

"The mural's value far outstripped the building's worth": art, architecture and protest at Aniwaniwa

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ABSTRACT: John Scott's Āniwaniwa Visitor Centre is lucky to get a mention in many of the reports and rememberings of the removal of Colin McCahon's *Urewera Mural* by Tūhoe activist Te Kaha in 1997. The focus at the time, and even in subsequent retellings, was on the artwork and the personalities involved (including McCahon himself despite dying ten years before the removal). Even when discussed in the context of the performance of protest (or cultural activism as some would have it), the contribution of architecture to this episode is either ignored or downplayed (or not understood).

This paper explores the role that architecture played in the 1997 removal and subsequent return of McCahon's mural. It builds on earlier research into how protests played out architecturally in the 1880s (Parihaka) and 1980s (Waitangi), primarily through media reports of the protest act, but also looking at how this has been treated by academic literature. While John Scott's Visitor Centre was the initial physical site of the act of protest, there are a number of spaces at play (the Urewera itself, the Auckland City Art Gallery where the mural reappears, and the undisclosed location where the mural was hidden). The relationships between these spaces reinforce the performance of protest - providing an architectural landscape to New Zealand's most famous art heist.

Introduction

On Thursday, June 5th 1997 just before 4am, someone (or some people) gained access to the Department of Conservation Āniwaniwa Visitor Centre near Lake Waikaremoana by breaking a window. In less than five minutes, with security alarms blaring, they had removed Colin McCahon's *Urewera Mural* from where it was hanging, bundled it into a vehicle, and left the scene. Nothing else was taken from the building, just the mural.

Over a year later and after several police search warrants, the mural's return was secured by art collector, patron and Te Papa Board member Jenny Gibbs. Like a scene from a movie, she was driven to an undisclosed location in Auckland where the mural was

loaded into her stationwagon. Once back behind the wheel herself, Jenny Gibbs headed straight to the Auckland Art Gallery and handed the artwork over. It would take another two years before the mural was returned to its original site at the Āniwaniwa Visitor Centre, and another ten before it needed to be removed again due to concerns with the weathertightness of the Visitor Centre. In 2015 the mural was moved again to the Tūhoe tribal chambers in Tāneatua, where it continues to reside on public display.

This paper is a continuation of a theme explored in two other papers presented to earlier iterations of this conference:

- * the 2009 iteration that looked at the 1980s, where I outlined how protests at Waitangi during the 1980s were played out architecturally through the media,¹ and
- * the 2013 iteration where I considered how similar themes were expressed by the media one hundred years earlier at Parihaka.²

These earlier papers were built around two main concepts:

- * Patrick McAllister's analysis of national identity formation through public rituals

¹ Schmidt ""We don't have time for that carry-on anymore"" pp 62-69.

² Schmidt ""that headquarters of fanaticism and disaffection"" pp 73-84.

such as Waitangi Day and other national events.³ These types of cultural performances are symbolically-rich stories, with the roles of the state and Māori told and expressed in a variety of ways.

- * Sue Abel's analysis of how the media focuses not just on the biculturalism of the state and Māori, but instead places emphasis on Pākehā, "tame" Māori, and "wild" Māori.⁴

Architecture plays an important role in helping audiences understand these concepts as part of media reports. Various participants are often framed occupying specific places and spaces, and the inclusion or exclusion of groups is often expressed architecturally.

This study has used the mainstream newspaper and periodical publications as source material – primarily the *Dominion*, the *New Zealand Herald*, the *Sunday Star Times*, and *The Listener*. Together these publications represent how the majority of New Zealanders received information about the disappearance of McCahon's *Urewera Mural* and participated in the events that unfolded. I

³ McAllister "Waitangi Day" pp 155-180.

⁴ Abel *Shaping the News*.

have purposively left out publications written for a Māori audience – such as *Mana* magazine. While a comparison of the narratives between these and the mainstream publications would likely reveal rich insights, time and space considerations mean that will have to wait for a later conference.

Core concepts

McAllister shows that Waitangi Day commemorations are public rituals, a form of cultural performance. He notes that they have three key features:

- * reflexivity – they are stories that people tell themselves about themselves, enabling them to interpret who they are and where they fit
- * part of, and linked to, wider social process – they are never divorced from the ongoing flow of everyday life and the social and political events that are taking place and have taken place
- * not passive, but can transform things through establishing a certain reality – this sometimes occurs incrementally, and at other times dramatic and immediately.⁵

⁵ McAllister "Waitangi Day" pp 159-164.

Events such as those at Waitangi during the 1980s can therefore give us an understanding of wider race relations in New Zealand at that time. The juxtaposition of Te Tii marae on the south side of the Waitangi River to the Treaty Grounds to the north, added to the differences in rituals undertaken at each of these spaces, leads McAllister to state that the "spatial dimensions of the commemoration of the Treaty perform a significant meta-communicative function, for it shows that the "landscape of nationhood" is symbolically bifurcated."⁶ We were able to look at Parihaka in the 1880s in a similar way since at the time it too was part of a dialogue around national unity. While the symbolic expression of nationhood at Waitangi Day is rehearsed in a compressed format every year, the expression at Parihaka was stretched out over a number of stages over a number of years.

Sue Abel's media analysis makes it clear that an ideology is presented which "serve[s] the interests of the dominant [Pākehā] group."⁷ She shows us that media coverage of Waitangi Day implicitly pushed the concept of national

⁶ McAllister "Waitangi Day" p 169.

⁷ Abel *Shaping the News* p 19. Abel's work focuses primarily on the sesquicentenary ceremonies at Waitangi in 1990.

unity ("we are all one people," "we are all New Zealanders") and effectively marginalised and contained dissent by, for example, positioning protest action as a threat to the national interest ("celebrations turned nasty," "protesters taunted police lines"). But whereas McAllister's analysis focuses on the bifurcation of the landscape of nationhood, Abel's analysis highlights that it is better to talk of a trifurcation of space. Alongside the Crown and its representatives (police, armed forces, even the media itself it could be argued) are also placed Māori:

- * Tame Māori (or good Māori) fit into society without a fuss – polite, dignified, old, passive – are members of the business or professional classes,⁸ hold traditional and conservative beliefs, and take part in official welcomes, celebrations, or cultural performances.⁹
- * "Wild Māori" – bad Māori or stirrers – are mainly young, urban, aggressive and demanding malcontents who are not happy unless they make trouble, misleading sections of Māori society (a less affluent and more urbanised working class,

⁸ McCreanor "Talking About Race" pp 91-92.

⁹ Abel *Shaping the News* p 119.

	People	Place
Pākehā	Governor General, Prime Minister, Ministers, other guests, Navy, Police	Treaty Grounds Te Tii marae (when invited)
"tame" Māori	Tangata whenua, Ngāpuhi elders, local Māori who adhere to protocols	Te Tii marae Treaty Grounds (as part of formal ceremonies)
"wild" Māori	Protestors from outside Local Māori not adhering to local protocols	In-between Te Tii and the Treaty Grounds March in from other places Stand outside Treaty Grounds, no formal access to Te Tii

Table 1: People and places in 1980s Waitangi Day celebrations

	People	Place
Pākehā	Settlers, surveyors, soldiers	Waimate Plains (i.e. the lands surrounding Parihaka) once surveyed and settled
"tame" Māori	Local Māori who resided at Parihaka and worked the land	"Small" Parihaka Not Waimate Plains
"wild" Māori	Te Whiti & Tohu Visitors from other areas	"Big" Parihaka Marae and other gathering places Not Waimate Plains

Table 2: People and places in 1880s Parihaka

mostly)¹⁰ into thinking that they are hard-done-by.¹¹ They are not able to be controlled by tame Māori, and are the ones to be blamed for disrupting the state's attempts at creating a peaceful and coherent national narrative.

The trifurcation of space in Waitangi during the 1980s was clearly demarcated. Newspaper

¹⁰ Hazlehurst *Political Expression and Ethnicity* p 19.

¹¹ McCreanor "Talking About Race" pp 91-92.

reports from the 1980s constructed quite distinct identities for each of the players, and placed each within a defined space. Tame Māori were closely associated with Te Tii marae, the State with the Treaty Grounds, and wild Māori with the spaces in-between. Assigning wild Māori to the in-between space in the 1980s meant that both the tame Māori and State spaces were able remain somewhat "pure" – the trifurcation of space was quite distinct. At times there were transgressions – for example when tame Māori engaged in

discussion with wild Māori on Te Tii marae, or when wild Māori invaded the Treaty Grounds. Even being able to view these as transgressions means that we began with very defined, separate spaces.

The trifurcation of space that played out at Parihaka in the 1880s had one noticeable difference to that from Waitangi Day commemorations in the 1980s. Parihaka was a fluid space – it was always Māori, but media constructions switched between tame and wild Māori space as the 1880s progressed. The first step was clarifying the status of the Waimate Plains as being that of the Crown (for settlers), which in doing so established Parihaka as Māori space. Media representations of "outsiders" who visited or resided at Parihaka emphasised its status as wild Māori space, as did reports that highlighted its centrality for land issues (such as Te Whiti's demands that the Governor visit him at Parihaka). Cleansing the pā of the visitors, removing its ability to host large groups, and controlling access of Māori wishing to return to Parihaka were the main tactics in taming the space.

The removal of McCahon's *Urewera Mural* is similar to Waitangi Day and Parihaka in that

it was an event that evoked strong feelings of national identity. Newspaper headlines such as "A legend in its own wall space" and "McCahon theft leaves hole in NZ art heritage" indicate the reverence with which the artwork was held.¹² Art dealer and writer Warwick Brown told *The Listener* that the "outrage over the theft is justified. The work is a New Zealand classic, one of McCahon's best."¹³

The situation was not being viewed as a private asset going missing, but instead something that was more akin to a public good of which there was significant national pride attached. It fulfilled all three of McAllister's key features of public rituals and performances – it was reflexive in that it was deeply tied to stories that people tell themselves about themselves, it was part of the wider social process in terms of Tūhoe progressing its rights with respect to the Crown, and it was a dramatic and immediate act that actively helped establish a certain reality. The rest of this paper will also show how it fits Abel's trifurcation into "Pakeha, tame Maori, and wild Maori," and in fact

¹² Courtney "A legend in its own wall space" p 7. Boland "McCahon theft leaves hole in NZ art heritage" p A9.

¹³ Watkin "Have you seen this picture?" p 23.

starts to introduce a further distinction through a split of the Pākehā players and spaces.

"the pervading atmosphere of what is the Urewera"¹⁴

Geoff Park suggests that the Department of Conservation (or National Parks Board as it was at the time of commissioning McCahon) was wanting something that their chosen artist was never likely to deliver – "McCahon was a painter neither of picturesque landscape nor of wilderness."¹⁵ Commissioned in 1974 on the advice of the Parks Board's architect John Scott, McCahon prepared by researching millenarian Māori prophetic movements of the nineteenth century, with particular focus on Te Kooti, Rua Kēnana, and Te Whiti at Parihaka.¹⁶ Following two years of work and rework, McCahon's *Mural* was finally accepted and installed in time for the opening of the Visitor Centre in June 1976. McCahon chose not to attend the opening, and Simpson notes that:

¹⁴ Simpson *Colin McCahon* p 248. This is Scott's suggestion to the Department of Conservation of what the commissioned mural should aim to convey.

¹⁵ Park *Theatre Country* p 56.

¹⁶ Simpson *Colin McCahon* p 249.

[n]either Park Board, nor Tūhoe, nor McCahon, were entirely happy. It was a sorry outcome for a great if contested painting which strove to honour all parties – architect, building, Park Board, painter, Tūhoe, the Urewera.¹⁷

Mark Williams' view in *The New Zealand Journal of Art History* expands on the contested nature:

McCahon's painting has been the vehicle of exchange involving discovery and contention. An act of resistance to those who commissioned it, disputed by those it celebrates, praised, dismissed, stolen, restored – the work lies at the borders of misunderstanding, confrontation and tentative accommodation that have marked cultural relations in New Zealand since colonisation.¹⁸

The main controversy with the work related to the perceived overemphasis of one branch of Tūhoe by McCahon. Simpson notes that McCahon was initially nervous about the National Park Board potentially finding his pro-Tūhoe approach unacceptable, with the work focussing on prophetic leaders and strong statements about Māori relationship with (and allusion to ownership of) the land. Instead, he faced criticism from within Tūhoe itself over using the name of Tūhoe ancestor

¹⁷ Simpson *Colin McCahon* p 253.

¹⁸ Williams "The touch of man" p 56.

Tūtakangahau.¹⁹ This was seen as only representing one part of Tūhoe, invoking tensions from the past when the Native Land Court was seen as displaying similar preferences when investigating title to Tūhoe lands in the nineteenth century.²⁰ Wording changes were requested by Tūhoe elder John Rangihau, with negotiations going on for months as McCahon initially resisted but then seemingly relenting.²¹

Mark Williams states that *Urewera Mural* was already a famous painting before it was taken in 1997. To him, that fame comes from the painting successfully existing "at the intersection of worlds – Māori and Pakeha, colonial and national, traditional and modernising, archaic and utopian."²² To Geoff Park it is this, as well as the painting's ability to express a different form of respect and

¹⁹ Simpson *Colin McCahon* p 252.

²⁰ See Webster *A Separate Authority* for a detailed description of some of these tensions as part of establishing the Tūhoe Māori Sanctuary. Also see Binney *Encircled Lands*.

²¹ Simpson *Colin McCahon* p 253. *Park Theatre Country* p 62. I have said "seemingly" here as Park notes that the name Tūtakangahau was still visible, and potentially painted so that it become more prominent as the artwork aged.

²² Williams "The touch of man" p 57.

adoration of the natural landscape, and the spiritual relationship between man and the land. Others were impressed with the numbers, with the media reporting the painting's value having gone up from the \$6,000 commission in 1974 to somewhere in the order of \$1.2 million in pre-theft 1997.²³ Another viewpoint is expressed by Tūhoe Waikaremoana Trust Board (and former National Parks Board member) Tama Nikora, who sees it more as a tool of colonialism: "You know, this big light brought in to enlighten the ignorant masses. But then anyone can place their own construction on the work."²⁴

"... an historic place of outstanding heritage value ..."²⁵

It is perhaps telling that the only image alongside the heading introducing *Urewera mural, Urewera triptych* in Peter Simpson's book on the later years of Colin McCahon is a photograph of the Āniwaniwa Visitor Centre designed by John Scott. It was Scott – a "Māori friend" of McCahon's – who suggested to the National Parks Board that they commission the painter, perhaps because he knew he was

²³ Boland "McCahon theft leaves hole in NZ art heritage" p A9. Rose "Mural evokes strong opinions" p F2.

²⁴ Rose "Mural evokes strong opinions" p F2.

²⁵ Philp "Dignity in decline" p 7.

someone who shared his view that a traditional approach was not appropriate for architecture or art at a visitor centre in Te Urewera.

Rather than delivering a conventional type of information and administration centre with "a single room dedicated to displaying Maori [sic] items" as requested in the Park Board brief, Scott created a facility where the entire building was part of interpreting local Māori history and "the unspoilt wilderness character of the Urewera."²⁶ His first step was to get the Park Board to change sites so that the building could be nestled in amongst the bush closer to the culturally-significant waterfalls of the Āniwaniwa river. He then designed a building that spoke to Māori values in terms of approach (the building leading the visitor through a series of spaces directly referencing the movements when coming onto a marae), engagement with the site (it gave preference to direct and close views of the surrounding trees and bush, rather than sweeping panoramic landscape vistas), and form (from the modernist interpretation of a whare, through to building elements such as the

²⁶ Philp "Dignity in decline" p 7. Wagstaff & Dangerfield "Te Urewera" p 11.

circular windows that referenced Rua Kēnana's eye and the matapihi of a traditional meeting house).

There are two aspects of John Scott's Āniwaniwa Visitor Centre that are particularly relevant to this paper:

- * the close relationship between the building and the artwork, and
- * the differences in opinion expressed toward the end of the building's life, revealing a similarly contested nature to the artwork it housed.

New Zealand Historic Places Trust Pouhere Taonga's registration report for Te Urewera National Park Visitor Centre notes that the *Urewera Mural* was always part of Scott's "visual and thematic design concept for the building."²⁷ Matt Philp describes the relationship between painting and building as "hand and glove," and prominent art critic Hamish Keith, upon hearing that the painting may be toured around New Zealand galleries in the 1980s, wrote to government Ministers warning that removing it from the wall that it was intended for would be "an act of

²⁷ Wagstaff & Dangerfield "Te Urewera" p 23.

vandalism."²⁸ Geoff Park noted that McCahon and Scott envisaged the *Mural* being hung so it was lit by dappled light from a nearby window, and that it was designed to be viewed when walking past rather than standing still.²⁹ Moving it around the building, let alone to other locations, would ruin this very special relationship between artworks.

The closure in 2010 and eventual demolition of the Āniwaniwa Visitor Centre in 2016 revealed distinct positions from various parties associated with the building. These can be summarised as:

- * a formal Tūhoe view that favoured demolition and creation of a new visitor centre elsewhere. Waikaremoana Tribal Authority chairman Lance Rurehe was quoted in the *New Zealand Herald* as saying "he respected architects' views but he was equally determined to "truly reflect a tangata whenua personality to enable a genuine Te Urewera Waikaremoana visitor experience."³⁰ Te Urewera Board member Tamati Kruger expressed it similarly,

²⁸ Rose "Mural evokes strong opinions" p F2.

²⁹ Rose "Mural evokes strong opinions" p F2.

³⁰ "Last-ditch effort" np.

I'm not an architect myself, but we acknowledge the heritage value of the old VC [visitors centre] building and all of the accolades that the New Zealand Architects Institute [*sic*] have put on it - that's really not in dispute, what we have to consider is who comes first: Tūhoe interests or architectural interests?³¹

- * similarly formal views by the likes of the New Zealand Institute of Architects and New Zealand Historic Places Trust. The Institute of Architects argued to save the building on the basis of national identity – lobbying agencies responsible "for conserving New Zealand's heritage" and noting that a building "paid for by all New Zealanders, should have official protectors."³²
- * individual professionals expressed similar views - architect Gerald Blunt praised the Āniwaniwa visitor centre as being "about the New Zealand story" and "about the fusion of Māori and European," through to the starkly political statement by local architect Pierre du Toit that it was "a colonial purge by Tūhoe who are using

DoC [Department of Conservation] as a scapegoat."³³

- * Crown agency the Department of Conservation reinforcing their intention to build a different relationship with Tūhoe in light of the recent Treaty settlement and co-management arrangements for Te Urewera. The Department's Chief Executive of the time was quoted as saying "We do value John Scott. We do value heritage, but we really, really value our Treaty partner relationship with Tūhoe."³⁴
- * Ngāti Ruapani who asked the Crown to transfer the visitor centre to them so that they could implement their vision of it as a centre for Ruapani activity in the area. Ngāti Ruapani had a long history of engagement with Tūhoe (ranging from battles through to marriages), but only entered into Treaty settlement negotiations some two years after demolition of the visitor centre. The earlier advancement of the Tūhoe arrangements with the Crown (including transfer of ownership to Tūhoe of the land that the visitor centre stood on)

made it difficult for Ngāti Ruapani to engage effectively with government agencies on their view.

Cops and robbers

Pākehā are represented in the story of the missing *Urewera Mural* through four main identities – the police and judicial system, the Department of Conservation, the art community, and also McCahon himself.

The police are portrayed as primarily outsiders and largely ineffective, to the point of being almost sidelined in later reports. The immediate police response was by a single local officer, a constable based south of the visitor centre at Tuai. Reports noted that the likely getaway vehicle headed north to Ruatāhuna, in the opposite direction to where the local officer was based. This led to Department of Conservation staff undertaking most of the immediate response – including setting up roadblocks and stopping vehicles. When local men Te Kaha and Laurie Davis (who would eventually be charged with the theft) were stopped at Ruatāhuna some 45 minutes after the break-in at the visitor centre, it was a Department of Conservation staffer who searched their vehicle. The local constable arrived another hour or two later

³¹ Bootham "Heritage listed demolition" np.; Blundell "Centre of controversy" p 28.

³² "Demolition of Āniwaniwa Visitor Centre" np.; "DOC urged to save Āniwaniwa Visitor Centre" np.; "Institute of Architects urges DoC to halt Its conservation week vandalism" np.

³³ Story "Building demolition "colonial purge"" np.; Manhire "The building is going to get scalped tomorrow" np.; Blunt "Āniwaniwa demolition sacrilege" np.

³⁴ Blundell "Centre of controversy" p 28.

(accompanied by two other Conservation staffers), and a local officer also stopped a vehicle in Murupara later than morning.³⁵ This limited police capacity in the area adds to the narrative of vastness and wilderness, but also reinforces the Urewera as an area of limited State control.

For two weeks the police response remained driven from local stations, before a coordinated operation was established. By 10 June 1997 – less than a week after the break in – police were reporting that their "inquiries had almost drawn a blank" and that "they have almost exhausted all lines of enquiry."³⁶ Despite cooperation from locals (including assistance searching the area around where the burnt-out escape vehicle was found), and the use of a Māori liaison officer to help with protocol when dealing with local marae, no information was forthcoming. While there were no questions about the quality of the work being done in the reporting, it was obvious that the state had limited reach into the community. It was as though this was not their place.

³⁵ Taylor "On the trail of the missing McCahon" pp A10-11. Watkin "Have you seen this picture?" p 22.

³⁶ Courtney "A legend in its own wall space" p 7.

Once Operation Art was established it was headed up by Detective Inspector Graham Bell. Bell had previously served as police media liaison for the Moutoa Gardens (Pākaitore) occupation in 1995, and his grandfather was one of the policemen who arrested Rua Kēnana at Maungapōhatu in 1916. He eventually rose to national fame in 2002 as the face of television show *Police Ten 7*. While describing it as one of the most rewarding of his 30-year police career, upon recovery of the *Urewera Mural* by arts patron Jenny Gibbs, Bell was left to comment on why the police were not successful in doing so. Perceptions of police racism, criticism about too much effort going into finding "a few daubs on a canvas," and tales of always being one-step behind whoever was hiding the artwork – all of which is summed up by Tame Iti when he says of Bell: "He didn't get the painting back."³⁷ There is a distinct sense of pride in the fact that the State was unable to solve a case so deeply embedded in Tūhoe, and that it was only Tūhoe itself that could negotiate a solution. Despite ramping up resourcing to a national level, this was not the place for police.

³⁷ Philp "Between worlds" p 20.

A coda to the involvement of the State was the eventual conviction of Te Kaha and Laurie Davis for theft of the *Urewera Mural*. Two aspects stand out – the ability of Te Kaha to have bail conditions amended to allow him to travel to France, and the perceived lightness of the sentence handed out to him. On Friday 11 September 1998 lawyers acting for Te Kaha successfully obtained permission for him to travel out of the country for "about two weeks," placing significant trust in the offender in terms of returning.³⁸ Te Kaha also avoided a jail sentence, instead being fined and required to carry out community service work (including some done at the Auckland Art Gallery), in recognition of the political motivation behind the removal of the *Urewera Mural*.³⁹ Both of these lessen the view of the offenders as "wild" Māori by the judicial system, and instead we get a sense that the State sees some validation in the actions of the offenders.

The Department of Conservation was a relatively passive identity throughout proceedings. As noted above, their

³⁸ Wall "Art-loving millionairess flies to Paris with bailed Māori activist" p A1.

³⁹ Legat "The patron" p 78; McNaught "Tūhoe want McCahon mural" p 7.

involvement in the immediate response to the break-in showed them to be the most present of State actors, outnumbering police and being seen as more "of the area." Any more active involvement by the Department is perhaps summed up by their regional manager who stated "There's a limit to how far a conservation officer can go at four in the morning."⁴⁰ The Department's involvement as a player remained closely tied to place – as owner and custodian of the visitor centre and the artwork. This role was questioned in two ways, first through criticism about the security of the *Urewera Mural*, and second in terms of its location upon its return. The Department's response to both questions was to refer back to the wishes of Colin McCahon and John Scott: "Despite the security risks surrounding the uninsured masterpiece, DOC opted to keep it where McCahon wanted it and where it could be seen by the 60,000 people who visit the centre each year."⁴¹ In this way the Department is framed as being "for the people of New Zealand," ensuring access for all of those who wanted to view the artwork. While the art community debated exactly where it should be placed in the visitor

⁴⁰ Watkin "Have you seen this picture?" p 22.

⁴¹ Watkin "Have you seen this picture?" p 23.

centre, eventually it was tradition that won through with the *Urewera Mural* being returned to its original exhibition wall.⁴² The only challenge to the visitor centre as "home" was from Tūhoe when Tame Iti gained support for the idea of establishing a museum at Ruatāhuna "where all Tūhoe taonga, including the Urewera mural, would be returned."⁴³ This vision would be realised a decade and a half later with the *Urewera Mural's* transfer to Te Kura Whare in 2015, where it remains for public viewing.

The art community was also positioned as "for all New Zealanders." A day after it went missing, fine art auctioneer Peter Webb was quoted as saying that the removal of the *Urewera Mural* was a tragedy, and that "it's possible that I might never get to see it – me and a lot of New Zealanders."⁴⁴ Art dealer and writer Warwick Brown noted that "outrage over the theft is justified. The work is a New Zealand classic, one of McCahon's best."⁴⁵ The media always associated Dame Jenny Gibbs (as she would later be known) with public

⁴² McNaught "Tūhoe want McCahon mural" p 7.

⁴³ McNaught "Tūhoe want McCahon mural" p 7.

⁴⁴ Boland "McCahon theft leaves hole in NZ art heritage" p A9.

⁴⁵ Watkin "Have you seen this picture?" p 23.

institutions such as Te Papa the Museum of New Zealand and the Auckland Art Gallery, with the implication that she was acting on behalf of the New Zealand public. That Jenny Gibbs was negotiating on behalf of New Zealand is reinforced by her comment that "There were some people in Tūhoe who wanted it destroyed – just as their taonga had been destroyed – and it took quite a bit of negotiation to get it back intact."⁴⁶ The "place" for all New Zealanders in this sense was the art gallery, as demonstrated by the tour of the *Urewera Mural* around different city galleries before being reinstalled at the Āniwaniwa Visitor Centre.

Reporting showed that there was a close connection between the art community and Māori during the recovery of the *Urewera Mural*. In contrast to the police, the art community was shown as having a softer and more connected approach in its negotiations. The peak of this connectedness was perhaps when Te Kaha travelled with Jenny Gibbs to France while he was on bail, resulting in the news reports almost tipping into tabloid status.⁴⁷ But behind the scenes the connections

⁴⁶ McNaught "Tūhoe want McCahon mural" p 7.

⁴⁷ Wall "Art-loving millionairess flies to Paris with bailed Māori activist" p A1; Philp "Between worlds" pp 20-23.

were varied, with Detective Inspector Graham Bell noting that "Every man and his dog has wanted to get involved in retrieving this painting."⁴⁸ Te Papa Museum of New Zealand was negotiating with Tūhoe and the Department of Conservation, and lawyers were working in tandem with activists and artists. This indicated that while the State struggled to have reach into the Urewera community, other cultural institutions found it easier to find a place there. Tame Iti recognised this when he said "We depend on people outside our nation to support us."⁴⁹

In a similar cross-cultural context, but more contested, was Colin McCahon himself. Though he had died over 12 years earlier in May 1987, his presence was strongly felt throughout the reporting. His status as a national art icon who worked hard to explore the interaction between two cultures was emphasised, almost as a way of reflection of how the nation viewed itself in terms of bicultural dialogue. Dr Geoff Park pointed to both McCahon and John Scott's intention for the building to be "a fusion between a marae and visitor centre" (i.e. between Māori and

⁴⁸ Philp "Between worlds" p 21.

⁴⁹ Philp "Between worlds" p 22.

Pākehā cultures).⁵⁰ McCahon's desire to communicate the relationship between Tūhoe and the land through the *Urewera Mural* was used as a gateway for understanding wider political frustrations and agendas, as expressed by Professor Michael Dunn:

A lot of the issues he raised in that period are the centre of public debate today. Like a number of major artists in that period, he was responding to a feeling for the need to validate Māori cultural rights and their links to the land.⁵¹

This blurring across cultures continued when the *New Zealand Herald* published a large image of the *Urewera Mural* hanging in Auckland Art Gallery, the headline "Tūhoe symbol of land protest back in focus" suggesting that McCahon painted the *Mural* as a protest piece, or that it was its theft and return that was the protest.⁵² Not that all parties shared this cross-cultural view – Tūhoe Trust manager Tama Nikora saying "When it went missing I told the minister we wouldn't miss it," and Tame Iti being blunter with "I'm an admirer of McCahon's paintings,

⁵⁰ Courtney "A legend in its own wall space" p 7.

⁵¹ Boland "McCahon theft leaves hole in NZ art heritage" p A9.

⁵² Anon "Tūhoe symbol of land protest back in focus" p A4.

but most Tūhoe don't care a damn."⁵³

Jenny Gibbs talked of "some Tūhoe," and Tame Iti "most Tūhoe." As a general rule, these qualifiers introduced a level of nuance when constructing Māori identities in the reporting of the *Urewera Mural* disappearance and return. Early reports tended to avoid identifying the people in the vehicles leaving the visitor centre as Māori, simply referring to them as "the men in the van" or "those who stole it."⁵⁴ References to Māori instead focussed on those helping police with their inquiries (e.g. locals helping search the bush), views on what had happened to the *Mural* (e.g. "art dealers and Māori elders say they believe Colin McCahon's stolen work ... is safe and has been taken in a political act"),⁵⁵ and to the wider political issues Tūhoe were seeking to address in its relationship with the Crown. While Māori were most often associated with the Urewera (and by association the wilderness and the rural), this was often balanced or underpinned by reference to the political aims or a small amount of history of Tūhoe, helping avoid

⁵³ Philp "Between worlds" pp 22, 23.

⁵⁴ Watkin "Have you seen this picture?" p 22; Taylor "On the trail of the missing McCahon" pp A10-A11.

⁵⁵ Courtney "A legend in its own wall space" p 7.

associations with separatist or militant actions that often accompany "wild" Māori identities.

The two Māori most central to the reporting were Te Kaha and Tame Iti. The media made good use of images of their faces with moko, squarely placing them in the role of "other" at the time. This device was used, for example, to heighten the sense of "being out of place" when the media were reporting on Te Kaha's travel to Paris with Jenny Gibbs or even simply the association between Gibbs, Te Kaha, and Tame Iti. Despite Te Kaha having working premises in Auckland (as well as in the Bay of Plenty), and Tame Iti regularly travelling to Auckland and around New Zealand, their appearance in Auckland to discuss the *Mural's* return was seen to be transgressing boundaries. *North & South* framed Jenny Gibbs as doing something beyond anything most New Zealanders would do: "Her liberal instincts and academic background in New Zealand history predisposed her to be interested in and moved by the Tūhoe cause and to engage with rather than dismiss Te Kaha and Tame Iti."⁵⁶

References to Te Kaha and Tame Iti being

⁵⁶ Legat "The patron" p 78.

activists, protestors and "nationalists," and Te Kaha as the offender, were the main devices used to create the "wild" Māori identities. Their roles as artists and community members did come through as well, helping avoid one-dimensionality. As the story progressed and the *Urewera Mural* was returned, more was made of the political motives behind the removal of the *Urewera Mural*, adding context to Tame Iti's involvement with the negotiations. While *The Listener* utilised a number of provocative statements from Iti about the loss of land and different interpretations of what is meant by "stolen," even this was placed in the context of history and political protest action.⁵⁷ When located in Tūhoe lands and the Urewera, these statements and actions were arguably not seen as creating "wild" Māori space as in Waitangi and Parihaka. Instead, it was only when those actions went to other places (i.e. Auckland) that they were seen as being "out of place."

Location, location, location

There is no surprise in that most of New Zealand has a hazy view of the geography of Lake Waikaremoana and the surrounding area. At least two to three hours away from

⁵⁷ Philp "Between worlds" p 22.

major population centres such as Taupō, Napier or Rotorua, it is a destination you proceed to with a purpose. Its remoteness was emphasised through media reports of the *Urewera Mural* escapades – reinforcing both the mythology of the Urewera as place of mist and mystery as well as the mystery of just where the *Urewera Mural* was being hidden. As Geoff Park noted, as you approach the Urewera area "you can watch the landscape suddenly slip from grip of the great colonial project."⁵⁸

Distance was a theme running through the media reporting. One report had Ruatāhuna 52 kilometres from the visitor centre, and another had it 40 kilometres.⁵⁹ It was also noted that police officers had to fly by helicopter from Whakatāne to Ruatāhuna, inferring that travelling by road was too time consuming and arduous.⁶⁰ As soon as the Department of Conservation worker realised that the *Urewera Mural* had been removed, he rang the nearest police officer who was based

⁵⁸ Park *Theatre Country* p 54.

⁵⁹ Taylor "On the trail of the missing McCahon" pp A10-A11. Courtney "A legend in its own wall space" p 7; Watkin "Have you seen this picture?" p 22.

⁶⁰ Taylor "On the trail of the missing McCahon" pp A10-A11.

13km to the south of the visitor centre (or 20 minutes drive according to another report).⁶¹ Adding further emphasis to the distance away from police assistance, the first roadblocks were set up by Department of Conservation staff rather than police.⁶²

Another theme was the ruggedness of the area. References are made to metal roads, winding roads, dense bush, thick canopy, and rough country. Even when criticism was levelled at the security surrounding the *Urewera Mural* in the visitor centre, comment was made that it was left "hanging in Urewera bush."⁶³ Recounting unsuccessful attempts to locate the *Urewera Mural* with the help of informants, it was noted that a police four wheel drive vehicle became stuck during one of several river crossings and subsequently swamped with water.⁶⁴ This was as much law enforcement versus nature as it was versus the offenders. It was certainly not your typical day on the beat in the city: "Though calls have been flooding in to the small rural police

⁶¹ Taylor "On the trail of the missing McCahon" pp A10-A11.

⁶² Watkin "Have you seen this picture?" p 22.

⁶³ Courtney "A legend in its own wall space" p 7.

⁶⁴ Taylor "On the trail of the missing McCahon" pp A10-A11.

station, nearly all of them have been media enquiries."⁶⁵

Auckland makes an appearance as a location later on in proceedings. It is constructed as a place of wealth and sophistication – you could even say civilisation – in comparison to the relatively unknown world of the *Urewera*, Lake Waikaremoana, and the Bay of Plenty. The byline to *The Listener's* lead article on 17 October 1998 points to an "unlikely link between Paritai Drive's millionaire row and Tūhoe Country."⁶⁶ The cover for that issue shouted "The millionairess and the radical," with art patron and Te Papa Board member Jenny Gibbs' photograph placed right next to the headline and just above an image of Te Kaha (with full-face moko). A month earlier the front page of *New Zealand Herald* was headed with "Art-loving millionairess flies to Paris with bailed Māori activist," with the first mention of Gibbs being "Auckland millionairess."⁶⁷ There is no confusion over names here – no need to explain what Paritai Drive or what a flight to Paris symbolises.

⁶⁵ Courtney "A legend in its own wall space" p 7.

⁶⁶ Philp "Between worlds" p 20.

⁶⁷ Wall "Art-loving millionairess flies to Paris with bailed Māori activist" p A1.

The Auckland Art Gallery, academics, art dealers and lawyers are the other references supporting the construction of civilised Auckland. This emphasis was driven by the media focus on the importance and value of the *Urewera Mural*. The day after it was removed from the Āniwaniwa Visitor Centre, the *New Zealand Herald* ran an article that solicited input from the Dean of Fine Arts at the University of Auckland, the principal curator of Auckland Art Gallery, and "Auckland fine art auctioneer" Peter Webb.⁶⁸ Stories on the return of the *Urewera Mural* also emphasised Auckland Art Gallery, and also introduced different lawyers who were either supporting Dame Jenny Gibbs in her efforts or pursuing their own lines of enquiry. In "Secret bid recovers mural," the Auckland Art Gallery is almost given status as an emergency department for art, with the *New Zealand Herald* reporting that Dame Jenny Gibbs "drove straight to the Auckland City Art Gallery" after recovering it, where luckily the art conservators proclaiming the mural to be in remarkably good shape.⁶⁹

The Āniwaniwa Visitor Centre itself was a key

⁶⁸ "McCahon theft leaves hole in NZ art heritage" p A9.

⁶⁹ Chisholm & Keane "Secret bid recovers mural" pp A1-A2.

location in the story of the *Urewera Mural*. As noted above, much was made of the visitor centre being built for the artwork and how the two were inseparable. Locating the visitor centre "deep in the Ureweras" or in the "Urewera bush" signalled a remoteness similarly applied to local Māori, and also a oneness with the landscape that echoed the inseparability of building and artwork.⁷⁰ That this was a building owned and managed by a Crown agency – the Department of Conservation – seemed of little relevance in many of the reports. While there was some initial noise about not returning the *Urewera Mural* to the Āniwaniwa Visitor Centre for security and art conservation reasons, any real challenge to the visitor centre being "home" only came from Tūhoe after the return of the *Mural*. There was even suggestion that the motive behind removing the *Mural* in the first place was a reaction to rumours that it was going to be relocated to Wellington for display at Parliament.⁷¹ Both Tame Iti and Jenny Gibbs raised the question of the *Urewera Mural* being held at Ruatāhuna instead, with Gibbs making the distinction that it may no longer be appropriate for the Department of

⁷⁰ Courtney "A legend in its own wall space" p 7.

⁷¹ Taylor "On the trail of the missing McCahon" p A11.

Conservation to be responsible for its care.⁷² Home for the *Mural* would still be in Tūhoe lands, just not Lake Waikaremoana or "deep in the Ureweras." To most people outside of the area this would have been a very fine distinction, and the shift from Āniwaniwa to Ruatāhuna just a move from one part of the wilderness to another.

Conclusion

Waitangi in the 1980s revealed a clear delineation between Pākehā, "tame" Māori and "wild" Māori spaces when reporting on protests. Architecture reinforced the narratives around our national day, helping to construct a message of unity across cultures. At Parihaka in the 1880s we could see similarities around reporting on the protests of the time, with the key difference being that Parihaka had to be converted by force from "wild" Māori space to "tame" Māori space.

Both Colin McCahon's *Urewera Mural* and John Scott's Āniwaniwa Visitor Centre have been part of a discourse on national unity, with both seen to be aiming to achieve a cross-cultural dialogue between Māori and Pākehā. The protest action of removing the *Urewera*

⁷² McNaught "Tūhoe want McCahon mural" p 7.

Mural in 1997 from the visitor centre can be read in similar ways to Waitangi in the 1980s and Parihaka in the 1880s, examining how architecture reinforced the narratives of nationhood.

In comparison to Waitangi and Parihaka, the *Urewera Mural* removal presents a more complicated picture of spatial relationships. Rather than representing a "trifurcation" of space, the players and places involved in the *Urewera Mural* removal are more fractured and more fluid. The police as State agents were clearly seen as outsiders, with even the local stations seen as distant and unable to be part of the local community. Whereas the arms of government were clearly aligned in the cases of Waitangi and Parihaka, with the *Urewera Mural* the police occupied a very different position to the Department of Conservation which was seen as more aligned to the community and overall New Zealand. However, it was the art community and Colin McCahon himself who were seen as most strongly as actively working on New Zealand's behalf, though still outsiders in terms of their relationship to Tūhoe.

While the *Urewera* was framed as remote and distant wilderness (especially when

juxtaposed against the civilised and wealthy Auckland), this did not mean the Urewera and surrounding areas were seen as being "wild" space. It was different and difficult to understand (is Ruatāhuna part of Urewera? Is it 40 or 52 kilometres to Ruatāhuna?), but not dangerous or threatening. What tended to make this space understandable was the continuing history of Tūhoe seeking redress from the Crown for previous confiscations and wrongdoings. Rather than trying to control or tame as in Waitangi and Parihaka, it was an attempt to understand that was more dominant with the *Urewera Mural*.

The only clear identification of space with "wild" Māori was "not Auckland." This framing of space as somewhere where they should not be was not matched with a location where "wild" Māori should be – we could expect this to be the Urewera but as noted above this tended to be predominantly associated with "tame" Māori. People like Tame Iti were able to occupy both spaces – as negotiator for the recovery of the *Urewera Mural* he is reinforcing the Urewera as "tame" Māori space, but when framed as activist (i.e. "wild" Māori) then he was seen as not belonging in Auckland (but not necessarily only associated with the Urewera).

		People	Place
Pakeha	Police	Local station officers Operation lead Detective Inspector Graham Bell	Not part of local community, distant, thinly spread and outsiders
	Department of Conservation	Park rangers who responded immediately to removal, working on behalf of New Zealanders	Deep in the Urewera, part of community (though not Tūhoe), Āniwaniwa Visitor Centre
	Art community	Dame Jenny Gibbs, art dealers and auctioneers, curators	Auckland, art galleries around New Zealand
	Colin McCahon	Pākehā striving to understand Māori	New Zealand (a national icon), Āniwaniwa Visitor Centre
"tame" Māori		Tame Iti as negotiator Tūhoe	Urewera (including Ruatāhuna), wilderness
"wild" Māori		Te Kaha as offender Tame Iti as activist	Not Auckland

Table 3: People and places involved in 1990s Urewera Mural removal and recovery

Timeline

October 1974	McCahon invited to paint mural for a new visitor centre at Āniwaniwa
June 1976	<i>Urewera Mural</i> installed and Āniwaniwa Visitor Centre opens
1984	<i>Urewera Mural</i> removed from "Māori hall" of Visitor Centre and rehung above reception desk
5 June 1997	<i>Urewera Mural</i> taken from Āniwaniwa Visitor Centre
August 1998	<i>Mural</i> recovered by Jenny Gibbs, taken to Auckland Art Gallery
March 1999	<i>Urewera Mural</i> on exhibition at Auckland Art Gallery
September 2000	<i>Mural</i> returned to Āniwaniwa Visitor Centre
2008	Top floors of Āniwaniwa Visitor Centre closed
2010	Āniwaniwa Visitor Centre closed, <i>Mural</i> taken to Auckland Art Gallery
2011	<i>Mural</i> on exhibition at Tauranga Art Gallery
2013	<i>Mural</i> on exhibition at Whakatāne Museum and Research Centre
May 2015	<i>Mural</i> transferred to Te Kura Whare, Tāneatua
September 2016	Āniwaniwa Visitor Centre demolished

It is possible to draw a line between the original aims of McCahon's *Urewera Mural* and Scott's Āniwaniwa Visitor Centre as a

way to explain the more complicated, and less delineated, construction of space as part of the *Urewera Mural* removal and return. Whereas

at Waitangi and Parihaka the State aimed to achieve a very structured dialogue that reinforced a particular view of nationhood at those times, for the *Urewera Mural* removal and return this dialogue was continuing with no predetermined end point being imposed at the time. If the removal and return of the artwork was indeed a political stunt, then it was a continuation of an attribute that Tame Iti saw in McCahon's work: "It's the interesting thing about this painting: it has generated discussions, both within and outside of Tūhoe."⁷³

⁷³ Philp "Between worlds" p 22.

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