

*Là où dialoguent les musées:*

**The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa at the Musée du Quai Branly**

by

Lily Phillips

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# Abstract

The opening of the Musée du quai Branly in 2006 signalled a new approach to the display of Māori and Pacific collections in France and the beginning of a new relationship with the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

Between 2006 and 2012, the two museums were brought together by two challenging events: the repatriation of *toi moko* (Māori tattooed heads) from France to New Zealand and the 2011 exhibition *Maori: leurs trésors ont une âme* at the quai Branly. Through a close study of the repatriation and exhibition, and interviews with participants, this thesis considers the questions these events raise. How can museums with very different approaches to the treatment of artefacts negotiate issues of repatriation and the exhibition of sacred objects? How should colonial-era anthropological collections be exhibited today? What is the place of contemporary indigenous art in the museum?

By focusing on the exchanges between two institutions, Te Papa and the quai Branly, this thesis suggests how conversations at an individual level can lead to shifts in the perception and exhibition of museum objects, and how dialogues between museums internationally can contribute to an evolution in the treatment and display of indigenous artefacts and art in museums.



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# Introduction

*“Là où dialoguent les cultures.”*

- Slogan of the musée du quai Branly.

*“Conversations across boundaries of identity – whether national, religious, or something else – begin with the sort of imaginative engagement you get when you read a novel or watch a movie or attend to a work of art that speaks from some place other than your own... I’m using the word ‘conversation’ not only for literal talk but also as a metaphor for engagement with the experience and ideas of others” (Appiah, cited in Phillips, “Museum of Art-Thropology” 19).*

A conversation is a sociable affair that depends on a degree of reciprocity. It may be initiated by one participant, but must be sustained by several if it is not to fall into the repetitions and stasis of soliloquy. The conversation at the heart of this thesis is essentially a dialogue between two main participants: France’s musée du quai Branly (quai Branly) and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa). Between 2006 and 2012, a relationship developed between these two iconic institutions that would draw them together in a variety of ways. In 2011-12, the two museums would be involved in two significant events: the repatriation of 21 preserved, tattooed Māori heads from museums in France to New Zealand, and the staging of Te Papa-curated exhibition *Maori: leurs trésors ont une âme* (*Maori*) at the quai Branly.

The opening of quai Branly, in 2006, promised a “revolution” in the exhibition of France’s ethnological collections: a new dialogue between France and the cultures on display. Yet even before its opening, the museum provoked debate amongst French and international critics. Sally Price, anthropologist and authority on the exhibition of primitive art in the West, has contributed significantly to this debate, tracing the historical forces and political deal-making that led to the founding of this new museum in the heart of Paris.<sup>1</sup>

In the wake of quai Branly’s opening, doubts continued to be expressed, especially about the museum’s capacity to realise in practical terms the promise of “dialogue” implied in its slogan. The “conversations” in the museum’s permanent display – between ethnography and art, traditional and contemporary works, and the objects on display and their histories and creators, to name only a few – were critiqued as dysfunctional or entirely absent.<sup>2</sup> Some, observing problems in the quai Branly’s architecture and permanent exhibition space, nonetheless saw potential for evolution in some of the less rigid aspects of the museum, such as the temporary exhibitions and hosting of contemporary artists. In particular, the insights of James Clifford, in “Quai Branly in Process,” are of particular relevance to a thesis concerned with the impact of an groundbreaking temporary exhibition, *Maori*.

While these concerns and debates on museology provide context for the current analysis, the focus here is on the perspectives represented by two institutions and, especially, on the people responsible for them. For as Clifford argues, the concept of the museum as expressed

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<sup>1</sup> For Price’s exploration of the exhibition of “primitive” art in the West, see *Primitive Art in Civilized Places*. In *Paris Primitive*, “Enduring Power,” and “Return to the Quai Branly,” Price turns her anthropological lens on the quai Branly.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Digard; Price, *Paris Primitive*; Clifford, “Quai Branly in Process”; Dias; Shelton.

by *là où dialoguent les cultures* contains an inherent problem: “cultures don’t converse: people do” (“Quai Branly in Process” 16). The problem is, of course, that when people converse, complications follow. A museum object, freed from the display case, may have multiple stories assigned to it, depending on the storyteller. Collectors, curators, audiences, or those who feel a cultural, historical or spiritual relationship to the object may all apply different – sometimes conflicting – values and meanings to the object.

The word “dialogue,” American anthropologist Geoffrey White asserts, “is inspiring and mystifying all at the same time. It speaks to idealistic visions and the almost universally valued need for improved mutual understanding, particularly across geocultural zones marked by histories of conflict and oppression” (46). Yet the term has the potential to “distract and obscure as much as enlighten” (White 46). A case study of the *Maori* exhibition, its background and realisation, provides the opportunity to examine the translation of “idealistic visions” of dialogue into a concrete project. What happens when *people* – not “cultures” – enter into conversation on the contentious topics of the exhibition and repatriation of museum objects? Through a study of *Maori* – the convergence of two cultural, political and historical backgrounds – this thesis responds to Price and Clifford’s initial predictions, as well as some more recent assessments of the quai Branly’s evolution.

In 2011, the narrative of the quai Branly intersects with another, that of New Zealand’s national museum Te Papa Tongarewa. The history of Te Papa’s creation is equally important for understanding the different collection policies and exhibiting styles that would come into contact during the repatriation and *Maori* exhibition. In New Zealand, the work of Conal McCarthy explores the history of Te Papa’s collections and the evolution towards a new museum. Like the quai Branly, the promise of “conversation” at Te Papa – in this case, as the

site of bicultural dialogue – has received mixed responses. Ben Dibley and Paul Williams have taken a critical stance on the museum's realisation of its stated biculturalism.

Unpacking the conversation around *Maori* requires us first to know our orators. According to Marilena Alivizatou, every museum is “a culture in itself,” one “entangled in different historical, political and social webs” (23). Chapter One therefore does not aim to provide an all-encompassing account of Te Papa and the quai Branly, but rather to provide a sketch of these two “cultures” and the “webs” in which they find themselves. By examining each museum and its context in turn, Chapter One sets the scene for the following chapter: “cultures” in contact.

In Chapter Two, the development of the relationship between Te Papa and the quai Branly is traced through the background to the *Maori* exhibition and the process of its staging at the quai Branly. The reflections of two curators involved in the *Maori* exhibition, Te Papa's Rhonda Paku and the quai Branly's Magali Mélandri, provide insights into the workings of the collaboration between the two institutions: its difficulties and limitations, but also its reciprocal benefits. Going behind the scenes of the *Maori* exhibition, this thesis seeks to examine how such collaborative projects might offer an opportunity for the realisation of the quai Branly's potential to become a site of dialogue, and provide reciprocal benefits for Te Papa.

# Chapter One

Eight years apart, on opposite sides of the globe, two museums were founded: one on the Wellington waterfront, the other on the banks of the Seine. The two institutions, the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (opened 1998), and the musée du quai Branly (2006), both claimed to represent a revolution in museology, a break with past modes of conserving and exhibiting collections in each country.

Te Papa, a national museum, and the quai Branly, a museum of the arts of “Asia, Africa, Oceania and the Americas,” each have a different focus and purpose. Common to both museums, however, is the exhibition of similar types of collections belonging to the broad category of ethnographic artefacts (Alivizatou 23). These ethnographic artefacts are the inheritance of earlier collecting practices of museums in France and New Zealand. Anthropological museums began to take shape in the late nineteenth century, as collections of exotica in cabinets of curiosity were transformed into specimens of the emerging science of anthropology (Ames 51). Both anthropology and anthropological museums were offshoots of “the nineteenth-century expansion of Western imperialism and rationalism” (Ames 51).

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, anthropological museums “salvaged” huge collections of archaeological, ethnographic, and historical objects from what were then considered vanishing cultures (Welsh 841). Specimens of “primitive societies” were now compared and ranked in a field of study modelled on natural history and closely linked to colonialism (Ames 51). Cultures and belief systems were evaluated in relation to each other and ordered hierarchically (M. Ross 92).

In museums today, this mission has largely been abandoned and anthropological research has gradually moved from the museum to the university (Ames 39). In the late twentieth century, New Zealand and France thus both faced the question confronting all museums possessing ethnographic collections:

“What was to be done with old collections, modes of display, and the museums that continued to house them? Should these institutions be preserved as museums of themselves? As ethnology’s heritage? Or, should the museum reinvent itself?”

(Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “From Ethnology to Heritage” 204).

In both countries it was decided that the museum would be reinvented, old modes of display rectified, and old collections given new status. In doing so, the two museums sought to differentiate themselves from their predecessors, institutions linked (sometimes irrevocably, by their architecture) with the colonial project.

In different ways, Te Papa and the quai Branly are typical of Alivizatou’s description of the “twenty-first-century museum as an institution that grapples with multiple constituencies and engages with calls for a reinvented museology” (Alivizatou 23). Both France and New Zealand faced calls to reinvent their museums in light of changes in society and break with the colonial past. Both museums would shed the label of “ethnological” or “anthropological” museums; both would place a new emphasis on cultural diversity, but approach this in different ways. At Te Papa, the museum was to exhibit a decolonised, bicultural national identity. At the quai Branly, cultural artefacts once exhibited as ethnographic objects were to be elevated to the status of high art.

## A new Museum of New Zealand

On the 14 February 1998, the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa opened in Wellington. An editorial titled “Welcome, Te Papa,” in that day’s *Evening Post*, declared that “like it or not, the \$317 million Museum of New Zealand showcases the nation in a way never before seen” (4). As the editorial’s opening line suggests, the new museum had provoked significant public controversy before the doors even opened. As a government-funded institution of significant cost, the museum was bound to attract public interest. As the “Museum of New Zealand,” however, the institution took on the particular challenge of showcasing the nation, to the nation – and, indeed, the world. It was thus a different challenge to that faced by the quai Branly, which would seek to repurpose museum objects, once used to glorify France, in a new context: as a celebration of the art and cultural diversity of the world.

The *Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Act 1992* established the museum and set out its purposes as

“a forum in which the nation may present, explore, and preserve both the heritage of its cultures and knowledge of the natural environment in order better –

- (a) to understand and treasure the past; and
- (b) to enrich the present; and
- (c) to meet the challenges of the future” (s. 4)

The museum’s intended role as a “forum” representative of New Zealand’s cultural diversity represented a new approach to exhibiting the nation’s history and identity. As a “flag-bearer” for New Zealand (“Welcome, Te Papa” 4), the museum faced pressure to represent the country as a “grown-up” nation with its own identity (Tramposch 341).

The creation of a new institution to house the collections of the National Museum (NM) and National Art Gallery (NAG) was initially driven by practical considerations. By the 1980s, space at the NM was reaching capacity. Earlier plans to create a new national art gallery or to extend the NM had failed, leading the Government to consider a merger of their collections in a new institution (Williams, "New Zealand's Identity Complex" 52).

Contributing to the desire for a new museum, according to Tramposch, was the significant growth in international tourism to New Zealand and declining visitation at the existing museum, which the public viewed as outdated and unwelcoming (340). Te Papa was in some ways a political project, although not to the same extent as the quai Branly. In the early nineties, at a time of fiscal prudence, then prime minister Jim Bolger used his authority to drive through funding approval for the stalled museum project despite the opposition of the Cabinet majority (Venter, "Bolger").

Te Papa would unite the collections of two institutions with strong links to New Zealand's past as a colonial outpost. The NM had been founded as the Colonial Museum, in 1865, renamed the Dominion Museum in 1907, and finally the National Museum in 1972 ("History"). The NAG, established in 1930, originated from a national collection previously managed by the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts (Museum of New Zealand ix). In 1936, the two institutions, along with the Academy, moved to a new, shared site on Buckle Street, Wellington. The Buckle Street museum, with its neo-classical architecture, "exuded timelessness" and evoked associations with Empire (Williams, "New Zealand's Identity Complex" 53). Since 1936, however, New Zealand's ties with Britain had weakened. When Britain joined the European Economic Community in the 1960s, New Zealand was rapidly forced to find its economic and social independence (Tramposch 341).



The NM's approach to exhibition was shaped by its Colonial Museum origins and the scientific views that had generated its collections. At the Colonial Museum, Māori had been displayed in the same manner as natural history, with Māori artefacts and human remains acting as specimens. Māori culture, divorced from its tribal context, was "represented through the museological techniques of taxonomy, models and dioramas" (Williams, "New Zealand's Identity Complex" 127–8). Cases were crammed with objects, "while explanatory text about history, usage and ownership was minimal" (ibid. 127). Elsewhere in the museum, other peoples of the Pacific were also exhibited as subjects of ethnology as part of the museum's "Foreign Ethnology" collection.

The ethnographic presentation of an authentic "Maori life" at the Colonial Museum manifested widely-held views of Māori at the time. At the turn of the twentieth century, the belief that the Maori people would become extinct, or at least be assimilated, was widespread (Belich 191). Acting on the assumption that Māori were a "dying race," or else a vanishing culture destined to become a relic, "museums practised a 'salvage paradigm' that aimed to rescue authentic cultural expressions out of destructive historical change" (Williams, "New Zealand's Identity Complex" 128). At the Dominion and the National Museum, the image of the disappearing "real" and "authentic" Māori persisted (Hakiwai, "Search for Legitimacy" 156). There had been some attempts to update the museum display in the 1970s, moving the Māori exhibits towards "art" rather than "artefact." However, although temporary exhibitions tested the boundaries, substantial changes in the display of Māori objects at the museum were resisted (McCarthy, "From Curio to Taonga" 201).

The NAG, too, was slow to recognise the changes that were occurring at regional museums, which were beginning to mount significant exhibitions of contemporary Māori art by the 1970s (McCarthy, “From Curio to Taonga” 213). The gallery, which had once focused on European art, began from the 1950s to embrace a New Zealand artistic identity, but the focus remained almost exclusively on art following the European tradition (Brown 291). It was not until 1978 that the NAG hosted its first internally-curated exhibition of contemporary Māori art (McCarthy, “From Curio to Taonga” 202). As McCarthy explains, the exhibition, and the recognition given to contemporary Māori art in New Zealand society, had important symbolic value:

“With ‘brown art’ included in the ‘white spaces’ of the art gallery, Māori nationalism fought its way up to the most prestigious strata of Pākehā society. More broadly, contemporary Māori art provided the arena for a spirited engagement with modern urban life which demanded, not just a spot in the art gallery, but a place for Māori within decolonised New Zealand society” (McCarthy, “From Curio to Taonga” 202).

The NM and NAG both acted as arenas for the negotiation of the place of Māori in decolonised New Zealand identity, but the changes they instituted did not keep pace with Māori cultural and political self-assertion outside the museum and gallery.

The development of a new museum merging the collections of the NM and NAG. would create the possibility for the substantial changes yet to occur at the two institutions. Te Papa aimed to redress the relative exclusion of Māori from the NAG and the ethnographic representation of Māori in the NM, a situation now “untenable not only on political but also on scientific grounds” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “From Ethnology to Heritage” 204). Just as the NM had reflected the colonial context of its creation, Te Papa would reflect its own context in its policies, architecture, style of exhibition, name, and inclusive slogan: “Our Place.”

## **The influence of *Te Maori***

Coinciding with plans for the new museum was a significant event that would help shape the nature of this institution: the successful *Te Maori* exhibition, which toured the United States in 1984-5, and New Zealand as *Te Maori: Te hokinga mai* ("The Return Home") in 1986-87. The exhibition of 174 Māori artefacts from New Zealand museums was perceived as "a watershed moment" for the status of Māori art in New Zealand and "the turning point in museum presentations of Maori culture" (Schorch and Hakiwai 6; Tamarapa 162). *Te Maori* was seen as revolutionary in its presentation of "artefacts" as "taonga." The exhibition "established the status of 'taonga', a Māori culture of display that was closer to the style of presentation of high art" than to the ethnographic style dominant in New Zealand museums at the time (McCarthy, "Before 'Te Maori'" 118). The aesthetic mode of display was controversial, however, and the appropriateness of exhibiting taonga in this way was the subject of "heated debates" within Māori communities (Dibley, "Museum, Nation, Narration" 98).

*Te Maori* was significant for the development of Te Papa not only in its re-evaluation of Māori objects, but also in creating a new relationship between museums and Māori. The exhibition was considered revolutionary in its involvement of Māori in the representation of Māori culture. Authority was sought for the museum objects to travel, and iwi "participated in its opening ceremonies in a visible, distinctive manner" (Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* 210). Although Māori had been involved in New Zealand museums and museum representation of Māori previously (see McCarthy, "Before 'Te Maori'"), *Te Maori* was the first time that Māori were consulted on such a national scale.

*Te Maori*'s tour of the United States signalled a change in practice behind the scenes, introducing new concepts to host institutions such as Māori keeping taonga "warm" by attending to them during their stay in overseas institutions. According to Mead, displayed items are sometimes "named ancestors" that live on in a "social and kinship sense" (160). It is necessary to keep them "warm" through social interaction "while they are overseas and away from their social universe" (160). The presence and involvement of Māori in *Te Maori*'s staging in the United States is also stressed by Jahnke as an essential part of *Te Maori*'s watershed status. According to Jahnke, Māori would have bewildered the American public as they "conversed with images, addressed them by name or wept before them" (199). By attending *Te Maori* but engaging with it in a completely different way to the American audience, Māori visitors revealed to this audience a completely different concept of the object: not as artefact, but as taonga:

"Art was rendered accessible through ritual and ritual empowered art. It was a process of de-contextualising art as an 'object of desire' or 'object of gaze', in order to reconfigure the object as a precondition of culture" (Jahnke 199–200).

This contextualisation of artefacts as taonga as part of *Te Maori* could not have come about, therefore, without the visible presence of Māori at the site of the exhibition and the framing of art within ritual.

The introduction of Māori custom to host institutions in the United States as part of *Te Maori* was not always easy, requiring a new relationship to be negotiated between museum and Māori. There were "protracted negotiations" before the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the exhibition's American sponsors would agree to the dawn ritual to open *Te Maori* in New York (Mead 160). This dawn ritual, according to *Te Maori*'s curator, turned out to be a moving ceremony for many of the American hosts as well as the New Zealand

contingent, and drew the particular attention of American and international media covering the exhibition (Mead 159). The process of negotiating the opening rituals to accompany *Te Maori* in the United States gave Māori custom “international status” and led to acceptance internationally of a Māori customary practice as a necessary part of opening ceremonies (Mead 160). Behind the scenes, the objects were also recontextualised, treated as ancestors rather than artefacts, an approach that would inform Te Papa’s permanent and travelling exhibitions.

*Te Maori* was well-received in the United States and viewed by almost a third of the New Zealand population on its return (McCarthy, “Before ‘Te Maori’” 118). For the New Zealand public, the exhibition “suddenly showed Maori cultural heritage as art as much as artefact, as unique and as a sleeping asset” (McLeod, cited in Dibley, “Antipodean Aesthetics” 134). In the wake of *Te Maori*’s phenomenal success, the New Zealand government perceived significant social and economic advantages in creating a permanent home for this resurgent Māori cultural heritage. Planners thus began to consider “a radically different institution” – one where the sleeping asset would be awoken (Williams, “New Zealand’s Identity Complex” 53).

## **Towards “Our Place”**

*Te Maori* had brought to the fore issues of museum representation of Māori and control over Māori cultural heritage that formed part of a broader Māori movement for recognition and greater autonomy. The 1970s had seen a significant rise in Maori activism and political and cultural self-assertion. Māori anti-colonial activists reacted against institutional racism and

the negative effects of government policies of assimilation that continued well into the 1970s (Dibley, "Antipodean Aesthetics" 131). The Treaty of Waitangi, once held up as a symbol of "New Zealand's supposedly near-perfect race relations," now become the focus of debate as Māori argued that the Crown had repeatedly breached the promises made under the Treaty (Hill 294). The most radical activists sought tino rangatiratanga, Māori self-governance (Brown 288).

As a rapidly-growing and increasingly urbanised segment of the population, Māori concerns could no longer be ignored (Belich 475). In response to this Māori political self-assertion, the concept of biculturalism, originally developed in relation to Anglophone and French Canada, was increasingly advocated in New Zealand from the mid-1980s. Biculturalism, it was argued, would allow for a degree of Maori self-determination while not threatening the unity of the nation. As interpreted in New Zealand, bicultural policies positioned Māori as a "partner" of Pākehā in the administration of the state. The Treaty of Waitangi was "rehabilitated" as the "founding document" of New Zealand and basis of the Māori- Pākehā partnership (see Henare pp56-7).

In New Zealand museums, the influence of biculturalism had been building slowly since the 1970s, but it was *Te Maori* that suddenly gave "momentum" to the recognition of Māori cultural values by institutions (McCarthy, "Before 'Te Maori'" 118). In light of *Te Maori*, Māori elders made a series of recommendations concerning the role of Māori in museums that would inform the policies of Te Papa:

- "1) that Maori people should determine how their own *taonga* or cultural treasures are presented and interpreted;
- 2) that museums are the caretakers of the *taonga*, not the owners; the *mana* of the *taonga* resides with the *iwi* from which it originates;

- 3) that the relevant *iwi* or tribe should be consulted on all matters regarding their *taonga*;
- 4) that Maori *taonga*, in a museum setting, should be presented as part of a living culture rather than as a relic of the past;
- 5) that Maori staffing levels in museums should be dramatically increased to enable the appropriate cultural considerations regarding the well-being of the *taonga* to be put in place; and
- 6) that museums with significant collections of Maori *taonga* should begin to effect institutional change to enable them to become bicultural institutions in the future” (Tamarapa 163).

These recommendations responded to inadequacies of the existing presentation and treatment of Māori objects in New Zealand museums and the need for greater Māori involvement in the management of their cultural heritage.

Following *Te Maori*, Māori had affirmed that, unlike existing museum displays seemed to imply: “We are not dead. We did not die out before the turn of the century and are not a diluted form of the supposed ‘real’ and ‘authentic’ Maori. We still speak the language, we still have our traditions, our stories, our myths – our culture” (Hakiwai, “Search for Legitimacy” 156). The new museum would be forced to respond to the recommendations cited by Tamarapa: the involvement of Māori in the presentation of their own culture, the display of objects not as relics but as part of a “living culture,” and the enactment of institutional change to create a bicultural museum.

Planning for the new museum, from 1984-89, took place as *Te Maori* gave “momentum” to sharing authority over exhibitions and the state emphasis on biculturalism began to take effect at a high level. Court of Appeal rulings required the government “to pay heed to the Treaty in disposing of state assets,” Māori was established as an official language, and “bicultural initiatives in education and social policy” were created (Te Papa, *Icons* xi). By the 1980s, “each institution was staking out a claim to become the cultural (and

bicultural) centre for the whole country” (Te Papa, *Icons* x). The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa would position itself as the vanguard of this institutional biculturalism, embedding biculturalism in its concept plan, policies, operations, architecture and displays.

## **A bicultural museum**

The *Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Act 1992* defines the museum’s duty to

- “(a) have regard to the ethnic and cultural diversity of the people of New Zealand, and the contributions they have made and continue to make to New Zealand’s cultural life and the fabric of New Zealand society:
  - (b) endeavour to ensure both that the Museum expresses and recognises the mana and significance of Maori, European, and other major traditions and cultural heritages, and that the Museum provides the means for every such culture to contribute effectively to the Museum as a statement of New Zealand’s identity:
  - (c) endeavour to ensure that the Museum is a source of pride for all New Zealanders”
- (s. 8).

Although the Act does not explicitly reference biculturalism but rather “ethnic and cultural diversity,” biculturalism was woven into the rhetoric of museum developers and policy-makers. The 1989 concept plan for the museum sets out the museum’s bicultural ethos: “The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa... will express the bicultural nature of the country, recognising the mana and significance of each of the two mainstreams of tradition and cultural heritage and providing the means for each to contribute effectively to a statement of the nation’s identity” (cited in Brown 288). Plans for Te Papa envisaged three governing concepts, “Papatūānuku (‘The earth on which we all live’), Tangata Whenua (‘Those who belong to the country by right of first discovery’) and Tangata Tiriti (‘Those who belong to the country by right of the Treaty’)” (Te Papa, *Icons* xi).



Te Papa's architecture, in contrast to its neo-classical predecessor, was designed to symbolize a bicultural relationship. According to its architects, the building responds on its southern side to the "European-based urban grid of Wellington", and on its northern side to "the alignment of the most open axis of Wellington Harbor, more in keeping with the traditional approach to landscape adopted by Maori settlers" (Jasmax, cited in Henare 57). The architectural concept has been critiqued as simplistic, however, reducing the "entangled nature of life in a former colony to a simple nature-culture opposition" (Henare 57). Within the museum, biculturalism is expressed architecturally through the "cleaving" - "a drawing apart while pulling together" - of the 'Tangata Whenua' and 'Tangata Tiriti' galleries by the Treaty of Waitangi exhibit *Signs of a Nation* (Dibley, "Antipodean Aesthetics" 134).

Issues of representation in the museum, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has noted, do not only involve what is displayed and how, but also "being represented in the institution's infrastructure, on its staff, and in its audience" ("The Museum as Catalyst" 10). Defined as a "forum" in its founding act and branded as "Our Place," Te Papa was given the role of opening the museum to the community and attracting a more diverse audience. Beyond its commercial imperative to draw in a wide range of visitors, Te Papa's audience is expected to reflect the demographics of New Zealand society in the age, gender and ethnicity of its domestic visitors. Whereas earlier incarnations of the museum were "rarely visited by Māori," Te Papa has been far more successful in attracting a Māori audience (Tamati-Quennell, cited in Alivizatou 67).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In 2011-12, for instance, 11.2% of domestic visitors to Te Papa were Māori compared, while Māori make up 11.9% of the New Zealand population.

Biculturalism is integrated into the Te Papa on an operational level. A position equivalent to that of the Chief Executive Officer, the Kaihautū, is responsible to iwi and tasked with “the overall management of taonga” (Kreps 70). An increased number of Māori were trained in the museum profession and recruited, non-Māori staff were trained in tikanga, competency in te reo was set as a performance standard (Kreps 69–70; Dibley, “Antipodean Aesthetics” 135).

Language is an important symbol of biculturalism at Te Papa, where te reo is used alongside English on all labels and signs (Dibley, “Antipodean Aesthetics” 134). The bilingual approach is apparent in the museum’s full name, the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. “Te Papa Tongarewa,” literally “container of treasures,” is formed from Māori expressions with multiple levels of meaning (Te Papa, “Meaning”). The museum is most commonly known, however, by its abbreviated Māori name, “Te Papa.” Interestingly, this leads to a situation in which the museum’s common name, like the Colonial, Dominion and National Museums before it, is monolingual – but this time exclusively Māori. “Te Papa” also marks a departure from its earlier incarnations as an institution defined neither by the word “museum,” nor the word “gallery.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The brand name “Te Papa” and slogan “Our Place” were developed by advertising agency Saatchi and Saatchi. The shortening of the name for branding purposes provoked significant criticism, not only by those who denounced the absence of the word “Museum” from its title, but also by Māori language experts who claimed “Te Papa” on its own was “meaningless” (Macleod 3). There seems to have been a recent shift towards the use of “Te Papa Tongarewa” or “Te Papa Tongarewa Museum” on Radio New Zealand. The museum’s website, however, tends to use “Te Papa” or “The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa,” and newspapers almost exclusively “Te Papa.”

## Mana Taonga

At the level of conservation and display, biculturalism has had far-reaching effects on the new museum. According to McCarthy,

“arguably the most important area of reform in museum practice at Te Papa is the way that collection care and management has been transformed from the former philosophical framework of ethnology to kaitiakitanga, guardianship, underpinned by tikanga taonga, protocols for taonga, and mātauranga Māori, Māori knowledge” (*Museums and Māori* 125).

Te Papa’s approach to its treatment of Māori collections (and its collections more generally) is encapsulated by the principle of “Mana Taonga.” Post-Te Maori, Māori collections had been reassessed, not as curios or specimens, “but as cultural treasures handed down through the generations (referred to in Māori as taonga tuku iho)” (Butts 218). The links between taonga and the people for whom they had significance were increasingly acknowledged in New Zealand museums (Butts 218). At Te Papa, Mana Taonga was intended to repair relationships with communities (such as iwi and hapū) and redress past injustices relating to the acquisition and treatment of taonga (Te Papa, *Icons* xiii).

Developed through extensive consultation with iwi as a guiding principle for the treatment of taonga in the museum’s collections, Mana Taonga recognises the “*living* relationships and connections between taonga and their cultures of origin. Mana Taonga recognises that communities have a right to their taonga by virtue of these concrete relationships” (Schorch and Hakiwai 7). Although Mana Taonga was particularly motivated by Māori concerns around the treatment of Māori objects and given urgency by *Te Maori*, the

concept of taonga, as defined by Te Papa, is not limited to objects nor to Māori collections.<sup>56</sup>

The policy can thus be seen as representative of a more general trend in which museums worldwide have aimed to engage more closely with the communities whose heritage is collected and represented, not only indigenous ones. These museums no longer claim to be owners of the objects and cultural and scientific arbiters, but instead position themselves as “caretakers” or “guardians,” responsible for presenting multiple viewpoints. This approach fits with Te Papa’s duty – and commercial imperative – to draw a wider audience, but the new principle had particular significance for those communities whose “*living* relationships and connections” to exhibited objects were not recognised, or adequately recognised, at the NM and NAG. Theoretically, therefore, those who feel a connection to taonga/objects now share authority over the conservation and exhibition of these collections with museum insiders.

Te Papa’s approach to its collection of some 25,000 Māori and Moriori taonga (Te Papa, *Icons* 2), inherited from the NM and NAG and built on since, is guided by the concept of Mana Taonga. Collections are now classified not only by type, but by iwi affiliation (Tamarapa 166). The treatment of Māori collections at Te Papa now takes into account tikanga, or Māori cultural protocol. Te Papa’s practices in relation to its Māori collections recognise the concept of mauri, “the life principle or essence that derives from a Maori world view, where

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<sup>5</sup> “Taonga” is defined by Te Papa as “treasure or property that holds value. Taonga embraces any cultural items of significance or value and can include a diverse range of material, from the most highly prized tribal taonga - such as ancestral carvings, personal ornaments, garments, and weaponry - to ‘worked’ material such as fragments of flaked stone from archaeological excavations, bird bone, mammal bones, and shell. Language, waiata (songs) and karakia (incantations, prayers) are also regarded as important taonga” (Te Papa, “Statement of Intent 2012-15” 6).

<sup>6</sup> In the context of community exhibitions at Te Papa, ‘taonga’ is interpreted to include the “material and intangible culture of any community in New Zealand, not just iwi” (Gibson and Mallon 45).

humankind is genealogically related to all matter.” (H. Smith, “Museum” 2.1). All things, “both animate and inanimate, possess mauri,” and may require “ritualised attention” (H. Smith, “Museum” 2.1).

Some of the protocols relating to the museum’s Māori collections are obligations, (for example, “don’t eat food or drink,” “don’t stand or step over any taonga”), while some are personal choice (“to say karakia/prayers,” “not to work on taonga when menstruating”) (*Museums and Māori* 126). Kōiwi tangata Māori and koimi Moriori (Māori and Moriori human remains) in the museum’s collection, which had earlier formed part of exhibits, are now removed from display and treated “with the utmost respect at all times” (Te Papa, “Statement of Intent 2012-15” 6). The museum has successfully advocated for their repatriation from overseas museums, after which Te Papa attempts to identify them in order to return them to their iwi of origin.

The application of Mana Taonga at Te Papa can be seen in the negotiations around exhibitions of Māori art, history and culture. The long-term Māori exhibition *Mana Whenua* “was the product of Māori staff working *with* Māori communities, and in doing so becoming facilitators of a process rather than authoritative experts” (McCarthy, *Museums and Māori* 136). The museum has also mounted short-term exhibitions devoted to different tribes, produced in collaboration between the museum and the iwi to be on display. The involvement of iwi and Māori curators in the museum has a strong symbolic value, asserting Māori authority over the *narrative* told by the museum, not just over collections. As Alivizatou describes, “iwi are the authors of the museum narrative and their self-representational discourse... The exhibition becomes a space where tribal communities

affirm their living bonds with tradition and consolidate their presence in the museum narrative” (Alivizatou 60).

The sharing of authority with museum stakeholders, encapsulated in the Mana Taonga principle, can also be contentious. Mana Taonga has been criticised by some, such as Paul Tapsell, for passing over the protocols of Wellington’s local iwi, thus neglecting Te Papa’s duty to tangata whenua under the Treaty of Waitangi (Dibley, “Antipodean Aesthetics” 136). Opponents of the policy argue that Te Papa’s nationalised taonga repeat “colonial injustices experienced by the tangata whenua of the Wellington region” (Dibley, “Antipodean Aesthetics” 136).

The realisation of the Mana Taonga principle in practice often requires a complex process of negotiation, Te Papa Pacific Cultures curator Sean Mallon explains. Who has authority to speak for a community within the museum, how authority is to be shared between museum and community representatives, and whose knowledge and way of engaging with objects takes precedence, are all topics to be negotiated as part of each interaction. The curator’s authority, established anthropological knowledge and the museum’s own narrative may be challenged by the views of community members on the objects on display. Sharing authority thus has its difficulties, but also its rewards: these outside perspectives are often ethnographically-rich resources which provide insights that would not otherwise be available to curators (Mallon, “Right, Right One”).

The stories told through exhibitions at Te Papa were intended to replace a singular, outsider view of Māori, with a multiple one, formed by the intersection of museum anthropology and “Mātauranga Māori,” Māori knowledge. Mātauranga Māori is defined as a system of Māori knowledge informed by “kōrero-ā-whānau, ā-hapū, ā-iwi (narratives and history of

whānau, hapū and iwi), karakia (prayer/incantation), waiata (songs) and knowledge arising from interaction with Te Ao Tū Tonu (the universe) and Te Ao Tūroa (the natural environment/world)" (Te Papa, "Statement of Intent 2012-15" 6). At Te Papa, Māori knowledge relating to "custom, tradition and practice" works alongside "academic scholarship," and the two are "encouraged to encounter each other" (Te Papa, *Icons* xii).

At Te Papa, Mātauranga Māori is expressed not only in specifically Māori exhibitions, but across disciplines. In the natural history exhibit *Awesome Forces*, for example, science and mātauranga are presented as equally meaningful narratives, and Māori perspectives and traditional knowledge are woven through other natural history displays (Alivizatou 65). Although Alivizatou describes the interrelation of Western science with mātauranga at the museum in positive terms, Williams has strongly criticised the concept of Mātauranga Māori and its "artificially fabricated opposite ('Western history/science')" as essentialising, prescribing "a narrow image of what constitutes Maori culture" (Williams, "New Zealand's Identity Complex" 133).

Attempts to link the museum's collections with a "living culture" are evident in Te Papa's Te Marae, an unconventional marae within the museum. The space serves as "Te Papa's response to the challenge of creating an authentic yet inclusive marae (communal meeting place) for the twenty-first century" ("Te Marae"). The museum thus does not simply display tradition, but places the enactment of that tradition at the heart of the museum. According to Cliff Whiting, kaihautū at the time of the museum's opening, the whare was designed to represent a diverse New Zealand identity: "For Asians there are dragon forms, for Pacific Islanders one of the designs is a tapa, the English have a rose and thorn, and there are Celtic symbols" ("Where Cultures Meet" 3). The marae is also unconventional in that all visitors

are conceived of as the “tangata whenua” of Te Marae, under the Mana Taonga principle. Thus, “all people have a right to stand on this marae through a shared whakapapa (genealogy) and the mana (power) of the taonga (treasures) held in Te Papa's collections” (“Te Marae”).

The unconventional inclusion of a functional marae in a museum has also provoked criticism. Williams reports that some museum kaitiaki have interpreted requests for iwi participation in corporate and official events held at Te Marae as suggestive of a “dial-a-powhiri” approach (Williams, “Bicultural Space” 96). Even more contentious is the issue of “the undifferentiated inclusiveness of Te Papa’s Mana Taonga policy” in relation to Te Marae, criticised by Williams as excluding Wellington tangata whenua and undermining marae tikanga (Williams, “Bicultural Space” 97). These criticisms reveal the difficulty of establishing a space for Māori culture within the museum without repeating the tropes of colonial museums and exhibitions, in an institution that also has to serve a non-Māori New Zealand audience, as well as tourists, and corporate and official clients. Neill has remarked upon the tension between the museum’s commercial imperative and aims: its institutional biculturalism is necessarily shaped by “the commercial priority of ‘visitor experience’” (182).

Te Marae symbolises a defining aspect of the new museum: the value placed on intangible aspects of tradition such as ritual, dance and music. Te Marae embodies the aims of the museum to represent a living Māori culture, not a “display case culture.” According to Te Papa’s Karl Johnstone, the story, not the object, is the starting point at Te Papa, “since you can fill it out with tangible and less tangible aspects” (cited in Alivizatou 74).

Despite Te Papa’s aims to become an innovative, bicultural museum, its approach to exhibiting its Māori collections has been criticised by some as reproducing the traditional



aesthetic and ethnographic forms of display. Brown sees Te Papa as largely following *Te Maori*'s "high art" approach to exhibiting Māori culture (290). In *Mana Whenua*, boutique lighting singles out items, and space around the exhibits permits for "concentrated contemplation of their formal features" (Brown 289). This aesthetic focus represents a form of redress, a means of "balancing – if only symbolically – power relations" between Māori and Pākehā (Brown 293). Williams, however, perceives the overall tone of *Mana Whenua* as perpetuating a "traditional ethnographic feel" with its solemnly-lit cases and "traditional taxonomic labels" ("New Zealand's Identity Complex" 136). In his view, the contemporary works in the gallery are largely "faithful to traditional forms," and in general *Mana Whenua* – despite Te Papa's claims to create links to a "living culture" – has a definite nineteenth century focus ("New Zealand's Identity Complex" 137).

The reverent approach of the Māori galleries towards the objects on display was contrasted at the time of the museum's opening to the irreverent, playful mode of display in the exhibitions of Pākehā art and history, some of which have since been removed or revised (Henare 59; Jolly, "On the Edge?" 446). Henare considers the respect for objects in the Māori sections as appropriate to "the Museum's original purpose as a locus for the development of artefact-based knowledge," but questions why the same approach was not applied to the "Pākehā" galleries (59). Others have criticised the noticeably different presentation of Māori objects as primitivising and exoticising (Williams, "New Zealand's Identity Complex" 134; Dibley, "Museum, Nation, Narration" 107).

*Mana Whenua* (in place since the museum's opening) is not representative of the museum's varied approach to presenting Māori art and culture, nor does it reflect evolution in the museum over the past two decades. Nevertheless, critiques of the museum as perpetuating an outdated vision of Māori culture continue. In his 2011 critique of the Te

Papa exhibition *E Tū Ake*, New Zealand art critic Peter Ireland calls into question the realisation of Te Papa's biculturalism in its exhibitions. According to Ireland, the "allegedly ground-breaking" *Te Maori* did not actually lead to an approach significantly different from the "existing Eurocentric models" (64). Beyond the superficial changes at the museum, such as signs in two languages, Ireland asserted, there was a need for a more fundamental change (64). Although the staffing of museum departments with Māori had led to some changes, he argues, there remains an "uneasy dynamic between customary expectations and professorial requirements" (Ireland 65). "There remains a fundamental clash of cultures," Ireland declares,

"in the display of tribal objects within conventional exhibition culture. The godfathers of the latter, no matter how well-intentioned or eager to be seen 'on the right side', are children of the Enlightenment, and their rationalist classifying still imprints the concepts of professionalism shaping every aspect of prevailing exhibition culture" (65).

Storeroom practices have changed considerably more than in the galleries "where the dominant partner," conventional exhibition culture, "still pretty much dictates the dance" (Ireland 65). The dynamics of the "dance," or dialogue, between Te Papa's stakeholders thus remain contentious. While some praise Te Papa for fostering Māori voices in the museum, others, like Ireland, believe the museum has not gone far enough, and that the principal authority still rests with the proponents of a conservative, conventional exhibition culture.

## *Un autre regard*

On 20 June 2006, at the official inauguration of the musée du quai Branly, then French president Jacques Chirac set out a series of guiding principles for the new museum. The institution would not only be “une incomparable expérience esthétique, ” but also “une leçon d'humanité indispensable à notre temps” :

“Il s'agissait pour la France de rendre l'hommage qui leur est dû à des peuples auxquels, au fil des âges, l'histoire a trop souvent fait violence. Peuples brutalisés, exterminés par des conquérants avides et brutaux... Peuples aujourd'hui encore souvent marginalisés, fragilisés, menacés par l'avancée inexorable de la modernité ”  
(Chirac).

Opening eight years after Te Papa, the French museum also represented a radically different approach to the display of its collections in relation to its predecessors. In this institution in the very centre of Paris, a stone's throw from the Eiffel Tower, works that once formed part of ethnographic collections would be elevated to this status of great art. At the centre of the project, Chirac declared,

“il y a le refus de l'ethnocentrisme, de cette prétention déraisonnable et inacceptable de l'Occident à porter, en lui seul, le destin de l'humanité... Il n'existe pas plus de hiérarchie entre les arts et les cultures qu'il n'existe de hiérarchie entre les peuples. C'est d'abord cette conviction, celle de l'égale dignité des cultures du monde, qui fonde le musée du quai Branly” (Chirac).

For the public, the museum would promote “un autre regard, plus ouvert et plus respectueux, en dissipant les brumes de l'ignorance, de la condescendance ou de l'arrogance qui, dans le passé, ont été si souvent présentes et ont nourri la méfiance, le mépris, le rejet” (Chirac). The museum would act, according to its director, as “a portal, an interface between Western and non-European societies” (Martin, cited in Shelton 9).

Chirac's bold rhetoric set a high bar for the new museum to reach. Two headlines in *Libération* hint at the mixed reaction to the quai Branly's opening: on 22 July, "Branly success story" noted the high visitor turn-out; on 25 July, it was "Le musée Branly étrillé par la presse étrangère" (Noce). The museum was a great success with the French press at its opening (Grognet, "Musées Manqués" 173), but met with a cooler reception from the Anglophone media. The new museum has provided fodder for endless discussions by (especially Anglophone) anthropologists, art historians and museologists on the merits, or failures, of the new museum.

## A presidential project

The creation of the Musée du quai Branly was driven by the political will of Chirac, president from 1995-2007 and primitive arts connoisseur.<sup>7</sup> The quai Branly would represent Chirac's contribution to the tradition of presidential *grands travaux*, the building of an iconic project to stand as the tangible reminder of the leader's legacy. The museum's origin story begins with a chance encounter between Chirac and art dealer Jacques Kerchache in Mauritius in 1990, whereupon both discovered each other's passion for *arts primitifs* and became fast friends (Price, *Paris Primitive* 1–3). As Price emphasises, however, the meeting of "Jacques and Jacques" is not merely part of museum legend: their friendship "was as

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<sup>7</sup> As Price explains, "primitive art," also referred to as "tribal" or "ethnographic" art, refers to the category of objects defined not by their innate properties, but by the single common factor of having been "cast by both Western traditions of scholarship and Western 'commonsense' thinking as dramatically Other, and... Primitive" (*Paris Primitive* viii). "Primitive art" and "*arts primitifs*" have obtained negative connotations, evoking the idea of a hierarchy in which Western cultural productions are more "evolved" than those of "primitive" societies. Chirac and other proponents of the Pavillon des Sessions and quai Branly would favour the euphemism "*arts premiers*," although the title Musée des arts premiers was eventually rejected as too reminiscent of the charged *arts primitifs*. Recent museum documents seem to avoid *arts premiers* in favour of geographical terms such as "Arts et Civilisations d'Afrique, d'Asie, d'Océanie et des Amériques" and "*arts extra-européens*" (Musée du quai Branly, "Musée Passerelle" 1, 3).

responsible as any single factor” for the recent dramatic shifts in the Parisian museum landscape ( *Paris Primitive* 3).

Chirac’s desire to see a new location and status for “primitive art” in Paris would see the dismantling and partial dismantling of two museums and a rejection of their approaches to exhibiting objects, in a continuation of the recategorising and reassignment of Parisian museums’ ethnographic collections that has occurred periodically since the nineteenth century. The creation of the quai Branly would see the transfer of 236,509 items from the ethnology laboratory of the Musée de l’Homme, and another 22,740 from the Musée national des Arts d’Afrique et d’Océanie (MAAO) (“Artefacts”). Like Te Papa, the quai Branly was presented as a necessary break with the “old museology” of former institutions. The move to a new museum was touted as an opportunity to salvage these neglected objects from failing institutions and present them in a new way, in the kind of context they deserved as *chefs-d’oeuvre* (Price, *Paris Primitive* 87).

The Musée de l’Homme and the MAAO, like New Zealand’s National Museum and National Art Gallery, were facing a number of practical problems. Their collections, housed in the Palais de Chaillot and Palais de la Porte Dorée, respectively, suffered from pest problems and poor storage conditions (Amato 56). The conservation issues were symptomatic of a more general state of decline, even crisis, afflicting the institutions. A 1990-91 study depicted the Musée de l’Homme as “catastrophic in every respect,” with the deteriorating building matched by “an environment of intellectual and moral vacuity” (cited in Price, *Paris Primitive* 85). Unsurprisingly, visitor numbers had suffered. The MAAO, officially an art museum, had become best known for its aquarium and ancient crocodile – remnants, like the architecture, of the 1931 *Exposition coloniale internationale* (Price, *Paris Primitive* 99).

Paralysed by various crises, the museums were criticised as relics of a bygone era and purveyors of outdated knowledge. The museums' failures to adapt to changing circumstances – in particular, the changed relationship between France and its former colonies – left them vulnerable to accusations of representing an antiquated, colonial worldview. The MAAO, in particular, suffered from its associations with French colonialism. Founded as the Musée permanent des Colonies<sup>8</sup> (an offshoot of the 1931 *Exposition coloniale*), the museum was representative of an era in which French empire was at its geographical apex; a time when colonial culture, like colonial politics, played a significant role in French life (Aldrich 90).

The museum initially carried on the promotional role of the *Exposition* through a combination of aesthetic, educational and propagandistic exhibits, designed to attract visitors to invest in “les produits de l’Empire” (“Palais”). The items on display included colonial art, such as ethnographic busts, and other items relating to France’s colonising missions – including a small section of *arts africains et océaniens*. Some contemporary commentators, critical of the current popularity of the exotic (nineteenth century *exotisme*), objected to the exhibition of objects from without the French artistic tradition, warning against “la valeur subversive des arts d’Afrique, d’Amérique ou d’Océanie” (Murphy 48). However, the museum was hardly a platform for “dangerous” ideas: it maintained a hierarchy of civilisations, with France’s subject peoples (and their arts) in a subordinate position (Murphy 48).

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<sup>8</sup> The museum reopened in 1932 as the Musée permanent des colonies et de la France extérieure and became the Musée de la France d’outre-Mer in 1935. In 1960, the museum shed its colonial name to become the Musée des arts africains et océaniens, and finally, in 1990, the Musée national des arts d’Afrique et d’Océanie.

The museum's colonial message was reinforced in its architecture, the exterior dominated by a vast bas-relief depicting French overseas possessions, with "tall ships, lions, tigers and elephants among jungle palms and semi-naked Pacific, African and Asian peoples" (Naumann, cited in Jolly, "Becoming a 'New' Museum?" 112–3). Outside the entrance, viewers were welcomed by an enormous bronze statue, *La France apportant la paix et la prospérité aux colonies*. Inside, display cases honoured the *grand hommes* of colonial conquests and their role in France's civilising (and economic) mission (Murphy 50). Like the *Exposition coloniale*, the museum was designed not only to promote investment in the colonies, but to present the justifications for French colonialism.

By the 1960s, the harmonious empire promoted in the museum, now the Musée de la France d'outre-Mer, was crumbling. In response, the Minister for Cultural Affairs, André Malraux, redirected the museum towards the promotion of "les arts et les cultures africaines et océaniques" ("Palais"). Over time, the museum attempted to downplay its colonial origins: colonial art and sculpture were relegated to the reserves, and the room containing frescoes explicitly depicting France's *mission civilisatrice* were closed to the public (Aldrich 92). The (now embarrassing) exterior bas-relief with its lions, tigers and (former) subject peoples, however, could not be hidden. The museum made attempts, for instance in its 2001–02 exhibition *Kannibals et Vahinés*, to turn a more critical eye on France's colonial past, but the change had come too late: in 2003, its collections would depart for the quai Branly and the museum would close (Aldrich 92).

The Musée de l'Homme, although not as explicitly linked with French colonialism as the MAAO, was also cast as woefully outdated by supporters of the quai Branly project. The museum was the successor to the Musée Ethnographique du Trocadéro (MET), founded in

Paris in 1878 following the *Exposition universelle* of that year (Dias 128). Whereas the MET “embodied evolutionist notions of difference, physical as well as cultural” (Dias 129). The Musée de l’Homme rejected the idea of a racial hierarchy, and emphasised the “unity of humankind” (Dias 131). However, the concept of a *cultural* hierarchy remained, as it was believed that humans had equal potential, but the products of this potential were not equal, and thus “races exist on an equal basis, but their cultural achievements cannot be put on an equal footing” (Dias 131). According to Dias, this hierarchy of cultural productions would continue until the 1990s, when French curators came “to defend the equal worth of certain material productions, in this case aesthetic ones, in the name of the equivalence of cultures” (132), an idea that would be central to the rhetoric surrounding the creation of the quai Branly. As Chirac would assert in his speech inaugurating the new museum, “il n'existe pas plus de hiérarchie entre les arts et les cultures qu'il n'existe de hiérarchie entre les peuples.” The repudiation of a hierarchy of civilisations would be translated into the “elevation” of the world’s cultural productions to the level of European achievements.

The Musée de l’Homme, like the MAAO, had endured into the 1990s as a relic of the time of its creation without significant changes: some display cases, in fact, had not been altered since the museum opened in 1937 (Price, *Paris Primitive* 85). The Musée de l’Homme created a vision of a timeless, peaceful colonial world that, while “mythique” in the first place, increasingly jarred with the outside world and the breakdown of France’s former colonial empire (Sergent). The museum’s relevance had also reduced as anthropology’s focus on material culture diminished and the museum was largely replaced by the university as the locus of anthropological knowledge. Attempts to reinvigorate the museum and stage more



up to date exhibitions fell through, or came too late – the plans for quai Branly were already in motion (Price, *Paris Primitive* 86).

The staff of the Musée de l'Homme fought strongly against the removal of their collections in a battle covered closely by the French media. The staff and their supporters, including prominent academics, who feared that the scientific and pedagogical role of the objects would be lost in an art museum, decried the “aggressive aestheticism” of the planned museum and the “looting” of ethnographic collections (Clifford, “Quai Branly in Process” 8). The quai Branly’s opponents were suspicious of the close involvement of art dealers, such as Kerchache, envisaging “an exotic art museum run by people who judge objects by their prices on the art market or the star status of the people who stole or possessed them” in the place of an educational institution (Price, *Paris Primitive* 91).

In the 1930s, a desire to validate anthropology as “a legitimate *science*” led the Musée de l'Homme to distance itself from the disorderly approach of the MET in favour of rigidly scientific displays with exhaustive contextualisation (Price, *Paris Primitive* 96). Unlike the MET, with its focus on “des bizarreries et des comportements incompréhensibles,” the museum was to exhibit “un portrait apparemment *objectif* des cultures de la grande famille humaine” (Aldrich 90). Those aligned with the Musée de l'Homme cast the new museum as a *régression scientifique*, turning back the clock on centuries of scientific advances and letting valuable ethnographic knowledge built up around the collections at the Musée de l'Homme go to waste (Sergent 3). The fight against the appropriation of its collections for the new

museum was eventually a losing battle for the Musée de l'Homme: in spring 2003, the ethnographic galleries were closed.<sup>9</sup>

The first step in the shift from the MAAO and Musée de l'Homme to the Musée du quai Branly was the creation of an “ambassador” for the new museum – a wing of the Louvre, opened in April 2000, containing 120 “masterpieces” of *arts premiers*. The Pavillon des Sessions represented the realisation of Kerchache’s longtime dream of seeing “the art of the whole of the humanity in the Louvre” – a goal achieved with the help of president Chirac, who imposed the plan over the objections of the Louvre’s director and curators (Shelton 10). The opening of the Pavillon des Sessions had a particular symbolic value as the museum had long held out against any breach of its walls by non-Western art since the last ethnographic curiosities were evicted in 1904 (Price, *Paris Primitive* 31). The move to the Louvre, therefore, represented a symbolic victory for the concept of *arts premiers*. The quai Branly would present quite a different situation, however, as a museum solely of *arts premiers*, without the historical and cultural cachet of the Louvre.

By the time the Pavillon des Sessions exhibition opened, plans for a new museum of *arts premiers* were well underway. In 1996 the commission appointed to “study the most appropriate means for giving primitive art its rightful place in French museums,” and headed by Jacques Friedmann, had recommended a “a museum of man, arts, and civilizations” uniting the collections of the ethnological laboratory of the Musée de l'Homme with those of the MAAO (Amato 56). The development of the museum was not without its

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<sup>9</sup> The Musée de l'Homme is to reopen in autumn 2015, after five years of renovations, with a focus on human biology (Evin). The MAAO has been replaced by the Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration. The crocodiles, along with other tropical aquarium creatures, remain, incongruously, in the basement.

difficulties, especially in the negotiation of an approach that took both the aesthetic and the ethnographic into account. Renowned anthropologist Maurice Godelier, who, like Kerchache, was part of the museum's steering committee (the Conseil Scientifique pour la Préfiguration du Musée de l'Homme, des Arts et des Civilisations) envisaged "a resolutely postcolonial museum, helping the public step back and take a critical view of Western history," a place of "scientific and cultural collaboration with the countries where the objects originated" that would "fulfill a function that was both political and symbolic, given its presence in an increasingly multicultural Western country like France, where immigration-related racism and xenophobia not only exist but are on the rise" (Price, *Paris Primitive* 50). In 2000, however, "Godelier departed, convinced that social and cultural perspectives were destined to remain marginal and underfunded" (Clifford, "Quai Branly in Process" 9).

The debate over the future museum's direction is reflective of the complex set of professional, personal and political interests involved in the process of creating the quai Branly. The museum emerged, like Te Papa, from this *mélange* of various, often conflicting, views of where and how the collections of the Musée de l'Homme and MAAO should be displayed. Moving the collections of long-standing (and, by some, beloved) institutions would necessarily court controversy, and the transfer has provoked ongoing analyses of whether the Musée du quai Branly represents an improvement worth its cost and the closure of two institutions, or a regression.

## Into the forest

As the new museum gradually materialised at 37 quai Branly, it became clear that physically, at least, this was an entirely different kind of institution from its predecessors. At the Palais de Chaillot and Palais de la Porte Dorée, “monumental” architecture had served to validate the institutions as sites of superior knowledge and civilisation, and at the MAAO, to reinforce the grandeur of the French Empire. It was a style quai Branly’s architect Jean Nouvel deliberately worked against: the imposing size and symmetry of the *palais*, and the impression of their solidity and permanence imparted by stone, are at quai Branly replaced by their very opposite. The museum is a “sinuous structure” (Shelton 2), punctuated with boxes that “[perch] like tree houses” (Lebovics, “Will” 106). The long, low, asymmetrical building, relatively small considering the size of the site (a large part of which is given over to greenery), seems to be deliberately *impermanent*. When the forest planted around the museum has grown, “the museum will, according to its architect, mysteriously dematerialize” (Clifford, “Quai Branly in Process” 3), giving the impression that “le musée et un simple abri sans façade, dans un bois” (Musée du quai Branly, “Musée Composite” 3). The museum’s *mur végétal*, a “living wall” composed of thousands of plants, further breaks down the barriers between manmade structure and the “jungle” surrounding it.

Nouvel’s vision is continued inside the museum, as the architect also oversaw the scenography, including the display cases and interpretive platforms (Shelton 5). The sinuous form of the building is echoed inside by the “River,” the winding entranceway that leads to “le plateau des collections,” the museum’s permanent exhibition space. The *plateau*, containing some 3,500 *œuvres*, is designed to lead the visitor on “un parcours fluide” through the geographical “zones”: Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas, linked by three

“grands carrefours entre les civilisations et les cultures : Asie-Océanie, Insulinde, Mashreck-Maghreb” (Musée du quai Branly, “Plateau”). Supplementing the objects are multimedia and video installations.

The quai Branly’s Māori collections are included in *Océanie*. A search of the quai Branly’s online collections for “Maori” points to nineteen current “objets exposés,” out of a collection of 261. The exhibited objects – all dating to the nineteenth century or earlier – include carved treasure containers (waka huia), the prow of a waka, a hei tiki, and a number of weapons.

The mode of display in the *plateau* is strongly theatrical – a deliberate effect of Nouvel’s architecture and scenography. In Nouvel’s design for the museum, according to its curators, “visitors become explorers” (cited in M. Moore). The entrance to the building is deliberately made difficult to find by “twisty paths”; once inside, the viewer must pass through the “dark tunnel” (Lebovics, “Will” 106) of the River before emerging into “a vast magical world, theatrically illuminated” with “fluid spaces rather than rooms; a dark, disappearing ceiling [and] everything in earth colors” (Clifford, “Quai Branly in Process” 4). The objects on display form part of the theatre, emerging from the darkness “bathed in spotlights, stunning and enigmatic” (Jolly, “Becoming a ‘New’ Museum?” 114). The feeling of mystery is heightened by “music with a strong drum beat playing faintly” from somewhere in the gloom (Lebovics, “Will” 106). In the permanent display, “‘illusion’ and ‘work of art’ coexist with the realism of ethnography and history” (Clifford, “Quai Branly in Process” 5).

The sense of wandering lost through a mysterious, primordial jungle from which “discoveries” – singular, beautiful objects – emerge is, as Lebovics points out, “just the effect

that Nouvel was looking for" ("Will" 107). The museum would be, Nouvel's proposal for the architectural competition indicated,

"un lieu marqué par les symboles de la forêt, du fleuve, et les obsessions de la mort et de l'oubli... C'est un endroit chargé, habité, celui où dialoguent les esprits ancestraux des hommes qui, découvrant la condition humaine, inventait dieux et croyances. C'est un endroit unique et étrange. Poétique et dérangeant" [qtd. in] (Musée du quai Branly, "Musée Composite" 3).

Nouvel's exterior and interior designs thus deliberately evoke a return to nature, in contrast to the museum's traditional image as a bastion of civilisation and culture. The realisation of these designs, when first seen at the museum's opening, was praised as daring and spectacular by a number of French and international journalists (Ouroussoff; M. Moore).

Nouvel's design, however, was also the subject of sharp criticism, being slated by Michael Kimmelman in the *New York Times* as a primitivist "heart of darkness," a spectacle that was "briefly thrilling" but ultimately "brow-slappingly wrongheaded. Colonialism of a bygone era is replaced by a whole new brand of French condescension" ("Heart of Darkness"). The *mur végétal* was criticised as evoking "insidiously prevalent associations of jungle life with the arts and cultures of the Other" (Harney 9), a criticism also levelled at the interior gloom and jungle imagery, particularly the River.

The curation, as well as the architecture, of the permanent display has similarly faced criticism for encouraging a "primitivising" vision of the objects on display. According to Jolly, the emphasis in the permanent collections is "on the purity of ancient and unfamiliar objects and the vast differences among regions of the world" ("Becoming a 'New' Museum?" 131). The selection of ancient, "exotic objects, and their arrangement into cultural zones, serves to downplay cultural change and cultural exchange – including between Europe and the rest of the world (Jolly, "Becoming a 'New' Museum?" 131). In a place

where cultures of the world are supposed to meet and dialogue, Sauvage observes, the European continent is mysteriously absent (141). In Sauvage's view, the *plateau* fails to live up to the declared mission of the museum to "[dissiper] les brumes de l'ignorance": instead, "the exhibitions give only an external description of these cultures, making them look superficial, distant in time and space, and indeed without much historical context" (Sauvage 142).

Despite claims in museum documents that objects are displayed "tout en mêlant à chaque fois une approche esthétique et didactique" (Musée du quai Branly, "Musée Passerelle" 6), the *plateau* has been judged as overwhelmingly aestheticised, through a lack of historical and ethnographical contextualisation, or by making such contextualisation difficult to find in the recesses of the so-called "parcours fluide" (Lebovics, "Will" 107; Jolly, "Becoming a 'New' Museum?" 117; Clifford, "Quai Branly in Process" 10). This cordoning off of contextual information, it is suggested, "maintain[s] an unbreechable aesthetic halo around the artefacts themselves" (Shelton 5). Others have seen the relation between art and science in the museum in a less critical light. Harding, in a review for the *London Review of Books*, criticises some aspects of the scenography but argues that "great efforts have been made to explain and contextualise the artefacts on display without overbearing quantities of text. It is not fair to see the huge gallery, the centrepiece of the museum, as the burial ground of ethnography."

In response to these criticisms, Stéphane Martin has defended the museum's minimalist approach as resisting the Anglo-Saxon tendency to overwhelm the object with contextualisation. "Every European and French curator will always start from the object," Martin argued, whereas "the American or Anglo-Saxon curator will start from the story..."

The whole exhibition is more narrative... I have the personal impression that the French are obsessed by the purity and authenticity of the object" ("Making a Museum" 122). According to Martin, "the priests of contextualisation are poor museographers" (cited in Kimmelman, "Heart of Darkness"). Furthermore, as Martin would explain, many sources of information about non-Western societies are now available and thus the museum does not need to provide comprehensive information (cited in Kimmelman, "Heart of Darkness").

A source of sustained controversy concerning the new museum has been whose point of view is represented on the *plateau*: who speaks on, or for, the objects on display. Today, people once considered subjects of ethnography – the "vanishing" cultures who survived – have increasingly become involved in museums and the representation of their cultures therein (Ames; Message; Simpson). Of particular concern are what Welsh calls "potent objects," such as human remains, objects related to ritual practices, and objects of cultural patrimony (846). In countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada, the development of relationships between museums and indigenous peoples has led to increased indigenous curatorship and authority over the management of collections (Sauvage 138).<sup>10</sup>

At the quai Branly, however, the histories and opinions of indigenous peoples linked to the objects on display have often been perceived to be missing. Largely absent at the quai Branly, Alivizatou argues, "are the voices of people connected to the collections, like collectors and source or diasporic communities" (160). Shelton makes an even harsher assessment, reporting that "there are no native voices or colonial histories in the quai

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<sup>10</sup> "Indigenous," following Clifford, is used here as the general name for "human societies throughout the world that were often called 'primitive,' 'native,' 'tribal,' or 'aboriginal' ... Applied to diverse communities, the name does not presume cultural similarity or essence but rather refers to comparable experiences of invasion, dispossession, resistance, and survival" (Returns 15).



Branly” (Shelton 13). The museum’s motto may have been “là où dialoguent les cultures,” but the *plateau* seemed to be, for this fundamental reason, performing a monologue.

The *plateau*’s “pared-down” approach to contextualisation tends to place emphasis on the objects’ prestigious European collectors, rather than the histories of their original makers and sometimes troubling trajectories into French museum collections. France’s colonial past “reste largement dans le domaine du non-dit” even though many of the quai Branly’s collections originate from colonial-era expeditions, *expositions* and personal collecting (De L’Estoile, “L’Oubli” 98).<sup>11</sup> It is telling, in this regard, that Chirac’s rhetoric of redress for past injustices in the newly-opened museum made no explicit mention of the French colonial empire. France was described, in vague terms, as “une nation de tout temps éprise d’universel mais qui, au fil d’une histoire tumultueuse, a appris la valeur de l’altérité.” This “histoire tumultueuse,” and its precise relationship to the objects in the quai Branly today, De L’Estoile has argued, requires acknowledgement on the *plateau*, if the museum is to truly depict the dialogue between France and the world (“Past” 98).

## **Diplomats and *rugbymen***

The critiques of the *plateau* seem to suggest an inconsistency between the rhetoric of the museum and the curation of the initial, permanent collection. The description of the museum as a “portal” between European and non-European cultures, an institution that would “multipli[er] les points de vue” (Chirac), seemed to apply to future exhibitions rather

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<sup>11</sup> The explicitly colonial origins of some of the quai Branly’s inherited collections led the museum’s developers to tread carefully. De L’Estoile reports that it was only after “des longues hésitations que les collections coloniales héritées de l’ancien musée de la France d’outre-Mer ont rejoint le Quai Branly, sous le nom euphémisé de ‘Collection historique’” (“L’Oubli” 97). Furthermore, at the time of the quai Branly’s opening, no objects from the MAAO collections were included in the permanent display (De L’Estoile, “L’Oubli” 97).

than the curation of the founding collection. The museum was planned by “committees of elite French academic and political leaders,” thus “reproduc[ing] lines of distancing that the project professes to challenge” (White 46).

As a French public institution, the quai Branly is a secular space, and by its very nature, therefore, is not open to equal dialogue with other worldviews. Since the principle of *laïcité* is race-blind, “it is not possible for the museum to have special relationships with groups and communities that are ethnically defined” (Alivizatou 162). The proposal to include representatives from the cultures exhibited on the *plateau* was avoided because of fears “it would become politicized, directed toward ‘ethnic militancy’” (White 47). Instead, the creation of the museum was directed by “politicians, art dealers, anthropologists, and international culture brokers” (Alivizatou 160). At the quai Branly, “intercultural exchange” is understood as taking place at the level of international diplomacy, rather than through groups or individuals as might occur in other countries (White 47).

An example of quai Branly’s “state-to-state” interaction can be seen in its inclusion of contemporary New Zealand and Australian art, organised through diplomatic negotiations. Interestingly, the small percentage of contemporary art that was included in the new museum was mainly from Australia and New Zealand – “other nations’ former empires,” not France’s own (Lebovics, “Echoes” 12). In a complex practical, political and diplomatic process, Australian Aboriginal art was incorporated into the museum’s décor (Price, *Paris Primitive* 213) – including, in 2013, the roof of the museum. According to Price, the inclusion of this art served as an “instrument of solidarity” against the backdrop of French nuclear tests in the Pacific and the two countries’ divergent positions on the Iraq war (*Paris Primitive* 213). Although Price does not indicate whether the same message of “solidarity” applied to the New Zealand donations, she later notes that “the museum’s role in international

diplomacy has been particularly evident in Australia and New Zealand" (*Paris Primitive* 219).

Price refers to "a most unusual" artwork donated by New Zealand, in collaboration with Adidas: "a four-meter-long canvas realised with blood samples provided for the purpose by every member of the national rugby team, the All Blacks" (*Paris Primitive* 219). In addition to this rugby-centric, sanguineous work, New Zealand "a souhaité faire un don à ce nouveau musée," to be chosen by the quai Branly ("La Photographie"). The selected works by two New Zealand photographers of Māori descent, Fiona Pardington and Michael Parekowhai, were put on permanent display, although not on the *plateau*. When Laird visited the museum in 2006, Pardington's photographs of hei tiki were located near the museum's restaurant (2). Jean Nouvel apparently so liked the New Zealand works that he commissioned larger versions, to be visible from the museum's exterior (Venter, "There for All").

Lebovics judged the museum's decision to exhibit contemporary art in temporary exhibitions or as décor, rather than as a significant, integrated part of the permanent display, as a disappointing and "inadequate" response "to the question – which the planners of Quai Branly seem not seriously to have posed themselves – of the status in the West of the present day art of the South" (Lebovics, "Echoes" 12). Furthermore, Jolly has argued that "diplomatic harmony," "mutual celebration between France and Australia" and the "media hype" "glossed over" the sometimes tough content of much of the Indigenous Australian art (Jolly, "Becoming a 'New' Museum?" 119–20). The work of one artist, Judy Watson, evokes the impact of nuclear testing in the Pacific, and another, Rover Thomas, comments on Australian colonial massacres (Jolly, "Becoming a 'New' Museum?" 120). The abstraction of

the works into décor and the lack of contextual information, however, conceal these difficult messages (Jolly, “Becoming a ‘New’ Museum?” 120–1).

Pardington’s photographs – hei tiki from museum collections, re-envisioned and “reactivated” as taonga – likewise contain layers of meaning that might not be evident to a French visitor on first glance. Ironically, given the photographs’ resonance for issues of museum collecting and the valuing of objects in the museum, they are separated from the hei tiki in the permanent exhibition. The taonga and Australian Aboriginal art exhibited on the *plateau* thus remain part of a predominantly colonial-era display, while in other parts of the museum, taonga, colonial history and French intervention in the Pacific are subject to challenging revisions by indigenous artists – but are not located in a space that facilitates the public’s awareness of these works’ complex meanings.

### **The museum in progress**

At time of the museum’s opening, Fiona Pardington, although she believed museums were “Western receptacles at their worst,” declared that the staff at the quai Branly “are thinking hard and open to change” (Venter, “There for All”). Pardington has since twice returned to the museum as artist in residence at *photoquai* (the quai Branly’s annual photographic exhibition), creating works which place French collecting practices and colonial science in the spotlight.<sup>12</sup> The work of another *photoquai* resident, Greg Semu, a New Zealand photographer of Samoan descent, incorporated Māori and Samoan cultural references into a revision of a famous French painting (Musée du quai Branly, “Résidence d’artiste”). The links formed with contemporary artists from New Zealand suggest that the museum is

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<sup>12</sup> See Baker and Rankin, *The Pressure of Sunlight Falling*.

interested in moving beyond the more traditional image of indigenous cultures, exemplified by the *plateau*, in other aspects of the museum. The hosting of artists such as Pardington has enabled ongoing collaborations and further exhibitions that have expanded the small role given to contemporary art initially.

The criticisms aimed at quai Branly at the time of its opening in 2006 were often qualified by the expectation – or, less optimistically, at least the possibility – that the museum could develop and improve as it “found its feet” and responded to critical assessments. Hopes for the museum’s development were most often pinned on the large temporary exhibition space, which seemed to offer the chance for experimentation and perhaps more “challenging” exhibitions where the rigid permanent exhibition space did not. According to Martin, the revolving programme of events had always been intended as the necessary complement to the *plateau* (“Un musée” 8). The dedication of fifty percent of the museum space to temporary exhibitions, “ce rapport inversé entre le permanent et le temporaire,” represented a radical move, in Martin’s opinion (“Un musée” 8). The temporary exhibitions *would* allow for other “voices” in the museum, as “l’oeuvre d’un commissaire qui a un message et un engagement forts à transmettre” (“Un musée” 15).

The success of quai Branly’s ambitions as a site for dialogue, critics such as Clifford, Deleporte, Price and Jolly have predicted, hinges on its ability to collaborate and to listen to external voices. Based on her several visits to the museum in 2008–9, Jolly believed that the museum’s rhetoric of “novel postcolonial relations will remain only that if it is not translated into the hard work of daily institutional practice” (“Becoming a ‘New’ Museum?” 128). In an article published in early 2011, she suggested that the museum might be able to improve

through ongoing conversations with other museums, as a permanent counter to the museum's initial "monologue":

"Perhaps the curators of the 'new' museums of Aotearoa/New Zealand, Hawai'i, French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Vanuatu, and even the United Kingdom might, through future collaborations, help to ensure that France is better articulated with broader global debates and ongoing transformations in museum practice"  
("Becoming a 'New' Museum?" 129).

In this way, the quai Branly might create conversations "not between reified 'cultures' but between living, embodied people":

"Revealing the real treasures of Oceanic collections means reconnecting these object-subjects with living Pacific persons in all their diversity in Island and diasporic communities, their refractory differences and contending views, strategies, and even on occasion their loud, indignant calls for the physical repatriation of objects and especially human remains... As [Te Papa's] Arapata Hakiwai has affirmed, the worth and efficacy of 'new' museums resides not so much in the wealth of their collections but in the richness of human relationships they engender and nurture " (Jolly, "Becoming a 'New' Museum?" 129).

Jolly points to the *Polynésie: Arts et Divinités 1760–1860* exhibition<sup>13</sup> and the *Exhibiting Polynesia* symposium<sup>14</sup> hosted by the quai Branly in 2008 as examples of "Pacific voices... heard inside the museum, in deep conversation and robust debate" (Jolly, "Becoming a 'New' Museum?" 129). The symposium would be attended by a number of representatives from New Zealand, including Te Papa's Director Mātauranga Māori (now Kaihautū) Arapata Hakiwai, and an entire session would be dedicated to "Le modèle du Te Papa."

Just how well this "deep conversation and robust debate" was heard throughout the museum, however, is uncertain. The conference was orchestrated by British curators and conducted mainly in English; only the opening was attended by senior quai Branly staff,

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<sup>13</sup> *Polynésie* is the French version of an exhibition originally curated by the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts at the University of East Anglia, *Pacific Encounters: Art and Divinity in Polynesia 1760-1860*.

<sup>14</sup> *Exhibiting Polynesia: Past, Present and Future*. Musée du quai Branly, Paris, 16-18 June 2008.

“while only two or three curators were present throughout” (Jolly, “Becoming a ‘New’ Museum?” 127). Nevertheless, Jolly maintains a “cautious optimism” for the future of the museum (“Becoming a ‘New’ Museum?” 127). As Jolly notes, New Zealand’s request for the return of preserved Māori heads had finally received a positive response in 2010.

Jolly’s 2011 predictions foreshadow, in many ways, the collaboration between quai Branly and Te Papa curators (one of these “‘new’ museums of Aotearoa/New Zealand”) later that same year, around the *Maori: leurs trésors ont une âme* exhibition and the repatriation ceremony of Māori heads to New Zealand. Jolly’s reference to calls for repatriation signal an important aspect of the relationship between Te Papa and the quai Branly. In this story of two museums, the legal decisions concerning the repatriation of human remains operates on a governmental level, but the discussions around repatriation and its implications for Māori and for French museums would take place at an institutional level. It is also at this museum-to-museum level that collaboration on exhibiting and conversations about “transformations in museum practice” would take place, as part of the *Maori: leurs trésors ont une âme* exhibition. The “richness of human relationships,” as Jolly predicted, would prove to be a vital part of the story of the repatriation and exhibition bringing together Te Papa and the musée du quai Branly – a story which involves a conversation “between living, embodied people,” not “reified ‘cultures.’”





## Chapter Two

In Shane Cotton's 2006 painting *VEE*, a disembodied, grimacing head looms huge against a dark sky. Around the head, five birds somersault, as if attracted yet repelled. These are hummingbirds, the only bird that can "rewind time" – fly backwards (Byrt 38). The head and birds are suspended in a space that seems both ancient and futuristic: in the lower frame, we see the symbols for stop, fast forward, and rewind. *VEE* is set to rewind.

The head is a *toi moko*,<sup>15</sup> one of "the most volatile cultural images that an artist can reach for in New Zealand" (Paton, "Finding Space" 41). These preserved heads were once created by Māori to serve as mementos of loved ones or trophies of war. For private collectors and museums, the heads were exotic and fascinating curios, prized for their deeply-incised *moko*. On display in curiosity cabinets or museum display cases, *toi moko* could both attract and repel as titillating, gruesome souvenirs of "savage" peoples.

The first recorded trade in heads between Māori and Europeans began with Cook's first voyage to New Zealand, when Joseph Banks purchased a damaged head in return for "a pair of white linen drawers" (Salmond 246). The trade reached its peak during the Musket Wars in the early nineteenth century, when heads became a valuable commodity for Māori in the race to obtain guns. This new economy engendered fear, mistrust and conflict. Intertribal conflicts were staged to obtain *toi moko* – or the tattooed living, whose heads

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<sup>15</sup> The heads were also referred to as *mokomōkai* (or variations on this spelling) in nineteenth century and early twentieth century accounts. According to Te Papa, this term refers in the original language and context to the preserved heads of slaves and is considered derogatory if used to discuss preserved heads in general ("What Is a Toi Moko"). Although a number of other names for the heads exist, Te Papa's preferred term "*toi moko*" is used here.

were now also at risk – to trade for muskets. Chiefs, who possessed the finest moko, “were consequently ever looking over their shoulders, lest one of their own be tempted” (Tapsell 156). The practice once reserved for loved ones or respected enemies was now perverted as Māori tattooed the heads of slaves with meaningless lines, sometimes after death, to supply the trade (Tapsell 156). By 1831, the supply of heads had dried up now that most (surviving) tribes had obtained firearms, “restoring the balance of power” (Tapsell 157). Apart from a few purchases “reported to have occurred as late as the 1870s,” trade had ceased by the time of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 (Tapsell 157).

The legacy of the trade in heads lives on in the collections of museums throughout the world. By 1830, hundreds of the heads had been traded “via Sydney, Australia, finding their way into major European and North American private collections and museums” (Tapsell 156). Since 1830, toi moko have continued to make their way into museum collections through purchases and donations from private collectors. According to Te Papa’s estimates, some 100 of these heads remain in overseas collections (“How Many Toi Moko”).

In New Zealand, the tattooed heads could be seen on display in Te Papa’s predecessor, the Colonial, later the Dominion, Museum (McCarthy, “From Curio to Taonga” 191). Although Māori unease at their public exhibition saw the heads moved to a more discreet location in the Dominion Museum’s Māori Hall, they were not removed from permanent display until the 1970s (McCarthy, “From Curio to Taonga” 191). In many foreign museums, the heads have also been gradually removed from display in response to shifting sensibilities and Māori campaigning since the 1970s.

Over the same time period, Māori have sought not only the removal of toi moko from display, but from foreign museum collections altogether, assisted by the National

Museum and later Te Papa (Te Papa, “International Repatriations”). Once returned to Te Papa, these heads are kept in a wāhi tapu (consecrated repository), awaiting identification and return to their place of origin.<sup>16</sup> In 2003, Te Papa received the government mandate to pursue the repatriation Māori and Moriori ancestral remains from institutions overseas under the Karanga Aotearoa Repatriation Programme.

In Cotton’s toi moko paintings,<sup>17</sup> Paton argues, there is a sense of something being summoned, or coaxed forth: “a haunting or a switching on of these faces, they are sort of coming back to life, coming back towards the present” (“Shane Cotton”). Cotton himself has described the way these images “don’t come back to life” but “they’re in this kind of uneasy sleep.” Painting almost “activates a moment around those heads, around those souls” (Cotton). In *VEE*, time is rewound and something is being reactivated – but why? “When Cotton began painting toi moko in early 2000s,” Barlow explains, “they were like a dark rumour, known but the subject of unease, rarely so deliberately brought to light” (Barlow 85). Exploring these charged images through art “has provided a way for people to actually sort of look, and discuss the issues around the history of the heads” (Cotton). “What can art do with the knowledge of violence?” Barlow asks (87). Cotton’s paintings “open up what might otherwise be a realm of silence, finding within it complexity and turmoil” (Barlow 87).

In 2006, the same year *VEE* was painted, the tumultuous history of the heads dramatically resurfaced in France when a provincial museum decided to return a toi moko from its collections to New Zealand. 2006 also saw the opening of a new French museum,

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<sup>16</sup> This is not always an easy task, especially in the case of suspected tattooed slaves. Blackley’s “The Mystery of Matoua Tawai: Fiona Pardington at the Govett-Brewster” discusses the challenges to identification – in this case, not of a preserved head, but a mysterious life cast.

<sup>17</sup> Exhibited at the City Gallery, Wellington as part of *Shane Cotton: The Hanging Sky*, 15 June – 6 October 2013. Exhibition reproduced in Paton, *Shane Cotton: The Hanging Sky*.

the quai Branly. Inaugural discussions marked the beginning of a dialogue between French and New Zealand curators and museum professionals, a conversation that was reprised in 2008 around the contentious topic of human remains repatriation. In 2011, as France prepared to repatriate its *toi moko* after a long legal struggle, the image of the heads returned to haunt the museum – as art. From 4 October 2011 to 22 January 2012, *VEE* was featured in an exhibition curated by Te Papa and staged at the quai Branly, *Maori: leurs trésors ont une âme (Maori)*. The exhibition was the first major exhibition dedicated to Māori culture to be shown in France (*L'exposition Maori*), the first international collaboration between the quai Branly and Te Papa, and the first time an outside institution (Te Papa) had been given *carte blanche* to present its own exhibition at the quai Branly. At the close of the exhibition, the quai Branly once again hosted an event involving Te Papa, the repatriation ceremony for 20 *toi moko* from museums throughout France. The ceremony brought the journey of the heads full circle as they exited French museums to return to New Zealand.

The *Maori* exhibition would emerge from the controversy surrounding the repatriation, bringing together two institutions despite initially differing stances on *l'affaire des têtes maories*. Different approaches, too, on the conservation and exhibition of objects/taonga would be brought into contact and negotiated. *VEE* is thus located at the intersection of two histories linking the Te Papa and the musée du quai Branly: the collection, exhibition and now return of Māori remains by French museums, and the contemporary exhibition of Māori art in France. These two histories are interwoven in the story of the 2011 *toi moko* repatriation and the staging of *Maori* at the quai Branly.

### *L'affaire des têtes maories*

In 2006, the sequence of events leading to the 2011 repatriation and *Maori* exhibition was set in motion by the rediscovery of a *toi moko* in a museum in Rouen. The museum was le Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle de Rouen (Muséum de Rouen), soon to reopen after ten years of renovations. The *toi moko*, of uncertain origin, was donated to the museum in 1875 by one Monsieur Louis Hegéssipe Drouet. Before the museum's closure in 1996, the head had been displayed in the "prehistoric" display (Brisson). In the ten years leading up to the reopening of the museum, the ownership and display of human remains collections had become delicate issues in France. In 2002, an exceptional law<sup>18</sup> was created to grant the return of Sarah Baartman's remains to South Africa from the Musée de l'Homme after years of negotiations – including a request in 1994 from then South African President, Nelson Mandela. The case of Baartman, once exhibited as a human zoo attraction, "la Vénus Hottentote," drew international media attention. In France, the case brought the issue of human remains in museum collections to the attention of the French public.

Changes in attitudes in French museums had also affected what was now considered appropriate for display. By the time of Rouen museum's reopening in 2006, French public museums had ceased to exhibit *toi moko* in response to requests from New Zealand. The Direction des Musées de France, the Ministry of Culture's museum arm, advised Rouen not to put the head back on display lest it should provoke an "incident diplomatique" (Cortial 47). The museum's new director, Sébastien Minchin, seemed to have little choice but to relegate the head to the storeroom, as had many museums in France. However, the museum, with the support of the Rouen council, decided to take a different path and accede to Te

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<sup>18</sup> *Loi n° 2002-323 du 6 mars 2002 relative à la restitution par la France de la dépouille mortelle de Saartjie Baartman à l'Afrique du Sud.*

Papa's longstanding request for the return of *toi moko*. Rouen Senator and then deputy Rouen mayor, Catherine Morin-Desailly, considered the repatriation a "symbolic gesture" of respect for Māori beliefs and an attempt to turn the page, in order to foster a more equal and respectful relationship with indigenous peoples (28–9). It was also a chance for Rouen to open up debate around repatriation issues in France (Morin-Desailly 29) and put French patrimony laws concerning human remains to the test (Cortial 57).<sup>19</sup>

As a *Musée de France*, the Muséum de Rouen is subject to France's strict laws governing the collections of these museums.<sup>20</sup> Publicly-funded museums in other parts of the world, such as New Zealand and the United Kingdom, typically have greater individual freedom to make decisions about the items in their collections. In France, museums are "solidly under the thumb of the State" (Price, *Paris Primitive* 23). *Musées de France* are subject to the 2004 *Code du Patrimoine*, which prescribes the "inalienability" and "imprescriptibility" of collections (arts. L 451-3 and L 451-5). An object can, hypothetically, be "declassified" by the *commission scientifique nationale des collections des musées de France*, and thus legally be removed from a collection. A potential declassification request by Rouen, however, would have faced numerous obstacles. By 2006, the *commission scientifique*, established in 2002, had not yet examined a single case and lacked criteria for judging declassification cases. Compounding the problem, the Rouen head had never been inventoried, and only inventoried items could be declassified. Finally, the *Code* dictates "les biens incorporés dans les collections publiques par dons et legs ou, pour les collections ne relevant pas de l'État,

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<sup>19</sup> The story of the repatriation, summarised briefly here, is discussed more fully in my Honours thesis "*Objet or Ancestor? France and the repatriation of toi moko to New Zealand*," Victoria University, 2012.

<sup>20</sup> *Musée de France*, an official label introduced by *Loi n° 2002-5 du 4 janvier 2002 relative aux musées de France* can be awarded to state, local or non-profit private museums.

ceux qui ont été acquis avec l'aide de l'État ne peuvent être déclassés" (art. L 451-7). The Rouen head – like many *toi moko* in French museums – had been donated.

The Muséum de Rouen, barred by the *Code du Patrimoine* from returning the head, then resorted to a novel, and controversial, approach. The Rouen council approved the museum's decision to repatriate based on an interpretation of the *toi moko* as human remains, subject to bioethics law, rather than as a *bien culturel*. This interpretation would, the Council agreed, exempt the *toi moko* from patrimony law protecting state museum collections from transfer or sale. The French Ministry of Culture, concerned about the legality of this argument and the potential precedent for future cases, intervened to refer the case to Rouen's administrative tribunal, where the council's decision was overruled (Amiel 372). Rouen, which had already organised a repatriation ceremony, was legally barred from handing over the head to Te Papa.

Not all in the French museum world welcomed Rouen's repatriation attempt – at least, not initially. Some were not opposed to the repatriation of the *toi moko per se*, but felt apprehensive about Rouen's legal argument, which they feared would set a dangerous precedent for future claims. The potential flow-on effects for France's scientific collections – for instance, the 23,000 human specimens in the Musée de l'Homme – worried French scientists. Although only a small percentage of specimens had been or were currently being studied, for scientists the importance of collections lay in their *future* potential value for science (Guerrin).

Not all Māori, it should also be noted, supported Te Papa's moves to return the head from Rouen to New Zealand, or even its removal from display. Artist George Nuku, who would later work with the Muséum d'histoire naturelle de Rouen on its new *Océanie* exhibit,

considers the return of toi moko as misinformed and condescending (94). If it were his decision, Nuku has stated, the heads would be exhibited as the commemorative objects they were originally designed to be (94).<sup>21</sup>

Resistance to the Rouen repatriation in France reflected a larger set of concerns around the protection of collections that went beyond human remains: if toi moko were given back, would cultural artefacts be next? At the musée du quai Branly, which held seven toi moko, initial reactions were unfavourable towards the idea of repatriation. Museum director Stéphane Martin expressed his support for the Ministry's intervention, arguing that the heads "are cultural artefacts that had a function in society... Sending these artefacts back to New Zealand, and destroying them by burying them, is a way of erasing a full page of history" (cited in Sciolino). Martin pointed out that the museum's heads were not exhibited, but stored in a special area with access restricted to a few specialists (Sciolino). Martin's initial position on the Rouen toi moko reflected the stance of the quai Branly on repatriation since its inception.

In 2005, the museum's director of international relations, Séverine Le Guével explained the rationale for the museum's opposition to requests for the return of human remains or objects containing human material:

"First, the bodies have never functioned as human remains. Secondly, they were (for the most part) *given* to the explorers who brought them back, not stolen or taken without permission. Plus, they're not identified. We don't know who they belong to. Thus, they've become art objects; they've become ethnographic objects. That makes a difference. Therefore, they should be preserved like art objects, and can't be destroyed... If we were to honour the claims for everything that contained human remains, it would mean giving away the *entire collection* of the Musée du Quai Branly

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<sup>21</sup> See David-Ives for a discussion of Nuku's artistic response to the Rouen repatriation.



– anything that contains a bit of bone, anything that contains a skull...” (cited in Price, *Paris Primitive* 121).

A repatriation request had already been made by Māori, but, according to Le Guével, “the New Zealand government understood that it would be very much against the country’s interest to create ‘tensions’ with France” (cited in Price, *Paris Primitive* 123).

The Musée de l’Homme’s Fabrice Grognet, writing in the quai Branly’s journal, *Gradhiva*, would present a similar argument to Taylor in relation to the change in status of museum collections generally. Upon entering the museum collection,

“l’objet n’appartient donc plus à ceux qui l’ont matérialisé, façonné, et perd également sa raison d’être initiale, sa fonction originelle. Ainsi, ce qui distingue un objet de collection ethnographique, qu’il soit d’origine naturelle (écofact) ou réalisé par la main de l’homme (artefact), c’est qu’il a perdu la fonction d’usage qu’il avait à l’origine pour en acquérir une nouvelle, symbolique, en arrivant dans le musée” (“Objets” 2).

According to this reasoning, a *toi moko*, which is both “écofact” and “artefact,” gains a new *raison d’être* as a museum object. An item that may have had some ritual purpose or spiritual significance (“sa fonction originelle”) is reinstated with a new identity as an object of ethnographic study or a masterpiece of *arts premiers*.

Underlying both Le Guével and Grognet’s arguments is the belief in the museum as an *espace laïc*. Articles which enter the museum are detached from their context and their original function, whether spiritual or corporal. Claims for special treatment of these items, or for their restitution, cannot be accepted in a public institution subject to *laïcité*, or state secularism. In a 1999 interview, quai Branly’s director of museology, Germain Viatte, explained that “universalist and secular” France could not give into claims for restitution made on religious or ethnic grounds, and must avoid “giving in to a kind of paternalism, confining other people to their particularities and reserving universalism exclusively for

ourselves because we're worried about being 'politically correct'" (cited in Price, *Paris Primitive* 124). Likewise, Le Guével would frame quai Branly's stance on repatriation in terms of *laïcité*:

"We at the Quai Branly, as elsewhere in France, have decided to respect the principle of *laïcité*. Therefore, we do not take into consideration any claim based on religion or ethnicity... We're a public institution, a secular institution operating in the public domain. If you allow the legitimacy of one religion, you allow them all, and then they all cancel each other out... If you really believe that these things have a profound meaning, well, the museum isn't made for that. The museum is not a religious space"(cited in Price, *Paris Primitive* 123–4).

*Laïcité* in French museums and its effects on French museums are thus clearly essential to deciphering France's inaction on repatriation compared to other countries, as of 2006, and why Rouen's attempt to break the standstill was so controversial.

### ***Le musée: espace rituel?***

The idea of the museum as a secular space is not a uniquely French point of view. According to Gurian, "most museums are dedicated to maintaining a clear separation between the knowable and factual and the spiritual part of life. Museums have traditionally preserved material, even religious material, as inanimate and interesting, but without power" (202).

This "clear separation" is seen as essential to the museum's scientific objectivity:

"Scientific thinking and seemingly fact-based impartiality are held in such high status that veneration of objects of any religion is generally not accommodated within museum displays... To overtly embrace the passion inherent in or the ritual prescribed by the objects within a museum setting is to acknowledge the nonrational aspect of thinking" (Gurian 202).

Embracing the "nonrational aspect of thinking" would thus be antithetical to the purpose of the museum, with its Enlightenment origins, as a site of rational knowledge. The

Enlightenment “prided itself” on the rejection of superstition, an attitude “carried over into dealings with Other cultures. At best, respectful nods were made towards their beliefs, but the objects referencing them were treated simply as examples of material culture, and displayed as such until... effectively the present day” (Ireland 65). Although anthropological museums may have provided labels, for instance, explaining an object’s original spiritual significance, the idea that an object could retain its “power” in a museum setting has only gained currency in certain museums around the world in the last few decades.

In Gurian’s experience, “upon encountering museums that hold their objects, native people often demand that their materials are presented in accordance with belief systems that are an anathema to the institution’s existing policies” (202). Different understandings of objects by scientists and museum professionals and by indigenous groups can therefore lead to conflicts when the latter seek to assert their authority over museum practices and exhibitions. But they can also provoke changes. In many institutions over the past few decades, policies have shifted in response to such claims, becoming more open to emotional and spiritual responses in the museum environment (Gurian 204). At Te Papa, for instance, leaf offerings may be seen near certain exhibits. Behind the scenes, as discussed in Chapter One, protocols have been instituted for the treatment of taonga by those working in the museum.

In French museums such as quai Branly, *laïcité* places certain limits on these practices now finding favour in museums in other parts of the world. At the quai Branly, collections tend to be considered as “desacralised or dead objects separated from their original environment and showcased as *objets d’art* or museum pieces” (Alivizatou 188). Unlike museums such as Te Papa, where objects might be treated as “living” or “animate,” or possessing a life force (*mauri*), in the secular museum space of the quai Branly “material

culture is largely divested of its spirituality” (Alivizatou 188). This “separation” has implications not only for those working with collections, but for viewers’ interactions with and understandings of items on display. As the Director of the quai Branly’s Education and Research Department, Anne-Christine Taylor, has explained,

“we specifically say, if these objects are here, they are not sacred, simply because the museum and particularly the French museum cannot be a sacred space... It would be complicated and embarrassing if someone for example bowed down and started praying or brought offerings for statues. *Laïcité* is a principle that many people find hard to understand, but it is one of the basic [tenets] of French public space” (cited in Alivizatou 188).

But why exactly would an interaction between visitors and objects as sacred items or ancestors be so “complicated and embarrassing” for a French museum?

Price has observed that “the complex ideological bundle that revolves around specifically French ideas about equality, cultural exceptionalism, freedom, *laïcité*, and national sovereignty is not easily reduced to a brief discussion” (*Paris Primitive* 214–5).

Unravelling some of this “complex ideological bundle” is essential to understanding why Te Papa’s repatriation requests and *Maori* exhibition challenged French concepts of the status of the museum object and the role of museums on such a fundamental level. This was a dialogue that began as a debate – albeit one courteously conducted – between people coming to the (round) table with different assumptions about the status of *toi moko* and their appropriate treatment.

### *Une République laïque*

*Laïcité*, in its strictest sense, is “the separation between Church and State: one shall neither run, influence nor finance the other” (Vince 155). The current French constitution affirms

that “la France est une République indivisible, laïque, démocratique et sociale. Elle assure l'égalité devant la loi de tous les citoyens sans distinction d'origine, de race ou de religion” (art. 2). As the wording of the French Constitution indicates, *laïcité* is strongly associated with the French Republican values of “liberté, égalité, fraternité.” Mbembe identifies three principles underpinning secularism and republicanism “à la française”:

“(1) the ideal of equality, which requires that the same laws apply to all; (2) the ideal of liberty and autonomy, which presupposes that no one should be subjected, against his or her will, to the will of another; and (3) the ideal of fraternity, which imposes the duty of assimilation on everyone — a condition necessary for the constitution of a community of citizens” (104).

*Laïcité* is thus considered essential to the equal treatment of the individual and the individual's liberty. It also imposes a duty on the individual to participate in “a community of citizens.” It is this last aspect in particular that has made *laïcité* a consistent feature of passionate social debates around immigration, “French identity,” cultural diversity and *communautarisme*. Some of the most intense debates in France in recent decades have centred on the place of Islam in the secular French state, such as the controversy surrounding the banning of “conspicuous religious symbols” in French state schools in 2004.

In the Republican vision of *vivre-ensemble*, expressions of cultural, religious, or other differences are relegated to the private sphere. Unlike many Anglo-Saxon and Nordic countries, “concepts such as the ‘right to difference’, ‘minorities’ and even ‘communities’ are alien to French political culture” (Drake 59). Instead, the State positions itself as “blind to difference” and “individuals are deemed to enjoy innate and natural characteristics that transcend differences, whether of gender, or nationality... This ambitious perspective translates into the notional equality of all citizens and, vitally, a commitment to equal treatment of all” (Drake 123). Under the French model, *multiculturalisme* is perceived as

“opening the door to the fragmentation of the nation into interest groups” – a process given the pejorative term *communautarisme* (Vince 154). From the French perspective, “multiculturalism is nothing short of a cultural disaster, threatening the polity with fragmentation, and the nation with dissolution” (Schor 53). In a museum setting, the notion of blindness to difference can translate to a refusal to respond to the demands of indigenous or minority groups, for instance for repatriation, lest “identitarian politics” or “ethnic militancy” threaten academic standards and independence (Alivizatou 187; Price, *Paris Primitive* 46–7).

Interlinked with the ideals of liberty, equality, fraternity and *laïcité* is the concept of French universalism. Enlightenment universalism “was grounded in the belief that human nature, that is rational human nature, was a universal impervious to cultural and historical differences” (Schor 46). As Chirac claimed in his opening address for the quai Branly, France, “une nation de tout temps éprise d’universel” had nonetheless “appris la valeur de l’altérité.” Navigating a path between a universal worldview and that learned recognition has not proved easy for the new museum, however, and how these ambitions can be realised remains the subject of extensive commentary, and controversy. Dias argues that the quai Branly

“explicitly stresses the equality of cultures (with the consequent denial of cultural hierarchy) on the one hand, and the defense of French republican values, namely citizenship and *laïcité*, on the other. There are no allusions to cultural difference in this project, as if this very notion was incompatible with the supposedly universal values of French republicanism” (125).

The museum operates within political and social context where recognising “altérité” is complicated. As Mamadou Diouf would ask at the museum’s inaugural round tables, “le musée sert... à créer une communauté. Qu’est-ce que cela veut dire dans une société comme

la société française qui exclut la communauté, qui exclut la notion dite de ‘communautarisme’?” (*Le Dialogue* 151).

The context of *laïcité* thus has important repercussions for the quai Branly’s dealings with other nations and museums and with minority groups. Price argues that the quai Branly’s attitude toward disallowing repatriation claims “based on ethnic or religious identity” for objects or remains can be seen “a logical consequence of the ideology in France that privileges a sense of national unity over religious or ethnic identities and in which ‘communitarianism’ is viewed as a divisive force that endangers the unity and harmony of civil society” (*Paris Primitive* 126). The quai Branly’s opposition to repatriation in 2006 can therefore be viewed as a reflection of French society and an embodiment of Republican principles – a “logical consequence” of its environment. Yet Rouen’s decision to repatriate its *toi moko* demonstrates that the quai Branly’s *interpretation* of secularism and the limits it imposes on public institutions is not necessarily that of museums elsewhere in France. For the Muséum de Rouen, the repatriation of human remains to New Zealand some 150 years after their collection was interpreted as a necessary and justifiable action.

### ***Laïcité* in the museum**

In June 2006, the implications of *laïcité* for museums would be directly addressed in one of the quai Branly’s inaugural round tables. Organisers of the round table (“Le musée: Espace laïc, espace rituel, espace multiple?”) did not shy away from the difficult questions facing the new museum in stating the *problématique*:

“Certains objets des collections du musée du quai Branly sont les dépositaires de pouvoirs, qui leur sont conférés par les cultures et les rituels de leurs sociétés d’origine. Quelle relation l’institution peut-elle – ou doit-elle – entretenir avec les

croyances attachées à l'objet ? Comment concilier l'exposition muséale et l'interdit de vision originel ?" (Musée du quai Branly, "Le musée").

Price singles out "Espace laïc, espace rituel, espace multiple?" as by far the most controversial of all the round tables (*Paris Primitive* 142). As moderator Catherine Clément (philosopher, novelist and programming advisor to l'Université populaire du musée du quai Branly) explained in her opening remarks, the topic of the round table "est particulièrement perturbant pour la France, pays très attaché à la laïcité" (*Dialogue* 146). The French concept of *laïcité*, "extrêmement stricte, est très différente de la conception anglo-saxonne," Clément added (*Le Dialogue* 146).

Indeed, a split would emerge at this 2006 round table between the French participants, who argued strongly for museum *laïcité*, and their colleagues from the (Anglophone) Pacific, who described museum practices that were often shocking to their French counterparts. Already, therefore, in the quai Branly's inaugural dialogues, there were tensions evident between two differing concepts of the appropriateness of religious or spiritual beliefs in museum curation and conservation.

Round table participant Kirk Huffman, then curator at the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, described the provision of separate entrances for men and women into a certain exhibition of ni-Vanuatu objects as a simple matter. In accordance with traditional ni-Vanuatu beliefs, some material is restricted to women, and some to men (*Le Dialogue* 164). The idea of a separation in access based on cultural protocols was not simply perplexing for the French participants but was met "with stupefaction and outrage" (Price, *Paris Primitive* 142).

Clément protested that "l'idée qu'on puisse, à moi femme, m'interdire un savoir quelconque m'est philosophiquement insupportable. Le fait de ne pas y être m'est égal, mais le fait de ne



pas savoir, m'est intolérable philosophiquement" (*Le Dialogue* 166). As ethnologist Monique Jeudy-Ballini explained, although she did not call in to question "le bien-fondé de la vision" of museums presented Huffman, these practices represented "le contre-exemple absolu de ce que doit être un musée en France" (*Le Dialogue* 171).

Jeudy-Ballini found the idea of restrictions based on sex hard to bear, she explained, not because she is a feminist, or French, but simply because she is not *croyante* (*Le Dialogue* 172). For the Melanesians she works with "une femme française n'est pas une femme," and is thus not considered subject to the protocol applying to women of that society (*Le Dialogue* 172). A similar argument was made by Jeudy-Ballini and Derlon in their study of a 2001 exhibition at the MAAO of Australian churingas – considered sacred objects that are not supposed to be seen by non-initiates. Discussing the curator's decision to show the churingas (albeit in "semi-invisibility"), the authors contend that restricting access would cast visitors as non-initiates, and thus believers, in an Aboriginal religious system, "which of course they are not" (cited in Price, *Paris Primitive* 125).

For this reason, Jeudy-Ballini and Derlon agree that the museum had a responsibility to *resist* appeals to religious sensibilities. Although, the authors argue, it is understandable that "that oppressed, minority, native peoples, as part of their political and identitarian strategies," choose to make restrictions on the viewing of their objects,

"it could hardly be said that museums are fulfilling their mandate if they allow themselves to be pushed around, however legitimate the cause may be... A museum that honours such a request is not only going against the principle of laïcité, but also acting as if its job is to accept the religious laws of the cultures whose objects it owns, in some sense giving itself the job of assigning a sacred status to the sacred beliefs of others" (cited in Price, *Paris Primitive* 125).

Interestingly, given the MAAO's decision to exhibit the churingas, the curators of another exhibition at the MAAO, in 1999, *La mort n'en saura rien*, "décidèrent, à la demande des Maori... de ne pas exposer leur cranes décorés. Ils prenaient ainsi des positions rejoignant celles qui pouvaient être prises en Amérique du Nord" (Desvallées 99). The MAAO was evidently willing to make concessions for some indigenous requests – more easily in the case of human remains, it seems, than objects considered sacred.

The experiences shared by representatives of Pacific museums at the round table provoked concerns amongst French participants about ethnocentrism and the pressures of external interests on the objectivity of the museum. EHESS ethnologist Brigitte Derlon described herself as "frappée" by the situation of Māori in museums in New Zealand (*Le Dialogue* 156). According to Derlon, museums in Canada, Australia and New Zealand have fallen victim to a "re-sacralisation" of museum objects by indigenous groups, whereby museum employees were now obligated to follow "interdictions" such as not showing certain objects or banning food and drink in the proximity of certain items (*Le Dialogue* 156).

A different take on these changes was recounted at the round table by participants from museums in Australia, Vanuatu and New Zealand, including Te Papa's then chief executive, Seddon Bennington. Bennington described in positive terms the involvement of Māori in museums, the personal interaction of visitors with museum objects and the incorporation of Māori protocols at Te Papa (*Le Dialogue* 159)– practices Clément deemed, borrowing Derlon's term, "re-sacralisation."

In Derlon's view, the "re-sacralisation" and assertion of cultural protocols taking place in museums was more than "une récupération identitaire," "c'est une récupération politique... On arrive à une situation où [ces populations minoritaires] sont plus politiques

que religieux" (*Le Dialogue* 157). As much as this "récupération identitaire" and "politique" was now a given in museums such as Te Papa, Derlon argued, it was necessary for France to resist this kind of "instrumentalisation" (*Le Dialogue* 157). Ethnologist András Zempléni (Cnrs) concurred, criticising what he described as the "musée 'identitaire'" as "un instrument d'affirmation de soi" (*Le Dialogue* 156). According to Zempléni, assertions of identity and "la rencontre de la beauté et de l'ethnographie" belong in separate spaces (*Le Dialogue* 156). The museum, according to the French participants' arguments, needs to remain separate from political struggles and identity claims in order to maintain its academic objectivity and the *laïcité* appropriate to a French public institution.

At a different round table at the inaugural discussions, participants focused on the topic of international co-operation. How could the museum become *là où dialoguent les cultures*? At the heart of the matter, it seemed, were relationships: with people, and with other institutions. Samuel Sidibé argued that

"la question posée est fondamentale: comment le musée du quai Branly peut-il, dans sa démarche, être un espace de dialogue? D'abord un dialogue entre professionnels qui puisse permettre que les gens venus de régions diverses contribuent à la réflexion, à la construction du discours du musée" (*Le Dialogue* 261).

According to the Vanuatu Cultural Centre's director Ralph Regenvanu, the museum needed to establish "reciprocal, far-reaching, contemporary links," or risk irrelevance (cited in Clifford, "Quai Branly in Process" 23). Similarly, Clifford would argue that "pour décoloniser, on doit entrer en contact avec ses partenaires, mettre en œuvre de coproductions, des alliances politiques avec ces peuples premiers. Je crois que c'est maintenant sur l'agenda du musée... Les peuples premiers sont présents et ils parlent. C'est cela l'avenir, c'est un avenir de dialogues mais aussi de luttes" (*Le Dialogue* 263). The round

tables in themselves were evidence of the beginning of “dialogues mais aussi de luttes” on subjects such as repatriation. Indeed, discussions between museums in France and internationally, and the *mise en oeuvre* of collaborations, would prove vital to the repatriation of the *toi moko* and the organisation of the *Maori* exhibition at quai Branly in 2011.

Clifford’s idea that “cultures don’t converse: people do” recognises the need to shift from theoretical ideals towards conversation between people, with all the potential disagreements and misunderstandings that implies, if real dialogue is to take place. It is possible to identify two opposed perspectives on repatriation in 2006-7, but at the same time the beginnings of “la réflexion” at the quai Branly. At the 2006 discussions, quai Branly and Te Papa were brought together around a round table on *laïcité*, even though they were reading from different scripts. The Anglophone and Francophone curators each made their case and were respectfully heard, but there seemed to be little give and take between the perspectives. This impasse may not have been overcome had it not been for another “reciprocal, far-reaching” link created between France and New Zealand around the same time. The Muséum de Rouen and Te Papa had begun talking on the subject of *toi moko*, a conversation that would result in a legal challenge to the status quo on repatriation in France. Rouen’s determination to return its Māori head would bring representatives of Te Papa and the quai Branly face-to-face once again.

### **From “cultures” to “people” in dialogue**

After Rouen’s initial decision to return its *toi moko* based on bioethics law was overruled in 2007, the museum sought another solution. Catherine Morin-Desailly would lead the charge

for an exceptional law to specifically permit the return of all *toi moko* from French public collections. On 22 February 2008, the same day Morin-Desailly introduced the *proposition de loi* into the Senate,<sup>22</sup> a symposium began at the musée du quai Branly that brought together some of the key players in the story of the repatriation and the *Maori* exhibition. Thus, in 2008, our two main players – quai Branly and Te Papa – return to the stage together. This time, the conversation begins in earnest.

*From Anatomic Collections to Objects of Worship: Conservation and Exhibition of Human Remains in Museums* (22-3 February) was organised at the instigation of the Ministry of Culture in response to the repatriation controversy. Rouen's repatriation bid may not have been successful initially, but it certainly achieved its aim of sparking debate in France. At the symposium, participants from France and overseas – including politicians, scientists, museum professionals and representatives of indigenous communities – came face to face to express their differing views on the question of repatriation. Among the participants: Stéphane Martin, director of the quai Branly, and Seddon Bennington, then director of Te Papa, who had participated in quai Branly's inaugural round tables two years earlier.

It was at this 2008 symposium that the two stories – the story of the repatriation, and the story of the *Maori* exhibition – converged. According to Magali Mélandri, Oceania curator at the quai Branly and *correspondante scientifique* for *Maori*,<sup>23</sup> the encounter between Bennington and Martin served as the impetus for the exhibition. The project was “issu... d'un échange diplomatique entre Te Papa et le musée du quai Branly,” and in particular, between the two museum directors (Mélandri, “Interview”). The idea for

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<sup>22</sup> *Proposition de loi visant à autoriser la restitution par la France des têtes maories.*

<sup>23</sup> In relation to *Maori*, this role seems to have entailed acting as a cultural (and linguistic) mediator in facilitating the staging of the exhibition at the quai Branly, rather than in a “scientific” capacity, as Te Papa had complete curatorial control over the exhibition.

“un projet commun” may be traced back earlier, to the 2006 round tables (“Interview”).

However, the key moment which gave momentum to this project seems to have occurred during the 2008 symposium, where Bennington “avait abordé la question des instruments nécessaires à la gestion équitable des restes humains. Stéphane Martin a alors souhaité que le musée du quai Branly collabore avec le Te Papa Tongarewa” (Mélendri, “Exposition” 15). In an unprecedented move, the French museum would offer *carte blanche* to an outside institution, Te Papa, to present “une exposition qui donnerait la voix entièrement à la culture maorie au musée” (Mélendri, “Interview”).

An invitation by the quai Branly at a symposium on human remains would certainly represent an interesting starting point for the *Maori* exhibition, given Martin’s initial opposition to Rouen’s decision to repatriate its *toi moko*. The invitation to host a Te Papa-curated exhibition seems to have thus emerged from, or despite, a tension between the museum directors’ differing views on the place of Māori remains in museums. For this reason, the symposium invites closer examination, for it was here that two different viewpoints were expressed in the context of an encounter which led to co-operation and the strengthening of relations between the two museums. This in itself is suggestive of the importance of face-to-face, extended dialogue in addressing and surmounting ideological differences. As the lengthy and somewhat difficult process of organising the *Maori* exhibition would demonstrate, long-distance, less immediate forms of communication can exaggerate pre-existing ideological, cultural and linguistic differences and lead to difficulties and misunderstandings.

Appropriately, in terms of their decision to embark on “un projet commun,” Bennington and Martin both spoke during the symposium’s fourth and final round table, “How to reach a

mutual understanding? Institutional mediations and negotiations.” In line with the round table’s title, the various speakers placed much emphasis on mediation, negotiation and mutual understanding. Moderator Jacques Rigaud stressed that, as the symposium had demonstrated, “il y a avant tout un besoin de coopération, de dialogue, et d’accord. On ne peut pas se limiter au droit strict, à des revendications, à des exigences: nous travaillons tous, d’une manière ou d’une autre, pour le dialogue des cultures, pour le pluralisme culturel” (97). Each speaker was careful to acknowledge the differing, sometimes opposing, viewpoints represented at the round table and to express hope for compromise.

Despite the rhetorical emphasis on mutual understanding, there were still signs of a divide on some of the fundamental issues: the respective weight given to scientific and indigenous claims, understandings of human remains as ancestors or as artefacts and specimens, the rights of living people to old, sometimes ancient or anonymous, remains. Bertrand-Pierre Galey, of the Muséum national d’histoire naturelle, reminded listeners that “dans ce pays le pacte social repose sur l’idée que la religion ne se mélange pas, notamment à la science, et vice-versa” (123). Some speakers were critical of France for being particularly slow to respond to issues of repatriation. Bret Goldsmith, director of international repatriation with the Australian Government, remarked that “I think we spoke a lot about negotiation and mediation but I didn’t hear a lot about it from the other speakers, which suggests there’s still not a lot of it happening in France” (122).

Contrasting the situations in France and Australia, Goldsmith expressed some doubts about the potential for co-operation advocated at the round table:

“I’m going away with the feeling that there’s a sense that indigenous people will at some stage realise the value of science, even if they don’t now. The expectation is that the indigenous people will come to an understanding, and not that the scientists will come to an understanding of the indigenous perspective... You’ll only have

successful negotiation if you can shift the position according to which emotion, passion and religious beliefs is somehow secondary to some kind of objective [scientific] endeavour” (122).

Goldsmith’s comment underscores the division of viewpoints that continued to be expressed at the conference between “scientific rigour” and “emotion, passion and religious beliefs,” a division which is at the heart of discussions around repatriation.

The beginnings of a fruitful dialogue between Te Papa and quai Branly could nonetheless be discerned in the discussions involving Martin and Bennington. In their speeches at the round table, it is possible to see the divide in opinions evidenced elsewhere in the symposium, but also a desire to overcome these differences and foster co-operation between their institutions. Bennington, cautious in his discussion of the as-yet unresolved issue of the Rouen repatriation, emphasised Karanga Aotearoa’s policy of requesting, rather than demanding, the return of Māori and Moriori remains in overseas museums: “we don’t use the word claim, we don’t use the word obligation” (108). France needed to deal with the issue raised by Rouen in its own way, without interference from Te Papa. The French legal process concerning the Rouen toi moko was “not a process we feel we should intrude into in any way. We respect different museums, we have different approaches, attitudes, priorities, we recognise there are different legal frameworks” (108). The issue is ultimately not a legal one, but one of “mutual respect” (108).

Bennington’s angle on repatriation reveals an intelligent awareness of the way that objects, such as toi moko, come to form part of not only a national patrimony, but a museum patrimony, linked to collectors, conservators and viewers and embedded in the museum’s history. Attempting to separate an object from this web of connections could be perceived



as an assault on the museum's role as protector of scholarship and heritage. As Bennington described it, however, repatriation is not a one-way transfer, but confers benefits on both Māori and the repatriating institution. He would argue that repatriation is not simply "an exchange of artefacts, this runs deeper than that. Te Papa sees itself as facilitating a journey, it's a journey that isn't organised quickly, it's a journey that requires a great deal of discussion by the institution that has often held the human remains for 200 years" (108). Museums who have engaged in the repatriation process with Te Papa, he suggested, "have been always impressed by the sincerity and depth of gratitude [of Māori welcoming their ancestors], by the depth of feelings that is expressed in the process" (108). By framing repatriation as a mutual gain, Bennington was able to pick up on and respond to the potential anxieties of French museum conservators and management. Instead of losing a "full page of history" by excluding an item from their collections, French museums could stand to gain a new relationship with Te Papa and with Māori and acquire new knowledge about their own collections.

In the final words of his speech, Bennington issued a challenge to museums with subtlety and tact:

"Museums have a tremendous responsibility and opportunity to be effective agents in post-colonial reconciliation. In New Zealand we have seen the development of a strong, assertive confidence, culturally, by Maori. That has implications for health, education, and self-esteem, well-being, sense of place in the world. A sense of place that, in the colonising period was taken away. Museums need to think carefully about the responsibility they have in this process" (108).

Bennington's description of the museum's role directly echoes the role proclaimed for the quai Branly in the rhetoric surrounding its creation as a site of post-colonial reconciliation and homage to the arts of "peuples aujourd'hui encore souvent marginalisés, fragilisés,

menacés par l'avancée inexorable de la modernité. Peuples qui veulent néanmoins voir leur dignité restaurée et reconnue" (Chirac). Bennington's speech thus framed repatriation as both an opportunity for French museums to write a "new page" in their relationship with Māori, and as a chance for these museums to live up to their proclaimed ambitions. According to Bennington's argument, institutions stand to gain from engaging with the formerly colonised peoples whose objects are represented in their collections. They are not simply losing items to repatriation.

In response, Stéphane Martin remarked that he had listened to the Te Papa director's speech "avec beaucoup d'intérêt et beaucoup de respect, parce qu'il a parlé avec intelligence, mais aussi avec beauté et avec sensibilité" (*From Anatomic Collections* 128). The considered nature of Bennington's case for repatriation had impressed Martin:

"La démarche qui a été entreprise par le Te Papa est une démarche en ce sens absolument exemplaire et infiniment respectable. Doublement: d'une part parce que comme la très joliment dit Seddon Bennington tout à l'heure, il ne s'agit en aucun cas de venir forcer la main des dépositaires actuels, et d'autre part parce qu'il s'agit d'un processus de longue haleine" (*From Anatomic Collections* 129).

At Te Papa, Martin agreed, the use of wāhi tapu (consecrated repositories) to store Māori and Moriori remains at Te Papa "[est] dans la continuité de la relation que le peuple maori entretient avec ses anciens et les pièces conservées au sein de cette institution" (*From Anatomic Collections* 128). Martin seemed to accept the differences in practices at Te Papa as legitimate, albeit as part of a completely different context to that of quai Branly. In the *Maori* exhibition and repatriation ceremony these different contexts – and approaches towards toi moko and museum objects – would be at last brought together.

The round tables also opened up a broader discussion of museum collections and exhibitions which had resonances for both the *toi moko* repatriation and *Maori* exhibition. For Samuel Sidibé, director of the Musée de Bamako, the symposium was “un nouveau départ” that would not have taken place ten years ago – proof that “les choses changent” (113). However, Sidibé, like Goldsmith, had reservations about the presentation of the “other” – specifically, Africa – in Western ethnographic museums:

“lorsque vous visitez la plupart des musées d’ethnographie, si vous êtes Africain et que vous vivez en Afrique aujourd’hui, vous avez le sentiment d’avoir une Afrique qui n’est pas celle que vous connaissez... il y a encore aujourd’hui dans les musées occidentaux une envie de présenter l’Afrique de la manière dont les collections le permettent, c’est-à-dire comme une Afrique du passé” (114).

Although not directed at the quai Branly in particular, the comment brings to mind criticisms levelled at the museum’s permanent exhibition and its representation of “les autres.” Sidibé’s reservations foreshadow the specific aims of the *Maori* exhibition to present Māori as a “living culture,” showcasing how Māori traditions have both endured and developed across time. In the eyes of some French critics, the exhibition would provide a corrective to misinformed, exoticist visions of Māori life and demonstrate a living, evolving culture, not one frozen in the display cabinet. The *Maori* exhibition, the product of an extended dialogue between two museums represents a different prediction from the universalist one informing the *Océanie* section of the *plateau des collections*. By collaborating with Te Papa, the quai Branly was able to offer French viewers a different lens through which to view Māori culture. While quai Branly’s permanent Māori display is limited by its small collection of Māori objects, *Maori* would include a wide range of exhibits representing “le présent” as well as “le passé.”

The repatriation controversy that motivated the 2008 symposium would finally be resolved, two years later, with the adoption of an exceptional law put forward by Catherine Morin-Desailly.<sup>24</sup> The *têtes maories* law grants the return of all *toi moko* in French collections, implicating six regional and three national museums and twenty heads. L'Université Montpellier 1, not covered by the law, voluntarily returned its head as part of the 2012 collective repatriation, bringing the total number of repatriated heads to twenty-one.

The repatriation had raised some uncomfortable issues for France, but it also signalled the beginning of new relationships and co-operation with New Zealand. At the Muséum de Rouen, the connection forged by the repatriation led to “wider discussions with Māori staff from Te Papa about the care and management of their Māori collection and, in particular, assistance with building a new permanent exhibition around their Pacific collection” (Jean 217). Furthermore, it was the Rouen controversy that set off the sequence of events leading to the invitation by Martin to host *Maori: leurs trésors ont une âme* at the quai Branly in 2011.

### **A new Te Maori?**

The exhibition that would travel to the quai Branly in response to Martin's invitation premiered at Te Papa on 9 June 2011 as *E Tū Ake: Māori Standing Strong*. Curated by Te Papa as an international touring exhibition, *E Tū Ake* - the largest overseas exhibition of Māori taonga since *Te Maori* – was “developed to share the knowledge, stories and treasures of Maori culture with international audiences” (“Te Papa's New Exhibition”). The exhibition, drawn mainly from the Te Papa's collections, features over 250 objects, including customary

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<sup>24</sup> Loi n° 2010-501 du 18 mai 2010 visant à autoriser la restitution par la France des têtes maories à la Nouvelle-Zélande et relative à la gestion des collections.

taonga, audio-visual works, photography and everyday objects, supplemented by labels, extensive text panels and an accompanying catalogue.<sup>25</sup> As the subtitle, *Māori Standing Strong*, suggests, the exhibition is designed to tell a story: “the quest for Māori political self-determination,” or tino rangatiratanga (H. Smith, *E Tū Ake* 40). Taonga and contemporary art are linked by the accompanying texts to this narrative of Māori political development, touching on issues such as land rights, environmental protection, and te reo revival.

The exhibition originates from a more traditional international exhibition of taonga curated by Te Papa. In 2007, *Mauri Ora: Māori Treasures from the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa* was shown at the Tokyo National Museum. According to Te Papa, it was the success of the exhibition in Japan that prompted Te Papa to “re-articulate *Mauri Ora* by incorporating a powerful contemporary dimension” (H. Smith, *E Tū Ake* 10), resulting in the exhibition *E Tū Ake*. However, in his review of *E Tū Ake* at Te Papa, Ireland suggests that “it has been common knowledge for a few years that Te Papa has been casting around for a new *Te Maori*, an export-quality exhibition” (65). According to Ireland, *Mauri Ora* was “re-articulated” specifically in response to “an opportunity to exhibit at the Musée du quai Branly” (65), although the official material on *E Tū Ake* makes no mention of the French invitation in relation to the exhibition’s creation. According to a 2009 Te Papa document, *E Tū Ake* was originally planned for November 2008, but was postponed. The plans indicated that it would now tour internationally in 2010 and then exhibit at Te Papa in 2011 – an order that would be reversed in actuality – to coincide with the Rugby World Cup and influx of international visitors (Te Papa, “Financial Review” 3).

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<sup>25</sup> Huhana Smith, *E Tū Ake: Māori Standing Strong*. A French translation (*Maori: leurs trésors ont une âme*) was commissioned for the staging at the quai Branly.

Although *E Tū Ake* was apparently a reworked version of *Mauri Ora*, Ireland considers them to be two very different projects: *Mauri Ora*, “primarily a display of notable traditional objects,” was a “visual” exhibition, and *E Tū Ake*, with its focus on tino rangatiratanga, is “conceptual” (65). It is a comparison that could equally apply to another predecessor, the “visual” *Te Maori*. Where *Te Maori* presented taonga as “high art,” bringing their previously underappreciated aesthetic qualities to the fore, the objects, text panels and audio-visual material of *E Tū Ake* convey an overarching narrative, the story of Māori political development. Te Papa’s own description of the exhibition, strikes a balance between the two, describing it as both “an expression of artistic excellence and cultural identity” and “a commentary on the continuity and challenges of upholding Māori culture” (H. Smith, *E Tū Ake* 9).

The “conceptual” nature of *E Tū Ake* is evident in the multi-layered narrative structure that frames the objects. The exhibition’s major theme, “the quest for Māori self-determination,” is explored through three “strands”: mana, whakapapa and kaitiakitanga (interpreted in the catalogue as “empowerment and leadership,” “identity and interconnectedness” and “protection and sustainability,” respectively) (H. Smith, *E Tū Ake* 40). These core concepts are illustrated by a number of sub-themes, which themselves contain a number of topics. The whakapapa, or “interconnectedness,” strand, for instance, is explored through the sub-topics waka (“canoes or vessels”), whare tupuna (“ancestral meeting houses”) and tā moko (tattoo) (H. Smith, *E Tū Ake* 46). The “waka” sub-theme spans genealogy (the vessels bringing Pacific voyagers to Aotearoa), art and spirituality (the carving of the waka and its spiritual significance), and contemporary sport (waka ama) (H. Smith, *E Tū Ake* 51–63).

The holistic, referential structure of the exhibition fosters links between objects across and within themes and sub-themes. Within the waka sub-theme, for instance, there is a visual link apparent between tā moko designs, the carving of whare tupuna and the patterns on contemporary waka ama. Furthermore, there is a symbolic link, “genealogy,” linking waka (as the origin of iwi in New Zealand) and tā moko (as a marker of lineage). Aspects of voyaging both literal (Pacific voyaging, waka ama) and spiritual (“the strong association between waka and the spirit’s journey to the afterlife”) (H. Smith, *E Tū Ake* 57) are shown as parts of one whole.

In *E Tū Ake*, different facets of life – from art, to sport, to politics – are interwoven. Connections are constantly affirmed between different objects on display, and between these objects and individuals, significant events, and the spiritual world. Taonga can be appreciated as “art objects,” Smith explains, “but for Māori, such taonga are more than art objects. They have a mauri, or life force, that transcends time, connecting past generations to those of the present and future” (H. Smith, *E Tū Ake* 12). The exhibition has an aesthetic purpose, but also “seek[s] to show how taonga – both physical and intangible – have a vital connection to a living culture” (H. Smith, *E Tū Ake* 13). The exhibited objects are frequently placed in the context of people who owned or used them or their links to a particular iwi in a very specific way. For example, the catalogue describes a canoe cenotaph from a waka as “associated with Te Mahutu, a chief from the Whanganui region of the western North Island” (H. Smith, *E Tū Ake* 57).

*E Tū Ake* includes items that do not fit traditional categories of art or ethnography, or that are not typically placed in a museum setting. For instance, the exhibition features a trestle table and settings from the wharekai where marchers in the 2004 foreshore and seabed hikoi were fed (H. Smith, *E Tū Ake* 153). This arrangement of everyday items is

included within the theme of kaitiakitanga as representing “current forms of manaakitanga,” or “care and hospitality” (H. Smith, *E Tū Ake* 153). The context of the foreshore hikoi links it with another aspect of kaitiakitanga, the “care and guardianship” of the environment and natural resources, a key narrative of the exhibition.

*E Tū Ake* differs from *Te Maori* and *Mauri Ora* in its inclusion of contemporary works by New Zealand artists. Centuries-old taonga are juxtaposed with works by contemporary artists to “[portray] the living and dynamic culture of Māori... from a contemporary Māori viewpoint” (H. Smith, *E Tū Ake* 12). In *E Tū Ake*, the contemporary art not only illustrates connections between past and present and the continuation of certain traditions, but provides commentary on the notion of exhibiting. Fiona Pardington’s photographic “portraits” of hei tiki recast the “tipuna” hidden away in storage vaults as ghostly, glowing presences. In the context of *E Tū Ake*, Amery argues, Pardington’s works “[encourage] the viewer to think more carefully about why such an artefact is being presented like this, and how photography and museum storage alters it.” The contemporary art does not necessarily serve to make a political statement, but is included for its own value. Artworks

“like a recent Shane Cotton painting [VEE] featuring a floating grisly Mokomokai (a stronger statement of the cultural treatment of such sacred taonga you’d be pressed to find) aren’t pulled apart as political statements. Rather, in this context it emphasises the continued importance in Cotton’s work of his Nga Puhi heritage as a living spiritual presence” (Amery).

The subjects of Pardington and Cotton’s works – hei tiki and toi moko – have personal connections for the artists. Yet the inclusion of Pardington’s hei tiki and Cotton’s *VEE* by Te Papa can also be seen as a self-reflexive comment on museum collecting and the categorisation and exhibition of taonga.



In the setting of the quai Branly, Pardington's photographs would contrast with the presentation of a hei tiki and other taonga in the permanent *Océanie* exhibit. On the *plateau*, these taonga are not displayed as "tipuna," but form part of an aesthetic and ethnographic context. In *Maori*, Pardington's photographs and ancient taonga would be exhibited side by side; in the quai Branly, a set of Pardington's hei tiki photographs donated by the New Zealand government is exhibited outside the *plateau*, separate from the taonga they depict. Cotton's painting would likewise have a particular resonance in the context of the quai Branly, where seven toi moko were once held and the repatriation ceremony for the toi moko would take place. As Amery notes, *VEE* provides a connection to these heads – the subject of so much debate – on a personal, rather than political level.

The inclusion of contemporary art in *E Tū Ake*, linked to customary taonga, can be seen as an attempt to overcome fixed stereotypes of "Māori art" or "Māori culture." The idea that surviving indigenous cultures are not sufficiently "authentic" can have political and cultural implications (Welsh 843–4). The standing of descendants or ethnic or cultural groups to make repatriation claims, for instance, can be called into question (Welsh 844). According to Te Papa Senior Curator Mātauranga Māori Rhonda Paku, one of the aims of the exhibition's staging in France was to contribute to an understanding of the importance of toi moko and repatriation to Māori. *L'affaire des têtes maories* had generated significant public and media interest, and consequently there was a desire amongst French people to learn more about the history and beliefs motivating these requests. *Maori* would demonstrate that Te Papa was not simply "gathering bones" without reason, but acting on the concerns of a living people (Paku).

*E Tū Ake* debuted in Wellington to sharply divided predictions from two New Zealand art critics about the exhibition's prospects in France. Ireland, reviewing the exhibition on display in Wellington, found the complex structure confusing and wondered how the exhibition would be comprehended by a French audience. For Ireland, Smith's catalogue – which does not simply illustrate the exhibited items, but adds historical context and further develops the themes of the exhibition – is more successful than the exhibition itself “because it is fundamentally a thesis with illustrations. The thesis is outlined more systematically and fully than the show's labels can manage” (66). The catalogue, with its supplementary information and images, allows for “a more intelligible context” for the objects than the exhibition (Ireland 66).

As an exhibition, rather than a “thesis with illustrations,” Ireland believed *E Tū Ake* suffers from a surfeit of themes (66). Unlike Te Maori, he argued, *E Tū Ake* lacks a clear focus (66). Instead, it is “a show from which at least a dozen other exhibitions are struggling to surface” (Ireland 66). In Ireland's view, the textual elements of *E Tū Ake*, such as an eight-metre wall panel, overwhelm rather than complement the objects on display (65). The placement of contemporary art is confusing and lacks connections to the customary objects (Ireland 67). This lack of cohesion, Ireland claimed, made the exhibition difficult to comprehend even in its Wellington setting; “heaven knows what handle the Parisians will get on it” (Ireland 67).

A completely different perspective prediction for the exhibition's showing in Paris was offered by Mark Amery. In Amery's view, the exhibition “is welcomingly direct and vocal in its expression of political purpose” and has a “light touch” in visually conveying “how contemporary Maori art builds on tradition whilst continuing to play a social and political role. It emphasises... that political identity isn't all just about providing agitprop

slogans.” Unlike Ireland, Amery believed *E Tū Ake* successfully blends contemporary art and other museum pieces. The exhibition would, he believed, “in all likelihood... get lots of attention in the media in New Zealand when it opens to acclaim in Paris” (Amery).

In reality, the result lay somewhere between Amery and Ireland’s two extremes. The exhibition would indeed open to success in Paris in terms of French media acclaim and visitor numbers. However, as Ireland predicted, the volume of text surprised the French museum and its audience. Some of Ireland’s fears about the confusing nature of the exhibition would also be realised, although not quite as disastrously as he had imagined. The unpredictability of the exhibition’s outcome in Paris may partly be explained by the long process of collaboration involved in adapting *E Tū Ake* to the quai Branly. *E Tū Ake* is not the same exhibition as *Maori*: it is a version of *E Tū Ake* which reflects the particularities of the French context and the variables and difficulties of collaborating on an international exhibition across time zones, languages and cultures.

### **Bringing *E Tū Ake* to Paris**

From 4 October 2011 – 22 January 2012, the quai Branly’s largest exhibition space, the galerie Jardin, hosted *E Tū Ake*’s overseas debut as *Maori: leurs trésors ont une âme*. The quai Branly collaborates frequently with other institutions on temporary exhibitions, but *Maori* differed in that it was developed entirely outside the quai Branly, as a touring exhibition by Te Papa. Although the exhibition’s objects and thematic content would remain largely the same, the exhibition design, contextual information and public presentation of *E Tū Ake* needed to be adapted to its new setting. Bringing *E Tū Ake* to the quai Branly involved the building of

trust between the institutions in order to “translate” *E Tū Ake* in a way that was faithful to the original, while remaining accessible to a French audience.

Italian exhibition scenographer Massimo Quendolo was commissioned to adapt *E Tū Ake* to the larger, differently-shaped space of the galerie Jardin. According to Mélandri, just as the quai Branly gave Te Papa *carte blanche* in terms of content and curation, Te Papa “[a] donné carte blanche aux architectes pour adapter le contenu de l’exposition dans cet espace” (“Interview”). The direction of this design, however, was determined by collaboration and negotiation with Te Papa. For Te Papa, the sharing of knowledge around the exhibition shifted the responsibility to French colleagues for a respectful display (Paku). The design team “ont fait le voyage en Nouvelle-Zélande, pour voir les objets, pour discuter directement avec Te Papa, sur ce qu’ils attendaient de l’exposition, en termes de l’architecture et de la scénographie, et ensuite les architectes ont précisés leur projet, et tout ça a été validé par Te Papa” (“Interview”). Although the visual design of the French exhibition proved quite different from the original, the *parcours* was carefully retained exactly as in the original, with the themes in the same order and the same connections established between objects (Mélandri, “Interview”). The individual presentation of objects was also preserved. Te Papa sent the quai Branly “des plans, des photos des vitrines, et des plans des élévations des objets” (Mélandri, “Interview”).

Simon Jean, a French intern at Te Papa at the time the exhibition was organised, recounts that in 2010,

“the design team from Paris came to Te Papa for five days to discuss initial ideas for this exhibition, the first time French museum staff had worked directly with colleagues in New Zealand. Interestingly, differences and tensions emerged in terms of the different approaches to creating an exhibition of Māori taonga, which were reflected in the final installation” (218).

The quai Branly tends towards a more aesthetic presentation of its objects, a feature evident in the French presentation of *E Tū Ake* – perhaps one the “differences” in exhibition style Jean observed. Mélandri recalled the differing expectations around the exhibition of one object, an intricately carved feeding funnel for those being tattooed (kōrere) (“Interview”). Whereas the French museum would likely have chosen to exhibit the object to best demonstrate its form (the carving), Te Papa prioritised an exhibition of its function (“Interview”). The exhibition catalogue details the kōrere’s purpose and usefulness (preventing infection) (H. Smith, *E Tū Ake* 82). The funnel is located within the theme of tā moko (tattoo) as a “marker of identity,” part of the larger theme of whakapapa (H. Smith, *E Tū Ake* 82). The functional and symbolic value of the object is thus primary, with its aesthetic value as a secondary consideration. In the exhibition of the kōrere as part of *Maori*, it was Te Papa’s exhibition style that prevailed.

The quai Branly might have chosen to exhibit more objects in the larger exhibition space, or some objects in a different way, if it had been curating the exhibition itself, but this was not possible in the case of *Maori* (Mélandri, “Interview”). The impossibility of altering certain visual aspects of the exhibition was not necessarily due to intransigence on the part of Te Papa, but perhaps stemmed from or was exacerbated by the distance and time zones separating the institutions and the resulting communication difficulties. In terms of the number of objects on display, Mélandri explains, “si on avait discuté de ça juste autour d’un table, je pense... si nous avions discuté de ça juste autour d’un table, je pense que... nous aurions pour l’adaptation” (“Interview”). The “differences and tensions” Jean observed are perhaps inevitable when two very different exhibition styles come into contact for the first time. These differences might have been easier to resolve, however, without the obstacles of distance and time difference.

Despite distance and differing styles of display, the quai Branly and Te Papa were able to negotiate a successful staging of *E Tū Ake* that responded to Te Papa's intentions for the exhibition. According to Paku, the design elements of the Paris exhibition, such as the dappled light which gave an ethereal effect, brought the taonga "alive" and connected them to the visitors. She believed that the spiritual essences of the objects, such as "wairua" and "mauri," were successfully expressed through design in the French museum space. The mauri stone, placed at the entrance to the exhibition, served as an anchoring element to introduce the viewer into this spiritual context (Paku). Mélandri also noted that this pounamu helped introduce and connect the visitor to the spiritual themes of the exhibition ("Interview").

The *carte blanche* granted to Te Papa led to an exhibition very different from one that the quai Branly could have curated alone. Although Mélandri emphasised that there was no rigidly "traditional" style of temporary exhibitions at the quai Branly, the exhibition, if created by the quai Branly, would likely have been structured in a more traditionally ethnographic manner ("Interview"). For the quai Branly, the key differentiating feature of the *Maori* exhibition would be the lack of mediation "entre le public, les objets, et la culture d'origine" (Mélandri, "Interview"). This unmediated view, Mélandri acknowledges, is itself subject to filter: that of Te Papa, an institution that acts as the official "voice" for different iwi of New Zealand ("Interview").

In addition to the visual adaptation of *E Tū Ake*, the contextual information surrounding the objects in the exhibition needed to be reoriented for a French audience. The same wall texts and captions were used as in the Te Papa staging, but the translation into another language and context necessitated some changes. According to Jean, there was "a significant

difference in the translation of text and graphic panels and the catalogue in English and French” (Jean 220). Māori concepts were more difficult to introduce to an audience in France than in New Zealand, as the French did not have the same background knowledge (Jean 220). Thus, more translations of Māori terms were used in than in the original, words familiar to a New Zealand audience such as “Aotearoa” were explained, and a map of New Zealand was included at the beginning of the exhibition to add context for the French audience (Mélendri, “Interview”).

The adaptation of the exhibition into French illustrated some of the difficulties inherent in cross-cultural translation. The inclusion of “tribu” as a gloss of the original term “iwi,” for example, received the approval of Te Papa (Mélendri, “Interview”). Mélendri, conscious of the connotations of “tribu” with anthropology and evolutionary hierarchies in French, suggested the term “communauté,” which to her seemed more respectful (“Interview”). *Tribu*, however, prevailed. Here, the term which is negatively “connoté” in French is the *only* appropriate term in New Zealand, where “community” could apply to any grouping: ethnic, geographical, religious, or otherwise. “Tribe,” “sub-tribe,” and “tribal,” on the other hand, have a particular historical and political significance in a New Zealand context as the terms reserved for New Zealand’s indigenous peoples, Māori, whereas anyone can form a “community.” Iwi/tribes are not only important historically, but have a political role as factors in land claims and other Māori rights issues, and are significant, genealogically, to individual Māori identity.

Tribe/*tribu*, a term invested with complex and fraught meanings in New Zealand English *and* in French, thus illuminates the challenges involved in “translating” *E Tū Ake* from one historical, political and cultural setting to another. It also signals another reason that *E Tū Ake* is necessarily a different exhibition from *Maori*: a French audience cannot

possibly view and understand the exhibition in the same way, coming to the exhibition with very different knowledge to a New Zealand audience. The exhibition does not operate the same way in each setting, nor does it have the same purpose. According to Jean,

“in New Zealand, the exhibition’s purpose was to declare Māori self-determination by presenting some case studies of conflicts from the past and trying to describe the evolution of the struggle with the government. On the other hand, in France the goal was principally to increase understanding about the position of the Māori community within New Zealand. The French institution did not set out to express a point of view about the political situation in New Zealand, but to present the Māori community through its art and history” (Jean 220).

Certainly, the exhibition’s political message had a different effect in France as opposed to the country in which this “struggle” for tino rangatiratanga is taking place, New Zealand, but neither is *Maori* an apolitical exhibition. The quai Branly may not have “set out to express a point of view,” but in welcoming an exhibition whose central theme is “tino rangatiratanga,” the museum allowed Te Papa’s point of view to be expressed to a French audience. The exhibition should not be underestimated as a political statement, especially in France. An exhibition devoted to the achievements and aspirations of a minority indigenous population, including greater control over the presentation of its history and heritage (a movement embodied by Te Papa), would seem to contradict the values of the previously-discussed *anti-communautarisme français*. The exhibition’s exploration of “contemporary social and political realities,” Jean suggests, “may represent an important new departure for exhibiting cultures in France” (218).

The long, careful process of organising the exhibition took place against the backdrop of repatriation negotiations on a governmental level between France and New Zealand. This “diplomatic relationship” contributed to the concern taken with the exhibition and the



respect for Te Papa's *carte blanche*. In light of the Rouen *affaire* and Catherine Morin-Desailly's *proposition de loi*, "Stéphane Martin souhaitait montrer que nous n'étions pas en opposition avec ces démarches" (Mélandri, "Exposition" 15). In Ireland's review of *E Tū Ake*, he seems to imply that while Te Papa has been given an "opportunity" to exhibit (66), the French were still running the show. In relation to the *E Tū Ake*, Ireland claims that "apparently, a publication was one of the conditions under which the Paris museum agreed to take the show" (66). Mélandri refuted the allegation that the quai Branly had demanded a catalogue; the *carte blanche* offered to Te Papa was, in fact, exactly that ("Interview").

Operating in a delicate diplomatic situation, it does not seem that quai Branly was in a position to place "conditions" on Te Papa, as Ireland insinuates. Instead, the museum appears to have gone to great lengths to defer to Te Papa's choices regarding content and exhibition style. Jean's experience as an inside observer at Te Papa seems to support this theory: he notes that "it was the Māori curators and their tribal communities, not the French staff, who made the final decisions about the display in Paris" (218). The experience of collaborating on the exhibition, despite the various challenges, seems to have had reciprocal benefits. For the French participants, "it was the first time they had worked with *iwi*... on the display of their treasures" and "staff from both institutions felt that this indigenous involvement showcased innovative museum practice" (Jean 218). At the quai Branly, "the staff was able to increase their knowledge about the Māori *taonga* preserved in the quai Branly's own collections" (Jean 221).

The collaboration between Te Papa and the quai Branly on the visual and contextual content of *Maori* depended upon a strong relationship between the curatorial teams. The provision of the exhibition themes and content by Te Papa altered the quai Branly's typical role in

organising temporary exhibitions. Whereas a French curator might usually make certain thematic choices, in this exhibition these were decided entirely by Te Papa (“Interview”). Instead of making curatorial decisions, *responsable de collections Océanie* Magali Mélandri took on the role of liaison between the museums. This involved overseeing the translation of the catalogue, to guarantee that “tout était conforme, et ne trahissait pas le propos maori,” and the “translation” of the exhibition into its French version (“Interview”). As Mélandri had viewed the exhibition in Wellington, she was able to understand the links between the objects on display and make sure they were retained in the French setting (“Interview”).

Mélandri would also take on the role of “médiatrice”: the Francophone spokesperson for interviews and visits, and representative for the exhibition after the Te Papa team had left. In this role, “légitimité” was highly important: Te Papa needed to be able to trust Mélandri’s ability to “prendre la parole” for the exhibition in French (“Interview”). For Mélandri, it was important to have the validation of Te Papa “puisque la parole leur a été donné,” and thus only Te Papa could grant her legitimacy as the exhibition’s French spokesperson (“Interview”). Although there was also a French speaker at Te Papa involved in verifying the translation of the catalogue. A significant amount of trust seems to have been placed in the French team to convey the *discours* of Te Papa in France. In this way *Maori* could be seen as a mutual leap of faith, with quai Branly handing over the reins for the first time to another museum, and Te Papa entrusting the French institution to *prendre la parole* for the *Maori* exhibition.

### *Leurs trésors ont une âme*

The process of staging *Maori* required extensive negotiation to determine not only its visual and textual adaptations, but also the conditions that would apply to the French staff behind the scenes. *Maori* brought together two different approaches towards the treatment and exhibition of objects, necessitating a dialogue between two “museum cultures.” A contract, requiring long deliberation, was signed between the two museums, specifying the technical aspects of the exhibition, the loaned objects, and the protocol towards these loans (Mélandri, “Interview”). According to Mélandri, “l’aspect rituel du montage de l’exposition” was one of the distinguishing features of the experience of staging *Maori*: “tous les comportements, la bonne conduite en présence des œuvres étaient des conditions qui étaient pour nous assez nouvelles, parfois” (Mélandri, “Interview”). What was surprising for the French technical team was, for Te Papa, a continuation of the normal operations of the museum. In interviews, Paku matter-of-factly described the practices introduced to the quai Branly during the exhibition’s set-up, such as the saying of karakia, as part of the normal protocols concerning Te Papa’s Māori collections that naturally accompanied the exhibition as it toured overseas.

From the beginning of the collaboration on the installation of *Maori* at the quai Branly, the team from Te Papa had clearly explained the protocol that was to be followed. For Mélandri,

“C’était un des moments très intéressants du montage parce que la première fois, le premier jour, où l’équipe est arrivée, ils ont fait une petite réunion dans l’espace de l’exposition pour expliquer à toutes les équipes françaises ce qu’elles avaient le droit et pas le droit de faire ” (“Interview”).

The academic staff of the museum were already familiar with the idea of cultural differences in the understandings of objects and attendant protocol. For the technical staff involved in

the installation of *Maori*, however, some of the practices involved were “grandes nouveautés” (Mélendri, “Interview”). A number of the practices introduced by Te Papa were familiar to the quai Branly staff, such as the ban on food or drinks in the exhibition space (Mélendri, “Interview”). Others were less so. The French learned that the Māori team setting up the exhibition would perform prayers and chant in front of the objects, “[pour] qu’ils se sentent bien dans l’espace d’exposition” (Mélendri, “Interview”).

A protocol particularly foreign to French museums was the idea that it was potentially unsafe for pregnant women to work with certain objects. As it happened, a pregnant conservator at the quai Branly was involved with the exhibition (Mélendri, “Interview”). As a result, “il a fallu discuter... Elle n’a pas pu travailler sur certains objets qui risquaient d’être dangereux pour son bébé. C’était une mesure de protection en fait” (Mélendri, “Interview”). Protocols associated with Māori objects, and their implications for *l’égalité des sexes*, had received prior attention in French media. Te Papa’s advice for pregnant and menstruating women to avoid a behind the scenes tour at Te Papa in 2010 had attracted the attention of *Libération*, *Le Monde* and a number of smaller French papers. Despite *Libé*’s somewhat light-hearted title (“Règles À Part”), it accurately reported that the museum strongly *discouraged* these women from visiting; an article *Le Monde*, on the other hand, claimed that Te Papa “avait créé une polémique en respectant à la lettre les croyances maories: les femmes enceintes ou ayant leurs règles n’avaient pas le droit de voir certains objets sacrés” (Guillot). The former article noted the arguments of feminists that “un musée financé par les fonds publics ne devrait pas forcer les visiteurs à suivre des croyances religieuses ou culturelles qu’ils ne partagent pas” (“Règles À Part”).

Despite this earlier coverage, the application of this same protocol in a French museum received no attention in the French press, suggesting that French journalists were

not aware of it, or else did not consider it noteworthy. The French media in fact seemed to devote little attention to the rituals involved in *Maori*. In Québec, by contrast, it was reported that

“Le peuple maori ne rigole pas avec le rituel... les journalistes ont dû assister à des cérémonies et des discours durant une bonne heure et quart avant de pouvoir visiter E TU AKE - Maori debout” (Boisvert).

Although French journalists presumably received the same briefing, their emphasis tended to fall on the “spiritual” qualities of the objects, without mentioning “le rituel” that attended them.

The museum’s decision to respect restrictions applying to “dangerous” objects is somewhat surprising considering the French approach towards the secularity of the museum space, especially one that has been specified as *not* the place for “profound meanings” (Le Guével, cited in Price, *Paris Primitive* 124). It seems that either the rhetoric of an unassailable *laïcité* as a tenet of French society and its museums is belied by a more flexible approach in practice, or that this temporary exhibition, presented by another museum and subject to its practices, was an exception to the rule applying to permanent collections. The other possibility, that the rhetoric of the museum’s founding and inaugural discussions is giving way to a less rigid approach to the museum as an “espace laïc” is difficult to judge from one exhibition alone; only future exhibitions will reveal the extent to which the idea of the museum as “espace rituel” or “espace multiple” is welcomed in quai Branly’s temporary and permanent exhibitions spaces.

### ***Maori*: The public and media reception**

The staging of *E Tū Ake* in Paris involved a revision of the exhibition's image to appeal to a French audience. The exhibition was heavily promoted, with advertising "prominent in some of the busiest parts of Paris" (Jean 220). The publicity for *Maori* was tailored to French knowledge of Māori and New Zealand and French expectations of an exhibition of Māori art and culture at the quai Branly. The change in name from *E Tū Ake: Māori standing strong* to *Maori: leurs trésors ont une âme* downplayed the political themes and emphasised the spiritual, aesthetic qualities of Māori *trésors*. The exhibition was thus rendered more familiar and perhaps more appealing to an audience accustomed to the quai Branly's permanent exhibition style. The poster was likewise altered from a photograph of the 2004 foreshore and seabed hikoi with the Māori flag at the forefront – two completely unfamiliar images for a French audience – to one of a tattooed arm holding a hei tiki against a backdrop of abstract koru.

The exhibition was promoted to a French audience through perhaps the most popular symbol of New Zealand in France – namely, rugby. The title of a review of *Maori* in *Le Parisien*, "Avant le rugby, il y avait les Maoris," was indicative of the image of Māori in the forefront of many French minds: *les All Blacks*, soon to face off with the *les Bleus* in the final of the 2011 Rugby World Cup being held in New Zealand. Capitalising on the popularity of the World Cup and the idol status of the All Blacks in France, the museum used rugby as a hook to reel in *le grand public*. The quai Branly offered a free live broadcast of the final match, after which visitors were invited to "découvrir autrement la Nouvelle-Zélande" by visiting *Maori* for free and attending various other events linked to the exhibition, such as a haka workshop (Musée du quai Branly, "Coupe"). These familiar

signifiers of the *Maori* poster were replicated in publicity for the rugby events, with the hei tiki replaced by the official World Cup rugby ball, which, conveniently, was also decorated with koru. The haka's fame in France was employed to attract potential visitors, with a promotional "flashmob haka" taking place in a busy *métro* station plastered with posters for the exhibition.<sup>26</sup> Using rugby as an initial attraction, *Maori* was proposed as a way to go behind surface impressions (haka, tattoos, Māori *rugbymen*) that French viewers may have gained from watching the All Blacks to provide a more rounded view of Māori and New Zealand.

As an expo *grand public*, *Maori* was a success in terms of attendance, receiving 160,000 visitors ("France Gives Back Toi Moko"). The success of the exhibition's mission in providing a more informed, contemporary view of Māori and New Zealand is more difficult to quantify. According to Mélandri, the *livre d'or* contained many positive responses, and visitors empathised with the key messages of the exhibition such as the continuation of Māori identity and traditions today ("Interview"). Mélandri perceived *émpathie* with Māori struggles amongst the French audience; according to the visitors' comments, "ce qui était le mieux compris c'était les questions identitaires, politiques, historiques et les questions de revendications identitaires" ("Interview").

Jean, who was present at the exhibition in Paris felt that "visitors probably did 'get' the main point about Māori survival today," but concluded that this was achieved mainly through the art, rather than the interpretation (220). Echoing Ireland's presentiments, Jean notes that "it appears that there was too much text and explanatory material and often the

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<sup>26</sup> A video of "Flashmob haka: les Māori dans le métro" is available on the quai Branly's YouTube account.

public got confused and overwhelmed” (220). An exhibition so enmeshed with New Zealand’s political and cultural setting undoubtedly represents an elevated risk of losing elements “in translation” when an exhibition is transferred from one setting to another. A Parisian museum audience accustomed to viewing objects with often minimal contextual information, or information placed at a distance from the object, might find the textual information even more “overwhelming” than an audience accustomed to Te Papa’s more textual approach. In Jean’s view, the success of the exhibition’s message seems to have occurred despite, not because of, the exhibition’s attempts to convey numerous, complex themes through interpretive material to an audience unfamiliar with New Zealand politics and history (220). The core message of tino rangatiratanga, therefore, seems to have been transmitted effectively in visual terms at least, and the French were able to gain a new perspective: Te Papa’s viewpoint on Māori identity.

When *Maori* opened at the quai Branly in October 2011, French media paid attention. The headline of *Le Monde* declared “La force vitale des Maori submerge le Quai Branly” (Mortaigne). Newspapers, arts magazines, and television and radio shows reported on the exhibition, frequently in relation to the repatriation debate and the planned return of the toi moko at the closure of the exhibition. The *têtes maories* debate and law had generated interest in the exhibition beyond the usual media coverage of a new international exhibition at one of Paris’ major museums. Paku, part of the museum’s contingent at the opening ceremony of *Maori* in Paris, recalled being blinded by camera flashes. Compared to previous international exhibitions that she had been involved in, the Te Papa curator observed that this show attracted an unusual level of attention.



For some critics, *Maori* succeeded in offering a contemporary, demystified vision of Māori culture to a French audience. A reviewer in *Le Figaro* considered the exhibition a welcome alternative to the vision of “ces Maoris réputés couverts de terribles tatouages et inventeurs du non moins terrible haka” (Bietry-Rivierre, “Haka”). As a reviewer in *Histoire* magazine put it, French knowledge of Māori “se résume bien souvent à quelques individus tatoués vêtus du maillot noir des All Black réalisant un haka avant de disputer un match de rugby. Une vision réductrice et schématique que le Quai Branly met à mal” (O. Thomas). *Maori* not only offered an informed view of Māori but of New Zealand, “deux terres... qui méritent d’être connues autrement que par le rugby, le haka et le kiwi, cette drôle de poule à long bec” (Bietry-Rivierre, “Les Maoris”).

The exhibition was perceived by French critics not only as an aesthetic or educational experience, but also as a “spiritual” one. For *Le Parisien*, the pounamu available to touch at the entrance to the exhibition “transmet dans la paume la force tranquille d’une culture... qui a su se maintenir envers et contre tout malgré la colonisation anglaise” (“Avant”). *Maori* is thus “plus qu’une exposition: une initiation” (“Avant”). Picking up on the theme of whakapapa, *Le Monde* argued that “si la civilisation des Maori, peuple premier, toujours vivant, de la Nouvelle-Zélande, a quelque chose à enseigner au monde, c’est que tout est interconnecté – les personnes, les objets animés ou inanimés, l’environnement” (Mortaigne). These responses seem to suggest that Māori concepts such as mauri and whakapapa, as well as the historical and political themes of the exhibition, were to some degree successfully conveyed to a French audience.

Many of the reviewers drew attention to the unconventional *carte blanche* given to Te Papa to curate *Maori*, an exhibition “livrée clé en main par la Nouvelle-Zélande” (Cachon). The quai Branly, *Le Figaro* reported, “a confié les clefs de son rez-de-chaussée au Te Papa

Tongarewa Museum de Wellington afin que les Maoris se présentent eux-mêmes” (Bietry-Rivierre, “Les Maoris”). Mortaigne, in *Le Monde*, noted that the Parisian scenography respected “à la lettre les desiderata des conservateurs néo-zélandais” (Mortaigne). For a number of critics, the freedom given to Te Papa led to an exhibition *hors-norme*, especially in its focus on identity and political themes. According to a review in *Beaux Arts*, “l’exposition du quai Branly ne ressemble à aucune autre. Confrontant trésors ancestraux et œuvres d’artistes contemporains, elle raconte de façon didactique et vivante l’identité du peuple maori, ses luttes comme ses victoires” (Geoffroy-Schneiter 138). Interweaving “passé, présent et futur” – for instance, displaying a modern waka ama alongside part of a traditional waka – was unusual and might not have worked, a *Le Monde* reviewer contended, “mais l’enthousiasme et le prosélytisme du Musée Te Papa donne son souffle à ce brassage” (Mortaigne). At one extreme, some of the reviews seemed to come away with a utopian vision of Māori society. According to a reviewer in *Le Parisien*, the exhibition demonstrates that Māori are “visionnaires... égalitaires, écologistes, et même à l’avant-garde des modes, comme en témoigne leur science ancestrale du tatouage” (“Avant”).

### **A change of heart?**

Between the symposium in 2008 and the opening of the *Maori* exhibition in 2011, Martin had changed his mind on the repatriation of the toi moko. Speaking soon after the opening of *Maori*, Martin presented the rationale for his earlier opposition. In an echo of his earlier fears of “erasing a full page of history,” Martin had explained that to “cut” a part of history made him uneasy:

“I mean, those heads are part of history. They have been in Europe for a very long time and they are significant traces of something that happened and, although what

happened is not a very happy event, it's always, I think, not a good thing to say 'well, this is a sad story, let's forget it.' That was my main reason" ("Maori Collection"). Nevertheless, Martin now supported their return "because I think that collections, museums, are very important but relations between [people] are more important, and I felt that this Repatriation Act was so important, was so significant for the Māori people" ("Maori Collection"). Despite his earlier qualms, Martin was "now very happy and very proud that those heads are going back to New Zealand" ("Maori Collection").

Not everyone was convinced by the quai Branly's change of tune, however. In a 2010 article in *Rue89*, an unnamed "conservateur de province" is quoted as complaining that "au quai Branly, il y a quelques ethnologues de bureau qui veulent conserver tous les objets. Jusqu'à il y a trois ans, le musée ne répondait pas aux requêtes des Maoris et faisait profil bas" (Lejeune).

The need to pass an exceptional law to return the heads would have no doubt quelled fears about a slippery slope toward the loss of collections. In 2012, the quai Branly's Marine Degli was careful to point out that the law "ne nous engage pas à restituer les momies à l'Égypte ou d'autres reliques ailleurs. La seule raison pour laquelle on va restituer ces têtes, c'est parce qu'il y a eu une revendication formulée propre à une culture sacrée, celle des Maoris" (cited in Lejeune).

In Martin's explanation of his change of heart, however, "relations" are identified as the key element. The decision to repatriate the seven heads in quai Branly's collection was imposed by legislation, but the relationship formed between Te Papa and the quai Branly seems to have led to a response above and beyond the scope of the law. It is possible that the face-to-face dialogue between Martin and Bennington at the 2008 symposium, and perhaps on earlier occasions, created the conditions that allowed for a strengthened relationship to

emerge from this potential conflict. As Bennington had predicted, the repatriation had provided the opportunity for strengthening relations between the museums, an opportunity Martin had taken up by welcoming a major exhibition curated by Te Papa –and, furthermore, granting Te Papa complete authority over the staging of the exhibition.

In 2006, the stance of the quai Branly, at least officially, was one of resistance to repatriation of *toi moko*. In the subsequent five years, professional, political and diplomatic influences seem to have contributed to a change in this official discourse. If the quai Branly had formerly sought to avoid dealing with Māori claims, as the *conservateur de province* claimed, Rouen's decision and the subsequent law change seem to have pushed the quai Branly into new territory: collaborating with Te Papa on the *Maori* exhibition, hosting the *toi moko* repatriation ceremony and returning its seven *toi moko*.

### **The repatriation ceremony**

The two stories, the repatriation and the exhibition, converged again on the day after *Maori's* closure, 23 January 2012, when the quai Branly played host to another type of exchange between New Zealand and France: the ceremony for the handover of twenty *toi moko* to the Te Papa delegation. The Muséum d'histoire naturelle de Rouen had already transferred its *toi moko* to Te Papa in a separate ceremony in 2011. The ceremony was organised separately from *Maori*: according to Paku, the two were not designed to coincide, but rather that it made sense economically to send one delegation to the two events. Their timing and location, however, tie the two together. Furthermore, the dynamics of the repatriation ceremony, analysed in detail in Natacha Gagne's "Affirmation et décolonisation: la

cérémonie de rapatriement par la France des toi moko à la Nouvelle-Zélande en perspective,” suggest certain parallels with *Maori* and offer another perspective on the relationship between Te Papa and the quai Branly.

The repatriation ceremony was hosted by the French in the museum’s théâtre Claude Lévi-Strauss, but once again Te Papa was given *carte blanche* for its organisation (Mélendri, “Interview”). As Gagné explains, although the French were officially hosting the proceedings, this was not an official ceremony conducted on French terms. Instead the ceremony followed the structure of a “traditional” hui, albeit with some significant alterations to accommodate the French participants (8). The manuhiri, or guests (made up of delegates from New Zealand, including representatives from Te Papa and the Karanga Aotearoa Repatriation Programme), for instance, took on certain roles in the ceremony usually performed by the hosts (12). Nevertheless, the ceremony placed the French in an unusual position, as the hosts of a proceeding that they were not familiar with, conducted mainly in an unfamiliar language (Māori), following Māori protocol. Rituals such as the transfer of koha and the hongi created moments of hesitation and a degree of confusion amongst the French participants (22). On their home ground – in an auditorium named after France’s most famous ethnologist – the hosts “parurent à quelques reprises plutôt décontenancés, ne sachant pas toujours comment réagir et quoi faire” (22). The ceremony, like the exhibition, had its unorthodox and sometimes awkward moments for its French participants. In both cases, accommodations were made on both sides to overcome some of the most significant differences separating the two institutions.

Despite the various barriers to comprehension, Gagné suggests the significance of the ceremony seems to have been, to a certain degree, “translated” for the French audience.

Gagné observed effects on the French audience similar to those of Catholic rites, and from the French reactions concluded that “on peut penser que les Māori ont bien réussi à transmettre le caractère sacré de la cérémonie et à transporter ainsi les Français présents dans l’assistance et sur la scène dans une atmosphère empreinte de religiosité” (18). While the entirety of the ritual was not translatable, the Māori participants “ont su créer une atmosphère solennelle empreinte de *tapu*, un sacralité qui était facilement décodable, même pour les non-initiés” (20). As in *Maori*, the presentation of Māori beliefs in the museum seems to have resulted in a sense of connection and empathy amongst many of the “non-initiés,” rather than alienation.

The repatriation ceremony brought Māori tradition into the heart of a European cultural establishment, not as ethnographic exhibit or entertainment, but as official protocol. As in the *Maori* exhibition, a Māori perspective on taonga and the attendant tikanga took precedence in a French setting. The effect of this “renversement” in both the exhibition and ceremony can be interpreted as a symbolic shift in power relations. During the ceremony, French hosts were transported into “l’univers māori,” creating, Gagné suggests, a symbolic “renversement du rapport politique en faveur des Māori” (20). The ceremony’s “inversion symbolique” allowed Māori to “affirmer leur *mana* en donnant à voir leur assurance, leur maîtrise du rituel, une culture encore bien vivante, des performances oratoires impressionnantes qui n’ont rien à envier à celles des hôtes français ” (20).

The Māori authority over the ceremony, Gagné argues, offered Māori the opportunity to “prendre une revanche,” not only by re-establishing mana and renewing of links with ancestors, but “en affirmant l’autorité et le désir d’autodétermination de tout un peuple après près de 200 ans de minorisation” (21). This “désir d’autodétermination” that can also be seen in *Maori*’s central theme, tino rangatiratanga. It is also embodied by Te Papa

itself, as an institution in which Māori curators and iwi have important roles in determining representations of Māori. According to Gagné, the repatriation ceremony “fut... l’occasion de se présenter dans des termes différents face à une ancienne puissance coloniale et ses institutions, dont les musées font partie” (Gagné 22). *Maori*, too, offered the opportunity for Māori to “se présenter dans des termes différents” in France. At least temporarily, the outside view of Māori in one French institution (quai Branly) was supplemented by another perspective, one of Māori identity as presented by Māori.

Gagné notes the possibility for the solemn ritual to reinforce the idea of “une supériorité morale,” a situation in which oppressed, especially indigenous, people are accorded a certain status, “péchant même parfois par l’essentialisme et par une sorte d’utopisme” (Gagné 22). Yet the ceremony does not seem to have been intended to demonstrate “une supériorité morale,” but was motivated by both protocol and the desire to acknowledge the handover officially. As Gagné describes, the success of the ceremony was considered “extrêmement importante,” because “the ritual has to be gone through if things are to be tika [correct]” (Salmond, cited in Gagné 22). Furthermore, an official ceremony is not only about “politeness” or “diplomacy,” but is a necessary part of actualising and solidifying a new relationship (Gagné 22). The relationship between Te Papa and the quai Branly, based on a dialogue that began in 2006, resulted in two events very different from what each might have accomplished alone. In both the exhibition and repatriation we can see a strengthening and deepening of this relationship through concrete action – and perhaps one answer to the question asked of Martin and Bennington in round tables in 2008: “How to reach a mutual understanding?”





## Conclusion

The notion of a successful dialogue suggests something civil and organised; a deliberate exchange of ideas leading to mutual understanding. Tracing the background to and staging of *Maori* at quai Branly, however, has revealed that the process of dialogue can also be circuitous and contentious. In the conversation around *biens culturels*, the personal and the political have important roles to play, and certain actors – in this case, the Muséum de Rouen – can move the topic of conversation in unexpected directions. The result of this back-and-forth is not necessarily the vaunted “mutual understanding,” but can be something closer to a compromise, a *rapprochement* of perspectives despite fundamental differences.

Conversation, as Appiah points out, “doesn’t have to lead to consensus about anything, especially not values; it’s enough that it helps people get used to one another” (cited in Phillips, “Museum of Art-Thropology” 19). The staging of *Maori*, by bringing Māori art and identity to a French audience, and Te Papa to the quai Branly, signals not the achievement of an idealised, harmonious dialogue across languages and cultures, but the opening of channels of communication that did not exist before. And while all reciprocal dialogue results in some kind of modification, or evolution of views, there is no guarantee that this opening round will have a sequel.

Two recent cases deliver mixed messages about France’s position on repatriation and indigenous perspectives in museums. In April 2013, a number of Hopi masks were auctioned in Paris despite the objections of the tribe, which argued that the masks were “spiritually imbued, sentient living beings” that should be returned to the Hopi (Ganteaume 106). Arguments on both sides of the debate contained echoes of *l’affaire des têtes maories*. In

private collections, the auctioneer contended, the masks “are no longer sacred” (Neret-Minet, cited in S. C. Moore 107). A consultant to the auctioneer, invoking the “slippery slope,” maintained that refusing to sell these masks for religious reasons would undermine the entire collection of the quai Branly (Dubois, cited in Elzas).

As in the *toi moko* case, the quai Branly is directly implicated in the Hopi mask controversy. The museum purchased one of the masks in the July auction, despite the Hopi requests for repatriation and their view that the masks should not be displayed or photographed (Mashberg). The purchase suggests some continuing inconsistencies within the museum’s concept of a “dialogue between cultures.” In a return to its original stance, the quai Branly appears to be attempting to create a dialogue with Hopi *culture* through objects, rather than with the *people* who have an attachment to the objects concerned. Recognising Hopi claims for sacred artefacts, of course, would trouble those in France concerned about the mass repatriation of objects from museum and private collections.

There is also evidence that the conversation concerning French museum collections and exhibitions is moving in a less contentious direction. In October 2013, the exhibition *Kanak: l’art est une parole (Kanak)*, opened at the quai Branly. Like *Maori*, *Kanak* takes place against the backdrop of a long-running repatriation struggle. The Kanak have long sought the return of the decapitated head of Chief Ataï to New Caledonia, but the repatriation has faced a number of obstacles. The precise location of Ataï’s head was shrouded in mystery until 2011, when it was “rediscovered” at the Musée de l’Homme (“Premier ministre”; Blanchard and Daeninckx). In July 2013, French Prime Minister Jean-March Ayrault promised that the head would return in the immediate future (“Premier ministre”). Unlike *Maori*, it does not seem that the *Kanak* exhibition will close neatly with a repatriation

ceremony, but the anticipated return of the head suggests that the toi moko case has had some impact on the French approach to the return of human remains from museums.

*Kanak* also represents the product of co-operation between curators. The curation of some 300 items relating to Kanak culture from European and New Caledonian collections was a joint effort between French ethnologist Roger Boulay and former director of New Caledonia's Centre Culturel Tjibaou, Emmanuel Kasarhérou. In a 2003 lecture in France, Kasarhérou had argued that "you should not imagine that by putting our objects into your museum you're letting us be the ones to talk about them" (cited in Price, *Paris Primitive* 176). As part of the *Kanak* exhibition, however, Kasarhérou would take up the position of *Chargé de mission pour l'outre mer au musée du quai Branly*, working within the French museum to create a collaborative exhibition. *Kanak*, with some alterations, will travel to New Caledonia in March 2014 to be exhibited at the Centre Culturel Tjibaou – another example of those "reciprocal, far-reaching, contemporary links" that might yet bring quai Branly to the world, and the world to quai Branly.

Te Papa, like the quai Branly, aims to be a site of "dialogue." At Te Papa, this aim is encapsulated by its mission statement to be a "forum" for the nation. Conversations, framed by the Mana Taonga principle, are conducted between museum insiders and those with a stake in the museum's collections and the narratives. The success of such a dialogue assumes the willingness and ability of curators and community members to communicate and to come to an agreement about the stories to be presented in iwi and community exhibitions – a process which can be fraught with difficulty, as Mallon has described. The balance between indigenous perspectives and Western anthropology at the level of display has been critiqued as uneven, with too much weight given to conventional exhibition

culture. However, it is Te Papa's willingness to attempt these dialogues that has drawn praise for the museum as an innovative institution. The nuances of this dialogue continue to be renegotiated through the development of new exhibitions such as *Tangata o le Moana: New Zealand and the People of the Pacific* (Mallon; Mallon, Māhina-Tuai, and Salesa), opened in 2007, and changes in the museum as a whole.

The museum's new CEO, Michael Houlihan, appointed in 2010, has overseen the development of a plan for "Te Papa of the Future." In September 2013, plans were announced for an offshoot of the museum located in Auckland, dubbed "Te Papa North," which may lead to new partnerships between the museum and its communities. As the museum's latest Statement of Intent indicates, "Te Papa is an organisation undergoing significant change" (Te Papa, "Statement of Intent 2012-15" 7); where this "significant change" will lead the museum remains to be seen. The *E Tū Ake* exhibition, and its staging in Paris in 2011-12, offers an encapsulation of Te Papa's exhibition style and aims at a time when the museum is beginning this significant transition.

As well as providing a "forum" for the nation to represent itself, Te Papa aims to represent New Zealand internationally by acting as a waharoa, "gateway," advancing the nation's reputation overseas (Te Papa, "Statement of Intent 2012-15" 20). The *Maori* exhibition highlights Te Papa's innovative practices in comparison to its European counterpart, as well as weaknesses in the museum's approach to exhibiting in a different cultural and linguistic context.

The staging of *Maori* is thus significant not only for the quai Branly, but for Te Papa in its role as waharoa. The *Maori* exhibition permitted Te Papa to add its side of the story to the repatriation debate in France, giving context to the repatriation claims as part of Māori beliefs and the reassertion of Māori identity. In addition, it brought exposure to taonga and

contemporary Māori art. Like the quai Branly, Te Papa's ability to "dialogue" is also limited by its circumstances: in Te Papa's case, by New Zealand's location as an insular country in the South Pacific. By collaborating with the quai Branly, Te Papa was able not to simply speak to New Zealanders about New Zealand identity, but to engage curators and museum visitors from a different national, social and cultural background in the conversation – opening the national forum to an international audience.

Museums can promote understanding – of science, art, history, and of the experiences of others – by acting as an intermediary for this knowledge. This knowledge is filtered by the museum, structured into exhibitions, and thus conveyed to its audience. To be a good intermediary, however, a museum needs good relationships: without outside perspectives, the museum exists in an echo chamber. According to Appiah, even viewing art that speaks from some place other than your own can lead to "imaginative engagement" – the beginning of a conversation. But this imaginative experience can be expanded, and the conversation reciprocated, through more profound and complex encounters with the experiences of others. Museum can be a "portal" (in the French concept) or "waharoa" (the New Zealand one) to others' art, histories, and worlds. How best to display these worlds is still debated, but it seems clear that the further a museum's connections reach, the more this portal expands.

As an institution, the concept of "engagement with the experience of ideas of others" does not imply that a museum must surrender its collections, or devalue its own knowledge of the objects in its care. Collaboration between "insider and outsider perspectives," is not a question of right and wrong, Ames reminds us, "it is the continuing interaction between these various perspectives that is important" (57). Museums can only present their own

points of view, with all the limitations that implies, and work in partnership with others to round out this perspective.

Both Te Papa and the quai Branly are subject to limitations imposed by their circumstances. The museums are expected to entertain as well as educate, please multiple audiences and draw tourists. Financial pressures, politics, and internal debates all have their part to play in dictating the museum's agenda. Each museum is not simply a dialogue between Western anthropology and indigenous perspectives, but the arena for debates over society, culture, history and identity.

At Te Papa, a policy of biculturalism is the chosen method for accommodating or keeping in check (depending on one's perspective) New Zealand's diverse, fragmented national identity. Museum biculturalism supposedly represents an approach that is acceptable from a museum *and* a community perspective, but it also has its detractors, who critique it as a simplistic and superficial response to a complex issue. At the quai Branly, there is not only a *mur végétal*, but a less permeable, protective *cultural* wall: museum *laïcité* as a barrier against the fragmentation of perspectives and loss of the museum's voice to a hypothetical cacophony of identity claims.

The museums' abilities to include multiple perspectives are thus circumscribed by a range of factors, but aspects of each museum suggest paths forward. At Te Papa, Mana Taonga offers a chance to let new perspectives in, if curators are willing to listen and are given the opportunity to undertake extended and complex negotiations. At the quai Branly, interactions with foreign museums, such as Te Papa, curators from "outside," such as Kasarhérou, and contemporary artists, like Pardington and Semu, reply to the lone voice of the *plateau* to create an animated conversation.

A successful conversation depends on a degree of reciprocity. The *Maori* exhibition suggests that some at Te Papa and the quai Branly, at least, are eager to engage in dialogue. At the quai Branly, indigenous curators, artists and representatives continue to make tracks through the museum's dark "forest" of objects. Meeting them on equal terms might just lead to some interesting conversations.





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