

# Paul Cullen—Of Building Structures

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This article provides an account of the 1970's practice of Paul Cullen (1949-2017) including a focused discussion on his exhibition 'Building Structures' at the Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland (November/December 1979). While Cullen received attention in the last two decades of his life, little is known of the origins of his work in the 1970s, and how the foundation for key facets of his career's work is located there. Although his quite radical 1979 solo exhibition 'Building Structures' was a definitive statement in the context of 'post-object' and conceptual art in Auckland, with art critic Wylan Curnow noting at the time the work's significance, the exhibition has been overlooked in historical accounts of the period. The article concludes by bringing 'Building Structures' up to date in regard to Anthropocene thinking and with reference to its reconstruction for a 2018 exhibition.



Paul Cullen, *Building Structures* (installation view), 1979, balsa wood, various dimensions. Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland, N.Z. Digital scan from 35mm transparency. Foxcircle Archive, Auckland.

These man-made structures, by being alienated from their makers and uses, by being this unaccommodating, are designed to push us to re-ground our making in a re-discovered sense of our human being.<sup>1</sup>

—Wystan Curnow, November 1979

In November 1979 Paul Cullen (1949-2017) installed some 30 balsa-wood forms throughout the Barry Lett Galleries in Auckland, New Zealand, in a show titled 'Building Structures'. Here, works were positioned in relation to floors, walls, ceilings, recesses and corners. These miniature forms heightened the visitor's awareness of scale. The exhibition seemed to ask, 'in being human, how do we inhabit?'

The 30 structures were all of different sizes and configurations. Model trusses and ladders of various lengths leant against or extended from walls, or were tucked into recesses. Some were even attached to the ceiling, requiring visitors to look up, or were embedded in the

fabric of a wall or positioned underneath lintels, beams and other architectural supports. Nine structures were laid out on the floor of the main gallery. All were made out of balsa wood, a material then commonly used in architectural model making. This material heightened the connection to building forms such as foundations, floor joists and platforms. Some supported small pieces of green tinted glass, others had mesh attached to their surfaces. In two of Cullen's structures, this mesh functioned as an interface between the work and the building fabric.

Though referencing model making and hobby kits, the works were more than models. These tiny structures might be defined instead as 'minumental', that is, the very opposite of monuments. Yet, if the viewer shifted their perspective to accommodate the idea of the space serving as a kind of 'world', then they still retained a sense of scale. The 'minumental' still has a relation to architectural precedents as built forms in space. Cullen employed the term 'structure' with specific intent. His installation in part referenced his interest in the structural anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss, which was widely influential in the late 1960s and 1970s.

In its experimental nature, Cullen's exhibition is a good example of 'post-object' art. This new expanded mode of sculptural practice was a feature of the Auckland scene in the 1970s. Cullen has never quite found his place in the history of this particular and significant moment. This essay redresses this omission by considering Cullen's output between 1975 and 1979.

The unfolding of 'Post-object art' is an unparalleled moment in New Zealand art history. Though Auckland was the main centre of activity between 1969 and 1980, artists located in Wellington and Christchurch also contributed to its history.<sup>2</sup> Paul Cullen studied at the Ilam School of Fine Art at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch between 1972 and 1975. There he was stimulated by the teaching of Tom Taylor, who led the sculpture programme between 1960 and 1991. As with Jim Allen in the sculpture department at Elam School of Fine Arts at the University of Auckland, Taylor encouraged students to utilise ideas from other disciplines. His architectural background also filtered through to students, who he exposed to a range of new art practices including Conceptual and Process art of the 1970s. In particular, Taylor introduced students to art writer, Jack Burnham's radical structural analysis in his *The Structure of Art* (George Braziller, 1970). Burnham's analysis of work through the lens of a structural matrix became an influential teaching text in the sculpture department.<sup>3</sup> In addition to

Taylor, Cullen became well acquainted with the New York / New Jersey based photographer Lawrence Shustak and with Martin Mendelsberg, a U.S. based neo-Dada artist. They were invited by Taylor to take up visiting lecturer's positions at Ilam in 1973 and 1974 respectively. Cullen was also influenced by the New York based artist Billy Apple, who undertook an important series of site-specific installations throughout New Zealand on his extended tour of his homeland in 1975. Also, Cullen travelled to Auckland in his student years to see first-hand examples of 'post-object art' practice unfolding there. After he completed his studies in 1975 he moved permanently to Auckland. 'Building Structures' was the second of the two exhibitions he presented at Barry Lett Galleries, the first being in 1977



Paul Cullen at Birdlings Flat, Banks Peninsula, Horomaka/Te Pātaka-a-Rākaihautū, 1975. Image credit: p.mule in association with Minerva Betts, black & white photograph.

## 1975 – 1978 OF POSSIBILITIES AND PROBABILITIES - REGIONAL MYTHOLOGIES

It seems to me there is running through everything a structure and meaning, a balance of energy intuitively graspable yet outside objective definition. One senses this ordering in human's physical and social structures, in plants and animals; in all beings and through art attempts are made to reconstitute it in a form mediated by personal experience.<sup>4</sup>

—Paul Cullen, 1975

Cullen's influences extend beyond his art school years. Indeed, growing up on a farm in Te Awamutu; his BSc in Ecology (University of Auckland) and a year studying at Lincoln University are all important elements of his artistic formation. These led him to engage with nature and the found forms and structures of both rural and urban landscapes. Cullen brought these interests to his structural understanding of the world in his final year of his studies. He developed a way of working that sought the underlying basis for the way things are organised, experimenting with and against physical laws so as to tap the 'hidden logic' operative in the natural world. One project in his graduating year was a book that included black and white photographs documenting various everyday subjects from farmland, rural dwellings, outbuildings, and fencing materials, to playground equipment and railcars lined up at the central rail interchange in Moorhouse Avenue. With these photographs Cullen sought to imply that these disparate items were somehow connected in a continuum that bridged distances and differing contexts. A deeper influence was his interest in molecular structures that function at microscopic levels. Appearing between the photographs, on every alternate page, were short quotations, such as: "The link. Synapsis, conciliation" and "The existence side by side of any two forms of organisation creates an interface, a frontier. Where adjacent forms manifest differing social orders, interfacial tension is created."<sup>5</sup> 'Synapsis' is a scientific term referring to cell division. Its etymological root is in the Greek word for 'junction' or 'connection'. Cullen shifts the scale from cell division to larger material things in the real world, pointing to the larger societal concerns of humans and their social organisation. The 'interfacial' relates to the formation of a common



Paul Cullen, black and white photograph of sculptural ideas, 1975. Foxcircle Archive, Auckland.



Paul Cullen, Of Possibilities and Probabilities, 1975, Centre Art Gallery, Christchurch. Found sticks, found stones, string, various dimensions. Digital scan from 35mm transparency. Foxcircle Archive, Auckland.

boundary, a fraught undertaking where tensions can arise in the demarcation of built environs.

If Cullen demonstrated his concerns in this photographic essay, in his studio he directly experimented with natural objects to test their unseen properties. The results of these tests were presented in a 1975 installation titled *Of Possibilities and Probabilities* at the Centre Gallery in the Christchurch Arts Centre [Figure X]. Reviewing the exhibition, T.L. Rodney Wilson described Cullen's work as '...an absorbing collection of constructions exploiting balance and the equilibrium of energies.'<sup>6</sup> He went on to state:

Cullen's pieces trace their intricate linear forms through a series of major and minor direction changes, shifts of energy transmission, and a major and minor ploys of balance. He is a poet of irony but produces a poetry firmly located in a structural logic. Stones form weights employed in his balance-schemes . . . [S]ticks are at times fulcrums, at times means of creating changes into and out of which the cord appears, disappears and reappears.<sup>7</sup>

The documentation of this 1975 exhibition bears out Wilson's analysis. Although the raw materials were crude: stones, branches, sticks, and string, Cullen's earliest sculptures were nonetheless ingenious constructions. River stones and branches, collected from the exposed terrain of Birdling's Flat, were drilled and slots chiseled to fit taunt string lines that held each of the structures in balanced equilibrium. Using crude engineering technologies, Cullen suspended his natural materials at acute gravitational fulcrum points, to articulate hidden 'energies' embodied in the balanced play of opposing forces. Photographs show how this potential energy in the individual works becomes an interrelated network in the installation as a whole, as each construction played off the architectural details of the Centre Gallery to extend the works into their immediate architectural surrounds. In Cullen's words, this embodied the idea that "[t]here are no gaps in the physical world, it may be perceived as a continuum. A continuum analysable as a series of connected energy states."<sup>8</sup>

Cullen's works also operated to ensnare the human visitor—quite physically—as they navigated their way through the space. Wystan Curnow cautioned visitors three years later in 1978, when two of these works were installed at the Mildura Arts Festival in Australia, "watch the string," lest they trip.<sup>9</sup> Here, terms such as 'tension, balance,



Paul Cullen, *Of Possibilities and Probabilities*, 1975, Centre Art Gallery, Christchurch. Found sticks, found stones, string, various dimensions. Digital scan from 35mm transparency. Foxcircle Archive, Auckland.

equilibrium, energy' can be understood in a different manner to the formal poetics by which Wilson celebrated Cullen's work.<sup>10</sup>

In 1978 Cullen was selected to participate in the Seventh Sculpture Triennial at Mildura, Australia together with other New Zealand 'post-object' artists Phil Dadson, Don Driver, Andrew Drummond, Jacqueline Fraser, Gray Nichol, David Mealing and Nicholas Spill. Here he showed two of his 1975 works together with a small untitled installation. One of Cullen's works, *Movement, A Transition and Extension* (1975), was purchased by the Mildura Arts Centre and it received high praise from the Australian critic Elwyn Lynn, who described its "anti-volumetric movement" as an instance of the achievements of the New Zealand artists who he thought "... seem[ed] much (more) creatively intellectual in such modes than their Australian counterparts."<sup>11</sup> Cullen's work was then included in the National Art Gallery's touring exhibition of the Mildura project, *New Zealand Sculptors at Mildura*, that travelled to eight centres throughout New Zealand between October 1978 and November 1979. In reviewing this show, Neil Rowe singled out Cullen's works describing them as "eloquent gravitational essays."<sup>12</sup> Such responses suggest that Cullen's explorations of organic forms and natural forces had found their place in the first attempts to survey the new sculptural practices that have now been historicized as 'post-object'.

While his work was touring the country, however, Cullen was moving away from using stones and sticks and experimenting

with tensions and balances, instead turning to the construction of explicitly 'man-made' structures in balsa-wood. Perhaps this shift was conditioned by his circumstances in Auckland, which led him to experiment with manufactured materials that were more discrete constructions which could potentially find a market. On his arrival in Auckland in 1976, and now with a young family, Cullen established a cane furniture-making enterprise as a home business to make ends meet. He became very proficient in this craft, and this skill set was readily transferred to the 'fiddly' task of making structures with the balsa-wood that was the basis for his second exhibition at Barry Lett Galleries. In 1977 the family managed to buy their first home, a wooden villa in Devonport. Maintaining this was another stimulus, in particular, observing the house's foundations which connected it to the ground, Cullen saw how the dwelling was connected to the earth at the same time its structural layout conditioned how the family organized itself within this built frame.<sup>13</sup>

Cullen's interest in architecture preceded the purchase of his own home. He had researched the relationship of architecture to art, whilst studying landscape architecture at Lincoln University. This fostered his broader interest in how humans plan and build for living. At Lincoln, and later at Ilam, he had become familiar with many prominent examples of 1970s' environmental and land art, exploring the work of Richard Harris and Mary Miss, who undertook projects to alter people's perceptions by building towers above ground and excavating sites as square hollows. He was also drawn to the model sculptures of architect Siah Armanji, such as his 1974 series *House Beneath Bridge* and *House Above Bridge*; Alice Aycock's 1975 land art project *Projects in Nature*, which entailed excavated underground wells and tunnels with ladders leading into them; and Neil Dawson's 1978 series of 'House Alterations' were a local reference point.<sup>14</sup>

'Building Structures' 1979 was the outcome of these shifts. The exhibition functioned as a turning point in Cullen's career. An experimental exhibition staged at the twilight of post-object art in Auckland, it led to a string of projects through which Cullen developed his signature style, with shows at RKS Art (the dealer gallery that emerged after Barry Lett resigned as director in 1979/1980), a one-time exhibition with Brooke Gifford Gallery, Christchurch; as well as a significant representation in *Aspects of Recent Sculpture*, at the Robert McDougall Art Gallery also in Christchurch. Cullen's subsequent career largely unfolds outside the frame of post-object art, with new terminologies defining his interests in the 1990s and after.

1979

## BUILDING STRUCTURES—A STRUCTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

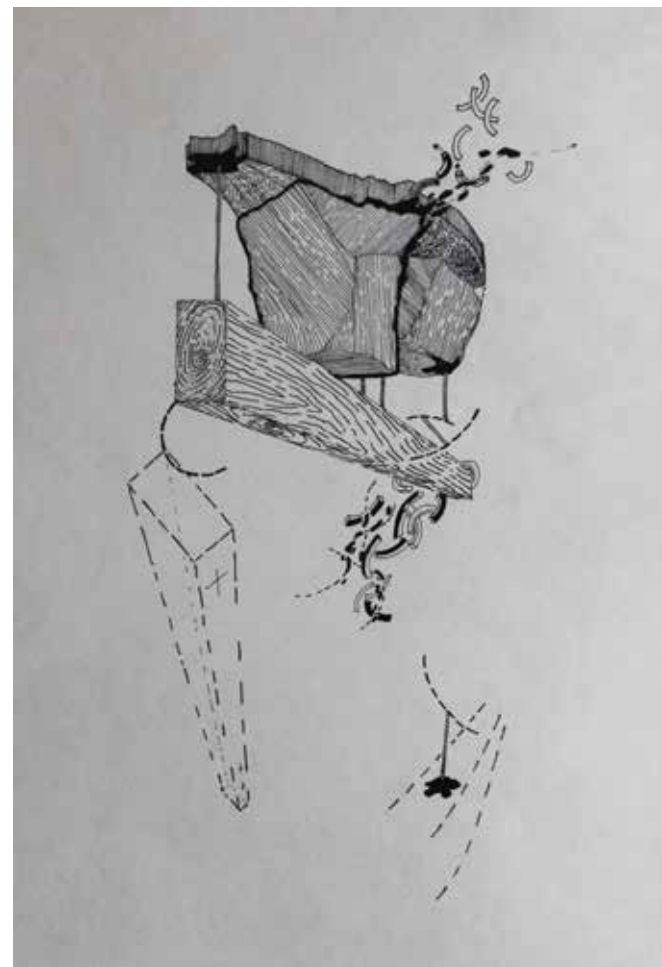
Cullen was drawn to anthropological theories of social organisation. He was interested in the changes that occur through time, and in what is physically manifested in a society.<sup>15</sup>

-Rhonda Bosworth, 1980

Cullen first developed his interests in Claude Lévi-Strauss and structuralism when reading Jack Burnham's *Beyond Modern Sculpture* (1968) and *The Structure of Art* (Revised edition, 1973). The latter book's first chapter is an introduction to the structural anthropology of Lévi-Strauss. The contents of the book's second half impart a real wealth of material on Conceptual and Process Art of the 1960s and early 1970s and was a critical source for contemporary artists. Burnham, using the lessons of structural anthropology, demonstrated the relationships between nature and culture and included studies of the work of several artists including: Joseph Kosuth, Marcel Duchamp, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Donald Judd, Dan Flavin, Carl Andre, Richard Serra, Hans Haacke, Dennis Oppenheim and Les Levine, amongst many others. Cullen studied this book closely during his years at Ilam. He was drawn to Burnham's proposition that an art object is in itself empty of meaning, relying instead on its referentiality within a history and in relation to other structural referents in the world. At the outset, Burnham debunks humanist assumptions, which he lists as:

- (a) Anthropocentrism, or the belief that the Earth is at the complete disposal of its dominant inhabitant, man;
- (b) Functional rationality, the belief that modern societies operate according to logical principles determined by man;
- (c) Messianic technology, the faith that all problems of mankind can be eradicated through further scientific discoveries; and
- (d) The illusion of historical progress, which presupposes that man is moving toward some predestined or structurally determined plateau of perfection.<sup>16</sup>

This is prototypical of the deconstructive logic of postmodernism, proving the durability of Burnham's thinking to this day. Cullen was drawn to such thinking. Looking at Cullen's drawing



Paul Cullen, *Untitled*, 1976 (from a series 1975-77). Pen and ink on paper, 310 x 330mm. Foxcircle Archive, Auckland.

practice of the mid- to late 1970s we can better understand his thinking about the relationships between nature and culture.

In the two years between 1975 and 1977, Cullen drew prolifically. His drawings might be described as 'ecological' in the sense that they draw attention to 'things' in relation to each other and to their surrounds. They seem to demonstrate a concern for how scientific laws, especially physical laws, govern the material world. In many ways they are diagrams that underpin the genesis of Cullen's later practice in which he employed 'pata-physics' as an imagined science that did not necessarily have any logical basis. As Cullen's repertoire and volume of drawings and notations grew, they became a knowing prompt for subsequent work.

Elements of these drawings were referents for the construction of Cullen's balsa-wood structures. Beams and supports already fully rendered in the round in the drawings were almost 'ready' to become three-dimensional structures in real space (though both retained their conceptual status as speculative models).<sup>17</sup> Via discussions with Cullen in 1980, Rhonda Bosworth put it this way:

His small balsa constructions are 'articulations of matter within space'. [. . .] Paul is working back to the concept or ideas that gave rise to the structure; and the transition from the idea (or natural thing), to the completed form, where the idea becomes culturalised and physically realised is important.<sup>18</sup>

This corresponds with Lévi-Strauss's concept of bricolage and the artist as a bricoleur. The bricoleur uses existing forms in new combinations. It is "between the subtle interfaces of culture and nature that bricolage works are born" as being a "morphogenetic power of the intellect."<sup>19</sup> The methods of Cullen's drawings and their output sit well here. Of the cultural transformations of the bricoleur, Lévi-Strauss writes:

The combinations do not come from 'nowhere', nor are they conjured up on the spot: they are drawn from already existing linguistic structures. Objects can thus be arranged in a variety of combinations, but are derived from language structures that already exist. The bricoleur thus deploys particular practio-theoretical logics to enable systems of transformations, meaning objects can have fluid meanings within systems of classification and exchange. The bricoleur therefore does not merely speak with things, but speaks through the medium of things."<sup>20</sup>

On the verso of some of his drawings and in notebooks of the period are various handwritten lines or stanzas. Rather than functioning as conventional titles, they use language to relate to other 'things' in the world. They present the oppositional binary of a structural linguistics typical of this era. One example reads:

The tilting of the sun into the moon (and laughter), Green light/  
Product of Fall (Falling), Velocity (Becoming a consequence)  
of action, line, a demarcation (direction/link/continuum),

between focus, A Conjugation. Love/hate, light/dark, soul/  
body, nature/culture, raw/cooked.<sup>21</sup>

Structural anthropology sought to 'discover' underlying unifying human concepts across all cultures. For Lévi-Strauss,

poetic language aspires to recapture the cosmic connections that language originally possessed. Similarly restoring the natural relationship that has been lost between nature and most of humankind, totemism fosters the kind of intellect that intuitively and holistically perceives humankind's posture in the universe.<sup>22</sup>

Lévi-Strauss' concept of totemism requires further consideration in relation to Cullen's thinking in the 1970s. As Ian Woodward explains, the concept is fundamental to a study of how humans "construct and assign meaning within their cultural universe" providing the foundation from which to tackle the assumed universalisms of empirical science.

Totemism is a cultural attempt to understand the world and its systemic organisation. [. . .] This means that plants and animals must be treated as elements of a type of cultural message system, the signs and signatures of which (the 'logics') are not only discovered, but ordered, by human activity. The ends these objects are put to are not merely technical or utilitarian in any simple way, but are part of the cultural grammar. It is not that plants are good to eat, but that they are good to think.<sup>23</sup>

Cullen's 'Building Structures' are the outcome of his reading and his process drawings. They are built manifestations sited within an art gallery. Cullen's terminology suggests two senses of his title. On the one hand it suggests a process of giving organization to something, and on another, it offers a version of built form that questions how we can use art to perceive things around us. The title 'building structures' may well have been used by Cullen to infer a discourse. Lévi-Strauss writes:

I think we are on the borders of a confusion that would be extremely dangerous. It is not each object in itself that is a work of art, it is particular arrangements, dispositions of

objects, particular relationships among objects that result in a work of art. Just like the words of a language, for example. Taken alone, words are weak in themselves, almost void of meaning. They only really take on a meaning in context.<sup>24</sup>

While Cullen's installation operates in line with Levi-Strauss's argument, there is a further constituent—the 'structure of experience'—that must be addressed to fully appreciate the logic of the artist's practice at this time. A phenomenological perception is necessary to complete interpretations.

## INTO AND THROUGH: A PHENOMENOLOGY OF BUILDING STRUCTURES

We look down on what is ordinarily over one's heads. We are inhabitants of sky-space.  
-Wystan Curnow, 1979

Cullen did not simply place the structures 'anywhere' in the Barry Lett Galleries. Notes in his workbooks of 1978-79 show an appreciation for 'mapping' works and locating the balsa-wood structures specifically in relation not only to the interior space of the gallery but to its location in a building in Auckland's central business district. Structures were constructed precisely to fit within or have some relationship to existing recesses and surface features. Cullen identified and studied the gallery's every nook and cranny when researching for his show. Recall that Cullen was interested in "systemic organisation and ordering by human activity," which led him to search for those potential 'synaptic interfaces' between his structures and the space as an 'ecological' whole. The balsa-wood forms were installed not only in relation to the building's visible features, but they were aligned with lintels and joists hidden beneath wall cladding and floor surfaces. By logical extension, they could connect through the building to the earth beneath or the sky above. Cullen's works succeeded in going beyond their object status into the 'energy' of other things. "There are no gaps in the physical world, it is a series of connected energy states"(Cullen, 1975).

In his notes on the exhibition, Wystan Curnow pondered where shafts and tunnels might lead, and he understood how reading the



Paul Cullen, Untitled Building Structure (installation view), 1979, balsa wood, various dimensions. Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland, N.Z. Digital scan from 35mm transparency. Foxcircle Archive, Auckland.

works was necessarily undertaken through accumulative investigation.<sup>25</sup> He proves that the spectator became implicated in a process of reading the works. They performed as an interface to speak/think through form to the substrates beyond. Here Cullen enables the viewer's direct bodily perception. Curnow's notes provide a further, specific interpretation of the 'Building Structures' that privileges phenomenology as a way of understanding the world through the primacy of our body's senses. Phenomenology concerns the study of the structures of experience. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's writings in particular were an important stimulus to artists in the 1960s and 1970s. His ideas concerning an embodied phenomenology were important because he emphasized the body as the primary site of knowing the world. The body and what it directly perceived could not be separated. He termed this "the ontology of the flesh of the world".<sup>26</sup> Curnow saw the show and wrote about it. His notes therefore are a direct source for the experience of the work; they offer an immediacy of response that is worth repeating:

Ordinarily ways of looking into and out from architecture:  
Sky-lights let light in, here they let light out.  
We look down on what is ordinarily over one's heads.  
We are inhabitants of sky-space.

'Sky-space' is elemental. It orients the viewer and reader to the work while simultaneously connecting us to another magnitude in the world: it opens possibilities. In his final chapter, "The Intertwining—The



Chiasm", of *The Visible and Invisible* (1964), Merleau-Ponty writes:

The flesh is not matter, it is not mind, it is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term "element," in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a general thing, midway between spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being whenever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an element of being.<sup>27</sup>

Phenomenology was used to explain the viewer's sense of embodiment in relation to the experience of works of art. For Curnow this was about locating an approach to Cullen's structures.

One action, these sculptures elicit, make habitual indeed before you leave the show, is that of finding an angle of vision by which you look into a structure as though into a tunnel.

[W]hile the artist encourages us to find these points of view he not only makes us assume odd positions in order to find some of them, some are rendered inaccessible.

The strategy of encouraging and discouraging our ability to rationalize the structures sets up two of the poles of reference to the viewer's body, of having him establish for himself the limits within which he works because of his height and upright position, etc.

In his conclusions to the project, Curnow's experience of both the relative size and scale and accessibility of the structures leads him to contemplate what is their simultaneous effect: these would-be structures perform functions in the real world and yet they are open-ended creations. He writes:

The fact these are not abstract objects is important. They have reference to human shelter. It seems patently perverse to reduce the scale of objects whose function necessitates they are scaled according to human need. One way or another these buildings are in real life made by us for us. They are the right size for man, were they not they'd have no *raison d'être*.

So in a sense the sculptor is opening up questions which have already been solved. Why is that? It can only be concluded, he doesn't think them closed.

We inhabit a man-made world. These man-made structures, by being alienated from their makers and uses, by being this unaccommodating, are designed to push us to re-ground our making in a re-discovered sense of our human being.

The last line is as telling today as it was in 1979. It is no coincidence that Cullen's long career began with resources from nature. Much of his career was spent addressing questions of humankind's relationships with nature, energy, physics, and the molecular synapses between all things. Balsa wood is a natural material; prior to the arrival of digital technologies it was put to use for the design and prototyping of future structures for humans to inhabit. These are structures that connect humans to their world through one of their core needs: shelter. At the heart of Cullen's project lies an ecological motive that resonates in our current moment of precarious living.

## FOR FUTURE STRUCTURES

In 1979 Wystan Curnow believed that Cullen's work "push[ed] us to re-ground our making in a re-discovered sense of our human being." The comment is prescient nearly forty years later, as it tallies with various eco-political voices who are seeking today to locate a new moral compass for the world we live in, given the perils of our own and other species' extinction. If Cullen were reconstructing the structures today he would be certain to employ the implications of the Anthropocene, the geological epoch we have entered which sees the full extent of the impact of human existence on Planet Earth.<sup>28</sup> The fragility of Cullen's balsa-wood structures, scattered over the floor without protection or leaning and hanging precariously throughout the Barry Lett Galleries reads now in new ways. Not only can his structures, in their material form, be understood as architectural prototypes of their time, but they now seem to offer an idea about how we might live ecologically today.

Humans are only now at a reckoning point with the urgency of climate change which industrial 'man' has caused. Cullen's building structures can be read in 2018 as adaptive structures for a future

needful of change. His early interests in ecology, anthropology and social organisation can be redeployed as we become more conscious of the detrimental effects of human behaviour. His works now unfold in a context of anxiety regarding habitats, habitations, and the imposition of imperious habits that have characterised almost all building and urbanisation in the Western world since the origins of modernity. Cullen's work and project uses humour to good effect to invite speculation on the relationship of built forms to their human inhabitants. This lends a certain honesty and poignancy to Cullen's project, and provides a compelling rationale for its reconstruction and representation.

Concerning *The Anthropocene Style*, the Swizz architect Philippe Rahm employs the body's physiology. He writes:

Climate change is forcing us to rethink architecture radically, to shift our focus away from a purely visual and functional approach towards one that is more sensitive, more attentive to the invisible, climate-related aspects of space. [ . . . ] Between the infinitely small scale of the physiological and the infinitely vast scale of the meteorological, architecture must build sensual exchanges between body and space to invent new approaches capable of making long-term changes to the form and the way we will inhabit buildings tomorrow.<sup>29</sup>

The decision to reconstruct Cullen's work in 2018<sup>30</sup> enables a new opportunity to physically engage with his work. Through the processes of carefully remaking the small balsa-wood constructions, then placing them in space something is imparted, between them and (my) bodily experience. The effect/affect of being with the 'minumental' reconstructions arouses a sense of vulnerability. They compellingly reacquaint us with the question of how we build to inhabit.

Cullen's structures make us consider the environments in which we live. Their impact and effect go beyond our anthropocentric terms of reference. That is why they have been re-made. In 1979 fragile constructions were sited. They formed an ecology of adaptive systemic structures. In some ways they were ahead of their time.

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 Wystan Curnow, unpublished notes on Paul Cullen's 'Building Structures', Barry Lett Galleries, November 1979, used with permission.
- 2 'Post-object' artists engaged a range of extra-artistic theories that saw art become increasingly resistant to categorical definition and convention. For an overview see Christina Barton's 'Post-object and conceptual art in New Zealand.' <https://teara.govt.nz/en/post-object-and-conceptual-art/>.
- 3 Thanks to p. mule for these insights. E-mail message to the author, April 25, 2018.
- 4 Cullen, Paul, 'A Documentation of Possibilities and Probabilities' (Diploma in Fine Arts (Hons), University of Canterbury, 1975), unpaginated.
- 5 Cullen, untitled documentation book, 1975. School of Fine Arts, Canterbury University.
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- 7 T. L. Rodney Wilson 'Tensions and balance', *The New Zealand Listener*, 1 November 1975, pp. 5-6.
- 8 Cullen, untitled documentation book, 1975. School of Fine Arts, Canterbury University.
- 9 Curnow, Wystan. N.Z. Sculptors at Mildura, QEII Arts Council, 1978, p. 5.
- 10 As 'traps' they remind me of the primitive structures for hunting that social anthropologist Alfred Gell would later invoke when he drew comparisons between these and the features of contemporary installation art, including the example of Rebecca Horn and Damien Hirst, in his essay 'Vogel's Net: Traps as Artworks and Artworks as Traps'. See Alfred Gell, 'Vogel's Net: Traps as Artworks and Artworks as Traps', *Journal of Material Culture*. London: Sage, 1996.
- 11 Elwyn Lynn as quoted by Tom McCulloch in his 'N.Z. Sculptors in Mildura'. N.Z. Sculptors At Mildura, (Wellington: QEII Arts Council, 1978), p.4.

- 12 Neil Rowe, Evening Post, Sat 30 June 1979. Te Aka Matua Reference Library, Paul Cullen Artist Files.
- 13 Cited in Bosworth, 'Paul Cullen', Art New Zealand, Number 20, p. 59.
- 14 Cullen became closely acquainted with Neil Dawson in the mid-1970s. Dawson's 1978 work at Mildura—included in the touring New Zealand show—would have made an impression on Cullen. He was also well aware of Dawson's work in Christchurch during his time studying at Canterbury University, including Dawson's 1974 Environmental Structure. Dawson wrote of these works that he sought an "illusory possibility in material combinations." He was concerned to make work with "physical and perceptual tensions . . . the whole only being conceived through accumulative investigation [. . .] dependent on the spectator's distance from the work." Neil Dawson Artist's Statement, N.Z. Sculptors at Mildura, QEII Arts Council, 1978, p. 19.
- 15 Bosworth, op. cit.
- 16 Jack Burnham, *The Structure of Art*. (New York: George Braziller (revised edition), 1973), pp. 5-6.
- 17 This idea was later developed in his Construction series (1980-83). For these Cullen explored how the projection of a 3-dimensional structure is already held in the 2-dimensional plan.
- 18 Bosworth, op. cit.
- 19 Nakazawa, Shin'ichi, 'What is the 'structure' of Levis-Strauss.' In *Feature: Encounter with Claude Levis-Strauss*. Coucou no tchi, Winter 1999, Japan Association for the World Exposition, Tokyo p. 93.
- 20 Lévi-Strauss cited in Woodward, *Understanding Material Culture*, (London: Sage, 2007), p. 67.
- 21 Cited in Bosworth, op. cit.
- 22 Nakazawa, Shin'ichi, op. cit., p. 91-93.
- 23 Woodward, op. cit., p. 67.
- 24 From a dialogue between Lévi-Strauss and Georges Charbonnier, cited in Burnham, op. cit., p. 160.
- 25 Of import: the month prior to Cullen's show the artist Billy Apple requested the removal of a gallery wall as alteration to The Barry Lett Galleries (October 16 - 26, 1979). It was one project in a series titled Alterations: The Given as an Art-Political Statement (a full record is made by Wystan Curnow in Art New Zealand 15). Cullen made good use of the 'channel' in the gallery floor left by the wall's removal. Cullen sited a structure in relation to a conceptual project that had come just before, in many respects it was still in play. By placing one of his structures there it occupies the cerebral space of another building structure taken away.
- 26 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Intertwining—The Chiasm" in *The Visible and Invisible* (Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 139.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 In more recent years, Cullen's work has utilised various philosophical ideas of a speculative realism. These are matters Allan Smith eloquently registered in 2017. See Allan Smith's tribute 'Paul Cullen (1949-2017)' in *Art New Zealand* Number 163, 2017: 42-44.
- 29 Phillippe Rahm, *The Anthropocene Style*, San Francisco Art Institute, March 29 – May 19, 2018. <http://www.sfai.edu/exhibitions-public-events/detail/philippe-rahm-the-anthropocene-style>.
- 30 Paul Cullen Building Structures 1979, curated by the author for The Engine Room, Massey University, 23 May - 13 June, 2018.

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