good draughtsman and that we have a command of geometry and optic laws. We must be well versed in arithmetic, history, philosophy, music, medicine, and astronomy and have a thorough knowledge of building law. Ultimately, it is our breadth of education that equips us to make buildings exhibiting the triumvirate of Vitruvian qualities: *utilitas, venustas, and firmitas*.

It is thought that Vitruvius served in the Roman Army where he was involved in building siege machines, bridges and constructing the Roman water supply. So we have a picture of someone leaning towards the engineering end of the architectural spectrum, towards the primacy of construction methods and building techniques in shaping architecture. (Vitruvius in fact declared that he was not a successful architect, referring only to a basilica in the provincial town of Fano as being his handiwork.) But aside from this engineering-bias there is another factor that arguably pushes Vitruvius towards building and its methods as architecture's defining concern – the audience for the treatise. Vitruvius was primarily addressing those for whom buildings were built and, as the book's dedication shows, to one potential client in particular. Kruft explains: *"The treatise is dedicated to Emperor Augustus … The author seeks to commend himself to Augustus through his work, possibly in the hope of receiving building commissions."* Vitruvius' *Ten Books* is a marketing tool, like the countless treatise that followed. And while there is nothing wrong with this, it is important to recognise that the definition of architecture as the art and science of building is historically founded on a marketing-drive and, for a host of associated reasons, it therefore promotes a definition of architecture that reserves a special place for building.

Many architects recognise that a focus on building offers clients an accessible way to understand architecture. But if we set marketing and clients aside and think things through differently, does building still hold prominence? Daily experience suggests that while architecture may draw on knowledge from the arts and sciences, it is questionable whether this knowledge is directed towards building. It is questionable whether it is our building knowledge that defines us amongst the team it takes to make a building. These observations come to the fore when sitting at meetings with various parties (contractors, developers, engineers, leasing managers, tenants) where it becomes clear that many people have knowledge of building and its methods, both from an artistic and scientific point of view. Under these circumstances, one questions what it is that the architect in particular brings to the table? What else might architecture be the art and science of?

One answer comes again from daily experience. I regularly get a call from a development manager looking for "one of those axonometrics or a little 3D sketch." Sometimes they will ask for construction details, but more often I will get to site and the actualities of how something is to be built will be drawn out on the face of a column, or I'll receive an email with a strange coloured-block diagram drawn in Word on the site PC. And both will be good approximations of the architect's intent, invested with their fair-share of art and science. What is instead being asked for with the "little 3D sketch" is a vision for life beyond building. Architects are capable of sharing a vision of what things will be like when building work is done, when the contractors have gone, when the paint is dry, when all the bills have been squared-away and when the occupants are well into their daily routines. And it is this visionary capacity that the architect brings to the table. To venture that architecture is "the art and science of occupation" is to propose a definition that gives precedence to the architect envisioning other worlds. And it is a definition that captures something of the rich and complex relationship between architecture and building.

Earlier this year, David Mitchell wrote on the Chatlist about his frustrations with the crippling demands of Council building consent requirements. He was worried that the documentation required for houses had blown out to the point that domestic architecture had become almost unachievable. He said that the minimum compliance documents required for consent had multiplied by a factor of ten in his lifetime and it was questionable as to whether this had resulted in any improvement in standards. David's observations brought to mind a wonderful sheet of details I had on file for an architect-designed house from the 1970s. Black-felt blocks in the necessary stuff, while notes capture the things affecting architectural quality. Given the problems David identifies, it is obvious that such drawings would not pass muster today (despite the fact that having visited the house I can attest to its beautiful spaces and its reasonable weather-tightness for a building its age). The drawings would have little show of gaining territorial authority.

Admittedly much has changed since the 1970s, but in the most basic terms, it is expected that we now draw in detail what black-felt here elides. Typically, this means attending more to building. It means making drawings that eliminate the space between drawing and building by shining a light on the dark-spots. There are, therefore, a range of pressures that push today's architect towards a pre-occupation with building, towards defining architecture as the art and science of building. And indeed some architects have whole-heartedly moved in this direction, as our local magazines attest to with their celebration of an increasing sophistication in building design. Some architects revel in drawing out what pre vious generations blacked out. But whether it stems from personal choice or the behest of authorities, significant questions surround the burgeoning pre-occupation with building and the growing pressures to eliminate the distance between drawing and building. For despite what Vitruvius contends, such a pre-occupation may threaten our defining vision. *Sean Flanagan*

Closing the gap between drawing and building

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Auckland Plan

Andrew Patterson's report to the Branch committee on changes to the Draft Auckland Plan

The following changes were negotiated with DINZ and AAA and fed through to the NZIA and Council. A selection of directives are discussed, stating the existing, the proposed with changes underlined, with supporting comment:

1. Directive 3.3 (Page 62)
Existing: *"Support artists and creative enterprises and contribute to Auckland's Vibrancy, sense of community and its economy."*
Proposed: *"Support artists, architecture and creative enterprises to contribute to Auckland's vibrancy, sense of place, sense of community and its economy.*
Comment: Sense of place has been acknowledged as an expression of Auckland's culture. The connection between Auckland's sense of place and its architecture is critical and specific supporting policies for this process will be required. A strong sense of place will attract local and international interest, attracting people to experience our culture as expressed through architecture, and providing people with places to meet, work and play. Supporting architecture to contribute to sense of place will also contribute to Auckland's vibrancy, sense of community and its economy.

2. Box 8.3 (Page 124), Aspect: Work with the Landscape
Existing: "Work with the landscape. Places should use the sites intrinsic resources - climate, landform, landscape and ecology - to minimise energy use."
Proposed: *"Work with the landscape, Architecture and place making should use the sites intrinsic resources, climate landform, landscape and ecology - to create places for people"*
Comment: The existing aspect overemphasizes the connection between landscape and minimization of energy use. Sustainable energy use involves a complex raft of initiatives including insulation, education, utilities and economics. We suggest minimization of energy is focused on in the following clause. What's more appropriate to this clause is the relationship between the built environments places" and Auckland's natural environment, this creates the goal of Auckland's built environment matching the quality of its natural environment.

3. Box 8.3 (Page 124)
Existing: "Design for changes places must be … demography."
Proposed: *"Sustainability - Places must be designed to be enduring in their attraction and use, flexible enough to accommodate change and to minimize energy use"*
Comment: The existing clause is intended to ensure a built environment which is able to accommodate the future. However, for a place to be valued enough to be retained, it must have an enduring attraction. The principle at the heart of this clause, is that of long term sustainability. We propose this change to strengthen this intent, a sustainable city is one which is able change, use low energy, and with buildings which stand the test of time.

4. Add additional aspect to Box 8.3 (Page 124)
Processes: *"Processes to enable creative and innovative architecture"*
Comment: This aspect is proposed to ensure that creativity and innovation are not stifled by processes pertaining to the built environment and acknowledges the strategic direction principle in Box C.1: *"Act prudently and commit to projects and initiatives that achieve the best value result without compromising quality or stifling creativity and innovation. Focus on achieving long-term benefits and intergenerational equity"*

5. Directive 8.7 (Page 125)
Existing: "Developments are expected to take into account environmental design principles"
Proposed: *"Developments are expected to take into account environmental and Best Practice Architectural design principles"*
Comment: Developments are primarily for people, and an expectation for developments to take into account Architectural design principles will ensure buildings are enduring in their attractiveness and performance, leading to a higher standard of living experiences. We must aim to build Auckland as a city of the world's most liveable buildings.

6. Box 8.3 (Page 125)
Existing: "Design for flexibility and innovation - encourage designs which can be easily altered and extended"
Proposed: *"Design for flexibility, creativity and innovation - encourage designs which can endure in attraction and be easily altered and extended."*
Comment: Key to ensuring a built environment which is valued enough to encourage alteration rather than demolition and rebuilding is that it can endure in its attraction.

7. Directive 4.14 (Page 222)
Existing: *"5. Investigate ways to support and develop Arts and Culture in the region."*
Proposed: *"5. Investigate ways to support and develop Arts, Architecture and Culture in the region."*
Comment: Acknowledgement in line with its importance in creating a liveable City.

8. Directive 8.5 to 8.8 (Page 230)
Existing: "3. Support the continuation of an Auckland Urban Design Panel to review major development proposals"
Proposed: *"3. Support an Auckland Design Panel to review major development proposals"*
Comment: Major developments should be reviewed by an Auckland Design Panel that is capable of supporting all aspects of Design, not just from the perspective of Urban Design. The proposed change calls for a panel comprised of a wider spectrum of design disciplines.

9. Directive 8.5 to 8.8 (Page 230)
Existing: "5. Develop a comprehensive design manual to inform the design and function of new development and public realm, including street environment"
Proposed: *"5. Develop a comprehensive manual on processes to support the creation of designs for the function of new development, including street environment"*
Comment: This issue is regarded to be of great importance: The use of a "Design Manual" simply recognizes minimum standards. It encourages default and ill-considered, formulaic responses to design problems. A design Manual stifles creativity and innovation through providing generalized solutions to specific problems. Architectural design and the pursuit of architectural principles in design requires a complex process. An informed design process generates specific results for a design problem through encouraging lateral thinking, creative exploration, iterative/sequential addition of information to working models, and much more. To encourage innovation, creative process must be encouraged and supported.

10. Directive 8.5 to 8.8 (Page 230)
Existing: "6. Investigate projects and programs to increase public art and sculpture in streets and public spaces."
Proposed: *"6. Investigate projects and programs to increase public art, Architecture and sculpture in streets and public spaces."*

11. Directive 8.5 to 8.8 (Page 230)
Existing: "8. Undertake design assessments for all new public realm projects to assess the needs of children, the elderly and disabled."
Proposed: *"8. Undertake design assessments for all new public realm projects to assess the needs of children, the elderly and disabled, and the diversity of Auckland's population."* *AP*