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THE BROADSHEET OF THE AUCKLAND BRANCH OF THE NEW ZEALAND INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS

**BLOCK**

## Considering Christchurch

Mike Hartley on Shaky Grounds



*Deserted: Empty streets in the wake of one of Christchurch's many recent earthquakes*

For some it dawns immediately. For others, they need to experience and feel it before an event becomes a reality.

In the last few months I've had three trips to Christchurch. The following discussions and visceral experiences have led me to an understanding of where Christchurch is now.

*'You know you're from Christchurch when: GeoNet is saved as your homepage.'*

My visits to Christchurch have all had 'after shocks'. I find them thrilling. Adrenaline coursing through your veins will do that. However I have not been there for the big three; for those who have, Chinese water torture would be more pleasant. People can only take so much 'flight or fight' readiness; their bodies and minds are weary.

### *Project manager – demolitions:*

**MR** It's process, we need to get demolition consents and then need to contact every person who has a vested interest in that building to notify them of their half hour access.

**MH** Half an hour... doesn't seem very long to clear out...

**MR** We can't guarantee safety, no one can. We simply don't know when the next shock will hit. We not too keen on having people just wandering around...

**MH** There's a few blank slabs – quite a few buildings have already come down.

**MR** Yep, we've had to leave the slabs. The Historic Places Trust see the opportunity to excavate Christchurch's past. However there simply aren't enough qualified people to do it, so we have to seal it all in with the slab for when the appropriate qualified excavation can be done.

*Continued on p.2...*

## Considering Christchurch *Continued from p.1...*

*'Yuck, what happened to the water?'*

As high school chemistry students setting experiments we were advised that the water flowing from conventional plumbing was most likely to be purer than any distillate that we could ever produce. The natural filtration process occurring as the underground water made its way from the Southern Alps down to the sea really did a great job. Opening a tap let forth water that had the fresh crisp taste of a mountain stream. Now it tastes like any other large city. 'Tainted water' is a massive blow to the identity of those living in Christchurch.

*Architect:*

*MH* You busy?

*NF* Not more than usual, not yet. It's very strange. There is an obvious need but the projects are yet to take form. The traditional project drivers are considerably different right now. It seems to be a waiting game.

*MH* Yet we have competitions for 'temporary homes' that no architect is invited to.

*NF* Hmmm temporary. Likely to be there for a while...

*Walking around the western edge of city I am struck by how strangely deserted it is. There are many signs of population, drinks half full at outdoor cafe tables, awnings at full stretch above, gas heaters poised. No one there, a movie set on a break.*

My parents moved into the city for the concentrated amenity that cities provide. Friends, food, the arts, goods and services all in close proximity. One trip 'to town' could tick off the whole list. The list is now achieved in fits and spurts. Supporting the same shops, services and people requires multiple trips, often to separate suburbs. A one-hour trip now takes three. Why stay? They're not. The city will take many years to rebuild, years they would prefer to spend elsewhere.

*Engineer A – trip into the 'red zone'*

*JR* Yeah g'day. I've got a couple of Auckland Architects here. I want to show them my building.

*Checkpoint Charlie* We can show you photos.

*JR* Na, they need to see it.

So after a completing the formalities we were admitted to the 'Red Zone' but only after we had been told to keep an eye out for fence jumpers. There had been five that morning. In two hours all we saw were three police cars.

*MH* The destruction is quite incredible, it looks as if they all need to come down. How come there wasn't more after the first one?

*JR* February, while being less on the Richter scale, measured the highest ever recorded in terms of acceleration, 2G. Pretty much straight up. Carnage.

*Carrion is in the air.*

The smell is incredible, memories of farm offal pits scream forward, though apparently this is due to thousands of abandoned lunches. We walk past a McDonalds, the stench is ripe. We thought they lasted forever...

*Engineer B:*

*AW* The Insurance Companies hold many of the cards at the moment.

*MH* Do we really want insurance companies setting the project frameworks for rebuilding a city?

*Where to from here?*

The destruction is overwhelming. The latent potential to re-envision the city has been exposed. The possibilities to resolve public spaces are alluring. Who knows, 'the square' might even become a place worth inhabiting rather than just passing through.

What are the catalysts for the regeneration and regrouping of a dispersed city? I suspect there is huge potential for architecturally seeded projects forming the basis for a reconsidered city. *MH*

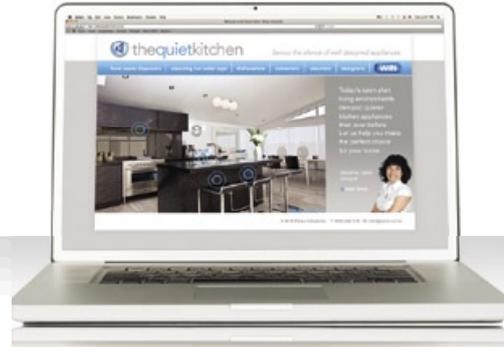


*Where to from here? It's a long road back.*

# Shhh...

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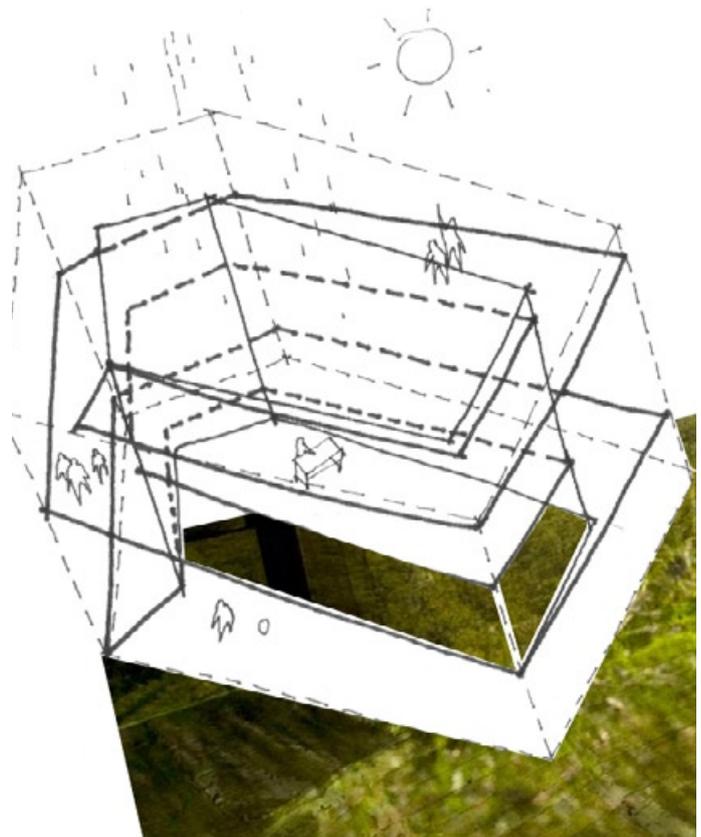
## Against Recycling Nature Carl Douglas Considers Buildings Beyond Site

'Ecology' sounds like something to do with science and solar panels, animal liberationists and atmospheric chemists. But Timothy Morton, author of *Ecology without Nature* (2007) and *The Ecological Thought* (2010) claims otherwise. Rather than being a topic or an area of study, he suggests ecology is simply exploring the consequences of a single thought: that everything is connected. It's not a very complicated thought, and as far as philosophical insights go, it seems kind of obvious. We're fairly well house-trained now when it comes to recycling and checking where our food comes from and switching off the lights – or at least we know we're supposed to feel guilty we when transgress in these areas, because we're supposed to have a bigger picture and understand the far-flung effects of our local actions. What Morton suggests, however, is that being ecologically-minded is not just considering a subset of our actions that have larger-scale effects, but recognising that *all* of our actions have such effects.

Some odd implications follow from the axiom that everything is interconnected. To begin with, there is no longer any outside. We throw our waste away, but it comes back to us because 'away' was never really a place. As philosopher Bruno Latour puts it,

"There is no reserve outside in which the unwanted consequences of our collective actions could be allowed to linger and disappear from view. Literally there is no outside, no *décharge* where we could discharge the refuse of our activity... It is not only Magellan's ship that is back but also our refuse, our toxic wastes and toxic loans, after several turns." (*Harvard Design Magazine* n.30)

Because there is no outside, ecology, in Morton's eye, has little use for the concept of Nature. He puts it as bluntly as



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No boundaries: A kindergarten which traces connections beyond its property envelope

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## Against Recycling Nature *Continued from p.3...*

saying that Nature does not exist, that it is a ghost “dressed up like a relic from a past age,” that “haunted the modernity in which it was born”. His reasoning has nothing to do with dubious postmodern idealisms that claim nothing really exists; on the contrary, he is completely committed to the real existence of the Great Barrier Reef, global warming, plutonium, and coffee plantations. What he rejects is the idea that some of these things are Nature, and that Nature is an *outside*.

Nature, he contends, is an entirely synthetic construction, an artificial segregation of things into two classes: the Natural and the non-Natural. We're highly finicky about how we like our Nature: trees, mountains, and birds are great, but slime moulds, earthquakes, and rats aren't. Everybody wants to save the baby pandas, but pity the poor activist trying to get people to care about slugs. When we talk about Nature, we tend to imagine a small set of things that we like. Nature has long been a conceptual touchstone for architecture and urban design, where it often appears as an emblem of harmony, authority, and purity. Nature is an idealised image of the world we find ourselves thrown into. It is also a reductive image, because it requires us to draw a circle in the sand labelled 'Nature' and decide on what goes inside it and what doesn't. Instead of a new *concept* to replace the old one ('the environment', for example), Morton suggests we need a new *practice* – the practice of tracing connections.

A shift like this might make us reconsider one of the most common givens of architecture: the property boundary. Property boundaries allow territory to be parcelled into neatly sealed units which plug into a limited number of inputs and outputs (water, power, and waste connections, for example). The boundary is a perimeter that can be policed as private space, discrete from the public space outside. But when we isolate something like this, we are imagining its connections to be severed in a way that cannot happen. Surface water, for example, has a notorious disregard for property boundaries, as do sound, vibration, animals, and light. Ecological practice, I submit, would begin for an architect not with Greenstar accreditation (as worthy as such an accreditation might be), but with the tracing of connections, particularly where they cross such boundaries. The drawing above is a concept sketch for an inner-city kindergarten on Emily Place that aspired to be this kind of architecture: instead of a fenced plot, it was imagined to be a place of constant passage for children, teachers, passers-by, sun, air, water, birds, plants, food, and voices.

Nature is an imaginary place. The fantasy of an *outside* world is dangerous when all we have available are more *interiors*. To imagine that our projects are sited in Nature is to fantasise about disconnection: to imagine that there is a world out there separate and unaffected by the world within the borders of the project. Nature is a bankrupt idea: too small, too idealised, and too disconnected. Latour writes, “I am all for recycling, but if there is one thing not to recycle, it is the notion of 'nature'!” CD



## NZIA Membership Category Changes

Given the rapidly changing nature of the profession the NZIA Council is currently considering changes to membership categories and is seeking feedback on this from the Branch committees and membership ahead of our Council Planning day to be held on August 6th. Please email your thoughts and opinions to Tim Melville at [tim@rtastudio.co.nz](mailto:tim@rtastudio.co.nz).

The RIBA recently commissioned a study, Building Futures, which sets out to explore the future role of architects, asking: who will design our buildings in 2025; what roles will those trained in architecture be doing then and how will architectural practice have changed as a result? Through a series of one-to-one interviews and round table sessions the study aims to examine the breadth of those who shape the built environment: including traditional architects and those working in expanded fields of practice, as well as clients, consultants and contractors. The resulting speculations provide an opportunity for discussion and interrogation - an exploration of the imminent changes likely to affect the industry over the next 15 years. The key findings are summarized below. They have pertinence for our examination of our current membership categories and how well they will meet our future needs as an Institute of Architects.

The thoughts of Indy Johar are particularly relevant to this discussion. He is a qualified architect and policy researcher. He is a director of the global Hub network, co-founder of Hub Makelab – a supportive eco-system for social startups. He co-founded 00:/ [zer'o zer'o] in 2005, a design strategy practice focused on catalysing change in our cities, towns and neighbourhoods through a fusion of physical and institutional interventions. Projects range from the scale of low-carbon homes, developing a new class of learning institutions, to community led neighbourhood retrofits and 'mass collaborative' community master plans. Indy has taught and lectured at various institutions from Columbia University New York to Saïd Business School Oxford.

Indy Johar, writing “an open letter to the professional Institute” (the RIBA), has said: “One thing is certain – we are in a period of change and liquidity that we have not witnessed for just over a generation. This change will almost certainly reconfigure our cities, towns, suburbs and villages – and by consequence us, as a profession. Make no mistake, there will be no ‘back to normal’; we are at the tipping point of a systemically different conversation.”

“Which means, inevitably, we need to think about the institution and its role in agitating, facilitating, encouraging, catalysing, driving, narrating, interrogating and sharing our reflections – but fundamentally driving the systemic renewal of the profession – from our ethics, to our knowledge base, to our forms of practice and overcoming the existing pathways of dependencies, momentum and capability gaps buried deep within the ecology of our ‘profession’.”

“This requires a progressive institution built to reflect the challenges and opportunities presented not by the 20th century but the 21st century. I would therefore argue that it may be time to explore new modalities and behaviours for such institutions. And I would suggest that as a starting point we need to understand the following:

1. We are not a membership organisation. We are a learned society - driven by the logic of knowledge and public value and learning as opposed to the interests of its members.
2. We are a profession - not an association of consultants. Our first duty is to do no harm to the places where we work, regardless of who pays us and how much we are paid. We are privileged to co-shape places which will significantly outlast the hands and financial instruments that made them – so we are curators of that near and long term future.
3. Our knowledge and IP ecology as a profession is fundamentally fragmented and isolated across thousands of small organisations. Imagine an institution which understood the solution was not to promote larger organisations but to create a platform for sharing our individual knowledge. This would be

an institution where we would all become more valuable and viable.

4. The purpose of the "title" of architect is not to build a castle around the profession and help keep people out but to build a lighthouse to attract, interrogate and advocate the best talent, ideas and practice. Imagine an institution that did not have to sell its associative "brand" but became a true content aggregator of knowledge and practice and a filter for evaluating and showcasing best and next practice - leading the propositional debate for the progressive evolution of our cities, towns and villages.
5. As practitioners we are increasingly operating in a complex and dynamic world where innovation flourishes through a process of iterative interaction with the locality, citizens, customers, suppliers and knowledge institutions, and deep scientific and technological research. Imagine a profession which reframes its learning ecology - from University to CPD to reflect this innovation reality and respects the systemic role of practice in innovation and research.
6. We are in a new world - where social frameworks and the modes and methods of people organising themselves are being revolutionised. Imagine an institution born today, in the age of Twitter, Crowdfunder, personalised budgets, wikipolicy responses, Facebook, TEDx, iPhone Apps and LinkedIn for a new learned movement not just a society.
7. The physical setting of such a professional institute should not be a living history museum that merely showcases its members but a place for discourse and conversation. Imagine an institution which is made of a thousand coffee shops throughout the land rather than the single "awe-inspiring" monument - a micro massive institution fit for purpose, and open to public scrutiny and engagement.

The time to build such an institution is now and the responsibility to build it ours - the members, if we are to leave a living legacy to a future generation of place makers, as opposed to just history".

Although not specifically stated, it could be inferred that collectively, the Institute's objects are intended to ensure the ongoing development of a capable and diverse architectural community to meet future needs, so its existence is not incompatible as such. However, it may be that the way we regard ourselves and our role as an institute has become inflexible.

Any proposal looking at future needs must necessarily assume some knowledge of what those needs are, but the discussion can begin within our own New Zealand architectural community and outside it, and draw on those published elsewhere, for example by the RIBA under the banner "Building Futures".

At a grass roots level, a key issue is the inflexible nature of the label 'architect'. This has two main implications: a practice may be being held back in terms of the type of work they do; and the Institute may not be being sufficiently flexible to allow for a wider range of member 'types', engaged in a broader range of activity than is currently allowed for.

The term 'architect' is perhaps being regarded as a 'brand', dictating an assumption of what you do and how you will do it. The limitations of doing 'traditional architecture' are embedded in the reality that that role has been changed in a variety of circumstances; some may even say eroded or invaded.

At the same time some architects are still annoyed that some designers are still presenting themselves as 'almost architects', offering service in the traditional manner as a means of winning clients and getting onto the ladder. There is still, for many, architects and designers alike, the ability to make a living from producing a personal service, and show resilience to change in at least the medium term.

This subject matter will be at the basis of Council's planning day to be held on August 6<sup>th</sup>. One approach allows for both traditional roles, continuing the brand "architect" as the dominant membership category, and new ones, allowing recognition of the

broader reaching, interdisciplinary concept of architectural practice. Further it allows for those who are not architecturally qualified but are part of the built environment landscape to be allowed, as it were, inside the architects' tent.

Working towards this broader definition of a member of the NZIA will assist graduates in the future to move into career paths leading to a wider range of roles in the built environment professions and to better respond to the changing nature of practice. It will also assist those "once were" architects, i.e. those who have moved into other areas of work and who, because of the NZRAB's requirements for continued registration, have been or will be in danger of being lost to the profession.

## UoA International Architect-in-Residence 2011

Following on from the studio led last year studio by Momoyo Kaijima of Tokyo's Atelier Bow-Wow, The University of Auckland School of Architecture and Planning has appointed Cameron Sinclair of Architecture for Humanity as its International Architect-in-Residence for 2011.

Sinclair and Kate Stohr founded Architecture for Humanity (AfH) in 1999 as a charitable organization to seek architectural solutions for humanitarian crises and provide design services to communities in need. Over the past decade the organization has worked in 26 countries on projects ranging from school, health clinics, affordable housing and long-term sustainable reconstruction. Sinclair himself has become a global leader in the field of post-disaster design and socially conscious efforts by architects to improve living conditions through innovative and sustainable design.

In the upcoming semester, the entire third and fourth studio programs at the School will be focussed on Christchurch earthquake recovery projects. Sinclair will be providing general input to the 200 students undertaking this work, as well as leading a specific studio for 15 students. Sinclair's studio is related to a project currently being carried out by AfH's Auckland Chapter, which involves working with students and staff of Unlimited: Paenga Tawhiti, a state-funded Montessori secondary school that has lost access to its 'red zone' Cashel Street premise. The project involves developing a new set of ideas that will inform its permanent re-establishment. As part of the project, the studio will use a participatory methodology that builds on a recent AfH charette and remotely engages with the school, its communities of interest and local design practitioners. A particular focus of the studio will be to examine the dynamic yet cohesive urban patterns that would be generated when a school becomes the hub of community redevelopment in Christchurch.

Cameron Sinclair will present a public lecture as part of the School's Fast Forward 2011 Lecture Series on July 27<sup>th</sup> 2011 at 6.30pm, Engineering Lecture Theatre 439, 20 Symonds Street (10 CPD Points). For more info: [www.creative.auckland.ac.nz/uoa/fast-forward](http://www.creative.auckland.ac.nz/uoa/fast-forward)

