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**COUNCIL FOR EDUCATION AND CULTURAL ACTION CONFERENCE**  
**CHRISTCHURCH, NEW ZEALAND**

**From Zero to 360 degrees: Cultural Ownership in a Post-European  
Age**

Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,  
Let Maps to other, other worlds on worlds have showne,  
Let us possesse one world, each hath one, and is one.

So wrote the English Metaphysical poet John Donne in the early years of the seventeenth century. His poem *The Good-Morrow*, speaks of the mystical union of two bodies in one act of sexual congress. ['Where can we finde two better hemispheres/Without sharpe North, without declining West?'] However, *the* world of the great beyond had yet to be fully mapped, gridded, named, claimed and possessed by Europeans for Europe. The English colonisation of Virginia was just under way. The islands of Aoteaora New Zealand awaited 'discovery' in December 1642, and naming by officers of the Dutch East India Company trading from their citadel at Batavia.<sup>1</sup> Captain James' Cook's epic voyages into the Pacific, his circumnavigation of the globe, were more than a century and half away.

In the European race for mastery of the sea — and hence dominance in international trade — scientific curiosity and technological superiority soon gave Britian the competitive advantage over the Portuguese, the Dutch and the French so that by 1740 the English composer Thomas Arne was able to assert his country's naval supremacy in the air, 'Rule Britannia, Britannia rule the waves.'

Among the many scientific advances of the age, were systems of temporal and spatial measurement that eventually gained almost universal acceptance, and vastly aided the British expansionist project. In

1676 Thomas Tompion built the two most accurate clocks ever made, and these were installed in the Greenwich Observaory up the hill from the Royal Naval Hospital at Greenwich in London. From these clocks at this place was established the prime meridian of Greenwich Mean Time, zero degrees longitude. The calculation of longitude for sea voyages, remained, however, problematic, and its solution the subject of a race amongst European scientists. It was the Englishman John Harrison who succeeded in inventing the marine chronometer, a device of astonishing accuracy, as Cook was to find when, on his second voyage of 1772, New Zealand and Australasia were charted and positioned on a map showing the world's geographical features relative to zero degrees longitude: the vertical line in the exact centre.

Along with this activity went information-gathering on a breathtaking scale. From a globe now gridded in terms of 360 degrees, information, images (provided by artists on board French as well as British ships), and objects — "artificial curiosities" — flowed back into Europe to form part of a monolithic, encyclopedic knowledge base of staggering proportions. This was a view of the world constructed from the perspective of intellectual and cultural institutions situated at, or near, zero degrees longitude in the northen hemisphere — for example, the Royal Society founded in 1662; the Royal Academy founded in 1768 (around the time of Cook's first voyage); the British Museum; and their rival institutions on mainland Europe. The information was processed, analysed, classified and interpreted in ways that privileged Europe, and in that monolithic form even delivered back to those territories across the globe that Europeans had mapped, named, claimed and begun to settle.<sup>2</sup>

The overlay of the imperial project is all about us in the Pacific in the 'newness' of placenames, for example, New Caledonia, New South Wales, New England, New Guinea, and of course New Zealand, and

further afield, Nova Scotia, and New York (formerly New Amsterdam) which obliterate their more ancient indigenous names. This occurred, however, in a world that was new only to Europe, not to the ancient peoples indigenous to those places. The New World was what the Europeans brought with them into the old worlds of the Pacific and the Americas. The histories and cultures of the Old World of Europe and a quite mistaken sense of the recentness of Australia and New Zealand's histories and cultures make some 'antipodeans' self-conscious — make them cringe culturally and colonially.

Museums are of course implicated in the imperial project. The traditional concept of a museum as a repository of classical antiquities was soon expanded, in tandem with European expansion into the wider world, to accommodate natural history, ethnography, and so on right up the specialist museums of our own time. Vast quantities of objects flowed back into Europe from conquered and colonised territories, objects acquired by various means — barter, purchase, theft, force, enslavement and genocide (holocaust, as New Zealand's Associate Minister of Maori development has controversially termed it). Some of the most impressive collections of treasures from the Pacific are to be found in public collections in British, French, German and Austrian museums — collections in which for the greater part of their existence culture was, and is (mostly), exhibited outside the ritual contexts in which the meanings of those objects were originally constructed by their makers and owners. More worrying is the fact that treasures of colonised indigenous peoples, not to mention ancestral human remains, were also acquired by private individuals, and from time to time make their way to the great European and American salerooms.

In this region of the world, as elsewhere, whole communities — nations — were wiped out and all that survives are the material

evidences of their cultures held in the museums. Those that survived were culturally raped and their innocence destroyed. All too often the ancient culture was destroyed by missionisation.<sup>3</sup> Thus, on the first of his two visits to French Polynesia, Paul Gauguin discovered that very little survived in Tahiti of the kind of art he had so admired at the Exposition Universelle in 1878, and in the museums in Paris. So he had to invent a 'primitive' iconography, incongruously juxtaposing images appropriated from a variety of exotic sources to create and reinforce a sense of otherness. On his second visit in 1895 he stopped over in Auckland and drew Maori treasures from the Auckland Museum and obtained photographs from which he quoted in paintings completed in Tahiti and the Marquesas.<sup>4</sup> Thank goodness Maori were saved from similar exploitations and indignities on their own home turf by the Treaty of Waitangi.

In 1840 Queen Victoria's representative in New Zealand, Lieutenant William Hobson, entered into an agreement with many (but not all) Maori chiefs. Britain was to be permitted to establish a governmental administrative structure in return for which Maori would enjoy the rights and privileges of British citizenship. Article the Second of the Treaty unequivocally recognises Maori as the rightful and legal owners of the things they possessed at that point:

Her Majesty the Queen of England confirms and guarantees to the Chiefs and Tribes of New Zealand and to the respective families and individuals thereof the full and undisturbed possession of their Lands Estates Fisheries and other properties which they may collectively and individually possess so long as it is their wish and desire to retain the same in their possession ...<sup>5</sup>

'He iwi tatau katoa,' Hobson proclaimed at the signing: now we are all one people.<sup>6</sup> The northern chief, Nopera Panakareao, understood from

the Treaty that "the shadow of the land is to the Queen, but the substance remains to us."<sup>7</sup> Later that year a British official feared that the Maori would discover that the British had acquired "something more than the shadow."<sup>8</sup> Soon afterwards came Nopera's bitter recognition that the substance of the land had gone to the Queen; only the shadow remained with Maori. Maori had been duped. Another Maori leader was wryly to observe: 'When the missionaries first came here, we had the land and they had the Bibles; now we have the Bibles and they have the land.'

Contemporary Maori art often expresses itself in terms of reversals: this was how things used to be before the white people — the Pakeha — came; this is how they are now, and asks, how did this happen? Robert Jahnke's sculpture, *Nga Ata o Te Whenua* (The shadows of the land), 1990, uses two T-cross shapes in order to contrast pre-colonial Maori and Pacific forms with colonial European forms. Robyn Kahukiwa's painting *The Choice*, 1974, depicts a young Maori woman seated on a black and white chequered ground, holding a white mask in front of her face, and confronting the dilemma of the continuity of a customary marae life or the alienated, detribalised life of young urban Maori. Emare Karaka's *The Treaty of Waitangi: The Black and White of It*, 1986, contrasts the two language versions of the document — one in Maori, the other in English — in order to highlight significant differences in meaning and understanding.

What land and resources the colonial government could not obtain by fair means — because Maori would not, and could not, sell that to which they regarded themselves as belonging (and not the other way round), the colonial government seized by force of arms and the coercive power of legislation. Mary Hobhouse, whose husband was the first Anglican bishop of Nelson, might well ask in 1861: "How can the

natives expect justice when the people who covet every inch of their land are the makers of the laws?"<sup>9</sup> "Over the nineteenth century," as Paul Tapsell remarked, "we were carved up into blocks and sections."<sup>10</sup> The role of surveyors — with their systems of land measurement ultimately related to the western grid of longitude and latitude — in advancing the imperial cause has a particular resonance in New Zealand's history in the events leading up to the British military invasion of Taranaki after surveyors had moved in to measure the land and local people pulled up the surveyors' pegs.<sup>11</sup> But Papatuanuku, the Earth Mother, the primal female parent, was eventually flayed and butchered over almost her entire body. With their land and resources crushingly depleted, and their livelihoods destroyed, Maori fell into a swift decline, and became dependents and suppliants of the dominant culture's institutions. But the ensuing generations nursed grievances, fretted over continuing losses and diminishing resources, and have agitated ever since for redress.

The Treaty of Waitangi Act, 1975, recognises that in New Zealand nation's founding document are grounded political, legal and moral imperatives. The Act provides the means by which grievances of longstanding can be rectified — if only in part. In the extraordinary resurgence of Maori nationalism and culture there has been a determined push to reclaim land, reclaim resources, reclaim identity, reclaim self-respect and reclaim culture and cultural ownership. and ensure cultural integrity. Cultural ownership in this context means: ownership of land and resources, ownership of cultural treasures, ownership of their stories and histories and the language in which they are related, ownership of their cultural meanings and spiritual significance, ownership of the cultural systems and institutions, of their own world view ....

Within the museum world Maori have agitated for the repatriation of taonga, the return of cultural treasures to their original owners.

Mataatua, the magnificently carved and decorated meeting house, symbol of tribal and cultural identity for the tribes of the Mataatua confederation, especially Ngati Awa, in the Central and Eastern Bay of Plenty, was borrowed for exhibition in Sydney and Melbourne in the early 1880s, and then presented to the British Government by the colonial government. The building was eventually repatriated from the Victoria and Albert Museum to New Zealand but presented to the Otago Museum from which it has only recently been returned to the original owners after years of agitation.<sup>12</sup>

Dr Paul Tapsell of Te Arawa, a Central Bay of Plenty tribe, was instrumental in the repatriation of Pukaki, a large carved ancestral figure of great significance to Te Arawa, from the Auckland War memorial Museum.<sup>13</sup>

In the natural course of events such treasures are, of course, unlikely to have survived. "Thanks to the Western practice of collecting "quaint" works of art and modern conservation techniques," as Hirini Mead observes in the catalogue of the exhibition *Te Maori*,<sup>14</sup> treasures such as Te Papa's carved and decorated meeting house, Te Hau-ki-Turanga, survive. "The finest flowering of Maori art," Sir Apirana Ngata called it, and "New Zealand's greatest national treasure," in Mead's opinion, Te Hau-ki-Turanga survives only through the intervention of the Colonial Museum in Wellington, although it has to be said that the holdings of Maori material in museums then became for many Maori artists, because of the disruption of the living and continuous traditions, the major reference resource in the recovery of their art.

Maori concern about overseas holdings, and overseas sales of koiwi and moko mokai (bones and tattooed heads) has resulted in the establishment of government to government protocols towards their

repatriation, and encouraged the removal of human remains from public view.

Maori frustration over the presentation and interpretation of Maori cultural material, modes of interpretation that perpetuate the prejudices and ignorances of a bygone era, in museums provoked an insistence that Maori be consulted so that a proper ritual context may be provided and insider stories reinscribed, attached to cultural treasures to replace the outsider stories in which they were previously cocooned. There is concern, likewise, over the presentation of pictures of ancestors in "shadow paintings" (as Sir Apirana Ngata called the ancestral paintings of the Paris-trained New Zealand academic realist painter Charles Frederick Goldie), in whakaahua (photography) and in whitiahua (film). Who own our images?<sup>15</sup> In her series of paintings, *Unidentified Maori Women*, whose title comes from the label on a drawer of photographic studies in the Alexander Turnbull Library, from which Robyn Kahukiwa not only symbolically reclaimed images but provided ancestors and descendents in her painted reclamations.

Maori are taking a dim view of the appropriation and misappropriation of Maori images and design, and misuse of texts, indeed of any traditional material. Sir Paul Reeves, New Zealand's first Maori Governor General has expressed concern at tribal histories running loose in bookshops and libraries, leading lives independent from their traditional owners. Maori have looked askance at the appearance of traditional tattoo designs on the faces of anorexic models on the fashion runways of Europe and on the muscular shoulder of British rock star Robbie Williams.

In order to fulfil the gathering expectations of Maori, New Zealand museums will need to appoint — if they have not already done so — culturally competent Maori curators and establish Maori advisory



committees acceptable to the tribe that holds the spiritual authority over the particular locality in which the museum is situated. There is a need to develop bicultural policies and institute Treaty of Waitangi education with a view to lessening the gaping disparity between Maori staff who are all compulsorily bicultural and Pakeha staff who are not. But something more than the mere recognition of the co-existence of parallel knowledges implicit in the terms biculturalism and multiculturalism is required if progress is to be made. All museum professionals, including indigenous curators, must be culturally literate if museums are to be staffed by enabling custodians rather than gatekeeping preventers. Ignorance, prejudice and fear are the greatest impediments to racial and cultural concord. We have never needed cultural literacy more than we need it now. Museum education and cultural action can encourage and provide it.

Maori are coming more and more to regard museums as exercising custodianship rather than ownership of cultural treasures so that, regardless of legal impediments, threats of the removal of treasures are now heard when a museum gives offence or lacks the will or the means to treat emblems of identity with respect.

Maori curators are looking at the international systems of classification which museums have customarily applied to their cultural treasures and are finding unacceptable the common denominators and universals, the levelling processes to which they are subjected, that diminishes their cultural specificity and distinctiveness, and are looking at more appropriate alternative nomenclatures.

Maori efforts to extricate, to disentangle, as much of themselves as they can from a culturally subservient position must be paralleled by colonised indigenous Australians and the First Nation Peoples of Canada and the United States of America. The same discussions about

intellectual and cultural property rights, copyright, about the protection of culture and tradition, about dispossession and alienation of cultural properties (and rights) repossession, the same indignation about institutional and political interference in cultural matters, the same rise of indigenous essentialism and tribal fundamentalism, the same desire for the decolonisation of knowledge<sup>16</sup> and the decontamination of culture — these now link colonised indigenous peoples into a particular global network.

The cultural assertiveness of Maori during the past twenty-five years seems to Maori to be a cause of deep anxiety, insecurity and resentment to some, perhaps many Pakeha New Zealanders. "It's all very well Maori having a culture," a Pakeha taxi driver told me last year, "but what's my culture? Why can't we all be New Zealanders?" (In Australia: "We should all be one country ... one nation.") You cannot go into any art gallery or museum in New Zealand and be shown, as I was shown by the Curator of Twentieth Century Canadian Art (with outstretched arms) in the National Gallery in Ottawa, "the icons". The mountain, the river, the canoe of origin, the ancestor, the marae, the language — these are the fundamental elements of Maori identity. What are the emblems of identity for Pakeha? What is the song with which they would endorse their sense of identity? A jingle from a television advertisement for Chesdale cheese?<sup>17</sup>

Pakeha are the people who define themselves by what they are not. who want to forget their origins, their history, their cultural inheritance — who want Maori, likewise, to deny their origins so that we can all start off afresh. (What use would museums be in such a culture?) If history, as Milan Kundera, asserts, is the "struggle of memory against forgetting", Pakeha can seem to Maori like people for whom, perversely, the present is the struggle of forgetfulness against remembrance. Despite

the best efforts of the dominant culture to assimilate, to re-educate Maori, to educate their sense of their past out of them, however, Maori have retained, against the odds, a strong sense of their origins right back to an ancestral place of origin in the ancient Pacific: Hawai'iki (Hawaii, Savaii). Many Maori still believe that it is the past and their ancestors, not the future, that they face. It is that past that today's cultural custodians desperately want to bequeath to their descendents.

Compounding the Pakeha sense of cultural uncertainty was Britain's shock entry into the European Economic Community in 1975 leaving the descendents of the colonisers, the Anglo-Celtic majorities, seemingly abandoned and marooned in Australia and New Zealand. We all suddenly ceased to be British subjects, and had to begin to forge political and economic alliances elsewhere, especially in 'Asia' and the Middle East. New Zealand and Australia did not withdraw from Europe. Apart from France which still retains territorial interests in the Pacific, Europe withdrew from the Pacific, drew back into itself. In the European place of origin for Pakeha — with its dramatically reshaped economic and political alliances, vanishing borders and the possibility of a common currency and language — the affirmation of European-ness has become a primary concern of the European museum world, as I was fascinated to observe at a Museums Education conference I attended at the newly opened Tate Modern at the end of June. Europeans now seem very clear about the otherness of themselves when they are abroad ("I feel very European when I am in America."); and the otherness of those who do not live in Europe. Such is the so-called postmodern condition, the postcolonial, postimperial (or post-European as I prefer to call it), post-industrial and post-Christian world which has overtaken us during the past quarter century, all subsets of the age of globalisation in which we are said to live.

Globalisation *can* seem to indigenous people like an instrument of international capitalism, a new kind of imperialism, and hence a new threat. How are we to retain our cultural distinctiveness if our lives are to be controlled by the dynamic of the World Trade Organisation (of which a prominent former New Zealand politician is head)? Maori anthropologist Hirini Mead wonders whether it is *globalisation* - or *gobble-isation*. But just as the information superhighway shows us that in place of the old monolithic body of knowledge there are *knowledges*, so there are *globalisms*. Biculturalism involves a recognition of parallel knowledges; multiculturalism, likewise. The indigenous network is one such globalism. Contemporary Maori artist Lisa Reihana takes satisfaction, derives comfort from the knowledge that "the indigenous network can be quite close even though the distances are very far." And it is electronic telecommunications that allows this network to be woven and interwoven with a myriad of other networks.

All of this is taking place on a formerly static map of the world now reconfigured, dynamically, as a ceaselessly revolving globe. From telecommunications satellites it is possible to understand the world in a completely new way, as a network of constantly reforming clusters of cultures, co-existing and overlapping with other macrozones, microzones and networks — a world of communities and cultures, a world of worlds, no longer necessarily related to, and constructed in terms of, point zero degrees fixed at Greenwich. On our remapped and regridded globe, the world is constantly and dynamically reconfiguring itself in terms of shifting boundaries and overlapping centres. At the Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art in Brisbane in 1993 the New Zealand artist Robyn White recalled, in her floortalk, that her teacher, the eminent New Zealand painter Colin McCahon, had told his students in the 1960s that the Pacific would become the centre of the artworld.<sup>18</sup> Now living in

the small tropical Pacific Island country of Kiribati, where else could the centre of the artworld possibly be for her?<sup>19</sup> At the Second Asia-Pacific Triennial in 1996, Chris Saines, Director the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, observed that the periphery had become its own centre. So it seems natural for artists such as Ruth Watson in *Another Map of the World* 1989 to situate herself in a centre which is New Zealand; and for the Christchurch performance artist, The Wizard, to produce an upside-down map on which "down under" is shown "up over". From *our* centre, New Zealand artists link out to engage with other centres, as Neil Dawson has done with his globe suspended above the Centre Pompidou as part of the *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition in 1989.

At the Tate Modern's Museums Education conference in June, 2000, Lloyd Grossman spoke about the 24 hour museum, a virtual museum permanently online in Britain. In fact, much of the museum world is now online, rendering the old constructs of centres and margins or peripheries obsolete. For artists the World Wide Web has become a new image bank, replacing libraries and museums. The contemporary Maori artist Shane Cotton quotes images of the earth in his latest series of paintings from live pictures — presumably in the public domain — of our planet relayed from telecommunications satellites in space in real time, downloaded from the internet. This is a positive use of new technology that promises to enhance and enrich cultures everywhere, including Maori culture. More worrying, however, is the reality and prospect of our images — our "shadow carvings" — and the substance of our culture in hard information, "running loose" on the Web, beyond the control both of their traditional owners and of inter-governmental regulatory bodies. (Who owns the air waves? is an urgent and perplexing question that Maori leaders have tested in the courts.) Just at the point where some recovery of our rights under the Treaty has raised our hopes

and prospects comes a new threat not only to our specific rights of cultural ownership but the rights of every cultural community on the planet. The price of cultural integrity remains, like freedom, eternal vigilance.

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<sup>1</sup>Jakarta in present-day Indonesia.

<sup>2</sup>The authority of that view of the world is such that there are considerable numbers of people of European descent (Pakeha) and some indigenous people in this part of the world, i.e. Australia and New Zealand, who still assume themselves to be 'antipodeans'. Antipodeans are always the 'other': thus Australians and New Zealanders can only be Europe's 'antipodeans' not their own. Unthinking Eurocentrism of this kind tells Maori that Pakeha want to continue to stand with *them* overseas rather than with *us*, the indigenous peoples of Australia and New Zealand.

<sup>3</sup>When I visited Rarotonga in order to view ancient treasures, I found a new museum building with practically no exhibits, and a rival museum in a run-down library with a few choice pieces, borrowed from a New Zealand collection, and displayed in dusty showcases.

<sup>4</sup>See: Bronwen Nicholson, *Gauguin and Maori Art*. Auckland, 1995.

<sup>5</sup>See: Claudia Orange, *The Treaty of Waitangi*. Wellington, 1987, p. 258.

<sup>6</sup>Although this has often been used by the "Why can't we all be New Zealanders?" brigade as a pretext to deny Maori the very ownership rights they were guaranteed.

<sup>7</sup>*ibid.*, p.83.

<sup>8</sup>*ibid.*, p.86.

<sup>9</sup> 14 April, 1861. Wife of the first Bishop of Nelson writing to her sister-in-law on the Maori land question. See: Shirley Tunnicliffe, ed., *The Selected Letters of Mary Hobhouse*. Wellington, 1992.

<sup>10</sup>Rapporteur. Summary of ICOM/SECA Conference Sessions, Christchurch, 1 November 2000.

<sup>11</sup>See: *The Taranaki Report: Kaupapa Tuatahi*. Wellington, 1996.

<sup>12</sup>See: Sidney Moko Mead, *Maori Art on the World Scene*. Wellington, 1997, especially P.212ff.

<sup>13</sup>See: Paul Tapsell, *A Comet Returns*. Auckland, 2000.

<sup>14</sup>Sidney Moko Mead, ed., *Te Maori: Maori Art from New Zealand Collections*. Wellington/New York p.20.

<sup>15</sup>Ngapine Tamihana Te Ao, Who Owns Our Images?, *AGMANZ Journal*, 20:1, 1989, pp.17-18.

<sup>16</sup>cf. Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous People*. London/New York/Dunedin, 1999.

<sup>17</sup>See: Mike Harding, *When the Pakeha Sings of Home*. Auckland, 1992.

<sup>18</sup>See: Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, A Recentred World: Post-European/Pro-Indigenous Art from Aotearoa/New Zealand and Te Moananui-a-Kiwa/The South Pacific, in *The Second Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*. Brisbane, 1996, pp.28-30

<sup>19</sup>She has recently returned to live in New Zealand.