"Falling in love with the climate crisis."

A field guide for beginners in simple easy to understand language.

A distillation of the essence of complex ideas to avoid getting lost in the detail.

A path through the labyrinth.



"You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us. And the world will live as one."

John Lennon

A change of attitude away from anthropocentric thinking, and a change in our way of seeing our social, economic and political structures, are the first necessary moves to deal with the climate crisis.

You cannot deal with a crisis by using the same way of thinking that has created the crisis.

Most of the current responses to the climate crisis are little more than an excuse for avoiding fundamental change to a consumer growth economy.

Seeming to be doing something has now become a tactic for both avoiding and delaying effective action. An excuse for doing nothing.

The good news is that changing our way of seeing and thinking would cost nothing, and both people and governments could do it immediately.

The really good news is that changing our way of seeing and thinking could dramatically improve our quality of life.

If you disagree with the logic of this thesis then by all means come up with some better ideas.

However avoid mere criticism. Negative criticism is a waste of everyone's time. In the game of life one rule should be that an idea can only be beaten by a better idea.

Remember that the problem with convincing arguments is that no one is convinced by them.

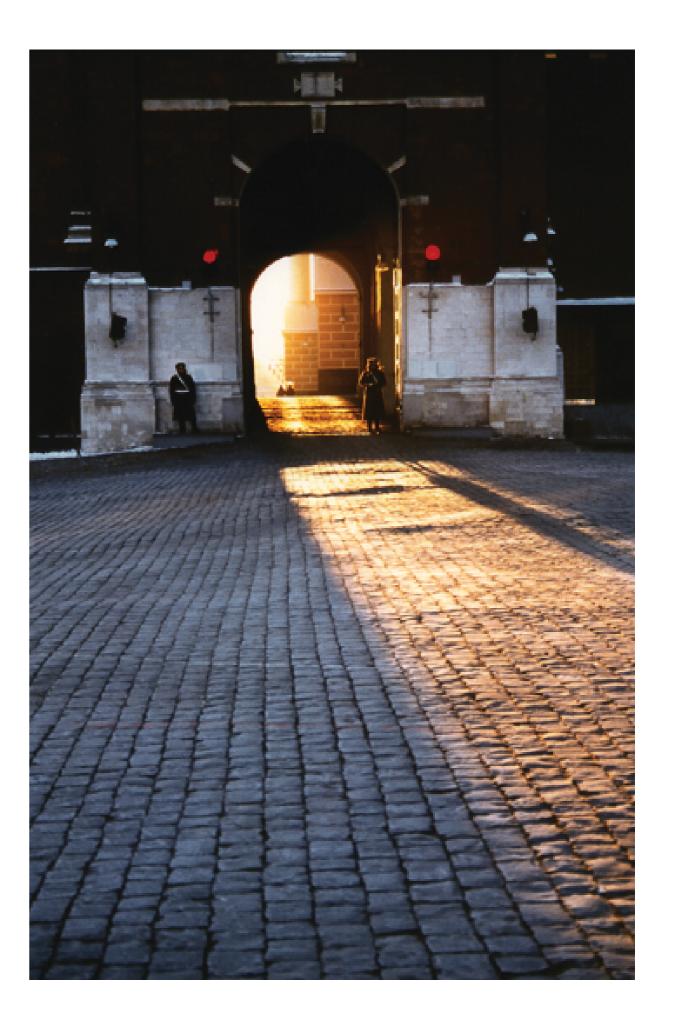
Deep down almost everyone is convinced that the climate crisis could not possibly bring about the extinction of the human species. Surely all that music, art, architecture, and technology will live on, somehow?

If you agree with the logic of this thesis then begin making immediate changes in your life.

You might, for example, take back the "right to build" that you have given away to those wanting only to make money out of the climate crisis. Take control of your life, and your architecture, and begin having fun, while being both alive and ethical.

Leave making money to Midas, Monopoly and the Growth Economy. More money is the cause of the climate crisis, not the solution.

Density is a brain disorder.



Raping the planet is not a criminal offence.

Our anthropocentric legal system is a significant contributor to the climate crisis.

"If the law supposes that" said Mr Bumble, squeezing his hat emphatically in both hands, "the law is such an ass - a idiot"

Charles Dickens, Oliver Twist, 1838

It seems odd that raping the planet is not a criminal offence. It is perhaps even more odd that women, in general, do not have a problem with raping the planet. It seems that rape of the planet is not a gender issue. Over time our anthropocentric legal system has been developed to regulate the rape of the planet. Our legal system divides up the spoils with expensive lawyers haggling over who gets to rape. Our legal system, like our economic system, assumes that the planet comes free and has no value.

Human beings are the great predators. We have turned exploitation into an art form. We begin with a world of exquisite beauty and then we celebrate destroying it by giving awards to architecture. We justify our destructiveness by calling it development. We reward those who exploit and take advantage of the planet.

It is lawyers who have destroyed the idealism of the RMA.

Giving the Whanganui River legal standing has been hailed as a significant step forward. In fact it was a step backward. It gave credibility to anthropocentric thinking. We allowed the river to be just like us. Giving the river the right to employ a lawyer to defend itself against exploitation misses the point.

Our anthropocentric legal system assumes that human beings are the measure of all things. Lawyers haggle over who shall have the right to exploit the natural world. In fact no one has the right to exploit anything.

The Labour government made an error of judgement in taking away the democratic principle of public participation and then asking Judge Randerson to recommend new legislation to replace the RMA. It was the wrong question. Judge Randerson should have been asked to recommend a new legal system to replace our antiquated anthropocentric British law. It is past its use-by date. We should debate whether a judge is the right person to do that job, or even capable of understanding the issues. Asking Judge Randerson to redesign the RMA was rather like asking a fox to design an enclosure to protect ducks from other foxes.

We need a nature centred legal system that values all life and recognises that humans are a species like any other species.

Anthropocentric law is part of the climate problem not part of the solution.



We need to completely replace our entire anthropocentric legal system with an earth-centred legal system before we can begin to address the climate crisis.

The planet will win the global war between people and the planet.

The climate crisis is just a symptom of a broken relationship between people and the planet.

"I am deeply impressed with the designer of the universe: I am confident I couldn't have done anywhere near such a good job."

Buckminster Fuller

In life everything is interconnected.

Healthy relationships are a necessary foundation for a positive healthy life.

In a healthy person, or a healthy planet, all relationships are in perfect harmony.

We are currently at war with ourselves. The natural environment continues to give us all air to breath, water to drink and food for nourishment, as it always has done. It surrounds us with astonishing beauty and fills us with wonder. However with greed and selfishness we have wanted more, regardless of the cost.

The cost of the growth economy has been air not fit to breathe, water not fit to drink, and the failure of crops. We blame nature for not being able to satisfy our desires in the manner to which we have become accustomed. We have forgotten that there are limits. We have initiated the sixth great era of extinctions, and moved from the Holocene to the Anthropocene.

Nature is the best friend we will ever have. "Doing no harm" is not enough. We need to fall in love.

Good relationships do not need lawyers. Lawyers thrive on bad relationships. They love adversarial combat fuelled by greed, envy and anger. Lawyers should be kept well away from the climate crisis.

Peace is much more than the absence of war. Peace is a positive idea.

We need to declare peace with ourselves.



To address the climate crisis we need to declare peace between people and the planet.

Architecture gives physical form to the relationship between people and the planet.

The climate crisis is essentially an architectural question.

"Since my house burnt down I have a better view of the rising moon."

Japanese haiku.

When we build we give form to our relationship with nature. If you want to know about a person's relationship with nature you only need to look at their architecture. Buildings give form to our attitudes and values. We are what we build.

If we are afraid of nature we cower in fear, and worry about shelter. We hide from life. We never realise our potential.

A passive house protects us from a world that we have come to see as an enemy. Nature is not destroying us. We are destroying ourselves.

Our egocentric cities protect us from an awareness of nature. Relationships are concealed. Food comes from somewhere, and rubbish goes to somewhere. We do not know, and we do not care. We lose our grip on who we are. We welcome water only when it comes in pipes, because we have lost our awareness of the sacred water cycle. We never see the stars.

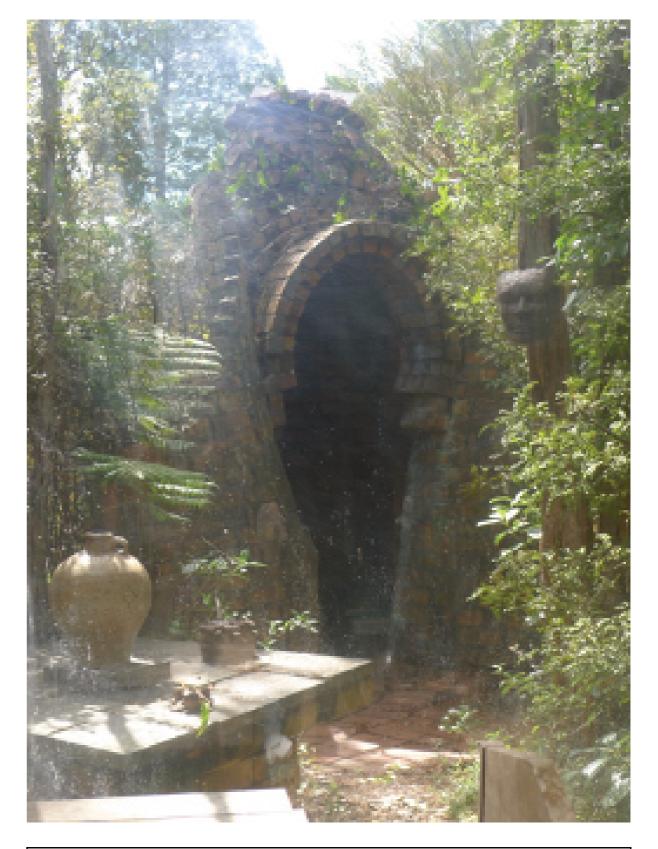
More than half the world's population now live in cities. The power of the democratic vote is focused on an unreality of an artificial, anthropocentric world. Any government that does what needs to be done will be voted from power.

If we embrace nature our architecture strengthens that relationship. We become more sensitive. We become more aware. We develop wisdom and understanding. We become more alive as we become whole. We belong, just as our architecture belongs. We find joy in the gentle breeze.

Earth-centred architecture is an attitude. A way of going. A way of being. A way of seeing. A way of becoming. Earth centred architecture begins with belonging. Belonging in place. Belonging in history. Belonging in community. Vernacular architecture belongs.

Building is both a verb and a noun. Life however is a journey, not a conclusion. In a climate crisis world we need less things, and more involvement. When others build for us we live out our lives crippled by someone else's, too often woefully inadequate, relationship to nature.

We need to recognise that the built environment is not only the most significant cause of the "climate crisis", but also offers the most immediate, and most significant, options for overcoming the "climate crisis".



To address the climate crisis we need architecture that belongs to the earth and enhances a peaceful relationship between people and the planet

Traditionally most architecture has attempted to make certain an uncertain world.

The climate crisis is a consequence of our failed attempts to "manage" the planet.

"I met a traveller from an antique land who said - Two vast and trunkless legs of stone stand in the desert... Near them on the sand Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown, And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command, Tell that its sculptor well those passions read Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things, The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed: And on the pedestal these words appear: My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings; Look on my Works ye Mighty, and despair! Nothing beside remains. Round the decay Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare The lone and level sands stretch far away."

Percy Bysshe Shelly (The Examiner of London 11 January 1818.)

More than anything else most architecture throughout history has been driven by the myth that we can make certain the uncertainties of a dynamic and constantly changing world. Architecture students study the monuments left behind by forgotten civilisations, and develop the skills they will need to build monuments to be left behind by our civilisation.

Most great civilisations became victims of their own success. They became paralysed because they were very good at what they did. They were not overcome by some external force. They lost their ability to be responsive to change, and quietly died. Western civilisation is following a familiar pattern.

We, in our turn, are being paralysed by the urban form of our cities, along with the financial and organisational structures which create and profit from that urban form. A mortgage paralyses your ability to think and to make changes. Our passive architecture creates passive people. The passive houses we are building have bedrooms rather than workshops. We cut down trees because we are afraid they will grow. We are being paralysed by our dead architecture and our dead planning.

The anthropocentric view that we are able to "manage" the natural world, as found for example in the mandate for DoC, finds its ultimate expression in architecture.

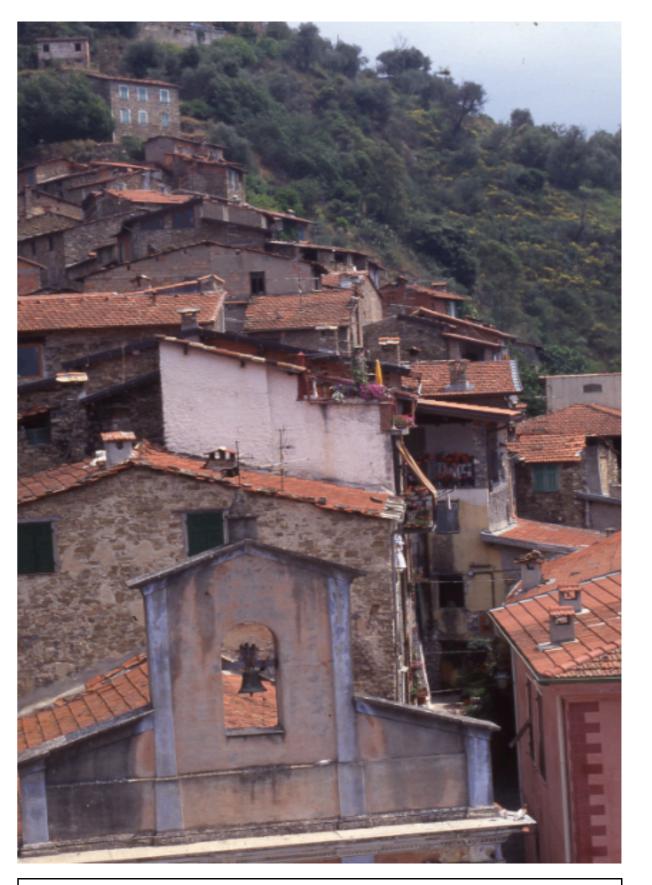
Our architecture has embraced the certainty of death rather than the uncertainty of life.

The Built and Natural Environment Bill is a dead document, embracing death rather than life.

Life is a dynamic journey through an uncertain world.

Our current built environment is not only the primary cause of the climate crisis. It also takes away most of our options for doing anything about the climate crisis.

Vernacular architecture is living architecture. It gives constantly changing form to dynamic and living cultures.



We need to delight in architecture that embraces the uncertainty of a dynamic planet.

Spatial planning also attempts to make certain an uncertain world.

The climate crisis is but a response to failed management, ignoring the inevitable consequences of action.

"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but rather, the one most adaptable to change."

Credited to Clarence Darrow, rather than Charles Darwin.

A wise person plans for the unexpected and delights in the challenge of the unknown.

The only certainty is that tomorrow will be uncertain. Our predictions are always going to be wrong.

Planners embrace computers without thinking that no one planned for them, or that the first computer did not even exist less than a brief lifetime ago. Planners spend most of their time trying to stop tomorrow from happening.

Modern planning has been driven by the myth that we can make certain the uncertainties of a dynamic world. From being a way of going, planning has come to be seen as a point of arrival.

New Zealand's 1953 Planning Act confused planning and design. Zoning was a perceived design objective, limiting other possibilities. Closing off options rather than welcoming change.

The planning profession became concerned with making plans, not with planning. Modern planning offers the elusive dream, always over the horizon, driven by anthropocentric thinking.

The Auckland Unitary Plan, for example, is not a plan at all. It is a road map to attempt to achieve the idle dreams and fads of planners. It is a document to empower incompetent planners, along with developers, and disempower everyone else.

Over time a new breed of planners came to believe that they were competent designers. Self-proclaimed visionaries with personal visions they felt were superior to those of other people. Anthropocentric gods.

The planning profession is now devoted to the idea of one group of people controlling the lives of another group of people. Planning began with the romantic idea of building a better world, but quickly morphed into a better world for a few. Lawyers with Ferraris telling other people to catch electric buses to save the planet. We need to give up trying to manage the natural environment, and move beyond anthropocentric thinking.

Human beings are not the centre of the universe. We cannot even control our lives.

We need to plan for uncertainty and welcome the unexpected. We need to be alive.



We need to completely replace our entire anthropocentric planning process with an earth-centred planning process before we can even begin addressing the climate crisis.

Peace between people and the planet needs to begin with peaceful architecture and peaceful cities.

The climate crisis conflict between people and the planet becomes visible in our architecture and cities.

"What if a building were more like a nest? If it were, it would be made out of local abundant materials. It would be specific to its site and climate. It would use minimal energy but maintain comfort. It would last just long enough and then would leave no trace. It would be just what it needed to be."

Jeanne Gang

We have become so accustomed to architecture beginning with anger and aggression that no one notices any more. We move in with a bulldozer to destroy the topsoil that has taken tens of thousands of years to form. We chainsaw down any trees or vegetation. If other generations have enriched the land we send their embodied energy off to landfill. We destroy our stories, our heritage, the accumulated knowledge written in our buildings, the love of past generations and our memories.

Our architecture has become counterproductive because in destroying the planet we are destroying ourselves.

We need to ask why we build. Are greed, ego and a lust for power the only possible motivations, or are there better options? Could we caress the planet with gentleness? If we want to look at the climate crisis we need to first look our own lives and values.

The United Nations adopted the concept of Peaceful Cities at Habitat II in Istanbul in 1996. It was a New Zealand initiative.

The urban form of a peaceful city enhances peaceful relationships. Cities, like people, filled with anger, resentment and selfishness, are in a poor position to address the climate crisis.

Destroying the planet has resulted in vast amounts of capital sloshing around in the world looking to give form to egos. It provides the economic foundation for most of our cities. Cities that give form to greed and selfishness are not fit for human beings. Spending money fighting the climate crisis only makes the crisis worse.

The climate crisis has been caused by too much money, the desire for more money and the unequal distribution of money. We do not need more money to respond to the climate crisis.

Building less architecture of a higher quality is like improving your diet by eating only high quality food. Lifting the curve of counterproductivity.



Peaceful cities are a necessary foundation for peace between people and the planet.

Life is an opportunity to be embraced, not a problem to be solved.

The climate crisis, like life, is also an opportunity to be embraced, not a problem to be solved.

"Heaven preserve me from littleness and pleasantness and smoothness. Give me great glaring vices and great glaring virtues, but preserve me from the neat little neutral ambiguities. Be wicked, be brave, be drunk, be reckless, be dissolute, be despotic, be an anarchist, be a suffragette, be anything you like, but for pity's sake be it to the top of your bent. Live fully, live passionately, live disastrously."

Voilet Trefusis 1918

We each have but one chance to explore the meaning of life. No one else can do it for us.

Only by living life to the full can we discover what life might be. Fortunately getting on with life, although it requires dedication, commitment and tenacity, is not only rewarding and fulfilling, but also fun. Just being alive can provide all the excitement, drama and trauma any person can want or handle.

Being concerned about the impact of your life on the lives of other people and the planet only makes it all the more interesting.

Of course, along the way, we need to take our chances and break the rules. We need to question and explore. We need to fall in love with the beauty of nature all around us, and to be filled with awe and wonder at the cosmos. We need to learn from the wisdom of those who have gone before, while recognising that their world is not our world. We need to treat with caution those who tell us they have all the answers. Discovery is in the doing. A wise person listens to everyone but holds their own counsel.

Human development is concerned with releasing potential. Being more alive. Seeing what might be. Taking opportunities. Acting with creative harmony. Going around difficulties rather than overcoming them. Along the way releasing everyone else's potential for goodness within the context of ethical responsibility.

The climate crisis is a species issue. We are all involved. This is not a time for competition. As a species we are not as alive as we might be. We need to rise above the mess we have made of our planet.



We need to boldly take the climate crisis in our stride, just like any other crisis.

For a fulfilling life we need to celebrate what is right, not complain about what is wrong.

With the climate crisis we need to focus on improving what is right, rather than wasting resources becoming resilient to what is going wrong.

"Upon the upland road, Ride easy stranger; Surrender to the sky, Your heart of anger."

James K Baxter

In seeking to find meaning in life it is important to avoid both negative people and negative institutions.

People who complain about everything, and criticise everyone, make poor travelling companions. They assume that they can lift themselves up by putting everyone else down. It is possible to drown in their negativity. For them the climate crisis is something other people ought to do something about.

Negative institutions invite us to participate in helping them solve what they have defined to be problems. They weave a web to empower themselves and disempower those caught in their web. Everyone needs to be cautious of the person who says "I'm from the government and I'm here to help you". Bureaucrats who are arrogant enough to assume a right to run other people's lives are dangerous. Those who want to lead your life for you have no desire to set you free.

Self-centred individuals and self-centred institutions are also to be avoided. The climate crisis is not a personal issue. Negative and self-centred institutions tend to employ negative and self-centred people, which compounds a problem best avoided. Selfishness, greed and the lust for power have caused the climate crisis.

A positive approach to life is essential.

Seeing the climate crisis as a problem rather than an opportunity paralyses effective action. Solving problems becomes an excuse for not taking necessary action. Energy and resources wasted on negative actions or protest is not available for creative and positive action.

Boredom creates a need for escapism and distractions. The consumer society thrives on bored people. Someone else has all the fun, making, doing and being creative.

Architecture has been captured by the consumer society. The constant need to escape from boring architecture provides victims for the market. Real people build houses for themselves. Bored people cut the grass. The need to escape from architecture indicates a failure of process. The need to "get away from it all" indicates a need to address systemic failures.

As we exit life there is only one key question we need to ask. Has our life left the world a little richer or a little poorer?



We need positive, creative, enjoyable responses to the climate crisis.

In life it is wise to associate with people who are enabling, not disabling.

The climate crisis is exacerbated by political structures that are disabling, not enabling.

"Bureaucracy is like a fungus that contaminates everything."

Jaime Lerner

The second phase of the modern global environmental movement was the recognition that our existing political structures could not answer the ecological questions being asked. Fifty years later the situation has deteriorated even further. Democracy is in decline. Neoliberalism has not helped. The move from an egalitarian society to a society with the greatest gap in the world between rich and poor has created government by the rich for the rich. The only question being asked by the rich is how they can make money out of the climate crisis.

The government has done away with public participation. The media has done away with debate and discussion. The universities have been corporatized so that they are no longer "the critic and conscience of society".

You will always lose when you are playing someone else's game and they are making the rules. The game needs to be changed.

A positive local or national government, appropriate for dealing with the climate crisis would be enabling.

If there really is a housing crisis, for example, it would be possible to assist those wanting to build themselves a house rather than disabling them by putting obstacles in their way.

More rules and regulations are not going to solve the climate crisis. We need less.

Life, like the planet, is not simple and its complexity and diversity are to be celebrated. Reductionism is always to be avoided.

Strong communities begin with the mutual respect of strong individuals.

Bureaucrats need to earn the respect they do not have.

The climate crisis needs civil servants, not bureaucratic masters.



We need to replace our anthropocentric, disabling political structures before aware people can begin to address the climate crisis.

Kaitiakitanga is the keystone of responsible, ethical planning and architecture.

The climate crisis is a result of ignoring the precepts of Kaitiakitanga.

"In achieving the purpose of this Act, all persons exercising functions and powers under it, in relation to managing the use, development, and protection of natural and physical resources, shall have particular regard to Kaitiakitanga."

Resource Management Act, 1991, 7 (a)

Human beings are part of the natural world. We are not set apart.

Kaitiakitanga sees human beings as belonging within the natural world.

Kaitiakitanga was introduced into the RMA because it could not be translated into English. It is a completely different way of seeing from "stewardship" or "guardianship". These are anthropocentric terms that see human beings as the centre of the universe. We need to do away with anthropocentric thinking.

The Resource Management Act was at first ignored, and then destroyed, by lawyers, over the last 30 years. Anthropocentric lawyers could not understand it.

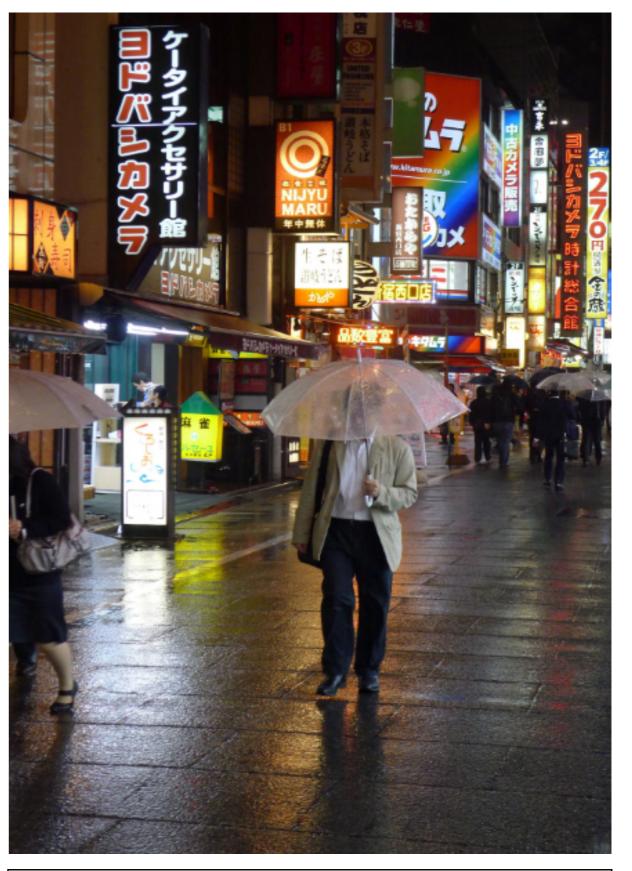
The ultimate absurdity has been to ask a lawyer to create legislation to destroy the Resource Management Act. It has not been tried and found wanting. It has never been tried.

New Zealand's legal system is adversarial. There are winners and losers rather than any attempt to build a better world. The legal system rewards the rich and powerful. It is totally inappropriate when considering either the natural or the built environment.

The RMA introduced the concept of kaitiakitanga into law in 1991. The RMA declared that we belonged to the planet. The planet did not belong to us. It was a first step in addressing the climate crisis. It was also a challenge to anthropocentric thinking.

Judge Randerson recommended to government in 2021 that the concept of kaitiakitanga should be removed from New Zealand law.

We need to have particular regard to Kaitiakitanga.



Kaitiakitanga is a necessary foundation for addressing the climate crisis.

In life you need to grasp the present moment.

With the climate crisis we need to grasp the present moment, and act now.

There is a tide in the affairs of men, Which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune. Omitted all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and miseries. On such a full sea are we now afloat. And we must take the current where it serves, or lose our ventures.

William Shakespeare

The time to deal with the climate crisis is now, not in 2030 or 2050.

Today's opportunities are tomorrow's history. Getting life right today is the best way to prepare for life tomorrow. Dealing with the climate crisis today is the best way to prepare for dealing with the climate crisis tomorrow.

If it is well designed and well built the architecture we are building now can reasonably be expected to still be around in a hundred years. For all that time it will be determining how we live our lives, and limiting our options.

Demolition and rebuilding to some different standard is not an option.

In the 1960s we were talking about long-life, low-energy, loose -fit architecture. It was recognised that what we were building then would remain long after the reasons for building it had passed away.

All building should be functionally non-specific.

Fashionable fads should be treated with caution. Density, for example, does not reduce the ecological footprint of a city. It simply increases the carbon emissions of transportation, and the cost of infrastructure.

The toxic slums we are building now will continue giving form to the relationship between people and the planet in 2050, and far beyond. Trashing them will not erase the environmental debt created by their construction.

Being alive should not be postponed.



In 2030 or 2050 everyone will ask what we did, or failed to do, in 2022.

In life clear thinking is needed to avoid getting lost in the detail.

With the climate crisis clear thinking is needed to avoid getting lost in the detail.

"Why do you dwell on the things that don't matter when there are so many things that do."

Dennis Sharpe. Destroyer of Worlds.

There is nothing wrong with renewable energy in itself, but there is a problem when asking where energy comes from becomes an excuse for failing to ask where energy goes to. It is incorrect to say that energy is always "a good thing". Energy can be used to do great harm. Coal and oil transformed architecture when the built environment was set free from human labour. You could argue that freely available energy not only depersonalised architecture and destroyed craftsmanship, but also desensitised human understanding and fractured the relationship between people and architecture. Building was once a verb. Freely available energy, and the consumer society, reduced building to a noun, and fractured the relationship between people and the built environment. Renewable energy has contributed, and continues to contribute, to the climate crisis.

There is nothing wrong with electric vehicles in themselves if you can ignore the environmental cost of producing them and the insoluble problems of lithium batteries. However there is a further problem when the means of going becomes an excuse for failing to think about the idea of journey. It is incorrect to say that electric vehicles are always "a good thing". They can make it possible to avoid human interaction. When you cycle through a country like Italy it is the ease of stopping to share a meal or stay for the night that enhances the experience of journey. If there was a Tamaki Estuary Regional Park within walking distance you would not need an electric vehicle to get there. Analysis of the enormous environmental cost of producing and disposing of electric vehicles would not be necessary.

There is nothing wrong with insulation, but there is a problem when insulation is seen as "a good thing", and no one stops to ask if insulation is one cause of the climate crisis. How can you understand a violin if you are insulated from ever hearing music? There is a time to avoid contact and there is a time to embrace. Architecture that insulates people from the natural world destroys the joy of being alive. There are millions of stars in the cosmos, but Aucklanders never see them. Over time it is possible to forget they exist. Dulling the sensitivity of Aucklanders leaves them struggling for artificial delights. The synthetic replaces the real.

The climate crisis is an intellectual challenge. It is an invitation to every person to think more clearly, and to question assumptions. To move beyond opinions and the conventional wisdom to be more fully alive.

Nothing is as simple as it first appears. Doing something is not the same as doing what needs to be done.



We need to move beyond fine tuning the way of life that has caused the climate crisis.

The climate crisis is interesting precisely because it has almost nothing to do with climate.

In the future the climate will go on doing what the climate has always done. Adjusting predictably and scientifically to the circumstances in which it finds itself.

You can depend on the climate. It does not play tricks.

If we cut down almost all our forests, as we have done in New Zealand, the climate will simply respond. It is unfair to blame the climate if we are unhappy with the consequences of our actions.

We would do better to talk about "The Human Crisis".

Greed, selfishness, envy, pride, a lust for power, and above all else abuse of the natural environment. have caused the crisis the planet is facing.

Blaming the victim is disingenuous.

Driving an electric car, using solar panels or insulating your passive house is not going to have any impact on "The Human Crisis" the planet is facing. Going "carbon neutral by 2050" is just a waste of time. Carbon emissions are not the issue.

We have been wasting our time internationally having Climate Summits in Kyoto, Paris or Glasgow. We have been wasting our time locally in setting up a Climate Commission, establishing an Emission Reduction Plan, or appointing a Climate Minister. Rather than saying there is a climate crisis we would do better to say there is a human crisis that is impacting on the climate. The IPCC Reports are useful because they tell us about ourselves.

An incorrect diagnosis has resulted in treating symptoms while ignoring the disease.

The planet is facing a moral and ethical crisis. You could say that there has been an eternal battle between good and evil, or you could say we have reached end-game. You could say we have one last chance to get it right. The choices are ours to make or ignore.

How do you overcome selfishness in a world where millions go hungry although there is enough food? How do you overcome greed when the real cost of our architecture is manic? How do you overcome envy when it is the stuff of land agents and advertising? How do you overcome pride in a competitive society? How do you overcome abuse of the natural environment when it is the foundation of the growth economy?

We miss the point when we do nothing more than reduce emissions or embrace green architecture without building a great deal less.

The good news is that to address moral and ethical dilemmas we can all begin by looking at our own lives.

Tony Watkins Karaka Bay 10 June 2022