NEW ZEALAND’S IDENTITY COMPLEX: A CRITIQUE OF CULTURAL PRACTICES AT THE MUSEUM OF NEW ZEALAND TE PAPA TONGAREWA

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Produced on acid-free paper
DECLARATION

This is to certify that

(i) the thesis comprises only my own work,
(ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to other material used,
(iii) the thesis is less than 100 000 words in length, exclusive of figures, bibliographies, appendices and footnotes.
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Chapter One

Making a Spectacle of Ourselves:

An Introduction to the New Museum
1. Day One: Anticipating the New Museum

On Valentine’s Day, February 14 1998, the Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa (hereafter known by its brand name, Te Papa) opened its doors for its first day of business. Having been promised the romance of a ‘new deal’ with its national museum, and after nearly a decade and a half in the planning, public anticipation was high. Te Papa is one of the world’s largest museum project in recent years, and the most significant project in New Zealand’s cultural sector for decades. ‘Day One’ celebrations encapsulated much of what lay in store. For the 30 000 who gathered on the museum’s wide waterfront terrace (participants in a so-called ‘queuing festival’), it would have been quite apparent that Te Papa intended a radically different experience from its predecessor, from other New Zealand museums, and from any other museum in the world. New Zealand has some 500 registered museums including major regional museums in Auckland, Christchurch and Dunedin. Generally reflecting the colonial heritage of local areas, New Zealand’s museums typically display examples of Maori art and culture, colonial voyages and shipwrecks, and settler history (chiefly labour histories related to the timber, mining and farming industries). They collect and classify the natural environment (particularly birds, marine life, molluscs and insects), and also often feature war shrines and memorials. Though it was anticipated that aspects of these topics would
exist in the new museum, pre-opening publicity fostered an expectation that they would be conceptualised and presented in exciting and novel ways.

Crowds waited to elbow their course through the new building’s five levels, twenty-one exhibitions and four ‘discovery centres’, set on a site New Zealand Geographic approximated as (in national parlance) ‘the equivalent size of three rugby fields’.  

Visitors were marshalled into lines marked by hay bales, providing rustic seating that brought a whiff of the nation’s farming roots to the capital city. The opening ceremony was scrupulous in its cultural diversity. The array of performers that entertained the crowd included Pacific Island dancers, a gospel choir, buskers, a Maori-pop hybrid music group, and an opera singer. Following official speeches from Pakeha and Maori (in English and Maori), Howard Morrison, New Zealand’s best-known Maori entertainer, sang the national anthem. Later, the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra performed the Te Papa Suite, a specially commissioned fanfare composed by a young Wellingtonian. The first official visitors through the front doors were children, a Maori boy and a Pakeha girl, who crossed the threshold of the nation’s new cultural frontier holding the hands of Sir Peter Blake, the helmsman of New Zealand’s yachting successes. Then-Prime Minister Jenny Shipley hailed the museum as symbolising ‘the unique mosaic of culture that is New Zealand’.  

In sum, visitors witnessed a carefully orchestrated display of cultural complementarity that evenly favoured Maori and Pakeha, male and female, young and old, city and country, high and popular culture.

Several key moments that day may have prompted some misgivings, however. Day One promotion made a point of explaining to visitors waiting on hay bales that their seating was only temporary; the bales would soon travel south to provide feed for Marlborough farmers most affected by a drought severely affecting the east coast.  

In the face of widely publicised information that the new museum had cost $317 million of public monies, the token hay bales may have suggested a skewed allocation of Government resources. Although the Day One celebrations promoted the idea of a cosy, home-grown institution, many in the crowd would have been aware that the ‘Te Papa/Our Place’ brand and thumbprint logo alone had cost taxpayers a further $200 000.  

In the wider scheme, it
may have struck many as anomalous that successive Governments had proved willing to fund what is reputedly the nation’s most expensive-ever building. While over the previous decade Governments practised an unwavering commitment to privatisation and low public spending, the new museum arose on the harbour-front as a monumental statement of immoderation. After the long delays of the queue, the moment when visitors finally edged into the museum’s foyer may have disappointed. The first exhibit on view was a large, smooth 1.1 tonne granite ball supported by a column of water. Visitors, encouraged to touch the ball, found themselves tracing the engraved names of the museum’s major corporate sponsors. For most New Zealanders absent from the museum ceremonies, initial impressions arrived via a prime time TV special that evening. As viewers admired Te Marae, New Zealand’s first national marae (the customary Maori ceremonial complex that includes a meeting-house and forecourt for orators), delight may have been dampened when it was used on that first night for a live draw of the national lottery.

At dawn that day, Te Marae played a pivotal part in a more reverential ceremony. On the shoreline of Wellington harbour the crews of 30 waka taua (war canoes) prepared for the arrival of Te Aurere, which, accompanied by seventeen smaller waka ama (outrigger canoes), carried tribal representatives from New Zealand and Hawaii. In a less orchestrated moment of cultural complementarity, Te Aurere was towed part of the way by the police launch Lady Elizabeth III after encountering difficulties against an outgoing tide and strong wind. Nevertheless, the moment when Te Aurere and the waka ama paused in the harbour and signalled their arrival with the sound of putatara (shell trumpet) was triumphant. A putatara responded from Te Marae and the waka taua launched from the shore to meet Te Aurere. As the large waka entered the shelter of the beach, the sound of haka powhiri (welcoming challenge) burst forth from those gathered. The crew on board Te Aurere responded with a return haka. Te Papa’s tikanga Maori (customary knowledge) coordinator then delivered a resonating karanga (call) from Te Marae to welcome the waka onshore. The accumulated visitors promenaded from the shoreline to the museum’s walkway, before ascending an external stairway to Te Marae. Once inside, the manuhiri (visitors) were promptly issued with a wero (challenge) from tangata
whenua (local tribe). In return, manuhiri sang a waiata (traditional song) before finally observing tangata whenua with the hongi (greeting). The solemnity and antiquity of this highly scripted ritual blessing would stand in stark contrast to the popular entertainments later that day.

It is quite curious, on first reckoning, that the museum had not been opened one week earlier to coincide with Waitangi Day. This public holiday, ostensibly New Zealand’s national day, commemorates the Treaty of Waitangi, New Zealand’s semi-constitutional contract signed in 1840 between Maori chiefs and Crown representatives. However, highly fraught protests in the years prior to 1998 meant that a Waitangi day opening might have proven politically hazardous. That year was no exception, as events conspired to form a disconcerting prelude to Te Papa’s dawn ceremony. Opposition leader Helen Clark (now Prime Minister) and then-Prime Minister Jenny Shipley travelled to Waitangi for the ceremony. In the days before the event, local kaumatua (elders) had extensively debated the right of the women to speak on Te Tii marae. The kaumatua (already bristling at deputy Prime Minister Winston Peters’ threat that funding for the event was at risk unless sufficient English was used during the commemorations) eventually made a decision to allow Clark and Shipley to speak. At the dawn ceremony, Clark took her place in the front row of the whare-wananga (meeting house) with the visiting speakers – a position normally reserved for men. Affronted Te Arawa visitors moved to the opposite end of the room. When Clark was invited to address those gathered, activist Titewhai Harawira interrupted. She avowed that no Pakeha woman should speak on the marae if Maori women did not enjoy the same privilege. In the face of this challenge none of the elders present defended Clark’s entitlement to speak or the promise they had assured. In tears, Clark declined to speak and stood down. She later said that the incident was distressing, and that there are ‘a lot of internal issues that Maori have to debate there, before any meaningful debate between Maori and Pakeha at Waitangi on Waitangi Day can go on’. Only a week after Clark’s difficulties, Shipley’s Government opened the brand new museum featuring a fully functioning national marae with a female CEO, Cheryll Sotheran, at the helm. It is within this fraught context that Maori tradition is mobilised as an essential facet of the new national museum.
This unwieldy nexus of popular spectacle, candid commercialism and state-promoted biculturalism introduces Te Papa as unique. Indeed, if the museum is difficult to categorise as any traditional ‘type’, this ambiguity is instructive. In the material produced by and about Te Papa, the recurring theme is that the functions of the museum are directed less by research or collections than by the perceived desires of its constituencies. Science, natural history, social history, ethnography, art and entertainment are combined in an institution that is part cultural centre, children’s museum, educational institution, research base, and amusement arcade. While these various inputs point to an idiosyncratic institution, they nonetheless denote important issues that bear on a much wider scope. In the remainder of this introduction I will clarify the tangled effects described so far in order to introduce Te Papa’s major precepts. The two key priorities evident from Day One celebrations – that Te Papa desires broad public approval, and that it pledges strong support for Maori culture – are not themselves visionless or flawed foundations for a new museum. The critical question, however, is whether these main concerns, when entangled in practice, provide for a valuable and meaningful visitor experience. This issue is important not only because it represents the basis of any encounter with Te Papa, but also because it offers lessons for the larger museum world.

Methodologically, how can one set about analysing a major, multifaceted contemporary cultural institution like Te Papa? There are a range of ways of conducting such analyses, some of which are particular to the specific institution in question, and some of which derive from choices that result in inevitably partial accounts with specific emphases. This thesis brings together a number of approaches usually dispersed across the disciplines of history, anthropology, art history, media studies, architecture and indigenous studies. This interdisciplinary methodology is characteristic of Cultural Studies. Recent years have seen a growth in the examination of museums outside of museology. These analyses often seek, among other objectives, to consider the larger cultural and political ‘work’ performed by museums. It is to this field of inquiry that my thesis seeks to make a contribution. Among the authors involved in this pursuit, three stand out for their influence on this thesis. These are Tony Bennett, James Clifford, and Barbara
Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. In the following paragraphs I describe their distinct approaches, and in doing so specify the three major thematic concerns informing my method of analysis.

Tony Bennett’s work is primarily concerned with exploring the relationship between the museum’s ‘exhibitionary complex’ and specific governmental programs. As a strong advocate of the field of Cultural Policy Studies, Bennett is particularly concerned with the way that political and economic policies bear on museum practices. In the preparation of this thesis, significant attention was devoted to excavating and examining the policy material that initially conceptualised and legislated the museum, and has, since 1998, monitored its performance. In pursuing strongly policy-based research, I have utilised several key resources. I made frequent use of Te Papa’s own policy material housed in its Te Aka Matua Library. Outside the museum, I obtained policy material from the National Library, the Department of Internal Affairs, the Ministry for Arts and Culture, and the New Zealand Tourism Board. Additionally, I procured internal documents from Te Papa staff, past and present. I also carried out recorded interviews with Joe Doherty (poutakawaenga), Arapata Hakiwai (curator) and Cath Nesus (bicultural policy), and Hineihaea Murphy (National Services). These were conducted on a one-on-one basis, and were based on questions set out in writing beforehand. I also took handwritten notes at the time of the interviews. As a result of these activities, this thesis is thoroughly grounded in the policy prerogatives governing Te Papa.

James Clifford’s work takes a more fluid approach to the analysis of relations between museums and their constituencies. Clifford has proposed that, particularly for postcolonial societies, museums might act as ‘contact zones’ that can mediate between indigenous peoples and settler populations. Clifford’s work encourages attention to the reconciliatory potential of indigenous peoples’ performance of traditions and ‘stories’ within the public sphere. As part of my research in these areas, I conducted a reasonably comprehensive review of the literature on Maori tradition and custom, and on New Zealand politics, particularly as it concerned issues associated with Maori sovereignty. In order to grasp the state of affairs of Maori involvement with New Zealand museums, I
also sought cross-cultural comparisons. Following, I visited several key museums located in Australia, the U.S, and Canada. Additionally, a four-week period in 1999 spent at the Australian National University’s visiting scholar program, ‘National Museums, Negotiating Histories’ was especially useful in this regard. This experience allowed me to grasp the unique challenges Te Papa faces in the area of meaningful Maori involvement.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s writing on museums (and Te Papa specifically) is valuable for the way it draws attention to the political and cultural peculiarities of museum products (chiefly exhibitions and public programs) as they are shaped by the tourist industry. Her interdisciplinary mode of exhibition analysis closely mirrors my own, particularly as it seeks to explore meanings and interpretations that are somewhat speculative and imaginative. This mode of analysis has required my own first-hand interpretation. At each of my four extended visits to Wellington I took extensive notes, collected relevant materials and photographs, and spoke informally with Te Papa ‘hosts’. This research process was purposefully protracted and reflective, as I sought to understand, within the context of institutional policy, and political and cultural factors, how Te Papa’s exhibitions might be variously produced and received.

As a result of this combination of detailed policy examination, a critical appraisal of political context, and comprehensive exhibition analysis, I have developed a method of analysis that is uniquely fitting to this specific institution. At the same time, I envisage that my approach has a good deal of commonality with others performing political and cultural critiques of the museum. Although this thesis is sometimes sympathetic to the concerns of the ‘new museology’, it is not strictly museological by any means. Instead, it seeks to explore, from a position ‘outside’ the museum, both the political and cultural factors that have shaped its style and practices, and the real and potential public outcomes that may result from these.

2. Uncharted Waters: Te Papa’s Significance in an International Context
Both historically and in the present, the museum represents a distinct and unique cultural formation. It provides a locus in which history and material objects, science and entertainment, race and identity, experts and interpretations, and visitors and expectations come together with a visibility rare in other domains. An analysis of Te Papa crystallises, arguably more acutely than other museums, key issues in museology, cultural policy studies and cultural studies. This investigation would not be so pressing if Te Papa had not become the subject of proclaimed importance. Such claims have been made in three overlapping spheres. One is the official congratulation that credits the museum as a synecdoche for a range of ideas. At the time of Te Papa’s initial planning, Prime Minister David Lange promised that the museum would ‘speak for New Zealand’. In 1994 Prime Minister Jim Bolger called Te Papa ‘a symbol of the nation’s economic recovery’. The Governor-General designated it ‘our generation’s most monumental statement’. Cheryll Sotheran called a visit to Te Papa ‘a pilgrimage’. Te Papa’s current Chairman, Roderick Deane names Te Papa ‘truly one of the great museums of the world’. The international print media also gave Te Papa glowing reviews. The New York Times called it a ‘spectacular museum’; The Times reported ‘a great success’; The Glasgow Herald found ‘something for everyone’; The Weekend Australian described it – presumably complimentarily – as ‘a leviathan symbol of the nation’s self-awareness’. Inevitably, the flurry of early accolades focused on the museum’s outward show, with little serious criticism of its larger institutional philosophy.

A second sphere in which Te Papa has received significant praise is amongst museum professionals and critics. Internationally, one of its pre-eminent supporters is British Science Museum Director Sir Neil Cossons:

One of the great things about the Museum of New Zealand is that it is a new museum that has managed to discard a lot of the hangups that are no longer relevant to its future... It has been able to disregard all the old irrelevant academic
boundaries that tend to restrict the way in which museums think. It will be a mould-breaker internationally.  

Canadian museum consultant Catherine Cole reported that ‘what’s happening in New Zealand is a model for many of us. I have seen the promotional material…and I think that what they are doing there is fantastic’. America museum consultant Elaine Gurian wrote that Te Papa ‘gives hope to all of us in the museum world’, and that it ‘has profound implications in the ways in which we in the museum business will do our work in the future’. Canadian Museum of Anthropology Director Michael Ames views Te Papa as ‘an important example for all of us to consider, not so much as an example we should all borrow, because it is specific to the situation there, but as an example of how to show that there is light at the end of the tunnel’. Dawn Casey, Director of the new National Museum of Australia (hereafter NMA), asserted that it is important that we recognise,

…the growing importance of museums as places which must examine and illustrate issues of national historical importance in ways that give them contemporary relevance. This is reflected, to cite one example, in the extraordinary interest in New Zealand which greeted the opening of Te Papa… The success of Te Papa also confirms the value of…sharing information and learning from each other’s experiences to deliver successful outcomes in providing world-class attractions of which all can feel proud.

Prominent American museum and tourism analyst Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has stated that Te Papa ‘is a bold and innovative venture that has to be taken very seriously from an international perspective’. She furthermore declares that,

… one of the most extraordinary features of Te Papa is that it is so, if you will, family friendly and child friendly and I think adults are simply not used to a major institution making itself intelligible and appealing to such a wide spectrum by
way of age... I think that it is possible to reach a wide audience and be true to one’s mission, and in my view Te Papa does that. The arrangement of new ideas about museum practice. Anthony Wright, Director of the Canterbury Museum and Chair of Museums Aotearoa, writes:

Worldwide, there’s no more completely well thought out model of the (for the moment) ‘new’ museum than our own Te Papa. The team there have laboured mightily and produced an experience which has shaken the foundations of the museum world. Although less enthusiastic, John McDonald also affirms that, ‘there is probably no single institution anywhere in the world that better represents the triumph of so-called “new museology”’. It is important, in a scholarly sense, that these claims made by a wide-ranging group of museum critics should be tested.

Te Papa’s assertion of its own importance, made chiefly in statistical terms, forms a third sphere. It claims to be the most visited museum in Australasia. The museum’s first year visitation target of 723 000 was achieved in only three months; in its first year, around 2 million had visited. By June 2000 the number of visits reached four million, eclipsing New Zealand’s population. By June 2001, three and a half years after opening, the number had reached 5 million. Although Te Papa proudly reported that over 1.5 million of these were international tourists, it has reminded the public that its ‘first responsibility is to the people of New Zealand’. Further satisfaction is taken from in-house visitor surveys cite that 93% of Te Papa’s ‘customers’ consistently rate their experience in the range from ‘satisfied’ to ‘extremely satisfied’. Moreover, the museum has attracted visitors whose age, gender and ethnicity very closely mirrors that of larger population. This study has been undertaken in a formative period when visitor statistics are a main cause for celebration – and the chief weapon in the museum’s defence.
As thousands of visitors are added to existing millions, the future will unavoidably see a loss of statistical momentum, along with the meaning and persuasive power that has accompanied it. Less empirical, more philosophical forms of evaluation will grow in importance. Nonetheless, these figures remain consequential. Why has a museum whose location and status might normally place it at the margins of the museum world captured the imagination the way it has? New Zealand is certainly not immune or indifferent to major Western cultural shifts, but nor is it any kind of centre. New Zealand is, as Ross Gibson has written of Australia, ‘both a long way from the world (as it has always been) and it is nowhere in particular, in the swirl of electronic information and entertainment’. Moreover, Te Papa has appeared at a time when much political and cultural criticism positions both nations and museums as categories of decline. MacDonald and Fyfe characterise museums as ‘bound up with much that is heralded to be nearing its end – stability and permanence, authenticity, grand narratives, the nation-state, and even history itself’. Theories of globalisation suggest that national borders are becoming immaterial in an age when, as a result of new communications technologies, new information flows or ‘scapes’ move around various continually travelling and disjunct perspectives. As trans-national markets, populations, and media unify and re-spatialize the world the unvarying, monolithic national museum might be seen as outmoded, far from the cutting edge of cultural innovation. The post-modern celebration of surface and speed over depth and contemplation makes little provision for the temporal aura traditionally proscribed to museums. Formulaic modes of history in the national museum often involve the construction of an evolutionary procession through ‘national time’, from ancient origins to an illuminated present. For many commentators, this construction is hopelessly unacquainted with a more recent pluralised, relativised post-modern historical critique. The object-as-proof is regarded by some as a sentimental vestige of the industrial order that has greatly reduced significance in a contemporary culture that celebrates the pleasures of popular culture and the virtual quality of information.

An analysis of Te Papa at this juncture provides a fresh standpoint from which to consider the confounding of scholarly opinion that characterises museums as endangered
or irrelevant. Worldwide, museums are experiencing an unprecedented, extended boom. In the U.S between $4 and $5 billion has been spent on new museums in the last decade.\textsuperscript{36} 600 new American art museums have been built since the 1970s.\textsuperscript{37} According to Neil Cossons, a popularly quoted statistic – that in Britain a new museum opens on average every two weeks – has remained consistent since the 1970s.\textsuperscript{38} Accounts like these, dominated by attention to North American and Western European museums, have become quite familiar in museum literature. Yet equally instructively, museums have also flourished recently in Australasia, where they have not received equivalent scholarly treatment. Over the last decade, Australia and New Zealand have opened new national museums in their capitals. Melbourne has a new Immigration Museum and a new Melbourne Museum, the Museum of Sydney opened, and Perth has a new Western Australian Maritime Museum. Christchurch will soon open a new art museum, and the Auckland Museum is undergoing major redevelopments. Quite apart from numbers, of vital importance is that while museums originated in Europe and proliferated with colonial expansion, in the current period they are being used in Australasia as a reinvigorated postcolonial form through which social identities are constructed, related and distinguished in national and global arenas. Moreover, these museums are being reinvigorated the same forces that foresaw their demise: global capitalism, in the form of cultural tourism, and post-modern, virtual information, utilised in new modes of display. The convergence of new technologized museum practices and the recognition of ethnic difference has become a defining feature of Australasian museums. Former Melbourne Museum director George MacDonald suggests they share a unity of purpose characterised by a ‘marketplace’ of perspectives and experiences, and ‘negotiated’ rather than ‘official’ histories.\textsuperscript{39} The renewal of the long-established cultural form of the museum offers considerable food for thought for the intersecting fields of critical museum studies and postcolonial nation-formation. So too does the strength of reaction – both positive and negative – to the initiatives at these new museums. Along with Te Papa, Australian museums have not escaped criticism for their similar emphasis on an enlarged indigenous presence and new technological innovations. Scorn has been directed particularly at the Museum of Sydney, although the Melbourne Museum and NMA have also received criticism.\textsuperscript{40} Yet it is Te Papa over other museums that stands as the most
far-reaching experiment in new museological practices, and has correspondingly attracted the greatest attention.

3. Identifying Te Papa’s Innovations/Circumscribing Spheres of Criticism

This section introduces Te Papa’s three main areas of innovation and my corresponding points of critique. These topics organise the structure of this thesis, comprising one chapter each. First, however, I want to introduce the primary literature to which this thesis responds and contributes. This material can be grouped into three categories, each of which has a different audience and degree of consequentiality. First is a swathe of generally brief, descriptive, uncritical journalistic reviews. Among this category are several articles in art magazines suspicious of Te Papa’s capacity to display the national art collection. Among print media reviews, two pieces stand out for their incisiveness and impact. Denis Dutton’s piece, first published in the *New Zealand Herald*, disparages the irreverent presentation of the art collection, the nostalgic excesses of some displays, and the ‘obstinately provincial’ tone of the museum’s overall scheme. The other, written by Theodore Dalrymple for the *New Statesman*, likens Te Papa to an amusement arcade, deems it ‘the institutional exemplar of the lowest common denominator turned into official cultural policy’, and further cautions that Te Papa’s practices ‘stands as a terrible warning to the rest of the world’.

This second article was particularly influential in the decision by Prime Minister Helen Clark (who took office in late 1999 and is also Minister for Arts and Culture, responsible for the museum) to order a peer review of the museum. A second international review, commissioned by Te Papa itself, was wide-ranging and suggested future improvements to its quality of research and the public realisation of its bicultural philosophy. The peer reviews and internal documents that engage with the museum’s philosophy and operations form a second category. More permissive criticism appeared in the years
preceding Te Papa’s opening when it remained at the conceptual level. Key papers by Directors of the previous National Museum and National Art Gallery (before the restructuring that created Te Papa fused the two institutions) form a vigorous dialogue over the new museum’s infrastructure. The most contentious aspect was the reduction of the National Art Gallery to one department in the greater Te Papa institution, making New Zealand ‘the only developed country without a national gallery listed in the phone book’. Additionally, several early papers from museum affiliates attend to the implications of the Treaty of Waitangi for Te Papa. A heavy Treaty emphasis in Te Papa’s National Services documents relating to bicultural management suggests that the earlier speculative papers were influential. However, these more recent documents generally address biculturalism as a pragmatic principle of museum administration and avoid more wide-ranging, philosophical approaches.

A third category encompasses the scholarly articles on Te Papa. The museum’s creation has significantly increased the volume of literature on museology in New Zealand. Several articles on Te Papa appeared prior to its opening. An article by Ben Dibley provides a useful analysis of Te Papa’s planned concept, but is limited by a reliance on policy material. A ‘hypothetical tour’ of the new museum visualized by Conal McCarthy is speculative and arbitrary in its methodology. An article by Jock Phillips, who designed the Pakeha social history exhibitions, offers a useful background to several exhibitions and stands out from internal museum documents due to its scholarly nature. Conference proceedings by Ian Wedde, Te Papa’s ‘concept leader’ for art, which provide a disordered explanation of the museum’s display philosophy, are less enlightening. Since Te Papa’s opening, contributions have been varied in focus. An article by Charlotte MacDonald makes some trenchant points, but its brevity and wide scope means that it offers only an overview. An incisive piece by historian Peter Munz charging Te Papa with censorship of its Maori gallery appeared to surprisingly little fanfare. An article by Margaret Jolly includes some interesting observations, particularly with regard to the Pacific Island exhibits. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett contains comments about Te Papa and New Zealand’s wider tourist aspirations in her book Destination Culture. E. H Gurian and Pete Bossley provide architectural accounts of Te Papa. Paul Tapsell’s
doctoral thesis makes an important contribution to the subject. He argues a strident tribal perspective of Maori involvement in New Zealand museums, including a scathing criticism of Te Papa’s bicultural concept. A doctoral thesis by James Gore provides a comparative account of the histories of New Zealand and Australia’s National Museums. The documentary film Getting to Our Place, which reveals the often-contentious debates in the lead-up to the museum’s opening day, also offers entertaining insights. Finally, an article by the present author examining the problematic construction of national identity in Parade (Te Papa’s now-terminated art-in-society exhibition) provides a valuable accompaniment to this thesis. While these sources collectively provide a sense of the different issues pertaining to Te Papa, there lacks, in sum, an analysis that is independent and in-depth.

As the following chapter outlines indicate, this thesis performs its critique more thoroughly and in different ways than others who have written about Te Papa. While museums are spaces for education, research, publication, conservation and storage, my thesis primarily focuses on Te Papa’s exhibitions (for the location and layout of these exhibitions, see figure 2: Te Papa floor plan, level 2, p. 38; figure 3: Te Papa floor plan, level 4, p. 39). As the ‘soul’ of a museum experience, it is exhibits that project meaning, encourage certain constructions of national selfhood, and produce particular conceptions of place and history. The policy frameworks informing exhibits will be combined with their material complexity, which includes the objects themselves, exhibition design, architecture, and additional information conveyed through brochures, audio and video material, interactive media, and captioning. My criticisms, directed towards a wide set of issues and problems relating to Te Papa’s philosophy and practice, explore the ways that the museum is most flawed in the very spheres it claims exceptionality. Te Papa acts as a vibrant case study for three crucial sets of debates, involving museums and the public, museums and historical scholarship, and museums and indigenous participation. In introducing the three areas of investigation next, I consider the different semiotic inflections that can be read in the brand name Our Place. This exercise highlights how the different areas of innovation hang together in the ‘total concept’.
a. Making Heritage Popular: Te Papa’s ‘New Deal’

Te Papa’s first innovation, encapsulated in its Day One celebrations, involves a ‘new deal’ between the museum and its public, which it variously conceives as citizens, communities, tourists, sponsors and consumers. Of these, Te Papa’s chief allocation of resources and priorities is arguably geared towards realising domestic visitors as nation-bearing citizens. Foremost, then, the brand-name *Our Place* positions the museum as a microenvironment for the nation and evokes ingratiating notions of home and belonging. As one writer affirmed, ‘A lot of what’s on display may well be meaningless to people from overseas, but that’s alright by me because it truly is Our Place’. The museum’s thumbprint logo also communicates an infatuation with identity and the unique mark citizens have culturally imprinted on the nation’s geographical space. By eschewing a formal ‘Museum’ title, *Our Place* also downplays the distinction between the museum’s traditional exclusive aura and the routine sites of daily life – a recent Te Papa publication promotes the museum as ‘a mirror on our [New Zealanders’] lives’. This imitative principle aims to efface the (arguably inescapable) distance between the everyday social life of the nation and its representation in the museum. The idea of a transparent two-way flow between cultural representation (‘expresses and recognises’) and public participation (‘provides the means…to contribute’) is legislated in the museum’s Act, which states that the Board shall:

*Endeavour to ensure both that the Museum expresses and recognises the mana [authority] 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.*

Embedded in this apparently straightforward directive is the vital idea that the museum should *express cultural identity*, rather than, say, ‘display heritage’, ‘showcase antiquities’, or ‘record history’. The chosen terms indicate a preference for the communicative and the subjective over the representative and the objective. Indeed,
‘telling stories’ has become a favoured idiom of new museums, consistent with a re-conceptualisation of their root function as *mediums of communication*. Stories denote a shift towards emotion, empathy and personal participation, away from intellectual concerns about accuracy that characterise institutional authority. A language metaphor also indicates that the museum aims to discursively rearticulate cultural meaning and national history as multi-accentual. Attention to ‘voices’ and ‘stories’ allows museums to sidestep charges of didacticism by encouraging groups to ‘speak for themselves’ in the parlance of their collective memory. For a new museum aiming for wide accessibility and popularity, the universality and inalienability of identity as an overarching framework has broad appeal. Everyone ‘has’ an identity, or can be prompted towards ‘searching for’ or ‘rediscovering’ one. The indeterminate, exploratory nature of identity allows Te Papa to frame core programs and exhibitions – and its own institutional life – as revelatory and future-oriented. An inscription on the museum’s observation area looking out on the Wellington hills reads ‘This is my wakening up, my camp, my resting place along the never ending lines that cross my world’. A promotional postcard calls Te Papa ‘an amazing adventure – one in which all New Zealanders are travellers’. Te Papa promotes itself as a *vessel* in both senses of the word: it is a container for valued treasures and a vehicle for collective self-understanding.

In this latter role, Te Papa has been largely informed by recent thinking during the 1980s and 1990s about the social function of museums. This critical museum literature, most influentially expressed in Peter Vergo’s collection, *The New Museology*, criticises conventional museology for being too focused on methods over purposes. The ‘new museology’ emphasises a shift from a collections-centred philosophy to one that is relationship-oriented. Caroline Reinhardt summarises these changes:

There is something happening behind the scenes at the museum. A revolution has taken place in its philosophy, which would like to see the glass cases smashed. Today’s museum aims to be genuinely populist. It welcomes – indeed seeks out – all sectors of the community, and eschews anything that smacks of elitism. Explanatory material (preferably using state-of-the-art technology) is pitched at
the simplest possible level. And, above all, the new museum seeks to pull its head out of the historical sand to address issues in the contemporary world. The buzzwords are ‘access and relevance’.  

The ‘ecomuseum’ movement that developed in Europe from the late 1960s articulates an allied set of concerns. As Peter Davis delineates in *Ecomuseums*, the concept of home, whether conceived in physical, societal, historical, or psychological terms, is vital. Attention to locality, often encapsulated in miniaturised ‘living ecosystems’ and urban environments, is positioned as a remedy to the universalist program of the traditional museum. Together, the doctrines of the ‘ecomuseum’ and ‘new museology’ are reflected in Te Papa’s new modes of exhibiting and viewing. In order to nurture a sense of the visitor’s place in the world, museums deploy colourful, loud, immersive displays, touch-screen games, ‘simulation rides’, children’s ‘discovery centres’, and actively obliging ‘hosts’.

The desire to attract a mass audience through new modes of display is also driven by economic necessity. A strong emphasis on self-generated income, commercial sponsorship, and an active relationship with leisure and tourist industries constitutes Te Papa’s obligatory corporate mode. The constant struggle to win visitors’ hearts, minds and currency sees a broadening of ideas about what constitutes ‘culture’ worthy of museum support. Exhibitions not only popularise historical topics, but also historicize popular topics (such as Te Papa’s ‘Star Trek’, Punk music and ‘Lord of the Rings’ retrospectives). Te Papa embodies a belief that cultural services are best accessed through market mechanisms, and following, that cultural outputs can be primarily evaluated in fiscal terms. Te Papa’s twin ‘corporate principles’ of ‘customer focus’ and ‘commercial positivity’ are conceived in complementary terms: satisfied visitors in large numbers attracts corporate investment and creates its own financial reward. Income, in turn, is channelled back into exhibitions, programs and display techniques that feed a public demand for new forms of ‘info-tainment’ satisfaction.
Chapter Two is organised into two major parts. The first backgrounds how Te Papa was conceptualised against traditional museum models. A newly accommodating institutional style was a vital consideration for the Project Development Team (PDT) who conceptualised the museum in the mid-1980s. They imagined a ‘modern Pacific’ museum distanced from the stuffy elitism stereotypically associated with European institutions. The PDT averred that the ‘forbidding monumentality of the traditional museum has no place in the life of a modern Pacific nation, aware and proud of its identity, nurturing and caring of its diverse cultures’. For the PDT, a properly native institution would gain wide relevance by repudiating significant aspects of the imperial museum form. The British Museum, for instance, when caricatured as a monumental storehouse for the ruins of Empire, provided an opposite for the creation of Te Papa as an open, informal site for postcolonial reinvention. In this conceptual shift, the new institution would aim to pull apart the relationship between heritage and the cultural and class distinctions that New Zealand inherited in its historical imaginary as ‘Britain of the South Pacific’. The foregrounding of Maori culture in representations of nationhood was clearly central in the strategic rectification of New Zealand’s geo-historical location in the Pacific. A resurgent indigenous presence could provide the museum with a ‘deep past’ that, when placed alongside an emboldened Pakeha sense of culture, promises to at last realise the nation’s ‘true’ identity. Such representational tactics are important, since national museums, as well as being principal tourist sites in themselves, embody a centralised, distilled national essence that provides a surrogate for travel. The need for an identifiable ‘national brand’ is paramount given that tourism, ‘which suffers from sameness, knows the value of difference in creating and diversifying destinations’. At the time of Te Papa’s legislative creation, a New Zealand Tourism Board review observed that the nation’s image has been ‘ill-defined, out-of-date and lacking in personality’. Te Papa’s advertisement of New Zealand through new technologies and a newfound cultural confidence projects to the global tourism industry an image of a competitive, upwardly mobile nation. As a figurehead of national culture and the ways that corporate culture can be applied to cultural institutions, Te Papa allies the health of the nation’s culture with an effusive drive towards attracting capital. Te Papa’s message, to domestic and
international tourists alike, is that New Zealand is now capable of participating fully in
the global market of cultural institutions.

The conceptual framework of unimpeded public access, bicultural national identity and a
corporate approach to culture may appear feasible ideals. However an in-depth
excavation of their entangled effects, which constitutes the second part of this chapter,
unearths problems. I concentrate on several emblematic displays to analyse the ‘new
accessibility’ in representational practice. These include Parade, the Pakeha art-in-
society exhibition, Te Marae, a custom-built, publicly inclusive customary Maori space,
and Golden Days, a nostalgic national history film. Each ties quite distinct aesthetic
values to ideas about cultural and national identity. In Parade, Te Papa reinterpreted the
display of much of the national art collection, usually seen as a key arbiter of ideas about
taste and value, into a popular, identity-based scheme. Parade projected a forgoing of
ideological didacticism, and credited visitors as individuals of profound singularity in
determining the meaning of exhibits. A text panel read: ‘Is it treasure or junk? Everyone
has an opinion. Is it art? Decide for yourself’. While the cognitive space not only
accommodated but also celebrated heterogeneity, ideological space was distinctly
homogeneous and ardently constructed visitors as citizens. In an environment where
artworks formed only one device of engagement, their fate, and the viewer’s appreciation
of them, was highly compromised. Te Papa endured heavy criticism for its policy of
‘unified collections’ – its drawing together of objects and modes of interpretation from
different disciplines – and Parade, probably the foremost example of this, was
subsequently removed.

Analysis of Maori cultural representation is limited, in this chapter, to Te Marae. More
than other Maori sections, Te Marae gears Maori tradition towards popular accessibility
and nationalist iconography. The built form of the marae complex allows for the
redefinition of ‘customary architecture’ that both presents an image of cultural and
national vitality to tourists, and provides a new and novel site for indigenous performance
upon which the museum can capitalise. Despite its bright colours and contemporary
design, the power of Maori tradition is paled when it is made comfortable and inviting.
*Te Marae* may lack aesthetic charge for many non-Maori, who seek the authenticity associated with aged taonga and indigenous ‘deep time’. *Te Marae* has also proven unsatisfactory for some tribal Maori, who see customary tradition being compromised in order that the space is made sufficiently national. *Te Marae* illustrates the difficulties of combining indigenous tradition and myth with new display modes, when the restricted or privileged custom that makes Maori tradition meaningful conflicts with the museum’s desire for public accessibility.

More than any other exhibition, the superficial, hyper-textual narrative employed in *Golden Days* draws attention to the perils of the sentimental construction of national history. *Golden Days* is testament to the evacuation of meaning that occurs when post-modern display strategies are combined with nostalgia. It is significant that it is in *Golden Days* that visitors see renowned themes and events (national tragedies, sporting victories, coronations, popular entertainers) that are conspicuously absent elsewhere. The demotion of this material to sentimentality and post-modern ‘play’ communicates Te Papa’s desire to distance itself from history associated with previous incarnations of the nationhood. The style of *Golden Days* implicitly marks off this well-trod past as lacking the vital new perspectives that can inform a newer national identity formation. What is bypassed, however, is the opportunity to meaningfully engage with the mythologies that have been (and arguably remain) central to national imagining.

I arrive at two main lines of critique from the observations drawn from these displays. First, the relationship between market-driven display technologies and bicultural policy is problematic. New display technologies, premised on immediate impact (and prone to obsolescence) are increasingly placeless and dynamic and make little provision for in-depth reflection. Topics like national identity, citizenship and biculturalism, when conveyed within spaces of amusement and simulation, and couched within narratives that ostensibly deny authority, are deprived of the serious scrutiny they undoubtedly deserve. Second, while a museum may be ‘national’, it does not necessarily follow that ‘the nation’ constitutes the focus of exhibitions, particularly in more esoteric areas like art. For those not engaged by the affirming nationalism of *Our Place* (including New
Zealanders), Te Papa is conceptually stifling. Opportunities to consider themes outside the bounds of national life are critically thin at Te Papa. Rather than reflecting a nation that is, by itself, proud and upstanding, the exhibitions described above project a feeling of overzealousness and insecurity. The received message is that Te Papa has little confidence in the inherent interest, value and power of its collections. By subsuming exhibitions within ‘identity’ in order to attain wide relevance, Te Papa’s claim to be ‘world class’ may be undermined precisely because it fails to look beyond its own limited frame of reference.

b. Producing Communities in Difference: Bicultural Museum Histories

While the previous chapter examines how Te Papa publicly promotes itself as *Our Place*, chapter three analyses how, alternatively, Te Papa makes a territorial claim for the nation as *Our Place*. Dominant in the museum’s exhibition concepts is the idea that, as a geographical, historical and cultural domain, New Zealand belongs to those who inhabit it. By invoking rooted community, local parameters, a sense of place, close social ties and the historical, embodied nature of the self, *Our Place* invokes identity in, simultaneously, communitarian and cultural nationalist forms. Te Papa was created in large part as a catalyst enabling citizens to realise what the PDT identified as a nascent sense of nationalism:

This government is presiding over an era of emerging national self-consciousness. Obviously our sense of identity as New Zealanders in the Pacific/Asian region is served by greater understanding and development of our own national culture. The cultural heritage of the nation must be protected and receive the highest priority in the use of resources.\(^{75}\)

The reorganisation of material heritage towards an exclusively national focus signals a novel development in New Zealand’s museum history.
From the late nineteenth century, the Colonial, Dominion and National Museums (as the institution was variously named) had neglected social history and the nation-state as a core focus. Maori material culture, however, has a long history in New Zealand museums. It was the keen interest from key colonial administrator-turned-ethnographers in preserving Maori specimens that drove the creation of New Zealand’s first museums. Yet Maori culture was clearly not exhibited with national history in mind. Settler history, for its part, was presumed to be the domain of local, hobbyist heritage societies, and received little dedicated attention. Given this legacy, Te Papa’s task at this juncture involves barely less than the fresh recounting of national history. While the effort to produce what Nicos Poulantzas’ has neatly called the ‘territorialization of history and historicization of territory’ may be particularly pressing in settler states, it does not occur, at Te Papa, as a story of ever-unifying integration between Maori and Pakeha. As we shall see, the reorganization of the nation’s discursive properties entails producing Maori and Pakeha in separate spatial and temporal dimensions. A dedication to ‘the stories of the nation’ sees the museum aiming to produce a ‘collective autobiography’ that discursively differentiates yet ideologically coheres.

The rapaciousness of the imperial museum has become an established theme for those writing at the intersection of history and cultural studies. What is not so clear is whether Te Papa’s key innovation in Maori display – granting Maori control over self-representation – results in displays that are worlds apart from those of an earlier museum age. The focus on Te Marae in the previous chapter establishes the indifferent results that can accompany the subversion of traditional forms of Maori representation. Mana Whenua, the main Maori gallery, displays taonga (ancestrally inhabited treasured objects) in a more traditional, sacred register. Iwi (tribes), in concert with Te Papa, have elected for less novel, more didactic modes of representation that eschew the invitation to (recalling Parade) ‘decide for yourself’. Open and expansive, Mana Whenua is dominated by a wharenui, waka, pataka (storehouse) and various forms of weaving and carving. The past is communicated as a source of techniques, forms and motifs, and generalised cultural principles such as mana (honour) and whakapapa (genealogy). Representations uphold the longevity and resilience of tribal histories, the ordering of
cultural symbols, and the consensus of Maori tradition. In continuity with ethnographical display practices, taonga are framed through the assumption that ethnicity and material culture are isomorphically related, and that there is a close coincidence between art and cultural style. If, earlier, the object was separated from its tribal context and declared a specimen, at Te Papa it is upheld as a singular expression of the complexities of tribal culture. Taonga are presented as high art and sacred heritage whose imminent power derives from the ancestral and cosmic worlds. As one prominent Maori art historian has put it:

In a good performance or when contemplating a very fine piece of carving the response is likely to contain an element of wehi (awe and fear) because the source of ihi is believed to be supernatural. The artist does not have artistic skill as part of his natural endowment, genetic or cultural. Such a belief is consistent with the origin myths which generally support an extra-human source for art.

As a narrative strategy, the inalienability of Maori culture is expressed through the idea that art, as an expression of identity, is bestowed from the spiritual world. Yet the self-managed Maori shift from taonga as ethnographic specimen to fine art does not necessarily alleviate what many see as the ‘problem’ of decontextualization. While at Te Papa taonga are given additional explanation by ‘hosts’, videos and computer consols, its content nonetheless avoids Maori social history and everyday urban life. The absence of Maori from the life of the nation produces a sense that Maori are attached to a mythical-geographical space that exists outside or beyond Western historical change. Ideologically, I explore how Maori maintain themselves, as Simon During puts it, ‘at the far side of the difference’ – in a position that emphasises their uniqueness and difference from Pakeha.

When we consider Te Papa’s treatment of Pakeha, the starting point is the lack of any authoritative concept about who or what Pakeha might be. As a response, Jock Phillips, head of the history team, conceived a scheme that uses three exhibitions to convey opposing ideas about Pakeha identity. Passports, a migration history exhibition, claims that, ‘We [Pakeha] are no more than the sum of the cultural baggage which landed on our
shores.* The exhibition aims to convey that Pakeha culture is comprised of aggregative immigrant cultures. *On the Sheep’s Back* endeavours to make the inverse statement – that a particular, unique range of cultural characteristics was forged as a result of farming life. *Exhibiting Ourselves*, for its part, counteracts both ideas by suggesting that authentic identity is itself a phantom. This exhibition recreates parts of New Zealand’s entries at four international exhibitions from the past 150 years. It demonstrates how projections of nationhood are constructed to suit the political needs of the times. This conceptual triad aims to show how the nation is an idea constructed in various political, cultural and geographical terms that shifts over time.

The most curious aspect of Te Papa’s treatment of Pakeha history is in the way it employs an irreverent and demythologising style, even though the Government-appointed PDT asked the museum to positively respond to an endemic settler ‘crisis of identity’. That is, while the museum states as a policy aim the bolstering of a distinct Pakeha identity, its curatorial methods communicate scepticism towards any essential settler character. This paradox reflects the cross currents of the application of new museology with the new historicism popular in post-colonial societies – an intersection that has recently produced a large amount of literature. In its efforts to impart a sense of cultural uniqueness, Te Papa’s Pakeha history is unequivocally post-colonial, relegating Empire as a point of origin. As a result, there is little sense of the sacred in Te Papa’s Pakeha cultural history that compares to the Maori spirituality on display. When considered in contrastive terms – which the museum’s spatial and conceptual scheme certainly encourages – Maori taonga are displayed with a dignity and solemnity far outweighing that accorded to Pakeha exhibits. Te Papa avoids mainstream, hagiographic history that might comprise galleries of politicians, accounts of war, or images of adventurers or sporting heroes. Visitors are left with a peculiar result: a museum, otherwise strong in its proclamations of cultural nationalism, which contains several galleries devoted to gently undermining cultural and national myth.

Hence, Te Papa’s Maori and Pakeha exhibits do not simply recapture the nature of historical relations between groups, but instead break or redraw the past through existing
lines. In accordance with a key theme in critical museology explored by a number of other authors, I argue that the use of selected traditions in re-making history signals certain kinds of contemporary change. The decentred historiographical mode deployed for Pakeha is perhaps the inevitable response for a cultural category that is one ‘half’ of a biculture, but receives no substantial theorisation in policy. Further, an open-ended and revisionist identity may be the only kind of moral ‘space’ available for Pakeha, when Te Papa wishes to communicate a new, post-colonial identity, yet denies it the positivism or essentialism of Maori. Despite its avoidance of older unitary assumptions about nationhood, there are limits and dangers of misrepresentation associated with Te Papa’s conception of either all Maori or all non-Maori as ‘cultures’ within a bi-culture. Attaching to objects an unchanging cultural allegiance through time produces its own totalising view of history. The idea of a bi-culture creates the illusion that groups exist in separate times, and that qualities of victim-hood and conquest are distributed evenly and unequivocally. Moreover, the received message is that Pakeha identity is a malleable experiment best explored through history, whereas Maori is an immutable cultural worldview. My argument is that, despite its new gloss, Te Papa perpetuates traditional paradigms of indigenous culture versus Western history. The central paradox is that while Te Papa stresses postcolonial independence and a distance from imperial museological paradigms, ‘race’ remains fundamental to the museum’s physical and cultural space. The uncertain effect of embracing an indigenous-settler concept (biculturalism) whilst marginalizing empire – when in fact empire and race are so inextricable in New Zealand’s history – attests to the difficulties that former colonies may experience in untangling colonialism within an institutional form inherited from the colonial era.

c. The Museum as Bicultural Forum: Te Papa’s Negotiation of Lore and Law.

Attention and admiration from museum professionals around the world has above all been focused on Te Papa’s development of responsive strategies with its indigenous people. Maori involvement at Te Papa, in the form of staffing, collaboration with iwi, and the co-authorship of bicultural accords for issues of display, interpretation, repatriation and ownership, has been upheld as a model for other museums – particularly those in
settler societies.\textsuperscript{83} The Maori struggle for social equality and recognition of historical injustice constitutes part the international indigenous cultural renaissance that has occurred, in an uneven fashion, over the last several decades. New Zealand is among a growing number of postcolonial societies that is directing an indigenous appeal for control of their resources towards museums. A growing body of literature on this topic attests to its current importance.\textsuperscript{84} Yet Maori involvement certainly remains part of the larger national project. Te Papa’s mission statement declares the museum, ‘a forum for the nation to present, explore and preserve the heritage of its cultures…(my italics)’. ‘Culture’, conceived as ethnic units, emerges as the dominant genre of acts of communication in Te Papa’s concept of itself as a public sphere. This forum mission imagines Te Papa as a site for productive deliberation over an essentially contested nation-space. Hence, \textit{Our Place} can be understood, in a third sense, as a pluralistic, negotiated or moderated space for different cultural groups.

The critical question I ask of the museum in chapter four is how effectively it fulfils its forum mission. The public sphere, most notably characterised by Jürgen Habermas, can be conceived as the realm of both spontaneous and customary linguistic exchanges through which a society depicts itself, reflects upon itself and critiques itself. In museological literature, James Clifford has influentially articulated a productive role for the museum in the public sphere through the related idea of the museum as ‘contact zone’. His idea emphasises the processes through which group relations are managed:

The crucial issue of power often appears differently at different levels of interaction, and it cannot simply be read off from ascribed geopolitical locations. Power and reciprocity are articulated together in specific ways. Who calls the shots? When? Do structural and interpersonal power relations reinforce or complicate each other? How are differing agendas accommodated in the same project?\textsuperscript{85}
By reworking the notion of the pluralistic public sphere as a cultural meeting ground, Clifford sees the museum as an ideal space for competing cultural perspectives and discursive styles.

Taking Clifford’s model as a starting point, the first half of chapter four critically explores Te Papa’s management of Maori issues. These include effective representation, repatriation of taonga lost during the colonial period, control over the management of resources, and the implementation of tribal sovereignty. Of vital concern to Maori is that their cultural property can be used as valuable corporate assets without this entailing cultural degradation. As a safeguard for lasting Maori involvement and consultation, Te Papa’s bicultural policy includes principles adapted from the Treaty of Waitangi. This is a highly significant development. Given that the Treaty promised protection of Maori resources yet failed to uphold them, the adoption of a Treaty-based institutional framework lends a weighty ethical and political dimension to Te Papa’s practices. By making the Treaty the marker of contemporary social division, its promises, particularly that of Maori cultural sovereignty, are drawn into the present. Since these principles are themselves the subject of fraught contest between iwi and National Government in the Treaty claims process, Te Papa has emerged as a visible testing ground for new forms of Maori governance in the public sector. Yet Te Papa’s encouragement of tribal involvement with the museum is more than a matter of political principle. The historic shift from taonga as objects of anthropological fascination, to taonga as emblems of cultural sovereignty and continuity, is an attractive idea for a self-consciously postcolonial museum. At Te Papa, Maori are able to accentuate the corporeal, living nature of taonga, and to claim sole responsibility for their care and management. Emotional Maori participation with their material culture offers a performative dimension through which Te Papa can market itself and the nation.

While much of my discussion in this chapter focuses on managerial and governance issues, I also explore how the forum idea is manifest in display. The Treaty of Waitangi exhibition *Signs of a Nation* is Te Papa’s central crux in spatial and conceptual terms. The exhibition, constructed as both a reverential space and a place of public contest, deals
directly with the themes of biculturalism and political reconciliation. A ceremonial effect is achieved visually, in the form of huge Treaty replicas flanking the walls. By allowing the Treaty to ‘speak for itself’, the exhibition aims to allow visitors to read and consider, without undue interference or prejudice, the articles that have become the subject of such contemporary disputation. The forum effect is communicated through devices such as recorded and looped conflicting opinions of ‘ordinary New Zealanders’ contained in ‘audio poles’. These are intended as a spur for visitors to consider their own feelings about the Treaty settlements. However, my close analysis of *Signs of a Nation* reveals how it gestures towards aiding the circulation of political opinion without providing real channels for political participation. Further, although the exhibition communicates ideas of a troubled colonial past, any harder conclusions are tempered by the absence elsewhere of Maori social history that shows the ensuing devastation of colonialism. An institution-wide emphasis on celebratory cultural expressions means that the idea of the museum as a place of self-scrutiny is indistinct. In what ways, then, can Te Papa claim to represent a public forum?

The second half of the chapter explores the kind of public life that Te Papa does provide. I argue that Te Papa can be considered somewhat effective as a forum, but only if this metaphor is understood as a structural form of museum-community dialogue organised around biculturalism. Although Te Papa’s public image and exhibition tactics offer an image of social diversity, it is of a highly managed kind that is ultimately constrained by highly specific and even abstruse ‘bicultural principles’. Te Papa’s formulation as a forum suffers from an inherent tension between democratic policies, which depend on pragmatic notions of undifferentiated public inclusiveness, and bicultural policy, which represents a governmental attempt to manage the group differences of the population. Hence, Te Papa is better seen as a symbol of biculturalism, and a stage for its promotion, rather than a forum for it. However, evidence that Te Papa itself is still largely unsure of how to apply biculturalism in the museum context suggests the forcing of a political principle that does not necessarily enhance the visitor experience. For instance, the museum’s policy division of New Zealanders into tangata whenua/tangata tiriti (people of the land/people of the Treaty) represents a heavy symbolic conferment of political
responsibility. This division construes the relationship between cultures as a Treaty contract between parties about matters of mutual concern, both of which – parties and concerns – continue to exist over 160 years later. I argue that entrenching this kind of ethnic structuralism in Te Papa’s philosophy and operations is in many ways limiting. To counter Clifford’s idea that the contact zone signals a genuine shift in power relations, I conclude the chapter by pursuing a more governmental line, arguing that the projection of national uniqueness is not necessarily upset by ideas of cultural dialogue, and is often forged precisely through the managed performance of assorted cultural repertoires. In fact, despite its forum mission, Te Papa is a prime site for the state management of ethnic difference.

4. For the Future of the Past: A Te Papa Critique

This thesis, begun shortly after Te Papa’s opening, analyses the museum’s founding concepts, exhibitions, and public activities in its first four years of operation. An investigation of Te Papa is important in its own right, given that it represents a major Government intervention in the cultural sphere and a correspondingly large allocation of resources. Yet its significance is even greater for the example it offers other nations attempting to refurbish the museum as a cultural institution through architectural, intellectual, technological and entertainment strategies. Te Papa attempts to negotiate the major challenges and tensions that have become a dominant feature of museum practice over the past two decades. These include, for instance: a wish to become a vital part of public culture, yet also claim a competitive place in the tourist and leisure industries; a desire to utilise new media technologies that graft together different kinds of spatial orientations alongside older object-based display strategies; a responsibility to manage policy priorities that are strongly pedagogic and stress a revised view of indigenous culture and ethnic relations, with a more general celebration of unified nationhood. These are just a few of the issues that recur throughout the following four chapters. Although these topics are significant for many other major public museums, I focus exclusively on
Te Papa. Its creation has provided a set of circumstances through which these issues emerge with an unmatched visibility.

Collectively, the criticisms outlined in this introduction begin to indicate why I will argue that Te Papa’s formative philosophy may not possess adequate conceptual depth to sustain the museum over a long period. Despite public gestures that claim that the museum welcomes openness, debate and uncertainty, Te Papa can be revealed to be deceptively closed and politically ideological. That is, while it seeks to end the exclusion of any public constituency by reifying a vision of widely popular nationhood, the blanket bicultural framework applied to its practices strongly suggests that Te Papa experience is not as negotiable as it may initially appear. We might speculate whether, when the policy moment that combines a highly market-oriented institution with stringently defined biculturalism passes, New Zealand might be encumbered with a museum that speaks volumes about the preoccupations of New Zealand’s policy-makers and museum workers in the current period, but little of enduring worth?

4 This episode is captured in Cottrell, Anna & Preston, Gaylene (dir.), 1999, Getting to Our Place, In association with NZ On Air and TVNZ, 72 mins.
6 In January 2003 Seddon Bennington, ex-Director of Pittsburg’s Carnegie Science Center, replaced Cheryl Sotheran.
7 See, for instance, Karp, Ivan et al. (eds), 1992, Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture, Smithsonian Institute Press, Washington.


17 Quoted in Jenny Forsyth, ‘It’s Our Place and We’re Proud of It’, *New Zealand Herald*, January 30, 2000, p. 7.


23 Quoted in Jenny Forsyth ‘It’s Our Place and We’re Proud of It’, *New Zealand Herald*, January 30, 2000, p. 7.


See Jameson, Frederic, 1991, Post-modernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, Duke University Press, Durham, chapter 1.


MacDonald George F., 2001, ‘Negotiating Histories: A Perspective from Two Hemispheres’, in McIntyre, Darryl & Wehner, Kirsty (eds), National Museums, Negotiating Histories (conference proceedings), National Museum of Australia in association with the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research and the Australian Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy, Canberra, p. 104.

See, for instance: J. McDonald, ‘From there to Eternity’, Sydney Morning Herald, March 10, 2001; M. Mottram & R. Usher, ‘Pierced Penises, Online Exhibits, and Kylie’s Wedding Dress from Neighbours…Victoria’s New Museum is Funky, but is it a Museum’? Melbourne Age, October 1, 2000; Windschuttle, K., 2001, How Not to Run a Museum, Quadrant, XLV, (9), pp. 11-19.


Wedde, Ian, 1996, ‘Information and Entertainment’, *Communications Technologies - What are their Social and Cultural Implications for New Zealand?* Paper presented at Humanities Society of New


70 Reinhardt, Caroline, 1998, ‘History with Attitude: Elitism is Out, Populism is In’, The Spectator, April 4 1998, pp. 43-44.


72 Project Development Team, 1985, Nga Taonga o te motu: Te Marae Taonga O Aotearoa, Treasures of the Nation, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, p. 11.


74 New Zealand Tourism Board, 1992, Tourism in the 90s, New Zealand Tourism Board, Wellington, p. 21.


83 See, for instance, the discussion in Canadian Museum of Civilisation, 1996, Curatorship: Indigenous Perspectives in Post-Colonial Societies, Canadian Museum of Civilisation with the Commonwealth Association of Museums and the University of Victoria, Quebec.


Chapter Two

Making Heritage Popular:

Te Papa’s ‘New Deal’

1. Reforming the Reformist Museum: Introducing the Identity Principle
In the museum world it has become orthodox to criticise national museums for being ‘backward-looking’ and ‘traditional’. At face value, this accusation is paradoxical: a museum’s very mission typically involves preserving heritage and showcasing tradition. As these charges are articulated however, they target not the museum’s functions but its ideological effects. Using neo-Marxist terms, museums are often arraigned for serving an elite class, perpetuating bourgeois ‘cultural capital’, being bastions of white male tradition, and validating conservative political arrangements. While an artistic and cultural avant-garde have besieged museums on similar grounds since the post-war period, in the last twenty years opposition to traditional museum values has become widely institutionalised as a working premise. Within this stream of thought stands Te Papa, a new museum ‘relevant for everyone regardless of culture, education or financial standing’, as former director of museum projects, Ken Gorbey, claimed. While these values promise the public a newly intrepid adventure with the past, the institutional processes involved are rather more calculated and routine. Public relevance, known at Te Papa as ‘customer focus’, is based on extensive pre-opening market research geared towards exhibition and public program design. ‘Customer segmentation studies’ explore the preferences of different ‘target audiences’. Public awareness of the ‘Te Papa brand’ is monitored. Studies were conducted into the feasibility of admission charges; a decision was made to refuse them. In day-to-day operation, detailed profiles of who is purchasing what and their perceptions of value for money are monitored in exit interviews. Performance indictors, based chiefly on ‘customer satisfaction’ and program ‘service delivery’ are judged against goals detailed in the Statement of Intent provided for the Government. At first reckoning, then, policy priorities and management techniques aimed at bringing large public museums into line with the accountability required of other Government sectors, whilst also gearing them to compete in the tourism and leisure industries, might be considered largely managerial, programmatic concerns.

In fact, these organizational modifications, now widely adopted (in various degrees and forms) by museums across the world, have ignited a debate that exceeds the exigencies of any single institution, and indeed, has transcended the museum’s walls. For many, the distinctive aura attached to museums and the reason for which they have been cherished
is precisely their differentiation from other public services and tourist attractions. Many believe that the museum’s distinction is rooted in something ineffable, inasmuch as heritage, despite its often-routine appellation, is a powerful conduit for a society’s spiritual communion with the past. The public nature of museums’ treatment of heritage makes them a primary stage on which to observe the tensions of our times – between access and exclusivity, common and expert knowledge, the constitution of public taste, and who has the right to produce and disseminate it:

Lying behind the rhetoric of these debates and controversies are larger questions about what kind of society we want to live in, how much social and cultural diversity we can tolerate, and how we wish to represent ourselves and others. Thus, the activities and institutions dealing with ‘art and culture’ – subjects often considered secondary to the important things in life, such as earning a living – are, to the contrary, deeply implicated in the major issues confronting contemporary society.³

This introduction will delineate the main lines of fracture in this debate over museum priorities, which has become part of a wider conflict put to political use in a variety of spheres over the past twenty years, between ‘canonical’ high culture and ‘grass-roots’ popular culture. These issues are described in this first section in general terms, reflecting the somewhat surprising uniformity in the way political arguments over the museum currently ‘line up’ in Western nations. At this juncture, after widely adopted changes inspired by the new museology critique, the battle lines of the ‘culture wars’ (as journalists and critics call it) have been redrawn. Criticism now comes from those (usually dubbed ‘conservative’) who believe that museums have been commandeered by left-liberals dedicated to representational practices that favour popular culture, diversity, and revisionism. Conservatives charge that museums now too closely resemble other tourist and leisure forms and have wrongly adopted the fashionable yet intellectually suspect notion of ‘identity politics’.
Yet generalizations are, of course, just that. Turning momentarily to New Zealand, the situation is less straightforward. Certainly Te Papa itself represents a liberal stronghold sympathetic to minority interests. One writer has characterised the driving constituency behind the museum as ‘a left liberal, tertiary-educated, middle-aged Pakeha middle class’. However, at the level of official patronage we can observe an opposite trend. Under the previous centre-right National Government, Te Papa enjoyed goodwill and cooperation with Prime Minister Jenny Shipley, who recognised that a close association with the nation’s most popular new institution could access mainstream support. Yet the most notable figure to profess their belief in established forms of cultural excellence is Helen Clark, Prime Minister of a left-liberal Government. The November 1999 Labour party victory saw Clark take the Minister for Culture and Heritage portfolio that oversees Te Papa. Clark has criticised the museum’s populist style and has asserted that future funding partly depends upon Te Papa ‘enjoying the respect of scholars and museum and art critics’.

Although some commentators couch a museum’s political leanings within the ‘culture wars’ discourse, deliberations over the merits and risks of mass public admittance have been a longstanding feature of the modern museum. Although Te Papa is promoted on the basis that a focus on nation and democratic access are pioneering values in ‘breaking down the museum’s walls’, these are in fact cultural ideals associated with the nineteenth century reformist period. Then, as now, quality of research was seen as threatened as classification shifted from indulging scientific interests to serving the needs of popular education. The transfer of private collections to public hands saw large museums assume the responsibility of upholding aesthetic and intellectual standards as the best examples of human endeavour, beyond the province of any group or class. As Roger Kimball describes, ‘they were open, but not necessarily accessible, to all. The bounty they offered exacted the homage of informed interest as the price of participation. Accessibility was a privilege anyone could earn, not a right that everyone enjoyed’.

While the idea of a museum meritocracy with prospectively universal bearing has a substantial tradition and retains some purchase, changing ideas about personhood have
undermined assumptions about a default or normative subject position on which the idea of ‘the visitor’ was based. Discourses of selfhood have, over the last few decades, become increasingly ‘cultural’ in orientation. Identity, as a social-psychological category, became popular from the early 1960s and was taken up widely by both cultural nationalist and multiculturalist political movements. Erik Erikson developed the term ‘ethnic identity’ as a way to address perceived difficulties of American immigrants assimilating to a majority culture. Subsequent work revealed identity formation as a complex process in which people construct from historical accounts biographical continuities between ancestors and their descendants as a group. The content, form, style and strength of this imagined entity is formed in a wider context of other social phenomena and other ethnic groups.

The current age witnesses an undiminished public interest in questions of private identity – and an unprecedented willingness for museums to oblige this. Te Papa embraces cultural diversity – understood not as, say, Melanesian arts or Chinese history, but as the identities of its visitors. Hence, Ken Gorbey’s advertisement of Te Papa as a place for everyone regardless of culture, class or education is quite inverted: it claims relevance because it foregrounds different cultural understandings and contains interpretive devices pitched at different educational and socio-economic levels. The ‘culturalist turn’ in museums is premised on the idea, expressed regularly on gallery walls, as well as in its mission statement, statutory functions, policy documents, and press releases, that the nation and its constituent ethnic groups have cultures that can be owned. In this logic, existence is a function of possession: we are a nation or ethnic group because we have a culture (and this culture can be displayed). The idea of cultural identity as an inalienable possession (expressed by the notion of ‘cultural property’) works with the premise that objects are not just experienced subjectively as external to the self but are defining constituents of it. Culture validates museum ephemera (‘cultural icons’) and asserts its importance to group identity (‘culturally significant’). Implied in such phrases is the notion that objects can tell us plenty about groups, which in turn possess characteristics sufficiently distinct that it is meaningful to divide society into such units.
The philosophy and practices of national museums communicate social statements apprehended by visitors and by those who gain a sense of the institution’s priorities from afar – though in both cases not always reliably. Pierre Bourdieu has written that ‘at stake in the struggles about the meaning of the social world is power over the classificatory schemes and systems which are the basis of the representations of the groups and therefore of their mobilization and demobilization’.  

If by publicly recognising certain constituencies museums elevate and legitimate them, cases where recognition is argued to be inadequate often receive equivalent condemnation. Since the 1960s, museums’ earlier attempts to display accounts of evolution, civilization and nation have become subject to a Whiggish criticism that draws attention to their embedded sexism, class bias and racism. With the glare of hindsight, these criticisms have revealed the museum ideal of providing universal representation, akin to the ‘story of man’, as at best an impossible dream and at worst deliberately hegemonic. As the social visibility of ethnic minorities and women increased in recent decades, their absence in museums became correspondingly noticeable. The museum was put under increasing pressure to serve and represent not its vision of the finest human endeavour, but all cultural groups. This notion of even-handed pluralist representation arguably presents the museum with a broader assignment than that of a ‘high culture’ meritocracy. The struggle to provide comprehensive representation inevitably leaves museums open to charges of partiality. Tension between what the public museum represents in theory and how it functions in practice accounts for the emergence of a politics of access – for the ‘unending and… unendable demand that museums develop more democratic profiles of public use and access’.  

As Tony Bennett observes:

Alien demands...are fuelled by the mismatch between, on the one hand, the rhetorics which govern the stated aims of the museum and, on the other, the political rationality embodied in the actual modes of their functioning – a mismatch that guarantees that the demands it generates are insatiable.  

Equipped with the expectation that the museum should provide all communities with a past useable in the validation of ethnic identity, critics and visitors alike are aggrieved
when they identify distortions or absences. This principle is also applied retrospectively to the museum’s past, as far as the historic invisibility of certain stories is held to have played a part in smothering or subjugating the realization of some identity. The extent to which the ‘politics of display’ has become a dominant feature of museum discourse itself attests to the idea that museums offer a valuable opportunity to tie the abstraction of an ethnic culture to a set of material objects and narrative conventions that articulate myths, symbols, values and public memory. The museum’s ability to objectify identity, power and tradition links its aristocratic beginnings to its culturalist present and provides for its continued salience.13

As much as the ‘culturalist turn’ in museums should be underscored, it is important to also note the ongoing utility of national museums as grand, state-sponsored statements. While ethnic identity has become basic to understandings of difference in plural nation-states, it has also retained a central role in managing contemporary nation building. The collection and display of ethnic cultures under one roof has helped to give many peoples a dramatised sense that they are collectively part of the nation-state, with a stake in its future.14 When we plot the historical emergence of any modern democratic nation-state, we trace a coterminous story of the rise of large metropolitan museums. The historic formation of museums in Western Europe and North America (the basic form of which subsequently spread globally) was part of a wider governmental program of mass education. Alongside other public spectacles like street parades, sporting contests, international expositions, and monuments, memorials and awards ceremonies, museums have been mobilised to project visible and tangible forms of community. Along with the census and map, Benedict Anderson identifies the museum as an important instrument in the promulgation of the national ‘imagined community’. These technologies, of particular importance in colonial administrations, helped the state to organise, categorise and display native flora, fauna, languages and peoples, and enabled its subjects to envision a common history and purpose.15 The historic creation of a new $320 million museum pointedly devoted to nation at this juncture shows that these ideological programs cannot be consigned to the past, and that the redefinition of ideas about New Zealand culture and society remain a pressing concern for the state.
An analysis of Te Papa is especially crucial given that it stands for a belief that increased popularity and the inculcation of a devotional sense of place and history can be consistent and productive rather than conflicting. As an institution conceived in the midst of the ‘culture wars’, Te Papa was poised to pre-emptively confound the terms of argument by achieving both popularity and excellence. The chief aim of this chapter is to analyse whether its key cultural themes and values are successfully forged in exhibition formats that aim for accessibility and entertainment. The following section provides the necessary background for an appreciation of how Te Papa is defined against the previous National Museum. This is chiefly considered in spatial, architectural and branding terms. I also consider the very different economic pressures, in the form of market-driven tourist competition, which have helped establish a new set of institutional priorities. The subsequent sections proceed to examine the different models of accessibility applied to Maori and Pakeha exhibits. Considering Te Marae first, I argue that the ways that Maori tradition has been made appealing and serviceable to identity may diminish its resonance for Maori and non-Maori alike. Next, I analyse how accessibility is translated in the (now defunct) Pakeha gallery, Parade, and in the synchronised theatre display Golden Days. In these exhibitions I concentrate on the limitations of an identity focus, and suggest that Te Papa’s heady assortment of display narratives and interpretive devices produces superficial results that highlight shortcomings in its application of the new museology. In all three exhibitions I identify a fundamental conflict. Outwardly, the museum utilises popular, informal display practices and a range of information technologies that encourage a strong sense of individual agency in uncovering meaning. At the same time, the total ‘Te Papa experience’ is predicated on a deceptively strong pedagogic civics that emphatically emphasises cultural and national identity over all else.

2. Relocating and Revaluing New Zealand’s Heritage
a. A New Sense of Place

The state governs Te Papa at ‘arm’s length’, whereby it owns and funds the institution and appoints its governing Board, which is in turn required to perform functions prescribed by parliamentary statute. Within the limits of this statute, the museum acts autonomously in determining and implementing policy, allowing it to develop without undue Government interference (and insulating Government from public ire arising from museum controversy or unpopularity). While Te Papa is somewhat detached from state legislative apparatuses it is, nonetheless, a political site. As a space where society can be depicted and criticised and its current dimension strengthened or altered, museums can be a vital instrument of civil society. Within this public sphere, culture is the dominant genre of acts of communication. Culture is both an instrument and outcome of the museum’s work, whether conceived as specific artistic products, in the more general anthropological sense of a society’s modes of signification, or in the more esoteric sense of refinement, taste and sophistication. Indeed, museums are a major point of transition or articulation between these different understandings of culture, given their capacity to organise artworks and anthropological meaning in the direction of certain public discernments, tastes and conducts.

If these capabilities suggest that the museum occupies an important public role, in New Zealand the state has not historically accorded it attendant interest. Until recently, museums, galleries and heritage organizations were largely treated as the domain of a smallish hobbyist group. Their supervision by Government did not proceed in any programmatic way, reflecting a general belief that they were a result or by-product of a society’s natural desire to collect, preserve, and showcase. New Zealand’s cultural policy, which emerged in the post-war era, has been less developed than economic or social policy, often being created by default in these policy areas or through specific, piecemeal cultural initiatives. While it is widely recognised that cultural organizations are broadly valuable for democracy, the fragmented and scattered nature of Government policy has meant that issues such as diversity within the cultural sector have not been properly addressed. Yet this has begun to change in recent decades. From the 1970s, partly as a
result of concepts of cultural development promoted internationally by UNESCO, the Government started to initiate structures to support a range of cultural activities in local ethnic communities. The definition of culture as a domain of Government policy interest has slowly been broadened beyond ‘the arts’ and into popular culture and the folk life of ethnic groups. Correspondingly, ‘elite’ institutions have been put under increasing pressure to attract a wider demographic. However while Government subsidised cultural activities generally follow a certain course – the de facto strengthening of local and Maori culture against imported cultural products – there has been some hesitation to articulate this within an overarching scheme.

It is only in the last decade that Government has expressed a more explicit interest in the cultural sector. Recent acknowledgement of the necessity for investment in cultural activities and institutions has been justified on two grounds. One is economic. Increased expenditure on cultural projects and infrastructure is predicated on optimising returns from a growing tourist industry. A recent ‘conservative estimate’ is that 5% of tourist spending in New Zealand is directly on cultural products, amounting to some $200 million annually. Since cultural institutions have been (and often still are) perceived as a welfare burden, increased investment in and attention to the sector has also meant the instalment of a managerial style in museums. Institutional accountability is not, however, conceived simply in terms of fiscal responsibility. Museums are expected to demonstrate that they can not only efficiently account for the resources entrusted to them, but that they can use resources effectively in terms of a positive outcome within the community they serve.

These qualitative, semi-measurable social consequences are the second grounds for greater Government intervention. They have received their most in-depth articulation in the recent Heart of the Nation (2000) policy. This document argues, as the title reflects, the centrality of the cultural sector for New Zealand’s social vitality. Along with economic growth and employment, its policy purpose is ‘to nurture and sustain vibrant arts and cultural activities which all New Zealanders can enjoy and through which a strong and confident cultural identity can emerge’. The document, which identifies
‘invisible heritage’, ‘neglected identities’ and ‘under-resourced Maori culture’ as areas of future concentration, signals an emphasis on wide public participation in the sector alongside a more narrow investment in the excellence of flagship organizations.24 Te Papa, for its part, is expected to play a strategic role in bridging broad participation and cultural excellence. A chief strategy in this mission is for outputs like exhibitions and public programs to be designed for target groups, with success being measured by their ability to attract the demographic in question. For instance, Te Papa consistently foregrounds findings that 13% of those who visit describe themselves as Maori – close to the 14.5% in New Zealand population statistics.25 For Te Papa, the key to producing outputs closely attuned to minority interests is through strong minority involvement. Museum workers and consultants become, in this capacity, ethnic and community representatives.

Before proceeding to analyse how this thinking has altered the national museum experience, it is important to recount Te Papa’s origins. The practical details of Te Papa’s creation are somewhat mundane, mired in incremental, procedural and piecemeal operational modes typical of the development of public institutions. Te Papa originated from a series of policy failures that had aimed to grant the National Art Gallery and Museum, which occupied common premises but were separate organizations, greater institutional autonomy from one another. In 1984, the Government cancelled plans, tantalisingly close to realization, for the construction of a new National Art Gallery in Wellington in favour of the development of the High Court on that site. A condition of proceeding with the new Art Gallery development had been the abandonment by the previous Government of plans for a much-needed extension of the National Museum. In 1985, the Government appointed a caucus committee to investigate plans to merge the two organizations within a new entity. Part of the rationale was that a brand new institution might assuage the bitterness over failed plans. In fact, the residue of the Government’s initial development failures would come to plague plans for the unification of the art gallery and museum. Several years into the planning process, Dr. Michael Volkerling, director of the Board between 1989 and 1992, wrote that ‘the compromised development plans haunt us in the present as unfinished business’, and that ‘the
community of interest that supported these separate developments has been shattered by this accumulation of missed and compromised revolutions’. If the professional feeling in the National Museum and Art Gallery at that time was one of disenchantment, the larger cultural climate was very different. Buoyed by the huge success of the *Te Maori* tour, the Government sought to capitalise on the economic and social benefits of the unprecedented levels of attention being paid to Maori culture, by Maori and Pakeha alike. Briefly, (this exhibition is considered more closely in chapter four), the 1984-85 *Te Maori* tour of the U.S was the first-ever overseas touring exhibition of Maori art. Its homecoming tour has been credited with bringing an awareness of Maori art and culture to the broader New Zealand public. The idea of giving this cultural resurgence a permanent home seemed to offer enormous benefits, both social and economic. These motives for change suggested to planners a radically different institution.

The decision to build a new museum focused on cultural diversity was driven not only by the practical difficulties of overhauling the existing institution, but also by perceptions of its attachments to Empire. Established in 1865, the original Colonial Museum consisted of a small wooden building tucked behind parliament. In 1913 Government passed an act that made provisions for a National Art Gallery. In 1936 the Dominion Museum (as it was now known – being renamed the National Museum in 1973) joined the newly created National Art Gallery in new premises on a Wellington hilltop. The external architecture of this stone building featured wide ascending steps and a colonnade of pilasters recalling the portico of a Greek temple. Its restrained neo-classical architectural style was a local instance of the monumental international museum style that was seen as the most appropriate architectural translation of Enlightenment values. The building stood in isolation from its immediate surroundings and exuded timelessness. Its external wall bore the inscription: ‘Erected by the people and dedicated to the service of art and science’. Above this labelled motifs designated aspects of the museum’s collection: painting (a palette), sculpture (a Roman bust), architecture (a building), and a Maori head (ethnology). The visitor was positioned from the outset as the beneficiary of canons of knowledge whose providence lay in Greek and Roman antiquity.
Inside the previous National Museum, an enclosed inner sanctum concentrated visitors’ attention by distancing them from the world outside. The galleries inside resembled large white boxes, in line with the belief that ‘...ocular epiphanies in this mode require pristine environments in which the object of contemplation is set off for riveting attention’.  

Downstairs, in the classificatory spirit of Western materialism, the museum galleries presented an artifactual record of New Zealand’s human society and biota where the original status differences of the objects displayed were neutralised through their presentation in terms of the taxonomies of scientific rationalism. Upstairs, the objects displayed, in the contemplative spirit of Western idealism, were accorded the status of art – a status confirmed through their physical exclusion from the artifactual record below. Significantly, the architects made no provision for any vertical connection between the zones of art and science to whose service the building was dedicated.

In the current period, the old National Museum is now criticised, at least among those who champion Te Papa, for having combined a forbidding architectural style with often narrow-interest displays, presented within rigid disciplinary practices. The consensus among those planning the new museum was that its regular visitors (mostly Pakeha and middle class) were too few, and that even these people had grown overfamiliar with the shape, content and quietude of its galleries.

The early vision for the new museum was for three semi-autonomous ‘Pacific Cultural Centres’ devoted to Maori, Pakeha and Pacific Islanders. James Mack, discussing the project, stated that precedence must be given to Maori culture, with ‘all other cultures dominant in Aotearoa’ being represented through ‘the best possible examples’. The idea of ethnically specific museums, common in large cities in Europe and North America, was soon judged to be unsuitable for a national project. Subsequent plans reasserted internal unity and a conventional museum institution. According to one prominent critic, Luit Bieringa, ex-Director of the National Art Gallery, where the earlier scheme admitted and empowered diversity, a shift towards centralization implied cultural
It seems, therefore, anachronistic to create a homogeneous monolith, which, in confusing unity with similarity, represents an order reminiscent of 1950s and 1960s assimilation. Not only does it speak of centralised bureaucracy of the kind being demolished by the present Government, but it is also out of step and shows an insensitivity to the aspirations of cultural and disciplinary communities.32

Bieringa drew a series of connections between the reversion to old departmental arrangements and broader political implications, arguing that ‘the “dulling” or flattening-out process is assimilationist and disarms the strengths of diverse interest communities’. He asserted (using an interesting mixed metaphor) that the museum will only ‘facilitate the mixing of all colours to achieve an encyclopaedia without clear entry points’.33 For Bieringa, a Government desire to impose limits on the Maori push for cultural sovereignty at that time were all too clearly demonstrated by the incorporation of taonga into a unitary National Museum structure.

Despite this criticism, the Project Development Board (PDB) persisted, opting for a building custom-designed to express national identity – one that would ‘enable New Zealanders who journey through their National Museum to easily assume and recognise the cultures it defines’.34 The PDB forecast the new museum as a ‘vigorous national symbol’, ‘an expression of New Zealand as a distinctive Pacific culture’, and the exemplification of ‘a twenty-first century nation in which cultural diversity is able to flourish’.35 Exhibitions and public programs were to be about New Zealanders in order to ‘powerfully express the total culture of New Zealand’.36 In 1990 the PDB organised an architectural competition, limited to national teams.37 Jasmax, the successful firm, proposed a plan stressing separate Maori and Pakeha elements. This design is most evident for visitors at the main exhibition concourse on the fourth floor. To the left, towards the sea, are Te Marae and Mana Whenua: the Land, the People and the Spirit that Binds. The siting of the Maori galleries, overlooking the harbour and aligned with the Taiti valley to the northeast, is considered vital. On the right-hand landward side
towards the city are the tangata tiriti (Pakeha) galleries. The Interpretive Plan states that ‘the northern (Maori) part of the museum, aligned with the harbour axis, expresses the natural elements associated with papatuanuku/ tangata whenua, while the southern (Pakeha) part is aligned with the urban grid of the city’. This spatial dichotomy constructs the Western and indigenous in a highly familiar scheme that opposes the Maori natural world and the Western built form, the spiritual and the material, and ecological harmony and capitalist exploitation. The Treaty of Waitangi exhibition Signs of a Nation physically cleaves these spaces and expresses the concept of the encounter of worldviews. Architecturally, Te Papa is promoted as a unique combination of Western geo-morphological science and Maori cosmology. Jasmax states that the museum is spatially disposed around an ‘orientation spline’ that ‘suggests the shifts, folds, and faults of New Zealand geology, and the might of Ruaumoko’ [the Maori earthquake god]. Although the building is promoted as the embodiment of ecological and mythical forces, in actual fact it sits on land that was reclaimed – dredged from the sea to allow the expansion of the colonial capital. A huge raft of concrete beams and pads form the foundation, on top of which 150 lead and rubber shock absorbers carry the building itself. Unlike museums built to commemorate historic sites, Te Papa is situated on land chosen for its vantage and availability. If the museum’s location is to be significant, it is because it has been produced as such.

The easy level terraces visitors cross to reach Te Papa contrast with the ascending steps on the hill-site of the old National Museum. The museum’s waterfront entrance is set within a curvilinear wall that forms one wing in an irregular, decentred design. Bright blocks of coloured glass on the streetscape complicate the combination of cream and grey facade, jutting angles, and waving roofline.
Unfortunately, the main visitor entrance from the city is unspectacular. As Steve Bohling recognises, Te Papa is most expressive ‘when viewed as a jagged advancing promontory from the harbour’. Another critic suggests that ‘Te Papa’s postmodern-jigsaw construction looks unfinished, as if the builders have not yet worked out where each piece should go’. Given the dramatic and symbolic possibilities of a new relationship between national culture and built space, it is unsurprising that initial criticisms of Te Papa centred on spatial issues. After the public release of the building design in 1992, 95% of Wellington’s *Evening Post* poll respondents recommended shelving the plans. Reasons were wide-ranging: its location in Wellington was considered inappropriate due to the city’s weak tourist appeal; its harbour side location was deemed unsafe; the building was said to be too large; Maori exhibits were to have been granted too much space; art was considered to have too little. These conjectures suggest that while all institutions are produced spaces, museums are particularly visible and meaningful in their spatial orchestration. The size and character of spaces, the relation between them, and the activities they support significantly determine the received messages. The museum is a cultural project in which, as John Urry puts it, ‘spaces, histories and social activities are being materially and symbolically remade’.
which social divisions and cultural classifications are expressed using spatial metaphors or descriptive spatial divisions. Among and within Te Papa’s exhibitions, geographies of centrality and marginalisation are related through the relative disposition of space. Apart from the bicultural division, the other spatial scheme is an approximate sense of the traditional ascension from natural history on the lowest exhibition floor, to art at the highest, with social history in between. Interior space, decentred and without a spatial apex or conceptual culmination, encourages non-linear exploration. If the building makes any monumental statement, it is scepticism towards monumentality.

The stark permanence of the façade of the old National Museum can be seen as having expressed the immanent power associated with the state. Susan Stewart has written that, the discourse of a city is a syncretic discourse, political in its untranslatability.

Hence the language of the state elides it. Unable to speak all the city’s languages, unable to speak all at once, the state’s language becomes monumental, the silence of headquarters, the silence of the bank. By contrast, a museum like Te Papa inhabits an ambivalent position with regard to Stewart’s notion of monumental language. As a national museum it remains a repository or ‘cultural bank’ (like the bank, its valuables lie in vaults). Both institutions have relied on architectural permanence to induce customer confidence, yet they also now wish to pursue those who found this appearance inhospitable. Like banks, museums attempt to reverse this sense of seclusion, by using glass partitions rather than stone walls, for instance. If the thick walls of the old National Museum suggested a kind of fortification against the whims of the times, Te Papa’s colourful windows aim to let the outside world in, and make the inner workings transparent to the gaze of passers-by. (A prime example of this is the new Melbourne Museum. On its second floor, the museum has a glass wall containing rows of staff offices, allowing visitors on the forecourt below to watch museum staff as they work). Furthermore, like contemporary banks, museums attract customers by promoting communication technologies as tools that benefit consumers by allowing them to personalise information. While it may be disputed that, unlike
commercial institutions, the museum is expected to be ‘relevant’ for reasons that are not only financial, the contemporary museum façade increasingly reflects commercial concerns, inasmuch as an idiosyncratic architectural style is itself a major visitor drawcard.

b. New Grounds for Intervention: Market Rationalism and ‘Cultural Tourism’

An architectural style consistent with national ‘branding’ is strongly motivated by issues of international prestige and competition. As the PDB identified in their 1985 document, a new museum could augment New Zealand’s appeal as a cultural tourism destination:

It is not an outlandish claim to note that a country’s museums can play a considerable role in establishing how a country is viewed from the outside. They can and do act as a significant trigger in tourist destination choices. Despite the high profile tourists already have among New Zealand museum visitors, it is clear from studies that cultural objectives do not figure significantly among tourist expectations of New Zealand.  

An investment of resources towards the concept of a Pacific Aotearoa/New Zealand possesses greater competitive advantage than the ‘Britain of the South Pacific’ reputation fostered in previous decades. To promote this new national statement, the PDT imagined the new museum taking its place alongside other waterfront attractions. They proposed sculptures from the national collection in the outdoor public spaces, ships berthing at a wharf next to the complex, a jetty, a beach, and a range of shops and cafes. Glazed display halls connecting the museum with the city and the harbour were planned to attract visitors into and through the museum. The concept was internationalist in outlook:

The area is destined to develop a sense of excitement similar to that around the Centre Pompidou in Paris with its performers, Fisherman’s Wharf in San Francisco with its grouped tourist attractions, or SoHo in New York, an art and
cultural district. It has the potential to become one of the best-known open spaces in New Zealand.⁴⁸

Although little of this larger concept has come to fruition, the desire for such a plan reflects Te Papa’s conceptualisation in an era that sees escalating competition to house new architecturally iconic museums in dramatic cultural precincts. Recent examples include James Stirling’s Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart (1984); Arata Isozaki’s Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art (1986); Gae Aulenti’s Musee D’Orsay in Paris (1987); Mario Botta’s San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (1995); Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim in Bilbao (1997); Richard Meier’s Getty Center in Los Angeles (1997); and Renzo Piano’s Jean-Marie Tjibaou Cultural Centre in New Caledonia (1998). These signature buildings have become highly significant cultural objects in their own right, to the point of replacing the collection as the main attraction.

If the building has largely become the exhibit, the name has become a brand. Te Papa aspires to ‘brand recognition’ in the way that Guggenheim has taken its place alongside international labels like Gucci or Moet. This ambition relies on an information and communications environment that seeks seamless harmonization between the logo, architecture and orientation lobbies, information trails and signage, restaurants, layout and cabling of lighting and sound, interior design, storyboarding of exhibitions, and visual interfaces. This is enclosed in a graphic identity, reproduced in pamphlets, print advertisements, street posters, and websites, to create a recognisable corporate unity. Te Papa’s thumbprint logo is ubiquitous (an earlier logo – a rough ‘X’ that aimed to convey territorialisation – was the subject of internal contention. Several Maori consulted believed the X was an underhanded slur towards those Maori chiefs who did not possess signatures for the Treaty of Waitangi). While an iconic brand is most simply a mnemonic device, it also helps to increase sales at museum stores (given that a recognisable icon on souvenirs allows consumers to associate themselves with the institution’s image). Consumer strategies are carefully assessed; Te Papa takes few chances with visitor preferences. Surveys and focus groups influence everything from the way hosts are trained, to the preferred name for a new exhibition. Market research produces quite
specific target markets. For instance, the ‘potential audience for Masquerade [a visual arts exhibition with a courtship theme] has been defined as those visitors extremely interested in love and sex in New Zealand, fashion and listening to music’. The target audience is female, employed in the manual and clerical occupations, and ‘goes to nightclubs, enjoys socialising’. They are ‘likely to spend money in the Foodtrain, Espresso and Te Papa store’.  

Te Papa’s creation coincided with the Government adopting (via the New Zealand Tourism Board) a ‘national brand’ for the first time, whose keywords include: unaffected, open and honest; young, active, fresh; not knowing ‘can’t do’; resolute; quiet achievers; and seeking contemporary solutions. Awareness of the museum’s utility for national branding helps to explain its somewhat anomalous existence, given the Government’s diminution of funding to the public sector in the past two decades. Fundamental changes have been consolidated that have shifted New Zealand from a society regulated by the communitarian principles of social democracy to one focused on the individualism of free-market liberalism. From the mid-1980s, the New Zealand Government sought to explore new revenue sources to reduce public sector costs, and activities deemed marginal have experienced substantial budget cuts. Yet the creation of an expensive, publicly subsidised institution with free entry goes against the grain of a wide-ranging ‘user pays’ philosophy in other public sector areas. A $320 million museum cannot be considered, on any scale, a contraction of funds to the cultural sphere. Moreover, given that the Government established, owns and partially subsidises Te Papa, it has not greatly rescinded its role as patron, guardian and educator in the sector. Nevertheless, the Government has made clear its expectation that a substantial proportion of ongoing, operational costs will be supported by the museum’s revenue-creating activities, and it exerts strong pressure for financial accountability. Under the Public Finances Act of 1989, Te Papa was classified as a Crown entity. As such, it was required to produce an annual corporate plan that aggregates its activities into a range of costed outputs and reports on its success in achieving them. If we recall (from chapter one) ex-Prime Minister Jim Bolger’s claim that Te Papa represents a ‘symbol of the nation’s economic recovery’, this might be better seen not because Te Papa stands for taxpayers’ $320
million largesse, but because its market competitiveness would allow it to be partially ‘released’ from Government dependency. A corporate rationale is applied at the micro level, where the museum’s operations are subject to close empirical scrutiny, and at a macro-ideological level, where Te Papa exemplifies and publicises its commitment to the free market. Hence, Te Papa was not just affected by a wider shift towards market-oriented policies, but was positioned as a symbol of the nation’s sleek, new international competitiveness.

If the museum was once imagined as an exemplary refuge from economic transactions (since its financial relations were largely hidden from public view), it now proves a particularly provocative site to witness corporate involvement in the public sector. The Government program to ‘change the culture’ in New Zealand signals how ‘culture’ refers, in this context, to the complex of social values, customs and beliefs informing workplace relations. The ‘culture’ of cultural institutions is imagined as a manipulable medium to be reworked in the political sphere. In Te Papa’s case, ‘cultural policy’ appears to be partially subordinate to economic policy. Within the museum, economics has become cultural policy inasmuch as it assumes the status of ideology and generates its own worldview and institutional language (such as the ‘corporate principle’ of ‘commercial positivity’). Meaghan Morris has observed how, in this kind of project, ‘culture’ is redefined ‘as merely the malleable, consumable environment of economic action’. In this sense, the tourist, recreation and leisure industries that the museum supports become the characteristic cultural forms of an economic ideology. The Department of Internal Affairs has stated:

[ it] is difficult to separate out cultural policy from social and economic policy... it is clear that cultural diversity and an innovative society are necessary ingredients for economic development. There is a strong argument for the Government’s involvement in the arts and cultural area on economic grounds alone.

During the critical period of Te Papa’s development in the late 1980s, a paper commissioned by the New Zealand Trade Development Board estimated that the arts
alone could assist the expansion of the economy by generating NZ$200 million in foreign exchange revenue.\textsuperscript{55} When market liberalism itself constitutes a cultural worldview, the conceptual separation of ‘customer focus’ (as cultural policy) and ‘commercial positivity’ (as economic policy) is obfuscated. This conflation strongly suggests that the wider systems of belief and values culturally generated and transmitted – and the public policies through which they find expression – will eventually be harmonised with individualistic concepts informing market liberalism. However, this observation may itself conceal how New Zealand’s economic culture has already exerted far-reaching effects on aspects of personal belief, value systems and ways of life – in other words, culture in its ‘organic’ sense.

Te Papa links its services and its fortunes to those of the local tourist industry. The museum was planned during a decade that saw a 105% increase in tourist growth in New Zealand. However, this mostly bypassed Wellington, which remained stagnant.\textsuperscript{56} Despite being the centrally located capital, it was only the fifth most visited destination by international tourists after Auckland, Christchurch, Rotorua and Queenstown.\textsuperscript{57} Wellington has historically been best known as the site of Government rather than a tourist centre in its own right. In a country where the natural environment itself has typically been viewed as a ‘total attraction’, tourist industry representatives have expressed doubts over whether New Zealand can develop specific tourist sites. The \textit{Wellington Region Tourism Strategy} laments, ‘most attractions are in themselves outside the scope of the industry’, including ‘free, inherent and natural resources’ or ‘incidental resources from various industries’.\textsuperscript{58} While Wellington is the obvious home for a national museum due to its capital city status, the museum’s location was also a determined effort to reverse the city’s tourism fortunes. This appears to have worked; Te Papa claims it brings over $200 million of additional spending into the region per annum.\textsuperscript{59} In 2001 the tourism sector contributed 9.3% to New Zealand’s GDP, making it the largest foreign exchange earner and accounting for, directly or indirectly, one in ten jobs.\textsuperscript{60} Yet, there remains a notable paradox that despite its success in attracting visitors, Te Papa’s national mandate means that it scarcely represents Wellington city at all – this is left to other local
institutions such as the Maritime Museum, Colonial Cottage, Katherine Mansfield Birthplace, and the City Gallery.

To attract large numbers of tourists prepared to spend, Te Papa supplements its fixed exhibitions with regular touring ‘blockbuster’ shows. Wide-ranging in nature, these have included Star Trek (TV/film series), Punkulture (punk music), Ancient Lives (Greek, Roman and Etrurian antiquities), Versace (fashion), ReggaeXplosion (reggae music), Henry Moore (sculpture), Body Odyssey (interactive science), and Lord of the Rings (book/film series). Te Papa has emerged in a period of growing criticism worldwide (though perhaps not from the public at large) of museums’ growing propensity to rely heavily on blockbusters. In the U.S key museums have been charged with trivialising their own status through popular culture displays (called the ‘McGuggenheim’ phenomenon in the press). In London enormous crowds at Tate Modern for blockbusters have been held responsible for diminished attendance at other ‘solid, well-created exhibitions’. In Australia it was recently reported that ‘cash-strapped state galleries [are] being forced to stage more “blockbuster” exhibitions at the expense of Australian content and curatorial quality’. Undeterred by such concerns, Te Papa has keenly pursued the international trade in blockbusters. In February 2001 museum staff travelled to Los Angeles to court New Line Cinemas to host a ‘The Lord of the Rings’ exhibition (to compliment a proposed Lord of the Rings theme park in Wellington). Their success, made possible with Government support, saw them open the exhibition in December 2002.

Corporate sponsorship is a mandatory part of Te Papa’s business model. Ronald Trotter, ex-Chair of the Board put it bluntly: ‘You might have to think about things that you don’t want to think about, like ‘Fletcher Forest Park’, or ‘Telecom Walk Through Time’. But if I can get $10 million out of Telecom, they can call it what they like’. Te Papa has the Tower (finance) Gallery, the TelstraSaturn (telecommunications) Centre, and the Ericsson (mobile communications) Zone, amongst others. The latter features a display at the entrance with an antique wooden phone. Beneath it sit latest model Ericsson mobile phones with accompanying placards advertising their features. In this case at least,
pressure from sponsors has compromised the integrity of the museum by turning collection items into advertising props. Te Papa’s promotional material also makes it clear that exhibition spaces are produced not only with visitors in mind:

Imagine your function in the interactive Awesome Forces exhibition amid earthquake simulators and real footage of Mt Ruapehu eruptions. Picture a fabulous cocktail evening in Signs of a Nation, right in the heart of Te Papa.66

The transformation of pedagogic national space to decorative corporate space suggests that what might be pitched as instructive for some may merely be a novel corporate pitch for others. To be fair, a perilous balancing act is required of the museum: it must partially shun the public trough and generate its own income, yet it is criticised if it pursues commercial opportunities too eagerly.

A key aspect of Te Papa’s tourist appeal is its Maori attractions. The rapid growth of cultural tourism specifically focused on traditional Maori culture throughout New Zealand has seen the Government create legislative and management initiatives geared towards interpretive and protection strategies. Emphasis has been not only on gaining Maori agreement to the packaging and marketing of Maori culture but also on developing opportunities for Maori ownership and control of tourist enterprises.67 In practice, these directives often amount to an appeal for Maori culture to be promoted in ways that offer a ‘superior tourism’ unavailable to conventional tourists at mainstream sites. As Meaghan Morris has observed, ‘the rhetoric of moral superiority to tourism (especially in the form of touristic anti–tourism) [is] in perfect conformity with the logic of differentiation that motivates tourism.’68 For example, writing about a pre-colonial model village set in native forest at Tamaki, industry magazine Venture states:

Tourists will enjoy the ‘roots and context’ of Maori culture at the Tamaki Maori Village, and they will also enjoy other valid cultural experiences in New Zealand, and help put us on the map as a chosen destination by the sophisticated, the educated and the discerning traveller. The tourism strategy notes that if we are to
differentiate ourselves on the global tourism market, then more cultural tourism ‘products’ are needed.  

The potential conflict between ‘more products’ based on ‘valid cultural experiences’ highlights how tourist projects risk producing a narrowing of ideas about what is legitimate and authentic in a cultural repertoire. The marketing of indigeneity for consumption as a visitor experience depends largely on projecting an aura of uniqueness and wholeness. Through its performance at fixed sites, ‘culture’ is amplified. A cultural range is delimited and clarified through repetition and canonised through recordings made by a flow of visitors.

Marae are the generally accepted home of Maori culture. Though urban marae became common from the post-war period, those in rural settings with older histories are generally idealised as more authentic. Marae visits, incorporating tribal rituals of welcome and encounter, have emerged as the predominant form of Maori cultural tourism. At Tamaki, a marae ceremony begins with a decidedly theatrical, scripted experience:

The journey through time unfolds when your coach turns imaginatively into a Maori canoe (waka) and everyone on board paddles toward the village, a chief is selected, a song learnt and the eerie cry of the welcome goes forth before entering into a world of ancient Maori and proud warriors.

Tourists are then received by an orthodox powhiri including a wero, haka, and karanga. They can then attend workshops to learn Maori weaving, wood, bone and greenstone carving, native bush health remedies, musical instruments and warring challenges. Later visitors enjoy food from a hangi (earth oven), bar service and entertainment. Tamaki Village currently attracts 130 000 visitors annually and recently won a New Zealand Tourism Award for Best Cultural Experience. A similar experience is offered at Nga Hau E Wha marae in Christchurch. ‘A Night of Maori Magic’ begins with a powhiri, followed by an explanatory tour of the marae and hangi food. The evening is completed
by a performance from the marae’s cultural group that includes poi dances, action songs and a haka that encourages audience participation. In the decade since the attraction opened in 1990, the group has made 1000 performances. While this urban marae is set aside for members of disparate tribes with no traditional cultural centre, this apparently does not detract from the authenticity of the experience. ‘Tourists aren’t that interested in North and South Island tribal distinctions’, says David Brennan, chief executive of Nga Hau E Wha, ‘so long as they have a good time’.

Approaching Te Marae, we might consider how Te Papa balances tourists’ desire for spectacle with a respect for protocol. Or rather, we might speculate about the effect viewers’ expectation of authenticity has on the performance of traditional protocol. The popularity of many ‘traditional’ cultural tourism events is due in part to the tourist’s willing suspension of disbelief, in which immersion in experience overrides doubts about manipulation. Performances like the marae shows enact a paradox of authentic cultural tourism that Dean MacCannell calls ‘staged authenticity’, and Christopher B. Balme names ‘fictionalised real encounters’. MacCannell contends that tourism is a prominent cultural expression of a ‘dialectic of authenticity’ that structures modern consciousness. He argues that for contemporary Westerners, authenticity is thought to be elsewhere, ‘in other historical periods and cultures, in purer, simpler lifestyles’. For MacCannell, the lingering vestiges of modernist colonial romanticism and cultural domination are the historical underpinnings of the Western attraction to the primitive, including the postcolonial cosmopolitan rationalization for voyeuristic experiences of cultural otherness. According to MacCannell, modern tourists are motivated by the paradoxical and seemingly inexhaustible hope that they can discover genuine cultures and pristine states of nature that have somehow remained uncontaminated by the very market forces that enable tourists to experience them.

On the surface, the institutionalization of primitive-performance-for-others appears as a hybrid form. Such performances seem to combine modern elements of self-interested rational planning and economic calculation with primitive costumes, weapons, music, and rituals that once existed beyond the reach of
economic rationality.... It is a pseudohybridity characteristic of the ideology of complexity found in postmodern groups and classes that want to think of themselves as being on the cutting edge even as they no longer support and even suppress new and alternate ways of thinking. The image of the savages that emerges from these exprimitive performances completes the postmodern fantasy of ‘authentic alterity’ which is ideologically necessary in the promotion and development of global monoculture.\textsuperscript{78}

MacCannell’s reference to the development of a global monoculture does not imagine a homogenising or ‘Americanising’ process. Rather, he contends that it is the systematic recital, routinization and classification of cultural differences that facilitates their commodification, marketing, and consumption. The value ascribed by tourists to the experience of travel, both literal and metaphoric, outside one’s own cultural frame of reference subtly reproduces a narrative of exoticism.\textsuperscript{79}

Returning to Te Papa, we might anticipate that an awareness of this kind of critique might create difficulties of principle for the museum. On the one hand, a standard Maori cultural repertoire is undeniably desirable in projections of national uniqueness, given its uniqueness and existing cachet. Further, if Maori at the museum choose to present Maori culture in standard or traditional ways, then it is hardly suitable for others to disallow this. Yet, on the other hand, Te Papa has nurtured an image of presenting the culture and history of its constituencies in progressive and even unpredictable ways. How, then, might Te Papa advertise and celebrate Maori culture without reproducing hackneyed or culturally conservative forms of exoticism? In this next section, I argue that Te Papa responds to this dilemma by making Maori tradition available for tourist consumption in a particular postmodern, unconventional style. Dodging established forms of marae culture, Te Papa promotes its own innovative brand of cultural self-determination as a key asset in the Te Papa experience.
3. Te Marae: Making Maori Tradition Popular

a. Encountering Te Marae

Te Papa is the world’s only museum to have a living, functioning marae.\(^80\) In 2001 43\% (550 000 people) visited *Te Marae*, making it, in Te Papa’s estimation, a ‘key attraction’.\(^81\) *Te Marae* is also used frequently for events. In 2001 108 events took place, mostly powhiri for corporate and tour groups, in front of 20 884 people.\(^82\) *Te Marae* is centrally located with multiple approaches, to encourage as many people as possible to pass through it. Te Papa prefers to describe its location through Maori creation myth:

As the children of Rangi and Papa established themselves in this world, they each developed special responsibilities – Tawhirimatea, for the wind, Tangaroa, for the oceans, Tane, for the forest and so forth. Thus it is appropriate that our marae is situated here, at the confluence of these elements.\(^83\)

As Day One celebrations attested, *Te Marae* is a key space in Te Papa’s scheme to ‘support the encounter’ between Maori and Pakeha through an arrangement that ‘preserves and respects the differences in the cultures while promoting a common ground of conversation between them’.\(^84\) The *Interpretive Plan* states:

[a bicultural museum means] in Pakeha terms… drawing upon the Western tradition of museums as places of learning, enjoyment, contemplation, and intellectual activity.. [In Maori terms]… the spiritual dimension, the taha wairua, centred on the Marae will be manifest throughout the Museum… Museums are one of the gifts that European culture has brought to this land, just as the Marae is one of the gifts that Maori society brings to the Museum.\(^85\)

The design brief stipulated that the marae would tell ‘the story of the creation of Aotearoa/ New Zealand’ and ‘express biculturalism’.\(^86\)
Te Marae’s main feature is the carved whare-wananga named Te Hono ki Hawaiki (‘the link back to Hawaiki’). It is most notable for its unusual appearance:

The decorative three-dimensional figures are cobbled together from pieces of composition board, the stuff the cheapest children’s furniture is made of, cut into shapes by modern, powered fretsaws, embellished with pieces of galvanised iron cut with tin-snips, and painted with aerosol shading in garish non-Maori colours such as peacock blue, purple, apricot, and pale emerald, surrounding an inverted Japanese archway leading into a shallow interior surmounted by a row of Turkish minarets leading up into an impossibly sapphire sky.87

The fibreboard carvings of Te Hono ki Hawaiki include Polynesian flowers, Chinese dragons, Celtic emblems and English roses. Mythical Maori ancestors and gods are positioned beside settler characters, such as a missionary, farmer, and schoolteacher. While it is most obviously modelled on a traditional whare-wananga, the inside walls present carved reliefs similar in appearance to stained glass windows, while the back section features the Gothic doorways of the medieval church.
To appreciate the import of this highly unconventional appearance, a brief explanation of the customary role of the marae and whare-wananga is useful. The marae is central to Maori mythical history; it migrated with Maori to New Zealand about 1000 years ago, and is asserted to have been part of Polynesian culture for 3-4000 years. It is the cornerstone of tribal culture and provides spiritual, economic, social, and political organization. Maori beliefs about cosmogony, origins, life, death, and ethnic unity find elaborate revelation in the exalted woodcarvings of the whare-wananga. Carvings are also one way that Maori ‘remember’ the ancestral migrations that brought them to New Zealand. Storytellers on the marae link the main events and characters depicted in carvings through the traditional method of genealogical recital. Details of mythical voyages (the names of canoes, chiefs, elders and master carvers, and the objects, plants and animals they brought with them) are familiar to the descendants of the founders. The powhiri expresses tribal ownership over the whare-wananga and makes a claim for it as a living entity. As a marae guidebook puts it, ‘Just as the ancestors live on through the

Figure 5: Te Marae Picture courtesy of Te Papa.
house, so the *karanga* provides the medium by which the living and the dead of the [visitors] may cross the physical space to unite with the living and the dead of the [hosts]. This teleology helps to elucidate how the whare-wananga as a living presence ‘is richer than mere simile; it is beyond the idea of metaphor or representation in a European educated sense. For the Maori, the house is not *like* an ancestor, it *is* the ancestor.’ Hence, mana is vested not only in the recovery of a neglected art form, but also in the remembrance of tribal ancestry:

For taonga the issue is not a second life as an exhibit. What is at stake is the restoration of living links to taonga that never died... The life force of taonga depends not on techniques of animation but on the living transmission of cultural knowledge and values.

Customarily, the *building* of any whare-wananga itself carries significant cultural and historical weight. The impetus to construct a new whare-wananga reflects that, since the 1970s, the meetinghouse has been re-politicised as a symbol of ethnic and indigenous distinctiveness. It is suggested that the recent Maori cultural renaissance would not have gained its visibility without the traditional whare-wananga as its focus. Over the past thirty years the rejuvenation of Maori art and carving has been pursued by the state with the political goal of improving Maori socio-economic standards through integration and cultural pride. In this light, the well-publicised construction of *Te Hono ki Hawaiki*, led by former kaihatu Cliff Whiting (joint-CEO, whose name is taken from ‘helmsman of a waka’), and carried out by young apprentice carvers from throughout New Zealand, not only speaks of the Maori ‘cultural renaissance’ but gestures towards the state’s desire to be seen as publicly supporting the program to keep Maori culture alive.

How might we conceive a situation where a patently constructed tourist attraction is produced as traditional? *Te Hono ki Hawaiki* stands for the expansion of conceptions of what is cherished and valued in Maori culture, beyond the classical pre and early colonial ethnographic periods typically favoured by the museum. By claiming that ancestral presence equally imbues this new structure, Maori at Te Papa assert their right to define
what qualifies as tradition, and assert that tradition is not a matter of old appearances, materials or techniques, and nor has it been lost to modernity. These ideas appear particularly valid in the present period, when a general article of faith associated with ‘identity politics’ says that only members of a culture can define cultural values; whatever Maori claim as authentic becomes, ipso facto, authentic. This self-defined sense of authenticity is closely related to James Clifford’s notion of the ‘newly, traditional’. In this, objects are authenticated not through the colonial museum philosophy of ‘salvage ethnography’, which awarded the museum the duty of preserving the finest examples of a culture’s classical past before being lost, but through a different temporality that allows tradition to flow into the contemporary. Maori objects and things designated as taonga become newly, traditionally meaningful in the context of their present validation – with an eye for becoming tradition of the future. Although \textit{Te Marae} potentially represents a suitable example of Clifford’s idea, I reflect in the next two sections on the lack of charge or persuasiveness that the marae possesses, and following, the problems associated with communicating the ‘newly, traditional’.

\textbf{b. Tribal Difficulties with \textit{Te Marae}: Protocol}

Rather than its irregular appearance, it is Te Papa’s least visible departure from tradition that makes \textit{Te Marae} contentious for some Maori. The issue of naming – specifically, the museum’s full Maori suffix, ‘Te Papa Tongarewa’ – effectively introduces the issue of customary authority that underpins the marae. The controversy began when Peter Tapsell, Government minister responsible for the museum, asked Pateriki te Rei, a kaumatua of the local Ngati Toa-Te Ati Awa tribes, to provide a suitable name. During a tangihangi (funeral) Pateriki te Rei’s attention was drawn to a waiata-tangi (song of lament) that made reference to the most precious greenstone taonga ever known: \textit{kuru tonga rerewa}. This name was gifted from Te Arawa, the customary owners of the greenstone, to Pateriki te Rei, who then presented it to the Government. When the name ‘Te Papa Tongarewa’ was legislated into being in 1992, Pateriki te Rei saw it as nonsense that not only insulted the Maori language, but also demeaned the famous taonga’s mauri (life force). Over the next four years, the tribes tried unsuccessfully to gain an
explanation. They eventually received notification only that the original name had been lost, and that the new name ‘Tongarewa’ was synonymous with ‘Tonga rerewa’. Meanwhile, ‘Te Papa - Our Place’ had been chosen as the brand name. The starting point for the brand is the Maori customary term turangawaewae, an important poetic reference to ‘a place to stand’ on one’s home tribal marae. ‘A place to stand’ was in turn simplified to ‘Our Place’, before finally being transliterated back into Maori in the form of ‘Te Papa’. The dubious processes through which these names were chosen suggests to one prominent critic, Paul Tapsell, that Te Papa’s consultation process ‘seemed to have less to do with listening and more to do with the sale of post-colonial “biculturalism” to wider Maori society’. What began as a gift with specific tribal attachments became diffused through a series of linguistic slippages in order that it could appeal to any tribal marae – and indeed, with its English language brand name, to anyone’s sense of home.

*Te Marae* is positioned as the embodiment and exemplification of Te Papa’s central institutional principle of ‘a place to stand’ for all citizens. Yet the traditional marae form is quite unconducive to an all-welcoming public space (as the Waitangi Day example cited in the introduction attested). Customarily, local tribes exercise absolute rights of invitation and procedure, and a strict set of rules governs the conduct of manuhiri. However, Te Papa’s planners sought to make all elements of the institution accessible, including the marae. In order to justify this unprecedented situation, Te Papa created its concept of *Mana Taonga*, which upholds:

1. Rights of iwi to the marae in equality with all other iwi was their right through their taonga held by the Museum.

2. These rights were enshrined by the fact that they had a whakapapa both in the traditions/history expressed by the taonga as well as that of the creator of taonga.

3. These rights accorded to iwi the mana to care for their taonga, to speak about and with them, and to determine their exhibitionary use or uses by the Museum.

4. These rights gave iwi the mana of co ownership of the marae with all other iwi.
The crux is that all New Zealanders have the right to stand on this marae because the museum’s collections – reconceived as Maori and Pakeha taonga – belongs to its citizens, who have a common, intertwined whakapapa. Te Papa’s Interpretive Plan asserts that the ‘concept of Mana Taonga will enable the Marae to extend its mana, or spiritual power, over the treasures of both cultures, and will allow both cultures to use the Marae for events and ceremonies’. To enable this to occur practically, much standard protocol is waived: visitors can enter the space without being invited by local tangata whenua; those who visited Te Papa before its opening were not only permitted but welcomed to enter the marae during the traditionally tapu (sacred) carving process; visitors are not asked to remove their footwear; women are afforded equal status to explore the marae and speak as they wish; it is made available for corporate events where alcohol and food is present. There has been some displeasure expressed by Maori kaitiaki (guardians) at the way that museum requests for iwi participation in corporate and official events verges on tokenism – a ‘dial-a-powhiri’ situation.

Yet more than these matters, it is issues of inter-tribal protocol and relationships that make Te Papa’s policy most contentious. The customary ownership of land on which a marae rests is intrinsic to the very concept of the marae-as-meeting-ground in tribal life. The Mana Taonga arrangement – where the ‘descent’ of objects that collectively ‘belong to’ (though only symbolically) Maori, Pakeha and other minorities dictates who can stand on the marae – ignores the tangata whenua who has proprietary authority over the land. Broadly speaking, this policy is symptomatic of the increasing trend for museums to gesture towards a very wide and democratic notion of cultural property. More specifically, the scheme was undoubtedly informed by memories of Te Maori, where each museum adopted the role of marae host for the duration of the exhibition. While this arrangement may have been practicable in the U.S, its continuation for the homecoming tour of New Zealand was a different matter. It confounded and displeased many Maori who expected to exercise customary tangata whenua authority in their own region.

Similarly, the undifferentiated inclusiveness of Te Papa’s Mana Taonga policy not only alienates Te Ati Awa and Ngati Toa, the tangata whenua of the Wellington region, but it profoundly undermines the tikanga that makes the marae unique. A marae that is not the
preserve of a local tribe exists in a kind of customary non-space. This has led to perilous cultural precedents. For example, former kaihatu Cliff Whiting, when asked to justify the policy of open public access to the normally tapu carving process, responded: ‘Who was the iwi here? It was only us! And of course, the Board. They’re the iwi – and none of them told me to make it tapu’! In effect, Te Papa has become the self-appointed iwi, with non-tangata whenua employees and advisers maintaining the marae, while all others have the status of manuhiri. However, if some tribal Maori accuse the Mana Taonga arrangement of interfering with tradition, evidence suggests that even this compromised form of Maori custom was hard-won. A bitter debate between Sir Ron Trotter (ex-Chairman of the Board) and Cliff Whiting over the protocol of Te Marae (then still in construction) is captured in the documentary film Getting to Our Place:

Trotter: I gather it’s [the marae] not going to be entirely traditional, and I’m anxious to think that the developing ideas that will be taken into the next millennium are… respecting the past, and taking the best from the past, but being a little more liberal. If we have a concept of a place to stand for all New Zealanders, that has really to be respected in the marae… and it’s to work out in a way that makes it both comfortable and warm for any iwi who come here, but comfortable and warm and part of the place for any Pakeha who is part of the Mana Taonga that we are talking about. That’s the concept that we are trying to develop.

Whiting: There are two main fields that have to be explored, and one that is most important is its customary role in the first place, because marae comes out of and comes from the tangata whenua who are Maori. To change it –

Trotter: It’s not just for Maori! (Begins thumping table). You must get that. If it’s… a Maori institution and nothing more, this marae has failed, and they must get that idea… because we are bicultural. Bicultural talks about two people, and if it’s going to be totally Maori, and all driven by Maori protocols, and without regard for the life – museum is a Pakeha concept. I’d rather be without a marae if women can’t speak on the marae, so we’re all going to be Ngati Porou [North Island East
Coast tribe], because they let women speak. We can’t have a kawa that says that women can’t speak. I will not chair an institution headed by a woman if she can’t…stand there in her own right. Now I know there are sensitivities by…some iwi, but we’ve got to be bold enough to say we’re going to make our own kawa. And I don’t mind if 75% of iwi are a bit irritated, that we are being more liberal because we’re going the Ngati Porou way, but at least within Maoritanga there are both sides to that debate… We want to be able to put a bicultural spin on the ball is what I’m saying, and I say, this has to satisfy both cultures.

Whiting: And yes, I would say that I support that, but it has to satisfy both and not be compromised.

(Later, to camera) I just had to suppress a lot of inner feeling, mainly because it’s what I do know, of a life-long experience is that to gain some of the ground forward is to actually at times to have to take that sort of crap. And there are lots of things which I found very arrogant and contained a lot of ignorance. Somebody who doesn’t know Maori culture – doesn’t know Maori full stop – to come in and start to want to change a very important part of the culture, and, you saw it. It’s one of the major threats for instance, to the maintenance of Maori culture. It’s very fragile. 107

The moot issue is how a contemporaneous bicultural version of an institution that is traditionally tribally specific should function. By requesting that the marae be made more ‘liberal’, Trotter links progressive, modernized Maori culture with democratic involvement. For Trotter, the virtues of the democratic public sphere can be relatively simply applied to the marae as a corrective to outdated notions ingrained in tradition. The Te Marae conflict is symptomatic of wider issues involving the position of restricted indigenous custom in museums. The built-in paradox of the marae as a place of privileged access and genealogical inscription, and a modern tourist site that is a highly recognisable emblem of Maori culture, means that it is simultaneously private and public, secret and publicised, nurturing and performative. The popularising of the marae requires a delicate balance between tradition being knowledge earned in a restricted tribal context,
and tradition as a focus for national communion. As I will argue next, the problem for non-Maori audiences may be that, in this instance, tradition is seen as too detached from its social base to offer a compelling vision of tradition.

c. Non-Maori and Te Marae: The Authenticity Dilemma

Te Marae’s break from Maori tradition can be viewed as echoing and reinforcing Te Papa’s break from conventional museology. That Te Marae is produced in discontinuity with other marae around New Zealand (and marae-type structures in the Pacific) is immediately noticeable. On everyday, unscheduled visits, the absence of any encounter ceremony greatly reduces an awareness of how a marae is put to use. As a pallid replacement, visitors can use interactive touch-screen kiosks that offer two ways to learn about a powhiri. One uses cartoon figures in a step-by-step guide, while the other challenges the user to piece the sequence together as a puzzle. The brightly coloured fibreboard and highly irregular subject of some carvings will strike those with any familiarity with Maori carving as inauthentic. The unorthodox practice of situating a Te Hono ki Hawaiki on the fourth floor, within another host institution, is also likely to be widely observed. Its sequestration from the outside world, its elevation from the earth – its distance from papatuanuku – makes it symbolic aspects, such as cosmogonic character representations of the winds, oceans and forests, more remote.

These physical aspects might not unduly bother visitors if they did not arrive with the expectation that carvings offer some kind of conduit to a different cultural world. The autochthony and animism that characterises Maori origin myth situates it in an alternative temporal and conceptual space from Enlightenment historical narratives, of which national modernization is a latter-day part. The personification of creation in Maori myth disrupts the basic scientific order that posits the existence of nature prior to people. The geological and anthropological sciences attest that New Zealand was settled only extremely recently. More than almost anywhere else, New Zealand is a land that has only of late coevolved with humans. For most Westerners, the counter-intuitive nature of Maori claims to primordial existence means that they can only accepted as rhetorical or
fantastical, rather than evidential. Historians too have drawn attention to the way Maori have produced their own beginning by extending the poetic and linguistic qualities of their historic memory.¹⁰⁸

Nevertheless, this is not necessarily a problem for the museum. The elegiac quality of a Maori ontology that posits an alternative mode of expression and temporal dimension to Western historicity is particularly attractive for a museum constructed as pointedly post-colonial. A performative, social connection with ancestors from deep time counteracts the previous museological location of indigeneity in a nature-state preceding society. Maori have reclaimed taonga as animate beings, and assume the responsibility to nurture, speak to and stroke them. Te Papa has not been slow to recognise that this kind of object-performance provides a valuable device for the wider inculcation of ideas about identity and place. *Te Marae* is presented as not just a source of information about Maori myth, but also a place for the universal unearthing of cultural ‘roots’. Te Papa’s website states that ‘accepting the spiritual nature of Hawaiki enables this marae to be a place for all to stand’.¹⁰⁹ The mythical, geographically ambiguous nature of Hawaiki (scholars have deduced it may be the Cook or Society Islands) supports a metaphorical understanding: Hawaiki is anyone’s spiritual homeland.¹¹⁰ Several aspects of *Te Marae* are geared towards this premise. In one corner a huge slab of pounamu (greenstone) sits in a font of water shaped like a waka. Visitors are encouraged to run their wet hands over it, smoothing its surface, before being directed to water receptacles positioned at the marae’s entry and exit to remove tapu (sacred) spirits. In late 2001 a desk was installed in *Te Hono ki Hawaiki* to teach visitors about whakapapa by encouraging them to research their own lineage and record it at the desk. In practice, this involves writing on paper one’s affiliation to country, tribe, mountain, river, canoe, name, and parentage. Visitors then make a charcoal rubbing of one of the marae carvings (a missionary, teacher, chief et cetera) that most closely resembles their sense of identity. Once the page has been dropped into the slot at the desk, the visitor is deemed to have made a ‘formal connection to the marae’. Judging from the visible entries, many struggled to conceptualise their identity through the categories on offer (tribe and canoe being particularly troublesome).
These display tactics use indigeneity as a tool to encourage visitors to travel to their own spiritual awakening – itself imagined as a primal or elemental thing. Although by all appearances Te Papa supports Maori cultural self-determination and a new sense of national postcolonialism, this idea of discovering oneself through other cultures in fact echoes an older, well-established enticement for Westerners visiting ‘primitive’ museum galleries. The material culture of indigenous peoples has long been valued by Western museum visitors for its ability to offer insights into fundamental truths about the human condition (and one’s own psyche). According to some cultural criticism, the anomie of the modern industrial age has produced a particular mindset related to collecting and viewing. Susan Stewart has developed the idea that alienation from one’s personal past creates needs that collecting attempts to satisfy. The loss of specific origins of individual memory lends poignancy to collections, both personal and public, precisely because the souvenir can be seen as a symbol of the demise of memory.111 According to Stewart, museum objects are metonymic references between faint past events and the present that help to stir a longing for the past – and for personal memory. As she puts it, ‘the souvenir involves the displacement of attention into the past. The souvenir is not simply an object appearing out of context, an object from the past incongruously surviving in the present; rather, its function is to envelop the present within the past’.112 Along similar lines, in Cannibal Cultures Deborah Root argues that the loss of communal pasts produced by the industrial age was one main reason for the nineteenth century explosion of museums. In museums, ‘primitive peoples’ were especially valuable in offering a more innocent past and a proximity to nature seemingly lost to Westerners. The museum experience can be called ‘cannibalistic’ inasmuch as the ‘exotic experiences’ delivered by the tourism industry encouraged particular kinds of appropriation, representation and consumption of cultural difference.113 This tendency is highlighted by the current interest in the ‘new primitivism’ of new-age movements. From the 1970s, a growing interest amongst liberal Pakeha in environmentalist causes and Maori culture saw them being labelled the ‘bone people’ (due to the Maori bone carvings they often wore).114 Another writer characterised these Pakeha as ‘...the guilty liberals [who] hang bone carvings around their necks, adopt Maori spellings of their names, call New Zealand Aotearoa and flock to the Te Maori exhibition as if it will assuage their guilt’.115 Even for those indifferent to this trend, it
remains that cultural tourism, along with eco-tourism and adventure tourism (the other types promoted in New Zealand), promises self-discovery as the reward of travel.

Museum history, which authenticates through material evidence, has an uncertain relation with Maori myth, given that no objects directly prove the time of original arrival and settlement. Confidence in the spiritual aspect of Te Marae requires a cognitive leap from the idea that it resembles a marae to the acknowledgment that it houses living spirits and is one. Where built form plays a role in the public appreciation of other cultures, it is generally as a material dimension reflective of, but separate from, culture defined as a system of meaning. The accepted separation of built form and culture means that cultural considerations are usually seen as symbolised additions to principles of building construction. To assume that there are meanings behind things is to assume that culture and built form, subject and object, or mind and body are separate. Visitors may believe that Maori believe in living ancestors, yet do not themselves know it. By wondering about the hidden meanings inside the carved figures, they are a symbol or emblem of deep time – but not the ‘(corpo)real thing’.

In their display of indigenous cultures (often housed in ‘primitive’ galleries), museums have typically conflated the dimensions of time and space. A certain style of ‘in-situ’ display – most notably dioramas set in nature – created a setting felt to suitably convey life in an earlier ‘ethnographic present’. The art of diorama froze indigenous peoples in their ‘natural habitat’ and produced a profound disjunction between an idealised model and those living in modern society. Contemporary Maori who live outside cities (in what is often glossed as a ‘tribal lifestyle’) are typically conceived as having been ‘left behind’ by the time of modern industrial nationhood. For those with little personal experience with tribal culture, marae are located ‘out there’, in some undefined space-time unmarked by the industrial processes that would define it within some epoch. Hence, the rural marae can be conceived from a tourism perspective as a setting that aids the projection of a deep ancestral connection. For most visitors, the patina of agedness that places objects in pre-settler time is essential to the imagination of antiquity. The ancestral figures carved into wooden house posts, canoe prows, storage boxes, and wooden and stone weapons in
Mana Whenua are visually striking and suggest a revered visual language. After viewing the magnificent totara carvings of the imposing mid-nineteenth century whare-wananga Te Hau ki Turanga, the self-consciously colourful Te Hono ki Hawaiki pales in comparison. Te Marae speaks in a ‘poetics of detachment’ in a different way from axiomatic pronunciations of indigenous artefacts’ de-contextualization that focuses on their displacement and radical functionlessness. Since much of the meaningfulness of any whare-wananga lies in stories about its construction, ownership, location or relocation, it is difficult to imagine Te Marae attaining the kind of aura that colonial era whare-wananga, residing on customary lands, command. Te Marae is de-contextualized not because it has been salvaged from history after an earlier life, but because remains divorced from any geographical and historical embedded-ness outside the museum.

In his pejorative review, Theodore Dalrymple compares Te Papa to an amusement arcade. While Dalrymple may have been primarily thinking of the flashy attractions inside the museum, the association is also relevant for the way it highlights the idea that amusement arcades (like theme parks, cinemas, convention centres or shopping malls), can be created anywhere. By contrast, Te Marae is overtly a small but significant part of Wellington’s 1990s harbour redevelopment. While it has location, as a spatial distribution of activity, it lacks attachment to place. Compared to marae that demonstrably function as the living, breathing heart of a community, Te Marae lacks history and credibility. Because it is so clearly as an exhibition space within a building, and because for most visitors not invited to any special event it has no welcoming ceremony, Te Marae cannot lay claim to an encounter dramaturgy in the way other marae can. Te Marae can be viewed as a postmodern simulacrum of the marae that mimics the use function and raison d’etre of the original, yet serves dissimilar ends. Te Papa’s interiors are meticulously designed not so much around the objects on display, but by visitors’ physical behaviours. Indeed, when Te Papa’s Ian Wedde calls the museum a ‘mall with chapters’, it is chiefly in the predestination of visitors’ movements that this is apprehensible. Exhibits are organised to punctuate main visitor pathways, with food, seats, views and iconic objects varying visitors’ sense of pace and attention. For its part, Te Marae has greater resonance as a culturally decorated atrium offering a breathing
space from Te Papa’s hive of activity. Similar to the location of chapels in airports, a marae in a national museum forms part of the gateway for tourists’ initial encounter with the new place, and offers a publicly visible statement of diversity and tolerance.

The chief conclusion apparent from the design and use philosophy of Te Marae is that it intends to make Maori culture available to all. It does this by conceptually organising the ancestral presence that animates tribal histories towards the broader, all-inclusive category of genealogy. However, by deploying customary ideas in a democratic scheme, universalist ideas about roots are privileged over a specific, local Maori life-world. Homi Bhabha has observed that the Western sense of synchronous tradition, that is, traditions that can be expressed as ‘separate but parallel’, tend to act teleologically to relegate the coeval, and are inclined to reject unresolved moments in the expression of histories of places. Non-sequential events and myths are written out as the past is modernised into a naturalised and unified discourse about the nation and tradition. In the process of assimilating tribal tradition into a popular national frame, it is turned into a different form of otherness from that produced in ethnographic displays. Te Papa’s Mana Taonga policy assimilates whakapapa as a new way of understanding collective identity. If Maori tradition is demystified to problematic effect in Te Marae, I next want to consider an exhibition devoted to Pakeha art-in-society to compare its treatment. Although art is shown in several spaces, Te Papa’s most ambitious and ideologically loaded exhibition was the (now defunct) Parade.

4. Parade: Valued Art and Public Values

a. Bringing Art to Life

The broad, irregular, semi-enclosed corridors of the Pakeha exhibitions are advertised by large colourful signs and striking iconic objects positioned at their entrances. From
opening until late 2001, visitors were particularly drawn to an old station wagon clad in corrugated iron which sat beneath a sign: *Parade: where there are people, there is art.* Jeff Thomson’s 1974 HQ Holden is clad in roofing iron retrieved from a rubbish dump after being scorched in a Nelson hotel fire. The vehicle was suspended slightly off the ground, as if to clarify its status as art. For those emerging from the solemnly lit *Mana Whenua*, the battered station wagon appeared impertinently modern. The Holden seemed more amusingly crude because of its placement next to John Britten’s futuristic 1000cc ‘superbike’. Hung high and surrounded, incongruously, by coffee lounge chairs, the kevlar and carbon fibre motorbike appeared weightless next to the cumbersome Holden. The story of the bike, relayed on nearby text panels, is that Britten, undeterred by a lack of the massive capital investment required by the big production workshops of American and Japanese motorcycle manufacturers, retreated to his suburban garage in search of design solutions. Working round the clock with his friends, Britten discarded conventional plans, from the shape of the chassis to the position of the fuel tank, and produced a radically different bike that went on to win a string of international victories and speed records. Despite the very different appearance and function of the two vehicles, their combined inference was clear: local creativity can be the ingenious stuff produced from rubbish dumps and garages. The vehicles demonstrated an irreverent do-it-yourself ethic heroically indifferent towards global industrial standardization.

As the vehicles at its entrance anticipated, *Parade* did not intend a traditional art gallery experience. While *Parade* featured works drawn from the collection of the old National Gallery, their incorporation into Te Papa has seen a radical change in their display. Compared with the clean walls and controlled landscapes of learning in the traditional museum, Te Papa creates a clash of contradictory spatialities. Narrative driven displays utilise state-of-the-art digital information delivery. TV, mechanical interactives, virtual reality, computer programs, and other applications of new communications technologies are employed to modify the sensory composure through which cognitive space in the museum has conventionally been predicated. Te Papa’s ‘unified collections’ policy, based on the cross-pollination of material drawn from different disciplines, is designed to allow curators to create polysemous readings of collection items, and has allowed the
process of collection itself to be differently conceived and prioritised. The PDT spoke of
drawing the collection up to a series of conceptual ‘windows’ in ‘different contexts and
relationships’ to reveal ‘interactions between different cultures’ and to ‘redefine’ the
‘relationship between mankind and the natural world’. The subject or media dedicated
galleries that characterised the traditional museum are no longer automatically aligned
with discrete spatial divisions. Art and artefact are not inevitably segregated nor is
interpretation organised by the conventions of contemplative idealism or classificatory
materialism.

These display tactics were plainly organised in opposition to conventional exhibition
modes. Much has been written about the way that the modern museum sought to regulate
visitor behaviour and inculcate civic values through austere yet sanctified spaces. In
fact the repetition of such generalizations has urged Eilean Hooper-Greenhill to suggest
that the British Museum (an institution that could be considered the imperial example
against which a postcolonial Te Papa was conceptualised) has achieved the status of
myth, in that much of what is held to be archetypical does not actually describe its
flexible and variable practices. Nevertheless, as a historical generalisation, objects,
‘rescued’ from real life, have conventionally been re-contextualised through taxonomic
display. This scheme aimed to explain patterns and ideas by ordering objects in one
horizon, be it spatial or temporal. Enclosed box-like spaces ensured no outside
distraction, allowing the object to monopolise attention. The physical space between
viewer and object reinforced the importance of the ocular, subordinating other senses to
sight. Sight was static, emphasising transcendental order rather than theatrical or
spectacular modes. Cognitive space was (and often still is) consistent with ideological
space, in that, ‘just as ideological space constructs the visitor as the inheritor of
Enlightenment canons of knowledge, cognitive space encourages the acquisition of that
knowledge mediated through the ‘textualized object’. As Walter Benjamin famously
observed, the aura of originality that surrounded the art object prior to mass production
was threatened in the modern age, due to the ability to separate an image from its object,
thereby displacing it from its particular time and place. Once the authority of the
original object could no longer be taken for granted, it had to be constructed and
guaranteed through certain display strategies. The cognitive space of the conventional museum is predicated on the interaction between the viewer and an object contextualised through catalogues and labels, which were intended to act as a surrogate for an absent lecturer.129

By contrast, Parade’s focus was very much on collapsing the conceptual space between viewers and objects. The exhibition’s ‘where there are people, there is art’ subtitle neatly communicated this new curatorial philosophy. This rhetorically democratic phrase suggested the rather flattering proposition that the simple fact of New Zealanders’ very existence is creative. Further into Parade an array of evidence is marshalled for this proposition. Art objects, priceless and without substitute, were intermingled with those mass produced, faddish and ephemeral. Linked by their national significance, items included airline crockery, high fashion design, plastic miniature All-black rugby players, folk art made from string, archival television footage depicting a glass-eating man, Goldie’s nineteenth century realist paintings of Maori men and women, domestic and industrial design such as an armchair, television or electric jug, anthropological photo-documentary, a film about New Zealand’s post-war welfare state, modernist abstract painting, extravagantly dressed mannequins of pop group Split Enz, and contemporary sculpture. As well as being spread across the floor space, objects are contained in pullout drawers and as part of mechanical interactives. The children’s ‘Discovery Centre’ and ‘Inspiration Station’ featured jigsaws, sound buttons, mystery touch objects hidden in holes, and clay or potato blocks that made imprints of objects. The smallish subdivided spaces that comprised Parade featured bright bold colours, mostly yellow, blue and red, and three-dimensional block signs. The orchestrated clutter encouraged viewers to repeatedly circle the exhibits rather than pause at each in turn. Some objects hung very high and backlit were designed to catch viewers’ attention from a distance or at a second glance. Parade’s exhibition narrative relied on a trans-textual search for significance – a strategy one reviewer calls ‘learning by osmosis, or art by stealth’.130 The juxtaposition of emblems of prior cultural epochs with familiar fragments of the present produced an unresolved tension between radiance and reassurance, and glorification and irony.
This mishmash reflects the difficult role asked of Parade: how to aestheticize a ‘national way of life’ through objects? Given New Zealanders’ immersion in the trappings of global capitalism (Parade might have been more suitably subtitled, ‘where there are people, there are commodities’) how might Te Papa effectively express national identity through mass-produced items – the stuff of global popular culture? Broadly speaking, the role of objects in the construction of identity is peculiar. Historic objects are part of everyday life and are everywhere on display, not just in museums, town halls, galleries, churches, libraries, universities, and historic homes, but also in streets, buildings, parks, and stores. Te Papa recontextualizes movable history from closets, attics, archives and walls of public and private dwellings (along with images and copies of immovable history) into a microcosmic new collective home. Yet since everything in museums was made for another use, we can conceive of museums as places where things are saved from real life. In an exhibition of the culturally familiar like Parade, the criteria for which objects should be saved from an ordinary past are far from self-evident. While everything within the boundaries of the nation might be national, only certain objects are considered sufficiently iconic, in either their ubiquity or uniqueness, to count. Questions about the extent to which objects symbolize, connote, denote, constitute, embody, realize, signify and objectify point towards the difficulty in assuming that objects reflect social relations in a relatively passive sense. Given their amplification in the museum context, objects can be considered prime contributors to mythmaking. Daniel Miller has theorized that,

The process of signification is what accomplishes the task of the myth; it subverts simple denotation through its wider connotation, it naturalizes culture as the given order of the day, and it utilizes the ambiguities and tendencies of the process of signification itself in order to effect its apparent closures.\(^{131}\)

The kinds of objects that Te Papa recovers and makes emblematic are those that suggest a unique way of life but are not easily reproduced elsewhere.\(^ {132}\) While representational practices that treat entities like nation-states as material for exhibition always necessarily involves a deferral of reality, the difference in Parade is that this deferral is explicit and
on show. Over time, the museum object has been exhibited through a variety of interpretive frames that can roughly be characterized as realist, modern and postmodern. Where the object-as-sign initially reflected only its own material existence, throughout the twentieth century it was put to work to stand in for larger narrative wholes increasingly abstracted from its own materiality (such as ‘culture’), until, in its postmodern usage, it alluded only to the signifying process itself (such as ‘the construction of identity’). By making objects stand for identity, Te Papa engages in the process whereby culture, a central anthropological concept concerned with the ongoing creation of meaning, is objectified as the fixed property of a bounded group. In this logic of ‘cultural ownership’, the symbolic aspects of the materiality of a plethora of objects (such as the improvised form of the corrugated iron Holden) are ascribed an allegorical relationship with national culture.

The distinction between a representative national art history and an allegorical approach to culture is central to analysing *Parade*. Art exhibitions conventionally work from a more imaginative basis than science and history exhibits. Yet their exploratory nature has generally been conceptualised and interpreted not as social per se, but as the expression of a heroic personal, subjective and non-utilitarian vision. History exhibitions, by contrast, ascribe fragments from other times and places with a more objective social communicability. At the same time, a national art display has traditionally projected the idea of eventual completeness; the collector ‘takes up the struggle against dispersion’ as Walter Benjamin observed. The allegorist, by contrast, ‘for whom objects represent only keywords in a secret dictionary, which will make known their meanings to the initiated’, purposively dislodges things from their context. While artworks gain their resonance from their illumination in the exhibition format, allegorical objects gain their power from their *incongruity* with it. That is, while non-art objects are displayed in a structured space, they also refer to a space outside the walls of the museum in which they have another significance. In this way, writes Roger Silverstone, they ‘act as media, metonymically related in their displacement to other places’. People have a great capacity for observing attributes in objects that may not be obvious to others, or alternatively, ignoring attributes which may have appeared to outsiders to be an inextricable part of the
object. In the display of national icons, curators must transcend the everyday and culturally familiar in order to be aware of an object’s general potential as a signifier, yet identify that which makes it easily recognizable as part of that particular context. In the case of either art or allegory, objects gain importance through the strong sense of expectancy that visitors bring to the national museum, precisely because it is a site of ultimate representativeness. A corrugated iron Holden is ordinary in the sense that its materials can be found in the sheds of the nation, yet its suspension in the museum, traditionally a space associated with ritual and extraordinary objects, magnifies and decorates it, and attributes it with that most ineffable function: symbolising identity.

The idea of possession is an intrinsic part of the discourse of cultural heritage. Indeed, in its original form, the concept of heritage was simply the private property that could be inherited, bought or sold; ownership was all. In earlier periods there was no greater idea of understanding it, relating to it, or finding identity through it. In the present, while the issue of whose heritage a particular collection represents might be contested, the idea that material culture epitomises some collective identity – and in epitomising it, can be considered the property of that identity – is rarely disputed. The ascendancy of a holistic, anthropological notion of culture within new national museums like Te Papa arguably makes objects more expressive, symbolic and representative than earlier narrow and more elite conceptions of cultural property, for it focuses on the preservation, documentation and display of life itself. A national museum, by specifying some cultural traits as authentic, proceeds from the assumption that a culture-bearing nation exists. In Western thought, the nation is perceived as a collection of individuals, each of who replicates, and who together constitute, a collective national individual. Working with a basic synecdoche, the museum associates the sense of memory holding together personal identity with the manner in which collective or national memory holds together national identity.

Parade drew on this premise of national personification to encourage visitors to see their own individual appreciation and understanding of material on display as culture-bearing, adding up to the multiple views and tastes that constitute national culture. The
deployment of common objects in Parade appeared to be both about breaking down the
dominant status of ‘high’ art, and exposing more people to the habit of appreciating art
(of all kinds). Nonetheless, the exhibition created some mixed messages. Subverting the
notion of a didactic canon, Parade treated viewers as active and singular participants in
the construction of meaning. The ‘you decide’ invitation positioned the viewer as having
already-formed tastes and opinions. However, display tactics that provided interpretive
cues and self-consciously introduced familiar commodities into the art world suggested a
more pedagogic approach. For instance, ‘debate poles’ provided, with no adjudicating
museum position, conflicting aural opinions on some artworks, ranging from those of
school students to art critics. Another example is the ‘choice trail’, where Te Papa asked
both well-known and unknown New Zealanders to arrange ten items of their choice, from
Parade and from amongst their own possessions, in a trail for other visitors to follow.
The ‘choice trail’ aimed to creatively extend the principle that visitors construct their own
personal route through exhibitions by allowing visitors to take the curatorial project into
their own hands. Personal memory is expected to contribute to understanding through the
construction of a walk-through within which visitors can conjure their own cultural trail
and compare it to that on offer. This strategy works with the idea that socio-historical
knowledge is best conveyed through items that evoke affective identification. The tension
between institutional histories and subjective memories draws attention to relationship
between collective memory, which is held to reside in objects, and practices of personal
remembering, which is increasingly deployed in narrative interpretation devices. The
‘debate poles’ and ‘choice trail’ work from the basis that cultural knowledge is socially
positioned and that art appreciation is a learned technique. In this, Te Papa appears to
respond to the idea that an understanding of art is bound up in one’s ‘cultural capital’, an
idea chiefly associated with the work of Pierre Bourdieu, who has written:

A work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the
cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded…A beholder who
lacks the specific code feels lost in a chaos of sounds and rhythms, colours and
lines, without rhyme or reason… Thus, the encounter with a work of art is not
“love at first sight” as is generally supposed.138
However, if Te Papa worked to both acknowledge a ‘love/loathe at first sight’ response, and to develop a deeper understanding of the works on display, interpretive prompts like a large plastic icon comprised of two hands, one thumbs up with approval, the other down for disapproval, denied a more sophisticated interpretive response in favour of an either/or decision.

*Parade’s* simultaneously pedagogic and identity-affirming strategies might be viewed not as a simple idiosyncrasy, but as reflecting larger ideas about how the museum conceptualises its visitors as certain kinds of subjects. Dipesh Chakrabarty has written that museums are a highly visible site of two coexisting and sometimes contradicting modes of democracy. One, associated with nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reformist movements, states that individuals are not born political, but become rights-bearing citizens only after gaining appropriate education. Museums, as ‘cultural technologies that inducted their visitors into new ways of acting on and shaping the self’, aimed to provide a broad public with the means to develop an appreciation of art and science. A later twentieth century understanding posits that individuals are born as citizens, and further, as citizens with a particular cultural identity that is intrinsically political. In this circumstance, the museum sees its task as providing points of identification for different identities. These different models produce different modes of display in the museum. One emphasises its pedagogic role, where visitors might accumulate facts and conceive abstract things. The other accents a capacity for the performative, which emphasises personal memory and the embodied and sensual qualities of the visitor. At Te Papa we can see persistence of a pedagogic approach to democracy (particularly in the natural history and Treaty sections). At the same time, however, the idea that visitors, as possessive, identity-bearing beings, come to Te Papa with the expectation of experiencing *their place* is supported Te Papa’s division of museum space into separate ethnic areas.

If the vehicles at the entrance to *Parade* offer a homespun national identity allegory, a more exalted vision of the national condition can be found in a painting like Colin
McCahon’s *Northland Panels* (1958). In the scholarly discourse of a ‘national search for identity’, art (along with literature) is often believed to offer the most direct route and pure expression. Hung at the rear of *Parade, Northland Panels* consists of eight sizable strips of canvas positioned vertically alongside one another. Several panels depict the semi-circular arc of a hill, while others evoke dense scrubland. On some panels the sky is flecked with clouds, on others it is brooding or stormy. The alignment of discontinuous, unframed landscapes is disquieting, producing the sense that the landscapes are neither romantic nor placid. The lack of scenery in the panels challenges the viewer to think about the depth of their connection for their place. For McCahon, Northland was New Zealand’s most distinctive idiographic province. However, rather than being parochial, the painting’s sublime dark and light spaces suggests a biblical theme; for McCahon, ‘land is the stage upon which is played out the life and death drama of human salvation’. Viewers gain a sense of this preoccupation through McCahon’s foreboding inscriptions, which relate his response to a land he felt was environmentally and psychically endangered by popular indifference: on the fourth panel one can decipher, ‘A landscape with too few lovers’, and on the eighth and final panel: ‘O yes it can be dark here and manuka in bloom may breed despair’. The human absence in McCahon’s landscapes evokes questions ‘of doubt and survival, of alienation, reconciliation and redemption, and of visible mysteries and invisible effects’.

b. Parading Technology

If this interpretation suggests a conventional art historical response to McCahon’s work, its display at Te Papa supports a rather different understanding. Ian Wedde, chief ‘concept leader’ for art, expressed his vision for *Parade* in a 1992 article, calling for:

… an approach which locates art among the other products of a culture, asking it chiefly to help explain that culture and its history to its consumers and inheritors; an approach that seeks to siphon off the degeneration identified by Michael Fried in his famous last-ditch defence of late Modernism *Art and Objecthood*: ‘art degenerates as it approaches the condition of theatre’. The proceeds of this
For Wedde, the self-conscious mixing of art and ephemera would theatrically evoke different but unmistakably national cultural milieus. *Parade*’s excess of signification was directed towards explorative association rather than personal transcendence. Positioned alongside *Northland Panels* was a Toby jug, an old TV set playing advertisements, Hamada pottery, and, most notably, a 1959 Kelvinator ‘Foodarama’ refrigerator framed within a Farmers department store period window display. The principal connection between the fridge and painting, related on a nearby text panel, is the time of their creation. Wedde justified the hang through the idea that New Zealand culture was at least as affected by the arrival of TV as it was by McCahon’s work. (Sir Ron Trotter, ex-Chair of Te Papa’s Board provided a rather different explanation, remarking that ‘if we hang a Colin McCahon alongside a Kelvinator refrigerator, then Fisher & Paykel [the refrigerator manufacturers] pay for it – in a big way’).

For Wedde, the juxtaposition is poignant because, he claims, McCahon longed for the kind of popular audience TV achieved. Extending the metaphor, Wedde asked why ‘some people go on believing that what programmed McCahon was in some way more responsible or meaningful or serious within the culture, than what programs television’, while ‘other people believe that what programs television is meaningful but that whatever programmed McCahon was a kind of hoax...called ‘modern art’.

Part of a small New Zealand avant-garde, McCahon was, when he painted *Northland Panels*, working amidst a mass consumer culture still, due to the lag of isolation, in its infancy. However, in *Parade* the painting is recontextualized into a technologically developed postmodern setting that is able to thoroughly assimilate art of any avant-garde kind. *Parade* implicitly constructed an image of New Zealand’s cultural postmodernity by showing how the nation has surpassed the by now traditional, outdated or even redundant divide between high and mass culture.

However the efficacy of a nationalist frame for art interpretation is questionable. The fridge and TV, which evoke an affluent, comfortable post-war period when the nation’s standard of living was among the world’s best, counteract the sublime, unnerving
qualities of *Northland Panels*. While artworks are inescapably produced in social and cultural contexts, they are often hermetic, anti-social and confounding. As Denis Dutton satirically put it, ‘knowing that they are from the late 1950s is as significant as learning that Lord Rutherford and Mae West were both Virgos’. By situating it within national identity and commodity culture, art like McCahon’s is stripped of its high modernist art-historical context and denied its artistic singularity of vision. Art critic Robert Leonard concurs, ‘although New Zealand artists have long dodged the mandate of national identity, the display at Te Papa will only reinforce the perception that our art is parochial, recruiting work to illustrate social histories’. McCahon’s lack of stylistic sophistication may express the rough New Zealand landscape, but it equally testifies to the influence of European artists like Cezanne, Braque, Picasso, Gris, and Mondrian, and post-war Americans like Pollock and de Kooning. McCahon’s aesthetic qualities, which suggest meanings neither easy nor immediate, befit an austere and contemplative gallery space – not unlike a church, to complement McCahon’s biblical theme. In his stinging critique of Te Papa, Theodore Dalrymple likens the trend towards sensory overload at the museum to changes in the modern hospital. While the almost monastic silence of the hospital was once regarded as part of the patient’s treatment, its wards are now alive with the sound of music and TV. Similarly, Dalrymple posits, for those who believe in the traditional idea of museums and galleries as a form of sanctuary, Te Papa’s excited atmosphere is a symptom of a society not interested in salving its collective psyche. If *Parade’s* excited style does succeed in stirring some devotional sense of ‘civil religion’ for some, it may be as an implicit rejoinder to New Zealanders’ reputation as a sober, Puritan people.

Wedde also rationalised the curatorial strategy through reference to changing conceptions of the status of the object engendered by new media:

The distinction which once said, television is primarily information, art primarily artefact, is now an unsure distinction...Or at least the distinction between data and material has become metaphysical or symbolic, rather than categorical. Similarly, when an artefact can be so readily reconfigured as data, its materiality begins to be a stage, rather than a state, of existence. And similarly, if we can pass rather quickly over the epistemological complexities of the terms, there is no longer a
sustainable categorical distinction between knowledge and experience or let’s say between cognition and encounter, in the current cultural environment; nor between research and leisure in the current museum environment. It seems to me that in some ways these are all versions of the same, or a similar question: when we ask, what is the relationship of information to artefact, of knowledge to experience, of research to leisure, we are no longer asking for the reiteration of a value distinction. Rather, we are beginning to ask for a fundamental formula or definition in a new kind of physics – a particle physics of meaning.  

Similarly, D. Uzzell has argued that ‘the heritage industry is...[also] in the business of mass communication... the boundary between museums and media, and that between reality and fantasy, between myth and mimesis in both sets of institutions and practices is becoming increasingly blurred’. Arguments that stress the eclipsing of boundaries between artefact and information typically make two related points. One is that information stored and distributed as downloads and on discs has become almost artefactual. The second is that when an artefact can be so readily reconfigured as data, its materiality begins to be a stage, rather than a state, of existence. What may be at first a photograph, sound recording, or video or film excerpt are all subject to the same process whereby they become a binary language of ones and zeroes. If exhibition ‘stories’ employ different kinds of data bits, the artefact or artwork becomes principally a data device in the larger narrative being posited. Given the weight awarded to new technologies at Te Papa, it is worth exploring here how these are deployed.

Prevalent in museum education is the idea that a range of interpretive ‘entry-points’ should be offered catering to visitors’ different learning abilities and preferences. Te Papa uses various ‘info-tainment’ technologies (interactive consoles, Internet, audio devices, film, rides) to make learning agreeable. About 60 blue computer kiosks scattered throughout the exhibition spaces offer a window into the archival and editorial information provided by the museum’s multimedia database, Te Papa OnScreen. Featuring large touch-screens and monitors for group viewing, Te Papa OnScreen provides a description of every collection item currently displayed (around 6000 of 2.5
million collection items). Much of the information is presented in animated game style, with content designed by museum staff and created by local multimedia companies. In all, Te Papa has around 24 video programs, 20 audio programs, 10 computer interactives, and 120 mechanical interactives. Digital items are delivered via the network to data projectors and speakers throughout the public space. Recorded audio and video are typically presented with a face or voice deemed to most appropriately ‘speak for’ the subject: Maori explain taonga, Pacific Islanders describe their culture, children speak in children’s sections, while Pakeha voices are generally used in science displays. Direct participation is now seen as essential to the learning process and is, at Te Papa, incorporated into exhibits wherever possible.

Within a competing sensory environment, attention is dispersed rather than focused. Exhibitions are not created as detailed, linear sequences of information. Instead, extraordinary, humorous or unexpected elements or motifs are deployed, in the hope that visitors grasp main themes by coming across items and stories that appeal to their sense of self. The ‘reality’ of an object is less important than the opportunity to interact with something. Promotional material advertises the museum not as a system of knowledge but as a series of events:

At Te Papa you can roll a one-tonne piece of granite, start an earthquake, crawl into a Maori whare (house), build a bird, skipper a sailing ship, record a mihi (Maori introduction), prepare a virtual umu (earth oven) for 100 people, and lots more! Icons that assist visitor recall of their ‘Te Papa experience’ are important not just for educational reasons. For a few dollars, visitors can be digitally photographed in 3-D in situations only faintly related to the museum, such as being pursued in a jeep by moas (huge, extinct flightless birds), riding a tyrannosaurus or a Harley Davidson, sitting in a Christmas stocking, in a space capsule bearing the New Zealand flag, or with a condor resting on an outstretched arm. Te Papa also participates, most uncharacteristically for a museum, in New Zealand Tourism Board’s ‘Ultimate Challenge’ package ‘aimed at
promoting New Zealand as the ultimate destination for taking part in endurance events (triathlons, marathons, multisport events and adventure experiences).\textsuperscript{157}

You can do a virtual bungy jump here – experience the thrill without actually falling. Strap on the safety harness and anti-gravity boots, don the head-mounted display in the revolving bungy capsule and suddenly, with live action video, you’re diving into Skipper’s Canyon – the longest bungy drop in New Zealand.\textsuperscript{158}

Other virtual rides (accompanied by taped sounds of screaming and laughing) include windsurfing, dragon boat racing, whale riding, water skiing and a ‘magic lilo’ (inflatable water cushion). By ‘adding value’ to objects, Te Papa positions itself as a type of entertainment attraction. In promoting itself as a consumer experience, Te Papa invites considerations about whether it was ‘worth’ the time and money invested. In this, ‘national heritage’, often attributed with inestimable value, is reduced to a more mundane model of consumption.

Although often glossed over in museum literature, the actual shape of visitor interaction with new media and high-tech devices deserves mention. The best way to understand the nature of visitor experience in the present is through a comparison with that of past epochs. While we have some record of the physical appearance and specimen organization at the Colonial and National Museums, we know less about the actual visitor experience. While the disciplinary and civic objectives behind the encouragement of public museum visitation in the nineteenth century are well established, this does not suggest that the experience was without merriment and fascination. Lisa C. Roberts has argued that nineteenth century museum visitors were predominantly lured by a ‘culture of imitation’.\textsuperscript{159} In the context of a mature Industrial Revolution, semi-illusory items such as mass-produced furniture in European aristocratic styles, linoleum recreations of wood and marble, amusement rides that simulated famous disasters, cylindrical panoramas that recreated landscapes or events, and wax and paper fruit and flowers, celebrated society’s burgeoning technological prowess and unprecedented control over the forces of nature.\textsuperscript{160} In the twentieth century, concern over the loss of aura of original objects saw simulation
give way to more rigorous concerns about authenticity. ‘True experience’ entered the
museological lexicon as people sought direct contact with the real, at least through purity
of form. Large dioramas, living historic settlements, and ‘behind the scenes’ parliament,
courts, or jail tours aimed for a serious mimetic effect – although their reproduction of
other times and places meant that the lines between imitation and authenticity were not
clear-cut.

The current era deploys simulation towards a vivid sensory experience, one that is not
necessarily undermined by its overt fabrication. The reality of an object has become as
much a feature of presentation as provenance. Hence, at Te Papa the putative existence of
national identity, for instance, depends upon the effectiveness of its signification. The
pleasure of visitors’ experiences, produced through stories, props and gadgets, in large
part determines the convincingly of the outside reality being put forward. As Roberts
puts it, ‘what is paramount is not the “reality” enshrined in museums but the possibility
and the hope that there is something that can be so enshrined’.161 The museum no longer
works from the premise that it represents a world that is given. Like other new museums,
Te Papa invests heavily in the postmodern emphasis on multiple ‘voices’, ‘stories’ and
‘perspectives’, and draws on narratives in political, philosophical and folkloric
discourses, along with song, fairy tales and literature. In this museological paradigm,
language is used to actually constitute the social world, rather than only labelling the
objects that attest to it. Feeling and evocation are privileged over truth and knowledge as
the basis of experience. This itself acknowledges the many reasons for museum
visitation, including social interaction, reminiscence, personal exploration, psychic
restoration and information. The museum experience has been fashioned as one where
people are encouraged to seek inter-contextual meaning through stories of lifelikeness
and verisimilitude – rather than authoritative grounds for establishing formal and
empirical proof. Te Papa encourages visitors to receive messages by composing them –
invitations to make one’s own ‘trail’ through the exhibitions is geared towards the idea
that everyone will leave with their own ‘Te Papa story’.
Despite Te Papa’s strong emphasis on narratives of place, its heavy use of technology in some ways encourages remoteness. The variety of spatial orientations created by video and user interfaces work to reduce the necessity of objects in one specific place. Video shows graft an alternative spatial orientation (the moving world outside) to the museum’s static objects. The increasingly seamless qualities of video presentation provides an immediacy and realism that makes them metaphors of the real, trusted to stand as accurate evidence of other places and other times. Mechanical interactives, for their part, offer the opportunity for visitors to transcend individual space through the illusion of reach and control. The coincidence of the mainstream take-up of internet technology and Te Papa’s creation has seen the museum focus on the ways that its ‘forum for the nation’ mission can be leveraged and enriched by an online interface. In one delivery mode, the Internet can neutralise geography, provide interactivity by drawing in information as well as sending it out, and it can hyperlink between databases, institutions, languages and critical perspectives. As a network of decentralised communication, the internet counters the centralised and hierarchical model of knowledge dissemination embodied by a national museum. However, despite rhetoric that user interfaces encapsulate a ‘world of information’, they can be seen as another controlled environment strictly limited by its own structure. Te Papa’s website is solely geared towards providing, rather than receiving, information. Like other museums, Te Papa uses its website as an advertisement for the real physical experience, rather than a replacement for it. Generally speaking, museum websites lack differentiation in scale and texture, and unlike the ‘glass cases’ often derided in new museums, virtual user surfaces lack the charge of the original object.

Video, mechanical and internet media, once incorporated into the museum, blur the boundary between the museum space and the public world – one that was largely steady when both objects and visitors had to exist in the same physical threshold. By filling exhibition spaces with videos, TV monitors and computer games, the museum resembles other places (homes, offices, schools) where these devices are common. This is particularly significant given that the tourist gaze ‘presupposes a system of social activities and signs which locate the particular tourist practices, not in terms of some intrinsic characteristics, but through the contrasts implied with non-tourist social
practices, particularly those based within the home and paid work. Te Papa’s technological mediation occurs chiefly at a personal user level, drawing on familiar domestic technologies. Despite Te Papa’s affinity with new technology, a notable omission at the museum is any large screen display (such as IMAX) that has become a popular fixture at other institutions, such as the Melbourne Museum. Although, as noted above, Te Papa has been influentially compared to the theme park, it lacks one of its key tactics: the gigantic visual displays that aim to produce awe in a communal spectatorship through pure spectacle. While new technologies allow stories to be visually framed on a scale much larger or smaller than the object, this may not be such a radical change. Screen technologies can be viewed as another instance of the hybrid media that museums have employed since objects were initially aestheticised. These innovations, once ‘new technologies’ themselves, include dioramas, in-situ recreations, skylights, photographs and film.

Against Wedde’s notion that objects are a stage or ‘particle form’ of information, museum technologies may be better viewed as an additional information source rather than a form of object equivalence. The difficulty with Wedde’s formulation, and with the wider notion that narratives have replaced objects as the principle attraction, is that the subject at hand (national identity) is invested with and realised through the very ‘value distinctions’ such arguments play down. Insofar as national identity gains some kind of concrete meaning in the way that narrative constructions of it draw upon material symbolization (the way, for instance, artists and cultural critics draw on everyday-iconic objects to evoke a national ‘way of life’), value distinctions remain essential. Visitors enter a national museum with expectations of hierarchy, including what deserves to be there in physical form and what might be reproduced. The ownership of objects, their relative spatial disposition, how they are protected, presented and lit – these are the kinds of museum practices that help to visibly convince the public that a topic is worth pursuing. Physical presence is, moreover, one of the things that distinguish museums’ narrative power from other formats such as film or computer simulation. The idea that objects have been reduced to props in stories neglects the idea the stories themselves derive their resonance from objects’ tangible sensory form. Objects have seldom
represented complete *evidence* for any broad historical narrative (such as those of national progress) yet they are essential to their authenticity. As Julie Marcus has put it, objects in museums might be imagined as ‘facts without their clothes on’; the museum object, through its very visibility, is thought of as revealing the naked truth that language alone cannot grasp.\(^{167}\) The concrete physicality of objects might lead us to expect that they are relatively superficial phenomena, and that it is language and narration that does the ‘deep thinking’ for us. However, perhaps the opposite is true. While objects are visible this does not make them *evident*; artefacts may resist conscious articulation precisely because the meanings bound up in the object world are powerful. While objects assert their presence as simultaneously a material force and a symbol, their meaning is not necessarily restricted to their material dimensions and the practices with which they are associated.

Of particular importance is the way that new museums like Te Papa seek to make information technologies compatible with postmodern notions about the ‘play’ of postcolonial identity. Their complementarity exists in their consolidation of the new museum as markedly distinct from the intellectual solemnity and universalism associated with traditional European museums. Yet, if we accept Carol Duncan’s proposition that a defining feature of the traditional museum is the ceremonial walk through its galleries that performs a ritual of citizenship, Te Papa, despite its dispersed display modes, is not subversive of this effect.\(^{168}\) While Duncan’s theory relates the older spatial spareness and order of the art museum to a general sense of moral benefit and citizenship, Te Papa aims to make the visitor not just the beneficiary of knowledge and nation, but also *technology*. Te Papa posits a strong causal relationship between technology and culture. Te Papa’s movement beyond concrete objects helps to signify that New Zealand is no longer simply an agricultural-industrial producer nation, but has become part of the information age. The thematic shift from New Zealand-as-work to New Zealand-as-play, the latter ultimately embodied by Te Papa itself, is achieved largely through information technology. The technology ostensibly supporting the nation’s stories itself becomes a cultural artefact in its own right. In this sense, technology *is* culture, ‘not assisting or causing but substituting, referring only back to itself’.\(^{169}\)
To further explore the link between technological simulation and an advanced mode of nationhood we can consider Te Papa’s *Time Warp* motion simulator rides located on the second floor. In ‘Future Rush’, the visitor is taken on a tour of Wellington in a ‘state-of-the-art flying car’ in the year 2055. Strapped on their backs in moving seats, visitors are taken on a ride that goes inside a futuristic house and zooms down an electrified Wellington harbour and city streets, before accelerating towards a ski field. The ‘entertaining and unpredictable guide, Rima, a girl from another time’ acts as the cyber-docent. The clear accent on the nation’s technological possibilities is mirrored in Te Papa’s own use of technology (which in some cases, like the use of barcode readers to scan visitors’ ride tickets, verges on the gratuitous). ‘Blastback’, another ride, uses digital animation to fuse geology and Maori creation myth. Viewers see New Zealand torn from Gondwanaland and mythical Maori ancestors create the landmass in the same seamless story. In its combination of strongly nationalist themes and high-tech ‘vertigo machines’ designed to provide ‘the creation of pleasure from shock’, Te Papa is close in spirit to contemporary pavilions at international expositions.\(^{170}\) ‘Time machines’ efface the remoteness of the past by allowing people to visit it without an apprehension of the abstract elements necessary for historical understanding. These simulated rides create a kind of sensual immediacy, drawing on an intuitive rather than analytical response.\(^{171}\) Despite being obviously fabricated, it may be the promise of *physical* experience that attracts people. They offer sensation with little specific cultural referent. While representational technologies such as in-situ displays, dioramas and videos provide context to render culture-as-lived-experience visible, ‘simulation technologies do not require context, they simply produce effect, and in so doing they erase the social conditions of their production’.\(^{172}\)
Using her concept of the ‘informatics of domination’, Donna Haraway has observed how technological modes of representation display and structure social relations. In *Primate Visions* she reveals how American capitalist patriarchy at the New York Natural History Museum strove to recreate African wildlife, their object of attention, in a perfect and desirable form.¹⁷³ For Haraway, realist representation is the preferred form of white patriarchy, and can be contrasted with more subaltern media forms, such postmodern simulation and science fiction.¹⁷⁴ In this light, Te Papa’s choice of a young Maori woman as the futuristic tour guide in ‘Future Rush’ is instructive. Along with its implicit assertion of the permanency of Maori culture, it emphasizes that the nation’s future no longer unquestioningly resides in the cultural body of the Pakeha male. In this, the ride emphasizes not just the technological possibilities of the nation’s future, but social ones. Along similar lines, Te Papa’s institution-wide child-focus is constructive inasmuch as the trope of the child stands for the nation’s futurity.
The use of open-ended, hyper-textual information devices at new museums like Te Papa can be seen as consistent with a post-nationalist ideological thrust. As Cochrane and Goodman have observed:

If modernism coincided historically with the heyday of nationalism, and a belief in the importance of increasing production in an industrialising world, postmodernism coincides with a period of critique of nationalism, and a belief in the importance of improving communications in the era of the microchip.\(^{175}\)

However, inasmuch as in settler states progressive postcolonialism is predominantly a cultural matter, describing and celebrating indigenous autonomy and control in symbolic ‘cultural’ circumstances – rather than actual changes in political and material relations – we should be wary of over-emphasising the strength of any critique of nationhood to which Cochrane and Goodman refer. Within the cultural industries, the expansion of the category of ‘cultural citizenship’ to include those who are argued to have been previously excluded from participation within national life is an important part of national renewal itself.\(^{176}\) While Rima’s journey might celebrate the borderless possibilities of the microchip, her virtual journeys remain geographically rooted in the nation. The ride figuratively fulfils Benedict Anderson’s notion that nations ‘glide into a limitless future’.\(^{177}\) Te Papa plays a central role in reinforcing the emotive pull of the nation, and indeed, makes it difficult for New Zealanders to imagine a future without its existence. The strongly nationalist dimension of Te Papa’s rides reassures visitors that the technological innovations that accompany globalisation will not threaten the normative link between culture and citizenship.

5. Golden Days: The Comfort of Nostalgia

Amongst the Pakeha galleries, a persistent queue forms outside a small weatherboard bungalow. An old bicycle leans against the facade, which supports a classic roofed letterbox and a window that features a roughly painted, ‘Flat 2 - Keep Out’. About twenty
visitors at a time are led in by a Te Papa ‘host’ and seated on a motley collection of chairs. The dimly lit room is stacked with bric-a-brac. A newsreel whirs into action and the four-by-two-metre screen shows the window of the shop looking out on to well-known Willis Street, a short distance from Te Papa. An old man appears and pulls down the junkshop’s grille, ending his day’s work. Immediately the footage changes to old New Zealand newsreels, movies and advertisements. Simultaneously, announcements and accompanying sounds bombard the audience and the previously immobile curios spring to life in animated synchronicity. War footage shows troops in lemon-squeezer hats on Europe’s battlefields, while toy soldiers march across a coffee table while two Vickers guns reel off rounds. A storm blows up and sinks a miniature Wahine ferry. Queen Elizabeth is crowned and a spotlight falls on a biscuit tin lid depicting her wedding photo. Shots of a suburban front lawn are shown as a Victa lawnmower runs up and down a strip of fake grass. Disasters, wars, sporting triumphs, pop music, cinema, and local industry are orchestrated in this sophisticated marionette theatre. As the 15-minute sequence draws to a close, the elderly shop owner returns and gruffly orders viewers to vacate his junkshop.

Figure 7: Interior of Golden Days  Picture taken by author with permission.
If the museum is a microcosm of the nation-space outside, then *Golden Days* is a microcosm of the museum (or at least the art and social history exhibitions); if the museum artificially reduces the ‘New Zealand experience’ to an easily digestible day indoors, then *Golden Days* reduces the ‘Te Papa experience’ to a fifteen-minute bytesized snack, a kind of fleeting mental souvenir, further indoors. *Golden Days* offers the opportunity to further explore the intersection of postmodern interpretive devices and popular history. The fast, fractured sequence of images in *Golden Days* aims to jog the memory, rather than providing any linking narrative or chronologic cause and effect. The events depicted, generally isolated, one-off occurrences like a disaster, coronation or musical performance, are suited to this narrative style. Cognitively, the experience is similar to a cursory flick through a popular New Zealand history picture-book starting from somewhere near the middle and moving in either direction. ‘Chronology doesn’t matter’, Steve La Hood, the installation’s creator states, ‘people just want to know emotionally where we are’. The appeal of its unashamed and self-conscious nostalgia is predictable and perhaps inevitable, if we accept David Lowenthal’s assertion that a preference for the past is a natural consequence of constant (and accelerating) replacement. It offers succour for those who wish to be visually reminded of the past without its thorny, entangled aspects. The film aims for recognition rather than understanding (in its emotive approach it shares similarities with the NMA’s *Eternity* gallery). Te Papa’s own promotion likens the film to ‘a national home movie’. The domestic metaphor is consistent with Te Papa’s institutional theme, yet it more directly points to the role of TV in producing a shared national culture, and also reinforces the elision of the domestic and public that the consumption of TV, in particular, has helped to produce.

The amount viewers absorb inevitably depends on their prior familiarity with popular New Zealand history. For most international tourists – and many New Zealanders not attuned to popular mythology – the program might pass in a bewildering blur. For instance, a cricket ball rolls along the shop floor to coincide with the infamous incident when an Australian cricketer bowled an ‘underarm’ ball to deny New Zealand a chance at
victory. Only those who understand cricket rules (a six off the last ball, what a ‘six’ is, why the underarm ball was unprecedented) will understand. But perhaps this is the point of nostalgic displays; they communicate an in-group mentality and provide pleasure on the basis that they are a kind of ‘kitchen table’ history. In its declension of historicity and depth, *Golden Days* is an example of what Fredric Jameson calls ‘nostalgia art’, which, he writes,

…gives us the image of various generations of the past as fashion-plate images, which entertain no determinable ideological relationship to other moments in time: they are not the outcome of anything, nor the antecedents of our present; they are simple images.¹⁸²

Part of the popularity of *Golden Days* may be due to the idea that it references media history itself, and does not exercise any interpretative or narrative control beyond the media images and moving objects themselves. All events are film events; viewing pleasure may largely be apart of the passive yet emotional response that typically accompanies media consumption. Alongside *Parade, Golden Days* further distances the visitor from the aural and authentic object by only signifying icons through image, sound and the miniature toys. Although the viewer sees no valuable objects, the magical synchronicity of the marionette theatre makes historical material *feel* alive. The contrivance wherein the cinema screen assumes a shop window unwittingly signifies the commodification of history in the museum. However, even though the museum might constitute a large and politically decisive market for historical material, it does not follow that the museum is unmatched in inculcating a sense of cultural history. The very popularity of *Golden Days* over object-based displays unwittingly hints at the suspicion that it is not museums (no matter how interactive) but the media and entertainment industries that have a greater impact in this regard. Compared to their predecessors, museums today *compete* with TV and the Internet as sources of information – a Te Papa spokesperson identified the museum’s competitors as ‘*Friends, Titanic* and *Sony PlayStation*’.¹⁸³ Their inclusion in museums acknowledges that these media inform our historical consciousness. Dahl and Stade concur that ‘the relative power of
anthropological descriptions in shaping the image of other cultures has dwindled compared to the influence of mass media and the entertainment industry’. Our everyday consumption of TV and film provides us with a visual awareness of older standards of living, costumes, warfare, and the likes that museum visitors in previous eras lacked.

In its utilization of multimedia cinema, *Golden Days* adopts a broadly postmodern narrative technique. As an exhibition aesthetic, postmodernism is characterized by ‘the kaleidoscopic approach, the ambition only to provide a “series of impressions”, the abandonment of a master narrative, and the frequent collage-like use of pre-existing statements (films/objects/images)’. The arrangement of images around a nationalist narrative in *Golden Days* means that events are lifted out of their specific histories and de-politicised as a ‘golden moment’. It could be defended that a connection between postmodern representation and historiographical shallowness ignores the idea that historical representation has always relied on the media technologies of the times. While what has been available to museums has never been ‘the past’ as a stable referent, but only documentary and materialist traces of it, the difference in Te Papa’s case is that *Golden Days* appears to have given up on history as a disciplinary system of organization. Its superficial narrative style draws attention to the distinction between a critical analysis of the national past, and the sentimental construction of national history, where ‘good history’ is ‘history that feels good’. If history can be conceptualised as a convention that organizes experience across time, then *Golden Days* effaces historical depth and simulates history. Robert Hewison similarly argues:

> they [postmodernism and nostalgia] both conspire to create a shallow screen that intervenes between our present lives, and our history. We have no understanding of history in depth, but instead are offered a contemporary creation, more costume drama and re-enactment than critical discourse.

Jean Baudrillard has argued that in the social logic of postmodernism, the subject is so immersed in the standardized and mechanized world of commodified things that any
attempt to distinguish between inside and outside, or surface and depth, is doomed to be reabsorbed into the hyper-real and ecstatic world of style and aesthetics. For Baudrillard, meaning exists only in closed and self-referring systems of semiotic exchange. As ‘the real’ has become indefinitely reproducible and the original referent is submerged in an excess of surface and style, the only available meaning is simulated, contained in the codes through which it is mediated.\footnote{Golden Days demonstrates how the collusion between postmodern display strategies and the nostalgic tendencies of the heritage industry effect the kind of emptying of meaning to which Baudrillard refers.}

However, rather than seeing an emptying of meaning only as a melancholic reflection of the heritage industry, it is more interesting to note the way this deficit of consequence produces a certain understanding of national history. The significance of \textit{Golden Days} resides not so much in the semiotics of the multimedia film itself, but in its larger location and function amongst the social history displays. The physical segmentation of the theatrette and its corresponding lack of any linking narrative set it apart from the rest of the social history displays. As repositories of the historically sentimental, provincial and kitsch, junkshops contain memories piled in disarray. They are connotatively antithetical to systematic arrangements associated with national modernization. Given this, it is revealing that \textit{Golden Days} represents very well known events such as war, sporting victories, and coronations – those that are notably absent elsewhere in the museum (one writer estimates that displays dealing with sport could ‘fit inside a decentsized broom cupboard’).\footnote{Rather than seeing this as a simple base-covering tactic, I would suggest that the superficial treatment of this material is more pointed. Their relegation to nostalgia communicates the museum’s desire to distance itself from the canonical national history of old. Even the name \textit{Golden Days} suggests a slightly ironic, knowing slant on the dictates of popular history. The nature of the program relates its own lack of importance and implicitly marks off this well-trod past as lacking the vital new perspectives that might inform a newer national identity formation. In terms of its actual reception, however, the unparalleled popularity of \textit{Golden Days} may suggest that visitors are less interested in delving into critical history than affirming relatively unchallenging ideas about identity.}
6. Conclusion: A Crisis of Authority?

The emerging story that forms a background to all of this analysis however, is how Te Papa, as a major cultural project, is being directly shaped by the economic relations of the day. From March-June 2000, Prime Minister Helen Clark ordered a Review Team to examine several aspects of Te Papa’s performance, the most pressing of which was its display of art. Clark was particularly troubled by scathing articles by Theodore Dalrymple and Denis Dutton, the latter of whom called Te Papa a ‘junk shop’ that tries ‘never to exceed its own dumbed-down conception of public taste’. Clark said she ‘had to cringe’ at these attacks, and warned that, ‘We [the Government] are entitled to require, on behalf of the public, that we make sure the museum receives critical acclaim. There are some quality issues that need to be addressed’. Clark’s comments came on the heels of Te Papa’s briefing papers to the Government, which revealed deep financial trouble. The gap between revenue and costs was $4 million per year, while depreciation, unfunded by Government, was a further $13 million. Te Papa asked the Government for an additional $8 million (on top of the $17 million it needed to meet its budget). Sir Ron Trotter, then-Chair, called Te Papa ‘the most well-managed Government project in New Zealand’, but warned the Government that ‘you will have another Buckle St [home of the former National Museum] down there in a few years’ time if you do not fund the full amount we are asking for’. If evaluations of Te Papa’s performance had previously rested on public popularity, Clark’s concerns signalled a shift towards international opinion and expert acclaim. Even if Te Papa is judged principally by visitor satisfaction, display tactics outlined in this chapter appear to have alienated a significant portion of its audience. An independent poll found different results: 47% are ‘very satisfied’, 31% are ‘fairly satisfied’, 16% are ‘not that satisfied’, and 6% are ‘not at all satisfied’. Whether this is interpreted as nearly one quarter being discontented, or less than half being truly pleased, the numbers are rather different to Te Papa’s routinely-cited in-house survey that claims 94% rating the museum good to excellent. It may be that a good proportion of
those who withhold praise are those who might constitute a national museum’s traditional core audience – no more important than new visitors, but no less.

The Review Team suggested several key improvements, including more information about the objects in Parade, more coherent linkages and layering of information about those objects, and better positioning and design of the exhibition’s ‘graphic identity’. As it transpired, the decision was made not to salvage Parade. In late 2001 it was closed and replaced by Made in New Zealand, an exhibition based on a more conventional range of visual and material culture. Additionally, four new art galleries comprising 1500 square meters of space were set aside to display more of the art collection in standard ways. These changes achieved a kind of corrective to internal restructuring in the early to mid 1990s, which, according to former director of the National Art Gallery, furtively undermined the legislated museum concept that had promised the art department some independence from the museum’s populist philosophies. The developments, very hurriedly coined the ‘Greater Te Papa Project’ (GTTP), did not escape criticism:

It must be something of a world record that a new national museum on such a scale refurbishes spaces formerly dedicated to other purposes as galleries for the display of visual art at a cost of $4.5 million within three years of opening… Poetic in form but fictional in content, the GTTP revamps not so much physical space as the whole notion of planning. Formerly it was a prospective idea – with Te Papa it’s become retrospective.

This development saw Te Papa open Sightlines (objects from the collection) and What’s New (new acquisitions). However, it remains significant that though the total space for the display of art was increased, their sequestration on the top level, divorced from the rest of the museum, limits their effectiveness in terms of their contextual role in the Te Papa’s ‘unified collections’ project. In practical terms, Te Papa has disabled one of its seminal concepts.
Shortly after *Parade* was closed, a decision was made to purchase another of McCahon’s major works, *A Painting for Uncle Frank*, for $1.8 million. After the placement of his *Northland Panels* next to the refrigerator had become something of a Te Papa hallmark in the media, the decision to purchase a major work to be displayed in a conventional gallery space seemed to indicate a distinct shift in priorities. In the face of some obstinate public opinion that questioned the allocation of funds, the affirmation of expert opinion and tactical considerations (a desire to keep the painting in New Zealand, combined with pride that it reportedly would have fetched an extra $1 million in Australia) was significant. A different media reaction also met the purchase:

“A Painting for Uncle Frank” offers something rare in our secular world, a glimpse of something beyond our ken, as baffling as a godhead, wondrously expensive and apparently useless. Had the painting been worth nothing the public would have done no more than glance at it. What matters is not whether the painting is worth the money, but that someone believes that it is. When the price is vast, the aura grows. New Zealand art has joined the greatness club.  

Te Papa’s shift in curatorial philosophy allows us to observe, in hindsight, some of the difficulties and risks that may come about through the application of new museology. These have proven to be particularly acute when market principles and a strong brand identity are applied to a relatively narrow set of ideas about national and cultural identity.

In their somewhat unique facility as both a political project and a commercial enterprise, museums have the ability to objectify history and tradition as both a moral and aesthetic value and as a commodifiable resource. Te Papa promises to be ‘commercially positive’ by creating an environment that is fiscally responsible and attractive to corporate sponsorship. However, unlike the contemplative ideal associated with the traditional museum, commercial cultures are increasingly placeless and dynamic, and make little provision for reflection and debate. Commercial cultures aim for immediate impact and possess a high likelihood of obsolescence. The very thing that makes market cultures so exciting and vibrant – the search for the new, the dramatic and the novel – makes
substantive intellectual and cultural exchange difficult to achieve. In a sense, discourses of biculturalism – Government-oriented, structuralist and gradual – and consumerism and the market – malleable and faddish – are diametrically opposed. The critical issue, and the grounds on which Parade failed and Te Marae and Golden Days may be on unsteady ground, is whether these can be productively balanced. Rather than seeking to inspire awe or deep thought, these displays avoid didacticism in favour of an array of impressions and perspectives. Yet whether the subject matter is art, Maori custom or national history, all three exhibitions are contained within a restrictive focus on national identity. The point is not so much that other forms of identity should be equally illuminated, as much as the valorization of identity is itself an intellectual scheme with limited prospects.

Te Marae showed that the power of Maori tradition is lessened when that tradition is made comfortable and assimilable. The built form of the marae embodies the reinvention of tourist performance that presents an image of cultural and national vivacity to national and international tourists. In its efforts to show that Maoritanga is not stuck in a colonial past, a display has been created that may speak volumes about the preoccupation with biculturalism and populism in the current period, but may offer little of lasting worth. I have suggested that it is satisfying for neither non-Maori nor Maori visitors. It lacks the visual impressiveness, patina of age and suggestion of sacredness that remains integral to the viewing of non-Western material, yet also displays little of the local tribal characteristic differentiation that makes it meaningful for much of the tribal Maori population. It seems problematic to suggest that a simple shift in appearance, from totara to fibreboard, and from customary to inclusive arrangements, effects something akin to ‘modernising tradition’. In fact the new marae seems to contend with tradition little, instead fulfilling the role of a tourist space that uses tradition to advertise the museum’s cultural diversity aspirations.

My criticisms of Parade, Te Marae and Golden Days, which are characteristic of much of the rest of the museum, draw attention to the questionable worth of highly interventionist interpretive strategies that come between the viewer and the object. While
the past is reworked through a different economy of value from the traditional museum, the accent on the everyday still possesses an idealizing force equal to that of official ‘national heritage’, but without any of the wonder or grandeur. Once the novelty of high technology displays and simulated rides wears off, sound scholarship must form the backbone of the museum. Stephen Weil has suggested that museums must answer the question: ‘to what ongoing public need is this institution a response’? To my mind, reifications of identity enclosed within high tech information scapes constitute a dubious public need. Conceived as some kind of therapy or support system for personal identity, museums take on an almost unachievable role. It is doubtful that a focus on place and identity is sustainable in the longer term. Museums have long been places where people seek to learn about others lives and ideas greater than their own. At Te Papa, this is not the case. A national museum with the confidence to look beyond the boundaries of nation, rather than one that remains inward looking, will undoubtedly serve New Zealanders more boldly in the long run.


The rationalization of this display approach is found in: Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, 1995, The Exchange – Concept Design, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, pp. 5-8. The Exchange was the original name for what became Parade.


Ronald Trotter quoted in Cottrell, Anna & Preston, Gaylene (dir.), 1999, Getting to Our Place, In association with NZ On Air and TVNZ, 72 mins.


Chapter Three

Producing Communities in Difference:

Bicultural Museum Histories
Introduction: The Location and Dislocation of History

a. The Nature-State

Beyond the science exhibitions on Te Papa’s second floor, large doors open onto an outdoor bridge spanning a small man-made lagoon. With a vantage over Wellington harbour, visitors cross a bridge to enter a recreated habitat island called Bush City. The outdoor exhibition compresses vividly distinct geographical and geomorphic forms along intersecting paths, just metres from the sea. Visitors can stroll past lush native fauna, clamber across a swing-bridge over a freshwater stream, enter the dark passageways of a limestone glow worm cave, glance down at bones of moa heaped at the bottom, climb an imitation lava flow, dig for the replica fossils of a giant marine reptile, and visit a dripping wetland. Hidden amongst the rushes are myriad small forms of life. All around is the sound of flowing and falling water, bird song and the wind through the tree canopy. As the path develops, the native vegetation thickens and the museum’s block-like exterior is obscured from view.

Figure 8: Swing bridge in Bush City.

Picture taken by author with permission.
Bush City is a product of the ecomuseum movement, which seeks in its display philosophy to liberate natural history from glass cases and staid, indoor environments, and to uphold the principles of sustainable development.¹ The exclusively native composition of Bush City harmonises with Te Papa’s strong Maori accent, and draws on the strong link in the public imagination between conservationist and indigenous values. A micro-environmental project like Bush City can be interpreted as a symbolic gesture supportive of Maori sovereignty over land, indigenous species and ecosystems. Indeed, it is appealing to draw a symbolic correlation between the re-flourishing of self-sufficient, native ecosystems and Maori culture. Viewed as a kind of postcolonial bush garden, Bush City can be imagined as a corrective to the colonial impulse that saw much of New Zealand replanted in the botanical image of Britain.

However, the artificiality of Bush City unsettles this easy equation. A sign along the path informs visitors that the bush has been reconstructed to resemble the Wellington waterfront 200 years ago. The ecological recreation of New Zealand’s diverse biotic realms – on what is reclaimed land – produces Bush City as simultaneously native and artificial. Bush City is not only hyper-real, in the way it condenses natural features, but also unreal, in the sense that it is a recreated environment that no longer naturally exists. This simulated microcosm transcends and denies time, by winding back history, and also space, since the reality of the location is rejected in favour of an idealised habitat. Ideologically, the exhibition wipes away the impact of exogenous species and re-envisages pre-European purity. Bush City may honour the Maori ability to maintain a connection with land despite despoliation, yet it also suggests a desire to cover over the geographical scars of colonisation. By recreating native bush from 200 years ago (rather than, say, 2000), the tacit awareness that Maori lived amongst this nature suggests harmonious coexistence – despite evidence that Maori burnt off huge portions of native forests and made extinct the moa whose bones rest at the bottom of the cave. Yet Pakeha are certainly not without blame in this area. While it may have been colonial governments that were responsible for the creation of New Zealand’s first national parks, the paradox is that conservationism emerged partly as a response to the ecological mistakes and excesses of colonial rule. Moreover,
conservation laws were only possible because of the huge land area under direct European control – 85% of the country by 1914.\textsuperscript{2}

In the contemporary period, land and environmentalism remain pivotal topics for Maori-Pakeha conflict that most evidently connect the nation to its colonial origins. The central disagreement is best conceptualised as one between being in place and being out of place. The emergence from the 1970s of a Maori resurgence that focuses on land for its cultural, spiritual, legal and political impetus, and of a Pakeha movement to cultivate a unique local culture on home soil, have heightened (though not always in a harmonious way) the general social awareness of the bond between identity and territory. Yet Maori and Pakeha often conceive of their relationship with homeland in diametrically opposed terms. Radical Maori criticise the ecological outcomes of settlement, such as mining, deforestation and urbanisation, as the figurative rape of papatuanuku (earth mother) and the desecration of the base of the Maori cosmology. Pakeha conservation legislation, in turn, is criticised by some Maori as being part of a Romantic European tradition that artificially separates people from nature.\textsuperscript{3} On the other side, contemporary Maori land rights claims are linked, in the minds of many Pakeha, with assumptions about the protection of a static and subsistence existence. For many, the Maori reinvention of their relationship with the land as environmental confirms a suspicion that they were incapable of extracting a surplus from the land, and that the nation’s agricultural-industrial ascension could only begin with the arrival of settlers. Land claims going back to the nineteenth century indicate to some that Maori are too embedded in place and hence, non-modern. While a rational modern mentality pursued a relationship with the land, particularly in the form of extraction and surplus, an irrational, primitive mentality was in and of the land.\textsuperscript{4} In their opposition to Maori claims for reparation for colonial wrongdoing, Pakeha often implicitly reject their own historical sense of place. Those who consider themselves ‘innocent’ of the actions of colonial forefathers inhabit a position out of place. That is, they rupture any tie between bloodlines and land and instead imagine an individualistic ‘born-again’ relationship with history and place.
These divergent, incommensurate sets of ideas would present any museum aiming to represent the concept of ‘nation’ with a difficult challenge. The situation is all the more fraught for one that aims to instil a strong sense of belonging for all New Zealanders (as ‘our place’), yet is also driven to support biculturalism, which acknowledges differing and conflicting historical and territorial claims. In what ways, then, could Te Papa produce for visitors a sense of unified nationhood when the history of that domain is characterised by contest and betrayal? How might the museum square those things that celebrate national progress, such as growing population, industry and cultural sophistication, with the acknowledgment that these things are built, in different ways, on Maori losses? Rather than immediately proceed to Te Papa’s exhibition spaces to examine their attempts to publicly engage with these difficult questions, it is constructive to first remain temporarily in the back-projected era of Bush City, when European settlement of New Zealand had barely begun, and, figuratively, where its overgrown vegetation meant that Te Papa could not yet be pictured. By commencing from this vantage to consider the early treatment of Maori and Pakeha in New Zealand’s museums, we gain some insight into Te Papa’s cultural inheritance, and the history against which the museum seeks to productively respond. The final section of this introduction then outlines the key arguments pursued in this chapter.

b. A Dissimilar Inheritance: Maori and Pakeha in Earlier Museums

The mid-nineteenth century development of museums, zoos, and learning societies not only coincided with colonialism, but was stimulated by it. In New Zealand, the earliest museums date from the period of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi – a crucial point in the annexation of the colony. The decades after the 1860s saw the development and spread of the colony’s museums, in the broader context of industrialisation, increased settlement, strengthened government discipline, civic consolidation, and the bloody Land Wars. British legislation encouraged colonial authorities to invest in the provision of public cultural resources to accompany programs of mass public education. Six regional centres saw their first public museum built during this period (including, in 1865, the Colonial Museum, Te Papa’s
although their subsequent growth was irregular, and subject to ad hoc funding. New Zealand’s first museum was at Stoke (near Nelson) in 1841. By 1890, museums had opened in New Plymouth (Taranaki Museum), Napier (Hawkes Bay Art Gallery and Museum), Wellington (Colonial Museum), Auckland (Auckland Museum), Dunedin (Otago Museum) and Christchurch (Canterbury Museum). These early museums were generally founded by philanthropists (geologists in particular) and specialised in the natural history of their region of survey, which also included all things Maori. For their part, Maori lacked anything very close to the cultural-historical form of the museum. Nevertheless, they were highly familiar with the practice of collecting and conserving objects passed between generations. Tribes used chiefs’ houses, pataka, and (in times of strife) peat bogs in wetlands to store valuable tribal objects. From the 1860s the conversion of Maori tribal lands to individual title under the Native Land Court system saw Maori relegated to a life of poverty on marginal lands. Taonga that lay on acquired land (legal or otherwise) were considered part of the transaction, or they were spirited away, sold, abandoned or buried. Museums were built at the seat of each centre of provincial power as a marker of the growing maturity of the colony and, in the context of the Land Wars, of conquest. Local antiquarians and historians, keen to claim for New Zealand a prestigious role in international scientific inquiry, strove to make these museums participants in the imperial web of exhibition and exchange.

These relations provided the basis for the different treatment that Maori and settlers histories would receive in museums over the following century. The Colonial Museum was situated within the natural history and rare art collecting paradigms that dominated what Ruth Phillips has called the ‘museum age’ of 1840 to 1930, when museums were arguably as influential as universities as research centres. Ethnological collecting was premised on the assumption that race and cultural material were isomorphically related, and that there was a natural fit between art and cultural style. In this scheme, Maori craft and ethnography were not opposite categories but complementary modes based on a common epistemological premise. Divorced from any tribal context, Maori culture at the Colonial Museum was represented through the museological techniques of taxonomy, models and dioramas.
Carvings, weapons, tools, clothing and human remains were supplemented with sketches, portraits, and scale models and replicas created by administrators. Maori life was divided into ethnographic sections, including hunting, fishing, pastimes, adornment and warfare. As far as possible, each section was overflowing with objects, while explanatory text about history, usage and ownership was minimal. Expertise on the subject of Maori was reserved for Europeans, and in particular longstanding director Augustus Hamilton. His book, *The Art Workmanship of the Maori Race in New Zealand*... defined an orthodox style for carving produced for museums and model villages. Hamilton strongly discouraged post-contact syncretic modes and motifs in favour of a pseudo-traditional narrative pictorial style.

Archaeologists, ethnologists, scientists and amateur collectors saw Maori as an important piece of the puzzle of human origins. As almost the last ‘untouched’ area on earth, the European discovery of the South Pacific coincided with the age of archaeology and ethnography that saw an explosion of interest in theories of racial evolution and diffusion. The colonies were natural laboratories for popular monogenist, polygenist and social Darwinist theories of the time. The compilation of evidence of Maori material culture, particularly items deemed to be from an earlier ‘classical’ period, was seen as an important contribution to the ‘Story of Man’. Objects were integrated into the emerging paradigm of social evolution, where the level of sophistication of a group’s objects provided a kind of fossil record of social development. In this scheme, Maori were more highly esteemed than some other indigenous peoples. An 1863 edition of the *Daily Telegraph* speculated that if ‘noble savages’ were more than just the figment of the popular imagination, then it was in New Zealand, over any other colony, that such people would be found. At the same time, from the late nineteenth century the collection, measurement, arrangement and distribution of Maori artefacts and human remains alongside native flora and fauna was accelerated by a competing notion that they were a dying race – the musket having quickened the process of natural selection. Museums practised a ‘salvage paradigm’ that aimed to rescue authentic cultural expressions out of destructive historical change. It was a matter of pressing concern that the colony’s most valuable ethnographical resource were withheld and preserved before being lost
overseas. In 1901 the Native Minister introduced a bill to parliament that sought to
‘compile Maori history’, provide ‘evidence of the Maori race’ and prevent the export
of Maori relics overseas. After a rapid parliamentary passage, the *Maori Antiquities
Act* was passed, enabling the prosecution of any person attempting to remove any
Maori antiquity from the colony. In the *Colonial Museum Bulletin* of 1905, Augustus
Hamilton wrote that the new law was ‘the subject of much favourable comment in the
scientific world’, although he also recorded his sympathy for the belief expressed by
parliamentarians that ‘such a measure should have occurred at least twenty years
earlier’. Nevertheless, ‘many supported the bill as still urgently required’.16

Unlike European travellers who brought objects back from faraway lands, collectors
in the colonies exhibited in the lands of the people who were being studied. It was
scarcely imagined that one day Maori would themselves curate this material. It is this
situation that has made the contemporary politics of Maori collection and display in
settler societies so inflammatory, and the interpretation of their histories a hazardous
intellectual task, even for Maori. The critical issue has not been the historical
invisibility of Maori material culture, but the absence of Maori control over its
authorship. Viewed in a broad perspective, demands for representational equality are
a product of museums’ own historic program that once sought to collectively
represent the universal ‘Story of Man’. The strength of Maori claims for space in the
museum appeals to this mission by strategically reversing the power relations on
which ethnographic representativeness is founded. That is, the inclusion of Maori
within the museological fantasy of microcosmic universalism pursued in the colonial
‘disciplinary museum’ provides the basis from which Maori can now command that
same space, for different ends.

‘Once in N.Z. you’re dead as far as history is concerned’, J. C. Beaglehole, one of
New Zealand’s most noted scholars, wrote in the 1920s.17 History, in Beaglehole’s
conception, resided in Europe. New Zealand could have been considered history-less
both for its lack of antiquity and perceived dearth of dramatic events, and for its
geographic removal from history-in-the-making, its isolation from the stream of world
affairs. However – with hindsight at least – it is clear that new colonies like New
Zealand were precisely where pivotal historical events were occurring. The founding settler population were part of the massive nineteenth century European diaspora involving around 50 million people. Though New Zealand received fewer settlers than the U.S, Canada or Australia, its settlement is noteworthy simply because of the unique way it unfolded. Yet this is not a history that, generally speaking, Pakeha know well. Speculatively, this may be because emotionally, the process of settlement itself involves a form of forgetting. Perhaps it is this sense that Beaglehole references? Aware, conceivably, of the historic possibilities of the colonies, Beaglehole may have been referencing a different kind of history-lessness. The emotional process of permanent departure from what is familiar may require the dormancy of one’s historical memory. Moreover, the dream of settler history is that the present and future will be better than the past, and that the new country can be made superior to the old. The ability to see New Zealand as a ‘land of promise’ or a ‘new Arcadia’ involved, for many, the disarticulation of ardour for the old country. One legacy of estrangement from Europe may be a settler identity formed out of the irresolvable state of longing for, and aversion from, the old country.

This legacy of displacement and ambivalence has made the relation between settler identity and cultural origins a vexed question. The normative logic of cultural belonging rests on an unbroken circle of links: one’s natural right to belong to a space depends on possessing the culture that is also used to identify the territory. In the European museum model, the nation-state has been the object of collective identification for some time. European museums celebrated citizens within a national identity-producing story, which joined other forms of power and authority such as the religious story of salvation and the evolutionary biological story of humanity’s emergence from the great chain of being. Even in newer North American societies, the quest to preserve knowledge of the nation’s birth and the inculcation of native democratic values following the War of Independence resulted in a strong investment in social history museums. However in settler states, the sacred links that identifies ethnic groups with a geographical space, and the space with a culture, lack historical weight. Compared to an idealised organic model, settler states are transparently artificial, political phenomena. They exist because, as William Pfaff
bluntly puts it, ‘they were made to exist’. 22 Perhaps more than other British colonies, New Zealand lacks an ideological foundation. The British seized upon New Zealand as part of the imperial competition for territory and resources, and the colony’s eventual independence came about not through bloody revolution or popular resolve, but a British act of parliament. Without monarchs’ crowns, revolutionary armaments, religious idols or even convict chains at its disposal, Te Papa inherited objects from the previous Colonial and National Museums that do not present a clear-cut settlement narrative.

Indeed, Te Papa was, in the first place, planned and developed with doubts about whether it even possessed a satisfactory Pakeha history collection. The National Museum had primarily focused on natural history and anthropology. When a colonial history gallery was finally opened in 1969, it featured ‘a simple weatherboard dwelling that a Wellington settler might have built in the 1840s’, sections on early navigators and Victorian technology, and period rooms displaying the Elgar collection of Victorian furniture (discussed later in this chapter). This display remained more or less unchanged for the remaining life of the old National Museum. 23 Hence, in 1994, an internal inquiry found that:

The material culture of the Pakeha is profoundly under-represented in the Museum, such that it is neither fulfilling its fundamental statutory function as the repository of comprehensive collections of truly national significance, nor is it capable of presenting Pakeha history and culture in public displays. 24

The report states that this historical under-representation ‘partly reflected the interests of the Museum administrators, and partly reflected the view that the Pakeha society has little history worth exploring’. 25 Museum collections, though famously idiosyncratic, often represent the accumulated ideas (of the elite who make such decisions) about what deserves salvage from the eroding process of everyday life. Colonial administrators and well-placed settlers considered themselves, in the first place, collectors rather than the subject of collections. The settler self-perception that they lacked a history sufficiently important for museums was exacerbated by the
youth of the colony. Until the twentieth century, early settlement was in the *living* memory of some Pakeha. Further, the colony was, to borrow Anderson and Reeves’ term, ‘born modern’; founded without any intellectual or political revolution.\textsuperscript{26} It was governmentally developed in ways that were document-rich rather than object-rich. Maps, stock reports, customs documents, land deeds, tax rolls and censuses were the recorders of progress.\textsuperscript{27} In a settler state like New Zealand, the discovery of archaeological deposits could not be used to connect the present back to a glorious national past. Without forcing a synecdoche between the national museum and nationalism, the paucity of Pakeha material history (at the level of official heritage) suggests that the material vestiges of settlement have not been collected with the devotion associated with a vaunted history. A legacy of pale or deficient inheritance represents a difficult staging point for a new national museum seeking, among other goals, to reinvigorate a Pakeha relationship with national history.

We might reasonably anticipate that Te Papa would aim to produce new meanings for each constituency formed in reaction to those from the colonial era. For instance, we might expect Te Papa to forgo essentialist and backward-looking Maori representations in favour of those which award greater expression to the complexity and heterogeneity of Maori social life. Likewise, given the paucity of Pakeha material, we might expect Te Papa to respond by dedicating itself to building a canon of settler heritage. Yet what we find in both cases confounds expectation. Turning first to the *Mana Whenua* gallery, this chapter asks how and to what extent greater self-representation and control has altered received meanings of Maori culture. It has become routine to expound on the predatory and fetishistic relations that typified the traditional ethnographic museum of the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. Less obvious is whether changes in governance and management structures and increasingly self-reflexive and self-critical conceptual approaches have produced a substantially different experience. The dominant principle articulated by Maori is that taonga, previously only attributed in the museum with an ethnographic origin and a taxonomic destination, must regain their lives as things that both had a complex social existence before being turned into specimens. However, I argue here that it is far from self-evident
whether this cultural principle has produced a different sense of Maori culture at the level of visible exhibition display. I suggest that despite the gloss provided by new technologies and narrative styles associated with the new museology, taonga are not displayed in substantially different ways from the older museum model from which Te Papa seeks dissociation. Taonga, now marshalled as singular instances of the power and intricacy of tribal culture, do not elucidate the diversity of Maori life in the nation. Moreover, the postcolonial impulse that situates taonga in a temporal dimension divorced from ‘national history’ in fact reinforces the exoticising tendencies of the colonial era. The attempt to forcefully articulate a whole Maori worldview (known at Te Papa as ‘Matauranga Maori’) against an artificially fabricated opposite (‘Western history/science’) only helps to prescribe a narrow image of what constitutes Maori culture.

The subsequent section examines how Te Papa, having constructed this inflexible opposition, relates Pakeha social history in marked contrast to Maori culture. Te Papa refuses any notion of basic settler identity in favour of an altogether more sceptical approach. This is achieved through juxtaposing three exhibitions offering distinct ways of thinking about New Zealand culture: as an amalgam of immigrant cultures; as a unique farming culture forged through communion with the land; and as an invented image constructed in projects like international expositions. As my analysis of Parade in the previous chapter showed, Te Papa avoids didactic structuralist categories like home life, kinship, work or sport. In line with the intellectual currents dominating the new museology, structuralism is rejected for its hypostatising and objectifying tendencies that treat social categories as totalities already constituted outside individual histories. Instead, in order not to break with primary experience or bypass particular histories, exhibitions focus on personal stories, and encourage visitors to appraise these against their own. However, this declension of authority is not without its own ideological point. Te Papa’s choice to deny any essential Pakeha identity implicitly critiques a view that would position Pakeha as a national centre or norm. What is curious is that, as my background history described, Pakeha have never been awarded a principal role in national museum history. In this, Te Papa demystifies a history that, at least in the museum sphere, was never mystified or revered. Further,
we find that Te Papa is unable to meaningfully resolve the awkward relation between an unfailing validation of individual identity in exhibition interpretation, and reluctance to assert any framework for collective Pakeha history despite positioning itself as a bicultural ‘our place’.

In sum, the application of the identity dictate to Te Papa’s conceptual scheme restricts Te Papa’s ability to make meaningful insights about New Zealand’s history. While biculturalism suggests a movement past traditional ideas associated with the unitary nation state, the paradox is that this separate treatment of Maori and Pakeha disallows the museum from treating these as other than non-intersecting cultural totalities. Colonial history, in all its variance and colour, is limited to and constrained by a basic opposition between Maori and Pakeha. Ultimately, Te Papa’s history spaces create meanings that are anti-historical, in the sense that meaning is controlled and subordinated through a variety of tactics that attempt to construct for the visitor an artificial biculturalism. When placed against each other, the revisionist impetus of Pakeha displays starkly contrast with the essential tradition of *Mana Whenua*. The received message is that Maori know who they are, while Pakeha, who apparently have little idea, are prompted to consider alternative ways of thinking about cultural identity. This divergence reinforces the notion that Maori possess *culture*, while Pakeha are best understood through *history*. Ultimately, this culture/history divide plays out established forms of indigenous/Western difference that is, paradoxically, rooted in the colonial museum form.

2: Communicating Maori Culture through Taonga

a. An Essential History
Te Papa has New Zealand’s largest Maori collection, numbering almost 16,000 taonga. Dating predominantly from the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century, the museum’s collection includes carved meetinghouses, canoes, storehouses, palisade posts, cenotaphs, weapons, musical instruments, and burial containers and memorials. Weaving includes thick rain capes, feather and dogskin cloaks, piupiu (flax skirts), floor mats, baskets, fishnets, and war belts. The collection also includes a wide range of stone adzes, fishing and food cultivation tools, and domestic implements such as weaving pegs, pounders, torches, and cooking utensils. Over the past twenty years, the ownership, lending, handling and display of this material have become a flashpoint between Maori and museums and heritage organizations. Both Maori and Pakeha museum workers have become particularly concerned about their role in the contemporary political climate of Waitangi Tribunal Treaty decisions, international indigenous rights protocols, and government’s shift to an official bicultural policy. These pressures have generally encouraged strident support for Maori aspirations – and a rhetorical endorsement of Maori culture that is evaluative rather than analytic. Consider Te Papa’s promotion of Mana Whenua:

Mana Whenua captures and conveys the richness, complexity and dynamism of the Maori people... contemporary Maori artworks explore and reinforce the continuum of tipuna culture and whakapapa, linking past generations to present day descendants and the dynamics of cultural continuity... these taonga, or treasures, reconnect through whakapapa, or genealogy, to the living descendants of today in dynamic and meaningful ways... Mana Whenua presents and celebrates the mana (power, authority, dignity) of our culture...28

This assenting, celebratory description contains two competing currents often invoked in contemporary accounts of Maori identity. One is essentialist, rooted in tradition and formalised in the legal and bureaucratic spheres as a bounded ethnicity. The other discourse, articulated in the academic, cultural and artistic spheres, stresses a dynamic, postmodern and reflexive approach to identity. Tension recurs throughout Te Papa’s work between an official Maoritanga located in indigenous custom and
knowledge that is a constituent part of a biculturalism, and the multiple and unstable interpretations of identity that inhere in the creative realm. As a starting point then, we meet claims that may not establish a critical framework for an investigation into the Maori past, but are revealing inasmuch as they will, in some future time, speak volumes about the present felt need to accentuate a vital Maori identity.

Despite such lip service to the dynamism and changeability of Maori culture, the most striking aspect of Mana Whenua in the context of Te Papa’s overall tone is its traditional ethnographic feel. Mana Whenua is not easygoing and light-hearted in the manner of the rest of the museum. The puns elsewhere that mimic popular media styles (‘home is where the art is’, ‘shear hard work’, ‘eyelights’, ‘life of iron’, ‘off the record’) are dropped. The glass cases are solemnly lit and use traditional taxonomic labels. On some display cases sit fresh kawakawa leaves, placed by staff and tribal visitors in respect to ancestors. Unlike Parade, there are no ‘thumbs up’ or prompts to ‘decide for yourself’. Absent in Mana Whenua are the different economies of value applied across categories of objects elsewhere in the museum – in Te Papa’s Mana Pasifika (Pacific Island) gallery, for instance, we see, next to a Samoan ceremonial headdress and Cook Island women’s white church hat, a Chicago Bulls cap; a richly patinated 19th-century Tongan kava bowl shares its case with a plastic ice cream container; a rare Tahitian mourning costume faces a 1995 Lycra dress designed by a Pacific Islander. It is worth noting at this point that the Auckland War Memorial Museum is generally regarded as having the nation’s most important collection. Its refurbished He Taonga Maori gallery, featuring cool marble columns and polished wood floors, displays its taonga in a conservative manner in three semi-distinct areas: artistry (predominantly woodcarving); functional art (fibrework, tattooing); and large carvings (the whare-wananga Hotunui, waka Te Toki A Tapiri, and sections from the pataka Te Kaha).

In its display of taonga at least, Te Papa is not vastly different. The expansive, dramatically lit Mana Whenua gallery is dominated by a whare-wananga, a waka and a pataka, which have emerged as mandatory elements in Maori displays. Around these large objects visitors see smaller displays on topics such as Pacific voyaging,
the ancestors, places and traditions significant to particular iwi, traditional musical instruments, and examples of weaving and taniko (decorative wall paintings). Even in places where it gestures towards innovation (such as the self-consciously novel Te Marae), intangible values like authenticity, myth, and tradition remain central. Te Papa supports the right of Maori to make their own representations and interpret their own histories. This is reflected in the ethnicity of the Maori ‘team’, and in the bicultural arrangements that determine that each taonga must be displayed in ways that satisfy the tribes maintaining customary ownership. New presentation modes for taonga are not necessarily the foremost of Maori concerns. For curator Arapata Hakiwai, ‘the accent on the traditional and the positive is a natural reaction. You’ve been denied for so long. You’ve been disempowered for so long. You get an opportunity, so you present your culture as powerfully as you know’. The sense of honour and obligation that comes with ‘speaking for’ a relatively small community may account for a preference for display arrangements that are valorising, time-honoured and conservative. Moreover, the shift towards input from multiple iwi means that a more radical agenda for display, if it were to exist, would be problematical to coordinate and impose. Additionally, the continuation of traditional displays does not draw attention to how key changes ‘behind the scenes’, such as the repatriation, cultural property and copyright, representation in management and staffing, and consultation with Maori communities (subjects dealt with in the following chapter) are not generally visible at the level of display. While it is reiterated throughout the gallery that taonga express sacred tribal histories, the idea that they have been wrested back from the control of Pakeha curators, and that this act itself signifies some elemental political changes, remains only implicit.

Te Papa’s Maori displays are generally either in-context or in-situ. In-situ displays recreate an object’s environment through a mimetic reproduction of its mise-en-scene (seen most commonly in dioramas, period streets or public houses, interiors of living rooms or ship’s cabins, and reconstructed villages). Rather than utterly detach objects from their imagined context in a taxonomic mode, this display strategy uses theatrical spectacle to provide mise en scene:
… the in-situ code of immersion wants to create the illusion of continuity, of rupture and detachment not having taken place. In this sense, the museum tries to deny that it itself is the new context of the artefact – that the object has been turned into a specimen.34

If in-situ approaches can be critiqued for recreating a subject to exotic effect in rather arbitrary and artificial ways, their theatricality does, nonetheless, fire the imagination. In-context displays, by contrast, provide a conceptual framework and historical context for the object. Textual and audio-visual labels, explanations, charts and diagrams are used to assert strong cognitive control. The schematic classification and arrangement of objects in relation to each other is used to contextualize the thematic unfolding of historical events at various levels: at an emic or internalised frame of reference within a group; as a positional framework that references temporal, spatial or socio-cultural settings; or as part of a grand narrative for larger themes such as national identity, colonial conquest or economic development.35 Te Papa’s large woodcarvings are a kind of in-situ display, in that they provide a total environment for visitors to circle and explore, but are also accompanied by text and audio that assert cultural ownership over objects. Generally speaking, the inference of exoticism that now accompanies in-situ displays, combined with their limited provision for indigenous authority, has meant a general shift in museums towards ‘in-context’ explanation.

*Mana Whenua* simultaneously presents taonga as fine artworks and as examples of the sacredness of Maori culture. It continues the precedent of the *Te Maori* exhibition, which:

...presented particular works, isolated in dark spaces, as remarkable individual artworks; even the smallest jade ornament was transformed into a peculiarly heavy monument, its spirituality and authenticity bearing down upon the viewer...This kind of display, and especially also the catalogue photography that goes with it, reproduces the old operation of decontextualisation, but to different ends. If, earlier, the thing was appropriated into a vacuum so that it
could be declared a specimen, it is now appreciated into a vacuum as a work of art as an expression of the complexities of tribal culture.\textsuperscript{36}

\textit{Te Maori} excluded contemporary art, and experimental nineteenth century and early twentieth century art such as figurative painting, carved guns, pipes and furniture, and works that used iron or wool.\textsuperscript{37} 1860 was chosen as an arbitrary cut-off date for ‘classic’ Maori art.\textsuperscript{38} Similar to Nicholas Thomas’ account of \textit{Te Maori}, Te Papa displays taonga as extraordinary instances of fine art that, when combined with in-context interpretive devices, produce a kind of celebratory auto-ethnography. As the authoritative statement of Maori culture at Te Papa, \textit{Mana Whenua} amplifies and aestheticizes difference through what appears to be a strong nineteenth century focus. Disconcertingly, visitors can only go by appearances, since only around one-tenth of taonga are labelled with a date.\textsuperscript{39} It is often difficult to tell whether objects are centuries old, or more recent reproductions of older forms. While there are contemporary works in the gallery, they are generally faithful to traditional forms, as if to demonstrate that old techniques have not been abandoned. In the absence of concrete dates, explanatory text panels and audio and visual guides emphasise how the techniques, forms, styles, and motifs of taonga have upheld cultural principles such as mana, tapu, mauri across time. The dominant expression of cultural power in \textit{Mana Whenua} is the Maori ability to resist external influence and materials.

Conventionally, there has been a strategic division between the curatorial principles of natural history and anthropology museums, on the one hand, and art museums, on the other. In the former, information, objective and dispassionate, ideally allows visitors to reach their own conclusions. Art museums by contrast, are concerned not so much with supplying information, but with aesthetics and conveying abstract interpretive frameworks.\textsuperscript{40} In recent times, some commentators have expressed a concern that this distinction has collapsed – particularly in the display of indigenous cultures. For example, in a review of the Bunjilaka Aboriginal Centre at the Melbourne Museum, Peter Timms reports that the gallery has opted for an ‘unashamedly biased presentation that makes few claims to objectivity’. He argues that the Bunjilaka gallery intermixes art and artefact as the basis for conveying a
system of ideological beliefs about the nature of identity, rather than a range of factual information about Aboriginal history and life.  

James Clifford calls this new approach to indigenous displays, brought about by the erosion of the opposition between art and anthropology, ‘aestheticized scientism’.  

A reluctance to define taonga solely as art is no longer justified on the grounds that they lack the aesthetic qualities of European art. Instead, indigenous peoples (and those who support the new museology) express unease about defining their objects through a ‘Western’ category, and argue that the spiritual presence that inhabits objects enlarges them beyond the status of ‘art’. Indeed, Maori stress that the category of taonga embraces a far greater sphere than ‘artworks’ – it can include, for instance, greenstone pendants, geothermal pools, knowledge of weaving, a proverb or a song. In *Mana Whenua*, utilitarian objects, previously distinguished from artworks in older taxonomic displays, are attributed with the same status as taonga precisely because they also have an ancestral past. The principle that taonga encapsulate a whole worldview plays a vital role in justifying the eschewing of standard structuralist anthropological categories, which may be charged with artificially disconnecting, say, spirituality from war, or kinship from carving.

This holistic basis of indigenous self-representation somewhat thwarts standard critical approaches to museum ethnography. Ivan Karp, for instance, has written that exhibition strategies for non-Western cultures (in what he calls the ‘glossier, disguised form’ of contemporary ethnographic museums) tend to fall into two camps: exoticising and assimilating. Exoticising displays work by inverting the familiar – by showing how well known practices take an inverted form amongst other people. Assimilation takes the form of artistic similarity and shows how aesthetic similarities and similar formal properties connect cultures. While the display of taonga aims to communicate a self-contained cultural worldview, its absolute centrality to the larger Te Papa project makes it irreplaceable in conceiving the bicultural nation. In a postcolonial context, the uniqueness of Maori culture is usable and valued in projects of national self-definition, rather than representing an otherness against which mainstream identity can define itself. James Clifford has identified a more sophisticated range of representations based on four forms of ethnographic authority:
experience, interpretation, dialogue, and polyphony. The first two represent the longstanding basis of the analyst’s authority and draw on paradigms of observation, scientific objectivity and objectification. The latter are more recent strategies that aim to recognize the unavoidably political context of research and emphasize the reflexive basis of knowledge through an accent on the interpersonal and communicative. Clifford believes that categories like ‘culture’ and ‘art’ ‘can no longer simply be extended to non-Western peoples and things. They can at worst be imposed, at best translated – both historically and politically contingent operations’. While empathy runs the risk of a loss of critical distance and an acceptance of idealized truths, analysis risks not listening to the actual experiences and beliefs of subjects. Like Karp’s opposition between exoticism and assimilation, Clifford’s scheme, which places the outside analyst’s experience and interpretation at one end of a continuum of authority and the cultural authority of the culture in question at the other, obscures the way that curators engaged in analysis – Maori especially – may also be culturally and politically empathetic. In new museums in settler states, there tends to be an inescapable balance in acts of representation that prove that complicity and resistance can no longer be attached to colonial and postcolonial paradigms in any straightforward way. Furthermore, in new museums, the issue of the ‘right to be displayed’, which consolidates a conventional logic of curator-subject and display-object, has been overtaken by questions about who authors and has access to information, and what is included or left out.

Although Te Papa seeks to draw attention to an unjust colonial past, the formal qualities of taonga typically betray little of the dramatic context from which they were wrenched. Kenneth Hudson calls ethnographic museums ‘anaemic’ because they convey little of a sense of the life and blood of a culture.

The ambitions, the fears, the poverty, the disease, the climate, the cruelty and brutality, the satisfactions and the sufferings of these people are not there to give blood, sense and cohesion to the exhibits…Ethnographical museums may collect widely, but they do not dig deeply. The political consequences of doing so would be too serious, or so it is felt.
While political ramifications are indeed one issue (and will be addressed soon), what Hudson does not make clear is the considerable difference between ethnography and history in terms of their capacity for communicating concrete events. The dominant ethnographic tradition that emphasises ocular wonder over explanation has detached non-Western peoples from the events of history. In the shift from nineteenth century evolutionist theories of human development to twentieth century cultural relativism, explanations of the primitive or tribal groups’ lesser development was explained through the ambiguous temporal status of the ‘ethnographic present’. Inevitably, in Western taxonomies, non-Western ‘ethnographic presents’ were actually pasts. In Te Papa’s auto-ethnographic, self-justified cultural model, Maori indifference to chronological ‘national time’ has nothing to do with ideas of relative cultural progress. The almost entire absence of ‘Maori history’, typically understood in categories like labour relations, war, urbanisation, demographic changes, political struggles, gender relations, significant sporting or cultural events, or education and health standards, is instructive. Compared to, amongst others, the Bunjilaka display at the Melbourne Museum, the First Australians Gallery at the NMA, the Indigenous Australia gallery at the Australian Museum, or the First Peoples’ Gallery the Royal British Columbia Museum, Te Papa is much less forthright about contemporary racism and inequality. Generally speaking, New Zealand’s large public museums are less confrontational about racism and inequality than those in Australia. This may simply reflect the lesser degree of historical persecution and contemporary inequality Maori have suffered. Yet it might also say something about the incorporative effect of the implementation of ‘official’ bicultural policies and arrangements in museums across New Zealand. Ideologically, the absence of objects within social history categories may not necessarily be politically conservative, inasmuch as this accents an unwillingness to define the Maori historical experience in accordance with the incorporative or assimilative policies of the state. The projected image in Mana Whenua is of a self-secure and self-contained Maori nation that possesses pathways to advancement or maturity that have little to do with national progress.
b. Inside Te Hau ki Turanga

This section looks more closely at the history of one particular exhibit. On its own, the eventful life of the carving provides a cogent case study of colonial ethics and Maori empowerment. More purposely, by examining the way Te Papa and the iwi involved in its display have chosen to represent, we gain a better sense of the museum’s preferred version of the Maori past. The large carved totara whare-wananga Te Hau ki Turanga (‘the breezes of Turanga’) is the centrepiece of Mana Whenua. While the structure at first seems dwarfed by the cavernous museum space, its interior is deceptively large. By entering the whare-wananga (after removing their shoes) visitors activate a syncopated light and audio presentation that informs them they have entered the body of an ancestor of the Rongowhakaata tribe. Rich decorative carvings of ancestors called poupou cover the tukutuku (lattice panels) and kowhaiwhai (rafter paintings). On the exterior of the meeting house the koruru (figurehead) is his head; the raparapa (bargeboards) are his arms and fingers; the amo (posts) are his legs; the roro (porch at the entrance) represents the brain; the heke (rafters) are his ribs; the poutokomanawa (centre post) his heart; the tohuhu (ridgepole) is the ancestor’s backbone. A video presentation on a monitor outside the whare-wananga shows Rongowhakaata tribal land in Poverty Bay, various shots of men carving, and children singing in front of the building. It ends with a still picture of members of the iwi, overlaid with the text ‘the relationship continues’.

Figure 9: Te Hau ki Turanga  Picture taken by author with permission.
*Te Hau ki Turanga*, built in 1842 by the Rongowhakaata people under the direction of master carver Raharuhi Rukupo, is the oldest extant meetinghouse in New Zealand. At that time both the Treaty of Waitangi and Christianity had arrived in Poverty Bay. The construction of the whare-wananga engaged with a new world of Western knowledge, being one of the first carvings to use steel tools and utilising painted designs that borrowed European drawing techniques. Rukupo and his craftsmen also inscribed the names of 67 ancestors beneath their carved representations in a Roman script popularised by the Maori translation of the bible. Despite this missionary influence, whare-wananga were often built as direct counter-symbols to churches and the disempowerment they embodied. In difficult times, the whare-wananga was a powerful symbol of resistance to military invasion and land alienation, and often expressed a tribe’s allegiance to tribal and pan-tribal independence movements.

Missionaries compared the great attention and artistry of the whare-wananga being built by the Maori King Movement (a pan-tribal movement supporting a Maori monarchy) with earlier Maori efforts put into church building. The marae complex represented a site where alternative forms of tribal governance and protocol could be practised that were conspicuously indifferent to policies of bureaucratic centralisation and cultural assimilation that were the basis of Native Affairs (later Maori Affairs).

In 1867 two settlers named Richmond and Biggs ordered the removal of *Te Hau ki Turanga* to Wellington. They instructed the captain of a government steamer to dismantle the whare and load it aboard his vessel. Although he was told Maori had agreed to the action, the captain encountered some resistance when he arrived. £100 was paid to several Maori, but the captain later expressed doubt that they were the correct people to deal with. It remains a matter of debate whether the whare-wananga was confiscated as an act of retribution for Rongowhakaata’s actions in the 1860s Land Wars, or whether Richmond and Biggs wished to compassionately preserve what they reported to be a decaying house. The whare-wananga was reassembled around a frame inside the Maori Hall at the Colonial Museum and soon became the yardstick by which museum anthropologists measured post-contact changes in Maori
culture. According to Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, it was the placement of the whare-wananga *Te Hau ki Turanga* in the Colonial Museum that initiated the obligatory requirement of including a whare-wananga in Maori galleries across the country.\(^{55}\) By the early twentieth century the whare-wananga was seen as ‘out of time’ with other contemporaneous structures such as the town hall. As their oppositional significance was reduced they became aestheticised as a dying art form, produced by colonised subjects on the peripheries of empire.

In the 1930s, largely due to the work of Apirana Ngata, the Minister of Native Affairs, the whare-wananga became a focal point for the articulation of what has become known as the ‘first Maori renaissance’. In Ngata’s renovation plans, *Te Hau ki Turanga* became the prototype for a revival in the carving of traditional meetinghouses. Ngata’s belief in the scientific distinction between races was central to his anti-assimilationist political program that aimed to provide Maori with skills usable in rural tribal contexts. New whare-wananga would become the focus for revived Maori rural life under Ngata’s land development scheme, and a remodelled *Te Hau ki Turanga* became the template for carvings, panels and rafters to be produced for public and municipal buildings. Dissatisfied with some of *Te Hau ki Turanga*’s European motifs, Ngata followed pre-1840s precedents and recoloured the pingao (sandgrass) and kiekie (climbing plant), and changed the shape of the house to more aesthetic proportions. Around the same time, the Department of Public Works, discovering that the original wall slabs were too tall to fit the museum enclosure, sawed off their bases – the section on which the names of ancestors had been inscribed in biblical script. While it is unclear whether this was Ngata’s intention, the removal of missionary influence suited his efforts to reconstruct the house in a pre-colonial past.\(^{56}\)

In this state the structure stood at the National Museum, until the mid-1990s when it was detached from the wall and taken to Te Papa. There it was completely restored by museum staff and members of Rongowhakaata using traditional methods and materials. Te Papa also recently repatriated six painted church panels to Rongowhakaata in exchange for acting as continued custodian of *Te Hau ki*
Until recently, these developments signalled a Te Papa success story. However, at the time of writing, Te Papa’s ownership and care of Te Hau ki Turanga is being contested at Waitangi Tribunal hearings (the importance of the Tribunal in Te Papa’s work is analysed in the next chapter). The Rongowhakaata iwi has claimed that the confiscation of the whare-wananga breached well-established English legal principles as well as Treaty of Waitangi guarantees. The tribe also alleges that the taonga has suffered from unfit care through Te Papa’s mismanagement. The main accusations are that consultation was almost non-existent until recently, and that alterations and additions had been made without Rongowhakaata’s involvement. A Rongowhakaata spokesperson stated in the *New Zealand Herald*, ‘to add salt to the wound, the museum allowed others to place plaques in the whare claiming ownership despite the fact that such information was false and museum staff were aware this was the case’. Although many of the original features are discernible to visitors, ‘much of the rest of this Rongowhakaata taonga has been substantially altered since it was stolen from its people and wrenched from its roots in 1867’. It remains to be seen how accommodating Te Papa will be in the situation that the Tribunal recommends the return of the whare-wananga, and how *Mana Whenua* may be altered as a result. Certainly it would mean the loss of its principal attraction and a significant dent in its reputation as a highly progressive museum with regards to issues of treatment of indigenous artefacts. We may soon see a phase of retribalisation added to the life history of the whare-wananga, and with it, the culmination of its use as a symbolic constant of Maori material culture.

When an object like Te Hau ki Turanga is contextualised chiefly in terms of a point of origin and its present location in the museum, an explanation of its social life is limited to narratives of continuity or rupture. Objects are affirmed, in postcolonial fashion, as the unequivocal possession of a cultural group emblematising their longevity and prosperity. Or, having changed hands from the indigenous to the colonial, they are held to illustrate processes of manipulation and subjugation. In either case, the ‘communities’ that maintain or lose possession of objects are presumed to be static. However, as Dahl and Stade put it, ‘to organize exhibitions and texts around presumptions of shared substance and continuous identities is, in effect,
to deny history. It is to produce people without history’. More information about the social life of the object, and of the variable experiences of the people who have lived with their meetinghouse in a national museum for over a century, would allow audiences to grasp the way that its context and meaning changes with its appearance. However, given that the whare-wananga can be cherished as a symbol of Rongowhakaata’s tribal quintessence, it is not surprising that Te Papa and Rongowhakaata have chosen to ignore a provocative conjecture about the large whare-wananga: that they only emerged in the colonial period and have since become ‘traditionalised’. Jeffrey Sissons describes the process of traditionalisation as one where aspects of contemporary culture come to be regarded as valued survivals from an earlier time. According to Sissons, the construction of whare-wananga appears to have begun in Northland as recently as the 1830s. Prior to that time, chiefs may have had large houses with elaborate lintels, but political and religious gatherings were invariably held outside and parties of visitors slept outside, in their hosts’ dwelling houses or in the porches of storehouses. He argues that during two successive phases – exhibition and aestheticization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (as idealised by Augustus Hamilton), and standardization and tribalization under Apirana Ngata’s direction in the 1930s and 1940s – the ‘traditionalised’ structure was put to a diverse range of uses, including projects promoting national identity, tourist marketing, ethnology and state-directed rural development. According to Sissons, no real distinction is now made between mid-nineteenth century meetinghouses and those built subsequently. They are all now thought to symbolise kin-group identity and all are considered to be equally ‘traditional’. Despite its hint of demystification, Sissons stresses that traditionalisation differs from the contemporary anthropological discussion of the ‘invention of tradition’ because traditionalisation is less a contemporary interpretation of the past than an historical accomplishment (and is not reducible to acts of misrepresentation). The whare-wananga, then, can be seen as a traditionalised object with a genealogy in both Foucauldian and Maori senses. Its Foucauldian genealogy is traced through a history of cultural commodification and colonial state-formation that enacted new forms of power/knowledge. It has a Maori genealogy inasmuch as it embodies a history of kin-based negotiations with these different forms of power.
c. *Matauranga Maori: Relating a Worldview*

As visitors move through Te Papa’s relatively discrete galleries, they may become aware of the symbolic construction of what Goldie Osuri calls ‘multiple spacetimes’. The majority of the museum, containing science, history and art exhibits, shops, cafes, ‘rides’ and information desks, is culturally undifferentiated (though, for the sake of bicultural compatibility, is often called ‘Western’ in policy). *Mana Whenua*, however, is separated from commercial and functional intrusion. The gallery intends to reflect a self-contained space-time that differentiates Maori philosophical belief from universalist ‘Western’ representational practices. In Te Papa’s scholarship this belief system is called ‘Matauranga Maori’. Ideally, Matauranga Maori consists of the paradigm of customary knowledge pertaining to specific communities, passed down through oral techniques by tohunga (experts), and whare wananga (ritual recitation learning meetings). These narratives often include origin stories, genealogies, land boundaries, placenames and significant sites, traditions of war and peace, and spiritual knowledge, and traditional medicine.

In Te Papa’s exhibitions Matauranga Maori is manifest as bilingual text, audio and video presentations, reference to tribal genealogies, and a rhetorical emphasis on the vitality and deep rooted-ness of tribal culture. Videos beside many of the major exhibits show tribal members (backed by birdsong and rural settings) avowing the spiritual importance of the objects and the continuity of ancestral tradition. Together, these tactics create cultural boundaries and inform non-Maori visitors that they are outsiders to the producer culture. A good example of Matauranga Maori on display is the *Papatuanuku* film in *Awesome Forces*. The exhibition showcases New Zealand’s ecological development, including its southward drift from Gondwanaland, displays on dinosaurs, geysers, volcanos, earthquakes, and a walk-in beach house that endures a simulated earthquake. Inside a small theatre with *Te Marae*-style fibreboard carvings, a female Maori voice describes the mythical creation of Aotearoa. The screen shows giant trees, rocky coastline and wild skies, accompanied by an ambient sound-scape of whistling wind, war chants and wood instruments. The narrative
describes the way the earth was created when the cosmic embrace of Papatuanuku and Ranginui (the sky father), was broken by one of their sons, Tane. With his back against his mother and feet against his father, he split his parents apart, separating sky and earth. Tane (god of forests) and his siblings were then able to establish themselves as various natural elements, creating Aotearoa.\textsuperscript{68} The lack of any lateral reference to the scientific material surrounding the theatre suggests this material is presented as a competing system of knowledge. However, it is difficult for viewers to gauge the location and context of this customary knowledge, since the program does not make self-conscious reference to who holds belief in these ideas, or what kind of narrative function its serves in Maori communities.

Another example of Matauranga Maori in display is the small wharenui \textit{Makotukutuku} in Mana Whenua. Visitors who crawl inside the house observe a hard earth floor and bed, a fake fire and a carefully thatched roof. A video outside the entrance relates that while recently excavating the Makotukutuku settlement, archaeologists revealed the remains of a wharenui that stood 600 years ago. Inspired by this find, the Ngati Hinewaka tribe decided to construct a replica of the wharenui using traditional tools. A video presentation shows the house in construction. Traditional wood instruments play background music while statements about the need to nurture the land, rivers and sea are voiced over. A member of the tribe rhetorically asks the camera, ‘what were people in antiquity like? Just like us… we possess their mana’. The video program informs visitors that the reconstruction of the wharenui is more than an exercise in historical restoration. The articulation of an unbroken circularity between past and present suggests an implicit distinction from the idea, prominent in the Western historical imagination, of distant ancestors as ‘other’ and the past as ‘a foreign country’.\textsuperscript{69} That is, if dioramas and domestic scenes depicting everyday life many centuries ago are intriguing partly because visitors might struggle with the strangeness of their conditions, the \textit{Makotukutuku} display asserts that physically circumstantial differences (such as living arrangements) are immaterial next to bloodlines.
One of the difficulties with Matauranga Maori is that its idealised nature risks engaging little with how Maori might actually speak. The *Papatuanuku* creation film and *Makotukutuku* video communicate ideas about pre-modern Maori culture that have an uncertain relation with distinctly heterogeneous contemporary Maori belief systems. In the same way that few ‘Westerners’ actively and self-consciously ‘practise’ Western science, Matauranga Maori is, for the most part, distinct from Maori life as it is lived. Although Matauranga Maori is a system of signification that is problematic to verify against ‘Western science’, Te Papa’s strong impulse to make scholarship bicultural means that the two are constructed in a high degree of opposition. The policy document *Speaking with Authority* (1996) conceives knowledge in two parts, and positions Matauranga Maori as an equally whole and complete worldview. For instance, the exhibition theme ‘Peopling New Zealand’ conceives tangata whenua (Maori) and tangata tiriti (Pakeha) separately, and asks of Pakeha alone, ‘what were the effects of tangata tiriti on the land and environment?’

Topics are justified through the combination of cultural and economic concerns that identifies Te Papa’s peculiar policy language: ‘all tangata tiriti have family who migrated to New Zealand, and so this subtheme relates to a wide group of customers’, or ‘since many Maori have non-Maori ancestors, this theme will enrich everybody’s whakapapa’.

The lack of delineation in *Speaking with Authority* about what constitutes ‘Western science’ might suggest that, by default, Te Papa will represent it in conventional disciplinary forms. However the brand of science in Te Papa’s displays scarcely conforms to this notion. While the exhibitions and programs are researched and produced in consultation with experts, only *Awesome Forces* contains something like ‘hard’ science. *Mountains to the Sea*, which chronicles New Zealand’s range of animal and marine life, combines species with little regard for taxonomy. Birds, stingrays, seals, and swordfish are all suspended from the ceiling, and skeletons are set against animals, some feathered, some fibreglass. A large cut out tree, shiny fake fish and cartoon landscapes make the space reminiscent of a children’s play centre. A whale skeleton is positioned amongst trees. Underneath a kingfisher suspended in flight, the panel reads: ‘Terminator bird. For any fish, frog or insect that crosses the
path of the kingfisher, it’s “Hasta la vista, baby!” While visually enticing and appealing for children, such displays do not evoke the formal, disembodied, hegemonic ‘Western science’ that would provide an opposite to Matauranga Maori.

In fact, much of the discussion found in documents like *The Implementation of Strategies for Scholarship and Matauranga Maori in Museums* provides little that is worthwhile. The category of ‘Western science’ is treated as virtually boundless (it includes everything in the museum that is not Maori), and it is often characterised as didactic and emotionally cold. Te Papa’s eagerness to recognise the diverse and unique characteristics that distinguish Maori tribal societies essentialises the West to the extent that it creates, to invert Edward Said’s well-known formulation, an Occidentalism. For instance, one concept trivializes ‘Western knowledge’ by dividing it into three parts: *spiritual* (‘In the West, this is for priests’), *moral* (‘this is for politicians and lawyers’), and *knowledge of the natural world, based on experience* (‘this is science’). As a more organic or natural opposition, ‘all three components of worldview are seen as belonging together within a concept such as “Matauranga”’. The formulation has now gained popularity beyond Te Papa. Gaynor Kavanagh has affirmed that Westerners ‘might imbue an object with magical
properties or attach a belief to it, but this comes from within us, and unlike the Maori, it is not a central or stable part of our belief system’. Similarly, at a Te Papa hui (meeting) on Matauranga Maori, Des Griffin, Director of the Australian Museum, proposed a distinction between Western knowledge ‘out there’ in the world, waiting to be seized upon, and Maori knowledge ‘in here’, in the minds of those who possess it. These clear-cut oppositions are, of course, dubious: all objects from which we can learn about the world are ‘out there’, and knowledge of them is always ultimately a personal acquisition. The difficulty in all of this is not the concept of Matauranga Maori, which is undoubtedly meaningful in certain instances. Instead, it is Te Papa’s insistence on its application in all spheres of museum work, which results in it becoming strongly reified, that is problematic.

Notwithstanding the gestural banality through which Matauranga Maori is expressed in policy, there are some general points worth observing. One is that Matauranga Maori is a holistic worldview that links phenomena. Another is that it resides in bodies and communities and is passed between them orally in ritual situations. The idea that oral discourse relates tribal histories better than texts (precisely because ancestral mana lives on in present-day bodies) establishes an opposition between narrative and empiricism. An emphasis on communal and reciprocal obligation in speech acts contrasts with a broadly Western notion that ascribes only individual responsibility. Yet while Western science is plural in derivation and in use – all peoples assume the right to use ‘Western knowledge’ as they wish – Te Papa wants to stress that Maori knowledge is restricted. Hence, a third related point is that Maori people alone should author information about Maori. As James Ritchie declares:

Who, then, does speak for Maori culture? Everyone who ascribes to Maori identity may, with some authority based on their personal rangatiratanga. If they are wise they know who is standing behind them as they speak. And if they are straightforward they will tell you for whom they speak. If you have learned to read the codes of such communication, you will know the extent and significance of their standing.
Some Maori have accordingly dismissed conventional museological scholarship as ‘pakehas writing letters to each other’. Along similar lines, Ngahuia Te Awekotuku has asserted that ‘institutional records require serious decolonising, so that the voice, the true voice, of the taonga themselves, is heard. How? Maori scholars – scholars of Maori descent – and cultural and linguistic fluency – must produce a Maori canon’. The idea is that only those Maori who possess proper tribal authority and knowledge can release from the taonga the ancestral voice that has been quieted.

Te Papa’s deployment of Matauranga Maori as argumentative tactic in contentious display situations has been revealing. One relatively minor example involved consternation from some Maori that Te Papa had displayed Te Atiawa’s whakapapa in a visible tree diagram format. This information is customarily tapu, conveyed only on the marae through oral recital. Curator Arapata Hakiwai defended this decision: ‘At the end of the day the Te Atiawa people got together, they had a series of hui and they decided they wanted it there. And if the tribe consensually decided for it to be there, then it stands, even if other Maori groups opposed this’. While this instance could be subdued by appealing to tribes’ mutual respect for one another’s cultural autonomy, a very different and more controversial situation ensued when Pakeha scholars challenged the appropriateness of the Moriori iwi display. In a glass display case, visitors see adzes, fishhooks, and the unique carvings the Moriori inscribed into the bark of (what were once) live trees. For most visitors, however, it is not the carvings but reference to the Moriori itself that sparks curiosity. The myth of the Moriori went (and often still goes) that they were the original indigenous inhabitants of New Zealand who were driven out and exterminated by the warlike Maori who arrived as a Great Fleet around 1100 AD. However, there is now a scholarly consensus that the Moriori were a Maori tribe who travelled to the Chatham Islands (east of the South Island) between AD800 and AD1000. The onset of the Little Ice Age around 1400 brought harsher climatic and sea conditions which meant, combined with a lack of timber for canoe building, that the Moriori were cut off from the mainland. A distinct culture eventually emerged on the Chatham Islands. According to Moriori tradition, a chief named Nunuku ended internecine violence, replacing tribal warfare with ritualised contests between individual representatives armed only
with quarterstaffs. European discovery of the Chathams in 1791 saw the sealers introduce disease. However it was Te Atiawa Maori who arrived to annex the Islands in 1835 who decimated the Moriori population. The tribe travelled the island, taking over land and killing anyone offering opposition. Those not killed were forbidden to marry or to reproduce, suggesting a deliberate attempt to exterminate them as a people.  

It appears remarkable that Te Papa’s Moriori display makes only an allusion to twentieth century ‘survival’ (some Moriori descendants remain) but no direct reference to the 1835 invasion. In an open letter, a group of well-known historians called Te Papa’s research standards ‘inadequate’, citing the failure to address this event as exemplary. A variety of responses were marshalled in the museum’s defence, most of which included direct or indirect reference to Matauranga Maori. ‘Concept leader’ Ken Gorbey justified the omission on the grounds that it risked ‘a return to a view of history which has overtones of racism’. Racism, in his reckoning, appears to involve revealing facts that show Maori unfavourably – and provide a case for Pakeha prejudice. Of course the point is precisely that the Te Atiawa extermination of the Moriori was fuelled by beliefs about the superiority of their warring stock over another that eschewed violence. Former Board Chairman Ron Trotter took a different tack, arguing that the exhibition is ‘informed by the detailed and rigorous research undertaken in the course of developing Moriori’s Treaty of Waitangi claim’. A letter from Mason Durie, states that ‘the Moriori exhibition was all the more telling for the omission of the Te Atiawa contact. Anyone who is informed about Matauranga Maori would have been able to infer from the exhibition that the relationship between Moriori and Te Atiawa remains contentious’. Similarly, when questioned on the Holmes TV show, Moriori Trustee Maui Solomon indicated that the omission would help promote reconciliation between the present-day descendents of the Moriori and Te Atiawa. The situation to which all three spokespeople obliquely referred was the Moriori Waitangi Tribunal grievance claim made at that time. The Moriori charged that culpability for their losses lay with the Crown, since the government of the time was aware of the invasion but failed to intervene and stop their subsequent enslavement. Since only
very few Moriori remained, continues the claim, when the 1870 Native Land Court ruled on the Chatham Islands, it treated them as a defeated people and awarded 97% of the land to Te Atiawa. Inflaming this situation, a Te Atiawa sub-tribe made the counter-claim that the 1975 Treaty of Waitangi Act does not cover the Moriori because they are a different people, and not actually Maori. This present-day reversion by a Maori group to the colonial myth of distinct racial Polynesian types somewhat undermines any notion of a united Maori nation. The situation also sits uncomfortably within a Treaty-based biculturalism that is based on clear and dualistic roles of oppressor and oppressed.

The key issue that emerged at Te Papa was whether Matauranga Maori was being used to legitimate historical selectiveness. Cheryll Sotheran argued the need to acknowledge other knowledge systems ‘if we’re going to be honest about our histories’. A letter from Ron Trotter justified the exclusion by stating that, ‘the Board recognises that there are two equally valid systems of knowledge that may be applied to telling our stories’. Trotter claimed that the Moriori, who helped create the display, decided ‘not to present themselves as victims’. Maui Solomon confirmed that the Moriori are ‘creating history of a different kind’ because they ‘do not wish to dwell in the past’. A letter from Solomon to Cheryll Sotheran affirmed that the iwi wanted to ‘tell the story from our point of view’ and further stated:

We reject that there has been any deliberate distortion of historical truth. Rather, the distortion may be in the minds of those whose opinions are influenced by their own historical, political and institutional prejudices and failure to appreciate the importance that the knowledge holders attach to their own culture.

In a similar vein, Durie states that,

Matauranga Maori…does not exclude the link between research and the purpose of the exercise. Nor does it pretend that the perspective of the story-
teller is the only view, or make any claim on historical truth as if it were some absolute and immutable phenomenon.\textsuperscript{91}

Te Papa’s deployment of Matuaranga Maori in this instance can be argued to be problematic for several reasons. First, a customary Maori version of this event is precisely one that not only acknowledges but also justifies the massacre. At the Native Land Court in 1870, a Te Atiawa representative called Rakatau warranted the attack on the grounds that it was the then-expected result of Maori custom and behaviour.\textsuperscript{92}

Second, Te Papa does not make it clear to visitors that the display is not necessarily objective ‘history’, but instead a Matauranga Maori version of the past. Visitors will invariably assume that information in a national museum is both authoritative and reasonably complete. Yet it is not just the slaughter of the Moriori that is missing. Close examination of Te Papa reveals a lack of substantial reference to slavery, cannibalism, inter-tribal warfare in pre-contact and colonial Maori society, and the 1860s Land Wars (which were inter-tribal as well as between imperial and Maori forces). Conflict is contained only in the Treaty exhibition (which I explore in the following chapter) where discord is represented as between tribes and the Crown. Mention of the bloody skirmishes between Maori and settlers, between Maori tribes, and within settler society, is difficult to find. Defending these omissions on the grounds that conflict is not a theme that constituencies want to represent themselves through certainly demoralises the idea of museum history. If the museum is to retain some authority as an institution of public education, it must treat the (admittedly difficult) ideals of objectivity and comprehensiveness on any given subject as a basic objective. While Te Papa partially transfers interpretive control to tribes, this does not free it from ultimate responsibility for content, and nor does it mean that it has given up or passed on an ideological position. That is, the museum’s decision to defer to the good of parties involved in a Waitangi Tribunal dispute strongly suggests that it privileges certain political interests over the ideal of disinterested knowledge.

Third, the notion of Matauranga Maori as an understanding of the past that works from a wholly different basis from ‘history’ is specious, for at least two reasons. First,
while the idea that all stories are subjectively located is a defensible principal, it is a leap to say that one is not obliged to admit an event actually occurred. By upholding the validity of a Matauranga Maori perspective, Te Papa stands by the idea that all perspectives have an equal purchase on truth, and that all societies live through their myths. Supporting this notion, Angela Ballara has written that, ‘there is a contemporary recognition that scholars, whether Maori or Pakeha, would be gravely mistaken to attempt to separate “fact” from the so-called “mythical”, because the narratives so denuded would be devoid of meaning’.  

For Ballara, the legitimating criteria for Matauranga Maori narratives are immanent in it. Yet this indifference to critical examination is precisely why Peter Munz believes it is misguided to compare Matauranga Maori, as a belief system ‘designed to bond people into a community’, with Western scholarship, ‘designed on the application of unrestricted criticism and scrutiny to all beliefs’. In its clustering around myth and legend, the realm of Matauranga Maori is not its truthfulness corresponding to an objective world, but its ability to poetically describe a possible world. For this reason it is perhaps unsurprising that, as ex-CEO Cheryll Sotheran lamented, Matauranga Maori has not been supported by the Ministry of Research Science and Technology’s ‘Public Good Science Fund’, because the work was seen as ‘merely myths and legends’.  

Rather than conceptualising all of this as a division between fact and myth, it is more useful to consider the different kinds of representations that the epistemological and the enunciative make possible:

if the epistemological tends towards a reflection of its empirical referent or object, the enunciative attempts repeatedly to reinscribe and relocate the political claim to cultural priority and hierarchy (high/low, ours/ theirs) in the social institution of the signifying activity. The epistemological is located into the hermeneutic cycle, in the description of cultural elements as they tend towards a totality. The enunciative is a more dialogical process that attempts to track displacements and realignments that are the effects of cultural antagonisms and articulations...
Indeed, the enunciative emphasis in *Mana Whenua* can be at least partly seen as a dialogic response to standard museum history, inasmuch as Maori aim to carve out a distinct cultural space in the museum. Te Papa’s endorsement of Matauranga Maori is in part because the notion of a situated ‘story-teller’ is consistent with its narrative approach in exhibitions. There appears a neat compatibility between the many and varied ancestral stories that form the basis of tribal distinctions within the Maori world and the themes of decentralisation and multiple groups ‘speaking for themselves’ favoured in the new museology. My second rejoinder to Te Papa’s construction of a Matauranga Maori as an alternative, self-contained narrative mode is that it relies on a totalising, unflattering idea of disciplinary history. Characterising history as being concerned primarily with monographic grand narratives is anachronistic, and does not credit the way contemporary historians engage with personal memory, myth, and multivocal narratives. Moreover, and moving in a different direction, we should be cautious not to overemphasise the rigorously scholarly qualities of museum history. Whether of a ‘Maori’ or ‘Western’ kind, museum history is best geared, in the absence of detailed textual evidence and explanation, towards stimulating visitors to imagine different places and times. Scholarship at contemporary museums like Te Papa is of a different kind to universities or libraries (institutions to which the museum has been traditionally compared), inasmuch as it is as much concerned with evoking meaning and feeling as producing knowledge. This is made explicit, for example, in the *Eternity* gallery at the NMA, which organises Australian history through ten emotions, such as Joy, Passion, Mystery, Loneliness, and so on, and relates diverse individual stories to based around these topics. Hence, to return to the Moriori case, a more accurate reason for the exclusion of this ‘story’ is not a struggle between two competing knowledge systems, but an inability to situate it within the valorising impression of Maori culture that *Mana Whenua* strives for.

Summarising this Maori section, we have seen how the placement of taonga in displays that fuse fine arts with tribal interpretation has distanced Maori from the relativism and populism that characterises much of the rest of the museum. Yet the strong association of deep tradition with authority, and the symbolic and ideological
elaborations of tangata whenua with which Te Papa is concerned, may not speak to the modes of empowerment that many Maori actually experience. In an effort to show the unity of Maori culture, a narrow kind of essential representation is privileged over social representativeness. The limiting of diversity to tribal differences underlines this backward-looking focus by reinforcing social structures established prior to colonialism. As I further explore in the next section, while Te Papa ideally relates Maori and Pakeha ‘communities in difference’, it struggles to contain the tension between difference and unity from which national distinctiveness is claimed to flow. What we find in the second part of this chapter is that Pakeha exhibitions are subject to wholly different principles of representation. While Maori categories of knowledge are related to an idealised state, Pakeha history topics at Te Papa principally aim to demythologise and demystify.

3. Pakeha: Living Without History

a. Unsettling the Settler Past

After many years of neglecting the nation-state as a core focus of exhibitions, New Zealand’s national museum is now asked to produce a cohering, national identity-producing history. This is warranted as a pressing concern for New Zealand at this time. Jock Phillips, chief designer of Te Papa’s Pakeha history exhibitions, has asserted:

We too have our ‘Theatres of Memory’, in Raphael Samuel’s phrase; but the difference is that whereas in Britain’s case (which is what Samuel is talking about) the cult of popular history seems mere nostalgia, a fashion which offers succour to a nation in decline, history has a more urgent task of national self-definition in New Zealand.\textsuperscript{97}
Given this stated importance, we might reasonably expect Te Papa to develop an authoritative and affirming concept for Pakeha identity. However, within Te Papa’s numerous bicultural policy documents, elaboration of any intellectual scheme concerning Pakeha history, identity or culture is conspicuously absent. The most detailed policy statement addresses biculturalism as the basis for institutional governance, mediated by politico-legal constraints, between iwi and the Board, and iwi and Government. Arrangements for institutional partnership and parity are accented over any discussion of what constitutes Pakeha. In fact, the document scarcely refers to Pakeha at all, except in their institutional capacity as museum directors or curators typically held responsible for abetting the historical marginalisation of Maori.  

In the absence of any consolidation of an objectivist, recognized Pakeha identity in policy, Phillips conceived a somewhat provocative premise:

The question of what is pakeha history is of course a major conceptual issue, but at an operational level we solved the matter quickly. We argued that there was no pakeha identity as such. Pakeha had co-opted an identity as New Zealanders and their definition as we quickly discovered included Maori. So the exhibitions became New Zealand identity from a pakeha perspective.

Phillips proposes that it is precisely the pre-eminence of Pakeha – and their in-built resistance towards considering themselves only a subset of the nation – that largely explains their deficiency of ethnic community. David Pearson makes a similar point when he writes that the Pakeha ‘view of the world is constructed within a system of dominance. Their ethnic systems are frequently national symbols, because they are “the nation” in their own eyes’. When we recall the wholly supportive language used as a starting point for Mana Whenua (‘…captures and conveys the richness, complexity and dynamism of the Maori people…’) it is quite clear that the Pakeha exhibitions proceed from a more deliberately problematic premise. The in-built flaw or inconsistency (‘co-opting an identity as New Zealanders’) means that, from the outset, Te Papa intends to be largely demystifying. Indeed, Phillips developed a
scheme that would use three long-term exhibitions to convey deliberately contrary ideas. Passports, an immigration history, would express the idea that, ‘We [Pakeha] are no more than the sum of the cultural baggage which landed on our shores’. The exhibition is designed to show how Pakeha culture can be attributed to aggregative immigrant cultures. On the Sheep’s Back is designed to make the opposite statement – that a distinctive and unique set of Pakeha cultural characteristics was forged as a result of interaction with the physical environment. Exhibiting Ourselves recreates New Zealand’s entries at four international exhibitions from the past 150 years. In demonstrating how projections of nationhood are selectively invented to suit the political needs of the times, it contradicts the other exhibitions by suggesting that authentic identity is itself something of a phantom. This conceptual triad avoids a hagiographic ‘gallery of heroes’ style and instead aims to convey something of the uncertain, uncanny nature of settlement.

This approach has its precedent in Richard White’s Inventing Australia. He posited that the search for identity, ‘a history of a national obsession’, has no objective or essential referent. The nation is an idea constructed in various political, cultural and geographical terms that changes over time. This methodology reflects Phillips’ unease (and that of other historians) towards ‘the nation’ as a productive framework for historical investigation. History of the kind that contributes to national identity and that which makes a contribution to understanding New Zealand’s past are not the same thing; one of the dangers of using history to explain group identity is its tendency to seek an essential past that artificially plays up certain events and trends at the expense of diversity, and imposes coherence on arbitrary conditions of historical assemblage. Moreover, for many historians, the monolithic topic of nationhood is somewhat suspect or exhausted in an environment in which forces of globalisation, cultural diversity, market pressures on public culture and new information and media economies are reshaping cultural institutions.

In line with these trends, Te Papa exhibits scepticism towards a canonical national history. Visitors are presented with three different schemes about identity, from which they can gain not just an understanding of different aspects of history, but the various
ways it can be represented. (It is notable that the NMA also explores settler identity through the themes of relationship with the land, Australia as an immigrant nation, and national identity as a construction).105 This scheme dissuades visitors from seeing history as an object of cognition, and instead encourages a self-reflexive awareness of how an affective and subjective understanding of history is formed. While this may present visitors with a provocative intellectual task, an important question is whether museum exhibitions can be schematically disruptive whilst still fulfilling the ‘urgent task of self-definition’ that Phillips identified. We might, for instance, predict conflict between the exalted autonomization of the national past and the forces of historical revisionism that sees the inclusion of previously neglected voices in national histories. Alternatively, it may be that by ‘unsettling’ or ‘re-exploring’ national identity, Te Papa in fact fuels and legitimises a nationalist impetus by encouraging visitors to focus on it afresh.

The remainder of this chapter concentrates on the three major exhibitions introduced here to explore how Te Papa produces Pakeha social history. I argue that, in some areas, the triadic hypothesis of identity as immigrant baggage/farming/elite invention succeeds in foregrounding how settler identity is a psychical structure imbued with coexisting and even contradictory ideas. Yet in a sense this demystifying approach is also a limitation: while the tone and narrative strategies of the Pakeha galleries suggest a knowing, postmodern reflexiveness that undermines the very idea of a proud Pakeha history, engrained Pakeha mythologies carry their own enduring weight. That is, public values may not have kept pace with intellectual trends, particularly when many come to their new national museum expecting to experience, for the first time, something like a comprehensive or canonical national history. Moreover, an undefined, revisionist postcolonial identity inhabits an uncertain role within an institutional scheme that understands biculturalism as a principled contract between Maori and Crown. When weighed against the essentialist representations of tangata whenua explored in the previous section, we can see that Te Papa produces two profoundly different populations. If Mana Whenua stresses authenticity, the Pakeha galleries accent play. This difference point towards a conclusion that despite its novel and revisionist gloss, a basic scheme that attributes Maori with an essential
culture and Pakeha with an uncertain history is actually doomed to repeat older museum practice. While Te Papa succeeds in constructing a postcolonial gloss in the form of a contemporary institutional style, it fails to help the public re-imagine the basic coordinates of the past.

b. Passports: A Derivative Pakeha Culture?

Of the segmented, semi-enclosed Pakeha history exhibitions, the logical starting point is with settlement. The main feature of Passports is the recreated steerage of a New Zealand Company colony ship. Various displays around the ship attest to the arduousness of the voyages from Europe. A recording reports that ‘today the ship’s captain cut his throat’, while a less gloomy 1887 voyage diary caption tells us the story of Fred, who received a black eye after a 6lb. tin of preserved meat fell on his head. ‘Had it gone to his temple, it might have been very serious’. In this area visitors can view the personal stories, objects, and images associated with over fifty migrants. As well as experiences of the journey, the stories reveal first impressions upon arrival, such as loneliness, the desolation of the streets, the unfinished appearance of the settlements, and the abundance of sheep. The exhibition uses the idea of migrants’ ‘discoveries’, ‘experiences’ and ‘journeys’ as an analogous process for visitors’ explorations. Visitors follow a spatial and conceptual path through the migrant experience: from the choice to leave, to the uprooting of the voyage, to the struggle to make a new home in an unfamiliar land. Self-guided devices such as interactive consoles and a range of video and audio biographies encourage personal involvement. By opening one of the drawers on offer, visitors can view a traveller’s diary entries, letters, mementos, and valued objects. For $1 children can purchase a personal ‘passport’ to document their interactive journey through the migrant stories. Part of the exhibition is devoted to identifying the origins of various elements of everyday national life. A sign prompts: ‘Discover who brought with them, as their precious luggage, jandals, marmite, beer, rugby’. Displays reveal that fish and chips were borrowed from Northern England, ‘sheila’ from Ireland, health stamps from Denmark and beer from Germany. Also of interest is the interactive wall display that allows visitors to test whether they would be eligible to immigrate by pressing yes/no buttons.
that correspond to policy criteria. For international tourists the process is, in the context of Te Papa’s central role in promoting the nation, both a ‘test’ and a kind of invitation. For citizens, the process may be quite uncanny: some seem relieved to find that their age, education, income and family win them the right to live in their homeland on grounds other than birthright; others may be discomforted by the idea that they are categorically deficient citizens.

In the present period, social historians are particularly interested in both the demythologisation of public memory, and the utilization of individual memories as they contribute to deeper personal historical understandings. Museums’ increasing interest in this area of social history, combined with their devotion to the breaking down of barriers between institution and minority communities, has found a suitable home in migration histories. Australia is particularly strong in this area. It boasts specialist migration museums in Adelaide (Migration and Settlement Museum, 1982) and Melbourne (Immigration Museum, 1999). Additionally, the major public museums of Melbourne, Sydney and Bendigo focus on migrant histories, as does the Horizons exhibition at the NMA. The prominence of the ship, suitcase or passport as a favoured design gesture of ‘the journey’ provides the setting for stories rich in personal memory and material associations. Settler stories, often infused with narratives of uncertainty, contact and adaptation, are well suited to a kind of auto-anthropology that ostensibly relinquishes institutional narrative authority.

Yet, at Te Papa quite evident ideological strategies can be observed. One involves a move away from a conventional focus on European discovery voyages and the first British immigrant ships, towards all immigrant arrivals to the present. As well as describing the experiences of Greek, Dalmation, Chinese and Gujuratis immigrants, the exhibition distinguishes the regional, religious and class differences in Great Britain. (Curiously, Australia, with whom New Zealand has long shared migratory flows, is wholly absent). Attention to a variety of inherited cultures challenges the comfortable notion that Pakeha identity represents merely an antipodean twist on that of Britain. The diffusion of immigrant origins to include other European nations, Asia and the Pacific opens a conceptual distance from Empire consistent with a
postcolonial historical focus. Charlotte McDonald has remarked that, ‘compared to societies with a much older tradition of acknowledging their past as an immigrant nation, the question of origins for Pakeha is appealing in its novelty’. This observation references the current Pakeha interest (at least among a certain sector) in the ways a kind of ‘cultural internationalism’ is positively transforming some aspects of New Zealand’s cities. The notion of New Zealand as home to diverse, ‘exotic’ historic cultural influences neatly fits a desire for current cosmopolitan sophistication. By disrupting the notion of an orderly, Anglocentric ‘peopling’ of the nation, Passports provides a ‘useable past’ that historicizes current cultural diversity and social change. The dispersion and multiplication of Pakeha origins also has the advantage of directing attention inward, towards New Zealand – something more difficult to achieve if a predominant country of origin is upheld. Notably, while depictions of diversity and diaspora claim for New Zealand a place along the route of cultural bodies and commodities, Passports presents migration as a one-way aggregative process and overlooks the social and economic effects of New Zealanders who have departed.

The predicament for a museum heavily focused on national identity is how to frame micro-historical migration stories within some unifying narrative. The theme deployed in Passports is the common trauma of migration. Phillips describes this idea:

> The suggestion is that this experience is a key to New Zealand identity since it happened to every pakeha identity or his or her ancestors. It is a founding trauma that must be at the core of identity. The fact that we are all a migrant people, attempting to make a new home, must be a central truth to our identity.\(^{107}\)

The personal accounts to be ‘discovered’ in Passports both celebrate and rue migration. For example, visitors may explore the story of Edward Mrozeck who, fleeing Poland after Nazi invasion, assisted in resistance movements but was eventually arrested and held in a concentration camp. Released in 1945, he travelled
to England and joined the merchant navy. Whilst docked in New Zealand, Mrozeck met his future wife, settled down and, as the text panel reads, ‘found prosperity, friends and peace’. Alternatively, visitors may learn of Ingeborg Stuckenberg, a talented and wealthy Danish artist who, together with the gardener she fell in love with, decided to escape nineteenth century bourgeois society by fleeing to New Zealand. Overcome by the drudgery and poverty she suffered after arrival, she committed suicide fifteen months later.

The point is that between generalisations about identity and the personal experience there is often a large fissure. Diversity, particularity is played off against the larger myths, and since this is an exhibition in which the visitor is free to wander or open which ever drawer he or she wishes, the larger meanings are left to the visitor’s own interpretation. Material is presented, juxtapositions are made, conclusions are not hammered home.¹⁰⁸

Phillips posits diversity in terms of varied personal experiences as a historical theme unto itself. However while the idea that all settlers share a common trauma proposes a kind of historical bond, it is certainly not one unique to New Zealand. Furthermore, the individual mapping of common trauma also represents a levelling strategy in the way it obscures group experiences and makes inter-ethnic relations more resistant to generalisation. The suggestion that unsettling and disturbing conditions impacted universally clouds the fact that New Zealand was settled as a British colony and has never played host to a fundamentally democratic scheme of settlement. Immigration favouring Protestant Anglo-Celts was expressed in an unofficial ‘White New Zealand’ policy that lasted until 1945.¹⁰⁹ Although statistically dubious, ‘98.5% British’ was a favourite national slogan by the late nineteenth century.¹¹⁰ Since the development of New Zealand nationhood rested more with the building of state institutions than a surge of mass allegiance, a coincidence of nation and state meant that the British template remained the primary mechanism through which elites established their class, gender and ethnic supremacy.¹¹¹
The premise that the markedly different hardships and social barriers faced by Northern European, Southern European, Asian and Pacific peoples can be equalized as common trauma is problematic. Constituting Pakeha society as a conglomeration of ethnic influences stresses a horizontal perspective that says little about class and inequality. This, in part, reflects a common limitation of museum history: jandals, marmite, beer and rugby are far easier to make visible than abstract social relations. Objects are not easily made to ‘speak’ of inequality. Museum objects are generally effective emblems of cultural difference; they generally struggle to convey differences in economic and social power. For this reason, the dispersal of national origins does little to reveal the relations of incorporation or segregation, prejudice or concord between the dominant group and minorities – precisely what makes immigration a provocative topic. A self-conscious focus on the ‘impact’ of arrivals leaves other complex questions begging, such as the way migrant societies are made and remade, the political mobilisation for and against new arrivals, and the influence the migration has on source countries. Matters of internal tension within groups, and the larger tension between representations and reality, tend to be subdued.

Though removed spatially and conceptually from Passports’ dominant identity theme, Te Papa does consider single ethnic group experiences. The simple setting apart of minority sections in the museum is an unambitious but standard strategy, which may reflect the absence of familiar or self-evident schemes for the meaningful integration of group diversity. The largest non-Maori, non-Pakeha space is the Mana Pasifika gallery, devoted to the cultures of Polynesia and Fiji. Against a backdrop of palm trees silhouetted against a brilliant blue sky, the exhibition touches on religion, warfare, ceremony, craft, music and dance. The main installation demonstrates a highly domestic focus – not just because it is a recreated Pacific Islander’s living room filled with comfortable chairs, family photos and leis, but, more pointedly, because the audiovisual stories it contains attest to the difficulties and benefits of adapting to a New Zealand way of life. It is not obvious why Mana Pasifika exists as a permanent gallery, when other minorities do not have the same thing. Yet we can surmise that this organization may be a remnant of (or concession to) the original
Pacific Cultural Centres scheme, which granted Pacific cultures parity alongside Maori and Pakeha.

The Chinese and Dutch are groups to have received exposure in Te Papa’s separate (and modest) ‘community gallery’. These exhibits have used a two-part scheme that has become conventional in the more established migration histories in Australian museums. The first part is a historical narrative that takes viewers through a chronological sequence. The Chinese display, for instance, was conceived as five historic phases: from goldmining; to discrimination; to the war years and family life; to post-war assimilation; to present diversity. The second part extends on diversity, and employs a sociological overview that shows an unanticipated range of lifestyles, lending the exhibition a contemporary feel. This latter part, consistent with developments in exhibiting national identity more generally, draws upon developments in social and cultural history such as the emphasis on personal agency, and plural and competing views and interpretations. We see a corresponding demotion of broader macro level factors related to politics, the economy, and the state, which may lack emotional charge – and convey an inhospitable government image. Instead, community galleries typically represent an eminent focus for celebration and validation. Subjects of an exhibition gain the opportunity to view themselves in a highly visible public capacity, while other visitors gain a felt sense of living in society that is tolerant, diverse and culturally rich. To be sure, this type of exhibition does normally make at least editorial reference (on placards, display headings or pamphlets) to social and cultural barriers and mainstream prejudice. However a concurrent narrative of cultural enrichment (for instance, Te Papa cites a Dutch influence for changing attitudes to restaurants and catering, design, and commercial flowering growing) usually mitigates such criticism.

The exclusion of Maori from Passports suppresses how the arrival of settlers produced for them trauma of a different and altogether more destructive kind. Further, by placing Maori outside the cultural baggage that has contributed to Pakeha identity, Maori-Pakeha cultural fusion (and a largely uninterrupted history of miscegenation) is denied. Nearly universal Pakeha knowledge of certain words such as puku (belly), kai
(food), hui (meeting) and haere mai (welcome), and customs like the haka, hongi and hangi may not signal a deep engagement with Maori culture, however it is nonetheless misleading that reference to these informal social contexts is missing. It also adds to the distorted impression that Maori and settler societies developed in isolation from each other. This absence is not surprising, however. The idea of Maori as only ‘the first migrants’ brings with it a host of conceptual problems relating to time-scale, historical experience and self-perception. Maori, keenly aware how claims that ultimately ‘we are all immigrants’ serve to diminish and relativise the significance of Maori culture (and all cultural difference) are understandably ambivalent towards their migration status. A closely related assertion that ‘we are all New Zealanders’ constructs a culturally undifferentiated ideology of public citizenship and relegates culture and ethnicity to the private realm.

Elizabeth Gertsakis has written that, ‘the futurism, the reformism of ‘planning a nation’, of visualising heterogeneity (for example, mixed ethnic, racial, religious communities) as part of political and economic legitimation, relies on a continuous production of coaxing public mythologies’. How coaxing is Passports in this light? Overall, despite some reference to more recent arrivals, Passports may struggle to counter the formidably popular mode of thought that, not unreasonably, locates the formation of Pakeha society in the nineteenth century. Given that, as Phillips recognised, Pakeha commonly identify themselves as New Zealanders in ethnic terms, the collapse between these categories highlights the difficulties minority immigrants face in claiming to be New Zealanders in the same way. The inclusion of immigrant diversity in Passports might represent a critique of an earlier unitary version of New Zealand identity. However, their sequestration as separate community histories (and absence in the other major Pakeha exhibitions) means that their overall social influence is seen as quite limited. Ultimately, diversity is presented as an array of descriptive flavours rather than the evaluative grounds for reconsidering settler history. While in settler states, histories produced in large public museums are generally no longer predicated on a unitary national culture, it would be a mistake to overestimate the strength of this message of multiplicity in the greater context of a bicultural national museum. While competing viewpoints are encouraged as a
representational principle, cultural diversity is often itself mobilized for unifying purposes. The notion that despite some differences a certain likeness unites citizens, and that aspects of difference can fruitfully coexist in any individual, are important facets of the bicultural or multicultural citizen. Whether the narrative construction of national identity emphasises diversity as pluralistic in structure (many peoples, one nation) or as internal (personified cosmopolitanism), sameness and difference are compatible rather than opposed. Ultimately, twentieth century immigrants are understood as ethnic ‘add-ons’ to the dominant culture who ‘missed the boat’ of settler identity formation. Indeed, the containment of multiple diversities within Passports reflects the ascendance of biculturalism (in that it does not form an organising principle for the museum as a whole). Spatially and conceptually, minorities are not critically positioned in relation to the contemporary negotiation of bicultural identity. This task (which represents my specific focus in the following chapter) is left to Maori and Pakeha elsewhere in the museum.

c. The Farming Hypothesis: On the Sheep’s Back

On the Sheep’s Back, located at the juncture of the Pakeha galleries, comprises several smaller displays. ‘Shear Hard Work’ features images of Pakeha shearers in gumboots and black singlets at work, wool samples, an old wool press, and a photomontage of record-breaking shearing feats set inside a reconstructed wooden wool shed. ‘Grassy Empires’ deals, somewhat scantily, with information outlining the importance of sheep in the colony’s livelihood. The visitor learns, for instance, that from 1861 to 1995 sheep numbers increased from 2.7 million to nearly 49 million, and the area of sown grass increased more than one hundredfold. ‘Home is where the Art is’, by contrast, celebrates ‘the home-spun creativity of New Zealanders working with wool’. This area includes material items such as tea-cosies, Maori cloaks, socks from the First World War Great National Sock Appeal (which yielded over 30 000 pairs), and woollen flowers made by a 15-year-old schoolgirl in 1885. In ‘Woollen Yarns’, fashion garments from contemporary young designers are displayed alongside pristine woollen suits stockpiled on remote Stewart Island (in the far south) in case of shipwreck. This section also features the results of Te Papa’s competition for the best
tale about a ‘Swanni’ (woollen bush shirt). One man, trapped in a flooded creek, apparently turned his into a raft by tying it up and somehow inflating it. Another used his to bury his favourite sheepdog.

In *On the Sheep’s Back* wool is the emblematic base for a broad field of meaning encompassing Pakeha material comfort, rural social life, and communion with the physical environment. Perhaps out of the awareness that wool represents a rather lacklustre subject for an exhibition, the tone of the exhibition is distinctly playful. It is partly pitched at international tourists; sheep are one of New Zealand’s most instantly recognisable emblems, and the ‘clean green’ ‘great outdoors’ is promoted as the country’s greatest drawcard. Emblems of farming life are arguably no less popular with a predominantly urbanised national audience. Visitors are encouraged to consider personal psychological attachment to the land – that is, ‘our place’ as an internalised sense of belonging. The exhibition uses wool and farming to convey the perspective that a distinctive Pakeha pattern of life and identity emerged as a result of interaction with the environment. This ‘farming hypothesis’ posits that Pakeha reliance on land for work, leisure, and, less tangibly, symbols of national uniqueness, has played a large part in steadily producing a people who were not simply
transplanted, but became a new national breed. ‘We’re all farmers at heart’, Jock Phillips has asserted, ‘farming culture has deeply penetrated the New Zealand identity’.  

By emblematising rural life in national identity, Te Papa perpetuates a conservative intellectual tradition. From the late nineteenth century, middle class writers and artists promoted a fledgling nationalism that romanticised bucolic life. Repudiating any connotations of decadence associated with their own bourgeois status, they promoted as quintessentially national a masculine and materially Spartan lifestyle that denied flowery articulation, yet expressed something profound and natural. Andreas Huyssen’s theorization of the gendered nature of the divide between high modernist culture and mass culture is particularly pertinent to this cultural history. Anxiety over a rapidly expanding mass culture in Europe in the latter half of the nineteenth century saw modernist artists and intellectuals ascribe it as feminised. The serious, disciplined style of modernist criticism was self-proclaimed as superior to the frivolous seductive world of mass culture. However, in New Zealand the masculine culture, faced predominantly with backbreaking physical tasks, historically held intellectualism and book learning in low regard. Englishmen of letters who made it to the colonial frontier often found little respect for their training. In the seemingly inverted world of settler societies, the expression of ‘real’ national identity was to be found neither in high modernist art and literature, nor the trappings of material mass culture, which was not only feminised, but generally foreign in provenance. Favoured symbols of national culture that emphasized physical work and sport not only expressed an indifference to urbanity, but were also precisely those unconducive to displays of high culture in museums.

Curiously, On the Sheep’s Back does not explore the centrality of gender in Pakeha constructions of identity. This is surprising, given that exhibition designer Jock Phillips’ best-known book, A Man’s Country? engages precisely with this premise. However, we should recall that Speaking with Authority, the document that forms the basis for Te Papa’s scholarship, stipulates the principal social division as being between tangata whenua and tangata tiriti. As a potential fracture that might spoil the
dualism of this scheme, gender is neglected as a productive category of analysis. Lack of reference to the connection between the domestic and national economies limits the significance of women’s unpaid work that was crucial to the profitability of farming families. Despite the blurb for the exhibition on the website that quips, ‘the thing that made some of us rich and most of us jerseys – wool!’ there is little substantive engagement with economic patterns or changing income, class structure, kinds of state intervention, or regional fortunes (topics seldom seen in museums, and more seldom seen displayed effectively). The domestic woollen items displayed in ‘Home is Where the Art Is’ are not related to the larger category of ‘economy’. Home economics are predominantly displayed as hobbyist craft, or a cottage industry. While objects displaying modes of production are straightforward (shears, a wool press), those signifying consumption (woollen jerseys, tea cosies) do not draw attention to the uneven profits created by run-holdings and stations of radically different status. The single attempt to relate this process is the Elgar collection of 17th and 18th-century European antiques backed against the wool presses and shears. Ella Elgar, who collected the pieces, was the granddaughter of one of Wairarapa’s first major sheep farmers, Charles Pharazyn. A sign rather awkwardly explains that it was the wool industry that provided the wealth for their purchase. The somewhat obliquely replayed idea is that the national museum collection has profited from an economy based on proficiency in grass growing. Furthermore, when On the Sheep's Back is contemplated after the diffusion-of-origins theme in Passports, the idea of cultural diversity is eclipsed. Visitors, doubting that the Chinese or Tongan immigrants in Passports are closely associated with the Pakeha farmers pictured, may well wonder about became of those cultural influences.

Along with the disregard of gender and ethnicity, the other gaping absence in On the Sheep's Back is Maori. While they are not explicitly excluded from the theme of working the land (and indeed a high proportion of men laboured as farmhands and shearers), Te Papa appears to uphold their ‘real’ relationship with the land as environmental rather than agricultural. The restated point of tribal narratives in Mana Whenua is the inalienability of land. The spirituality or cosmology of the tangata whenua discourse, while rhetorically stressing cultural dynamism, nonetheless
emphasises the natural world in terms of the power of the elements and the life force of living things. Yet by connecting Maori only with a *Bush City* environment, Te Papa denies visitors the opportunity to engage with the major area of twentieth century Maori labour history. Moreover, Te Papa does not (and perhaps cannot) reconcile farming culture in *On the Sheep’s Back* with its attention in *Signs of a Nation* to the swathe of injustices that flowed from Treaty-sanctioned land acquisition (explored in the following chapter). This incommensurability is captured in a revealing exchange between Georgina Te Heuheu, a Board member, and Ronald Trotter, former Chairman of the Board:

**Georgina Te Heuheu:**

How do we make that [biculturalism as a corporate principle] underpin our exhibitions? If we’re talking about peopling ourselves and exhibiting ourselves, then we have to bring Maori into the equation. While the sheep runs were being developed, Ngai Tahu, over 20 years, lost all their land.

**Sir Ronald Trotter:**

I came from a tough Scottish farming stock who came out in 1860 to the South Island where there were none of Tipene’s [Tipene O’Regan, kaimatu and spokesperson for Ngai Tahu] people – it was too cold for them – and if we don’t give pride to that, well, we wouldn’t be here. I mean we wouldn’t be the country we are today. If we only stole things, and god knows they never thought they were stealing, then that’s also part of our understanding on the other side.\(^ {122} \)

The total avoidance of the Land Wars in *On the Sheep’s Back* shelters Pakeha from the less desirable aspects of their formative history, and indeed, the exclusion of any Maori perspective masks the political, social and economic dominance that allowed Pakeha to enjoy unhindered ownership and access to land. Capitalist settler society inevitably destroyed non-capitalist modes, which might have persisted in cultural
forms, but collapsed as a viable alternative way of living due to a lack of material base.\textsuperscript{123} The considerable wealth that Pakeha extracted from farming meant that workers’ wages remained comparatively high. If this contributed to a myth of egalitarianism, it concealed the real division between Maori alienated from their land and settlers, among whom the wealth from Maori land functioned to reduce class conflict.\textsuperscript{124} The importance of land dispossession cannot be underestimated in New Zealand’s colonisation. As Tom Brooking puts it, ‘the simple idea that moral claim to land ownership was undermined if it was not used productively, in the end proved more destructive… than bullets, racial stereotyping or social Darwinism’.\textsuperscript{125} The unacknowledged point is that Pakeha wellbeing – and by extension, Pakeha identity – has relied on Maori loss.

While the display of economic relations is not typically one of museums’ strengths, farming, as a single industry community where the dynamics of living standards and way of life are particularly entangled, remains strategically useful for displaying community. Farming is seemingly congruent with a ‘natural’ social history. Values of community, kinship, interdependence and a settled allegiance to place are far more harmonious with Te Papa’s ‘our place’ theme than urban values of individualism, competitiveness and transience. In \textit{The Country and the City}, Raymond Williams demonstrates, by drawing on English literature, the contrasting feelings and associations that have gathered around the country and city. New Zealand has inherited a tradition that associates the city with ‘an achieved centre: of learning, communication, light’, and the country with peace, innocence and simple virtue.\textsuperscript{126} Farming also evokes the idea of community in the cultural imagination of New Zealanders precisely because normally the material organization of everyday urban life makes its routine enactment problematic. As we saw in the \textit{Parade} in the previous chapter, mass-produced commodity items lack aura, precisely because they are embedded in a highly familiar consumer taxonomy that makes them immediately identifiable. If relations of consumption are all too evident, modes of production in cities are often invisible; their wealth derives from raw materials from the country.
However, given that New Zealand is one of the most urbanized nations in the world – the 1996 census defined 85% of the population as urban – a rural focus for settler history might be seen as rather mystifying. Why focus attention on land rather than built cultural heritage, particularly when progress is more easily demonstrated through the development of cities, from the makeshift town to the metropolis, of cities and their infrastructure? A possible explanation lies with the pattern of New Zealand’s urbanization. Its cities, typically large and low density, may be seen as lacking an idiographic cultural geography. Cities also possess profoundly modern geographies, sitting atop or concealing what might be perceived as the true character of the land.

David Lowenthal has observed that nineteenth century American nationalist movements celebrated and sanctified natural monuments like Yosemite and the Grand Canyon partly as a response to a felt deficiency of cultural icons like European cathedrals or ruins. Yet, Lowenthal continues, this focus on nature came to be associated with self-reliance and a self-propelling sense of history. While time and history had tarnished and constrained Europe, the American destiny lay open ahead. However, rather than exalting the wilderness, On the Sheep’s Back focuses on farming – restraining – the land. Indeed, Te Papa makes very little connection between the farming culture of On the Sheep’s Back and nature (residing downstairs in the form of Mountains to the Sea and Bush City). By contrast, the NMA’s Tangled Destinies exhibition effectively fuses natural and social history, producing an interdisciplinary account of the environmental impact of both Aboriginal and settler populations. At Te Papa, visitors, seeing no examples of trees, grasses, birds, and insects, must assume this context from the wool press, paintings and photographs. The absence of elements from the natural world from the farming exhibition allows visitors to separately celebrate New Zealand’s biological diversity and its farming culture, without recognising the fundamental conflict that has seen the latter reduce the former.

The retreat to the safe pastures of tradition in On the Sheep’s Back produces an incongruous effect in a new hi-tech museum representing an emerging postcolonial nationhood. In the ‘Timewarp’ area, visitors can test their own shearing skills using a barcode reader in place of a razor handpiece. To play, visitors swipe the sheep’s
barcodes in sequence as quickly as possible. If the sheep takes the shearer over 41
seconds, he or she is declared a ‘townie’! However, the effect of witnessing the
general ineptitude of local visitors shearing an imaginary sheep with a barcode
handpiece, in front of a reconstructed shed, within a high-tech museum, situated on a
waterfront location several kilometres from downtown Wellington, produces an
uncanny relation to Phillips’ idea of a nation of ‘farmers at heart’. It demonstrates
how the cultural use of ‘country’ (a word used by New Zealanders for both the rural
and the nation) has been urbanized. The hay bales that provided seating on Day One
celebrations delighted local crowds and encouraged the idea of ‘our place’ as a
national territoriality (as did a series of Te Papa postage stamps featuring the
museum’s web address). On the Sheep’s Back speaks of that indeterminate place
simply known as ‘the country’. Whether imagined on the micro level, as a small rural
township, or the macro, linking up farms, farming towns, and sprawling cities the
length and breadth of both islands, ‘the country’, Nick Perry has written, ‘nonetheless
contains and controls the fissuring and splintering of the idea of a common
culture’. In the present, ‘the country’ pulls the idea of New Zealand together in a
time when rural and urban are often distant in standards of living. Paradoxically,
while inequality appears to be tempered in the everyday textures of rural life where
life’s comforts appear more simple and equitable, the small towns of ‘the country’ are
now where economic schisms in New Zealand are most visible.

Contrary to the commonsensical belief that rural regions are visibly transformed only
very slowly, it is in the country that we see some of the most vivid attempts to
reinvent landscapes as tourist attractions. The use of wool as a motif for the nation in
On the Sheep’s Back has a lateral connection to a range of recent tourist initiatives in
rural areas. In small towns throughout New Zealand, the manufacture of heritage has
all but replaced that of industry. This is most visible in the way towns spell out
their colonial histories on road signs: ‘Welcome to Edenvale, The Pioneer Town,
Home of New Zealand Cheese since 1881’. Others choose huge roadside objects to
encourage visitors to stop. A twenty-metre tall fibreglass shearer proclaims Te Kuiti
‘shearing capital of the world’. Ohakune has a big carrot; Te Puke a kiwifruit; Gore a
brown trout; Hawera a cow; Kaikoura a Crayfish; Lake Tekapo a border collie dog;
Ohakune a carrot; Riverton a paua shell; Paeroa a bottle of ‘Lemon and Paeroa’ soft drink. While a claim of being ‘the ___ capital of the world’ concentrates identity and refutes their marginality, at the same time it reduces towns to memorable emblems and conceals the varied forms of social life that occur within them. In an analogous way, On the Sheep’s Back foregrounds wool and farming in order to project an internationally memorable motif. National museums are ‘high density’, in the sense that they usually attempt to represent desirable fragments of the whole nation within a few floors of designed space. Given that the heritage condensed in museums is also dispersed in fragments throughout the country, the museological process of representing the world outside is recursive: the world outside represents itself, while museums create an effect that is inevitably a slight, unreal semblance – a simulacrum.

The museum’s construction of the nation beyond its walls creates a precinct of condensed experience that saves tourists time and money (although extracting some money remains a museum prerogative), and provides a reference point for further travels. At Te Papa, and in museums in settler states generally, colonial history itself has become an object for export. Increasing global awareness and constructions of local uniqueness can be seen as twin effects of an economic demand. New Zealand’s limited consumer market means that all products, particularly those that are ‘cultural’ and pitched at the tourist industry, must be modelled with the export market in mind. Since there can be no separation between representations aimed at domestic and international tourists, the expression of ‘national identity’ so vital to Te Papa is unavoidably produced with an outward as much as an inward vantage. Hence, New Zealanders are subject to ‘a tourist-land of their own making’, one they have helped to make – or make over in a postcolonial fashion.\textsuperscript{131}

\textit{On the Sheep’s Back} produces the historic sense that this common culture is indistinctly periodised somewhere between the consolidation of the modern dominion in the early twentieth century and the fracturing of social life by the 1970s, when New Zealand’s fortunes as an agricultural producer began its decline. An exhibition devoted to rural work in the current era produces a strong sense of nostalgia for the comfortable decades of the post-war period, when New Zealanders enjoyed one of the
highest per capita incomes in the world. In the fifteen-year period since Te Papa’s initial conceptualisation, New Zealand has floundered in dispiriting economic recession. New Zealanders will generally be all too aware that economic progress and upward mobility no longer remain cornerstones of national identity. There now exists a fraught contradiction between a highly privatised free market economy that sees increasing disparities of wealth, and a continuing belief in the basically egalitarian nature of New Zealand society. It may be that a museum devoted to cultural identity is presently successful because it provides a tangible sense of shared community in a time of economic uncertainty. Hamish McDonald has similarly suggested:

The museum’s popularity may also be part of a perceptible wave of nostalgia, 14 years after economic reform started dumping the old welfare state into the Tasman. That era is taking on the gilded sunset glow of a time when everybody was roughly equal, and mateship prevailed. Economically, New Zealanders feel they have taken a big bungy jump into the Asian chasm and are waiting anxiously to see if the elastic works.

The high-tech devices present at Te Papa may help to symbolically assure citizens that New Zealand is internationally competitive in an ‘information age’ economy. If there are lingering anxieties about the unknown fortunes that accompany the embracing of the global economy, they may be offset and reassured by a rural identity theme that focuses on cultural continuities and appears little concerned with the ‘new economy’. Museums generally struggle to make evident, in ways that are not dry or didactic, the relationship between large-scale economic patterns and cultural ‘ways of life’. On the Sheep’s Back is little exception, inasmuch as the exhibition displays a rural culture that largely floats free of economic factors.

We can conclude that Te Papa’s intrinsically conservative choice of an exhibition based around farming life partly reflects the demand of constructing Pakeha history in a bicultural scheme. As a subject area, farming life somewhat enables the museum to represent Pakeha history as autonomous and non-overlapping. The light-hearted tone of On the Sheep’s Back may also dissuade visitors from considering more knotty
questions about the colonial acquisition of Maori land. The sentimental overtones of the exhibition momentarily recreate the warmth of common culture. However, its consignment to museum heritage simultaneously suggests its passing. While the lack of criticism towards the basis of a Pakeha ‘way of life’ might suggest to some the maintenance of a white male hegemony, it seems that the nostalgic tone of the exhibition may inadvertently perform its own subtle critique. That is, in much the same way as *Golden Days* produces a pastiche of canonical ‘national history’, *On the Sheep’s Back* implies that the time of a countrified bucolic culture has passed. The idealised moment in farming culture suggests a fragment of a (national) whole, when in fact the whole itself is has been somewhat displaced. As a result, *On the Sheep’s Back*, despite its familiar nationalist iconography, produces a strong sense of dislocation.

d. ‘Exhibiting Ourselves’: The Self-Conscious Settler State

*Exhibiting Ourselves* takes the viewer, in chronological sequence, through displays from New Zealand’s pavilions at four selected international trade expositions. The interior design of each mimics the dominant style of the time: the steel and glass, red velvet and gold of the 1851 Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace, London; the Edwardian archways, pastel colours and photomurals of the 1906 Christchurch Exhibition; the Art Deco curves, neon and electrics of the 1940 Dominion Exhibition in Wellington; and the dramatically lit multimedia images of All-Black rugby and yachting success at the 1992 World Expo in Seville, Spain. Highlights include the remarkable 1851 display of Ohaeawai pa (war fort) and village, modelled by John Gilman, a survivor of the ill-fated attack on the pa. In the 1906 exhibit, pictures of Premier Dick Seddon in his elaborate royal court regalia are complemented by those depicting elite pastimes such as game hunting, sports contests and military manoeuvres. These are contrasted with images and text relating to workers’ housing and sweated labour. Arching over the 1940 Dominion Exhibition space is a large image of Apirana Ngata shaking hands with Governor General Galway. While Ngata’s textual quote rues the loss of Maori life and land, text alongside Galway proclaims that ‘the natives are bringing about their own extinction’. We also see ‘Dr.
Wellandstrong’, a talking, moving mannequin who is brought back to life to espouse the role of the welfare state in producing fit and healthy citizens. The final 1992 space is darker and more theatrical. On entering, visitors trigger video projections that slickly advertise tourism and wine. At the exit, a text panel suggests one way to read this progression: ‘From shy fledgling nation to the quiet cocky achiever? You decide’. In sum, the exhibition contains a rich tapestry of historical references that challenges viewers to distinguish ‘real history’ from self-serving projections – and encourages them to ponder the blurring of these categories.

By showing how societies never arrive at a fixed sense of identity, *Exhibiting Ourselves* conveys the shifting and relational nature of identity formation, and suggests that the activity of rediscovery and reinterpretation of the nation’s past is never complete or straightforward. It also supports the sub-text that heritage projects like new national museums fuel the search for identity, and in doing so, legitimise the nation as the focus for popular identification. When walking through the displays in sequence, the radical shifts in the scale of objects, lighting, display techniques, colours, and use of text and sound, heightens the awareness of how the same subject (‘nation’) can be strategically manipulated. A focus on design, aesthetics, and ‘branding’ shows how the nation is as much a promotional as a putative category. *Exhibiting Ourselves* is an example of the recent museological innovation towards postmodern reflection, mirroring and self-consciousness. As a form of historical retrodiction, the spatial arrangement of *Exhibiting Ourselves* presents the visitor with an intellectual task, in the form of cognitively locating a substantive national identity from a field of varied representations, but also a more general sense of a physical walk through the nation’s ascendency through modernity. Bennett’s work on evolutionary narratives in museums (theorized predominantly in relation to nineteenth century natural history exhibitions) closely applies to the effect of *Exhibiting Ourselves*:

The museum, as ‘backteller’, [is] characterized by its capacity to bring together, within the same space, a number of different times and to arrange them in the form of a path whose direction might be traversed in the course of
Exhibiting Ourselves places the visitor in a progressive sequence that emphasizes the need for incessant technological modernization and cultural sophistication if the nation is to realise its destiny. The progression from nineteenth century raw materials, to twentieth century industrialization to contemporary post-industrial products and services presents an allegorical relationship between commodities and culture. The exhibition implicitly directs the visitor towards future civic improvement fashioned around an increasingly cosmopolitan outlook. This culminates in the 1992 Seville exhibition, where the array of stylised and market-savvy niche products produces a sense of New Zealand’s arrival on the global circuit. If the New Zealand pavilion in earlier periods arrayed goods in a realist mode to market the nation’s potential as an agricultural producer, the Seville pavilion might be seen as an analogous space that deploys electronic communication technology and stylised imagery to promote the nation within the burgeoning cultural tourism market.

Exhibiting Ourselves works with an interesting temporality. First, Te Papa visitors experience exhibits obviously not as the newness of our time, but as the pristine newness of other times. The ‘brand new’, once dated, tends to appear nostalgic, since it represents material aspirations that have generally been surpassed. What we lack is the wonder of seeing those things for the first time – an experience that has been diminished by the spread of communications technologies that provides immediate simulated access to places and times other than our own. In these times of visual media saturation, objects themselves may not possess the same ability to imaginatively transport viewers to earlier times and faraway places. Second, unavailable to the viewer of Exhibiting Ourselves is a coherent sense of how the exhibits were organised and received in their own time. Te Papa’s visitors may not apprehend that the displays are a constructed and edited in-situ recreation carried out in the present. As contemporary interpretations of selected self-representations of earlier periods, the four displays that comprise Exhibiting Ourselves are twice removed from the period they depict. This exhibition-of-exhibitions potentially
creates interpretations more unpredictable than those inevitably accompanying exhibitions. For this reason, the ‘you decide’ prompt at the exit of the exhibition solicits a response on two levels: a judgment of the nation’s changing cultural character; and an assessment of the ability of curators, both past and present, to manipulate their subject.

Ultimately, *Exhibiting Ourselves* is only self-referential about, rather than subversive of, the construction of progressive national history. Its purposeful selection of items that suggest some thematic consistencies about New Zealanders means that it does not wholly abandon a meaningful narrative. By organizing the expositions in a linear arrangement, viewers are encouraged to identify facets of the nation’s cultural history that have persisted and improved through time. For example, the displays foreground the economic benefits reaped from a productive land: from flax, kauri gum, and iron sand in 1851, to baskets of fruit and grain in 1906, to electric power and agricultural technology in 1940, culminating in the entrepreneurial production of ‘clean and green’ wine and dairy products in 1992. By displaying the progression of exhibitions in reasonably small and interconnected spaces, *Exhibiting Ourselves* also spatially makes evident New Zealand’s accelerated modernization from a settler society, to a society of agrarian producers, to an industrialized welfare society, to a society of free-market entrepreneurs. The relocation of the colony’s 1851 display from the Crystal Palace to Te Papa allows it to be reclaimed as part of national rather than colonial history. New Zealand’s presence at the first (and most recent) major world exhibitions conveys the idea of the longevity of New Zealand’s global competitiveness as a sovereign nation.

Another thematic constant is that of the relationship between settler origins and advertising. Alongside books, pamphlets, newspaper advertisements, placards in public houses and rail carriages, hoardings and ‘sandwich men’, pavilions at international exhibitions were used to sell the colony to migrants. The New Zealand Company described the precipitous hills of Wellington as ‘undulating plains, perfect for grapevines, wheat and olives’, and avowed that ‘the Banana and a few other tropical fruits form immense orchards in New Zealand’. International expositions
are a good example of how new spaces for consumption were created as a result of the vast expansion of capitalist markets. Commodities were arrayed as a celebration of industrial manufacturing and the possibilities of the global economy. In this display style, the neatly categorised objects betrayed little of their process of production, including the circumstances of the objects’ acquisition and movement from farms, marae, and factories, to the exhibition. New Zealand was also the first country to establish a Department of Tourism, in 1901. The idea of New Zealand has remained an integral part of its history, and one that has been recently revived by the government’s establishment of ‘Brand New Zealand’ (‘100% pure’) – and a new national museum. Although there are functional distinctions between trade expositions and museums, their common location in the cultural tourism industry, and their shared desire to project national culture through style and design means that certain similarities are striking. Like international expositions, Te Papa aims to attract visitors by blurring the boundaries between education, consumption and leisure. If we consider James Morris, a spectator at the 1924 British Empire Exhibition, bemoaning that ‘the millions who did go often went for the wrong reasons, paying altogether too little attention to the New Zealand dairy products, and altogether too much to the amusement park, the dance hall and Joe Lyon’s gigantic grill room’, it is easy to hear echoes of the contemporary ‘culture wars’ debate over new museums like Te Papa.

The final thematic continuity evident across the displays is that New Zealanders have long been aware that Maori culture is their principal attraction on the world stage. Maori culture has been variously couched as a spectacle of savagery, as totems of a people in decline, as ethnographical specimens, and as valued survivals. In each case, it was seen to possess an intrigue that made New Zealand unique. At the same time, taonga have provided Pakeha with the vivid distinction needed to illustrate their own modernity. In order to elucidate the unjust nature of Pakeha appropriation and the erroneous assumptions behind racial models of progress, Te Papa’s curatorial team have added information to Exhibiting Ourselves not found in the original display, or failing this, an editorial critique. For instance, visitors are informed (unlike those at the Crystal Palace) that Gilman, the modeller of the Maori pa, suffered a harsh comeuppance for his construction of primitive tranquillity when he was forced
to flee to Australia after conflict with Maori over land saw his family killed. In 1906 a full-scale reconstructed Maori pa, organised by Sir James Carroll, was built as a sideshow next to the exposition’s fairground. Te Papa’s text panel laments that Maori, no longer a threat, ‘were now presented as little more than a tourist attraction’.

Further on, Te Papa records Governor-General Galway’s thoughts on Maori development since the Treaty at the opening of the 1940 Centennial Exposition: ‘The fair and equitable treatment that [Maori] received at the hands of Governor Hobson in the first place and later as the result of wise government was such that they readily appreciated the advantages of British rule and in living among British people’. In case visitors miss the conceited mistakenness of this proclamation, Te Papa juxtaposes a quote from Sir Apirana Ngata, made in the same year but from a marae at Waitangi: ‘Lands gone, the powers of the chiefs crumbled in the dust. Maori culture scattered – broken’. In 1992 a grass-skirted dance troupe were incorporated as a native flourish to a pavilion based on global market aspirations. On a text panel above the wines, cheeses and apples, Te Papa includes a quote from a member of the Seville concert party: ‘Maoris were dancing downstairs, while the bosses were upstairs’, which remains ‘a very accurate description of our current race relations situation’. In this editorial role, the museum positions itself as an exemplary space fully aware, with the benefit of hindsight, of an insensitive and unsophisticated past. Yet a subversive reading of Te Papa’s own institutional arrangements and exhibition modes suggests that, rather than representing a decisive break, it can be situated as only the most recent example of the perpetuation of the historical theme of ‘New Zealand as Maoriland’. In the contemporary period, culture, tradition and identity are still the main tropes that make the nation unique, even if these differences are no longer grounded in biological idioms of race – after all, how different is Te Marae, available for corporate hire, from the replica full-scale pa built for the 1906 Christchurch exhibition? We might hesitate before proclaiming Te Papa a ‘clean break’ from colonial exhibitory practices.

Shifting my line of inquiry, I finally want to speculative on the implications for visitor interpretation that stem from self-reflexive histories. Of Te Papa’s exhibitions, it is Exhibiting Ourselves that is closest to emblematising a conventional chronological
national history, replete with developments in industry, monumental architecture, and images of national leaders. Yet an overriding narrative of ‘projection’ and ‘imagining’ means that historic royalist and loyalist allegiances are never examined as serious phenomena. It seems that Jock Phillips was all too aware of the risks of self-aggrandisement that attend the production of national history in a popular and populist institution. The overriding problem, says Phillips, was ‘how to pursue history as a way of exploring and affirming national identity (for that is what society wants), yet do so in a way that takes account of the very genuine concerns, both intellectual and social, about that notion among the community of historians’? In the present professional climate, the recovery of certain types of memories, such as those possessed by previously ignored social groups, is a prerogative for many public historians. As Te Papa endeavours to re-build an image of New Zealand along new bicultural lines, it must partially un-make the unitary, established national history of old. If we conceive this as a balancing act between conveying the idea that history, tradition, and identity are social constructions, without becoming highly sceptical about this subject matter, it appears that Te Papa tips towards the cynical position. This is most evident in Te Papa’s conspicuous absence of Government, military and sporting displays – the usual signs of canonical nation-state representativeness. Similarly, as one writer has similarly written of the NMA’s Nation exhibition, which irreverently explores the shared symbols of nationhood, from the flag and anthem, to the kangaroo, suburban backyard and national slang:

It is as if non-Aboriginal culture is a joke, all upside-down Hills Hoists and tongue-in-cheek Victa mowers. The museum is supposed to reflect national identity. But all of World War II is dealt with in the small part of a display case that is not filled with Phar Lap’s heart. That war gets less space than the proposed republic…The entire ANZAC tradition is summed up by a bleached-out statue of a Digger, displayed as just another piece of drollery.

The root cause of this kind of display appears to be the often-awkward intersection of two trends: one in social history curatorship that favours self-reflexiveness and demystification, and another in the broader museology that seeks anti-elitist public
inclusiveness. As John Kelly has identified, ‘what constitutes good scholarly representation is often so intrinsically ironic, that it is hard to imagine how it could be constituted as a permanent museum display. Glorification and irony make strange bedfellows’. The difficulty with self-reflexive history exhibitions is that they tend to overlook what a significant proportion of the public comes for: an integrated story that links cultural, political, economic, technological, military and social events into an intelligible framework. Despite not having ‘kept up’ with current curatorial trends, a desire to learn conventional history from authentic objects undoubtedly remains. As a publicly inclusive institution, it seems incongruous that Te Papa would not take more seriously those who seek information on mainstream national history for sake of improving their lives. At the least, the presence of some basic sketch of key events in New Zealand’s past would help visitors to make sense of the other demystifying narratives put forward.

What is even more problematic about a demystifying approach to canonical history in Exhibiting Ourselves is that New Zealanders are not, as a whole, generally familiar with – even – *conventional* national history. Unlike parts of Europe and America, where national museums helped to make national histories in the service of nation building, New Zealand’s museums do not have a long background of established national history. However, Te Papa is engaging with this topic at precisely the time when the category of national history has become unfashionable amongst many curators and public historians. The result is the demystification of something that was never mystified – at least in the museum context. In this sense, Te Papa has leapt towards a postmodern critique of museum history, without its predecessors having exhausted the *modern* history of the nation. A demystifying approach is implicitly predicated on the idea that absorption of a canonical history is something that has occurred elsewhere. In this area, Te Papa adopts an elitist approach that belies its publicly egalitarian principles.

Before offering some final conclusions, it is important to note recent changes in Te Papa’s exhibitions. Since the period of my analysis, Exhibiting Ourselves, like Parade, was permanently removed as part of the reshuffling of space known as the
Greater Te Papa Project (2001). In addition to losing an exhibition that was, on balance, admirable for its engagement with a provocative premise, Phillips’ thematic triad appears to have been squandered in the process. The result has been a further simplification of the ways Pakeha identity can be understood at Te Papa. This is made more troublesome by the existence (and popularity) of *Golden Days*, which, by heroically affirming national identity, undermines the ability of the remaining exhibitions to question it. *Passports* and *On the Sheep’s Back* now stand in a simple scheme that posits identity as either immigrant cultural influence or a slightly hackneyed version of rural life. Inasmuch as both of these are drawn out, abstract processes not tied to a particular concrete moment or expression, *Exhibiting Ourselves* had provided an excellent counterpoint. It showed how ‘national identity’ could be realised not just as a psychical structure, but an institutional project. This raised provocative questions about not just how identity is can be represented, but also how it is governmentally produced. It is this two-way process of governmental-institutional *cultural projection* and national *self-understanding* that is now missed with the decision to close *Exhibiting Ourselves*.

**4. Conclusion: Principles of Difference**

If, as David Lowenthal remarked, ‘the most successful museums are those that are able to play on the divisions and problems of nations’, how does Te Papa fare? Outwardly, Te Papa directly confronts New Zealand’s chief social and cultural schism through its focus on biculturalism. Te Papa’s redefinition of New Zealand as bicultural, which intends to generate a national identity *and* cultural identities in line with officially sanctioned rhetoric, involves an obvious tension between the former, representing a strategy of unitary national consciousness, and the latter, which pays homage to cultural difference and diversity. Te Papa’s struggle to manage this contradiction has seen bicultural nationhood realised at the exhibition level in a highly idiosyncratic scheme. The disjuncture between the museum’s philosophy and its received messages is a problem identified by a recent international peer review as an
‘incomplete articulation of the vision in the public displays and a lack of clarity in the way the vision is communicated inside and outside the museum’. The difference between what visitors might expect, involving some representation of how Maori and Pakeha have lived together, and what is portrayed, in the form of conceptual and substantive disconnection, is disconcerting. As Dahl and Stade have observed:

Once a museum was either the self-glorifying institution of national romanticism seeking the roots of a nation in an idealized rural background, or an exoticizing museum depicting the colonial other. In territories where indigenous peoples were subjected to European conquest these two categories are today often muddled, signalling new relations between nation-building and indigenous-ness.

Empire is almost absent at Te Papa, even as a point of Pakeha origin. Yet while Te Papa stresses a new kind of postcolonial independence, the central issue of ‘race’ remains fundamental to the museum’s physical and cultural space. The uncertain, or even contradictory, effect of embracing a settler-indigenous racial concept (biculturalism) whilst marginalizing empire – when in fact empire and race are inextricably bound in New Zealand’s history – is an exemplary case of what Dahl and Stade call the ‘muddled’ ways that former colonies untangle colonialism and forge new histories. This conundrum also illustrates how, as many critics in the field have noted, postcolonialism simultaneously describes both the aftermath of colonialism and its ongoing effects. In Maori displays, race is the fundamental (yet unnamed) basis to maintaining a position ‘at the far side of the difference’. Yet for Pakeha, whose descendents were quite concerned with the racial purity of the colony’s settlement, any idea of a representing a common ‘race’ in exhibitions is unspeakable. As Robert Young has observed:

Hybridity shows the connections between the racial categories of the past and contemporary cultural discourse: it may be used in different ways, given different inflections and apparently discrete references, but it always reiterates
and reinforces the dynamics of the same conflictual economy whose tensions and divisions it re-enacts in its own antithetical structure.\textsuperscript{148}

Young’s point urges a consideration of the way that, despite the relegation of Empire, one of its principal obsessions, the racialization of the colony, continues to inform New Zealand’s postcolonial reinvention. Despite the contemporary avoidance of ‘race’ as a category, it remains central to contemporary biculturalism, precisely because it is obliged to refer back to colonialism in a way that multiculturalism, which suggests a movement past (and possibly an avoidance of) indigenous politics, does not.

In cultural discourse, identity is asserted as both a fixed object, passed from one generation to the next, and as territorial claim, where the space of culture becomes imbricated with ethnic ideas. This forms a particularly potent and inseparable combination of blood and soil; precisely the link that tangata whenua articulates. As a bodily metaphor, ranginui and papatuanuku are not dissimilar from other nations’ concepts of ‘fatherland’ and ‘motherland’. However the spiritual aspect of Pakeha heritage is not presented in a continuum with the notion of taonga. In none of the exhibitions is Pakeha heritage attributed with the same weight as Maori taonga. A playful ambivalence towards Pakeha identity does not, however, reflect its security. It may be countered that settler identities are perennially insecure – that this is their essential nature – yet this seems somewhat evasive given that Te Papa itself acknowledges that visitors arrive with some expectation of intellectual guidance – Cheryll Sotheran herself calls the excursion a ‘pilgrimage’. There appears to be a scrupulous avoidance of the sacred in Pakeha cultural history and there is, more generally, little early colonial history. What kind of convincing narrative is ultimately forged from conflicting mythologies? The received message is that Pakeha identity is a malleable experiment best explored through history, whereas Maori is an immutable cultural worldview. However, where ‘culture’ is an effective tool for providing concrete ideas about Maori identity (particularly as they are reiterated throughout the museum in text, audio and video), a set of inconsistent historical themes leads viewers searching for Pakeha identity only towards indeterminism.
As a recent state initiative and policy buzzword, biculturalism may suggest a progressive approach to the relationship between nation and culture. However, in Te Papa’s case, its deconstructive or liberating capacity should not be overestimated. Biculturalism is not only maintained as a subservient clause to the larger national system, but it is actually complimentary to the demands of the constant refashioning that the inculcation of nation identity demands. Multi-accentual or decentred revisionism can remain a nation-building force, inasmuch as a *truer or corrected* sense of history can be seen as a requisite for postcolonial reconciliation. By endeavouring to ‘correct’ history, biculturalism promises to strengthen the nation by reconciling ‘both sides’ to a more productive future. The future-orientation of revisionism is based on the idea that the debunking and disavowing of myth may allow a true identity to at last be realised. Even if this history – or these plural histories – are more ruptured and uncertain than older unitary narratives (no longer Maori ‘native curiosities’ or a settler ‘Britain of the South’) their quest for a more representative past is nonetheless nation-building insofar as it posits that New Zealand is progressing towards a truer self-understanding.

The decision to construct difference in two distinct disciplinary schemes (Matauranga Maori and Western scholarship) might mean that Te Papa in fact shies away from the ‘the divisions and problems of nations’, to use Lowenthal’s phrase. The lack of dialogue or commonality between the Maori and Pakeha sections of the museum may suggest that, as Elizabeth Gertsakis puts it, that ‘a society structured around a precise history of dominant/passive power relations does not really want to know how the past (tradition, heritage) actually constructs the present or future (contemporaneity)’. A major reason why Te Papa represents biculturalism as bi-nationalism is precisely out of the museum’s desire to represent the holism and self-sufficiency of a Maori worldview – something that would be impossible if Maori were subject to similarly demythologising narratives. Despite the apparently straightforward identification of biculturalism as two cultures, Maori self-identification as tangata whenua ascribes them a status *beyond ethnicity*. A crucial tactic in the perpetuation of Maori difference in the museum is the maintenance of
ideas about a sacred past that cannot be learned or completely understood through Western modes of historiography. It is precisely the ongoing Maori investment in myth distinguishes it from Pakeha. Tangata whenua is purposefully contrastive with the colligatory nature of Pakeha ethnicity constructed through three exhibitions. The difference between pasts preserved within colonised societies and the Western present tends to harden into an opposition between culture and enlightenment. Indeed, the self-consciousness of Maori ‘having a culture’, understood as a discrete set of traditional objects (such as the whare-wananga, pataka and waka) and practices (oral marae traditions and suchlike), is partly a legacy of colonial ethnography. Te Papa provides a key opportunity for the perpetuation of this particular brand of ‘Maori culture’ in both the political environment of government (and self-government), and in the tourist economy.


15 See Clifford, James, 1987, ‘Of Other Peoples: Beyond the “Salvage” Paradigm’, *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, 1, DIA Art Foundation, pp. 121-130.


24 Review Team Report, 1994, *An Agenda for Scholarship: Scholarship and Research in the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa*, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, p. 7. This report was spearheaded by the Board but initiated as a rearguard action by scientists dissatisfied with the increasingly entertainment-focused direction of the museum.


30 Some commentators have interpreted criticism of Te Papa as reflecting a parochial battle between Wellington (Te Papa) and Auckland (Auckland War Memorial Museum). See Chamberlain, Jenny, 2000, ‘Museum Wars’, North and South, April 2000, pp. 48-54.


44 Karp, Ivan, 1991, ‘Cultures in Museum Perspective’, in Karp, Ivan & Lavine, Steven (eds), 
*Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, Smithsonian Institution Press, 
45 See Clifford, James, 1988, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, 
47 Hudson, Kenneth, 1991, ‘How Misleading Does an Ethnographical Museum Have to Be?’, in Karp, 
Ivan & Lavine, Steven (eds), *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, 
49 Clifford, James, 1987, ‘Of Other Peoples: Beyond the “Salvage” Paradigm’, *Discussions in 
Contemporary Culture*, 1, DIA Art Foundation, p. 122.
50 Email communication from Susan Superville at the Te Papa Enquiry Centre, December 4, 2000.
Auckland, p. 109.
12-15.
55 Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, personal interview, June 20, 2002.
16-21.
57 Tamarapa, Awhina, 1996, ‘Museum Kaitiaki: Maori Perspectives on the Presentation and 
Management of Maori Treasures and Relationships with Museums’, in *Curatorship: Indigenous 
Perspectives in Post-Colonial Societies*, Canadian Museum of Civilisation with the Commonwealth 
Association of Museums and the University of Victoria, Quebec, p. 166.
36-46.
61 Neich, Roger, 1993, *Painted Histories: Early Maori Figurative Painting*, Auckland University Press, 
Auckland, p. 92.


Colonial Societies, Canadian Museum of Civilisation with the Commonwealth Association of Museums and the University of Victoria, Quebec, pp. 160-177.


84 Mason Durie, letter to Jim Te Puni, May 23, 1999.


91 Mason Durie, letter to Jim Te Puni, May 23, 1999.


These three main galleries dealing with social history at the NMA are, respectively: *Eternity: Stories from the Emotional Heart of Australia; Horizons: The Peopling of Australia Since 1788; Nation: Symbols of Australia*.


McShane, Ian, 2001, ‘Challenging or Conventional? Migration History in Australian Museums’, in McIntyre, Darryl & Wehner, Kirsty (eds), *National Museums, Negotiating Histories* (conference...
proceedings), National Museum of Australia in association with the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research and the Australian Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy, Canberra, p. 129.


122 Quoted in Cottrell, Anna & Preston, Gaylene (dir.), 1999, Getting to Our Place, In association with NZ On Air and TVNZ, 72 mins.


Chapter Four

The Museum as Bicultural Forum:

Te Papa’s Negotiation of Lore and Law

1. Introduction: Circumscribing the Museum’s Public Role

a. The Metaphorical Museum
It reveals something about the peculiarly hybrid nature of the museum that commentators have often felt the need to draw on other places to describe it. Compared to other more functionally self-assured institutions, the definition of the museum has been the subject of extensive deliberation among museum professionals.\(^1\) Its characteristic amalgamation of science and spectacle, of order and otherness, of aged heritage and new technology, often makes any basic role or function challenging to locate. In the first place, the museum produces classification from chaos, not unlike the library or university. Yet it also transgresses social order by displaying objects – sometimes in spectacular ways – that are marginal or extraordinary, in ways that are similar to the fair or theme park.\(^2\) However, these comparisons, while fitting, are not sufficiently suggestive of the political and ideological capacities of the museum. Three other spatial metaphors have emerged in museological discourse over the past few decades that emphasise this role.\(^3\) These are the temple, stage and forum. The temple envisages the museum as a reverential, hallowed place that allows objects to speak to its audience in direct and specific ways. It usefully captures the way a national museum aims to produce something like a Durkheimian ‘civil religion’ amongst its citizens. In the present era of the new museology, the temple is disparagingly employed to describe a monumental institutional approach that venerates objects at the expense of public understanding. The stage conceptualises the museum as an institution that derives its source of power from its capacity to publicly classify, represent and define peoples and societies. In this model, which foregrounds the museum’s governmental qualities, assertions about what and who is central and peripheral to nationhood are paramount.\(^4\) The museum-as-stage is also now viewed unfavourably for both its hegemonic capacities and its lack of scope for dialogue and participation. Without asserting that the practices associated with the temple and stage has disappeared altogether, they have certainly lost favour in recent years to those associated with the forum. The forum imagines the museum as a widely accessible public space detached from the political arm of the state. It aims to differentiate contemporary museums from the hierarchical, governmental museum by providing an environment that encourages participation in exchange and debate. The forum calls upon associated theories of the public sphere
and civil society, which help to describe a setting where ideas about citizenship, civil
liberties and responsibilities, and national and cultural identity are forged in the
course of relatively unstructured public deliberation.  

Significantly, it is not only museum writers but also the institutions themselves that
draw on such metaphors for self-definition. In the course of Te Papa’s legislative
creation the forum was enshrined in its mission statement:

The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa is a forum for the nation to
present, explore and preserve the heritage of its cultures and knowledge of the
natural environment in order to better understand and treasure the past, enrich
the present and meet the challenges of the future.

In this introduction I outline the significance of Te Papa’s mission and sketch the
policy ideas that led to its adoption. An analysis of the mission is vital. It stands to
distinguish museums from other kinds of institutions – particularly commercial ones.  
This topic also holds great importance because it encompasses the way the museum
aims to extend its sphere of influence beyond the realm of exhibitions to claim a
creative and meaningful role in the larger public sphere. An analysis of Te Papa’s
effectiveness in achieving its mission will come later. First I want to consider both the
museological influences and also the social and political conditions that encouraged
those involved with Te Papa to choose this objective.

Te Papa’s mission anticipates an active and critical visitor role (‘forum to… explore’) in
addition to a more typically valorising emphasis (‘treasure the past’). The impetus
for this first idea, articulated by the PDB responsible for planning Te Papa from the
mid-1980s, was a perception that New Zealanders needed to overcome a submerged
sense of cultural identity:

Individuals can only grow within a culture which recognises them and which they in turn decide to assume. Indeed, one powerful definition of colonial
oppression is that of a people whose culture has been smothered by that of a colonising nation and closed to the future. It is not too far-fetched to claim that this is also true, in differing degrees, for both Maori and Pakeha New Zealanders. For the Maori this has been an historical situation, but one which is equally exacerbated for both Maori and Pakeha by the powerful role the electronic media plays in our lives.\(^7\)

This statement from *Treasures of the Nation* (1985) draws attention to the common ‘colonisation’ of Maori and Pakeha through the global diffusion of (predominantly American) media and popular culture. Understated here is how British colonialism caused Maori losses incomparably greater than those associated with a contemporary ‘cultural neo-colonisation’. Further, it was this formative colonisation that historically produced ‘Maori’ and ‘Pakeha’ as ethnic and cultural categories in the first place. Nevertheless, it seemed clear from the outset that broadly popular museum activities would aim to strengthen national identity and sense of place. At the same time, however, the PDB imagined that this would be balanced by a critical, revisionist view of historical relations. From their statement, we can identify a left-liberal political agenda that upholds the museum as an instrument of social change:

This is a period in which traditionally held views of New Zealand history are being scrutinised and, inevitably, reassessed. For many New Zealanders this process is a disturbing one. Disturbing or not, the process will continue and indeed, the pace of cultural change it brings about is likely to quicken. This process of re-assessment is to be encouraged as an essential part of the nation’s growth towards maturity, however much it might bring a temporary discomfort to some.\(^8\)

The PDB’s assertion of historical reassessment as ‘an essential part’ of national progress despite possible public ‘discomfort’ indicates that, alongside its populist national identity focus, Te Papa was anticipated to fulfil a pedagogic task. This assumes governmental qualities when we consider that the processes of historical
reassessment referred to here are predominantly those of Maori-Crown reconciliation that take place in formal politico-judicial settings. Following this initial statement from *Treasures of the Nation*, affirmations of biculturalism became ubiquitous in policy material. The *Report of the Interviews* (1988) stated that the museum should ‘define New Zealand’s cultures, explain their histories, and promote a respect for and understanding of the bicultural nature of the country’s past and present’. Evident in this short statement is a clear tension between, on the one hand, definitions and explanations of cultural histories, and on the other, their confinement within the promotion of a respect for biculturalism. *A Concept for the Museum of New Zealand* (1989) forecast that Te Papa ‘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’. It also pledged that, ‘In all that it does the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa will honour the principles of Te Tiriti-o-Waitangi – The Treaty of Waitangi’.

These directives suggest a markedly prescriptive basis for the museum’s future treatment of cultural histories.

By the early 1990s when legislative provisions were being made for the museum, a strongly pedagogic vision was set aside in favour of the conceptualisation of the museum as a forum. However, the maintenance of biculturalism as the most vital organising precept meant that the forum was conceived not just as an institutionalised arena of interaction for the broad public, but as a way to reconcile a centralised and unifying national space with a managed Maori-Pakeha pluralism. A bicultural forum presents Te Papa a significant challenge, precisely because the nation usually gains symbolic force when represented as a unity. We can identify both unity and difference in the following statement by Cheryll Sotheran:

> If there is a single driving force in the museum it’s in the new definition [in the mission statement] that calls it a forum, and that’s a word I have really loaded with meaning. It takes us back to our European roots, our roots in the Northern Hemisphere, it has a parallel with Maori culture in the marae, it is
about discussion, it is about debate, it is about people not only coming here to feel proud but to make a difference – be active participants in the formation of their own identity. New Zealanders are fantastically well voiced to do that.¹¹

While the forum can be argued to be suitably bicultural due to its historical association with both the ancient Greek agora and marae traditions, it does not follow that either Pakeha or Maori have been encouraged or equipped in the past to approach the museum as a place where they might ‘make a difference’, to use Sotheran’s phrase. By providing an opportunity for the public to actively participate in the meaning-making process, Te Papa promises a very different museum experience from one where information is disseminated outwards to passive subjects. Yet, even at the rhetorical-conceptual level, we can glimpse how Te Papa’s particular scheme may dampen the potential for social interaction. The idea endorsed by Sotheran is that Te Papa encourages visitor participation as it is directed towards discovering and strengthening private identity. Like the drawing on the front of a Te Papa flyer that shows the museum’s galleries shaped like a thumbprint, with visitors separated from one another by its whorls, the projected idea is self-discovery, rather than social communication. The idea of the museum as a kind of personal forum, rather than one that situates visitors in multiple subject positions and challenges them to consider diverse social issues and attitudes, appears a limited realisation of a greater concept. To gain a fuller understanding of what the forum can mean in the museum context, I next consider the viewpoints of other key museologists.

b. The Forum in Museology

Although there is little policy material explaining Te Papa’s adoption of its forum mission, we can speculate that the flood of ‘new museology’ literature that emerged in the early 1990s heavily influenced its development.¹² Although these texts make a common appeal for museums to assume a more proactive public role, there was (and remains) a tendency for the forum to be conceptualised in unpersuasive ways. For Ivan Karp, it scarcely involves people at all; it is ‘most clearly expressed in the
increasing complexity of activity that confronts the museum visitor – from shops and restaurants to galleries, lectures, and performances’. Stephen Weil calls the museum a distinctive public space ‘in which diverse elements of the community might intermingle in ways not readily available elsewhere’. For Weil, museums’ provision for social interaction is the key. He views museums as places where minorities may gather ‘without fear of intimidation’, and as a more general ‘antidote to urban loneliness’. In this conception, the actual content of a museum and the kind of dialogue it sustains is secondary to its general accessibility.

Others imagine something more politicised than a general sense of ‘togetherness’. As Michael Kimmelman put it, ‘when people talk today about democratized museums, they don’t just mean more popular shows and more access to the collections. They mean that museums are expected to practice collective bargaining over civic priorities’. This kind of contest may be what George MacDonald has in mind when he asserts that the museum forum should ‘represent the viewpoints of all of its constituents’. His inclusive vision suggests a museum of identity that can support fissiparous communities of interest. While such representation might be possible for museums devoted to regions or localities, ethnicities or tribes, or labour or recreational histories, national museums cannot easily stand for specific communities in the same way. Moreover, we might expect the forum to represent something more meaningful than a struggle over resources stemming from multiplying claims for representation. Closer to the mark, Constance Perin is interested in a dialogic museum that ‘closes the communicative circle’ between institutions and their publics. She writes: ‘Audiences “hear” the messages exhibitions convey, but what audiences say during their own turns can only be assumed. Talking only to and among themselves they find that their turns in the museum’s communicative circle rarely, if ever come up’. However, Perin values visitor feedback only in terms of developing more sensitive empirical visitor research to improve programs and displays. The idea of the museum as a site where the public can mingle and debate is absent.
In a different vein of understanding, other commentators see museums as valuable loci for the assemblage of information made available through recent developments in media technologies:

... the shift in values, attitudes and perceptions that accompany the technological transition from industrial to information society can make it possible for museums to achieve their full potential as places for learning in and about a world in which the globetrotting mass media, international tourism, migration, and instant satellite links between cultures are sculpting a new global awareness and helping give shape to what Marshall MacLuhan characterized as the global village.\(^{18}\)

Although he considers the utilization of technology chiefly in terms of national identity rather than global networks, Te Papa’s Alan Smith attributes it with a similarly pivotal function:

National identity is usually framed by technology – TV, movies, music and so on. So technology is not an artificial intervention – it is part of the cultural fabric. The Web, now established as part of the core information infrastructure, is part of that cultural fabric and is central to the debates and informed communication which the forum function will demand.\(^{19}\)

The co-emergence of the new museology and the mass take-up of the Internet have added vitality to ideas about the museum’s potential transformation through unrestricted public access to interactive information. However, it seems prudent to counter that while the Internet is undoubtedly a valuable communications tool, it alone seldom enhances a museum experience that otherwise offers limited participation. All museums establish the communications architecture for visitors and set the limits of how far visitors (both physical and virtual) can explore. Those who proclaim the vast potential of new media technologies tend not to question whether national museums – which are typically centralised, physically enduring and slow to
evolve – are the most fitting or effective location for their public use. Moreover, lacking in these technology-based accounts is emphasis on some element of civic sociability, which appears necessary if the forum is to seize the public imagination.

Of any cultural theorist, it is James Clifford who has most influentially applied a concept of exchange to museum practice. He describes with some optimism the new meanings and relationships that previously marginal groups (particularly indigenous peoples) have recently brought to the museum. Rather than ‘forum’, Clifford prefers the term ‘contact zone’ to describe the way museums have been opened up to contestation and collaborative activity.  

[‘Contact zone’] helps make visible the different agendas – aesthetic, historical, and political – that diverse ‘publics’ bring to the contexts of display…the wholesale movement of exotic collections into ‘artistic’ and ‘cultural’ centres, involved appropriations and translations now being re-inflected, and, to a degree, reversed.

In conventional museology, the museum has been positioned as a collecting centre, with the places from which objects are collected occupying the periphery. This model allows little space for any communication or reciprocity between the collectors and those whose objects are collected. The latter are presumed to be inactive subjects of imperialist appropriation, engaged in a disparate power relationship. For Clifford, an assumption that the museum is an object’s final resting place, and that the ‘story’ of the relation between indigenous peoples and museums is inevitably exploitative, does not recognise the utility that indigenous groups can bring to the relationship. Clifford follows authors such as George W. Stocking Jr. and Arjun Appadurai, who have shown how objects themselves have contact histories, and that their meanings change when they are moved into different contexts. Clifford’s anecdotal examples, whether between Tlingit elders and curators of the Rasmussen Collection in Portland, or between New Guinean artists making a sculpture garden at Stanford and visitors from the University, show how a degree of ‘mutual exploitation’ often takes place.
An analysis of Te Papa through this scheme is especially apt considering that Clifford (seemingly unaware of Maori protests) cited the *Te Maori* tour as a positive outcome for tribal groups negotiating with museums.\(^{23}\) We might predict that the situation where separate iwi with different histories and agendas negotiate with Te Papa on their own terms fits neatly with Clifford’s idea of relational ‘networks’ that defy hierarchical centre-periphery relations.

While a bicultural institutional philosophy possesses the capacity to contest assertions about cultural sovereignty and the right of self-representation, it could equally be mobilised towards a more authoritative transmission of knowledge. Indeed, the forum concept opens up an important question regarding to what extent the museum might represent a space of horizontal negotiation, or of governmental instruction. While the politics of any institution are not often understood in such dichotomous terms, it is worth drawing attention to this more governmental position. For this purpose, Tony Bennett’s ideas about museums’ reformist capacities can be seen to function as a counterbalance to Clifford’s optimistic vision of indigenous peoples using museums to gain a degree of political liberation. Bennett’s analysis of the nineteenth-century ‘exhibitionary complex’ demonstrates how both spectacular viewing modes and the panoptic organization of space was designed to produce in visitors a voluntary and self-regulating conduct. For Bennett, the museum’s exhibition modes, and the meanings and practices they engender, formed (and still form) part of ‘a set of institutionally inscribed processes for shaping the attributes of populations, and particularly modern citizens, which, if not directly governmental, are in some way governmental constituted and superintended’.\(^{24}\) Bennett draws on a Foucauldian perspective which holds that knowledge and power are utterly mutually implicated; power structures the production of ‘truths’ and ‘facts’, and knowledge has implications for the uses of power. ‘Knowledge’, in the museum context, includes not only formal, didactic information, but also the expertise and assumptions of parties involved behind the scenes in exhibition and program design and access policies. Similarly, ‘politics’ includes not only legislative acts and policy, but also the detailed tactics through which individuals and populations are administered in the institutional
Bennett’s governmental understanding of museums challenges the idea that Clifford’s contact zone represents some kind of radical break in function:

For what is the perspective of museums-as-contact-zones if not a proposal that, by tinkering with a range of practical arrangements, the inherited form of the museum might be refunctioned in a manner calculated to bring about a redirection – indeed, reversal – of its reforming potential with a multicultural civics premised on a need for greater cross-cultural understanding and tolerance?²⁶

For Bennett, the incorporation of groups once only the subject of display into the exhibition process represents an extension of the museum’s essentially conservative pedagogic function. That is, the museum’s ability to contain diverse cultural groups within the unaltered frame of basic universal representativeness attests to its success in constructing histories that imagine an integrating and progressive unity for its subjects. I cite this difference in understanding between Clifford and Bennett as a way of introducing the central issue informing this chapter: how effectively does Te Papa, conceived as a bicultural forum, produce and circulate discourses that both reinvent the museum and imagine a new bicultural future for New Zealand?

Out of this hotchpotch of other museums commentators’ ideas, I want to clarify the forum by suggesting that it should encapsulate two ideas: a physical sense of place, and a structure for mediation. That is, the forum involves both how the museum publicly presents itself, and also the kind of participation it allows. The first idea involves museums’ increasing awareness of their civic presence. Museums now acknowledge that their collections and displays are unavoidably involved in debates relating to culture, race, gender and society. Museums are beginning to actively participate in these debates in order to maintain their relevance and justify their existence. The second related idea of means for participation deems that museums should provide not just the means for the public consumption of these debates in the form of exhibitions, but also for the input of various groups at the levels of planning,
consultation, and collaboration. Museums are now increasingly concerned with negotiating arrangements and opening up channels for debate over issues of ownership, access, authorship and commercial appropriation. It is important that we bear in mind a distinction between civic presence and means for participation precisely due to an awareness of the tendency for the idea of dialogue to be used as a promotional ideal without any real provision for its attainment.

The previous chapter used exhibition analysis and a largely undifferentiated or generalised notion of ‘the visitor’ to show how Te Papa’s treatment of Maori and Pakeha reifies a traditional culture-versus-history scheme. In contrast, this chapter looks (mostly) ‘behind’ the displays to examine the social and political parameters of the relationship between the museum and its community. Te Papa’s principal consultation is with iwi. The iwi/museum relationship, most prominently expressed in policy, is a major pivot upon which claims to be bicultural rest. Te Papa has adopted a particular bicultural model that emphasises partnership based on a legal interpretation of the Treaty of Waitangi. Examining Te Papa’s adaptation of the Government interpretation of the Treaty, I argue that while it might provide a fitting framework for addressing issues of Maori ownership and repatriation, it is poorly equipped to deal with the array of social issues that an open-ended ‘national forum’ invites.

Strict attention to Maori-Crown relations in policy fits uneasily with the socially reconciliatory meanings produced in programs and displays. In order to judge how Te Papa’s Treaty model is made publicly perceptible, I examine the pivotal long-term exhibition that has so far only been mentioned in passing: Signs of a Nation. This exhibition is analysed here (rather than the previous history chapter) because it is the space that most directly engages with its objective to inform the public about issues of Treaty conflict and reconciliation. This exhibition provides the opportunity to consider whether the facilitation of contesting and critical viewpoints is a step away from governmental consensus. Alternatively, when viewed through the filter of the museum’s otherwise celebratory atmosphere, it may be that such criticism is tempered. I lean strongly towards this latter argument, arguing that although Maori
have forged a strong role in the museum’s governance, in many instances cultural
difference is made innocuous when critical ideas (such as those addressing inequality)
are held in suspense due to their perceived inappropriateness in the festive museum
space. The incongruity between a bicultural ideology rooted in a judicial-political
Treaty discourse, and ‘soft’ exhibitionary reconciliation strikes at the heart of Te
Papa’s problematic realisation of bicultural nationhood.

‘Culture’ is mobilised in the museum not just for public consumption, but is also
played out ‘behind the scenes’. In fact, the negotiation of practical arrangements that
draw on arguments about cultural protocol, tradition and beliefs often exposes group
relations more explicitly than visible public exhibits (which tend towards moderation
and valorisation). I argue that Te Papa’s Treaty model generates an unproductive
effect, in the form of the hardening and entrenchment of an ethnic-structuralist
understanding of cultural difference. At the level of visitor experience, a wide array
of activities gestures towards a kind of ‘forum of events’. However, these manifold
display tactics are not supported by an intellectual framework or exhibitions that
encourage visitors to think beyond the confines of personal identity. Indeed, the ideal
of a national forum only becomes more unstuck as a result of Te Papa’s rigid
bicultural structure. As a result of this cluster of arguments, I suggest that Te Papa is
better seen as a deceptively ideological symbol of biculturalism, rather than a forum
for it. Te Papa’s dedication to a strict Treaty-based model strongly upholds a
particular policy moment in New Zealand. While acknowledging that the historical
contingency of any institution makes it susceptible to future realignments in public
temperament and Government policy, I conclude this chapter by suggesting that Te
Papa is particularly predisposed to this risk due to the obstinacy of its bicultural
model.

2. Situating the Maori Cultural Revival
Since a central theme of this chapter is the way that Maori have designated Te Papa as a key site for the articulation of Maori political aspirations, it is important to map the emergence and character of this political resurgence over the past three decades. I place an extended emphasis on this subject precisely because the potently cultural characteristics of this movement created conditions that made a bicultural national museum not just viable, but to be expected. There are, generally speaking, two competing accounts of New Zealand’s path to bicultural nationhood. One avows that it is the evident state of two peoples who have shared a common historical brotherhood and destiny. This belief grew out of the late nineteenth century myth of the ‘white Maori’ possessing Aryan origins (which coexisted uneasily with stereotypes of the ‘black’ (savage) Maori and ‘grey’ (dying) Maori). In 1901 a newspaper proclaimed that ‘owing to his exceptional characteristics, the Maori interferes in no way with our national homogeneity. His position is…unique’. The ‘Aryan myth’ survived well into the post-war period as a racial explanation for a Pakeha belief of Maori as ‘honorary whites’. Into the present period, a ‘common sense’ view (popular in private, informal contexts) holds that New Zealand can well be called bicultural, if this word describes a history of comparatively harmonious ‘race relations’ (to use a favoured phrase among New Zealanders). Indeed, some historians have defined the nation’s international uniqueness partly through the success of this relationship. For instance, R. Q. Quentin-Baxter writes:

If New Zealand has a destiny as a separate nation, rather than as a detached part of Australia, it will be principally because these islands were a meeting place of two great races, and because – even in the worst times – their dealings with each other never lacked a certain grandeur. It is of course a flawed record; but the world has no better record and can ill afford to lose this one.

In recent years, this idea has been heavily criticised in academic criticism as at least naïve, and more likely imperialistic. It has become far more accepted – and accurate – to describe the emergence of biculturalism as the result of a hard-fought Maori
struggle for recognition. In this, Maori are again regarded as an international model – in this context not for their assimilable character, but as an example of the political and legal gains that can be made by indigenous peoples. Ken Coates concurs: ‘Maori are, in some quarters, held up as an example of the accommodations that can be reached and of the capacity of an indigenous population to persist in the face of conquest, broken treaties, and economic and social integration’.  

Proceeding from this basis, an account of the Maori push for biculturalism suitably begins in the early 1960s with the publication of the Government’s *Hunn Report*. This document provided the first comprehensive statistical base against which Maori circumstances were measured. It recognized the social and economic problems facing Maori, and evaluated the effectiveness of Government solutions in combating these. However the *Hunn Report* offered few new ideas and proposed ‘racial integration’ as the best policy goal. It did not take seriously the idea that Maori might choose alternative modes of life from Pakeha, nor that solutions to Maori socio-economic inequality might be conceptualised in different ways from that of Pakeha. Maori subsequently criticised Hunn’s report for its reliance on assimilationist language and conclusions. Yet Maori critics countered formidable Pakeha resistance to the possibility of Maori self-determination. We gain a sense this from a 1968 essay by Ernest Beaglehole, New Zealand’s pre-eminent historian at the time, who portrayed Maori culture as doomed:

Aboriginal Maori culture has gone for good, with all its cruelty, its cannibalism, its warfare, its sorcery, its *muru*, its *utu*, its cosmogony, its arbitrary chiefly power, its slavery. What has survived during the last 150 years? Community living for many, not for all; the Maori language for some, not for all, and in decreasing use for most; a feeling for tribal membership symbolised by meeting-houses and *marae* arts and crafts that are for the most part used for symbolic decoration, not as parts of everyday living; patterns of tribal authority that are in rapid process of change; the *poi* dance that are symbols of group feeling... These ‘aspects’ of *Maoritanga* are all that there is
upon which to build a unique Maori culture in New Zealand. I suggest they are not enough, for the simple reason that they do not give sufficient help in living in a complicated modern environment. In effect, over the past hundred years Maori have slipped out of the warm embrace of aboriginal culture into the cold air of a rather fragmentary existence.\(^{36}\)

Not only does Beaglehole relate a blameless history of indigenous dispossession – Maori simply ‘slipped out’ of their culture – but what he identifies as the bric-a-brac of customary culture is seen as an inadequate resource for contending with modernisation. Beaglehole’s verdict ruled out, in his words, ‘the practical (and the theoretical) possibility of a symbiosis of cultures or an integration of Maori and Pakeha cultures...’ and concluded that ‘the only workable possibility is for the Maori to advance still further along the road of social and personal change’.\(^{37}\)

If, for Beaglehole, change had to be assimilative, anthropologist Erik Schwimmer, the first author to use the term ‘bicultural’ in the New Zealand context (also in 1968), had something similar in mind.\(^{38}\) He identified biculturalism as an identity issue facing tribal Maori, who largely resided in rural areas but were increasingly forced to negotiate between two worlds:

> Often the relationship between the country and the town brother is that the former helped to pay for the latter’s education; and that the latter does not claim occupation of the land, and occasionally sends money home...

Corresponding to the roles played by the two brothers, there are two complementary (not contradictory) ideologies: according to the former, anyone who leaves the countryside is ‘lost to the tribe’ and ‘gives up his Maoritanga’. According to the second ideology, the need for high socio-economic status is emphasised, so that the Maori can successfully compete with the Pakeha. The former emphasises biculturalism; the latter emphasises inclusion in the New Zealand societal community.\(^{39}\)
For Schwimmer, biculturalism was a necessary coping strategy for Maori forced to mediate between tribal and urban contexts. At that time there was no notion of biculturalism involving a pan-Maori nation, nor another partner, such as Pakeha or the Crown.

From the early 1970s, the development of a political consciousness among a new generation of Maori instigated innovative ways of conceiving their identity. These Maori, generally urban, young and secular, founded their critique of Pakeha society on a nascent sense of counter-hegemonic struggle. The international indigenous and ethnic minority movements of the 1960s and 1970s (particularly black American civil rights) profoundly influenced this thinking. As Homi Bhabha observed, a range of culturally and racially marginalised groups assumed ‘blackness’ to ‘audaciously announce the important artifice of cultural identity and its difference’. Maori emphasis on a politico-aesthetic ‘negritude’ helped to articulate the cultural alienation that reflected a ‘black’ psychic identification. Radical Maori aimed to unsettle the civilising and modernising foundations of the settler state’s sense of destiny. The identification of widespread anomie and disillusionment in Maori society was asserted to be a symptom of contact with Pakeha society. Activist Donna Awatere, for instance, wrote that Pakeha are characterized by ‘ignorance of one’s culture’ and ‘cultural amnesia’, and that, ‘you [Pakeha] subconsciously hate your own destructive culture and your empty lives...you only “live” for the present and maybe for a couple of generations hence. That’s why you’re so dangerous’.

In Frantz Fanon’s terms, the search for Maori political consciousness necessitated a kind of cultural rebirth that could un-knot the colonised Maori mind. By the late 1970s the perceived need for Maori re-acquaintance with custom, tradition and language saw a shift ‘from negritude to ethnicity’. The conceptual influence on Maori activism moved from black power ideologies to the decolonising movements of the ‘Fourth World’. By this time the awareness had grown in many circles that Maori social and economic deprivations had reached epidemic proportions. The causes were held to be personal, cultural and institutional racism, and Maori cultural
deprivation and alienation. The rediscovery of culture as the basis for political assertion became vital. The Maori nation was imagined as not only a political entity but also an organic people possessing an enduring culture. By making spirituality or consciousness central to social change, prevailing economic, political and technological arrangements were critiqued from an idealist viewpoint that posited a basic incompatibility between Maori and Pakeha values. Maori sought to undermine a progressive settler history that moved from unrestrained nature (at the time of settler arrival) to culture (in the form of government, cities and commerce), by criticising the alienating acts of Government and colonial-era violence that they believed undergirded such progress. Lengthy marches and occupations of public properties aided Maori activists to force the point that inequality and social problems stemmed from land alienation. The customary concept tangata whenua provided both the necessary overarching scheme that could tie cultural ideas to political protest, and a pan-tribal base for Maori nationalism. Since all Maori could theoretically make a claim for a tribal turangawaewae, Maori could collectively claim to be the tangata whenua of the entire land.

In the mid 1980s two new points of focus for Maori politics arrived. These ‘top-down’ Government initiatives added to, and were prompted by, widespread and influential grass-roots activism, particularly amongst urban Maori. One event was the 1984-85 Te Maori tour of the U.S, which represented the first-ever overseas touring exhibition of Maori art. Prior to the exhibition, organizers took the unprecedented step of consulting with different tribal elders to gain consent for each taonga to travel. Since this was not legally necessary (the taonga were almost all the property of the Crown) it was considered a substantial act of reconciliation. In the U.S Maori performance of their spiritual power attracted nearly 750 000 visitors and significant media coverage. In each city the exhibition was opened with a dramatic dawn ceremony in which a different group of elders would lift the tapu spirits from the taonga before entrusting them to the care of the host museum. At each venue a paepae (welcome area) was maintained from which visitors were challenged by a fierce haka. The homecoming tour of New Zealand in 1986-87 saw many different tribes take
their turn on the paepae where they performed their distinctive ceremonial customs, collectively demonstrating the vitality of tribal culture. The homecoming tour also allowed urban Maori, the great majority of whom genealogically belonged to lands and kin groups located in rural areas, to be acquainted with tribal Maoritanga.

It was the exhibition’s problems as well as its successes that spurred Maori to turn the political activism associated with Maori sovereignty towards museums. Tense debate ensued over whether taonga should be used to communicate Maori skills and traditions to a wide audience, or whether they had little place in American museums, removed from the local context where they had mana. This was made particularly palpable because taonga were displayed in the ‘Primitive Art’ exhibition of the Metropolitan Museum in New York, and at the ‘Natural History’ section of the Chicago Field Museum. It was also brought into sharp focus when, within days of Te Maori opening at the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, the controversial exhibition Primitivism in Twentieth Century Art: Affinities of the Tribal and the Modern opened nearby at the Museum of Modern Art. This latter exhibition used Oceanic and African art as the backdrop for the search in high modernist art for informing principles of universal aesthetic experience. Considering that James Clifford would identify Te Maori as an example of the proper contextualisation of tribal objects contributing to an appropriate political cause, it was noteworthy that he used the other exhibition as an opposite case. Clifford criticised the Primitivism exhibition as a cautionary example of how tribal peoples’ material culture, when displayed in Western museums, is typically radically decontextualised, allowing tribal peoples themselves to be regarded as timeless and without history.47 Yet some criticised Te Maori on these same grounds, citing that its singular focus on pre-twentieth century taonga created an evident disjuncture between exhibition objects and those who tributed them in performance.48

Tension also surrounded the ethnological explanations of taonga provided in the catalogue, which some elders dismissed as nonsense – one pretended to wipe his backside with it when giving a public speech.49 Tension ran particularly high because
Mobil Oil Company, the exhibition’s chief sponsor, was hoping to sign a contract with the Government for the construction of a natural gas refinery. Maori charged Mobil with polluting Maori fishing grounds, and the Government with abrogating the spirit of partnership enshrined in the Treaty by making deals without their consultation.\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Te Maori} also provided a catalyst for repatriation issues. One noteworthy case was the contest over the whare-wananga \textit{Mataatua}, built in 1875 to mark the kinship ties of the Mataatua confederation of tribes of the Ngati Awa iwi.\textsuperscript{51} In 1878 it was removed by the Colonial Government and shipped to England, where it was displayed at the South Kensington Museum, before being dismantled and stored. Decades later it was repatriated by the New Zealand Government for the 1925 New Zealand and South Seas exhibition in Dunedin, which featured the largest Maori ethnographic section at that time.\textsuperscript{52} Afterwards it stayed at the Otago Museum, which had requested its repatriation because it was a major regional museum conspicuously lacking a whare-wananga. There it stayed, until very recently. When the Otago Museum took its turn to host the \textit{Te Maori} homecoming tour, the presence of \textit{Mataatua} spurred Ngati Awa to include the whare-wananga in its Waitangi Tribunal claim. In 1996 the Tribunal made its recommendation to the Crown that \textit{Mataatua} be returned to Ngati Awa. It is now temporarily housed at the Whakatane Museum, awaiting the construction of a new marae where it will stand.\textsuperscript{53} In sum, \textit{Te Maori} alerted Maori to both the productive and exploitative uses of their material culture in public display – and impelled the conviction that such affairs should, in future cases, be governed by Maori themselves.

A second focus for Maori activism was the rebirth of the Treaty of Waitangi through the legislative expansion of the Waitangi Tribunal. The Treaty, signed in 1840 between Crown representatives and over 300 Maori chiefs, ceded to Britain the governorship of New Zealand and gave the Crown an exclusive right of pre-emption to land that Maori wished to sell. In return, Maori were guaranteed full rights of ownership of their lands, forests, fisheries and other prized possessions. The Treaty also promised Maori the rights and privileges of British subjects, including Crown protection. An abbreviated form reads:
Article the first: The Chiefs...cede to Her Majesty...without reservation all the rights and powers of sovereignty...

Article the Second: Her Majesty...confirms and guarantees to the Chiefs...full and undisturbed possession of their Lands and Estates Forests Fisheries and other properties...so long as it is their wish and desire to retain the same in their possession; but the Chiefs yield to Her Majesty the exclusive right of Preemption...

Article the Third: Her Majesty...extends to the Natives of New Zealand Her Royal Protection and...all the Rights and Privileges of British Subjects. ⁵⁴

From the mid nineteenth century the Treaty had been quickly forgotten by the Colonial Government and declared a ‘simple nullity’ in 1877. ⁵⁵ Despite periodic attempts by Maori to have the Government ‘honour the Treaty’, it lay dormant for a century thenceforth.

Spurred by strident Maori activism, in 1975 the Government established the Waitangi Tribunal to hear Maori claims of current Crown contravention against points of the Treaty. However it was not until 1985 that the Treaty Amendment Act gave the Tribunal any real power – in the form of jurisdiction to hear, establish the facts of, and advocate redress for tribal Maori claims for injustices going back to 1840. Since then the Tribunal has become a quasi-judicial forum for historical claims on a broad scale that take a litigatory stance against the state. The Tribunal investigates grievances on a case-by-case basis and recommends to parliament appropriate forms of redress. As the Mataatua example showed, the public vitalisation of taonga at Te Maori was closely allied with the re-emergence of the Treaty. The Maori cultural renaissance emerged in tandem with the assertion of historical injustice, exposing the extent to which both mana and political agency are invested in and constructed through reference to the ancestral past. In the compensatory claims that have come before the Tribunal, reports of longstanding tribal tradition are mandatory for constructing a convincing basis for customary ownership. Proof of the provenance of
taonga is a tribal issue, as oral histories of ancestral spirits are iwi-specific. *Te Maori* provided a highly publicised forum for the performance of different tribes’ age-old chants, dances and rituals that superseded the cultural realm: they were a kind of political claim that allowed Maori to force the point that the second clause of the Treaty (promising full rights of ownership of land *and taonga*) had, all along, promised Maori the control over their possessions that their performances now signified. That Maori could perform so powerfully amidst an exhibition comprised entirely of Crown-owned objects only underlined this statement.

Since the mid-1980s, the Treaty has remained at the centre of Maori political claims. It has helped to reify a possessive and essential understanding of ‘culture’, which, in turn, has remained the favoured idiom for mobilising resistance against political authority and a hegemonic national culture. The Tribunal, for its part, has been important for its consistent assertion that the Treaty should represent the template for managing the nation’s future ethnic relations:

The Treaty…established the regime not for uni-culturalism, but for bi-culturalism… It was not intended merely to fossilise a status quo, but to provide a direction for future growth and development. The broad and general nature of its words indicates that it was not intended as a finite contract but as the foundation for a developing social contract.\(^5^6\)

In the mid-1980s when Te Papa was in inception, biculturalism was established as Government policy, defined at the time as ‘…the sharing of responsibility and authority for decisions with appropriate Maori people’.\(^5^7\) The expansion of Maori interests from land rights into public sector areas like education, health and the arts signalled a halt to Government efforts to promote multiculturalism as a response to immigration.

The insertion of biculturalism into the museum’s mandate was consistent with increasingly visible official bicultural policies in state departments and administrative
bureaucracies in the 1980s, many of which could be suitably applied to the museum: Maori names were coined for policies, activities and programs; Maori ceremony was increasingly used for official occasions; Maori units were created to advise on issues of tradition and protocol; aspects of Maori tradition were included in educational programs. By the 1990s, Maori in authoritative positions were pushing biculturalism towards the idea of Maori self-determination. Dissatisfaction had arisen from a belief that Maori were being given only advisory roles rather than real power sharing, and that Pakeha leaders were gaining a veneer of cultural understanding that produced a competitive advantage in situations where Maori may have benefited. As we shall see, the principle of separate development has now become an integral and challenging aspect of Te Papa’s application of biculturalism. In sum, by considering Te Maori and the Waitangi Tribunal as formative and indispensable influences, we may gather how Maori involved with Te Papa approached their role with both celebratory expectation and a politicised sense of entitlement. That is, on the one hand, the Maori ability to celebrate their cultural ownership of taonga in a national space is integral to the veracity and appeal of the museum’s claim to be Our Place. On the other, the expansion of the Waitangi Tribunal has aided an awareness of how issues of Maori sovereignty and ownership have become an obligatory element of any Government project. Te Papa’s treatment of taonga has emerged as an implicit test of the nature, legitimacy and structure of the state’s bicultural policies. The following section analyses Te Papa’s ability to function as a ‘contact zone’ for the contestation of Maori cultural sovereignty.

3. Political Entanglements: Te Papa, the Treaty and Taonga

Maori stakeholders have stridently seized upon Te Papa’s creation as an opportunity for control over representations of their culture. The general response amongst New Zealand’s museum professionals has been unprecedented attention to involving Maori in the production and critique of museum practice. A number of initiatives have
followed. Te Papa has adopted a language policy that recognises *te reo Maori* (the Maori language) as an official language of New Zealand, to be accordingly used in policy, corporate documents, exhibitions, and directional guides.\(^{60}\) Maori are involved at every staffing level, from the Board, to joint-CEO, to curators, to information ‘hosts’. In the restructuring of the previous National Museum to create Te Papa, two important new positions were created. One was kaihatu, who is joint-CEO on the Maori side. While the CEO is accountable to Government, the kaihautu is accountable to iwi. The other position was poutakawaenga, who is responsible for the ‘interface’ between iwi and the museum. For both positions key issues include borrowing and lending taonga, deciding what can be displayed and where, necessary protocol, and which information the iwi is prepared to make public, and which is restricted.\(^{61}\) In order for these arrangements to proceed from a principled basis, Te Papa takes its lead from the processes through which the Waitangi Tribunal responds to tribal claims.

The Tribunal’s combination of English and Maori texts, court and marae ‘forum’ protocol during hearings, and legal and spiritual principles of interpretation strive to display the ideal of biculturalism as *mutually beneficial partnership in action.* Importantly, this current interpretation of the Treaty serves to differentiate Maori from simply taking one side in an oppositional ‘us’ and ‘them’ (indigenous/non-indigenous) relationship, which would potentially only award them with a broad and abstract marginality. The Tribunal has not only made key findings in tribal claims against the Crown, but it has also been important in providing a framework for understanding the issues. One of the dominant ideas to emerge is that Maori understand the Treaty in ways where its wairau (spirit) transcends its literal interpretation (given the tendency for pre-twentieth century treaties to be stale and specific).\(^{62}\) Since Maori stress that they regard the Treaty itself not only a binding document but also a sacred taonga, its significance has been doubly reinforced.\(^{63}\) A Treaty-based interpretation of taonga dictates how the museum’s collections are conceptualised and treated, and defines the de facto rights and responsibilities of biculturalism. Te Papa has obliged itself to consider its collection in terms of an
everlasting relationship with the descendents of the ancestors that inhabit taonga. Its Treaty responsibility to protect taonga includes not just physical protection but proper spiritual upkeep.

In Tribunal hearings, the cerebral and emotional way that Maori bind customary ideas to modern-day resources works in stark contrast to the disinterested coolness of bureaucratic language – particularly when the latter appeals to economic and legal grounds for validation. For instance, the Muriwhenua Fishing Report presented to the Tribunal asserts that a Maori view of the sea involves not just a food supply, but reverence for creation and the sanctity of nature, feelings of kinship with other life forms, and an ethic of reciprocity. In concurrence, the Tribunal stated:

The use of the word ‘taonga’ in a metaphorical sense to cover a variety of possibilities rather than itemised specifics is consistent with the Maori use of the language. It would be entirely inappropriate to apply English canons of construction to the translation of a Maori text and so argue that the failure to make reference to the ‘fishing grounds’ in the Maori text indicated that fishing grounds were not within the purview of the Treaty.

This terminological precedent, which expands taonga beyond any narrowly material interpretation, has been used to justify the protection of Maori culture in a number of spheres, such as language, health and heritage. Responding to this precedent, the Royal Commission on Social Policy’s highly influential April Report (1988) claimed that, ‘within the Treaty, economic, social, constitutional and spiritual dimensions are intended... Few, if any aspects of social well-being can be seen to stand outside the Treaty’. Following this lead, Te Papa similarly treats the Treaty as a ‘living accord’ that provides for flexibility of interpretation. As a result, the key term ‘taonga’ has come to include an expanding range of things. This is evident in Te Papa’s National Services component, which coordinates resources across the nation’s museums.
recent effort to attain nationwide consistency for the implementation of bicultural accords, National Services stated that museums that claim to have ‘no taonga’ are ignoring their role ‘to care for taonga other than artefacts (e.g language, histories, natural environment and knowledge)’. In another National Services document Hekia Parata proposed that museums also consider another kind of taonga:

One of the taonga of nga whare taonga o Aotearoa, the museums of New Zealand that I think is often overlooked is the taonga of relationships. We get caught up with what is tangible and material, in particular with artefacts as taonga. I think the museum sector should treat bicultural relationships as taonga. How may such taonga be represented on a day-to-day basis?

Reference to the ‘taonga of relationships’ illustrates the term’s considerable elasticity. The suggestion that the museum’s bicultural relationships possess the status of taonga makes it difficult to fathom how any contact between iwi and museum operations, no matter how intangible, might be disqualified from enjoying the same status. Yet it seems nonsensical to describe ‘relationships’, highly alienable in nature, as unassailable taonga. An awareness of New Zealand’s current political context however, alerts us to the principle driving behind Parata’s point: that as a Crown institution, Te Papa cannot avoid being duty-bound by the Treaty and notions of partnership. However, a Treaty-obligation-based conception of taonga carries at least two significant risks. One is that actual taonga objects will be reduced to an expression of colonial conflict and Maori dispossession at the level of their display. As we shall see in the next section, the centrality of Signs of a Nation to Te Papa’s total physical and conceptual scheme tends to consolidate the idea that the Treaty suitably stands as a timeless fulcrum of Maori-Pakeha relations. The other risk is that, behind the scenes, taonga will become tools or emblems for managing a bicultural relationship. While a history of loss and displacement in the colonial era is often an important aspect of the lives of taonga, their significance, as many tribal Maori would affirm, does not predominantly lie in their capacity to act as symbols for negotiating biculturalism.
While Te Papa professes an allegiance to ‘Treaty principles’, it is not clear what this means or how it should be applied to the museum. For its lead, Te Papa has looked to the Government. In 1989 the Government released *Principles for Crown Action on the Treaty of Waitangi*. The document strategically aimed to dispel the uncertainty caused by a series of contentious developments between Maori, Government and the courts. The Government set out five principles that Te Papa adapted and translated into *A Concept for the Museum of New Zealand* as follows:

1. *kawanatanga*, ‘that the Government has the right to govern’, became ‘to support the principle of a single Board, that includes effective and equal representation of both Maori and Pakeha’.

2. *rangatiratanga*, ‘like all New Zealanders, Maori have the right to organize as iwi, and under law, to control the resources they own’, becomes ‘a management system that allows the two distinctive cultures to manage and control their taonga’.

3. *equality*, ‘that all New Zealanders are equal before the law’, becomes ‘to affirm the cultural differences and ensure that all contracts between Maori and Pakeha are fair’.

4. *co-operation*, ‘that the Government and the iwi are obliged to accord each other reasonable co-operation on major issues of common interest’, becomes ‘to encourage frank and open dialogue between Maori and Pakeha and to pursue every opportunity to involve iwi in the planning and decision making process’.

5. *redress*, ‘that the Government is responsible for providing effective processes for the resolution of grievances in the expectation that reconciliation can occur,’ becomes ‘to establish and resource a process for resolution of*
grievances’, (this was amended in 1996 as ‘to establish and resource appropriate and effective conflict resolution processes that are sensitive to the needs of the bicultural partnership’). 71

To appreciate the implications of the five principles, it is helpful to delve briefly into how they relate to the Treaty itself. The first and second principles reflect and reiterate the conflict built into the Treaty: the cessation of Maori government (kawanatanga) in return for Maori retaining control of their resources (tino rangatiratanga). While the Government may, for instance, make laws concerning the operations of the museum, that right should not disregard or diminish the right of tribal authorities to exercise control over taonga. Te Papa’s strong emphasis on iwi consultation, cultural ownership of taonga and knowledge, and Maori representation in staffing means that it pushes for a particularly strong articulation of iwi sovereignty as a counterbalance to the fact of Government legislative authority and ownership. Although the trajectories of the two articles appear inconsistent, Maori understand the Treaty as the blueprint for a dynamic, ongoing and reciprocal relationship with the Crown. Government and Te Papa also appear to accept institutionalised conflict as the platform for future action. While this may seem unproductive, it is accepted that it is only through the reiteration of the dissent built into the Treaty that an historically grounded partnership can proceed. The third and fourth principles elaborate the first two. Equality and cooperation are outcomes that extend from the requirement that Government agencies and Crown entities have knowledge of Treaty issues, recognise respective entitlements and obligations, and provide resources that enable the negotiation of kawanatanga and rangatiratanga. Te Papa extends principle three from a Government emphasis on Maori ‘equality before the law’, to the active affirmation of difference. The fifth resolution is particularly provocative for the way it posits that the museum should adjudicate between parties by appealing not to truth or justice, but to partnership. Recalling the case of the contentious Moriori display cited in the previous chapter, we could identify the application of this resolution in the way that Te Papa was reluctant to assert Maori culpability in the interests of upholding the bicultural ideal of Matauranga Maori.
Perhaps the most problematic aspect of the museum’s bicultural model is the unyielding manner in which it conceives social constituencies. Te Papa constructs the past and organises the contemporary political landscape chiefly through a fixation on colonial social and political structures and the antagonisms between them. In *A Concept for the Museum*... (1991) nation is divided into *papatuanuku* (natural environment), *tangata whenua* (Maori) and *tangata tiriti* (non-Maori). It is notable that, unlike Te Papa, the NMA, which also uses a tripartite concept (‘land’, ‘people’, ‘nation’), makes a distinction between lived experience (‘people’) and ‘nation’ as a symbolic entity. *Tangata whenua* (‘those who belong to the land by right of first discovery’) is a customary expression of profound identity. It denotes a unique Maori ontology relating the simultaneous presence of remote ancestors, gods and future generations. However, to describe people as *tangata whenua* is to accord them a self-justified status without necessarily knowing what entitlements should follow. If the state has special duties in relation to its indigenous population, to whom do (or should) these duties extend? Contained within the customary concept *tangata whenua* is a double usage that exposes one of the ruptures of Te Papa’s bicultural model.

Although *tangata whenua* is widely publicly understood as Maori generally, this is a more recent meaning that came about through pan-tribal Maori cultural nationalism as a response to colonialism. Its older meaning, as I discussed in chapter two, refers to the specific tribal ownership of a region. While Te Papa uses *tangata whenua* in both senses, it favours the idea of a single Maori culture consistent with biculturalism nationhood. Ian Wedde has argued that by reifying Maori culture as one half of biculturalism, Te Papa produces a Maori nationalism that ‘runs absolutely counter to Maori culture’s fundamental base in tribal regionalism’. 72 In its National Services policy advice to regional New Zealand museums however, Te Papa stresses a strongly Treaty-driven separation of local tribal Maori from the greater Maori constituency:

...the museum sector must be clear about the distinction between hapu/iwi and Maori. Maori groups are covered by Article III of the Treaty of Waitangi,
which deals with citizenship rights of Maori. Hapu and iwi groups are covered by Article II, which concerns the tangata whenua rights of Maori.\textsuperscript{73}

The difficulty with nominating the primary relationship as being with iwi is that it leaves other liaisons (for example, between different iwi, or with urban and non-tribal Maori) in the hands of the local tangata whenua, which can serve to intensify conflict between Maori groups over status and recognition.

One of the recurring issues in this study is Te Papa’s profound reluctance to theorise Pakeha identity.\textsuperscript{74} If consultation with iwi is paramount for Te Papa, for non-Maori groups, more general attention to ‘market research’ is seen to suffice. Maori are treated as \textit{communities}, while non-Maori are envisaged primarily as \textit{consumers}. The only concept devised as a bicultural counterpart to tangata whenua is \textit{tangata tiriti}, ‘those who belong to the land by right of the Treaty of Waitangi’.\textsuperscript{75} Introduced to the bicultural lexicon by Tribunal Judge Durie, the term is largely alien to non-Maori – and undoubtedly many Maori. The deployment in policy of an obscure, semi-legal term to identify non-Maori is at odds with Te Papa’s projection of an approachable, unpretentious image. Why this unnecessarily awkward neologism? Te Papa appears to have adopted the label for two reasons. First, the term incorporates not just Pakeha, but all non-Maori. Tangata tiriti suggests through a linguistic idiom how multicultural diversity might be figured within biculturalism. While hypothetically ‘Pakeha’ possesses an elasticity that can incorporate non-European immigrants, it has lost its historic referent as a generalised non-Maori, and has become Anglo-Celtic specific. Tangata tiriti is useful because it does not posit that non-Maori ethnicities share a single nor even similar culture (and the separate community gallery demonstrates this point).

Nonetheless, the dominance of Pakeha as the counterpart to Maori, combined with their status as the descendents (or imagined descendents) of colonial Treaty signatories, means that even tangata tiriti may eclipse non-Pakeha ethnicities. The conflation in policy of all settlers as one part of a bicultural alliance diminishes the
disparities, rooted in historical experience, socio-economic status and political power, between British settlers and other non-Maori. As I argued with reference to the Chinese and Dutch community gallery in the previous chapter, the incorporation of non-European immigrants within a Treaty-focused bicultural policy effects their disappearance. The idea that post-war immigrants, for instance, obtain their right to inhabit New Zealand due to a conferred responsibility as Treaty partners gives the Treaty an ethical dimension superseding its actual historical influence. A major conceptual problem plaguing Te Papa is its inability to position minorities in its overall scheme. The issue of diversity within biculturalism has been largely avoided at Te Papa. Maori collections manager Awhina Tamarapa admits that the unsuitability of tangata tiriti as a concept for immigrant minorities ‘has been flagged for discussion a number of times by both Maori and non-Maori forums, but as yet there seems no conclusive agreement to this debate’. The only institutional consensus appears to be that debate over cultural diversity policies should be sensitive to long-term timing. For instance, Hekia Parata argued:

What Maori share with Pakeha is the platform relationship as far as I’m concerned. Other migrants, by making New Zealand their home, do so on that platform. Until we have that whariki [floormat], if you like, worked out between us, it will continue to have fault lines that will represent themselves all through the rest of the population.

Joe Doherty, Te Papa’s poutakawaenga, has similarly stated that, ‘somewhere in the future the tension will reduce to the extent where there is acceptance that we do have cultural diversity here, and other groups do have intrinsic value in terms of contributing to the nation’. This idea that a museum should heed the perceived limits of a society’s capacity for ethnic absorption and tolerance prescribes it a distinctly conservative and reactive role. The principle that Te Papa should merely reflect community values may prove publicly popular, but it is hardly visionary. To the extent that the museum remains a pedagogic institution, it can be expected to express ideas and values that are challenging, rather than simply gratifying. An appeal
to community support also conceals the fact that biculturalism itself is not a populist
development but a clear ideological choice by policy makers in Government and Te
Papa’s Board. From its early development in the mid-1980s, the museum’s bicultural
agenda was a matter of internal policy, rather than community consultation.

The second reason for the deployment of tangata tiriti is to strategically achieve – on
paper at least – a reversal of the power relations that allowed Pakeha their own sense
of precedence in ‘building the nation’. A citizenship principle that makes Pakeha
guests in the land, rather than owners of it, appears in *A Concept* as the central moral
logic of biculturalism. Despite the bilateral nature of the Treaty itself, it appears that
the moral status attached to prior occupancy precludes the argument that all people in
New Zealand are tangata tiriti. Considering that the Treaty remains the focus for
Maori grievances, the categorisation of Pakeha through the same lens emphasises
their ongoing accountability as the descendents of British Treaty partners and
affiliates of the Crown. Tangata tiriti returns Pakeha to being ‘European’ (a name
preferred by many Pakeha anyway) by restoring their identities to the colonial era.
However, most Pakeha evidently do not understand the Treaty in terms of a lasting
obligation. Conceived in politico-legal terms, Pakeha typically respond to the issue of
biculturalism predominantly as a matter of distributive justice. In this, the
repayment of Maori for confiscated land and alienated resources are seen as an end in
itself, rather than a matter of cultural survival. Conceived alternatively as a social
category, many understand biculturalism as an expression of the condition of Pakeha
who can move between both cultural groups (which has more in common with
Schwimmer’s 1968 concept than any associated with the Treaty). Since, for many
Pakeha, questions of culture pertain to anthropological and aesthetic things, it does
not necessarily follow that a Pakeha willingness to celebrate Maori culture will act as
a precursor to public acceptance of rights and claims.

In sum, the extent to which Te Papa’s support for Treaty-based reconciliation can be
considered politically radical depends largely on whether or not the Waitangi process
is deemed progressive. Maori can only claim reparation for historic injustice in their
capacity as citizens of New Zealand, and their claims for distinctiveness from other New Zealanders depends partly on the success of the Waitangi process itself. Yet the current claims and settlements being made are, by any standards, highly significant, not only in terms of compensation packages, but also in terms of their potential ability to form the basis of lasting tribal leadership, economies and political organizations. Since Te Papa is a Crown agency, the Board may have felt obligated to reproduce the Government’s framework in order to operate in a politically and legally responsible manner. However, it seems that such close attention to this framework disables the museum from developing its own position. It seems anomalous that the Board could imagine a politically and culturally progressive role for the museum without equipping it with an alternative framework (not necessarily bicultural or even multicultural) that might allow it to reflect on social relations critically and creatively.

Indeed, if Te Papa is to represent a contact zone between Maori and the museum, we might expect a more open-ended or exploratory policy concept (or set of concepts, if Maori were not to be conceived as a single nation). Those Maori who exercise power at Te Papa have the accepted agency to designate appropriate narratives and terms of cultural engagement. For tribal Maori and those urban Maori with a stake in development strategies organised around the tribal unit, the Treaty remains the most critical point of political purchase. However, it also produces a certain image of Maori community that marginalizes other ways of being. As we saw in the previous chapter, an authentic Maori identity is constructed as involving aspects such as dedication to whakapapa, environmentalism, fluency in language, and knowledge of custom. Not only are associations with tribal Maori dominant over those of an urban Maori diaspora and the many New Zealanders of part-Maori descent, but also other affiliations and differences such as generation, region, gender, and class are subdued. Postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha have accented the importance of acknowledging the ambivalence and ambiguity of cultural identities. His ‘split locations’ and ‘fractured identities’ exist in some indifference to the monadic historicities of ethnicity and nation that have classified and dominated Maori under the grand narratives of the Enlightenment and colonialism. Attention to a wider
range of subjectivities may go some way towards producing a larger ‘zone’ in which contact takes place. Margo Neale, Director of the Gallery of First Australians at the National Museum of Australia, articulates this vision:

I hope the museums of the future increasingly become sites of negotiation. Places where multiple histories are told by diverse voices and stories have no end. A place where contradictions are allowed to exist, hard questions are posed without qualification, answers are debated and conclusions are forever rubbery.\(^{85}\)

The application of a Treaty model to the forum mission restricts and confines the potential for the kinds of uncertainties Neale suggests. A highly political sense of contractual obligation exists uneasily alongside the museum’s friendly public image. Te Papa’s concept does not allow hybrid, non-constitutency based themes, given that exhibitions must show their relevance to either tangata whenua or tangata tiriti.\(^{86}\) There is little provision for inter-cultural or international allegiances, or indeed, for any exhibition that does not take Maori or Pakeha identity as its starting point.

### 4. Ownership and Repatriation

Only two decades ago, Ngahuia Te Awekotuku felt it was warranted to assert that New Zealand’s museums represent ‘a place of death, of bones, of plunder and relics and pillage’, and that those who collected taonga were ‘necrophiliacs and grave robbers’.\(^{87}\) Along similar lines, Ranginui Walker claimed that for many Maori viewing taonga in museums was like entering a rua koiwa (death house).\(^{88}\) These claims position museums as receptacles for the worst aspects of colonial pillage. While undoubtedly many taonga were acquired in questionable and even violent circumstances, one should take care not to deny the existence of trade (and plunder) in pre-contact Maori society, nor to obscure the range of contact relationships that
occurred. Revisiting the *Antiquities Act* referred to in the previous chapter, we can consider the example of Tamahau Mahupuku, a chief of the Rongokako people in Wairarapa. Wishing to commemorate the *Act* with the gift to the Colonial Museum of a large carved whare-wananga, *Takitimu*, Mahupuku wrote a letter conveying his gratitude to the Minister of Native Affairs, reprinted in the 1905 *Colonial Museum Bulletin*:

> ... to have put into shape as something to leave to the after-ages, and your Act, O Minister! should cause this to be done...Honourable members of the Legislative Council! may your days be lengthened to lead the people to the fulfilment of those honourable positions which are attainable by the Maori people in these days, that their bodily health may be preserved through the medium of the Maori Councils; that such highly beneficial and humane measures be encouraged as the sanitation of the *marae*, the removal of garbage... the relieving of the poor, the stranger and wanderer, the blind, the deaf, the cripple, the leper, the paralytic, and the insane... O Timi Kara! if you be pleased to accept this gift our hearts will rejoice with exceeding great gladness.\(^{89}\)

Mahupuku’s faith that the *Act* might provide the basis for a much-needed resurrection of tribal knowledge, which might, in turn, revitalise the health of Maori people, need not be dismissed as a naïve act of collaboration. In fact, the basic motivation for Mahupuku’s gift bears a close likeness to contemporary justifications for the new national museum to retain Maori taonga a century later. If, throughout most of the twentieth century, the Maori experience of museums had indeed resonated with death, the arrival of Te Papa has now held to signal a decisive shift to bringing Maori culture in the museum to life.\(^{90}\) This section looks at Te Papa’s innovations in the areas of management, ownership and repatriation. These provide a further test of the museum’s role as a contact zone or space of negotiation with Maori.
If the last section showed the Treaty to be a distinctly inflexible model for the conceptualisation of social constituencies, we might expect it to make a more worthy contribution in issues of management, ownership and repatriation, given their more politically concrete nature. Surprisingly, Te Papa largely omits specific reference to the Treaty in these areas, resulting in some anomalous situations. For instance, despite a raft of bicultural policy discussion and significant Maori appointments, Te Papa is New Zealand’s only major museum without a legislative requirement for Maori representation on its Board. The best explanation for this anomaly lies with the huge challenges facing a brief that might establish national Maori representation. Unless it looked to the authority of local tangata whenua to appoint a trustee, there is no pan-Maori organization with an uncontested nationwide mandate to make such appointments. However, as I have reiterated, the museum’s bicultural concept only nominally recognises the tribal authority of local tangata whenua. It remains critical that Maori are not officially recognised as partners of equal status (occupying half of the positions) on the Board. The absence of such legislation exerts a double bind: the museum actively promotes itself as a supporter of the sovereignty aspirations of tribal Maori, yet it cannot grant Maori fixed representation in its governance precisely because its national orientation runs counter to traditional Maori tribal organization.

It also appears highly irregular that, after a swathe of references in early policy, Te Papa’s founding legislative Act makes no explicit reference to the Treaty. This can be partly accounted for by the nature of statutory acts, which typically allow little that is indeterminate or provisional (which the politically volatile and legally uncertain Treaty remains). Cheryll Sotheran has provided a rather different explanation. She indicates that it was Te Papa’s very confidence in its bicultural concept that made explicit reference to the Treaty unnecessary:

>[Including the Treaty in legislation] may be an important piece of insurance for organizations or public bodies that are more reluctant about coming to the discussion. Writing the Treaty into legislation doesn’t necessarily facilitate attitudinal change.91
Sotheran’s response is noteworthy for its suggestion that biculturalism is more about ‘attitudinal change’ than Treaty obligations. Yet this is somewhat unpersuasive: if Te Papa is secure in its ‘bicultural attitude’, then what is the harm in consolidating this commitment in legislation – particularly since Te Papa is a flagship bicultural institution? To pursue the point more aggressively: what are the dangers of Treaty policy ‘insurance’ for Te Papa?

Omission of the Treaty can be explained by the conflict between parliamentary sovereignty and the courts. The pivotal State Owned Enterprises Act (1986), which provided for the alienation of Crown property, contained a hastily added clause: ‘Nothing in this Act shall permit the Crown to act in a manner which is contrary to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi’ (section 9). In a series of crucial court decisions in cases initiated by the New Zealand Maori Council, the Government was disallowed from letting go of Crown assets in a period when their privatisation was central to sweeping administrative and fiscal reform. In this, the courts, and especially the Court of Appeal, seemed to have assumed the function of interpreting Treaty principles as a set of fundamental constitutional rules by which all institutions, including parliament, were bound. After the 1989 Crown Principles statement, new legislation pertaining to local government reform, town and country planning and Maori affairs, while requiring officials to ‘have regard to the Treaty’, stipulated that it should be balanced against other considerations. Treaty principles were not given special priority, and ‘no scope was given to the judges for interpretation of the legislation which would see the Acts’ provisions trumped by any constitutional doctrine relating to the overriding force of the Treaty’. Te Papa’s establishing Act can be located within this subsequent stream of legislation.

Speaking speculatively, there may be some in positions of museum authority who hope that the adoption of less binding Crown principles in place of Treaty legislation might protect the museum from possible court action. At around the same time that Te Papa was considering how to apply Treaty principles for its impending Concept
document, prominent Maori representatives clearly delineated for the Board the responsibilities and repercussions that the Treaty entailed. The recurring point of these papers was that consistency with the Treaty meant taking steps towards iwi repatriation of taonga. Keith Sorrenson argued that ‘it seems likely that the Tribunal would have to take it [Crown ownership of taonga] seriously...and that it could hold the museum, as an agency of the Crown, in breach of a principle of the Treaty, possibly “rangatiratanga...o ratou taonga”’. No such provisions for this kind of action are contained in the Act. In it, the museum is obliged to provide for collections ‘...in the Board’s care’. From that point on, however, all reference is to ‘its [the Board’s] collections’, implying Crown ownership. An evasion of the Treaty in legislation may also be due to the discrepancy between the two texts of the Treaty. In the English version, the rights of Maori over their taonga are qualified by the words ‘so long as it is their wish and desire to retain the same in their possession’, whereas in the Maori version there is no such qualification. If the museum was legally forced to honour the Treaty, the Maori version upholds the inextinguishable right of Maori to repatriate taonga no matter any history of apparent relinquishment. As it stands, the situation whereupon aggrieved iwi must formally appeal to the Tribunal for the repatriation of taonga affords the museum the appearance of some distance from politics.

The pertinency of power relations makes the handling of objects a symbolic field of contact and exchange – particularly because many of the museum’s valued objects crossed from a tribal world as a result of the political inequalities of colonial domination. As frameworks for the proper cultural treatment and context of indigenous peoples’ objects are being developed worldwide, Te Papa has taken a progressive stance by resolving that those who best know their complex histories should control their interpretation. In place of relinquishing legal ownership to Maori, Te Papa has further developed the concept (first articulated in Te Maori) of ‘cultural ownership’. The general arrangement is that New Zealand's museums act as guardians of the objects on the understanding that Maori families and tribes have unrestricted access to the object for tribal occasions such as tangihangi (funerals) or
hui (assemblies). While this has enriched the significance of tribal membership for many Maori, it only represents a step – albeit a significant one – towards Maori control of their culture.

Contest over the suitability of museums as repositories for other peoples’ material culture does not necessarily proceed along the well-worn lines of science and conservationism versus moralism and humanism. The topic has been politicised to the extent that matters are not – if they ever were – settled theoretically, but instead on a case-by-case basis. Furthermore, new museum practices have outmoded some of the assumptions on which older arguments rested. For instance, if museums argue the purpose of a museum object to be not for wealth and status but to support the study of some aspect of the culture in which the object is embedded, then it is of secondary importance whether the museum permanently owns the object. Alternatively, it may be that as long as a museum stores and displays objects in ways designated by the traditional owners and provides unrestricted access to them, then they may remain appropriate repositories. Indeed, some indigenous peoples feel that large museums – particularly national ones – endow objects with unparalleled status. Some Maori believe that objects should be left in the museum, as they gain mauri because their mana as prestigious objects is accentuated. Other museum commentators view any removal of ethnographic objects to museums in a melancholic light. For example, in his article, ‘Why Museums Make Me Sad’, James A. Boon laments that, ‘Museums are a locus of dislocated fragments, displayed in-coincidently with the motives of their production, revalued along other lines of exchange or schemes of competition...’ Christopher Steiner goes further by hypothesising that when Westerners cherish tribal objects, they are in fact ‘celebrating’ the absence of their original, contextual function. Authors like Boon and Steiner only see the museum negatively ‘revaluing’ dislocated objects, rather than their (re) re-valuing at the hands of their owners in the museum context. When set against accounts with this gloomy outlook, James Clifford’s identification of more variable realm of ‘contact responses’ is credible.
Turning to the issue of repatriation, it presently stands that where individuals, museums or organizations purchased Maori material or human remains legitimately, they are protected under International Property Law and are not obligated to return them. Like their original sale, the form of exchange is negotiable. However, where the object is as stolen, there is the expectation that they should be returned unconditionally. Maori accentuate that the issue of repatriation is not only legal, but deeply personal and familial. Maori seek to balance the debt to their ancestors by returning *mana* lost in colonial situations. To stress the incompatibility of historic terms of exchange between Maori and ‘the West’, Maori have articulated a whole alternative understanding of the life cycle of objects. Paul Tapsell has described, for example, the customary principle whereby taonga, once they become old and fragile, are brought back to tribal lands, committed back to the earth, and the wairua of the ancestor is transferred to newly made object.\(^\text{100}\) Ngahuia Te Awekotuku has stated that even if presented as a gift, taonga are given with a heavy sense of reciprocal obligation, and the expectation that they are ‘making a journey’ and will be returned at some future point.\(^\text{101}\) The irony, of course, is that repatriation from such places is often only possible because taonga, particularly those made of wood, were given museum shelter.

Repatriation takes place in two spheres: from overseas to New Zealand, and from New Zealand museums to tribal contexts. In 2001, Te Papa’s Maori unit succeeded in repatriation in both spheres – from the National Museum of Australia to Te Papa, in one case, and from Te Papa to the Ngai Tahu tribe, in another.\(^\text{102}\) However, a significant amount of Maori material exists in places as diverse as London, Rome, Salem, Leningrad, Dublin, Stockholm and Philadelphia. Further, many koiwi tangata (human remains) remain in overseas museum storerooms. Perhaps most famous is the Robley collection of 39 mokomokai (tattooed heads) at New York’s Natural History Museum.\(^\text{103}\) With regard to human remains, the situation is unsurprisingly fraught and heavily imbued with issues of tapu. The subject of koiwi tangata gained worldwide attention during the 1980s in two well-publicised instances of mokomokai being offered for sale at Sotheby’s and Bonham’s auction houses. Public outrage met
the proposed sale; one Maori leader described it as ‘degrading and deeply offensive desecration’. In response, and in the absence of any formal Government policy on the repatriation of koiwi tangata, Te Papa (under the leadership of Maui Pomare) created a consecrated urupa (crypt) in the basement to serve as a national repository for koiwi tangata with unknown tribal origins. Access to this highly restricted facility is granted by the National Museum Council only in association with the appropriate iwi authority.

In an international context, Maori have assumed a pivotal role in indigenous cultural property rights. In the same year as the 1993 U.N Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, New Zealand hosted the First International Conference on the Intellectual Property Rights of Indigenous Peoples, out of which the Mataatua Declaration appeared. The Draft Declaration is wide-ranging and the most formal of the current international instruments addressing indigenous peoples’ cultural and intellectual property. The document upholds indigenous maintenance, protection and development of the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, as well as the restitution of cultural property taken without their informed consent or in violation of their laws, traditions and customs (article 29). The Mataatua Declaration is more uncompromising than the Draft Declaration. The key passages that refer to museums include specific statements amounting to: the return all human remains in a culturally appropriate manner (2.12); the production of an inventory of any indigenous objects still held in their possession (2.13); the offer of any indigenous objects to their traditional owners (2.14). As a document ascribed to by most iwi, and as a position statement with a strong New Zealand flavour, the Mataatua Declaration represents a decisive starting point in discussion on these issues.

In the absence of international law (the Draft Declaration, due to the UN’s lengthy approval process, is yet to be ratified), ‘indigenous rights’ are generally defined by national sui generis legislation and existing intellectual property law. In the Mana Tangata discussion paper attached to the U.N. Draft Declaration document, New Zealand’s Government notes that U.N. human rights declarations may have great
moral force, but they are not ordinarily legally binding, whereas ratified Treaties are. (The hypocrisy of this assertion is probably not lost on Maori, who might remind the Government that the Treaty was ignored for over a century). The Government insistence on the precedence of the Treaty may grant Maori sovereignty over taonga, but does so in a setting that is essentially contested and subject to a legal process that considers ownership on a case-by-case basis. This situation is agitated by the fact that the terms of the 1975 *Antiquities Act* (the presiding legislation) are inconsistent with the Treaty. Rights to archaeological finds of Maori material, for instance, remain with the Crown rather than local iwi. It also remains humbling for New Zealand’s museum sector that this prima facie Crown ownership prevents New Zealand from acceding to international conventions such as the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (1970). In response, a group has drafted the Taonga Maori Protection Bill, currently awaiting parliamentary passage. It envisages a Taonga Maori Trust, a taonga register, and an inspectorate – developments that would reduce Te Papa’s central role in repatriation. The Bill generally appears a further positive development in the Maori control of their heritage. However, some Maori have expressed misgivings. Aroha Mead of the Maori Congress has argued that because it is limited to material cultural property, it potentially damages Maori efforts on intellectual property issues. Others recognise that as it stands, article two of the Treaty allows far wider interpretation of taonga than the bill. An emphasis on the Tribunal’s interpretation of the Treaty’s second article is, after all, a significant strategy in furthering broader Maori social development.

The final subject in this discussion of legal aspects of the museum-Maori relationship is commercial appropriation. In the previous chapter, I discussed how, as indigenous people have recently assumed greater control over representations, the art and artefact display distinction has been rejected in favour of a holistic ‘indigenous world-view’. An attendant development has been the placement of restrictions on a third object category – that of the commodity. The inscription of Western modes of commodity production on indigenous peoples has been an important aspect of the extension of
colonial power. This is not to say that the process has been one-way; the producers of indigenous objects have also manipulated commodity production in order to serve economic needs.¹⁰⁸ Maori are presently greatly concerned with the improper and exploitative use of customary culture. New Zealand has a long history of Pakeha appropriation of Maori imagery, iconography and language in projects designed to highlight an emerging nationalism. This nowhere better demonstrated than through the ritual display and consumption of Maori iconography at Te Papa itself.

Throughout the museum Maori design insignia is used to make different spaces ‘feel Maori’. The detachment of some of objects from *Mana Whenua* (such as the large waharoa at the central lobby carved for the 1906 Christchurch International Exhibition) gives them predominantly an ornamental function. The Maori objects for sale in Te Papa’s gift shops occupy an intermediate position between the sacred ‘fine art’ in the displays, and profane tourist art. Shop reproductions borrow their appeal from the original objects and from the expertise involved in professional museum practice – and indeed, Maori reproductions usually come with an explanatory tag not unlike display captions.

Examples from outside the museum also demonstrate how Maori iconography is often ambivalently entangled in contexts both compromising and beneficial. One well-known icon, the koru (fern), has been commercially appropriated by Air New Zealand – one of Te Papa’s principle sponsors. Pakeha artists such as Gordon Walters have also adopted Maori motifs – yet his work is celebrated in Te Papa’s *Made in New Zealand* exhibition. The well known ‘bar and stop’ design was featured as the brand for New Zealand’s 1985-85 America’s Cup yachting challenge – yet it also appears as the logo to advertise the biculturalism of Government agencies.¹⁰⁹ Dutch photographer Hans Neleman’s ‘Moko – Maori Tattoo’ photo essay has recently been shown at the Holland Festival to international acclaim – yet the book is dedicated to Maui Pomare’s efforts to repatriate mokomokai.

If these examples suggest some benefit to Maori interests, a more public statement about commercial appropriation is located in *Mana Whenua*. A display called
‘Kaitiaki Maori’ is devoted to the Waitangi Tribunal investigation into Maori intellectual property rights, known as Wai 262. Introductory text laments that while intellectual copyright protects individuals, it does not protect iwi knowledge. One display panel deals with a Wai 262 claim being brought by Hana Murray against the Government for allowing commercial mining in an area of Northland where pingao, used for traditional weaving, grows. Photographs show the otherwise unspoilt Parengarenga area, while a video demonstrates Murray’s traditional weaving techniques. Also assembled in the area are examples of folk art and tourist advertisements. An advertisement for the ‘Napier Savage Club’ features a cartoon with a naked Maori gnawing on a large bone (it is unclear who or what the club is for). Another display shows a generic New Zealand tourist T-shirt featuring an image of an unnamed Maori carving. Viewers are informed that the carving is in fact the sacred Ngati Whakaue ancestor, Pukaki. Also displayed are various plastic tikis (a carved fertility symbol), ashtray tikis, a photograph of the Beatles wearing giant tikis, and Maori chiefs’ faces adorning bookends and a toby jug. The ordinariness of the objects chosen to communicate the theme (and the blatant racism of some) means that little connection will generally be made with more serious (though less crudely visible) Tribunal grievances – such as the most proximate taonga, Te Hau ki Turanga. Furthermore, given that Te Papa publicly displays Maori icons, designs and songs throughout, it is not immediately clear to visitors what kind of appropriation amounts to a breach of intellectual copyright. While Te Papa may justify its use of such emblems in embodying the ‘spirit’ of biculturalism, should visitors expect that same ‘spirit’ to be evident in, say, Adidas advertisements that feature the All Blacks (rugby team) performing a haka? The question of intellectual property is sticky when it comes to separating perceived breaches of Maori rights from more informal, social situations that celebrate the symbiosis of Maori and Pakeha. This distinction again raises the question of whether the bicultural forum is better conceptualised as a site for negotiating political arrangements, or a popular place for celebrating Maori-Pakeha communion. In the next section I explore the Signs of a Nation exhibition to further analyse how Te Papa deals with the tension between the judicial-political character of the Treaty and public understanding.
5. Exhibiting the Treaty: Signs of a Nation

The most immediate aspect of *Signs of a Nation* is its incongruity with the rest of the museum. Unlike the other generally small-scale, fast-paced and interactive displays, the exhibition is meditative and physically arresting. It is also more overtly political and stridently pedagogic than other exhibitions (and less popular, according to discussion with ‘hosts’). *Signs of a Nation* represents Te Papa’s physical and cultural crux. Located at the meeting point of *Mana Whenua* and the Pakeha galleries, the exhibition combines architectural motifs of both the cathedral and the marae, including a very high, wedge-shaped ceiling with interlocking brown and white ‘finger’ beams. The spatial and metaphorical idea behind its situation at the architectural cleavage of the Maori and Pakeha sections is that interpretation depends on ‘which side you come from’. The gallery is designed as simultaneously ceremonious and supporting contest. The ceremonial effect is achieved visually, through the huge Treaty replicas flanking the walls. These boards aim to accentuate the power and dignity of the words, allowing them to be read without undue interference. Dominating the space is a seven-metre high glass Treaty replica, yellowed and tattered with large parts missing. Visitors learn that, after being nearly lost in a fire in the Government offices in Auckland just a year after its signing, the Treaty was filed and forgotten. It was rediscovered in 1908, rat chewed and water-damaged. On each side of the replica are six metre high kahikatea wooden panels inscribed with the full text. On one side is the Maori version; on the other is the English. Seats in front of the Treaties provide a place for visitors to contemplate its short articles. The theme of contestation is communicated in several ways. A small display that places an English translation of the Maori text alongside the English text shows how the two versions did not match. It asks the reader to judge which text offered Maori more (the evident conclusion being the Maori version). At the entrance, visitors are surrounded by a thicket of poles (highly reminiscent of the ‘At the Edge
of the Trees’ artwork entrance of the Museum of Sydney) from which a variety of voices of ordinary New Zealanders articulate conflicting views about the value of the Treaty: ‘Nobody owns the fish in the sea’; ‘These protestors – you never know what they want’; ‘The Treaty is just a gravy train for the rich Maori elite’; ‘We need to stop this bickering, we are one people – at least that’s what Governor Hobson said’. ‘We can support a symphony orchestra, but a full time Maori culture group wouldn’t even be considered’.

Figure 12: Treaty facsimile from *Signs of a Nation*  Picture taken by author with permission.

As a balance to the ceremonial aspect of the Treaty, historical conflict is found further back in three display cases that organise objects related to the three articles. The ‘Government/Kawanatanga’ display contrasts Maori icons such as 1830s United Tribes flag, Huia feathers, a Rakau whakapapa (staff with notches for reciting genealogy), and a toki poutanga (greenstone weapon), alongside Crown items such as the New Zealand flag, a ballot box, and an 1841 Seal of the Colony. A video shows a range of historical dramatisations of Maori and Pakeha talking about the effect of the Treaty on their lives. Visitors may see Maori women peeling vegetables and
discussing the Queen’s impending 1954 visit; contemporary Maori rugby players comparing Treaty relations to sport; a young Maori woman likening 1970s Prime Minister Norman Kirk’s awareness of the land to that of Maori; a Scottish female colonist indignantly describing their own claim to the new country; and post-war Maori shearers doing the same thing. In ‘Land and Cultural Heritage/Te Whenua me Nga Tikanga tuku iho’ we see the iron ruler, surveyor’s chain and theodolite and gold pocket watch that were tools of land appropriation. In the same case Maori objects that speak of a continued connection with land include an eighteenth century whenua pot (for burying placenta) and a nineteenth century carved pouwhenua (signpost). In ‘Citizens’ Rights/Mana Tangata’ the shared experience of Maori and Pakeha is signified by a copy of the Magna Carta, a barrister’s wig, a bayonet, wire-cutters, and a WW1 Maori battalion helmet.

Prior to Te Papa’s opening, the exhibition development team produced detailed plans for an exhibition called The Treaty Always Speaks. This expressed a more political narrative than its replacement, Signs of a Nation. The former exhibition was premised on ‘the plain fact...that all the promises as set out in the Treaty were broken. They were broken by one partner, the Crown or the Agents of the Crown’. Unlike the monumentality of Signs of a Nation, The Treaty Always Speaks planned to show the Treaty’s role in the Land Wars, the Colonial Government’s failure to maintain its promise of Maori sovereignty over land and resources, and detailed case studies of Treaty breaches up to the present day. Jock Phillips has intimated that it was chiefly due to a growing awareness of the strength of mainstream Pakeha aversion to the prospect of a stridently political Treaty exhibition that The Treaty Always Speaks was dropped. On a practical level, Phillips says he had ‘grave doubts about whether the Treaty was suitable for exhibition at all’, given that the Treaty itself is on display at the National Archives, there is a memorial in the Bay of Islands (where it was signed), and Te Papa’s collection contains little direct material evidence of its relevance. Yet, in New Zealand’s current political and cultural environment, it is difficult to imagine a national museum coming to fruition without this focus.
Te Papa’s efforts to govern difference are geared towards encouraging Pakeha openness towards a range of Maori conducts and intellectual resources, rather than an explicit critique of settler culture. The acts of exploring *Te Marae* and rubbing the pounamu, entering one’s personal details in the whakapapa desk, removing one’s shoes to explore *Te Hau ki Turanga*, and reading the Treaty in *Signs of a Nation* produces a strong sense that Te Papa encourages visitors to practise ‘being bicultural’. This ‘performative civics’ draws on the notion that visitors bring with them the willingness to adopt ‘a certain state of receptivity’. The exhibition is promoted as providing a contemplative space removed from everyday life where visitors can discuss and debate the Treaty without interference. A text panel reads:

The Treaty of Waitangi is a living social document. Debated, overlooked, celebrated. A vision of peaceful co-existence, or the cause of disharmony? An irrelevancy, or the platform on which all New Zealanders can build a future? The meaning of the Treaty changes depending on who’s speaking. Engage with our founding document. Hear a range of voices from past and present… The floor is open for discussion.

However, aspects of *Signs of a Nation* reveal the difficulty in making biculturalism, at heart a state attempt to manage difference, an appealing topic. The visitors’ bodily movement beyond the bickering poles to the vast Treaty itself quite clearly communicates the great ideological importance Te Papa attaches to it. The scale of the display discourages scepticism towards the relevance of the Treaty to contemporary life. Its monumental size also suggests the Treaty’s semi-constitutional status when its status in law is uncertain. Due to the ambiguous language of the original Treaty document (exacerbated by changes in wording across translations that encompass several different versions, combined with the nuances of tribal oral histories) the Tribunal makes its recommendations based on ‘the spirit of the Treaty’ rather than any literal meaning. While drawing viewer attention to the original text may help the public to appreciate the original intentions of the Crown, it does little to elucidate what the Treaty spirit, so critical in political decisions, might entail. The
audible articulation of a range of ‘everyday’ ideologies in the talking poles (which were in fact fabricated by the exhibition designers) produces the notion that reconciliation is largely reliant on public input. While this is fair in a platitudinous sense, it masks the fundamentally governmental and bureaucratic nature of the Waitangi process. Kenneth Minogue expands on this point:

That the Waitangi process is an elite project with a clear mistrust of democracy is a realisation that forces itself slowly on the awareness of anyone who looks carefully at the way it is treated. It is perhaps necessarily so, because it is self-consciously high-minded, and the demos tends towards bread and butter issues. This element of elitism is the reason that the process is so pre-eminently legal.¹¹⁴

Indeed, reparative justice for Maori upheld by the Tribunal often collides with public opinion. In an everyday understanding, Maori compensation for land and resources is widely considered a unilateral Government action favouring factional interests. However, in the space of a national museum, reconciliation can be couched as a collective moral duty suiting the interests of the nation.

The crux of the difficulty of Signs of a Nation is that individuals identify with the nation rather than the state. Most Maori would not see the Treaty as their point of ethnic origin, and nor is it a popular symbol of nation for most Pakeha. Yet the Treaty remains the only ‘birth of a nation’ moment offered at Te Papa. The privileging of the Treaty over other events is consistent with the institution’s postcolonial stress. Neither James Cook (references to whom are thinly scattered) nor Abel Tasman (whose legacy was contained to the Dutch community gallery) are positioned as ancestral Pakeha heroes. Te Papa’s conspicuously slight attention to these explorers dispatches them back to Europe; they may have discovered New Zealand but they are not of it. Focus on the Treaty resituates national beginnings in domestic time. It also communicates two ‘nations’ mutually meeting and negotiating one another, rather than one people discovering and, before long, subordinating another. Against an
understanding that positions Maori as the passive subjects of colonisation, the objects in the glass display cases behind the Treaty emphasise that Maori encountered European arrival with their own objects, symbols and concepts equal to those of Europeans. It is notable that this principle, crucial to a revisionist understanding of New Zealand’s past, seems the most difficult to objectify in exhibitions. The simple juxtaposition of two sets of objects (with each item given only a minimal title and date) is not a highly effective scheme for representing two different and competing streams of history and ways of life. Comparisons are made fraught by the value distinctions regarding the significance of objects that visitors inevitably carry. Are Maori claims to land better represented through whenua pots or muskets? When wooden or flax implements are contrasted with those of iron and cotton, how might Te Papa contradict assumptions that one people has technologically superseded another? Given such problems, Te Papa textually imposes the desired interpretation. For instance, an introductory text panel in Made in New Zealand (which replaced Parade) emphasises mutual impact:

When Maori and Europeans first encountered each other, it was a meeting of cultures and traditions as well as of peoples. Each culture took away what it found to be useful and interesting. For example, Maori were quick to appreciate the value of materials like iron, while Europeans collected specimens and made images of everything from plants and mammals to Maori artefacts. As a result of these encounters, both cultures began to be changed.

To further affirm the theme of equality-in-difference, the panel contains a quote from James Cook: ‘The green talk (greenstone) axes that are whole and good they [Maori] set much value upon and never would part with them for any thing we could offer’! The need for such editorial intervention attests that objects alone are not a particularly effective tool for conveying the rupture between pre-contact and early colonial Maori society (represented through traditional taonga such as a whenua pot) and the subsequent social and economic effects of land alienation. Viewers can, at best, imaginatively construct some kind of conflict out of, say, the surveyor’s chain and
traditional signpost. Yet neither object ‘speaks’ far beyond its use value. Visitors unfamiliar with, say, the organization of tribal social structures and landholdings, will not learn this from the accumulated objects. Furthermore, the objects are located within an ambiguous and unspecific expanse of time. Contemporary legal struggles are documented in the Tribunal section upstairs (discussed next). Missing are the 140 or so years of struggle in between the Treaty and the Tribunal. The decades of Maori toil and poverty that forms the substantial link between a proud tradition (shown through traditional taonga) and recent reassertion (in the Tribunal section) are almost entirely absent, producing a skewed sense of the relation between past and present.

On the mezzanine floor is *Poringi, the evolving story of the Treaty*. The space features two sets of rotating information boards on opposite walls. The left side panels take the viewer sequentially through the tribal history of Te Aupouri. The boards move from mythical beginnings, to a description of longstanding attachment to the land, to European contact, to the wrongful sale of Te Aupouri land to missionaries. Despite Te Aupouri protest, a 1919 Crown decision refused to return the land, but made a compensatory payment – to Nga Puhi tribe. In 1987 Te Aupouri presented a claim to the Tribunal, which made a recommendation in the tribe’s favour. Te Aupouri now seeks recompense, in the form of an apology, the return of significant sites, and payment to provide an ‘economic base for twenty first century participation’. The right hand side ‘government’ panels are not arranged chronologically, but seek to explain the Tribunal’s work. The chiefly textual explanation of complex legal-political topics (including the Tribunal’s 1975 origins, principles for Treaty interpretation, the significance of the State Owned Enterprises Act) makes for an exhibition with limited popular appeal (and was deserted each time I visited). A small section includes reference to Rongo Whakaata’s claim to *Te Hau ki Turanga* (‘even Te Papa is affected’). The main and mezzanine spaces carry conflicting messages. downstairs the accent is on the relevance of the Treaty for the entire public, whereas upstairs, by laying stress on the specific relationship between iwi and the Crown, it avoids any idea of social conflict between the broad categories of Maori and Pakeha. At the end of the room is a window with painted white godwits
that appear to soar towards Wellington’s hills. Viewers are told that the birds symbolise the nation’s open future and ongoing bicultural partnership. A nearby video presentation shows diverse New Zealanders speaking about the significance of biculturalism and the Treaty in their lives. The use of video testimony in communicating public opinion appears, in a highly designed environment like Te Papa, somewhat contrived. Cynically perhaps, their sound bytes are geared towards advertising anti-racism and cultural cosmopolitanism and rather than aiding an understanding of the topic.

Nevertheless, Poringi does improve on the previous display in the mezzanine space. The space was initially comprised of a series of kiosks featuring the interactive touch-screen ‘Power Game’. The opening screen showed a picture of New Zealand’s parliamentary house and the message: ‘You are New Zealand’s Prime Minister. Can you stay in power?’ The following screen states, ‘Your reaction to the Treaty Report will decide if people vote for you.’ Next, visitors are given one of several hypothetical scenarios. In one example the user is told that decades ago army barracks were built on sacred Maori ancestral grounds. The barracks have since been converted into a public hospital. Maori claim that this infringes article two of the Treaty (‘undisturbed possession of lands’). Moving to the next screen, the user is presented with four different policy envelopes: from a conservative opinion columnist from Kia Kahu Maori News; from the Ministry of Finance; from Te Kohanga Reo (Maori language education); and from the right-wing ‘True New Zealand Movement’. The viewer may choose, say, the Minister of Finance’s envelope, and ‘Te Papa TV’ broadcasts the decision: ‘Land benefits all, no action needed, says PM’. Votes are counted, based on the policy envelope choices of previous users. The Finance Minister policy choice loses the election! In this instance, the crudeness through which Te Papa encouraged a kind of ‘citizenship training’ is stark. Asked to imagine oneself as Prime Minister, the visitor is given great authority – and culpability. A basic link is forged between one’s private moral or political judgments, and representing the good of the nation. In this, the state becomes, quite simply, any citizen in a public capacity. It is notable that other visitors have overwhelmingly
chosen policy favourable to Maori interests (hence, in a self-perpetuating process, those who do also win elections). This result may be explained by the reconciliatory influence of a journey through Te Papa, or it could reflect the political preferences of those who visit the museum. Either way, it is hardly representative of the wider demographic, yet it again suggests that the Treaty process is directly accountable to public opinion.

In sum, despite its attempts to make the ‘Waitangi process’ publicly engaging, *Signs of a Nation* gestures towards aiding the circulation of political opinion without providing any channels for it. The exhibition forges a metaphoric relationship between the lack of discursive common ground in the versions of the Treaty, and the lack of a single institutional or legal body that can conclusively ‘end’ the differences and hence, the viability of differing, variable public opinion. That is, as long as the Treaty is undecidable, opinion is valued. Between the speaking poles at the entrance, the grand Treaty facsimile, the *Poringi* Tribunal boards, and the interactive ‘Power Game’, visitors receive confusing mixed messages about the degree to which they can indeed ‘have their say’. As it stands, the exhibition itself speaks of the uneasy relationship between public opinion and elite politics that characterises New Zealand’s reconciliation process. If, to summarise so far, the Treaty represents a rather intransigent basis for Te Papa’s key policy concepts, and the Treaty exhibition struggles to make tangible the notion of bicultural forum, then in what other capacity can Te Papa claim this role?

### 6. The Condom Controversy

The most visible test of Te Papa’s forum role came only several weeks after opening, in the form of an art-religion scandal. The controversy surrounded artist Tania Kovat’s ‘Virgin in a Condom’. The artwork, a three-inch high plastic Virgin Mary statuette encased in a condom, was exhibited with the charged-for touring British
exhibition *Pictura Britannica*. The artwork immediately drew protests from Christian groups who announced that they would boycott Te Papa, and Jewish and Muslim groups also registered their sharp disapproval. A nationwide petition was circulated calling for the work’s removal. Protesters congregated on the forecourt outside, increasing in number after The Christian Action group took out a full-page advertisement in *The Dominion* newspaper inviting people to join their protest. They threatened to take Te Papa to court on the grounds of ‘blasphemous libel’, a 1961 Crimes Act offence against ‘religion, morality and public welfare’. Te Papa staff also became the target of abusive and threatening phone calls and letters. The exhibit was guarded after being physically attacked, and following that, a guard near the work was assaulted. According to the attacker, ‘the host started giving me the Te Papa ideology and I wanted to expose my views. But he didn’t listen. I was angry that the Te Papa bureaucracy is such a closed door’.  

Te Papa responded by refusing to remove the offending artwork. A television debate saw Cheryll Sotheran defending the exhibit as a valid artistic expression. She said the work reflected ‘concerns about issues of sexuality, contraception, safe-sex messages in the community and abortion, which she feels the Catholic Church should be considering’.  

After the initial fracas, Sotheran welcomed protestors back, stating that the museum’s aim was not to offend, but to stimulate debate as a forum. However, she stipulated that debate would not concern the removal of the artwork, but only its meanings and interpretation, claiming that, ‘the people of New Zealand would want the museum to take a strong position on this, not to succumb to intimidation as some other museums have’.  

The move sought to align Te Papa with other art museums that have taken the side of artistic freedom in spite of well-publicised protest (the statuette was banned in Adelaide, stolen in Sydney, and dropped from its British tour).  

Though ostensibly positioning itself as neutral space for debate, Te Papa’s stand was nonetheless political. It communicated the institution’s liberal credentials that associate (non-Maori) secularism with institutional progressiveness. In spite of ideas about the apparently self-evident
benefit of debate, the fact remained that, whatever the intention, people were offended, and that this affront had itself produced a barrier to open dialogue.

Perhaps the most notable aspect of the controversy was the way the terms of the debate shifted from blasphemy to *ethnic-cultural* sensitivity. The leader of Christian Heritage Party claimed that the sacrilegious display of the statuette was hypocritical, given that the museum is careful not to offend sensitivities about Maori spirituality.\(^{119}\) A member of parliament (who called for Cheryll Sotheran to be prosecuted) similarly said, ‘they [Te Papa] wouldn’t wrap a Maori taonga in a condom or the gracious Maori Queen in a condom and get away with it, and neither should they’.\(^{120}\) Protestors carried pickets that read ‘Te Papa breaks tapu!’ to emphasise the perceived double standard. The strength of the conflict stemmed from two highly idiosyncratic aspects of Te Papa. One is its structural blurring of the role of art galleries, which often divide opinion and provoke strong responses, and public museums, which now typically aim to accommodate all constituencies (‘our place’). The controversy may have been somewhat mitigated in an art gallery, which do not promise to ‘speak for all New Zealanders’. The second aspect explaining the discursive shift from blasphemy to cultural diversity is Te Papa’s unyielding ideological commitment to biculturalism – and Maori interests in particular. In this case, Te Papa was revealed to be a ‘forum for the nation’ of a kind that struggled to provide any platform for religious diversity.

This case was brought into sharp focus by a concurrent controversy when a show by Pakeha artist Dick Frizzell at the Waikato Museum was cancelled. Amongst Frizzell’s best-known works is ‘Grocer with Moko’, featuring the ‘Four Square’ convenience store shopkeeper icon adorned with a moko (facial tattoo). Frizzell’s theme was cultural dislocation, in the form of meshing tradition and advertising, the sacred and commercial, and the authoritative and quotidian.\(^{121}\) The Waikato Museum withdrew the exhibition after a Tainui kaumatua attached to the museum complained that the exhibition was offensive and inappropriate at a time when the Tainui iwi’s definitive exhibition, *Ara o Tainui – Tainui the Journey*, was also on show. Despite Frizzell
travelling to the museum to speak to members of the Tainui iwi (and his work being booked first) the museum stood by the Tainui complaint and Frizzell’s work was not shown. On reflection, it seems that both Te Papa and the Waikato Museum implicitly staked their positions on the calculation that charges of impiety or censorship (respectively) are less politically sensitive than those involving race or ethnicity.

It is notable that while Matauranga Maori is supported as a philosophical approach to life, Christianity is not (or at least not to the same degree). If Te Papa does represent a forum for a wide array of beliefs, and if Maori myths of autochthonous status are reiterated throughout, what is the basis for the invisibility of Creationism? In display, the relegation of the nation’s Christian past is a glaring omission at Te Papa. Where there is a sacred marae and whare-wananga, there is no chapel or altar. Only a single panel in Passports shows several of the idols carried by immigrants. While colonial missions are briefly discussed in Signs of a Nation, this is only in the context of the Poringi display about the Te Aupouri Waitangi Tribunal grievance. Yet in real-world terms, there are undoubtedly more New Zealanders – including many Maori – who believe in Creationism than in Maori origin myths. The idea that Creationism is outside ‘Western science’ should matter little; like belief in Matauranga Maori, the justification is that it many ‘customers’ find it a convincing narrative. The answer is of course political. Te Papa stands as a highly partisan expression of support for biculturalism. It seems fair to suspect that Christianity is neglected across the museum because it is seen to be inconsistent with the kind of progressiveness associated with a liberal vision of a postcolonial Pacific nation.

One factor that clearly distinguishes new museums from their predecessors is their self-conscious public referencing of these very debates about museums’ responsibilities to their constituency. Where once the museum saw their realm as above and beyond the affairs of the day, the great importance now placed on relevance means that the ‘here and now’ has become part of museum life. However, that Te Papa has welcomed being the target of public controversy for the sake of
stimulating debate makes for a peculiar understanding of the forum idea. Ideally, New Zealanders would use Te Papa as a conduit for larger discussions. Yet a focus on being controversial may often mean that New Zealanders talk more narrowly about the museum itself (‘at least it’s not boring’ or ‘squandering taxpayers’ money’). The idea that controversial moments in the life of the museum are spread via the media throughout society imagines a forum concept that is impossible to measure quantitatively or qualitatively.

The National Review Team assembled in 2000 to investigate Te Papa propounded a different understanding of the forum. They credited Te Papa with achieving its mission because it had attracted visitors from a wide sector of society.\textsuperscript{123} However, large visitor numbers or a varied demographic spread, whilst desirable, does not make the museum a forum so much as simply a popular site. The idea of visitors actually contributing directly to an exhibition-in-progress, where thoughts and experiences are recorded for others to consider, is rare in museum literature. As at most museums, the opportunity to spontaneously ‘talk back’ is uncommon (perhaps because it would be difficult to organise within a profession-centred institution). If we review the opportunities for visitor dialogue, they are quite restricted: iwi and minority galleries are highly planned, involve only certain community representatives, and have a slow turnover; the pen and paper response at the whakapapa desk in Te Marae potentially offers such an opportunity, however others’ entries are buried from view in the table; informal conversations with ‘hosts’ do not generally outlive that moment; the hosting of huis, wanangas or seminars (often at Te Marae) generally limits participation to formal and official events. Ultimately, due to its hierarchical, centralised structure, Te Papa can only be sensitive and reflexive about issues of power, rather than dialogic and self-critical.

Perhaps it is only appropriate to speak of Te Papa as a forum in the way it contains a multitude of experiences. It is a place, according to Te Papa’s Williams Tramposch, ‘where something is always happening’.\textsuperscript{124} While this activity faintly gestures towards the forum in that it offers visitor (or customer) choices, it does not alone
necessarily invite debate over, say, the legacy of colonial history, contemporary social inequality, or indeed, issues that originate far beyond New Zealand. Te Papa’s strategy of immersing visitors in sights, sounds, activities, and emotional responses is ultimately an issue of institutional methods, rather than a rethinking of the museum’s role in the public sphere. After all, although visitors will undoubtedly take different ‘experiences’ away with them, these remain designed and choreographed by the museum. Te Papa’s one-way communication is geared towards allowing the visitor to ‘try out’ and gauge the emotional appeal of a variety of ideas about cultural roots and national identity. This tactic, which Gary Edson calls ‘socioexhibitry’, is premised on the belief that people’s cultural identities, rather than the objects themselves or themes devised by the curators, should form the basis of the museum’s work. The idea of communicating in a wide variety of modes to a broad array of private selves may be a popular and inexorable museum tactic, but it is not one that is suitably described as a forum. Beyond this, the remainder of this chapter argues that, rather than conceiving Te Papa as a bicultural forum, we might more suitably consider it a symbol of cultural pluralism.

7. Bicultural Forum or Bicultural Symbol?

In order to appreciate why Te Papa’s accent on controversy and activity represent a limited realisation of the forum, it is useful to review the basic principles and critique of the public sphere. Closely associated with the work of Jurgen Habermas, the public sphere has been invoked in a whole series of spaces – actual, metaphorical, or both. Habermas named museums alongside coffee houses, literary and philosophical associations and the early press as vehicles for the exchange of public ideas in the midst of absolutist regimes in early modern Europe. In the present, we might envisage town hall meetings, public hearings, interest group assemblies, television, Internet discussion groups and marae as additional spaces. Along with the ideals of universal access and a disregard for rank, the idea is that deliberation should observe
certain discursive conventions so that reason and argument prevail over privilege and power. Habermas’ model of community based on communicative consensus has been critiqued for its assumption that there exist stable spaces and identity boundaries within which an integration of perspectives can proceed. Nancy Fraser, for instance, counter-argues that certain discursive conventions and ideas about argument and reason are a culturally specific form of power that favours some speaking modes and kinds of speakers over others.\textsuperscript{127} Rather than see different speaking modes and values as a problem in the way of consensus, Iris Young has theorised that cultural difference in discussion can be made the basis of productive argument. Young proposes, as an alternative to the ‘deliberative democracy’ of the public sphere, a ‘communicative democracy’ that takes into account cultural differences.\textsuperscript{128} She is less concerned with the strength or authenticity of cultural community than the ways that cultural understandings can be mobilised as resources. In this, her concept starts from incommensurability and reifies difference. For Young, communication creates ‘publicity’ because different standpoints teach people their own partiality and enable publics to understand what is at stake in policy. She includes ‘greetings, rhetoric and storytelling’ as valued discursive modes.

As an overtly ‘cultural’ space, Te Papa contains the kind of emblems that strongly supports performed difference. In this, the productivity of culture consists in the role it plays in structuring the discursive ground where social interaction takes place.\textsuperscript{129} Young’s idea, upheld by Te Papa, is that proverbs, stories, dance and song add to the total pool of experience and encourage understanding. Te Papa provides regular opportunities for such displays, including: marae performances (including powhiri and similar encounter ceremonies); ‘organic’, non-hierarchical meetings such as hui and wananga; ritualised ceremonies such as the lifting of tapu spirits from taonga; support for embodied, oral Matauranga Maori histories; and specific programs such as ‘Matariki’ (which celebrates the Maori New Year). Cultural difference is used to describe distinctions in institutional priorities. Curator Arapata Hakiwai has stated that in the lead-up to opening, there was conflict between ‘marae’ and ‘management’ approaches: ‘On the marae you talk, people get together, you consult, and you take as
long as you need to make a decision based on those opinions. In the project management style of the museum it must be on time and within the budget.\textsuperscript{130} The opposition between a warm consensual style and cold bureaucratic guidelines plays out a familiar form of indigenous-mainstream signification. In such instances, ethnicity provides a platform for the enunciative positions that structure discussions. Actors use ethnic identities to categorize themselves and others for purposes of interaction and form ethnic groups in this organizational sense. In a bicultural institution, the empirical distinctions between ‘weak’ or ‘strong’ ethnic communities – and assumptions about authenticity attached to these poles – are critical not so much as autonomous ‘facts’, but in the way they are drawn on.

In its signifying acts, only certain elements of an ethnicity are made available as culture for consumption. While the content of such representations strives for uniqueness, what they share is a ritualised and mimetic nature. Robert Cantwell has described ‘ethnomimesis’ as:

\begin{quote}
the imaginative life, the social and material practices that grow up in the noetic vacuums of complex, diverse civilizations but that, at the same time, have a special kind of originality or independence, at once a consequence of their special situation, a kind of primary instance of the cultural process generally, and a particular form of interaction between ‘official’, disciplinary, or ‘hegemonic’ cultures and the marginal, enclaved, or ephemeral cultures that arise within them and yet are, in another sense, an extension of them.\textsuperscript{131}
\end{quote}

The performance of ethnicity involves a particular kind of objectification. The solid permanence of the museum, combined with the dependable, programmatic qualities of exhibitions and programs and its celebratory, festive impulse, typically provides for a particularly stable and uncritical enactment of ‘culture’. Verbal, pictorial and dramatic modes of self-representation both solidify established and virtuous cultural activities, and respond to other groups’ stereotyped expectations. Representation is not only a function of chosen social attributes but also indicates the tension or fault
lines occurring at the imagined boundaries between groups. Even at a museum – chiefly a repository of objects – Maori culture is seen as being inhabited in bodily performances spread evenly among the social demographic. In the absence of live performances such as those on Te Marae, the use of recorded media, such as the videos near Makotukutuku or Te Hau ki Turanga, demonstrate weaving and carving in a personal, instructive frame that is entirely absent in the display of ‘Western’ art.

The idea that these cultural attributes deserve to be protected as ‘rights’ alongside those of citizenship has gained critical purchase in recent years. For instance, John Frow has written of a ‘positive’ concept of the public sphere, where ‘cultural rights’ precede and enable personhood:

They are rights to the raw material of human life: language, ideas, an inherited culture, a ‘common heritage’ of environmental resources, bodily integrity, civic entitlement. These are not ‘natural’ rights, located in an originary contract or a state of nature, but customary social rights, developed and recognized as a provisional end state of the struggle for civilized conditions of life (and of course, whatever their recognition, always contested).132

Frow’s idea is that because the category of ‘citizen’ has traditionally excluded some groups due to an unequal opportunity for accessing the requisite conditions for participation, ‘cultural rights’ aim to strengthen public values beyond the ostensibly neutral notion of civic responsibility. Indeed, ‘cultural rights’ are increasingly becoming part of the state itself. In New Zealand at least, the lines between legal facts and social practices that might be relevant to the law are becoming blurred. The concept of custom has shifted from something that was persuasive in informal social contexts to becoming the grounds for judicial decisions, which possess an entirely different authority – one associated with government. ‘Customary law’, or customary challenges to government, are not simply a more evolved form of custom. The acting out of representations has itself become part of the process that constitutes customary law as a legal instrument (for instance, in land claims). In the broadly political
environment of public institutions, the language of essential cultural identity is the basis for the allocation of resources, funding, ownership, staffing, decision-making, and similar matters. The culture concept in this sense has changed from an anthropological one concerned with a closed system of mutually referring symbols and meanings, to practices of collective identity that are technologically representable and legally contestable.  

Turning briefly to the politically concrete, we can see how Te Papa plays a small but important role in legitimating the authority of tribes. We might, for instance, recall Te Papa’s recognition of Moriori in Mana Whenua in the face of a Tribunal claim that denied them tangata whenua status. More generally, in 1994, during the period of Te Papa’s planning, the Government Minister responsible for Treaty negotiations announced that there would be a $1 billion ‘fiscal envelope’ for Treaty claims to be settled within a decade. This plan (now abandoned) threatened to divide iwi in the race for a share, and reinforced the need for state and public recognition of tribal organization. Yet the symbolic and ideological elaborations of tangata whenua that find a finely tuned articulation in taonga are phenomena largely analytically separate from either the lived experiences of Maori or their classification at the hands of Government. There is a critical disjuncture between the ‘Maori Renaissance’ and the social indices of Maori health, employment, income, education and crime. The cultural renaissance, most often realised in terms of art and carving, customs and language, has not been accompanied by any improvement in systematic Maori disadvantage. A theme that arches over all of Te Papa’s work is that its representations often abstract Maori culture into a set of customary beliefs (mana, wairau) and social attributes (communalism, environmentalism) rather than specific manifestations of culture-in-practice. Examples of the latter might include te kohanga reo schools, church organizations, private enterprise schemes, secondary school and university courses, new ministerial positions, Maori bureaucratic representatives, and new land trusts.
Te Papa takes its place alongside Tribunal cases and academic writing in showing how culture elaborates basic ethnic categories. Te Papa’s holistic treatment of Maori culture merges the cultural and social to the point that any distinction between them is effaced. In the logic of identity politics, social and political divisions are translated as cultural divisions. Culture, as it infuses individual identity, is something (unlike political gusto or intellectual prowess) that all members of a group are seen to inherently possess. Unlike a political belief, a claim of cultural difference becomes an individual’s and a group’s assertive right and can scarcely be criticised. The ideological dimension of ethnicity means that (as we saw with reference to the Moriori controversy) criticisms of museum representations are politically fraught. Museums are particularly valuable sites for presenting tradition and history not just as they relate to internal identity constructions but also in the external arenas in which political or national claims are evaluated.

Here public culture and the culture of international politics are intertwined: the cultural status of this or that tradition and history will depend on its political status in the international game of recognition, that is, the recognition of claims to indigenous rights, minority status, etc. In addition, the global environment offers a commercial evaluation of history, authenticity, and exoticism in the contexts of tourism and entertainment.¹³⁶

For Arjun Appadurai, the granting of expressions of minority and indigenous self-representation and uniqueness is ultimately a state strategy of containment. In the following statement we might consider the museum as a kind of media ‘stage’:

National and international mediascapes are exploited by nation-states to pacify separatists or even the potential fissiparousness of all ideas of difference. Typically, contemporary nation-states do this by exercising taxonomic control over difference, by creating various kinds of international spectacles to domesticate difference and by seducing small groups with the fantasy of self-display on some sort of global and cosmopolitan stage.¹³⁷
Appadurai’s reference to both ‘taxonomic control’ and ‘the fantasy of self-display’ hints at the double-inscriptions of museums both as modern institutions of governmental classification and as spaces of glorification, descending from competitive imperial projects. His use of the phrase *domesticating difference* – particularly apt for a museum branded as ‘Our Place’ – describes the ideological effect when cultural difference is publicly celebrated within an entirely national frame.

If, as I discussed earlier in this chapter, policy entrenches a narrow bicultural ethnic structuralism, it is hardly revelatory to conversely posit that all of us ‘live culture’ in ways where meanings, values and are not hermetically bound by a single cultural category. Dipesh Chakrabarty makes this point well:

> The realm of the lived ultimately belongs to embodied existence. And experience always touches on this level. It follows then that experience does not have to always connote a subject (or an identity) defining the experience as such…The politics of identity thus often reaches out to a level that actually defeats any project that the ‘politicians of identity’ may have of making identities appear fixed, immutable and essentialised.\(^{138}\)

The notion that whole groups share a unified approach to an issue or a style of discourse may be as artificial as the idea that actors enter debate devoid of cultural conceptions. Nancy asserts that the idea of ‘cultural community’ often involves little more than shared ‘particularities’, rather than any autonomous essence.\(^{139}\) For Nancy the ‘true’ sharing of space of community requires the shattering of myths of commonality upon which collectives base their cohesion.\(^{140}\) Instead, social and cultural facts arise that become progressively entrenched and more elaborate as they continue to be used to describe identities. Fredrik Barth makes the point that the sharing of a common culture can be regarded as an implication or result, rather than a primary and definitional characteristic of ethnic group organization.\(^{141}\) Analyses that
imagine New Zealand society in terms of interactions between prefigured, closed and bounded cultural spheres risk saying little about the social and political life of the nation – precisely the discursive area of the national forum. A singular focus on ‘bicultural New Zealand’, naturalised as a self-evident compound for two ‘ways of life’, ‘cultural communities’, or ‘ethnicities’ (the slippages between private and public formations are a feature of such rhetoric) means that other ways of conceiving the national body, through region, religion, age, and gender, for instance, are downplayed. Instead, the theme of unity-in-bicultural-diversity supports its own kind of national coherence.

It appears that at least a few at Te Papa are interested in destabilising the assumption of bounded cultures. Articulated in the *Wananga on Bicultural Developments in Museums* (1999) is the seed of an idea otherwise overlooked at Te Papa:

> Biculturalism should be seen as something more than the sum of iwi culture + Pakeha culture; it has the potential to be a third culture that is born from the interaction of the two distinct cultures. This third culture – a biculture – could provide a new and unique vision, one that offers the museum sector a range of opportunities and advantages not seen before.¹⁴²

The marriage analogy, which attempts to express degrees of both cultural unity and autonomy, suggests a new kind of cultural (pro)creation – new, at least, to the formal practices of the national museum. The museum has traditionally dedicated separate galleries to separate cultures, within which it would group objects according to themes. The introduction of subject-based displays (such as religion, work, or conflict, for instance) that would ignore such ethnic structuralism could produce exciting new ways of conceiving social histories. Advantages to such an approach may lie in Te Papa’s potential to develop programs and exhibitions that not only express cross-cultural perspectives on historical and social phenomena, but also represent emerging postcolonial cultural forms that serve as a useful marker of national distinctiveness.
The idea of an informal synthesis of cultures is one usually relegated in museological literature in favour of issues of single-community empowerment. Yet what the idea really refers to is not the formal dialectic of a ‘third culture’, but simply the idea of giving expression to life and creativity as it actually occurs in private, informal contexts. Sally M. Weaver has identified private ethnicity as behavioural, subjective, emotional and characterised by self-identification, whereas public ethnicity is part of the political culture of the nation state, determined in the arena of relations between governmental institutions and the peoples it organizes as ethnic groups.\(^{143}\) Public ethnicity consists of primordialist discourses and cultural symbols that may or may not explain situationalist private cultural behaviour and identity. These different concepts also suggest distinct temporal trajectories:

Whereas private ethnicity can be seen as emphasizing the ‘being’, or the present condition, of aboriginal groups, public ethnicity stresses the ‘becoming’, the future desired condition of aboriginal minorities which the nation-state has determined, and the processes (e.g., of civilizing, integrating or self-managing) whereby this eventual condition is to be achieved.\(^{144}\)

We have seen how Te Papa looks back to colonialism for the construction of categories (tangata whenua/tangata tiriti) that may serve a future ideal bicultural state. This disjunctive sense of historical time emphasises Maori historical consciousness and commits Pakeha to the understanding that the past is vital in the re-inscription of the Maori future. However, as Homi Bhabha has theorised, the political liberalism that creates governmental programs like biculturalism contains a non-differentiated concept of cultural time. That is, despite making provisions for cultural respect and the recognition of equal cultural worth, there is no recognition of the disjunctive temporal spaces – for instance between tribalism and modernity – in which indigenous cultures might sometimes exist. For Bhabha, the genres or epochs of memorised-oral cultural time and the modern time of the nation-state must be
simultaneously attended to – not as binaries or contradictions, but as hybrid and partial discursive temporalities.\textsuperscript{145}

Following theorists like Bhabha, Moira McLaughlin has theorised that museums typically act as maps that orient their users to linear, culturally specific narratives of time and space. Instead, she proposes the idea of ‘borderlands’ as an alternative museum philosophy that describes a space where citizens, languages, and customs not just coexist but clash, unavoidably recognizing the presence of one another. Borderlands are transformative places that provide for the liberating possibilities of discursive strategies that express alternative, hybrid and liminal subject positions:

Post-colonial theory and practice asks that we question the polarities that have perpetuated this particular representation of the Native Other and to explore the ground that lay between. The challenge to traditional museological thought and practice is asking that we consider alternative spaces, to map out spaces and identities that defy essentializing. These critiques suggest a museum where encounter within these polarities is paramount: a borderland.\textsuperscript{146}

However, the expectation of thorough and iconic representativeness associated with national museums (distinct from the Canadian tribal cultural centres to which McLoughlin refers) means that they may struggle to act as borderlands. Te Papa’s bicultural model clearly privileges ideal over everyday meanings, and a reconciliatory ‘becoming’ over the portrayal of present social conditions. Despite the accoutrements of informality that give Te Papa its tone and style, at its foundations Te Papa is heavily structuralist. Te Papa displays nationhood in terms that are far from ‘postcultural’, to use Simon During’s phrase:

One has entered postculturalism when, accepting that the construction of a non-modern cultural identity is the result of interactions between coloniser
and colonised, of mutual misrecognitions and forgettings, one celebrates the productive energy that is released in these processes.\textsuperscript{147}

It is mistaken to assume that questions of identity and relations affecting Maori are heading towards a post-structural or post-cultural form. In essence, a Treaty focus cannot be postcultural, not simply because it is a colonial contract set out from a dominant Crown position, but because the drive to retain it as central part of the life of the nation comes from Maori.

It appears that biculturalism requires the production of restrictive kinds of cultural identities. After a period of nearly 160 years of interaction between Maori, settlers, the state, other immigrants – and all those who have floated between these categories or avoided them entirely – Te Papa casts the relationship as the interplay of two substantively contrasting categories. As the Treaty has become the central concept of political contest in the past two decades, a tendency to project it backwards as the crux of New Zealand’s colonial history has the effect of obscuring all of those lives that have been scarcely touched by it. For Simon During, what \textit{has} remained constant through time is:

\textit{…a remoteness that scholarly research – like tourism and the global popular – conceals under the simulation of contact. In this remoteness, lives are lived in some indifference to the events named by big words such as ‘colonialism’, ‘postcolonialism’ and ‘globalization’; and, furthermore, ‘we’ can only gain access to those who live those lives within the structures that those big words describe.}\textsuperscript{148}

We can add ‘biculturalism’ to During’s list. Attaching to objects an unchanging cultural identity through time produces its own totalising view of history. The idea of a national bi-culture creates the illusion that cultures exist in an empty, homogenous medium of time and that qualities of victimhood and conquest are distributed evenly and unambiguously across collectivities. As Dahl and Stade put it:
Museum predilections for producing locality in the image of ecological adaptation, cultural homogeneity, closed-system cosmologies, and basic immobility, impede an approximation between exhibitions and actually existing forms of life and worlds of thought.\textsuperscript{149}

The crucial point is that while Te Papa is particularly eager to represent the everyday ‘worlds of thought’ of New Zealanders, it is doubtful that they always possess a self-conscious, secure, or non-fluid notion of personal identity. The unity expressed in ‘Maori culture’ stitches together elements that express an eternal belongingness. While this organic closure is necessarily and unavoidably arbitrary rather than ‘natural’, at Te Papa there is little acknowledgement of this in Maori self-representation. In the case of a binary identity constructed as half of a bi-culture, enunciation typically reiterates a singular self-image based in the originary and eternal. For Maori, Te Papa only organises the multi-accentual according to locations in modern political organization: difference within tribes, between tribes, and between tribal and non-tribal populations. It may be that any realisation of Maoridom more fragmented than the tribal level confuses the continuity of historical temporalities, confounds the ordering of cultural symbols, and upsets the consensus of Maori cultural history on which political persuasiveness relies.

\textbf{8. Conclusion: Mission Accomplished?}

Te Papa is better conceived as a \textit{symbol} of bicultural governance than a forum for it. It strongly appears that certain aspects of Te Papa’s policy and practice actually obscure or undermine the public sphere even as it ostensibly supports it. First, a stringently bicultural emphasis communicates the idea that only a certain view of social critique is supported. While Te Papa is carefully designed around the idea of representing a new kind of institutional openness on social issues, it has provided
little real debate about issues of cultural difference precisely because it is so focused on the bicultural and the national. Second, highly impressionistic postmodern displays that seemingly point to an opening up of artistic and cultural values may actually cloud the ideal of cultural communication that has been such a significant aspect of the museum’s mission as an agent in the public sphere. This may occur through the use of display styles that seek to demystify the object at hand (such as the ‘you decide’ prompts discussed in chapter two) that lend themselves to simplistic understandings or a prioritising of style over substance. Third, as a close analysis of Signs of a Nation demonstrated, Te Papa’s biculturalism struggles to traverse the gap in understanding between Government and Tribunal processes and a social history of shared experience. Formative policy material reveals the Government’s expectation that the museum should function as a vehicle facilitating public understanding of judicial-political negotiations as part of the living social history of the nation. However, Te Papa’s tendency to translate reconciliation into ideas of public input means that its specialised, exclusive and highly regulated nature is misrepresented.

Te Papa’s pedagogic effect is geared towards inculcating a general image of tolerance, sophistication and liberal reconciliation that works at a personal level, even though it has little to do with biculturalism as a political or legal arrangement. In this sense, perhaps the closest formulation of Te Papa’s forum idea in museological literature is Appadurai and Breckenridge’s notion of a ‘zone of contestation’ that primarily serves the ‘new cosmopolitanism’ of public culture. Although Te Papa exists in a radically different geo-political location to postcolonial India (the topic of Appadurai and Breckenridge’s article), what Te Papa does share with India’s new museums is a cosmopolitan experience energised by new technologies of leisure, information and movement that distinguishes it from the old museum as a ‘dusty relic of colonial rule’. While India’s new museums take their place alongside ethnic and national festivals and exhibition-cum-sales, Te Papa can be similarly seen to variously ally itself with the theme park, urban marae and international exposition pavilion. As a concrete expression of bright, confident cosmopolitan togetherness, Te Papa provides for a public experience that signifies an antidote to an imagined
opposite – the glazed gaze of the lifeless, colonial museum. That is, the idea of a public space where different classes, groups, and low and high cultural media all interact is constructed in opposition to the idea of white male expert-curators working behind closed doors to produce narrow displays of cultural Otherness. If Te Papa is a forum primarily in this sense of providing for public interaction and self-visibility, this itself serves a certain ideological tendency. Carol Duncan writes:

The public museum also makes visible the public it claims to serve. It produces the public as a visible entity by literally providing it a defining frame and giving it something to do. Meanwhile, the political passivity of citizenship is idealized as active art appreciation and spiritual enrichment. Thus the art museum gives citizenship and civic virtue a content without having to redistribute real power.\textsuperscript{152}

Duncan sees the museum display as the means through which the relationship between individuals-as-citizens and the state-as-benefactor is constructed. In the project of nation building, the museum’s symbolic organization of ethnic classifications and definitions is central to the formation of public meaning. Tony Bennett argues that national museums offer a rare opportunity for Governments to mould ideas about national and cultural identity:

There are few areas in policy formation in which the state can play so direct and leading a role in organizing the time-space coordinates of the nation...It is not surprising, therefore, that these should have been perceived as potentially powerful cultural technologies of nationing in the context of the broader post-war political and cultural initiatives to produce a postcolonial culture and identity.\textsuperscript{153}

The vision of a constructive museum relationship with ethnic groups emphasises the role of the Government in organising public culture. For Bennett, communities do not exist outside of Government, waiting to collaborate with institutions like museums.
Instead, ‘communities – insofar as we are concerned with them in the realm of museum policy – often prove to be the creations of government’. 154

The national-museum-as-forum aims to symbolise the progressive, highly developed state of national life. The forum is a strategy through which national modernity, involving, in New Zealand’s case, democratic bicultural ideals, is constituted. It is a site of managed contestation but not dispersal. Valorising Maori culture and affording Maori in the museum to assume ‘cultural ownership’ does not, after all, undermine the fact that the museum remains a centralised and national institution, and nor does it noticeably alter the relationship between patrimony and the public. Te Papa works within rather than outside these entanglements. Hence, returning to James Clifford’s work, it seems that he may be inattentive to the degree to which the ‘contact zone’ can be utilised, in a post-nationalist environment, as a promotional tool for nationalist articulations. That is, in a time when unitary national cultures are viewed suspiciously (particularly by the liberal consensus that often dominates the institutional climate of museums) metaphors that cluster around the ideas of contact, meeting, dialogue, communication and engagement provide a way of dramatising and enlivening the museum itself, and its subject – in this case, the nation. As Tony Bennett puts it:

In their commitment to the depiction of different communities with different cultures and values, such projects entail changing museums into sanctuaries of examples: into places, that is, which, rather than constructing a single norm of conduct as an ideal for the citizen to emulate, offers a vision of dialogue, of the exchange of meaning between different communities, of mutual tolerance and understanding as the ideal civic virtues for our time. 155

Where in assimilation policies, culture, as difference, was a problem in the way of social harmony, culture, as (bi)cultural diversity, can be refugured as a necessary tool for a more desirable social outcome. For Tony Bennett, the contact zone emerges as a technical instrument of the museum:
Cultural change – or perhaps better, changing what culture does – thus emerges as a largely technical matter, not however, in the sense that it is something to be left to specialists but rather in the sense...that it results from tinkering with practical arrangements rather than from an epic struggle for consciousness.\textsuperscript{156}

The most valuable aspect of Clifford’s contact perspective is that it allows us to see all culture-collecting practices as responses to particular histories of dominance and resistance and mobilisation, and to see how claims to univeralism or specificity are related to concrete locations.\textsuperscript{157} In this light, the discrete cultural tribal articulations of tangata whenua status can be seen as a response to the history of struggle and reassertion outlined in the introduction, while tangata tiriti might be viewed as a liberal institutional response to the problem of how to concoct a Pakeha postcolonial politics consistent with biculturalism. Bennett’s point is that these key cultural interventions can only be achieved through relatively regulated ‘practical arrangements’. At Te Papa, bicultural collaboration may entail an open-ended, laissez-faire exchange of ideas with various Maori representatives and communities, but it is ultimately only made publicly tangible once channelled through institutional activities such as policy initiatives, exhibition design, or education programs. The point is not that operations in large institutions are inevitably restrictive, but that any cultural change associated with a greater indigenous involvement remains at least partially governmental.

Finally, it is questionable whether the museum’s bicultural policies and practices can maintain long-term legitimacy. The museum’s development occurred throughout a particularly unique and unstable political period. New developments are beginning to suggest that the political climate and accompanying discourse of the 1980s that spurred Te Papa’s formative development may be shifting. For instance, in 1999 the Race Relations Office launched ‘Agenda New Zealand’, a paper prospectively invited public opinion on the viability of a Government policy move towards multiculturalism. In response, and demonstrating the anxious state of ethnic politics
in New Zealand, the Minister of Maori Affairs at the time suggested that the Race Relations Office should be closed because it was not giving proper priority to Treaty issues. The Minister argued that the Race Relations Office’s Agenda New Zealand was an invitation for Pakeha to vote for multiculturalism and was ‘like changing our constitution under the covers’. The unfaithfulness inferred by this simile is particularly apt, if we recall that ‘marriage’ was suggested earlier as a suitable metaphor for biculturalism. However, the point is precisely that the Treaty and biculturalism are far from constitutional. Unavoidably, particular realisations of cultural policy form in specific contexts. The endurance of ethnic identities conceived as the binary subsets of bicultural nationhood depends heavily on the continued state recognition of presently fragile and unlegislated notions of cultural partnership. Such is Te Papa’s complete investment in biculturalism that it may find it difficult to sustain the claim to represent a forum space in the event that this understanding becomes outmoded.


Perspectives in Post-Colonial Societies, Canadian Museum of Civilisation with the Commonwealth Association of Museums and the University of Victoria, Quebec, p. 164.


130 Arapata Hakiwai, personal interview, December 5 1998.
135 For detailed information on these indices, see Webster, Steven, 1998, Patrons of Maori Culture: Power, Theory and Ideology in the Maori Renaissance, University of Otago Press, Dunedin.


Chapter Five

Bringing it all Together:

Te Papa – A Successful Assemblage?

1. Reviewing Te Papa’s First Half Decade
In mid-2000, Cheryll Sotheran observed that the crucial debate about Te Papa’s place within the museological ‘landscape of change’ had not yet occurred. She lamented that instead of analysing the greater Te Papa experience ‘critics will focus on one element in the Te Papa mix and not put it in the broader context of that contextual shift’. As the first comprehensive analysis of Te Papa, this thesis is well situated to instigate the larger debate Sotheran had in mind. The preparation of this thesis, which has coincided with the first five years of the museum’s operation, suitably positions it to make key observations about the museum’s formative philosophy and performance. During this half decade, the museum has experienced a series of tumultuous events, including a publicly triumphant opening, an art-religion controversy, a fiscal crisis, a content and interpretation predicament that has necessitated two peer reviews and significant alterations, and the surprise resignation of the CEO. After a honeymoon period of public celebration and institutional novelty, Te Papa now faces a process of reassessment in which questions about its future priorities and direction are imperative.

The purpose of this final chapter is to critically review the initiatives that have distinguished Te Papa in its opening years, with an eye towards assessing their productivity for the future. The three overarching areas through which my critique of Te Papa has been organised are: accessibility, popularity, and the museum’s ‘new deal’ with the public; the contrasting display modes and themes utilised for Maori culture and Pakeha history; and the viability, in policy and practice, of the museum’s ‘forum’ mission. Combined, the three chapters structured around these themes cover (with varying degrees of detail) each of Te Papa’s long-term exhibitions, several temporary displays and programs, and its principal policy documents. Equally important, this thesis has engaged, in a less schematic manner, with a range of issues that possess wide resonance for museums generally, and particularly those in settler societies. These issues relate to a range of topics, including: the tactics through which museums manage the prerogative to be commercially focused; the shifting visitor experience stemming from museums’ utilisation of simulation and communications technologies; the cultural politics surrounding the assertion of self-representation by indigenous peoples; and the
limitations that may stem from an ethnic-structuralist approach to conceptualising the public.

To make a final assessment of Te Papa meaningful in the wider museological context, I have chosen to frame it within the prevailing topic of inquiry applied to museums in the present. Today’s primary critical discourse is arguably one of the museum’s ‘identity crisis’. To speak of a ‘crisis’ is not to suggest, however, that large public museums are currently endangered; commentators generally agree that Western nations are in the midst of an ongoing museum boom that has so far lasted two decades. Nor is the proliferation of sizes, budgets, physical forms, and degrees of professionalism that has stemmed from this boom, and which has made ‘museum’ a rather broad designation, seen as particularly problematic. Instead, the ‘crisis’ pertains to the way that the priorities, values and ideals of museums as a whole are currently uncertain – and the subject of ongoing politicking. MacDonald and Silverstone have characterised the current period as one where museums are collectively engaged in a ‘struggle for a new legitimacy’. Museum professionals currently devote great energy to establishing where their institution should position itself in relation to, for instance: civic consolidation and national celebration versus minority empowerment and the exploration of cultural difference; the museum’s role as a storehouse for objects versus its responsibility to attract and satisfy its social constituencies; the museum’s immersion within the tourist and leisure industries versus a desire to maintain an extraordinary image, akin to a ‘secular cathedral’.

2. A Place of Entertainment or Edification?

Amongst this range of alternative values and priorities, three reasonably clear points of disagreement have emerged. One involves the relationship between entertainment, edification and audience. In the view of some commentators, new institutions like Te Papa have transformed their practices to the point that they have lost – or discarded – the museum’s core function and social role. Theodore Dalrymple’s criticism that Te Papa is
‘masquerading as a museum’ conveys his belief that it has adopted institutional priorities that are only very superficially grounded in the authority and legitimacy of museums’ historic mission.⁴ Denuded of their special aura that removed them from commercial influence and everyday ephemera, the museum is perceived by some to have come unstuck from its idealised historic mission as a disinterested space of enlightenment. Stephen Weil, for instance, argues that ‘if museums cannot assert their importance as museums, then museums may not be perceived as important at all’.⁵ Similarly, Michael Kimmelman asserts that for museums to be valuable, they must be able to articulate their own eminence:

Between the university and Disneyland is not a morass of compromise but a realm of rational entertainment, a concept harking back to the Enlightenment. Rational entertainment requires a standard of quality on the part of museums. Quality has become a dirty word, an antidemocratic concept, according to museum critics, but quality, and the ability to explain it eloquently, is still what separate museums from shopping malls.⁶

Unlike market-oriented spaces, museums are expected to be pedagogic, and socially and morally responsible. They produce knowledge, whereas shopping malls or theme parks are simply about pleasure from devices of display. Kimmelman’s appeal to ‘quality’, ‘rational entertainment’ imagines a museum experience that combines the sublime inspiration of rare and hallowed objects with the rational instruction associated with order and taxonomy. The antithesis is those museums with apparently arbitrary and shallow entertainments that privilege spectacle for its own sake. Yet those who defend museums like Te Papa against such charges do so on the grounds that their use of simulated rides, ‘friendly’ interpretive devices, and popular culture exhibitions is essential if museums are to maintain relevance as widely accessible institutions. Instead of this kind of entertainment being an evasion of thought, new museologists (including those at Te Papa) posit that it is an instrument of it. Accessible and enjoyable display modes that often replicate forms of amusement from other media and tourist sites are deployed as a conduit for gaining visitors’ confidence, encouraging them to proceed to more complex
topics. Against Stephen Weil’s assertion that museums should preserve their unique public image, those at Te Papa believe that it is the idea of the museum experience that often acts as an obstruction to greater visitor participation. Ian Wedde, for instance, has declared his commitment to dismantling ‘taste and caste in the museum’. This intention has apparently been fulfilled. One writer has observed that ‘on busy days the museum’s patrons seem to represent the entire demographic spectrum, from black T-shirts and tattooed forearms through to Cashmere sweaters and Gucci handbags’. Accessibility demands not only widely appealing display strategies. Practical factors like advertising and branding, free entry, ample car parking, family-oriented cafeterias, children’s ‘Discovery Centres’, automatic teller machines, and late opening hours also play a part in demystifying the museum experience.

Concerns over the prevalence of insubstantial or lightweight entertainment in the museum relate not just to how the museum conveys information, but also to what deserves communication. Typically, singular objects with minimal explanation (or alternatively, lengthy textual information) are argued to be the preserve of elite culture, while interactive technologies that provide for a diversity of interpretation are seen as being consistent with a broad and diverse cultural segment. Te Papa’s commitment to presenting itself as a public service has been accompanied by a democratisation of interpretation in exhibitions and programs. Hence, issues of entertainment are intimately connected to those concerning whom the museum is for. For those allied with new museums like Te Papa, the inclusion of hitherto marginalised groups has the effect of updating and transforming museums into more lively, meaningful and politically progressive places. Hence, rather than representing a break from museum values, a commitment to greater inclusiveness and more popular display modes can be seen as continuing the museum’s historic mission in the area of mass public education.

This ‘new inclusiveness’ in access policies and exhibitions works in concert with the emergence of a wide-ranging concept of cultural property. The domain of what constitutes ‘culture’ has become greatly expanded in museum projects that aim to
communicate civic awareness and cultural assertiveness. Te Papa focuses on national life itself as the object to be preserved, documented and displayed. Ian Wedde attests:

We want to recognise in it our experience of culture, including the delights of hoarding, the emotions of family treasuring, and above all, perhaps, the promiscuity of taste and valuing which is the life of culture but, very often, anathema to the traditional connoisseurship of the museum: that connoisseurship which has favoured artefact over data, and if it must have data, has favoured knowledge over entertainment.

However, as we see at Te Papa, a drive towards representing popular tastes does not necessarily entail a democratisation of public input. In the contemporary period, travelling ‘blockbuster’ shows based on global popular culture (such as Star Trek, Versace or Lord of the Rings) are given high priority. In addition to the commercial benefits of staging such shows, Te Papa also satiates a local desire for participation in the spectacle of international popular culture that blockbusters signify. However, it is important to consider how the national museum might conceive its responsibility to its constituency. Are the public better served through the delivery of various forms of international popular culture, or through supporting particular local cultural productions, such as progressive contemporary art or regional and marginal social history topics? As the unending task for Te Papa is how to attract sufficient public numbers to ensure its economic viability, considerations about what suitably constitutes ‘culture’ becomes increasingly pressing. Te Papa displays a perhaps inevitable preference for the reflection and exhibition of ‘culture’ as predetermined products over the development of skills of cultural production. Moreover, the entrenchment of Te Papa’s corporate model means that ideas of audience participation, community development and ‘positive discrimination’ exist chiefly in the realm of consultative reports, rather than actual public debate. Ian Wedde has noted a similar incongruity:

Neither the romance of a new deal between institutions of national culture and audiences, nor the possible drama of daring revision, is well expressed in the
language of the Museum’s corporate documents. Culture is unstable – and its products very often dramatise and celebrate daring, risk, romance and instability. The corporate language of cultural institutions does the opposite: unlike the culture it charters itself to serve, it must promise sustainability. It must do this for its political and fiscal masters, and also to be accountable to its own processes.¹¹

Moreover, there is discrepancy between a broad ‘customer focus’ policy that seeks to attract all social groups by removing any barrier to the museum experience, yet then, once inside, understands these customers within a rigid bicultural conceptual scheme. There is a similar incongruity – perhaps strategic in nature – between the way Te Papa, in its edifice and style, promises a broadly popular and nationalistic visitor experience, yet displays a revisionist approach to history that largely avoids popular national topics such as war, early settlement and sport. The combination of inclusive access policies and a revisionist history that is sensitive to biculturalism itself displays two distinct understandings of the relationship between culture and identity. In one sense, wide public use of museum activities is promoted and justified as being of wide public benefit. ‘Culture’ is something to be attained for the improvement of both individuals and the larger society. Yet Te Papa’s bicultural model proceeds from an understanding of culture as something already inherent in the individual. In this, the museum sees its job as encouraging individuals to appreciate how their story can be identified within the larger ethnic and national stories on display. In the way that it combines these edificatory and identity politics senses of culture, we can view Te Papa as a pedagogic, future-oriented institution that aims to assist individuals – and a nation – to ‘become bicultural’.

Of these two senses of cultural acquisition, I would argue that it is Te Papa’s focus on intrinsic bicultural identity that is of limited value. Te Papa’s strategy is to present ‘object-stories’ in the hope that visitors will identify something meaningful to their identities, rather than working from the premise that it possesses objects and information with enough wonder and universal resonance that one’s cultural circumstances are surpassed. According to the guidebook, Te Papa promises to be ‘a mirror on [New Zealanders] lives, a place where their stories are told, a place to lose yourself and to find
However, the theme of identity may be ill suited to the kind of material culture found in museums, which depends upon a basic difference from lived experience to gain its sense of wonder. By attempting to make themes and topics readily apprehensible through emphasising a basic life-likeness, rather than extraordinary events or daunting ‘genius’ that has no parallel in everyday life, Te Papa appears to favour succour over inspiration. To call Te Papa parochial is to draw attention to the way its national geo-historical fixation only minimally provides visitors with the opportunity for some experience of metaphorical travel or transcendence. In sum, Te Papa is predicated on the idea that visitor entertainment requires a heavy emphasis on comfortable experiences. The extent to which Te Papa *self-consciously* celebrates the ‘culturally familiar’, in an effort to allow visitors to ‘find themselves’ amongst the stories offered, suggests heavy scepticism towards the museums’ historic values of objectivity and edification through the exploration of other places.

### 3. The Global Challenge to Museums

Discussion of the way the museum directs its pedagogic capacities towards inculcating ethnic and national partisanship leads me to a second area of inquiry contained under the ‘crisis of the museum’ umbrella. This concerns whether national museums should be seen as anachronistic in the current ‘global, information age’. Despite this phrase often appearing as a conjunction, its two elements can be considered in turn. The issue of museum ‘information’ involves the challenge posed to the role and status of material objects from new communications technologies. National collections and the concrete materiality of objects are, for some, held as a remnant of an older nationalistic, industrial order. For those concerned with updating the museum and envisioning its future dimensions, the ‘virtual museum’ is upheld as a likely model. However, at this juncture it remains quite indeterminate. Most museums, which lack the resources to allow visitors to access a computer-generated three-dimensional representation of gallery interiors, are limited to making images and fragments of exhibitions accessible via the Internet. While
website’s ability to neutralise geography goes a little way towards fulfilling a kind of ‘community outreach’, they lack information-depth, responsiveness and accountability, as well as a sense of wonder and resonance.

The counter-argument to the impulse to ‘digitally update’ the museum is that today’s abundance of images and information (often immersed in commercial contexts) has only increased the aura of historic, valuable objects that exist outside the commercial realm. However, a heavy emphasis on branding, customers, and digital information delivery can be seen to position Te Papa in continuity with other commercial forms, rather than as a refuge from them. Te Papa is strategically dedicated to identity and telling ‘stories’ that are narrative driven and information based. As such, authentic visitor experience is forged as much out of meaningful experience with communications technologies as with rarefied singular objects. Arguably, the fact of New Zealand’s relative sparsity of ‘high-tech’ built environments (in comparison to an ‘authentic’, overabundant natural landscape) may mean that New Zealanders are particularly attracted to experiencing their heritage through the novelty of the artificial and simulated. Despite strong gestures towards local place, Te Papa heavily employs display strategies associated with global-popular forms that thrive free of specific location, such as theme parks, shopping malls, television, and computer games. A keen investment in the technical innovations associated with multimedia, video games, simulation, touch screen interactives, and ambient sound systems projects the idea of New Zealand and its future being competitively positioned within the ‘new information economy’. Te Papa’s own stridently produced sense of national pride and independence is, after all, an international statement as much as one directed towards citizens. The museum (and its website) is, in concert with media and travel, an important way that national and international publics learn about themselves and others.\(^\text{13}\)

The other dimension invoked in discussions of globalisation and museums concerns the status of ethnic and national identities. On the one hand, it can be postulated that economic and cultural globalisation will progressively consign national identity and ethnicity to the folklorist margins of society. Some argue that the structuralism associated
with traditional state boundaries will be helplessly undermined by trans-national and trans-cultural allegiances that have more to do with the flow of information than political arrangements. Given that museums have historically been associated with nation building, we might expect that museums now have a lesser role, given the proposition that the nation is losing some of its unifying force. On the other hand, it might be argued that re-tribalization along ethnic lines may act as a form of resistance against the depersonalising tendencies of advanced industrial society. Following, the identity politics that informs ever-bifurcating claims for representation in the museum might be seen as an outcome of the homogenizing effect of global media forms. However, any argument that stipulates an either/or approach between ethnic dilution and revitalisation tends to neglect the dialectical dynamic at play. The notion that we are seeing an increasing homogenisation of social and cultural forms appears to have been accompanied by a propagation of claims to specific authentic identities. As Marshall Sahlins has put it:

Consider again this surprising paradox of our time: that localization develops apace with globalization, differentiation with integration; that just when the forms of life around the world are becoming homogeneous, the peoples are asserting their cultural distinctiveness.

The ‘paradox’ can be partly explained by the way that ethnic and national groupings are played up or ‘branded’ as cultural forms and styles in the international tourist market. Groups are afforded a felt sense of uniqueness through the very processes that make them part of the dominant global flow of information. The vitalisation of Maori taonga can be regarded in this light: as a political claim that has been validated by recognition on the world stage (in Te Maori, and now at Te Papa). Simon During has explained how the coincidence of economic globalisation and Maori cultural autonomy are dynamically interrelated effects of a linked cluster of causes. The Government’s commitment to the global free market from the mid-1980s (the time of Te Papa’s planning) was caused by estrangement from old markets, particularly Britain. Combined with the land claims process (involving Government admittance of wrongdoing) and Te Maori (an
international statement of New Zealand’s Maori-ness), these effects contributed towards the de-legitimation of a normative, uncritical history of settlement. This in turn allowed Maori the moral space to claim that their culture must be protected and encouraged in the future. The Government’s response, in addition to Treaty settlements, was a decisive shift from a broad multicultural policy to a bicultural one. Hence, the retreat from regulation and state support indirectly provided Maori the opportunity to push for the management and self-promotion of their cultural resources. If this equals ‘resistance’ to homogenisation, it is not resistance that rejects the technologies and amenities of modernisation. Maori are not, for instance, diffident towards marketing their cultural productions as productively as possible.

So the question is less, ‘are cultures converging under globalisation?’ than, ‘under what structures and pressures are cultural agents all around the world making choices what to communicate or export, what to import and graft, when to shift cross-border allegiances and target markets/audiences, and when to reshuffle their own cultural repertoire to exploit, bolster, shrink or transform their traditions and heritages’?  

While the Government’s allegiance to the global economy may have rekindled Maori cultural autonomy rather than diminishing it, the existence of Te Papa attests to the way that this revitalisation has occurred in a context that has not challenged the boundaries and conditions of capitalist nationhood. New Zealand’s limited number of consumers and financial capital means that all products, particularly those that are ‘cultural’ and fall within the tourist industry, must be modelled with the export market in mind. Since there can be no meaningful separation between representations aimed at domestic and international tourists, the expression of ‘national identity’, so vital to Te Papa, cannot avoid being produced with both an outward and inward vantage. This does not necessarily mean that people are deprived of a local identity, but that it is mediated with an export market in mind. In postcolonial museums, colonial history itself is as much an object of export as a subject for self-understanding. In its celebration of icons of national life in exhibitions like Parade, Golden Days, and On the Sheep’s Back, there is a danger
that culture is no longer being thought of as a means to enrich life, but as an economic formula that produces experiences associated with creating a tourist image of the nation. Te Papa’s dedication to a sense of locality, made tangible through its informal naming (‘our place’), iconography (Maori emblems, sheep, maps), colloquial titles and captions, and its topics of exhibitions, is partly informed by an awareness that global cultural competition may be best served by provincial representations. The less impressive instances of this tendency has led one commentator to compare Te Papa to ‘the hick town mayor telling us how his or her town has the sweetest-smelling air, the cleanest streets, the best gardens with the biggest tomatoes, and limitless business investment opportunities’. 18

The paradox is that, in this global age, Te Papa must be singularly focused on the domestic if it is to maintain Maori and Pakeha as starkly distinct. Greater attention to international indigenous affiliations, to the immersion of Maori and Pakeha alike in global popular culture, to highly distinct immigrant histories, to hybrid identities, and to those who profess indifference to ‘cultural identity’ altogether, all detract from the veracity of New Zealand’s advertisement of itself on the global stage as possessing a unique brand of biculturalism. Yet, if the lingering need in postcolonial societies for explorations of settler identity is partly a response to globalisation, this often proceeds in a highly ambivalent manner. After all, Pakeha remain simultaneously figured in policy as members of a dominant and broad ‘Western’ (non-Maori) identity. As a result, we find that although identity remains an indispensable topic, scepticism towards the coherence of both settler and national identity has influenced the kind of narratives deemed possible. From the style of Te Papa’s Pakeha displays, we can observe that the constant refreshment of ideas and symbols that nations require may actually be suitably achieved through an irreverent critique of national icons. However, in New Zealand’s case, such an approach may be getting ahead of itself, given that settler histories have been historically neglected, seldom receiving ample articulation in museums. Yet in order for Te Papa to differentiate Maori from Pakeha to the extent that the notion of two cultures becomes plainly evident, it has had to produce for Pakeha a mode of representation quite distinct
from the essentialism associated with Maori. Gordon Campbell describes the larger effect:

Behind the gizmos and several worthy displays, the museum does reflect who we are now, but perversely. It showcases Maori confident of their identity, and Europeans who haven’t a clue, lost as they are in mere nostalgia – mainly because European tradition is now being rewritten by gender and race zealots that most Europeans neither believe nor endorse… ¹⁹

Despite Pakeha history being the junior partner to the comparatively long history of Maori in museums, it has been propelled forward into a museological paradigm of self-consciousness and demythologisation. Although Te Papa promises accessibility, the result of this kind of wryly postmodern approach can be seen as elitist: the museum proposes that visitors enjoy a kind of reflexive knowingness about Pakeha history, and presumes that visitors come equipped with the necessary background knowledge learned from other sources. All considered, rather than museums being in apparent crisis from globalisation, richer forms of information delivery and the assertion of repertoires of ethnic uniqueness are twin effects that may be enlivening museums. However, in Te Papa’s case, a perceived ‘threat’ of globalisation has also produced a narrow and defensive notion of nationhood that ignores other productive ways of thinking about culture.

4. A Governmental or Subaltern Museum?

The third area of inquiry prevalent in museological literature concerns whether museums’ tendency towards valorisation makes them chiefly governmental sites geared towards social containment, or whether they have seized a new role as a forum or ‘contact zone’ that facilitates social change. My analysis of Te Papa has shown how this opposition might not be clear-cut, inasmuch as ‘culture’ is mobilised as both a conventional object
for national celebration, yet also as a symbolic form of narrative used to emphasise and consolidate difference. In this, Te Papa potentially fulfils laudatory, conservative and critical, progressive roles simultaneously, by allowing cultural difference to be apprehended as a national asset. While Te Papa’s approach to exhibitions, wherein visitors are constructed as unique individuals whose opinions are singularly valuable in determining meaning, might be understood as politically progressive, we need to remain aware that acceptance of cultural diversity and bicultural nationhood is not limited to private identities and conceptions of selves. In its larger ideological use of space, the museum appeals to citizens’ public personae, in their capacity as bearers of rights and duties. Te Papa positions visitors as – first – citizens who collectively exemplify national identity, and – second – members of ethnic groups who understand themselves as possessing partial and positioned perspectives. While there may appear to be fundamental tension between national and ethnic affiliations, they remain consistent insofar as they are both based on the affirmation of identity, belonging and historical continuity. As we saw, Te Papa’s interpretation of its forum mission was to encourage visitors to locate from multiple stories and interpretive devices their own sense of being at home at ‘Our Place’.

Yet to truly feel at home at the museum is to warm to its strong bicultural mandate. As a Government directed cultural project with broad ideological implications, biculturalism at Te Papa neither simply expresses the current self-evident reality of New Zealanders visiting the museum, nor simply captures (if it were possible) the nature of historical relations between Maori and Pakeha. Instead, the museum’s display of the past is fundamentally dialectical: it resurrects the past by consigning it to institutional history – and in doing so, mediates it through the concerns of the present. Representations produce stories of destiny, of inevitable historical linearity, that, as Stephen Weil reminds us:

…do not so much recreate or represent the past as they legitimatize the present. They are not about what really happened in other times so much as they are about why our own times, our own society, our own pecking orders could only be the way we find them and not some other way.
In this thesis I identify several areas in Te Papa’s representations that implicitly speak of present concerns. The almost total absence of colonial violence, for instance, with all its divisive and discordant overtones, closely reflects current aspirations for social harmony rather than any truth about the past. Equally, the preference for Maori themes of environmentalism and myth and tradition over those of, say, urbanisation, labour or religious conversion communicates a contemporary image of Maori that seeks to retain a strong sense of incommensurable difference. As a further example, the ideas that Pakeha origins might be best communicated in a dispersed migrant narrative (*Passports*), or that sedentary themes like ‘working the land’ (*On The Sheep’s Back*) and ‘national self-consciousness’ (*Exhibiting Ourselves*) should be framed in a demythologising scheme, both communicate the perception of those at Te Papa of the problematic moral status associated with a Pakeha colonial history.

These examples suggest that Te Papa presents an historical viewpoint that is both fashionably liberal in its aversion to canonical national history, yet also consistent with an uncontentious, politically moderate vision of cultural harmony. This particular version of history has, to date, emerged unscathed; criticism of the museum has largely been limited to the domain of art and (less stridently) science. Should we surmise that New Zealanders are largely accepting of Te Papa’s vision of public history? Perhaps. However there may be something in the way that Te Papa constructs a pervasive kind of togetherness (‘our place’) and egalitarianism (‘you decide’) that serves to disarm critical reflection. I want to suggest that by narrating history around the basis of identity, Te Papa encourages an interpretation less concerned with the veracity or truth of an idea, than its appeal as a ‘story’ (which exist in the slippery space between fact and myth). In Te Papa’s usage, personal identity is a topic that visitors may find ingratiating due to the way it accentuates variance over singularity, and a demythologising ‘play’ of ideas over any staked claim for importance or authority. By affirming the validity of all interpretations, the Te Papa ‘customer is always right’. Furthermore, by artificially playing up the communitarian and national properties of art and artefacts, psychological, emotional, and otherworldly perspectives are neglected. As Homi Bhabha argues:
The linear equivalence of event and idea that historicism proposes most commonly signifies a people, a nation, or a national culture as an empirical sociological category or a holistic cultural entity. However, the narrative and psychological force that nationness brings to bear on cultural production and political projection is the effect of the ambivalence of the ‘nation’ as a narrative strategy.\(^{22}\)

Bhabha highlights how, in representative projects like the museum, individual stories are made to stand in for the story of the collectivity itself. A variety of stories are utilised to demonstrate a kind of cosmopolitan celebration of difference. Together these stories contribute to, if not an autobiography, then at least an anthology of nationhood. The museum, which has been enlisted by Government to create unity out of constitutive division, produces a narrative of historical reconciliation that, in its celebration of difference, seeks to end uncertainty. Homi Bhabha has characterised this governmental strategy as one that calls on the ‘double time’ of the nation. On the one hand, to produce a coherent people, the state promotes a national pedagogy, making citizens ‘historical objects’ in a story of social homogeneity. On the other, and at the same time, the state presents citizens as subjects in a signifying process aimed at showing the life-world of the nation as a continuous heterogeneous process of reproduction and renewal. This double coding, which Bhabha describes as \textit{the many as one}, and \textit{out of many one}, narrates nationhood as a split between a continuist, accumulative temporality, where the ‘scraps, patches and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a coherent national culture’, and the repetitious, recursive strategies of the performative, which intends to embrace a growing circle of national subjects.\(^{23}\)

In the postcolonial settler state, we might typically imagine historical revisionism moving in a poststructuralist direction; that is, away from a static model that positions the Western and indigenous in diametrical opposition. However, I have shown how Te Papa elaborates colonial categories (reinscribed as tangata whenua and tangata tiriti) that reifies race and denies the variability of historic experience and partial, hybrid and
shifting attachments normally associated with revisionism. If there is any reinterpretation of traditional representations, it is only through a curious muddling of disciplinary categories traditionally associated with the Western and indigenous. Maori cultural material, once classified and displayed as ethnography, is now displayed in *Mana Whenua* as a kind of ethnographic-fine art hybrid. Pakeha artworks, however, once exhibited simply as art, were exhibited in *Parade* as ethnographic material, inasmuch as they were made to speak of social life and identity. Nevertheless, the larger observation stands that, in producing a vision of quite separate indigenous and settler identities, Te Papa produces representations that attribute Maori with an *essential culture*, and Pakeha with a *contested history*. Despite the museum’s aspirations towards showcasing a progressive postcolonial nationhood, its representations loudly echo older colonial conceptions of difference that located the native and European in distinct temporal dimensions and disciplinary areas.

Te Papa’s reification of race or ethnicity as the sole basis of affiliation also jars with the openness that Te Papa’s ‘forum’ mission suggests. The combined effect of the avoidance of ‘harder’, more political topics (as obvious as the land Wars, and as challenging as twentieth century inequality), and the production of ethnicities as wholly separate entities, means that Te Papa’s biculturalism lacks the provisions for political debate, and cannot reflect the complex and rich intermingling of Maori and non-Maori. In short, its manifestation of the forum mission lacks both political potency and social vibrancy. Instead, biculturalism is limited to being a promotional symbol for the nation. Manuel Borja Vilel has highlighted the way that pluralism governs difference by making it a representative symbol and unifying theme, rather than something that challenges the museum’s encompassing voice:

Multiculturalism’s simplistic celebration of a diversity of styles conceals an insidious new universalism which does exclude differences, but neutralises them by subsuming them within a mechanism which contains them. This phenomenon is intrinsically linked to the erosion of the public sphere: the communal space in which plural identities come together in creative conflict, a situation which must
constitute the basis of any democratic project. We have imagined the museum as a cultural construction in which the Other can speak to us, but in most instance this is not the case. On the contrary, artistic pedagogy has become institutionalised and art has become little more than a rhetorical paradigm in contrast to what may be conceived as the chaos of society.\textsuperscript{24}

Vilel’s criticism can be justly applied to Te Papa. Maori, Pakeha and immigrants may be ‘empowered’ to ‘speak for themselves’ (in different ways and to different degrees), but this occurs only inasmuch as their ‘voice’ is directed towards locating them as national assets. Despite its politically liberal sentiment, the organization of constituent groups within a Government-sanctioned (Treaty) framework means that biculturalism is realised in fundamentally conservative terms. Other ways of thinking about one’s place in the world (generational differences, labour histories, trans-national affiliations, for instance) are suppressed. Given the very recent incidence of biculturalism as state policy, and its correspondingly speculative and unresolved nature, its entrenchment in a structural, Treaty-based scheme appears counterproductive. This is particular striking given that New Zealand’s museum sector has not been able to agree just what biculturalism means, despite an unerring philosophical commitment to its principles.\textsuperscript{25} In interviews with museum staff, questions about the viability of the museum’s bicultural model were answered with recourse to the volume and diversity of visitors: if a bicultural museum was attracting a bicultural public, then the bicultural model was working.\textsuperscript{26}

Yet, the museum’s attention to bicultural visitor demographics is not the same thing as the public responding productively to the pertinency of biculturalism in conceiving the nation’s past. Perhaps the most intellectually troubling aspect of an identity-focus is the way it forges a link between cultural formations and historical events, without a central causal logic. The assertion of stable cultural identities through time has the effect of denying history, in the sense that it struggles to explain shifting social structures. An identity focus requires historic similitude and continuity to make the past ‘our place’. While continuity is a fundamental premise of the spiritual basis of tangata whenua, it is also present in Pakeha exhibits, given that each provides an explanation for the historical
factors informing a contemporary Pakeha identity. Given this, the sub-discipline of museum history may be unsatisfactory for what Te Papa does. Conceiving Te Papa’s practices as a kind of ‘auto-ethnography’ better aids us to describe the centrality of objects in museums, and also the way that culture and identity are accented over all other concepts. The idea of museum auto-ethnography works with the emergent tendency for museums to avoid representing groups other than their constituencies, and from making cross-cultural comparisons between those that are represented. The assignment to produce object-stories relating only to the nation-space signals an apparent halt to the museum’s historic mission, for it seeks only to continually visit familiar ground.

5. The Future of Our Place

As a broad and final conclusion, Te Papa represents the captivating but troublesome result of the forces of market-driven accessibility, liberal historical revisionism and indigenous assertion. While the first response to the three ‘crises’ of the museum is an emergent and even inevitable response to the pressures of financial accountability, the latter two reflect more troublesome trends. Perhaps the museum’s greatest weakness has been its inability to forge a truly fruitful bicultural narrative. Biculturalism was conceptualised as a way that Te Papa could respond to the crisis of national identity. Its implementation has, paradoxically, allowed important gaps and problems in that identity to go unexamined. By presenting biculturalism as an achieved postcolonial state, Te Papa overlooks not only a history of colonialism, but also the continuing inequality between Maori and Pakeha that made biculturalism a necessary state response in the first place. Crucially, this new bicultural form of forgetting resumes a process that characterised the history of the previous incarnations of the national museum. Elizabeth Gertsakis argues that this rewriting of the nation’s cultural history to incorporate contemporary heterogeneity is a process that typically masks the power relations central to historical understanding:
The ‘new’ in such a cultural figuration must be a continual sophistry of new beginnings, new births, new origins which effectively conceal the truths of its formations and its means for arrival into the new...the psychic aversion within the dominant society to its own moment of migration and hybridity still lives with it despite using ‘contemporaneity’ as a shield, as a form of forgetting and rewriting of the consequences of its own ‘traditions’.27

Te Papa is better seen as an exemplary pedagogic symbol rather than a place that conveys social realities and debates their significance. The uneven, uncertain process of what Edward Said calls the ‘entanglements’ of overlapping cultures is almost entirely absent.28 Te Papa may be unable to achieve its desired postcolonial state as long as it remains mired in notions of racialised identity.

As the various exhibits in Te Marae and Mana Whenua show, Te Papa embodies a variety of practices that simultaneously show the cultural incommensurability of Maori, yet, in the spirit of both commercialism and civic pedagogy, also make indigeneity available to visitors. The same forces drive the irreverent and accessible tone of the art and Pakeha exhibits. The attachment of two radically different display styles to different cultural constituencies has a long history, and may not be as progressive as Te Papa may hope. Dubious and artificial assumptions that oppose Maori and Pakeha, essential versus provisional identities, reverent versus irreverent tones, ‘deep’ versus modern time, and ancestral presence versus disembodied heritage come across as incongruously backward-looking within a built environment that seeks to position the nation at the international forefront of thinking about ‘culture’.

The absence of a more expansive and experimental conceptual plan potentially hamstrings the museum. Assuming that today’s bicultural policy has a limited shelf life, Te Papa may become outdated. ‘Our place’ appears highly representative of what one professional group sees as the particular issues of ‘our time’. There may well be, over the next decade, an increasing call by New Zealanders for a place that inspires the public as much as it responds to it. An abiding impression is how Te Papa, which unavoidably
suffers from a slow turnover of ideas and display tactics, is heavily weighted towards the novel and new. As another author with similar concerns to my own put it, ‘this magazine-style presentation, turning everything into a soundbite, or “side bar”, might work, that is, if a museum was a magazine. But it can’t afford to keep changing every week… so in five years time, it’ll be the same old catchphrases, which take less than 60 seconds to digest, and a bunch of plastic thumbs gathering dust’. While technology dates notoriously quickly, it may almost be matched by a cultural policy that positions culture in such discrete packets. While museums speak of things past, Te Papa may become a narrower monument to that decade and a half that saw the peculiar effects of the free market, soul-searching about Pakeha identity, and a Treaty-based Maori cultural assertion.

The issue for Te Papa is not simply how to lure a mass audience, but how to draw the maximum number of people to what it is that Te Papa could be. After all, the most successful museums – even in terms of visitor numbers – are those that promise a sense of enduring meaningfulness. While this need not equate to a focus on classical or ancient culture, it does at least require that the institution stands for values that transcend the here and now. One of the risks for a museum formed as a specific response to, firstly, the perceived crisis of the museum as an institution, and secondly, national concerns such as its cultural tourism industry and ethnic and national consolidation, is that these anxieties do not form an adequate basis for longstanding authority. Museums, unlike many other institutions, are built with the expectation of an uncommon historical longevity. In the way that Te Papa stands for 160 years of New Zealand’s colonial past, we might reasonably expect to project its existence for a similar century and a half into the future. Yet in its current state, Te Papa stands as an institutional time capsule. By not taking seriously the idea that it can understand New Zealand’s past in a way that will speak to future generations, the museum does its constituents a disservice. In spite of – or perhaps precisely because of – its heavy use of technology and its deployment of biculturalism as a future-ideal, it remains dubious that the museum will outlive its origins.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amo</td>
<td>Front supporting posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aotearoa</td>
<td>Maori name for New Zealand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haere Mai</td>
<td>Welcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hangi</td>
<td>Earth oven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hapu</td>
<td>Sub-tribe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haka</td>
<td>War dance with chant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hawaiki</td>
<td>Mythical Maori homeland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heke</td>
<td>Rafter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hongi</td>
<td>To press noses in greeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hui</td>
<td>Meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Iwi</td>
<td>Tribe, people</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kai</td>
<td>Food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaihatu</td>
<td>Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaitiaki</td>
<td>Guardian, cultural caretaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karakia</td>
<td>Ritual prayer</td>
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<td>Karanga</td>
<td>Call to the marae</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kaumatua</td>
<td>Elder</td>
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<td>Kawanatanga</td>
<td>Government</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kiekie</td>
<td>Climbing plant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Koiti Tangata</td>
<td>Human remains</td>
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<tr>
<td>Koru</td>
<td>Fern emblem</td>
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<tr>
<td>Koruru</td>
<td>Carved figurehead on gable of wharenui</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kowhaiwhai</td>
<td>Scrollwork on rafters in wharenui</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mana</td>
<td>Power, honour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manuhiri</td>
<td>Guest, foreigner</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marae</td>
<td>Ceremonial complex that includes a meeting-house and forecourt for orators</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matariki</td>
<td>Maori New Year</td>
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<tr>
<td>Term</td>
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<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matauranga</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mauri</td>
<td>Life force</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moa</td>
<td>Large flightless bird, now extinct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moko</td>
<td>Facial tattoo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mokomokai</td>
<td>Tattooed head</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pa</td>
<td>War fort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paepae</td>
<td>Welcome area on marae</td>
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<tr>
<td>Papatuanuku</td>
<td>Mythical mother earth</td>
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<td>Pataka</td>
<td>Storehouse</td>
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<td>Pingao</td>
<td>Sandgrass</td>
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<tr>
<td>Piupiu</td>
<td>Flax skirt</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pounamu</td>
<td>Greenstone</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poutokomanawa</td>
<td>Centre post of wharenui</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pouwhenua</td>
<td>Signpost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powhiri</td>
<td>Welcome to marae</td>
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<tr>
<td>Puku</td>
<td>Belly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putatara</td>
<td>Shell trumpet</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rangatiratanga</td>
<td>Sovereignty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranginui</td>
<td>Sky father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rakau Whakapapa</td>
<td>Staff with notches for reciting whakapapa</td>
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<tr>
<td>Raparapa</td>
<td>Bargeboards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roro</td>
<td>Entrance porch of wharenui</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rua koiva</td>
<td>Death house</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tangata Tiriti</td>
<td>People of the Treaty of Waitangi, Pakeha</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tangata Whenua</td>
<td>People of the land, Maori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tane</td>
<td>God of forests, male</td>
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<td>Tangihangi</td>
<td>Funeral, mourning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taniko</td>
<td>Decorative wall painting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taonga</td>
<td>Artefact, treasure, object imbued by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ancestral presence</td>
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<td>Tapu</td>
<td>Sacred, forbidden</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maori Word</td>
<td>English Definition</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>Te Kohanga Reo</td>
<td>Maori language education</td>
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<td>Tikanga</td>
<td>Custom, principles</td>
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<td>Tiki</td>
<td>Carved neck pendant</td>
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<td>Tino Rangatiratanga</td>
<td>Sovereignty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tohuhu</td>
<td>Ridgepole of wharenui</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tohunga</td>
<td>Expert, specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toki poutanga</td>
<td>Greenstone weapon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tukutuku</td>
<td>Lattice panels of wharenui</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turangawaewae</td>
<td>Place to stand, home</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urupa</td>
<td>Crypt</td>
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<tr>
<td>Waharoa</td>
<td>Gateway</td>
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<tr>
<td>Waiata</td>
<td>Song</td>
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<td>Waiati-tangi</td>
<td>Funeral song</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wairau</td>
<td>Spirit</td>
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<td>Waka ama</td>
<td>Outrigger canoe</td>
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<td>Waka taua</td>
<td>War canoe</td>
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<td>Wananga</td>
<td>Ritual recitation learning meetings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wehi</td>
<td>Awe, fear</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wero</td>
<td>Challenge</td>
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<td>Whakapapa</td>
<td>Genealogy, cultural identity</td>
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<td>Wharenui</td>
<td>House</td>
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<td>Whare-wananga</td>
<td>Meeting house</td>
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