

BENNETT, Barnaby

BIO

My name is **Barnaby Bennett**. I am a Pakeha New Zealander born in Whangarei, the northern end of the North Island. Currently living in sunny Wellington, I am thankfully now in my final year of a combined Bachelor of Architecture and Bachelor of Arts double degree. I am presenting at this conference, some recent writing about the role of Whakapapa in the built environment and its relation to the more Eurocentric understandings of architecture. This work combines my on-going interests in architecture and Maori culture, while confronting the problems that come with any attempt to understand an indigenous culture that is not one's own. My current research regards the role of prisons in the processes of colonisation.

ABSTRACT

Peer, Glimpse and Gaze: A Pakeha View¹ of Whakapapa and Architecture.

Both of the words, architecture and whakapapa, offer metaphorical and categorical insights into their respective European and Māori cultural origins. The respective primary realms of built form and genealogy assert methodologies of inter-cultural and cross-cultural ownership of that knowledge; power. Hence both concepts are deeply imbedded in the processes of cultural construction.

The Māori Architect Rau Hoskin's questions the accuracy of directly translating the European notion of architecture into Māori built form. The development of a post-colonial attitude to Māori culture in the past twenty years has led to an academic desire to understand Māori built form on its' own terms. The works of Austin, Linzey, Wood, Treadwell and other Pakeha architectural academics sets a mood of atonement for the lack of European appreciation of Māori Architecture.² "One common architectural myth is based on the racist premise that Western versions of the built environment are necessarily 'advanced' formal expressions, while that of so called 'native peoples' is merely primitive, indeed not architectural at all."^{3,4}

From the works of these people there can be no doubt that there exists in Māori culture built forms, (and discourse around these forms), that have no reason not to be to be considered architecture. However Hoskins questions the wisdom of asserting

¹ Oxford English Dictionary. Online 2005. 10a. A particular manner or way of considering or regarding a matter or question; a conception, opinion, or theory formed by reflection or study.

² In one passage Wood writes that "Critical architectural commentators on Māori architecture have accounted for this in-betweenness through 'landscape' (Austin), 'binary architecture' (Linzey), 'exclosure' (Dickson), and 'ideology' (Brown and McKay). Each of these commentaries identifies the difficulty in discussing mythological architecture within a Western discourse' Wood, Peter. *Re-Framing Architecture: Theory, Science and Myth*. Pg 223. Both Austin and Wood claim the term exclosure is coined by Dickson, however the OED defines an exclosure as 'an area from which unwanted animals, etc, are excluded'. The common farming practice of enclosing small areas of native Cabbage or Totara trees within farmland springs to mind when reading this definition; and also seems a possibly appropriate metaphor for the important way in which the Marae space preserves the Māori culture by selectively excluded unwanted cultural elements.

³ Woods' footnote refers the reader to Linzey's 'Speaking to and Talking about: Māori Architecture.' *Interstices*, Issue 1. 1991. 48-60. It is interesting that Linzey re-titles his earlier 1987 paper 'Speaking to and Talking about: Māori and European educated comportments toward architecture'. The later simplification removes the academic ambiguity of the earlier and replaces it with *Māori Architecture*.

⁴ Wood, Peter. *Re-Framing Architecture: Theory, Science and Myth*. Pg 219.

the existence of Māori architecture; perhaps suggesting that the Pakeha urge to compensate for the past wrongs of considering Māori built form to be inferior to European architecture can not be alleviated by allowing Māori buildings to enter the club of European architecture.

In this sense Rau Hoskins is being canny when he does not accept the tag of Māori architecture. To accept this offer of Māori built form being architecture is to risk the built form becoming categorised, and consumed by the Western discourse of architecture. Recent Māori writers particularly Brown, and Andersen have been working within university institutions to make negotiations with Western ideals of architecture that do not rely solely on the writings and speculations of European, or Pakeha writers. So the new Māori architectural writers are able to work within the established systems and enable themselves to select which western⁵ concepts they choose to appropriate.

Both Anderson and Brown suggest that the Māori idea of whakapapa is a key concept in developing an understanding of Māori built form. "All architecture has a whakapapa. This assertion is a counter-colonisation of Western hegemonic thought by Māori ideology. It is an appropriation."⁶

The building is a living ancestor, a text that carries the stories and knowledge of past histories. There is a complex of alternative layering and explanations that can be given about the social, spatial, and formal aspects of Marae and whareniui; the telling of these is itself a whakapapa. The Māori universe can be seen as a complex fabric of interwoven concepts and narratives. The genealogy of whakapapa provides the narrative grounds; the wairua or spiritual content gives meaning and connection, mana relates it to the personal histories and politics; these are only a few of the threads.

Essentially it is an injustice to attempt to pick out one of these threads, that of whakapapa, and focus attention on it. It seems when studying this material that when each thread is examined it becomes the central concept that holds the fabric together. Even as we gaze at the material it turns, shimmers, and constantly re-centres itself.⁷

⁵ "And indeed, even as we speak of the west it is important also to know which West we are talking about." Ahmed Zaoui 2004, speech titled *Clash of Civilisations: Myth or Reality?*. Presented on his behalf by Peter Sharp at Auckland University, October 19, 2004.

⁶ Brown, Deidre. *Moorehu Architecture*. Pg 4.

⁷ "The Māori image disturbs the traditional European educated tendency to naively believe in discrete categories of existence, even to the extent of forcing a chasm of unknowing between them; it attends instead to the reality of tension between categories. The Māori image attends to the weave and structure of rope itself, allows the ends of the rope to dangle and tangle as they will in the realm of the 'mytho-poetic.'" Linzey, Michael. *Speaking to and Talking About: Māori and European educated compartments toward architecture*. Pg 1.