



### TRUTHER TAKEOVER AT TE PAPA

Fresh from a pasting by Kim Hill on Radio New Zealand, Californian architect and 9/11 'Truther' Richard Gage appears at Te Papa on a November Saturday afternoon before a packed house. In the audience of 320, there are 11 architects and 18 engineers. We know this because we put our hands up when he asked. Gage also asks how many of us accept the official view that the Twin Towers were destroyed by fire as a result of aeroplanes crashing in to them (30) and how many are unsure (97). He can't be bothered counting the rest of the audience so assumes the remaining 192 believe that the buildings were brought down by explosives deliberately detonated, which is his position. Employing the audience manipulating techniques of prestidigitators and performing psychics undermines Gage's credibility. But the converted are here; all hail the preacher.

Gage talks at length about the collapse of World Trade Center 7, the 50-storey building that stood 100 metres from the towers and collapsed seven hours after them. He raises questions about how this could have happened, and answers them with a theoretical model of his own construction. Holes develop in his argument when he builds a case for detonated explosions based on a hysterical comment overheard by a fireman. The excited outburst is elevated to evidence and Gage has the 'truth' he is looking for. Apparently.

In the pursuit of his theory Gage overlooks two key considerations: the scale of the catastrophe, and the nature of the response. There was no precedent for 9/11, nothing of its impact (literally) before or since. Engineering design is based on the experience of what has failed and conjecture about what might fail in the future. The scale of the destruction of the Twin Towers could not have been predicted and the event can't be repeated. How buildings perform in such situations can then only be based on evidence – planes hit the towers, they

burnt, then they collapsed. If the fate of the towers does not fit with traditional models of how such buildings would react in such circumstances, those models need to be reviewed. Gage and his fellow travellers won't brook such logic, and instead have constructed their own theory based on their own evidence, much of it flimsy. They would do well to revisit the ideas of William of Occam.

The nature of the catastrophe elicited dramatic responses around the world. Forget where you were when – or if – you heard JFK had been shot; 9/11 is the cultural marker that will define this century and, who knows, this millennium. Responses to the terrorist act were heightened and often hysterical, particularly on the ground in New York – ask anyone who was there. People in the street didn't have access to the arm's length televisual news coverage that the rest of us did. They had to make sense of it as best they could and often their best wasn't good enough. Many of them thought they heard explosions before the buildings collapsed, but how many of these witnesses were in the best position to see and accurately report on this? Yet Gage depends considerably on eye-witness accounts of those whose lives were in most danger, who were reporting on something they didn't really comprehend, while in a state of hysteria. It brings to mind the words of Ambrose Bierce who defined faith as "belief without evidence in what is told by one who speaks without knowledge, of things without parallel". I left our national museum thinking, "All hail, Ambrose Bierce". **Tommy Honey**

### TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE

Trans-Form-ers was a joint venture for Architecture Week, between the University of Auckland School of Architecture and Planning, the Unitec School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, the Unitec Bachelor of Interior Design, and AUT's Department of Spatial Design. Students from the

three schools were challenged to design mobile deployable pavilions that could be taken in convoy from Unitec's suburban site to the old ARC vehicle maintenance sheds near Victoria Park.

At six o'clock on the Friday of the event, the sheds were the site of a magnificent chaos as vehicles disgorged their contents, and hundreds of students (and press-ganged associates, including more than a few bemused parents) deployed and wrestled with their recalcitrant contraptions: unfurling, stretching, suspending, bolting together, wiring up, switching on, tuning, inflating, taping, amplifying, and tweaking. A crew of valiant volunteers from the tutoring staff at Unitec and UA did their best to keep vehicles moving (including towing one misplaced car), and the event organisers (among whom Kathy Waghorn deserves special mention) bustled around looking slightly shell-shocked.

The pavilions themselves (01, 02, 03) were interactive, ingenious, and often funny. It was impossible not to smile at 50 strangers lifting a kind of blimpy parachute into the air and crowding into the bubble-shaped lounge that resulted; or stare in perplexity at performers writhing in latex embryonic sacs on a scaffold, atop which a printer spat pages of updates from Twitter into the air.

Videos of some of the work and its genesis can be seen at [trans-form-ers.blogspot.com](http://trans-form-ers.blogspot.com). Trans-Form-ers bears witness to an inventive enthusiasm for construction amongst the current generation of students, and an energy usually sadly lacking in Auckland's architectural culture. Congratulations to the winners, and thanks to the judging team, lead by Pip Cheshire. **Carl Douglas**

### ERRATUM

In the previous (September/October) issue of *Architecture NZ*, Autex, a supplier of insulation materials to the Ironbank building in Auckland, was misspelled in the credits list for that project.

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