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TUSITALA

TELLER OF TALES

Exploring graphic representations of diasporic
poetry for engaging Pasifika youth

An exegesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Design

Massey University College of Creative Arts
Wellington, New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

While many high achievers come from the Pasifika community, current research into New Zealand secondary schools has identified a literacy gap between students from Pasifika backgrounds and those from other ethnic groups (Telford & Tuomu'a, 2013). The findings highlight the need to investigate engaging and culturally-responsive methods for strengthening the literacy outcomes of Pasifika students.

Tusitala – teller of tales aims to explore graphic narrative as a sequential storytelling method for the engagement, education and empowerment of Pasifika youth. Graphic narrative is used as an umbrella term by comic theorists to describe narrative work in the medium of graphic novels, and comics. The project is contextualised within an existing body of research into the effectiveness of graphic narratives as multimodal texts, for engaging reluctant and struggling readers. Positioned primarily as a practice-based design investigation into the potential of graphic narrative for educational outcomes, the project is further underpinned by pedagogical and sequential art theories.

As a subset of this project, poetry from Pasifika authors is highlighted for its particular role in reflecting the identity and experiences of Pasifika youth today. The resulting design investigation applies both a formal analysis of graphic narrative works and textual analysis of four poems from contemporary Pasifika poets. These poems are then synthesised into a set of large posters that draw artistic influence from both Western and Indigenous precedents. The resulting set contributes to a growing body of work that reflects Pacific diasporic identity in New Zealand.

Key words: Graphic narrative, Pasifika, diaspora, reading literacy, poetry, multimodal.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"TUSITALA"

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SOME MORE
OF SAMOA
OF MY SACRED CENTRE

(Marsh,1994, p.137)

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BACKGROUND

The intent of the project is to explore graphic narrative as a strategy for developing reading literacy skills in Pasifika youth. Graphic narrative is used as an umbrella term by comic theorists to describe narrative work in graphic novels, comics, comic strips, manga and Bande dessinée. As such, graphic narratives may comprise many of the formal properties of comics such as panels, speech bubbles, speed lines, onomatopoeia and so on. Chute and DeKoven (2007) discuss their understanding of graphic narrative as a hybrid or multimodal medium composed primarily of verbal and visual languages. In this exegesis, the term is employed interchangeably with comics, to separate the cultural artefact of comics or graphic novels from the narrative languages found within those works.

There currently exists a large discrepancy between achievement and literacy levels of Pasifika youth and their peers from other ethnicities (Telford & Tuomu'a, 2013). Both my Pasifika heritage and personal struggle with reading at school informed my decision to undertake a practice-based project that addresses this issue. The project was also inspired by my professional career as an illustrator, and my role in creating and producing educational resources and storybooks for both Pasifika and Maori audiences.



MY STORY

Some of my fondest childhood memories are of writing and illustrating stories with my grandmother. Some of the works that have been preserved include, “The Chronicles of Nazrat” (Tarzan spelt backwards), detective stories, and various tales about boys finding trapdoors in their bedrooms that would lead to fantastical lands. I can remember a sense of wonder and joy at seeing these stories come to life through a combination of words and pictures. They were not great works of literature or art, but for me, vehicles for expressing my own boy-hood aspirations of being a hero, discovering unknown lands and saving the day. They gave me a taste of what it is to be a tusitala, or storyteller, and the sense of empowerment and identity that telling stories can bring.

When I entered the New Zealand school system, however, it suddenly seemed that stories were to be critiqued and analysed rather than enjoyed. Reading and writing were no longer leisure activities, but homework tasks. Very soon, the literacy skills that I had acquired before school slipped as I lost confidence. During my college years, my reading and writing ability continued to decline as books lost their appeal and the English classroom became a source of anxiety. The thought of reading aloud in class filled me with dread due to the fear of making mistakes and being scrutinised. These negative experiences at secondary school had continued repercussions into adulthood, as I would actively avoid situations that required me to read and write. Unfortunately, many Pasifika youth share similar experiences to this, which have a huge impact on their sense of identity and confidence.

CONTEXTUALISING THE ISSUE

THE PACIFIC DIASPORA

Throughout this exegesis I employ the terms diaspora and Pasifika to describe the Pacific peoples that reside in New Zealand. The term diaspora has been defined as “the dispersal of a people from their homeland” (Butler, 2001, p.189). It was first used in a Biblical reference (Deuteronomy 30:4) to describe the forced displacement of the Jewish people, who despite living on foreign soil, maintained a separate identity in their place of residence and held on to a desire to return to their homeland. As used today, the term describes diasporic communities who are more likely to become embedded in their new home, where their collective identity is constantly being “debated and re-imagined” (Hall, 1990, p.235) as they “reconstitute their cultural and communication practices to speak to and reflect upon their migration experiences” (Drzewiecka 2015, p.1). Myria Georgiou (2001) thus states that the term diaspora implies that “particular cultures survive, transform and remain relevant even when members of an ethnic community have not lived in the original homeland”. As such, diaspora can be used to describe younger generations who have not experienced the migration processes but who still carry a “sense of ethnic belonging” (p.1).

The Pacific diaspora in New Zealand stretches back multiple generations and in contrast to the popular perception of Pacific people as recent immigrants, over 58% were born in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2010).

Pasifika is a common title employed by members of the Pacific diaspora living in New Zealand, to define themselves. Fleras and Spoonley (1999) state that “Pasifika” provides a “political and linguistic link to the tangata whenua of Aotearoa; and it represents the evolution of New Zealand-located identity or, more accurately, identities” (p. 191). The Pasifika community include but are not limited to people of Samoan, Cook Island Māori, Tongan, Niuean, Fijian and Tokelauan descent all of whom have are unique in their cultural practices, first language, religion, and educational achievement.

Pasifika youth currently make up 9.2% of New Zealand’s primary and secondary school population and it has been projected that by 2040 the majority of students in New Zealand primary schools will be of Maori and Pasifika decent (Alton-Lee, 2003, p.5). This factor has enormous implications for our education system and highlights that future teachers, more than ever, need to be able to cater to the complex learning needs of students from an increasingly multicultural society (Samu, 2015).

Tusitala – teller of tales focuses specifically on Year 9 - 11 Pasifika students (13-16 year olds). During this time students develop important foundational skills which are needed for higher levels of learning. Therefore, it is important for students to develop their literacy skills and build their confidence in engaging texts in all subject areas.

Gaining a strong foundation in language and literacy during the early years at school is essential for students to achieve academic success and become lifelong learners. Literacy skills are the building blocks for all learning. (Ministry of Education, n.d. ,p.2)

THE ROLE OF READING LITERACY

The definition of reading literacy has changed over time as society has evolved culturally and technologically. It is no longer seen as a static set of skills taught during childhood, but an expanding set of knowledge and strategies which changes and builds as we grow in various contexts and through interaction with our peers and the wider community. The 2009 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) guidelines, defines reading literacy as “understanding, using, reflecting on and engaging with written texts, in order to achieve one’s goals, to develop one’s knowledge and potential, and to participate in society” (OECD, 2009, p.14). Consequently, reading literacy is crucial to any student’s achievement within New Zealand’s education system (Telford & Tuomu’a, 2013). Reading skills are necessary for learning in every subject area and become increasingly more important as students progress into higher levels of college and university study. Moreover, literacy skills are essential for full participation in our Western information-based society. The EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy state that:

Literacy empowers the individual to develop capacities of reflection, critique and empathy, leading to a sense of self-efficacy (and) identity.... Literacy skills are crucial to parenting, finding and keeping a job, participating as a citizen...and taking advantage of digital developments, both socially and at work (2012, p.21)

DEFINING THE ISSUE

THE CURRENT LITERACY GAP

While many high achievers come from the Pasifika community, the New Zealand Education System is yet to deliver equitable literacy outcomes for Pasifika Students (see Statistics New Zealand and Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, 2010). The 2009 Program for International Student Achievement (PISA) showed that 15 year olds from Pasifika backgrounds demonstrate both high and low levels of reading proficiency, but on average they achieve less well than other ethnic groups (Telford & Toumu'a, 2013). In addition, 42.9% of Pasifika students obtained a University Entrance qualification in 2012 in comparison to the national average of 67.6% (NZQA, 2013). These, and similar findings, have resulted in a great deal of research into how the New Zealand Educational System might be able to close the current literacy gap and offer better support to Pasifika learners in their language development.

To further investigate the literacy gap, I conducted a literature review which covered a range of research around this topic –the possible causes and how it is currently being addressed by teachers and educators. To support these findings, I also conducted interviews with two English high school teachers, Stephanie Coates and Martin Reynolds. Stephanie Coates (Tawa College) has over 10 years experience working with Pasifika students in both Auckland and Wellington schools and Martin Reynolds is currently working on a PhD that asks what success is under a Pasifika paradigm, while also teaching at Wellington College.

I have grouped the findings under three key areas: Reading engagement, vocabulary challenges and culturally-responsive pedagogy.

READING ENGAGEMENT

I think one of the main ones [barriers to reading literacy for Pasifika students] is actually getting kids to pick up the page and start reading and I think there are a whole lot of reasons behind that. Actually getting them hooked on something is really difficult. I think they don't see how it's [the reading material] relevant to them...So that is one of the main challenges I have (S.Coates, personal communication, May 28, 2015).

The issue Coates highlights is reading engagement, which is a crucial component to the development of a student's literacy skills. Reading engagement describes the extent to which one has a positive attitude towards reading, seeks out texts and makes

time to read (Brozo, Shiel & Topping, 2007; Guthrie & Humenick, 2005). Further, it is synonymous with reading enjoyment; if a student holds positive views towards reading they are more likely to read often. In terms of reading for enjoyment, Telford & Toumu'a (2013) discovered that a gap equivalent to approximately two years of schooling existed between students who enjoyed reading the most, and those who enjoyed reading the least. Overall, Pasifika students are less likely than their non-Pasifika peers to hold a positive attitude towards reading (Telford & Toumu'a, 2013).

VOCABULARY CHALLENGES

Vocabulary challenges can affect the motivation to read, which in turn decreases reading frequency. Therefore, the achievement gap between those who read frequently and those who are reading adverse, increases over time (Brozo, Shiel & Topping, 2007). Pasifika students from non-English speaking households may be at a disadvantage in the classroom, as having English as the primary language spoken at home is connected with literacy achievement (Robertson, 2013). Coates also highlighted the vocabulary challenges of some Pasifika students in her classroom as a key barrier to them accessing texts. In our interview she said that, "Counting new words all the time...can be difficult, as there is no access point, all the words are hard, because they haven't heard them before" (S.Coates, personal communication, May 28, 2015).

CULTURALLY-RESPONSIVE TEXTS

Both the literature review and teacher interviews suggest that Pasifika students' reading literacy learning could be enhanced with the use of culturally-responsive texts. Currently, however, Pacific literature is under-represented in the New Zealand English classroom. The absence of Pasifika texts in classroom teaching material was also a finding of the literature review and my interview with Coates:

We are looking at quite an English and American Canon... it is still a white Western history. I think that's mainly the way it is at the moment and I think that is a shame. (S.Coates, personal communication, May 28, 2015).

Dr Selina Tusitala Marsh (2010), Lecturer in Pacific Literature at Auckland University, agrees with Coates and states that "many [Pasifika] students have not been exposed to the expression of Pacific selves in literature...[and] have yet to see themselves reflected in this nation's literary mirror" (p.3). Marsh contends that this is why more teachers are becoming increasingly aware of the need for their classroom canon to reflect the Pasifika identity (2010b).

SUMMARY

This brief overview of the findings from the literature review and teacher interviews has focused on three main areas of need for Pasifika students. In the following chapter I will explore ways these three areas might be addressed via design.

EXPLORING SOLUTIONS

This section discusses two possible strategies for addressing the issue of literacy for Pasifika youth, namely, the use of graphic narrative and literature from Pasifika authors in the classroom.

GRAPHIC NARRATIVE IN THE CLASSROOM

Literary scholars and educators have recently begun to recognise the literary merit of graphic novels and comics (Brozo, Moorman, & Meyer, 2013). As a result, graphic narrative scholarship has flourished (Williams, 2012) and is now a burgeoning area of study in fields such as literary criticism, cognitive science, linguistics and education. Further, graphic narrative scholarship has undergone a resurgence resulting in an increasing interest in graphic novels and comics to promote literacy (Biebrich, 2006; Brozo, et al., 2013; Cohn, 2015; Gorman, 2013; Schwarz, 2006; Yang, 2003; Yildirim, 2013). Consequently, graphic novels and comics are now seen as important resources for the development of both language-based and content-based literacies (Brozo, et al., 2013). Once regarded as a medium that lacked depth, graphic versions of many classic works of literature can today be found in bookstores and libraries.

The National Library of New Zealand states that “Graphic novels are very popular with boys and girls and represent great reading material for ESOL students. They are an invaluable resource for teaching visual literacy skills and ideal for teens” (2016, para.6).

Although graphic novels are now embraced in the educational arena, this has not always been the case. Prior to their current status, comics were historically viewed, “at best, as popular entertainment and, at worst a dangerous influence on youth” (Jacobs, 2007, p.19). Such attitudes were popularised during the 1940s and 1950s by ardent critics of comic books such as Frederick Wertham, a prominent psychologist, who claimed that comic books were the cause of “juvenile delinquency, taught erroneous scientific concepts, encouraged homosexuality and provided girls with poor role models” (as cited in Brozo, et al., 2013, p.39) In his 1954 book, *Seduction of the Innocent*, Wertham argued vehemently that comics “are death on reading” (p.121). The assumption underlying Wertham’s critique is that the visuality of the medium is dangerous, because it makes the process of comprehension too easy for the reader. Conversely, this is exactly where the proponents of graphic narrative argue for its merits.

PEDAGOGICAL BENEFITS

Brozo, Moorman, & Meyer (2013) argue that there is good evidence “that graphic novels motivate reluctant readers, provide assistance for struggling readers” and “support English language learners” (p.39). Moreover, research suggests that graphic novels can support the acquisition of metacognitive strategies, which are connected with literacy achievement (Noel, 2015). As regards to this, Aşkın Yildirim (2013) contends that rather than hindering literacy acquisition, the visual elements of the graphic novels can function as a mediating tool with the text that does not disrupt the learning process. By facilitating reading comprehension, the images can help students deal with more complicated reading materials with confidence. Michelle Gorman (2002) argues that a novice reader may be able to understand up to 70% of the story within a graphic novel just by looking at the pictures and as a result ,struggling readers with limited vocabulary do not lose motivation early on and develop a positive attitude towards reading. In this respect, graphic novels and comics can become important motivating tools for learners who may harbour a negative attitude towards reading or have limited English vocabulary.

Yang (2003) asserts that the combination of verbal and visual elements in a graphic narrative generate visual permanency, a quality that requires the reader to slow down and analyse both words and images in order to extract meaning from the narrative. This type of reading which requires the reader to interact with two or more modes of communication is termed multimodal literacy (New London Group, 2000; Kress, 2000). Taking into account the various modes of communication found in graphic narratives, it becomes clear that they are far more complex than solely word-based texts. The New London Group state that graphic narratives may contain up to five additional modalities that are not found in traditional texts. These may include linguistic, audio, visual, gestural, and spatial modes, as well as multimodal design elements (2000). While comics offer support for struggling readers, they are complex multimodal texts that require considerable thought and analysis to comprehend. If teachers adopt a multimodal literacy approach to comics, they can become a diverse resource for educators. The written elements can be used to discuss language features and build vocabulary and the visual elements can be used to foster visual literacy (Brozo, Moorman, & Meyer, 2013).

The popularity of graphic novels among youth has grown significantly in recent years (Yildirim, 2013), most-likely due to the many film adaptations of superhero comics and graphic novels. But as visual texts, the popularity of graphic novels could also be attributed to the fact that they respond well to the literacy practices of contemporary society.

Today's youth have grown up in a highly visual, highly technological environment. They are comfortable with and adept at visual learning. Graphic Novels provide today's youth with the opportunity to learn in a medium with which they are comfortable (Brozo, et al., 2013, p.5).

Like the use of graphic narratives in an educational context, multimodal texts fit within a framework of sociocultural approaches in education (Brozo, et al., 2015). Sociocultural theory highlights that the development of literacy and language cannot be understood without taking into account the influence of social interactions and cultural contexts.

Today's youth are growing up in a society that is dominated by the visual (Kress, 2000) and as such, need to be fluent in various forms of visual media. They have to be able to read and interpret print, television and film as well as interactive media such as websites and smartphones. Consequently, in today's "media-dominated society" (Schwarz, 2006), there is increasing need for educators to equip students with the critical resources to engage purposefully with media and advertising.

An important factor in arguing the case for these texts in secondary school education is their appeal for Pasifika youth. Telford & Toumu'a (2013) highlight the findings from the 2009 PISA Report which identified that 15 year old Pasifika students were twice more likely to read comic books than other ethnic groups in New Zealand. These findings are significant in light of this project's aims, as it would seem that graphic narratives are already a part of Pasifika students' outside-of-school literacy activities.

USE OF PASIFIKA LITERATURE

The many benefits of using Pasifika literature to engage Pasifika students in learning has been raised by academics, for example, Selina Tusitala Marsh (2010b) and highlighted by research undertaken in the New Zealand Secondary School System, for example, Harvey (2002). In her article, *The Body of Pacific Literature* (2010), Marsh discusses how contemporary Pasifika authors play a particular role in reflecting the experiences of Pasifika youth today. One such example is the South Auckland Poets Collective (SAPC), a group of young spoken word poets formed in 2007 by four leaders from Youthline, a national counselling service. SAPC poets are determined to challenge the negative statistics and representations of Pasifika people that are currently prevalent in the New Zealand media. However, Marsh notes that these poets' works often "fall beyond the parameters of the mainstream aesthetics, struggle to find avenues for publication" (p.4) and subsequently have limited exposure to students. She maintains that Pasifika poets such as SAPC can have a positive influence on Pasifika youth because they provide these students with empowering narratives that feature characters, plots and settings they can relate to (2010).



Figure 1. Selina Marsh portrait by E Hughes. 2016

Today, the existence of spoken word collectives such as SAPC “present tangible evidence that young people, particularly young Polynesian people, have been empowered by their experience [of spoken word poetry]” (Johansson, 2014, p.17).

Spoken word poetry has stirred up something of a “revolution” amongst Pasifika communities in recent years. In her recently published article *SUP and the Spoken Word Revolution* (2014) Michelle Johansson, explains that spoken word poetry resembles the forms of hiphop music, Polynesian theatre, and also resonates with indigenous oratory practice. Moreover, spoken word poetry is situated within a growing body of contemporary Pasifika literature which looks to frame (or reframe) diasporic identity. As a published and spoken word poet herself, Marsh is aware of the power of the poetic medium for framing identity. In one of her most well-known works, *Fast Talking PI* (2009), Marsh seeks to generate a holistic picture of Pasifika identity. She explains that the poem was created in response to “the barrage of one-sided media coverage” concerning Pacific Islanders, who she observed were continually being cast in a negative light by the New Zealand media (Marsh, 2011, p.33). In this lengthy spoken word poem, the narrator and storyteller, lays claim to both negative and positive aspects of the diasporic Pacific community.

SUMMARY

This chapter has argued graphic narrative as both a popular literary format and a resource for developing reading literacy. As multimodal texts, graphic narratives can be a valuable resource for developing verbal and visual literacies in youth growing up in a media dominated environment. They are now celebrated in popular culture, scholarly circles and amongst Pasifika youth. Further, there is both anecdotal and research-based evidence that suggests literature from Pasifika authors, in particular poetry, might be used to as culturally-responsive texts positively influence Pasifika youth.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

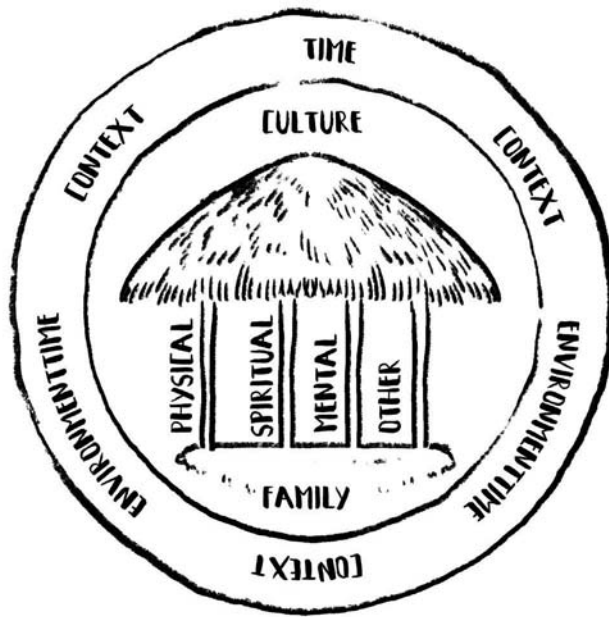
This project is located within a Pasifika perspective and has employed Pasifika as well as Western approaches to research. The production phase of the project was informed by a literature review, textual analysis, formal analysis, and a reflection-in-action methodology, in conjunction with the following Pasifika research methodologies and models:

TALANOA

Talanoa is both a research method and methodology based around formal and informal discussion. The talanoa process is a qualitative data-gathering and interviewing method which can be used in one-on-one interviews or group discussions (McFall-McCaffery, 2010).

In 2015 I interviewed two experienced high school English teachers, which provided anecdotal evidence in the support of the findings from my literature review. The interviews were conducted during the months of May and June after obtaining ethics approval from Massey Universities Human Ethics Committee.

Throughout the course of this study I also sought to talanoa with the Pasifika community at Massey to gain their perspective on the project. I discussed the project with members of the Pasifika Advisory Committee (PAC) and in a Pasifika Postgraduate Seminar with the faculty staff. I also attended the Pacific Research Talanoa Symposium, where I was able to discuss the project with representatives from the Ministry of Education and Pacific Island Affairs. Finally, on the 24th of November 2015, I presented Tusitala – teller of tales as a work-in-progress at the Pasifika@Massey Conference. The conference provided me with the opportunity to present to Pasifika academics from different disciplines and receive feedback from them.



FONOFALE MODEL

The Fonofale model was created by Fuimaono Karl Pulotu-Endemann (2007), as a Pacific Island model of health for use in the New Zealand context. The Fonofale model depicts a holistic as opposed to a hierarchical picture of Pasifika culture. The model is used to build understanding of Pasifika people, so that they are treated in a more holistic, safe and effective way. While originally developed as a model for health, the Fonofale model is applicable to almost any area of research involving Pasifika peoples.

The roof represents cultural values and beliefs which are seen as a shelter for life. In some Pasifika families culture may comprise traditional values and practices from the Islands whereas others may be more Westernised. The foundation of the Fonofale model is family. Family can be the immediate family as well as an extended family. The four Pou or pillars of the fale each represent an aspect of Pasifika life that connects the roof culture to the foundational family. The spiritual pou may represent either Christianity or traditional spirituality. The physical pou relates to material aspects of life, while the mental pillar relates to the mental and emotional dimension. The last pillar is labelled other which may include but, is not limited to gender, sexuality/sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status.

The Fonofale model was used in this project primarily as a guide for the selection of source texts for adaptation. I wanted to make sure that the texts reflected narratives common to Pasifika youth. The Fonofale model depicts a holistic picture of Pasifika culture without elevating one aspect over another.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

This section outlines the fundamental properties of graphic narrative theory that underpinned the production phase of this project.

SEQUENTIAL IMAGES

There has been considerable debate over how the mind comprehends sequences of images in comics. Sequences of images or panels in a comic often produce the illusory sense of time passing, where each panel represents a succession of moments or temporal units (Cohn, 2010). Some scholars, such as Scott McCloud (1993) have compared this quality in comics to the phenomenological experience of reading or have equated it to the temporal nature of cinema.

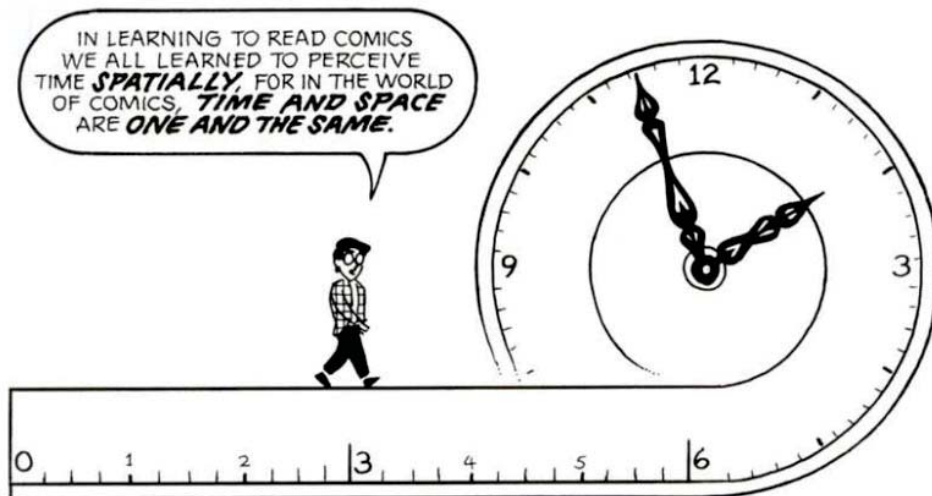


Figure 2. McCloud explains the relationship between space and time in comics (McCloud, 1993, p100).

Popular author and comic theorist, Scott McCloud (1993) proposes that each image or panel in a comic represents a successive temporality similar to the individual frames of a film reel. He formalises this perspective in his six panel transitions, which specifies the nature of the shift from one panel to another:

- Moment-to-moment – between small moments of time
- Action-to-action – between full ranges of actions or movements
- Subject-to-subject – between characters or objects in a scene
- Aspect-to-aspect – between aspects of a scene or an environment
- Scene-to-scene – between different scenes
- Non-sequitur – have no apparent connection

To enable these transitions, McCloud posits his theory of closure, where the mind “fills in the gap” between images. He states that the spaces between images or panels “fracture both time and space” offering the reader a “jagged staccato rhythm of unconnected moments”. Closure allows the reader to connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous unified narrative (McCloud, 1993, p.67).

In contrast to film or language-based narration, McCloud states that in comics there is a particular relationship between time and the spatial dimension of the page. Time here refers more accurately to fictive time, where McCloud equates physically moving from one panel to another, to a progression of time within the narrative. Thus, the size and shape of individual panels and the distance between them all become important variables that influence fictive time in a comic. In this sense the two-dimensionality of the comic’s page differs from the two-dimensionality of the cinema screen, which is more analogous to a single comic panel (Bredehoft, 2006, p.873).

Comic theorist Thierry Groensteen (1999), asserts that individual images or panels do not simply connect to their direct neighbours, but can have meaningful relationships with other images throughout a graphic narrative, which may take the form of a strip, page, or book. Groensteen’s theory of arthrology, explains how individual panels interact with all other panels on the page or across pages in a manner similar to braiding. The theory is based on Groensteen’s analysis of compositional relationships between panels and his observation of reoccurring compositional or thematic motifs across varying distances and space throughout a document.

On the surface McCloud’s notion of closure, and Groensteen’s theories of arthrology and braiding appear to be about the creation of meaning. However, cognitive scientist Neil Cohn (2008) argues that neither theory “scratches the surface” of what he calls the “holy grail” of questions about comics - namely, how the reader extracts meaning from sequential images (para.18).

In *The Visual Language of Comics: Introduction to the structure and cognition of images* (2013), Cohn outlines his theory of visual language, which he theorises “fills the gap for categorising the cognitive system at work in graphic expression” (p.3). Cohn’s notion of language is not merely used as a metaphor or analogy and this is what separates his theory from others (e.g. Eisner, 1985; McCloud; 1993). For Cohn, visual language describes a “primary human ability for expression of concepts using a grammatical system” (p.3) on par with verbal and signed languages.

For something to be identified as a language, Cohn argues that it needs to have three primary components, namely, modality, meaning and grammar. Modality is a channel by which human expression and language can take place, such as verbal sounds, body movements (as in sign language) and drawn images. Secondly, language uses

modalities to express meaning, which may be abstract or concrete. Finally, language employs a system of rules and constraints for expressing meaning in a sequence. If a sequence of words or images obey these rules, we can comprehend their message or grammatical coherence, while those that violate the rules through being ungrammatical can be difficult to decode.

Cohn explains that where sentences use linguistic grammar, sequences of images are governed by a narrative grammar. In visual narrative grammar, individual panels take on categorical roles in a broader narrative arc. These roles are argued as establisher, initial, peak and release. Similar to how syntax organises words in sentences, a narrative grammar organises sequential images into narrative sections commonly diagrammed using a tree structure as shown below:

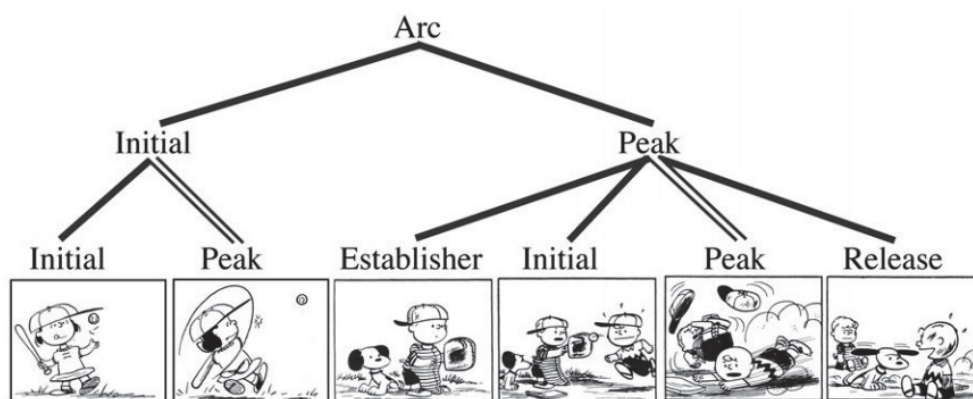


Figure 3. Constituent structure in a visual narrative. (Cohn, 2012, p.5)

Cohn’s work on visual language is useful to understanding how the mind interacts with sequences of images and how it extracts meaning from them, because it proves that at a cognitive level sequential images function in a similar way to verbal and signed languages. Further, narrative grammar, as a set of rules that governs sequences of images, demonstrates how one might manipulate and assess the coherence of a visual narrative.

WORD-PICTURE RELATIONSHIP

While visual language theory provides understanding of how the mind interacts with sequences of images, it does not explain how pictures are understood in conjunction with words.

Chute and Dekoven (2007) state that the verbal and visual modes do not merely synthesize or blend together, creating a unified whole, but “remain distinct” and comprise “separate narrative thread[s] that move [the reader] forward in time” (p.769). Further, Lawrence Sipe (1998) posits a “synergistic” relationship in the combination

of words and pictures, where the total effect depends not only in their union, but also in the “perceived interactions ... between these two parts” (p.98). Cohn (2013) also proposes four specific interactions between words and images in graphic narratives:

- Inherent - where words and pictures are part of each other's structures (e.g. where writing appears in the illustrations such as on street signage).
- Emergent - where text and image relate to each other (i.e. via word balloons).
- Adjoined - where words and pictures are integrated but do not directly connected (e.g. the use of captions).
- Independent - where words and pictures are fully separate. (p.2)

Cohn further proposes that his theory of visual narrative grammar provides a descriptive tool for characterizing the nature of the interactions between these two different language structures. By expanding on Jackenhoff's (2002) parallel architecture for language, Cohn outlines three general categories for understanding multimodal interactions in a comic, which he terms multimodal parallel architecture (2015):

- Autonomous – Productions where only one modality is present (e.g. silent or wordless comics would be visually-autonomous).
- Dominant – Productions where more than one modality is present, and only one uses a grammar. This arrangement places one of the modalities into a supportive role semantically.
- Assertive- Productions where both syntactical and narrative grammars are present, but the meaning is conveyed by only one modality. (p.319)

These underlying structures form the basis of multimodal interactions. Although, Cohn's work here only specifies bimodal interactions (words and pictures) he states that this approach “should also apply to arrangements involving images, speech and bodily expression” (2015, p.318).

In each of these categories the modality that carries the most meaning, the one that is semantically dominant, is typically the modality that utilizes a grammatical structure (syntactical or narrative). Thus, “as a modality is relied upon for conveying meaning, its structural complexity increases” (Cohn, 2015, p.318).

SUMMARY

This chapter has highlighted some of the theoretical underpinnings of graphic narrative to explain how students might read and comprehend multimodal texts. Cohn's theory of Visual Language has been highlighted for its lucidity in explaining the cognitive process at work when we read sequences. Further, Cohn's theory of multimodal interactions provided a good starting point for examining the relationship between words and pictures. From a production standpoint these theories helped inform decisions for more complex and interesting word-picture relationships.

Walter Moang

Selected Poems in English

Albert Wendt
&
Robert Sullivan

DESIGN SYNTHESIS

The following section chronicles the production phase of the project where I address the issues raised by the research findings. This stage included the gathering of poetic source texts from Pasifika authors, followed by a textual analysis which informed the final design direction. Additionally, I conducted a formal analysis of popular comics and Pasifika visual art which examined the aesthetic properties of line, tone and colour. The findings from this analysis lead to a series of initial studies where I experimented with narrative and aesthetic elements.

POETIC SOURCE TEXTS

In the section on Pasifika literature I highlighted the relevance of poetry, in particular, spoken word poetry, as a way to engage contemporary Pasifika youth in reading and literacy. The following graphic narrative and poster design exploration looks to capitalise on the effectiveness of this trend, by using poetry from Pasifika authors as source texts. These poems were selected from two anthologies of Contemporary Polynesian Poetry in English - Whetu Moana (Wendt, Whaitiri & Sullivan, (Eds.) 2003) and Mauri Ola (Wendt, et al., 2013). Not only are Pasifika poems imbued with culturally embedded metaphors, they also relate to the oratory traditions and experiences of a diasporic community. Moreover, by selecting the literary form, the poem, I was able to experiment with a variety of different narrative devices without compromising continuity. Further, a poem's minimal word count can offer a rich and fulfilling reading experience without intimidating the novice reader.

The Fonofale model was used as a guide for selecting the final four poems for graphic narrative re-presentation. Fonofale uses the structure of the Samoan fale (or house) as a metaphor for the Pacific worldview. The four pou or pillars of the fale each represent an aspect of Pasifika life that connects the roof (culture) to the foundational (family). Each selected poem links to one of the four pou of the Fonofale model. While the poems collectively conveyed more than one aspect of the Fonofale model, each had a particular correspondence to one of the four pou. Tusiata Avia's Wild Dogs under my Skirt looks at the how tatau can be a physical assertion of cultural identity, Alistair TeAriki Campbell's Gallipoli Peninsula raises the mental and psychological effects of war, John Pule's Ocean Song to Myself explores the spiritual and emotional connection the people of the Pacific have with the Ocean, and in Afakasi Selina Tusitala Marsh represents otherness in her portrayal of mixed-race identity.

The authors of these works are all well-established in the New Zealand literary canon and therefore function as academic role models for Pasifika youth. Unfortunately, the limited scope of this project meant that many other important Pasifika authors, such as Samoan poet Albert Wendt and Tongan/Palangi poet Karlo Mila were omitted from the text selection.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

The textual analysis process was an integral part of the overall design process. Before adapting the poetry, into a graphic I needed to identify the poetic features of the text and understand the historic and culturally specific metaphors. In the absence of any primary sources, secondary sources were used to build understanding of each text. Two valuable resources in this process were the Pasifika Poetry section of The New Zealand Electronic Poetry Centre and Michelle Keown's (2007) Pacific Islands Writing. This process of textual analysis not only helped me build understanding of the poetry, it informed the narrative and aesthetic decisions of the final works.

FORMAL ANALYSIS

In addition to textual analysis, the final aesthetic of the collection was informed by a formal analysis of the 14 most popular comics amongst youth (sourced from the 2015 Will Eisner Comic Industry Awards list) (fig). For this analysis, I created a list of common descriptors to define the formal aesthetic properties of line, tone and colour. I also created a separate category for character descriptions. These findings were then cross-referenced with a similar analysis of both traditional and contemporary Pacific art. The most common descriptors from the small survey are tabled below:

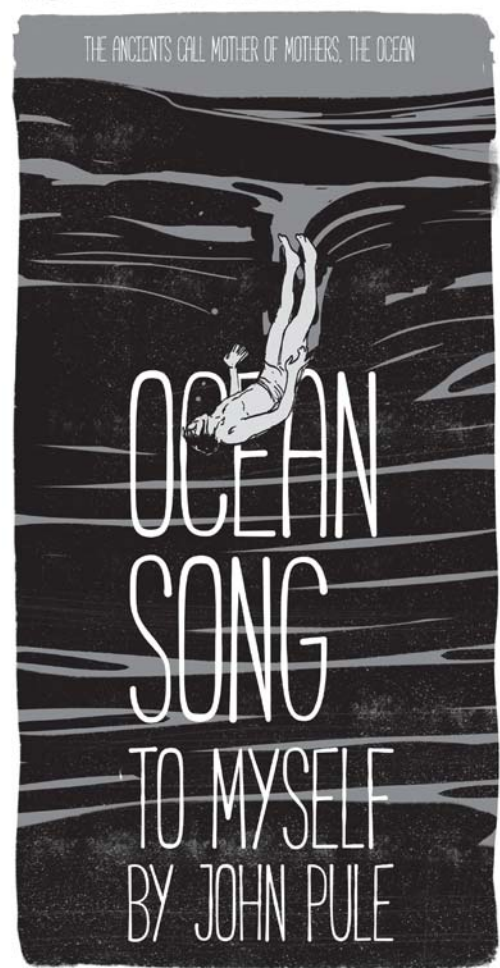
Category	Popular Youth Comics	Pacific Visual Art
Characters	<i>Stylised</i>	<i>Stylised</i>
Line work	<i>Gestural, brushed</i>	<i>Thin, minimalistic, geometric</i>
Tones	<i>Flat, high-contrast, solid blacks</i>	<i>Solid blacks, high-contrast, flat tone</i>
Colours	<i>Natural, saturated</i>	<i>Black and white, accent colour</i>

The results from the formal analysis revealed that the use of stylized characters, with flat tones, solid blacks, accent colour and high-contrast imagery were the most common descriptors amongst the selected works. These findings helped to inform my aesthetic decisions later in the next stage of initial experimentation.

RIGHT Sections from the Formal Analysis Comparison tables.

POPULAR TEEN COMICS	LINE	TONE	COLOUR	CHARACTER	Line	Tone	Colour
Doomboy by Tony Sandoval (Magnetic Press)					Sketched Thin Loose Gestural Informal Minimalistic Stylized figures	Solid Blacks High contrast Low contrast High key	De-saturated Limited pallet Split complementary
The Dumbest Idea Ever by Jimmy Gownley (Graphix/Scholastic)					Medium Solid Gestural Formal Minimalistic Stylized figures	Solid Blacks High contrast Gradients Flat tones	Natural colours
Lumberjanes by Shannon Watters, Grace Ellis, Noelle Stevenson, & Brooke A. Allen (BOOM! Box)					Medium/thick Solid Gestural Formal Minimalistic Stylized figures	Solid Blacks Gradients Flat tones	Saturated Limited pallet
Meteor Men by Jeff Parker & Sandy Jarrell (Oni)					Medium/thick Loose Gestural Calligraphic Brushed Informal Minimalistic Figurative Detailed	Solid Blacks Flat tones	Natural colours
This One Summer by Mariko Tamaki & Jillian Tamaki					Medium/thick Loose Gestural Calligraphic Brushed Informal Minimalistic Stylized figures	Solid Blacks Brushed Gradients Flat tones High contrast	Single colour
In Real Life by Cory Doctorow					Thick Loose Gestural Calligraphic Brushed Informal Minimalistic Stylized figures	Solid Blacks Flat tones Brushed Gradients	Saturated Warm colour Saturated Accent colour
The Wicked + The Divine by Kieron Gillen & Jamie McKelvie					Medium Gestural Calligraphic Brushed Formal	Solid Blacks High contrast Gradients Flat tones high-key/low-key	Saturated Harmonious Accent colour Natural colour

Traditional Art	LINE	TONE	COLOUR	CHARACTER / SYMBOLISM	Line	Tone	Colour
Cook Island Tapa					Brushed Thick Minimalistic Stylized Detailed Geometric	Solid Blacks High contrast Flat tones	One colour Harmonious pallet
Niuean Hiapo					Sketched Thin Loose Informal Minimalistic Stylized Detailed	Solid Blacks High contrast Flat tones	BW Accent colour
Niuean Hiapo					Sketched Thin Loose Informal Minimalistic Stylized Detailed	Solid Blacks High contrast Flat tones	BW Accent colour
Samoa Siapo					Brushed Thick Minimalistic Stylized Detailed Geometric	Solid Blacks High contrast Flat tones	BW Accent colour
Tongan Tapa					Sketched Thin Loose Informal Minimalistic Stylized Detailed	Solid Blacks High contrast Flat tones Textured	BW Accent colour
Samoa Tatau					Tattooed Thick / medium / thin Detailed Stylized Geometric	Solid Blacks High contrast Flat tones	BW
Fijian Tapa					Brushed Thick Minimalistic Stylized Detailed Geometric	Solid Blacks High contrast Flat tones	BW Accent colour
John Pule					Sketched / brushed Thin Minimalistic Informal	Solid Blacks High contrast Flat tones	BW Accent colour

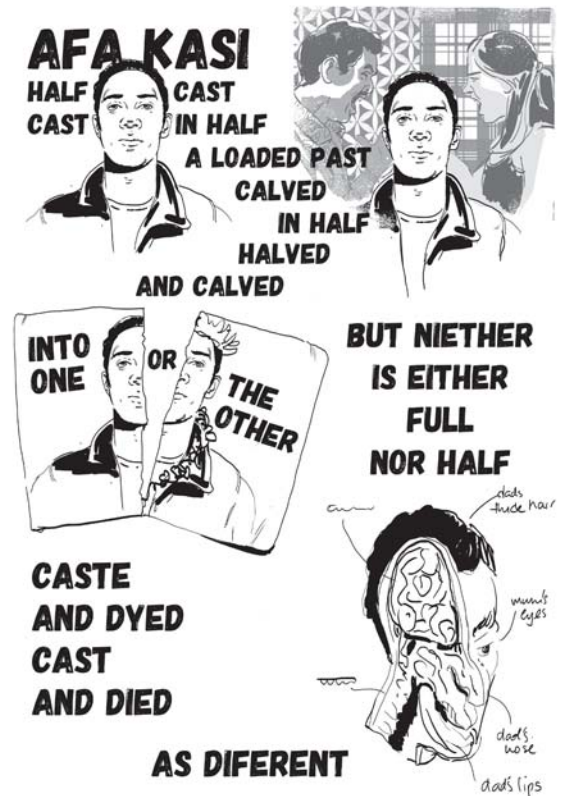


INITIAL EXPERIMENTS

Before settling on a final design output I conducted a range of graphic narrative works or studies based on my instinctual reading of each poem. These iterative experiments involved the design processes rapid ideation and reflection where I gave myself the freedom to experiment with narrative and aesthetic styles and techniques. The works generated went to inform the next stage of the project where I sought to refine my aesthetic direction using the findings from the formal analysis.

Using the most common descriptors from the formal analysis, I looked to develop an illustration aesthetic that both mirrored contemporary comics and invoked the appearance of Pacific visual art.

The resulting aesthetic is a figurative style (realistic characters), that utilises solid blacks and flat tone. For the line work, I used a bristled digital brush to create a roughened visual appearance similar to what is found in traditional tapa cloth.



ABOVE Selected examples from the initial experiments.



THE FINAL WORKS

The final set of works employs a large scale poster format to invoke the scale and experience of a large hung tapa cloth. Inspiration for this format came from the Phantom Billstickers poetry posters, which also showcase the works of New Zealand poets and traditional tapa cloth. The poster can elicit an immediate response from the reader/viewer, is applicable to a classroom context, and is ideal for group reciprocal learning tasks. Additionally, posters can have street presence, be hung in libraries, community halls, churches and any other venue where Pasifika youth might congregate. Each poster narrative can be seen to chronicle a character's transition from adversity towards empowerment. In the reformatted selected poems, a young woman renews her sense of Pacific identity and emancipates herself from colonial expectations, a young man find solace in the ocean which connects him with his ancestral homeland, a mixed-race girl dances a siva Samoa, while wearing colonial dress in both protest and acceptance of her hybrid identity, while homesick soldiers find respite, amongst the horrors of war, through reflecting upon the beauty of nature.

The following analysis of each graphic narrative includes a brief textual analysis of each poem. This textual analysis is designed to give an overview of the themes, issues and tone of each poem, and to contextualise each design within the final set of designs.

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AFAKASI

By Selina Tusitala Marsh

Afakasi (Wendt, et al., 2003, p.133) by Selina Tusitala Marsh is a rhythmic poem that examines the linguistic and socio-political limitations implied by the title phrase. Afakasi is the Samoan approximation of half-caste and although the term does not necessarily have the same derogatory connotations of half-caste in English, it still carries with it historical baggage from the colonial era in which mixed-race people were marginalised among Samoan society. Malama Meleisea (1987) notes that the historic status of the mixed-race population was an important issue from the time European settlers first became influential in Samoa, when afakasi had both status and were treated as outsiders within indigenous tribal structures (p. 155). This racial prejudice has persisted into the present day, where people of Polynesian-European descent are still stigmatized as “different” within the New Zealand diaspora (Keown, 2008, p. 516).

As a woman of Samoan, Tuvaluan, Scottish and French ancestry, mixed-race identity is a personal subject for Marsh and a commonly appearing theme in her work. The subject of afakasi identity has also been explored by diasporic authors Tusiata Avia (2004), Karlo Mila (2005) and Albert Wendt (2003). Michelle Keown (2008) notes two categories of writing that examine the afakasi identity, “those that explore the continuing difficulties attendant upon being mixed race, and those who draw upon their mixed heritage more positively in order to create new syncretic aesthetic visions” (p. 516). Marsh’s Afakasi fits into the former category, although her other works and interviews convey views that are far more optimistic.

“Reporting an interview with Marsh, Monique Esplin wrote (2006, n.p.): Marsh says her mixed Samoan and Pakeha roots have put her in a privileged position of having a foot in both worlds, but that the flipside is that she feels like she is never fully part of either culture. Typically optimistic she says, “I take in the best of both worlds.” (As cited in Culbertson, & Agee, 2007)

While the poem’s narrator seems frustrated on the surface level, the poem like much postcolonial literature, is counter discursive. In this poem, the narrator’s frustration concerns the negative connotations implied by the word “half”. In one of her other poems, Afakasi Chameleon (2015), Marsh dispels the myth of pure bloodlines by highlighting the genealogical diversity in all people. The last line of this poem reads “we are all / ‘afakasi” (p.21)

In adapting Marsh’s Afakasi, I wanted to explore how the sombre tone of the poem could be portrayed, while also highlighting the strengths associated with being mixed-race. Inspiration for the final visual narrative was derived from investigating siva Samoan as an important expression of Pasifika identity, and the performance work of Shigeyuki Kihara.

The poster features a young afakasi woman, performing a siva (Samoa dance) while wearing a 19th Century European gown. These types of gowns were typically restrictive, hindering mobility, but this character is confident and adept in her movement which increases in scale and intensity as the narrative unfolds. The central theme of the narrative is of two cultures, woven together in a single performance. Her attire is Western but her dance is of the Pacific. As one of the most beloved and revered cultural practices in the Pacific, I wanted to use the Samoan siva to render afakasi identity in a positive light. In a traditional siva the dancer glides across the floor, seemingly weightless while she tells a story with her hands through slow, fluid movements. Performing this dance places the young afakasi in a position of honour, ascribing malu or dignity to her.



Figure 4. Siva in motion - still 3. 2012



Figure 5. Thomas Andrews photo - 'Samoa half-caste' 1886.

While researching siva Samoa, I came across a series of performance pieces by Shigeyuki Kihara that feature the artist wearing a black mourning gown, in a style of dress first introduced to the Pacific by the German colonial administration in the early 1900s. The inspiration for this dress came from a photograph by Thomas Andrew of a woman wearing a similar gown captioned Samoa half caste (1886). Kihara describes the costume as a “metaphor for loss, the impact of colonialism on Samoa, and the bizarre fusions of different cultural traditions” (Artnews, 2012, para.6). In two of her recorded works, Siva in Motion and Glu Afi (2012), Kihara wears the gown while performing a traditional siva. Her dance is enhanced using a postproduction multi-tracking technique, where several instances of her movement overlap in a single frame. The technique is inspired by photography of Futurists, such as Eadweard Muybridge and Eitenne Jules Marey, whose early



Figure 6. Photo of Shigeyuki Kihara wearing colonial restrictive mourning gown 2012.

experiments capturing movement were an essential step toward the development of cinema. In Kihara's work the multi-tracking technique becomes a metaphor for the "lingering psychological scars of colonialism, the recent tsunami, global recession and climate change" (Artnews, 2012, para. 10)

The first three panels introduce the character in a series of starting poses, situated in a traditional Samoan fale. In the centre panel her gaze is fixed on the reader, she appears bold and defiant with her fists clenched in front of her chest. Following this Panel, panel four captures a historic point of encounter between European and Pacific sailors. The text "a loaded past" alludes to the historic tensions between the colonists and the local indigenous people of the Pacific. In this point in the graphic narrative, I wanted to show how the historic conflict between two peoples is contained within the body of the afakasi. Hence the scene is framed in the silhouette of the character who is represented looking back over her shoulder. Panel five references the Nifo'oti a hooked bladed implement used by Samoan dancers. The Nifo'oti creates a visual link with the text which reads "carved in half" and which is further symbolised by the two split panels. Panel six represents a transitional point in the narrative where the dancer, resembling the mythical multi-headed dog Cerberus, is shown with three heads looking in different directions. This frame emphasises the sense of situational dislocation as used by Wendt (2003, p.263) and implied in the text. The dancer is shown set against the diamond woven pattern of the afa - a traditional rope used to bind the beams of a fale. As used here, the afa functions as an alternate analogy for the afakasi and symbolically represents a rope that binds two cultures together as one. Following this, panels seven

and eight focus on the dancer's hand movements. Similar to panel six, these panels feature a patterned background. In these panels, however, the design references embroidered patterns common to German colonial dress.

In formulating the graphic narrative design, I chose to mimic Kihara's multi-tracking technique to represent Marsh's views regarding the fluidity of mixed-race identity. According to Marsh "we are holistic beings, our identities are fluid. I like to think of our identities as 'chameleonic' – they change/adapt according to the context I'm in" (Interview, 2007, p.2). In the title banner and panels seven to nine of the graphic narrative the afakasi's siva is captured through a series of overlapping stances that mimic the kinetic imagery of photographic multi-tracking. This visual adaptation has its origins in comics as polymorphics, explained as frames that contain a full action by repeating entities over and over again (Cohn 2006). In my treatment of Afakasi the movement implied by the polymorphics represents an ethnic identity in a constant state of flux, one that is engaged in adapting and harnessing cultural resources to suit social context. Viewed within the context of the poster format, these panels invoke a sense of movement and rhythm that is in keeping with the rhythmic nature of the poem.

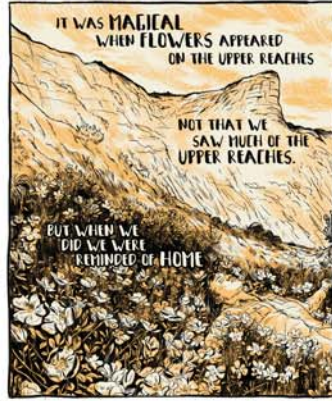
The final panel combines many of the conceptual motifs of the narrative with the fullest expression of polymorphics. The low angle of the composition also reveals the intricate roof beams of the fale bound together by afa. Situated below the final lines of the poem, the dancer follows a path across the canvas towards the right where she is positioned under the words "as different". Resembling some form of Hindu deity, through the many movements and positions of her arms, the dancer gazes looks beyond the frame as if looking forward to the future - self-assured and confident in her status and identity as afakasi.



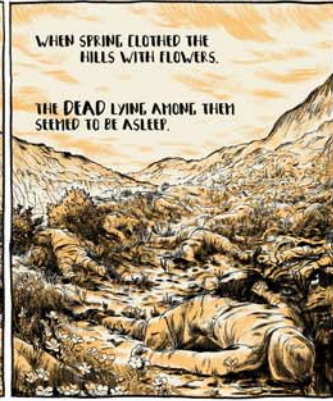
Banner



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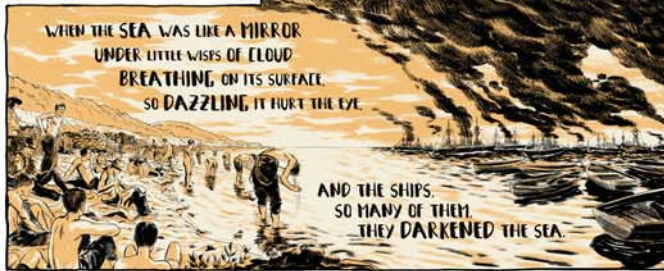
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GALLIPOLI PENINSULA

By Alistair Te Ariki Campbell

Gallipoli Peninsula (Wendt, et al., 2003, p.33) by Rarotongan poet Alistair Te Ariki Campbell comes from a collection of poems entitled Gallipoli and Other Poems (1999). The collection comprises two poetic sequences dealing with the themes of war, peace and love. In the war poems, Campbell writes in first person narrative based on the testimony of his father, among others, who fought in the disastrous Gallipoli campaign 25 April 1915-9 January 1916.

Gallipoli Peninsula is written as a first-hand account of a soldier, who sets out to describe the natural beauty of the Turkish coastline, remarking on the flowers of the “upper reaches”, the glassy ocean, and beautiful sunsets, which he likens to home. Yet for all the poems whimsy, there is an overall tone of pessimism to the piece. The narrator’s whimsical descriptions of the landscape are juxtaposed with the macabre realities of the First World War, which gives the poem a sombre and yet hopeful tone. For example, the poem begins by describing the flowers on the “upper reaches” as magical and then goes on to note how the corpses of the fallen soldiers looked like they were sleeping among them. The narrator then describes how the beauty of the glassy sea was marred or darkened by the many warships. The poem concludes by stating that amidst all the activities of war, there were still moments for respite where one could “feel ... human” again and in doing so remember the value of human life. Campbell’s poem can ultimately be read as a meditation on how even in the midst of the horrors war one can find a sense of human dignity during moments of peace and respite.

I chose to adapt this poem by Campbell after reading Andrew Burden’s book entitled Ngarimu Te Tohu Toa or Victory at Point 209 (2012). The book tells the story of VC Lieutenant Te Moana-nui-a- Kiwa Ngarimu who, in 1943, led an attack on a vital hill at Tebaga Gap in Tunisi. Burden’s book primarily focuses on the contribution of the Maori combatants. As a Rarotongan, I was interested in using one of Campbell’s works and wanted to highlight the little known deployment of Cook Islanders in the Gallipoli campaign. Recent research has identified four Cook Island residents or native born individuals who fought at Gallipoli (Cook Island Times, 2013). Although no photos of these men were available, they inspired the four characters that feature in the last two frames of the final poster.

My graphic narrative treatment of Gallipoli Peninsula conveys a sense of homesickness as the narrator recounts his day-to-day experience as a soldier in this theatre of war. In this sense, the graphic narrative addresses the subject of diaspora from a different angle. While not a diaspora in the strict sense, many young Pacific island men were sent away from their homeland to fight on foreign soil during the First World War, some of whom never returned. Consequently, many of the psychological and emotional effects



Figure 7. Bodies of dead Turks. 1915.

associated with diaspora could also be true of those deployed abroad. Due to the serious historic nature of the subject matter, I wanted to ensure historic accuracy with the visual elements, so I made several visits to Gallipoli Gallery inside The Great War Exhibition at the Dominion Museum Building, Wellington. Each panel of the final poster is based on selected photographs from this exhibit.

In keeping with the structure of the original poem, where the grim realities of the war are contrasted with descriptions of the natural environment, the poster graphic narrative employs a similar strategy through the use of subversive imagery. For example, the first two panels are a diptych of a sweeping hillside landscape. The “upper reaches” are covered in the flowers described in the poem – the yellow centre of these flowers inspired the colour palette of the poster. The effect of this diptych relies on the convention of left to right reading. Panel one shows a man lying peacefully among the flowers. However, any notion that this man is napping is contradicted by panel two which depicts the corpses of his fellow combatants littered along the hillside. The two sequentially placed panels also serve to draw attention to the two opposing elements of the poem, namely, the life of nature and the death of war.

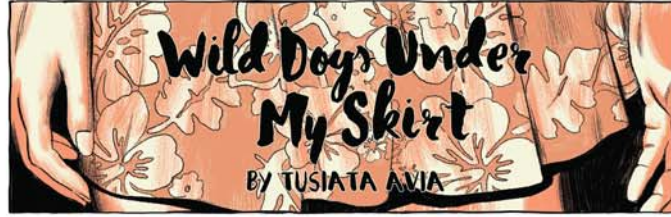


Figure 8. Anzacs swimming and relaxing at Anzac Cove. 1915.

The use of diptych and subversive imagery becomes more complex in panels three and four where comic book structural conventions and framing devices are exploited to generate interesting symbolic relationships. The soldiers scaling the hillside in panel three invoke notions of epic Greek mythology. In panel four, these notions are subverted as the source of the cloud is revealed to be the smoke coming from the ships in the seas off the peninsula. This image invokes some of the pessimism about the war that is present in the source text, and dispels any notion of heroism and fantasy in favour of a more realistic portrayal of the complexities of war. This is conveyed via the left-hand side of this composite panel which depicts a well-known image of WW soldiers bathing in the sea (shown in figure 8), and which contrasts that serenity with the war ships that “darken the sea”.

Panel five signals a shift in the narrative where the tone of the poem becomes more hopeful. This panel features words cascading downward towards the central four characters, who are transfixed by flower petals floating in the night sky. The floating petals reference the flowers depicted earlier in the poster graphic narrative and symbolically evoke the natural landscape and prevailing nature of life. The image of soldiers huddled together in a bunker, was inspired by a series of similar images capturing brotherhood and comradeship in the midst of war. In panel six to eight the four characters are again depicted to the right of the composition. In this vertical triptych, the scene is broken up into time slices initially focusing on the floating petals and moving downward to another image of soldiers relaxing amongst the upper reaches. The content of this composite panel closely resembles panels one and two. In this case, however, the soldiers are alive and are shown “delighting in little things / in just being human”.

Banner



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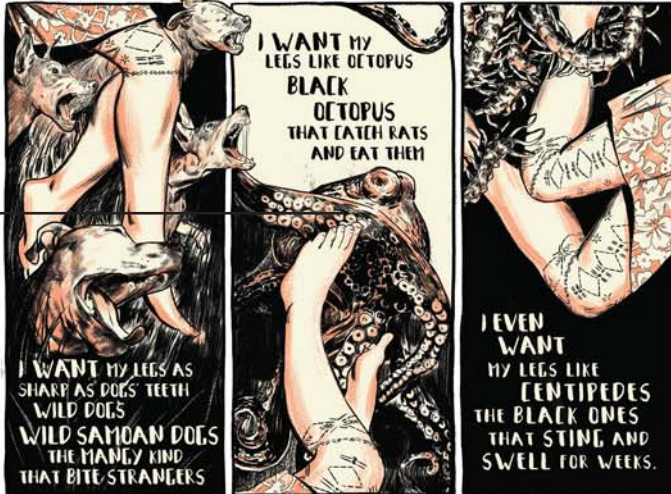


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WILD DOGS UNDER MY SKIRT

by Tusiata Avia

Wild Dogs under My Skirt (Wendt, et al., 2010, p.14-15) by Tusiata Avia explores the act of receiving tatau or malu (traditional Samoan tattoo) as a form of cultural identification and decolonisation. The poem was the title work in her first collection of poetry and has been performed as a spoken word piece in her 2007 stage show by the same title. The Book Council have described Avia's work as "confrontational and entertaining, raw and lyrical ... occupying legend and history – yet breaking through into an urban landscape" (n.d., para.5). These qualities are all present in Wild Dogs under my Skirt making it a relevant piece for a young diasporic audience. The poem highlights the effects of colonialism and the desire to recoup a sense of Pacific authenticity in the midst of a Western society.

In the first stanza of the poem the narrator expresses a desire to be tattooed in the traditional Samoan way with "hammer and chisel". The central motif of the poem is the tatau, a traditional Samoan tattoo. Samoan author and academic Albert Wendt, discusses the traditions of tatau or malu in Samoa as visible assertions of cultural identity (1999). An analogy can be drawn from the process of receiving tatau and then healing, for the pain of colonial impact through to decolonisation and cultural resurgence. Once the tatau process has begun, participants must complete their tatau, otherwise they will bring great shame on their aiga or wider family. This element of tatau is highlighted in stanza two "Once you've pushed off...there's no looking back now, Bingo". In Samoan culture, tatau not only function as a form of bodily adornment, but as a rite of passage and a way of connecting with and serving your aiga. Many living among the diaspora choose to get tatau as a way of reconnecting and confirming their cultural identity as Polynesians (Wendt, 1999).

The poem also contains many allusions to colonialism. In stanzas three, four and five the tatau designs are likened to "dogs teeth", "octopus" and "centipedes". These abstract designs found in traditional tatau can also be regarded as symbolic commentary regarding Western perceptions and portrayals of Pacific Island people. The "wild dogs" mentioned several times in the poem, may be a reference to the Western portrayal of Samoans, with the "strangers" being a representative of the colonisers. In Enlightenment and colonial European literature, Polynesians were often categorized as "wild" and noble savages. Keown states that:

"the Romantic theory of the 'noble savage' was in wide circulation at the end of the eighteenth century, popularized by the writings of French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau...and the 'noble savage', like 'the Oriental', became Europe's binary opposite, an ideological construct against which Europe could define and assert itself" (2007, p.31).

The theme of colonial impact carries throughout the narrative. Towards the end of the poem the narrator exclaims that they “want the tufuga to sit back and know they’re not his / they never were”. Speaking of her now fully tattooed legs, the narrator may be hinting at political independence in the Pacific. In this context the young woman narrator’s legs become symbolic of territory that has been reclaimed or re-identified as Polynesian.

The final poster graphic narrative design is rendered in an earthy red that resembles the dye made from ‘o’a bark used in tapa cloth and the blood spilled during the tatau process. The narrative centres on a young female character who due to the first person narrative style of the poem, also functions as the primary narrator. Panel one introduces her, a young Pasifika woman, seated on an inner city bus, staring directly at the viewer with her hands modestly crossed on her knees. She wears a patterned skirt that resembles contemporary lavalava or puletasi. The young woman is surrounded by strangers, all of whom are engaged with some form of digital device. These strangers’ obsession with technology situates the narrative within contemporary society.

In panel two the young woman raises her skirt slightly to reveal her bare un-tattooed legs. This is followed by a closely-framed depiction of her mouth saying the words “but black”. The three panels collectively set the tone of the piece as slightly seductive or suggestive. This is in keeping with the tone of Avia’s live story word performance and the closing lines of the poem which make reference to “lovers”.

The next six panels focus on the tools and practice of tatau, through enclosed visceral compositions. These frames reference the intimate and yet confronting relationship between the character and the tatau (tattoo artist). A face-off between the central character and the tufuga is captured in the diamond shape of the malu, a tatau motif that features on the back of a woman’s knee. This term is also used to describe the whole female tatau.

Panels ten and eleven signify a shift in the poem, where Avia uses more simile and metaphor. Picking up on the text of stanza two which compares the tatau process to “paddling across the whole Pacific in a log”, frame eleven depicts the character as an ancient Polynesian sea voyager accompanied by the line “there’s no going back now. Bingo” in a speech bubble. Panels twelve to fourteen signal the peak of the narrative. This vertically oriented sequence features the poem’s “wild dogs”, “black octopus” and “black centipedes” interacting with the young woman’s legs. Depicted this way, the creatures allude to the threatening and unsettling aspect of this section of the poem while also keeping the rhythm of the poem and graphic narrative intact.

The final three panels at the base of the poster reflect the size and compositions of the first three frames, but with a number of alterations. The use of repeated framing and composition generates a direct comparison with the beginning of the narrative. This technique closely resembles what Cohn terms a visual rhyme. Cohn postulates that in the same manner that the sound of one word can correspond to the sound of another word, correspondence between the composition and content of images creates a visual rhyme (2006).

In panel fifteen the poem's central character still sits on the bus, but is now dressed in the traditional ceremonial costume of a taupou, as an external representation of her internal cultural renewal and resistance to the hegemonic culture that surrounds her. In the following panel the young woman proudly displays her fully adorned legs, which she wants to use to "frighten her lovers". Rather than directly repeating panel two, I chose to show the back of the back of her legs, which feature the diamond shaped malu design. In the final panel the suggestive tone of the poem is emphasised, by an intimate close-up of the young woman's mouth, her tongue slightly protruding while she utters the last word of the poem, "teeth".

Banner



1



3

2



5

4

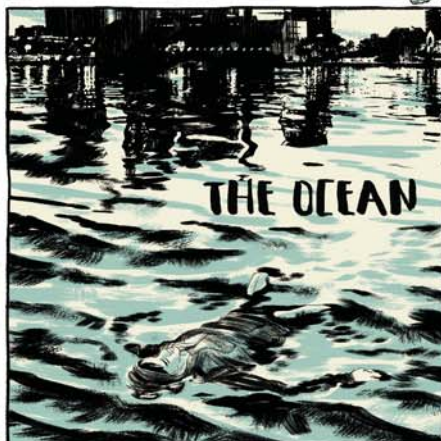
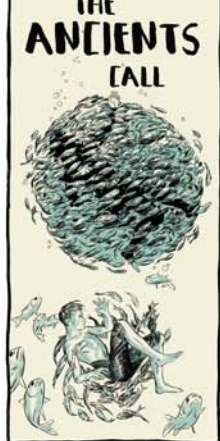


6

7



8



9

OCEAN SONG TO MYSELF

By John Pule

Ocean Song to Myself (Wendt, et al., 2003, p.165) by Niuean poet John Pule, explores a holistic world view that is common to many people of the Pacific. The full poem comprises six stanzas. However, for this adaptation I chose to focus on the first stanza as it has often been quoted by Pule and in isolation from the rest of the poem.

Like much of Pule's work the poem is a "journey of cultural reclamation - partly and inevitably an experience through degrees of separation" (Hall, 2007, p.8). At its heart, is a sense of loss, homesickness, and the recovery of Pacific identity. Ocean Song to Myself may be read as autobiographical, perhaps reflecting Pule's own experience of immigrating to New Zealand at a young age and rediscovering his cultural roots upon returning to Niue many years later.

In this first stanza the body and soul seek refuge in the ocean which is a source of both physical and spiritual healing. Here Pule draws attention to the centrality of the sea for Pacific Islanders. In *Pacific Island Writing* (2007), Keown posits that many Pacific peoples still depend on the sea for their livelihoods and had skilfully navigated trade routes across the Pacific long before the arrival of Europeans. This rich maritime heritage of Pacific peoples has been a central motif in indigenous oral and written traditions.

Oceania, one of the established conceptual labels for the Pacific, draws attention to the connection Pacific Islanders have with the ocean. Rather than being a large body of water that separates land, the ocean is seen as a link between people of the region. Pacific oral traditions and cosmologies consequently figure Oceania not as an assemblage of tiny, far-flung islands, but rather a "sea of islands seen in the totality of their relationships" (Keown, 2007, p.4). This conceptualization of the ocean closely relates to the Pan-pacific concept of the *vā*, which translates as the space between or space of relating. In an oft quoted passage Albert Wendt describes *vā* as:

The space between, the between-ness, not empty space, not space that separates but space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together in the unity-in-all, the space that is context, giving meaning to things. (Wendt, 1999).

As alluded to here, *vā* is a holistic worldview that describes an interconnectedness between things physical, spatial, relational and spiritual. Not only does this concept inform the spatial relationship between physical elements, such as the patterns of *tatau*, it also governs relational ties between people.

For Pule the ocean represents a link between past and present, current location and homeland. This concept is woven into his work by personifying the ocean as the “mother of mothers”. She is an “ancient” force that “fills the earth’s land with moisture” and “changes the coast in a dream”. In this stanza Pule pays homage to indigenous myths which often feature anthropomorphization of the natural world (Keown, 2007), thereby creating an ancestral link with the writers and poets of the past who have been nourished by the “warmth and love of our mother, the Pacific (Wendt, 1980, p.19) In adapting *Ocean Song to Myself* I wanted to explore how Pasifika people’s interconnectedness with the ocean might be portrayed in a diasporic context. Panel one introduces the main character, a young Pasifika man standing at the edge of a shoreline at night. His clothing indicates a contemporary urban setting. Looking slightly dejected, the character stares into the water as if reflecting on some hurt or grievance (this is also implied by the text). In the following framed sequence, he is shown entering the sea fully-clothed then floating on the surface of the water in a meditative state.

The narrative then shifts into a dream sequence where the young man is shown plunging through the surface of the water into the ocean depths. For this sequence a long vertical format was used to accentuate the character’s downward descent. As he descends, a school of fish begin to swarm around him eventually encapsulating him in a cocoon.

The dream sequence references both Christian Baptism and Pacific Mythology. As a symbol of death to rebirth, baptism seemed an appropriate metaphor for the cultural rebirth of the character, and the fish are symbolic of the fish gods in Niuean mythology. The ocean “mother of mothers” presented the opportunity to introduce another character to the narrative, which led to me exploring various character designs using fish and kelp. However, for the final graphic narrative sequence I settled on a less-personified version of the “mother of mothers” than earlier iterations, as I felt that introducing another character so late in the piece would detract from the core narrative. In the final design, fish collectively symbolise the ocean “mother” and the cocoon they form around the main character acts as a womb from which the young man emerges reborn.

The peak moment of the narrative is signalled by the revealing of the pe’a (Samoan male tattoo) on the character’s thighs and torso. As the fish disperse from around him, the young man emerges from this cocoon, stripped bare of his urban clothing to reveal a detailed pe’a tatau on his thighs. This tatau marks an important transition from adolescences to adulthood for a young man in Samoan culture, and symbolises his rebirth or reclamation of Pacific identity.

As the dream sequence comes to a close in the final panel we once again see the character floating on the surface of the water fully clothed. The sun, now risen to reveal a cityscape in the distance which is further reflected in the waters of a vast harbour. The final panel is a reminder of the urban landscape in which the character resides, and although the events in the preceding panels were only symbolic, the smile on the young man's face suggests that he has undergone an internal transformation. Instead of dejectedly staring into the harbour waters, he looks into the sky content, reminded that Oceania is as much a part of him as the ocean itself.



REFLECTIONS ON THE POSTER SET

This practice-based project presented a number of challenges that caused me to grow as a graphic artist and storyteller. Prior to the project I had never adapted poetry into a graphic narrative, let alone read much poetry. This undertaking has certainly awakened in me a love of Pasifika poetry and desire that the works might, in turn, expose others to the beauty of this poetry.

Restricting the exploration to a single-sided poster format also posed a number of design challenges. Each graphic narrative adaption had to be concise, to accommodate a limited canvas, while conveying all the cultural meaning embedded within the original poem. The large scale of the poster graphic narratives also tested my skills as a digital artist. Further, working on a 24inch screen meant that it was difficult to imagine how the poster graphic narratives would be experienced at full scale. It was consequently a pleasant surprise to see how well they evoked the experience of reading a large tapa cloth once printed.

The project also stretched my skillset as a Pasifika/Palangi graphic artist. Previous to this, I had gained considerable experience creating and producing educational resources for Maori and Pasifika audiences. Tusitala - teller of tales, however, required me to delve far deeper into the Pasifika worldview than I previously had. I now realise that my prior knowledge of Pasifika visual and material culture was only a surface understanding, and that through this project I have extended my understanding of Pasifika art forms such as tatau and siva Samoa. It is a goal of mine, that these works might inspire non-Pasifika designers to investigate and incorporate Pasifika indigenous art and methodologies and methods in their own practice.



SUMMARY

Tusitala –teller of tales can be conceptualised as a weaving together of diverse disciplines and cultures. This project not only investigated the storytelling potential of graphic narrative; it tied in pedagogical theories to formulate an alternative approach to developing reading literacy in the classroom. This weaving also permeated the final practice-based exploration, which is informed by both contemporary illustration practice and indigenous art forms and narratives. Further, this research drew on Pasifika methodologies and models to generate a holistic picture of Pasifika identity, and therefore, contributes to the ongoing discourse amongst the Pacific diaspora, where collective identity is constantly being “debated and re-imagined” (Hall, 1990, p.235).

The final set of posters is not intended as a comprehensive picture of Pasifika society. Rather the source texts and resulting poster set function to frame aspects of diasporic identity without explicitly targeting a particular Pacific culture.

There are a number of potential applications for the project that are beyond the scope of this thesis. Firstly, if this project was to continue, the next step would be to test out the graphic narrative posters in a classroom setting. There are currently two Achievement Standards in NCEA English that these works would be applicable to. One of these requires students to “respond critically to significant aspects of visual and/or oral texts”, while the other asks students to “create a fluent and coherent visual text” (NZQA, 2012, p.1). The latter would provide students the opportunity to create their own graphic narratives. Thus, the poster set as well as my methodology could become a model for future and emerging tusitala’s to tell their own stories.

Secondly, the poster set could be exhibited in either a gallery setting or in a public space, such as the light boxes in Courtney Place Park. Set against an urban backdrop instead of the traditional white gallery walls, the light boxes would be an ideal location for public display. Further, an expanded set designed to fill all eight lightboxes would be appropriate for the Light Box Project. Proposal guidelines state that the Light Box Project are interested in works that “explore and present new artistic practices” and that “seek to engage with specific cultures and communities and their histories” (Wellington City Council, n.d., p.3).



Figure 9. In context shot of 'Afakasi' and 'Ocean Song to Myself' in Courtenay Place light boxes. Original photograph by: Price, N. 2010.

Finally, another potential avenue for continued research comes in the form of a project involving graphic narrative adaptations of R.L Stevenson and Albert Wendt short stories. This viable opportunity arose when I was contacted by Dr Michelle Keown of Edinburgh University. Keown is interested in involving artists with Pasifika backgrounds, such as myself, in a digital distribution project that she is currently applying for funding for.

Through exploring re-presenting Pasifika poetry via graphic narrative, I have developed my skills as a graphic artist and as a teller of tales. I now acknowledge the importance of indigenous art forms and methodologies in informing my design practice and role as a graphic tusitala. The knowledge acquired through this project has led will hopefully contribute to visual communication and indigenous art scholarship and design and has also helped me expand my own design thinking and practice.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

As relating to their use by the author of this text.

Panel

An individual frame within a sequential narrative that can be with or without visible borders.

Graphic Narrative

A term used in this thesis to describe narrative work in the field of comics and graphic novels. The term can also be applied to other verbal-visual mediums such as film.

Modality

A channel by which human expression can take place. (i.e. verbal-auditory, visual-manual, visual-graphic).

Multimodality

A combination of modalities (i.e. word-picture relationships).

Polymorphic

A representation that repeats entities in different stages of an action.

Reading Engagement

A critical variable in reading achievement that describes the extent to which one has a positive attitude towards reading, seeks out texts and makes time to read.

Reading literacy

A set of language skills which include understanding, using, and reflecting on written texts, in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential, and to participate in society.

Visual language

A primary human ability for expression of concepts using a grammatical system on par with verbal and signed languages.

Visual Narrative Grammar

A theory of sequential image comprehension that argues panels take on categorical roles in a broader narrative arc.

Pasifika terms:

'Afakasi (Samoan)

The Samoan approximation of half-caste.

Aiga (Samoan)

An 'extended family' structure.

Fale (Samoan)

A Samoan house with open sides and a thatched roof.

Nifo'oti (Samoan)

A hooked bladed implement used by Samoan dancers.

Pasifika (Pan-Pacific)

An umbrella term for the term for diasporic Pacific peoples and cultures of New Zealand.

Siva Samoa (Samoan)

A Samoan dance with fluid hand movements.

Talanoa (Samoan)

A term meaning to talk or speak. Talanoa is also used as both a method and methodology which involves formal and informal discussion in research involving Pacific peoples.

Tausaluga (Pan-Pacific)

A ceremonial siva that holds great significance for Pacific peoples.

Taupou (Samoan)

The dancer of the Tausaluga.

Tusitala (Samoan)

A 'Writer of stories' or 'teller of tales'.

Vä (Samoan)

A Pan-Pacific concept that has both spiritual, spatial, relational, and ethical dimensions and relates to how things are interconnected.



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Pasifika Graphic Narratives

INFORMATION SHEET

The purpose of this research is to gain insight into the reading habits of Pacific Island teenage boys. Current research in New Zealand literacy rates shows that while literacy outcomes for Pasifika students are improving steadily, the education system is still failing to deliver equitable outcomes for Pasifika boys. I aim to better understand the reading habits/interests of Pasifika teenage boys as well as effective methods for engaging them with reading literacy.

Project Procedures

I intend to conduct interviews with secondary school teachers, librarians, publishers, representatives from the Ministry of Education about the reading habits of teenage Pasifika boys.

I would greatly appreciate it if you would assist me with this study by agreeing to participate in this research project as an interviewee. The interview will take roughly thirty minutes and will be conducted at a time and place convenient to you.

Data Management

The interview will be recorded, transcribed and stored securely on an external hard drive. On completion of the project all the data that has been gathered will be destroyed.

If you have any queries or would like to discuss some aspect of the project further please feel free to contact either myself 0277579918, vaughanflanagan@gmail.com or my supervisors Dr Caroline Campbell c.campbell@massey.ac.nz and Gray Hodgkinson g.f.hodgkinson@massey.ac.nz (04) 801 5799 ext 63640

"This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor John O'Neill, Director, Research Ethics, telephone 06 350 5249, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz".



MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA

5 May 2015

Vaughan Flanagan
95A Waipapa Road
Hataitai
WELLINGTON 6021

Dear Vaughan

Re: Pasifika Graphic Narratives

Thank you for your Low Risk Notification which was received on 28 April 2015.

Your project has been recorded on the Low Risk Database which is reported in the Annual Report of the Massey University Human Ethics Committees.

You are reminded that staff researchers and supervisors are fully responsible for ensuring that the information in the low risk notification has met the requirements and guidelines for submission of a low risk notification.

The low risk notification for this project is valid for a maximum of three years.

Please notify me if situations subsequently occur which cause you to reconsider your initial ethical analysis that it is safe to proceed without approval by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees.

Please note that travel undertaken by students must be approved by the supervisor and the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor and be in accordance with the Policy and Procedures for Course-Related Student Travel Overseas. In addition, the supervisor must advise the University's Insurance Officer.

A reminder to include the following statement on all public documents:

"This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Dr Brian Finch, Director (Research Ethics), telephone 06 356 9099, extn 86015, e-mail humanethics@massey.ac.nz".

Please note that if a sponsoring organisation, funding authority or a journal in which you wish to publish requires evidence of committee approval (with an approval number), you will have to provide a full application to one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. You should also note that such an approval can only be provided prior to the commencement of the research.

Yours sincerely

Brian T Finch (Dr)
**Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and
Director (Research Ethics)**

cc Dr Caroline Campbell
School of Design
Wellington

Mr Rodney Adank, Co-HoS
School of Design
Wellington

Mr Gray Hodgkinson
School of Design
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Pasifika Graphic Narratives

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM - INDIVIDUAL

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me.
My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask
further questions at any time.

I wish/do not wish to have my recordings returned to me.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature:

Stephanie Coats

Date:

28/5/2015

Full Name
(printed)

STEPHANIE COATS.



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Wellington 6140,
New Zealand.

Pasifika Graphic Narratives

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My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I ~~wish~~ do not wish to have my recordings returned to me.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature:

M. Reynolds

Date: *23 06 15*

Full Name
(printed)

MARTYN REYNOLDS

28-05-2015

Interview with Stephanie Coats, Tawa College

What are some of the main challenges you've experienced with some of the students and how they develop reading literacy?

There are plenty of challenges. I think one of the main ones is actually getting kids to pick up the page and start reading and I think there are a whole lot of reasons behind that. Actually getting them hooked on something is really difficult. I think they don't see how it's relevant to them. They know the teachers say they have to read and all sorts of things, but they would just rather be doing something else. So that is one of the main challenges I have. There are huge vocabulary challenges as well for a lot of those kids who are coming from families where English is a second language. Counting new words all the time, and so every text can be (for some kids) difficult, as there is no access point, all the words are hard, because they haven't heard them before, just because of those language skills. So that's one of the challenges as well.

That term 'access point' - what does that mean?

They might be reading something with all these crazy words and they are hearing it, they know it's words but they can't kind of understand what they are trying to say. They know it's a word but don't know what to do with it.

Are there strategies that you have employed and found particularly effective with them?

I've been teaching for a while now, it's been 12 years, and there are a whole range of strategies that you try. One I've been trying this year has been a series of reciprocal teaching. I don't know if you have come across it?

It's Teacher and Student learning together?

Yes, it works around putting them in groups and giving them the text to deal with and the reading, and they actually teach and manage the conversation around the reading themselves. It's a package of reading strategies, of vocabulary strategies, prior knowledge strategies, questioning strategies and predicting strategies and they work together as a package of strategies and the kids think they are doing just one thing but they are actually engaging in these different strategies and I think that's worked really well as a way to help students connect to text and hear them and have a chance to discuss and question about them and legitimize some of that struggle they have with the vocabulary because it is part of what we ask - "What haven't you been able to understand?". Often we give children text without them having the chance to think, question, and not understand them - we ask them to read and completely understand straight away, but this strategy is one that breaks down the steps and there is a journey to understand we will go on and I think that is very powerful. Watching some of my kids enjoy those conversations and get some 'buy in' around that has been really cool.

And the types of text that you're looking at has been varied?

What a good question! I think in English, because that is my subject area, we have this huge canon of incredible text we want to teach - at the same time we have all these 'emerging literacies', which I think is a phrase you have used. So the answer is 'yes', we use a range of texts, and for me, I am using short stories and novels, some old stuff, some new stuff. We look at visual text, short text and long text, film reviews, film posters and all sorts of things. There is a whole range of things but there are so many

different types of texts it's hard to get them all in there. It's hard to develop - so I'm going to sound a little bit 'English teacherish' but in terms of understanding text, you need to understand conventional text. The more you understand conventional text, the more access you have to understanding what the text is trying to do. So if you have met a text like it before, you understand how the text is supposed to work. So doing the ones they have met before, again and again, gives them more access to these texts, because it gives them more to compare to.

When you said 'film posters' that pricked my ears, as I come from an illustration background. So are you studying both the visual and verbal text?

When I talk about text, I was just meaning a method of communication. We are studying the visual techniques used in the poster - things like dominant image, color and proportion. Frame, font, symbolism, contrast and balance - all those sorts of things... Looking at them and how they communicate an idea. And then we look at that alongside the actual written component of the text because I think that is one of the things that does help kids with buying in. Those kind of things they see and they use and respond to, without realising they are English and then all of a sudden having them in English, is cool for them. I really enjoy that.

That's intriguing, that is something we teach in design school and it is interesting to see those things coming together.

It is hard though as some of the kids say, "Miss, this is Art, why are we doing Art in English". I say "Look, it is communicating something to you, let's talk about it," and they are, like "Oh yeah, okay".

Some of the readings I have been doing have been on 'visual studies', in terms of how they have been used in 'linguistic studies'. I'm intrigued that that's something that has been studied... how it uses a visual language as opposed to a verbal. Using all those terminologies, like grammar ... it's been really interesting. In terms of genres, are there any particular genres that students respond well to?

Kids love music, they don't want old stuff and that is a challenge for us teachers to respond to ... to keep finding new stuff, but still not losing the joy of the old stuff. I think it is about trying to teach a range and I know in my classes we deal with all sorts of genres. One of the texts that did quite well in Year 10 was the 'Outsiders', which is about gangs in the 1950's. It's an old classic. I used what feels a bit like a romcom text with my Year 10 class this year and they just loved it. They were asking if it was in the library, so it was really cool and I think what it was is that they were teenagers in highschool and dealing with issues of belonging, bullying and shunning. They connect with that and they see themselves in that. I think it was probably the same with the gang as it was a 15 year old kid.

In my senior classes we have been doing some stuff around the Holocaust. That is a really interesting genre for them. It is really different from what they have experienced and I think they can see that they were real events and it's a powerful thing. They have this beautiful sense of justice and injustice. It has been very cool.

Have you been looking at a particular novel?

We've looked at the 'Pianist' as a film and then we looked at 'Maus' by Art Spiegelman. Then they had to do a close viewing of comparing 'Maus' to either side of 'Band of Brothers'. Now they are creating a graphic novel of their own experience watching the 'Pianist'. It has been really cool. I have a couple of Pasifika kids in that class, at Level three and they are hooked. It's English but they are enjoying it and they can see why it matters, which is really cool.

I only recently read 'Maus' and it's a good text. "It doesn't pull any punches though!" Yeah it is very brutal. Getting back to those Pasifika students - have you found using

text that represent their culture or maybe written by Pasifika authors? Have you done any experimentation with that?

A little bit, yeah, I think in terms of having access to texts that are at the level of what we are talking about, in terms of our senior classes, it's sometimes a bit harder to find and when we have got such easy choices from the canon that we know how to teach, well that I know how to teach, sometimes it's easy to keep doing what you have already done. That being said, I don't know what you include in Pasifika, but, this year I gave my kids choices between WWII culture and looking at Hone Tuwhare and they chose WWII culture, which I thought was pretty interesting and I thought, "Come on, come on guys". But I think it just involves a lot more work on our part and I think it is really important work.

You talk about the Canon. Would this mostly be European and American?

We are looking at quite an English Canon, American and it is still a white Western history. I think that's mainly the way it is at the moment. And I think that is a shame. The New Zealand Maori aspect as well, that's really precious in our English canon as well, but some of our students have less access culturally to that and it can be beautiful to open that up to them.

I've done a lot of school journal work and there is a huge emphasis on Maori stories, but there isn't a huge emphasis on Pacific stories. But when that is the case, there is a lot of what's been called tourist perspectives of the culture. Would you say there is an under representation within the curriculum? Yes, absolutely I would. Looking at text from another angle, would you say out of school interests come into play? Like sport, what's popular, music, dance...etc. Those extra curricular activities. Do they help students engage? For example, a story about a rugby player?

In our junior school, we have what we call 'reading lots'. Students read whatever they want to. It could be reading something from a magazine they choose, a novel, a textbook. It could be the Bible, it could be something from their actual life out there. I think that is really cool because there we follow their interests. We've got students writing about the latest movies because they are texts themselves, books and different things that go with them. Biographies of people they are interested in. It is interesting that they can bring whatever they want to. But there is still not the same kind of 'buy in', which is a bit of a shame.

Maybe those types of texts do not have the kind of literary weight you are looking for in the English classroom?

We are doing two things simultaneously. Trying to get reading mileage out of the students from the canon and it doesn't really matter what it is. But the ones we teach in class, we are looking for ones that have easy accessible ideas and language that is being used purposefully. Sometimes that is harder to find in a way students can access easily in text.

You mentioned that you studied 'Maus'. How did you find that? What was the experience and difficulties with teaching a graphic novel?

Well we didn't actually 'teach' it. We just kind of let the kids loose on it. Because if I taught it, they couldn't write about it. Because it would be my observations, not theirs. But that being said, I've never taught a graphic novel before, I've never even thought about the language used in graphic novels and all of a sudden I am confronted with trying to teach the students the conventions of language without teaching them in this specific text. And it really did make me go and think, this is such a really cool language. It's really powerful, it uses narrative beautifully, it's kind of like a film on paper. I really enjoyed it, but it was really hard. I felt I was doing a lot of the finding and creating myself, rather than drawing on a collective wisdom and just channeling it. A huge learning curve for me, but I think as a teacher that learning has been good to peak

my interest, to get me passionate about something else again. I've been talking to my HOD that we should be doing more graphic novels, we should be doing them in all levels. So that's interesting.

There are several levels of graphic novels - 'Percepolis' has been studied in schools a bit. I have read a bit about that and it has been banned in some of the schools in the United States. It's worth reading and it's quite topical as well, with all the Middle Eastern stuff going on. It's a more advanced one, have you heard of 'Jimmy Corrigan'? 'Jimmy Corrigan the smartest kid in the world' is it's title, by graphic novelist Chris Ware. I think he is up for a Nobel Prize for it. It's about absent fathers and is very dense. It's quite a complicated read but very interesting as far as themes and very powerful.

In our Library we have a graphic cartoon group, all our graphic text set aside. We spend a couple of lessons in there a month and that room is always popular.

To that 'new media discussion', like digital media... Has that been effective - like online text?

There are some huge challenges there, in terms of students reading independently. We have got students reading WattPad quite a bit, which gives them access to a whole lot of different types of texts. I know a lot of my girls are a whole lot keener on that. Often what happens in order to get things into students' hands, we have to print them because we don't have the same kind of access to the digital format. Access to computer rooms is really tough. A lot of the students don't have the same kind of access. I also wonder in terms of text to teach, sometimes it's hard to find texts and a lot of the stuff is written really fast for internet and it doesn't have that beautiful sense of crafting. It can do, absolutely, but it's a bit harder to find as you weed through quickly written stuff, trying to find what's beautiful. They both have their purpose in different places. So it's just a matter of weeding through and finding the right stuff for your kids that you're going to teach.

23-06-15

Interview with Martin Reynolds, Wellington College

What is your current research in?

My research is looking at what Pasifika success, as Pasifika means to the boys here and I am doing it as a case study of Year Nine boys. So I'm looking at boys in transition. If you take a Pacific view of things, I just backtrack from that, so I'm working with Pacific boys and I use the word 'with' deliberately, because a lot of research has been done on them, and you find out a lot of things about them, but you don't find out a lot of things from their point of view. So I have tried to work through a Pacific research paradigm. So that means then, everything I've done has come from a Pacific viewpoint. And at times that is not possible because there isn't anything I can use, so I have had to go outside of the [fa'a] Palangi, but generally I'm trying to stay inside. So I'm interested in what Pasifika success means for the Pasifika boys. So that means, the Pacific view on things is that you don't exist in independence, you exist in inter-relationships. I've been looking at the relationships between the parents and the school, the students and the teachers. And looking at the students and their peers. Those are the kind of main relationships and most research doesn't do that.

Most research ignores the strength of relationships between Pacific boys. But it is evident that it exists. If you wander around school, you very much see it, and my view is to take a strength based approach and not go "what's not happening", but go with "what is happening" and how can that be used for those people's benefit. And benefit is defined by 'them'. What is that they're trying to achieve and how can the school shape itself so it can help them achieve what they want to achieve. So it is trying to capture that voice and see what the boys' view of what success is and what it would look like if they had more of it.

I was recently reading a PHD by Karlo Mila. - That 'Political Cultural Capital'.

Yeah - I've been using a lot of her stuff. There is a whole debate. So you take Bordeaux and you have got 'cultural capital', but then 'critical race' theory which is stuff from the States, which seems to put another lens on why black students, but also Mexican students, but let's stay with black - why African American students do less well. And so they have reviewed Bordeaux's concept and they have called it 'community capital'. So 'cultural capital' is stuff that belongs to the system but 'community capital' is stuff that you bring with you. So if you take Bordeaux's view, then you have either got 'cultural capital' or you haven't. Whereas 'critical race theory' is that we may not have cultural capital existent but we have 'community capital'. So we don't have nothing. The question is - "what have we got and how can that be used for our benefit?". So I'm taking that approach and have gone, "What do these guys do well? How do they organise themselves? What sort of relationships are they looking for and how can schools shape themselves so we don't suppress them?". So Karlo Mila is really important to me, she is also interested in a concept called va.

I have done a fair bit of reading around va and... now I have to call myself a student of the 'va'. Generally speaking, when you look at [research people have done on] Pacific kids in schools, they will talk about relationships but they will define it from a Palangi point of view. For instance, I am reading some stuff from 2002 at the moment which is kind of an analysis of civil bits of research where they set it up as - like ethical relationships. And a whole bunch of other Palangi concepts. But if you put that all to va it makes a

lot more sense. So I'm trying to teach, or rather, learn with some of the other teachers about va on the basis that if you use that united framework, not a matter of if you do this or do that, it's a matter of "think of it like this - what is your ethical responsibility for the upkeep of the relationship?"

That concept of va interests me both from the social relationships seat belt, but it's also used in a spatial design sense.

Yeah it is a really holistic concept and has got physical, spatial, spiritual, social and ethical aspects to it, typical of Pasifika concepts from my point of view anyway. It's holistic. And that's why dividing it into a series of categories, which is what people have done, that's okay because you are doing a Western analysis. But if you're not trying to do a Western analysis and you are going "how does that look from a student's point of view?", explaining things is caring for the relationships as much as asking you how your game went. I mean, they are the same thing... So as part of my thrust, I'm trying to go down the va route, because it is potentially a Pasifika way of analysing Pasifika data, as opposed to getting Pasifika data and running it through Western concepts.

Another methodology that I've been employing is Talanoa.

Talanoa for me is not va... va is not a methodology, va is an analytical concept. But if you're looking at Talanoa, in order to make Talanoa operate, you have to care for the va. So for me, va is not a method, it's an over arching concept as part of your way of being. But you need to have done that in order to make Talanoa work... If you go and ask questions of Pasifika people, you're going to get answers. But you have shaped those answers. So the whole point is that "I don't know", so my job as a researcher is to create space for those guys to go and fill the space, I think it is relevant. Rather than "here's my questions, answer these". So I'm just going, "What is success? What is success? You have to talk about something."

We asked the parents, "What do Pacific parents think teachers need to know about Pacific students?" And the first thing they said was, "That's a really wide question". Yeah well, that's the point. One of the questions I have had in my mind throughout this process has been, "Is the purpose of my project for Pasifika students to have success in the Western System or is it for the system to change?". What parents said, and this has come from the book by Annemarie Tepua, she had this concept and other people have used it as well, in 'critical race theory' as well - but she calls it 'edge walking'. So it's what the parents want and what the students want. And it makes sense, if you are a Pacific student or Pacific parent you send your 'brown' kid to this school, what you want effectively is bilingualism. You want the ability to exist in two worlds and to know when to be in one and when to be in the other. And you want fluency around that movement. That's one of the things they are trying to achieve here. As a teacher, what you are looking for is the scaffolding. And that's not a natural thing to be able to do, and it's a harder thing than most people do. If you are bilingual, it's a real benefit, but you have to learn to be bilingual. But the job of the school is not to change and say - "everyone's going to be Pasifika here", cause that's ridiculous, because we are only at 5%. Even if you want to, you may as well not bother.

Do you know Camille Nakhid? She's got this concept of space as well. What she says is we need to create space for students to have their identification process valued by the school. So students will identify themselves and create their identity as they grown up, that's what they do. But if it is valued by the school and the space exists, then they can find their own path. If it's not valued by the school they will either have to be Palangi - the brown person decides to be Palangi and is academically successful, if it's to be successful, or the brown person decides not to be Palangi and it's not going to potentially be successful because they are running against the current. They will follow the school's stereotype or... Because you haven't created space. If you create space - social, cultural space, then it allows people to be who they would hope to

be. And that for me is one of the markers of success. Success is being who you would like to be as a cultural and academic, and all those sorts of people, because in fact that's just one person.

So, the ability to form your own identity?

And having it valued. I mean everyone will form their identity, but if you value people's ability to form it, you create space for them to do it. If you don't value their ability to do it, you tell them, well, through your operation. You only offer one option for instance and that option can be accepted or rejected. There is no space. So then if you go back to va and you run with va, that makes a lot of sense because va is cultural-social space. The role of people in a va relationship is to care for that relationship. So if you are caring for the relationship, what you are doing is creating options and space, through space. So the two things are not the same. But I can see how they would operate in a classroom.

So the answer to your question, "What are you doing it for?". Well I don't think it has to be either for the 'polys' or for the system. But you can't change the whole system, like you say, you can't overturn something, but you can transform the way it operates in its relationship with other people. So if that makes sense, you can't change the whole thing, but you can go, hey, how about thinking of va when you have those kids in your classroom. How about creating space for them and seeing what they want to do and how they would like to do it. Within the rules of the game of course and the rules of the game of schools are academic success. You can't go - "everyone's going to be happy, but they haven't got any qualifications and that doesn't matter". You can't do that. Because that's essentially unethical as well. But within the rules of the game, what can you do?

You have probably already alluded to this, but I'm going to rephrase this question. I've been thinking a lot about having a strength based approach to the research. So would you say va is, that concept is, an advantage for the Pasifika students?

It depends on how you look at it. Some people would go...I once had a meeting with somebody, I won't name, but she's pretty famous. She was talking about how some people tell her that some people give up a subject because they don't like the teacher. But I think that is completely stupid. So that's one way of looking at the va between the student and the subject, but it should not go to the teacher. Students see that the desire to have a relationship with the teacher is a weakness, in which case va is a weakness. But I would say it is a strength. I would say that if I can form a relationship with people then they would want to come with me. It's a huge strength, because then they will come with me. I can ask them to do things they have never considered. They will go, "oh, okay, I trust that guy, he's shown a good heart, he's attempted to understand me, I'll attempt to understand him". And you can see it. I want to see it as a strength based thing. We can go strength focused, weakness focused. Anything can be re-envisioned. And that is what I am trying to do. You cannot change everything around you, but you can change the way you look at it and therefore how you define it. Then you can change the agency you have with it. So to me it is a huge strength. People want relationships and when you're in a position to give it to them, or to create them or take part in them, that's really good. And as a teacher, I don't think it is too far-fetched to use the word 'love'. And if you have a [good relationship with] students and you can give that back and you can use that to find out what they want - what Pasifika success is to Pasifika actually is, and you can deliver that, [that has] also got to be a strength.

Talking to you as an English teacher now. Have you found any strategies or materials that have helped you engage the students?

It's interesting, 'cause this is a different environment here from some environments. You're drowned out by 'white noise' from South Auckland schools - Decile 1 - 3 schools. We are always told - "this is what you should be doing" ... So there is a lot of people

pushing stuff like, "you have to have text with these kind of people or these kind of issues", whatever. I don't necessarily agree with that. If you take gender as an example, when I was Head of English in schools up the country, I found access points for the boys to access it. For example, there are a lot of fundamentalist religions up there, so I bought a book about that. And we started at just talking about, "how many people did they know in the Brethren? How many do you see with head scarves? What do they believe in?". Because they had that experience all their lives, I found that access point and the fact that the main character was female, wasn't an issue. Here we take Shakespeare in my Year 13, we are doing Shakespeare and we have to come up with a point of access for analysis. The standard thing to do is use Feminism and Freud. Feminism is like minority interest in the school, but it's good, I'm up for it, you can use 'queer' if you want to. But I said to my PI guys "Do you want to use Whakapapa and you just do the same". Feminism hadn't been invented when Shakespeare wrote, so your stuff is just as legitimate as theirs is. It's a different perspective. So what I'm really saying is, if you look at Shakespeare and you go, "it's completely irrelevant", you are just putting people down by doing that. What you need to do is go, "Why would this be relevant? Why would it matter?".

Yeah, one thing the English teachers talk about is how universal stories have a broad appeal and the boys were interested in these romantic dramas and they wanted to read more of them. You have got 'punch points', like family, jealousy. There is a reading about Shakespeare in Uganda. I think it was 'Macbeth'. Here Macbeth is like the flawed hero, he was mad to kill a king. So people read the story in different ways and the dominant view is, "Why does Desdemona die?". Desdemona dies because she doesn't show Whakapapa. She doesn't show respect to her father. She goes behind her father's back. So when Argo goes chasing her, why would you be surprised about that. If you don't show respect to one person in the community, then you're not showing respect to the community. So it's a completely different reading, but it's making that space. Space is going to the guys, "You never thought of this, I thought of this, you can do it, go and talk to your parents, I'll find you some academic stuff from Victoria and let's talk about it. I'm interested if you're interested." So that's the kind of latest and crazy thing I've done I suppose.

So you think it's not so much about the kind of text, but what you're able to highlight from it?

Yeah, well in that case and example it is. I spent five weeks on my own in Tonga, my wife went home early and my son gave me 100 movies. In the end, I got sick of listening to American accents. In the end I ran a Vinnie Jones movie and I didn't know if it was any good, but I was going to watch it 'cause he speaks like me. So there is an element of that too. In the Year 9's one of the boys walked up and said, "Thank you Sir, because you use lots of sports stars". But if it's part of your life, you can import it into the text... It doesn't have to be someone on a Waka, gang violence, meth or drug deals, it doesn't have to be something like that.

One of the things that I have been thinking about is the use of Pasifika authors as well, as it outlines all those role models as well in an academic sense. Have you used any of those?

Yeah I do... My job is to offer pluralism, not just to brown people. I'm trying to offer pluralism to everyone I teach, on the basis that it is good for everybody, it is good for different reasons. Yeah I use Pasifika authors.

Have you used Karlo Mila's poetry?

Yeah we have used some of her stuff from Tusiata Avia, it's been used in the department and I'm happy to use that. What you have got to do is you've got to not piss anyone off... What I tried to do here this year, but I didn't get enough students, was to run a South Pacific English course.

(Appendix G)

POPULAR TEEN COMICS	LINE	TOPE	COLOUR	CHARACTER	Line	Tone	Colour
Doomboy by Tony Sandoval (Magnetic Press)				Sketched Thin Loose Gestural Informal Minimalistic Stylized figures	Solid Blacks High contrast Low contrast High key	De-saturated Limited pallet Split complementary	
The Dumbest Idea Ever by Jimmy Gownley (Graphix/Scholastic)				Medium Solid Gestural Formal Minimalistic Stylized figures	Solid Blacks High contrast Gradients Flat tones	Natural colours	
Lumberjanes by Shannon Watters, Grace Ellis, Noelle Stevenson, & Brooke A. Allen (BOOM! Box)				Medium/thick Solid Gestural Formal Minimalistic Stylized figures	Solid Blacks Gradients Flat tones	Saturated Limited pallet	
Meteor Men by Jeff Parker & Sandy Jarrell (Oni)				Medium/thick Loose Gestural Calligraphic Brushed Informal Minimalistic Figurative Detailed	Solid Blacks Flat tones	Natural colours	
This One Summer by Mariko Tamaki & Jillian Tamaki				Medium/thick Loose Gestural Calligraphic Brushed Informal Minimalistic Stylized figures	Solid Blacks Brushed Gradients Flat tones High contrast	Single colour	
In Real Life by Cory Doctorow				Thick Loose Gestural Calligraphic Brushed Informal Minimalistic Stylized figures	Solid Blacks Flat tones Brushed Gradients	Saturated Warm colour Saturated Accent colour	
The Wicked + The Divine by Kieron Gillen & Jamie McKelvie				Medium Gestural Calligraphic Brushed Formal Figurative Detailed	Solid Blacks High contrast Gradients Flat tones High-key/low-key	Saturated Harmonious Accent colour Natural colour	
The Shadow Hero by Gene Luen Yang & Sonny Liew (First Second)				Thick Gestural Calligraphic Brushed Loose Informal Minimalistic Stylized figures	Solid Blacks High contrast Gradients Flat tones	De-saturated Saturated Limited pallet Split complementary	
The Wrenchies by Farel Dalrymple (First Second)				Sketched Brushed Medium/ thick Loose Gestural Informal Detailed Stylized / realistic	Solid Blacks Brushed Gradients Flat tones	De-saturated Saturated Natural colours	
Bandette by Paul Tobin & Colleen Coover				Thick Loose Gestural Calligraphic Brushed Informal Minimalistic Stylized figures	Solid Blacks High contrast Brushed Gradients Flat tones	Saturated Saturated Limited pallet Accent colour	
The Wormworld Saga by Daniel Lieske				Painted Detailed Formal Calligraphic Stylized figures Brushed	Full range High contrast Brushed Gradients	Natural Saturated Split complementary	
Nimona by Noelle Stevenson				Sketched Thin Loose Gestural Informal Minimalistic Stylized figures Geometric	Solid Blacks High contrast Flat tones	De-saturated Limited pallet Accent colour	
The Private Eye by Brian Vaughan & Marcos Martin				Medium Gestural Calligraphic Brushed Formal Figurative Detailed	Solid Blacks High contrast Gradients Flat tones	Saturated Harmonious Limited pallet Accent colour Natural colour	
Stand Still. Stay Silent by Minna Sundberg				Medium Gestural Calligraphic Brushed Informal Stylized figures Detailed	Solid Blacks High contrast Brushed Gradients Flat tones	Saturated Harmonious Limited pallet Accent colour Natural colour	

(Appendix F)

Traditional Art	LINE	TONE	COLOUR	CHARACTER / SYMBOLISM	Line	Tone	Colour
Cook Island Tapa					Brushed Thick Minimalistic Stylized Detailed Geometric	Solid Blacks High contrast Flat tones	One colour Harmonious pallet
Niuean Hiapo					Sketched Thin Loose Informal Minimalistic Stylized Detailed	Solid Blacks High contrast Flat tones	BW Accent colour
Niuean Hiapo					Sketched Thin Loose Informal Minimalistic Stylized Detailed	Solid Blacks High contrast Flat tones	BW Accent colour
Samoa Siapo					Brushed Thick Minimalistic Stylized Detailed Geometric	Solid Blacks High contrast Flat tones	BW Accent colour
Tongan Tapa					Sketched Thin Loose Informal Minimalistic Stylized Detailed	Solid Blacks High contrast Flat tones Textured	BW Accent colour
Samoaan Tatau					Tattooed Thick / medium / thin Detailed Stylized Geometric	Solid Blacks High contrast Flat tones	BW
Fijian Tapa					Brushed Thick Minimalistic Stylized Detailed Geometric	Solid Blacks High contrast Flat tones	BW Accent colour
John Pule					Sketched / brushed Thin Minimalistic Informal Stylized Detailed Geometric	Solid Blacks High contrast Flat tones	BW Accent colour
John Pule					Sketched / brushed Thin Minimalistic Informal Stylized Detailed Geometric	Solid Blacks High contrast Flat tones Brushed Gradients	BW Accent colour
John Pule					Sketched Thin Minimalistic Informal Stylized Detailed Geometric	Solid Blacks High contrast Flat tones Cross-hatched gradients	BW
John Pule					Sketched / brushed Thin Minimalistic Informal Stylized Detailed	Solid Blacks High contrast Flat tones	BW Accent colour
John Pule					Sketched / brushed Thin Minimalistic Informal Stylized Detailed Geometric	Solid Blacks High contrast Flat tones	BW Accent colour
Contemporary Tapa					Thick Minimalistic Formal Stylized Detailed Geometric	Solid Blacks High contrast Flat tones	BW Accent colour
John Pule					Sketched / brushed Thin Minimalistic Informal Stylized Detailed Geometric	Solid Blacks High contrast Flat tones Brushed Gradients	Limited pallet

