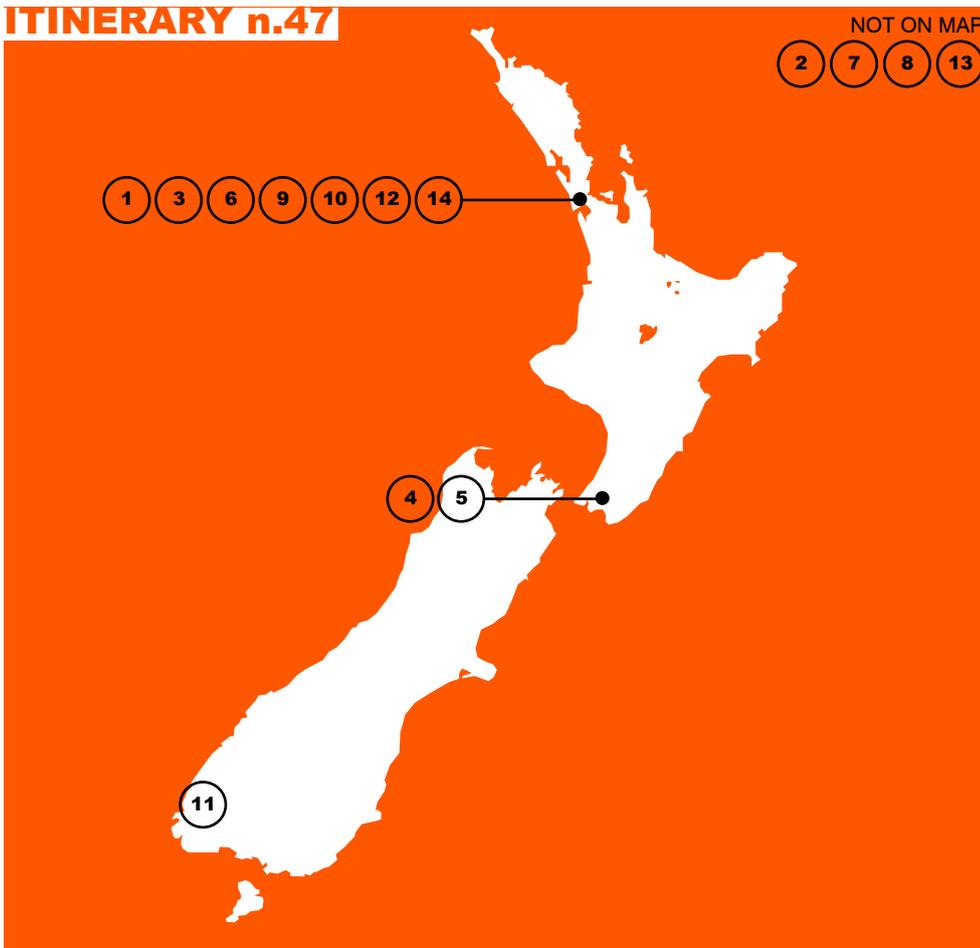


ITINERARY n.47



This year marks 25 years since *Deconstructive Architecture* was inaugurated with a controversial exhibition at MoMA. This itinerary looks at local contributions to this global phenomenon.



Venice Biennale Installation

Deconstruction in New Zealand

The late 1980s was a turbulent time for New Zealand architecture. In the decade's prosperous early years, Kiwi practitioners embraced the up-beat forms of post-modernism that swept ashore from various northern points of origin. In the less giddy times following the '87 stock market crash, many local architects were receptive to the more skeptical stance and aggressive aesthetics linked to deconstruction.

Local architects had a particular interest in this new trans-Atlantic deconstruction phenomenon. Auckland *enfant terrible* Mark Wigley, who had achieved local notoriety through television shows on Kiwi architecture, popped up at the center of the action in New York. He worked alongside Philip Johnson to put together the canon-defining 1988 *Deconstructivist Architecture* show at the Museum of Modern Art. Reports on Wigley's involvement appeared in *Architecture NZ* at various stages, swiftly followed by reviews of both the show and the associated catalogue. In the years that followed, an ideological battle raged in international architecture circles between deconstruction and postmodern classicism (and the closely related New Urbanist approach). Given the long-term ascendancy of the decon-ers (three of the seven MoMA exhibitors would go on to win Pritzker Prizes) it was a battle that, in the realm of high architecture at least, decon eventually won.

In our schools of architecture it was a shorter and more decisive skirmish, culminating in the unprecedented success of The University of Auckland's decon-informed exhibit at the 1991 Venice Biennale. As exemplified by the Venice project, in New Zealand deconstruction came together in an unusual way with the local version of another internationally prominent stream of thinking, critical regionalism, with its concern for the geographical and cultural context of architecture. These streams intersected in notions of "ground" and "fault" that saw the literal and conceptual ground for architecture in New Zealand being unstable and fissured. The "deep-grinding energy" that Michael Linzey (see Listing 7) posited as characterising both our lively geology and evolving bi-culture was invoked to explain the "aesthetic of fragmentation" in local projects.

The advent of postmodern classicism and deconstruction on the local scene seemed to raise anxieties about overseas influence, particularly the way in which ideas flowed in from abroad through magazines. The new work was decried as inauthentic and obscurantist, a view in turn criticised as anti-intellectual and inarticulate. Looking back, however, it is surprising to find that outside the architecture schools and corner bars, deconstruction generated remarkably little architecture. The talk was rarely walked. Based purely on built results, in the local battle between decon and pomo, pomo won hands down.

Both however, were soon overtaken by neo-modernism, and nervousness about overseas influence faded, in part because even the most significant international developments have had little visible impact on our local scene. While such major shifts as those signaled by Rem Koolhaas' hyper-rationalism or Zaha Hadid's fluid geometries have been much discussed here, there is little evidence of their being adapted for local use. We have no blobs, no datascares, and few explorations of the new structures or geometries made possible by digital technology. The new approaches associated with sustainability are among the few entries into our architectural mainstream. Twenty-five years on from deconstruction's brief flowering, the issue for Kiwi architecture may not be its dependence on overseas ideas but its independence from them. *Andrew Barrie*

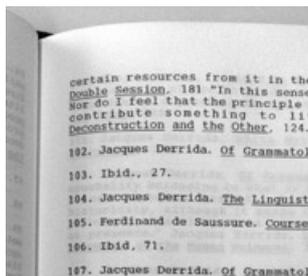
Deconography

The fuss kicked off with events held in 1988 on either side of the Atlantic – a symposium at The Tate Gallery in London, and the exhibition at New York's MoMA. The MoMA show's controversial list of exhibitors included Frank Gehry, Daniel Libeskind, Rem Koolhaas, Peter Eisenman, Zaha Hadid, Coop Himmelblau and Bernard Tschumi. Most denied any direct connection between deconstructive theory and their work, and even the show's curators preferred to see the work's roots in Russian Constructivism, although most of the exhibitors disavowed this connection too. The notable exceptions were Tschumi and Eisenman, both of whom took up direct collaborations with Jacques Derrida. Perhaps because they bound themselves so closely to the theory, the careers of these two suffered when decon waned. In contrast, Derrida-deniers Gehry, Hadid, and Koolhaas went on to win Pritzker Prizes. The pale, neo-modernism of the 1995 *Light Construction* show at MoMA signaled the end of deconstruction's ascendancy. Intriguingly, several decon exhibitors (Tschumi, Koolhaas, Gehry) were also included in the *Light Construction* show.

1

1986

Jacques Derrida and Architecture
PhD Thesis
Mark Wigley

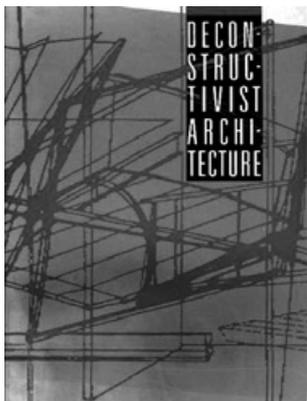


This doctoral thesis, completed at The University of Auckland under the supervision of Mike Austin, looked at the "architectural argument embedded within Derrida's work" before Derrida became directly engaged with architecture through the work of Bernard Tschumi and Peter Eisenman. Eisenman was invited to act as one of the thesis' examiners, and would later facilitate Wigley's entry into the New York architecture scene, including making an introduction to Philip Johnson – see next entry. A reworked version of the thesis was eventually published as *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida's Haunt* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).

2

1988

Deconstructivist Architecture
Museum of Modern Art, NYC
P. Johnson & M. Wigley, Curators



Alongside a symposium at The Tate Gallery in London, this exhibition held at MoMA served to lodge deconstruction at the center of international architectural debate. The curators declared decon was not a movement but a "point of intersection among ... architects moving in different directions." They suggested it would be short-lived, and they were right. The story of Wigley's involvement is entertainingly told in a chapter entitled "Canon Fodder" in Michael Sorkin's *Exquisite Corpse* (New York: Verso, 1991).

3

1988

Uncanny*Atopia*Fiction
Auckland
Nigel Ryan, Organiser

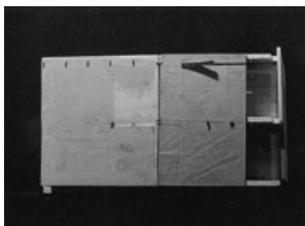


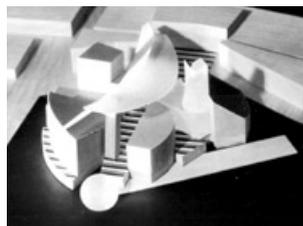
Photo: Twose/Rawson/Jenner

The first Resene Paints Architecture Exposition, held in 1986 and titled "Tabula Rasa", was judged by Ross Jenner, Francis Pound, and Mark Wigley. The 1988 Exposition, organized by Nigel Ryan, then a Masters student at The University of Auckland, took on a more international flavour. The theme was set and judged by Thomas Leiser of Eisenman's office (and Wigley's NYC flatmate) and Renato Rizzi from the school of architecture in Venice. The competition co-winners – a project by Nick Stanish and another by Simon Twose, Brendon Rawson and Ross Jenner – were exhibited in a specially rebuilt George Fraser Gallery. See *NZ Architect* 5, 1986 and *Architecture NZ* Nov./Dec. 1988.

4

1990

Museum of NZ Competition Entry
Wellington
Athfield w/ Gehry & Thompson

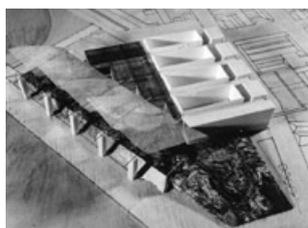


The two-stage competition for MoNZ drew 38 first stage entries, this one being a collection of the prismatic pavilions that characterized Gehry's '80s work. Despite not being selected for the second stage, the scheme was relentlessly promoted by Russell Walden, his criticism of the judging becoming particularly accusatory when the 1997 Bilbao Guggenheim catapulted Gehry into the architectural stratosphere. The MoNZ scheme was prepared at the time Gehry began developing the ideas that crystallized at Bilbao, but had it been built it would have sat in the rather frustrating position as the last of Gehry's 1980's-style works rather than ranking among his groundbreaking 1990s designs. EuroDisney, not Guggenheim.

5

1990

Museum of NZ Competition Entry
Wellington
Architect

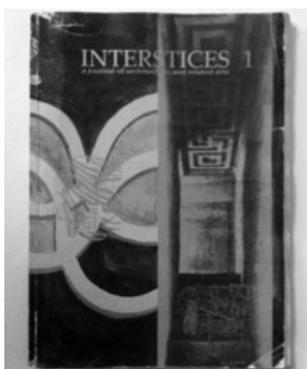


This competition entry, one of five selected for the second stage, was developed by a partnership that included Cook Hitchcock Sargisson, Bowes Clifford Thompson, John Scott, and Ross Jenner. A key theme for the design was "ground". Connecting the weak bearing the Museum's reclaimed site to New Zealand's geological origins in the uplift of tectonic plates, the building was set on "immense tilted floor planes". It had been a long time since a big urban earthquake in NZ, and the designers took an almost romantic view of seismic activity: "Stone-clad these [planes] would have the freshness, and the streaming, resplendent, glistening qualities of newly formed land". See *Archi NZ* July/Aug. 1990.

6

1991

Interstices 1
Dept. of Arch., Univ. of Auckland
Ross Jenner & Nigel Ryan, Eds.



This scholarly journal emerged from an annual series of University of Auckland seminars focused on new developments in theory. The first issue is an intriguing mix of contributions by names now obscure and notable; it includes early projects by Architectus, a house by future Oscar-winning art director Kim Sinclair, and the MoNZ competition entry by 2005 Pritzker Prize winners Morphosis. See Ross Jenner in Kirk Wooller (ed.) *20/20: Editorial Takes on Architectural Discourse* (London: AA Publications, 2011).

7

1991

Architecture to a Fault
Venice Biennale Catalog Essay
Michael Linzey

Published in Italian in the Biennale's official Venice Prize catalog, *Quinta Mostra Internazionale di Architettura* (Milano: Electa, 1991), this text accompanied images of a selection of staff and student work from the School. In a text dense with philosophical and literary references, Linzey makes a variety of allusions to the "ground": he posits the work as emerging from an "archeology of theory", alludes to the Maui myth of NZ's creation, points to fault lines in our culture, language and architecture, and draws on images of seismic activity to describe a "deep-grinding energy" he sees in the work. The text captures the "interrogative" spirit of a moment in a time when faultlines were fun. Published in English in *Interstices 2* (1992).

8

1991

Venice Prize Installation
5th Architecture Biennale,
Venice, Italy
The University of Auckland



Included in an exhibition of 43 architecture schools from around the world, this installation played with notions of drawing, representation, lightness, and ephemerality. Staff and student projects on the walls and a large drawing on the floor were placed in dialogue with a paper shroud wrapped around a timber structure in which 3604 framing collided with a Melanesian navigation map. The installation was given the "best in show" nod, the Venice Prize. The drawings are still clearly visible on the floor of the exhibition hall at the Arsenale. See *Arch NZ* Nov./Dec. 1991, *Interstices 2* (1992), *Lotus International* 73 (1992) and *Backlogue 1* (1992).

9

1991

A. B. Gibbs House
14a Kingsley Street, Westmere
Lane Priest Architects



Photo: NZ Herald

The client for this building had lived in Manning Mitchell's Kiwi postmodern icon, the 1984 Gibbs House in Parnell, and this project extended the family's architectural patronage. Positioned as a "subversion of the typical urban house", this collection of disparate elements – concrete block walls, a brick chimney, a sinuous steel beam, rough timber framing, an upside-down roof, a stream running through the marble floor – were described by architect Noel Lane as "an assemblage of independent elements, of disciplined irregularities". See *NZ Home & Building* Oct./Nov. 1991 and James Ross' *Noel Lane Architect: Recent New Zealand Projects* (Auckland: Vision Warriors, 2003).

10

1992

Austin House
1/55 Churchill Road, Murrays Bay
Mike Austin



An alteration and extension to a bach once occupied by Mark Wigley, Mike Austin's own residence was dubbed "the ugliest house in the bay". Intended to disturb domestic conventions and to play with the layering of elements and references, the design eclectically marries Gehry-esque elements like crooked windows and wonky metal roofs with 'local' features such as jaunty nautical elements and rough sawn boards nailed crudely over the existing fibrolite cladding. David Mitchell wrote of it in expansive terms: "Austin's maneuvers suggest a powerful way in which a New Zealand architect, well-acquainted with the international architectural world, might deal decently with the architectural task here." Now extended. See *Arch NZ* May/June 1992.

11

ca. 1992

Milford Sound Visitors' Center
Milford Sound Highway, Milford
John McCulloch



Photo: Bruce Foster

Standing on the waters edge at the head of Milford Sound, the complex serves as a link between road transport and tourist boats. Praised as "not an easy building", the design was linked to the lineage of "ground" architecture extending from the Biennale project and the Architect MoNZ scheme. The design makes reference to local geology with "fractured" window joinery layouts and a huge stone facade wall patterned with fissures. Now extended. The facility hit the news recently when it was revealed chemicals leaching from antifouling paints on the boats had reached toxic levels. Uneasy, indeed. See *Arch NZ* Sept/Oct 1992.

12

1993

National Bank
122-130 Karangahape Road
Andrews Scott Cotton



This project became one of New Zealand's most credible expressions of deconstruction beyond the domestic scale. Dense with references to fine art, architecture and the history of the site, the building is a fractured composition in which layered solid and glazed facades and floating canopies slide past each other. The project won an NZIA Branch Award in 1993. See *Architecture NZ* May/June and Nov./Dec. 1993, as well as *Constructional Review* Feb. 1995. ASC employed a similar fractured aesthetic on the now expanded Ronald McDonald House (1994), located nearby at Auckland Hospital. See *Architecture NZ* May/June 1993 Sept./Oct. 1993 and Jan/Feb 1995.

13

1996

New Zealand Installation
Milan Triennale, Milan, Italy
Ross Jenner, Commissioner

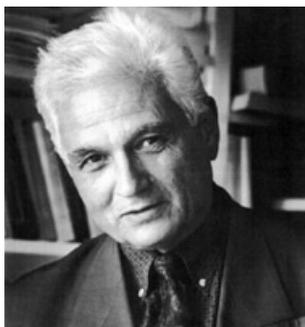


This installation represented NZ among 30-odd other countries and institutions. Like most other entries in this itinerary, it was not explicitly deconstructivist, but followed on the lineage of "ground" projects. The key element of the installation was a huge, white, crumpled plane over which were presented drawings and images of recent Kiwi projects. It was intended to evoke both the paper of the Treaty and the local landscape as "a complex surface of negotiation". Presented at the Palace of Art in Milan from February to May 1996, the installation was later shown at the New Gallery in Auckland. See *Transition* 49/50 (1996).

14

1999

Forgiving the Unforgivable
Town Hall, Auckland
Jacques Derrida



Laurence Simmons, a key player in the emergence of *Interstices*, arranged a visit by Jacques Derrida to New Zealand and an associated conference. Derrida's keynote address was presented at The Town Hall as a public event. It was a measure of local interest in Derrida that the house was filled to capacity for the two-and-a-half-hour session. Indicating deconstruction's then current standing in architecture, however, the lecture was not covered in *Architecture NZ*. See Laurence Simmons & Heather Worth eds., *Derrida Downunder* (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 2001).

Sources:

Except where noted, the photos are by Andrew Barrie. Many thanks to Mike Austin and Ross Jenner for their generous help in preparing this guide.

The most useful general sources on deconstruction include Philip Johnson & Mark Wigley's catalog for the MoMA show, *Deconstructivist Architecture* (New York: MoMA, 1988). The development of the MoMA show was mentioned in *Architecture NZ* March/April 1988 and May/June 1988. The completed exhibition was reviewed by Paul Walker in *Architecture NZ* Nov./Dec. 1988, and the catalog reviewed by Russell Walden in *Architecture NZ* Jan/Feb 1989.

Another useful and well-illustrated general guide is Andreas Papadakis, Catherine Cooke and Andrew Benjamin's, *Deconstruction: Omnibus Volume* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989). See also Aaron Betsky's *Violated Perfection: Architecture and the Fragmentation of the Modern* (New York: Rizzoli, 1990), and Geoffrey Broadbent's rather skeptical *Deconstruction, A Student Guide* (London: Academy Editions, 1991).

For those looking to understand the relationship between the philosophy

and the architecture, try Jacques Derrida, "Architecture Where the Desire Can Live", in Kate Nesbitt (ed.), *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture: An Anthology of Architectural Theory 1965-1995* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), or the section on poststructuralism in Neil Leach ed. *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory* (London & New York: Routledge, 1997).

The Architecti scheme for MoNZ is presented in some detail in the monograph *Architectus Bowes Clifford Thompson* (Auckland: NZ Arch. Pub. Trust, 2004). The Athfield-Gehry-Thompson scheme is included in Julia Gatley's *Athfield Architects* (Auckland: AUP, 2012). Other international names to enter the MoNZ competition included Morphosis, Denton Corker Marshall, SOM, Arup, Douglas Cardinal, Philip Cox and Nikken Sekkei.

A two-volume catalog for the Milan Triennale was published, *Triennale di Milano XIX Esposizione Internazionale: Identity and Difference* (Milan: Electa, 1996), which includes texts by Mark Wigley, Ross Jenner, Rewi Thompson and Sarah Treadwell.