Kanohi ki te kanohi: Face-to-face in digital space

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Introduction

Kanohi ki te kanohi or face-to-face communication is a facet of human behaviour. It is indeed a key principal of being and doing as Māori. It allows one to not only see who or what one is communicating with, but also to hear, feel, and smell the relationship. In this age of fast growing digital 'stuff', increasing disconnection, and instant reconnection, we of Te Aitanga a Hauiti of Tolaga Bay, are finding different ways to re-engage with the notion of kanohi ki te kanohi. This applies, not only to ourselves as descendants of an ancestor but also, to numerous icons and artefacts associated with, and representative of ourselves. We have explored, and continue to develop, different ways to engage with these artefacts, and in effect with each other, by utilising the digital tools and expertise at our disposal. Short of all being resident in the one place or molecular transportation of Star Trek fame, it is as close as we can get to rebuilding and reconnecting our cultural stronghold, the essential whakapapa or genealogy of our whare kōrero, the house of stories, which contain our body of knowledge. This is what sustains our particular way of being and doing, and provides a platform for progress into the future.

Kanohi ki te kanohi in digital space

Marae or pā are considered to be places which provide and promote strong foundations for Māori cultural well-being. They epitomise the notion of kanohi ki te kanohi' engagement through both formal and informal encounters. They encourage connection, re-connection and reaffirmation of family and tribal links through marae ātea[1] discussion, wharenui[2] storytelling, and wharekai[3] 'catch-ups'. In times of sorrow, joy, celebration, serious debate or simple get-togethers, it remains an important social hub of Māori society.

According to the 2013 Census there were 668,724 people of Māori descent living in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2013) out of a total Māori population of 723,400 (Statistics New Zealand, 2017). Of the New Zealand residents, 86% lived in the North Island with nearly a quarter in the Auckland region, along with high percentages in the Waikato, Bay of Plenty, and Wellington regions. This correlates with urban migration trends over the past 60 years that have increased Māori populations in some key metropolitan areas and conversely depopulated some tribal homelands. This does not take into account the large number of Māori who live in Australia[4] or elsewhere overseas. Despite this, in 2013 according to *Te Kupenga* (Statistics New Zealand, 2015), 71% of Māori still knew their ancestral marae, with 89% of those having visited their marae at some time. This figure decreases further to 54%, however, when asked if they had visited their marae in the previous 12 months. Even though they may wish to visit, time, distance, and money are noted as major barriers.

The statistics paint a picture of what we have seen happening in rural tribal areas, or

more particularly, the effects of depopulation on iwi, hapū, whānau[5], and on pā and marae. Māori, like any other group of people, moved from one place to another for a range of reasons, ongoing survival probably being the predominant factor. Our history is highlighted with, and at times defined by 'heke', migrations brought about by both push and pull factors. Our ancestors traversed eastwards across the vast water continent of Te Moananui a Kiwa[6] over several millennia, reaching as far east as Rapanui and South America (Roullier, Benoit, McKey, & Lebot, 2013; Switek, 2013; Yen, 1974) and south to Aotearoa New Zealand. Within Aotearoa, Māori moved within larger areas of familiarity and sometimes completely outside of those for the same reasons as their ancestors. Pre and post European contact did not diminish movement and in fact contributed to Māori travelling abroad to other places, particularly to New South Wales and Tasmania in the 19th century. During the 20th and into this century Māori have continued to 'heke', from rural tribal territories to urban multicultural centres. The rural marae and pā and their associated communities have therefore, become depleted of people; the majority of descendants present in heart but not in body.

The population of Tolaga Bay was 768 in 2013, 81% being Māori. There are five active marae in its vicinity. Those five marae are immediately served by a small portion of this community, balancing responsibilities with work, child and aged care, recreation, social engagements, and other myriad obligations all communities are faced with. For example, since the mid-1960s, our own particular marae, Hinemaurea at Māngātuna, Tolaga Bay, has witnessed the disappearance of some 30 homes and whānau associated with these. Also four major floods that have adversely affected the marae facilities, the death of numerous descendants of the marae, the change of school status from mainstream to kura kaupapa Māori[7], the bussing of the majority, if not all children, 10 kms from Tolaga Bay to the kura, the shift from normally three or four speakers on the paepae[8] to one if organised in advance, the positive absence of alcohol at marae functions, the advent of smoke free marae, and, the growing gap of home experience between the home people and those who have left the area.

The consequence of these and other related effects are that communities change. Whakapapa however is constant and requires some attention to ensure that the nature and practice of whānau connection is maintained and nurtured. This is where opportunities arise to challenge ourselves around how we might do things differently given the changed circumstances. Differently does not always mean new. For us of Te Aitanga a Hauiti it is about understanding how our own people thought and worked in their own era and applying that to the now. Our learning and behaviour, before European contact, was based on the premise of whakairo (the verb and the noun), art knowledge and its fundamental importance in the world. This is expressed through the maxim,

> Ka tipu te whaihanga, e hika, ki Uawa.
> And art and knowledge did flourish in Uawa, oh son.[9]

Using this as our guiding principle, we have since 1999 deliberately explored ways and means through art to reconnect and re-energise our whakapapa, our bodies of knowledge, and our particular way of thinking and doing.

Toi Hauiti, an arts working group of Te Aitanga a Hauiti, initiated, organised or supported a range of experiences, activities, and projects that involved face-to-face or digital engagement. Some of these projects were simple. Cobbling together computer bits and pieces hooked up to a makeshift transmitter, enabled us to live-stream a tangihanga[10] to whānau around New Zealand and abroad in 2006. More organised ventures like Te Rauata, from 2010 to 2013, involved research institutions in Auckland and Cambridge, England cataloguing artefacts scattered throughout the world with provenance to the Uawa-Tolaga Bay region (Lythberg, Hogsden, & Ngata, 2017; Ngata, Ngata-Gibson, & Salmond, 2012). These types of experiences have led to sometimes more formal, sustainable engagements, while others have been parked until such time that we have the capacity to deal with them

We have experienced a range of communication tools in our lifetimes. One of our uncles, as a child, was responsible for lighting signal fires on a high point above Māngātuna to let people know in Hikuwai, 15 kms to the north, that a tangihanga was being held. Compare this with the fact that we can now use a small handheld device to carry out a video conference with several others who may be anywhere in the world. Our practice is not so much about digitisation as it is about adaptation. In this regard there are practical, ethical, and tikanga issues which arise around the care of, and access to taonga. We want to access both taonga and people for Te Aitanga a Hauiti, wherever they are, in order to reconnect with our ancestors through the taonga. To see, feel, hear, and smell the medium used by them to tell our stories. To engage fully with this one needs to physically access taonga, to talk with them, to be present with them, to re-establish them in the cultural contexts to which they belong. For the vast majority of taonga this form of repatriation is not possible for a number of reasons, particularly legal and regulatory barriers, as well as distance and cost considerations. We therefore utilise and adapt the available technology to do as much as we practically can to re-engage with our taonga, through building digital catalogues like the aforementioned Te Rauata, connecting live engagements through social media, and exploring how to recreate 3D digital taonga that can be 'beamed' out to Te Aitanga a Hauiti people around the world.

The focus of all of these activities has been on building the knowledge, skills, and strength of our own people through formal and informal participation in the arts. The effects of this focus are art and community outcomes such as creating a star navigation compass in the school playground. Young people are currently involved in waka hourua (double-hull canoe), non-instrument navigation and sailing in the Pacific Ocean. A weavers' collective is replacing whāriki, or woven mats, for all of our active marae. Working relationships with institutions such as the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge University, and the American Museum of Natural History, New York, are providing annual scholarships for local school leavers moving into tertiary study. Organising bandwidth through local Canterbury providers enables national broadcasters to

broadcast Te Matatini[11] 2015. Currently Toi Hauiti is supporting a large range and number of arts-based projects. These include local artists' work around flax maintenance, wharenui restoration, local heritage trails, visits abroad to other indigenous art gatherings, and, visits of waka hourua to Uawa to coincide with 'Native Voices', a gathering of local and other indigenous artists in Uawa in 2019 to produce and exhibit works at the Tairāwhiti Museum. Toi Hauiti is also supporting work with Te Aitanga a Hauiti Hauora[12], the Horouta Healthy Families Collective[13], and Google Outreach using Google tools and expertise to map our Tairāwhiti stories from Te Whakatōhea people of Ōpōtiki in the north to Ngāi Tāmanuhiri people south of Gisborne, as a way of encouraging our people to reconnect with those stories by actively walking the story trails. This is part of a major focus on providing strength based, preventative health solutions for Māori.

The scope of our work with art, and how it intersects with technology, is organic in some ways as it depends on who is interested, available or organised to attend to activities. It is preordained in the aforementioned adage, 'Ka tipu te whaihanga, e hika, ki Uawa'. The focus is not so much on the actual activities but rather the types of positive outcomes derived from those activities. This allows a degree of freedom for our artists and 'techno-peeps' to explore, adapt, respond, and create as they see fit because they can see and understand this bigger picture, and are not constrained by unnecessary restrictions. We meet four to five times a year at whoever's place is providing the best lunch and talk at length about what is happening, what is needed to support that, who is doing what, and by when. The technology helps us to push boundaries through exploration but local whakapapa is what keeps us grounded and relevant. Promoting and providing opportunities for artistic expression is for us always about building local potential, economic pathways, and community engagement. Digital compilations of artefacts, live streaming of local events, virtual experiences, and Google Maps are all a means to that end. What happens for people beyond that is key to how Te Aitanga a Hauiti communities develop.

The art and technology activities that we are involved in are part of a wider landscape of community projects, marae engagement, and iwi progress. They are not isolated activities. Some are well planned, some are responses to opportunities that arise, some are simply part and parcel of normal daily life.

So, we ask the questions. 'Is our work building effective art knowledge and art people? Is it helping to build good people and contributing citizens?' 'Is it helping to develop economic opportunities?'

The answer to these questions is, yes. Without some dedicated research around acknowledging the types of systems that are operating and measuring the collective impact of our activities, however, it is difficult to say exactly how effective we have been, or how many 'good' citizens and businesses have been developed because of our work.

Our next steps are important in the sense that we have trialled a number of initiatives over the past 18 years. There have been many positive outputs and outcomes and we need to celebrate those. The fast changing technologies require us to adapt, particularly around how we preserve, present, and share our information, kanohi ki te kanohi with our

own who are scattered far and wide. It is a good time one thinks, to reflect, review, re-plan, and re-energise for the coming generations of Hauiti people—'Kia tipu tonu te whaihanga, e hika, ki Uawa'.

Endnotes

1. The space in front of an ancestral house.
2. Ancestral house of a marae.
3. Dining room of a marae.
4. 128,430 in 2011 (Te Puni Kōkiri 2014).
5. Tribes, sub-tribes, and extended family.
6. The Pacific Ocean.
7. Total Māori language immersion primary school.
8. The speakers seat on marae.
9. From Verse 6 of *Te Tangi a Rangiuia (The lament of Rangiuia).*
10. Funeral service.
11. The pre-eminent national Māori cultural performance competition held every two years.
12. An indigenous provider of health services.
13. A collection of eight iwi health providers from Ōpōtiki in the north to Gisborne in the south.

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