VOICES BEYOND THE PÆE

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Whakarāpopoto Korero

Ki te ao Māori ko te tuarā whakatere, kakatī kaupapa. I tipu ake te mahi toi i te tauira o te pae. Ko tēnei tuhitūhi e hau tu i te whakaaro ko te pae hei whakapuaki i te pū manawa, oha atu i te mahi toi. Rokohanga atu ka pupū ake te reo tāhu mai tētahi pae ki tētahi pae. Ko te hua mai o tēnei momo reo tāhu te kawenata hei tātari i tā te Māori titiro i āna tikanga.

Abstract

For Māori the pae is a zone of demarcation and negotiation. Māori art evolves out of a negotiation of the pae. This paper proposes that the pae is an inevitable spatial domain that must be negotiated to rationalise one’s position as a Māori artist. Invariably, voices from beyond the pae generate tensions in the transition from one side of this domain to the other. These voices and the tensions generated will be examined through a consideration of instances of Māori cultural representation.

The other world

Like other indigenous people throughout the world, many Māori continue to operate in two worlds. One is the marae while the other is the world promoted through national icons as New Zealand. The world of customary practice continues to impact on Māori positionality within this other world. The ability to negotiate between each is often an onerous task as loyalties are tested through the acquiscience of customary rights or the choice of freedoms (real or imagined) promoted in the other world. In many instances the boundaries between the two worlds have blurred as the protocols that define order in one are transposed into the other. Often the sites of interaction are charged with discourse as ideologies are contested, accepted or rejected. The transposition of protocols associated with the pae has increased in intensity over the last few years as one of a number of strategies for the empowerment of Māori art. This strategy is not the prerogative of the arts alone but extends beyond the sites of art practice to confront other institutions of cultural dissemination as well.

Pae as transitional zone

The pae has retained its intrinsic cultural dimension as margin, boundary and horizon. It is the critical area of interaction between sky and land, and between people and people. It is a conceptual zone that locates the position of host and visitor. It is the locus of power that mediates relationships between people, defines spatial zones of communication and establishes the order of social interaction. For some, the pae is a barricade: a site of demarcation between the known and the unknown; between the familiar and the unfamiliar. Conceived as such, the male role is understood to provide a barricade between the insider and the outsider, to protect women and children from harm and to guard the mana of iwi, hapū and whānau. The latter conception of the pae is subject to reconfiguration as Māori women contest the imposition of patriarchy perpetuated through colonial discourse.

Rendered as paepae, it becomes a threshold that is intensified in its potency by its qualifying descriptor. Thus, the paepae āwhā locates the border between the landscape and architecture while the paepae tapu delineates the threshold that marks the outside of the house from the inside, the realm of Tūmatuaengā from the realm of Rongomatāne. The allocation of Māori deity to external and internal spaces dictates the standards of discourse permissible in each area. The qualifying descriptor contextualises the pae and delimits its dimension as accessible through ritual or non-ritual mediation. Thus, the qualification of paepae with tapu intensifies the threshold region as a significant area in the transition from the exterior of the house to the interior. Implicit in the transition between zones is a metaphysical transformation of state as one moves from the domain of confrontation and debate to the domain of resolution and placation, as one crosses the boundary from potential hostility to security. From this perspective, the pae is a border that separates the insider from the outsider, one from the other. To cross the pae may require ritual negotiation between one side and the other. This
transition may be achieved through a mediator or through personal negotiation. For those conversant in Te Reo Māori the transition across the pae may be easier than those who are non-conversant. Facility in the Māori language enables one to articulate and comprehend the intricacies of apparent antithetical discourse that regulate transition across the pae. The antithetical discourse of the pae is generated by the shifting parameters of social interaction that condition the protocol of the various tribal groups within Māori society. While protocols varied across tribal boundaries in traditional Māori society one is also confronted with the reconfiguration of protocols as sub-tribes become tribes or external alliances (religion provides one example) are forged to accommodate a reconstituted order for social interaction. Examples of this reconfiguration may be found in the Te Ati Awa practice of shifting the pae from the outside marae into the meeting house and pre-empting the ritual of the pae with the practice of whakaruru or hongi. The latter practice may be interpreted as a process of placation or union between opposing groups that follows, rather than precedes, the settling of issues on the pae in many tribal areas.

Kinship as a framework

Freedom of expression has its place within the sites of Māori cultural practice. But the protocol of the pae is usually regulated by the prerogative rights afforded through genealogy, seniority or proxy. Genealogy legitimises one’s status as pre-eminent within Māori society and hence a significant determinant of the right to speak. Seniority, with its implicit notions of wisdom and respect, endorses the speaking rights of elders, while proxy is gained through the conferment of speaking rights from parents in the first instance and older siblings in the second. It is the pae that holds the key to genealogical sanction. In affirmation of genealogy there is an affirmation of heritage, in affirmation of heritage there is an affirmation of identity as Māori. It is this affirmation of identity that allows one to cross the pae secure in the knowledge that one is not an outsider regardless of one’s facility in the language. In partaking of the fruits one is united with one’s ancestors. But it is only through honing one’s taste buds that one can savour the delicacies that lie beyond the distension of the belly. In the words of Bourdieu:

“‘Taste’ unites all those who are the product of similar conditions while distinguishing them from all others. And it distinguishes in an essential way, since taste is the basis of all that one has - people and things - and all that one is for others, whereby one classifies oneself and is classified by others”. (1984)

Taste is very much conditioned by the constraints of culture. For too long Māori have been sold the notion of a homogenising vision filtered through imperialist lenses. Māori taste has often been absent from the equation unless the Nationalist discourse necessitated such inclusion, as an icon of the New Zealander. Māori artists employ a number of strategies to construct a platform for the de-colonisation of this Nationalist discourse; strategies that are intimately connected to a wider discourse of cultural representation. According to Paul Spoonley:

“The ethnic revival of the 1960s and 1970s has shown that ethnicity is an extremely malleable product that continually changes according to circumstances and requirements...In order to politicise ethnicity, it has to be made appropriate to contemporary conditions...[discarding of traditional symbols]...In this process of selection and rejection, then leaders of the ethnic group play a critical role. They guide and reinforce change and their ability to alter the ethnicity of the group without alienating members is important to the success of politicizing a particular ethnicity”. (1993:38-9)

Contemporary Māori art is part of a wider cultural discourse that seeks autonomy of expression as a right of citizenship on both sides of the pae. It is conditioned and informed by ethnicity and gender that seeks to express the ideals of a group whose representations are often empowered by kinship. Kinship provides a critical framework that is conditioned by cosmological and genealogical narratives as an elementary notion of being. Much of the Pākehā literature of the past has sought to de-construct this genealogical framework as (literate) linear history or as a (functional) capitalist enterprise. The current project is aimed at replacing this logo-centric framework with a more affable model that accommodates Māori notions of spirituality and of communal affirmation.

Kinship groups, within Māori society, are more than economical quotients for transaction. ‘Iwi’, rendered as ‘tribe’ has severed the genealogical imperative that underpins Māori customary concepts. The holistic union between the body as a critical notion of regeneration and nature as personification of being is often absent from contemporary translations of ‘iwi’. ‘Iwi’, is more than ‘people’ or ‘tribe’. It is the essential
component of the spine, a fulcrum that articulates the nerve centre of Māori culture. It is the ‘bone’ that protects the marrow of culture. It encompasses ‘hapū’ and ‘whānau’ as sustenance for the regeneration of ‘iwi’. It exists as a cultural backbone whose strength and durability carry the essential ingredients of culture. The concept of nurture within the womb has been trivialised in the translation of ‘hapū’ as sub-tribe. ‘Whānau’, in its colonised translation as ‘extended family’ is accessible as an economically viable unit. Unfortunately, erasure of the inseparability of genealogy and birth epitomises the imposition of Pākehā terms of reference. As such these colonial categories of capture attempt to render the metaphysical as illogical or human potential as capitalist units of production or servitude.

Ritual as vehicle and site of capture
The tenacious adherence to a Māori cultural framework continues to infuse the creative projects of a number of artists working in the marae context. It is also applicable to a number of artists involved in the translation of non-customary processes and practices into culturally familiar and accessible models.

The creative work of Manos Nathan provides an appropriate example of this new wave of cultural representation. Vessels like the Waka Taurahere Tangata (vessels for the internment of afterbirth) and Waka Pito (umbilical pot) endorse the customary practice of returning the whenua (afterbirth) to the land. His Ipu Pure are water vessels for ceremonial use. The function of the vessel is infused with a new order of existence beyond the transport of produce or as an ‘object of desire’. The severed link with the Lapita potters of the past has been re-activated through allegorical seizure. Over time the vessel has been enriched through the latent visual and conceptual vocabulary inherent within customary vessels including papahou (treasure box), hue (gourd), kumete (bowl) and kōrere (feeding funnel). At a pragmatic level Nathan sees the potential of clay as an economic resource that may be harnessed to supplement the income of his people.

In transforming earthen-ware to cultural vessel, this artist conceptualises earth as Papatuanuku and vessel as a manifestation of wairua. It is a process of transformation that finds its cultural significance in ritual; a significance that is achieved through the metaphysical and the physical interaction between object and culture. Thus, the vessel is ritually charged in the return of the afterbirth to the land. This endorsement of customary practice acknowledges the vital and the essential union between earth and humankind. A practice that exemplifies the sympathetic coalescence of the natural cycles of life and death, reproduction and decay. The creation of cultural vessels invested with significant customary pattern presupposes the continued relevance of ritual within Māori culture. In this sense, ritual is both the vehicle and the site of capture of an alien process. Object and process are reconfigured to align with a customary paradigm of essential(ist) Māori practice.

The essentialist debate
In some quarters, this act of cultural seizure, of re-writing the text, of reconfiguring the object to comply with a Māori world view is met with approbation. Māori artists are warned that such practices are grounded in ideology and sustained by notions of essentialism.

“[The] ‘essentialist’ approaches to ... race-specific art have theoretical pitfalls and political dangers. Theoretically, they disregard the fact that artistic skill is culturally, not biologically acquired...Māori are buying into the biologistic fallacy and thereby reinforcing the very kind of stereotyped thinking of which they are usually victims”. (1994:70-1)

The rise in Māori cultural representation cannot be dismissed as a theoretical recapitulation of biological determinism. In rendering this genetic paradigm impotent, Pākehā academics employ biological determinism as a hegemonic tool. It is a tool that seeks to render Māori incapable of liberation from this imperialist doctrine; a tool that has run its
course as a tenable instrument of subversion. To label Māori art as essentialist perpetuates the imperialist tactic of preserving intellectual distance and intellectual superiority. Further, Pākehā academics neutralise the ‘other’ with their discarded weapons of possession. In erasing the criteria of heritage (whether biological, cultural or experiential) as a legitimate protest against oppression, Pākehā (non-Māori) academics merely perpetuate the essential white doctrine as the sole criteria for cultural enlightenment. As a non-European scholar suggests, what is absent from the critique of essentialism is the way that essentialism informs representations of whiteness. It is always the non-white... who is guilty of essentialism (Hooks:1992). What is omitted in the debate over essentialism in New Zealand is the Māori right to self determination of art and art practices. Māori protests against the inappropriate use of Māori customary image and motif is translated by Pākehā academics as: ‘Māori think they are better at reproducing Māori images because they are born Māori’. A more pertinent translation should read: ‘Māori would prefer to retain control over their customary images and motifs because of the cultural significance associated with these forms’, or ‘The Māori use of Māori images is not only being Māori but of having access to conscious and unconscious elements of cultural heritage and thereby being able to negotiate the pae with credibility and significance’. I do not wish to enter the debate over cultural property rights which is outside the scope of this paper but it does present a critical issue for future consideration.

Tino rangatiratanga

The current emergence of the voice of reclamation signals a reaction against integrative policies that have promoted the notion of a single national voice and a single notion of cultural excellence. It comes as no surprise that several Māori artists use art as a vehicle of protest. While it appears that land issues provide the catalyst for many creative projects, the underlying discourse, upon which much of Māori art is grounded, is tino rangatiratanga.

The tenor and construction of representations of tino rangatiratanga are as diverse as the sites of cultural production. Often blatant, sometimes subtle, these representations may be configured as word, image or concept. Whatever its appearance or conceptualisation, it is as an invocation of lands alienated and territories lost. In attempting to recapture territories lost Māori women artists, Shona Rapira Davis and Robyn Kahukiwa, have protested against the right of Pākehā women to deliver the karanga. In ritualising her creative process through karakia and banning food from her area of art practice, Kahukiwa commits herself to customary practices of art production. She endorses the right of Māori to self determination by articulating the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi through her art. In her ‘white out series’ of 1990, Kahukiwa endeavours to rename Māori women rendered anonymous through colonial lenses. She is joined by a host of Māori women artists, like Dianne Prince, whose energies are dedicated to a reconfiguration of customary values and practices that demand a consideration of rights of Māori women as prerequisite to Māori self determination.

The capture of site

Since the 1970s, museums and galleries, as sites of cultural representation, have increasingly been rendered accessible. In comparing two recent ‘contemporary’ Māori exhibitions Korurangi and Toihoukura, Jonathan Mane-Wheoki suggested that Korurangi exemplified the “individualistic and idiosyncratic” while Toihoukura exuded a “collective identity and energy” (Mane-Wheoki, 1996:43-7). He also noted a collision between ritual and art practice; dramatic in Korurangi and imperceptible in Toihoukura. What was absent from Jonathan’s analysis of these two exhibitions was the demand (on the part of some Māori curators) for Māori protocol as a critical element of the exhibition process. The ritual seizure of site is of-
subsumed beneath the current debate over authenticity, essentialism and appropriation. It is in the capture of site that Māori cultural representation finds its most provocative presence.

Artefact as taonga
Wherever the tāonga of Te Māori were exhibited in the United States of America so too were the Māori people. Te Māori was not merely an exhibition of ‘artefacts’ or ‘objects’ but, it was also an exhibition of Māori culture whose tāonga constituted an elementary voice. Imagine the bewilderment of the American public as Māori conversed with images, addressed them by name or wept before them. At the heart of the successful interface between Te Māori and America was the ritualised contextualisation of artefact as tāonga and tāonga as a condition of cultural practice. Thus, the ritual of the pae, that establishes protocols for the interface between art and culture, was enacted abroad. Art was rendered accessible through ritual and ritual empowered art. It was a process of de-contextualising art as an ‘object of desire’ or ‘object of gaze’, in order to reconfigure the object as a precondition of culture.

Te Māori provided a blueprint for the Te Waka Toi exhibition of contemporary Māori art that toured the United States during 1992 to 1993. Like Te Māori, the ritualised negotiation of the pae together with a Māori presence at each of the venues was a critical and necessary condition of curatorial practice. Sandy Adsett, as a member of the Atinga committee of Te Waka Toi, together with Cliff Whiting, as Chairman of Te Waka Toi, were instrumental in establishing a curatorial agenda for the Te Waka Toi exhibition. This exhibition imposed a culturally defined curatorial sequence at each venue. A sequence that was configured on the ritual of the pae. In the Te Waka Toi exhibition, the art works functioned, not only as art, but as an imprint of cultural values. On the one hand, this was achieved, through the ritual opening of the exhibition at each of the venues, and on the other, through an arrangement of the art works as a conceptual endorsement of the protocols associated with the pae. Thus, the art works were aligned to evoke the karanga, the wero, whaikōrero, waiata and poroporoaki. It was a curatorial process that endeavoured to transcend the individual status of art as ‘object of gaze’ or ‘object of desire’ in order to align art and artists with a Māori cultural paradigm of social interaction between art and artist as products of culture and the cultural contexts of art production. As a further endorsement of this curatorial strategy, the concept of ahi ka was engendered through Māori attendance at each of the exhibitions.

Patua, Wellington City Art Gallery, 1996.

Patua: Māori arts in action, which opened at the Wellington City Gallery, 1 March 1996, provides a recent example of the cultural capture of space. On entering the gallery one was confronted by a pāwaho, that assumed the form of a gateway. This facade was erected to signal the presence of Māori at the Wellington City Art Gallery and to demarcate the space outside the gallery as a pae for the ritual interaction between tangata whenua and manuhiri. This area became the zone of welcome for official visitors and dignitaries, a temporary marae. Beyond the facade one entered the reception foyer of the gallery to be greeted by a secondary facade.

A stone sculpture, acted as a conceptual mauri, providing an anchor for the exhibition. A wall relief
as a koruru (gable figure) while art works positioned to the left and right of the stone sculpture alluded to the amo (support posts) of a meeting house. In the gallery on the taha mauī the works exhibited were coordinated through monochromatic hues of browns, creams and blacks to provide a backdrop for cultural interaction. Wood and fibre surfaces provided an added element of integration. The gallery on the taha matau became both exhibition and work space for artists in a range of disciplines. The upper galleries were organised into zones of pakeke and rangatahi.

Apart from the dictates of function and practicality, works were organised according to customary conventions of architectural signification and customary protocols for social interaction. Architectural signification was achieved through the allusion to the meeting house facade cited above. Customary protocols for social interaction was revealed in the ordering of the upper gallery according to the interrelationship between senior and junior artists. However, the latter arrangement was managed with an element of flexibility. Some younger artists appeared amidst the older artists, the latter amended order conditioned by the secondary principle of colour harmony and balance. Additionally, the inversion of cultural signification of taha mauī and taha matau was conditioned by considerations of size and access within the lower gallery spaces. Within the context of tribal meeting houses the hosts occupy the left side of the house while the visitors occupy the other. Thus, the spatial ordering of people within tribal meeting houses provided a customary framework for the curation of art works within the gallery context.

The integrated nature of the show may be attributed to Sandy Adsett whose influence pervaded the exhibition as curator and host. Adsett’s inimitable presence could be found in the colour harmonies that pervaded many of the works and the general atmosphere of hospitality that emanated from the City Gallery during the period of the Toihoukura residency. It was a period during which the Wellington City Art Gallery was seized as a site for cultural representation.

In the Toihoukura exhibition at the Dowse Museum and Art Gallery in Lower Hutt, the walls were blackened to intensify the chromatic key of images constructed, painted and woven. The impression generated was one of intense enlightenment. Light emerged from darkness as an enunciation of the Māori generative process: the epochal emergence of Te Aomārama from Te Pō. It would have been obvious to even the most unenlightened viewer that customary pattern and form provided the cohesive formula for this exhibition. A convention that is also evident in the current Toihoukura exhibition at the Manawatu Museum and Science Centre. The essential(ist) vocabulary of this vision may be related to the art of the whare whakairo that has informed Adsett’s art for a number of years and currently informs the representations of the Toihoukura programme.

Towards a new order
The right to self determination of the codes of art practice and the definition of art is a critical consideration in the realignment of Māori cultural perception. The visual arts, like other forms of cultural production, are social constructs that are grounded in personal and communal negotiations of time and space. While art for art’s sake is often advocated as the sole criteria for artistic evaluation, customary templates that reference or translate customary forms and practice are proffered as legitimate frameworks for shaping artistic
ten perception and practice. This does not mean a total eradication of a western aesthetic framework. Nor does it mean a single politicising agenda as the sole determinant of vision. In shaping a vision for the future the configuration of the past often provides a framework for reconfiguring that future. What is critical in the process of reconfiguration is the construction of identity as an inseparable condition of the past and the future. It is a familiarity with the concepts and dimensions of Māori knowledge that offer a sense of empowerment to those who seek an indigenised vocabulary to realise their personal or group realities. Māori negotiation of reality is subject to redefinition and reconfiguration depending on the extent of our extra-cultural interaction. The imposition of one cultural system upon another generates an inevitable conflict as opposing ideologies contest the sites of cultural representation. This conflict is never static or uniform but is subject to redefinition as territories are won, lost or neutralised through contestation, concession or even withdrawal. This contestation of site is not grounded in the binary dialectic between ‘us’ and ‘them’ or ‘he’ and ‘she’ but also between ‘us’ and ‘us’. This apparent contradiction does not present an insurmountable obstacle but is symptomatic of the constant redefinition of cultural realities; realities that are subject to reconfiguration under the shifting tides of cultural allegiance and the establishment of an alternative cultural order.17 In the past Māori were erased from the art history of New Zealand. Today there is growing desire amongst the Pākehā art historians to erase Māori art as an independent notion. These writers wish to capture Māori art and name it New Zealand art in the interests of Nationhood. While Māori artists are not necessarily opposed to the development of a New Zealand nation or sense of shared nationhood, they do not accept that it should be at the expense of a strong Māori identity - even a Māori nation (Durie:1995B) within New Zealand.

1 Timoti Karetu, 1996, Mataora, in print. Timoti Karetu is the Māori Language Commissioner for Te Taura Whiri in Wellington, New Zealand.

2 It is important to remember that the outsider may be Māori. In a recent Court of Appeal ruling (31 June 1996) Māori has once more been subjected to redefinition in consideration of the distribution of Fishery assets associated with the Sealord deal negotiated between Māori and the Crown. The latest ruling dethrones the genealogical imperative that conditioned access to the Fisheries assets for those Māori who are able to establish their genealogical ties to iwi. Thus, endorsing their legitimate registration as members of Runanga a Iwi. Instead, an acknowledgement of Māoriness is the sole criteria for consideration of rights of access to Fisheries assets. This ruling is an acknowledgement of the rights of those Māori who (through no fault of their own) have no knowledge of their iwi connection or do not wish to exercise a connection. These are urban Māori whose links with their turangawaewae have been severed through decades of colonisation. Responses to this decision have been variable ranging from accusations of continued colonial oppression through to the affirmation of the edifying principle of humanitarianism of the justice system in its consideration of the dispossessed. Perhaps the only valid response warranted is an acknowledgement of the success of the assimilationist policies of the past that have rendered Māori anonymous within their own tribal land.

3 Research on the question of identity by the Te Hoe Nukurua research unit at Massey University shows that secure identity includes an acknowledgement of genealogy, access to land, whanau (family) participation, access to cultural knowledge, some facility in the Māori language and access to Mainstream society.


5 Percy Smith’s theory of the ‘Great Migration’ has been subject to reassessment over the last decade. His notion of one great flotilla of seven canoes landing in Aotearoa (c. 750 AD) has been rendered implausible through his omission of important tribal canoes. He is also criticised for his imposition of temporal and historical frameworks on Māori genealogies from different tribal regions. See Simmons, D. R. The Great New Zealand Myth, Wellington, A. H. & A. H. Reed, 1976.

6 In keeping with the theory of functionalism, Raymond Firth views Māori culture as an economical unit that sustains its existence through exchange and transaction of commodities and services. See Firth, Raymond, Economics of the Māori, [2nd ed.], Wellington, Government Printer, 1972.

7 Nathan’s Waka Pito are made of unfired clay to permit reconstitution as earth.

8 Customary art practice was initiated with karakia and food was banned from the areas of art production. Abstinence from sexual intercourse was also a condition of customary practice.

9 The capture and rendering museum and gallery spaces accessible is a legacy of the forerunners of ‘contemporary’ Māori art.


12 Sandy Adsett is a Ngati Kahungunu artist. It is his belief that [a] Māori has an obligation to the art of his people. Its the people’s art. It doesn’t belong to you. It must identify Māori to Māori if it is going to remain relevant to statements about our
tribal beliefs, values and mana (standing) in today's and tomorrow's world. Quoted from Te Waka Toi: Contemporary Māori art from New Zealand, Te Waka Toi: Council for Māori and South Pacific Arts, Wellington, 1992.

13 Cliff Whiting is the past Chairman of Te Waka Toi and is currently kaihautu of the Māori collection, Te Papa Tongarewa, Museum of New Zealand, Wellington.

14 The ritual of the pae is a much more complex process than that outlined and is subject to variation from tribe to tribe. However, the process of delivering the respective points of view of host and visitor includes oratory and song with the proceedings initiated through the welcoming call and the challenge. The farewell terminates the events after matters to be discussed have been settled. The partaking of food is an inseparable component of the ritual process.

15 Ahi Ka is one of a number of customary concepts relating to Māori land tenure. One was required to metaphorically keep the home fires burning or literally to occupy the land as one of the pre-conditions of retaining rights to land ownership.

16 In the traditional Māori meeting house the mauri was buried beneath one of the corner posts of the house to guard against malevolent spirits.

17 Durie maintains that “Māori society is not static...It is both dynamic and interactive. Changing demographic patterns, technological advancement, interaction with other cultures and nation, and reduced control over resources, have been accompanied by changing cultural beliefs and practises. In addition, throughout the human life-cycle, situations, attitudes, values and aspirations change so that many Māori individuals at different stages in life may demonstrate quite different characteristics from those present at other stages.” (1995A:464-5)

References


