



04/05 2012

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BLOCK

Dark Night: Walking with McCahon

Pip Cheshire Reviews Martin Edmond's Dramatisation



Auckland University Press 2011

I wonder if it is the accommodation of life's trivialities that so diminishes architecture's ability to engage in more profound matters of existence. The necessity of dealing with the need to boil the daily egg being so dominant as to obscure, or in some cases obviate the potential for more weightier matters. This may be a fortunate happenstance for those for whom the correct alignment of solar radiation, topographic sensitivity and the correct workings of the domestic hearth are the focus but not for those for whom larger fields are contemplated. For those few the outcomes may well be a space in which to contemplate the sublime or, as in the cold, tipped floor plane at Ronchamp, the hereafter, but rarely does our art directly and singularly express the torment of life laid bare.

Perhaps deep in the underground approach to Peter Zumthor's pools at Vals one experiences an insistent olfactory engagement with the geothermal forces that hint at life forces below. Yet even here, amid the clouds of hydrogen sulphide and the alkaline leachate bleeding from the walls, the need to cater to human perambulation prevails over thoughts of Hephaestus or the wailing and gnashing of teeth in the netherworld that seems, at that moment, so close.

This is not a constraint on painters. Colin McCahon's progression from the early works of a terrestrial realm intensely observed, to those of a mind in restless and apparently tormented consideration of the divine, are anything but trivial. Yet Martin Edmonds frames a possible reconstruction of McCahon's last hours in a personal journey so flatly described as to seem trivial, the more so given both the context and the content of the central story.

The back story involves the McCahons' 1984 visit to Sydney for a retrospective of Colin's work and his subsequent disappearance from the public toilets at the Botanical Gardens and his finding by police in a disorientated state some twenty eight hours later.

Edmond establishes an elaborate construct in which he traverses a route that McCahon might have taken in the alcohol generated confusion and memory loss after becoming separated from his wife in the Botanical Gardens and ambled, confused away toward the east. The reconstruction and retracing of steps from decades earlier is interwoven with Christ's progression along the Via Dolorosa to his crucifixion at Calvary. The Stations of the Cross, those fourteen markers of events along Christ's walk, find their parallels in Edmond's progression through the contemporary city. Along the walk, vignettes of the city are springboards for the merging of history and the observed. Thus an encounter with a group of flamboyant boys in drag conflates an imagined scenario of drag queen Carmen mopping McCahon's forehead with the station of Veronica mopping Christ's brow.

Though the construct is, as reviewers have noted 'risky' and 'fully imagined' it seems a successful device from which to launch a sustained examination of a difficult issue, that of McCahon's faith. Though the painted work might offer evidence aplenty, the ambiguity of McCahon's own words, painted and spoken, suggest no certainty as to the the artist's faith. The paintings, the assemblies of pigment and canvas, is touched on lightly, but Edmond is an astute and well read author whose ruminations on the artists faith offer an interesting framework with which to approach the work. Along the way Edmond refutes the dominant canon of the latter paintings as evidence of McCahon as a Christ like figure arguing instead that McCahon was Christ-like "casually, intermittently, opportunistically, wilfully".

Continued on p.2...



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Philosophical Demands

Graham Burgess reviews *Philosophy for Architects*

Princeton Architectural Press 2011

When I was asked me to review a book for Block, I imagined getting a book that was primarily visual, a glamorous vanity production selling the work of some architect or other. How deluded. My book to review was a plainly presented academic text by UNITEC-based Branko Mitrovic “Philosophy for Architects”. It is a great accolade for Branko that this book has been published by Princeton University Press as one of a series of Architectural Briefs. To be included in such a series of books by one of the great universities of the world suggests that this text has rigour and is considered by the editors to meet very high academic standards.

The fundamental premise of the book is that there is a relationship between philosophy and architecture; that philosophical changes have affected architecture and that a philosophical approach may be taken to explain or discuss architecture. In order to facilitate that understanding the book follows the development of philosophical thinking from Plato through to the present day (using examples where possible) to illustrate how the arguments of various philosophers may have influenced architectural practice/education/thinking. This creates a somewhat linear narrative. The focus is primarily on the philosophical, with difficult choices having been made as to which philosophical thinking had primacy at which periods. It is made very clear that at no time is there agreement among philosophers, and that choices to include discussion of certain philosophers has been used in the book as an introduction to philosophical thought/argument that may have some relevance to architecture, not as a catch all.

It is a very demanding read, not an entertainment, and requires the reader to have an empathy for, and a reasonable knowledge of philosophy. *GB*

Colin McCahon *Continued from p.1...*

McCahon and his work need a constant revisiting, as Edmond says he is “best understood as a dramatist who felt compelled to enact, and re-enact the central story of our culture” be that of a land with “too few lovers” as in the Northland Panels or, in the same painting, a land in which the lush intensity of the bush hides a darker current of the human psyche. The later text based work seems accessible with its use of language alone, yet paradoxically, is more opaque and contestable than the earlier more figurative work.

Edmond’s exegesis will certainly fuel debate on how we see McCahon – as Christ like figure or tortured doubter, though whether this is aided and abetted by Edmond’s structure is a moot point. It seems churlish to decry Edmond’s constructs when he has gone to such lengths, both literary and physically, to inject a narrative into a complex philosophical enquiry, yet the cross town trek, complete with personal epiphany while sleeping rough, seems sketchy and, well, trivial amid such weighty subjects. Edmond has a taxi driver’s knowledge of the terrain and its inhabitants yet the streets seem not to come alive, the cast of characters too lightly drawn and hence the analogy of the ascent to Golgotha too stretched. *PC*

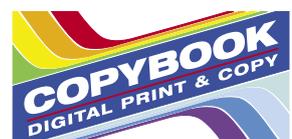
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The Fine Print: April

CHAIR'S REPORT: Richard Goldie

Welcome all and congratulations on your election. I trust your shoulders have recovered from the vigorous, yet democratic, 'tapping' they received pre AGM.

Committee meetings: Reports are as read. Make time for discussion at the end. We'll meet 7:30-8:45am if possible, which leaves 15 minutes for any closing discussion afterwards. At 9am, it's BACK TO WORK!

Committee structure: As proposed back in February, the committee is a pared-down version of the original with standing offices retained and the balance now 'Issues Groups' aligned with NZRAB (AACA) Units of Competency as follows (with Design, as suits its significance, having four limbs) as follows: Design-Architecture; Urban; Heritage and Environment; Documentation (DOG); Project Management (PMG); Practice Management (PIG); Core Professional Development - it was felt that this was encompassed above, so we haven't filled this spot.

To help define the activities of each 'group' (who have a fundamental CPD role) attached is the AACA 'National Competency Standards' - these are the foundation of Professional Education from the Tertiary Institutions to what we do every day and CPD. (Curiously the NZRAB use different nomenclature, which is strange as it is the NZRAB that require the schools to use the AACA Standards - straightening this out is a job for our NZRAB reps?)

Vacancies: Jennifer has indicated her wish to resign from the Committee. Gregory Heap has kindly agreed to remain in place as Treasurer until a replacement Secretary/Treasurer is found - all suggestions welcome. Preferably someone who could fill the Architecture+Women liaison role?

Things to do (excerpted from the Feb proposal):

- Continuity - Each 'office' has an 'officer elect' who assists the 'office', elected/appointed mid-term. To further continuity, each officer would enjoy the advice of their predecessor.
- This structure suggests that ideally everyone would have two years on the committee, but be involved for at least three - one actively assisting as 'officer elect' and two in the role.
- Each 'Officer' should seek to be involved in another appropriate forum eg the Urban Design Officer should be in the Urban Design Forum.
- Auckland Branch voice: as 'NZIA Auckland' (not the mouthsome 'the Auckland Branch of the New Zealand Institute of Architects'). Public commentary would be from 'NZIA Auckland' with either the Branch Chair or the appropriate Officer being its 'voice'. Perhaps the Officer should prepare the background of an issue, seeking input from others as appropriate, brief the committee (at the meetings but perhaps more likely by email and phone), then coordinate with John Walsh for a press release. I suggest we seek recognition of Branches' role from NZIA Head Office and encourage them to use the Branch as a resource for local commentary.
- Events will be coordinated by Andrew plus team. Subcommittees could be established for specific events like Arch Week.
- We should build relationships with external groups - politicians, council, engineers, property, urban design etc.
- All this could be a structure for Branch Committees nationally, with officers from the regions communicating with each other on relevant issues.

Committee for Auckland: A report from Terry Badham of DesignTRIBE regarding the Committee for Auckland 'Maori business strategy network hui' was held on Tuesday 28 February 2012 at the University of Auckland Business School. The theme of the event was 'Identity and Productivity'. On Thursday 29th March I attended an Iwi Business Hui at the BNZ Quay Park which featured Tainui Group Holdings CEO Mike Pohio talking about their developments and ambitions around the Waikato.

Urban Design Panel Governance Board: Attended a meeting last Thursday with the President. Critical issues are: maintaining the relevance of the UDP in the new Urban Environments Team environment; establishing the UDP process across the whole city; election of UDP Panel members (by June). Architects feature strongly in the panel makeup and are able to apply for 'Urban Design' positions as well.

NZIA COUNCILLORS' REPORT: Christina van Bohemen & Tim Melville

The first NZIA Council meeting for 2012 was held on Thursday 15th March. Key items discussed at the meeting were:

Crisis Response: This is being coordinated by Dennis Chippendale who has requested that each branch team get in touch with their local emergency centre and look to organise a group undertake volunteer training. The role that architects might play should come clear once the training has been done.

Practice Services: Practice notes are being prepared covering Restricted Building Works and Memorandum Certificate of Design Work. The Institute has been meeting with the Ministry of Education to discuss a variety of issues: contracts for PPPs, remediation work, seismic issues, design standards (Modern Learning standards, Green Star and Weathertightness standards), leaky schools and insurance related issues. The Practice Summit in Wellington on Saturday 26th May is intended as a review of the services that the Institute provides its members and where it can provide input and leadership in the field of architecture and construction. The summit is free to attend and principals are encouraged to participate.

Legislation Reviews - RMA and Building Act: Work is on-going.

Communications: John Walsh has been developing and maintaining relationships with relevant media resulting in a number of stories about architecture as well as the awards coverage.

Issues noted that NZIA will monitor for possible media engagement include Christchurch reconstruction including issues that may affect architects, LBP scheme, Productivity Commission, Ministerial inquiry into Poverty and urban densification. John Walsh is able to assist Branches with media engagement. Another Cross Section is being prepared, although JW believes a review of this medium and general communication with members is warranted.

Urban Design Award: NZIA has instigated a new award to celebrate and promote urban design. The award programme has the support of the NZ Institute of Landscape Architects, The Urban Design Forum, NZ Planning Institute and the NZ Property Council. The focus of the awards is the project which will be a team entry, submitted by one of the project disciplines. There will be categories for unbuilt and built work. More detail to follow from NZIA.

Membership Categories / Rule Revision: This was outlined by the Chief Executive at the Branch AGM. There are various minor amendments proposed for the AGM in May, but the main change is the addition of a new membership category of Allied Professional Member - opening up membership to NZIA to any person who is working in a field allied to the architectural profession, (such as urban design or landscape architecture) and is approved by Council.

The Fine Print: May

CHAIR'S REPORT: Richard Goldie

General: This month I have met with David Sheppard, the incoming Institute President. He shared stories of Christchurch that demonstrate, as only the most unique story anecdotes do, the detail of the personal effects he and his colleagues and staff are facing. Quite sobering.

I have offered to David any reasonable assistance he might need where our large numbers and proximity to national office may help. His emphasis, despite his ongoing and natural commitment to Christchurch, is to maintain a national focus and, in a happy parallel to our own ambitions, to bring Architects back to the center of the conversation, as professionals who can speak to the entire process of design and city making. His experiences over the last couple of years have led him to believe in the Architect as a person able to understand a community's' expectations, decipher regulation, and make a central contribution to the *design* of both buildings and cities, that is grounded in the realpolitik of property and finance. His reflections are great to listen to and I have invited him to address the Branch on his views on the profession, and Christchurch, as soon as his calendar allows.

Committee: Suggestions for Branch functions hosted and focused on that 'Issue Group' that each of us is coordinating are welcome and should be inserted into the Branch calendar.

I have spoken with John Walsh regarding the Branch having a voice in local issues and he has suggested that access to the

media can be easily established. He has also kindly offered to provide the necessary 'wordsmithing' to shape these pieces. Again, coordinators suggestions are welcomed. Issues that spring to mind are densification, heritage vs character, housing affordability?

Vacancies: Matt Grant, a recent émigré from Hamilton with a strong track record of involvement in Branch activities, has kindly offered to fill the role of secretary/treasurer from which Jennifer is resigning. Matt will attend the meeting tomorrow and move into the role with the help of Jennifer and Gregory Heap. Welcome Matt. Matt will also manage the Branch calendar, please liaise with him as to suitable times. Please ensure there are no clashes with National Office Calendar.

Urban Design Panel: The Branch has received formal correspondence from Auckland Council calling for Nominations for the Auckland Urban Design Panel. Nominations close and will be considered by the Urban Design Panel Governance Board on Tuesday 19th June 2012. Nominations are being called from the New Zealand Institute of Architects, New Zealand Planning Institute, Property Council of New Zealand, New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects, and Auckland Council's Built Environment Unit. The makeup of the panel members is as follows: 10-12 Architects; 2-4 Planners; 4-6 Property Professionals; 4-6 Landscape Architects; and 4-6 Urban Design specialists.

Note that Architects are able to apply for a position as an Urban Design specialist. All in all Architects are well represented. The panel composition anticipates a rollover of experienced and new panel members. Initially 50% of the previous panel will be invited to continue. Full copies of the correspondence and invitation are attached and will be circulated to the members.

Members are reminded that the Urban Design Panel was, prior to the establishment of the Super City, essentially an Auckland City only phenomenon, and voluntary. It has no legislative standing, and, since the creation of the Super City, the Built Environment Unit (largely Urban Design) has been established within Auckland Council. I suggest therefore that Architects, whose obligation is to quality, actively encourage Clients to take significant projects (large or small) through the UDP process.

Other: We have contributed to the Futuna Chapel Restoration by way of contributing to the cost of the (excellent) Rick Joy lecture to the tune of a \$2,500 donation and picking up some sundry expenses of \$818.

I've met with Ronnie Kay (Institute Accountant) and Gregory Heap to come up to speed on the Branch finances. Interesting and useful. The Branch generally operates on or below target spend each year. In general, functions, publications and events are funded or sponsored. Sponsorship is desirable in all cases. We have explored the cost of hosted Branch functions and suggest these would be around \$1500, for which we could host

Please note the NZIA policy on 'spends' in Ronnie's words: "Any grants/donations a branch wishes to make to an organization need to be approved by the Council; likewise any overseas travel for an international speaker needs to be approved by Council. Any spend from what is known as 'the interest allocation budget' also needs to be approved by Council. As the Council only meets four times a year (Feb, May, Sep & Dec) in my opinion it's a good idea to put even possible options for a particular upcoming financial year (Jan - Dec) forward at either the February or at latest May Council meeting for approval so that when ideas firm up to implement, the approval from Council has already been granted. There is also a rule that any speaker travel for Institute speaking engagements for speakers from Australia is done at economy rate and not business class because of the short distance."

I suggest the requirement to apply to the quarterly Council meetings may not work easily especially when opportunities for speakers or events may arise relatively suddenly. Perhaps another mechanism could be considered by Council? In any case the Branch should endeavor to manage these events to meet Council's established protocols.

NZIA COUNCIL: Tim Melville & Christina van Bohemen

The Practice Summit: A reminder that 'The Practice Summit' is being held in Wellington on Saturday 26th May following the AGM, and is intended as a review of the services that the Institute provides its members, and where it can provide input and leadership in the field of architecture and construction. The summit is free to attend and Principals are encouraged to participate.

Membership Rule Revisions: There are various amendments to membership categories proposed for the AGM on Saturday 26th May. The main change is the addition of a new membership category of Allied Professional Member - opening up membership to NZIA to any person who is working in a field allied to the architectural profession (such as urban design or landscape architecture). Postal voting forms have been sent out to members and the motion will be voted on at the AGM.

New Premises: The NZIA National Office has been looking at future office accommodation alternatives as the D72 lease ends in February 2013. The new offices will be of similar size to D72 and continue to be the home of the Auckland Branch and its activities. Currently the preferred option is at level 4 of Zurich House, 21 Queen Street. The building has a 5 star Greenstar rating and its downtown location is handy to the revitalized Britomart precinct.

Undergraduate Briefing: Christina and Andrew Barrie are currently organizing an undergraduate briefing session at the University of Auckland. The intention is to meet with Year 5 (and probably also Year 3 students), who are about to graduate, to discuss career paths, NZIA membership options and the path to registration vs LBP registration.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES GROUP: Alec Couchman

Presentation 1: The first EIG presentation of 2012 (01/05/12) was delivered by South African architect Llewellyn Van Wyk, an academic and scientist who is currently employed by the SA Government research organization CSIRO. Telling insights into Government policy making and the harsh environmental issues facing SA. Reasonably well attended despite the small window of opportunity to advertise.

Presentation 2: The next EIG presentation of 2012 (15/05/12) will be delivered by Heather Harris, the Resource Consent Manager for Auckland Council. Presentation being run in conjunction with UIG (Shannon Joe). A chance for architects to discuss any pressing issues/ concerns with the person who controls the processing of RCs in Auckland.

Presentations to be confirmed:

- Darren Jessop will discuss the PassivHaus house project currently under construction in Glenfield. This is set to be the first PassivHaus certified building in New Zealand.
- Net-Zero House: Jo Woods, an engineer from E3BW will discuss her own house, currently under construction, which is aiming to be a net-zero energy house.

Assistance: Lynn Maltby from Chow Hill has expressed an interest to assist where possible and, in the future, may be interested in taking over as EIG Chairperson.

UoA REPORT: Uwe Rieger

Functions: The annual Architecture Prize Giving for 2011 was held on May 2nd, followed by the NICAI graduation ceremony in the evening.

Christchurch: Under the title *Future Christchurch* the School is currently exhibiting a number of 2012 student projects at CPIT in Christchurch. The exhibition will be on display until May 23rd. Further on, the School intends to have an increased focus on design and research projects linked to Christchurch topics.

Study tours: Sixty students have returned from an exciting three week architecture study tour through the European Alps organized by Michael Milojevic. Manfredo Manfredini has returned with a group of thesis students from a two-week excursion through China.

UoA STUDENT REPORT: Jordon Saunders

The University of Auckland is firmly in to the second half of semester, with graduation and the SoAP prize giving taking place last week.

The end of the first half of semester saw the commencing of the intensive studio run by Susanne Hofmann of the Technische Universität Berlin and BD (Die Baupiloten). The studio produced some exciting projects with studio partner New Lynn School.

The return of two study tours abroad, the first Manfredo Manfredini's which has seen a continuation of the annual China Lab tours with first year masters students. The second saw students from 2nd, 3rd and 4th year design students return from an alpine tour in Tyrol Austria.

Last week saw the opening of exhibition of student work in Christchurch, the concept for the exhibition is to show students'

work that in some way is visionary, the aim of which is to encourage conversation. Some of the work is at times provocative and idealistic, yet the intention is to stimulate debate around design and what the future of Christchurch could become. The selected projects focused on different scales and aspects of Christchurch, but common among them is an investigative approach where students were asked to develop an insight or unique understanding that then led to their design, be it urban or architectural in scale.

UNITEC REPORT: Tony van Raat

Work on Dave Strachan's Studio 19 design/document/build project is proceeding. The project this year is two social houses to be delivered to Vision West, a housing organization in Glen Eden. Dave Strachan and Tony van Raat recently visited Auburn University in Alabama to see work there by the Rural Studio. The 60sqm/\$20,000 houses (\$8k in labour and \$12k in materials) were particularly interesting. Mind you the local authorities in rural Alabama are so cash-strapped that no codes are enforced and building inspectors don't exist. Build projects in Arizona and at Yale were also visited.

A group of about 20 students will shortly be leaving for Rome to take part in a three-week sustainability course in the rural district of Sabina (think 'the rape of the Sabine women').

Another group of 15 practitioners will be in Toscana in June to take a course in conservation organised by our fraternal organization of architects there.

Mark Mismash is in discussion with Trimble, manufacturers of digital mapping equipment, to get some of their latest equipment to enhance our GPS mapping capability. It appears that they have generously let us have \$10,000 of equipment that will be put to good use.

Most importantly, we are concerned by recent announcements by Stephen Joyce that government funding to students in tertiary education will end after four years of study. If carried out this will mean that architecture students will need to fully-fund their final year of study – about \$20,000. It is almost impossible to believe that any government would embrace the ignorance economy with such enthusiasm, or that it would seek to make higher education the preserve of the rich. The schools, the Institute and the registration Board are discussing ways of opposing this measure.

UNITEC STUDENT REPORT: Matthew Roberts & Stu Penno

Several students from across the year groups have submitted their design to the International Velux Award 2012 for Students of Architecture. The design competition that focuses on the innovative use of daylight wants to "encourage and challenge [...] students to explore the theme of daylight in its widest sense – and to create a deeper understanding of this specific and ever-relevant source of energy and light." With the overall theme of 'Light of Tomorrow,' the competition calls for an open-minded and experimental approach, seeking to challenge the future of daylight in the built environment. The prize pool is €30,000; our best wishes to all who entered, we look forward to good news in October.

Second Year B.A.S. students have been challenged to design a gallery space in an urban setting, considering where and how light

will enter. The gallery is to be designed to display the works of a particular artist, be it the likes of Hiroshi Sugimoto, Colin McCahon or Picasso. In part two of the project, the students are to take their ideas of form and space and consider the internal environment by applying their knowledge of mechanical services acquired from their Architectural Technology paper.

DOCUMENTATION: Brad Luke & Mark Mismash

Residential Ventilation: Following Marks lead, contact has been made with Dave Fullbrook of eCubed Building Workshop to gauge his interest in presenting a paper on ventilation options and strategies for residential construction. "With over 30 years experience in the industry, Dave is a respected building services and sustainable design specialist. He is the leading proponent for energy efficient and sustainable design for commercial, institutional and public buildings in New Zealand" - extract from eCubed website. Dave has given a positive response and is keen to meet with Mark and Brad to define scope and date for presentation.

Facade Design and Peer Review: Ron Hanley has been contacted to gauge his interest in presenting a paper on design principles for facades, material compatibility and peer review. Ron has recently presented to selected architectural practices for Trespa and has provided facade peer review for multi-story re-clad projects at Peddle Thorp. Ron has given a positive response and is keen to meet with Mark and Brad to define scope and date for presentation.

Moving Forward: Presentation dates and venues to be agreed.

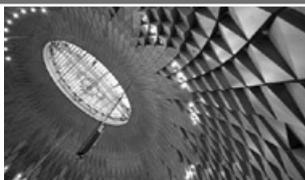
GRADUATE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM: Sandy Hayward

Graduate Workshop Group: To be held 6.00-7.00pm Wednesday 16th May. This is a chance to meet like-minded graduates to form groups to study towards similar registration intakes. NZRAB assessor Toni Orgias will attend to answer any questions.

University Under-Graduate Evening: We are also looking into presenting the requirements of registration to students at university studying architecture. This initiative is planned to inform students of areas to work towards once they complete study – i.e. maintaining project record forms and looking for work that involves areas of core competency.



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