



*Proceedings of the Society
of Architectural Historians,
Australia and New Zealand
30, Open*

Papers presented to the 30th Annual Conference of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand held on the Gold Coast, Queensland, Australia, July 2-5, 2013.

<http://www.griffith.edu.au/conference/sahanz-2013/>

Andrew Barrie, "Architecture to a Fault? Deconstructivist Architecture in New Zealand" in *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand: 30, Open*, edited by Alexandra Brown and Andrew Leach (Gold Coast, Qld: SAHANZ, 2013), vol. 1, p 29-40.

ISBN-10: 0-9876055-0-X

ISBN-13: 978-0-9876055-0-4

Architecture to a Fault?

Deconstructivist Architecture in New Zealand

Andrew Barrie

University of Auckland

The late 1980s saw the rise to international prominence of “deconstructivist architecture”. This approach emerged in the early 1980s, but was lodged at the centre of international debate in 1988 by two events held on either side of the Atlantic—a symposium at The Tate Gallery in London, and an exhibition at New York’s MoMA. The 1995 Light Construction exhibition at MoMA, which included post-deconstructivist work by a number of those involved with the 1988 show, might be understood to mark the end of deconstructivism’s international ascendancy. In this short period, deconstruction was central to debate about architecture globally, and could be expected to have had a significant impact in New Zealand. The tangible impact of deconstructivist ideas and motifs on New Zealand’s architectural culture was, however, limited. This paper surveys the local built results of deconstruction’s brief period of preeminence.

In New Zealand, deconstruction, with its desire to challenge or subvert established notions, came together in an unusual way with another internationally prominent stream of thinking, critical regionalism, with its concern for the geographical and cultural context of the building. These streams intersected in notions of “ground” and “fault” that saw the literal and metaphorical ground for architecture in New Zealand being unstable and fissured. A “deep-grinding energy” was posited as characterising both our lively geography and evolving bi-culture, and was invoked to explain the “aesthetic of fragmentation” apparent in local projects. Examining a series of key New Zealand texts and design works from the 1980s and 1990s, this paper traces the arc of this specifically Kiwi version of deconstruction. It notes the particular role that landscape played in local discourse, and outlines the connections that existed among a relatively small group of academics and designers responsible for this work.



Turning to the Horizon

The 1980s were turbulent times in New Zealand. Significant events included the Springbok tour in 1981, the election of the Lange Labour government in 1984 and the radical program of economic liberalisation that followed, the sinking of the Rainbow Warrior in 1985, and the stock market crash of 1987. It was a period when many of the key moments in the nation's social and economic history originated locally rather than flowing on from events occurring abroad.

New Zealand architecture, however, followed the opposite pattern. In the 1970s Warren and Mahoney, JASMaD, and the “New Romantic” architects (Roger Walker, Ian Athfield, Peter Beavan, Claude Megson, and John Scott) had been at the height of their creative powers, making architecture that many regarded as creating something unique to New Zealand.¹ In the 1980s, though, many local architects again turned their eyes to the horizon, adopting and adapting ideas from abroad rather than continuing to develop their personal languages.

1. “The New Romantics in Building,” *Designscape* 41, (October 1972), insert 5.

In the decade's prosperous middle years, leading local architects embraced the various forms of postmodernism that swept ashore from northern points of origin. In 1984, Philip Johnson completed his AT&T Building. This building's arrival on the Manhattan skyline, complete with “Chippendale” pediment, was widely regarded as legitimising postmodern classicism at the highest levels of international architectural and corporate culture. Postmodern classicism was finding similar acceptance in New Zealand at around the same time, with leading firms adopting the idiom: colonnades, pediments, and porticos become a key feature of Warren & Mahoney's work, starting in 1984 with the multistory colonnades of the Church Heritage Trustees Building in Christchurch; in Wellington, Athfield Architects employed a flamboyant pastel classicism in the Oriental Parade Apartments (1989) and colonnaded the rooftop of Telecom House (1988).

In the less giddy times that followed the 1987 stock market crash, many local architects became receptive to both the aesthetic of fragmentation and skeptical stance linked to deconstruction. The architecture of “violated perfection” had emerged in the early 1980s, but was lodged at the centre of international debate by two events held on either side of the Atlantic in 1988—a symposium organised by architectural publisher

Academy Group at The Tate Gallery in London in April, and an exhibition curated by Philip Johnson and Mark Wigley held at New York's Museum of Modern Art from June to August. The list of architects included in *MoMA's Deconstructivist Architecture* show had been the subject of much discussion and intrigue—it included Frank Gehry, Daniel Libeskind, Rem Koolhaas/OMA, Peter Eisenman, Zaha Hadid, Coop Himmelb(l)au, and Bernard Tschumi.² A publication based on the Tate symposium added James Wines/Site, Morphosis, Elia Zhengelis, Hiromi Fujii, Aquitectonica, and Emilio Ambasz to the list of key deconstructivists.³ Wigley and Johnson's exhibition catalog declared that deconstruction was not a movement but "a curious point of intersection among ... architects moving in different directions."⁴

2. The story of the exhibition's controversial development and Wigley's involvement is entertainingly told in a chapter entitled "Canon Fodder" in Michael Sorkin, *Exquisite Corpse* (New York: Verso, 1991), 254-259.

3. Andreas Papadakis, ed., *Architectural Design Profile 72: Deconstruction in Architecture* 58, no. 3/4 (1988).

4. Philip Johnson & Mark Wigley, *Deconstructivist Architecture* (New York, Little, Brown/New York Graphic Society Books, 1988), 19.

Wigley and Johnson suggested that deconstruction would be short-lived, and they were right. *The Light Construction* exhibition at MoMA, which opened in September 1995 and included post-deconstructivist work by a number of those involved with the *Deconstructivist Architecture* show, might be understood to mark the end of deconstructivism's international ascendancy. In the short period between 1988 and 1995, deconstruction was central to debate about architecture globally, and particularly given Mark Wigley's local influence could be expected to have had a significant impact in New Zealand. The tangible impact of deconstructivist ideas and motifs on New Zealand's architectural culture was, however, limited. This paper surveys the local built results of deconstruction's brief period of preeminence.

The Corruption of Innocence

Unusually in an architectural culture characterised by a persistent sense of being on the periphery, New Zealand architecture had a particular connection to deconstruction's trans-Atlantic advent: Auckland enfant terrible Mark Wigley had popped up at the center of the action in New York. In 1986 Wigley completed a doctoral thesis entitled Jacques Derrida and Architecture: *The Deconstructive Possibilities of Architectural Discourse* at The University of Auckland under the supervision of Mike Austin.⁵ The thesis examined the architectural argument embedded in Derrida's work in the period before Derrida became directly engaged with architecture through projects with Bernard Tschumi and Peter Eisenman. Eisenman was invited to act as

5. A reworked version of the thesis was eventually published as Mark Wigley, *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida's Haunt* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).



one of the thesis' examiners, and would later facilitate Wigley's entrée into the New York architecture scene, including making an introduction to Philip Johnson.⁶ Wigley's expertise and attitude impressed Johnson, who invited him to help put together the 1988 *Deconstructivist Architecture* show at the MoMA. Demonstrating Kiwi fascination with Wigley's foreign exploits, reports of his involvement appeared in *Architecture New Zealand* at various stages during the preparation of the exhibition, and were swiftly followed by reviews of both the show and the associated catalogue for which Wigley had provided the main text.⁷

Prior to this, Wigley had achieved local notoriety as the presenter of television programs on New Zealand architecture. His commentary during the shows was critical of local "high" architecture, avoided mentioning the name of even a single contemporary architect, and praised the supposedly banal architecture of tourist towns.⁸ In 1986 Wigley had been similarly contemptuous of the New Zealand architecture scene, but at that time judged its deficiencies to also represent a hidden potential. Alongside architectural academic Ross Jenner and art historian Francis Pound, Wigley had judged the first Resene Paints Architecture Exposition, entitled *Tabula Rasa*.⁹ The Exposition was intended to elicit "new interpretations and new opinions relating to architecture in New Zealand."¹⁰ In a whimsical and inexplicit essay commenting on the competition, Wigley characterised New Zealand as defined by "not a certain architecture but a certain resistance to architecture."¹¹ Arguing that while the Kiwi obsession with construction and function seemed to preserve local architecture in a condition of innocence, Wigley suggested that this traditional was secretly corrupted, a condition that meant "a deconstruction of the institution of architecture is only possible here."¹² He proposed that New Zealand's position hitherto outside international debate gave it a unique role to play: "the possibility of participating in that debate by subverting it."¹³

The Insinuation of Architecture

Whatever resistance existed in New Zealand's architectural culture, it didn't last very long. Not only did local architects and academics begin absorbing and debating the international work, but key international figures began appearing on the local scene. Some early attempts at connection were frustrated: Wolfgang Prix of Coop Himmelblau was to visit in 1987 but cancelled due

6. Pers. comm. Mike Austin to author, January 24, 2013.

7. The development of the MoMA show was mentioned in *Architecture New Zealand*, (March/April 1988), 88, and in *Architecture New Zealand*, (May/June 1988,) 103. The completed exhibition was reviewed by Paul Walker in *Architecture New Zealand*, (November/December 1988), 100-102, and the catalog reviewed by Russell Walden in *Architecture New Zealand*, (January/February) 1989, 66-67. The Tate symposium was mentioned in *Architecture New Zealand*, May/June 1988, 103.

8. See Kent Dadson, "Docktor at Large," *Architecture New Zealand*, (November/December 1987), 100-101, and Diana Witchtell, "High Culture in a Small Country," *Architecture New Zealand*, November/December 1987), 101-103.

9. A second Ex-position was organized by Nigel Ryan in 1988, and took on a more international flavor. The "Uncanny*Atopia*Fiction" theme was set and judged by Thomas Leeser of Eisenman's NYC office (and flatmate of Mark Wigley) and Renato Rizzi from the school of architecture in Venice. See Greg Bowron & Nigel Ryan "Resene Exposition," *Architecture New Zealand*, (November/December 1988), 89-91. Leeser and Rizzi would reappear as entrants to the MoNZ design competition.

10. *Resene News*, Winter 1988, 1.

11. Mark Wigley, "Paradise Lost and Found: The Insinuation of Architecture in New Zealand," *New Zealand Architect*, 5, (1986), 44.

12. Wigley, "Paradise Lost and Found," 45.

13. Wigley, "Paradise Lost and Found," 45.

14. "Te Papa Tongarewa: Museum of New Zealand," *Architecture New Zealand*, (July/August) 1990, 31.

15. See, for example, J. Rose "Absolutely Positively Mediocre," *Architecture New Zealand*, January/February 1995), 8.

to illness, and Peter Eisenman was booked as a keynote speaker at the 1988 New Zealand Institute of Architects National Conference but cancelled at the very last minute. Thom Mayne of Morphosis managed to complete his 1989 lecture tour, but perhaps the key moment of arrival for deconstruction occurred with the competition for the Museum of New Zealand (MoNZ), held in 1989. Although it was intended as a search for a design team rather than a design, the project's ambition was to create a building that would "express the total culture of New Zealand."¹⁴ The two-stage competition drew 38 first stage entries, including several in which local architects partnered with high-profile deconstructivists, including Morphosis with Hames Sharley, and Renato Rizzi with Thomas Leeser and Sinclair Group. The most significant entry resulted from a collaboration between Gehry and Associates, Athfield Architects, and Rewi Thompson. The design was a cluster of the prismatic pavilions that characterised Gehry's deconstructivist work (although Gehry himself resisted the deconstruction label). Despite not being selected for the second stage, the Athfield-Gehry-Thompson scheme had an enduring presence in the national architectural consciousness due to its relentless promotion by Russell Walden.¹⁵ Walden was appalled that the proposal was overlooked, his criticism of the judging becoming particularly accusatory when the 1997 Bilbao Guggenheim catapulted Gehry into the architectural stratosphere. It should be noted, however, that while the MoNZ scheme was prepared at the time Gehry began developing the ideas that crystallised at Bilbao, had it been built it would have sat in a rather frustrating position as the last of Gehry's decon-



Figure 1. Athfield Architects with Gehry & Associates, and Rewi Thompson, Museum of New Zealand Competition Entry, Wellington, 1989. Courtesy Athfield Architects.



structivist 1980's works rather than ranking among his groundbreaking 1990s designs. We would have got EuroDisney, not Guggenheim.

The first example of Kiwi deconstruction to proceed into built form was Memphis (ca. 1990), a bar on a prominent site in Parnell, Auckland, although the project might be dismissed as rather confused décor. Designed by Paul Francis of Francis Clarke Architects, the building's "demolition" look made use of deconstructivist motifs such as crooked windows, rotated axes, and disrupted grids.¹⁶ The project's deconstructivism was, it was claimed, "not intended," and the aesthetic and conceptual confusion was reinforced by the way it combined deconstructivist motifs with elements seemingly drawn from other than current modes—the work of the Italian Memphis Group (checkerboard surfaces, typography) and postmodern classicism (Doric columns).¹⁷

16. "Memphis – explosion in a chopstick factory?" *New Zealand Commercial Design Trends* 2, no.3, (1991), 32.

17. "Memphis," 33.

Two houses built in the early 1990s were far more intelligent and sophisticated. The A.B. Gibbs House (1991) in the affluent suburb of Westmere, Auckland, was designed by Noel Lane of Lane Priest Architects. 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 their architect as "an assemblage of independent elements, of disciplined irregularities."¹⁸ While this bold, self-assured collage took an approach comparable to deconstructivist dwellings that might have been built at the time in suburban Santa Monica or Stuttgart, the Austin House (1992) was more inflected by its coastal New Zealand context. Built in the seaside suburb of Murrays Bay, it was designed by Mike Austin for his own use. An alteration and extension to a bach once occupied by Austin's former student, Mark Wigley, the building was dubbed "the ugliest house in the bay."¹⁹ Intended to disturb domestic conventions and to play with the layering of elements and references, the design eclectically married Gehry-esque elements such as crooked windows and tiled metal roofs with "local" features such as jaunty nautical elements (sails and pipe railings) and rough sawn boards nailed crudely over the existing fibrolite cladding. David Mitchell noted the potential of the building's intrepid interweaving of local and global: "Austin's maneuvers suggest a powerful way in which a New Zealand architect, well-acquainted

18. Noel Lane, "Suburban Subversion," *New Zealand Home & Building*, (October/November 1991), 24.

19. David Mitchell, "The Ugliest House in the Bay," *Architecture New Zealand*, (May/June 1992), 28.



Figure 2. (L) Mike Austin, Austin House, Auckland, 1991. Photograph by the author.

Figure 3. (R) Andrews Scott Cotton, The National Bank on Karangahape Road, Auckland, 1993. Photograph by the author.

20. Mitchell, "The Ugliest House in the Bay," 31.

21. Wigley, "Paradise Lost and Found," 45.

22. Andrew Barrie, "Block Itinerary n.47, Deconstruction in New Zealand," *Block: The Broadsheet of the Auckland Branch of the NZIA*, (January 2013), 5.

23. ASC employed a similar fractured aesthetic on the now expanded Ronald McDonald House (1994), located nearby in the grounds of Auckland Hospital. See Jonathan Mayo, "The Attraction of Opposites," *Architecture New Zealand*, (January/February 1995), 88-94.

with the international architectural world, might deal decently with the architectural task here."²⁰ Six years earlier, Wigley had asserted that New Zealand had an intact building tradition "that could be "interrogated in such a way that undermines the distinction between building and architecture."²¹ Given Austin's referencing of the tradition of crude, improvised bach construction, this project might be regarded as exposing the "corrupted innocence" of New Zealand architecture in just this fashion.

A more slickly resolved project was The National Bank on Karangahape Road (1993) by Andrews Scott Cotton, a building regarded as one of New Zealand's most credible expressions of deconstruction beyond the domestic scale.²² Dense with references to fine art, architecture, and the history of the site, the building is a fractured composition in which layered sections of solid and glazed facade and floating canopies slide past each other.²³ As was often the case internationally, the architects of this building didn't directly connect their work with deconstructivist theory. As elsewhere around the globe, the places in New Zealand where this theory was most eagerly embraced were schools of architecture, appearing most visibly in a new magazine, *Interstices*, which first emerged from the Department of Architecture at University of Auckland in 1991. Edited by academic Ross Jenner and post-graduate student Nigel Ryan, this scholarly journal evolved from an annual series of University of Auckland seminars focused on new developments in theory. The introduction to the first issue boldly declared its deconstructive ambitions: the journal was not intended "to reaffirm existing normative standards and canons, nor to rest comfortably in the supposed self-sufficiency of the building object, regional identity, composition, nature, function ... but to explore the interstices, the gaps and fractures within an institution that appears solid, secure and fixed."²⁴ The first few issues presented contributions



by international deconstructivists such as Renato Rizzi, Mark Wigley, and Morphosis, as well as work by locals—most of them with links to the University of Auckland—including Mike Austin, Nigel Ryan, Ross Jenner, Mike Linzey, Bowes Clifford Thompson, and Rewi Thompson.²⁵ *Interstices* served, in essence, as the focal point for the small community of architectural deconstructivists active in New Zealand.

Fault, Faltering, Faulting

Key members of this community were involved in a series of Kiwi deconstructivist projects that developed a particular focus on “ground” which served to localise deconstructivism’s global concerns. This approach was crystallised in 1991 with an installation by the University of Auckland Department of Architecture at the 5th Architecture Biennale in Venice. It was included in the Venice Prize exhibition, a section of the Biennale that included 43 architecture schools from around the world. The installation, entitled *Architecture to a Fault*, explored the themes 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 an enlarged wooden Micronesian navigation map. The installation was awarded the Venice Prize, a “best in show” award equivalent to the contemporary Golden Lion. This award ranked among the most important moments of international recognition that had then been received by New Zealand architecture.

The installation was accompanied by an essay by University of Auckland academic Michael Linzey, published in the Biennale’s official catalogue.²⁶ 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 saw in the work included in the installation.²⁷ As implied in this text, in New Zealand deconstruction often came together in an unusual way with aspects of another internationally prominent stream of architectural thought—critical regionalism—with its concern for the geographical and cultural context of the building. These streams intersected in notions of “ground” and “fault” that saw the literal and metaphorical ground for architecture in New Zealand being unstable and

24. Ross Jenner, “The Spaces Between,” *Interstices* 1 (1991): vi.

25. The story of the journal’s origins and development is told in Ross Jenner, “Interstices,” in *20/20: Editorial Takes on Architectural Discourse*, ed. Kirk Wooller (London: AA Publications, 2011), 255-62.

26. Mike Linzey, “Architecture to a Fault,” *Interstices* 2 (1992): 190-194. Originally published in Italian as “L’architettura dell’incertezza,” in *Quinta Mostra Internazionale di Architettura* (Milano: Electa, 1991), 154.

27. Linzey, “Architecture to a Fault,” 190, 193.



Figure 4. (L) The University of Auckland, *Architecture to a Fault* Installation, Venice Biennale, 1991. Photograph by the author.



Figure 5. (R) *Architecti*, Museum of New Zealand Competition Entry, Wellington, 1989. Courtesy Architectus.

fissured. The “deep-grinding energy” that Michael Linzey posited as characterising both our lively geography and evolving bi-culture was invoked to explain the “aesthetic of fragmentation” apparent in local projects.

This obsession with unstable ground had been clearly expressed in the MoNZ competition entry by *Architecti*, a project that had been included in the Venice installation. The *Architecti* entry, one of five selected for the competition’s second stage, was developed by a partnership that included Cook Hitchcock Sargisson, Bowes Clifford Thompson, John Scott, and Ross Jenner. Connecting the weak bearing provided by 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.”²⁸ It had been a long time since a major earthquake had struck urban New Zealand, 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.”²⁹

28. “*Architecti*,” *Architecture New Zealand*, (July/August 1990), 38.

29. “*Architecti*,” 38.

One built design was explicitly linked by both its designers and commentators to the lineage of “ground” architecture extending from the Biennale installation and the *Architecti* MoNZ scheme: John McCulloch’s Milford Sound Visitors’ Center (ca.1992). 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 makes reference to local geology through a huge stone facade wall patterned with fissures and fractured window joinery layouts.³⁰

30. Angus Patrick, “Finding Fault: An Architecture at the Edge,” *Architecture New Zealand*, (September/October 1992), 32.



The series of “ground” projects received a late addition in the form of the *Paper to Architecture, Architecture to Paper* installation at the 1996 Milan Triennale. This installation, produced under Ross Jenner as Commissioner, presented New Zealand architecture alongside displays by 30-odd other countries and institutions at the Palace of Art in central Milan from February to May 1996.³¹ The key element of the installation was a huge, white, crumpled plane over which were presented drawings and images of recent New Zealand projects. It was intended to evoke both the paper of the Treaty and the local landscape as “a complex surface of negotiation, which bears the signs of strife and laceration.”³²

31. The installation was later shown at the New Gallery in Auckland.

32. Ross Jenner, “Milan Triennale, New Zealand Entry,” *Transition* 49/50 (1996): 94.

The Milan installation proved to be the last in the series. The recognition provided by the Venice Prize might have been expected to legitimate this version of deconstruction in New Zealand architecture. The Venice exhibit was widely celebrated in local and international magazines, and was the subject of a presentation at the 1991 NZIA Conference.³³ The “ground” approach was also less of a break with New Zealand’s architectural traditions than might have been supposed—it can be seen as a theoretically informed continuation of the concern for landscape context that was central to New Zealand’s regionally inflected post-war modernism. But interest in this approach petered out as deconstruction’s influence declined internationally in the mid-1990s. However, in a peculiar coda to this story, the three themes—deconstruction, fragmented buildings, and New Zealand’s plate tectonics—came together again in a painfully literal way following the recent Christchurch earthquakes. During the disaster clean up, the term “deconstruction” entered the common vocabulary, either as a euphemism for demolition (particularly of heritage buildings) or a term referring to the careful dismantling of buildings in order to recover construction materials. The first major urban earthquake in eighty years served as a reminder that while conceptually challenging and visually exciting, such subversions of structure and stability as deconstruction had sought were “resisted” by architects for good reason.

33. See Debra Miller, “Success in Venice,” *Architecture New Zealand*, (November/December 1991), 76-79, “The Venice Prize,” *Interstices* 2 (1992): 189-201, and Franco Purini, “The First Forty-Three Schools: The Schools of Architecture at the Venice Biennale,” *Lotus International* 73 (1992): 6-24.

A Return to Innocence?

In the years following deconstruction’s 1988 emergence, skirmishes continued in international architecture circles between key deconstructivists and high-profile postmodern classicists (and

their allies, the New Urbanists). Given that three of the seven *MoMA Deconstructivist Architecture* exhibitors would go on to win architecture's highest honor, the Pritzker Prize, it was a battle that, in the realm of high architecture at least, the deconstructivists might be regarded as having eventually won.

In New Zealand, however, outside the architecture schools and corner bars, deconstruction generated remarkably little architecture. The talk was rarely walked. On the other hand, Warren & Mahoney alone produced more than a dozen large buildings in the postmodern classicist idiom. Volume is a clumsy measure of the impact of ideas, but based purely on built results, in the local battle between deconstructivism and postmodern classicism, classicism won hands down. In New Zealand, it would be postmodernists Miles Warren and Ian Athfield who were awarded New Zealand Institute of Architects Gold Medals. Of course, placing NZIA Gold Medals alongside Pritzkers is hardly a fair comparison, but it does give a clear indication of what was valued in the global and local contexts respectively. It demonstrates that while deconstruction forms one of the main lines of development in architecture internationally, it failed to take on a similar importance locally.

In 1999, deconstructivism's fall from grace in New Zealand architecture was demonstrated by a public event. Laurence Simmons, a University of Auckland academic and key player in the emergence of *Interstices*, arranged a visit by Jacques Derrida to New Zealand and an associated conference.³⁴ Derrida's keynote address was presented at The Auckland Town Hall as a public event, and it was a measure of local interest in Derrida that the house was full to capacity for the two-and-a-half-hour session. However, unlike the Tate symposium and MoMA show a decade before, the lecture was not even mentioned in *Architecture New Zealand* or *Interstices*.

Despite much debate, local hero Mark Wigley's role, and the legitimization of Venice Prize, deconstruction's tangible impact in New Zealand was limited to a paper schemes, temporary installations, and a few relatively small buildings, most of them produced by a remarkably small group of designers and academics. Deconstruction's impact was felt most clearly in the schools of architecture, perhaps contributing to the ongoing local preoccupation with representation. It certainly influenced a generation of PhD students who trained in the late 1980s and early 1990s, many of whom have themselves taken up teaching

34. A volume of edited essays appeared from the conference: Laurence Simmons & Heather Worth eds. *Derrida Downunder* (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 2001).



roles in those schools. Some might think that deconstruction's limited impact was not unique to New Zealand. Could this also be the case in other places outside the northern hemisphere centres of debate? Could deconstruction mark a disruption in the supposed centre-to-periphery flow of ideas?

The advent of post-modern 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. This new work was decried as inauthentic and obscurantist, a view in turn criticised as anti-intellectual and inarticulate.³⁵ However, both deconstruction and post-modern classicism 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 the New Zealand scene. While such major shifts as those signaled by Rem Koolhaas' hyper-rational methodology or Zaha Hadid's fluid geometries have been much discussed in New Zealand, there is little evidence of their being adapted for local use. New Zealand has 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 the local architectural mainstream. New Zealand may in fact have returned to the condition Wigley identified in 1986, one of resistance to architecture. Twenty-five years on from deconstruction's brief flowering, the issue for New Zealand's architectural culture may not be its dependence on overseas ideas but its independence from them.

35. See, for example, Pip Cheshire, "The House that Jack Built," *Architecture New Zealand*, (July/August 1991), 5.