Author: Leach, Andrew

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Campus Confessions: Architecture and the Central Institute of Technology

Andrew Leach
Wellington Institute of Technology

Established in 1960, the Central Institute of Technology taught engineering and paramedical programmes not replicated in New Zealand universities and polytechnics. An extensive architectural project matched the educational strategy of the Institute in a campus spread across 23 hectares of Heretaunga in the upper Hutt Valley, north of Wellington. The design brief assumed that the location within New Zealand was irrelevant due to the specialist nature of its courses. Consequently, substantial brutalist buildings rise above the suburban fabric of Upper Hutt catering for the education and accommodation of a revolving student population of thousands. This paper examines the relationship between institutional structures and their architecture through shifts from familiarity to disestablishment. Government educational policy changes in the late 1980s allowed a competitive model of education to work through the tertiary sector, compromising the original intentions of CIT both as a specialist educator and as a custom-built architectural complex. The implications of the future of the Heretaunga campus is further explored through the controversial (and protested) decision to return custody of the complex to the Crown on 30 June 2001 for non-educational purposes. Is the value of the Central Institute of Technology's architecture and landscape independent of its educational function? What does the failure of the latter say of the former? This paper places these particular events within a wider discussion of architecture as a manifestation of educational program.

“If the secondary schools had not been so hide-bound, if they had [made] their programmes more liberal and realistic, New Zealand would possess not only a better system of secondary education but also technical education of a more advanced character. Incidentally, educational authorities would not be faced with the problems of conflict, overlap and co-ordination that are likely to trouble them for many years to come”.

John Nicol, The Technical Schools of New Zealand, 1940.

“Given a virgin site, enlightened clients and public funds, radical solutions can be achieved that in towns would be ruled out by commercial and bureaucratic pressures.”


The architecture of education, grounded in the university—a “space” for the formation and defence of theses, exists first as a disciplinary and philosophical structure, then as a physical space containing the delivery of lectures, experimentation and accommodation. “The university”, writes Mark Wigley, “has an architecture before it has buildings”.1 New Zealand’s Central Institute of Technology, though not a university, invokes ideas prompted by the architecture of education, suggesting a theoretical strategy for considering this Institute’s built environment. Indeed, the confluence of an emerging new phase in local educational strategies with the arrival to New Zealand of the aesthetics of The New Brutalism results in an architectural and a educational experiment played on the same campus. Time has not been kind to this venture: the Central Institute of Technology closed on 30 June 2001. As the political “architecture” supporting its activities became increasingly hostile, its physical architecture and landscape reverted to Crown ownership, stripped of their function. This essay therefore seeks to record the Central Institute of Technology as an educational and architectural moment in New Zealand’s history. Yet within that history, architectural and otherwise, lie clues to a tension underlying rational and “truthful” intentions. The resulting fissures in the Institute’s architecture highlight an inherent complexity within the architecture of The New Brutalism that, when played out in the theatre of the Central Institute of Technology project, provides a provocative dimension to its history.

New Zealand's system of technical education is one legacy of Sir Robert Stout—"a genuine admirer of technical education in the abstract"—who (already Premier of the Colony) became Minister of Education in 1885. Stout instigated a minor reform in New Zealand's primary school curriculum: the inclusion of drawing as a compulsory subject. Few teachers were versed in the fundamentals of drawing, and the Wellington Education Board established, in 1886, the Wellington School of Design to educate teachers in drawing. Railing against "the neglect of technical training" Stout instigated reforms in the 1880s and 90s to train the ninety per cent of students who had left primary school to join the workforce. By 1910, legislation allowed for "technical day schools", where post-primary students could study technical subjects. The "Education Act 1914" named these institutions "technical high schools", where students could either study full time or in the evenings after their daytime employment. William La Trobe's 1904 report to the Education Department alluded to the eventual form of these developments: "we look forward to the day when technical schools, in the large centres at any rate, will cease to be what to all intents and purposes they are at present—namely, evening schools only—and will take their place alongside the secondary schools as institutions at which scholars, on leaving the primary school, may continue their education along lines suited to their respective avocations".

As post-war industry regained some momentum into the 1950s, "technicians" emerged as a new category of employee, complementing tradespeople and university-trained professionals. Particularly in engineering, but also in commercial and scientific subjects, technicians required specific training that the trades' bases of technical high schools could no longer provide. Their studies towards three and four-year certificates were, after a time, able to be cross-credited with some degree programmes, indicating a shift in alliance from the technical secondary schools to introductory university programmes. A further refinement to the higher education system was instigated by Clarence Beeby (head of the Education Department from 1940 to 1960) and Bernard Lee (the Department's adviser on senior technical teaching.

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3 Nicol observes in this regard: "New Zealand employers have never as a class become convinced of the value of serious technical instruction, and afford little encouragement to the earnest student who, if reasonable rewards were forthcoming, would make the sustained effort necessary for acquiring mastery over the sustained principles governing his work", p 3.

4 Nicol, The Technical Schools of New Zealand, p 24. The Wellington School of Design has since been known by other names: Wellington Technical College, Wellington Polytechnic and now as a College of Massey University.


6 In a report written in 1904, William La Trobe outlined the aims of the "technical high schools" as they were formalised a decade later: (1) to "equip the student for intelligent apprenticeship and citizenship"; (2) to "provide a preliminary training for our evening students"; and (3) to "furnish, for the brighter students, a means of preparing to enter the University or the specialised Mining School, with a view to higher work on the same lines"—Nicol, The Technical Schools of New Zealand, pp 76, 119-120.

7 Appendices to the Journals of the New Zealand House of Representatives, Section E-5, p 11; cited in Nicol, The Technical Schools of New Zealand, pp 71-72.

8 Dougherty, Bricklayers and Mortarboards, pp 22-23. The test case (1960) involved the cross crediting of NZ Certificates in Engineering by the University of Canterbury to replace the first two years of the Bachelor of Engineering. Other examples across technically oriented disciplines subsequently followed and still persist.
from the early 1950s to 1969). Beeby was critical of institutions teaching everything from “spelling to professional engineering”; this model, he suggested, had come to the end of its time. Beeby sought to separate the senior end of this spectrum. Establishing a test case, he proposed that, from 1960, the Hutt Valley Memorial Technical College, a technical high school following the 1914 Education Act model, “graduate” to become a national technical institute, moving its secondary school students to a different site. He thus established a precedent for institutes offering day studies for adults at a level between the university and trades training: the Central Technical College, a nationally focussed institute offering technical programmes not replicated in other centres.  

Although the second national technical education provider—the Technical Correspondence Institute had been established in 1946 following wartime education efforts of the Army Education and Welfare Service—the Central Technical College was the first institute where national presence was reinforced by an architectural corollary. Taking further steps towards autonomy, it adopted the name Central Institute of Technology in 1963, teaching specialised courses in pharmacy, occupation therapy, nuclear medicine, radiography, dental technology, podiatry and orthopaedic technology as the decade unfolded. Still in transition, the Institute continued to teach regional block and evening courses for a variety of trade and technical subjects. The 1963 name change accompanied a Government decision to relocate the Central Institute of Technology to a green-field site in Heretaunga. One year later the Education Department split the Institute in two, leaving a new Petone Technical Institute to focus on the regional (primarily trades) as the Central Institute of Technology focussed on national (primarily technical) concerns. The Institute’s first principal, Jim Bateman, reflected after 25 years: “For the first time in New Zealand an institute offering only fulltime courses for technician and professional students was established. That meant no evening classes, no part-time day releases from work, no trades courses”. Ian Dougherty suggests: “This exalted position would contribute greatly to the institution’s phenomenal rise—its removal would have played a major part in the CIT’s ultimate demise”. 

The Central Institute of Technology appointed Haughton and Mair as architects in 1965 following an extended period of anticipation. The first building (B Block) constructed for the Institute on its original Petone site accommodated courses that would ultimately reside with the Petone Technical Institute: plumbing, welding, metalwork, machines, etc. Sited alongside older art deco styled administration (A Block, 1937) and classroom (C Block, 1932) blocks, the decidedly modern rhythm of the B Block’s alternating ridge and valley roof line architecturally signalled a shift away from the school’s traditional role. The new building housed an advanced engineering facility; effectively a mechanised shell, its completely flexible internal partitions (the folded steel truss roof spans 100’) allowed the building to adapt to technological advancements.

9 Dougherty, *Bricklayers and Mortarboards*, p 25. His comment in full: “A conglomerate type of institution, catering for 12-year-olds and adults, and teaching everything from spelling to professional engineering, has served the country well, but we can scarcely expect it to meet the more complex needs of the future.”

10 “Pharmacy was the first national course offered. The two-year course was the first full-time post-university entrance course to be provided in a technical high school, and was a milestone on the road to the placement of technical education in the tertiary sector”, Dougherty, *Bricklayers and Mortarboards*, p 27.


12 The terms “polytechnic”, “technical institute”, and “institute of technology” may be read as being equivalent in New Zealand. No legislation has forced a universal nomenclature for this part of the tertiary sector.


16 Cited by Iona McNaughton, “Institute Records Years of Growth”, *The Evening Post* (Wellington), 16 April 1985, p 16.


18 “Workshop and Laboratory, Central Institute of Technology, Petone”, *NZIA Journal*, (20 August 1968), p 236.
By the time of the project’s publication in the NZIA Journal (1968), the Government’s plan to split the Central Institute of Technology in two was widely known. The trades and part-time professional technician’s courses remained at Petone under the banner of the Petone Technical Institute, which formed after some delay in 1976. The remaining programmes (full-time professional and technician courses) re-established on a new site in Heretaunga. The Central Institute of Technology “being developed as an Institution concerned with national as distinct from the local and regional courses which are the concern of other Institutes”, was “established” architecturally eight years after its political and administrative formation.

Haughton and Mair were given approval to conduct site studies on a 23-hectare Crown land-holding formerly used by the nearby Trentham Army Camp as an extended car park for military vehicles during and after World War II. The firm, having some inkling of the magnitude (and value) of the commission, was entirely committed to an architectural response that reflected the importance of the project as a social and political event.

The Wellington-based office of Haughton and Mair, which had begun as Crichton and McKay in 1901, was a well-established and respected firm. The number of its partners who have variously held the New Zealand Institute of Architect’s presidency and complementary executive positions evidences its long-standing involvement with New Zealand’s architectural politics. Naturally, this reputation was enhanced by the “old boys network” of professional returned servicemen, and the list of respectable clients held historically by the firm was well maintained; the Bank of New Zealand, Woolworths, the Education Department and various hospital boards sit among the client register. Indeed, during the early 1960s a large amount of the firm’s work had been in the health sector, designing and renovating hospitals across the country. From this time, the Kenepuru Maternity Hospital designed for the Wellington Hospital Board offers an example of their capabilities in practice. Robert Haughton was the 1969 recipient of the Winston Trust Hospital Award, “which enabled him to undertake study travel overseas”, further demonstrating the firm’s ability to deal with the complex institutional design briefs. When combined with Lindsay Mair’s good contacts in the Education Department the firm’s history and profile indicated a weighty case for their commission to develop the Heretaunga site.

In 1968 the partnership appointed Chris Brooke White, then aged 29, to work on the commission. Brooke White had recently returned to New Zealand after some time abroad. (Coincidentally, he had received his secondary school education at Hutt Valley High School, which had subsumed students from the dissolution of the Hutt Valley Technical High School.) He graduated from the Bartlett School of Architecture with first class honours, working then in the offices of Basil Spence and Llewelyn-Davies Week. Entering the architectural scene in London in the late 1950s, and in these professional environments in particular, the young Brooke White could not have avoided the debates surrounding Peter Reyner Banham’s construction of “The New Brutalism”. Haughton and Mair subscribed to The Architectural Review, and would have been well aware of Banham’s assertions in its pages and the responses published by the appointed protagonists of the movement and other onlookers. The fortuitous timing involved in receiving the Central Institute of Technology commission at the same time as Brooke White was seeking work on his return to New Zealand is as likely a reason as any for his appointment to the firm. Additionally, the professionally conscious Haughton would have known of Spence as a former

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19 The Petone Technical College has since been known as the Hutt Valley Polytechnic and now as the Wellington Institute of Technology.
20 Dougherty, Bricklayers and Mortiarboards, p 31.
21 “Workshop and Laboratory, Central Institute of Technology, Petone”, p 235.
22 Name changes over the last century have seen the firm variously called Crichton, McKay and Haughton, Haughton and McKeon, Haughton and Son, Haughton and Mair and now Bullyment Fortune. For a comprehensive review of the first half-century of this firm, see Martin McCarthy, “The Haughton Partnership: An Historical Review”, Barch report research, Victoria University of Wellington, 1982.
23 Its solid character might be well illustrated by comments passed on the death of Vivian Haughton, father of Robert, the partner ultimately responsible for the Heretaunga project: “It is a remarkable fact that, throughout his professional career, he remained with the same firm and in the same premises and continued on the practice as a partner and then a senior partner—a span of 49 years”. “Obituary: Vivian Haughton”, Journal of the New Zealand Institute of Architects, (1957): 270-271.
26 As the key figures in these events have since died, some speculation is necessary.
president of the Royal Institute of British Architects (1958–1960) whose impact had been significant in courting the architectural attention of politicians.\(^\text{27}\) He would also have likely read his knowledgeable commentaries on church architecture at the time of the now famous Coventry Cathedral competition not won by the Smithsons.\(^\text{28}\) Likewise, he would have been familiar with Llewelyn-Davies new towns projects—the design for Milton Keynes completed only in 1967—as well as his health-care work.\(^\text{29}\)

Dennis Fortune recalls that Haughton and Mair was anxiously awaiting the approval to proceed with the Central Institute of Technology project.\(^\text{30}\) They would have understood the design imperatives associated with the massive capital outlay of establishing a completely new educational complex; the project demanded a contemporary and well-resolved response. The details of Brooke White’s résumé—an architect recently returned from England, an honours graduate of the Bartlett with references from Richard Llewelyn-Davies and Basil Spence—likely secured his position in the partnership and saw him assigned to work on the Central Institute of Technology.

Although the inhabitation of the Heretaunga campus became more complex in the following decades, Brooke White’s July 1969 site plan shows a small number of large-scale buildings operating along essentially orthogonal north-south and west-east axes. The linear development extended in relation to a link block, from which the School of Science (Block A; construction 1969–1972) extended to the north and the School of Engineering (Block B; construction 1969–1972) to the south. A classroom block (Block D; construction 1969–1972) lay to the west of the link, and a lecture theatre extension faced eastwards. Sitting next to the School of Engineering was the “engineering low block” (C; construction 1972–1974), containing workshop and laboratory facilities. The administration block (G; construction 1969–1971) was detached from the interlinked complex to the northeast. The largest of the buildings are monumental in scale, Block A extending 60m from the link block and rising five levels to 12m. Likewise, the shorter Block B is the same height but 45 metres in length (although it was planned as a four not five storied building). In each case, the interior is organised by a striking 12m long spiral corridor (interrupted only by fire-stops doors in the link block), from which classrooms, laboratories and staff offices are orthogonally organised on the lateral. The gridiron façade of these two blocks (punctuated on one side by the lecture theatre and on the other by Block D) is articulated by windows set in faceted and polished quartz aggregate modules of approximately four metres square.\(^\text{31}\) Until the start of 1973, courses run at Heretaunga effectively taught from a building site. An absence of stairwells, for example, meant that large amounts of laboratory and classroom equipment were carried up ladders and scaffolding in the link block. The ordered, institutional character of these buildings rises as a stern backdrop to the primarily single level suburban fabric of southern Upper Hutt. The formal characteristics of the other, smaller, buildings follow the cues established in the Schools of Science and Engineering; the composition of buildings into the stage one complex is careful and appropriate.\(^\text{32}\)

The most idiosyncratic element of the campus is the substantial lecture theatre block (F), housing three large theatres (each lined in rather too much 150x25 and 100x25mm tongue and groove timber). The external appearance of this block is extraordinary, sited between the ordered façades of the Schools of Science and Engineering. Block F sits above the ground as an expressive and textured concrete form, finished in concrete ribs, chipped (between 1972 and 1975) to provide an artificially rough, brutal finish. The architectural celebration of this Block further testifies to the political shift that the Institute was undertaking, reinventing itself as a university environment. Even if its programmes of study would not include degrees until the education reforms of 1990, the modes of learning were collegially orientated: students learned by attending lectures, tutorials and laboratory sessions. The lecture theatre, traditionally

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\(^{27}\) "Obituary: Basil Spence", \textit{RIBA Journal}, 84, 1 (January 1977): 40. Haughton may have met Spence during his historical 1965 visit to Wellington, where he allegedly sketched a suggestion for the new administration offices for the New Zealand Government: the Beehive.


\(^{30}\) Dennis Fortune, pers. comm., 6 June 2001.

\(^{31}\) The drawings dimension the modules at 13 feet three inches square. All measurements are taken from the volume labelled "Central Institute of Technology Heretaunga, Stage One, Working Drawings, Haughton and Mair Architects, Wellington NZ", containing drawings from 1968–1969.

\(^{32}\) Residential and support facilities, constructed between 1972 and 1981, are not considered in this paper.
the most identifiable environment supporting the transfer of knowledge from masters to students, as an architectural element, calls attention to new structural elements present in New Zealand technical education.

A formal comparison of Blocks A and B with Marcel Breuer’s design for an IBM research complex in La Gaude further reveals an interesting architectural reference.53 This latter project, published in Architectural Forum in 1961 and then in Bauen und Wohnen in 1963, would have been accessible to Brooke White. The reference (which, if unintentional is interestingly coincidental) places the Central Institute of Technology into an dialogue with, on the one hand, education with an architectural expression primarily through the brutalist form of the lecture theatre and, on the other, the steady control of technology as a concern of New Zealand’s future, signalled by Breuer’s late modern IBM complex. The three-foot recesses in the windows of Breuer’s building are mimicked in the Schools of Science and Engineering, although the “bright Mediterranean sun”, often absent from the upper Hutt Valley, does not force the Brooke White response past more than a formal faceted gesture.

Prime Minister Norman Kirk was not so sensitive to these nuances of architectural referencing. Opening the Central Institute of Technology on its new site in 1973, he is rumoured to have likened F Block, with its “wrinkly” concrete finish, to “an elephant’s arse”.54 In fact, Kirk was less than impressed with the liberal use the Central Institute of Technology had made of the Education Department’s chequebook. Calling the recently finished and well-appointed James Cook Centra to mind, he referred to stage one of the project as the “Heretaunga Hilton”. His displeasure at the amount of money furnished on the Central Institute of Technology (evidenced by extraordinary amounts of native timber panelling now only rivaled by grey carpet as the primary material finish) led to much tighter budgetary controls on further phases of the project. These other phases importantly included the Bateman Library and a 500-bed residential facility; both finished before the turn of the decade. These events identified an anomaly in that private firms rarely received commission for public architecture, given the strength of the Ministry of Works and the Government Architect’s Office.55 From the time of the Institute’s opening, the architects struggled against the project being handed to the Ministry of Works for completion. Principal Jim Bateman opposed the Ministry’s involvement on the site, responding to Education Department suggestions to this effect and stating that the Institute enjoyed the freedom and individuality that a private practice brought to bear on the Institute’s architecture.56

As the campus grew, it remained characterised by its attention to the needs of those academics, technicians and students whose professional lives were being cultivated in its bounds. Its composition reflects Brooke White’s concerns for the relationship between people and their environment. Ian Athfield comments that Brooke White was as interested in streets and cars as he was in buildings; architecture acts as a backdrop to the events that constitute our lives.57 The campus, as an expression of landscape, and the buildings, as three-dimensional resolutions of design work, become a stage for learning. In effect, the constructed elements of the Central Institute of Technology became the foundation for the secondary construction of education.

The Central Institute of Technology campus firmly belongs to what Paul Walker describes as “the gulag archipelago of New Zealand university campuses”, emerging from the coincidence of the 1960s and 70s

55 One further exception is found in the Ilam Campus of the University of Canterbury, primarily designed by Architecture Warren and Mahoney; Holmbury Eichhorns of the Ministry of Works designed the School of Engineering.
56 The “In Committee” Minutes of the Central Institute of Technology Council’s Building Committee, 12 March 1980, records: “Mr Bateman noted that recent advice from the Department of Education indicated that they favoured the employment of the Ministry of Works and Development as CIT architects for future work and that in his opinion such a situation may very well result in CIT losing the essential control that experience had shown to be necessary”. (Archives of the Central Institute of Technology).
57 Ian Athfield, pers comm, 6 July 2001.
"boom period of campus building in New Zealand" with "the local peak of New Brutalist influence". An émigré of one sort from the United Kingdom, Brooke White no doubt brought some understanding of the New Brutalist sensibility back to New Zealand. Writing in the populist *Architecture in Britain Today*, Martin Webb observed in 1969 that British architecture had been characterised by "lack of discrimination between good and bad; emotion prejudice against new forms; and inflexible planning". Yet over the 1950s and 60s, he suggests, "standards have risen sharply", returning to Great Britain an architecture "more alive and more responsive to everyday needs than at any time since the 18th century". Webb’s book begins with chapters on new universities, colleges and university accommodation. An unattributed quotation from *The Architectural Review* establishes his case for campus architecture as a dynamic microcosm of total-environment design with the complexity of urban designs: "University architecture in the 1960s in Britain has released, and is consuming, a long pent-up flood of interest and skill in the planning and shaping of total environments. It commands, and exploits, the whole gamut of architectural activities". Likewise, the Central Institute of Technology is resolved as a total environment of architecture, planning and landscape.

Although it is difficult to justify the Institute as a local exemplar of The New Brutalism, its design manifests some interests common with the "movements". In 1955, Banham characterised The New Brutalism by three primary characteristics: "1—Memorability as an Image; 2—Clear expression of Structure; and 3—Valuation of Materials ‘as found!’". For a country somewhat removed (geographically) from the events to which Banham responded, the "movement" articulated through the pages of *The Architectural Review* carried more weight than the actual buildings produced by Banham’s practising protagonists. Compounded by Brooke White’s first hand experience of 1950s developments, this likely informed many choices made on the project. Justine Clark and Paul Walker suggest:

"International influences on New Zealand architecture were neither unified nor brought to bear on local architecture in any singular way [...]. Despite this complexity it is important to consider the local work not only in terms of particular achievements but also from the view point of the wider discourses which in part moved it."^24^.

The wider discourse of The New Brutalism, as it arrived to New Zealand with Brooke White and was manifested in the Heretaunga campus, was the abstracted idea of, as Robin Middleton suggests, "an architecture of ruthless integrity and social intent". Robin Boyd reinforces this aspect of the "movement", saying: "For the New Brutalism was certainly the most articulate of all the attempts to re-establish the original integrity and strength of modern architecture that occurred after the soft decade following the war". Whether it progressed beyond that phase of development is the subject of Boyd’s review of Banham’s *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?*, yet he acknowledges that the "quality of aggressive candour" referenced the energy with which Le Corbusier had responded to a tired Europe 30 years before.

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28 Paul Walker, "Rough Poetry", in Gavin Hipkins, *The Habitat*, Auckland; Art Space; Wellington; Adam Art Gallery, 2000, pp 16-17. The exhibition which Walker’s essay accompanied was limited to campuses of officially recognised New Zealand universities (Auckland, Waikato, Massey, Victoria, Canterbury, Lincoln, Otago), therefore excluding the Central Institute of Technology. The formal similarities of the projects justify, I think, discussing them in the same context.


"The definition of the New Brutalist ethic appears much clearer than that of the aesthetic. It had almost nothing to do with being brutal. It was a revival and a tightening up of the code of early functional-structural morals." 47

Banham’s notion of New Brutalist architecture celebrated truth and rejected buildings that exhibited “an excess of suaviter in modo” to the detriment of “its brutality, je-m’en-foutisme, its bloody-mindedness”. 48 In this way, he could hold up Hunstanton School by Alison and Peter Smithson as an example “almost unique among modern buildings in being made of what it appears to be made of”. 49 Bloody-mindedness in building was to be matched by clear imageability: “Basically, it requires that the building should be an immediately apprehensible visual entity, and that the form grasped by the eye should be confirmed by experience of the building in use”. 50 Reinforcement by tactile architectural experience aside, the primacy of the eye cannot be detached from the visual precedents actively engaged by the artists of the collaborative Independent Group. Banham himself suggests that the “more sophisticated and aesthetically literate” would know the “Art Brut of Jean Dubuffet and his connection in Paris”. 51

Dubuffet’s art brut celebrated the “raw” in contemporary art: “Mud, rubbish and dirt are man’s companions all his life; shouldn’t they be precious to him, and isn’t one doing man a service to remind him of their beauty?” 52 However, Banham’s investment in art brut was a component of the art autre championed by French art critic Michel Tapié. He used the concerns articulated in Tapié’s 1952 Un art autre to articulate a theory of une architecture autre in the context of his New Brutalism article. 53 The Brutalist notion of l’autre in art which its proponents tried to apply in (and proposed for) architecture, sought an “unarguable truth which resided beneath the trappings of form”. 54 Commitment to the a-formal truth of modernism’s “other” was necessarily linked to the characterising “undercurrent of anti-traditionalism and anti-conventionalism” of the post-war art autre. 55

While Dubuffet’s art brut demonstrated one preoccupation of the art autre, the process-orientated surrealism offered ready and provocative models for anti-establishment gestures, drawing on automatic and semi-automatic techniques. 56 Reconstructing what Peter Smithson had called the “inheritance from Paris”, Nigel Whiteley notes the importance of Tristan Tzara, whom Smithson’s contemporary Eduardo Paolozzi had spent time with in Paris, and the Group’s interest in Dada. 57 Brutalist architecture conceived in this sense of automatic and subconscious production, while no doubt considered as a serious question by the Independent Group, was inevitably paradoxical. Whiteley draws a comparison between the works displayed in the Institute for Contemporary Art’s Parallel of Life and Art exhibition (1953) and those aspects of the Smithson’s work to which Banham attached significance:

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56 Whiteley, “Banham and ‘Otherness,’” p 189.
57 Scalbert, “Parallel of Art and Life”, p 61. Scalbert further explains the “Paris connection”: “As [Peter Smithson] saw it, he and Alison got this thing from Paolozzi, and Paolozzi got it from Jean Dubuffet. Hence they were, he claimed, “the inheritors of Paris [...] Paolozzi stayed in Paris from 1947 to 1949. His journey was not atypical at a time when every aspiring artist wanted to mix with the Surrealists [...] By Paolozzi’s own account, his most significant meeting was with Tristan Tzara [...] Though never a Surrealist, he had been a friend of Breton and was able to offer insights into the movement”, p 58.
“To think of architecture as a debris from life, or as the Smithsons intended with Brutalism, as the direct result of a way of life, was an irresistible conceit and a fascinating paradox. But a paradox, it shall remain.”

The “impossible aspiration” for buildings to be “automatic and unconscious” (as surrealist architecture) or traces left from the “spontaneous combustion of life” (as Dada) left Banham to articulate a more complex conceptual shift from art autre to architecture autre.” The bréton brut aesthetic associated with New Brutalist buildings operated as a clear corollary to Dubuffet’s anti-classical art brut. Popular culture (as engaged by Richard Hamilton) and technology (a theme evident throughout Banham’s œuvre) suggested additional methodologies not considered by “traditional” sources or even “modern” experiments. A vigorous revision of architectural “modernism” perhaps leaves the strongest trace of une architecture autre. Rather than reacting against the history of pre-war architecture, The New Brutalism subverts the formalism of architectural Modernism through an engagement with its attitudes. In this way, and ironically for Banham, the manifestos provided stronger munitions than the artefacts of that period; the New Brutalists “signalled a return to the attitudes of the Modernism of its early period.” That the anti-establishment attitudes of Dada and the surrealists underwrite the brutish character of The New Brutalism suggests an interesting undercurrent inherent to those buildings whose form subscribed to the New Brutalist aesthetic.

In the case of the Central Institute of Technology, a strongly anti-authoritarian figure in the person of Chris Brooke White coincides with an instance of “authority” operating against the safe structures determining the Institute’s survival. Though indeed a well qualified and able architect, “Chris Brooke White’s ability belied his manner and appearance, which was described at his memorial service as akin to the Pink Panther”. Assuming what one might imagine as a Monty Pythonesque approach to his work, “Brooker’s” sense of architecture as an inherently playful and human thing was reinforced by his “one worldly possession […] a 1960 Austin A30 which had been panel beaten by his daughter’s boy friend and painted in yellow house paint with a curving black racing stripe”. A more direct response to the institutionalisation of architecture in New Zealand lies in the cartoons appearing in New Zealand Architect between 1976 and 1983, under the editorship of Gordon Moller. His response to architects (seemingly divorced from his response to architecture) was marked by a penetrating humour. He engaged directly with the content each issue, often-attacking specific firms or people with his cartoon-critiques. One deliberately outrageous essay saw the New Zealand Institute of Architects defending a $100,000 libel suit.

In the Central Institute of Technology project, the juxtaposition of the formal science and engineering blocks with the expressive form of the lecture theatre suggests a tension between the “traditional” in Haughton and Mair’s practice and a new element of experimentation. The “traditional” practice concerns with an architecture of resolution and planning, demonstrated ably in their history of well-executed medical architecture met the experimentation of the new form of tertiary education with the same determination as its designers brought to bear on the political project. That each case saw this determination undermined is both unfortunate and extraordinary.

Architecturally, the construction phase of the Heretaunga campus stage one development was plagued with problems belying Brooke White’s inexperience with projects of this scale. The first concrete pour for the lecture theatre block failed as the scaffolding collapsed, forcing the project into delays. The second pour did not achieve the bréton brut quality sought by Brooke White, forcing a strategy of hand chipping the entire façade of the lecture theatre block between 1972 and 1975. Dozens of fenestration modules

55 Scalbert, “Parallel of Art and Life”, p 64.
59 Scalbert, “Parallel of Art and Life”, p 64.
finished in a polished quartz aggregate in the manner deployed by Breuer in the IBM complex were discovered, upon delivery, to be a different size to the module determined in the (already erected) building’s structure. As additional modules were ordered for the façade, plans were redrawn (to proportions determined by the module sizing) for other buildings in the stage one complex that had not begun construction. Each of the centre-pivoting windows in Blocks A and B, by 1981, were replaced because of leaks.

The instability of the Central Institute of Technology, as suggested in its architecture, was quickly matched by developments of a political nature. In 1985 principal Jim Bateman commented: “Even though we serve a national role I think we must look more closely to Wellington.”44 The then Minister for Education, Phil Goff, commissioned a report in 1988 on the polytechnic sector in the Wellington region. Reflecting on the role of the Central Institute of Technology as a nationally focussed educator, the committee responded that clear parameters of responsibility for the institute had not been provided. “In their absence the position of the regional polytechnics has tended to be strengthened at the expense of CIT... hindsight now makes it clear the decision to establish CIT has not worked out satisfactorily and the time has come to accept this”.45 The committee thus recommended that the Central Institute of Technology reform with neighbour and former collaborate Hutt Valley Polytechnic to form a regional institute. Following 13 years’ delay, Steve Maharey (Associate Minister of Education (Tertiary)) announced on 10 April 2001 that the Central Institute of Technology would be disestablished. From 30 June 2001, all assets not required by the new Wellington Institute of Technology, including the $30 million Heretaunga campus, returned to the Crown.46

Writing in response to Gavin Hipkins’ photographic exhibition “The Habitat”, Paul Walker reflects:

“By proposing that we look again at the buildings of New Zealand’s universities, The Habitat points at the bitter irony of the market’s occupancy of an architecture of education constructed on very different conceptions of cultural capital during the ‘free education’ period of socialism. The Habitat raises some fine and hard questions: How can those who teach and learn in universities know them and own them? Can we do it without those current images called ‘vision statements’, and all that goes with them? How should those places be inhabited?”47

The ethic inherent to the architecture of New Zealand’s campus environments, dominated by The New Brutalism, sits opposed to recent developments in the architecture of New Zealand’s polytechnics and institutes of technology. The corporatisation inherent to “new learning environments”, where “customers” are “served” by “providers”,48 The original vitality of the Central Institute of Technology, removed by its compliance to new approaches to education, has cost the Institute both its identity and its environment. The Institute’s lecture theatre, the most overly complicit element of a new approach to technical education with the values inherent to The New Brutalism, is precisely the form (and function) that has been completely removed from new ideas of flexibility in education. Perhaps, though, the fate of the Central Institute of Technology was already built into its architecture; The New Brutalism itself demonstrates a paradoxical search for an architectural truth that is, under its own terms, unattainable. Likewise, the architecture of the Central Institute of Technology, faltering under the burden of centralised national technical training, could never sustain the promises of its initial form.

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44 McNaughton, “Institute Records years of Growth”, p 16.