

"simply another thing to keep clean": New Zealand Architecture in the 1990s: a one day symposium

a one day symposium held under the auspices of the
Centre for Building Performance Research, Victoria University
Friday 4th December 2020.

ABSTRACTS

Andrew Barrie and Julia Gatley "Peak Architecture: The decline of international influence in New Zealand architecture"

Our way of telling the history of recent architecture has generally been to periodise it into movements and groups: Bauhaus, CIAM, the Greys and Whites, Deconstruction, SuperDutch. We can tell the story of New Zealand architecture by recounting how these waves of ideas, moving from their points of origin in the northern hemisphere, eventually swept across our shores. We could point to Christchurch Brutalism, local versions of Case Study Houses, and Kiwi Decon. The time difference between New York and Auckland is, so the joke goes, about 10 years.

In the nineties, the international arm-wrestle between the deconstructivists and the postmodern classicists was pushed into the background by the rise of neo-modernism. Following this, however, the notion of groups of architects following aligned paths, guided by commonly held ideas and values, seemed to wane. Influence instead tended to emerge from particular individuals and offices; battles weren't between camps, but between a spray of positions and languages. OMA developed a ruthless extension of form-follows-function modernism; Frank Gehry pioneered the use of fluid geometries; Toyo Ito found new ways of inserting structure into buildings.

In New Zealand in the nineties, neo-modernism quickly became the dominant mode, helped by a rapidly growing regard for the achievements of local mid-century moderns. This paper posits, however, that this rise of neomodernism marks a point at which the evolution of New Zealand architecture detached from that of the rest of the world. While up until that point there had been a slowly growing sense of connection and integration with global architecture, New Zealand didn't make the subsequent steps. Scanning recent New Zealand architecture, it is hard to discern the influence of Rem Koolhaas' hyper-rationalism, or of Frank Gehry's fluid forms, or Toyo Ito's structural inventiveness. We have also not seen the emergence of individuals to spur locally-inflected upsurges—such as Warren and Beaven's leadership of the Christchurch School, or Ath and Walker's influence in the 1970s. In New Zealand, the nineties is the moment of 'peak architecture', a point at which our development and consumption of architectural ideas seems to have gone into decline.

Michael Dudding "Taking the initiative: Melling:Morse and John Tait Village"

The 1990s was a decade of significant change within New Zealand's housing policies, an outcome of the economic and regulatory reform of the preceding decade. One important precursor to the most significant of those changes took the form of an eighteen point set of criteria that were established as the Housing Initiative design guidelines at the beginning of the 1990s. These were aimed at ensuring a greater range of affordable housing for the shifting demographics of New Zealand society. These were first put to the test in a design competition for pensioner tenants of the Housing Corporation. The winning scheme of the seventeen units that were completed in 1992 as the John Tait Village, was a controversial scheme, calling into question the validity of the design outcome and the competition process. The John Tait Village competition entry did, however, have the distinction of bringing together two architects whose partnership, Melling:Morse, would go on to have a significant impact in New Zealand architecture from the 1990s onward.

Tamsin Falconer, Ronnie Pace and Jamie Jacobs "Heritage Preservation, Conservation and/or Restoration: Old Government Buildings in the 1990s"

In the 1990s, a \$25 million project under the management of the Department of Conservation restored the "largest wooden office building in the Southern Hemisphere", converting it into the home of the Victoria University of Wellington School of Law. The restoration project took roughly the same length of time as the original construction. This presentation will present the 1990s work on Old Government Buildings as a case study of heritage practice in the 1990s. We will discuss aspects such as the retention of the heritage lift, the reinstatement of "chimneys" using 1990s construction techniques, use of native timbers, and the decisions made on replication, restoration and strengthening that may or may not be made differently today.

Nigel Isaacs "Keeping cost effectively warm – the inclusion of thermal performance in the NZ Building Code"

The 1990s saw change from the (nominally) prescriptive NZS1900 to the performance-based New Zealand Building Code (NZBC). Although there had been thermal insulation requirements for new houses since 1 April 1978, the change provided the opportunity to develop a performance-based requirement. It also provided the opportunity to include non-residential buildings, notably including for the first-time office and retail buildings. Whilst around two thirds of energy use in houses is for space conditioning (heating) and water heating, in commercial buildings the main energy uses are space conditioning (heating and cooling) and lighting. Extensive background research developed a set of proposed documents, which were then refined using the Committee structure of Standards New Zealand. The three standards (NZS 4218 *Energy Efficiency: Housing and Small Building Envelope*, NZS 4243 *Energy Efficiency - Large Buildings* and NZS 4305: *Energy efficiency: Domestic type hot water systems*) provided an integrated series of standards. The paper will explore the background research, the use of Standards Committees, and the political issues that played a crucial role in delaying the implementation.

David Kernohan "The Move from Kelburn to Vivian Street in 1995: an idyll?"

The VUW Schools of Architecture and Design building was designed by Craig Craig Moller and completed in 1995. The School moved its operations from Kelburn to Vivian Street. This paper discusses the reasons and ramifications both philosophically and physically of the move and what has been its effect on NZ architecture and the profession 25 years on.

Christine McCarthy "From Roper to Regional Prisons"

Among its recommendations, the 1989 Report of the Ministerial Committee of Inquiry into the Prison System included the establishment of "Habilitation Centres" in the community as an alternative to imprisonment. This idea has recently undergone a revival with the last year's *Turuki Turuki* report from the Safe and Effective Justice advisory board's report which recommended the "gradual replacement of most prisons with community-based habilitation centres;" and the Green Party adopting the idea of Habilitation Centres as an election policy.

Habilitation Centres were legislated for in the Criminal Justice Amendment Act 1993 (s102), the same amendment which introduced the sentence of home detention (s103). Four pilot centres were formed, with Christchurch's Salisbury Street Foundation the only one able to claim success. While the SSF is still in operation, the idea of habilitation centres as part of New Zealand's criminal justice system ended with their repeal by section 166(a) of the Sentencing Act 2002 just as the idea of Regional Prisons gained traction. This paper examines the idea and architecture of NZ's Habilitation Centre experiment in the 1990s.

Kerryn Pollock ""That building with the palm trees": Wellington Central Library"

Athfield Architects' postmodern Wellington Central Library (1991) represented the firm's

entry into public architecture. Part of the Civic Square development, Aotearoa New Zealand's largest construction project at the time, it was a propitious turn away from the corporate work that went from boom to bust in the wake of the 1987 share market crash. The library was a critical and popular success, winning three major awards and becoming known as "Wellington's living room." Fast forward to 19 March 2019, and it was closed with a few hours warning due to seismic concerns. Fears for its future prompted a public nomination for the New Zealand Heritage List/Rārangī Kōrero. This paper will explore the building's history, design and heritage values.

Jessica McDonnell-Buwalda "Fact or Façadism: the rise of skin deep heritage in New Zealand"

The protection and conservation of historic architecture has a long history of compromise and tension, with the perceived value heritage in ongoing fluctuation. In most cases when faced with developmental pressure, a heritage building is either retained and conserved or partially/completely demolished. In the grey area that exists between conservation and demolition sits an extreme architecture of compromise - façadism.

A last resort option for preserving the heritage streetscape while still allowing for development, façadism emerged as a means of negotiated compromise between heritage and economics, manifesting itself during the developer led building boom of the 1980s. Those buildings subjected to the practice, where all but the main façade is demolished and a modern edifice is constructed behind, become forgeries of their original selves. But despite representing the antithesis of key conservation values, such as integrity and authenticity which are defined by the ICOMOS New Zealand Charter (2010) as the "wholeness or intactness" and "credibility or truthfulness" of a places surviving evidence, façadism is still widely considered an acceptable conservation outcome for heritage – better to have saved something than nothing at all.

Today, within the New Zealand context there are still cases of façadism being constructed, or deconstructed, around the country. Local examples from Wellington, Christchurch and Auckland are considered in light of the "success" of their varied applications. Using international and local critiques of the practice, the following paper examines arguments that arise around issues of integrity, authenticity, significance and conservation. Highlighting uncomfortable truths about a society willing to accept skin deep heritage as conservation.

Tyson Schmidt ""The mural's value far outstripped the building's worth": art, architecture and protest at Aniwaniwa"

John Scott's Aniwaniwa Visitor Centre is lucky to get a mention in many of the reports and rememberings of the removal of Colin McCahon's Urewera Triptych by Tūhoe activist Te Kaha in 1997. The focus at the time, and even in subsequent retellings, was on the artwork and the personalities involved (including McCahon himself despite dying ten years before the removal). Even when discussed in the context of the performance of protest (or cultural activism as some would have it), the contribution of architecture to this episode is either ignored or downplayed (or not understood).

This paper explores the role that architecture played in the 1997 removal and subsequent return of McCahon's triptych. It builds on earlier research into how protests played out architecturally in the 1880s (Parihaka) and 1980s (Waitangi), primarily through media reports of the protest act, but also looking at how this has been treated by academic literature. While John Scott's Visitor Centre was the initial physical site of the act of protest, there are a number of spaces at play (the Urewera itself, the Auckland City Art Gallery where the triptych reappears, and the undisclosed location where the triptych was hidden for over a decade). The relationships between these spaces reinforce the performance of protest – providing an architectural landscape to New Zealand's most famous art heist.

Linda Tyler "The last decade: the New Zealand architectural designs of Friedensreich Hundertwasser (1928-2000) in the 1990s"

Constructivist in his approach to both painting and architecture, the Austrian designer Friedensreich Hundertwasser's technical innovations in building anticipated many of the principles of sustainability which characterize eco-structures. These include rooftop planting for insulation and temperature control, rainwater harvesting and use of recycled materials including glassware. His regeneration of Kaurinui in Northland has been located by some within the tradition of Land Art in the way in which it interconnects ecology and humanity. He became a New Zealand citizen in 1986 and produced an architectural model called "Spiral Monument" as his entry for the architectural competition for the Museum of New Zealand in 1990. In it, some have seen a hybridizing of Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* with Māori spiral designs. In 2021, his 1993 plan for improving a council building in the Town Basin in Whangārei and making it into an art gallery will come to fruition. His 1998 Kawakawa toilets have become iconic in the North. This paper will consider how these designs from the 1990s reflect Hundertwasser ongoing concern with rejecting rationalism in architecture.

Peter Wood "Once upon a time in Venice: The Invention of New Zealand Architecture at the 1991 Mostra di Architettura di Venezia"

There is little in the history of New Zealand that might resonate against measures of architecture established and perpetuated by Euro-centric socio-cultural development. And yet, in 1991, the University of Auckland was judged to have the World's best school of architecture. The circumstances of this recognition followed the 1992 Venice Biennale of Architecture where, for the first and only time, 43 select architecture programmes were invited to present themselves in open competition in the Corderie dell'Arsenale. The Auckland contribution was an elegant free-standing screen accompanied by a small selection of provocative instrumental drawings, and within the agenda set by the Biennale director, Francesco Dal Co, a claim could indeed have been made that with this win New Zealand, at that time, possessed the most eminent School of Architecture in the World. With hindsight the Venice Prize presented a high-takes paradox for New Zealand architecture. Superficially it offered a weighty endorsement for the pedagogic and disciplinary practices of the Auckland School, especially those associated to discursive modes of technical drawing. However, it did so at precisely the moment in history when these modes of representation were declining in the face of digital developments. But this hasn't hindered repeated attempts to duplicate the success in 1991. With this paper I will re-visit The Venice Prize, and subsequent Venetian visitations, with critical attention turned to teasing out some of trials that accompanied these presentations. In particular, thought will be given to how the narrative for New Zealand architecture presented in 1991 has become a prevailing New Zealand architectural mythology, and I will argue that each return to Venice since 1991 has entrenched this narrative as an ever regressive account of global marginalisation, fragmentation and isolation.