

## **Editorial**

### **Closure with a Wrecking Ball**

**Murray Edmond**

Several of the contributors to this issue of *Ka Mate Ka Ora* either are presently students, or else have only recently ceased to be students, at the University of Auckland. Some are also poets. The essays, accounts, reviews and reports you can read in this issue have all benefitted from the resources available at the University of Auckland in its various libraries. The recent decision by the executive management of the University of Auckland to close five libraries on its campus - the Elam Fine Arts Library, the Music Library, the Architecture Library, the Epsom Campus Library (the Epsom campus, the old Teacher Training College, will be sold off while Auckland faces an acute crisis in the supply of teachers) and Tamaki Campus Library – leaves one with a sense of confusion and deep disappointment. Not only will libraries be ‘closed,’ but also a substantial number of staff, including specialist librarians will lose their jobs (‘dis-establishing’ 114 positions and ‘creating’ 98.5 is the way the university executive and Council choose to describe what they are doing).

What the term ‘close’ will mean for the libraries is unclear. The executive management of the University has stated recently that it ‘closed’ the Maidment Theatre at the University of Auckland, the only public meeting space the university possessed, at the end of 2015. It did this on the 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2015, locking the building, firing the staff, and removing the art work from the walls – only to find out, in the case of the Don Binney painting that had long hung above the entrance to the main theatre auditorium, that the university did not own this painting it was about to seize. The case of the closure of the Maidment was exemplary in that it involved a mixture of unseemly haste and calculated timing. The reason given for this closure was that the building did not comply with the recent government bill that had brought in new earthquake safety standards. Although no report was ever shown by the university executive management, it is likely that the Maidment Theatre, completed in 1976, did indeed fall short of the new requirements. Middlemore Hospital maternity ward is presently (August 2018) faced with the problem of not meeting the new standards. The state of Middlemore maternity ward has been known since 2012 and the CEO of the Health Board, Mark Gosche, has stated (8<sup>th</sup> May 2018) that these new regulations require the owner of a building to get an assessment made within 15 years. Gosche also pointed out that

Auckland has the lowest earthquake risk of any region in New Zealand. Murray Lynch, Director of Playmarket in Wellington, said, at the time of the Maidment closure, that all Wellington's theatres were operating with a higher earthquake risk on a building to building comparison than the Maidment – and Wellington's earthquake risk is much greater than Auckland's. These factors, taken together, might suggest that a rational approach would have been to assess how the existing theatre might be improved and upgraded. Instead the executive management of the University of Auckland demolished the Maidment Theatre. The Maidment was originally built and controlled as a joint project between the University and the Students Association. At some point that remains rather unclear, ownership and governorship were transferred to the University. The University has put out statements about its intention to eventually build a new arts centre (what that might be has not been clarified), yet the subcommittee set up for initiating that intention has met minimally, while the Maidment moves into its third year as a high security hole in the ground. One might wonder which of the targeted libraries will face the wrecking ball?

The recent closure of the libraries is part of a pattern that has been going on for many years. The Science Library was closed some years ago, the Engineering Library was closed more recently; the Geology Library was also closed, as well as the Biological Sciences Library, a specialist treasure. If the newly proposed closures succeed then only Medicine and Law will retain separate libraries. One must ask why the executive management is removing those centres of knowledge which lie at the heart of the reason for its existence as a publicly funded institution of research and learning.

The saga of staff losses, a protracted tale, continues amongst teachers and researchers as, in June 2018, five senior staff in Music lost their jobs. And, following this, staff in the School of Languages and Literatures in the Faculty of Arts, as well as staff in the Faculty of Education, and in Social Work, have been targeted. Auckland University Press has suffered similar precipitate departures, leaving the Press now languishing without the expertise of literary editor, a rather dismal prospect.

The fine critical work in this issue of *Ka Mate Ka Ora* by the writers attached to the University of Auckland is a tribute to the expertise of staff and the quality of students. Both these groups, despite the bizarre turn that the University executive management has taken against the life and culture and purpose of its own place and people, manage to produce work of vitality and insight. I salute them.