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2020 New Zealand Architecture Awards

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November/December 2020 NZ\$11.90
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Parallel education systems

Lynda Simmons



IN FEBRUARY, MY PARTNER

and I shared a taxi from Wellington airport to the New Zealand Festival of Arts Talanoa Mau venue with a young artist from Northland, where they were both presenting. The conversation was riveting – Te Kaurinui Parata (Ngātiwai, Ngāti Pūkenga) is young, only in his early 20s, but already a mature thinker and generous with his knowledge. The aspect of the conversation that disturbed me, though, was his description of making a choice between one system of learning and another; between his university studies at Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington and the whakapapa knowledge systems at home. Despite nearing completion, he had left his philosophy and political science university degree behind, instead opting to be a student

Favourite reading spot: Lynda Simmons at home, with friends John Pule and Lucy Macdonald. Photo Madalena Refiti.

of Mātauranga Māori. Te Kaurinui's depth of knowledge and vibrancy as he discussed his work in whakairo and whale recovery showed that he had indeed made a good choice.¹

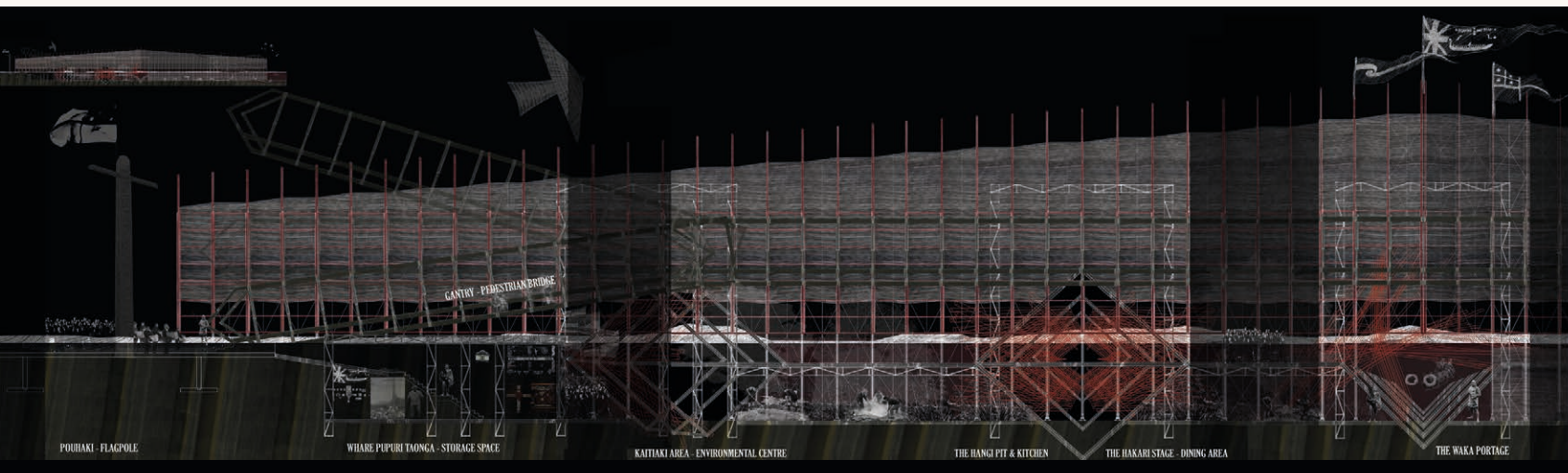
But I wondered why he could not have both, and why our universities are unwisely still losing talented students and leaders such as Parata, despite a commitment, by so many, to honour Aotearoa's foundations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The focus on increasing the numbers of Māori students and academics in universities, as well as Māori curriculum content, is to be celebrated but it has been slow,² perhaps because the established systems expect assimilation into one dominant (Pākehā) world view. Recent allegations of systemic and casual discrimination at the University of Waikato, followed by support from many across universities nationwide, highlight the inequities that continue to exist in our universities,³ and there is ongoing support for strengthening self-determined kaupapa Māori education.⁴ It seems that the focus is always on bringing Māori knowledge into westernised structures and systems, as a minor subset, rather than the other way around.⁵ This approach is about maintaining control and overlooks the rich possibilities that would emerge if Eurocentric academic worlds were to become a minor subset in the existing and parallel well-established Māori knowledge systems, which already have educational sovereignty.

Architectural education could offer such flexibility, with students moving between Māori and Pākehā systems of learning as they attain credits towards their architectural degrees. Architectural education structures in this country are always

evolving and have shifted radically before, from an apprentice-type training, which saw architects being 'articled' to particular practices, to the current recognised pathway via the university double degree system. Prior to and alongside these malleable Pākehā structures of education, there has always existed a parallel guild-like te ao Māori knowledge transfer for architecture, including the many forms of whakairo, mahi toi and raranga wānanga, which have been documented extensively by Dr Deidre Brown (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Kahu).⁶ Providing the ability for students to interweave the two autonomous education systems seems logical and necessary in a supposedly bicultural country and would remove the need for students to leave one system for another.

Beyond education and the academic world, it is hoped that, one day soon, this parallel knowledge system will also be recognised by the professional and registration bodies that govern our architectural communities. Taking a lead from the many emerging indigenous-led practices, such as ĀKAU, Matakoho

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ABOVE

Rameka Alexander-Tu'inukuafe, Section (partial), 'The Ritual Unfolding of an Event' from *Te Whare Tapu o Ngāpuhi: An Architectural Response to Taonga Revitalisation*, 2014, MArch (Prof) thesis. (Supervisor: Ross Jenner, Co-Supervisors: Deidre Brown and Rewi Thompson).

Digital image, hand-drawing, Revit and Photoshop (full original 2970x594mm)

Alexander-Tu'inukuafe's project investigated the concept of 'whare taonga' and its differences from the Western understanding of a museum, despite many New Zealand museums adopting the term since the Te Māori exhibition held in NYC in 1984. He considered, through extensive hui and


community engagement, the ways in which the kaitiaki of Ngāpuhi taonga may be returned to the hapū, and how the architectural expression of such care and protection may differ from museum typology. The final proposal questioned the architectural container itself.

Alexander-Tu'inukuafe's project was placed as Runner-up in the 2015 AAA Visionary Awards, Conceptual Category.

Architecture + Urbanism, Studio RT, MAU Studio, The Roots Collective, designTRIBE and TOA Architects, as well as some large practices establishing internal cultural advisory groups,⁷ and the professional support network Ngā Aho, current forms of practice supported by the Institute could easily be broadened.

I am aware that, as a Pākehā in conversations of this kind, my role is to listen rather than to speak, and the writing of this opinion column has exposed a navigation through my own ignorance. But this exposure is volunteered because I strongly believe that the current assimilation of one knowledge system into another needs revision and that an interconnection between existing self-determined indigenous-led education systems and current degree structures (as a subset) is possible.

During a recent NZIA National Awards jury tour, I was lucky to

visit the Hihiaua Cultural Centre, designed by Moller Architects. I was so pleased that Te Kaurinui Parata was working at the centre that day and that, in our fleeting catch-up, I was able to gain an insight into his passion for his ongoing education, valuable connections within his broader community and respectful, developing leadership. The knowledge he is safeguarding has a whakapapa to Ngāti Porou tohunga whakairo Pineāmine Taiapa (1901–1972), via his teacher Te Warihi Hetaraka. I look forward to a time when students from university architecture schools can study under educators like him. 

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this column are personal and do not represent the views of the School of Architecture and Planning at the University of Auckland, where Lynda is a Professional Teaching Fellow.

REFERENCES

- ¹ Te Kaurinui Parata is a student of master carver Te Warihi Hetaraka (Ngātiwai) and environmental/kaitiakitanga conservation and whale tikanga expert Hori Parata (Ngātiwai, Ngāti Pūkenga). Te Kaurinui is a member of the Manu Taupunga group that is the organising arm of the whale-body recovery operation.
- ² T. G. McAllister (Te Aitanga ā Māhaki, Ngāti Porou), J. Kidman (Ngāti Maniapoto, Ngāti Raukawa), O. Rowley (Ngāi Tahu) and R. F. Theodore (Ngāpuhi, Te Arawa), 'Why isn't my professor Māori?' *MAI Journal*, 2019, volume 8, issue 2.
- ³ waikato.ac.nz/news-opinion/media/2020/Findings-of-the-independent-review. See also Eleanor Ainge Roy, 'Māori academics call for national inquiry into racism at New Zealand universities', *The Guardian*, 24 Sept 2020. bit.ly/36cWlIM
- ⁴ G. Raumati Hook (Ngāti Mutunga, Te Atiawa, Ngāti Tama), 'A Future for Maori Education Part II: The Reintegration of Culture and Education', *MAI Review*, 2007, 1.
- ⁵ It is noted that tertiary institutions such as Te Wānanga o Aotearoa merge the systems into a certificate and degree structure. twoa.ac.nz. It is also important to acknowledge here the many advances within architecture schools, such as Unitec's long-running Te Hononga, led by Rau Hoskins and Carin Wilson, AUT's establishment of an architecture school with curriculum focus on indigenous and environmental knowledge, and the appointment of the first indigenous HOS at the University of Auckland (Dr Deidre Brown) and professor (Dr Anthony Hoete), as well as the student-led Tuākana programme.
- ⁶ See, for example, D. Brown (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Kahu), 'The architecture of the School of Māori Arts and Crafts', *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, Sept 1999, volume 108, number 3, pp. 239, 241–276. See also D. Brown 'Contemporary Māori architecture' in E. Grant, K. Greenop, A. Refiti and D. Glenn (eds.), *The Handbook of Contemporary Indigenous Architecture*, Singapore, Springer, 2018, and 'Open your eyes to the future of Māori architecture', 3 Jan 2020. <https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/news/2020/01/03/open-eyes-to-future-maori-architecture.html>
- ⁷ For example, the establishment of Waka Māia in 2015 within Jasmx has had an impact on the practice itself and on the wider profession. Waka Māia provides a highly valued, authentically Māori design voice within Jasmx.