

Re-packaging arts and re-constituting life-worlds

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ABSTRACT

This article places art and design education into their social contexts and traces processes through which some art forms are given centre place whereas others continue to be marginalised. The relationships between cultural elites and the lay public, cross-overs between different cultures, and the transitions to which art forms and practices are subjected under the rules of market economics are, to some extent, mirrored in educational settings and curricula. While this article is not directly about the arts curriculum in New Zealand, links have been made with that particular document in order to compliment articles by other writers in this issue. I argue that strategies of distance and differentiation (between system and life-world theory and practice, or ethnicity and repressive multiculturalism, see Žižek, 1997: 45; 1998: 997) will be replicated in schools and universities, unless a number of assumptions are put into question. While, for example, The Arts in the New Land Curriculum document (The Ministry of Education, 2000) encourages cultural diversity and the respect for difference between cultures, these concepts are neither explored nor rendered specific. This entails a danger of perpetuating naturalised views of culture that have a history of enshrining racisms. The arts curriculum also values community links - but, on closer inspection, what is meant is the arts community. This begs the question as to how much arts education will attend to problems around the marginalisation of practices that have not been accorded the status of art. An indication of this problematic is perhaps evidenced by the fact that words such as decoration or ornamentation are not mentioned once in the whole document.

Re-packaging arts in education

Mansfield (2001) and Grierson (2001) emphasise in this issue that it is not enough for arts education today to provide accounts of formal aesthetic relations, but that it is paramount - if we are to assist students to attain critical abilities and explorative questioning - to examine "art" and its signs and messages in the context of cultural production. This urgency may not be so obvious in secondary schools art education, but becomes prominent in (not only tertiary) design education, which is more closely linked to professional practices and market economies. In these contexts, "the skills, knowledge, and understanding" ('Introduction' The Ministry of Education, 2000) that students are to develop are likely to be of an instrumental nature, rather than to represent "artistic and aesthetic dimensions of human experience which contribute to our intellectual ability and to our social, cultural, and spiritual understandings" ('The Arts' The Ministry of Education, 2000). If students enter such education unprepared, they are unlikely to be able to recognise some problematic assumptions and strategies.

Western art education has, by and large, been modelled on the notion of "autonomous art", defined by Kantian categories, and removed from its social and cultural substrates. This has been the case for so long that it now seems natural to think of art as a separate realm of reality, "a bird sanctuary ... built right into rationality" (Baudelaire cited in Adorno, 1984: 167). But this separation is the result of a specific discursive formation which rests - as does virtually all cultural production - on a differential in power relationships (see Engels-Schwarzpaul, 2001: 399). Classification is inherently hierarchical, and "always begins with an implicit but powerful act of exclusion; to define categories is to assume the kind of superiority necessary to make such distinctions" (Crawford, 2000: 85).¹ Of the many topics and practices that have thus been excluded, ornament is a good example. It has been, and in most cases still is, suppressed in art and design education according to modernist canons. Alternatively, ornament as cultural practice is excluded due to a return to "high aesthetics" in the last decades, following the abandonment of modernist creeds in social, functional and technological issues (85). This view of aesthetics is based on Kantian categories of pure taste, shying away from the "low aesthetics" of popular taste, and bypasses social issues.

The same theoretical framework that served to discredit ornament and legitimate its suppression was used in New Zealand to de-classify Maori art (see Engels-Schwarzpaul, 2001: 6, 173). Traces of these histories are evident in present practices of ornamentation, including appropriation or misappropriation, in New Zealand. Ornament's exclusion from mainstream art and design education equates to the exclusion of both Western popular and non-Western art forms. "Functionalist coherence or formal systemisation" (Foucault, 1980: 81-2), have, in art and design education, buried and disguised matauranga Maori as well as Western cultural understanding: "a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate ... naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy" - both the forms of life (Wittgenstein, 1958: #16, #23) of the Other *and* those of everyday life.

To discuss issues such as ornament without questioning the classifications that have shaped our present understanding of terms and their connotations involves the acceptance of claims to cultural superiority ("white, male, European, and bourgeois", see Goldberg, 1993: 28). To discuss any form of cultural production purely in terms of aesthetics and theory involves a separation of culture from social and political issues. These approaches ultimately deny differences and avoid relational questions about the positions from which such claims are advanced, even as they promote diversity. They also obscure political questions of disadvantage and discrimination (see also Jahnke, 1996: 14-5; Rizvi, 1994: 59-61). When the arts curriculum (The Ministry of Education, 2000) suggests 'investigat[ing] selected symbols and motifs that are unique to class members' cultural heritages', no references to these complicated and problematic questions are made. It would be overly sanguine to expect investigations normally to involve the questioning of conventional categories. More realistically, it is likely to quickly proceed to "make drawings that integrate such images into a design for an item of personal adornment that expresses cultural identity" (The Visual Arts: Strands, Achievement Objectives, and Learning Examples, Level 4 in The Ministry of Education, 2000).

Such approaches would not enable students to come to terms with cultural issues. How the bypassing of cultural difference, particularly when combined with a potentially hostile relationship of educators to theory and a lack of context, can amount to an implicit encouragement of cultural commodification through misappropriation is evident in an assignment given to design students at a tertiary institution in 1996:

The European furniture industry (and to some extent USA and Japan) ... await the *next* design influence ... Already there is evidence that more *ethnic flavours* are being *enjoyed and sought after*: including those of the South Pacific. It is the remoteness and suggestions of *'far away places'*, space, blue skies, sea, freshness and a *return to more fundamental human values that these cultures represent*, that is so attractive. Europe yearns for all of these values in an *ever increasing need to escape overcrowding, pollution and political unrest etc. etc.* At the heart of the South Pacific is New Zealand with all of its environment features along with the worlds [sic] greatest density of Polynesians and *of course our Maori culture* with all of its own *distinctive* colour an

design New Zealand has yet to find ways of expressing *our* South Pacific influences in a *sophisticated marketable form* ... (my emphases).

In this brief, a lack of critical investigation and an unawareness of theories informing design practices play into the hands of marketing strategies pushing for cultural commodification. Rather than raising questions about desires for *ethnic flavours*, for instance, the (Pakeha) writer simply affirms them as a current marketing scenario; he assumes that New Zealand designers generally have access to the "fundamental human values" of Indigenous cultures of the Pacific; and that they are thereby able to provide, in marketing terms, "mythical stories and characters" (Roberts in Webber, 2000). Students are asked to respond to purported needs of unidentified users in Europe who are portrayed as suffering from an "unbroken chain of losses" (Williams in Clifford 1987: 122). Lost place, lost meanings, and lost stability are contrasted with New Zealand natural and Maori cultural assets. Both assets and losses, Europe *and* the Pacific, are "separated from their material core" and serve as ideological references (Semsek & Stauth, 1988: 704; see also Wetherell & Potter, 1992: 129-130). Imagined unblemished Maori and Pacific cultures, together with the life-worlds of their members are transformed into compensatory symbolic codes to produce a "myth of realify, locality and inter-subjectivity" (Semsek & Stauth, 1988: 707). These codes stimulate

within the capitalist metropolis ... a whole new picture production of cohesive life worlds and local communities in Third World societies. ... Within the sign and picture world of mass culture and consumerism, within this new public domain of distributed symbolism, the ... social community turns into a new privacy and the cultural rationalization imposed by the new symbolisms tends to bring about the degeneration of the substance of the life-world, including the culturally productive forms of survival economy (708).

This transformation of practical experience into codes and pictures separates the culture of life-worlds from "their material, practical and local context, and the latter becomes a mere 'show-off place' (a place of personal display) for visual production within the language directed and produced from the 'outside'" (709). Theory and education as long as they neglect the material core of their subject matter, can be complicit in this process. Thus the phrase "more fundamental human values that these cultures represent" in the above brief unproblematically assumes, amongst other things, that Maori and Pacific cultures have retained values and meaning in a way.

Western cultures have not. This is not an isolated nor local incident: Elsewhere, too, marketing experts promote "culture transfer" to discover ornamental impulses for design. "Particularly cultures that have rich treasures of ornaments at their disposal ... should be closely investigated." (Brandlhuber, 1992: 251) Taking advantage of such treasures in a global market place easily creates an exoticism characterised by "acultural illegibility, isolated from any coherence of origin" (Guest, 2000: 84). Subjects become "tokens lacking any significance beyond that of a fragmentary and unrepresentative ... insularity" (85). The material core of their cultures is made irrelevant. Through appropriation, "the living people and culture" are reduced "to the status of objects". (Root, 1996: 72)

The "reality of the daily struggles for survival" (Mead, 1997: 13) is easily glossed over in such representations. Saccharine versions of happy traditionalism present a vision of culture resembling "wild life and national parks ... As real beings the people who produced the art are often regarded as embarrassing to the fantasy". In New Zealand, "the Maori dimension" (Karetu, 2000: 86-7) is often consumed from a distance, for (national) identity politics or profit, whilst being the "very sector which cries out for cultural and linguistic recognition and the right to practise both freely". Distance from the material core of culture may thus lead to the denial of forms of life, their attendant epistemologies, and their concepts of identity or meaning (see Hunt, 2000: 26).

Assertions by Maori that their cultural production is not ornamental or decorative (see JS in Engels-Schwarzpaul, 2001: 84), that it carries meaning in manifold ways, that it is still in certain ways independent of and different from Western art, and that it is connected to different forms of relationships between individuals and groups (see Adsett quoted in Jahnke, 1996: 18), have often not met with acceptance. Rather than recognising them as part of a different epistemology, critics

have re-fitted them into Western frameworks, categorising them as "essentialist". Maori protests against inappropriate use of their cultural images, for example, were "translated by Pakeha academics as: 'Maori think they are better at reproducing Maori images because they are born Maori'" (Jahnke, 1996: 15). What is omitted in such theoretical discourses are Maori rights to self-determination in their art practices (see Engels-Schwarzpaul, 2001: 6,251; and Hunt, 2000: 26).

Struggles over cultural identity and self-determination are compounded by Pakeha perceptions of their own culture. Respondents in all my research projects (e.g. Engels-Schwarzpaul, 1997; 1998; 2000; 1999) frequently mentioned a lack of specificity and meaning in Pakeha culture.

"Cultural image" to me implies Pacific Island/Maori or similar ornamentation. Anglo Saxon ornamentation e.g. - gold rim on edge of plate I would not think of as cultural image. The implication of my assumption is that Pakeha/Anglo Saxon peoples do not have a culture, in NZ anyhow. (#102 in Engels-Schwarzpaul, 2000: 23; see also Wetherell & Potter, 1992: 129)

What, to a relative outsider, seems a recognisably Pakeha culture is often not conceived as such by Pakeha themselves. "Pakeha have considerable difficulties in describing their own cultural practices" precisely because they are regarded as normal (Spoonley, 1988: 64). Thus, "Pakeha culture" organises social, political and economic matters but when "distinctiveness and ethnic exoticism is called for", Maori culture stands in for national culture (Bell, 1996: 149). A "poorly developed sense of their own ethnicity" (Spoonley, 1988: 68) then leads Pakeha to look for inspiration (or direct consumption) to Maori cultural images. If, theoretically, ornament is sometimes defined by its loss of symbolic potency, then this palliative consumption turns the "tangible signifier[s]" of cultural and personal identity that constitute a "condensed package of cultural meaning" - providing a "sense of belonging" and the memory of "people who once treasured them" - into "mere ornament" (see Engels-Schwarzpaul, 2001: 160, 171; and Holz, 1972: 143, 164).

An adequate conceptualisation of social and cultural relationships relies to an extent on the rough ground of face-to-face interaction (see Elias, 1995: 19). The _more restricted interaction is, the greater the danger to be caught in the epistemologically vicious circle of "the sneaking transition from the model of reality to the reality of the model" (Bourdieu quoted in Arnold & Siebert, 1995: 143). This has particular relevance once social and cultural relationships are inserted into economic paradigms and turned from a source of collective and personal identification and appreciation into a resource from which to generate "a strong cultural identity" for New Zealand, as well as economic growth (Strategy Working Group, 2000).²

How does all this relate to art and design education? New Zealand students have, for a decade at least studied in an educational context that was increasingly transformed into a system of market driven relationships (see Jesson, 1987; and Hazledine in Kelsey, 1995: 360). Their learning and practice are based on deeply contradictory models: abstract cultural and political values (freedom, equality, etc.) are framed and operationalised under the influence of the "bloodless logic" (Jesson, 1987: 112) of market strategies. Students observe this, but are often not able to articulate or question the increasing concentration of more and more practices of signification in the hands of commercially driven agencies. Advertising, in particular, manipulates "highly dense symbols which evoke a futile hope to overcome the fear resulting from lack of orientation" (Horn, 1971: 111). But since little time is given in marketing or design practice to the processes that are supposed to produce cathexis to images, brands and products, any meanings thus generated (while they do play a role in the total range of significations attached to an image) in all likelihood sit "only loosely and externally" on the objects (Lorenzer, 1971: 89).

The design assignment above, with its emphasis on finding "ways of expressing *our* South Pacific influences in a *sophisticated marketable form*", is likely to be conducive to precisely the type of ornamental use design studio tutors are wont to condemn: a superficial application of cultural "elements", extracted from cultural contexts of which most students would have no knowledge. A project such as this might lead students to employ, without understanding, significant motifs of other cultures. This may contribute to a partial erosion of meaning and damage to the cultural fabric

from which the elements are taken (see Semsek & Stauth, 1988: 708). In addition, the new meanings fabricated in the process, being "intentionally and arbitrarily created symbol formations", are very superficial and have a fundamentally different value from "deep" (i.e. difficult to symbolise) meanings (Lorenzer, 1971: 89). Precisely because of their ineffectuality, design and advertising have to be constantly intensified. This contributes to a larger and larger appetite for cultural resources, and to the need for accessing and processing more and more "diversity".

A popular opinion amongst theorists, professionals, and some non-professionals, is that ornament has become "mere ornament" by losing any stable meanings it might have once had. However, there are obvious differences between theoretical discourses on meaning in ornamentation and its continued use in the life-worlds (Habermas, 1997; Husserl, 1970; Schutz & Luckmann, 1989) of users. How can those differences be described and explained?

Some knowledges and meanings do not lend themselves easily to being uprooted and discursively analysed (Certeau, 1984: 20). Thus, some research participants (Engels-Schwarzpaul, 1997; 1998; 2000; 1999) spoke of ornamentation in terms that cannot readily be accommodated into theoretical categories but that are nevertheless *real* to them. In the words of a Pacific participant, ornamentation can represent an external, static symbolic representation of self, of "that dynamic 'me' which is collective"; it is not necessarily tangible but can imbue life; particular symbols hold meaning and depth that words cannot describe (PK in Engels-Schwarzpaul, 2000: 19). These comments may well illustrate the types of knowledge about which Foucault (1980: 81-2) writes. What users do in their own private sphere is often in conscious opposition to the logic of the marketplace. Object relationships are mostly lasting and specific; very little indicates that users willingly participate in short cycles of obsolescence in regard to ornamentation and ornamental objects. Because of their long shelf-lives objects acquire meaning over time. But in most cases, prior meanings are also preserved: be it by association with persons or events, or cultural context and values (see also Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981: 239ff). Further, users see meaning in the form or the production of ornamentation.

People with whom I have had discussions are - in their overwhelming majority - actively involved in symbolic processes. In their observations they link making intention, and use on an immediately personal level to contemporary forms of life (see Engels-Schwarzpaul, 2001: 412) and are informed by their own life experience. On another level, users often think more generally about conditions of production, distribution and use, and share a (certainly nostalgic) longing for more immediacy between production and use. Mass production and contemporary architecture are frequently perceived as lacking care and attention, whereas hand-crafted objects still exercise a noticeable fascination with most users. The traces of the maker can conjure up whole stories of "what it might have been like", often referring to faraway places peopled by men and women living and working together in communities. Certeau's (1984:18) contention that users are able to transform a received language into a "song of resistance" was often confirmed in my research.

A sense of doom and ruin, however, emerges from the comments of professional Western commentators on ornamentation. Thus, the keywords in the *Avery* data base for an article called "Raiders of the lost art" (Fleischman, 1997) are "Decoration and ornament - Ruined, extinct, etc.". After "ornamentation was banned from the process of design almost eighty years ago", some modernist purists today still tremble at the thought of ornament's vindication (Campi, 1988: 21) and design practitioners do not even know how to confront it. In that sense, "recovering the ornament implies going against our culture's signs of identity to incorporate them into the projectual process. The problem is that we don't yet really know which are the signs of this culture we are living in" (21).

This leaves us as educators, particularly in New Zealand and in a precarious situation. Given that colonial history still shapes our perception and analysis (Maharaj, Tie, & Ryba, 2000: 12f), these issues are urgent- no matter which angle we choose to investigate. While questions of cultural identity are problematic, their complexity does not absolve us from a critical engagement with the issues. By

not acknowledging ornament and ignoring students' interest in it, we fail to provide them with opportunities to even begin to understand different forms of ornamental use.

By-passing these problematics does nothing to prepare students for their future. In an environment where the commodification of culture is generally progressing, and more specifically the trade with culture difference, ignorance of such problems may even lead to (mis)appropriation (Root, 1996: 68). Abstract and "arbitrarily eclectic" appropriation "without any understanding for the content of ornamentation its local community" (Schmidt, 2000: 5) is part of a wider process of objectification and alienation. In this context, appropriated and distorted cultural elements can have destructive effects when mirrored back to the cultures of origin (see Churchill, 1996; Smith, 1999: 38f; Trask, 1993; Ziff & Rao, 1997: 9). Forms and concepts then not only "almost dissolve in the breakneck speed of their reception" (Drescher, 2000: 30), but are also distorted beyond recognition and potential of identification.

A New Zealand design educator, who believes that there are no images with significant and permanent value left in Western culture (and perceives this to be different in Maori culture) relates this to the pressure brought to bear on cultures through the "constant production of images" (in Engels-Schwarzpaul, 2001: 229-230). The shifting emphasis "from production to reproduction, to the endless reduplication of signs, images and simulations through the media which effaces the distinction between the image and reality" (Baudrillard in Featherstone, 1991: 15) leads - as more and more structures of social and cultural life are deregulated and more relationships become fluent - to "a loss of stable meaning, and an aesthetization of reality in which the masses become fascinated by the endless flow of bizarre juxtapositions which takes the view beyond stable sense".

Re-constituting life-worlds in the market place

Marketing specialists, governed by "practical discourses" (Peters in Engels-Schwarzpaul & Whaanga, 1999: 40) of how to achieve profitability, are little troubled by notions of appropriateness or propriety. Profitability almost relies on what can be had "for nothing" (40) and leads characteristically to the appropriation of images. In an increasingly global market place, it is often important to find a point of difference that will distinguish a New Zealand product from others (see Labone in Engels-Schwarzpaul, 2001: 351). The projection of a New Zealand national and cultural "identity" can be used to this end. It is, of course, far from clear whether or not the arts curriculum consciously supports such agendas, but it does encourage students to "contribute their vision, abilities, and creative energies to arts initiatives and *industries* that help define New Zealand's national identity. (Howard Fancy Secretary for Education in 'Foreword' The Ministry of Education, 2000 -my emphasis).

National identity has already been identified as a resource. While New Zealand's current Prime Minister Helen Clark has asserted that there is a "yearning for something different ... non-material ... a real hunger for a different value structure" at the community level, and that people are "more than economic units" (quoted in Rudman, 2000), the Strategy Working Group, commissioned by her Government, promptly reframed issues of identity and cultural values in neoliberal terms. In its terms (classifications), "culture is seen more as a resource which, in addition to its capacity to inform and entertain, is capable of delivering a variety of benefits including a strong cultural identity, sustainable cultural industries and a contribution to economic growth" ('Purpose and Scope', Strategy Working Group, 2000). Phrases such as "viable commercial activities and Maori authenticity standards" or "resource for consumption-led economic growth", and terms like "cultural services" and "heritage products" are used to conceptualise the "Heart of the Nation" as a "nation brand" ('Environmental Scan - Economic Factors', Strategy Working Group, 2000).³ In similar style, the previously cited assignment for design students contended that "New Zealand has yet to find ways of expressing our South Pacific influences in a sophisticated marketable form".⁴

Thus, culture quickly turns from a source of collective and personal identification and appreciation into a profitable resource. Cultural policies are given the task to fill a "void" created by the "globalisation of politics, economics and daily consumption", which have "weakened traditional systems of identity manifestation" (Delgado quoted in 'Environmental Scan - Political Factors', Strategy Working Group, 2000). The intention is to generate cultural identity "through ... the valorisation of brand images, or aesthetic choices which highlight specific cultural traditions". It would appear that Maori culture is the only one in Aotearoa which - as a specific cultural tradition - could serve as a nation brand in a global context, and this raises crucial questions about control and benefits. Marketing professionals rely on Maori culture (including images that are conceived by them as "ornament"), for example, to provide "brilliant stories" - all Indigenous cultures are seen to be able to do that, even "cultures that have been wiped out" (A@482 in Engels-Schwarzpaul, 2001: 233). The meaning of these "stories", precisely, are used to produce the difference needed to distinguish New Zealand products in an international market.

Current views conceiving of meaning as an "endless flow of bizarre juxtapositions which takes the view beyond stable sense"⁵ are, however, very limited in their scope. While meaning is largely established by convention, these conventions rest on situated use in the different language-games in which people are involved (Wittgenstein, 1958). Meanings have never been fixed and given: some might newly come into existence and others be forgotten (#23). They are established in use as a "form of life" (#23), and if we want to understand the meaning of something, it is misleading to think of the word (or image) as one thing and meaning as another (#120). Separating activity and meaning in theory therefore puts us "onto slippery ice" because there is no longer the friction of context nor activity; this lack of friction can make us "unable to walk", in which case it is better to get "[b]ack to the rough ground!" (#107).

Alternative ways of understanding art and culture

It is remarkable how seldom people and their perceptions, practices, wishes and desires feature in both modern and postmodern theoretical texts: there is a significant absence of living and acting people (see Featherstone, 1988: 199-200). Treating art works a la Saussure leads us "to forget that the work of art always contains something *ineffable*, ... something which speaks ... on the hither side of words or concepts"

(Bourdieu, 1989: 2). This ineffable element is never completely contained in the product of art making, but also resides in its praxis. Artistic form cannot fully be discursively explained in any event (Kristeva, 1986; Langer, 1980). If it involves contested elements, students develop a heightened sense of the inadequacies of logic and rational explication, and experience what a participant described as "a student's dilemma".

Is it any surprise that students asked to rationalise the use of ornament, having originated in their subconscious, stumble to find the words. ... Here lies a student's dilemma, that as part of our subconscious nature we must ornament. However, as part of our education we must put our thoughts into words and therefore rationalise. (in Engels-Schwarzpaul, 2001: 398)

Students tend to avoid contentious issues - almost in proportion to the difficulties of justifying their *modus operandi* and *opus operatum*. It is hard to conceive how their education could enable students to be participating and empathetic cultural intermediaries, attentive and able to comprehend the needs and wishes of the majority of the population, let alone those of "minority groups".

Gadamer (1977: 63-4) argues that only through a slow process of "learning to spell, learning to read" will a work of art - or any other complex cultural work - begin to mean something to us. Understanding takes place in a "communicative commonality" to which we must contribute by engaging in the traditions into which we are placed - whether or not we want to recognise them. Tradition is not conservation, but the activity of bringing together the present and the "stony past",

a "constant interaction between our present and its goals, and the strands of the past which we are as well" (65). This is a point where art and design education could make an important contribution. Rather than turning culture and art (high or low) into objects of palliative consumption (63), it could motivate students to critically interrogate their conditions (66).

If experience of- but also *with* - a Thou is possible,⁶ then there is also a chance for us to understand our own prejudices better. To deny prejudice, particularly to believe oneself to be free of it, means to give oneself up to "the power of the prejudices that unconsciously dominate" us all (Gadamer, 1975: 360), which is the "tyranny of hidden prejudice" (270). Insofar as our pre-judices are based on our traditions, they must be considered in the relationship with the Thou, for a person

who reflects himself out of the mutuality of such a relation changes this relationship and destroys its moral bond. A person who reflects himself out of a living relationship to tradition destroys the true meaning of this tradition in exactly the same way (360).

If students were given the opportunity to learn about such issues in the context of the language games that are their original home - and this would include the material core of those cultures - then ornament's emotional and cultural power could help access complex issues not addressed currently in art and design education. This would not only benefit students' academic and professional development but also make them better cultural intermediaries, able to participate in a process of regeneration and actualisation of traditions in Aotearoa.

This process would also have to include a change in bicultural practices lest it become a merely a "more sophisticated form of appropriation" (JR@029 in EngelsSchwarzpaul, 2001: 409). Understanding cultural practices involves an appreciation of the role of the interpreter, which has its complement in an awareness that anything that is not "immediately situated in the world of the interpreter" is already estranged from its original meaning" (Gadamer, 1977: 165) and that the objects she interprets have been "wrenched from their original world" (166). This accepted, understanding is a fusion of ... horizons supposedly existing by themselves" (306). There is a tension in interpretation that needs to be maintained, rather than covered up through naive assimilation. Historical (and cultural) consciousness must be "aware of its own otherness".

The fusion of horizons is intimately related to the experience of the "Thou" as "something standing over against me" and asserting its own rights and requiring recognition. In that very process is 'understood' ... the truth that becomes visible to me only through the Thou, and only by my letting myself be told something by it (Gadamer, 1975: xxxv). Gadamer claims that we have to "transpose ourselves" (305) and to struggle to understand her and the "indissoluble individuality" of her otherness. This experience is clearly not possible in a situation where the Thou is not present. The above design assignment raises important questions about the participation of Maori and Pacific staff in such contexts. Opportunistic inclusion or exclusion of Maori culture point to a naive assimilation of two horizons in tension, and to a distanced disregard for others' claims. We do not get closer to the culture of others through the "trivial contemporary images we are served up by the culture industries. On the contrary "we are removed from them, put at a distance" (Osterwold, 1987: 433). Trivial images assume to understand the other, but "the claim to understand the other person in advance functions to keep the other person's claim at a distance" (Gadamer, 1989: 360). There is a deep sense of entitlement in the text of the design assignment regarding the use of Maori and Polynesian cultures: the author calls them "ours" thrice. Such sense of entitlement lies at the very base of (mis)appropriation, alongside a presumption that the desired objects or images already belong to it" (Root, 1996: 72).

This sense of entitlement goes hand in hand with a distance that Žižek (1997) considers typical of prevailing forms of multiculturalism, which involve

patronizing Eurocentrist distance and/or respect for local cultures without roots in one's own particular culture Multiculturalism is a disavowed, inverted, self-referential form of racism a "racism with a distance" - it "respects" the Other's identity, conceiving the Other as a self-enclosed

"authentic" community towards which he, the multiculturalist, maintains a distance rendered possible by his privileged universal position (45).

Distance is crucial for misappropriation. Just as Benjamin (1937: 28) pleaded for historical understanding, in order to avoid repressive multiculturalism it is necessary to relinquish this distance, to give up the contemplation and interpretation of the other from afar. "When we mean something, it's like going up to someone ' We go up to the thing we mean." (Wittgenstein, 1958: #455) This "going up to" implies interest and engagement, and a process in which consciousness of our own historical and cultural condition is furthered by experiences of "being pulled up short" (Gadamer 1975: 268).

These theoretical insights have significant practical consequences when it comes to finding an orientation in art and design education. Who is our Thou? Whom do we go up to and what do we ignore? What will we allow to pull us up short?

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Notes

1. A Maori art and design educator who participated in one of my projects had serious misgivings about the term "ornament" -which is alien to Maori concepts of culture (see AW@14 in Engels-Schwarzpaul, 1997: 51) - when applied to Maori art. Another participant, also an art and design educator, would like to see cultural images projected in "serious, thoughtful, meaningful, open way[s]" which do not "kick up things out of context" (JS in Engels-Schwarzpaul, 2001: 84). And yet, he believes that that is what Maori are often left with-"as a result of people doing things lightly over the past few decades, it's ornament, it's decoration, and we are not about decoration or ornament" (84).
2. See p. 63 below.
3. The material I am quoting from was accessed on 18 May 2000. When revisiting the site on 23 July 2000, it was no longer available, and I am relying on the HTML files I saved in May.
4. See p. 58 above.
5. See p. 62 above.
6. See p. 65 below.

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