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Aspects of symbolism and composition in Maori Art

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ASPECTS OF SYMBOLISM AND COMPOSITION IN MAORI ART

'It is the rhythm of the chemical drama in which synthesis and analysis are alternately engendered. It is the rhythm of the physiological drama in which the systole and diastole by turn fling life to the periphery and take it up again, poised and benumbed, to remake it.' ... Elie Faure

The study of meaning and the explanation of symbolism in Maori art has been limited by a prevalent view that whatever the symbolic meanings that existed in pre-European times were, they have been lost beyond recall or distorted beyond recognition. Even Elsdon Best, who spent many years among the comparatively isolated Tuhoe people of the Ureweras during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, echoed this attitude. Writing of the mysterious three-fingered hand in Maori carving, he concluded:

Some quaint reasons for this peculiarity have been given but the fact is that no Maori can give the origin of it any more than he can explain the *manaia* and other symbolical carved designs.¹

A recent article on Maori art in the New Zealand Encyclopaedia makes the same general point.

Very little is known of the meaning of carving. Probably very much of it was purely decorative... It is a reasonable conclusion, therefore, that either the amount of symbolism in carving has been greatly exaggerated or that it had been lost by the time the Europeans came to New Zealand.²

My own view is that the study of meaning in Maori art should not necessarily stand at such an impasse. I object to those conclusions which emphasise the paucity of direct descriptive information and assert thereby that the symbolism is lost or masked and that the art is merely decorative. Perhaps what is lacking to scholars is not so much material or information but rather the interpretive possibilities which modern

¹ Best 1924: 574.

² McEwan 1967: 9. Two other distinguished writers on the subject have come to the same conclusion. See Archey 1962: 279; Firth 1966: 29.

social anthropology offers. Can anthropology offer a model which, without exaggerated claims or elementary distortions, may throw new light on the meaning of Maori art forms?

I believe it can, and this essay is aimed at opening up new approaches to this subject.

ASPECTS OF MEANING

Victor Turner writes that it is important to distinguish at least three levels or fields of meaning: 1. the *exegetical* (the level of native interpretation, the data collected from informants); 2. the *operational* (the use of the symbol, the symbol in the context of social action); 3. the *positional* (the way in which the meaning of the symbol "derives from its relationship to other symbols in a totality, a Gestalt, whose elements acquire their significance from the system as a whole."³)

Clearly it is the relative lack of exegetical information that has baulked the efforts of scholars in their studies of Maori art. There is a general view that if Maoris themselves were (or are) ignorant of the meaning of their art then there is little chance of finding the meaning from any other source; we have only necessarily vague and approximate comparisons with other Oceanic art to go from. My intention in this essay is to devote more attention than is usually given to the operational and positional aspects of meaning since, in these cases, there is real opportunity for illuminating the meanings of Maori art. What these two aspects of meaning imply is really a functional approach in the first case (putting the art objects in the context of social action and belief), and an artistic approach in the second case (studying the principles and forms of composition in particular works of art).

ART AND SOCIETY: THE MICROCOSM AND THE MACROCOSM

Claude Lévi-Strauss has observed that much so-called primitive art constitutes an almost self-contained microcosm within the social macrocosm. He notes that one of the essential qualities of this art is that it in effect miniaturises or reduces in scale the object or subject contemplated by the artist. He writes . . . "this qualitative transposition extends and diversifies our power over a homologue of the thing, and by means of it the latter can be grasped, assessed and apprehended at a glance."⁴

³ Turner 1967: 51.

⁴ Lévi-Strauss 1966: 23.

However, the 'thing' so transformed in art must be clearly understood before embarking upon a discussion of particular relationships between the artist and his social milieu.

The social macrocosm is built upon rules, customary usages, terminological categories, principles of division and distinction, which are all subject to change. In a stable society the cyclical and seasonal events of social life bring people together on some occasions and split them apart on others. Moreover, in the lifespan of any individual he or she will occupy different roles or positions in the social structure. In a society where a great degree of irreversible change has been created as a result of conquest or colonial incursions new roles or structural positions are formed which have the same effect of putting some people at odds with one another and at the same time joining other people together in new 'communities' within the traditional milieu. In any of these cases change is attended by tension and even conflict between people, be it transient or permanent. Change always, for a time at least, tends to go against the security of the established order in both a psychological and sociological sense. Much of the dynamic of social life may be understood as being inherently an attempt to acknowledge change while maintaining order and continuity. Change, whether seasonal or the consequence of unprecedented and tumultuous events from outside, must be transformed into a positive force, compatible with social continuity and order. This paradox, this stress, presents itself to all men in all societies in one form or another. It involves tensions, doubts, transient chaos, and as Radcliffe-Brown observed, referring specifically to the kinship system, "for a system to work efficiently it must provide methods of limiting, controlling, or resolving such conflicts or tensions."⁵

I accept the view (espoused most notably by Lévi-Strauss) that it is largely in the intellectual and artistic workings of myth and of art that these conflicts and tensions of actual social life tend towards their resolution. Lévi-Strauss observes that the mythmaker is like a *bricoleur*. He creates new structures on the intellectual plane by means of events, new structures which are frequently not homologous with the prevailing social structure.⁶ The artist transposes and transforms reality, produces symmetry from imperfection, unity from contradiction. Lévi-Strauss sees the artist as existing half-way between mythological thought and scientific thought (which creates events — changing the

⁵ Radcliffe-Brown 1950: 83.

⁶ Lévi-Strauss 1966: 22.

world — by means of structures).⁷ In other words we can search in works of art for the ways and means by which the artist alters the very structure of social life in his attempts to resolve contradictions and tensions inherent in it, and we can also look for the ways and means by which he simultaneously creates social events outside the range of possibilities built into the rules and categories of normal social structure, employing artistic designs in the process.

The artist is always mid-way between design and anecdote, and his genius consists in uniting internal and external knowledge, a 'being' and a 'becoming' in producing... an object which does not exist as such and which he is nevertheless able to create... This is a nicely balanced synthesis of one or more natural or social events. The aesthetic emotion is the result of this union between the structural order and the order of events, which is brought about within a thing created by man and so also in effect by the observer who discovers the possibility of such a union through the work of art.⁸

The relationship between the artist and society is here considered as a complementary rather than as an opposed relationship. The synthesis he produces out of the events of social life and the objects of nature (wood, ochres etc.) affords the community at large a vicarious though none the less real opportunity for discovering underlying unities in a world which has been categorised and divided. There can really be no question "as to whether community influence or individual enterprise is the stronger motivating force in art production",⁹ at least not in primitive communities. The creative endeavours of the artist, whether carver, mythmaker, weaver, or singer of songs, must be seen as a dynamic complement to the social macrocosm in which conservative tendencies often collide with equally forceful tendencies for change and in which the community is continually besieged by the forces of the arbitrary and accidental, the individual and the adventitious. No better example of this dynamic could be given than from the many examples of culture-contact situations in which the myth-dreamers (as Burridge calls the prophets and seers of the revitalization movements) play such a dramatic part.

The *tapu* of the Maori artist can be seen as far more than a mystical association between a man and a sacred object. By being perpetually involved in those unifying transformations which so much art symbolises, the artist occupies a socially ambiguous position somewhere

⁷ *ibid.*: 25.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ Archey 1962: 280.

between 'being' and 'becoming'. Situated at the periphery of the social macrocosm his artistic microcosm is nonetheless concerned with matters of coherence and unity which are the central concern of the whole community. The art objects he created were, as will be shown, frequently associated with those 'rites de passage' which Van Gennep insisted were the heart of social life and the very dynamic of human social interactions. By transforming social reality the artist places himself partly outside the social milieu and the affirmation of the significance of his role is found in his *tapu*.

ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Maori woodcarving is almost completely involved with the social functions of architecture. As Sir Gilbert Archey notes: "Maori wood carving is in large part, perhaps in major part, an art of architecture; sculpture and house-building are linked in the one act of commemoration and personification."¹⁰ Canoe carving was also very much a part of this 'architectural' totality. From the early records it is evident that canoe carvings were frequently used on *pataka*,¹¹ houses,¹² and on burial coffins and memorials to the dead.¹³

Though recent arguments by Groube¹⁴ have cast many doubts upon the generally-accepted picture of pre-European Maori art forms and architectural structures the changes which took place in Maori art during the late 18th and early 19th centuries seem to have been changes in scale only. It would be a mistake to proceed with discussion of particular Maori art forms without a brief resumé of some of these changes and the implications of them.

The superior *whare whakairo*, as a permanent community meeting house or council house, appears to be a late development in Maori culture which can be traced back to the early 1830s, at least in the northern districts of the North Island. The following quotation from Augustus Hamilton gives us a picture of a building which does not seem to have existed as such in the early years of the 19th century.

In every group of houses of any importance there was one, a *whare whakairo* or carved house, which served in the first place as a council chamber and as a guest house, and was often regarded as a memorial of

¹⁰ Archey 1958: 98.

¹¹ Best 1916: 18.

¹² Polack 1840: 213. See also Wright 1955: 69 (an illustration of the door of a Bay of Islands house from the diary of M. Roquemaurel).

¹³ Polack 1838: 137; Savage 1939: 33.

¹⁴ Groube 1964 (a & b).

some great event in the history of the tribe, such as the birth of an heir to the principal chief, or of a special assembly of the tribes to discuss questions of war and peace.¹⁵

The emergence of this large house coincides with the emergence of large houses which were clearly being built by Maoris in the north for the use of missionaries or traders whom they wished to induce to settle amongst them. A comment by Tareha gives a clue to the origins of this kind of house. He notes that the house Tehaukituranga erected at Tauranga by Rahurahi in 1845 was completed "about the time when you Europeans introduced Christianity amongst us..."¹⁶ Thus the type of house which Hamilton describes was evidently a superior *whare puni* in which a high ranking person and his family lived. As Best describes the *whare puni* among the Tuhoe it is an unembellished structure with no interior carving at all, plain posts, and perhaps in some cases a few exterior carved panels or slabs.¹⁷ The *whare whakairo* often superseded this superior kind of *whare puni*, receiving much more artistic attention and taking on functions which the *whare puni* originally did not have. These new functions — religious, political, economic — must of course be explained in terms of the social changes in Maori society following the arrival of Europeans in New Zealand.

Evidence for the existence or non-existence of the *pataka* in pre-European Maori society is too meagre to allow us to draw any definite conclusions from it. However, it is a valuable clue in our investigations that Polack referred to the *pataka taonga* as *powaka*, the same word that the Maori used for the personal or family carved box in which precious objects were kept. The same word — *waka* — was also given to the canoes. The interconnectedness of various carved objects can be demonstrated linguistically as much as symbolically and I have already mentioned the process of interchanging carvings from one context to another. The treasures or *taonga* of a village were stored under *tapu* in the *pataka*. They symbolised the common heritage and the unity of the community. With the settlement of more and more people in permanent village communities (*kainga*) consequent upon the economic and political changes which the coming of the Europeans entrained, the various valuable and moveable property of hitherto dispersed groups of people would presumably be collected together in one place and the storage of these objects in the *pataka taonga* would symbolically affirm

¹⁵ Hamilton 1896: 79.

¹⁶ Tareha 1868.

¹⁷ Best 1924: 571.

the unity of the group. In this sense the *pataka* (or *powaka* as Polack calls it) was a logical extension of the functions and symbolism of the family *waka huia*, incorporating the communal valuables of several co-resident family groups or *whanau*. The absence of *pataka*, as attested in very early records, may only reflect the relative rarity of large permanent village communities. Certainly the earliest recorded *pataka* were very small and may have had additional significance in the context of cargo cult belief.¹⁸

The early records of the Maori reveal a picture of a largely nomadic population, the fortified *pas* being retreats in times of hostilities or simply fortified storage depots. Hawkesworth describes single family groups of some 15 or 20 people isolated from other similar groups, all along the East Coast.¹⁹ Forster observed a great number of temporary huts abandoned everywhere by these nomadic groups. He also noted that the villages were divided into districts, implying that when these *whanau* did combine on various occasions their basic divisions and tensions were not readily abandoned.²⁰ Like Savage²¹ he notes the hostility between family groups in all parts of the North Island coasts.²² When assemblies of large numbers of people did come about they were in the open air and there were no special buildings for the purpose. Nicholas gives the population figure for Rangihou and Waikati as about 150 people in both cases.²³ This would imply that villages were localised *hapu*, with more than one *hapu* perhaps represented in the village. That such localised groupings were temporary or unstable is attested to by the many accounts of deserted villages and ruined *pas*.

With the coming of the Europeans settlement in *pas* or fortified *kainga* become more the rule than the exception. As in the later years of the 19th century several *hapu* might be represented in a single village. The tensions and political intrigues which went into this new scale of social organisation are evident enough in tribal oral traditions. The tensions between lineage sections localised in villages, were resolved through marriage alliances, war pacts, reciprocal exchanges of goods at great feasts, but these tensions were constant and created in Maori society a state of nascent conflict. It is partly against this background that I have attempted to explain the place of Maori art.

¹⁸ Jackson 1968: 21.

¹⁹ Hawkesworth 1773: 311. See also Cook 1967: 810.

²⁰ Forster 1777: 124-125.

²¹ Savage 1939: 17.

²² Forster 1777: 100. Also Cook 1967: 71.

²³ Nicholas 1817: 175.

One of the consequences of these changes in settlement patterns and social organisation was that a greater amount of valuable and moveable property came to be localised in one place. Moreover, the production of immovable 'property' became more possible and the greater scale of buildings and art objects must be seen as a part of this social change. Greater effort, specialisation and diversification in art production also became possible and even if European tools added little to the craftsman's skill the larger permanent settlements made more coordinated and productive work possible. In the early 19th century there was an efflorescence of carved art in both the building of houses and *pataka*, while canoe carving declined. Economic changes may explain something of this, but there are other social explanations which will be discussed during this essay. However, the *pare*, which I think deserves special attention, was always equal in symbolic importance to the canoe carving. Indeed, the *pare* was so highly-valued, judging from the Maori's attempts to preserve it from the ravages of war and the rot of time,²⁴ that one is even more inclined to give it a special place in attempting to throw light on the meanings and values of Maori art. I therefore propose to make the *pare* the centrepiece of discussion in the following pages.

THE PARE

I earlier referred to art as a microcosm in which certain aspects of the social macrocosm were reduced in scale and rearranged in structure. Consistent with this idea is Sapir's concept of the 'condensation' symbol which he distinguishes from 'referential' symbols in the following way:

(Condensation symbols)... are highly condensed forms of substitutive behaviour for direct expression, allowing for the ready release of emotional tension in conscious or unconscious form... While referential symbolism grows with formal elaboration in the conscious, condensation symbolism strikes deeper and deeper roots in the unconscious, and diffuses its emotional quality to types of behaviour and situations apparently far removed from the original meaning of the symbols.²⁵

The Maori *pare* can be very usefully analysed in terms of this notion of condensation symbolism. I propose to show how the *pare* contains

²⁴ Many *pare* have been found in caves and swamps where they were evidently placed in times of war. Other carvings were similarly safeguarded. The *maihi* of the famous Te Kaha *pataka* said to be erected on the East Cape circa 1730, was secreted in a cave in 1814 to save it from a Ngapuhi raid led by Morenga. See Phillipps 1952: 168.

²⁵ Sapir, quoted by Turner 1967: 29.

a wealth of meaning, compressed from direct social experience, transmuted into new meanings and effects. This transmutation carries us into the realm of unconscious apprehension and effect. It carries us from the referential aspects of meaning to the more elusive levels of condensation symbolism, where, it should be recognized, a multitude of meanings may exist simultaneously. Seeking meaning at this level of structure, beyond the apparent and the referential, obviously reduces the value of exegetical statements about the meaning of the symbols to only one place in the total possibilities of interpretation — a point made earlier. But we do in fact have enough direct statements concerning the extrinsic social meanings and values of the *pare* in Maori community life to seek further and attempt to discover more about the intrinsic symbolic universe which the *pare* implicates. The *pare* and other carved forms of Maori art are not just signs to be read piecemeal fashion.²⁶ They involve us in a total symbolic system, the connections and interrelationships of which involve our attention at more than the conscious or manifest levels.²⁷ "Art is a patterning not merely of the seen, the images of the contemporary external world; it is also a patterning of the unseen."²⁸

PARE TYPES AND STYLES

Some kind of working classification of Maori *pare* would seem to be a necessary preliminary to a study of them. The criteria used in making such a classification could be: 1. the sex of the figures and composition of figures according to sex; 2. the number of the figures and composition of figures according to number; 3. style or tribal areas²⁹; 4. historical epoch, i.e. whether pre-European or post-European, early or late 19th century; 5. whether figure motifs or spiral motifs dominate in the composition.³⁰

The difficulties encountered in ascertaining provenance or dates for many *pare* make 3 and 4 of secondary value. As Archey has pointed out³¹ styles of carving do not consistently refer to specific tribal areas

²⁶ The attempt to decipher signs rather than study the positional meanings of symbols reaches its ludicrous extreme in the work of Ettie Rout 1926, Chapter 6.

²⁷ My agreement with the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss is obvious here. Cognitive structures in the human mind, largely at the unconscious level, must be referred to in order to maintain a complementarity between psychological and sociological explanation.

²⁸ Firth 1966: 31.

²⁹ e.g. McEwan 1967; Skinner 1921.

³⁰ e.g. Archey 1960; 1962.

³¹ *ibid.*

or provinces. It must also be remembered that even in the early 19th century carvers from one tribal area would frequently be engaged to carve important works in another.³² The historical criterion, when dates are known, is a useful way of explaining some anomalies and changes in design and this has been borne in mind throughout the writing of this essay. The sex of figures on the *pare* is sometimes difficult to determine or quite ambiguous. Either the figures were deliberately carved as sexually ambivalent in some cases or European prudery and ignorance dictated a reduction of sexual symbolism. I prefer the latter explanation since *pare* which are known to be very old usually present marked and even exaggerated sexual qualities. But in making a classification I have made this criterion a secondary consideration. I have classified primarily according to criteria 2 and 5, basing this classification on Archey's scheme³³ but enlarging and refining it according to what I believe to be a fundamental aspect of design and composition, namely the number of figures and the arrangement of them and of profiles of them along the *pare*.

- A (i) Full figure; *takarangi* spirals on either side; *manaia* at either end of the *pare*. (plate 1)
- (ii) Full figure; interlocking *manaia* forms on either side; *manaia* at either end of the *pare*. (plates 2 and 3)
- (iii) The Kaitaia lintel.
- B (i) Two full figures separated by a single large *takarangi* spiral; two half-size *takarangi* spirals on top of each other at either end of the *pare*. (plate 4)
- (ii) Same as above except that the single large central *takarangi* spiral becomes two adjoining spirals. (plate 5)
- C (a) Three full figures, arms upraised with fingers usually close to the ears, separated by *takarangi* spirals; with two half-size *takarangi* spirals on top of each other at either end of the *pare*. (plate 6)
- (i) Same as above except that the lower of the two end *takarangi* spirals becomes a *manaia* form in both cases.
- (ii) Same as C (a) except that the *takarangi* spirals between the central and adjacent figures become two small *takarangi* spirals in each case, one on top of the other.

³² Polack 1840: 50; 1840: 227-228. Tattooing artists also often came from the East Coast — Poverty Bay area to work in the north. See Earle 1966: 68.

³³ Archey 1960; 1962.

- (iii) Same as C (a) (i) except that there are no spirals at the ends of the *pare*.
- (b) Three full figures as in C (a) separated by interlocking *manaia* forms or *mata kupenga* designs; *manaia* at each end of the *pare*. (plates 7 and 8)
- (c) Two *manaia* forms at left-hand end of the *pare*, followed by three sinewy semi-*manaia* forms. (Taranaki type)

N.B. With the exception of a few late 19th century anomalies³⁴ all the *pare* which I have seen or studied fall into these general categories. The small but significant variations in *pare* design and composition will be discussed further in the pages that follow.

PRINCIPLES AND SYMBOLISM OF COMPOSITION

As Archey has pointed out³⁵ the majority of *pare* are composed of either 3 human figures and six double spirals of the *takarangi* or *pitau* type, or of a single human figure flanked by interlocking *manaia* forms or spirals and with a full *manaia* figure at each end of the *pare*. The Taranaki carvings seem at first sight to be exceptional in as much as a single identifiable style of composition is invariably associated with a single tribal area. *Pare* types (C (c)) are unique to Taranaki but if the *manaia* is considered to be 'structurally' equivalent to the double spiral and derived from it as Archey has suggested³⁶ then we can safely assume that these types of *pare* are simply highly-stylized variations on a single structural theme. Archey has also compared the human figure + flanking *manaia* composition with similar compositions on the *pataka paepae* and the sides of the great carved canoes.³⁷ But there is a difference which I consider significant, namely that the *manaia* on the *pare* face away from the central figure, while on the canoe boards and *pataka* they tend to face inwards, grasping the central figure. This fact will receive attention later.

The number three immediately presents a significance to us, for in most *pare* compositions there are either three full figures or a full figure + two *manaia* figures dominating the entire composition. There

³⁴ See Phillipps 1944: fig. 3, plate 49; 1955: 98, fig. 47; 1955: 101, fig. 51 for good examples of later work.

³⁵ Archey 1962: 278.

³⁶ Archey shows how the *takarangi* or *pitau* spirals derive, by a series of stylistic manoeuvres, from the opposed lip or beak forms of the *manaia*. Archey 1933: 178; 1936: 49; 1962: 276.

³⁷ Archey 1933: 184; 1936: 57.

are few exceptions. The use of two figures (category B) is known from very few examples. Where several other faces or bodies emerge from the chaotic interstices of the *pare* design they may be considered as secondary to the main figures which are carved in high or bolder relief (see plate 3), and I will endeavour to show how their meaning must be elucidated in the light of this. Several examples of *pare* (C (b)) show 3 main figures with *manaia* profiles at each end of the *pare*. Again the *manaia* are diminutive and may be shown to be structurally and symbolically equivalent to spirals³⁸ in these cases. These *manaia* do not present the same bold and forceful aspect as the *manaia* in the typical East Coast *pare* (category A, plate 2).

The first principle of composition which can be derived is the principle of symmetry. *Pare* composition is invariably symmetrical and this symmetry is founded upon a key central figure which is flanked by two others, either as full figures or *manaia* profiles. I consider the Taranaki type (C (c)) as a variant of this quintessential symmetry. The bilateral symmetry is frequently effected by the use of split-representational design. The central figure is split by a line down the centre of the head and may be envisaged as two profiles joined together. This is a very common motif in the art of Asia, America and New Zealand.³⁹ The *manaia* are therefore envisaged as transposed profiles of the central figure, the left side of the figure being transposed to the right side of the *pare* and the right side of the figure being transposed to the left. This establishes a correlative principle of symmetry, founded upon the first: the principle of the transposition of profiles.

The second major principle which can be derived concerns the relationship between the central figure and the adjoining figures or transposed profiles: the *manaia*. In effect the interjacent *takarangi* spirals lead the eye, with precise and formalized inevitability, from the central figure to the neighbouring figures and back again to the central figure. In effect the double or reverse spirals sweep the figures into a single and continuous 'line' on one level (the level of bas relief) while serving to distinguish the figures on another level (that of high relief).

In the case of the East Coast type of *pare* (see plate 2) the central figure is not only split and transposed, but it goes through a process of dismemberment, so to speak, before it is reassembled. The maze of

³⁸ Archey 1936: 57.

³⁹ Lévi-Strauss 1963, Chapter 13.

forms between the central figure and the *manaia* profiles are not ingenious design motifs to fill a space in the total composition but are in fact symbolic of the figure forms broken up and caught in a process of dismemberment in one instance and reorganization in the next instance. This process or procession of breaking up the forms and reconstructing them occurs in an outward direction (towards the end *manaia*) and at the same time in an inward direction (from the *manaia* to the central figure again). We might call this principle of composition the principle of the alternating rhythm or of fission and fusion. The forms are engaged in a kind of perpetual motion, breaking up and building up from the disengaged chaos of the bas relief areas. This structural or sculptural principle has been suggested in the comments of others.

The basis for ... abstractions is a dismemberment of the grotesque main form, and its reassemblage in such a way as to bring the abstractions into agreement with the existing space; and by doing this to present in the recombination of shapes and parts, the basic descriptive elements of these forms.⁴⁰

As the same writer has also observed, the dismemberment and re-articulation of the figure is assisted by the stylized joints, frequently represented by double-spirals.

The artists ... understood that the human figure is by nature an assemblage of separate forms which are articulated into an organic unity. The joints or points of articulation both separate the forms and permit their mobility.⁴¹

A close inspection of the interstices of the *pare* in question here reveals an organic chaos of limbs and body parts and we have further evidence that these parts reflect the combined wholes (the central figure and the *manaia* forms) in the fact that the carved designs on these parts are simulacra of those on the main forms. There seems little doubt that the *pare* composition reveals a symbolic connection with the Maori conception of birth and death, creation and dissolution, and some of the ambiguous notes of Thomas Kendall on the meaning of Maori carvings become somewhat clearer as a result. (See appendix II.)

Two important aspects of meaning emerge from the elucidation of the foregoing principles of *pare* composition. First of all the *pare* design subtly exhibits the double functions of both combining and separating.

⁴⁰ Wingert 1962: 323. Also 1953: 54.

⁴¹ Wingert 1953: 43.

Simultaneously, the figures are presented as parts of an organic whole and as autonomous figures separated by varying levels of relief and definition. Examination of the *pare* shows that three levels of relief can be discerned. The central figure and the *manaia* body and feet are all in high relief. In most *pare* of the type A (ii) the *manaia* head, the second arm and a sinewy *manaia* form which crosses the gap between the central figure and the end *manaia* are all in lower relief. Finally, suggested spirals or interlocking forms decorated on the surface with *pakura* or *ritorito* patterns make up a third, submerged level of relief. The high level of relief might be called animate to contrast it with the lower levels of relief which are inanimate. The emergence of complete living forms from incomplete inanimate forms is thus established by the use of three subtly related levels of relief in the carved design. The living forms emerge and assume unity but the dynamic of continuous movement simultaneously breaks them up and disunites them. Creation and dissolution are at the same time present.

The reciprocal or alternating rhythm which underlies the composition of these *pare* demonstrates still further the significance of the number three. In a more sociological frame of reference Simmel has stated this principle very succinctly.

Points upon which the pair would find no immediate contact are put in reciprocal relationship by the third element, which offers to each another side, and joins these, nevertheless, in the unity of its personality. Separation which the parties could not of themselves reconcile are accommodated by the third, or by their being included in a comprehensive whole. On the other hand, the direct union is not merely strengthened by the indirect but it may also be destroyed. There is no relationship so complete between three that each individual may not, under certain circumstances, be regarded by the other two as an intruder, even if it is only to the extent of sharing in certain moods...⁴²

Indeed the central *pare* figure mediates between the two neighbouring figures, coalescing and assimilating the *manaia* and lending symmetry and balance to the two other full figures. But the central figure simultaneously separates the neighbouring figures, giving them equal autonomy in the whole composition. The effect as much as the structural meaning of the spirals and the interjacent conglomeration of *manaia* forms is to "carry the eye of the beholder with great rapidity from part to part, and from element to element"⁴³ so creating both a unity of forms and a discrete definition of symbolic elements. The principle

⁴² Simmel 1902: 45.

⁴³ Wingert 1962: 322.

of symmetry and transposition together with the alternating movements of the forms (evident in the double *takarangi* spirals most notably) is involved in a rhythm and purpose which gives unity and stability to elements whose inner force tends constantly to fragment or disunite them.

Simmel's observation leads us at once to seek a general social frame of reference for the principles which we have discerned and elucidated in the *pare* composition. The task of tracing through a system of logical transformations between the art and the social system might now seem possible. But before proceeding with this task it is imperative to examine certain other aspects of *pare* design and carving.

KINESIC SYMBOLISM

The idea of gestural codes was introduced to social anthropology by Marcel Mauss who wrote:

Le corps est le premier et le plus naturel instrument de l'homme. Ou plus exactement, sans parler d'instrument, le premier et le plus naturel objet technique, et en même temps moyen technique, de l'homme, c'est son corps.⁴⁴

The highly-formalised use of gesture in Maori culture is a subject yet to be treated. But from evidence of the important role of formal dance, *poi*, and hand movements, and from a knowledge of the physiological categories and their cultural significance in Maori society, we might suppose that in their graphic and plastic arts such kinesic symbolism would also be found.

In the *pare* compositions the formal placing of the hands on certain parts of the body, the angle of the head, the general position of the body in relationship to other forms and the disposition of the limbs, indicates at once that a high degree of meaningful structure underlies the composition. But on this subject we are more bereft of clues and evidence than at any other point. Thomas Kendall wrote that the upraised arms of the three figures in certain *pare* represented the poles of the universe, the figures being described by him as "bearing up the heavens with the 3 middle fingers of each hand."⁴⁵ This clue suggests a mythical frame of reference for the carved *pare* figures, in particular the figure of Tane who, it will be recalled, was the only son of Rangi and Papa who was successful in separating them. This separation is maintained by poles

⁴⁴ Mauss 1950: 372.

⁴⁵ Binney 1967: 130.

or pillars, metaphorically the trunks of the forest trees, and frequently these are compared with the poles that support the ridgepole of the house itself. In this sense the *pare* seems to symbolise the fundamental division of the universe, condensing the myth of origins into a carved lintel, which, by surmounting the dwelling house, displays how all social life is dramatically involved in the context of mythological thought. The connections between the principles of mythological thought and of the *pare* composition carry the argument still further, demonstrating another aspect of those logical transformations which we are seeking in the art forms and the social structure of the Maori. The *pare* not only replicates the mythical account of origins but it gives it new emphasis and application in another context of social life. Fuller discussion of this point will be reserved for a later section dealing with the relationship between the *pare* and Maori community life.

At this point it is possible to account for the 3-fingered hand in Maori art on the basis of a logical consistency which it shows with other aspects of composition. Sufficient has been said to make it clear that the number three is central to the principles of composition underlying *pare* design. I have noted how the three elements are brought into a unity through powerful and rhythmic deployment. The three fingers unified in the single upraised arm might be considered to be consistent with the overall conception of the design. Its meaning is to be found in the total positional sense, not in isolation. Taken as an isolated referential symbol it would defy attempts to elucidate it.⁴⁶

The placing of the hands is an important aspect of positional meaning. Generally the hands are placed against the sides of the rib cage with the fingers extended across the chest, stomach and upper abdomen. In other *pare* the arms are upraised and the thumb and first finger are disguised as a *manaia* head or stylised ear while the other three fingers 'support' the upper ridge of the *pare*. Several examples of *pare* display differing placements of the hands. Sometimes the hands are on the knees, or one hand is on one knee and the other is placed on the side of the body. Sometimes one hand is in the mouth, particularly in Taranaki examples. In at least one Taranaki *pare* the placing of the hands produces an asymmetrical design.⁴⁷ Without speaking of the

⁴⁶ Most commentaries on the three-fingered hand have sought explanations in myth rather than explanations within the artistic structure of the carvings. See Mead 1961: 49-50; Phillipps 1946: 7; Taiepa 1939, chapter 9; Stack 1875: 172-176; Tareha 1868.

⁴⁷ See Phillipps 1955: 125, Fig. 65: 8.

whims of individual carvers I find it impossible to explain these aspects of design. But we do know that the Maori symbolised certain psychological attributes and affections in various organs and parts of the body. Thomas Kendall wrote that among the Maori "to study the different members and appendages of the human body with their uses, and the origin, progress, and end of nature, is to study the Supreme Being with his various properties and attributes, the work of his creation, and what he is carrying on and accomplishing in the world. It is in fact to study the universe. As every part of man has its appropriate and distinct use and significance and every part is in union with the whole, so, according to their view, every part of man is emblematical of and applicable to the Supreme Being..."⁴⁸ Thus the liver (*ate*) was the seat of the emotions and the kidneys or spleen (*hinengaro*) was the seat of thought and life.⁴⁹ The hands in many Maori *pare* refer us directly to the position of these organs in the body.

As for the angles at which the bodies or the heads of the carved figures are inclined, this seems to be related to the principle of the alternating rhythm which I have already described. In effect the forms lean or tend to move one way only to be turned in the opposite direction, to resume a cyclical and continuous process of movement which indicates the total unification of forms in the whole composition. In the typical Taranaki *pare* the splitting of the central figure into two distinct transposed profiles is not accomplished through an intermediary area of dismemberment. Rather the figures gradually proceed to become terminal profiles so that one profile is therefore phased out in the process. The profiles then return to unify themselves as full figures. The kinesic flow of the forms assists this process dramatically and dynamically.

CHROMATIC SYMBOLISM

The *pare* were painted a vivid red, the Maori using red ochres from the earth mixed with shark oil. The application of this mixture had preservative functions which were very important since the *pare* were highly-valued and treasured objects. But the colour had symbolic value besides.

Maning notes that red was the funeral colour for the Maori.⁵⁰ Taylor writes that *kura* (red) was a sacred colour, "the way of rendering

⁴⁸ Elder 1934: 197-198; Binney 1967.

⁴⁹ Binney 1967: 134.

⁵⁰ Maning 1930: 120.

anything tapu.”⁵¹ It is possible to show that both meanings, suggesting both death and life, were compatible in the Maori conception of things and that the colour red had symbolic value consistent with the general symbolism of the carved lintel pieces.

The lintel was set at the limen or threshold of the house. I anticipate a later section of this essay by suggesting that the act of entering a house was a secondary sort of *rite de passage* which frequently involved a change of social position, as it were, for the person who crawled though the narrow doorway beneath the lintel into the body of the house. The act of entering the *whare puni* was an act pregnant with significance on many occasions and this can be indicated in part by remembering that the word which designated extended family group — *whanau* — also meant pregnant.

Turner has, on the basis of comparative data from many parts of the world, been able to draw a general conclusion concerning the use of the colour red in such ritual or near-ritual contexts. He writes of *liminal personae*:

They are at once no longer classified and not yet classified. In so far as they are no longer classified, the symbols that represent them are, in many societies, drawn from the biology of death, recomposition, catabolism, and other physical processes that have a negative tinge, such as menstruation...⁵²

The symbol of death and birth is red and relates to the ambiguous position a person occupies *en passage* between the social world outside the house and the social world within the house. But Turner's observation is even more readily understood if we relate it to the process of decomposition and recomposition which is latent in *pare* design. This dismemberment and rearrangement of forms is invested with strongly organic and biological meaning. It is the death and rebirth of symbolic forms which is the essence of our inquiry. Menstrual blood equivocally refers to both processes in so far as it signifies the death of latent life and the potentiality for bearing life. It was logical for the Maori to associate the colour red, with all its connotations, with the *pare*. Moreover the *tapu* quality of the colour red can be understood in terms of the equivocal position of people as they pass from or into the house. They are both of the house (*whanau* group) and also of the wider society, be it the village community, the *hapu*, whatever. This is why Turner speaks of *liminal personae*. The crossing of the threshold, in certain

⁵¹ Taylor 1855: 95.

⁵² Turner 1967: 96.

circumstances, symbolised for the Maori a death and a birth at one and the same time, and this process is dramatised in the *pare* itself.

SEXUAL SYMBOLISM

The marked sexual features of the *pare* figures and the general sexual imagery of Maori art, outraged many early European visitors to New Zealand, not the least the missionaries. Their outrage draws attention to a significant aspect of Maori carved art, though it unfortunately also meant a gradual decline of sexual imagery in Maori art throughout the 19th century.

As a general rule the full figures on *pare* were female; genitalia were carved in an exaggerated style. However, breasts were never even suggested on the older carvings.⁵³ Some *pare* figures were male with large phalli.⁵⁴ On many *pare* the female figures are frequently carved in a state of parturition (see plate 2), a small figure or small head being situated in place of the genitalia. Often the features of this head are so stylised as to suggest the vagina. Perhaps this small head or figure was a later technique to disguise the genitalia after missionaries had indoctrinated the Maoris in principles of prudery. Other small figures or heads appear in the intermediating areas of the *pare* design. The *manaia* forms only rarely have carved sexual features to indicate whether they are male or female.

The Maori word for penis was *ure*, for the vagina, *tara*.⁵⁵ But the Maori word *tawhito* referred to the genitalia of both sexes. The word also means old or ancient.⁵⁶ Best also tells us that the female organ symbolised destructive energy while the male organ stood for protective energy.⁵⁷ The symbolism of the female organ is frequently shown to be consistent with the mythological role of Hine-nui-te-po who brought death into the world.

Best also notes that the Maori thought of the left side of the body as female (the weaker side) and of the right side of the body as male (the stronger side).⁵⁸

The right side of the body is the male side, the *tama tane*, the strong and lucky side. It stands for vigour, health, virility, life. The left side is the

⁵³ An exception to this rule is a late 19th century carved female figure. See Phillips and McEwan 1948: 58.

⁵⁴ These are, however, very rare on *pare* figures.

⁵⁵ Best 1925: 1129.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ *ibid.*: 1014.

female side, the *tama wahine*, the weak, listless, unlucky side, and represents misfortune, death, and such...⁵⁹

It is possible that the profiles of the full figures which are transposed in the *pare* (as in plate 2) carry this meaning of life and death. Certainly this would fit with the principles already elucidated concerning the reciprocal tendencies in the *pare* towards breaking down and building up. The sexual symbolism which the Maori possessed is therefore to be seen in the *pare* designs as one aspect of the movement and meaning of them.

Women were considered *noa* (without *tapu*) while the man was considered *tapu*. The role of the female figure on the *pare* has been suggested to mean that the house would be de-*tapued* by the effect of her 'common' influence.⁶⁰ The Maori believed that if a woman passed (her organ) over the ground where a canoe was being made she desecrated the *tapu* of that spot.⁶¹ It was also "common custom that a *ruahine* (was) the first to enter a fortress or house during the inauguration ritual"⁶² so that the *tapu* laying on the building would be lifted or annulled. Not only does this power to de-*tapu* or de-sacralize buildings stem from women's common role in Maori society, but as Johansen has suggested, it "is a result that she comes from another kinship group at marriage"⁶³ according to the custom of patrilocal residence.

On *pare* where the female genitalia are so prominently displayed it is possible to connect the sexual symbolism with the total context of composition. It is the female who brought death into the world, or, to put it in terms closer to the Maori philosophy, it is the female who has the power to transform life by destroying it and then by reforming it (by giving birth). It is precisely this double-sided function which is displayed in the *pare* compositions. The female reduces the forms to a state of chaos or decomposition only to effect a recomposition of them. In this process the sides of the body (which we have seen have sexual significance) are transposed. So she in effect unifies on another level the initial distinction between male and female elements. If these male and female elements are seen in the wider context of patrilineal and matrilineal lines or in terms of the sacred functions of men and the

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ *ibid.*: 1108; Johansen 1954: 227-228.

⁶¹ Johansen 1954: 223-224.

⁶² *ibid.*: 227-228. See also Wingert 1962: 325.

⁶³ Johansen 1954: 222.

'profane' functions of women, then a kind of ambilineal quality is produced, and we know that ambilinearity was for the Maori a means of overcoming anomalies, deficiencies or impasses in a descent system which emphasised unilinearity. Explanations of the symbolic role of the female figure on the *pare* which are given in the literature from which I have just quoted must be extended to include the more general principles underlying Maori social structure. This extension is important from another point of view, for we are looking for the manner in which the art compositions produce a new synthesis out of the events, elements or terms which are distinguished or discriminated at the level of empirical social reality. The female figure has therefore the explicit and consciously-observable function of de-*tapu*ing houses and other important constructions. But she has an implicit and more elusive role which can only be perceived by studying her position in the *pare* compositions. At this level we are looking for principles of composition rather than one-to-one relationships between isolated elements in the art and specific aspects of social life.

A further elaboration of this idea is offered.

Fraser has written a remarkable cross-cultural study of what he calls the 'Heraldic Woman' in the arts of mankind. This heraldic woman is clearly the female on the Maori *pare*, "an image of a displayed female that is symmetrically flanked by two other beings. By 'displayed' is meant a figure that holds its knees apart, exposing the genital area."⁶⁴

Fraser's study of the kinds of societies in which this composition is found leads him to presuppose a connection between the form of composition and hieratic values. His knowledge of Maori society was evidently limited since he found the Maori to be an exception to the hierarchical or stratified case. He elaborates on this connection in the following words:

Heraldic flanking presupposes hieratic values and the desire to represent them, because the flanking figures are subordinate and dependent, while the central one is dominant and unconditioned. A degree of social stratification... would appear to be a precondition for the advent of the flanked images.⁶⁵

Fraser has sought direct or homologous connections between the art and the social structure thus, in my view, limiting the strength of his observations. I am convinced that what is distinguished on the social plane tends to be blurred and unified on the artistic level so that order

⁶⁴ Fraser 1966: 36.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*: 79.

(peace) will overcome the contradictions between various aspects of the prevailing social structure (dis-order and in some cases such as the Maori, war). This aspect of art is what Lévi-Strauss calls *bricolage*. Enough has now been written on the principles underlying *pare* composition to show that the divisive elements of hierarchical structures are not represented but rather synthesised into a new unity, transcended and not portrayed. This is why the *pare* must be understood as condensation and not as referential symbols. The separateness of the elements on the level of high relief must be understood as part of the process whereby these separate elements are assimilated and unified through the mediation of the low relief areas. The whole visual and kinesis momentum of the *pare* forms tends to separate and then to coalesce only to separate again, to compose only to decompose and recompose again. The art preserves the social distinctions, symbolised in its various motifs, while at the same time overcoming them and unifying them. Both representation and refutation, as it were, are simultaneously apparent. And this is the very dynamic of the artistic arrangement.

However, Fraser's interpretations bring us to the point where much more can be said about the relationships between the art and the social order. It is time to overcome the divisions between the intrinsic relationships of elements in *pare* compositions and the extrinsic relationships between the *pare* and Maori social life which have been made necessary until now by the very form of the written essay.

THE *PA*RE AND MAORI SOCIAL LIFE

Writing of the social framework of primitive art, Raymond Firth notes that "the system of symbols corresponds to some system of social relations."⁶⁶ But Firth acknowledges that this 'correspondence' is not just a representation in the art of the principles governing social relationships. He notes that art,

...expresses a struggle... Where the symbols are those of kin groups, then their carving and their display illustrate and crystallize the opposition of these groups.

Moreover, it is not only opposed elements in the group field that are involved. Tension and struggle exist between individuals, even within the same individual. This tension may arise for many reasons, including interpersonal rivalries in age sets, men's clubs and secret societies, family jealousies, and conflict of experience from which moral lessons can be drawn.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Firth 1966: 18.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*: 23.

The abstraction in art, as Firth gives us to understand it, concerns relationships "between things rather than the things themselves."⁶⁸

Turner, in his work among the Ndembu, noted that many social conflicts involved an opposition between the principles of matriliney and virilocality, and "it seemed, therefore, reasonable to suppose that the opposition between the sexes would secure ritual and symbolic representation. I found that this was indeed the case, but I was not long in discovering that not only the dualism of the sexes but indeed every form of dualism was contained in a wider tripartite mode of classification."⁶⁹

I cite these observations of Firth and Turner in order to make it clear at the outset that not only do the binary or opposed categories of social life lead to dichotomies in experience which art tends to resolve or transcend, but that art tends to resolve these dichotomies by employing trinary systems in which the binary oppositions are assimilated or superseded by a third term.

For the Maori, warfare and inter-group constraint and conflict was a constant and often terrifying reality, largely as a result of the politico-economic organization of society. The first observations on the Maori that we have, those of Cook, record this condition.

The wandering life subjects them to perpetual alarms, and we generally find them upon their guard traveling and working as it were with Arms in their hands...⁷⁰

From my own observations, the information of Tiarooa and others, the New Zealanders must live under perpetual apprehensions of being destroyed by each other.⁷¹

The largely nomadic summer life and the relatively small sizes of the economic units of social existence created a state of disunity and hostility even between family groups (*whanau*).⁷² Yet, for certain occasions these small groups would cooperate as *hapu* and several *hapu* might be drawn into political alliances, marriage alliances or economically co-operating groups. The need to transcend the boundaries set by the exigencies of social life in one sphere of activities would have to be satisfied. Although the reality was often disunity, the ideal was certainly unity, as shown in the proverbial injunction: *He taura whiri*,

⁶⁸ *ibid.*: 27.

⁶⁹ Turner 1967: 59-60.

⁷⁰ Cook 1961: 171.

⁷¹ Cook 1967: 71.

⁷² Cook 1961: 134.

kotahi mai ano i te kopounga tae noa ki te puau (a plaited rope, entire from source to mouth).

But the Maori was faced with all manner of actual conflicts, between local residence group and descent group affiliation, between brothers and sisters who frequently grew up in different places, between those with whom one lived and those with whom one reckoned some relatively distant kinship connection. The Maori identified with his tribe but was forced in cases of conflict between *whanau* or *hapu* to eschew this identification and actually fight people to whom he could trace kinship connections. Perhaps the essence of this polarization or dichotomy in social life could be expressed as a contradiction between the local ties and descent ties, between the actual and the ideological. In the myths and in the art forms this contradiction tended towards resolution and it is possible to see how the notion of tribe was employed in the symbolism of the carvings to transcend divisions between individual *hapu* or *whanau*.

To recapitulate an earlier point it might be said that the *pare* demonstrates two alternating or reciprocating principles: one (unfolding and conjoining and making whole) is *tupu*, the second (waning, weakening, breaking up) is *mate*. In the interstices of the *pare* the forms break up, wane and weaken, fading out into the submerged *manaia* shapes. There is some evidence that these *manaia* forms were symbolic of death, evil influence, imperfection.⁷³ If the view of Skinner, Barrow and others is accepted, that the *manaia* is a lizard or snake form, then the symbolic identification of the *manaia* with evil influence is correct. There is certainly ample exegetical evidence to determine that the Maori considered that the lizard was symbolic of evil or pernicious influence.⁷⁴ This meaning is contained in the concept of *mate*. On the other hand the *pare* exemplify a process of restructuring, assem-

⁷³ Binney 1967: 142-143 (footnote 95); Phillipps 1955: 102 ("So when the human being is assailed by *manaia*, as he sometimes is on the *pataka maihi*, the *manaia* on the right is good, and on the left evil. I have been told this a number of times...").

⁷⁴ See Polack 1838: v. 1: 221 (lizard *tapu* and not to be killed); Polack 1838: v. 2: 229 (The *Ruatara* was considered to be a 'virulent deity'); Polack 1840: 241 ("The favourite form of the Gods is supposed to be that of a lizard or bird..."); Markham 1834: 66 (The Maori believed that the lizard might devour the entrails); Earle 1823: 147 ("One of their favourite subjects is a lizard taking hold of a man's head; their tradition being that this was the origin of man."); Wade 1842: 178 (lizards were held in 'universal abhorrence'); Cruise 1823: 283 (lizard as horrifying to the Maori); Hamilton 1896 (*manaia* a lizard or snake).

bling from the parts a new totality, unfolding from the chaos a new form. This reconstituting or unfolding can be called *tupu*. The metaphor of the moon's waxing and waning seems to have been consciously a part of this general principle of composition, decomposition, recombination.⁷⁵ Similarly the unfolding of the fern frond and the incessant action of waves on a beach can be discovered in these motifs. The imagery draws upon many sources just as the symbolic frame of reference for the imagery is manifold.

The process described here is logically and symbolically connected with the processes of fission and fusion by which lineage segments in Maori society (or even individuals) merged together to become a single identity — the tribe — or fragmented to live and act as partial units. The *pare* compositions permit both a statement of independence for the half-groups (as it were) and a statement of interdependence concerning the way in which these half-groups combined with one another to make up a whole, a wider unity, a tribe. The necessities and actualities of tribal segmentation and fragmentation are admitted. But the principles underlying this fission and fusion of tribal elements or individuals are condensed into a single powerful symbolic composition in the *pare*.

The *pare*, among other carved pieces, was a highly-valued part of the Maori *taonga* or treasure. Outwardly it symbolised the integrity of the tribe. This aspect of *pare* meaning becomes of primary importance when we consider the role of the carved house — the *whare whakairo* — in 19th century Maori society. The *whare whakairo* was constructed and owned by entire tribes, comprising many *hapu*. It was frequently said by Maoris to symbolise the unity of the tribe and to commemorate some crucial event which led to unification or peace among previously hostile tribal sections.

Best writes that the superior houses received special names.

They often receive the names of ancestors, or of a battlefield, or are named from some incident. When the Taupo chief Te Heuheu wished to bring to a conclusion an old quarrel with another chief, he built a new house, named it Te Riri Ka Wareware (The Forgotten Quarrel), and then invited his opponent to visit him. The guest was entertained in the new house.⁷⁶

The unity of the tribe depended upon a unity of the sections of the tribe and this, as we have seen, was symbolised not only in the house itself but in the design principles of the *pare* composition which was placed above the doorway of the house. The *whare whakairo*, which

⁷⁵ Binney 1967: 135.

⁷⁶ Best 1924: 578.

invited large sections of previously disunited or divided people to enter into a new unity and cooperation within and around it, used the same *pare* designs that were employed on the *whare puni* lintels. It was on the chief's house that such *pare* were generally found in the early 19th century, and subsequently its symbolism can be related to the unity of several co-residential *whanau* or *hapu* in the village. When, as was very common, several *hapu* were represented in one village the unity of them all in the tribe or village community was in part affirmed by the symbolism of the *pare*, and of course, in other art objects, the houses and the *pataka taonga*. The *pare* over the permanent *whare puni* of a single family group within the village symbolised the solidarity of the family group many of whose members were frequently separated by marriage or drifting.

This unity of persons, at whatever level of lineage one cares to study it, can be seen most dramatically in the *pare*. It was situated over the doorway of the house and its own dramatic composition was a part of the 'rite' of passage which, as earlier mentioned, was involved in people's crossing of the house threshold. This passing across the threshold involved a passage between two social lives. Outside the house a person was involved in economic cooperation with members of other *whanau* or *hapu* while inside the house the solidarity and the identity of the *whanau* itself was most important. The threshold of the house and the act of crossing it put people (sometimes more obviously and consciously than at other times) in what Turner has called "an interstructural situation."⁷⁷ As a member of a *whanau* a person was separated outside the house, was ambiguously situated on the threshold of the house, and was, inside the house, in the position of having consummated the passage into the body of the family. The three stages of the *rites de passage*, as defined by Van Gennep, are implicated here. The *pare* was a kind of isomorphic symbol, giving "an outward and visible form to an inward and conceptual process."⁷⁸ Because the *pare* was associated with the liminal and marginal stage of passage it included ambiguous forms appropriate to the social phase which it marked. This is undoubtedly part of the reason why the *pare* were coloured red and *tapu*, why the figures, unlike figures in other spheres of Maori carved art, had no secular markings such as tattoo

⁷⁷ Turner 1967: 93.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*: 96. It might also be noted here that I have avoided though at the same time implied the Freudian notion of the act of entering the house (conceptualised by the Maori as the ancestral body) as symbolic of entering the womb.

marks, no significance as ancestral figures, and, in many cases were sexually ambiguous as well. This last point would appear to contradict what has already been said about the sexual symbolism of *pare* figures, but if it were possible to explain differences of *pare* type in relationship to different houses or ritual functions this might not be so. As far as I can discover the sexually ambiguous *pare* are more frequently associated with *whare whakairo* than with *whare puni* or superior chief's houses of the very early 19th century type. Moreover, the lack of marked sexual characteristics goes with an increase in puritanism and missionary influence. We might conclude nonetheless that the rite of passage aspect of *pare* symbolism was far more important (consciously at least) in the case of the Maori meeting house or council house — the *whare whakairo* — and the sexual symbolism was often abandoned in this case in favour of the importance of total ambiguity of *pare* figures. Furthermore we have already noted that many liminal processes are, in Turner's words, "regarded as analogous to those of gestation, parturition, and suckling. Undoing, dissolution, decomposition are accompanied by processes of growth, transformation, and the reformulation of old elements in new patterns."⁷⁹ The role of the female in this symbolic process is quite evident in the Maori *pare* and certainly, on this level, that role is not necessarily contradictory to the symbolic patterning of liminal events.

CONCLUSIONS

The foregoing discussion of the *pare* has indicated how strong organic metaphors, drawing on the fern spiral, on reproductive processes, on menstrual and lunar cycles, on the assaults and retreats of waves upon a beach, are used as a part of a powerful symbolic representation, abstract and condensed at the same time, which can be related to the principles of division or opposition and the continuous quest for a transcending unity in social life. Situated at the threshold of the house, whether the *whare puni* of a single family or the *whare whakairo* of an entire tribe, the *pare* marks and describes the highly-significant passage from one social position to another. It serves to resolve contradictions between these positions while at the same time establishing and confirming the structure of discrete elements. The social categories and the cosmological or mythological terms of reference are reworked in the rhythms and reliefs of the *pare*, involved com-

⁷⁹ *ibid.*: 99.

pletely in each other while tending in the same direction. This symbolic and elusive tendency is an abstract movement towards producing a new structure from given sets of events, both natural and cultural.

I have chosen the *pare* for detailed analysis because it is one of the finest examples of condensation symbolism in Maori art, but its emotional 'weight' and meaning must also be found in its relationship to other art objects. It is therefore important to go on to discuss, albeit briefly, some other forms of Maori art, furthering the search for meanings in the entire context of Maori culture.

THE WHARE WHAKAIRO OR SUPERIOR WHARE PUNI

There is a formal if not a functional equivalence between these two types of house which permits a discussion of their artistry without distinguishing differences of an artistic order.

Named ancestral figures of the tribe or subtribe were portrayed in the carvings of the house (plates 9 and 10). In effect the house not only symbolised the unity of the tribe and the common identification of its members within it, but it symbolised the continuity of the tribe, maintaining the past as a part of the living present and thereby assuring the continuation of the past, through the present, into the future. The house carvings stood on the threshold of time just as we have seen how the *pare* stood on the threshold of space.

The very *mana* of the kinship group was sustained in the carvings.

The ancestors are one's pride; their names are honoured in the genealogies, and their pictures are carved in the large, richly decorated houses, recognizable by the tattooing and particular insignia, such as Tutanekai with his flute...⁸⁰

The whole house was more than just a metaphor for the tribe's integrity; the relationship was far more one of metonymy. The unity of the tribe within the house must be contrasted with what may often have been an actual or inherited disunity outside the house.

Hamilton tells us that the larger figures on the carved slabs (*pou*) represented the fathers while those on the *heke* were their sons.⁸¹ The supporting pillars were usually carved with ancestral figures (see plate 10). Taylor notes that this figure is usually the founder of the family where it is found in a *whare puni*.⁸² Ngata mentions that the supporting pillars of the Porourangi meeting house at Waiomatatina

⁸⁰ Johansen 1954: 149.

⁸¹ Hamilton 1896: 148.

⁸² Taylor 1855: 387.

on the East Coast were carved to represent the wife and the daughter of the ancestor Porourangi.⁸³

The *tekoteko* figure at the apex of the *maihi* in the front of the house was, in the case of the Porourangi house, "the ancestor Ropata Waha-waha, the elder responsible for the planning and construction of the building."⁸⁴ Savage refers to the *tekoteko* figure as the "proprietor of the house."⁸⁵ He also notes that "sometimes that of his wife is carved out of the beam which supports the ridge-pole."⁸⁶

Angas has given excellent drawings and descriptions of the Maketu house built by Puatia at Otawhao pa to commemorate the taking of Maketu. In this case "the figures surrounding the exterior of the house are all intended to represent various parties connected with the war."⁸⁷ The two *tekoteko* figures depict Whakatau who fell in battle, and Puke, killed at Rotorua. Another figure lower on the central pillar depicts Tara who was killed in Taranaki. The lowest figure on this pillar represents Taupiri, a chief of Tauranga who was the principal warrior in the capture of Maketu. The two standing figures at the sides represent Hikarea, a Tauranga chief killed at Te Tumu, and Tarea, another chief and friend of Puatia, killed at Tauranga.⁸⁸ Rangiheta's celebrated house on Mana Island (Kai-tangata) bears the image of Rangiheta who also carved large portions of the house himself. This image is at the base of the central pillar inside the house and also is the *tekoteko* figure surmounting the apex of the *maihi*.⁸⁹

Evidence available allows us to make the observation that figures far removed from present time tended to find their representation within the house while figures closer in time to present events tended to be depicted outside the house. Thus, the further one went into the body of the house the closer to ancestral time one got. The movement into the house symbolically parallels the progression of events in time which the Maori conceptualised as a constant regeneration and ritual recapitulation of the heroic past. The Maori attempted to make the present and future accord with the idealised model which was the legendary past, to make all time one.

⁸³ Ngata 1940: 316-317.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁸⁵ Savage 1939: 69.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

⁸⁷ Angas 1857: plate 25.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁹ *ibid.*: plate 46: 1.

The porch carvings suggest a transitional stage and the *pare* marks the transition at its most crucial point. In the movements to and from the house the Maori was involved in events of transition both through time and space and these were condensed into a single metaphorical expression. The exterior and interior figures of the house actually portrayed people while the figures near the doorway or on the *pare* itself belonged to another dimension, more ambiguous, more symbolic of abstract reasoning than of direct representation. This conclusion is consistent with conclusions reached in the preceeding section of this essay.

Another important 'division' of the house was the longitudinal division inside the house marked by the *pauruhungia*. The central passage of the house was variously called *ihonui*, *aruarua*, and *kauwhanga*.⁹⁰ This division clearly had important social meaning. Taylor notes how the different tribes whose delegates met in the large assembly houses were "ranged in two grand divisions, one party being on one side of the building, and the other on the other. One company possessed a staff, called *Te toko-toko-o-Turoa*, whose owner was Rangi-Tawaki. The other side also had a staff, named *Tongi-tongi*, which belonged to *Mai-i-rangi*."⁹¹ The purpose of this particular meeting was to discuss a possible alliance between the two represented tribes. Hamilton informs us that the guests' side of the house was the right side while slaves would sit on the left side of the house in a corner near the door (*te Kopaiti*).⁹² This division of the house was noted by several early European visitors to New Zealand.⁹³ However, some records show that the sleeping arrangement within the standard *whare puni* was different. Marshall notes that the family members (10 people) sleep with their heads all pointing towards the central pillar of the house, their bodies arranged in a circle around it.⁹⁴ It seems that the chief's house or the later meeting houses were divided longitudinally while the *whare puni* of individual families did not have such a division. The family was undivided, the *whanau* being the minimal lineage group in Maori society. But the people who were received in the superior *whare puni* or the *whare whakairo* were often relative strangers to each other, remote in kinship connections and often old enemies.

⁹⁰ Best 1924: 570.

⁹¹ Taylor 1855: 66.

⁹² *ibid.*: 388.

⁹³ See Wright 1955: 70-71.

⁹⁴ Marshall 1836: 213-214.

The bilateral symmetry in the *whare whakairo* echoes the bilateral symmetry which has been already analysed in the split representational forms of the *pare* and in relation to oppositions within the social structure. In the interior of the house we might say that the bilaterality (whether a descent bilateralism or a more general kind of conceptual opposition between two kinship groups) is assimilated into a trinary system in which a third factor, namely that of the house as a whole, transcends and unifies the opposition between the two. The logical progression whereby opposing binary factors (or factions) are resolved according to a common denominator or the submergence of them both in a third factor therefore manifests itself in the house symbolism and structure just as it is deeply a part of the condensation symbolism of the *pare*. Tribal coherence (symbolised in the whole house which was, anyway, thought of as the body of the ancestors) is affirmed despite initial and fundamental oppositions in actual social life between tribal sections.

Other binary oppositions in the interior structure and design of the house are similarly resolved in terms of the total meaning of the house itself. Along the walls of the house, carved slabs (*pou*) representing the ancestors alternated with *tukutuku* panels whose purpose was decorative and non-representational. (See plate 9.) The *pou* were always carved by men and coloured red, while the *tukutuku* panels were woven by women and coloured black, white and yellow. It is possible to produce a table showing the opposed terms and at the same time indicating the symbolic connections between each column of terms.

Decoration	Representation
Rectilinear	Curvilinear
Motifs from nature	Motifs from culture
Soft materials	Hard materials
Yellow, black, white	Red
Female	Male
Noa	Tapu

Most writers on the subject of Maori art tend to define decorative arts as those which cannot be understood in terms of symbolic values.⁹⁵ By showing that decoration and representation are complementary, and by indicating the social divisions of labour and role between men and women which these two aspects of art symbolically imply, we are in a better position to understand the logical system underlying the

⁹⁵ See McEwan 1967:9; Firth 1966:29; Barrow 1955:15.

oppositions involved. Once again a structural division is created within the house in the alternating *tukutuku* panels and *pou*. The *tukutuku* panels were made by women and were created around inanimate designs while the *pou* were carved by men and represented human and animate motifs.⁹⁶ But these distinctions, relating as they do to divisions of labour and social occupations and values outside the house, are resolved or transcended in the overall structure of the house itself. The house presents time past and present in a totality and a unity and it also effects a unity, through its symbolic design, among human events. It is art which fuses nature and culture together and it is art which fuses people together by affording a symbolic unification of the divided categories and forms. Therefore decorative art assumes a symbolic meaning when it is considered in its relation to the total complex of the house and its art workmanship.

CANOES

The structural themes already discussed can be further studied in the carved designs of the elaborately carved Maori canoes.

Early visitors to New Zealand noted that the occupants of the great canoes seemed to be divided into sections, just as villages were often marked out by small fences or pallisades into various sub-sections.⁹⁷ Savage observed that there was "usually a division in the canoe, formed of wattle, to prevent the dealings of the two families from interfering with each other."⁹⁸ Savage also noticed that the large canoes were owned and operated by two family groups. Cook wrote that generally one old man and sometimes two or three (*kaumatua*?) were conspicuous in each canoe and directed the work of the crew.⁹⁹ Nicholas also noted that canoes often had three chiefs in them.¹⁰⁰

The canoes were often village owned and operated. Since the villages were probably quite small around the turn of the 18th century it might be assumed that the members of two or three *whanau*, representing

⁹⁶ Buck 1950: 306 notes that weaving employed rectilinear motifs while the carved art was curvilinear. The motifs of the weaving were such as *roimata* (tears), *roimata toroa* (albatross tears), *turuturu* (falling raindrops), *kaokao* (ribs), *niho taniwha* ('dragon's teeth'), and *patiki* (flounder). Buck 1921: 464 notes that no anthropomorphic and few zoomorphic forms are found in weaving. Most are physicomorphs. The frequent use of water symbols may suggest a mediating function for these motifs.

⁹⁷ Cook 1967: 61.

⁹⁸ Savage 1939: 68.

⁹⁹ Cook 1955: 281.

¹⁰⁰ Nicholas 1817: 300.

more than one *hapu* in some cases, would cooperate in the building, upkeep and use of a single large canoe. Their kinship connections, which formed the basis for their economic enterprise, would be affirmed in the canoe. The word *waka*, which signifies both the canoe and the large-scale territorially-based supra-tribal unity of the Maori, was thus a unifying concept which transcended or overwhelmed oppositions between tribal sections or localised lineage sections. The frequent use of *waka* carvings in the erection of cemetery memorials and sepulchres to dead chiefs shows that this connection between art forms and symbolic concepts had very real meaning for the Maori.

If the actual carved motifs and compositions on the canoes are compared with those already described on the *pare* and within the house, then a further symbolic connection and continuity can be demonstrated.

Along the wash-strakes of the canoe full figures and profiles alternate, while on the carved stern and prow pieces the elongated profile forms are brought into dynamic conjunction with beautifully-carved *pitau* spirals. The double-spirals at both stern and prow have the effect of drawing the eye into and out of the terminal carved designs and creating a rhythm and movement from stern to stern in which all the carved forms are sinuously involved. The out-thrust figure at the prow signifies the unifying kinship of the canoe occupants and owners, an ancestral figure being depicted. Along the sides of the canoe the symbolic progression from complete figure to profile figure to complete figure again, assisted by the alternating rhythms of the double-spirals and the sweep of the canoe itself, reveals a conception of the canoe crew composed in unity as members of a single group. The composition of the canoe carvings follow the same principles that have been seen at work in *pare* designs. The symbolic connection between the area of division within the canoe and the unifying art compositions on the canoe is continuous with the principles elucidated for the house.

PATAKA

The *Pataka taonga*, in Johansen's words, "stands as a fixed point in the kinship group. Around it human beings are born and die, but it stands . . . with its history . . . which concentrates on its position in the kinship group."¹⁰¹ The carved *pataka* and its place in the village community as the treasury of the group, made it perhaps more im-

¹⁰¹ Johansen 1954: 102.

portant than any house structure in the early and mid-19th century. Best writes that for the Tuhoe "the carved *pataka* seems to have been an object on which the leading chiefs lavished the best and most skilled labour at their command."¹⁰²

The *paepae* or threshold beams, are comparable to the *pare* of the house both in design and composition. Best considers that the symmetrically arranged figures and the flanking *manaia* figures signified a human being and his *atua*.¹⁰³ Phillipps gathered information from an old Bay of Plenty carver that led him to conclude that the flanking *manaia* figures symbolised the *wairua* and the *kuhua* of the central figure. These were "his two ghosts; while at the ends of the figure the *manaia* is turned outwards because the man is dead."¹⁰⁴ This may relate to the principles already elucidated by which we understand life in symbolic terms as a unification of two profiles which, taken separately, are only 'half-figures' so to speak.

Generally the *pare* compositions which employ *manaia* forms involve a full figure with flanking *manaia* which are turned outwards, but on the *paepae* of *pataka* and on the sides of canoes the *manaia* are usually turned inwards seeming to grasp the central figure, the 'beaks' of the *manaia* adjoining the ears. The information given by Best and Phillipps adds another dimension to our understanding of this type of composition. Two half real figures are shown by the *manaia* but these realise themselves in the form of a central figure. In this sense the *pare* compositions reveal something of the Maori's conception of the individual person or the living whole which was his ancestral and tribal group. The out-turned *manaia* on the *pare* signify a stage in the creation of being and the dissolution of being, the entire movement being repetitive and circular in conception. At the stage where the central figure has been divided or split it is totally dead in the social sense though it has animal reality still. The eye at this stage is taken from the central figure and drawn towards the terminal *manaia*. At the next stage the eye is drawn back to the centre of the *pare* and the illusion, assisted by the movement of the design, is beheld of the *manaia* reconstituted as a full figure. Complete life is restored and the figure is unified, its natural and cultural identities being resolved. In this sense the meanings suggested by Best and Phillipps and the idea of 'ghosts' can be directly related to the meaning elaborated upon in an

¹⁰² Best 1916: 11.

¹⁰³ Best 1916: 12.

¹⁰⁴ Phillipps 1946: 17.

earlier section of this essay. However, the difference between *pare* and *paepae* beams or canoe boards is important. In *pare* the *manaia* turn away from the central figure, transposed from it. In the *pataka* and canoe carvings the *manaia* are turned inwards towards the central figure and the profiles do not appear to have been transposed. But the difference or anomaly can be understood by referring to the total composition of the *paepae* or canoe boards. Unlike the *pare* these compositions involve several 'sets' of full figure + *manaia* in progression along the carving. Therefore one might suppose that the *manaia* flanking one full figure is transposed from the neighbouring 'set'. This means that each 'set' is really linked into a unity, the *manaia* adjoining one full figure being envisaged as transposed from another. Thus in principle there is no distinction to be made between the two forms of this composition. The difference in composition is not a difference in conception but simply the logical result of there being more than one 'set' of figures and *manaia* on these much longer boards or beams. The operative principle of initial bilateral division and subsequent recomposition of the halves in a full figure is maintained and its meaning is continuous in all these cases.

The meaning of the *paepae* carvings can be further elaborated by considering the *paepae* of the Maori lavatory. Best gives us to understand that a ritualistic biting of the beam would protect a man from ritual pollution or the effects of *tapu*.¹⁰⁵ We can relate this ritual to the position of the beam at what has been referred to earlier as the limen or threshold of the building. This position is an ambiguous one in the social sense and here *tapu* is lost and here a passage from one identity to another is made.

Perhaps the most striking carvings on the *pataka* are the bargeboards or *maihi* which frequently show a whale motif and a series of *manaia* figures in the act of dragging the whale towards the apex of the board. The figure at the apex (the *kuwaha*) has been interpreted as a symbol of fertility.¹⁰⁶ The large hands carved on the figures which are involved in this design are similarly thought to symbolise bountiful production and rewarded labour.¹⁰⁷ The lifelike embracing couples which are often seen on the *amo* or in the carved porches of the *pataka* are viewed in the same light.¹⁰⁸ Marine symbols are appropriate enough for people

¹⁰⁵ Best 1925: 1129.

¹⁰⁶ Best 1916; Phillipps 1952.

¹⁰⁷ Phillipps 1952: 168.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*

whose livelihood was frequently dependent on the bounty of the sea, the rivers and the lakes. Some *pataka* were often constructed from canoe boards. The *Te Takinga pataka* in the Dominion Museum, Wellington, is said "to have been made from the canoes drawn overland from the sea to Lake Rotoiti by Hongi when he took Mokoia Island . . . in 1822. The main figure on the central slab represents Pikaio, an ancestor of the Ngati-Pikaio Tribe. The *tekoteko*, or small figure surmounting it, is named after Te takinga, a son of Pikaio."¹⁰⁹

But the fertility symbolism must be related to the positional meaning of the designs. The figures, related successively to the whale and the unity of hauling figures, show us how the Maori attempted, once again, to work discrete elements into a total unifying design. The cooperative basis for the economy and the kinship principles underlying group formation are thus elevated to the level of artistic expression and affirmed in the symbolic compositions of the *pataka*. The ancestral basis for tribal unity is also shown in the ancestral carvings which make up such a part of the sculpture on the *pataka*.

WAKA HUIA

The carved feather boxes in which the *taonga* of chiefs or families were kept are widely held to be the most beautifully carved and intricately designed examples of Maori art workmanship. The sexual symbolism and general composition of the motifs demands some discussion.

Alternating male and female figures, carved in high relief, and with exaggerated and stylised genitalia, are brought into close and often coital conjunction through the amazing and interlocking carved forms. Figures can frequently be viewed from either end of the box, in both cases appearing to be the 'right way up'. In an example in the Haddon Museum at Cambridge, England, figures appear to move along the ridge of the box lid then reverse back. Feet become arms or hands, foreheads become mouths or noses. Each figure is also another depending upon the point of view or angle from which it is looked at. Each figure is inextricably involved with every other figure. In several examples from the British Museum the tongues of small faces between the thighs of the female figures are also phalli, while the mouths of the small faces between the thighs of the female figures are also vaginas. There is a sexual ambiguity in the forms determined by the angle from

¹⁰⁹ Best 1916: 18.

which they are viewed: either from right to left or from left to right.

The unity of the married couple through the fecundity and productivity of the pair is symbolically demonstrated in nearly every case. The opposing figures are unified according to the remarkable reversals and intertwinings of the carved composition. Thus, once again, the unity of pairs of opposed forms is effected through the style of symbolic composition. In the case of the *waka huia* the immediate social context to which we can relate this composition is the family group itself.

MOKO

It is impossible to enter into exhaustive and detailed discussion of the subject of Maori tattooing here; to treat the subject properly would require an entire essay. But because Maori *moko* was in a very real sense an art of carving, the designs being inscribed deeply on the human flesh, it deserves more than a cursory glance. *Moko* is a symbolic extension of the principles already noted in the carved compositions and, indeed, many of the *moko* designs and motifs have their parallels in the motifs of the carvings.¹¹⁰

Moko, in the opinion of many writers on the subject, did not denote a person's rank, social status, or tribal affiliation.¹¹¹ At the same time, however, it is evident that well-known Maori chiefs would be known and recognized by their *moko*.¹¹²

Moko was nonetheless symbolic in the sense that a man would not consider himself complete without some degree of facial ornamentation. Taylor tells us that "a *papatea*, or pale face, was a term of reproach."¹¹³

As Lévi-Strauss has remarked, the tattooing reveals a bilateral symmetry, the face being represented as split in two down the middle.¹¹⁴ Two profiles joined together made up the full design. Evidence for this design conception is drawn from the very design plan of the *moko* itself, where a longitudinal line down the middle of the face separates two symmetrical and identical designs. Sometimes the Maori would

¹¹⁰ Robley 1896: 95, 97; Polack 1838, v. 1: 222, v. 2: 22; Barrow 1962: 197.

¹¹¹ Cook 1967: 810; Polack 1838: 387 (though contradicted in 1840: 48); Yate 1835: 148; Best 1924: 545-546; Shortland 1851: 16; Taylor 1855: 150.

¹¹² Polack 1838: 387; 1840: 42-43.

¹¹³ Taylor 1855: 150. See also Cowan 1921: 242.

¹¹⁴ Lévi-Strauss 1963: 247-249. Polack also described the same bilateralism for facial painting. He describes Puihi (a guide) who painted a "line of black and red joined in the centre of his forehead — continued down his nose to the throat." (1838, v. 1: 112). See also Polack 1840, v. 1: 81.

tattoo one whole side of the face before the other. Buck claims that "tattooing commenced on one side of the face, and sometimes the other side was completed later on in life. The half tattoo was termed *papatahi* (one side)." ¹¹⁵ Cook noted that the Maori "are so exact in the application of these figures that no difference can be found between the one side of the face and the other if the whole is mark'd, for some have only one side and some a little on both sides..." ¹¹⁶ Hawkesworth reported seeing a dead Maori with "one side of his face... tattooed in spiral lines" ¹¹⁷ and Shortland wrote of women with only one side of the face tattooed. ¹¹⁸

Many explanations have been offered for Maori *moko*: that it was to make facial painting more permanent, ¹¹⁹ that it was a means of disguising age by marking of the natural lines of the face, ¹²⁰ and that it was a sign to distinguish chiefs or tribes. ¹²¹ It is, however, useful to begin with a discussion of *moko* as a stylised facial mask, an explanation which does not contradict others put forward.

"...natural representation of ornament — of facial tattooing, which, used as it was as an emphasis of facial expression, may well have become the design framework for the stylized mask."¹²²

The first phase in the masking and marking of the face was the painting of it. Two colours, red and blue, were used. At puberty a girl's lips were often tattooed because the Maori considered that red lips were unsightly. ¹²³ Both blue and red ochre were used in the early 19th century for face painting, ¹²⁴ and the designs then were the same as those used in the actual *moko*. ¹²⁵ It seems that the Maori may have considered blue to be ritually equivalent to red, an equivalence often found in primitive societies and affirmed in other colour terminologies. ¹²⁶ In many myths and stories the colour red, and also the arts of tattooing and carving, originates in the underworld, the realm of *Hine-nui-*

¹¹⁵ Buck 1950: 299.

¹¹⁶ Cook 1955: 279.

¹¹⁷ Hawkesworth 1773, v. 2: 286.

¹¹⁸ Shortland 1851: 16.

¹¹⁹ Taylor 1855: 151.

¹²⁰ Dieffenbach 1843: 36; Robley 1896: 35; Savage 1939: 36.

¹²¹ Parkinson 1773: 97; Hochstetter 1867: 438; Polack 1838, v. 1: 387, v. 2: 48; Savage 1939: 27; Hawkesworth 1773, v. 2: 360.

¹²² Archey 1967: 229.

¹²³ Dieffenbach 1843: 35.

¹²⁴ Polack 1838, v. 1: 79; Cruise 1823: 283.

¹²⁵ Polack 1838, v. 1: 112; 1840, v. 1: 81.

¹²⁶ Turner 1967: 60; Percy Smith 1913: 122.

te-po.¹²⁷ Thus the death-in-life symbolism of red which has been related to *pare* symbolism also obtained in the case of facial painting. As in the chromatic symbolism of the *pare* the colour red had both mortuary and fertility connotations. In the Maori proverb quoted by Buck¹²⁸ this is made clear.

Hinga atu he tētē, ara mai he tētē kura
(as one red frond falls, another red frond rises)

Applied to chiefs (the red referring to the colour of the facial paintings) the continuity and connectiveness of Maori kinship is expressed and affirmed. Moreover, since *moko* is situated half-way between impermanent painting and permanent carvings or sculptures it mediates and acts as a link between the natural realm of decay and the human realm of continuity and cultural permanence.

Thus the purpose of Maori facial markings, whether painted or tattooed, "is not only to imprint a drawing onto the flesh but also to stamp onto the mind all the traditions and philosophy of the group."¹²⁹

Of the symbolism of split-representational design Lévi-Strauss writes that...

In native thought... the design is the face, or rather it creates it. It is the design which confers upon the face its social existence, its human dignity, its spiritual significance. Split representation of the face, considered as a graphic device, thus expresses a deeper and more fundamental splitting, namely that between the 'dumb' biological individual and the social person whom he must embody.¹³⁰

Moko thus brings the force of art closest to the individual person and links him with his cultural heritage and social identity. For there are two personae involved, namely the natural and the cultural person. They are resolved in the identification which the mask has with the flesh and bony structure of the face itself. From another point of view

¹²⁷ Best 1925: 1129; Mead 1961: 49-50; Percy Smith 1913: 84-87; Taiepa 1939, chapter 9; Buck 1950: 296.

¹²⁸ Buck 1950: 328.

¹²⁹ Lévi-Strauss 1963: 257. Cowan quotes Netana Whakaari (Urewera and Ngati-tama tribes) of Waimana who said that the tattoo of a man's face was his most durable possession. "He quoted a proverb... 'Taia o moko hai hoa matenga mau' — 'Have your face adorned with tattoo, to be your companion until death.' 'You may lose your most valuable property,' explained Netana, 'through misfortune in various ways; you may lose your house, your *patupounamu*, your wife, and other treasures — you may be robbed of all your most-prized possessions; but of your *moko* you cannot be deprived...'" (1921: 242).

¹³⁰ Lévi-Strauss 1963: 259.

the two profiles of the actual 'mask' involve two aspects of the cultural persona, resolving them in the single form of the complete *moko*, but at the same time, because of the obviousness of the vertical line which divides them, stating them as individual elements. Lévi-Strauss also notes how this line of splitting makes it possible to conceptualise the graphic design as a mask which opens up to disclose the face beneath.¹³¹ In this way the profiles stand in the same relation to the full face as the *manaia* do to the full figure on the *pare*.

The bilateral symmetry of *moko* and facial painting offers another manifestation of the binary structure of all Maori art, whether this structure is intrinsic in the object and its composition, or to be discovered in the relationships between several objects combined in the structure of a house, a canoe, a *pataka*, or even a whole village community. The culture-nature opposition which Lévi-Strauss shows to be fundamental to the existential meaning of *moko* is one variation on a single structural theme which has been analysed here in Maori art and elsewhere in the mythology.¹³²

CONCLUSIONS

By studying the formal composition of elements in Maori art and by seeking relationships between the principles governing composition and the social structure, it has proved possible to understand a good deal of the symbolism of Maori art. The relationships I speak of here are not direct functional ones, nor are they static. They are dynamic and emotionally powerful, the results of continuous stresses to which man as a social person is put, of the intellectual contradictions which all human life creates. In the art one can trace out the way in which the artist strives to create transcending structures which have the power of seeming to effect a resolution of these contradictions, a balance of stresses.

The discourse has been carried on at an abstract level, but then Maori art itself is an art of abstraction, a microcosm and a superstructure at the same time. By searching for the system of logical transformations underlying various aspects of social reality, including the art forms, it has been possible to show a connectiveness and coherence which is dramatic proof of the intellectual aspirations and the artistic power of the Maori. What is divided in one instant is

¹³¹ *ibid.*

¹³² Jackson 1968.

Plate 1
Carved door lintel. British Museum.

Plate 2
Carved door lintel. British Museum.

Plate 3
Carved door lintel from the Hauraki Plains area. Auckland Museum.

Plate 4
Carved door lintel. Auckland Museum. Locality unknown.

Plate 5
Carved door lintel. Auckland Museum. Locality unknown.

Plate 9

Carved wall slab or *pou* from a Maori carved house. On either side the decorative *tukutuku* panels can be seen.

Plate 11

Carved doorway showing traditional treatment of the lintel and jambs and modern treatment of the door panel. The location is unknown but is probably either Rotorua or the Bay of Plenty area.

Plate 10

Sculptured figure showing facial *moko* and more naturalistic treatment of the human form. The figure stands at the base of an interior upright within a carved house.

Plate 6

Carved door lintel. University Museum, Philadelphia, U.S.A. Locality unknown.

Plate 7

Carved door lintel. Dominion Museum, Wellington. Probably from Whakatane area.

Plate 8

Carved door lintel. Canterbury Museum. Taranaki area.

unified in the next. By transforming the structure of positions given in culture and inherent between nature and culture, the Maori artists attained that level of 'explanation' which we, the anthropologists, so steadfastly seek. By combining the role of *bricoleur* and scientist the Maori artists show a close kinship with the anthropologist, and their model might be taken as a model, in another sense of the word, for anthropology. The Maori artist reveals in his work the truth of that principle which Paul Klee expressed so well.

However, with each part, irrespective of the amount of study which it may itself require, we must not lose sight of the fact that it is only a part of the whole.¹³³

MICHAEL JACKSON

APPENDIX I

Many writers on the subject of Maori art have interpreted the *manaia* as a lizard or snake motif.¹³⁴ The evidence for this interpretation is drawn from three main sources. First, the symbolic idea of malevolent and evil influence which the Maori evidently associated with the lizard or tuatara.¹³⁵ Second, the possibility of Melanesian influence in Maori art through some cultural diffusion eastward in ancient times.¹³⁶ Third, the observation that *manaia* actually resemble lizards or snakes. Often the *manaia* forms are said to have distinctly avian characteristics and cultural diffusion theories are invoked to support this claim.¹³⁷ Sir Gilbert Archey seems to have stood alone in maintaining that the *manaia* is distinctively non-avian and must be seen as a profile of the full figure.¹³⁸ Buck has given some support to this view¹³⁹ and it will be obvious that I have started from this same viewpoint in this essay.

In the first place, when the lizard was represented it was represented in naturalistic manner (see plate 11) and such instances can be shown

¹³³ Klee 1966: 17.

¹³⁴ Skinner 1924, 1922, 1916, 1966; Barrow 1962, 1955; Fraser 1962, 1966; Phillipps 1952; Hamilton 1896; Tregear 1902; Percy Smith 1917.

¹³⁵ See footnote 74.

¹³⁶ Skinner 1916, 1924, 1966; Speiser 1966; Barrow 1955; Fraser 1966. Fraser has traced remarkable similarities between Maori art and late Chou Chinese art, in particular some metalwork at Taiwan. (1962: 139-140).

¹³⁷ Fraser 1962; Skinner 1916: 184.

¹³⁸ Archey 1933, 1936, 1960, 1962.

¹³⁹ Buck 1950: 313.

to be all late 19th century.¹⁴⁰ As Archey says, "I do not know of the inclusion of the lizard in any authentic pre-Pakeha piece of Maori wood-carving".¹⁴¹

In the second place, where the diffusionist theory is concerned, it is at the moment impossible to find evidence for a Melanesian origin of the curvilinear forms in Maori art which seem to contrast so markedly with the prevailing rectilinear forms of most Polynesian art. But even if a source for the motifs were discovered in history we would still have to supply reasons for the meaning of those forms in the context of Maori art and thought. We would, in the words of Lévi-Strauss,

... appeal to psychology, or the structural analysis of forms; let us ask ourselves if internal connections, whether of a psychological or logical nature, will allow us to understand parallel recurrences whose frequency and cohesion cannot possibly be the result of chance.¹⁴²

By adopting this procedure in this essay I have been able to make some sense of the symbolism without appealing to diffusionist connections. The same motif may occur in a thousand cultures in time or through history anyway, but this is never a satisfactory basis for concluding that the motif had or has the identical meaning in all such contexts.

In the third place it seems necessary to say something about why so many writers have pointed out lizard, bird, or snake forms in Maori art. There may be more to this than simply the fallacy of interpreting art motifs from one culture in terms of the society of another. If the diffusionist case has some truth to it and the *manaia* are bird monsters which derive from the Ancient Near East and the fables of Gilgamesh,¹⁴³ or are connected with the bird forms of Easter Island stone carvings, or are related to the Maori awe of the lizard or some racial memory of snakes, then this aspect of the general symbolism will have to be explained.

But the explanation, if proved or included, does not alter the strength of the explanation offered in this essay. It simply makes it more specific. If it is accepted that the profile *manaia* forms are derived from full figures and dismembered in a process whose ultimate goal is recomposition of the fragmented elements, then the *manaia* forms do in a very real sense symbolise a state of *mate*, of dissolution, of death. The symbolic idea of the *manaia* being evil, bestial, part-human, simply affirms the symbolic meanings which I have traced out. Archey's views and those of Skinner, Barrow, and others, can be shown hereby to reinforce each other rather than conflict. But all these views can

¹⁴⁰ This particular carving seems to be the work of the same hand that is responsible for the carved doorway, *Rauru*, at Whakarewarewa. See Phillippis and McEwan 1948: 58.

¹⁴¹ Archey 1936: 54.

¹⁴² Lévi-Strauss 1963: 248.

¹⁴³ Fraser 1962: 143.

only be sustained if the total context of art and society is considered.

Perhaps much of the confusion stems from the fact that from the late 19th century the Maori adopted, often through conversancy with European opinion, new ideas concerning their own artistic forms. Plate 11 demonstrates how one Maori carver turned the *manaia* into a naturalistic form with fish and bird elements combined in it. The carving is artistically crude beside the traditional *pare* above it, but it shows the extent to which the Maori artists themselves were caught up in changing ideas concerning their art, ideas undoubtedly without parallel in the traditional context.

APPENDIX II

KENDALL'S ACCOUNT

In the early 1820s Thomas Kendall collected and described several Maori carvings, including *pare*. His descriptions, although compounded with ideas from Christian iconography and Pythagorean theories of number, do not in my opinion qualify for the assessment which Judith Binney gives them.

Out of it all very little remains unaffected by his unconsciously imposed framework. His imprecise presentation of details makes his descriptions hopelessly obscure.¹⁴⁴

In my view Kendall's account of Maori carvings and their symbolism makes good sense in relation to what I have written in this essay. He speaks of the *pare* from *whare puni* as "The Crown of a family" and of other *pare* compositions (see plate 6) as representing "a Trinity on Creation and imperfection".¹⁴⁵ He describes the Maori concept of three states of existence through which all things passed: a state of union or perfection (before creation and conception), a state of duality and equality (the state of creation), and a state of imperfection or rest without motion which he called 'Triune'.¹⁴⁶ These phases of life were also related to social transitions. For example, Kendall noted that for the Maori "to enter the head or stern of the war canoe is according to the ideas of the New Zealanders a change of *state*, or death".¹⁴⁷ Kendall also explained the symbolical progression in terms of metaphors which the Maori used of the waxing and waning of the moon. He also related the phases of existence, symbolically presented in the *pare* designs, to the Maori conception of time. The first state (union) was out of time and embryonic, the second state (dual) was a state of sexual generation, in time and of this world, and the third state

¹⁴⁴ Binney 1967: 147.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*: 130.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*: 132.

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*: 131.

(triune) was symbolic of existence beyond death and the termination of life.¹⁴⁸

Judith Binney notes that this model was drawn from the Pythagorean idea that numbers were the archetypal models of the world,¹⁴⁹ but Kendall made this comparison, it would seem, with some justification. *Pare* compositions do indeed show a continuous movement from unity to disunity, from stasis to movement, from duality to triality, and we can take Kendall's observations as going some way towards vindicating the conclusions of this essay, conclusions based on completely different ways of analysing the symbolism of the carved forms. Kendall also mentioned the metaphors of fecundity and procreation, of menstrual and lunar cycles,¹⁵⁰ whose importance in Maori philosophy and art has been discussed in this essay. It seems that Kendall's account is a valuable one, though slightly obscured. But when taken carefully as a form of exegetical statement it reinforces and substantiates the views offered here.

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¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*: 133.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*: 131, 134.

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