

Māori visual culture on the run

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a discursive rewriting of “art” as visual culture in context of New Zealand education. It positions Māori knowledge alongside the paradigms of mainstream Western knowledge. The strategy of establishing a Māori-centric curriculum discussed in this paper comes from the Tertiary Education Commission policy directions for tertiary sector institutions, with its focus on addressing Māori management and delivery, Māori knowledge and ways of learning, and Māori advancement and aspirations. Proposing visual culture as “culture on the run” (Spivak), the discussion is concerned to reveal codes of practice that are essentialist and must be contested. It seeks a radical change in education, and in particular art education, and proposes ways by which this might be achieved.

Introduction: A Māori-centric momentum

The new millennium heralds a critical milestone in our progress towards an institutionalised bicultural visual and performance culture within Aotearoa/New Zealand that appears to endorse the principle of Treaty partnership. In 2000, the Ministry of Education, Te Tahuhu o te Matauranga, published *NgaToi i roto i te Marautanga o Aotearoa*, a Māori language version of the Arts Curriculum for Māori-medium learners alongside the *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* demonstrating definitive Crown acknowledgement of a valid and significant Māori visual and performance culture alongside that of mainstream New Zealand while acknowledging Māori-medium education as a natural component of contemporary New Zealand education.¹

In 2003, the Tertiary Education Commission, Te Amorangi Matauranga Matua, was established to drive the tertiary education strategy. This is a strategy in which matauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) is acknowledged as a valid knowledge paradigm and pathway alongside Western knowledge. However, this is not the only accession gained by Māori. Te Rautaki Matauranga Māori is one of six² Tertiary Education Commission strategies specifically aimed at contributing to the advancement of Maori development aspirations by providing strategic direction for tertiary sector institutions to enable them to address:

- Māori management and delivery;
- Māori knowledge and ways of learning; and
- Māori advancement and aspirations.

The critical ramification of these key targets is the necessity for Māori management and direction of Māori-specific strategy. At Crown level, there is active involvement of Māori members of parliament in shaping and contributing to policy in consultation with Māori at community level.³ At the Tertiary Education Commission level, a Māori Knowledge and Development panel has been established among others, including the Creative and Performing Arts panel, to evaluate research outputs relative to specific disciplines.⁴ At the tertiary institution level the aim is to increase Māori participation in management and delivery while acknowledging Māori knowledge and ways of learning in order to advance Māori aspirations. At community level, Māori involvement in governance and collaboration in research has been encouraged by the Tertiary Education Commission.

The ultimate goal of the tertiary education strategy is to realise the Māori educational aspirations that emerged out of the Hui Taumata Matauranga in Turangi in 2002 as advanced by Professor Mason Durie:

- To live as Māori;
- To actively participate as citizens of the world; and
- To enjoy a high standard of living and good health. (Ministry of Education, May 2002: 30)

The inclusive nature of educational reform in the visual and performing arts appears commendable to me as an educator involved in Māori visual culture, even exciting. However, the liberal tertiary educational policies of the last decade and a half have resulted in a saturation of visual arts programmes around the country and competition between institutions, and even within institutions,⁵ a situation that may have serious implications for pedagogical accountability and programme sustainability. Concomitant with this explosion in mainstream visual arts options has been the expansion in Tertiary Education Institutions and Private Training Establishments offering programmes in Māori visual culture.⁶ Such is the range of options for Māori students in the tertiary sector that they have access to visual culture programmes that straddle mainstream design, visual arts and fine arts programmes, and Māori visual culture programmes ranging across customary, trans-customary and non-customary practices. Te Wananga o Aotearoa has emerged as the most dynamic and entrepreneurial provider in tertiary education for Māori over the last few years with an exponential growth in numbers. Anecdotal evidence suggests that in 2003 tertiary enrolments have reached 40,000. This is a phenomenal increase when one considers that Te Wananga o Raukawa, Te Whare Wananga o Awanuiarangi and Te Wananga o Aotearoa, between them, attracted 22,775 enrolments in 2002.⁷

There is an important lesson to be gained from this statistic:

- Māori want to be educated;
- Māori want to be educated by Māori;
- Māori want to be educated in an environment conducive to Māori values; and
- Māori welcome free education.

In this respect, the establishment of the Tertiary Education Commission in 2003 presaged the anticipated increase in Māori participation in tertiary education with the aim of :

- accommodating Māori development aspirations; and
- recognising Māori systems of knowledge and knowledge acquisition as relevant and normal.

The interface between Te Ao Māori and Te Ao Whanui

At the Hui Taumata in Taupo early in March 2003, Professor Mason Durie presented a potential framework for Māori education that attempted to account for diverse Māori realities. A critical premise upon which this framework was based was the need for Māori learners to straddle the space between Te Ao Māori (the Māori world) and Te Ao Whanui (the global context). That is, Māori learners must interface between two worlds. This is not a new idea. The need to operate in two worlds was identified by Sir Apirana Ngata in 1949 when he signalled the necessity for youth to pursue Pakeha knowledge to sustain physical well-being while retaining Māori ancestral knowledge to ensure psychological well-being and to acknowledge Christianity to secure spiritual well-being (Cox, 1994: 91).⁸

The difference between the Ngata era and Durie era is the expansion of Te Ao Māori and the contraction of Te Ao Whanui. In 1949 New Zealand was subjected to demographic reconfirmation as Maori migrated from rural areas to towns and cities. Half a decade later, 80% of the Māori population live in urban settings and a quarter live in the greater Auckland area. Although Te Ao Māori is located predominantly in Aotearoa/New Zealand large numbers of the Māori population have moved to Sydney, London, Honolulu and other destinations around the world. Hence, Te Ao Māori is no longer solely contextualised within Aotearoa/New Zealand. Equally, Te Ao Whanui is as immediate as surfing the net or taking a jet ride. The critical point that was emphasised at Taupo was the necessity for Māori (learners) to interface with Te Ao Māori and Te Ao Whanui. Durie's adage for Māori is typically Māori-centric when compared with Ngata's, which captures the spirit of the age in which Pakeha knowledge was seen as a panacea for Māori progress. In contrast, the locus of participation and enjoyment of a "high standard of life and good health" rests firmly with Māori in Durie's Māori-centric strategy (Durie, 2001: 7). Māori must confront and negotiate Te Ao Māori and Te Ao Whanui in order to shape their individual world views. Māori must interface with Māori knowledge and Western knowledge in order to become citizens of the world. A critical aspect of Māori knowledge in contemporary society is its acknowledged status relative to Western knowledge.

While an explicit spiritual dimension is absent from the Durie formula it is implicit in the notion of living as Māori and enjoying good health. In this respect there is an obvious sense of compulsion and responsibility associated with a Māori-centric approach in that Māori must confront Te Ao Māori and Te Ao Whanui to determine their position relative to each. Māori, therefore, must confront biculturalism because they are Māori; not only biculturalism within the Aotearoa/New Zealand context but also within the global context.

Although there is no compulsion for non-Māori to act in a similar manner, the Tertiary Education Strategy has instituted a number of accountability measures to ensure a modicum of bicultural interface from non-Māori at a number of levels within the tertiary sector. This is a significant step in the history of tertiary education within Aotearoa/New Zealand. Recent demographic trends demonstrate that identity as Māori has endured and shows little sign of diminishing. In 1996, 85% (523,374) of Māori descendents identified as Māori and, 47% (273,438) of Māori descendents identified solely as Māori. Almost half of Māori descendents were identified with at least one other ethnic group, up from a quarter in the 1991 statistics (see Durie, 2001). Hence, Māori as a notion that distinguishes the indigenous population of Aotearoa/New Zealand from non-Māori, remains valid. The move by Māori descendents to acknowledge other ethnic affiliations demonstrates a malleable world view that accommodates the multiple variables that constitute contemporary Maori society.⁹

Visual culture as a substitute for art

Such is the pace of change that Māori visual culture is not only on the run but is sprinting ahead in leaps and bounds. At this point in the race toward Māori cultural development, it is wise to reflect on the wisdom of a renowned indigenous cultural critic, Gayatri Spivak, who warned the participants

at the conference for Indigenous Art and Heritage in Palmerston North in 2002, “Culture moves forward, it does not stand still; culture alive, is culture on the run.” Spivak warned Māori to avoid donning the essentialist yoke since cultural fossilisation engenders cultural stagnation and that any perpetuation of a traditional mindset is a sign of an incapacity to translate customary cultural values and beliefs into relevant contemporary codes of practice. Previously, however, Spivak signalled her support for “strategic essentialism”.¹⁰ Her recent reassessment of essentialism should not be misconstrued as a contradiction of her earlier position, since Spivak views “strategic essentialism” as a strategy that one must adopt in order to critique anything, not as a description of the way things are. I have adopted such a strategy in the past to differentiate Māori art from New Zealand art. This time around I resort to Māori visual culture as a term that is a culturally empathetic substitute for “Māori art” thus circumventing the need to address issues of appropriation, hybridity and essentialism.¹¹ Essentialism is a relativistic position that is ideologically contestable because it articulates a position of difference, a position that is outside the experience or cultural capture of the other.¹²

The concept of “art” is an essentialist notion born out the West’s desire to enable “art” as an academic discipline within the humanities that would lead to the differentiation between high art and low art, fine art and craft. In Aotearoa/New Zealand we perpetuate the essentialist notion of art in our “fine art” schools and our “fine art” degrees.¹³ However, there are signs of an emerging reassessment of this essentialist vernacular with “visual arts” substituting for “fine arts” in a number of bachelor degrees that emerged in the 1990s.¹⁴

For indigenous cultures, who would argue that the concept of art is irrelevant historically and, who would contend that art and culture are inseparable, the substitution of “art” with “visual culture” is both relevant and timely. Jan Jagodzinski (1999: 311) has argued that the most radical critique of difference is to recognise that “art” itself is a Western concept that exists only in difference, a distinct object of enlightenment discourse, and that art history remains nationalistic and heroic. Any radical change for a culturally diverse art education would need to re-write discursively all three terms: art, art history and the nation, which would virtually be an anathema to current art education curricula.

I agree with Jagodzinski that for any radical change to occur in art education a discursive strategy is necessary. However I would argue that such a strategy is not necessarily an anathema to current art education curricula in the tertiary sector at least. Since 1995, Massey University has lead the way in the delivery of a Bachelor of Māori Visual Arts degree; however, 2004 will see the introduction of Bachelors degrees in Maori art at Te Whare Wananga o Aotearoa at Whakatane and Te Wananga o Aotearoa at Te Kuiti and Hastings and visual culture at Te Whare Wananga o Awanuiarangi at Whakatane.

Toioho ki Apiti

In developing the Bachelor of Māori Visual Arts and subsequently the Postgraduate Diploma and Master of Māori Visual Arts I have discursively addressed art, art history and nation in order to create a model for Māori art education that reconfigures canons of Euro-centric art education in favour of a more Māori-centric approach that privileges matauranga Māori as a conceptual foundation for Māori visual cultural development and expression. In retrospect, I regret that I did not go far enough in 1995 in my discursive rewriting of “art”.

What follows is a brief glimpse of my discursive strategy in Māori visual culture education.

Unlike other visual arts programmes in the country in mainstream institutions the “Toioho ki Apiti” Māori visual art programme at Massey University in Palmerston North is positioned within the School of Māori Studies as a section alongside Te Reo Māori (Māori Language), Taonga Tuku Iho (Heritage Aotearoa) and Kaupapa Māori (Policy and Development). This location guarantees primary cultural experience within the marae context alongside secondary cultural experience within

classroom environments. As a core component of the programme, Māori language is facilitated through lectures and tutorials while marae interaction grounds experience in Māori language and protocols that is supplemented by interaction within wananga and inter-institutional contexts. Thus, Māori visual art is supported by Māori language and endorsed by an awareness of Māori cultural history. The value of this Māori-centric approach offers students an opportunity to situate themselves within contemporary Māori/New Zealand society and the multiple realities that contribute to their place within a Māori or mainstream world view. Māori students who have been brought up in urban contexts dislocated from their papakainga (ancestral home) and marae form part of the Toioho ki Apiti student clientele. In some cases, the dislocation is such that students come with a world view that has been shaped by two, sometimes three, generations of separation from papakainga (homeland). While students are encouraged to research whanau (extended family), hapu (sub-tribe) and iwi (tribe) connections and to participate in cultural events, their participation remains voluntary. In the end Māori visual art is but one of a number of cultural pathways that offer students the opportunity to define their respective world views as Māori or New Zealanders. Following Edward Said's "contrapuntal methodology" (cited in Sarup, 1998: 158) contested arenas of indigenous and colonial history must be interpreted not only hermeneutically but also politically. It is a strategy that is translated into studio practice in which the horizons of research are extended beyond Te Ao Māori to Te Ao Whanui.

An analytical framework for Māori Visual Culture

In 1996 I developed an analytical framework for Māori visual art that attempted to classify works of Māori art as customary or non-customary rather than via the people who created the works. The aim of the framework was to align a finite number of art indices that contributed to the manifestation of works of Māori visual art according to customary or non-customary confluence. The visual art indices included whakapapa (genealogy), matauranga (knowledge), ahua (appearance), waihanganga (process), wahi (site) and wairua (ritual practice). I have subsequently replaced wairua (ritual practice) with tikanga (protocol) because wairua is unquantifiable. The interactive indices may be as extensive or finite as one deems necessary to establish a valid assessment of products of visual culture as customary or non-customary. For example, the ahua index may be expanded to include subcategories such as media, pattern and form, or the waihanganga index extended to include tools and technique. More often than not, the framework exposes the "authentic" product as a confluence of varying degrees of customary and non-customary inflection. For some cultural commentators, "hybridity" encapsulates the latter notion of cross-cultural interface. For others "syncretism" is more apt with its inference of ideological intervention. In 1996, I considered syncretic as an intermediary classification between customary and non-customary but I have subsequently removed the term from the framework. Syncretism became problematic because it acted like a trash can into which you could discard difficult items. Although the framework classifies visual products as either customary or non-customary I continue to use trans-customary as a term of convenience and explication outside the framework. The practice of qualifying customary with traditional in parenthesis is maintained in order to make the framework more accessible and applicable across a wider range of educational environments. Whether we like it or not Māori continue to use English descriptors that maintain the imprint of colonial conditioning that is part of our legacy as a colonised people.

The value of the Māori visual culture framework is that it clearly demonstrates that there is no such thing as "pure" or "authentic" Māori art or Māori visual culture created today. In addition, its flexibility allows for synchronic shift that enables one to evaluate customary and non-customary concurrence of cultural products through time. Consequently, there was no "pure" or "authentic" Māori art or visual culture created in 1873 when Te Toka anganui-a-Noho was opened at Te Kuiti or even when Raharuhi Rukupo carved Te Hau Ki Taurangi in 1842.

A cursory examination of Te Hau ki Turanga, is informative in revealing the extent of non-customary influence within the house. What one finds at this period in history is that matauranga (knowledge), ahua (appearance) and waihanga (process) are the three areas most affected by cross-cultural interface. The use of metal tools impacts on the waihanga index resulting in bolder and sharper surface pattern permutations. Māori appropriation of European naturalistic conventions, showing ancestral figures grasping objects in a perceptually logical manner together with the physical intimacy demonstrated in a mother suckling her child and the carving of ancestor names on the chest of some of the ancestral figures, are examples of cross-cultural inflections pertinent to both knowledge and appearance.

If we accept that in order for something to be classified as customary it must have been endorsed by habitual practice we find that the use of text to identify ancestors became habitual practice during the period of Te Kooti Arikirangi's greatest influence from the 1870s through to the 1920s. With the introduction of the School of Māori Art at Ohinemutu in 1930 the practice waned until the 1990s when text once again entered the domain of the meeting house to identify ancestors. The fashion of text as a Māori cultural explicator is tied to three distinct phases of Māori cultural re-positioning: re-appropriation (1840–1920s), erasure (1920s–1980s) and reclamation (1990s–present). Rukupo used text as an innovative means of coping with the transition from an oral to a literate society to ensure a continuity of Rongowhakaata whakapapa (genealogy). Rukupo's example made absolute sense to Te Kooti as the meeting house became the site of Ringatu (a Māori religious denomination) observance in which Māori and non-Māori belief systems were fused. Simultaneously, the walls of the meeting houses associated with Te Kooti transcribed his scriptural messages and his position relative to Māori sovereignty.

Harold Hamilton, the first director of the Rotorua Carving School, viewed the use of text to identify ancestors as a visual anachronism that disrupted the authenticity of traditional Māori art. Like his father Augustus Hamilton, he shunned any diversions from the authentic. Sir Apirana Ngata supported Hamilton's orthodox view in the houses created under his stewardship. In contrast, Calvin Whetumarama-o-te-ata Kereama, a graduate of the Rotorua Carving School, who worked with Pine Taiapa, used text as a vehicle for ensuring a continuity of ancestral whakapapa that would be accessible to young and old for generations to come. Manomano, the meeting house at Te Taumata o te Ra marae at Halcombe in the Rangitikei district, is living testimony of the ability of a carver to break free of the shackles of orthodoxy propounded by Hamilton, endorsed by Ngata and practiced by Taiapa. In the Halcombe house, text returns as a visual codifier alongside customary surface patterns to present another layer of mnemonic endorsement that reinforces mana tangata (human prestige) and endorses mana whenua (right to land).

The point that I make in this brief historical journey is that European influence has been historically pervasive from the earliest period of European settlement. An awareness of the extent and nature of that pervasiveness is naturally conditioned by one's ability to see the extent of change. Māori visual culture of the nineteenth century, despite its customary appearance, is bathed in a Euro-centric hue. Despite this pale inflection, nineteenth-century Māori visual culture remained firmly grounded within marae culture. Hence, the site of Māori visual culture remains customary in spite of the non-customary inflections across other indices like matauranga (knowledge), ahua (appearance) and waihanga (process).

Despite these trans-cultural inflections the visual culture of the historical period is more consistently grounded within the customary index than within the non-customary. Of course, the converse is true for visual culture created today. Therefore, Māori visual culture tends to shift from the customary index to the non-customary in a state of flux that is largely determined by the philosophical position and ideology of an individual or group.

In keeping with the theme of the first day of the Nga Waka conference "Witnessing Biculturalism" I have presented a range of examples of biculturalism in action. If the customary and

the non-customary indices are replaced by Māori and non-Māori indices we find that the carvings in Te Hau Ki Turanga conform to a trans-cultural framework: one that is bicultural.

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Notes

1. Māori language together with English is an official language of Aotearoa/New Zealand. The locus of Māori-medium education extends from Te Kohanga Reo, which was established in 1981, to Wananga. While Kohanga Reo enrolments appear to have levelled out in 2002, Wananga have experienced a phenomenal increase in Māori participation in the tertiary sector. Over the past six years there has been a 2000% increase from 962 students in 1997 to 22,775 students in 2002 (Hui Taumata Matauranga Report Back, March 2003). Anecdotal evidence suggests that Te Wananga o Aotearoa alone has attracted over 40,000 enrolments in the tertiary sector in 2003.
2. There are six strategies that form the principal aims of the Tertiary Education strategic plan: Strategy One: Strengthen System Capability and Quality; Strategy Two: Te Rautaki Matauranga Māori – Contribute to the Achievement of Māori Development Aspirations; Strategy Three: Raise Foundation Skills so that People Can Participate in our Knowledge Society; Strategy Four: Develop the Skills New Zealanders’ need for our Knowledge Society; Strategy Five: Educate for Peoples’ Development and Success; Strategy Six: Strengthen Research, Knowledge Creation and Uptake for our Knowledge Society.
3. The Prime Minister, Helen Clark and her ministers attended a consultation hui in Palmerston North, 12 March 2003 to scope Māori aspirations for the economy, education, health, social work and Māori development.
4. The panels include Humanities and Law; Social Sciences and other Cultural/Social Studies; Education; Physical Sciences; Biological Sciences; Agriculture; Environment; Mathematical and Information Technology and Sciences; Engineering, Technology and Architecture; Medicine and Public Health; Health Management, Economics, Commerce, Business Administration and Marketing; Māori Knowledge and Development; and Creative and Performing Arts.
5. Government policy that encouraged the establishment of polytechnic craft design courses in the 1980s has been supplemented by government incentive to offer degrees (Carr, 1998: 20). Massey University currently (2003) offers a degree programme in Māori visual arts at its Palmerston North campus and a fine arts programme with an endorsement in Māori visual practice at its Wellington campus. Essentially there is competition within Massey University for Māori visual arts enrolments across campuses.
6. Te Whare Wananga o Awanuiarangi and Te Wananga o Aotearoa currently offer a Bachelor of Visual Arts degree.
7. Two decades ago the Institute of Māori Arts and Crafts was the sole provider of post-secondary Māori visual culture training in the country. Today, the most successful tertiary provider for customary (traditional) training in Māori visual culture is Te Wananga o Aotearoa at Te Kuiti. Toihoukura at Tairāwhiti Polytechnic in Gisborne currently captures the trans-customary (trans-traditional) market followed closely by Te Wananga o Aotearoa through the delivery of the Toimairangi programme in Hastings. The non-customary (non-traditional) market is more difficult to determine at the undergraduate level as the range of programmes range across kaupapa Māori, Māori-centred and Māori-referenced programmes. In the postgraduate area the Master of Māori Visual Arts programme within the School of Māori Studies at Massey University in Palmerston North currently attracts the

most Māori postgraduate enrolments in Māori visual culture. In contrast, enrolment in mainstream tertiary programmes have stabilised at a little over 10,000.

8. This is a liberal paraphrase of the famous passage written for Rangi Bennett aged nine by Sir Apirana Ngata in 1949 “E tipu e rea mo nga ra o to ao; Kotou ringaringa ki nga rakaau a te Pakeha, hei oranga mo to tinana; ko tongakauki nga taonga a o tupuna hei tikitiki mo to mahunga; ko to wairua kite atua nana nei nga mea katoa” (cited in Cox, 1994: 91).
9. For some multiculturalism would be a more appropriate term. From a pro-Māori perspective biculturalism accounts for Māori as tangata whenua (people of the land) and others.
10. Strategically one can look at essentialism not as descriptions of the way things are, but as something one must adopt to provide a critique of anything (Spivak, cited in Sarup, 1998: 166).
11. I was first introduced to the notion of Māori visual culture as an alternative to Māori art by Huhana Smith in 2002 when I presented the Matariki lecture at the Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa. I accept this term as particularly applicable to my practice as an artist and educator because the work I create and the work students create through the Toioho programme at Massey University in Palmerston North is grounded in Māori visual culture.
12. See <http://www.vuw.ac.nz/adamart/al/artforums/2001/robert-jahnke.html> for a discussion on the relationship between these issues and Māori art education.
13. The University of Auckland, University of Canterbury and Otago Polytechnic have inherited the legacy of the “fine art” qualification while UCOL Universal College of Learning at Wanganui perpetuates the essentialist qualification in the establishment of the Bachelor of Fine Arts degree.
14. For example, the Bachelor of Māori Visual Arts at Massey University in Palmerston North and the Bachelor of Visual Arts at Manukau Institute of Technology at Manukau City. The first Bachelor of Visual Arts in New Zealand was accredited in 1993 at ASA School of Art, Auckland, subsequently incorporated into AUT (see Grierson, 2000). Otago University also offers a Māori Visual Arts degree through the Department of Māori Studies.

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