

Sense of Belonging

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A sense of belonging is a conjunctive interchange between the interests and the influences that guide our relationship to place. A sense of belonging is also its result: it is the formation of identity and of personhood, through participating in the production of place. To belong is a need of those experiencing place, but we can understand a sense of belonging as developed through the need to become part of the place through associative elements of kinship: responsibility to care for and strengthen place and the ability to subsist through place.

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1. Sense of Belonging

In the sense of spatial experience, belonging is a concept that frames how we can view interaction with and habitation of place through social frameworks. The theme of emplacement encompasses the experience of the individual in space, while belonging coordinates the domain of the social, political and cultural in relation to the production of place. Considering the potential of 'belonging' to translate values and ideology into space, it can further inspire the production of frameworks that heed social and environmental principles in the design of place. Responding to the framework of belonging affords the researcher or the spatial designer the capacity to consider place as space shared between cultural and environmental concerns; a natural order fundamental to *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship). This section engages with the literature that dissects the relationship of belonging to place, according to prevalent cultural perspectives in Aotearoa-New Zealand. Incorporating Māori cultural perspectives brings reason to consider literature on postcolonial space that incites the political and cultural frames of British imperial ideologies that interact, on a very real level, with the social capacities of space and challenge senses of belonging. If we engage with place as space that is situated through the practices of belonging, then it is necessary to consider the values and ideologies that engender this relationship. We must also consider place in coordination with its postcolonial context and engage the literature on how this relationship shapes political issues and cultural memory. As such, this section invokes postcolonial theory, in relation to both postmodern geographies and the particular historical and social context of Aotearoa-New Zealand that shape what belonging means, by approaching concepts deeply imbued in *Mātauranga* (knowledge) and *Tikanga* (customs and values) Māori, such as *whenua* (land), *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship) and *whakapapa* (genealogy).

2. Whenua

Whenua (land or placenta) carries a multiplicity of meanings which, for the purposes of this review, are considered conjunctively. In this sense, Mead's treatment of the definition of *whenua* as inseparable in a thick description of Māori cultural practice follows:

"The whenua is the medium between the mother and the child, succouring a new life. After birth the whenua, as land, succours the new whānau. The two whenua are similar. Both are real. Whenua as placenta allows a foetus to become a baby, a small human being with all the potential to become a strong and healthy adult. Whenua, as land, sees that person develop and grow, make their contribution to society and then be 'born' into the spirit world".

^[1](p. 230)

The dualism in Mead's explanation of *whenua* is purposeful as it develops the readers' capacity to distinguish the connectedness of the body and the land, not to distinguish between the body and the land. This is not just a conceptual alignment of the human experience with the land but a customary ordering of human relationship within place, for Mead continues to richly describe the ritual of placental burial as incorporating two notions of *whenua* in physical and semantic alignment^[1]. *Whenua*, the environment in which people live, operates as a "foundation of their view of the world" and the

“means of giving reality to the [social] system in the forms of residences, villages, gardens, special resource regions and so on” (p. 208). Mead states that the ‘net effect’ of “cultural bonding mechanisms and traditional tikanga practices was to develop a relationship with the land” (p. 209).

3. Kaitiakitanga

Whaanga^[2] introduces belonging as *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship or kinship), the practice of the “intrinsic value of all creation where humans exercise kinship [with the environment], rather than domination [over it]” (p. 95). Whaanga systematises the development of Māori cultural values in relation to and through interaction with the imposition of a dominant Pākehā ideological framework. This approach enables the reader to understand Māori ideologies as situated within a New Zealand dominated by a colonial utilitarian approach to natural resources. The work he cites on Māori ethical responses to commoditised human labour introduces terms such as ‘hau’ and situates ideology within a contemporary social context. For instance, *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship) encapsulates *hau* (vitality), along with *tapu* (sacred) and *mana* (authority). Whaanga defends that the welfare of the people should be sought through a model of management of natural resources embedded in Indigenous values to enhance cultural capacity. A sense of stewardship, as in caring and responsibility for the wellbeing of the land, is deeply rooted in this concept. As Whaanga situates Māori values within the historical context, the reader is faced with their dialectical opposition to Western treatment of landscape and how these distinctions are mediated through the Waitangi Tribunal. The ethos underpinning the expanded prevalence of the Waitangi Tribunal represents a “contemporary emergence and adaptation of Māori and Pākehā values into unique New Zealand settings” (p. 95). The argument laid out here makes the crucial point that Māori conceptualisations of land use and *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship) are implanted through a series of mediation screens within their postcolonial context and interpretation.

Whaanga’s argument draws from the work of Henare^[3], specifically as it relates to the function of Indigenous ideology and the contested meaning of place. Henare dissects notions of Māori economic systems: “A Māori worldview finds kinship with ecological economics, the proposition being that economies exist in the ecology and not the other way around” (p. 9). These economies are significant to the integrity of *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship) as they underpin the notion of what it means to be within the world. Such a perspective makes explicit the confrontation between modalities of thought in relation to the production and treatment of place. Henare applies the notion of economics, a set of incentive-driven interactions that impose themselves over a landscape (usually considered as a resource; passive and exploitable), but repositions it in this context according to Māori ideology. In other words, belonging is constructed through the landscape and within place, not determined over it, in a sense defying the economic philosophies that demarcate place in ordinance with human interest.

4. Whakapapa

Whakapapa (genealogy) locates the genealogical bonds that connect the living with their ancestors, including those now located as identities in the landscape, in accordance with Māori kinship philosophy. The practice of reciting one’s *whakapapa* accords an authority to the orator’s identity and conveys them as living extension of their kinship-relations to the listener. To the function of placing oneself as an operative of kinship obligation, *whakapapa* establishes the conditions of *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship)^[2]. Mead^[4] summarises the function of *whakapapa* as providing “identity within a tribal structure and later in life gives an individual the right to say, “I am Māori” (...) In short, whakapapa is belonging” (p. 41). Mead^[4] further invokes an understanding authored by the Ministry of Justice:

“The land is a source of identity for Māori. Being direct descendants from Papatūanuku, Māori see themselves as not only ‘of the land’, but ‘as the land’. The living generations act as guardians of the land, like their tīpuna [ancestors] had before them. Their uri [descendants] benefit from that guardianship, because the land holds the link to their parents, grandparents and tīpuna, and the land is the link to future generations. Hence the land was shared between the dead, the living and the unborn”.

(p. 216)

Drawing attention back to Appadurai’s consideration localising practice, we might consider *whakapapa* as a way of managing “ecological, social and cosmological terrains”^[4] (p. 183). Gatens and Lloyd^[5] apply Spinoza’s philosophy to the relationship between identity and responsibility, providing the following applicable analysis: “We are responsible for the past not because of what we as individuals have done, but because of what we are” (p. 81). This supports the idea that

identity rests beyond our own immediate personhood, a notion at the core of whakapapa's virtue. In conducting an analysis of the formation of identity through shared existence in space, they are useful contributions; however, Rother's^[6] ethnographic analysis of the 'shared landscapes' provides a depth and culturally-specific focus that is more fitting to this discussion. She presents evidence that enforces locals' connection, their *mana whenua* (authority over land or territory), to the place and explicitly discusses the influence that the reverence of a common ancestor, Tairongo, has in developing a shared identity that is bound to a place. Amongst the gathered (and shared) experiences representing Rother's fieldwork and her broader analytical interpretation, she manages to represent the meaning of whakapapa as the conjunctive and inseparable function of place and kinship in the production of identity.

5. Indigenous Sovereignty

The production of place that represents the virtue and authority of these principles—*whenua* (land), *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship) and *whakapapa* (genealogy)—necessitates a general recalibration of the purpose of and commitment to spatial design. A conversion of emplaced Indigenous practices to facilitative and designative frameworks that promote the values expressed in these practices is highly sought; however, this is equally contentious as there is continually the threat of abstracting ideas and displacing epistemologies^[7]. Yet drawing from literature that responds to these points may enable us to consider generative design models that are conducive to representing the intent of Indigenous knowledge. The International Indigenous Design Charter, presented at the 2017 World Design Summit in Montreal and endorsed by more than 50 international organisations, results from the collaboration of Indigenous and non-Indigenous designers and identifies core principles by which to coordinate treatment of Indigenous practice in design. Respect for Indigenous knowledge as well as shared benefits and knowledge for those involved in the design process and awareness of the impact of a design are core to the charter, to name a few^[8]. Collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples has been structurally enforced by a dialectical view of coloniser/colonised, determining the shape of the relationship as one of 'encounter'^[9]. The charter seeks to reorder this relationship. Its purpose is to "facilitate accurate and respectful representation of Indigenous knowledge in all disciplines of design and associated media"^[8] (p. 29), bringing attention to the assertion of Indigenous practice within design disciplines and, ultimately, to issues pertaining to sovereignty.

Johnson^[10] addresses the landscapes that lie somewhere between the settler and colonised, or thirdspaces of Indigenous sovereignty, and illustrates the point that "evidence of the exercise of Indigenous self-determination can be seen on the landscape of the specific places in which it is exercised" (p. 46). Similar to Soja's consideration of thirdspace^{[11][12]}, Johnson aligns his thinking to Bhabha's designation of thirdspace as politicised and towards a socio-spatial phenomenon emanating from "particular discourses and social interactions"^[10] p. 7. Where Bhabha^[13] considers thirdspace as the site for the "elaborating strategies of selfhood" (p. 1), Butz and Ripmeester^[14] engage it as a 'sensitivity' that enables the "radically disempowered to discursively reconstruct actual spaces" to the extent of serving their self-determination^[14] (p. 8). From these holes in the fabric or generative sites, Māori political activism has historically emerged to contest the erosion of Indigenous sovereignty—from the marae, during the first half of the twentieth century, and additionally in the cities of Auckland and Wellington following the trend of Māori urbanisation at the century's midpoint^[15]. Brown^[16] does not consider it "surprising that urban Māori looked once again to the *whare whakairo* (carved meeting house) as an architecture that could represent unity, self-determination and cultural identity" (p. 114). Although it was never lost, it could be argued that extreme marginalisation ignited a principal function in thirdspaces to the sovereign claims of Aotearoa's Indigenous people^[17]. To this point, Brown^[16] asserts that the *wharenui* (meeting house) has been "re-contextualised for the contemporary period to meet the aspirations of communities and institutions as well as to confront the challenges of social inequity and physical displacement" precisely due to its "accommodation and embodiment of cultural practices" (p. 115).

A strand of research on cultural sustainability that seeks to prioritise the function of space (as opposed to absorption in its form or symbolic representativeness) praises the foundation of sites conducive to their surrounding ecology and cultural sensitivities. To Brown^[16], projects that are rich in material form and conceptually minded may represent environments but are not responsive to *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship) in a broader, lived sense (p. 108). *Kaitiakitanga* has, she opines, "manifested itself as sustainable building" (p. 110), signifying a prioritisation of Indigenous cultural formats to nurture the environments they sit within. Go-Sam and Keys^[18] propose the framework of 'cultural sustainability' to elevate the significance of culturally-informed actors in the attainment of sustainable outcomes in architectural projects. Their argument precipitates a deeper look into the intersection of culture and sustainability, recognising them as distinct modalities in a dynamic relationship. Cultural sustainability works to "resolve divisions arising from taxonomising cultures, by incorporating culture as a parallel and equal dimension of sustainable development" (p. 351). It seeks to distinguish culture as sociologically interactive^[19], involved not only in "representing realities but also constructing realities"^[20] (p. 214).

Visions of sustainability that are irresponsible to cultural concerns marginalise Indigenous values and entrench postcolonial states of 'spatial repression'^[21]. Seeking a postmodern explanation of urban sites as they constrain Indigenous expressions of self, Jacobs^[21] makes note of bicultural sites that intend a tone of reconciliation but are attached to performative representations using 'marketable signifiers' of Indigenous value rather than its internalisation through practice (p. 124). In as much as the construction of a place is a coordinated effort of culture and ecology, its situation within spheres of political and cultural interests makes it susceptible to these interests. Reviving Indigenous knowledge as a lens and stimulus for change in the way nature and people intricately interconnect, re-establishing holistic ideologies of harmony and union between the two and employing concepts such as *whenua* (land), *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship) and *whakapapa* (genealogy), a (re)connection is arguably possible. In this vein, Jacobs^[21] defends a more politicised interest in thirdspace and the contestation between visions of space in order to assert the presence of Indigeneity in urban settings. Jacobs^[21] refers to Indigenous knowledge being treated as a "cultural model for a modernity that might construct itself not around masculinised anthropocentrism, but through a decentred subjectivity" (p. 137). Even as we acknowledge the value of Indigenous practice and philosophy in the Indigenous Design Charter, for example, and 'thirdspace sensibilities'^[10] to engage a participatory self-determinism, Jacobs applies a postmodern geography to remind us that spatial developments are already engaged in a socio-spatial context that is as much shaped by historical politics as it is by the intention of the designer. Harnessing the natural environment can facilitate the healing of people's mental, spiritual, physical and social wellbeing as well as deepen their re(connection) to nature, enhancing one's sense of belonging

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