



A NEW MĀORI DIMENSION

Kei nga hoa, tena koutou,

For the last several years while I have been a board member, there has been a certain growth in Māori filmmaking. Before my time with the NZFC concludes in December, I want to pass on a few personal thoughts concerning the work of the Commission and its intersection with the Māori world.

MĀORI RESPONSIVENESS STRATEGY

The NZFC formally supports Māori film storytelling through:

1. The development of Māori talent and Māori film projects
2. The cultural integrity of films with Māori content
3. Industry infrastructure support for Māori filmmakers

In 2007/08 seven producer teams received development funding; thirteen writers or directors received support; the Wairoa Film Festival and the Ngā Aho Whakaari industry group had successful years with our support; the Te Paepae Ataata film development initiative made traction with the development of feature film scripts that have a strong indigenous focus; Māori short films are targeted through one of the Executive Producer Groups; it is now de rigueur for Māori content in any film to be assessed for cultural authenticity and appropriateness.

I'm proud of what we've done to date. We must do more.

The recent work of the commission has enhanced solid Māori talent development and also prepared the way for what could be a very nice trio of Māori films: THE STRENGTH OF WATER, THE VOLCANO and MATARIKI. I believe that there may be a slew of very good Maori scripts and production teams on the way.

The incarnations of board and staff with whom I have worked have always been very sincere and keen to foster Māori film. The levels of support are (as expected) linked with the myriad other elements that must be in order before acceptance and the unlocking of funds.

On one level, I think that this is all quite a good result. On another – I think we have a long way to go in order to prepare for the future:

1. We will have to cater for this emergent force of Māori filmmakers, and the rise of indigenous film generally.
2. There is growing Māori content in mainstream films that will require expert assessment and servicing.
3. The culture of the Film Commission itself should grow to better reflect our evolving bi-cultural national identity.

Those who advocate for the Māori position also commit to a Kiwi position where the Pakeha and the Māori dimensions are in harmony. To achieve this mutual understanding is one of the great challenges facing most national organisations in New Zealand today.

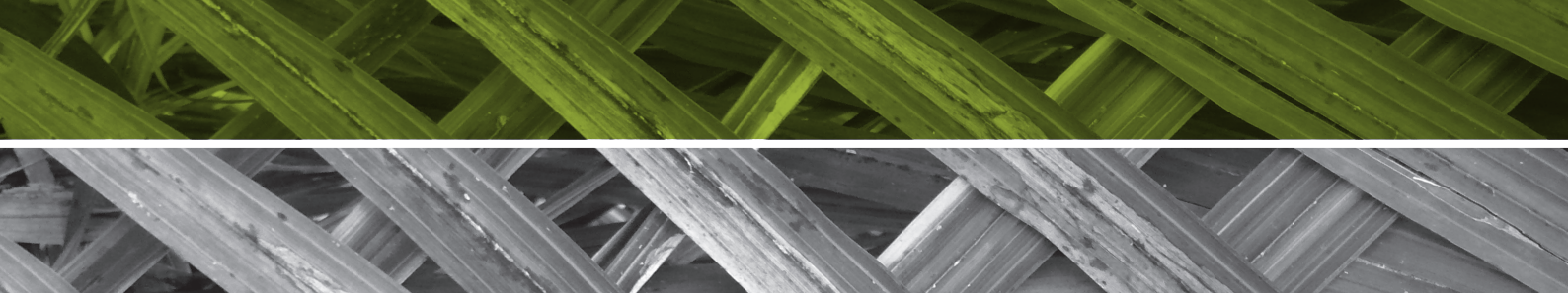
The NZFC is both leader and exemplar within our maturing culture. We help to debate and shape the national identity. I believe there are some cultural perspectives that board and staff could fruitfully consider and talk about. The following are just three of them. They reflect educational, political, and cultural challenges...

MIND THE GAP

Notwithstanding that we are a small country with a vivid shared racial history, it astounds me that there is still such a gap between Māori and Pakeha. In part this is because of the ignorance of the latter about the former. Maori are acquainted with the Pakeha language and culture. There is little choice about that. Most Pakeha know little about Māori language and culture. There is an element of choice about that.

In 2006 a clear example of this knowledge gap became apparent with the very successful television broadcast of the tangihanga for the late Māori Queen Dame Te Atairangikaahu. Both the Māori Television Service and TVNZ received plaudits and kudos for the live broadcast of the occasion. I recall the extent to which Pakeha appeared surprised at the simple fact of a large scale tangihanga - it's processes and rituals – as much as they were intrigued by the story of the Māori Queen.

Tangihanga and the King Movement have been around for many generations. They are a very normal part of the Māori world. Yet this world still remains foreign to too many New Zealanders. There are many reasons this is so. One has been the dearth of the Māori point of view in stories across all media. However, thanks to MTS (for example), the tide is starting to change. Two thirds of the channel's viewers are Pakeha. They reflect the demonstrable interest many New Zealanders have in things Maori – or what Maori have to offer. ▼



The NZFC must continue to have ready access to informed Maori opinion and knowledge. In the first instance the right staff and board members will provide that. But there is always the danger that any individual may become an effective 'guru' for anything to do with the Māori world.

The Māori world is just that – a world. The full panoply of everything exists in that world as for any other. I think we need a different approach to understand the wholeness of that world and how to interact with it.

I believe the NZFC needs to commit to a more formal programme of 'bi-culturation'. This will involve new relationships with Māori tribes, as much as specific staff training. I think we have to pre-empt the expectations that future generations of Kiwis will have of us.

Although there are few very experienced Māori in the film world, there is superior talent coming through. They are also of a generation that is more culturally secure than that of their parents.

The intuitive and practical Māoriness of many of our younger Māori and Pakeha will be fundamental in shaping the New Zealand of the future. They will close the gap more than we can hope to achieve ourselves.

MAKE WAITANGI A PART OF YOUR LIFE

Waitangi has had bad press. It is seen as a problem to be solved rather than a solution to be embraced. To many, the Treaty of Waitangi is the principle founding document of this nation. To some however, it is an irrelevant inconvenience.

Despite controversy over egregious breaches of the Treaty, the promise and potential it offers refuses to dim. (The Treaty settlements process for example helps to drive the current surge in Maori intellectual and commercial growth.) Perhaps the most important aspect of the document is less the disputed intent of the preamble and the clauses, but the simple fact of its existence.

Whatever its motivations or failings, the Treaty came into existence in order to ultimately forge an accommodation between two sovereign peoples. The notion of agreeing to a partnership and the subsequent and continuous dialogue that that fact entails, is a vital legacy. If a working and fruitful understanding between Māori and Pakeha can occur as a result, then so too can similar partnerships between other cultures who comprise a growing part of our society.

We need to de-mythologise the Treaty and the speculation that has swirled around it since 1840. It needs to be cleansed of suspicion and misinformation as much as it needs to be seen to be of relevance to every New Zealander. The Treaty has fashioned our society. It impacts upon our daily lives. We need to be aware of this and unafraid of it. New Zealanders should view the Treaty with pride.

Waitangi should be considered in all that we do. It provides a unique template for discourse between people of different mana. On a practical level this will require no more than to talk about Waitangi when we need to, and to be in an effective, positive, and apparent partnership with Māori.

WE NEED MORE RITUAL

One way by which Māori and Pakeha get to know each other is through the application of ritual. This is usually expressed in formal occasions of encounter, celebration and commemoration.

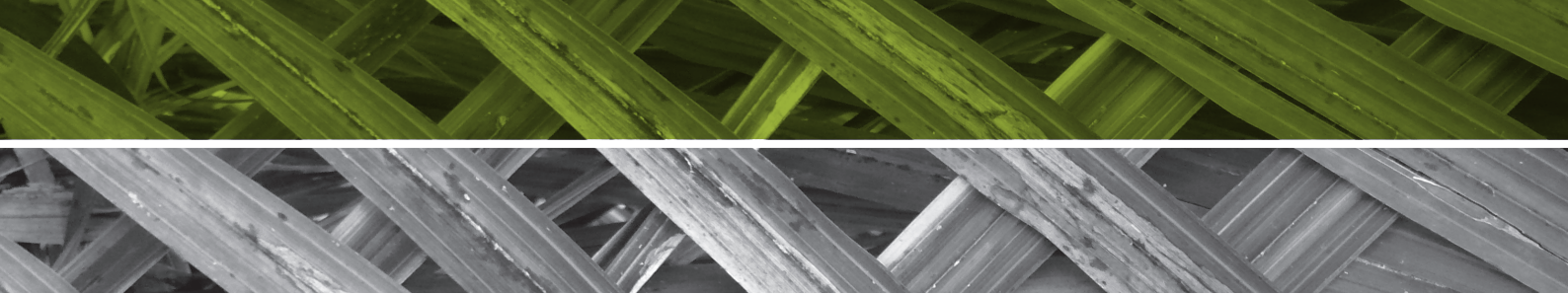
For Māori, such rituals include use of our language and our traditions. It has been my experience that most Pakeha appreciate opportunities to learn of these customs. It enables a spirit of inclusion and sharing.

Over the years I have sometimes taught waiata and simple speechmaking to various members of NZFC staff. There have been many occasions where I have assisted in formal welcomes, speeches or karakia on behalf of the Commission. There has always been a keen interest on the part of any participants. They want to be involved and to understand what is happening.

The imperatives of Māori often align with the interests and needs of Pakeha. The NZFC should always have access to cultural expertise that educates and informs the work of the commission, and which shows how to appreciate and use ritual.

In a recent discussion with Ruth Harley, she explained how she had instituted some of her own understandings of Māori ritual into the work she has been doing with Screen Australia. She was amazed (yet also unsurprised) at its efficacy.

In many ways I see ritual as perhaps one of the best means by which we can communicate with each other. And in a communications-based industry such as film, this can only be a good thing. ▼



CONCLUSION

I've thoroughly enjoyed my time with the Commission. I've appreciated the quirk and character of all the people I have been able to work with. I have been impressed by the calibre of the korero and the professional and personal commitment of the board and staff to do the very best for Kiwi cinema: through tough times and tougher. It's been a privilege. Kia ora rawa atu koutou.

It's difficult to foretell what the future will hold, but I believe we can take it as a given that Māori are heading into a 'golden era'. There are many reasons for this, but one of the most important is that it cannot be otherwise. Demographics and our era in history cannot be ignored. There is a confidence about Māoridom that is unstoppable – and an acceleration about its growth. There is a concomitant impetus to tell Māori stories on the big screen.

I believe that the Paepae Ataata will be critical for the growth of Māori film. Although the concept is in its early days, it may have a profound impact in assisting to develop culturally specific tangata whenua cinema. This is distinct from the Māori stories or content that will appear in mainstream films.

We will also derive inspiration from indigenous filmmakers worldwide. Closer to home the Australian Aboriginal film experience is instructive. Although our cultures and histories are so very different, Aboriginal film is of a depth and quality that is truly inspirational.

Māori film has equivalent potential. Our stories have domestic power and international resonance. We are blessed with a talent base that is full of creative wonder. With the current review of the Film Commission and the necessary changes the industry is going through, it is perhaps the Māori creative spirit that we need to protect and nurture most of all. We exist because of our ideas and our imaginations.

I suggest that the way we achieve all of this, is to normalise the presence of the Māori world in our lives. No easy task. But one we need to want to do.

**Heoi. Tena koutou me ta tatou mahinga tahitanga nei.
Noku te honore. Noho ora mai.**

Tainui Stephens