

LOOKING FOR EDGES

Descriptive geometry is generally not taught in schools of architecture these days and so is often poorly known by the readers of this magazine. Nevertheless we can assume that some smart Greek probably said something to the effect that the centre of an object is defined by its edges. Centres are where things are now. They represent, at best, the known and the familiar; at worst they represent the default, secure in its ordinariness and protected from novelty by its far from edgy location. Edges, by contrast, are where new things happen. If one recalls the amoeba (from the Greek amoibe, meaning change, because the organism can change its shape) it is the shapeless foot on the extremity, the pseudopod, which, throwing itself outwards, gradually pulls the whole in a new direction. Taking our cue from the amoeba, to find out where something is going we'd do better to look at the periphery than at the centre.

Having been invited by John Walsh to be a guest editor of this issue of *Architecture NZ* it seemed interesting, or at least potentially interesting, to move away from the centre that the magazine naturally occupies most of the time and to see what was happening on the edges of this country's architecture. At the outset the intention was to feature only people who had not appeared in these pages before: if not a *salon des refusés* then perhaps a *salon des inconnus*, people whose inclinations kept them away from the mainstream and therefore freer to pursue personal agendas, agendas which might nevertheless speak of a different and perhaps new kind of architecture that might return to inflect upon the main body.

But this proved too difficult. No searching of networks could turn up enough unknown players to make an edge team, although they're perhaps these outsiders are still out there somewhere, ready to be exposed to a wider public by this issue... In the end, therefore, there is a mix: some young intellectuals with bright ideas; some older architects no less passionate now than they ever were about what it is that makes architecture important; and some eccentrics who just want to do it their way, architects indifferent to style or fashion but driven by a personal vision of what a life in architecture means.

And then there are those who not only aren't members of the Institute but are not even architects: we shouldn't forget that the ability to make remarkable buildings is not confined to the profession, and that it is sometimes beneficial to look to others who are fuelled by the intensity of their creative visions and sometimes, perhaps, assisted by not having had

an education in architecture. Those who don't know the rules have to make up their own.

As well as dealing with a number of architects or architectural practices this issue also features some projects drawn from architectural education. If, notwithstanding the evidence contained in this issue, there is insufficient edge in New Zealand architecture, then it is in the process of architectural education that the origin of this lack might be sought. The recent report, *Understanding Architectural Education in Australasia*, noted the normalisation process imposed by accreditation systems, the essential hurdle that must be surmounted every five years if an architectural programme is to remain internationally recognised. As the burden of the next accreditation visit bears down on school managements, and as the need to increase research outputs distances staff from the essential role of engaging with students, the opportunities for experimental teaching practice may diminish. It is encouraging, therefore, to see here a number of examples of teaching which, at least for New Zealand, are attempts to do things differently.

Artistic creation is born of resistance to one's era. Architecture takes its material from life, but although this is its source, it is at the same time its enemy. Pragmatism and a complaisant acceptance of what is, or what is accepted, is the antithesis of the creative process which lies at the heart of architecture. To be threatened, stimulated and sometimes angered by what is outside can provide a potent source of creative energy. It was this sense of individual purpose that was sought when considering subjects for this issue of the magazine.

The pull of gravity is always towards the centre. But gravity is the force which that weighs us all down; sometimes the imagination needs to be freed from that ponderous attraction. Away from the hegemonic pressure of the centre, on the remote fringes where things are less conventionalised, architecture can be lighter. Its smell and taste and colour can be more intense. These are the highly personalised and somewhat distant realms that this issue of *Architecture NZ* seeks to identify. Experimental and inelegant work on the edges may occasionally be – and many of the ways of working in architecture shown here represent either blind alleys, or are too idiosyncratic for easy replication. But each is an example of that worthy cause: the battle against the bland. We could do with more of this architecture, and more of these architects. **TONY VAN RAAT**

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