As Written in the Flesh.
The Human Body as Medium of Cultural Identity and Memory in Fiction from New Zealand.

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A Note on Abbreviations

In the course of this project I will use the following abbreviations for the fictional works discussed here: Albert Wendt’s *The Mango’s Kiss* (TMK), Keri Hulme’s *The Bone People* (TBP), Witi Ihimaera’s *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* (NGS), *The Uncle’s Story* (TUS) and *The Rope of Man* (TRoM), and James George’s *Hummingbird* (Hum) and *Ocean Roads* (OR).

Unless not specified otherwise, I left the italic emphases from the works cited here unchanged.
Introduction

At the beginning of his novel *The Mango’s Kiss*, Albert Wendt creates a striking image that propels a sensuous experience to the foreground.¹ The passage focuses on the physical sensation of a mango pressed against Peleiupu’s cheek and mingles Peleiupu’s first childhood memory with the touch of mango against her skin. Words and definitions are pushed to the background in this passage of first self-awareness; they are only later added to the picture. Closely linked to Peleiupu’s memory are the impressions of her senses – the scent of her father Mautu, the texture and image of the mango and the feeling in her body – and they remain the central force of recollection of this particular memory. Yet, the final and perhaps most important sensation that should be coupled with the fruit has been severed from her mind. Whether Peleiupu actually had a taste of the fruit proffered by Mautu remains a secret of the past:

Down-pressing round coldness on her right cheek, radiating out across her face and down through her body to her tingling toes. She jerked away from it, hands clasped to the wet spot on her cheek. In her father’s hand, at the centre of her seeing, was a round green-orange object. (A mango, she’d learn later.) From the object to his hand, to his face, she looked, recognising he was smiling. She moved closer to him, her hand taking the object, the fruit, which assumed the shape of her grip: solid, fitting, apt, balanced. Her father nuzzled his forehead against hers. During the final moments of her dying, years later, that was how Peleiupu (or Pele, as everyone came to call her) was to recall, in slow vivid detail, that incredible dawn when her father, Mautu Tuifolau, pressed the dew-covered mango against her right cheek. At that startled moment, she was conscious for the first time she was an entity (I, me), separate from everything and everyone else – including her father, who was encouraging her, with repeated nods, to raise the fruit to her mouth and bite it. She would try, in her dying, to remember whether she’d taken that bite or what the mango had tasted like, and not be able to. (*TMK* 11)

This first encounter with a mango imprinted upon Pele’s mind and her skin reveals the thematic trajectory encompassing the fictions discussed here, namely that of cultural memory and identity and their relation to the flesh/body as a sensuous entity. The touch of the mango affords Peleiupu with a sense of self – the sensations perceived by her body, slightly removed from linguistic definition as the concepts of ‘father’ or ‘mango’ do not exist in Pele’s perception of the world yet, thus express and constitute a moment of individual identity. They also articulate a sense of time for the image of the

¹ Although Albert Wendt acknowledges firm roots in Samoan culture, he has also insisted that “I belong to Oceania – or, at least, I am rooted in a fertile portion of it – and it nourishes my spirit, helps to define me, and feeds my imagination” (Wendt 1976: 49). His works therefore embrace the connections and affinities between all indigenous peoples of Oceania, their common ancestry, cultural traditions and their shared struggle for decolonisation and empowerment. Wendt has spent many years living, teaching and publishing in Aotearoa/New Zealand, considering Aotearoa/New Zealand a “second home” (Wendt 1990: 59), and the launching of *The Mango’s Kiss*, for instance, took place at The Auckland University Marae (Tautai Contemporary Pacific Arts Trust 2003: 2).
touch of the mango marks the beginning of the narrative and its particular focus on Pele’s life that begins after the onset of colonialism in her Samoan home village of Satoa. There, the stories of Samoan people have already started to overlap with the stories of the papalagi, the white people. Trader Barker, for example, turns into a ‘savage’ and has his pale skin tattooed with the traditional patterns of tatau (Samoan tattoo). Missionaries have left a lasting impression and anthropologist Mardrek Freemeade (a satirical version of anthropologists Derek Freeman and Margaret Meade whose infamous screeds on Samoan sexuality were discredited by the former) becomes involved in a sexual scandal, while disillusioned writer Leonard Roland Stenson (an ironic twist on Robert Louis Stevenson), “a spinner of tales, a magician of words” (*TMK* 90), inspires Pele’s gift of storytelling.

The mango joins together Pele and her father Mautu through the element of touch and “the transaction of texture” (*Sedgwick* 2003: 22). They “commune through such haptic absorption” (*Sedgwick* 2003: 22-3), and the touch of the mango oddly penetrates Pele’s flesh – sensually as well as emotionally. The mango, a ‘newcomer’ to Samoa and the Pacific Islands (*Bally* 2006: 442) and, at the same time, influential on Samoan culture, was and is used as food and medicine for example (*Macpherson and Macpherson* 1990: 223; *Bally* 2006: 457). The fruit – coupled with its sensuous impact and the image of Pele’s father and remembered shortly before her death – also points to the past and, as the novel spans a number of decades in the life of Pele’s family, to elements of Samoan cultural memory that irreversibly intersect with the history of colonialism.

The epilogue of the novel propels us back to the beginning and poses a twist on the touch of the mango on Pele’s cheek in an intertextual reversal of the biblical Fall of Man. Pele watches her brother take the fruit from a special mango tree no one may climb or pluck mangos from – a “mad act, his right arm reaching up cautiously, up through the dripping leaves, his hand opening to cup the glistening, golden fruit, his fingers closing around it until it was secure in his grip” (*TMK* 463). Wendt does not conceive Pele as the heroine who wrestles indigenous culture out of the grasp of the coloniser. In fact, she is implicated in the capitalistic system so much that she loses ‘touch’ with her loved ones. Her husband Tavita, Barker’s son, thus blames her that “you’re so in love with money and power you’re betraying your own parents, Sao, our dead son, and all our dead” (*TMK* 460).

Just as the mango’s kiss is written in Pele’s flesh and produces complex sensations and emotions, colonialism causes stories to overlap and create new ones.
Consequently, Siobhan Harvey calls *The Mango’s Kiss* “a Polynesian dictionary and cultural workbook, one that explains and translates historic practices, beliefs and words. Wendt returns time and again to his core conviction: that, like the book itself, in spite of its surface tranquillity and beauty, Samoa and its people are many-sided, many-textured and possess many pasts” (Harvey 2003: 29). Hence, the many layers and intersections of cultures call for a dynamic conceptualisation of identity as Sonia Faessel suggests in relation to Wendt’s novel: “L’identité n’est plus donnée, fixée par un système socioculturel aux règles précises. Il faut à présent la construire en gérant les conflits et les tensions provoqués par le choc de deux mondes: celui d’avant et d’après la colonisation, celui de la tradition et de la modernité, celui d’une économie fondée sur l’autarcie et ‘insularité et celui de l’économie libérale’” (Faessel 2010: 156).² On a symbolic-metaphorical level, the mango represents Pele’s individual identity (Faessel 2010: 156-7), but it also manifests the textural, tangible facets of “the flesh in its relation to the concept of the subject” (Baldwin, Fowler and Weller 2007: 9). In relation to the palpability of the stringy “delicious flesh” (*TMK* 71) of the mango and its “sticky juice” (70), Albert Wendt makes us aware that the body, too, emerges as a multi-textured, sensuous creation – just as the complex layers of stories, pasts and identities do – and medium that negotiates epistemological questions of how the world, the past, and individual or communal identities can be known.

Maori writer Apirana Taylor makes a similar statement in his short story “Whakarongo”. Taylor portrays the jumble of past and present voices – “[a] thousand voices wake calling laughing voices and more calling laughing waking calling” (Taylor 2000: 106) – engaging in a verbal fight over the encounter between Maori and Pakeha and the contested identities of Aotearoa/New Zealand resulting from European

² The complex, many-layered conception of identity in *The Mango’s Kiss* also relates to Albert Wendt’s notion of the Va. Va captures a spatially conceived set of interrelations which, to a certain extent, mirrors the dynamics of meaning Bhabha ascribed to the ‘third space’: “Va is the space between, the betweenness, not empty space, not space that separates but space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-All, the space that is context, giving meaning to things. The meanings change as the relationships/the contexts change. […] This is crucial in communal cultures that value group, unity, more than individualism; who perceive the individual person/creature/thing in terms of group, in terms of va, relationships” (Wendt 1996: 18-9). These interrelations and the ‘betweenness’ thus form a crucial influence on identities that present a dynamic shift between categories: “This ‘me’ or ‘self’ has many dimensions; personal, indigenous, migrant, national, regional, cosmopolitan, global reflecting an interactive, post-colonial, pluralistic present” (Va’ai 1999: 56). Wendt’s reconfiguration of the va is thus coupled with a preoccupation with multi-faceted cultural identities, but in contrast to Bhabha’s dynamic, yet fragmented “hybrid identity” (Bhabha 2008: 55), Albert Wendt seeks to introduce a holistic indigenous framework that is capable of reconciling divergent identities: “[m]aking sense of multiple identities and defining ‘homeland’ is a preoccupation of the post-colonial present. It entails a resurrection, a reviving of ancient, ‘whole’ ways of seeing and turning the immense loss suffered under colonialism into a new way of Life” (Va’ai 1999: 90).
expansionism and colonisation: “Human voices breathing talking arguing... ‘It’s mine.’ ‘No, the land is mine.’ ‘We the Maori say this land is ours.’ ‘No,’ the Pakeha says. ‘It is ours. Ours. Ours. Which means not yours, Maori.’” (106). In this chaotic cosmos of contradictory voices and binary constructions, one Maori voice makes a crucial statement, namely “‘Pakeha, you say, you say. What we are, who we are, who are you?’” (Taylor 2000: 106).

The Maori voice thus hints at a pivotal point of colonial discourse – its reliance on (verbal) representations of the ‘other’ and its constructions of the colonised according to the colonisers’ world view. One such discursive strategy can be seen in representations of the indigenous body which has, throughout the history of western expansionism and (neo-)colonisation, always been written, to allude to the title of this project. The “[a]rguing laughing weeping crying friending enemying talking not talking confusion” (Taylor 2000: 107) arising from the multitude of voices in Taylor’s short story reflects the multi-layered pasts and presents of New Zealand and culminates in the repeated “[t]hey try and tell us who we are and what we are” (107), thus criticising the ambiguity of colonial discourse, of the writing machine of colonial culture, fuelled by contrary images of the indigenous population and “producing cheap pseudo-knowledge” (Beets 2000: 17). Especially since the 1970s and 1980s indigenous writers of Aotearoa have attempted, through the powers of the imagination, to reclaim the indigenous body in their texts, to represent and inscribe it anew from a differing point of view.

In addition to this, the body, in general, has been a fashionable topic for quite a while now and it is only reasonable to call the “growing attention devoted to the body in academic circles” (Kirby 1997: 1) a “boom” (Mieszkowski 2008: 19). Recent works especially display a wish, among other things, to defy redundant binarisms and “[counter] not only the familiar Cartesian distinction between mind, spirit (esprit) or soul (âme) on the one hand, and body (corps) on the other, but also the distinction

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4 Those decades saw a growing consciousness of issues such as repoliticisation, decolonisation, and increasing visibility of Maori artists and writers on the scene of cultural production. The period is quite often referred to as ‘Maori renaissance’, a term of contested nature (see Prentice 2004).

5 Compare, for example, Wendt 1996 and Keown 2005: esp. 1-15, 102-98. This focus on the body is by far not restricted to the literature and culture of Aotearoa/New Zealand. The works of Kenyan artist Wangechi Mutu that create composite bodies reflecting the many intersections of colonialism, sexuality, race and science among others or Robert Barclay’s novel Melal which interweaves mythological and present-day bodies in the context of nuclear testing and the ongoing military presence of the United States in the Marshall Islands may be some recent examples of a wide-ranging phenomenon whose multifaceted ramifications this project inevitably falls short of.
between materiality and ideality as such” (Baldwin, Fowler, and Weller 2007: 9). This dissertation contributes to the multitude of academic publications on the body and focuses on those moments when the fictional texts create a vibrant picture of the flesh and its textural inscription; on the body’s sensuous perceptions and the epistemological dimension of corporeality as it is explored in examples of writing from Aotearoa/New Zealand; it looks for the depths of the flesh that often escape the confusion of “[h]uman voices breathing talking arguing…” (Taylor 2000: 106); it shows the importance of the sensuous body as a medium of cultural identity and memory, something that is often pushed aside in the jumble of words as the repeated request “[w]hakarongo. Whakarongo. […] [L]isten listen…” (106) of Taylor’s short story emphasises.

Rooted in literary studies and placing emphasis on cultural issues, As Written in the Flesh comprises a controversial, perhaps even paradoxical thematic trajectory: the title of this thesis evokes the complex reciprocity and relationship between text and body, language and corporeality, as well as the translation of specific cultural and somatic epistemologies. My literary analyses focus on four novels from Aotearoa/New Zealand, namely Keri Hulme’s The Bone People (1984), Witi Ihimaera’s Nights in the Gardens of Spain (1995) and The Uncle’s Story (2000), as well as James George’s Hummingbird (2003) because all of these narratives attempt to render textu(r)ally the flesh and delve in various ways into the topic of what could be called ‘writing on the body’, that is the inscription and shaping of the human body, for example through tattoos or scars, and constantly attempt to transcend this textual quality in their explorations of the flesh, the perceptions of the senses, the body’s physicality, thus probing the boundaries of textual or literary representation. The novels – in a nutshell – explore the body along the focus of writing in the flesh and shed an interesting light on the tangible layers of bodily feeling and perception and their significance in terms of cultural identity and remembering.

This may be viewed as highly paradoxical for, on the one hand, anything that relates to corporeality or non-rational, meaningful sensuousness is nevertheless put into language and captured by the words that constitute the novels – codified in a system of letters, so to say – and as texts finally deciphered in our minds. Yet, these novels constantly seek to blur the boundaries of representation by attempting to create a

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6 Such a dissolution of bipolar constructions and a valorisation of the corporeal appears in works from a variety of disciplines, be it literary, cultural, anthropological or philosophical studies among others. See, for example, Sedgwick 2003, Keown 2005, Clough and Halley 2007, Howes 2003, Classen and Howes 2006, and Shusterman 2008.
language of the flesh and to incorporate sensuous feeling that often frustrates the explicit in its incommunicability and efforts of verbalisation. This is not to say that the sole aim of the texts is to dissolve this paradox. Rather, the novels seem to raise valid questions of the relationship between text and feeling and create fascinating impulses by means of this juxtaposition. Moreover, we can feel the material weight of printed books, touch and feel the paper with every turning of a page, and, in a sense, we see their substance, read with our eyes and, in the visualisations of our inner minds, walk through and ‘experience’ their “Sinn-Räume” (Roder 2008: 11), the sensual spaces they produce. This productive and more physical approach to literature takes its outset in philosophy and, more specifically, in phenomenology. Gaston Bachelard, for instance, focused on “language areas” (Bachelard 1994: xxviii) and “this fibered space traversed by the simple impetus of words that have been experienced” (xxviii), “the poetic space of the image” (xxviii) which can be walked through like real architectural structures, thus producing concrete sensations in their phenomenological existence: “Contrary to metaphor, we can devote our reading being to an image, since it confers being upon us. In fact, the image, which is the pure product of absolute imagination, is a phenomenon of being; it is also one of the specific phenomena of the speaking creature” (75). On the other hand, certain boundaries may arise from critical academic practice because a double translation opens up with the flesh in literature and literary criticism: the flesh is rendered textually in fiction which is then examined through literary analysis. Even so, the subject comprises the permeability of the flesh to what Vicki Kirby calls “the inscriptive penetrations of the writing machine we call culture” (Kirby 1997: 4), the textural, sensuous elements of the flesh and the quest for cultural identity and memory that is linked to the permeable character of the body.

To complicate the matter even further, the literary texts I focus on are by and large read to belong to the extensive field of postcolonial literature and therefore interpreted through the lens of postcolonial literary studies. Simply put, postcolonial readings often interpret texts according to the hypothesis that the body is rendered textually, formed and inscribed by the signs of the culture/s it stems from. The postcolonial body is therefore often read metaphorically or symbolically as submitted to a process of cultural codification, be it as a representation of the nightmare and aftermath of colonial violence and suppression, or as an image of a process of reclaiming, redefining and re-inscribing it from the perspectives of the formerly colonised. Michelle Keown, for instance, wraps up her discussion of several novels
from the South Pacific with the suggestion that “the tattooed Polynesian body may be read as a cultural cipher or as an index of (post)colonial history. It is also possible, however, to push the metaphor further, interpreting the tattooed Polynesian body as a figure for the inscription of cultural identity in the literatures of the South Pacific” (Keown 2005: 191). She then goes on to assume that the ‘Polynesian body’ in “[i]ts ritualized encoding of the transition from suffering and pain to healing and renewal not only represents the postcolonial energies of the new indigenous literatures of this region, but also symbolizes the way in which cultures, like bodies, adapt to the various influences and experiences which they encounter” (Keown 2005: 197-8).

As much as I think that Keown’s summing up of the topic of the body as it is treated in the literatures of the Pacific is fundamentally useful for the closer study of texts from Oceania, it may be countered that such metaphors, perhaps involuntarily, force these literatures in a dialectic of reacting to colonialism and its ongoing effects or, to put it bluntly, in a position from which ‘writing back’ appears to be the only alternative. Eventually, the – even if unintentional – construction of such a predicament has caused heavy protest among some Maori scholars as the following remarks show: “[T]he only thing we can do – and the first thing before doing anything else – is to ‘talk back’ to the West. I, for one, resent the time and energy that takes, and wonder if it ends up trapping us in a relationship with colonialism that we may think is anticolonial, but it still ends up being the only thing we can ever talk about” (Somerville 2006: 90).

One of the problems with postcolonialism may therefore lie in its production of and reliance on such discursive categories and metaphors. All differing definitions aside, postcolonialism can be roughly said to comprise a critique and discussion of “the various cultural effects of colonization” (Keown 2007: 23). As a reading practice it sets out to make us aware of and reflect upon “habits, notions, modes of meaning, ways of language and regimes of reading which have traditionally shaped the use of books” (Döring 2008: 6) especially in cross-cultural contexts. In broadest terms, postcolonialism urges us to pay close attention to texts arising from the many-layered effects of colonialism, the powerful encounter between different cultures and the creative process to come to terms with these circumstances. The term is often used to outline critical dialogue about colonial modes of discourse and their material

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7 Leonie Pihama “contend[s] that the use of the notion of ‘post-colonial’ in this country [Aotearoa/New Zealand] not only centres Pākehā definitions but is also disturbing in its denial of the voices of Māori” (Pihama 1996: 9), not least because the term may falsely suggest an end to the influences of the colonial past (11) and springs from “a Pākehā-centred theoretical framework” (9) adding to continuing marginalisation of minorities.
manifestations (that, as can be argued, have a lasting effect on the present) as well as the overthrow of the common and dominant symbols and meanings running all the way through the linguistic systems, the words and discourses we use:

Rather than simply being the writing which ‘came after’ empire, postcolonial literature is generally defined as that which critically or subversively scrutinizes the colonial relationship. It is writing that sets out in one way or another to resist colonialist perspectives. […] Decolonization demanded – and still demands – symbolic overhaul, a reshaping of dominant meanings. Postcolonial literature forms part of that process of overhaul […] to undercut thematically and formally the discourses which supported colonization – the myths of power, the race classifications, the imagery of subordination. (Boehmer 2005: 3)

This preoccupation with reshaping language, disrupting meaning and investigating discursive structures has been reinforced by the influence of poststructuralist theory and has become evident in “transgressive, non-authoritative reading[s]” (Boehmer 2005: 237) that take as their outset “theories of the ‘open’, indeterminate text” (237), the fragmentary and provisional nature of signification processes, and the constructedness of identity and of ‘grand narratives’ such as the superiority of Western reason. In a sense, then, postcolonialism’s obsession with discourse and meaning may engender a blindness towards the epistemological qualities of the senses and a certain kind of marginalisation of the dynamic potential of the feeling, sensuous body, the insights linked to perceptive corporeality, the sensuality transcending the rational, interpretive processes of the mind and the arbitrary nature of the linguistic game, all of which are explored in the fictions discussed here. This stance towards “[l]anguage games. Culture as discourse. World as text. Empire of signs” (Howes 2005a: 1), as David Howes puts it frankly, may neglect “a full-bodied understanding of culture and experience” (1) and the significance of “concrete bodily activities” (Malecki 2010: 155) to cultural identity and memory.

To be clear, this is not to suggest that this study aims at doing away with current postcolonial reading practices; rather, it intends to show through its analyses of the aforementioned four novels from Aotearoa/New Zealand how the postcolonial reading project may be opened and sensitised to the complexity that arises from the inscribed, feeling flesh and its negotiation of cultural identities and memories. The body in its manifold manifestations and explorations seems to be one of the central subjects in literature from Aotearoa/New Zealand as well as in literature from Oceania, and the
fictions discussed here incorporate a quality that exhausts our common methods of literary interpretation in that they push the boundaries of textuality by introducing a much more substantial, corporeal, even non-linguistic level surpassing the world of word plays and the arbitrariness of signs. They break up the conventional hierarchy of the senses and display a consciousness of the significance of gaining knowledge through the feeling and sensuous aspects of the flesh. In their disruption of centralised perspectives and exploration of insight through bodily perceptions, these novels create a dynamic potential that attempts to establish unexpected meaning and epistemological understanding even where language may prove to be insufficient. By and large, this potential is of course mediated by language, but the novels rely on highly creative alphabets of feeling in order to explore cultural identity and memory.

The central scope of As Written in the Flesh regards the epistemological qualities of bodily feeling as it is vividly explored in these narrative texts from Aotearoa/New Zealand. Coupled with this topic of a sensual corporeality are questions of how the ‘sensuous cracks’ in the novels push the boundaries of literary representation and conventional means of knowledge and insight, how these establish and convey different modes of perception, how the body may radiate different forms of meaning, and how the feeling flesh may be a decisive force in the negotiation of subjectivities and cultural remembering, also by challenging the narrow-minded assumptions of colonialism. This bundle of questions has therefore led me to include Keri Hulme’s The Bone People, Witi Ihimaera’s Nights in the Gardens of Spain and The Uncle’s Story, and James George’s Hummingbird in this study’s literary analysis because they constantly lure the reader to the realm of the senses and of the sensuous perceptions of the flesh, break up the narrative flux by creating spaces of feeling that illustrate the insufficiency of dominant categories of meaning, and establish new postcolonial identities and cultural memories through the epistemologies of the flesh.

Another reason behind this study’s focus stems from the relatively little attention that has been given to literature from Aotearoa/New Zealand in academic debates. Maori writing from New Zealand, alongside indigenous writing from the Pacific or Oceanic region in general, is only sporadically included in the big pool of postcolonial debates and quite often not considered at all. One of the reasons may be New Zealand’s

2005 and 2007, Jolly 2007, and DeLoughrey 2007, to name only a few). However, I have decided to focus on literature from Aotearoa/New Zealand for the reason that an inclusion of further works from the Oceanic region in the analysis section of this study would have been too extensive within its limitations. Moreover, this work remains selective and by no means strives for a representative character.
offsite location on the globe’s map; New Zealand – as well as the Pacific islands – are geographically situated ‘somewhere at the end of the world’ and therefore relatively removed from the ‘action’ (Keown 2005: 9). It seems rather problematic to me that the field of postcolonial studies has, more or less, created a hype around the literatures of a few countries, and most publications engage with writings from those nations while often ignoring the creative outpour of others:

From informal verbal lists of colonised places in the context of lectures, questions and discussions (Africa, South Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and maybe Ireland are the places that get the airplay), to formalised tables of contents, class syllabi, anthologies, collections of essays and conference panels, Maori writing is for the most part ignored on the basis of this double-invisibilisation: the Pacific is seldom mentioned at all. [...] How has one third of the earth’s surface been reduced to a marginal presence in the teaching and publication patterns of Postcolonial Studies? (Somerville 2006: 279).

Given the fact that the globe is most often represented from a western point of view which depicts the Pacific as a huge pool of water somewhere on the bottom of the map, all of the islands in this vast ocean are made to look like “tiny points on the margins, outlying areas to the Americas and to Asia, separated by the literal margins of the page which situate the islands as simultaneously west of the American ‘West’ and east of ‘the East’” (Najita 2006: 1). This geographic marginalisation manifests itself in ironic metaphors that picture the Pacific as a “hole in the doughnut” (Edmond 1997: 1), a ‘hole’ made visible through its rim. However, and no matter how far contemporary literature from Aotearoa/New Zealand is pushed aside in major publications in the field of postcolonial criticism, some of its examples are going to be the centre of interest of this thesis because, as I emphasised before, their outstanding explorations of a cluster of ideas that is here called as written in the flesh justifies a closer look.

Indeed, these five novels are neither meant to represent the whole literary scene from Aotearoa/New Zealand nor are they understood here as to stand in for a field of literature that generally goes by the name ‘Maori literature in English’. In the same way, these texts should only be loosely connected with the term ‘postcolonial’, for the

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9 Alice Te Punga Somerville rightly comments on the problematic nature of the term ‘Maori writing in English’, for it is often taken to encompass all indigenous literature from New Zealand, and implies a firm cultural background and identity, although it may actually refer to a very heterogeneous literary culture (Somerville 2006: 53-4). Though the term may be useful in establishing parallels and a strong group identity, a – at times absurd – discussion of who counts as a Maori writer often goes hand in hand with this category (Somerville 2006: 55-9). I, for my part, prefer the term ‘literature from Aotearoa/New Zealand’ because it suggests a greater flexibility, heterogeneity, and perhaps even fragmentation than the other term. It should also be noted that the term Maori retains a generalising notion and may disguise the fact that Maori culture is characterised by multiple facets, “that within Maori culture there are hundreds of centres; that the word Maori is a recent racial construct; and that there are many tribal nations within Aotearoa, defined by the dynamic politics of genealogy or whakapapa” (Sullivan 2005: 16).
term has been contested in relation to New Zealand literature\(^{10}\) and it may well be argued that they include and explore ideas that may certainly escape postcolonial readings or may not treat the relationship – in a wide sense – between coloniser and colonised, colonialism and postcolonialism.

As implied earlier, postcolonialism seems a productive perspective and reading practice, but it also has to be engaged critically. Despite its ‘Diskurslastigkeit’ mentioned above and its firm establishment in the academia, postcolonialism and postcolonial studies can be said to be far from orbiting around a fixed definition of what the word ‘postcolonial’ actually means. Rather, the concept ‘postcolonial’ has inspired a variety of definitions, thus having, “throughout its history, been a problematic and contested one” (Keown 2007: 23). Its controversial nature encourages heated debates, not least because of the term’s spelling variations between hyphenated and non-hyphenated form. While the hyphenated version has in many cases come to incorporate a historical or chronological outlook to describe discussions of colonialism and gained independence, the non-hyphenated word has been the preferred catchphrase in discussions of the cultural results and aftermath of colonization and has come to be applied to the multiple effects colonialism had or still has on different cultures and the many and various ways those cultures engage with those “after-effects of empire” (Quayson 2000: 2) in literature and other art forms.

In addition to the fact that “postcolonialism designates critical practice that is highly eclectic and difficult to define” (Quayson 2000: 1), there have recently been signs of tiredness if not a certain stagnancy concerning the field and, moreover, a tendency that the term postcolonialism will have to be overcome in the near future. Boehmer, for example, identifies a crucial split in postcolonial criticism between a “cosmopolitan approach […] located largely in the West” (Boehmer 2005: 243) mainly focussing on migrant literature and “a more context-based line of study, still concerned with writing in once-colonial European languages, but more centred on particular vernacular and cultural regions” (243). Yet Boehmer also prophecies a “coming-of-age for postcolonial writing” (Boehmer 2005: 243) and, “[a]s memories of empire (finally) recede into the past, both approaches will in time copiously outgrow the name postcolonial” (243). Apart from the term’s outworn status in general, it has even been

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\(^{10}\) In a former settler colony like New Zealand the term ‘postcolonial’ in its multireferentiality has created heated disputes (Somerville 2006: 263-90). Despite strong objections to it concerning its limitations, postcolonialism as a critical practice with its focus on decolonisation has proved to be a flourishing critical method; yet, it nevertheless contains a bitter taste to it (Somerville 2006: esp. 290).
strongly opposed by some indigenous critics. In the New Zealand context, critic Leonie Pihama, for instance, sees postcolonialism, particularly its hyphenated form, as a highly questionable concept, for it seems to echo and reinforce colonial structures in a different guise: “How can we possibly refer to Aotearoa as ‘post-colonial’ when every aspect of our lives is touched and imposed upon by the colonisers? […] The interests served are again those of the colonisers and, in particular, of those Pākehā academics who draw upon these frameworks to maintain their own position in the academy, and more widely in this country” (Pihama 1997: 9).

Despite signs of exhaustion, postcolonialism has also experienced a certain degree of reinvention in recent years – “diverse and mobile, alive to new configurations and reroutings of knowledge” (Wilson, Şandru and Welsh 2010: 11) – due to new interdisciplinary approaches and fields of inquiry such as globalism (Loomba et al. 2005), ecocriticism (Huggan and Tiffin 2010), transculturalism (Davis et al. 2004), comparative frameworks (Allen 2002 and 2007), and sexual identities (Hawley 2001), to name a few. The aftermath of colonialism still haunts Aotearoa/New Zealand and Oceania and the end of processes of decolonisation is perhaps far from having been achieved. Rob Wilson, for instance, in the case of Hawaii, points to the still visible effects of colonialism on present realities, their prevailing forms and stereotypical modes strongly smacking of colonial discourse:

Even as the political space of contemporary Hawaii, like Maori New Zealand, undergoes a renewed struggle for indigenous sovereignty and the recovery of lands […], the influx of some six million tourists per year creates a porous space on Oahu […]. This indigenous Pacific is deformed and troped, on a daily basis of mass-tourist banalization, into “lovely hula hands” beckoning the transnational tourist with exotic/erotic redemption from the cyborg labor of late capitalist everyday life. (Wilson and Dissanayake 1996: 7)

This New Pacific of postcolonial/postmodern transformation threatens to remain […] a strategic and commercial space where European, American, and Asian desires – to use these tourist sites for pleasure zones, for journeys of regression and redemption, for phallic bodily bliss, for temporary release into excess and leisure, for landscapes of Edenic wilderness and ecological purity – are still being played out at the expense of a globally worked-over and troped-upon native culture. (Rob Wilson 1998: 10)

Indigenous writers from New Zealand and the Pacific islands, therefore, continue to engage with the consequences of the omnipresent colonial power system which still throws manifold shadows on people and their lives. Albert Wendt, for example, makes this point – that indigenous people still feel the presence of colonialism, even though it officially ended and has been replaced – very clear: “I am Samoan yet a product of the process of colonialism. Or, should I say, like Pacific people
born after the first Papalagi arrived in our countries, I have undergone the process of colonialism (and am still trying to survive it)” (Wendt 1990: 63). Many indigenous writers from New Zealand and Oceania, thus, confront colonialism and its after effects head-on and negotiate questions surrounding and arising from it, yet this is surely not be their only objective. Witi Ihimaera perceives New Zealand identity as a conglomerate of many faces and facets, but reality is still marked by signs of marginalisation for Maori. According to Ihimaera, the struggle for empowerment goes hand in hand with growing complexity and diversification:

To me, living in Auckland, we still look overwhelmingly Pakeha, but it is a Pakeha who bops to the beat of the Pacific. […] But now comes the long dark tea-time of the South. It would be all too easy to establish multiculturalism in New Zealand […]. But just as in Australia, it would happen here at the expense of the indigenous people. Tough, folks, but what must ultimately be engaged, in any discussion of New Zealand’s Pacific destiny is why we have not fully recognised the Maori as tangata whenua and acknowledged that New Zealand has always had a Pacific identity by virtue of its Maori ancestry. You and I must bite on the bullet. And that bullet is called the Treaty of Waitangi. (Ihimaera 1991: 140-1)

Identities have become increasingly multifaceted in recent years and can no longer be captured by the bicultural Maori/Pakeha model. The multi-faceted realities of New Zealand society are further complemented by a growing diversity inside Maori culture. Maori writers thus still express a need to fight marginalisation and the oppressive influences and aftermaths of (neo)colonialism: “[V]ery much aware of their marginal position within New Zealand society, the Maori people still need to take an active part in the preservation of their culture even in the new millennium. […] The recurring theme of Pakeha supremacy even in novels from the twenty-first century attests to the difficulty of debunking enduring grand narratives” (Majid 2010: 84). However, with time new fights and possibilities have arisen and “there is an awareness of problems and required changes. Moreover, Maori now begin to see themselves in a global context, which leads to an expanding range of themes going beyond the confines of the Maori community” (Majid 2010: 201).

So, I don’t want to shut the door to postcolonialism, as well as its poststructuralist influences for that matter, but it is not the aim of this study to further explore their respective theoretical fields. Postcolonialism and poststructuralism therefore remain a formative and influential methodological frame for this study, but my focus on the flesh as a sensuous and feeling entity and medium of cultural memory and

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11 Others have done so in length. As the critical debate is extensive, may it suffice – in the field of postcolonialism – to refer to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2002, Boehmer 2005, Loomba 2005 and – in the field of poststructuralism – to Poster 1991, Bossinade 2000 and Davis 2004.
identity requires a step to the side of, roughly put, phenomenological criticism. If Jacques Derrida and Homi Bhabha are right in suggesting a referential omnipresence of the text respective representation and the construction of subjectivity and identity through the medium of language, then Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Michel Foucault or Richard Shusterman, for instance, make an equally valid point when they emphasise the constructive nature of bodily feeling and the nondiscursive production of insightful knowledge through sensuous phenomena.

My theoretical chapter, then, attempts to take a closer look at theoretical approaches towards the idea of the flesh as a crucial medium of feeling in order to outline tools for the literary analysis of the flesh and its negotiation of cultural identity and memory. The approaches of neo-pragmatist philosophy and its “attention to the body and its nonverbal messages” (Shusterman 1997: 176) and the ‘affective turn’ offer promising ideas for the literary study of the inscribed, sensuous, feeling flesh as it is explored in the narratives. These approaches are of course firmly rooted in western theory and critical practice, so that my consideration of them as well as my own European stance may inevitably invite the label “white-on-black” (Knudsen 2004: xi) for this project. The history of colonialism in the Pacific also contains a chapter of the German imperialist presence as well as commercial and colonial encroachment that started in the late 19th century and extended to Samoa, New Guinea and the Marshall Islands among others. In a similar sense, postcolonial studies may, of course, be “viewed as the convenient invention of Western intellectuals which reinscribes their power to define the world” (Smith 1999: 14).

In addition, the terms ‘body’ and ‘flesh’ are, however, not innocent denominations; they have been made to serve a variety of contexts and purposes and are particularly coated in Western frameworks – especially Cartesian traditions of thought have privileged mind over body which “resulted […] in condemning rather than celebrating the body as medium” (Shusterman 2008: 4). Such a crude distinction between body and mind and the privileging of the latter have also found their way into colonial discourse and its production of stereotypes. The prevailing subject-object hierarchisation of colonialism also influenced the subjection and oppression of ‘native’ bodies by the light of reason carried by the colonising power: “[I]n keeping with the 18th century Enlightenment mindset, the Europeans generally assumed, without question, subject status, while Maori, along with the components of their physical environment, were represented as objects to be described fully and accurately in
keeping with the *Endeavour’s* scientific mission* (Rountree 1998: 35). Maori “were not
deemed equal partners in a cross-cultural encounter; they were seen primarily as
specimens of scientific interest to the observers aboard Cook’s floating laboratory”
(Rountree 1998: 35-6).12 Perhaps not surprisingly, 20th/21st century cultural and
philosophical works and recent postcolonial writing have attempted to reclaim the body
from its rather passive and object-like instrumentality and restore it in terms of a more
active entity in the negotiation of questions of self, identity and individual experience.
At this point, some western and indigenous ideas of the body converge as binary
constructs – such as the mind-body-divide or racist stereotyping of sensuous perception
– cannot account for the complex and elaborate cultural conceptions of the body in
history and in contemporary societies and have to be overcome (Howes 2003: 46).

But despite the understandable and legitimate nature of these reproaches, the
complex nature of literature from Aotearoa/New Zealand has to be acknowledged as
well, for “[c]omning from very different cultural contexts themselves, writers emphasize
the need for a lively heterogeneity of styles and speaking positions in their work”
(Behmer 2005: 219). Maori writers draw from a variety of sources and cultures and the
European or western impact brought along by colonisation inevitably shapes the
cultures they live in. The cultural framework of the novels is therefore at least a double
one, and the works examined here display an affirmation of interaction, cultural
transformation and change.13 In this respect, Witi Ihimaera has pointed to the double
frame: “I think I am already a modern Ulysses – though I prefer a comparison with a
hero from my own history, like Maui – trying to locate or fix a Māori destination for all
Māori who negotiate their lives through the postcolonial constructs of a universal reality
and a hybridized world” (Meklin and Meklin 2004: 362). This may seem a relatively

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12 Western religious frameworks are for instance marked by a disapproval or abjection of the body as such
which also surfaces in missionaries’ accounts of Maori tattooing art (Nikora, Rua, and Te Awekotuku
2005: 192-4). Howes thus points to the fact that we have to divest criticism of “the long-standing
philosophical conceit that associated Europeans with the mind and reason while identifying non-
Europeans with the body and the senses. […] In fact, in the very act of measuring the body parts and
registering the sensory acuity of ‘primitive’ peoples, anthropologists were constituting themselves as
rational Europeans and their subjects as sensuous savages. The Europeans had a monopoly over the
scientific tools for measuring, testing, and recording, while their subjects often had (or at least were
expected to present) only their immediate corporeal being” (Howes 2003: 4). This dichotomy of reason
and body has also been perpetuated by the western notion of the museum: “Within the museum’s empire
of sight, objects are colonized by the gaze” (Classen and Howes 2006: 200). David Howes contradicts the
polarisation of mind versus body vehemently: “This is non-sense. For many societies outside the West
tasting and smelling are ways of knowing” (Howes 2005a: 6).

13 Following Chinua Achebe, Nadia Majid suggests that “[i]f we refused Maori literature the chance to be
studied in view of these standards, we would either take the very colonial stance of regarding this
literature as inferior to the vast majority of Western fiction that is not suited to be analysed with the same
tools, or it would suppose that Maori literature is so vastly different from any other that it is utterly
impossible to interpret it with the knowledge we have” (Majid 2010: 11).
poor justification, yet I believe that the theoretical approaches to the flesh that will be discussed in the first chapter introduce some interesting and valuable aspects that might fuel the discussion from a quite controversial perspective, but can nevertheless make us rethink the current ideas we juggle within the academy and take them further to new directions. However, Maori concepts of the body are just as crucial and significant to this discussion and have to be equally considered – if not even more so. One tool for literary analysis and the overarching concept that is also taken up in the title *As Written in the Flesh* stems from the indigenous cultural framework. Moko/tatau/tattoo\(^\text{14}\) captures the complex relations of flesh, inscription, feeling, sensuousness, cultural identity and memory and offers an interesting model for the interpretation of the novels introduced here. Actually, only James George’s *Hummingbird* explicitly evokes references to Maori tattooing practice while the other novels refer to tattooing only implicitly. However, it provides an exciting concept which forges links between the sensuous inscription of the flesh and resulting questions of subjectivity, identity and cultural remembering.

Again, a passage from Albert Wendt’s *The Mango’s Kiss* illustrates this thematic trajectory further. When papalagi trader Barker has his skin tattooed, his white skin now engraved and marked by the patterns of Samoan tatau, the “uniform of courage” (*TMK* 131) that “shone brightly against his pale skin” (129), is turned into an expression of identity. Barker becomes a papalagi who “doesn’t want to be a papalagi any more” (*TMK* 130), “a tattooed savage who isn’t a palagi or Samoan or aristocrat” (130) and who turns the categories of identity in the small Samoan village upside down. By having his skin tattooed, Barker unearths elements of a past Samoan identity that are considered pagan by some very religious people in the village. Pele’s mother considers him “the perpetually questioning darkness in the life of her aiga. Barker was a pagan, a white demon, from the pagan past of England, and now […] an aitu out of the time of Darkness before the Light, clothed in the most pagan of clothes, the tatau” (*TMK* 125).

The inscription of the flesh here works as a visible assertion and sign of identity and criticism of some facets of colonial and missionary influence since Barker “didn’t wear papalagi clothes any more, he lived in the fale instead of the store, he went everywhere

\(^{14}\) The word tattoo derives from the expression tatau that can be found in several Pacific languages, for example, Tahitian or Samoan, and that onomatopoeically captures its meaning ‘to strike’ referring to traditional practice. The cutting or striking of the flesh is also crystallised in the Maori compound tamao. Albert Wendt has compiled a short lexicon on the rich connotations of tatau (*Wendt 1996*: 17-8). “[T]he art was cut into the flesh” (*Te Awekotuku et al.* 2007: 14) by tattooing chisels; the pattern of wounds was then filled with ink and struck again so that the colour remained in the flesh (see also *Te Awekotuku et al.* 2007: esp. 10-39).
barefoot and spoke Samoan most of the time” (TMK 129) and removes himself from “European ‘civilisation’” (132) as he terms it. Barker, though, begins to realise that cultures and stories have already started to intersect in Samoa. He is hardly able to remove himself from this process of cultural sedimentation or amalgamation. Indeed, Barker is also implicated in this economy of sedimentation since he introduces many books and stories from European writers (TMK 27-32) that “Peleiupu would, in years to come, retell like a fagogo to generations of her descendants” (28).

It is Pele, however, who notes that Barker’s skin extends beyond itself through the inscribed signs of his “black tatau, which was barely visible under the lines of sores and scabs caused by the serrated edge of the chisel puncturing the skin” (TMK 122). She is spellbound by the enhanced and tangible texture of Barker’s cut and scarred skin as reflected by her vision of the patterns set apart and travelling from his skin: “Peleiupu imagined that his loud happiness was the bird motifs on his yet unfinished tatau detaching themselves from his skin and scattering, in a humming clatter, through the vegetation up to the mountains and across the seas to England and Barker’s castle, where they would tell his family that their lord was converting himself into a tattooed pagan and enjoying the magnificent pain of it” (TMK 123). Juniper Ellis thus points to the material and corporeal dimension of tattoo, for, “at once more than skin deep and marking the skin as a surface, the patterns remain both inside and outside the body” (Ellis 2008: 37). Albert Wendt not only probes into the visible and textual declaration of identity, but also explores the sensuous qualities triggered by the inscription of the flesh. The tatauing process that lasts several weeks lets Barker experience “stinging pain” (TMK 127) and saps his strength so that he becomes “almost a skeleton: a ragged, dehydrated bundle of flesh and skin wrapped around a brittle frame of sticks” (127). The painful procedure, however, marks a personal transformation for Barker – not simply from unmarked to tattooed. Barker seems to have metamorphosed into a different man who accepts responsibility for his family: “Peleiupu glanced at her father. His eyes were brimming with tears. This was the first time they had seen Barker showing any real affection, in public, for his children” (TMK 129). A similar relationship between cultural inscription and the body as a feeling, sensuous entity can also be detected in the four novels examined here.

Even more than 25 years after its publication, Keri Hulme’s The Bone People proves to be a continuing source of complex questions on identity, culture, society and so on. It is extremely interesting for my topic because it constantly confronts the reader
with the characters’ extremely painful experiences and physical transgressions. Throughout the narrative Kerewin, Joe and Simon suffer from an immense amount of pain, both physical and mental, caused by harsh beatings, violent mutilations and agonising experiences on the verge of death; the text thus includes many ruptures of violence and anguish that often break off the narrative and remain silent and elliptic. Skin and bones negotiate the constant struggle between (incommunicable) pain, healing, (dis)harmony and (dis)affection and pave the way for new meanings and a process of redefinition of identity and cultural memory. The human body, then, works as a mode of shattering prior definitions, and initiates and reconfigures a process of cultural resuscitation and a new vision of community.

Witi Ihimaera’s *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* and *The Uncle’s Story* confront the reader with the tension of two colliding worlds: the novels explore the identities of two gay men in their respective homophobic societies. *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* traces the double life of David, a gay Pakeha man, who eventually ‘grows up’ and ties together his identities as a father and a homosexual man, moving on from heterosexual marriage and anonymous sex with other men in the underground world of steam parlours. *The Uncle’s Story*, in turn, follows the struggle of Michael, a Maori man, who rediscovers his uncle’s story and confronts the hostility of Maori culture towards homosexuality by transforming central principles of Maori culture such as genealogy from a gay perspective. Located in an oppressive economy of shame (*Nights*) and fear (*The Uncle’s Story*), the characters unmask the homophobic mechanisms of feeling and the ‘norms’ of a society that hasn’t quite opened up for differing male identities. The fictions, however, explore the dynamic possibilities and active agency that result from the affective investment in shame and fear. *Nights* counters the oppressive inflictions of shame with the playful game of shame, shamelessness, steam, vision and touch inside The Steam Parlour and paves the way for David’s fulfilling gay identity. *The Uncle’s Story* defies the paralysing permeations of fear and its re-articulation from a gay Maori perspective in favour of agency and the affective range of aroha (love, empathy, concern). Witi Ihimaera therefore not only explores the sensuous spaces of gay identity; he also complicates the postcolonial because *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* challenges the common assumption that a Maori author mainly writes about Maori issues, and *The Uncle’s Story* attempts to solve the divide between two marginalised, yet conflicting groups, namely Maori and gay men.
James George creates a world full of sensual impulses and perceptions in his novel *Hummingbird*. Incorporating a multitude of sensuous images that range from the textures of land and sea to the human body, the narrative constructs a fine-meshed net resembling ta moko, the tattooing practice rooted in Maori culture. Just as the senses are explored as a medium of constructing patterns written in the body of the landscape – ocean, sand, sky – the sensorium of the human body is mapped, leading to a convergence of body, place, and an overall ornamentation that permeates every aspect of the narrative. The patterns of moko are therefore written in skin, earth, sky and water and come alive with feeling. The mapping or tattooing of place is intertwined with the mapping of the senses so that via the juxtaposition of the two James George creates an overall design pervaded by the motifs of Maori cosmology in order to inscribe and continue cultural identity and memory. Body and place mount to ‘sensescapes’ or sensual maps that record the bodies of the characters and the environments they inhabit in texture, sound, smell and taste and activate feeling as a formative medium of cultural survival and identity.

There are, Foucault rightly suggested, “many different ways of speaking” (Foucault 1996: 371) and also “many forms of silence” (371). Feeling may therefore engender, negotiate and convey potential meaning and new visions because the human body is highly communicative and affecting. It is therefore enthralling to ask how the body mediates questions of cultural identity and memory and in what ways the textual process of culturally shaping and inscribing the body opens the focus towards the somatic dimension of the flesh, its sensual perceptions and probably even “nondiscursive aspects” (Shusterman 1997: 13). How do the texts encode their messages and negotiate cultural identity and memory via sensuous contexts? And to what extent do they inundate the reader with feelings? These are some of the core questions I would like to address in the course of this study.
Chapter 1
As Written in the Flesh

1.1 Towards Sensuous Inscription

Envisioning the "Post-Colonial Body" (Wendt 1996: 15), Albert Wendt conceives of the human body as a naked outline which needs shaping – "clothing" (15) – through signs of inscription. To define the postcolonial body, he imagines a union of flesh and tatau, skin and signs, body and text:

[We can also see tatauing and its history and development as an analogue of post-colonial literature. The art of tatauing – or, more correctly, the way-of-life that is tatauing – had to survive the onslaught of missionary condemnation and colonialism. The act of tatauing a tatau (a full male body tattoo) or a malu (a full female body tattoo) on the Post Colonial Body gives it shape, form, identity, symmetry, puts it through the pain to be endured to prepare for life; and recognises its growing maturity and ability to serve the community. (Wendt 1996: 16-7)

The body and language become entwined in an act of clothing a naked shape. Just like black letters structure the white pages of a book – "a black human outline on blank white paper" (Wendt 1996: 17) – the flesh of imagined bodies is inscribed by the sign language of tatau in postcolonial literature in a "celebration of identity, of whakapapa – kinship, belonging" (Nikora, Rua and Te Awekotuku 2005: 194). Similar to Wendt’s concept of tatauing the postcolonial body in literature, Maori tattooing traditions have found their way into fictional texts as a means of transforming and inscribing the body with specific forms of cultural identity:15 “When the face is patterned, and, in this case, permanently patterned with traditional marks of Aotearoa, the wearer and their newly acquired ‘face’ is transformed from one identity to another. The transition is instantaneous. They are a new person [...] as they transformed from being unmarked to marked” (Nikora, Rua and Te Awekotuku 2005: 197). In this sense, tatauing the postcolonial body in literature may not only be seen as an attempt to keep the past alive in the present with “a body coming out of the Pacific” (Wendt 1996: 26), but also as an attempt to foster a utopian vision of the future, “a blend, a new development, which I consider to be in heart, spirit, and muscle, Pacific” (26): “In this world, today, wahine mau kauae, tangata mau moko, pukanohi – wearers – [...] insist

15 “[T]he tattooed ‘Polynesian’ body therefore functions as a testament to the resilience of Polynesian peoples, who have maintained a sense of continuity between past and present in spite of their various experiences of the allied forces of colonialism and global capitalism” (Keown 2005: 193). See also Keown 2005: 14, Keown 2007: 102, and Ellis 2008: 34-51.
that the decision to take the marking is about continuity, affirmation, identity and commitment. It is also about wearing those ancestors, carrying them into the future” (Nikora, Rua and Te Awekotuku 2005: 203), about merging cultural memory and present realities.

The issue nevertheless presents itself far more complex than this signifying or defining process of a blank outline might suggest at first glance. In contrast to the printed page, the visualised body is not merely enveloped in a garment of signs spread on its flesh like regular shirts and trousers. Rather, what Wendt seems to suggest is not so much an on-top-of-each-other, but an interlocking into-each-other – a text written in the living, experiencing, hurting flesh of a human body, a body that is paradoxically created through the text. Wendt’s semantic implications of “blood letting” (Wendt 1996: 24), “physical pain” (16) and “heart, spirit, and muscle” (26) also indicate that the tatooing process and the finished second skin or “clothing” (16) prompt and translate the sensuousness and feelings related to the flesh and their significance in the expression of cultural identity, belonging, remembering and acknowledging the past. The tatooed code presents itself to the onlooker as a second skin covering the body, but it is also deeply cut into the flesh and etched into the membrane. Its character therefore transcends any purely linguistic aspects of a text on the body because the tatoo’s textual qualities are closely connected to feeling, for instance in the sense that a tatoo is applied on the body through the wounding of its skin and flesh. Instead of “asserting the body’s total discursivity” (Shusterman 1997: 13) by focussing on its surface inscriptions, Wendt’s theory of the post-colonial body seems to combine both its discursive elements and sensuous involvement – that may touch upon a “notion of nondiscursive somatic experience” (13), too – through the inclusion of hurting, pain, and agony, but also a sense of belonging, love, pride and beauty – all aspects which can be found in various forms in the examples of literature from Aotearoa/New Zealand that will be discussed in the following.

The process of identity formation and cultural belonging that comes with “carving flesh” (Te Awekotuku et al. 2007: 30) and the relief-like textu(r)alisation of the flesh by “opening the skin, for the inlaying of colour” (50) accentuating the scars also points to the dissolution of polarities and dualistic notions that we witness in current theory. The skin as textured and textual creation is posited in-between; it mediates between inside and outside, subjectivity and objectivisation. Postcolonial theory has often been criticised for its inability to escape the “dualistic trap” (Sedgwick
2003: 2). Even though “[t]he term ‘post-colonial’ is resonant with all the ambiguity and
complexity of the many different cultural experiences it implicates” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and
Tiffin 2006: 1) and has been enriched with devoted attention to the multiple
intersections with other disciplines in recent years, its focus on “a continuing process of
resistance and reconstruction” (2; my emphasis) as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and
Helen Tiffin maintain builds a central assumption of postcolonial theory that may invite
“binary modes of thinking” (Sedgwick 2003: 2) to a certain extent: “[N]eat and
conveniently unified conceptions of what is deemed ‘postcolonial’ – such as the anti-
colonial centre/peripheries binary – often fail to account for the very intellectual
energies that have so far kept the field dynamic and responsive to change” (Wilson,
Şandru and Welsh 2010: 3).

The creation and negotiation of identity and cultural memory through “te
whakairo tangata – the art of carving people” (Te Awekotukatu et al. 2007: 18) and
accordingly through the medium of the human body can be seen as part of a vibrant
field of tension in which the body moves centre stage, yet not only as a site of passive
inscription, but as a site of negotiation and active agency that also translates the
sensuous impulses and effects of such inscription. The body, or perhaps most visibly the
skin, becomes a site in-between, a “third term” (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 115) that links the
possibilities of permeability, perforation and performance. Cutting or tattooing the skin
in order to create (scar) patterns initiates metamorphosis and change. Just as much as
the flesh is inscribed with specific cultural codes, the “assertion of beauty, confidence,
belonging and identity” (Te Awekotukatu et al. 2007: 72) is coupled with sensuousness
that extends from the mastering of pain to the textured result and moves to and fro from
the coded surface signs chiselled into the skin to active performances of identity. The
flesh thus becomes the pivotal – and sensuous – point of transition, a threshold from
unmarked to tattooed, from inside to outside (and vice versa), from individual self to
community: “Transforming the body, transforming the face, was primarily about
pleasing one’s self, and then pleasing others. And that pleasure, intrinsically, was about
pride” (Te Awekotukatu et al. 2007: 90). Maori tattooing practices have come to express
resistance against dominant culture from the position of a minority and assert a relation
of cultural identity and the body of the wearer. Excruciating pain, however, is a central
element of this visible affirmation of identity that, combined with the adornments cut
into the skin, results in an aesthetic ritual of metamorphosis. Transformation is thus
achieved by a painful, even traumatic, and highly affective, sensuous register: “Riding
the waves of hurt, moving beyond the pain, was integral to the process; moko could not happen without trauma. Beauty was paid for in blood” (Te Awekotuku et al. 2007: 39). Just as much as moko is about the invention and assertion of the self “[r]eclaiming control by transforming one’s body, and gaining a new sense of personal power” (Te Awekotuku et al. 2007: 98-9), the self extends beyond through the texturalisation of the flesh: “As well as communing with nature, it is also a strong and forceful way of communing with people; asserting a relationship with the world, with society” (150). Far from being only an ‘object’ inscribed, the flesh is seen as a living, sensuous creation and agent. Moko and tattoo practices therefore inherit a “sensitivity to the medium of living flesh” (Te Awekotuku et al. 2007: 126) that can hardly be captured by binary constructions such as mind versus body as it exceeds such polarisations through its transitional and ample range of possibilities and resonances.

To a large extent, postcolonial criticism has focused on the analysis and critique of colonial discourse, on the writing machine(s) of Empire(s) and the process of rewriting or writing back to them as it is asserted by the combative title of one of the well-known publications in the field, The Empire Writes Back. The textualist project has thus offered flourishing tools for the deconstruction of colonialism, the undermining of dominant structures of meaning and the articulation of postcolonial realities. Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson, for instance, point out that “[i]mperial relations may have been established initially by guns, guile and disease, but they were maintained in their interpellative phase largely by textuality” (Tiffin and Lawson 1994: 3): “Colonialism (like its counterpart, racism), then, is an operation of discourse, and as an operation of discourse it interpellates colonial subjects by incorporating them in a system of representation” (3). Their hypothesis leads them to define the postcolonial project as clearly focused on matters of power as it was and is exercised and maintained through language, and on textual resistance:

Just as fire can be fought with fire, textual control can be fought with textuality. [...] The postcolonial is especially and pressingly concerned with the power that resides in discourse and textuality; its resistance, then, quite appropriately takes place in – and from – the domain of textuality, in (among other things) motivated acts of reading. The contestation of postcolonialism is a contest of representation. (Tiffin and Lawson 1994: 10)

16 In contrast to the “[b]lack whorls of synthetic ink inflicted by buzzing metal into the anaesthetized skin of a modern youth” (Mason 2001: 114), poet Jane Tekura Mason celebrates the sensuous infliction of the “painful session” (Wendt 1996: 25) of tatauing and the “intuitive ritual language” (Mason 2001: 114) of the “peaks and curves” (1) sliced into the flesh.
A similar point is made by the authors of *The Empire Writes Back*. “One of the main features of imperial oppression is control over language. [...] Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of ‘truth’, ‘order’, and ‘reality’ become established. Such power”, as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin convincingly maintain, “is rejected in the emergence of an effective post-colonial voice. For this reason, the discussion of post-colonial writing [...] is largely a discussion of the process by which the language, with its power, and the writing, with its signification of authority, has been wrested from the dominant European culture” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2002: 7).  

Yet it might also be argued that through the critical objective of shattering rigid traditions of thought, of rethinking conventions of writing and reading, and the preoccupation with language the academic concept(s) of postcolonialism – although associated with values of resistance and pluralism – may appear obscurely discursive and opaque in its struggle over discursive matters and to be the cause of a certain fatigue:

[C]ultural representations were central first to the process of colonizing other lands, and then again to the process of obtaining independence from the colonizer. To assume control over a territory or a nation was not only to exert political or economic power; it was also to have imaginative command. [...] However, because of an overriding preoccupation with textual resistance, these practices [postcolonial critical discourse] often produce a densely discursive, even (possibly strategically) recondite commentary that, although insightful, can be highly abstract and generalizing in its effect. (Boehmer 2005: 5-6)

However, recent years have seen a shift in emphasis from the somewhat abstract theoretical freight of discourse towards more concrete and tangible analyses as Susan Najita suggests: “Contemporary literary theory has for some time focused on the constitutive effect of language, how it produces the effect of transparency, constitutes knowledge through discourse, and shapes power and desire. It has only recently begun to produce alternative praxes which transform institutional structures of knowing” (Najita 2006: 23-4). Particularly recent approaches of literary, cultural and philosophical

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17 Poststructuralism proved to be highly significant for postcolonialism because its methodological outline helped to deconstruct the well-trodden paths and modes of western thinking and culture and to engender different readings of literary texts: “It was as a method of cultural analysis and as a mode of reading that poststructuralism became central to the postcolonial project. Indeed, it is when we view it as a method of reading – a deconstructive method – that poststructuralism reaches a point of conjuncture with postcolonial discourse” (Gikandi 2004: 113). The nucleus of the affinity between postcolonialism and poststructuralism, thus, comes to light, for example, in close relations between suggestions such as “[t]here is nothing outside of the text” (Derrida 1997: 158) and “[t]here is no knowledge – political or otherwise – outside representation. It is to suggest that the dynamics of writing and textuality require us to rethink the logics of causality and determinacy” (Bhabha 2008: 33-4). For further intersections see Gikandi 2004 and, for instance, Racevskis 2005, Boehmer 2005: 215ff, and also Bhabha 2008.
studies diverge from the principles of the so-called “linguistic turn” (Rorty 1992: 9) and the concern of “the enlightened contemporary philosophical scene with words” (Rorty 1979: 263) and look for alternative registers. In response to Richard Rorty who advocated the idea of ‘turns’ in criticism, critics such as David Howes have initiated a “sensual turn” (Howes 2003: xii) directed “against the incorporeality of conventional academic writing” (xii), “the hegemony of vision in Western culture” (45) and the general neglect or underrepresentation of sensuous experience, while other recent works are rooted in “a turn to affect” (Clough 2010: 206) that can also be traced in recent postcolonial debates (O’Riley 2007, Nayar 2009). These approaches open up fascinating aspects of the body as an agent and medium in the quest for cultural identity and memory.

My argument therefore aims at an exploration of the concrete investment of the novels in the feeling and sensuous dimension of the body, its negotiation of ways of knowing, identity and memory, and in their respective creation of a language of the flesh. The spectrum of interacting, mediating, conflicting, paradoxical relations surrounding the trajectory of the language of the flesh and the literary creation of the flesh encourages me particularly. I am, however, not interested in scouring the novels discussed here for their investment in each and every affect or the schema of the five senses. Rather, my theoretical register attempts to lay the foundation for the analysis of the narratives which seeks to illuminate their manifold sensuous and emotional dimensions. Without losing sight of the fact that the body appears permeable to forms of discursive or cultural inscription and therefore somewhat passive in its engagement with the world, I would like to shift the emphasis to the body as an feeling and living agent in the exploration of cultural memory and identity. The permeability of the body as reflected by the possibility of inscribing, hurting, lacerating the skin is thus coupled with a range of textural, sensuous, affective details that present the body not merely as a foil to projection, but also as a medium of active potential and dynamic energies and thus as the vibrant spectrum for the articulation and negotiation of indigenous perspectives.

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18 The five-senses-schema – alongside the dominance of the visual structuring of the world through the “empire of sight” (Classen and Howes 2006: 200) – has also been countered and amplified by more flexible approaches to sensory perception that take into account various other ways of sensuousness. In his introductory remarks to The Sixth Sense Reader David Howes thus points to the importance of “open[ing] up the boundaries of conventional perceptual paradigms to new possibilities of perception” (Howes 2009: 36).
The “idea of inscription” (Nast and Pile 1998: 13) of the body, of encoding it graphically by “[w]riting cultural codes onto the bodies” (12), assimilates and emphasises the intersections of body, culture, power, and identity. Michel Foucault therefore located the body as a site of inscription in its specific cultural and historical circumstances and suggested that “[t]he body – and everything that touches it […] – is the domain of the Herkunft. The body manifests the stigmata of past experience and also gives rise to desires, failings, and errors” (Foucault 1998: 375); power structures and memories are so engraved “on things and even within bodies” (377). Not an untouchable, isolated form, but subject to power, language and history, for instance, “[t]he body is the surface of the inscription of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas)” (Foucault 1998: 375) and so “totally imprinted by history” (376) or “always already written” (Tiffin and Lawson 1994: 3). A certain – not entirely unproblematic – paradox is already at work here because these specific circumstances Foucault mentions appear only graspable through their textual mediations.

Foucault’s ideas have been put to fruitful use in literary and postcolonial studies as starting points for more concrete analyses of the subjection of the human body to mechanisms and systems of power. The body is therefore not seen as a “neutral screen, a biological or cultural tabula rasa” (Kwast-Greff 2002: 15), but as a space that is shaped and written on – imprinted visibly “with a culturally specific graphic code” (Keown 2005: 191) to create “a visual assertion of cultural identity” (191) through the literary text. In this respect, the body has been viewed as a site (real and/or textual) of the exertion of colonial power, as a metaphor of the pain (physical and mental) suffered from the suppression under colonial rule, and as a space of coming to terms with that pain, of reinscribing and reinventing cultural identity. Seen in this light, the body in literature becomes the site or representation of a critique of the mechanisms of colonial discourse, a representation of “the subjection of the colonial body to discipline” (Rao and Pierce 2006: 12). “The visceral, embodied experiences of domination and control – the immediate manifestation of colonial corporeality – were”, as has been pointed out, “an integral part of governmental practices of codifying, categorizing, and racializing difference. […] The body of the colonized became a critical locus through which ideologies of racial and cultural difference were enacted. […] Corporeal technologies inscribed difference on the body of an emergent other” (Rao and Pierce 2006: 5). In a

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19 Colonial authority, for instance, not only wrote their victims “into the textual world beyond them” (Nakata 2007: 129), but their “bodies were also regulated and disciplined by an array of bureaucratic, regulatory and discursive mechanisms associated with government, church and commercial interests
similar manner, the body is understood as a literary representation of a process of cultural counter-inscription; “violated bodies” (Rao and Pierce 2006: 21) are reclaimed and reimagined. The body is therefore valorised as a medium of articulation of the corporeal manifestations of postcolonial experience. Bodies, as Nast and Pile observe, are hence “woven into many layers of signification, through projection of images onto seemingly blank surfaces, onto the unwritten surfaces of the skin; through the writing of meanings onto bodies […]. The body is told, and acted out, through the stories that are folded into it. […] However, the body itself speaks its own language – and never remains silent for long” (Nast and Pile 1998: 12). The general notion of the body as it is explored in narrative is thus a textual one. But do readings of the body always have to come to this conclusion? May we not also ask the question about the sensuousness of the engraving of the flesh? Isn’t it also possible that the body leaves room for something else than the general view of it as a textual or graphic signifier, for even if “[b]ody and language are intricately linked” (Kwast-Greff 2002: 16), may the body not also be read along the lines of “the relation between the flesh and the text” (Baldwin, Fowler and Weller 2007: 11) and the flesh as a feeling, sensuous dimension in the construction and articulation of cultural identities and memories and not just as a site or object of projection? Aside from the role of the body as culturally/textually scripted, isn’t the body involved actively in the negotiation of cultural identity and memory, for “[t]he body is the vehicle of being in the world” (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 94) and the positive and instrumental location of our existence and grasping the world.

which was premised on and circumscribed by particular ways of thinking about ‘natives’” (129). In literature, as in reality and history, bodies – scarred, disfigured, dismembered – carry the “discursive and material imprints of earlier times” (Nakata 2007: 132) enacted upon them and point to the cruelties of the colonial regime. 20 Also, “[d]istorted bodies become symbols of a world that is being conquered, of rules breached and observed” (Kwast-Greff 2002: 25), and – through the inscription of a different set of codes – bodies come to symbolise the living outline of culturally specific tradition and identity. They become the textual expression of the assertion of cultural identity and transformation. Thus, in fictional texts, the body – like a book – doesn’t remain a blank surface, but appears as a culturally specific site or space that is coupled with the agenda of cultural recreation or transformation articulated in fiction: “The textualized body is therefore a metaphor […] susceptible to transmit a meaning inscribed in the marks and scars of the body itself, in the signs and inscriptions of the text” (Kwast-Greff 2002: 16).

21 Merleau-Ponty’s critique particularly aimed at philosophical traditions that neglected the body in favour of the analytical capacities of the disembodied mind. He argued that by the privileging of ratio over body in scientific traditions the “[c]onsciousness of the body, and the soul, are thus repressed” (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 87). In this wave of dualist thinking marked by a conception of the flesh as passively receptive and “a decay of sensitivity” (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 85), “[t]he body becomes the highly polished machine” (87) subordinate to rationalization. He attempted to recover, in “un-Cartesian terms” (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 89), the “modalities of a pre-objective view which is what we call being-in-the-world” (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 92). Merleau-Ponty’s existential philosophy eventually breaks with the conventional notion of the body’s subjection to the superiority of reason and places emphasis on meaningful experience located in perception, on “concrete being” (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 101) and the
A closer look at some passages from James George’s *Ocean Roads* (2006) certainly illuminates this set of questions. In the novel, Troy watches Akiko, a Nagasaki survivor and professional dancer, lose herself in movement, in dance. The physical experience of dance dissolves everything around her. It is an immediate reality or instantaneous moment during which all demarcations, even the sound of music, recede into the background in favour of bodily feeling and a dimension of indefiniteness, of interrogating time and space as her final movement into a question mark indicates:

She follows the pattern the others had danced, then stops for a second, staring above her. She moves on, no longer shadowing the melody’s recurring motif, but leading it. Each footfall guides the notes, as if a mother to a daughter. Minutes compress, seconds stretch, then the music fades. [...] Her body inches beyond even the music itself, when nothing but the hum of needle on empty grooves fills the auditorium. There is a click click click now as the stylus bounces, but the woman on the stage just keeps on dancing. Her point shoes call to the stereo’s needle. She dances no longer to melody, but to a discordant scratch. She stills. Her eyes close, one arm a half circle upward, the other down, a taut curve to her spine. Her shadow’s outline is that of a question mark. (OR 131-2)

In addition to the fact that Akiko’s body develops an agency of its own beyond the music, this dimension of questioning the world through the body and resisting its power structures from a place of non-verbal expression is further emphasised when the novel takes the reader back to Armistice Day 1970 and focuses on Akiko’s dance performance in the wake of the antiwar protests and the Vietnam War. As “[s]he has not allowed the organisers to announce her as hibakusha” (OR 360), as a survivor of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki, Akiko defies “poignancy” (360) and clear-cut definition. The novel here undermines notions of victimisation. Indeed, Akiko refuses to be categorised as ‘hibakusha’. Instead, her body becomes the agent of self-expression. “[H]er knowledge alone” (OR 360) is “captured, contained, burned into each step of her dance” (360) and her dance performance thus forms a moment of remembrance, of juxtaposing memories, as well as of resistance and dissidence when she dances in a crimson crane costume letting “long silk ribbons fly behind her, her feathers, her tail. The paper crane’s tail” (369). Like a fragile bird, she nevertheless attempts to ‘fly’ and counter the shadows of the past:

Beyond the point of the mask’s beak she can see her mother’s face, her father’s face, neither of which she has a memory of beyond photographs. They’re with her now. The pigeons from the peace park in Nagasaki swirl around her also, are part of her dance. As is that kiwi soft toy with the broken eye at Auckland Airport. She swoops and rises on the wind currents, currents she wishes could flow against history, wear it down like the sea wears away stone cliffs. She centres in her eye a carved figure, half-naked, his eyes closed. The ground zero monument in Nagasaki.

search for truths in sensuous corporeality, in short, on the “living body [...] which rises towards the world” (87).
Its stone finger rising to point to the sky. She dances until she runs out of music, then she stops, stands still, as she had that first moment when Troy came up onto her stage, touched her with a single finger. Behind the mask, where no one can see, a tear touches against her cheek. (OR 361)

What George seems to suggest here is that Akiko’s body is more than a cypher capturing the traumatic past. The physical agency indicates that resistance to dominant structures of power and meaning may not only be wrought through corporeal resistance against repressing discourse(s) and systems of power. Indeed, resistance can also be created from sensuous experiences, “experiences [that] can shatter our familiar sense of self” (Shusterman 1997: 28) and thus undermine the apparently rigid structures of categorisation from a place “outside that discursive cage” (33). By refusing verbal determination through the word ‘hibakusha’, Akiko solely lets her body find its expression in her dance performance. The bodily experience of dance and the movements she loses herself in are not linguistically reflected by Akiko. Indeed, the somatic feeling of dancing seems to be closely connected to her memories and emotions, the pain caused by the atomic bombing of Nagasaki and its nightmarish after-effects. This passage from Ocean Roads thus corroborates the idea that “there seem to be forms of bodily awareness or understanding that are not linguistic in nature and that in fact defy adequate linguistic characterization, though they can be somehow referred to through language” (Shusterman 2000: 127): “As dancers, we understand the sense and rightness of a movement or posture proprioceptively, by feeling it in our spine and muscles, without translating it into conceptual linguistic terms. We can neither learn nor properly understand the movement simply by being talked through it” (127). So, just as “it seems hard to limit meaningful experience and understanding to the dimension of language” (Shusterman 1997: 32), it is possible to explore the value of unspeakable truths beyond the limits of language and the possibility of resisting the mind-forged structures, defining terms and rules by emphasising the “importance of non-linguistic experience” (33), the sensuous, feeling abilities of the flesh and their “utopian resonance” (33). The human body as a living, active entity becomes “the core of our expressive capability” (Shusterman 2008: 49) and feeling functions as an imaginative register of working through the trauma of the past and mobilising cultural memory in order to cope with present actualities and create new concepts for alternative identities. In addition, the feeling flesh prompts reaction and solicits communal resonances; feeling tends to multiply and invite corporeal as well as emotional effects. Akiko’s intense dance performance has a lasting effect on Troy whose ‘touching’ reaction in turn affects the dancer. Her performance causes a spiral of ‘fleshy’ relations and Troy’s
touch comes to be inscribed upon her body just as much as it flashes through her memory years later as the previous quotation shows. The engraving written in the flesh challenges and encourages feeling and, in turn, new modes of coming to terms with contemporary realities. Shifted into focus, then, is “this ordinary, unassuming, and typically silent dimension” (Shusterman 2000: 133) one cannot “quite put into words” (OR 111), the moment when there is no linguistic “sign for a traveller to navigate by” (111):

Troy stands, walks down the aisle from the shadowed upper seats, steps up onto the stage. His boots clatter on the wood. People admonish him, but he ignores them, reaches to touch a single finger against the dancer’s quivering hand, her eyes still shuttered. She jerks back into the world, stares up at him. Shock in her pupils. [...] ‘I just thought, I thought you weren’t going to come back, from wherever you were.’ (132)

1.2 Bodily Frameworks

The idea of ‘cutting’ the human body into shape and (re)situating it in specific cultural contexts via a sensuous ritual of incising and patterning the flesh, living through the pain, healing and so on that we find in Albert Wendt’s writings reminds me of the critique of unified notions of the human body, its potential for permeability and ekstasis and its mediating function and capability of transformation that philosophical thinkers such as Foucault and Shusterman assert. Michel Foucault saw the body as a site of breaking free and a medium of critique of the discursive order. Especially his later writings cast a different light on the relationship between bodies and knowledge, language and a more corporeal understanding of experience. He thus emphasised extraordinary physical experience, transgressions that, according to his view, had the liberating effect of resistance, dissociation and transformation.22 “[L]anguage”, Foucault maintained, “exists everywhere and escapes us […], its face inclined toward a night of which we know nothing” (Foucault 1996: 27). In contrast to the assumption of the utter discursivity of the human body, Foucault’s ideas also demonstrate a different theoretical direction in relation to the body that moved away from a belief in the

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22 In his essay “A Preface to Transgression” Foucault defines the concept of transgression as “an action that involves the limit, that narrow zone of a line where it displays the flash of its passage, but perhaps also its entire trajectory, even its origin; it is likely that transgression has its entire space in the line it crosses” (Foucault 1998: 73). He then goes on to say that “[t]he play of limits and transgression seems to be regulated by a simple obstinacy: transgression incessantly crosses and recrosses a line that closes up behind it in a wave of extremely short duration, and thus it is made to return once more right to the horizon of the uncrossable. But this play is considerably more complex: these elements are situated in an uncertain context, in certainties that are immediately upset so that thought is ineffectual as soon as it attempts to seize them” (Foucault 1998: 73).
omnipresence of language towards “the unspoken in [...] discourse” (Foucault 1996: 199). Though Foucault suggested that the body is a textualised, inscribed medium and so subject to discourse, culture or history, he also considered the possibility of transformation and breaking away from forms of complete textualisation of the body through extreme physical experiences. Foucault therefore asserted that “[w]e should not restrict meaning to the cognitive core” (Foucault 1986: 174): “At this extreme limit, we find a revelation that no language could have expressed outside of the abyss that engulfs it and that no fall could have demonstrated if it were not at the same time a conquest of the highest peaks” (Foucault 1998: 7). Bodily resistance towards discourse and the categorisations of language from a place where there are no words is thus intensely significant. Opting for a more pragmatic-oriented view of active self-stylisation and self-fashioning of the body, Foucault demanded that the body should be created aesthetically just as art is. From Foucault’s perspective, self and body would be turned into a work of art, into an iridescent corpus of radical novelty, through an aesthetic practice of intense corporeality that could lift and transform repressive, discursive mechanisms. Correspondingly, Foucault asserted the body as a medium of discourse critique in that it is made to undergo extreme limit experiences which may hold the potential of shattering the structures of the system the discourse springs from, so that “a zone is created where language loses itself in its extreme limits, in a region where language is most unlike itself and where signs no longer communicate” (Foucault 1998: 17). The probing of the discursive boundaries defining subjectivities and experiences through physical excesses may disrupt and dissociate the self, create a kind of anarchical resistance dissolving conventional structures and thus transform it significantly. Such experiences ‘pierce’ the subject and impinge on the self in that they shatter, move and alter the self and its identity. This uncontrolled and unrestricted state of physical excess and intensity, Foucault argued, may be the foundation of a new construction of the self through disciplinary measures and critical self-control. Foucault thus emphasised the complementary and also contrary nature of bodily anarchy and bodily discipline, of self-transformation and self-inscription/aesthetic self-stylisation.

23 Foucault also put this claim to the final test in that he sought to transgress limits in his own life, “a life devoted to making oneself a distinctively novel work of art through transgressional explorations” (Shusterman 1997: 28), and not just in a conceptual sense, but in a very physical one, too. He sought to transcend boundaries through experimentation with drugs, sadomasochism and other rather violent experiences. Foucault also saw death as “nothing but a border” (Foucault 1996: 296) – the absolute zenith to dissolve life and the subject – and connected it to ultimate pleasure: “I always have the feeling that I do not feel the pleasure, the complete total pleasure and, for me, it’s related to death. […] I think that the kind of pleasure I would consider as the real pleasure would be so deep, so intense, so overwhelming that I couldn’t survive it. I would die” (378).
The body – the bios\textsuperscript{24} – becomes the material of aesthetic transformation and “disruptive existence” (Foucault 1998: 76) and opens up a space that – according to Foucault – provides us with “the basis for finally liberating our language” (76). For Foucault, extraordinary physical experience thus leads us away from the repressive categories of language and the “discursive cage” (Shusterman 1997: 33) and opens liberating spaces that elude its structures, “a place of which no one can speak” (Foucault 1980: 86): “Undoubtedly, no form of reflection, yet developed, no established discourse, can supply its model, its foundation, or even the riches of its vocabulary” (Foucault 1998: 77). The flesh is made the living substance of change and improvement; it is the medium of insight and self-transformation. Foucault’s interrogation of stagnant coherence of the self and his quest for self-transcending experiences associates the flesh with fragmentation and the shifting nature of subjectivity and identity and defies “fixed human essence” (Shusterman 1997: 37).

What we find in Foucault, then, is an affirmation of the possibility of resistance to the omnipresence of language and the possibility of meaningful experience, for the body is the medium of transformation and every attempt of verbalisation would inevitably fail to capture those moments of bodily ecstasy and meaningfulness, “the shapeless shape of utterly simple pleasure” (Foucault 1996: 297). However, Foucault’s propositions are not unproblematic. His philosophy of physical experimentation runs the risk of numbing or even destroying the body and its sensuous dimension that he asserted as the vital medium of resistance and transformation in the first place.\textsuperscript{25} Despite his fierce advocacy of physical limit experiences and transgressions of boundaries, Foucault carefully admitted that such intense experiences might be created or structured by the

\textsuperscript{24}In his genealogical attempt to illuminate the connections between power, history and bodies, Foucault clearly highlights the body as a site of power and history (see for instance Foucault 1990a: 139). Though the body can be viewed as subjected to a variety of power mechanisms – as written by power and history, so to speak – Foucault also emphasised the scope of freedom and resistance in reference to the body instead of its fatal subjugation to the “exercise of bio-power” (Foucault 1990a: 141). According to Foucault, we have “to counter the grips of power with the claims of bodies, pleasures and knowledges, in their multiplicity and their possibility of resistance” (Foucault 1990a: 157).

\textsuperscript{25}Foucault’s philosophy may be criticised as sustaining a very dark and violent, perhaps even desperate, element that – by embracing a death-defying, yet death-as-the-ultimate-pleasure heroism – runs the risk of negating optimism in life. Similarly, Richard Shusterman comments that “though death-battles evoke the most spectacular heroism, we should not discount the opportunities for courage in the ordinary business of living and its relentless struggles. […] Nor should the idea of creating oneself be confined to making oneself radically unlike anyone else. Finally, the somatic testing of experiential limits also admits of less violent varieties than those Foucault advocated” (Shusterman 1997: 49). In the same way, Foucault’s philosophical demands can be viewed as highly elitist, for only those who are willing to risk the very core of their existence may find a way to ultimate pleasure and self-transformation. Foucault’s politics of transgression and creative self-expression consequently go hand in hand with the excessive and spectacular, a practice only a few may be able to take on. Shusterman, therefore, is right in contemplating the lack of a democratic pluralism in the spectacular drama and wild éclats of Foucault’s approach to change (Shusterman 1997: 51).
linguistic and social background which they were meant to disturb and challenge in the first place. The body, Foucault thus argues, could never be the locus of absolute language-free reign, but would always be the site “where society inscribes its disciplinary practices to form its subjects, its socially functional selves” (Shusterman 1997: 34). However, Foucault’s theory implies a complex set of interrelations of corporeal permeability and agency – affected by the parameters of cultural frameworks, the human body functions as a sensuous location of such frameworks, but also of undermining them and creating new ones. The body becomes the expressive vocabulary of new identities.

Similar to Foucault’s conception of the body as a medium of resistance and metamorphosis, American philosopher Richard Shusterman opts for a theoretical and practical approach he terms ‘somaesthetics’ (Shusterman 2000, 2003, 2008). According to Shusterman, a somaesthetic approach re-centres “the living, sentient body as the organizing core of experience” (Shusterman 2003: 106) and unearths it from its subordination to the mind and the view of it as a mere object.26 Somaesthetics thus comprises a field of “critical study and meliorative cultivation of how we experience and use the living body (or soma) as a site of sensory appreciation (aesthesis) and creative self-fashioning” (Shusterman 2008: 1). Shusterman’s approach not only pays attention to theory, but foregrounds a concrete practical side to it. As Shusterman extends his definition,  

[s]omaesthetics claims that the body deserves more careful aesthetic attention not only as an object that externally displays beauty, sublimity, grace, and other aesthetic qualities, but also as a subjectivity that experiences aesthetic pleasures through somatic sensations. The notion of aesthesis (perception) that is incorporated into the very name of the discipline indicates that somaesthetics is concerned with the living, sentient ‘bodymind’ rather than with the body as a mere physical object or mechanism. Somaesthetics further argues that philosophical attention to the body should not remain merely theoretical; it should be aimed at improving our bodily functioning, not only by criticizing those practices and ideologies that result in somatic misery and misuse but also by directing our attention to methods that foster better somatic experience. [...] [S]omaesthetics blends aesthesis, cognition, and praxis to address some of philosophy’s most central aims: knowledge, self-knowledge, right action, happiness, and justice. (Shusterman 2003: 109)27

26 “The body in fact exerts a very powerful (though generally negative) presence in philosophy’s persistent privileging of mind and spirit. [...] Today, when philosophy has shrunk from a global art of living into a narrow field of academic discourse, the body retains a strong presence as a theoretical (and sometimes potently political) abstraction” (Shusterman 2008: ix).

27 Richard Shusterman distinguishes three main branches or categories of somaesthetics: analytic, pragmatic and practical somaesthetics (Shusterman 2003: 112-4). While analytic somaesthetics involves “an essentially descriptive and theoretical enterprise devoted to explaining the nature of our bodily perceptions and practices and their function in our knowledge and construction of the world” (Shusterman 2003: 112) and invests in the analysis and criticism of “how the body is both shaped by power and employed as an instrument to maintain it – how bodily norms of health, skill, and beauty, and even our categories of sex and gender, are constructed to reflect and sustain social forces” (112), pragmatic
Such an “art of self-fashioning” (Shusterman 2003: 106), be it critically reflective, programmatic or practical, is however not an invention of the 20th/21st century. Its various conceptualisations and ramifications can be traced back to ancient cultures and of course across cultures (Shusterman 2003: 106-7). As I already suggested, one example of such creative bodily self-expression and transformation are Maori tattooing practices which also transcend individualistic contexts of physical investment.

Shusterman’s field of interest is wide-ranging and complex so that I won’t be able to deal with all of its facets. I will therefore restrict my discussion of Shusterman to his conceptualisation of meaningful nondiscursive experience that resituates the body, or soma, the term Shusterman prefers, as the site of active potential and change and its involvement in approaching works of art. Richard Shusterman particularly attempts to valorise the body as the centre of nondiscursive experience and its significance to insightful and meaningful understanding. In order to resituate feeling and the body as the centre of feeling, Shusterman juxtaposes “nondiscursive somatic experience” (Shusterman 1997: 13) and textualism. In resistance to the hermeneutical principle that there is “nothing real […] that is not interpreted” (Shusterman 2000: 115) or not structured linguistically, he emphasises the active cultivation of meaningful physical experience that is, however, not as harshly and violently intended as Foucault’s notion of somaeotherics formulates, compares, and critiques specific and concrete “methods of somatic involvement” (112) and “remaking the body and the environing social habits and frameworks that shape it” (112). Practical somaeotherics translates the first two categories into “actual somatic practice” (Shusterman 2003: 114) that engages the individual in physically active terms and “involves actually engaging in programs of disciplined, reflective, corporeal practice aimed at somatic self-improvement (whether representational, experiential, or performative)” (114). However, Shusterman emphasises that such a categorisation of somaeotherics remains provisional and does not exclude the outline of further branches nor their overlapping intersections (Shusterman 2003: 112).

28 In order to sidestep the negative connotations of the body, Shusterman “prefer[s] to speak of soma rather than body to emphasize […] the living, feeling, sentient, purposive body rather than a mere physical corpus of flesh and bones” (Shusterman 2008: xii). However, I believe that it is possible to resituate the terms flesh and body in new contexts by approaching them from new perspectives and countering negative and damaging associations.

29 Shusterman particularly refines pragmatist John Dewey’s notion of the “dynamic and developing experiential activity” (Shusterman 2000: 25) and the “fulfilling and consummatory quality” (Dewey 1987: 202), the “quality […] felt, that is, immediately experienced” (196), unfolding in the process of perceiving art. Dewey criticised the separation of mind and body in the aesthetic experience of art and attempted to bridge the gap between them by reawakening the body as a valid and meaningful component in the appreciation of art and the dynamic relationship between works of art and their recipients (see Dewey 1987: 27). However, Shusterman urges us to think beyond Dewey’s rather foundationalist understanding of “the meaning of things present in immediate experience” (Dewey 1987: 28) and “immediate felt quality” (125) by balancing “the practical and cognitive” (Shusterman 1997: 6, see also 157-65).
of it.\textsuperscript{30} Questioning the overarching predominance of textualism, Shusterman resituates “immediate, nondiscursive experience” (Shusterman 1997: 158) and “bodily feeling” (158) as “the most salient locus of nondiscursive immediacy” (158). In other words, not everything – not every form of experience and perception – is, has to be or can be rendered discursively: “[T]extualism […] encourages an unhealthy idealism that identifies human being-in-the-world with linguistic activity and so tends to neglect or overly textualize nondiscursive somatic experience” (Shusterman 1997: 173).\textsuperscript{31} Richard Shusterman takes the valorisation of the body as an active vehicle for full-bodied experience as the starting point for a discussion on the aesthetic aspects of works of art and a practical approach to life as well as art and literature. Shusterman thus not only calls for “practicing philosophy as a concrete way of life” (Shusterman 1997: 2), as “a deliberate life-practice” (3) and “art of living” (3), but also attempts to revive “this practical perspective” (5) in critically approaching works of art: “Recognizing art’s deep roots in life’s needs and interests – both natural and societal – pragmatism incorporates the practical and cognitive, along with the somatic and social, as contributing elements in aesthetic experience. Urging the greater integration of life and art for their mutual improvement, pragmatism’s natural direction is the art of living” (6-7). Largely, Shusterman’s critique aims at interrogating central principles of ‘the linguistic turn’, the view of textualism and interpretation as the first and foremost principles and of the foundations of language as omnipresent and unequalled in the construction of meaning. In turn, Shusterman understands interpretation as an entirely purposeful activity of thoughtful and “deliberate reflection” (Shusterman 2000: 124) and contrasts it with the sensuous, affective and emotional capabilities of somatic feeling. The American philosopher expresses deep concerns about textualism, interpretation or linguistic structures as predominant and omnipresent models of criticism. He then opts for a more inclusive approach that also considers the “very crucial unthinking dimension of our lives and indeed of our thinking” (Shusterman 2000: 132) in his critique of “the belief that interpretation subsumes all meaningful experience and reality, that there is nothing beneath interpretation which serves as the object of interpretation, since anything

\textsuperscript{30} Though Richard Shusterman considers painful, extreme corporeal feeling as a possibility of “breaking out, even momentarily, from the linguistic labyrinth” (Shusterman 1997: 33) and gaining “intense emancipatory pleasure and new vision” (33), he values less radical forms of “somatic testing of experiential limits” (49). See Shusterman’s critique of Foucault, esp. Shusterman 2008: 15-48.

\textsuperscript{31} Shusterman’s notion of the human body as the situation of our experiencing and grasping the world is not unlike Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s quest for “the perspective of being-in-the-world” (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 94). However, Richard Shusterman engages critically with Merleau-Ponty’s foregrounding of the body as the ‘silent’ locus of our existence and the “tacit cogito” (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 468) as the source of perception and meaning. See Shusterman 2008: 49-76.
alleged to be such is itself an interpretive product” (116): “Interpretation is better served by letting it leave room for something else (beneath or before it), by slimming it down from an over-bloated state which courts coronary arrest, by saving it from an ultimately self-destructive imperialist expansion” (116).32

Dealing with the body in respects to feeling and epistemological questions, however, requires a reformulation of it in terms of antifoundationalism or “antiessentialism, a relative lightening of the epistemological demand on essential truth” (Sedgwick 2003: 6). Indeed, it appears necessary to view the body in terms of relativity and not as the grounds or instrument in the pursuit of incorrigible truth or as some kind of fundamental essence prior to and underlying all rational engagement with the world. When French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty wrote of “our primordial encounter with being” (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 294), of the “silent consciousness” (470) of unreflected bodily perception that “is directed, quasi-teleologically, towards a truth in itself in which the reason underlying all appearances is to be found” (62), he – to a certain extent – put the body on a pedestal of miraculous truth: “Our body […] applies itself to space like a hand to an instrument, and when we wish to move about we do not move the body as we move an object. We transport it without instruments as if by magic” (Merleau-Ponty 2004a: 36). If bodily experience is pinned down as the all-embracing principle ruling and regulating each and every thought process, we are once again trapped by the all too well-known body-mind dichotomy and a certain mystification of the body which can also be traced in Foucault’s writings. Intense physical experiences and sensations may be viewed as a form of resistance to and dissolution of the world as we know it, but in Foucault’s terms such forceful and extreme corporeality also includes a “search of the profound center of things, this

32 Shusterman’s critique particularly seeks to interrogate the totalizing characteristics of the “realm of discursive truth” (Shusterman 1997: 173) and endless “language-games” (173) with their adverse effect that bodily feeling “outside of language cannot be thought or given content” (173). The fact that various fields of the humanities are marked by a prevalent preoccupation with aspects of textualism and language – “[l]inguistics, semiotics, rhetoric, and various models of ‘textuality’ have become the lingua franca for critical reflections on the arts, the media, and cultural forms” (Mitchell 1994: 11) – prompts Shusterman to suggest a critical dialogue between textualism and nondiscursive forms of knowledge and meaning: “The interdependent continuity of mind and body is reflected in the similar continuity of conscious thinking and the nondiscursive background which orients thought, an often unconscious somatic background which can however be brought into consciousness. […] Though appreciative of the linguistic turn, I fear its totalizing tendencies and refuse to abandon pragmatism’s traditional concern with the somatic and nondiscursive” (Shusterman 1997: 169-71). According to Shusterman, the somatic dimension of experience in particular has to be revived in criticism and practice: “I reject Rorty’s textualism: the idea that the world we experience is thoroughly linguistic, that there is no meaningful experience that is not propositional, that our selves are but a collection of vocabularies and propositional attitudes. In contrast, I insist that in addition to the importance of language, there is a non-propositional somatic dimension of experience that is important for philosophy to recognize” (Leypoldt 2000: 65).
central ‘Limitless’ where all determinations dissipate. To disappear into the fire of the volcano is to rejoin, at the point of its inaccessible and open hearth, the All-in-One-simultaneously, the subterranean vitality of stones and the bright flame of truth” (Foucault 1998: 16). If all language and reason disappear or are overthrown by bodily feeling, doesn’t such a view underscore a certain parallelism of body, stasis and a quest for ‘essential truth’?

In order to escape a view of the body as the essence and foundation of all grasping and communication, putting uninterpreted understanding, bodily feeling and our implication in the narratives’ sensuous or affecting weight into perspective is valuable and necessary. Here, Shusterman admits that nondiscursive feeling has to be mediated in order to be captured and invites the textual paradigm back in through the back door. Shusterman highlights this point very clearly by critically asserting that immediate understanding in respect to the body “may have been the product of prior interpretations, though now it is immediately grasped” (Shusterman 2000: 131), but it also does not necessarily have to be grounded in “explicitly formulated or conscious understanding, and the ground it provides is not an incorrigible ground” (131).

Although his call for an antiessentialist critique is valid, Shusterman’s previous argument is certainly paradoxical and does not draw a clear dividing line between interpretation and instantaneous understanding. However, Shusterman consequently maintains that instead of holding on to foundationalist and unalterable truths we must reject them and come to a perspective of “transformational […] cultural criticism” (Shusterman 1997: 157) that opposes essentialist truths by recognising that our ways of knowing the world “are the product of perspectival grasping and revisable linguistic practices, and thus are always subject to reinterpretation” (Shusterman 2000: 83) and reconsideration. Shusterman therefore proposes an appreciation of and critical engagement with the “living, feeling, sentient body” (Shusterman 2008: 1) and nondiscursive or uninterpreted “subtleties of somatic sensibility” (10) on the condition that “pragmatism more radically recognizes uninterpreted realities, experiences, and understandings as already perspectival, prejudiced, and corrigible – in short, as non-foundationally given” (Shusterman 2000: 120-1). The nondiscursive aspects of the body should not be seen as unquestionable foundations or the doors to essentialist truths that form the background to any kind of interpretation or creation of meaning. Interpretation and sense-making of the world of arbitrary signs, on the other hand, must not be placed on a pedestal as final and omnipresent principles. Hence, it seems unreasonable to view
these theoretical poles as mutually exclusive and get caught in an either-or-trap of irresolvable extremes.

How, then, can such a dimension of feeling and sensuousness and the fictional investment in the human body be incorporated into a fruitful and sensible reading practice? What happens when we stop ‘interpreting’ according to Shusterman’s claim? Do we surrender to the sheer overflow of perceptual data and physical-emotional detail and just feel our way through the novels while immediately grasping their content? Probably not. Just as much as the human body is presented in a mediating role and link in-between, both feeling and language (or interpretation) and “the problem of the relationship between mind and body” (Hardt 2007: x) have to be considered in such a reading practice. Though Richard Shusterman presents his theories “as a third way” (Małecki 2010: 114) and opts for a creative interchange of both the nondiscursive aspects of the body and rational forms of sense-making such as language and interpretation in order to meliorate problematic, intolerant, or bipolar assumptions and put into perspective the epistemological pursuit of truth, his approach nevertheless appears to set up a certain polarity of nondiscursive versus discursive through its critique of the textualist stance. Shusterman’s critique appears a bit lopsided because his affirmation of bodily experience and feeling as an existential and meaningful part of life hangs on his challenge of textualism and “the referential identity of logic” (Shusterman 1997: 185). This differentiation as well as his assumption that interpretation may not involve feeling – perhaps unintentionally – feed a binary contrast without further taking into account the liminal interfaces between the corporeal and the linguistic, the textual and the textural: “Shusterman wants to demonstrate that any true appreciation of art must ex nessecitate involve an affective element, and so cannot be limited to mere interpretation. […] Shusterman himself courts a detrimental dualistic thinking when he assumes […] that interpretation of art is possible without qualia and emotions involved” (Małecki 2010: 73). In order to capture feeling and nondiscursive experience, it so appears that there is no way around some or other form of language and translation: “It is evident that, in order to indicate this unreflective and unassuming knowledge, the text must strive continuously keeping [sic] it present in the reader’s

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33 Wojciech Małecki argues that Richard Shusterman’s quest for the elevation of nondiscursive experience appears to be rooted in a somewhat too harsh criticism of Richard Rorty’s step towards textualism and deconstruction: “For Shusterman, in painting far too demonized a picture of Rorty, apparently neglects the fact that the latter was not so much interested in putting forward the totalizing thesis that everything is language but rather in something more modest. […] Rorty does not deny the existence of nondiscursive experiences. In fact, he only argues that one cannot use them as a philosophical proof without expressing them in language at the same time” (Małecki 2010: 30).
mind. Consequently, that which is thought of as ineffable or linguistically inexpressible must be rendered in words, must be described in terms of what seems to exclude it” (Pordzik 2002: 7). However, it is also worthwhile noting how creative and ‘touchy-feely’ such forms of translation can be – one just has to think of Maurice Merleau-Ponty who suggested that “we find in language the notion of sensation, which seems immediate and obvious” (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 3). I have to be fair, however, and emphasise that Shusterman never actually attempts to oust the textualist project from criticism, for he is undoubtedly aware of a certain paradoxical constellation surrounding nondiscursive experience:

How can I claim that any experience is non-linguistic, when in that very claim I have had to talk about it, refer to it by language? Any attempt to characterize something as non-linguistic or describe it as linguistically inexpressible self-refutingly renders it linguistic and linguistically expressed. [...] Surely, once we have to talk about something, even merely to affirm or deny its existence, we must bring it into the game of language, give it a linguistic visa or some conceptual-textual identity, even if the visa be one of alien or inferior linguistic status, like ‘inexpressible tingle’ or ‘non-discursive.’ But this only means that we can never talk (or explicitly think) about things existing without their being somehow linguistically mediated; it does not mean that we can never experience them non-linguistically or that they cannot exist for us meaningfully but not in language. (Shusterman 2000: 128)

Despite this inability to liberate nondiscursive experience from textualism, the strengths of Shusterman’s and Foucault’s works lie in their valorisation of the meaningfulness and even disruptiveness of nonverbal physical experience, its potential of resistance and change, and of the body as a medium and as “an end and means of reconstruction” (Shusterman 1997: 170) – not as an object and precedent foundation of truth. From Foucault and Shusterman, then, we can derive a critical framework that not only allows us to examine the body as an ‘object’ shaped by and subjected to the influences and power mechanisms of colonialism, but also as an agent of transformative energies, subjectivities and the cultivation of differing identities. Shusterman thus argues that “false dichotomies of mind/body, subject/object, self/world, and active/passive” (Shusterman 2003: 128) can be replaced by “the bodymind that constitutes a person and that is both action and passion, subject and object” (128) and therefore far more ambiguous than the mentioned binaries would suggest. Entering the realm of feeling(s) requires synthesis and translation because feeling(s) – as well as the affects for that matter – “straddle these two divides: between the mind and body, and between actions and passions. The affects pose a problematic correspondence across each of the divides: Between the mind’s power to think and the body’s power to act, and between the power to act and the power to be affected” (Hardt 2007: xi). Continually
shifting between object and subject, the body cannot be categorically subjugated in an either/or polarisation of object versus the location of the subject. It rather presents itself as a site in-between these two poles.

I find no fault with these quests for a more practical and pragmatic approach to life or art and a more integrative relationship between art and experience. If I take a more sceptical view here it is because I feel that postcolonial texts certainly challenge us to question, rethink and reformulate existing categories and practices. Postcolonial writing can generally be said to engage in “subversive manoeuvres” (Brydon and Tiffin 1993: 78) and “a constant process of negotiation of different world pictures that interpenetrate on different levels and put each other to the test” (Pordzik 2001: 27). Seen in this light, Shusterman’s attempt to relativise the principles of interpretation and to resituate the recipient in a more immediate context of understanding inevitably clashes with some of the tenets and narrative strategies of postcolonial writing which – to a great extent – “avoids the creation of a unified perspective and continually provokes the reader into readjusting his (constantly frustrated) strategies of naturalizing the distinct parts into a meaningful whole” (Pordzik 2001: 27). It therefore remains a vital issue that we ask questions about the relationship between language and power, how language shapes or works as an indication of power structures, how postcolonial writers evoke different realities and write against the grain by “capturing and remoulding the language to new usages” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2002: 37), or what language we use in critical and theoretical writing and how we read in general: “In fact, most of the critical debates and vigorous discussions in and about the field concern precisely the question of what terms are appropriate – under what conditions? for whom? – when trying to address major postcolonial issues” (Döring 2008: 15). It should not be neglected that a considerable part of postcolonial writing heavily relies on intertextual practices in order to undermine the oppressive and marginalising process created by colonialism. A certain shift back to textualism may therefore be necessary and inevitable. However, there is no need to mystify language or view it as the ultimate principle structuring every kind of experience. Even if the fictions ask us to question unified world views, unequal power relations and discourses and demand from us to open our perspective for alternative horizons, it is also indispensable to ask whether they convey their messages via contexts of feeling and slip them under our ‘skin’ without us being able to slip out of their grasp or even question them. At the same time, the narratives may make us aware of ideological assimilation of feeling, question such
perspectives and request us to find or take in new concepts in order to overcome unjust and rigid structures.

This is a crucial point because it appears to be a vital and absolutely necessary imperative that we look beyond western frameworks. Just as postcolonialism has been criticised of applying western-derived theories to the literatures of indigenous and formerly colonised peoples, a theoretical approach that foregrounds the feeling, affective, sensuous, and probably nondiscursive facets of the novels may very well be reproached as yet another attempt of reading those literatures through a western lens. It can be objected, however, that the “pluralistic openness” (Shusterman 2000: 113) and the “notion of fallibilism” (x) of such approaches should not be seen as a critical practice that uncritically remains preoccupied and fed with the boundaries of its western traditions and thoughts. Despite Shusterman’s careful look beyond western notions of the human body, Foucault’s and Shusterman’s attention to the human body as a medium of cultivation and change is clearly situated inside the framework of western individualism. Individual subjectivity and identity, for instance, seem to be important facets in the fictions from Aotearoa selected here – artist Kerewin Holmes in *The Bone People*, for instance, is a striking example of individualism turned egomania that is then mitigated and incorporated into a communal identity without subsiding entirely. However, the significance of the community, of whakapapa and tribal relations among others is highlighted in all of the narratives and crucially influences the concept of the human body and its negotiation of cultural identity and memory and is therefore an essential imperative in analysis. Just as “[t]here is no single description of the world and no transcendental, non-linguistic God’s-eye perspective of its objects that would be available for us to appeal to, that would even be intelligible to us as language-users” (Shusterman 2000: 91), Shusterman insists that “we can eschew foundationalism […] by insisting that understanding should itself be understood non-foundationally – that is, as corrigeible, perspectival, pluralistic, prejudiced, and engaged in active process” (Shusterman 2000: 133). It is therefore important to widen the scope and go beyond “the orbit of Western philosophy […] because other cultures […] have extremely rich philosophical traditions that closely integrate (perhaps far better than we do) the practice of theory with a complex, rigorous, and refined art of living” (Shusterman 1997: 8). This may, of course, be judged as naïve, but it nevertheless opts for a hopeful and creatively chaotic critical practice that constantly attempts to interrogate itself in its iridescent approach of both/and. In addition, my consideration of the novels’ fictional
rendering and investment in feeling and sensuous experience which may just as well include “extra-linguistic experiences” (Malecki 2010: 27) in respect to cultural identity and memory should, however, not be misconstrued as an attempt to relegate the fictions from Aotearoa/New Zealand discussed here to a place of a foundationalist world view or of nondiscursive nothingness, to a place where there are no words. Although these texts incorporate a sensuous and potentially nondiscursive dimension in relation to the exploration of the body, they engage with their respective topics highly discursively of course, and looking critically at this dimension by asking questions about their “sensual import” (Pordzik 2002: 13) and exploration of corporeal feeling should be seen as one step in the field and one turn in the discussion of how to approach these texts. In fact, none of the novels postulates the body as the ‘fountain of truth’. What they do have in common is that they explore the flesh as a medium to articulate resistance against aspects of predominant discourses, introduce aspects of specific cultural identities and memory, and offer provisional solutions to present problems and injustices.

Reading texts in the light of this philosophy of the body is hence not to mean that interpretation and textualism should no longer be valuable procedures in literary criticism. Instead of condemning aims of finding meaning through interpretive skills, the philosophical ideas singled out in this study hint at the importance of bodily feeling, not only in fictional explorations of it, but also in understanding literature as well as other arts. They “restore to its former significance a certain sense of understanding art and literature in their situational embedment” (Pordzik 2002: 5), underpin the significance of feeling to alternative epistemologies, and “make us more perceptive toward such sensations” (Malecki 2010: 165). A more somatic understanding of literature, then, “tries to tell us how a text or piece of art functions in experience […] Here the text makes itself ‘felt’ or rather ‘had’ as a total, qualitatively irreducible experience before it wakens us to its ethical import, its strategies, and aims” (Pordzik 2002: 5-6). Within the frame of the novel, however, bodily feelings and sensuous aspects are already mediated through language, so in order to trace them and their significance to cultural identity and memory it is necessary to look at the narrative ways or concepts that translate this feeling dimension that often lies outside linguistic structures or is marked by an uneasy, rugged relationship with language. The body rendered in narrative form thus mediates, negotiates and translates aspects of postcolonial realities, experiences, identities and memory; form in this sense enacts meaning. To view the body in opposition to language or culture unnecessarily reinforces
either/or constructions. Indeed, I see an interesting paradox and entanglement of discursive and nondiscursive elements here. A strict separation of the two seems forced and “unbearably artificial and rigid” (Howes 2005a: 1).34

The novels intertwine flesh and text, and even if these appear oppositional at times, a strict binary makes room for middle passages and both/and possibilities just as much as the cat in physicist Erwin Schrödinger’s thought experiment can be simultaneously alive and dead. The novels thus mediate corporeal, sensuous experience and display a concrete investment in feeling, and although we can never quite escape “the confines of language” (Howes 2005a: 4), “[w]hat it is possible to avoid, however, is the expansion of language into a structural model that dictates all cultural and personal experience and expression” (4). Just as the word ‘sense’ already implies a crucial nexus between sensory perception and understanding, body and mind, and feeling and word, so “language can be used creatively, critically, and sensitively” (Howes 2005a: 4). David Howes reminds us that “a certain paradox remains, a certain tugging of unstated sensibilities, a certain sense of alienation from lived experience” (Howes 2005a: 4). This tension, however, also creates a complex pool of possibilities that defies stasis and easy answers.

1.3 Translating Feeling

In respect to literary analysis, it appears necessary to ask the question about the specific forms and narrative strategies that capture a corporeal dimension. Perhaps it makes sense to twist Shusterman’s assumption of pre-linguistic or nondiscursive somatic experience and look for the sensuous and affective import of the fictions. It is therefore apt to ask how the fictions illustrate sensuous and emotional corporeality and ‘encode’ and convey their messages in a sensuous, ‘touching’ and affective manner. Figures such as Simon in The Bone People, the cheeky child who mainly communicates via a body language of gestures and touches and is simultaneously eaten by pain and

34 In reference to the senses, David Howes makes a similar point. The human sensorium has often been forced into a strict opposition to “the rhetorics of logocentricity” (Howes 2005a: 1) that he views as “markedly Western” (3) and that dissociates sensory experience from culture: “It has been customary to associate the senses with nature, whether ‘innocent’ or ‘savage.’ The senses in this case symbolize the antithesis of culture and thereby provide Westerners weary of the sophistry of civilization with what seems like a welcome retreat into untutored sensation. The human sensorium, however, never exists in a natural state. Humans are social beings, and just as human nature itself is a product of culture, so is the human sensorium” (3). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, too, criticises “the apparent common sense that requires a strict separation between the two” (Sedgwick 2003: 6), that is, “aspects of experience and reality that do not present themselves in propositional or even in verbal form alongside others that do” (6).
violent beatings, or David in Nights in the Gardens of Spain, the Peter Pan-like gay man who moves in a complex world of shame and shamelessness, may be capable of affecting the reader and tangibly negotiate complex cultural identities and memory. To assert that the mentioned writers attempt to create a ‘language of the flesh’ already indicates that the literary creation of the flesh requires an involvement of language. In the same way, an analysis of the novels requires certain strategies and tools to capture and examine the inscribed, sensuous, feeling flesh reflected in the fictions. This raises questions in terms of the semantic strategies, the character conceptualisations and constellations and the narrative structures of the novels selected here. In addition, it makes sense to pay attention to the specific ramifications of feeling and corporeality and their cultural implications the fictions explore, for instance, such as skin, fear, or aroha and the Maori contexts and perspectives they raise.

Similarly to Shusterman’s exploration of “effective bodily action […] [and] bodily feelings” (Malecki 2010: 153), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick is interested in art’s investment in feeling, yet Sedgwick doesn’t take Shusterman’s rigid antitextualist stance. Instead, her work draws attention “to the textures and effects of particular bits of language” (Sedgwick 2003: 6) and analyses “apparently nonlinguistic phenomena in rigorously linguistic terms” (6). In contrast to Shusterman’s stance toward bodily feeling as a general medium of change and meaning, Sedgwick elaborates on feeling(s) in more specific terms and its/their wide range of possibilities and syntheses. Her conceptualisation of “texture” (Sedgwick 2003: 13) as a way to circumnavigate one-way dualisms proves to be an inspiring theoretical compass for this discussion concerning the postcolonial body because it clearly relates to the formation and discontinuity of identities and subjectivities as well as the relevance of divergent identities, all of which are central concerns of the postcolonial fictions explored here. In her attempt “to explore promising tools and techniques for nondualistic thought and pedagogy” (Sedgwick 2003: 1) Sedgwick focuses on “the art of loosing: and not as one art but a cluster of related ones” (3). Interrelatedness instead of opposition and correlations instead of strictly formulated separations move to the centre of attention. Refusing to accept either-or-constellations, Sedgwick is interested in the whole spectrum in-between such categories, for “it is only the middle ranges of agency that offer space for effectual creativity and change” (Sedgwick 2003: 13) she suggests.

Her notion of texture therefore rejects one-dimensional or one-directional assumptions of investigation, but explores multiple trajectories: “To perceive texture is
never only to ask or know What is it like? nor even just How does it impinge on me? Textural perception always explores two other questions as well: How did it get that way? and What could I do with it?” (Sedgwick 2003: 13). Sedgwick distances herself from finalising constructions like ‘beneath’, ‘behind’ or ‘beyond’ (Sedgwick 2003: 8) in favour of the heterogeneous phenomenon of texture which is rather spatially conceived as indicated by one of Sedgwick’s preferred prepositions, namely ‘beside’ (8): “Invoking a Deleuzian interest in planar relations, the irreducibly spatial positionality of beside also seems to offer some useful resistance to the ease with which beneath and beyond turn from spatial descriptors into implicit narratives of, respectively, origin and telos” (8). “Beside”, Sedgwick hence proposes, “is an interesting preposition also because there’s nothing very dualistic about it; a number of elements may lie alongside one another, though not an infinity of them” (Sedgwick 2003: 8). Her vocabulary tries to erode “linear logics that enforce dualistic thinking; noncontradiction or the law of the excluded middle, cause versus effect, subject versus object” (Sedgwick 2003: 8), and certainly privileges side by side relations that exist in heterogeneous amalgamation marked by a continuous tug-of-war of various possibilities – correlative as well as contradicting – instead of homogeneous consistency: “Beside comprises a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivalling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations” (8).

The dynamic beside-relations that mark texture are, however, not relegated to the pursue of essentialist truths or fixed realities. Indeed, Eve Sedgwick introduces “nonce taxonomies” (Sedgwick 2003: 145), a mode of temporary nuances and provisional assumptions. This corresponds to her conceptualisation of texture which “comprises an array of perceptual data that includes repetition, but whose degree of organization hovers just below the level of shape or structure” (Sedgwick 2003: 16). Turning away from the binary lines of thought that tend to reverberate oppositions such as subject-object, flesh-mind, sensuous perception-linguistic logic, her work is characterised by an exploration of “aspects of experience and reality that do not present themselves in propositional or even in verbal form alongside others that do” (Sedgwick 2003: 6) without privileging any of them and by a disapproval of “subsuming nonverbal aspects of reality firmly under the aegis of the linguistic” (Sedgwick 2003: 6):

I assume that the line between words and things or between linguistic and non-linguistic phenomena is endlessly changing, permeable, and entirely unsusceptible to any definitive articulation. With Wittgenstein, however, I have an inclination to deprecate the assignment of a
very special value, mystique, or thingness to meaning and language. Many kinds of objects and events mean, in many heterogeneous ways and contexts, and I see some value in not reifying or mystifying the linguistic kinds of meaning unnecessarily. (6)

Just as Sedgwick is aware of the at times inextricable entanglement of language and nondiscursive elements, she opts for an entwinement of texture and affect assuming that “a particular intimacy seems to subsist between textures and emotions. But the same double meaning, tactile plus emotional, is already there in the single word ‘touching’; equally it’s internal to the word ‘feeling.’ I am also encouraged in this association by the dubious epithet ‘touchy-feely,’ with its implication that even to talk about affect virtually accounts to cutaneous contact” (Sedgwick 2003: 17). Sedgwick’s notion of texture, therefore, comprises the textural, affective facets of feeling and their ramifications in language. Her project relies on a semantic focus that implies the necessity of translation practices in the literary analysis of the flesh. In her literary and cultural analyses, Sedgwick uses Silvan Tomkins’ affect theory which emphasises the link between the affects and the corporeal, “the somatic rootedness of the affects” (Malecki 2010: 148) and “bodily action and affect” (Shusterman 1997: 31).35 This discussion cannot deal with all the riveting aspects of Tomkins’ and Sedgwick’s work respectively. Some points, however, appear highly fascinating. Tomkins’ studies and observations led him to conclude that “[t]he affect system provides the primary motives of human beings” (Tomkins 2008a: 63) and identified several pairings of “positive and negative affects which are inherently rewarding and punishing” (180).36 He observed that babies already display a range of physical symptoms of affects before they are able to take part in the connotative instrumentalisation of the affects: “The infant passively enjoys or suffers the experience of his own affective responses long before he is capable

35 Tomkins differentiates the affect system from the drives since the drives work towards specific objectives and along less complex lines than the affects. Drives are directly bound to definite purposes. They are typified by their “immediate instrumentality, the defining orientation toward a specified aim and end different from itself, that finally distinguishes the drives from the affects” (Sedgwick 2003: 19): “Not only may affects be invested in every variety of psychological function […], but they may also be invested in other affects, combine with other affects, intensify or modulate them, and suppress or reduce them. In marked contrast to the separateness of each drive, the emotions readily enter into combinations with each other and readily control one another” (Tomkins 2008a: 76). Tomkins criticises Sigmund Freud who – in his opinion – attaches far too great importance to the drives in the psychological formation of subjectivity, for neither did Freud draw a clear dividing line between drives and affects nor did he dissociate the drives from sexuality (Tomkins in Sedgwick and Frank 1995: 60).

36 Tomkins categorises the affects and their corporeal symptoms in largely three groups. Positive affects are “Interest – Excitement: eyebrows down, track, look, listen” (Tomkins 2008a: 185) and “Enjoyment – Joy: smile, lips widened up and out” (185), whereas “Surprise – Startle: eyebrows up, eye blink” (185) has resetting effects. Negative, in turn, are “Distress – Anguish: cry, arched eyebrow, mouth down, tears, rhythmic sobbing” (Tomkins 2008a: 185), “Fear – Terror: eyes frozen open, pale, cold, sweaty, facial trembling, with hair erect” (185), “Shame – Humiliation: eyes down, head down” (185), “Contempt – Disgust: sneer, upper lip up” (185), and “Anger – Rage: frown, clenched jaw, red face” (185).
of employing affect as part of a feedback mechanism in instrumental behavior. He does not know ‘why’ he is crying, that it might be stopped or how to stop it” (Tomkins 2008a: 63). In addition to the fact that the affects here precede their objects, they are also characterised by their freedom from a strict dependence on specific objects: “The object may evoke the affect, or the affect find the object. [...] It is this somewhat fluid relationship between affects and their objects which offends human beings, scientists and everyman alike” (Tomkins 2008a: 74).37 Autotelic in nature, “[a]ffects can be, and are, attached to things, people, ideas, sensations, relations, activities, ambitions, institutions, and any number of other things, including other affects. Thus, one can be excited by anger, disgusted by shame, or surprised by joy” (Sedgwick 2003: 19). It is almost impossible to deduce bipolarities from the pluralism and wide range of possibilities invested in “the formidably rich phenomenology of emotions in Tomkins” (Sedgwick and Frank 1995: 2).

In addition, texture and the extensive range of the affects are closely connected to the body. Depending on particular situations and the nature of a respective affect theory (weak or strong) we are swept away by a particular emotion, unable to resist doing so. Moreover, we are relatively powerless against the physical implications and symptoms of particular feelings. It is almost impossible to control or hide bashful blushing or fearful gasping: “Affects are sets of muscle and glandular responses located in the face and also widely distributed through the body, which generate sensory feedback which is either inherently ‘acceptable’ or ‘unacceptable.’” (Tomkins 2008a: 135) Feeling and emotional-physical sensations, on the other hand, contribute to the formation of the self and identity. They throw the self into sharp relief, affect our (re)actions and – in contrast to the effects caused by drives (the need to drink when one is thirsty, the need to warm oneself when one is cold etc) – opt for complex possibilities and “varieties of freedom which this complexity makes possible” (Tomkins 2008a: 61).

37 Tomkins repeatedly emphasises the relatively free play of the affects and their loose relations to specific objects. Besides, affects cannot be initiated or evoked according to schemata relying on cause and effect/affect: “The investigator can never be sure just how to evoke a particular affect in a particular subject without evoking quite unexpected affects with or without the response he wishes to study. Some years ago I attempted to use electric shock as a stimulus to evoke fear in human subjects. One had only to listen to the spontaneous exclamations throughout an experimental series to become aware of the difficulty of evoking one and only one affect by the use of what seems an appropriate stimulus” (Tomkins 2008a: 106). The reactions of the subjects stimulated by electric shocks varied considerably, the exclamations ranging from “feels like when Papa spanked” (Tomkins 2008a: 106), “[i]f you want a terrorizing pattern you’ve got it”, to “[t]hat’s a dirty trick” accompanied by laughing, “[o]h, you rat, cut it out; it’s maddening”, “[I’m not getting much out of this – I hope you are”, “[t]his experiment is stupid” and “[w]hat the hell’s burning up here?...What’s cooking in here anyway? It smelt like flesh or a rat cooking” (all of these exclamations cited in Tomkins 2008a: 107).
Questions of how and what we know, how we gain insight of the world, what constitutes subjectivities and identities, how the individual is affected by emotions, feeling and sensory impacts and what their creative potential of change may be are thus a central aspect of the tools offered by Sedgwick and Tomkins:

> If texture and affect, touching and feeling seem to belong together, then, it is not because they share a particular delicacy of scale, such as would necessarily call for ‘close reading’ or ‘thick description.’ What they have in common is that at whatever scale they are attended to, both are irreducibly phenomenological. To describe them primarily in terms of structure is always a qualitative misrepresentation. (Sedgwick 2003: 21)

For this discussion it will prove useful to extend Tomkins’ and Sedgwick’s occupation with affect and (cutaneous) feeling to other ramifications of feeling and sensory experience. All four novels analysed here probe into the textural manifestations of “the value of ‘he aroha ki te tangata’ (love for the people)” (Mead 2003: 178). Aroha loosely translates as ‘love’, yet its connotations are “loftier and more complex than the usual Western concepts of romantic love, or love as affection among friends and family members” (Panny 1998: 17). It includes a sense of belonging, care and “concern for our people” (Mead 2003: 345), and is closely connected to “te tangata, the importance of respecting and valuing people, the need for the group to support the individual and the individual to support the group” (Panny 1998: 19). As I hope to show, aroha takes on highly ‘fleshy’, textural and tangible expressions which are illustrated by the following passage from Witi Ihimaera’s *The Rope of Man*. Aroha binds people together in mutual love and concern; it includes very corporeal forms of expression that elude simple signifiers to a certain extent: “But words are so meaningless at moments of separation. They are only stitches across the wounds of the heart. Better to touch each other, to reaffirm by embracing, by the feel of skin on skin, that we believe in each other and that we are here. In life. Still in the world” (*TRoM* 17-8). Just as the word ‘sense’ ambiguously yokes sensory perception and mind, feelings are coupled with perceptive sensuousness. As the quote from Ihimaera’s novel indicates, feeling manifests itself in touch – to explore aroha includes texture as well (see also Sedgwick 2003: 17). Such relations, however, extend well beyond the intricate web of feeling and touch. The adjective ‘piercing’, for instance, records a variety of ‘touchy-feely’ details ranging from visual (piercing eyes), acoustic (piercing sounds), tangible (piercing sensations felt on one’s skin, but also hurting and cutting the skin as in the case of various forms of body ornamentation) ramifications to emotional-affective impact. In this sense, the bodily implications of emotions are also coupled with sensuous perceptions. The novels,
for instance, relate feelings of aroha to the sense of touch and cutaneous perception. The *Bone People*, for example, evokes an economy of skin relations. *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*, in turn, links a spectrum of visual perceptions to feelings of shame and shamelessness while *Hummingbird* invest in a wide spectrum of visual, cutaneous, auditory, olfactory, and gustatory impressions as well as a ‘sense of place’. Feelings in all their ramifications are therefore interrelated and appear on a wide scale. Merleau-Ponty already argued against hierarchic conceptions of the senses and instead envisioned the interaction of all sensory channels; the meaning or sense of a situation can only be grasped through the reciprocal interplay of all sensual perceptions. “Sensory experience”, so Merleau-Ponty asserted, “is unstable, and alien to natural perception which we achieve with our whole body all at once, and which opens on a world of interacting senses” (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 262).

In a sense, then, such a spatially conceived range or ‘claviature’ (Hotz-Davies 2007: 187) of “sampling – listing the possible” (Sedgwick and Frank 1995: 3) and of crystallisations and effects resulting from the textures of the affects also reminds me of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s step to the side of the ‘third’ in order to counter the body-mind-divide that inevitably reduced the body to an inferior position. Merleau-Ponty’s idea of the body as “our general medium for having a world” (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 169) and a link or “third term” (115) raises the question of possible artistic means that articulate such a position. The concept of the ‘third figure’ has created valid impulses in recent discussions of literary and cultural studies since the figure or concept of the third probes into epistemological negotiations that are situated between binary constructions (Breger and Döring 1998; Eßlinger 2010) and its translation into concrete figurative forms or *Gestalten* disentangles it from conceptual abstraction (Breger and Döring 1998: 2). The novels thus place the characters in-between two (or more) cultural horizons and identities just as much as they present the literary figures and their bodies as mediators that make tangible feelings, affects, textures, and sensuous or nondiscursive experiences and their relevance to cultural identity, memory, and transformation. One such literary creation of the third can be seen in the postcolonial employment of trickster or tricksterish figures that not only express the significance of indigenous concepts and traditions as “important source of inspiration” (Keown 2007:

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38 While Merleau-Ponty assumes a certain harmonious interplay of the senses, Howes underlines that we can never assume “a state of harmony” (Howes 2005a: 10); the senses interrelate, interact, coexist, overlap, and inevitably conflict (47-8). However, Merleau-Ponty’s writings also imply such inconsistencies (Roder 2008: 41-2). See, for instance, Merleau-Ponty’s essay “Eye and Mind” (Merleau-Ponty 2004b) in which he also considers the versatility of perspective.
178) and point to the relevance of cultural memory and reinvigoration, but also engender a communicative contest between positions towards a transformative reconciliation and therefore embody the dynamics of postcolonial subjectivities and their literary equivalent of the flesh. However, such examples of third figures do not necessarily have to be tricksters, embodiments of tricksters or modelled on tricksters. Simon in The Bone People, David in Nights in the Gardens of Spain, and Kingi in Hummingbird show concrete traces of (mythical) trickster figures: the Maori and pan-Pacific trickster Maui; Peter Pan, the mischievous flying boy with a never-ending childhood; and Tawhaki, another Maori trickster. In addition, The Uncle’s Story introduces the concept of shamanistic two-spiritedness in order to reconcile indigeneity and gayness. Other characters, too, are defined by their position in-between cultures. Moreover, the characters in The Bone People act as mediators of pain and (dis)affection while the mute child Simon illustrates a crucial silent presence always on the verge of the nondiscursive. The male protagonists of Nights and The Uncle’s Story make us aware of feelings of shame and fear and their dynamic implications concerning identity/memory. The narrative of Hummingbird, in turn, negotiates the cultural significance of sensory perception through the figures temporarily stranded on Aotearoa’s Ninety Mile Beach. Constantly, placed in-between opposite poles, “on the edge or just beyond existing borders, classifications, and categories” (Hynes 1993: 34) and “in continual transit” (34), the living and feeling body thus locates and mediates cultural identities and memories and becomes the crucial site in the literary investment in change.

In respect to the sensuous location of cultural identity through the inscribed, sensuous and feeling body questions concerning the literary creation of temporal and spatial aspects arise, not least on account of the fact that indigenous texts probe into the relations between the colonial past, its effects upon the present in the contexts of modernity, and the potential frameworks of change for the future. The flesh is thus far from historically, culturally or politically neutral territory and always subject to change.39 Just as much as the three-dimensional fabric of the human body generates a variety of shapes and spatial relations and may be mapped by fissures, scars, and wounds for instance, the body is able to generate a wide spectrum of feelings and

39 “[T]he body’s necessary ‘spatiotemporal location’ and its various cultural and biological specificities that inflect our perception” (Malecki 2010: 150) thus call for a view of it not as an impartial, universal entity, but as shaped by history and culture: “The human sensorium, however, never exists in a natural state. Humans are social beings, and just as human nature itself is a product of culture, so is the human sensorium” (Howes 2005a: 3).
sensuous impressions, “a maplike set of relations” (Sedgwick 2003: 5) and “increasingly divergent physical scales” (15). The flesh is thus capable of shrinking and multiplying, stretching and extending, scarring and regenerating and tends into a rhizomatic directionality as Steven Connor’s illuminating example of the cutaneous ramifications of fear indicates:

Our fear is written over our skin, insofar as the skin is our first line of defence. When our skin bristles with horror, when we horripilate, becoming like a hedgehog, we are defending ourselves against some threat, some horror, that is itself horrent, whose skin can stand up, piercing rather than sustaining, like the inverted breast of the Iron Maiden. If we think of that threat in terms of a threat to the skin, the possibility of being torn or pierced, we mime becoming the kind of creature whose skin can become an armed host, can itself come to be made up of blades or needles or spears or knobs. When we shiver with horror, we defend ourselves against penetration not only by hardening, but by shattering or multiplication. (Connor 2004: 244)

It should be noted, though, that it is inevitable to turn back to linguistic and metaphorical means – to analogies such as the image of a hedgehog – in order to capture bodily feeling. However, language itself may produce or cause physical responses. In addition to the spatial and multi-directional nuances of feeling, the body itself negotiates spatial contexts of cultural belonging and “a deep sensitivity and groundedness in place-specific epistemologies and life ways” (Najita 2006: 180). In the same way, it articulates specific cultural subjectivities and temporalities. One of the prevailing notions of western culture is its articulation of time in terms of progression, chronology or the development from origin to telos. Indigenous peoples were thus often assigned to the past and pitted against a western rhetoric of belief in progress. One such ramification of linear and progressive thought can be seen in the conception of the Pacific Islands as paradisiacal places where the clocks stopped ticking sometime in the past and their so-called ‘primitive’ inhabitants never evolved from a specific state of being. The evolutionary discourse cultivated a temporal divide between coloniser and colonised in order to justify and push colonial and imperialist endeavours:

A belief that Pacific cultures were dying out as a result of contact with Europeans gained widespread currency in the latter part of the nineteenth century, reinforced by the application of Darwin’s theory of natural selection to Indigenous societies that were ostensibly being overcome by stronger, putatively ‘superior’ European cultures. The ‘fatal impact’ theory (which held that Pacific populations would decline to eventual extinction) held currency well into the twentieth century, and was used to justify increasing European settler and commercial expansion into the Pacific. (Keown 2007: 40)

40 The “Deleuzian interest in planar relations” (Sedgwick 2003: 8) Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls to mind in reference to the affects has also been mobilised in postcolonial approaches. Diana Brydon and Helen Tiffin, for instance, have proposed “a model of cross-cultural interactions in which England is no longer privileged and the lines of communication are multiple, as in the multi-runnered rhizome” (Brydon and Tiffin 1993: 12). See Deleuze and Guattari 1987.
Such notions of stagnation or decline facilitated misconceptions that do not relate to the actual dynamics of indigenous realities and histories, and they fatally undercut temporal continuities: “Native cultures did not begin, or begin again, with European contact. A much longer history had gone into their making and some of their practices remained more or less unaffected by the arrival of the colonizer” (Edmond 1997: 14). Similarly, the term ‘postcolonial’ suggests a temporal state after colonialism, implying that colonialism is history and a phenomenon of the past. Albert Wendt, however, disapproves of such a definition since the effects of colonialism engender dynamic interrelations (also in a spatial sense) of past and present: “For me the post in post-colonial does not just mean after; it also means around, through, out of, alongside, and against” (Wendt 1995: 3). In addition, Frank Schulze-Engler criticises the oversimplified polarities that have arisen in literary theory and reading practices that either establish indigenous peoples and their literatures as fostering a return to traditional indigenous concepts and therefore as countering western notions of modernity or view them as victims of modernity which adds to a growing feeling of alienation, fragmentation and inauthenticity (Schulze-Engler 2007: 51) – this mindset “simply negates the continuum of modern indigenous experiences and life practices ranging from the rural to the urban, and from closely knit kinship networks to a wide variety of ‘mixed’ forms of indigenality based on ascription and identification rather than on genetic determination” (51).

This is a crucial point because the living, feeling body scripted by the fictions examined here not only ties cultural identity to phenomena of modernity, but also sets it in relation to the past. The expression and articulation of cultural identity can thus not be severed from a sense of remembering: “Memory is crucial: without a memory of the past, identity can never be whole. […] Inevitably, dealing with the present and trying to create the future requires an evaluation of the past” (Majid 2010: 5). The sensuous and corporeal location of the past as well as the integration of the individual in the wider context of genealogy mark decisive aspects of expressions and negotiations of cultural identity. Witi Ihimaera’s The Rope of Man thus translates the relatively abstract concept of history into “the great Rope of Man, Te Taura Tangata” (TRoM 30) which extends from the first Maori ancestors to the present, spanning the multi-faceted histories of Aotearoa. The body is therefore set in relations to ancestors and integrated into genealogies, be they biological, historical or by identification: “Ever-changing, the rope is a magnificent icon spiralling from one aeon to the next, charting the history of
humankind. At the beginning of its life, it was strong, tightly bound by Maori strands. […] It is different because the Pakeha became added to it, the strands of Pakeha culture entwining with ours, adding different textures and colours” (TRoM 30). Ihimaera’s conception of the individual as an integral part of the rope thus unfolds like a linear procession of people, but also “like a spiral […], or like the curling fern frond, a natural inspiration found also in Māori visual art” (Knudsen 2004: 4) which contains a circular or cyclic structure and develops ramifications in various directions:

The rope continues its journey, spinning, singing, weaving, sparkling, chanting its way through time. It charts the changing nature of the human odyssey. All our successes and failures as a people are woven into it, all our lapses from divinity and our triumphs over our inhumanity. The energy of the rope is awesome and awe-inspiring. As it continues into the future, parts of it split off through space, crackling and thundering, heading for other suns, ever, ever spinning, ever, ever singing, ever, ever glowing, onward and onward, ever, ever, forever. (TRoM 30-1)

The Maori proverb “te torino haere whakamua, whakamuri […] at the same time as the spiral is going forward, it is returning” (TRoM 271 and 276) – thus draws attention to the inextricable convolution of past and present and embeds the indigenous body in a temporal nexus that joins present realities and future visions to the memories of the past that are conceived as lying in front of a person while the future unfolds behind. In Ihimaera’s conception, the “invisible umbilical cord” (TRoM 321) hence connects bodies across space and time, and the body’s location in such a complex spatiotemporal situation “hopefully [brings] new strengths, not weaknesses, new possibilities” (321). Consequently, change is posited as an essential element in Maori fiction, but in order to move or ‘look’ forward, “a continued pursuit of the necessary cultural reinvigoration” (Majid 2010: 84) remains significant.

The literary creation of the human body is therefore located in a wide field of sensuous connotations. It illustrates manifold sensuous-emotional actualities and their significance in the negotiation of cultural identity and memory and becomes the medium of bodily agency that may just as well initiate new concepts and ‘touch’ us.
Chapter 2
“Skeletons and Skins” – Keri Hulme’s *The Bone People*

In his work *On Nietzsche* – as in a number of other writings – Georges Bataille expresses his fascination with moments of intensity in life, “a flash in the night – a language belonging to a brief moment” (Bataille 2004: 175). For Bataille, such intense moments could be created by violating the limits that define life, that is, by taking life to its extremes in situations of utter anguish and pain. Bataille’s quest for the destruction of life’s limits through excesses and his suspicion of language – “[h]ow painful it is at times to speak […] not to be intuitively understood but to be impelled to find words” (Bataille 2004: 138) – lead him to assert that, perhaps paradoxically, losing oneself in agonising excesses and painful extremes could bring about communication: “Deciding to make use of fictions, I dramatize being, I lacerate its solitude, and in this laceration I communicate” (107). “In the prisonhouse of the body”, he therefore asks, “what can we do, other than provoke glimpses of something beginning beyond the walls?” (Bataille 1997: 101). Influenced by Bataille and Sade, Michel Foucault similarly opts for “the possibility of resistance” (Foucault 1997: 292) “in terms of intensity” (293) that would propel the self outside conventional discursive categorisation and “silence its language” (Foucault 1980: 79), at least momentarily. A “cultivation of the self” (Foucault 1997: 234) and “techniques of self-forming activity” (265) through indescribably intense and violent experiences may thus create transformation.

In a sense, then, *The Bone People* by Keri Hulme can certainly be called a novel of extremes, for the narrative subjects the human body to a cycle of extraordinary violence and frequently dwells on intense and painful experiences that range from child abuse and harsh beatings to mutilation and near-death. The violent encounters between the protagonists are often marked by a certain incommunicability and resistance to dominant classifications and perspectives. This, however, mustn’t be viewed as essentially negative because Hulme’s novel, in all its painful intensity and incorporation or embodiment of silence, fosters a vision of communication. This paradox at the heart of Hulme’s award-winning novel also relates to a variety of inconsistencies and conflicting opinions that characterise the controversial debate Hulme’s fiction has sparked off since its publication in 1983. It is hard to imagine the literary canon of

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41 Quotation from *The Bone People* (*TBP* 218).
42 In addition to its focus on the masculine subject, Foucault’s philosophy of self-stylisation has been criticised for its one-sided occupation with violent erotics. See Shusterman 2008: 30ff.
Aotearoa/New Zealand as well as the canon of postcolonial literature without it. Yet, critical opinions on the novel are highly divided ranging from praise to rejection, and the critical debate may very well reflect the yawning gulfs in New Zealand’s official parole of biculturalism.\(^{43}\) In his infamous essay, C. K. Stead lashed out at those who received the book with acclaim in a “babble of excited voices” (Stead 1985: 101) and, in reaction to the fact that the novel won the Pegasus Award for Maori Literature, asked “[i]f The Bone People is not in any very obvious way a ‘feminist’ novel, in what sense is it a Maori novel?” (102). He continued to say that although Keri Hulme “claims to identify with the Maori part of her inheritance – not a disadvantageous identification at the present time – […] some essential elements in her novel are unconvincing” (Stead 1985: 103-4) because how can Hulme write as Maori ‘Other’ if her fictional portrayal of Maoriness is at best “willed, self-conscious, not inevitable, not entirely authentic” (104).\(^{44}\) This critique of Hulme’s “not entirely authentic” depiction of Maori culture is taken up by Mark Williams who asserts that “[t]he Maori spiritual material in the bone people is not pure an unmediated, a direct line back to the source. It bears the imprint of Pakeha reception and interpretation of that material. […] Hulme has dramatised readily available material and made it serve the particular purposes of the novel” (Williams 1990: 100). Williams also finds fault with the “form of romantic nationalism” (Williams 1990: 97) and the “species of spiritualised nationalism” (97) the text allegedly draws on in order to invent a new vision of Aotearoa/New Zealand: “Hulme’s novel attacks imperialist attitudes and reconstitutes the power of primitive magic” (97).\(^{45}\) Other critics

\(^{43}\) Several critics have drawn attention to the highly problematic nature of biculturalism. Augie Fleras and Paul Spoonley, for instance, argue that “‘biculturalism’ may mean a lot of things, but it seldom means Māori claims for tino rangatiratanga rights. The present usage of ‘biculturalism’ barely begins to address collective and inherent rights to self-determination of jurisdictions related to land, identity, and political voice” (Fleras and Spoonley 1999: 239). In the same way, Avril Bell has pointed out that “it is not good enough to continue with the ‘we are just New Zealanders’ identity claim with all the elisions and marginalisations that that implies” (Bell 1996: 156-7). Furthermore, Augie Fleras and Paul Spoonley express concerns about the shortcomings of the current concepts and discussions of biculturalism and multiculturalism as “Aotearoa/New Zealand is a multicultural and bicultural society; it is bi-national as well, at least in name, if not in practice and the challenge lies in constructively connecting the strands of these different discourses” (Fleras and Spoonley 1999: 248): “The challenge is to rethink New Zealand’s core institutions and values in a way that now encompasses the tangata whenua, and which addresses the pluralistic nature of contemporary New Zealand” (252).

\(^{44}\) Stead’s position has been countered various times and the “[d]ebate, supporting or refuting one or other of these positions, has raged for over a decade” (Panny 1998: 16). Alice Te Punga Somerville, for instance, asserts that “[f]or several critics, including myself […], if a writer has (and perhaps acknowledges) any whakapapa Maori, that is ‘sufficient’ basis – the bottom line, if you will – for determining that a text is ‘Maori.’” (Somerville 2006: 59)

\(^{45}\) See also Ruth Brown who deems Hulme’s use of Māori myth “a sentimentalised perversion of English Romanticism in ethnic dress” (Brown 1989: 253). In the same manner, Mark Williams views Kerewin’s return to her family and the land of her Māori ancestors as a reversed version of the “old Pakeha myth of Eden” (Williams 1990: 206): “The criticism of the Pakeha remains, but it has been subsumed into a myth that underlies the nation’s foundation. The novel, seeming to oppose the Pakeha, affirms the myth of
have countered these opinions, and “the positive responses to *The Bone People* by far outweigh any critical dismissal of Hulme’s authenticity as a Māori writer” (Knudsen 2004: 130) and of the content of the novel, for that matter. Recent scholarly attention has therefore been turned to the novel’s exploration of genealogy (DeLoughrey 2007), trauma (Najita 2006) and mythology (Majid 2010). Judith Dale sees the ambiguity of the novel as its strength: “The novel wants, needs, to have it both ways […] The way the novel manages to have it both ways is looking into the shifting patterns of a kaleidoscope where the same components appear utterly different yet are always still there and the same” (Dale 1985: 426-7).

These brief glimpses into the book’s reception history emphasise its continuous relevancy and its potential to fuel critical and academic debate. My discussion of *The Bone People* attempts to examine the investment of Hulme’s text – to come back to Georges Bataille – in unspeakable pain, a continual struggle of (dis)affections and their potential energies. Hulme spins a tale comprising a series of violent encounters, silences, unease and affection. Kerewin, “all Maori” (*TBP* 62) by heart and eloquent, self-sufficient “superwoman” (Janet Wilson 1998: 279) artist living in a tower, is thrown off track by the arrival of mute Pakeha child Simon – whose history and origin is unknown – and Maori Joe, Simon’s foster parent who lost his wife and son and beats his child because he cannot appreciate “his difference” (*TBP* 381). During the course of the narrative the trio, “[s]tranger and digger and broken man” (*TBP* 358), form a friendship, is then separated and eventually – an end that is also paradoxically the beginning – in a euphoric depiction of the three walking down a street holding hands and “shuffling ahead in the strange-paced dance” (*TBP* 3). From this beginning of the novel, or rather its end, the text draws attention to the human body, for Kerewin “can dig out each thought, each reaction, out from the grey brains, out through the bones” (*TBP* 3), and the three together, “all together, they have become the heart and muscles and mind of something perilous and new, something strange and growing and great” (4). Kerewin, Joe and Simon suffer from an immense amount of pain, both physically

perfectability that has sustained their nationalism. As the decade closed this myth was resurrected and reformulated for the sesquicentennial celebrations” (206).

46 Knudsen has analysed the narrative structure of the novel in terms of the double spiral, a frequent pattern in Maori art and cosmology. The last phrase of the novel – “TE MUTUNGA – RANEI TE TAKE [the end – or the beginning]” (*TBP* 445) – links the epilogue to the prologue “in a spiralling pattern” (Knudsen 2004: 141) and also embodies a Maori concept of time that, in contrast to the western notion of time as a linear progression, envisions the past as lying in front of a person and the future as lying behind one’s back: “The past is called ‘nga ra o mua’, which means ‘the days in front’ (the known and the ‘seen’), whereas the future is called ‘kei muri’, which means ‘that which is behind’ (the unknown yet to be seen)” (57). See also Keown 2005: 123.
and mentally, caused by harsh beatings, violent mutilations and agonizing experiences on the verge of death. The text thus includes so many ruptures of violence and anguish that it often breaks off its narrative and remains silent and elliptic as it happens, for instance, when “[n]asty” (TBP 16) and “[g]nomish” (16) Simon, “[o]ne of the maimed, the contaminating” (17), leaves Kerewin in the dark about the rosary: “’Umm, d’you mind telling me what this is for?’ He shuts his eyes and shakes his head. […] The pad and pencil are slipped deliberately back into his pocket. […] The boy goes on shaking his head, so his hair falls screening his face” (68).

In a cycle of hurting and pain, healing and resolution, (dis)affection and (dis)harmony, Keri Hulme creates a textured map of the flesh. The silences surrounding the broken, mutilated and scarred bodies in pain, however, are highly meaningful and “communicate […] through a wound” (Bataille 2004: 18). Clearly, The Bone People is concerned with the aftermath of colonialism and Maori cultural empowerment, yet I refuse to see the hurting and scarred bodies in terms of victimisation. Instead, I argue that Hulme imagines the body in terms of dynamic and active agency, and physical pain in the novel paves the way for new meanings and a process of redefinition of identity and cultural memory that is tied to bones and skins (new whakapapa relations) and utu (reciprocal action in reaction to an offence) and aroha (reciprocal ramifications of love and responsibility). The often non-verbalised elements surrounding the body, then, work as a mode of shattering prior definitions and reconfigure transformation. The painful experiences of the characters and the “good deal of beating and mutilation in this book” (Jones 1985: 17) that Jones “found a painful duty to read” (17) must therefore not necessarily be read as a bleak and pessimistic statement on New Zealand realities as Mark Williams’ reading of the novel indicates. Williams identifies the outraging violence of the narrative, the “vision of the human capacity for evil” (Williams 1990: 107) as the source of that power, yet fails to see that exactly that “negative fashion” (106), as he calls it, might be more significant than the bitter aftertaste he ascribes to the fiction: “Hulme is committed to the view that the human soul has depths in which darkness seems to predominate over light. The bone people finds something dark and negative that will not fritter away when the light of reason has been cast on it” (107). Judith Dale, however, makes an interesting remark that draws attention to the

47 Anna Smith, for example, emphasises Simon’s “ugly helplessness” (Smith 1995: 150) and reads the child as “the kind of figure who bears sickness for others, as if New Zealanders had implicitly made a pact that the mad and disfigured among them should make visible the suffering of all. In this sense he carries in his body the symptoms for a violent society” (150). Recently, Clare Barker vehemently contradicted such “stereotypes of disabled passivity and victimisation” (Barker 2006: 132).
possibilities of the textural spectrum of the novel. In relation to the intense pain the characters endure she writes that “[t]he worst scenes of violence and suffering are those undergone by Simon; but the gritty texture of the book includes a range of tactile experiences of every kind of pain both physical and mental” (Dale 1985: 419, my emphasis). Just as the bone people are affected and permeated by the many textures of pain and separation, healing and equilibrium, (dis)affections and aroha, they also afflict them upon each other and therefore encourage us to explore the correspondences and interrelations of this range.

2.1 From the Nonsense of the “Godzone Babytalk”\textsuperscript{48} to Spiral Skeletons and Resuscitation

In her discussion of Keri Hulme’s \textit{The Bone People} Michelle Keown “considers the novel’s movement from sublimated colonial violence to public resolution and socio-somatic regeneration” (Keown 2005: 102). The bodies of the three characters are, she suggests, “initially posited as palimpsests upon which are inscribed the sublimated violence of New Zealand’s colonial and pre-colonial past” (Keown 2005: 103) and then transformed through “cathartic experiences of violence and suffering which result in the eventual establishment of a new, regenerated collectivity” (103). Particularly Simon’s body, patterned by wounds, “long scar lines” (\textit{TBP} 387) and stitches and subjected to a vicious circle of domestic violence by his foster parent Joe, may be viewed as a record cataloguing “the sublimated violence of Aotearoa New Zealand’s colonial past” (Keown 2005: 108) that is then exorcised in a healing and thus also implies a ritual reminiscent of Maori tattoo, “a transitional step in the movement towards (adult) maturity and responsibility” (119). I find no fault with such a cartographic reading of Hulme’s novel. I would object, however, that the human body is thus set in parallel to a page displaying words, and skin only becomes visible with cultural inscription. Skin so provides the paper for the map and its ciphers, but it essentially remains a somewhat passive symbolic surface. Hulme’s text can certainly be viewed as positioning the body as a site of record and inscription, but it seems to me that Keri Hulme conceives the human body by way of a much more active and composite conceptualisation than the interpretation of the body as a ‘palimpsest’ and textualised surface would imply. What if the flesh – hurt, cut, and scarred – is posited as a means of transformation and change to plant,

\textsuperscript{48} Quotation from \textit{The Bone People} (\textit{TBP} 32).
locate and release feeling, to foster and feed the heart of the community? Though it is true that Hulme imagines the human body as inscribed by scars, her narrative also appears to cut the flesh in order to get inside the body to the literal heart of the matter. Just as Kerewin shares her lunch with a half-starved cat that “then fed itself into my heart” (*TBP* 432) at the end of the novel, the body contains feeling, the belly encloses emotions, and aroha resides, touches and moves out from the heart. Touching the heart therefore involves touching the stomach, for “emotions and affections reside in the liver, *te ate* (old people will still pat their stomachs and say things like ‘That really touched my heart, dear’)” (Hulme 1984: 33). Hurting and cutting the body touches the heart, involves feeling and prompts reaction. What manifests itself clearly in *The Bone People* is the idea that the body not only presents a site of inscription of cultural identity, but also – through this inscription and incorporation of feeling – a site of change and transformation. The hurting of the flesh and the wounds inflicted on the body through cutting, beatings and other violent experiences can thus be seen as instruments of physical transformation and as a revolt against predominant categories exactly by reason of the inclusion of corporeal extremes such as unspeakable pain and agony that conclude in the transgression of limits and the potential of new meanings. Foucault therefore speaks of “practices of freedom” (Foucault 1996: 433), of “an exercise of the self on the self, by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and to attain to a certain mode of being” (433) – an idea we also find in Bataille’s writings, who fervently insists on “a world like a bleeding wound” (Bataille 1985: 201) and explores the relationship between communication and wounding, a highly meaningful paradigm of “endlessly creating and destroying particular finite beings” (201).

The importance of reciprocal communication and physical messages – of “touching, retouching, touching-back” (Connor 2004: 36) – is already pointed to by the chronological beginning of the novel after the proleptic resolution of the end in the beginning where the image of joining hands figures prominently. Not only does the world the characters move in and the words that define this world no longer seem to make sense, it is also marked by a crude breakdown of communication and absence of intimacy. Whatever it is they are cannot be grasped or expressed by the “godzone babtalk. Hottie lolly cardi nappy, crappy the lot of it” (*TBP* 32).49 New meaning and

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49 The term ‘godzone’ – mocked in this ironic passage from *The Bone People* for its marginalising effects on Maori communities – goes back to a poem by Thomas Bracken (1843-1898), an expression of 1890s settler attempts to create a national identity for New Zealand: “Bracken and his fellow jubilee celebrants had proclaimed their society’s myths of itself as ‘God’s Own Country’ – the conquering of the bush and
propositional solutions, in turn, seem to stem from a language of touch and feeling which I will explore in detail later in this chapter. In order to resist and undermine the conventional means of language, Hulme creates characters that embody a crucial affinity for feeling and physical contact.

Situated in an economy of pain and healing, wounds and scars, bones and skin, aroha and utu, the figures of Kerewin, Simon and Joe form an odd trinity of contradicting, yet attracting poles. Polarities, however, are constantly blurred. With Kerewin *The Bone People* portrays an example of striking individualism. She leads a loner’s life, “an odd macabre kind of existence” (*TBP* 13), spending her days hunting, drinking, pondering her momentary creative inability and trapped inside her “prison” (7) tower, that insurmountable “wall, high and hard and stone” (7). Surrounded by the walls of her tower, she refuses to connect with people and “likes privacy” (*TBP* 23). The only traces of people in her life are the books in her library and a collection of all kinds of objects such as carved pounamu stones, pendants, chisels, guitars, and a coffee mill she took from her family’s home, all of which she guards like treasures not to be shared with anyone. Her “hunger for solitude” (*TBP* 109) and the “cold and uncaring sobriety” (92) she finds in alcohol, however, go hand in hand with isolation, estrangement and a certain meaninglessness of life: “But there’s no compass for my disoriented soul, only ever-beckoning ghostlights” (250). Her pick-and-mix existence resembles a flea market of curiosities, of various books and quotations, of “[e]ncyclopaedias of peculiar facts and wayward pieces of knowledge” (*TBP* 94), “[m]yths and legends by the hundred” (94), and a multitude of things and traditions from all kinds of cultures jumbled together to fill her solitude. Yet none of it can pave the way for meaningful communication; all that resonates is “the empty rumbling of their words” (Bataille 1985: 40):

Webs of events that grew together to become a net in life. Life was a thing that grew wild. She supposed there was an overall pattern, a design to it. She’d never found one. She thought of the

the building of a just egalitarian and biracial society, its heroic pioneer near-past, its uniquely beautiful landscape, its proud British heritage, its glorious future” (Jones 2004: 207).

50 A translation of aroha and utu into ‘love’ and ‘revenge’ would be oversimplifying and misleading because both terms are entirely complex in their conceptualisation in Maori culture and resist the connotations of such translation. Whereas aroha is based on mutual reciprocity and responsibility, utu “names the reciprocation that results from an offence such as deceiving, harming or killing others” (Panny 1998: 17) and is not necessarily connected to violence.

51 Kerewin’s ‘hoarding’ becomes even more obvious in the light of Simon’s generosity (Panny 1998: 20). Joe thus mentions that Simon “doesn’t play much […] We tried, Hana and I, gave him all kinds of toys at first. […] He didn’t exactly ignore them, but it was like he didn’t know why he should bother with them […] and then all the gear started getting lost. He gave some of it away quite openly to Piri’s kids” (*TBP* 204).
tools she had gathered together, and painstakingly learned to use. Futureprobes, Tarot and I Ching and the wide Wispfingers from the stars... all these to scry and ferret and vex the smokethick future. A broad general knowledge, encompassing bits of history, psychology, ethology, religious theory and practices of many kinds. Her charts of self-knowledge. Her library. The inner thirst for information about everything that had lived or lives on Earth that she’d kept alive long after childhood had ended. None of them helped make sense of living. (TBp 90)

Severed from her family and her creativity, “the mummified games set and dried in books” (TBp 53) neither afford Kerewin meaning in life nor can they incorporate her Maori ties. Her literacy is presented as mere prattle and nonsense and – even more so through her aversion of touch and physical contact while everyone else in her family is “demonstrative physically” (TBp 265) – cannot hide the fact that “[i]n the Maori world, the solitary person is nothing, being destitute in terms of family ties and interaction with people” (Panny 1998: 19). Her museum-like tower is thus also an expression of cultural alienation for, as Judith Dell Panny argues, “such hoarding signals a person who is sick in spirit. Most taonga [valuables] do not belong to individuals, but are the shared possessions if iwi or hapu, a tribe or a section of a tribe” (Panny 1998: 20).

In contrast to Kerewin’s hermit-like existence, Simon and Joe’s relationship is intensely physical. Whereas Kerewin is marked by an abjection of touch and physical connection – repeatedly “forestalling the contact” (TBp 71) with people because “she hates touching” (174) – Joe and Simon move on a scale ranging from intense physical violence to powerful affection. Joe violently beats his child until Simon’s small white body is terribly wounded, bruised, cut and scarred all over. Despite the abuse, Joe and Simon’s relationship is also characterised by an intense love mirrored in images of gentle skin contact: “It’s good lying against Joe like this, thinks Simon. All the muscles are soft, the strength in abeyance. He has let his own body go completely limp, relaxed into the curve of arm, the curve of his father’s chest” (TBp 170). Although Simon and Joe are unbreakably connected, they share Kerewin’s feeling of meaninglessness and unbelonging. Uprooted by the death of his wife and child, Joe is left with being a parent to a child not his own and the monotony of working in a factory, “being a puppet in someone else’s play. Not having any say” (TBp 89).

Joe is not as isolated from his family as is Kerewin. He is part of a larger family and “well-liked” (TBp 94), but the relationship between him and his family is troubled and uneasy. His family knows about his maltreatment of Simon and criticises him for it: “They still think I’m making a pissawful job of bringing him up. Whatever I do with him is wrong” (TBp 129). Despite the support of his whanau, Joe feels “that the
Maoritanga has got lost in the way I live” (TBP 62) and – like Kerewin – expresses a sense that the overarching order of the universe has been destroyed and that his life slipped into imbalance: “The lines on his face seem drawn by an inward corroding bitterness, not age. A carelessness of life, an abandonment, death of wife and death of him” (51). His relationship to Simon is constantly torn between love and violent beatings and the fact that he is not able to fully appreciate and love Simon the way he is. He later realises that “my child was a gift, and that I loved him too hard, hated him too much” (TBP 381). His rage gnaws at him and places his friendship to Kerewin under strain. This preoccupation with the inadequacy of the communicative system and even its complete breakdown as well as the marginal position of Maori culture in New Zealand society is highlighted by the novel’s portrayal of unequal power relations and “[t]hat curious impersonal property sense parents display over their young children’s bodies” (TBP 197): “[T]he feeling” therefore “that there was something very wrong between them grew and grew, until there was a wall up. […] Nothing communicated” (114). Hulme’s unmasking of the ‘godzone babytalk’ reveals the brutal and patronising strategies of an overpowering parent: “Simon’s shrinking back against the wall. […] [T]he boy gets hit, twice, hard. […] The matter is settled right then, thump, that’s it. It always looks so ridiculous, Joe hefty and twice his child’s size – but that’s the way we do it in good old Godzone” (TBP 95). However, Hulme imagines the characters as entirely active, creative and capable to unhinge New Zealand’s unequal bicultural ‘babytalk’ and call into question the ‘pedagogical’ investment of the colonial enterprise and settler societies.52

Keri Hulme positions the body as a means of derailing conventional communication and reintroducing principles of Maori culture such as genealogical and

52 Though Michelle Keown reads the body as a representation of “a symbolic rite de passage from (neo)colonial conflict to post-imperial resolution” (Keown 2005: 120), that is, from the violence of colonialism inflicted upon the body to its postcolonial transformation through Maori tattooing practices, she does not specify the nature of the colonial violence further. Susan Najita’s reading of the novel illuminatingly elaborates on the specific phenomena of colonialism in Aotearoa Keri Hulme reworks in her novel (see Najita 2006: esp. 108-16). Najita thus traces Kerewin’s “neuter” (TBP 266) sexuality, her lack of “any sexual urge or appetite” (266), to “the exchange of Maori women for European commodities” (Najita 2006: 102) as well as “the sexual economy” (103) inherent in the formation of inter-tribal alliances and negotiations. With reference to the female body as a ‘trade object’ Najita asserts that “Kerewin’s descent from the rangatira (chiefly) class on her Maori side reveals how her own ancestry as a Maori woman may be the means by which this historical past resurfaces in the form of traumatic realism. She re-lives the past, re-experiences events and embodies these ancestral figures. In light of this history why wouldn’t she distrust the institution of marriage?” (102). Simon’s body, in turn, seems to be inscribed with “the history of penal transportation” (Najita 2006: 108) of juvenile delinquents to New Zealand and their subjugation to Christian religious ‘re-education’ and corporeal discipline: “By no means a Christ-figure, Simon is the object upon which the Christian and disciplinary narratives of abuse, penance, and penitence are enacted” (114).
communal links founded on reciprocity of both beatings and mutual concern in order to
counter the unequal power relations provoked by the colonial past and initiate a
decolonising project for the future of Aotearoa/New Zealand. Corporeality – pain,
wounds, skin, feeling and so on – looms large and in various ramifications in The Bone
People and the plot evolves from a series of intense experiences of violence, feelings of
physical agony and pain, but also growing affection and aroha. These intense scenarios
of feeling are closely accompanied by gaps or fissures in the text, that is, by moments
when the descriptive power of the word fails and leads to a momentary textual
breakdown. Keri Hulme extensively incorporates omission marks to her novel; the
narrative repeatedly breaks off and remains elliptical. At these points, words do not
suffice to express or explain further meaning. Here, the novel wavers from the extensive
pain that springs from the psychological or physical wounds and the traumatic
influences of colonialism to feelings of aroha, recovery and renewal through a Maori
perspective that foregrounds a retrieval of the past and the extended community in order
to move forward. This is for instance indicated by Kerewin’s uneasy rhetoric during
their trip to Moerangi. Whenever her thoughts meander through the pain in her soul
caused by the break with her family and Maori roots, the stream of words breaks off.
Her linguistic attempt to grasp her pain repeatedly fails; she even uses her words as a
means of distraction:

Twenty-five years. That’s a long time. A quarter of a century. A generation. They were the only
people who knew me, knew anything of me, and they kept on loving me until I broke it… do
they love me now? Six years is a long time to be alone. To be unknown, uncared for. Cut off
from the roots, sick and adrift. They must have wiped me out of their hearts and minds… why
can’t I do that? Why do I keep on… careful, you’re wallowing, back in the slough of selfpity and
greasy despair… but why do I keep on grieving? When all meaningful links are broken? Forever.
(Because hope remains. Get rid of your hope, Holmes me gangrenous soul. Do you really think
you could apologise? Say you were wrong? Ask for forgiveness that might not be given? Never!)
(TBP 167)

At another point, Kerewin is confronted with Simon’s screaming pain and “screaming panic” (TBP
145) when she puts the drunk boy in the shower: “It’s a fierce high agonising to the ears sound. The child
goes on screaming. He starts to fight the cubicle walls, the floor, the water, in a blind panic to get
anywhere out” (145). Except for the screaming, the monstrosity of pain and terror remains unvocalised.
Helping him out of his wet clothes, Kerewin discovers his wounded, beaten body, yet both remain silent:
“From the nape of his neck to his thighs, and all over the calves of his legs, he is cut and wealed. There
are places on his shoulder blades where the… whatever you used, you shit… has bitten through to the
underlying bone. There are sort of blood blisters that reach round his ribs on to his chest. And an area
nearly the size of my hand, that’s a large part of the child’s back damn it, that’s infected. It’s raw and
swollen and leaking infected lymph” (TBP 148). Just as Simon remains completely silent, “Kerewin
didn’t say a word. […] ‘Why didn’t you say anything?’ There was pain in her voice, ‘Why did you keep
quiet?’ but he shook his head. And that was all she said” (TBP 146). The traumatic influences
of colonialism and “the violence of contact” (Najita 2006: 18) – mirrored in severed Maori roots and
screaming psychological as well as physical pain and scars – are also reflected by Joe who cannot cure his
child of his nightmares: “‘Scared of ghosts and things in dreams… if I was a proper Maori I’d….’ Into the
following silence, ‘You’d what?’ ‘Hah, I don’t know.’” (TBP 61).
Particularly Simon’s silent presence and creative communicative system unhinge the conventional discursive system. With the figure of Simon, Keri Hulme creates a significant contrast to her protagonist Kerewin, the isolated woman who fills her world with big words from books and innumerable artful objects. The mute and peculiarly elusive child turns Kerewin and Joe’s world upside-down. Like a snail withdrawing into its shell, he removes himself from spoken language, uses a peculiar kind of sign language – “[s]even fingers spread briefly, and then one hand describes fluid circles” \((TBP\ 27)\) – or completely refuses to communicate, therefore reducing Kerewin’s babble to absurdity: “It was like watching a snail, she thinks coldly. One moment, all its horns are out and it’s positively sailing along its silken slime path, and the next… ooops, retreat into the shell” \((27)\). Kerewin thus suddenly finds herself at a loss when being confronted with the fact that “something is out of place, a wrongness somewhere, an uneasiness, an overwatching” \((TBP\ 16)\) which goes hand in hand with the unexpected and disturbing arrival of the mute Simon. His refusal to speak and his aura of unreadability and lack of verbal communication are at odds with Kerewin’s babbling attitude, her habit of playing with words and quoting from a variety of literary sources – a habit she is entirely conscious of as she refers to herself as a “[w]ordplayer” \((TBP\ 92)\) and “[m]ere quoter” \((92)\). Although both get along quite well through “non-verbal communication” \((TBP\ 21)\), Simon is often “unnaturally silent” \((21)\) with a face “unreadable, still as stone, as though it is frozen” \((43)\) and he quietly “sits, his eyes hooded, and doesn’t make any response” \((25)\) while Kerewin “wriggle[s] away under cover of words” \((243)\) and talks “loud nonsense to cover her pain” \((25)\). Simon’s “self-effacement is perfect” \((TBP\ 74)\), and the “non-expression on his face” \((81)\) and his “[u]tter disinterest” \((81)\) make Kerewin aware of her empty juggling of words.\(^54\) Simon, then, is completely puzzled by Kerewin’s jabber because some of her words simply have no meaning in his world or are not of importance. They are at odds with his physical language: “What does she talk like that for? To fool me? and shakes his head in exasperation. Kerewin’s multisyllables were, for the main part, going straight in one ear

54 Kerewin’s quoting of John Keat’s poetic lines, for example, simply dies away in Simon’s complete silence. The literary tradition she frequently cites from suddenly seems out of place and insufficient or ineffective in the face of the impenetrable silence and defiance Simon confronts her with: ‘Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam of perilous seas,’ she quotes blandly, seeing his stare fixed on the window. ‘I’d open them and show you a forlorn fairy or something except you’d probably die of pneumonia soon after.’ Silence” \((TBP\ 32)\). Eva Rask Knudsen notes that “it is not the lack of linguistic control (the silent sign of the colonized condition) that casts Kerewin as an alienated part-Māori person but her exaggerated mastery of the English language and European traditions” \((Knudsen\ 2004:\ 147)\); Kerewin thus “finds herself speaking into a vacuum, because her words are like refined bricks, randomly chosen, however, from the colossal mental monuments of the Old World, and they seem to belie her antipodean place, making her a misfit” \((147)\).
and out the other, leaving behind an increasing residue of strange sounds and bewilderment” (TBP 38). The “odd child, with its silence, and canny receptiveness” (TBP 55) throws Kerewin and Joe’s life off balance, yet the novel also identifies the human body and specifically the figure of Simon as the key to balance and new communication that accommodate and re-centre principles of Maori culture.

The ultimate breakdown of language occurs during the final beating. Told from Simon’s perspective, the passage of staccato-like, broken sentences echoes the child’s unspeakable agony, monstrous pain and the series of kicks and punches that keep coming at him: “Try. Keep eyes. Them open. See the dark come. Can’t. Nothing. Badbadbad. Fucking useless Clare. Among the chaff and evil reedy voices round that hummock in unconsciousness he can hear the one he hates. Singing. It’s too near the threshold but go back up…. Hey! shh Sant’ Claro dulce and gentle a throbbing double kick, and the plateau tilts. Deeper, it welcomes” (TBP 302). The breakdown of conventional communication, however, holds the promise of alternative, more reciprocal ways of communication and connectedness that again belong to the world of the body and the textural aspects of feeling. The novel’s transition from piercing agony to mutual understanding and aroha is already prefigured by a passage portraying Simon and Kerewin at the beach. Here, feeling and reciprocal contact manifest themselves in cutaneous relations and breath, both of which point to the resuscitation of the human body and the community in the latter part of Hulme’s novel. Simon ponders that “knowing names is nice, but it don’t mean much. Knowing this is a whatever she said is neat, but it don’t change it. Names aren’t much. The things are” (TBP 126). This insight leads the mute Simon to whisper a torrent of words into Kerewin’s ear, words that come out of his mouth in a stream of air, in order to show Kerewin that communication or meaning mustn’t necessarily rely on linguistic structures:

Laughing secretly at himself. Because you can’t say names, Clare. But he’d come back anyway, and blown into her ear. A whole stream of names that is. Do you like them? Segment-lamanaria-vertebrae-lessonia-variegata-marauding-voodoo-korfie and ALL. Her eyes flicked open quick again, and were as sharp and threatening as glass splinters. It was just air, see? he’d thought hurriedly, my hand was more real, see? […] She’ll get to know it, one of these days. He’d sat, smiling his knowall smile into the sun, until, tired of making explanations for words, he lay down and went to sleep. (TBP 126)

With “one crazy kid and a mixed-up Maori” (TBP 62) and a “non-painting painter who’s not sure whether she’s coming or going” (62) the novel orbits around a “promise of times to come…maybe” (63), of a reconciliation of Maori and Pakeha perspectives. Just as Keri Hulme attempts to deconstruct the language of godzone New
Zealand, *The Bone People* deconstructs the human body in order to revive it and reconstruct it in terms of genealogy and aroha. This process of resuscitation of the human body is prefigured and accompanied by Hulme’s dismantling of Kerewin’s tower, the reconstruction of the meeting house, and the creation of Kerewin’s new spiral home and Simon’s music huches. Their skeletal structures provide the bones for the new iwi – tribe – and point to the significance of whakapapa – genealogy – and the mauri – the ‘life-force’ – both of which are connected to feeling and the permeability of the flesh as I will show later.

Kerewin’s description of the wharenui, the new communal meeting house, in her final diary entry implies the function of the wharenui as a skeletal structure or bone framework that reflects the genealogical connections and ramifications of the whanau, the extended family or community that, in turn, fills the body or stomach of the meeting house with life and feeling: “I’m singing with the rest inside the tight sweet hall that’s got a heart of people once more. The prayers and the hallowing will be done this coming Sunday, and, glory of glories, the old gateposts from the old marae, each with their own name, will be re-erected. We have not just a hall, but a marae again” *(TBP* 432). Eva Rask Knudsen further elaborates on the crucial link between body and meeting house:

> In Māori culture the *wharenui*, the meeting-house, embodies the spirit of land and people; it is ‘a place to stand’. The meeting-house has a human form (with head, backbone, ribcage and limbs) and it is conceived as a macrocosm of Māori ancestors. Thus, a Māori person who enters a meeting-house enters into the myths of the ancestors or into the body of the people. Texts are inscribed upon this body, often in the form of *pou pou*, carved figures, that have sprung from the darkness of the wood into the world of light to tell their stories. Assisted by a ritualistic recital of *whakapapa* (genealogy), from ‘Te Kore’ to the present time, these figures of all times come alive and allow the spiralling symbols etched on their bodies to unfold and speak. (Knudsen 2004: 23)

The notion of the meeting house as a body or bone framework that shelters and incorporates the communal body builds a stark contrast to Kerewin’s tower. Though

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55 “The wharenui (literally, ‘big house’), also known in many cases as the whare whakairo (carved house) or whare tupuna (ancestral house), is commonly conceptualized as the body of an important ancestor of the tribe, and poupo (carved images of various other ancestors) frequently line the internal walls of the building. On entering the meeting house, the individual therefore enters the body of the ancestor: the carved figure (kōruru) on the roof top at the front of the building represents the head; the bargeboards (maihi) which curve from the head towards the ground represent the arms, the central post (tāhū) running along the roof from front to back is the spine, and the rafters (heke) which connect to the carved ancestors (poupo) are conceptualized as the ribs” (Keown 2007: 208-9).

56 As much as *The Bone People* seems to rely on “[r]evisionist intertextuality” (Janet Wilson 1998: 271) – Hulme’s reworking of the tower image of *The Lord of the Rings* is only one example –, it clearly marks a decisive turn toward the human body. For a more in-depth discussion of Hulme’s usage of intertextual references see Fee 1991; Edmond 1993, and Janet Wilson 1998.
*The Bone People* depicts the tower as a “concrete skeleton, wooden ribs and girdle, skin of stone, grey and slateblue and heavy honey-coloured” (*TBP* 7), it becomes “an abyss” (7) and “a prison” (7) for Kerewin, and Simon broods over the claustrophobic structure of “the narrow haunted stairs that twisted upon themselves, like the inside of a corkscrew” (72). Joe, in turn, relates the tower to Kerewin and associates both of them with lifeless matter: “And then sometimes, she is inhuman… like this Tower is inhuman. Comfortable to be in, pleasant, if you ignore the toadstools in the walls, and the little trees and glowworms in holes by the stairs, and the fact that nobody else in New Zealand lives in a Tower” (*TBP* 101).57

There is another crucial detail about the tower that points to the rediscovery of the mauri (the ancestral stone and manifestation of the life force) by Joe and the creation of Kerewin’s new spiral home. Kerewin’s “six-floored Tower” (*TBP* 15) with its narrow “spiral staircase” (15) drains her off breath: “She runs up the stairs, and the sack drips as it swings. ‘One two three aleary hello my sweet mere hell these get steeper daily, days of sun and wine and jooyyy,’ the top, and stop, breathless” (15). The tower is thus a lifeless place, a place of unbelonging connected to claustrophobia and death. During Simon’s first visit to her tower, Kerewin conjures up an image of slaughtered and flayed sheep in her mind: “Momentarily, she sees the chain at the freezing works where fresh-killed sheep carmine-throated, are grotesquely hooded by their own skins. The skins slip along the floor as the white carcasses jerk and sway above them on the moving hooks… what deaths to occasion your comforts?” (*TBP* 29).

The suffocating image of slit throats and the lifelessness of her home also extend to Kerewin’s body and her nickname ‘te kaihau’, ‘the windeater’: “*I have taken to wandering a lot, gyrovague, te kaihau. There is a long desert beach here, my bush, and whispering stands of alien trees***” (*TBP* 96). The Maori word hau may refer to wind and implies Kerewin’s restlessness, always seeking, travelling, and ‘eating the wind’, but never belonging. However, hau may also mean ‘vital essence’ or ‘life principle’ and thus indicates Kerewin’s ‘breathlessness’, solitude and incapability to form meaningful relationships. Longing for breath, she is ‘gulping air’ but her ‘breathless’ existence is

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57 Similar to the tower’s prison-like atmosphere “the Gillayley’s den” (*TBP* 76) is an austerely furnished house “almost institutional in its unadorned plainness” (76): “What’s strange? No pictures, no flowers, no knickknacks I can see? Maybe, but not all homes have that sort of thing. Is it the barren cleanliness, the look of almost poverty?” (78). Kerewin wonders at the Gillayley’s “queer strait antiseptic haven” (*TBP* 88) and its lifelessness: “On the bed though, is a bright coverlet made of squares of crocheted wool; all colours, orange and violet, scarlet and shocking pink and vermilion, cornflower blue and sunflower yellow and limeleaf green. It is the only burst of colour she’s seen in the house, excepting the budgie. That’s one thing – everything is so drear. Small wonder the brat escapes twice weekly” (79).
also marked by an inability to share and acknowledge life. The life-giving essence of ‘breath’ in its double sense of actual respiration and vitality seems to be completely absent from Kerewin’s existence as she dedicates a large part of her time to hunting and killing. This is also exemplified by the image of Kerewin “crashing through loose clusters of lupins” \((TBP\ 13)\). The force of her body destroys the dew drops on the leaves when “she brushes past and sends the jewels sliding, drop by drop weeping off” \((TBP\ 13)\). Her ‘killer aura’ culminates in her involvement in the child’s final and nearly fatal beating: when Simon fights her trying to make her understand his mood and that the three of them belong together, Kerewin “punched him so hard he was down on the floor a minute catching his breath again” \((TBP\ 326)\), and she later beats him with harsh words, hoping that “his father knocks him sillier than he is now” \((307)\).

The \textit{Bone People} therefore joins the renewal of the community and the resuscitation of the individual human body by its exploration of the ramifications of mauri and hau. The words mauri and hau are often equated with ‘life-force’ or ‘breath’; their connotative richness, however, transcends such simplistic translations:

It was believed that a person, a people, a pā or house or waka, a river or forest, a food resource of any kind – any entity of value – possessed a life force, a vitality, which was termed a hau. In the case of a person, this hau was identified with the breath, and a number of bodily states involving the breath – such as being startled or sneezing – were said to be the act of the person’s mauri. With a person, then, the hau and the mauri were both located within the body. \((Orbell\ 1995:\ 117)\)

Keri Hulme outlines the principle of mauri further: “1. Life principle, thymos of Man. 2. Source of the emotions. 3. Talisman, a material symbol of the hidden principle protecting vitality, \textit{mana}, fruitfulness. In the old days a \textit{mauri} might be a stick or a stone, carven or in its natural state. They could be trees or rocks, but whatever they were, they were potent conditionally” \((Hulme\ 1981:\ 290)\). The “very black or very green” \((TBP\ 384)\) glowing stone retrieved from the cave guarded by the kaumatua is therefore directly linked to the human body that moves from death to life in the novel and, hence, to the revived community. Breath seems to be a significant part of \textit{The Bone People}, and its recovery sets in motion a process of resuscitation that is coupled with the dynamic ramifications of emotional and physical connections. These connections manifest themselves in hongi, the pivotal Maori gesture of physical connection combining a mutual exchange of touch, breath and aroha that overwhelms Kerewin:

He leans over and takes her shoulders. She stiffens, pulling away. ‘You don’t want to hongi with me?’ Her taut shoulders relax. I salute the breath of life in thee, the same life that is breathed by me, warm flesh to warm flesh, oily press of nose to nose, the hardness of foreheads meeting. I salute that which gives us life. He sighs loudly, then says, strongly, gaily, ‘It’s a great gift. A
Judith Dell Panny has therefore suggested that Keri Hulme’s “choice of words points to the significance of breath in the Maori world. [...] A hongi, which is a formal greeting, a gentle pressing together of two noses, is a sharing of breath, and also a giving and receiving of aroha which reaffirms goodwill. It may provide healing after misunderstanding” (Panny 1998: 18). The connotative richness of mauri and hau also extends to Hulme’s fictional project of touching off aroha and new love ties for the resuscitated community. Just as the mauri comprises a profound connection to a person’s emotions and hau incorporates reciprocal relations – hau also denominates a present given for a present received and food used in ceremonial contexts – it involves the Maori conceptualisation of the feelings of the heart located in the stomach (see also Najita 2006: 105). While Simon and Joe lighten Kerewin’s heart in a “flood of affection” (TBP 201), Kerewin feeds herself into their hearts. This is exemplified by the passage portraying Kerewin and Simon eating raw bivalves at the beach. First, Simon’s “mouth [is] agape in horror” (TBP 124) and his trying them is accompanied by a flow of tears, “weeping all the while” (125). His sadness may refer to his aversion to killing other creatures just as much as to the emotional connection between him and Kere, for “[h]e begs for more” (TBP 125). The Bone People thus places a hook in the heart and the belly and aroha cuts through the skin, inwards and outwards. By juxtaposing hau and mauri, aroha and skin, Hulme’s novel releases gut feeling, a permeating, affective and effective “whirl of gut, and cut and shielding skin” (TBP 424).

The vital energy associated with the hau and the mauri in Maori culture has been sucked out of the human body in Hulme’s novel. The effects of colonialism and their impact on indigenous culture are not only figured through the scars and wounds marking the body, but also eat into the body and suck out its life force. Severed from Maori values such as whakapapa and tribal links and their reciprocal implications of aroha, Kerewin avoids physical contact and relations with other people. Having heard of Joe’s loss, she is unable to offer comfort, be it by words or a physical-spiritual gesture: “They are always inadequate, words… if I knew you better, or I was a warmer person, I would hongi, but...” (TBP 88). In one of her dreams, Kerewin finds herself in a bloody kiss with a man eating away at her throat: “There is a sharp drawnout pain against her throat, as though someone has fastened their lips against it, suctioning” (TBP 186). The
vampire imagery not only portrays Kerewin as being drained off her blood,\textsuperscript{58} but also off breath; the biting kiss at her throat is blocking her trachea and taking her breath. Joe has a similar dream of Hana and Timote turning into moths while he and Simon drink from Hana’s breasts, and it is Simon who sucks the life out of her: “To his horror, he discovers he is sucking the fat furred end of an enormous moth. Hana and Timote begin to dissolve, to break up into whirling clouds of fire-eyed moths” (TBP 351-2). Kerewin, in turn, has the feeling that Joe and Simon are vampires robbing her of blood and vitality, “[s]ucking me dry, it feels like. Emotional vampires, slurping all the juice from my home” (TBP 278). This may be in direct reference to the novel’s criticism of the conventional western notion of family and its deconstruction of colonially effected power relations, but the vampire imagery also points to the importance of blood in indigenous Pacific contexts. Albert Wendt links tatau to vampirism (Wendt 1996: 24) and maintains that “[o]ur words for blood are toto, eelele, and palapala. (Toto can also mean to plant.) Eelele and palapala are also our terms for earth/soil/mud/earth. We are therefore made of earth/soil. Our blood, which keeps us alive, is earth. So when you are tatauing the blood, the self, you are re-connecting it to the earth, re-affirming that you are earth, genetically and genealogically” (25). The connotations of ancestry and cultural identity are further amplified by the recognition and significance of feeling of the tattooing process that moves from pain to gratifying pleasure: “Yet tā moko, like childbirth, is about blood, its spilling, and its pain; and just as childbirth brings forth life, tā moko brings forth beauty. […] And tā moko is about blood. About shedding it, making it flow, in the pursuit of beauty, terror, artifice, enhancement and pleasure” (Te Awekotuku et al. 2007: 76).

In contrast to Kerewin, Hulme not only portrays Simon as part vampire, but also as a peculiar life force. By incorporating Simon in terms of silence, \textit{The Bone People} underlines his breathing even more. As words are curiously absent from the child’s communication (except for the few disjointed phrases he writes on paper in order to make himself understood) the sounds of his respiration appear all the more significant when juxtaposed to Kerewin’s loquacious polyphrasia. Kerewin’s attempt to get rid of Simon soon after she has discovered him in her tower is quitted with a sigh – “he sighs audibly” (TBP 19) – a reaction he shows whenever other people have difficulties understanding him. Then “[t]he child sighs” (TBP 27), filling the air with his breath:

\textsuperscript{58} Susan Najita suggests a crucial link between the vampire imagery, the influence of capitalism and the commodification of Maori women: “In Aotearoa capital’s vampirism began as early as 1769 with the exchange of Maori women for European commodities” (Najita 2006: 102).
“Even as she thinks that, the child draws a deep breath and lets it out in a strange sound, a groaning sigh. Then the fingers round her wrist slide off, sketch urgently in the air, retreat” (17). Simon who has been hurled out of the darkness onto the New Zealand coast while the air was filled with “a drawn prescient hissing” (TBP 5) makes Kerewin oddly aware of her own breath and at the same time communicates through breathing sounds as well. Particularly his “giggle” (TBP 22) is presented as “[a] breathy spurt of chuckling that bubbles eerily out of him” (22) and a “strange throaty chuckle” (398). With the mute child in her kitchen, the only sound reverberating in the “unnaturally silent” (TBP 21) room is “[h]er breathing” (21), and later Kerewin’s attention is captured by the “air rising in the black depth of her drink” (30) while Simon produces a “sigh. Followed by a hiccup” (30). Keri Hulme imagines “aura-watcher” (TBP 251) Simon as giving life. His connection to the spirit world and his vital potential are further emphasised by his dream in which he resuscitates the “two mummified baby rabbits” (TBP 203) with the breath of his silent music, virtually singing them back to life:

You’re kneeling back by that hole. It’s hot in the sunshine. You feel like crying, but you know something better, and you want them alive. So you start feeding them music, underbreath singing, and little by little the withered leathery ears fill out: flick, flick, a tentative twitch and shake. The dead dried fur begins to lift and shift and shine. Those sunken holes of eyes and nostrils pinken slowly, like a blush stealing over, the eyes to moisten, darken, the nostrils to quiver, and then they open their eyes on you and they glow. The music rings and swirls now, picks up like a lift of a wave, and the light has turned from ordinary sunlight to a deepening bluegreen, shot with gold… you’re inside a moving wave of sound and light and quick joy, and it steadies, stays, before the motion of descent can begin, and sicken. The rabbits shift and nudge one another, start to joust with soft brown forepaws in a glad scrabble to get free of the hole of darkness, and scatter away into the green waterlight shine. (203)

The resuscitation of the human body and the community through the hau and the mauri also contains elements of Maori mythology and ancestral connections. Just as Joe breathed for Simon and revived him after he had washed ashore, so did Tane, one of the children of Rangi and Papa, personifications of sky and earth, give the woman he made from red earth the ‘sneeze of life’ – ‘tihe mauri ora’ (Alpers 1986: 23, Walker 1992: 172, Orbell 1995: 179). The elated and rapturous scene at the beach when Kerewin

59 His breathing represents one of the few sounds that characterise Kerewin’s perception of Simon’s presence, so that the sudden absence of these sounds results in a fearful image of kindstod: “She sneaks to her bedroom doorway: there is a curled shape dimly visible on the bed. No movement. No sound. She cannot hear any breathing. A sudden absurd fear, that the unwelcome guest has somehow changed into an even more unwelcome corpse, grips her” (TBP 35). Snuggled up somewhere inside the middle of a piled up blanket, Simon makes himself known to Kerewin only by his breathing: “She can hear breathing, but the boy’s idea of a comfortable bed was to pile the quilt in a heap and crawl somewhere inside the centre. She can’t see any part of him” (TBP 37). Simon’s ‘breathy’ silence is further highlighted by the bubbling sound he greets Kerewin with – “‘Urhh,’ says Simon – it is a sound: his fingers snatch at the air and swing abruptly to his throat” (TBP 46) – and their walk in the cold: “Not a sound. Not a whoop of dismay or pain. Just her breathing and his” (40).
effusively touches noses with Joe and both come together in an overwhelming embrace with Simon prefigures their reunion and the tangible love-ties bound together by flesh and breath: “‘Tihe mauriora!’ and Kerewin laughs and holds him and hongis. And the child runs into them both, literally, blind in his need to be with them. She picks him up, and holds him one-handed on her hip. ‘Tihe mauriora to you too, urchin.’ One arm still round Joe’s shoulders: they are knit together by her arms. She can feel their heart beats echo and shake through her” (TBP 163). The hau – “the vitality of the entity, understood as being equivalent to a person’s breath” (Orbell 1995: 117) – binds the small community of the three characters together and foregrounds the revived energetic life force that marks the novel’s end and its vision for the future. The ‘gaps’ and dislocations ‘punched’ into the narrative and the flesh of the bone people also anticipate the newly found, invigorating empathy of the revivified iwi that is already hinted when Simon is resuscitated by Joe after the shipwreck: “He has got that of me, I suppose. My breath… I was surprised when he started coughing” (TBP 85).

The boy’s “music hutches” (TBP 102) seem to embody or capture a similar creative swirl, breath or life force. Made from all kinds of lifeless objects, his constructions of “odd little temple[s], a pivot for sounds to swing round…” (TBP 127), resemble the bone structure of the meeting house, concentrate air and provide a spiralling space for it to swirl around causing it to resonate in whistling sounds:

He started picking up debris off the beach, and randomly at first, and then with a steady and abnormal concentration, he had built a spiralling construction of marramgrass and shells and driftchips and seaweed. […] He whistled and pointed to it. It whistles? He lay down on the sand with his ear by it, and she went to him, puzzled. Simon got up quickly. Listen too, he said, touching his ear and pointing to her. So she did, and heard nothing. Listened very intently, and

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60 Simon’s music hutches also allow for a reading of the The Bone People in terms of a movement from screaming pain to (dis)harmonious music. Indeed, Simon “was, and is, a fluent screamer” (TBP 86), not a fluent ‘speaker’, and his screams are transformed into singing. When he kills a wounded bird out of mercy, Simon produces actual sounds: “Then he sits back on his heels, keeping his mind dark, and sings to it. It is a thin reedy sound at first, nasal and highpitched. It is the only sound he can make voluntarily, because even his laughter and screaming are not under his full control, and it is as secret as his name. The singing rises and builds atonically” (TBP 236). Eva Rask Knudsen has therefore suggested that “Simon’s presence in The Bone People grows from silence to ‘voice’” (Knudsen 2004: 163). Her reading of Simon, however, hints at a progressive pattern that is perhaps implied but never fully achieved in the novel. Although “[h]e is the singer” (TBP 3) of “wordless mouth music” (240), he nevertheless remains extensively damaged and mainly reduced to listening: “The child listens on the fringes, but soon comes to her knee, leaning there, head down. His hair has regrown in fine straggling flakes and shades his crooked face: silvery moon hair pressed against the dark body of the guitar as he strains to hear the high notes sing” (443). In reference to the boy’s music, Hulme’s semantic usage again highlights the significance of breath as creative and vital energy: “Icansing! Icansing! Icansing! it sifts him like a wind, a tumult in him like the rush of music” (TBP 237). On the foundation of the replanted mauri the respirited and resuscitated community celebrates its reunion, renewal and new ties through sound; “it’s not any Maori music he’s heard before” (TBP 241) Joe thus remarks.
was suddenly aware that the pulse of her blood and the surge of the surf and the thin rustle of wind round the beaches were combining to make something like music. (102)

The proleptic end at the beginning of the novel anticipates the final stage of re-spiritualisation and revitalisation. Kerewin finally pulls down the tower “[b]ecause the burden of uselessness became too much” (TBP 412) and uses its circular foundations for the “new round shell house [that] holds them all in its spiralling embrace” (442). The circular shape of the new house extends outwards and is modelled on Simon’s music hutches that capture wind and turn it into sound; their material shells are enriched by a life principle, so to speak. Just as towers become senseless and are substituted by spiral houses that provide room to swirl and just as a variety of beach debris provides the skeletal structure for air to circulate and thus come alive with sound, the human body is revitalised, reassembled and reconnected with an energetic life force that seems to stem from the mauri Joe later replants on the grounds of Kerewin’s new home. Kerewin, Joe and Simon are reunited and filled with the life force that is tied up with the formation of an extended community on the ‘bones’ of their ancestors. By having Kerewin, Simon and Joe create new spiral homes, Keri Hulme confronts “the dislocations suffered within their culture, and look[s] to the restoration of those broken houses” (Bowman 1991: 245). Especially Kerewin, the once solitary and self-sufficient individual, becomes the central figure in the creation of the new marae and hence a new iwi. Just as Joe once breathed for Simon, Kerewin resuscitates the community and lays the foundation for a renewed life force that holds the community together. This spiritual re-connection is emphasised by the image of the three of them holding hands and singing, thus giving and receiving the breath of life and new-found energy: “The silence is music. He is the singer. […] She whistles softly as she walks. […] And she sings as she takes their hands” (TBP 3). Together they create “a new kind of soundwaves” (TBP 127) inspired by the swinging silence of Simon’s music hutches. Keri Hulme thus repositions the body as a living and active entity; the three of them become “the heart” (TBP 4) resounding aroha. This creative potential of the body clearly comes to the foreground in the “Moonwater Picking” chapter of the novel. Here, Kerewin, Joe, and Simon are eventually able to ‘breathe’ again, and this strength is coupled with the

61 The music hutches also embody the Maori concepts of Te Kore, the creative nothingness, and the double spiral that contains two separate strings that move inwards and outwards and form a harmonious whole. They so manifest the “paradoxical relationship between unity and disharmony or separation” (Keown 2005: 118), between creation and destruction, between positive and negative forces and “the organic dialectic between nothing and something, silence and sound” (Knudsen 2004: 167) that seem to be decisive and recurrent patterns of Maori cosmology. See Knudsen 2004: esp. 127-84 and Keown 2005: esp. 102-26.
energetic ‘breath’ of the mauri. The community therefore incorporates a vital principle of life and change and provides the imaginative room to ‘breathe’ and to move forward: “Ice crystal haloes round the stars, the crash of waves down on the beach, sweet-scented air breathed in with the wine on my breath. breath” (TBP 441). Indeed, one of the final thoughts Kerewin writes in her diary before she burns it implies her new embrace of change, transformation and multiple directions, of life in all its richness as indicated by the (dis)harmonious trinity of the three held together by aroha and respect for each other’s difference:

[T]he wind, my dear sour other self, is that of chance and change. Direction one, is recovery; two, a renewed talent; three, rebuilding; and four, tying up loose ends, making the net whole. Direction five is endeavouring not to dodge responsibilities, for me, or a wandering cat, or whomever. Six is related: I know I can move, can lead, can direct. Therefore, I will. No more sequestration, no more Holmes against the world. And seven is the pivot, the point of balance for the needle of my true soul – I have faced Death. I have been caught in the wild weed tangles of Her hair, seen the gleam of her jade eyes. I will go when it is time – no choice! – but now I want life. (TBP 436-7)

2.2 Bones and Skins, Utu and Aroha

If The Bone People is a story about violence and resolution, it is also a story about the manifold permeations and repercussions connected to skin, touch and feeling. The fiction displays a fundamental urge to uncover what lies beneath the skin, what lies beneath the surface. The title’s reference to the Maori pun ‘e nga iwi o nga iwi’ thereby reveals a crucial trajectory: to uncover ‘the bone of the people’ and to create ‘the people of the bone’ (Knudsen 2004: 128) who will be the skeletons, pillars and hearts of a new community. Bones, however, only form a skeleton; a human body can hardly be imagined to be alive consisting only of bones. Even the haunting skeletons of horror movies lack one of the most important and sensitive organs of the body – a skin to touch and feel (see Connor 2004: 65-6). Uncovering or digging up the bones of one’s ancestors and cutting or violating the skin in order to lay bare one’s own bones also implies another direction that moves beyond skeletal implications, namely one of healing, touching, reconnecting, communicating and regenerating skin. The narrative thus relates the Maori concept of aroha to feeling and touching skin and inextricably entwines feeling and cultural identity and memory. In this sense, the novel violates,
incises, goes under the skin, moves inwards, scars, heals, and produces new textures and multi-dimensional routes.62

Hulme creates the bodies of the bone people Kerewin, Joe and Simon as many-textured. Her continuous exploration of the textures of skin and flesh and bones reveals the overall agenda of *The Bone People*, namely to dig up the bones of one’s ancestors, resituate and empower whakapapa relations, and position the trio as the new ancestors of the future community. The textures of their human figures thus embody the novel’s double movement inwards to recover the bones and outwards to create anew, to connect and become involved, tangibly and provoking. From the beginning of the novel, Hulme’s language dwells on the permeability and textures of the flesh which is presented as many-faceted, cut, bruised, perforated, and embossed like a relief, reaching outwards, touching – not unlike the patterns chiselled into the skin by ta moko, resulting in “[a] raised texture” (Te Awekotuku 2006: 123, see also Keown 2005: esp. 120).

Whereas Kerewin and Simon’s throats are both marked by “two scar-like lines” (*TBP* 30) (Kerewin) and something “[p]ink and satin-shiney, like a scar” (30) (Simon), Joe’s skin is scripted by “deep lines round his mouth” (51) and a “long pale scar […] from his right shoulder blade down in a curve across his ribs” (56). Aside from “[t]he scarring lines that run down his cheeks” (*TBP* 51-2), Joe walks on “thin-calved and spindly” (56) legs, “funny skinny legs as a memento” (229) of poliomyelitis. This skeletal image is reflected by “the secrets that crept and chilled and chuckled in the marrow of her [Kerewin’s] bones” (*TBP* 7) and Simon, a walking skeleton only held together by his mutilated skin: “Slender and prominently boned, his smallness making him seem frail. A tallowness about his face, a waxen depth that accentuates the bruise marks of tiredness under his eyes, and the narrowness of his face” (31). Simon’s skin, in turn, is stylised as a topography of “cuts and bruises” (*TBP* 116), recording a history of violence, even of the time before he washed ashore, for “[h]e had some bloody funny marks on him when he arrived” (328). Hulme imagines Simon’s body as a “bruise island” (*TBP* 302) with “bruiselike shadows under his eyes […] deepened to mauve” (37), “those bloody nonexistent teeth” (71) and “a hole in his left ear. Like a small circle of flesh has been punched from the lobe” (190).

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62 Steven Connor therefore points “beyond the skin’s limited, cartographic condition” (Connor 2004: 36) and calls for a much more complex view of the skin: “More complex manifolds can only be visualized in a world possessing more dimensions than three. Perhaps one begins to mean by this, that the skin is a topology rather than a topography, a shape which does not present itself all at once to the eye, but emerges, like the gathering of a wave, or the piling of a cloud, through the passage of time, whose shape it itself comes to be” (36-7).
Moreover, a deep psychological pain and feeling of loss and meaninglessness corresponds to the wounded and scarred bodies. Kerewin thus mentions that “[y]ou’re wounded, soul, too hurt to heal” (TBP 261) while Joe is “full of remorse” (175) and Simon entirely traumatised, speechless and haunted by nightmares. In addition, the fiction in its “quest beyond the boundaries of conventional language” (O’Brien 1990: 79) displays a preoccupation with the inadequacy and the “highflown nonsense” (TBP 225) of the language and hierarchy of power “in good old Godzone” (95). Hulme therefore renders the “complex hierarchies of power” (Shusterman 2008: 21), colonialism and marginalisation textually visible by writing them on the body which maps and materialises the marks of such power. Convincingly so, Michelle Keown suggests that Keri Hulme “deploy[s] the diseased Polynesian body as an allegory for the ravages of (neo)colonialism, exploring ways in which Māori may alter their often circumscribed status within New Zealand society” (Keown 2005: 12). The Bone People thus makes us visualise the body as inscribed by histories – old and new. The skin turns the body into a means of graphic memory. However, Hulme’s conceptualisation of the human body presents itself far more complex, textured and challenging than such an interpretation would imply. Incising, cutting, hurting the body therefore already embodies Hulme’s trajectory of unearthing cultural identity and memory, and the relief-like textures of the flesh contribute to the new ties of aroha and the transformation into an extended family and community.

In her analysis of The Bone People Eva Rask Knudsen observes that the Maori concepts of the double spiral and Te Kore/the Void, “a nothing which […] seems to be something” (Knudsen 2004: 141), are reflected by the structure of Hulme’s novel. Thus, “[e]ach section consists of three chapters, of which the third always connotes darkness or pain – […] yet this darkness smoulders and eventually sends off sparks of light and hope into the first chapter of the following sections” (Knudsen 2004: 141). I would also argue that the fictional structure alternates between sections of touching and connection and sections of violent encounters and therefore mirrors the novel’s overall move from the excruciating pain of physical violence towards the affective and loving touch of aroha and community. The first section entitled “Season of the Day Moon” and particularly the chapter “Feelers” therefore portray the establishment of “the familiar category” (TBP 68) – the characters start ‘touching’ each other’s lives, figuratively and literally, as the following passage shows:
But hands are sacred things. Touch is personal, fingers of love, feelers of blind eyes, tongues of those who cannot talk… oops. Simon still has his hand out, and his smile there, turned smirk, as though he knows perfectly well her reluctance to touch anybody’s hands and is amused by it. […] Thanks, mouths Simon, kissing her hand, the grin widening after. […] Kerewin appalled.

The last sub-chapter of the section contrasts this beginning connection with the unspeakable violence inflicted upon the child when Kerewin finds out about Joe’s abuse of Simon and starts looking out for the boy and reaching out to both Joe and Simon. The next section repeatedly juxtaposes situations of affectionate and tactile communication and crude pain. Here, the novel wavers between “the warmth and strength” (TBP 169) of their friendship and violent outbursts such as the fight on the beach between Kerewin and Joe. The next chapter, then, continues the unresolved issues of their relationship and the physical violence but turns them into catalytic experiences; hurting the flesh and uncovering the bones is followed by the healing of their bodies and skins and an affirmation of aroha and community that again takes on very tactile expressions. Simon thus clasps the sculpture of their heads in his hands – “touch it, touch it, even if she has been burned here, touch her” (TBP 410) – and they begin to build an extended community at the end of the novel with “arms about each other” (442), moving away from hostile individualism, violent contact and the western core family.

With Simon Keri Hulme places an extraordinary silence at the heart of her novel. Simon never speaks although there is “no physical reason to prevent him from speaking” (TBP 86) – “if he vocalises, he throws up, and violently” (86), and all he can produce are sounds, hisses, snorts, and screams. However, Simon’s muteness doesn’t prevent him from communicating. In order to make himself understood, he uses a peculiar sign language and sometimes writes on his little pad, but “hell, he don’t like writing things” (TBP 399). His most significant communicative tools, however, are his skin and his ability to touch. Indeed, his first response to Kerewin is a tight grip on her arm: “Unexpectedly, a handful of thin fingers reaches for her wrist, arrives and fastens with the wistful strength of the small. […] Not restraining violence, pressing meaning” (TBP 17). While Simon uses touch to feel – not talk – his way through the world, he is also presented as a highly permeable figure with a skin permanently and violently wounded from the outside. Kerewin so takes out a splinter from his foot sole that has been pushed deeply into the child’s skin: “It was wooden, old wood, freshbroken, hard in the soft child-callous. Already the flesh around it is hot. […] She scrutinises the hole before it closes and fills in bloodily. No dark slivers, clean puncture, should heal well; and becomes aware of the hissing and twisting and sets the foot free. The marks of her
grip are white on his ankle” (*TBP* 18-9). Exposed to vicious beatings, his skin displays the textures of bruises, swellings, cuts, wounds, and scars; “white and sick with pain” (*TBP* 136), the small child “looks like he’s been trashed with a whip” (147) and his skin is a “crosshatch of open weals and scars” (151).

His ambiguous characteristics, the child’s silent suffering and the fact that Hulme conceives of Simon as the key in the novel’s movement from violence to resolution and ‘rebirth’ have prompted some critics to see him as a kind of Christ figure while others have vehemently contested such a perspective and/or focused on his tricksterish Maui’an capabilities. Indeed, the narrative repeatedly resists Christian belief. Kerewin thus mentions that her “cardinal virtue is hope. Forlorn hope, hope in extremity. Not Christian hope, but an innate rebellion against the inevitable dooms of suffering, death, and despair. A senseless hope” (*TBP* 330). What strikes me as particularly fascinating concerning the figure of Simon is his active potential and creative agency. In stark contrast to Christ’s victimisation as the sacrificial Lamb of God passively suffering for others, Simon – “[t]he vandal, the vagabond, the wayward urchin, the scarecrow child” (*TBP* 36-7) – displays a crucial potential of initiative and crossing borders. He violates existing rules and touches untouchable territory. In this sense, Simon parallels the deceptive and inventive resourcefulness of Maui, and his tactile capabilities and

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63 Judith Dale suggests that “Simon Peter (a very Christian name) serves the function of a kind of ‘saving’ figure who effectively (though not consciously) turns pain into joy and hope for others, and is himself much damaged in the process” (Dale 1985: 420). Dale also understands the “trinity” (*TBP* 436) formed by Kerewin, Joe and Simon as “[t]he holy family idea […] that partly seems to be that towards which the progress of the novel points” (Dale 1985: 426). In Anna Smith’s opinion, the novel engages in a cycle of suffering and redemption and Simon’s love “is a crazy, insane kind of love that seems not to bear resentment, as indifferent to suffering as a ‘crayfish cooking as it walked calmly through a hot pool’” (Smith 1995: 151, citing *The Bone People*).

64 “By no means a Christ-figure, Simon is the object upon which the Christian and disciplinary narratives of abuse, penance, and penitence are enacted. […] Simon’s body critiques Christian ideology’s glorification of suffering central to the economy of sin, penitence, and salvation which informs western notions of the law” (Najita 2006: 114-5).

65 Eva Rask Knudsen has traced the novel’s manifold references to Maui, the Maori trickster, and argues that Hulme conceives of Simon as “a contemporary Maui” (Knudsen 2004: 171) and “double-dealing […] contemporary trickster of a mythicized New Zealand” (171; also compare Janet Wilson 1998: esp. 281-2).

66 That the fiction frequently undermines the Christian perspective is further indicated by Simon’s unruliness. Instead of turning the other cheek, he bites Joe’s hand, throws plates and ultimately stabs Joe with a glass splinter. Moreover, Simon can’t make sense of “the brittle metal man, stripped to his pants and nailed to the wood” (*TBP* 141): “Why does she keep a dead man nailed on the wall?” (141). And after Simon has his hair cut – the long hair that then inspires the spiral pattern of Kerewin’s sculpture – Kerewin notes that “[s]pirals make more sense than crosses, joys more than sorrows” (*TBP* 273).

67 With the “[o]ddbod, spiderchild” (*TBP* 96) Simon, Hulme reworks quite a number of storylines from the Maui myth cycle (Knudsen 2004: esp. 169-73 and Janet Wilson 1998: 281-2). Aside from the numerous references to Maui’s birth and tricks through the figure of Simon, the most eye-catching allusions are the novel’s adaptation of the stories of how Maui fished up New Zealand (Knudsen 2004: 169-71) and how he attempted to conquer death (Alpers 1986: 66-70, Orbell 1995: 117). However, Hulme extensively rewrites these mythic stories of Maori culture and thus underlines culture in terms of transformation and change; “recovering the Maori ancestral past causes her radically to revise this
affective presence in the book add to his trickster role because Simon is the crucial vehicle of physical contact and dares to touch – literally and figuratively – when others don’t: “Breaking down division lines, […] [v]isitor everywhere, especially to those places that are off limits, the trickster seems to dwell in no single place but to be in continual transit through all realms marginal and liminal” (Hynes 1993: 34-5).

In Maori culture the trickster Maui is accorded a significant position in the negotiation of balance and imbalance, positive and negative forces. He was quick, intelligent and resourceful. He was bold, yet cunning and deceitful. From his penchant for deceiving his elders he was called Maui-nukurau-tangata, the trickster of men” (Walker 1992: 172). Always in-between, never entirely one thing or the other, “Maui acts out the role of both arch-trickster and benefactor to mankind” (Walker 1992: 174): “Maui is the most important culture-hero of Māori mythology. He is known to serve humans in distress, but he is not self-sacrificing in any sense that resembles Christian altruism. He is, rather, the contrary: a mischievous trickster […] not a sinner and not a saint, but a powerful advocate of human progress” (Knudsen 2004: 169). His tricks disrupt the universe and denote a negative and destructive potential that is balanced again by their beneficial and positive outcome. He propels the world ad absurdum and, at the same time, forward, constantly subtracting from and adding to the status quo. If Hulme stylises Simon as a contemporary embodiment of the mythological figure Maui and thus incorporates a mythological or magic realist element to her novel, she also translates these mythical overtones into very concrete and tangible expressions. If

heritage” (Janet Wilson 1998: 283). This strategy may emphasise the fact that colonialism has lasting effects on Maori culture, for “the person without a past is broken and incomplete. At the same time, this image of brokenness is symbolic of the many Maori who struggle in a non-space between cultures” (Majid 2010: 5). It also underscores Maori culture in terms of change, not stasis, growing into a complex fabric of its own. Keri Hulme thus rewrites the stories of Maui for the purpose of her postcolonial vision of Aotearoa “as both political act and self-empowering process” (Janet Wilson 1998: 272), for “[b]oth [Maui and Simon] are principles of change: Maui as a figure of agency upsets the equilibrium of human relationships just as he unsets his siblings; Simon constantly and deliberately disturbs the fragile balance between himself and his guardians” (281).

68 Tricksters or figures of tricksterish characteristics and “transgressive magic” (Makarius 1993: 72) appear to be a significant element of Maori mythology and story-telling. Maui may be the most prominent one, but he is accompanied by similar figures such as Tawhaki or Rata amongst others (Alpers 1986, Walker 1992, Orbell 1995).

69 Stephen Slemon interprets the magic realist concept in terms of “a battle between two oppositional systems […], each working toward the creation of a different kind of fictional world from the other” (Slemon 1995: 409). The concept thus contains a form of constant interrogation and critique of ideological formations, raising questions of authenticity, referentiality, and transformation: “In a postcolonial context, then, the magic realist narrative recapitulates a dialectical struggle within language, a dialectic between ‘codes of recognition’ inherent within the inherited language and those imagined, utopian, and future-oriented codes that aspire toward a language of expressive, local realism, and a set of ‘original relations’ with the world. […] [T]he magic realist texts tend to display a preoccupation with images of both borders and centers and to work toward destabilizing their fixity” (Slemon 1995: 411-2).
Hulme creates Simon as the embodiment of the trickster, Simon nevertheless remains a “child” (TBP 443) who is made to embody elements of both Pakeha and Maori ancestry. Simon’s appearance already implies an ambiguous indeterminacy and unsettling active potential: the “seabluegreen” (TBP 17) “opal brilliance” (28) of his eyes, his cheeky grin marked by a “teeth-bare gap” (24), his movements “like a lizard” (16), and his specialisation “in sneakthievery and petty vandalism” (34) and “[f]licking matches, and stealing. And when he loses his temper, he can get vicious” (172). The role of the trickster as taboo breaker and destructive force, as a third figure in-between categories, and also as a constructive medium are reflected by Simon’s abilities to unhinge the established order, to release a cycle of aroha and utu, to touch and affect, to initiate change and equilibrium, and to weave different strands into the genealogical rope of Aotearoa’s future. This corresponds to the Maori concepts of aroha and utu which indicate a balance between destructive and constructive forces, between negative and positive aspects. While utu demands reciprocal action to counterbalance offensive acts, aroha connotes a mutual love, friendship, and responsibility, a potential that unites polarities, contradictions and opposing elements as Cleve Barlow explains:

There are three essential elements to all things: the pū or positive force, the kē or negative force, and the hā or life giving energy or force. These elements are described by the following statement:

The nucleus or positive force is at the center,
The negative force is the outer shell,
The old elements are discarded
And the new elements are created,
By the power of aroha.

Aroha is the creative force that emanates from the gods. (Barlow 1991: 8)

This mutual reciprocity of both aroha and utu is further indicated by the passage in which Simon counters Joe’s apology for hitting him by biting his hand. “Aroha, mouths the child, grinning, aroha, and his smile is wickedly broad” (TBP 171), and Joe counters that the ‘love bite’ on his hand is “utu more like” (171), thus suggesting the reciprocal nature of human relationships in Maori culture: “Aroha includes giving and receiving, sharing and taking responsibility for the well-being of others” (Panny 1998: 17). Utu, in turn, denotes the reciprocation countering offensive action, but it does not necessarily imply violence (Panny 1998: 17). Whereas Simon is subjected to frequent beatings, he temporarily restores a certain balance to his relationship with Joe by hurting him in return.
Aside from Kerewin and Joe, particularly Simon’s presence in the novel prompts reaction. By positioning Simon as the object of violent beatings, the novel releases utu. With the fragile white child – beaten, mutilated, and scarred all over – and his aggressive father, Keri Hulme unmasks New Zealand power relations and their unequal bicultural overtones. Hulme’s twist on reality – a Maori man beating a Pakeha child – may be read as a form of utu, of revenge for the violence and marginalisation unleashed by colonialism. The white child embodies the Pakeha side of (colonial) contact, an “intruder” (TBP 15) encroaching upon Kerewin and Joe’s lives with “paleknuckled fingers gripping” (19) them. Joe’s relationship to Simon ambiguously pivots around affection and utu – if Joe fosters his son with “tender loving care” (TBP 173), he also considers him a disturbing force to his friendship with Kerewin, for he hopes that “bloody Haimona doesn’t wreck things” (77) and he feels that “Himi’s in the way. It’s like a punch in his stomach” (291) and a pain in his heart. He also seems to hurt Simon in reaction to his cousin Luce’s remarks on the homoerotic overtones of Joe’s sexuality – “[l]ike when I fought that shit Luce over his sneer that Himi would get to prefer the boys too, under my influence. […] And afterwards, he had gone home and […] finished by belting him [the boy] until he fainted” (TBP 174). Moreover, Joe appears to revenge Hana and Timote’s death by beating Simon. Reminiscent of the diseases the settlers brought to New Zealand (see also Keown 2007: 39-40), Joe’s dream at the kaumatua’s place reveals the pale child to be the reason why Joe’s wife and son died – “as the boy begins to drink, Hana’s face changes” (TBP 351) and she turns into a moth, a symbol of death in Maori culture (Hulme 1984: 32). Kerewin, too, wonders whether Simon’s Pakehaness may be the reason for the abuse, for “the sunchild” (TBP 297) appears to be a cuckoo, an invader in the nest of a Maori family: “Cuckold? Or so Pakeha a wife your blood can’t show” (298). Joe finally comes to realise that he maltreats the child because he “resented his difference, and therefore, I tried to make him as tame and malleable as possible” (TBP 381).

However, Hulme’s novel is far too complex as to construct a one-way revenge by positing Simon as “a whipping boy for Pakeha history” (Rauwerda 2005: 31) or even the opposite, the silent, mute colonised. His mute cries and intense pain, his beaten and wounded body, by far transcend any simplistic notions and may also touch and affect us and force us to confront and interrogate the violent mechanisms and unresolved aftermath of the colonial past that engender such unbearable suffering, pain and “intense distress” (Tomkins in Sedgwick and Frank: 1995: 115). Indeed, the fingers of the
“chance-given child, an odd, difficult and distressing child” (*TBP* 231), are “searching fingers” (410), always touching and caressing. If the violence in *The Bone People* refers to the reciprocity of utu, Hulme may also suggest that violence leads to a vicious circle of counter-violence that can hardly be broken. Releasing utu to counter the injustices and aftermath of colonialism may be one possibility to restore a certain balance, but it may just as well cause more violence and pain. Frequent beatings do not turn Simon into a docile child; instead he “declares war” (*TBP* 188), throws things, flicks matches and fights. Through the figure of Simon the novel asserts the necessity of “[t]he end […] still there” (*TBP* 73) in order for balance to be achieved. Smashing windows and destroying Kerewin’s guitar, Simon becomes the catalyst for the final and nearly fatal stage of violence and for “the narrative development from *mamae* to *aroha*” (Knudsen 2004: 140). Kerewin as well comes to see in him “the catalytic urchin who touched this off” (*TBP* 427). This corresponds to Simon’s view of himself. Even if he is the victim of harsh beatings and almost loses his life, the mute child is paradoxically the force that sparks off this violence and accepts the “darkness” (*TBP* 5) for the new light to come: “He had endured it all. Whatever they did to him, and however long it was going to take, he could endure it. […] They might as well not be, because they only make sense together. He knew that in the beginning with an elation beyond anything he had ever felt. He has worked at keeping them together whatever the cost” (395). In order to make Kerewin and Joe understand that *aroha* will affect them in more creative and communicative ways and effects equilibrium he paradoxically “fight[s] when he wants you to understand” (*TBP* 326).

Hence, *The Bone People* presents Simon as the crucial medium of contact, especially physical contact. Simon is also positioned as the significant source and object of affection and disaffection, of *aroha* and utu which pierce the skin, are written in the flesh and become crucial markers of cultural identity and memory. Whereas his skin bears the traces of the violent physical encounters with Joe, the child continuously solicits (skin) contact based on reciprocity and generosity. From their first encounter onwards when Simon realises that there is kindness and *aroha* behind Kerewin’s façade of solitude and animosity towards people the child is the initiator of subsequent visits and their growing friendship. Simon touches off contact by taking or giving things. After Simon’s first visit, for instance, Kerewin is left with the disturbed order of her chess set and the promise of more visits to come: “It’s when she’s putting the chesspieces away that she notices the boy has left his sandal behind. And taken the
black queen” (*TBP* 43). While Simon’s stealing implies a Maui’an wiliness, his taking and giving things is also reminiscent of “a kind of openness central to Polynesian cultures of exchange” (Najita 2006: 105) and “a form of indigenous borrowing. In Maori culture, borrowing was governed by strict rules: an article could be borrowed but had to be returned when finished with or on demand and should be acknowledged with a gift or counter-loan” (106). Simon’s giving Kerewin his rosary and signet ring and Joe’s sending mutton birds can be viewed as such gifts in return for borrowing and Kerewin’s hospitality (*TBP* 65-7). His stealing also solicits personal contact, an exchange of touches, and mutual sharing that resembles the reciprocity implied by aroha.

In response to Kerew in’s aversion of intimacy Joe mentions that “Himi likes kissing. […] [His kisses] are part of language” (*TBP* 265). Indeed, Hulme presents Simon as the source and object of an economy of skin contact and kisses. Object of both Joe’s affection and anger, Simon takes great delight in Kerewin’s appalled reactions when he kisses, touches or hugs her: “And as if he were waiting for that cue, Simon takes her hand. It takes all her self-control not to pull violently away. […] He has drawn her hand against his chest. She can feel the steady clock of his heart. He hasn’t made any other move, but she feels as though he’s saying something” (*TBP* 251). The fact that Simon’s body is extraordinarily skinny and quite diaphanous – one can practically see the bones through his “bonewhite” (*TBP* 210) skin – makes his skin even more significant as it holds the bones together. His skinniness is a crucial detail because it hints at the fact that Simon is already bones – accompanied by the feeling potential of his skin – whereas Kerewin and Joe still have to lay bare the bones. A highly textured construct of wounds and scars, his skin is extended by his long hair which seems to intensify his tactile abilities. Steven Connor thus notes that “[h]air is immensely important as a way of focusing and amplifying skin sensation. Long, tangled hair, like ragged clothes, seems to signify (in fact, as always with the avatars of the skin, to do more than signify), a body alert or awoken to touch […] – tactile, tangible, touched, torn, touching itself, soliciting touch” (Connor 2004: 32). Indeed, Simon “can’t bear his own hair being cut. I don’t see why it needs cutting, he thinks resentfully” (176). Simon therefore feels his way through life; he also turns outwards and forces others to feel just as his hair extends beyond his skin.

Aside from the touch of skin, hair embodies the necessity of communication and the new love ties of the community. Resembling “some kind of leftover mini-hippy”
(TBP 240), Simon fights tooth and nail to prevent his hair – the extension of his skin – from being cut: “[H]is hair needs cutting, and he flings the plate” (268). When Kerewin torches and cuts her hair, “the thick mushroom cloud […] tamed to a neat tight-curled cap” (TBP 284), in a fit of self-hate, Simon is shocked to his bones and this attempt to remove herself from Joe and Simon and maroon herself in her tower may be one of the reasons why Simon starts fighting her and sparks off the final beating.70 Just as his hair “tangle[s]” (TBP 269) and grows wild, his clothes don’t seem to fit and look “like the tailend of the ratbag” (240), thus moving beyond his skin, creating touch and impinging on others. Only when he realises that Kerewin will not force him into having his hair cut, but instead asks “What happens to your hair afterward?” (TBP 270), Simon agrees to a haircut. Joe then fashions a plait for Kerewin’s pendant out of the “thick, dead straight, wheatgold [hair] with a silver sheen” (TBP 270). The “necklet from his son’s moonshimmer hair” (TBP 281) thus fosters skin contact just as much as it ties together Simon, Kerewin and Joe in aroha. Aroha goes through the skin – from one person to the other and back, ‘aroha mai, aroha atu’ (‘love toward us, love going out from us’) – and strikes at the heart:

Much love from Hohepa and Haimona, aue… the braid is finely-done, five-ply and rounded. Joe has had the jeweller seal the ends with clips of silver, fitted permanently into the hole in the hei mātatau. The braid is just long enough to go over her head…. She slips it on, and the green jewel lies by the cross and the medal and the pendant she always wears. A hook to his jaw and a hook in his thumb and a kind of a hook in my heart, by God. (TBP 313)

Simon also puts an end to the final beating when he ‘hooks’ Joe’s heart by piercing his stomach with the glass splinter. The Māori word ‘manawa’ connotes both heart and stomach, for feelings and affections are believed to reside in the belly.71 The cutaneous relations of these love ties are also embodied by Kerewin’s sculpture of the three. The sculpture bounds their faces into a “triple head” (TBP 315), entangles their hair into “a series of spirals” (315) and also emphasises Simon’s curious ability to touch and connect: “Simon’s hair curves back from his neck to link Kerewin and Joe to him.

70 Whereas Kerewin begins to acknowledge the ties of aroha as the foundation of a genealogy of feeling, her cutting her hair also points to her refusal to marry Joe: “Through his gift [the necklace made of Simon’s hair], Joe proposes they link genealogies through marriage. Her refusal of his proposal and her burnt hair deny the significance of genealogical relations” (Najita 2006: 117), at least of relations engendered by marriage. Just as hair embodies the connection between people and their ancestors (Najita 2007: 117), it also becomes the embodiment of the links established by aroha in the novel. Kerewin therefore only rejects the significance of genetic whakapapa lines, not the possibility of a whakapapa created by adoption and heart.

71 This dimension of feeling is further hinted at by Joe’s name Ngakau which refers to heart and emotions: “Interestingly, this action strikes at the heart, literally of Joe’s being, for part of his middle name, ‘Ngakau’ means mind-heart, which is located in the belly” (Najita 2006: 105).
Round and round, and with each circumambulation, the faces become more alive” (315). Hulme’s text displays a crucial urge to overcome polarities and is thus suggestive of Sedgwick’s idea of “nonce taxonomies” (Sedgwick 2003: 145) and their “potentially innumerable mechanisms” (145). This communicative potential of reaching out to each other and creating new twists in the genealogical rope as exemplified by the spiralling connections of hair further manifests itself in Kerewin’s impression of Simon’s long strands: “The way it flows out with each turn of his head reminds her of the skirts of dancing dervishes as they spin to ecstasy” (TBP 68).

The violence inherent in Joe’s abuse of Simon, Kerewin’s “killer instinct” (TBP 190) and her “dark joy” (190) in fighting finally culminate in the novel’s sub-chapter “Nightfall” and then take a different direction towards healing and spiritual renewal in the section entitled “Feldapart Sinews, Broken Bones”. As Kerewin remarks Simon is “an unknown quantity” (TBP 315), impossible to define and always somewhere in-between violent force and peaceful serenity: “Twisted, with a streak of meanness and sadism in you, as Joe was so plainly afraid? A musician, full of zany fire? The dancer, the sweet singer, the listener to the silence of God on deserted beaches – ae, you had music in you. Ordinary sinner, extraordinary sinner, or some new kind of saint?” (315). Simon is both initiator of “the night of horror” (TBP 319) and almost ‘crushed’ to death by Joe. Just as the trickster Maui attempted to pass through the body of Hine-nui-te-po, the embodiment of the night, who gathers the spirits of the dead, Simon, too, is hurled into the shadows of death. By way of mischievous trickery Maui wanted to conquer death. However, when he took on the shape of a caterpillar and began to invade Hine-nui-te-po, his caterpillar movements made his companion the fantail laugh, so that Hine woke up and “brought her legs together” (Orbell 1995: 117) crushing Maui to death. Ironically, “[b]y the way of rebirth he met his end” (Alpers 1986: 70). Hulme draws crucial parallels to Maui’s last trick: Simon sneaks clandestinely into Kerewin’s tower “like a lizard” (TBP 16) and appears to have a connection to the world of spirits, for he can “see lights on people” (93) in the dark. Like the caterpillar, Simon’s hair creates ‘tingling’ effects; he relates through skin contact and touches off the encounter with death. He is haunted by the darkness while, at the same time, he also creates it, for instance with his music hutch that produce “a sound of darkness” (TBP 103). His dream of the resuscitated rabbits turns into a nightmare “and the light is turning to night” (TBP 203) when Kerewin and Joe’s faces seem to fade: “The voice grows and echoes, and the pain intensifies, and he tries to cry out against it, but no sound comes.
bitter sting in his arm, and then the fingers bite him, pushing into the places where it hurts worst, and sending him down into the blackness where he cannot breathe. The lid closes over against his silent screaming, and the blackness floods everything” (204).

The final beating enshrouds Simon in complete darkness, and he drifts into nothingness when “[t]he world tilts more, and helpless he begins to slide, downwards, underground, into the box. Turning pinioned. Sound. A scream. Suffocating. Deep dark” (TBP 302-3). The world tips over to imbalance; the pain becomes increasingly overwhelming and untranslatable. Simon desperately tells himself to ‘try keep a little longer on your feet’, but words turn into broken sounds and the sheer pain and utter darkness burst any linguistic frame of reference: “TRY KEEP A LITT ill guron your fee” (TBP 302). The novel thus posits the trickster figure in-between a dialectic of language and silence, pain and aroha, translatibility and untranslatability. While Simon’s pain is too extensive as to be verbalised except for broken sounds and screams, one word escapes his mouth in a last verbal effort “to overcome the repressive ideologies entrenched in our docile bodies” (Shusterman 2008: 29) and manifest in Joe and Simon’s relationship with Joe punishing the child for past losses and trying to beat him into the boy he wants him to be: “‘Ah no.’ He hears himself say it. For one second the bonds at his throat loosen” (TBP 302). This, however, remains the only situation where Simon produces an actual word, and the word cannot stop the violence crashing down on him. The pain is stronger and hurls his body into the dark where the logic of language collapses under the impact of feeling:

The world is full of dazzlement, jewel beams, fires of crystal splendour. I am on fire. He is aching, he is breaking apart with pain. The agony is everywhere, hands, body, legs, head. […] The lights and fires are going out. He weeps for them. The blood pours from everywhere. He can feel it spilling from his mouth, his ears, his eyes, and his nose. The drone of flies gets louder. The world goes away. The night has come. (TBP 308-9)

Simon’s beating denominates an end and triggers off the separation of the three, but “it is pivotal to the eventual process of reconciliation” (Keown 2005: 118), too. In contrast to Maui who dies between Hine-nui-te-po’s legs, Simon is not beaten to death by Joe, although the damage to his body – “looking lifeless” (TBP 314) – is substantial. “[A] set of godawful purple-red scars” (TBP 389) mark his head – “broken nose and broken jaw” (314) – and he loses the ability to hear, “[i]t’s all silence” (387) now. But even if Simon is mutilated almost beyond recognition, his recovery – the boy at first shifting in and out of consciousness and then in and out of the state and church institutions that are supposed to take care of him now – presents “the last fling of horror,
the final clawing grasp of the night” (*TBP* 388). “[H]is hope never quite dead” (*TBP* 386), Simon relies on his trickery to be reunited again with Joe and Kerewin. “[A]n uncommonly resourceful child” (*TBP* 403), he manages to run away repeatedly and ridicule the institutions that have taken it upon themselves to substitute Joe. In his efforts of “returning to his home” (*TBP* 405) he finally manages to run away to Kerewin’s torn-down tower where he finds the tricephalos sculpture, the image of their small family-community that is able to chase away “[t]he black world round” (410): “It is Kerewin, it is Joe, turning round the third face, aiee it is me, and even though he is moaning aloud, somewhere in the cloudy anguish a thready voice says, Together, all together, a message left for you, and he clasps it to his chest as hard as he can, and will never let it go” (410). The modern-day trickster therefore overcomes death; his “discomforting […] askew green stare” (*TBP* 397) returns and the western-derived institutions have to capitulate in the face of aroha, the “genuine love” (325) between the trio. Kerewin is then granted custody of Simon “while Joe gets access” (*TBP* 400).

After his final and almost fatal beating of Simon, Joe loses custody of his son, is sent to prison for a couple of months, and eventually tramps to “the middle of bloody nowhere” (*TBP* 335) inhabited only by a kaumatua, a Maori elder, whom locals call “the last of the cannibals” (335). Here, overwhelmed by guilt and loss, Joe attempts to kill himself in “the sin dance of forlornness, the one dance of death” (*TBP* 340), so “[h]e spreads his arms to the lowering sky and runs over the edge” (341), inflicting upon himself the wounds and pain he subjected Simon to. Similar to the section where Kerewin turns into a ‘skeleton’ while uncovering the bones of her ancestors, the fiction presents Joe as a “broken man” (*TBP* 336) who is then healed by the kaumatua and the reconnection with the past embodied by the ‘skeleton’ of one of the first canoes, “all in pieces […] carry[ing] the little god and the mauri” (369). Just as “the cold had pierced bonedeeep” (*TBP* 339) into Joe’s body, the impact of his fall down a cliff causes his body to disintegrate into “a shattered heap” (340) and his arm to snap “like a stick beneath him” (341) while his skin is cut open by stones and his “thigh won’t stop bleeding” (350).

However, the self-inflicted wounds and fractures can also be viewed as a process of transformation, releasing new possibilities by “beat[ing] your sense back in” (*TBP* 341). Keri Hulme thus imagines “the shattered bone” (*TBP* 350) as the first step towards corporeal and spiritual resuscitation and “digging or cultivation” (358) – these aspects are embodied by the mauri, the sculpted stone and life force Joe retrieves from the
canoe. Joe’s suicide attempt almost takes his life out of him, but it also fuels his will to live and to recapture his life force. The nearly fatal experience on the verge of death paradoxically triggers off new life. “[G]roaning with no air to groan on” (*TBP* 341) in a state of “shock and hurt and crying” (341), Joe implores the world of spirits for help: “E atua ma, wairua ma, if there are gods, if there are spirits, o, people of this place, I am made known by my stupidity. Aid me” (342). The extreme pain thus also prefigures a spiritual resuscitation and healing, for a renewal of the hau is already implied in his painful attempts to breathe when “his breath comes back in shuddering sobs” (*TBP* 341). Hence, the wounds written into Joe’s flesh are interwoven with an anticipation of physical and spiritual revitalisation that is coupled with Joe’s reconnection to the spirit of the land and the bones of his ancestors: “His own bone sticking out of the flesh, a weak china blue colour, like a pig bone in a butcher’s shop freshly laid from the meat. God god god make the pain go away…” (*TBP* 342). Covered by a “crust of blood” (*TBP* 348) where “the stones have bitten into his flesh as well as scraping long grazes on his hip and thigh” (348), Joe is then rescued by the kaumatua Tiaki Mira, an old man whose name also points to the nurturing and guarding of Joe and of one of the founding canoes and who had been waiting for “the broken man” (*TBP* 361) since his grandmother’s death while he seems to represent the past, for his face is marked by “[a] truly archaic moko, te moko-a-Tamatea. He [Joe] had thought the people who had worn that tattoo dead for centuries” (346). With corporeal healing comes Joe’s realisation that he failed Hana and Simon by abusing the mute child, and an almost ecstatic feeling replaces his former desire for death: “Strange… I feel gay and, o, I don’t know… unburdened? He considers that, sipping more of the hellbrew gingerly. Yes, unburdened. As though something’s climbed off my shoulders. Yet nothing’s different. I still remember everything. God, I can even feel my arm as bad as yesterday” (*TBP* 356). Spiritual renewal goes hand in hand with the physical recovery of Joe’s flesh as the kaumatua in his dying moments passes the guardianship of “[o]ne of the great voyaging ships of our people” (*TBP* 364), of “the little god that came with the canoe” (363) and of “the mauriora, for that is what the stone is home to” (363) on to Joe. Joe is thus confronted with the living history of Maori culture, for the water of the underground pool in which the canoe and the vital energy “located within a material counterpart” (Orbell 1995: 118) are buried is “like ten thousand tiny bubbles bursting on his skin, a mild electric current, an aliveness” (*TBP* 367), and the kaumatua expresses his hope of the extrication of the life principle from its colonially induced sleep and its
retrieval as a foundation of a transformation of the relationship between people themselves and between them and the land:

I was taught that it was the old people’s belief that this country, and our people, are different and special. That something very great had allied itself with some of us, had given itself to us. But we changed. We ceased to nurture the land. We fought among ourselves. We were overcome by those white people in their hordes. We were broken and diminished. We forgot what we could have been, that Aotearoa was the shining land. Maybe it will be again… be that as it will, that thing which allied itself to us is still there. I take care of it, because it sleeps now. It retired into itself when the world changed, when the people changed. (364)

In a sense, then, Joe rediscovers the life force or ‘breath’ that connects him to the ancestors, an aspect he seems to have been afraid of before just as “[h]e had been afraid to touch it [the stone], but the drawing power of it was immense. […] That’s what Haimona meant by light? Aie!” (TBP 385). How essential and necessary the transformation of the past in the present is, is again highlighted by Joe’s body. Though the soothing lotion of “melted mirogum” (TBP 350) closes the wound, and his broken bone is set by the kaumatua, later Joe’s “arm is set under anaesthetic, and the other cuts stitched” (374) in a hospital. In addition, Joe carves several rahui, land markers, in the shape of members of his family including Kerewin and Simon and takes the mauri with him when he leaves for home, hoping for “a new beginning” (TBP 382).

In contrast to Joe’s “half-hearted suicide attempt” (Keown 2005: 121) – “[i]f I make it, it will be a sign” (TBP 341) – Kerewin has been sick for a long time, at least since their trip together, and has no control over “the searing pain in her gut” (192). Kerewin, however, refuses medical treatment with the question “[w]hat say this is a nice neat no-questions-asked-after way of committing suicide?” (TBP 414). She readily encounters the “war with herself” (TBP 412) relying on her knife to release her from her painful existence, for it “may yet have the pleasure of slicing my sweet and tender blue veins. When the going gets too tough” (411). Through the respective near-death experiences of Joe, Kerewin and Simon The Bone People juxtaposes death and newly embraced life and posits pain and death as essential catalysts for the reassertion of elements of Maori culture, new vitality and creative growth. Kerewin’s painful and nearly fatal experience of her “own sick soul” (TBP 412) and the “unusual growth” (414) inside her body lead to an abandonment of her no-touch, individualistic aversion of people and a rediscovery of the ‘touch’ of aroha. Resuscitated and healed of her sickness, she begins to grow new skin, take on new responsibilities, reconnect with family and establish a new extended community.
After the destruction of her tower Kerewin maroons herself in a hut on her family’s land, enduring the sharp pain and decay of her body. “Reduced to unsteady crawling, […] part blind” (TBP 422) and only consuming “whisky and hallucinogen water” (422), Kerewin falls into a dreamlike state, disintegrating and losing weight until she is literally only skin and bones: “The fat cover she had sneered at, that lapped her body in protective covering, had vanished. The muscles of her arms were grotesquely exposed, while thighs and buttocks had thinned beyond recognition” (418). Haunted by the “always present” (TBP 417) pain in her body, Kerewin begins to “look kinda twiggy” (426). The narrative entwines this process of corporeal skeletonisation with a rediscovery of and reconnection with the ancestors, the whakapapa Kerewin was severed from. Her emaciation causes her bones to emerge just as much as it lays open the bones of her ancestors. Hence, spiritual and corporeal ‘death’ sets free dynamics of resuscitation and renewal. Kerewin begins to long for physical recovery: “As she contemplated the ruin of her body, she experienced an odd urging of protectiveness, a desire to renew it. There is only one of thee, and now nearly none” (TBP 418). In this sense, then, The Bone People intertwines the shattering of bodies and physical convalescence; “it appears that no less a loss than death is needed for the brilliance of life to traverse and transfigure dull existence, for it is only its free uprooting that becomes in me the strength of life and time” (Bataille 1985: 239). Kerewin finds a certain crude delight in her own decay and the “[j]oy of the worm” (TBP 420). With “the knife-paining” (TBP 412) and “the eczematous torture” (412) of her “infected” (418) skin – “[s]wollen, empurpled, leaking pus from every crack” (419) – Kerewin displays a grim sense of humour and morbid pleasure in the face of death:

And once, high and uncaring under the benefice of the mushrooms, she caught herself laughing at the way a bead of pus leaked from the bend in her wrist down her sloping forearm onto the guitar’s strings. It shocked her momentarily, the whole stupid end. But then she had giggled again, not in despair or dismay, but because that was the only way it was, and always had been, except for the lucid luminous days when the paintings grew like music under her brushes, and it was apt and fitting to go this way, to end the stupidity, decaying piece by piece. (420)

As the title of the chapter indicates, death becomes a “wellspring” (TBP 411). The pus that leaks from her skin thus parallels the amplifying movements of hair and indicates that Kerewin begins to reach beyond herself. She experiences her body dying and decaying; she has the feeling her bones are “fired, dissolved, earth to earth again” (TBP 423), but they are also implicated in the renewal of her self, for she realises that “[h]e’s the bright sun in the eastern sky, and he’s the moon’s bridegroom at night, and
me, I’m the link and life between” (424) Joe and Simon, an ancestress for the new iwi: “We’re chance we three, we’re the beginning free” (424). Shifting between dream and waking, sanity and delirium, Kerewin is then healed from “[t]he thing that blocked her gut and sucked her vitality” (TBP 425) by a vision of a mythological voice giving her a medicinal “sour brew” (425). The “formidable power of death” (Foucault 1990: 137) represents the ritualistic means of transcending the conventional categories of meaning and of transforming body and self along the lines of new meanings inspired by Maori cultural memory; the community and the land are revived “through this process of fragmentation and gathering together” (Najita 2006: 107). Kerewin’s new cultural identity is thus forged by a dream-like vision of herself being called by the ancestors and crumbled in order to build new houses and a new community: “[T]he people mill round, strangely clad people, with golden eyes, brown skin, all welcoming her. They touch and caress with excited yet gentle hands and she feels herself dissolving piece by piece with each touch. She diminishes to bones, and the bones sink into the earth which cries ‘Haere mai!’” (TBP 428). However, the reconnection with the past, the ancestors, and the land remains only one part of renewal. Hulme therefore seems to refrain from a complete recovery and relocation of the past in the present and her notion of the creation of new possibilities is again expressed by Kerewin’s body: “Thin and rigid under layers of peeling skin. […] The great muscles gather and stretch under my foul hide, feeling a way out. […] All the fat flesh has melted and left bare gland in a flap of skin. ‘A bit close to the skeletal for comfort, my soul.’” (TBP 425). “[T]he thing that has invaded her” (TBP 317), the pain in the stomach and thus in the heart, also prefigures new directions quite in contrast to her no-contact-with-other-people-individualism; “[t]he wild spreading cells that grow and grow” (317) foreshadow her communal responsibilities and her reaching out to Simon, Joe, and family. Similar to the splinter hook in Joe’s heart, the pain in Kerewin’s stomach is a pain but also a hook in the heart.72 During a cleansing ritual Kerewin removes old skin in order to uncover and grow new skin, and the text indicates that the new bones differ from the old principles of whakapapa, for Kerewin is “relaxed to the point where she feels boneless” (TBP 426). Her whakapapa line will probably end with her because she remains “a neuter” (TBP 266) refusing sexual touch, but her “new buoyant body” (429) becomes the

72 Kerewin and Joe are thus crucially linked by the pain in their bodies and, in turn, by aroha in their hearts: “She folds her hands over her stomach, containing the dull ache. ‘Ngakaukawa, kei te ora taku ngakau. E noho mai.’ [‘Bitter heart, you heal my heart. Stay here.’] And he covers his face and weeps” (TBP 311). These ramifications of pain and aroha and their physical expressions also extend to Simon who feels a “sickness in the pit of his stomach” (TBP 308).
medium of a new kind of whakapapa created by heart and aroha. With “her skin feeling pleasantly tight and new” (*TBP* 426) and “[f]ull of new wiry strength and gentle energy” (427) Kerewin no longer refuses skin contact and becomes “incredibly incurably sensible. To all modes, declensions, conduits and canticles of feeling” (423). After cleansing her “skeletal” (*TBP* 425) body, Kerewin emerges in her new self, paints again, rebuilds the wharenui and rekindles aroha relations with her family, the extended community as well as Simon and Joe: “Art and family by blood; home and family by love.. [sic] regaining any one was worth this fiery journey to the heart of the sun” (*TBP* 428). Touched and permeated by aroha with “[r]esponsibility creeping into me from all angles” (*TBP* 434), Kerewin begins to move outwards, share, and connect by “weaving webs” (431) and new ties, all of those manifested in her new, permeable skin and growing hair: “As she turns away, a great warmth flows into her. Up from the earth under her feet into the pit of her belly, coursing up like benevolent fire through her breast to the crown of her head. She feels her hair literally start to move. Shaking with laughter, shaking with tears, shook to the core by joy” (430).

Mark Williams has criticised Hulme’s novel for its apparent agenda of rediscovering “in pre-European Aotearoa” (Williams 1990: 96) a “pristine Maori presence” (97) and spirituality that is unquestionably asserted as a recipe for overcoming colonialism without interrogating the implication of Pakeha-style fabrication in such myth-making (100): “[T]he novel’s desire for authentic belonging coincides with the wish to purge New Zealand of the corrupting layers of European influence – to eradicate the colonial heritage – and to purify the nation by placing specifically Maori values at its centre” (97). The fact that Hulme chooses the novel form, a western form of creative expression, might certainly support such an argument. However, her turn to the novel may also be an ironic comment in itself because Hulme constantly strives to undermine that frame. Though it is true that Keri Hulme attempts to resituate and empower Maori culture by incorporating principles such as whakapapa and aroha relations into her fiction, *The Bone People* appears too complex and ambiguous as to propose a purification ritual reintroducing pre-colonial Maori traditions. On the one hand, the text insinuates that Joe eyes the old canoe and the kaumatua’s reciting of past spirituality suspiciously and constantly wavers between believing and interrogating their significance. From Joe’s point of view, the light of the stone might very well be “just phosphorescence” (*TBP* 385) and inauthentic and he remains torn in his opinion of the “shadows in the pool” (367):
And one part of his mind says sagely, it was all an old man’s dreams and fancies, and there were explanations for what you saw and felt that have nothing to do with mysteries, and another part says Listen, and the sage bit goes on, it’s just some rocks that have fallen in a rainwater well, and the other says Listen, and the wise bit over-rides it saying, You are a young man yet with plenty of things to do, you’re whole and healed and flourishing, and you’re released from any promise you gave; you’ve a future now, not an immurement in dank swamp country, and the other side says LISTEN! (384)

Rather than sticking desperately to the “wakeful and watchful god […] [that] lives in a luminous pierced stone which rests in a remote water-filled grotto” (Shieff 2004: 52), the novel seeks revitalisation for the new community from this life force, but also abandons a static belief in the past, in order to suggest new creativity and agency, for “[t]he past is irrecoverable. Continuity is the life-stream of culture but its flow carries one away from the source” (Edmond 1993: 287) and inevitably leads to metamorphosis and change. Joe thus manages to retrieve the stone from the “thousand tons of rubble” (TBP 384) that have buried the pool and the ship and decides to return home with it, but “the stone in his hands grew too heavy to carry” (385) near the grave of the kaumatua’s grandmother. At home the stone once again settles in the earth, this time permanently. The creative and vital potential radiates inwards and outwards away from the stone and back to it. Although Hulme’s pun – “E nga iwi o nga iwi” (395), ‘the bone of the people’, or, ‘the people of the bone’ – suggests the importance of the past in order to form new relations in the present, these new relations differ from the old ones. Thus, Kerewin, Joe and Simon rediscover their ancestors and in turn become the ancestors of a new tribe. Instead of guarding a stagnant principle, the bone people also move forward to a new (dis)harmonious, (dis)affectionate existence filling the scars of the past with a feeling of liveliness in the heart and body: “I got out of sight, and the mauri, set down, sunk itself into the hard ground. Or maybe the earth turned willing water beneath its touch. It vanished completely. But we all came back to it, after the hoha died down, and each of us can feel where it is resting. A sort of pricket and tremble in our gut” (TBP 445).

On the other hand, Kerewin’s diary presents a crucial expression of referential insufficiency and the impossibility of recovering the past entirely. In itself a ‘phosphorescent’ compilation of words and drawings, the diary lacks precise and coherent storylines: “[D]oodles and sequences of hatching. Small precise drawings and linked haiku. Some days were a solitary word. ‘Hinatore’ says one, ‘Nautilids!’ another” (TBP 36). To Kerewin it remains her “paper ghost” (TBP 96) and her attempt to write down her own detective story with herself as a Sherlock Holmes version
uncovering the secrets of Simon’s past and troubled existence merely comes to nothing and fizzes out in dead ends: “This is getting boring, ghost, I’m gonna immure you again. See you in another six years. snapping the book shut” (99). Yet, as a fragmented collection of “snippets of wisdom” (TBP 100) it also records “Kerewin’s fantasies of a linear, causal narrative of Simon’s trauma, his healing, and unproblematic growth into adulthood” (Najita 2006: 127). Kerewin’s last entry in the diary documents the events after her recovery “from the moribund bag of bones of a month ago” (TBP 431): she has rebuilt the marae, rekindled family relations, adopted Simon and found some answers to his mysterious arrival in New Zealand through “recovering the hull of the launch” (435). For the most part, however, her narrative of Simon’s past remains open-ended, leading to even more questions, for “o there’s worlds to go into yet, hells to explore...” (TBP 436).

The burning of the diary marks the end of old narratives and the beginning of new stories and a new way of constructing and telling those stories; it is “[a] meet end to make a fit beginning” (TBP 436) further emphasised by the novel’s spatial trajectory. Just as Kerewin Holmes chooses to live in her newly built spiral home in Taiaroa and not at her family’s place in Moerangi, she also breaks with the past and gives up the stylistic conventions of the master narratives of the old world.73 Kerewin’s “tender ritual” (TBP 436) of destroying the diary signifies the next step in Keri Hulme’s decolonising project and future vision of the community of Aotearoa – “weaving webs, and building dreams” (431). In addition to the sudden multiplicity of voices in the epilogue, The Bone People moves towards a resuscitation of the community and revives the bodies of Kerewin, Joe and Simon through affectionate touch and musical imagery: “Noise and riot, peace and quiet, all is music in this sphere” (TBP 443). The music and hence orality, “sound – not language – ” (Najita 2006: 128), and gentle, touching contact, not violent encounters, become the creative expression of the community and the strategy of healing the wounds of the past. In contrast to the “paper replica of what is real” (TBP 437) and its scribbled fictionalisation of Kerewin, Simon and Joe, the

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73 Not only does the destruction of the logbook point to a break with the past and a reconfiguration and transformation of Maori values, it also denotes the culmination of Hulme’s imaginative criticism of western forms of storytelling and “scriptural knowledge” (Najita 2006: 127) as Susan Najita rightly suggests: “The act of burning the diary signifies, then, Kerewin’s willingness to part not only with the constructed, positivist narratives of history and psychoanalysis – along with her broad knowledge contained in the diary – but also with her desire for causal, linear trajectories. […] The burning of the diary undermines the author-ity of the authorial and narrative voice, and in so doing undermines the novel as not only the physical embodiment of that voice but also its authority to construct the narrative itself” (127).
music is entwined with the reformulated “breath” (441) of the mauri and the revived life force of their breathing, singing, talking, feeling bodies.

The foundations for the new iwi are laid, but just as the physical messages of the body have shattered “conventional social and linguistic codes” (O’Brien 1990: 79), the new community has not yet reached the stage of clear-cut signification. It remains somewhere in-between, between past and future words that still have to be found. Hence, mute Simon “doesn’t know the words for what they are. Not family, not whanau… maybe there aren’t words for us yet? (E nga iwi o nga iwi, whispers Joe; o my serendipitous elf, serendipitous self, whispers Kerewin, we are the waves of future chance)” (TBP 395). This silence at the core of The Bone People “signals the provisionality of all constructions of meaning” (O’Brien 1990: 80), but also opens up the discussion and illustrates the need to find “a larger sense” (TBP 434) for Aotearoa’s future, one that empowers Maori, but its vision remains open-ended and yet to be verbalised. Hulme seems to be more interested in initiating a debate about the outline of the future community. Indeed, the figure of Simon – the child, fostered by Kerewin and Joe, who comes to embody Aotearoa/New Zealand’s entwined Maori and Pakeha genealogies – demands active involvement as Kerewin puts it when she finds the abused child in her shed: “What the hell do I do now? […] Man, I wouldn’t bash a dog in the fashion you’ve hurt your son. […] I’d have to look out for the child, and that means getting heavy. Getting involved. […] So what the hell can I do?” (TBP 147-9). Her friendship with Joe and Simon demands a sense of responsibility of Kere because “the responsibility for […] care rests with the entire adult population with whom that child lives” (Russell 2007: 5). Hulme certainly perpetuates the importance of tribal and whakapapa relations here instead of naively condoning child abuse. Reporting Simon’s abuse to the authorities, to police or child services, would mean a breach of those responsibilities and the reciprocal implications of the small family-community formed

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74 This hopeful vision of reconciliation and reciprocity is underlined by Simon’s empathic doctor Sinclair Fayden who mentions the possibility of Simon talking one day: “[Y]ou put a mite more air behind that word, any word, and one of these days you gonna surprise yourself and talk right out loud” (TBP 401). The figures of Kerewin, Joe and Simon thus manifest Hulme’s criticism of monoglot systems. Whereas Kerewin and Joe are bilingual, te reo Maori becomes the language “of greatest emotional intensity, and denotes a special level of sincerity in interpersonal connection” (Shieff 2004: 53). Simon, however, speaks neither English nor Maori, which is nevertheless not presented as a disadvantage. Conversations Simon prefers are thus marked by a many-layered exchange between different communicative systems, always shifting between spoken language, written words, sign language, gestures, silences, touch and feeling. Similarly, Clare Barker notes that “the face-to-face contact necessitated by Simon’s muteness, combined with his insistence on physical proximity and touch, forces Kerewin to re-engage in reciprocal relationships, rendering Simon’s muteness a social ability rather than a communicational disability” (Barker 2006: 135) and multilingualism a crucial element in Hulme’s vision of Aotearoa/New Zealand (135-6).
by Kere, Simon and Joe. Kerewin thus decides that “it might be a damn good idea if I come along” (TBP 152). A figure of agency itself, the child touches off questions such as: How to counterbalance that pain? Can we think beyond it? Can it be turned into something positive after all? Simon – as well as Kerewin and Joe – prompts us to think beyond that pain and how it might be countered. Pain thus moves in many directions – it wounds, scars, causes immense suffering, distress, even guilt; it also touches, creates agency and “indicates a potential for remedial action” (Tomkins in Sedgwick and Frank 1995: 119) and “promotes remedial strategies” (119) and “a feeling of protection” (TBP 127).

The affective directions of aroha prove to be one such strategy, for the Maori concept foregrounds the reconciliation of differences by uniting positive and negative forces and demands reciprocal relations and mutual understanding. Not unlike the Maori proverb ‘Ehara toku aroha i te kiri aroha, engari he aroha no te whatumanawa’ (‘my love is not skin deep, but a swelling of the passion of my heart’), The Bone People wounds the skin in order to set free what’s inside – aroha is thus not skin-deep, but comes from the heart, circulating outwards, connecting people, soliciting communication and impinging on the community. This communicative feeling, however, does not function as a simple one-way-street-like objective. Rather, it may produce, create or be coupled with a variety of other directions – just as the skin of the bone people is imagined as a textural construct and “body memory” (TBP 322), the novel’s assertion of aroha is marked by scars, ‘darkness’ and an uneasy equilibrium that can also be detected in the cannibalistic, commensal tension Hulme creates during and particularly in the end of her novel. The narrative here grazes on an anxious connection between aroha and such implications of loving someone to death (almost) or so much that a person will be completely consumed, eaten, scarred, or buried.75 However, the commensal overtones may also refer back to the idea of aroha because emotions and affections become tangible through the stomach, the ‘heart’ of the body. Joe is nevertheless confronted with “all the hate” (TBP 444) because Simon is lastingly injured: “There’s memory in all the eyes round him, furtive glances that rake him, all saying, The quick light is dimmed, the dancer’s grace is gone” (443). To some extent,

75 Philip Armstrong has therefore suggested that “both aspects, aroha and utu, are figured as forms of incorporation, eating the other” (Armstrong 2001: 19). Keri Hulme, however, gives no easy answer to Kerewin’s question: “O the groaning table of cheer…speaking of tables, does commensalism appeal to you as an upright vertebrate? Common quarters wherein we circulate like corpuscles in one blood stream, joining (I won’t say like clots) for food and drink and discussion and whatever else we feel like” (TBP 383). Hulme thus defies all too simplified notions of biculturalism as sitting at the same table in unison; “the possibility of a genuine ‘commensalism’ still seems utopian, to say the least” (Armstrong 2001: 23).
Kerewin, Joe and Simon’s reconciliation carries overtones of a funeral: “Hupe nose and eyes dripping as though this is a tangi, not a return. So gather him up, gather him in, arms tight full, and spin round and round and round in a giddy dance of ecstasy, aching with love to give, smothered by love in return” (TBP 443). The creation of a complex, heterogeneous, and yet reconciled society appears to be highly problematic and unequal hierarchies and tensions are hardly avoided. To a certain extent, the cultural and political empowerment of the tangata whenua forged by resistance and decolonisation necessitates Pakeha to be temporarily ‘silenced’; beaten into a “crooked” (TBP 394) shape, Simon is therefore “mainly calm and good as bread” (444). The end, however, also spirals the reader back to the prologue that refrains from such metaphorical devouring. Here, connection and communication via skin permeate Hulme’s language. Skin relations, tactile and touching at the same time, are established as the crucial ties that bind the community. The human bodies and particularly their “talking fingers, lovebent fingers” (TBP 411) provide the medium whereby new relations are formed and communication is created, a “language of gesture and deed – a true language of the heart” (Shieff 2004: 54): “But all together, they have become the heart and muscles and mind of something perilous and new, something strange and growing and great. Together, all together, they are the instruments of change” (4). The Bone People not only outlines a vision of the future community of Aotearoa/New Zealand; it also fosters what Richard Shusterman has called “heightened consciousness” (Shusterman 1997: 168) and “a new attention to bodily experiences […] by focusing heightened awareness on previously unnoticed and unattended somatic experience” (168). Its exploration of the multiple ramifications of breath, bones and skin encourage “an ineffable flush of energetic excitation [that] could spur one to think beyond habitual limits” (Shusterman 1997: 167). Hence, the flesh surmounts distances and forced hierarchies and “[t]he skin connects, and connects with everything” (Connor 2004: 34).
Chapter 3
“The clock in the crocodile began to tick again” – Gay
Identities in Witi Ihimaera’s novels Nights in the Gardens of Spain and The Uncle’s Story

In contrast to The Bone People’s portrayal of Kerewin’s unmotherly, neutral sexuality and perhaps contrary to his earlier novels that focused on a repositioning and empowering of Maori culture, Witi Ihimaera’s novels Nights in the Gardens of Spain (1995) and The Uncle’s Story (2000) explore the coming-out and the resulting alternative identities of two homosexual men in a society marked by the marginalising effects of homophobia. Whereas Ihimaera’s first gay novel Nights in the Gardens of Spain, told from the perspective of a gay Pakeha man, brings “to light a version of masculinity that had been disguised and repressed within New Zealand until homosexuality was decriminalised in legislation enacted in 1986” (Fox 2008: 171), the subsequent novel on the subject, The Uncle’s Story, shifts the perspective to a gay Maori man and his struggle of intertwining two identities, namely gay and Maori, that seem to mutually exclude one another.

The fact that Witi Ihimaera – “as a gay writer from an indigenous minority in a post-colonial settler society” (Fox 2008: 172) – has written a coming-out novel from a Pakeha perspective, then a similar narrative from a Maori angle, has fuelled the discussion of the already shaky concepts of masculinity, homosexuality, indigeneity, Maori and Pakeha identity and postcoloniality. While it may be easier to see in how far The Uncle’s Story relates to the postcolonial genre since the text clearly attempts to come to a reconciliation of homosexuality and Maori culture, both novels can be viewed to enlarge the scope of postcolonial literature beyond “a way of looking at the world through indigenous eyes” (Tawake 2000: 156) and beyond the mediation between a marginalised position and a predominant or mainstream perspective.

76 Quotation from Nights in the Gardens of Spain (NGS 90).
77 Alongside Patricia Grace, Witi Ihimaera is credited with the publication of the first Maori fictional work in English. His fictions explore the role of Maori in New Zealand society and are characterised by an engagement with issues of political realities as well as questions of representation and cultural empowerment (Keown 2005: 127-8, Keown 2007: 140-4, Fox 2008: 171). His 1987 The Whale Rider novel can be seen as a turning point in his fictional work, not simply because it is widely known due to the 2003 film version directed by Niki Caro, but because the novel engages with the strict gender roles and the misogynous structures in Maori culture. Ihimaera then took this discussion of gender roles to another level in recent works which focus on questions of homosexuality and cultural identity. His opera libretto for “Waiata Aroha” thus deals with the many forms of love and joins together the formal structures of classical opera and traditional Maori song (Ihimaera 1997: 176-83).
Indeed, these two literary examples contribute possibilities of relating and negotiating the complexity of a variety of identities. Sandra Tawake therefore hits the nail on the head in relation to *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* by pointing out that the “reality that the novel constructs (or deconstructs) is slippery and contradictory. Ihimaera, first Maori novelist, has created a Pakeha persona to narrate the first Pacific gay novel that dismantles notions of gayness, Maori-ness, and heterosexuality” (Tawake 2000: 170-1):

Offering a range of possibilities in identifying people avoids the pitfalls of oversimplification. Rather than representing reality by offering truths that the gay community may have agreed on […] Ihimaera has constructed a postcolonial novel that calls itself fiction but tells the truth even if it didn’t happen. […] To continue the discourse is to continue to construct new realities and to promote ‘other’ access to power by celebrating difference. (170-1)

With respect to *The Uncle’s Story* Alastair Fox suggests that Ihimaera’s “agenda for change is twofold: on one hand to ‘de-colonize’ gay Māori by freeing them from the tyranny of the gay Pākehā construction of homosexuality, and, on the other hand, to force Māori culture itself to open up a space within which Māori who identify themselves as gay can be acknowledged and flourish” (Fox 2008: 187).  

Ihimaera’s first novel on the subject of differing sexual identities, *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*, tells the story of a middle-aged Pakeha man, the married David Munro, father of two girls and respected university professor of a Film Studies programme. The protagonist of the novel leads a double life divided between a conventional heterosexual life and a gay life, “cruising to seek out anonymous sex with men at night” (Fox 2008: 172) in “the Gardens of Spain” (NGS 113) as one of David’s acquaintances nicknames “all the glittering establishments where we heretics gather” (113) such as “The Steam Parlour, The Fuck Palace or The Maze” (115). There, homosexual or bisexual men meet to “[l]eave that other world behind” (NGS 7) in

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78 It would go way beyond the scope of this project to discuss whether or not the novels are postcolonial or how far they relate to the autobiography of their author. May it suffice to say that *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* and *The Uncle’s Story* certainly go beyond any kind of binary construction. Ihimaera “extends the boundaries of the post-colonial novel” (Tawake 1999: 276) and complicates “issues of postcolonial relations” (Lyons 1998: 281): “There are, apparently, more ways of dividing the world up (or of forming solidarities) than along ‘racial’ or national lines, just as there are, implicitly, many more ways of choosing to be an ‘indigenous Pacific’ novelist than that of writing from overtly traditionalist perspectives” (281). See also Tawake 2000: 155-75 who identifies a growing complication and break with binarisms in recent fiction from the Pacific, Tawake 2006: 373-80, Schulze-Engler 2007: 51-69 who underlines “the strange links and impertinent connections that emerge in contemporary indigenous writing […] as contributions to the creation of a wider awareness of the interconnectedness of cultures and societies in a globalized world” (Schulze-Engler 2007: 53), and Fox 2008: 171-2. For a discussion of the narrator’s adoption of masks in *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* and their implication of the author’s mask see Roussos 2005 and Fox 2008: 172 and 182.
favour of the closet “X-rated world of steam parlors and gay beaches” (Tawake 2000: 168). Permeated by an economy of shame and shamelessness, David ultimately moves on to a meaningful gay identity that includes his role as a parent. When Michael Mahana in The Uncle’s Story tells his parents that his “girlfriend is a boyfriend” (TUS 18) “[a]fter all these years of Mum and Dad talking for me, and making up a history for me” (17), he is confronted with the fact that homosexuality is a taboo and an absolute “anathema” (27) in his whanau, his extended family: “You have been brought up to have a place in the tribe. People like you are outcasts. They do not belong. […] Does this mean that we will have no mokopuna? No grandchildren? What will happen to our whakapapa, our genealogy? It will finish with you, Michael. How dare you be so selfish” (27). Michael has to realise that homosexuality is completely silenced in his culture to the extent that the existence of his homosexual uncle has been kept from the following generation as his father’s violent outburst shows: “Nobody in our family has ever been like you, Michael. Nobody” (TUS 28). With the revelation of this family secret, with the telling of The Uncle’s Story, Michael begins a journey of making ends meet, of weaving two different identities together to form one. The human body figures prominently in the novel because it gradually enacts a new, alternative genealogy and points to the range and possibilities of fear. Bodies are tied together in order to combine homosexuality and Maoritanga. The choice is not an either/or, but a both/and:

Auntie Pat waited for me to calm down. Then she slipped a question in under my skin and opened me up. ‘What matters most to you, Michael? Being Maori, or being gay?’ For a moment I was taken aback. I didn’t know how to answer. All my life I had been Maori. Who knows? All my life I had probably been gay as well. One was affirmative, something to be proud about. The other was negative, something to be ashamed of. ‘I don’t believe any of us should be made to choose, Auntie. So far I’ve always been what everyone wanted me to be. But there comes a time when you can’t lie to yourself. It’s not a matter of choice. I am who I am.’ (TUS 28-9)

Although the male protagonists in both novels are on the verge of coming out about their sexual identities, readers find themselves in the role of confidants right from the beginnings of the texts. The stories thus evolve from a kind of double reality: while readers are openly confronted with that knowledge, the main characters have initially kept their sexuality secret and hidden from the fictional world they are a part of. After having come out, they literally have to reassemble that world, reshape their cultural identities and find new stories that capture their respective experiences of what it means to be a father and gay and of what it means to be Maori and gay. Though both novels touch upon the coming-out-of-the-closet process of their protagonists, they mainly focus
on the respective journeys towards the celebration of gayness and the complex identities resulting from a gay perspective.

David’s coming out and search for identity in *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* is set in parallel to passages taken from James Matthew Barrie’s *Peter Pan, or The Boy Who Wouldn’t Grow Up*, whose protagonist flies away to a parallel universe of dreams, adventures, and a never-ending childhood. David, for instance, refers to the house Annabelle and their two girls Rebecca and Miranda inhabit as “a Ship of Dreams, a galleon set full sail toward the shining star second from the right” (*NGS* 14), with sails “luminous with the moon” (14) and “unfurling, sprinkling stardust as they billow and swirl” (14), a “shining fairy galleon, spun of dreams and laughter” (14) surrounded by “the filigree of silver laughter […] [and] the sound of tiny bells [that] tinkles in the wind” (14). The novel represents David’s inner conflict and quest for a different identity as mirrored in the figure of Peter Pan, Neverland’s adventurous boy with a magically unending childhood, connecting his own homosexuality to Peter Pan’s story after one of his first homoerotic experiences on a beach he “knew men went to” (*NGS* 74):

A man joined me. He stroked my thighs. Pinched my nipples. Took me into the sand dunes. I stood. He kneeled in front of me. He cradled my balls in his left hand. Put his cool lips over my burning cock. And everything in me said, *Yes*. And I was gone. Lost. For ever. That night, when I returned to Saint Crispin’s, I waited for Lights Out. The moon was a galleon pointing toward the second star on the right. *Come on, said Peter. You will join us, won’t you?* I hugged myself tightly, trying to stop the tears. I cried my eyes out, the ocean in me spilling out. Howling at the moon. […] All I knew, and with terrible certainty, was that I had become one of The Lost Boys. (74-5)

Michael’s quest for identity in *The Uncle’s Story*, in turn, is interwoven with the telling of his Uncle Sam’s silenced story. The life and existence of Michael’s Uncle Sam have been kept a secret that is finally disclosed by Michael’s Auntie Pat who ends the family’s silence by giving Sam’s diary to her nephew, and urges him to explore the whole story of the family and fill in the silenced gaps: “The diary was charred, as if at some time it had been caught in a fire. I fingered through it gently. The slightest motion

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79 Peter Pan has become the ambiguous figurehead and “enduring icon” (Kavey 2009a: 2) of a variety of interpretations and adaptations, especially in reference to gender roles and questions of sexuality. David Munns, for instance, has traced the image of Peter Pan in popular representations and argues that “[n]o longer free of all sexuality, *Peter Pan* now serves as a vehicle to discuss ideas of developing sexuality and even developing alternative sexualities” (Munns 2009: 240). Allison Kavey goes a step further and suggests that in addition to the exploitation of Barrie’s narrative in contexts of sexuality “Peter Pan is made to serve many masters, not all of them particularly kind” (Kavey 2009a: 5): “From pop culture to gay culture to the military machine, the *Peter Pan* narrative has been indelibly stamped upon significant aspects of twentieth-century Western culture. Peter is alternately a charming figure of fun, an enchanting image of everlasting youth, a runaway, an irresponsible adolescent, a lost child, a sexual object, and an action hero” (11).
caused some of its edges to fray and pages to fly like wings in the wind. Some had been burnt right to the spine. Others were missing” (TUS 34).

What this chapter attempts to analyse, then, is the focus both novels put on the human body and the sensualities of the flesh as a medium of encountering and relating different identities and memories. The gay protagonists in the novels are constantly confronted with and even instrumentalised by the repressive reliance of their respective cultures on heterosexuality and the special and dominant status of the father figure. Yet, homosexuality is written deeply in their flesh. The bodies of David and Michael resist the heterocentralist narratives that they are supposed to fulfil. The two novels thus trace the quest for identity and cultural memory through a texture of feeling; step by step David and Michael feel their way from their coming-out to their new identities. They are perceptibly penetrated by or indoctrinated with the oppressive affective investment of their homophobic cultures in shame and fear. But, as the ambiguous complexity of shame and fear and their “varying degrees of freedom” (Tomkins 2008a: 61) and “unknown powers” (Hardt 2007: x) indicate, David and Michael also, and more importantly, sensually undermine those structures in order to create new identities and alternative narratives that tie together cultural conventions, traditions and memories with those new stories.

Since Nights in the Gardens of Spain and The Uncle’s Story are written by a Maori author, it is of course apt and necessary to ask if such western-derived methodological aspects are readily and effectively applicable to these texts. Just because Silvan Tomkins views the affects as a universally valid system human beings may virtually not escape from does not necessarily mean that the affect system may prove suitable and appropriate in the discussion of cultural difference. Shame and fear may be rated differently in different contexts, they may appear in different contexts and be related to different situations, feelings, or objects that activate or cause them just as well as they may not even exist. I would nevertheless suggest that both are significant motifs in Witi Ihimaera’s two novels. The theoretical approach of the affective turn provides a useful framework for closer reflection and literary analysis of the novels because the fictions imaginatively assimilate and process shame and fear as well as their repressive mechanisms and creative potential. Nights in the Gardens of Spain creates an interesting double emphasis here because the novel examines and scrutinises the marginalisation of homosexuality in Pakeha culture and only treats a gay Maori perspective as a side issue through the figure of the Noble Savage, a gay activist of indigenous descent. In
comparison to *Nights, The Uncle’s Story*, in turn, shows that homosexuality seems to be an angst issue and taboo far more rigorously handled from Maori perspectives than contemporary Pakeha perspectives. This point of view is of course not representative of all Maori culture. Jessica Hutchings and Clive Aspin thus affirmatively suggest that “[t]he role models set by our ancestors provide us with the confidence to believe that takatāpui are seen and acknowledged as integral components of networks within contemporary Māori society” (Hutchings and Aspin 2007: 22). With *The Uncle’s Story*, however, Witi Ihimaera makes us aware of some highly patriarchal and adamantly heterosexist facets of Maori culture.

3.1 *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*: The “Master Bedroom” and the “Unspoken Request” of the Flesh

As *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* constantly shifts between David’s secret gay life and his conventional heterosexual life, the text reveals that David seems to be trapped between two identities, two lifestyles, two personalities, and, of course, between two body images. When David, shortly after separation from Annabelle, picks up his two girls at his parents’ house, he contemplates the life his parents lead, their status and also their relationship to one another, in short, the identity and lifestyle that is entirely different to the homoerotic world of “the steam room and its welcoming warmth and wetness” (*NGS* 204). David’s parents represent heterosexuality of a very conventional form that rules out everything outside of it; snatches of a conversation between David and his father shed an ironic light on the matter when David advises his father to lock the door at night – a thing his father never does: “‘Dad,’ I sigh, ‘I’ve told you before about leaving the place with the doors open. You’ll get done over one day.’ ‘Nonsense,’ he snorts. It’s no use arguing with him. If he says something is nonsense, that is the end of the matter” (*NGS* 28). Although David’s father maintains a strict authority, the conversation foreshadows the fact that David’s parents are going to ‘get done over’ by their son who will eventually come out of the closet. The passage also offers a glimpse at the power relations at work here, yet not solely in a fatal sense of heterosexual discrimination against homosexuals, but also in a hopeful sense, because power always seems to include the possibility of resistance and freedom, as Foucault suggests: “This

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80 The Maori term takatāpui usually refers to an intimate friend of the same sex; nowadays, however, it is the preferred word for ‘gay’ or ‘homosexual’.
81 Both quotations from *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* (*NGS* 29 and 54).
means that in power relations there is necessarily the possibility of resistance because if there were no possibility of resistance [...] there would be no power relations at all. [...] If there are relations of power in every social field, this is because there is freedom everywhere” (Foucault 1996: 441).

The novel outlines the conflicting, yet at the same time at least partly converging, sexual identities between David and his parents and the almost overpowering effects of their conventional heterosexuality because, as kids, David and his sister held their parents’ “master bedroom” (NGS 29) a “sacrosanct” (30) shrine that was to be respected in every matter. Seen through David’s eyes, his parents deprecate any kind of change – anything that would pose a challenge or even threat to their upper-class complacency:

The new rich have put increasing pressure on my parents and their neighbours to sell. But the older retired folk are all very happy with where they are, thank you very much. They like to think they represent a certain stability and tradition in the city. They consider themselves a bastion against the appalling consequences of the technological revolution and spread of McDonald’s, Pizza Hut and other American fast-food chains. They represent good old-fashioned values in a crass world, a sense of British quality and style where the values of Commonwealth can be upheld. (NGS 29)

Their lives follow a strict schedule and are safely kept in the boundaries of their values and traditions or, as David suggests, “[n]ot a minute is left to chance. Every hour is accounted for. Otherwise something might get in between to disrupt, to subvert, to rock the boat” (NGS 30). Even feelings are dealt with according to an invisible schedule, as a consequence the reason of David and Annabelle’s separation cannot be discussed in the middle of the afternoon: “When the words come they are as I would have expected. Thought out. Considered. Measured. [...] ‘Dad, I – ’ ‘No. When you return from the beach’” (NGS 31). This almost military control includes matters of sexual identity as well, for “[t]here is a poignancy, an old-fashionedness about their

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82 The inviolability of his parents’ bedroom David describes in Nights in the Gardens of Spain seems reminiscent of the role of sexuality in the “Victorian bourgeoisie” (Foucault 1990a: 3). Foucault argues that the concept of (hetero-)sexuality in Victorian times maintained a strong repression and adherence to unimpeachable morality and “was carefully confined; it moved into the home. The conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction. On the subject of sex, silence became the rule. The legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law. The couple imposed itself as model, enforced the norm, safeguarded the truth, and reserved the right to speak while retaining the principle of secrecy. A single locus of sexuality was acknowledged in social space as well as at the heart of every household, but it was a utilitarian and fertile one: the parents’ bedroom. The rest had only to remain vague; proper demeanor avoided contact with other bodies, and verbal decency sanitized one’s speech. And sterile behavior carried the taint of abnormality; if it insisted on making itself too visible, it would be designated accordingly and would have to pay the penalty” (Foucault 1990a: 3-4).
marriage, redolent of another time when passions were less heated and more innocent” (*NGS* 30-1).

The control over emotions and even physical expressions of feeling is also indicated by the flood of meaningless phrases and the lifting and setting down of tea cups when David and his parents finally discuss the separation from his wife: “My parents want to believe the best in me. They settle for the usual sympathies. These things happen. It may blow over. It will all come out in the wash. There are always occasional problems between a wife and a husband. It takes time before a marriage settles down. Yes. Clink of teacups. Pity” (*NGS* 34). But David hasn’t got the courage yet to tell his parents (and his wife Annabelle) the truth about his feelings and sexuality, for he seems still undecided about his queer sexual identity and hasn’t found the words yet to counter the fear (both his as well as his parents’) muffled in tea-time chit-chat:

But it is not up to Annabelle, and because I crave my parents’ respect and love, I just cannot tell them why I have left. Oh yes, I could obscure the real facts by saying that the separation was something I had to do. I could say something to the effect that I had to work things out. Or that I had to find out who I was and what I wanted out of life. I could hide behind polite language. But I would bring my parents’ world crashing down around their ears, harbour bridge, suburbia, Uncle Tom Cobbleigh and all. Behind the small-talk, fear. (*NGS* 34)

In contrast to his father’s and mother’s strict world view and their meticulous rules of life and marriage, the novel presents David as having always felt different. Although he copied his parents’ life in his own, married Annabelle and built a conventional family with her, his body has led him away from his heterosexual relationship (though secretly) towards men. One could say that his body has been imprinted or written by his parents, the social and cultural conventions and the ‘norm’ of heterosexuality, by “an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies” (Foucault 1990a: 140), as Foucault termed it, yet there is something queer about his body that is written deeper in his flesh and that slowly, in the course of the narrative, breaks with his ‘normative’ sexuality and identity – the clock in the crocodile is ticking:

When Annabelle came into my life she didn’t know that I had already had sex with men and that, in fact, most of my sexual experiences had been anonymous bouts with men. But my first sex had been with women and that, I felt, meant that I was heterosexual and that sex with men was just a phase. I was often astonished that I could give pleasure to both without being too conscience-stricken. My body had a mind of its own and was easily aroused by the touch of skin. Any skin. It reacted the same with a woman as with a man. My helpless, mounting erection wished only to find blind completion in another person. (*NGS* 38).
Therefore, David’s sexuality constantly shifts between a heterosexual ‘norm’ and “that Other Life” (NGS 42) which he desperately tries to conceal and hide under the cover of conventional family life: “I sometimes ask myself whether it was a mistake for me to marry Annabelle. Sometimes, in my darkest nights, I regret that I have turned our princesses into victims. I had seen Annabelle as a means of my salvation. She was supposed to be the prop for my conventional life” (43). Consequently, David’s life resembles a conglomerate of contradictory elements and opposite realities that are steadily breaking apart, a fact David attempts to stop by fabricating his life into a Peter Pan story full of fairytale wishes that eventually collapse as well:

Once upon a time there was a Handsome Prince called David who had everything that anybody could wish for: looks, money, prospects. Well loved by family and friends, he sought, wooed, competed for and won the hand of the beautiful Princess Annabelle. All the bells in the kingdom pealed out on their wedding day. They loved each other and had two pretty daughters, Rebecca and Miranda. They were supposed to live Happily Ever After. (NGS 43)

David and Annabelle’s “marriage was supposed to save” (NGS 42) him: a wife and two daughters were supposed to be the step away from his being gay in a world largely built on homophobia. But this ‘normal’ heterosexual life is set in parallel to a fairy story, a make-believe world in which “[o]urs was a match to delight the augurs and fill the air with zephyr breezes” (NGS 42). Ironically, the parallel universe of gay cruising, steam rooms and anonymous sex is presented as a Neverland-like realm, too. Hence, David seeks oblivion and “peace from the shades that haunt me” (NGS 115) and from “the maenads” (115) in The Maze, a place full of danger and orgiastic promise: “Places like this attract all that is murderous, diseased and suicidal in human nature. It is not for the tourist, the faint hearted or the curious. Yet we still come, to walk that inhospitable territory toward the portcullis. There to take the first test: to seek entrance from Robocock, the doorman” (116). David is thus presented as being kept in a state of suspense, always in-between and of indeterminate nature just like Peter Pan, who “himself is a composite of bodies and characteristics borrowed from Pan, birds, fairies, and children that cannot fit into a single world” (Kavey 2009b: 102). Even his

83 Although Ihimaera’s novel concludes with the acknowledgement of a fulfilling gay masculinity, the narrative remains opaque concerning a clear-cut categorisation of David’s sexuality. David, like Peter Pan, appears undecided and between different poles: “Perhaps it was boredom. Frustration at work. Lack of fun in the established routine of our lives. Perhaps it was remembering the potency of the sex act with a man. Needing to conquer and to be desired. Perhaps there is a passage in men’s lives, whether heterosexual or homosexual, when the marriage bedroom and marriage itself become a confinement. All I know is that I felt I was growing old and I wasn’t too sure whether I wanted that. Maybe I grew tired of the prospect of responsibility. I wanted to play truant. Not to grow up. To have adventures. Fight pirates. Rescue an Indian princess. Fly to Never Never Land” (NGS 90).
coming-out does not mark the final step to a monolithic homosexual identity. Indeed, it may be argued that it complicates matters even more. After his coming-out, David temporarily gets back together with his wife. The marital relationship thus overlaps with his ongoing gay cruising and his on-and-off relationship with Chris. Constantly torn between fatherhood, marital relations, gay partnership and midnight cruising of shady establishments, David is an adult version of Peter Pan, with “a well-put-together body” (NGS 16), a playful, experimental attitude and an “impish sense of humour” (119), love interest of Annabelle as well as ‘fairy’ Chris, married as well as homosexual and always duelling, be it for his daughters, the Film Studies institute, against insurance issues or his traditionalist parents. Chameleon-like and heteromorphous, he is construed as the embodiment of a mysterious third figure of tricksterish nature. Never one thing or the other, always in-between certain poles and immensely elusive, David looks at his “naked reflection shooting off the glistening octagonal walls like a steel honeycomb. The uneven planes make my face sphinx-like, shimmering, remote” (NGS 13). The novel’s promise of a fulfilling gay identity is only kept in the final chapter of the novel; before that resolution, David’s sexuality shifts between his heterosexual ‘cover’ as a married man, bisexual overtones and his homosexuality that comes to overwhelm everything else: “It could never have lasted, the uneasy joining together again that Annabelle and I tried to do with our lives. [...] And too much of me, my gay eidolon, was trying to get out from behind the facade we had erected. My shadow, sewn on with such slender thread, was wriggling free, the thread popping out of each hole” (NGS 141).

With the figure of David, the text clearly displays a kind of longing for the conventional institutions of marriage, family and masculinity – his body partly mirrors his father’s masculinity. However, his homosexuality is written deeper in his flesh. The novel presents us with several theories of why David became or is gay, yet it remains opaque in terms of a conclusion to the issue, just as The Uncle’s Story does. 84 Left Dress, an employee with the Aids clinic, gives David an overview of the main theories that consider “genetic influences” (NGS 56), “bio-chemical influences and the balances and levels of hormones” (56), “arrested or psychosexual development” (56) or “learned

84 Responding to the questions of how or why, Michael in The Uncle’s Story tells his Auntie Pattie that “‘[m]aybe it dates from the time I was molested.’ […] Two uncles. Drunk. Coming from a party and stumbling into a room where children slept. Any old bed. Any warm body. Ripping me open like a tin can” (TUS 28). The novel, however, remains inconclusive on the issue because Michael later indicates that his homosexuality may have always been part of his identity, even before the rape: “All my life I had been Maori. Who knows? All my life I had probably been gay as well” (TUS 28-9).
and not instinctive behaviour” (56), but the crucial “point is that all the theories agree that homosexuality arises from factors over which the individual has no control. The homosexual condition is morally neutral. It is not deliberately chosen” (56-7). David is marked by “the homoerotic imagery that defined my sexual preference” (NGS 57). Since his childhood on his father’s farm in “[a]ll male country” (NGS 57) when the “fantasies of what my uncle may have done with his date disturbed my dreams” (57), David’s body yearns for men and the “pallor of extraordinary sensuality, like sweetest milk” (58) when the stockmen he went swimming with took off their clothes. For David, those experiences were magic, and the textual images already anticipate the forms of queer penetration he later seeks in The Steam Parlour: “Their masculinity was overpowering. […] For a shining moment all the world, the river, the hillside, the stars coming up, was apparelled in simplicity and in celestial light. All the tender earth was agleam with flowers, swaying in the lunar winds, their tubular petals drinking of the lifting moon” (NGS 59-60). His queer desire has somehow always been there, and “nothing at all can hide the truth that over two years ago the clock in the crocodile began to tick again” (NGS 89-90), not even the magic world of marriage and family, even though David – like his intertextual counterpart Peter Pan – first refuses to grow up and struggles for a fulfilling gay identity. David’s homosexuality can no longer be kept in the closet or overwritten by the conservative ideals of masculinity represented by his father:

Of course I have always loved my father, but my relationship with him has largely been regulated by my respect and fear of his authority and, therefore, by telling him what I think he prefers to hear rather than what should be said. Above all else I have desired his good opinion and have become everything he has wished me to become. Good sportsman. Fine student. Husband and father. […] We have been at stand off all our lives. Strategists in a command room, we jockey our forces into and out of sorties without engagement, yet without giving ground. […] Suddenly I am angry with him, for this is why I was unable to talk to him when sex began to lose its innocence. When beauty became bestial. When something natural became dirty, base, disturbing. (NGS 69-70)

In this relationship feeling becomes a matter that is not talked about, while David’s gayness is silenced and reduced to certain ideals of heterosexual masculinity that remain a superficial mode of definition and identification. Ihimaera shows how those ideals work as forces silencing homosexuality, relegating it to closet situations and a morally despicable territory as David “knew my lust for men was wrong” (NGS 73), but though silenced in discourse, queerness is written in David’s flesh, and it, more than anything else, defines his identity, for “male beauty, and what men did to women,
had already been imprinted on my sexual template and once there could not be removed” (73-4).

David’s gay registration thus always fights its way through; his body strives to love men, seeking that perfect pattern only men can fulfil: “I wanted to find that missing piece, that element my genetic makeup would say ‘Yes’ to, which my biochemical, hormonal or psychosexual personality would recognise. Or which would connect me with memories, skimming like a stone, of an uncle or of men swimming down at a river” (NGS 74). This is also mirrored in the description of the landscape when David and his colleagues go on a trip to secure an extensive and valuable collection for the Film Studies Institute. The trip reopens old wounds when David visits his ex-partner Charles who is dying from Aids. Although there is no explicit link between the visible and invisible marks inscribed by life to tattooing practices as in The Bone People and Hummingbird, the text nevertheless insinuates that the flesh is permanently written in, even if invisibly. Just as “our convoy is ahead of schedule, penetrating ever deeper into the heart of darkness” (NGS 211-2), David breaks the construed heterosexual surface of his identity. His homosexuality – first only admitted in anonymous places like The Steam Parlour and in secret affairs with other men – can no longer be kept in the closet, and just as it is engraved in his flesh, his coming out also leaves painful traces in his life as well as in the lives of others: “The landscape is filled with millions of trees, green arrowheads thrusting at the sky. Logging trucks rumble along the highway. But there are also signs of forest fires, blackened, scorched, like skid marks through the swathe of green. Life is like that too, with its angers, passions and pain. Tangled. Criss-crossed. Marked by scorch trails” (NGS 212). The text here juxtaposes David’s entering the scorched landscape and his memories of his relationship with Charles, a love that affected him intensely by the “burning touch of skin on skin” (NGS 218) and left him

85 Echoing Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness, the passage also parallels colonial exploration and exploitation of land and people. The “stamped-in network of paths spreading over the empty land, through long grass, through burnt grass, through thickets, down and up chilly ravines, up and down stony hills ablaze with heat” (Conrad 1994; 28), left by “[h]unters for gold or pursuers of fame, […] bearing the sword, and often the torch” (7), is reflected by the corporeal disciplinary practices of colonialism inscribed upon indigenous bodies. The ‘scorched’ characteristics of landscape and body thus signify “direct colonial control and/or economic exploitation” (Keown 2005: 193). Ihimaera’s reference to the scorched landscape in Heart of Darkness also echoes the ‘queer secret’ of Conrad’s narrative that Roberts points to in recourse to Sedgwick: “[W]hat Kurtz has done is precisely the non-specified or unspeakable: it is less any set of actual actions than a symbolic location of taboo-breaking. As such, and in the historical context of the turn of the century, it can hardly fail to evoke the homophobic taboo of ‘the love that dare not speak its name’. […] Marlow’s own feelings for Kurtz (tinged as they are with idol-worship) are themselves the horror. It is in sexual terms, as well as in terms of imperialist exploitation, that the darkness which Marlow imagines he finds in Africa is reflected back into the heart of the culture inhabited by Marlow and his respectable male listeners” (Roberts 2000: 133).
heartbroken. The scorched landscape mirrors David’s own feelings of being conquered and ‘scorched’ by the bold and experienced Charles who broke up with David following “his sexual imperative, submitting to his promiscuous nature” (NGS 221). ‘Burnt’ by homosexual love, David constructed a conventional heterosexual identity that is repeatedly and then ultimately broken by homoerotic desire.

In contrast to the story of David’s conformist straight life, the text depicts his homosexual life in terms of categorical vagueness and sheer physicality. “Pursued by conscience and the sound of a world shaki ng apart” (NGS 203), David cruises the establishments specialised on queer men in order to “seek forgetfulness in this netherworld” (203), to lose himself in physical contact and disconnect from the oppressing categories of masculinity. This is, for instance, highlighted by the lighting conditions in the places David goes to in search of sexual encounters. Neither completely lighted, nor completely dark, those places oscillate in half-light shading their cruisers and secretive explorers in mysterious beauty: “Light dies here, becomes ambient. The discreet darkness hides who we are. Hides what we do. Gives us anonymity and glosses us with glamour. In the netherworlds the wattage is always way down low” (NGS 10). The half-light, the protecting dark shades of night or the impenetrable wetness of the steam hides the love between men and, at the same time, unhinges the repressing categories of heterosexuality. The love that is or has to be kept secret blossoms in obscurity, and male bodies are shown in a new light far away from the authoritarian and almost military heterosexuality and homophobia David’s father stands for.

This change of perspective is also articulated by David’s habit of nicknaming the world and people around him. Interestingly, those nicknames defy the conventional categories of naming and instead focus on certain characteristic traits or bodily features, reminding us of the complex and multiple nature of reality and the absurdity of classification by sexual registration only. Be it at the gym or The Steam Parlour – David creates a naming pattern that captures the “playfulness and flirtation” (NGS 20) and nebulous demarcations of life, always off the divisions of heterosexuality versus homosexuality. Just as someone would label boxes with a few precise words, David predominantly tags people, particularly according to characteristic physical features. Bright Eyes, for instance, is one of David’s students with “eyes as blue as the sky” (NGS 19); The Hulk has a habit of flexing his muscles under the shower “so that the water shoots off them like bullets” (19); a “disproportionate penis” (19) marks That
Boy’s Deformed; size and a penis implant add up to Bionic Cock and Big Balls’ respective nicknames. A similar mode of embodiment seems to apply to most nicknames. From David’s perspective, the features of The Noble Savage are reminiscent of Gauguin’s Tahitian paintings; Snake Charmer, a man of Indian origin, “never look[s] at the face or the body but right at the cock” (NGS 53); Oh My Goodness and Wet Dream Walking capture the erotic tension as well as their astounding beauty. This corresponds to Ihimaera’s narrative style which places the queer male body in the spotlight and materialises feelings and sexual involvement in a ‘fleshy’ style. Moments of sexual arousal, physical action or emotional intensity are captured by increasingly shortened, enumerative and even disjointed sentences. At one point in the narrative, for example, David’s sexual cruising of the kaleidoscopic red-light scene is mirrored by the phallic imagery of shooting guns:

There are three places in this city where I like to find sex after midnight. The first is The Steam Parlour. The second is The Fuck Palace. The third is The Maze. Around this threesome there are the other establishments. The bars with their members-only Jack Off clubs. The X-rated gay cinema in the sleazy downtown area by the dock. Handcuffs (the S&M bar), Cowboys (the leather bar), the Powder Puff (the transvestite bar), Fa’a-afine (the Polynesian bar), The Tool Room, the two lesbian bars and the gay pubs. […] In front, streetkids play the video games, the machines stacked along the street. […] Whizz bang kapow. The evil starvaders keep coming row on row down the video screen. Blast the fuckers out of space before they get ya. Spray them to stellar smithereens. Bam. Bam. Bam. (NGS 49-50)

In the secret ‘restaurants’ only bodies matter. All stories from the outside – pretended heterosexuality, painful coming-outs, relationship problems and so on – are temporarily dissolved by “the spray” (NGS 52) and the quick, purely physical encounters David seeks there: “Just skin, bone, being given sex and giving sex, and five minutes of his life and mine. That’s all” (11). There is no need for words; language is more or less restricted to a minimum in this world where men are “driven by sex from crawl to walk to full erection” (NGS 13) according to a popular joke in The Steam Parlour: “With some men once is enough to tell you all you need to know. There’s nothing to boost you beyond the climax, as stunning as that might be, to wanting to know more – where they live, what they do, what animates them – all those curiosities which hook us into each other, which take us from anonymity to having names” (11).

Feeling is therefore given special emphasis in Ihimaera’s fiction. The narrative displays crucial overtones of corporeal sensuality/sensuousness and repeatedly illustrates that sense-making, the creation of meaning and questions of how and what we know and their relation to the self ensue from a concurrence of feeling and sensual perception. David again and again encounters situations in which words are pushed into
the background by the substance of the flesh. Hence, the text solely focuses on the physical love between men, on the unspoken fusion of bodies. David, for instance, communicates silently with “the cowboys from the foyer” (NGS 51); the attraction and understanding between them is reached through the interaction of their bodies. Verbal communication is restricted to a minimum or altogether unnecessary: “We look each other in the eyes. Size each other up. Hold the glances. The one in the red checked shirt wipes a hand across his lips. Sniffs. The cowboys start undressing. Nobody speaks. The air is swollen with meaning. There is no need to talk, for the language here is almost exclusively physical” (NGS 51). The narrative flux is frequently marked by rhythmic ‘gaps’ that seem to mirror the orgiastic atmosphere of the steam rooms and the sexual activities. At these points, Ihimaera’s fictional language could be characterised as written in a pulsating pattern of ‘gasps and groans’ as the following two quotes indicate:

The insurance policy is in front of me. To hell with it. I take up my pencil and slash fiercely at the boxes of the questionnaire. Duelling in the rigging. No. No. But, oh, yes. (NGS 166)

Later, and I can’t wait. We are resting half in and half out of the water among the rocks. Kissing. Fondling. […] We join together like Siamese mermen. Around us binoculars falter and flash.” (250)

As understanding is established mostly without speaking or “without answering” (NGS 54), Nights is characterised by a constant shift of the distance between subject and the desired object of the male body and an erosion of the differentiation of the subject/object constellation. David desires the bodies of other men; the novel indicates this desire through narrative moments of objectification or classification of the covetable objects. In this sense, “The Gardens of Spain is a restaurant” (NGS 114) where David can choose between a huge variety of ‘dishes’, of types, bodies and phalli:

Some are short, some are long, some are thick and some are thin. Some are capped, some are uncapped. Some dress to the left, some dress to the right, some hang straight down, settling nicely into the groove between the balls. Some have big balls, some have small balls, some have no balls at all. Some are brutish, some club-shaped. Some are conical, some crooked. Some are beautiful to look at, others could do with plastic surgery. Some take root from smooth alabaster

86 Similarly, Ihimaera’s description of David’s encounter with the ‘cowboys’ in the steam room fascinates by way of its terse and pulsating style: “The bits and pieces of body shown as he stands and runs his fingers through his hair. Cheekbones. Vein pulsing on the neck. Eyes veiled by lashes. Undraping of pectorals from sweatshirt, releasing ripples of light. The red plum of a nipple, edible and ready to be tongued from the chest. […] Fingers unbuckling a belt. The look again as jeans are slid from hips. That delicious arch of the buttocks to get the pants over the satin globes and down. In the ambient light a smooth alabaster thigh, flexing. Something and springing free as jockeys are slipped off, pulsing, drinking in the air” (NGS 51-2). This is again taken up when David shaves himself later: “Remembering bits and pieces of the cowboy last night. Smell of musk. Nice buns. Roll on the condom. Quick. Strong. Safe. The coup de grâce” (NGS 54).
thighs, others from hair so copious that the water does not penetrate. Some tuck there, others project out, but most conform to an unassuming configuration. (118)

Ihimaera creates a striking paradox here because he has David categorise the world in terms of a vocabulary of differentiation. Simultaneously, David looks for completion and an almost prelinguistic union between himself and another man and between all parts of their bodies. Sensual perception is thus of great significance because it illustrates a possible dissolution of the linguistic fixation of meaning and the separation of subject and object via the medium of the body: “Strength and vulnerability is more potent in the isolation of parts, the slow revelations of this or that. Together they are like pieces of an alphabet waiting to be locked into a sentence, a phrase, an exclamation, a gasp, by the fusing touch of another” (NGS 52). Maurice Merleau-Ponty, too, distinguishes between the objective body as opposed to the phenomenal body. On the one hand, perception may subject the body to objectivisation, to an object of scientific description; on the other hand, Merleau-Ponty adheres to a notion of the phenomenal body as an inseparable interaction of all perceived data and of the perceiving subject. In contrast to traditional science(s) which conceive of the body as an objectivisable mechanism of partial elements, Merleau-Ponty outlines the phenomenal body as a unity of the senses, the many parts of the body and the world. The body, as illuminated by Merleau-Ponty’s following example of the arm, is not simply “the outcome or the meeting-point of numerous causal agencies” (Merleau-Ponty 2003: ix) or “a mere object of biological, psychological or sociological investigation” (ix); it is rather constituted by an interaction of the senses with the world:

There is my arm seen as sustaining familiar acts, my body as giving rise to determinate action having a field or scope known to me in advance, there are my surroundings as a collection of possible points upon which this bodily action may operate, – and there is, furthermore, my arm as a mechanism of muscles and bones, as a contrivance for bending and stretching, as an articulated object, the world as a pure spectacle into which I am not absorbed, but which I contemplate and point out. (121)

87 This ‘third’ position of the body as intervening medium between subject and object is also postulated by Merleau-Ponty in the following quote: “The pure quale would be given to us only if the world were a spectacle and one’s own body a mechanism with which some impartial mind made itself acquainted. Sense experience, on the other hand, invests the quality with vital value, grasping it first in its meaning for us, for the heavy mass, which is our body. The problem is to understand these strange relationships which are woven between the parts of the landscape, or between it and me as incarnate subject, and through which an object perceived can concentrate in itself a whole scene or become the imago of a whole segment of life. Sense experience is that vital communication with the world which makes it present as a familiar setting of our life. It is to it that the perceived object and the perceiving subject owe their thickness. It is the intentional tissue which the effort to know will try to take apart” (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 60-1).
The novel, too, points towards a heightened sense of understanding and acceptance as it touches upon the crossing of sensual experiences and the meaningful potential of bodies. Hence, David seeks the orgiastic pleasure of sensual exchange and the purely physical encounters with the bodies of other men. The silent play and teasing between bodies in “the world of steam” (*NGS* 52), for instance, does not code homosexuality in a silent alphabet that may only make sense to the initiated, but creates an imaginative space of sensual and artful surrender in the union of the flesh: “Succumb to the succulence and to the slow teasing. Yes, for this is what homoeroticism is all about. This silent, slow seduction of a stranger, trying to coax his own hunger open like the petals of a flower” (205). Witi Ihimaera thus verbalises how the silent communication of bodies materialises queerness. So, paradoxically, the novel suits the word to the action, just as it suits the action to the word. Just as queerness is already written in David’s flesh before he even comes out of the closet, his body set in intimate relation to other bodies creates a mode of communication based on physical sensitivity that also proves capable to overcome homophobia and heterocentrism. When David violently forces his sister “to conjure up images of *fag, fruit, poofier, fairy, pansy, queer, homo*” (*NGS* 62), the words themselves refer to his homosexual identity. And yet, actual insight and further acceptance crystallise themselves through their body; by touching and feeling the skin of each other a new identity is forged:

> We were trying to reassemble our world. Piece by piece. One careful word building on another. Putting together a new vocabulary as if we had to learn how to talk again. Then she reached over and touched me. […] The body has its own language. Her touch began a physical alphabet. Indicated that an acceptance, a beginning to speech had been reached. It was then that I cried and the whole ocean in me poured over the lip of my soul. (*NGS* 62)

It may be argued that polarisation – to a certain extent dissolved by the methodological frameworks of postcolonialism – comes back in through the back door in the shape of the narrative’s spatial structure. The story thus moves between two crucial spaces, between a world grappling with homophobia and largely working along the lines of heterosexual regulations – a place of heterosexual scenarios and stage prop wives as in David’s case – and a world which wraps its queer participants “in a billow of steam” (*NGS* 54), a magical hiding place ruled by queerness, physical contact and “unspoken request[s]” (54): “Open Sesame. The steam from the shower is like a billowing warm friend, embracing every pore and every part of my body” (118). However, the novel facilitates a crossing of borders and both spaces are never completely opposed to each other. Ihimaera focuses on the liberating potential of bodies
inscribed with the meaningful sensuality of homoeroticism, but does not posit the ecstatic rhetoric of the Neverland of secret ‘gardens’ as the solution to counter the dominant homophobic perspective. In contrast to Merleau-Ponty’s relatively strong adherence to a notion of prelinguistic completeness and subjectivity that – complemented by the epistemological quality of sensual perception – transcends the formations of language and culture, David’s homosexuality cannot be solely confined to “all his Gardens of Spain” (NGS 284) and the world of wordless sex, silently consumed “erotic fantasies” (245) and “[a]ll those wonderful bodies, freely given, freely taken” (250). As the image of the clash between protesters and a nuclear-powered American military ship, “an awesome, palpable presence, a sea-going military city bringing with it resonances of all those gung-ho John Wayne movies” (NGS 167), indicates, a “man who loves other men is a world colliding with other worlds” (176). While the two worlds start overlapping in the text, David finds beauty and anguish in both of them. Clear-cut demarcations thus begin to dissolve. The underground underworld of places like The Steam Parlour with “the steam room and its welcoming warmth and wetness” (NGS 204) is also a garden “blighted by disease, rusting the white rose petals” (203), a place somewhat hellish in nature, for David crosses “The Spaniard’s palm with silver” (50) as if he was paying the ferryman who would take him into the realm of death.

Alistair Fox reads Nights in the Gardens of Spain as presenting the underground scene of anonymous sex “as an infernal parody of the settings of true romance” (Fox 2008: 174) and loving relationships. He thus concludes that “[i]n Ihimaera’s vision, Chris symbolises the possibility for gay men and lesbian women of attaining a condition of happiness in which they need not feel either alienated from split-off parts of themselves, or compelled to re-enact a fruitless search for something they can never find in the sterile aridity of the promiscuous cruisers’ arena” (Fox 2008: 182). It is true, though, that the novel does not present the reality of The Gardens Of Spain as the alternative for David Munro – fast, headless sex with strangers does not constitute the resolution to David’s search for a fulfilling gay identity. Moreover, Ihimaera attaches a Stygian monstrosity to the underworld of The Gardens: “This is what happens when we are at The Steam Parlour. This assembling of the parts to make up a Fuck for the night. Like Frankenstein” (NGS 206). However, I disagree with the assertion that Ihimaera conceives of The Gardens as a hellish and emotionally barren counterpart to romantic love. Though Aids poses an imminent threat to the gay cruisers, turning The Gardens into a path to death, the regulars of The Steam Parlour are emotionally connected
beyond their anonymous sexual adventures: “They are also chorus. Just as I am leaving
them they begin to tell affectionate stories about Snake Charmer. [...] When I need to
have payment made to the eternal ferryman so that he might take me across the river of
death, let the paymasters be Fat Forty And A Fairy and Always A Bridesmaid. They are
the finest among us all” (NGS 204). It rather seems to me that The Gardens represent a
space in-between the two poles of mainstream heterosexuality and out-of-the-closet
homosexual relationships. Instead of an inferno, they also offer a playful atmosphere of
indeterminacy and appear as the foil of shifting the perspective to gay male bodies and
to an alternative texture of feeling. Hence, Ihimaera not only offers a vision of a space
of homoerotic desire, but also of a temporal link between all the gay cruisers that visit
The Gardens. This connection of a bodily-sensual level with a spatial-temporal
conglomerate characterised by a playful and magical ambiguity is for example indicated
when David contemplates the significance of the soap in the shower room:

There is always just the one bar of soap in the shower room. It is meant to be shared, passed
from one man to another, to help start up conversation between strangers. [...] Its magic is
collected from all the bodies that have slipped it around the curve of buttock, beneath and around
and along the sweetmeats of our thighs. Sharing this intimacy makes the soap sacramental. So
slide it everywhere, spread the potency and add to it. (NGS 13)

For David The Gardens of Spain offer a place of transition. Ihimaera thus posits
the body as “a multifaceted, complexly integrated, dynamic field rather than a simple,
static, linear system” (Shusterman 2008: 208) and one-directional telos. With David’s
last visit to The Steam Parlour the narrative spirals back to the beginning and the
popular joke in the steam rooms, an ironic twist on the oedipal sphinx riddle. A play on
the human life cycle, the riddle also hints at a growing erection – a “man driven by sex
from crawl to walk to full erection” (NGS 13) – and denominates the gay man who
finally leaves the secret establishments to ‘penetrate’ the world and assert his
homosexuality:

And there is the door to the steam room itself. Who knows who will come through the door?
Someone youthful, bringing hope. Someone strong, someone handsome, someone pliant,
someone shining, someone succulent. Someone. Anyone. The shower room is like a crossroad.
And suddenly I see my reflection shooting off the glistening octagonal walls like a steel
honeycomb. The uneven planes make my face sphinx-like, shimmering and remote. What is it
that walks on four legs in the morning, two legs in the heat of the noonday sun and three legs in
the evening? (297)

The ambiguous terrain of The Gardens of Spain and the enigmatic “second
chance land” (NGS 205) of the shower room not only foster queerness in all its sensual
and physical ramifications, they are also spaces of freedom – “heterotopias” (Foucault 1986: 24) according to Foucault’s terminology\(^\text{88}\) – that provoke an interrogation of the structures of feeling superimposed on queerness, and sexuality in general, because they “have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect” (Foucault 1986: 24). If Foucault focuses on the concept of sexuality as “accessible to very diverse fields of knowledge and linked to a system of rules and constraints” (Foucault 1990b: 4), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick goes a step further and – by drawing on “the formidably rich phenomenology of emotions in Tomkins” (Sedgwick and Frank 1995: 2) – considers the dimension of feeling that underpins such a system. If The Steam Parlour provides a place for unspoken sensuality and physical pleasure, it is also a place where vision is of great potency and which forms an undermining counterpart to the inscription of queerness with feelings of shame. The playful oscillation of visual impressions in the secret, yet explicitly gay netherworld (or “restaurant” (NGS 114) as the uninitiated are made to believe) unmasks the strict heterocentralist regiment characterising David’s ‘official’ life as husband and father. The novel therefore transforms the male body through the iridescent intersection of vision and sensual-emotional affect, a complex texture of dynamic energies.

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\(^{88}\) Foucault defines heterotopias as having “a function in relation to all the space that remains. This function unfolds between two extreme poles. Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space […] [o]r else, on the contrary, their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled” (Foucault 1986: 27). The Steam Parlour, for instance, forms such a pole – magic, obscure and dangerous at the same time – to the world in which David ‘plays’ happy family with Annabelle and his daughters. Its entrance is marked by an inconspicuous door and system of doors and rooms on the inside; “the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place” (Foucault 1986: 26) and in order to enter “one must have a certain permission and make certain gestures” (26): “The Spaniard may grin but he never smiles. Although he knows who I am, he still checks my membership card” (NGS 9). Furthermore, it is characterised by its connections to the outside world from where its clients stream in and to where they go back to, and its inside incorporates an ambiguous set of decoration and rooms: “Not even low lighting, however, could ever transform the vestibule of The Steam Parlour. Like others of its kind, it exhibits wall-to-wall tackiness. On the left is a mural, presumably of a Spanish hacienda, complete with lurid red flowers suggestive of sex. On the right, a giant plastic cactus. In the middle is a bar selling watered-down beer, Coca Cola and stale potato chips. Four stools next to it are where you can catch your breath or use the telephone, and on the bar are bowls of plastic-wrapped condoms. Be careful you don’t eat them with your chips. But the vestibule at least serves its purpose. It provides a moment to get ready, to check out the scene, to pose and breathe in the heady sweet-sour smell that only places like this have. To acclimatise before moving on to the locker room. Extend your tongue and you can lick the warm sweat off the air” (NGS 10-1).
3.2 “Beyond constraints. Beyond respectability. Beyond the country of decorous behaviour” – Steaming Up Vision in the Spectacle of The Steam Parlour

Alongside the silence and inviolability surrounding his parents’ bedroom, David’s sexual experiences are countered by punishment and further silence. Not only does Ihimaera draw attention to the fact that sexuality is generally imprinted by taboos, he also confronts the repressing affective mechanisms which society encounters queerness with. When David broods over his imminent coming-out, he remembers an incident in his teenage years and his confusion after having witnessed one of the neighbours’ boys masturbating. Instead of answering his questions, his father punishes him and maintains a strict silence: “His reaction was to punish me. At the time I thought it was because puberty was shameful and dirty and asking about it was thus a sin. I now suspect that it was a reaction to the thought that his son might be involved in some kind of circle jerk with other boys. Whatever, I could never again speak to my father about sex” (NGS 70).

The repressive system of homophobia in David’s culture affects David even to the point of self-punishment; sex and queerness – the male erection ‘seen’ – have become subjected to silence and (self-) humiliation: “Working out, pursuing fitness and athletic excellence with a single-mindedness others found admirable. What they did not know was that I undertook my training out of fear and hope. I had already started to punish myself for what I suspected I was” (NGS 74). What strikes me as crucial here is the close relation between the masturbation act David has witnessed and the punitive consequences that for David result in “an inner torment, a sickness of the soul” (Tomkins 2008a: 351), to say it with Tomkins words. Vision becomes strictly regulated.

As these latter quotations indicate, the painful process of David’s coming out is accompanied by moments of shame, an affect of multiple range and repercussion that is closely linked to the gaze. In this regard, Silvan Tomkins has not only identified “the
face and particularly the eyes” (Tomkins 2008a: 386) as “the primary communicators and receivers of all affects” (386), but has also underlined the interrelations between the shame response and the visual. The visual sense, in turn, is often put under a taboo, for “the linkage of shame to the whole spectrum of affect expression”, Tomkins explains, “may result in an exaggerated self-consciousness, because the self is then made ashamed of all its feelings and must therefore hide the eyes lest the eyes meet. […] The eyes are used to express, receive and share experience of every kind of affect and are therefore vulnerable to whatever controls these affects suffer” (386). Despite the almost universal importance of the visual sense, seeing or looking is constantly subjected to a regiment of taboos in order to maintain power relations of various forms. David’s watching Pimple Face “pulling savagely at his cock” (NGS 70) and his attempt to discuss the incident with his father are relegated to a taboo position his father guards with “brute force” (68). David, in turn, is made to feel “himself naked, defeated, alienated, lacking in dignity or worth” (Tomkins 2008a: 351). Shame therefore introduces “a disruptive moment” (Sedgwick 2003: 36); communication is broken as “the individual calls a halt to looking at another person, particularly the other person’s face, and to the other person’s looking at him, particularly at his face” (Tomkins 2008a: 352) and is hence thrown back to himself: “In short, self-consciousness and shame are tightly linked because the shame response itself so dramatically calls attention to the face. […] The shame response is literally an ambivalent turning of the eyes away from the object toward the face toward the self” (360-1). The shame response thus comprises a paradox because, on the one hand, it provides a moment of interruption and termination of communication, especially through its reduction of “facial communication” (Tomkins 2008a: 352), but, on the other hand, it expresses “a desire to
reconstitute the interpersonal bridge” (Sedgwick 2003: 36) and “in a circuit of identity-constituting identificatory communication [...] shame, too, makes identity” (36): “In fact, shame and identity remain in a very dynamic relation to one another, at once deconstituting and foundational, because shame is both peculiarly contagious and peculiarly individuating” (36).

Being looked at can make us feel ashamed just as looking at someone or something may cause the same reaction (Sedgwick 2003: 35-6; see also Hotz-Davies 2007, and Tomkins 2008a: esp. 391). Wouldn’t it make sense, then, to ask whether or not *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* draws us into its depiction of shame and makes us feel ashamed? Whether or not the narrative may manipulate us in so far that we will no longer be able to interrogate why shame might be the appropriate response in a certain moment so that we will succumb to shame and accept any message as if it was the most natural and logic thing to do? Provided that shame is characterised by a high level of contagiousness and can easily affect people, that shame “can so readily flood me – assuming I’m a shame-prone person – with this sensation whose very suffusiveness seems to delineate my precise, individual outlines in the most isolating way imaginable” (Sedgwick 2003: 37), it might very well be the case that we, too, squirm with embarrassment, discomfort or shame when confronted with situations of shame:

I reach up to turn off the shower. The Bald One and the other two men are just about to go into the steam room, Size Queen in tow, when all of a sudden Snake Charmer, followed by a well-hung Out Of Towner, comes through the door. Everyone hesitates a moment and then casually returns to showering. [...] Out Of Towner looks a bit embarrassed about having an audience, twists the taps and clothes himself in a curtain of falling water. (119)

Under the circumstance that he has suddenly become the focus of everybody’s attention, Out Of Towner finds himself in an awkward situation, being conscious of the men watching him. The sparks of shame may thus infect us readers because Out Of Towner’s embarrassment is caused by the onlookers, and just as being looked at may result in feelings of shame, so does the act of looking (Tomkins 2008a: 391). Yet, such an interpretation seems oversimplified, for the narrative does not position the underworld of gay cruising as a strictly shameful place. On the contrary, the steam rooms appear as places of ambiguity because “[h]ere, silvered by falling water, you see men in all their pride, their beauty and ugliness, their variety, their collective manhood, ashamed or shameless. The family of Man in all his perfection and imperfection” (NGS 20, my emphasis). They rather court an indefinite game of the pleasure of queer voyeurism, mutual gazing and its playful aversion: “This is the age of photography, of
the close-up, the freeze frame, the slow-motion shot, the segmenting of parts into tits and ass, cock or snatch. [...] Let him see. Let him take a good look. Now look at him” (NGS 205). The gaze of and on the male body is essential in The Steam Parlour, but outside it is considered inappropriate and consequently regulated by taboos: “Our father is the only father we have. We fear his anger, his disapproval and his brute force. He has brought us up in his own image. It is an image of patriarchal masculinity. When we confess our lust for men, he can only become punisher” (NGS 68). By turning the argument around, we could also ask if the novel works to free us from such feelings of shame by destroying the heterocentralist gaze and the taboos put on homosexuality because “David sees his own sexuality and its consequences as a trap, bounded by moral judgments and suffering, that holds him within a specific definition of self based on his sexual identity” (Tawake 1999: 279).

Particularly shameless figures may prompt us to interrogate apparently unobtrusive and readily accepted frameworks. According to Ingrid Hotz-Davies, unashamed characters inherit a potential of freedom and appeal to our ability to determine and call into question situations and frameworks which we willingly submit to:

Dabei ist die Schamlosigkeit von höchstem Wert, weil sie die ideologischen Hindernisse sichtbar macht, gegen die sie sich artikulieren muss. In einer literarischen Figur wird die Schamlosigkeit uns, den Zeugen ihrer Artikulierung, das als Ideologie sichtbar machen, was wir sonst einfach und bequem für ‘wahr’ oder ‘richtig’ oder ‘natürlich’ halten. Der Schamlose zwingt mich dazu, den Ort, den ich ideologisch gerade scheinbar sicher bewohne, zu beschreiben, ihn zu benennen. Die Schamlosen kehren den Blick um und interpellieren uns. (Hotz-Davies 2007: 195)

The shameless challenge us to see the world from their point of view and not from the perspective that is turned against them (Hotz-Davies 2007: 198). As Nights depicts David as such an “unashamed” (NGS 16) figure and as the hero of the story, Ihimaera turns our attention to shame as a mode of regulation and marginalisation of sexual identities that deviate from the so-called ‘norm’. The first-person narrative subsumes our line of vision under David’s perspective and therefore draws us to the point of view of a peculiarly “unashamed” (NGS 16) character – at least that’s what David wants us to believe. In this sense, I’d like to argue that the text makes us aware of the ideological implications of shame in order to diminish the link between shame and sexuality, or better, different sexualities, and thus strives for a position of empowering marginalised queer identities.
Nights in the Gardens of Spain depicts David’s coming out as a shameful experience. When David pours his heart out to his father and tells him about his attraction to men, his “father gives a deep groan and bows his head. Normally he never does this, self-conscious about his thinning hair. He is utterly vulnerable in a way that shames me. Yet he does not realise that I am being kind. Diplomatic” (NGS 72). The situation is thus shameful for David and his father; for his father, because he is ashamed of his son who obviously has chosen a life that stands in stark contrast to everything he himself believes in; for David, because his father shows a vulnerability that David has never seen before. Hence, the passage displays the multiple nature of shame, and the following quote from Tomkins hints at the sheer endless variations of shame as his list can easily be extended: “If I wish to touch you but do not wish to be touched, I may feel ashamed. If I wish to look at you but you do not wish me to, I may feel ashamed. If I wish you to look at me but you do not, I may feel ashamed. If I wish to look at you and at the same time wish that you look at me, I can be shamed” (Tomkins 2008a: 391).

Now, at this point, the novel places the reader at the risk of giving in to feelings of shame because we may sympathise with the figure of David’s father whose whole world has just been disrupted. More likely, David may be the focus of our sympathy because the novel constantly presents us with his perspective and, in this case, with a moment of emotional defeat and weakness on his father’s side which may cause David to feel ashamed as well:

It is so difficult to watch this man, my father, as he wrestles with the unbelievability of my confession. His broken sobs come from some dark place he has never known before. It takes him some time to recover. When he does, his back comes up. Control returning. […] And now the words themselves. I’ve never actually said them before, even to myself. Just two words to acknowledge my self and my kind. At first they are stones in my mouth. Heavy. Lodged in my throat. Delivering them is agony and, in the doing, the life that was becomes bloodied. ‘I’m gay.’ (NGS 73)

Yet, the novel also leads us readers to interrogate these feelings of shame and their authority, for the following bits of conversation between David and his father expose shame as an instrument of social control, and the reaction of David’s father bears strong resemblances to Tomkins’ line of examples of how shame is deeply inscribed upon a person’s soul and body and readily slips under the skin. After regaining control over his emotions, his father makes a gesture that seems to force David into feeling ashamed “when he is upon me, backhanding me across the room, surprising me with his strength. ‘What I understand,’ his voice rising, ‘is that you will break your mother’s heart.’ Not his. Hers. ‘What I understand is that you will cause pain
to all of us.’ Shaking. Not giving ground. Filled with loathing” (NGS 73). The attempt to compel David’s body in a physical posture of shame is reinforced by an open display of contempt and by applying to David’s consciousness and responsibility towards his family. The reaction of David’s father, nevertheless, exposes shame as a means of heterocentralist power and social/political/cultural constraints that in the end do not correspond to David’s point of view. Alternative sexualities are forced under the yoke of sin and immorality: “A single-sex boarding school run by sexually repressed males is not the best place for Changeling Boys. The controls that are placed on us mirror their repression. And most of the controls are the most frightening of any concocted: the Thou Shalt Nots of Christianity and the society that has sprung from Christianity” (NGS 105). During his school years at a boys’ boarding school the protagonist of the narrative eventually “lived in fear that I would be found out” (NGS 105) in that homophobic “place of tears and sighs, of boys in the company of boys, [where] it was important to enforce an acceptable heterosexual code of sexual conduct. […] To stop the crushes, the affections, the idealisations that boys often held of each other. To enforce gender roles and masculinity. To combat homoeroticism” (105). The text thus makes us readers ask why David should be ashamed of himself and of his sexual identity and what actually is so horrible about his coming out that his father squirms with shame.

Ingrid Hotz-Davies thus considers shame in its duplicity both as a contagious and unquestioned (and unquestionable) agent enacting ideological frameworks and as a medium of scrutiny revealing such complicities:

Generell jedoch kann man erwarten, dass Werke, die uns in die Beschämung und Scham von Figuren hineinziehen, die also ihre Botschaften mit der Scham, in der gleichen Richtung mit der Scham, enkodieren, tendenziell die Ideologien, die diese Scham motivieren, unsichtbar machen, natürlich’ erscheinen lassen werden. Es besteht also die Gefahr, dass wir als Leser uns mit der entsprechenden Figur zusammen im Griff der Peinlichkeit winden werden, ohne uns genau zu fragen, warum wir uns denn jetzt gerade schämen und ob wir das überhaupt wollen. Schamlose Figuren hingegen werden uns befragen, warum wir denken, dass man sich jetzt schämen sollte; sie werden uns zwingen, unsere ansonsten unbefragten Annahmen zuzugeben, zu benennen. (Hotz-Davies 2007: 196-7).

As Sedgwick suggests, the kaleidoscopic nature of shame – ever-changing and unsettling, mellifluous and toxic at the same time – eludes any fixed identification with a negative and toxic feeling. Toxicity can be overcome and extracted in the process of asserting new or different identities. Though shame used as a kind of punitive controlling force motivates repressive structures – if we think of the instillation of shame David encounters in Nights – it is also “a kind of free radical that […] attaches to and permanently intensifies or alters the meaning of – of almost any thing” (Sedgwick...
Sedgwick is thus careful in her judgment of attempts to disperse the inhibiting and oppressive force of shame: “Which means, among other things, that therapeutic or political strategies aimed directly at getting rid of individual or group shame, or undoing it, have something preposterous about them: the may ‘work’ – they certainly have powerful effects – but they can’t work in the way they say they work” (Sedgwick 2003: 62). To be just, Sedgwick’s investigation of shame mainly focuses on “its anamorphic, protean susceptibility to new expressive grammars” (Sedgwick 2003: 64); in her view, shame cannot be seen as an absolutist corset choking any potential of change and transformation. “The forms taken by shame are not distinct ‘toxic’ parts of a group or individual identity that can be excised” she thus writes; “they are instead integral to and residual in the processes by which identity itself is formed. They are available for the work of metamorphosis, reframing, refiguration, transfiguration, affective and symbolic loading and deformation, but perhaps all too potent for the work of purgation and deontological closure” (Sedgwick 2003: 63).

At this point of the novel, we have already been introduced – through the figure of David – to a space where there is no place for shame as a homophobic and regulatory element of sexuality, at least not in the oppressive sense of shame we have witnessed between David and his father. Right from the beginning, Nights in the Gardens of Spain centres on a crucial differential paradigm of “the theatre, or arena” (Fox 2008: 173), represented, for example, by The Steam Parlour where gay men seek anonymous sexual contacts, and of a conventional world in which David grapples with issues of fatherhood, heterosexual marriage, career and his attempt to come to terms with his homosexuality after his coming-out. The novel vitally relies on vision and a complex pattern of seeing and being seen when it focuses on scenes taking place in establishments such as The Steam Parlour. There, queer male bodies become the central objets de volupté of the onlooker, just as the onlooker is exposed in the limelight. The sense of vision does nevertheless not constitute the only sensual path the novel explores, but overlaps with a general cornucopia of feelings. Thus Nights represents and illustrates the epistemological aspects of sensual potential. Alistair Fox may be right in asserting that the combination of orgiastic satisfaction and oblivion David, the “compulsively promiscuous cruiser” (Fox 2008: 176), seeks on his clandestine cruises does not form part of a fulfilling “new kind of gay masculinity” (181). But I do not agree with his depreciation of “the homosexual cruiser’s arena” (Fox 2008: 174) for it appears to me that – although his use of vocabulary hints at the importance of vision in
the narrative – Fox, paradoxically, does not pay sufficient attention to the spectacle connected to it and its potential of ‘piercing’ the skin just as shame does. The complex visual cluster tied to The Steam Parlour evokes a strong emphasis on the (naked) male body – both as sensually perceiving and as the object of sensual perception – and plays a significant part in the formation of gay identity. Ihimaera plays with the overlapping of several fields of vision and creates a complex spectacle; he so attempts to work towards a blurring of perspectives, towards steaming up the glasses of vision, so to say, and ultimately introduces a change of perspective.

Visual perception – a chiasm of looking and being looked at, of envisioning the male body and David purposely placing himself in the visual fields of other men – figures prominently in the text, especially when we follow David’s character into places like The Steam Parlour. Hence, the narrative heavily relies on images of crossing borders, of transgressing to a place invisible to the outside world, of going underground: “Muted laughter comes from behind the door of the steam room and, somewhere else, the sounds of soft sighs in the humid night. They quicken my desire to be part of the action. So. Quickly. Five in the steam room, huh? Turn the shower off. Nostrils flaring. Two strides. Already, tumescence. Into the steam room” \(^{13-4}\). As the novel creates two colliding worlds – a largely homophobic one and a queer one – its reliance on the visual, as well as on sensual-emotional perception in general, spotlights the bodies and feelings of gay men and, through the figure of David, focuses on the formation of gay identity and the merging of two seemingly opposite identities.

In the prologue of the novel, David introduces the reader to The Steam Parlour where “[e]ach window is a mirror of desire” \(^{7}\), a place surrounded by an air of secrecy, a place David obviously doesn’t want to be seen going into as the image of headlights from cars driving past indicates: “Quick steps take me away from the rain and along the pavement, following the curved wall of glass frontages. […] The headlights pinion me, popping flashbulbs like a photographer leaping out of the darkness, Gotcha. […] I push open the door. Get away from the searchlights of the traffic” \(^{7}\). The air of secrecy is further pointed to by the unobtrusive façade of the building: “There is no sign on the door. Only logos which indicate that Bankcard or American Express are accepted. You have to know the door is there. Nobody goes in by accident. You go in because you want what’s inside” \(^{7}\). Though David is very sensitive about and almost shockingly distressed by the possibility of being seen outside The Steam Parlour, he is highly attracted to the ‘peeping game’ inside the sauna rooms.
If Ihimaera posits David as a ‘shameless’ figure in the light of his sexuality, he also reintroduces shame through the back door, for the milieu of gay cruising remains an underworld hidden away in an air of secrecy, and its clients value anonymity just as much as they don’t want to be seen entering and leaving the establishments. ‘Spotted’ by the headlights of cars, David is thus entirely self-conscious, yet inside the Gardens he desires to watch other men and wants himself to be the object of their gaze. The novel therefore complicates matters through this double game of shame and shamelessness outside and inside the underworld of The Gardens; if David views himself in terms of shamelessness, he is also implicated in an economy of shame. The omnipresent threat of Aids symbolised by the red light on the wall is nevertheless often blocked out, be it by the closing of his eyes: “I step up to the shower and my reflection flashes around the entire room. Suddenly I feel alone and yearn to fill the room with other men. I try to will them to appear, all those wonderful men, laughing and shining in the glory of their years. Most are dead now. Or dying. Quickly, I turn on the shower, close my eyes and try to forget” (NGS 13).

*Nights* also includes overtones of a Maori cultural and mythological framework here. That shame confines David to the underworld of gay cruising, a world also marked by death through the always-present threat of Aids, may also – at least partly – refer to the Maori author behind the Pakeha figure of David, for “[t]he feeling of shame comes into Maori mythology”, Rangimarie Turuki Pere explains, “when Hine-titama realizes that Tane is both her father and husband. According to one version this trauma made Hine-titama run away from Tane, bearing deep feelings of remorse and shame to find revenge in the realms of the underworld” (Turuki Pere 2006: 152-3). Hence, shame is already inscribed in the beginnings of whakapapa when “Hine titama was overwhelmed with shame” (Alpers 1986: 23). Shame here also implies a turning inward and retreat to the self since Hine-titama withdraws to the underworld and becomes Hine-nui-te-po, “the goddess of the underworld, the place where the spirit goes following death” (Barlow 1991: 94): in the case of Hine-titama, it can be argued that shame “strikes deepest into the heart of man, that it is felt as a sickness of the soul which leaves man naked, defeated, alienated and lacking in dignity” (Tomkins 2008a: 367). In Maori contexts for instance, the diminution of an individual’s mana – generally the expression of “the place of the individual in the social group” (Mead 2003: 29) – can give rise to ramifications of shame: “Mana is much more open to extension than any other attribute. It can be described as the creative and dynamic force that motivates the individual to do
better than others. The rewards are an increase in mana, and an acknowledgement by others of one’s special abilities. Praise, in other words, instead of shame” (51).

By confronting the reader with David’s perception, Ihimaera makes the reader ‘cross’ into The Steam Parlour and thus a co-spectator, an accomplice of the insider David who shares his secret knowledge with the outsider (as a lot of readers probably are): David “is a guide who knows his way around; and he shows it all to those who accompany him. […] We visit this other world in David’s company, and he directs our attention in the language of fairy tales” (Tawake 1999: 277). This is made clear when the men – whom David refers to through names that pick up their characteristic appearances or personalities such as Wet Dream Walking or Hope Eternal Springs – speculate about how The Spaniard, the doorkeeper, knows when someone walks up the stairs to The Steam Parlour:

Then Hope Springs Eternal says, ‘Oh, chaps, we all know he does it with mirrors.’ That cracks us up. Not just because of Hope Springs Eternal’s upper-class delivery but also because it could well be true. The Spaniard is suspected to be a voyeur, but aren’t we all? We are fairly sure he has two-way mirrors in the cubicles, where the one on one action takes place, and in the bunk room at the back. At least, that’s what we think or like to think. (NGS 8, my emphasis)

The steam room is hence also a place obstructing a clear view or vision. Its “warmth envelops like an old friend” (NGS 7) and in this atmosphere of wet, steamy air and “muted spraying sound” (9) the focus of vision is drawn to the naked bodies of men “in this world of hair, curls, moustache, chest, armpit and pubic thatch” (8). How difficult it is to see ‘properly’ or ‘clearly’ or to rely on our ‘normal’ visual capacities is emphasised in the figure of Hope Springs Eternal, the “blind albino bat peering out from the darkest corner” (NGS 9): “Never approached for sex, he has accepted a role as onlooker. But if he takes his glasses off he won’t see anything and if he leaves them on they steam up. Windscreen wipers are no solution. The onlooker who needs glasses in the steam room must be the most frustrated man in the world” (NGS 8, my emphasis). The steam or the spray of the showers gives rise to an alteration of visual communication; the humid air obstructs the visual sense to a certain extent and blurs demarcations, but it paradoxically constitutes a spectacle that allows us to see differently and turn the attention to the interactions of male bodies, thus heightening a sense of feeling. David, for instance, mentions that all the men in The Steam Parlour have to “wait for their eye-sight to adjust to the red darkness” (NGS 54).

Just as vision is steamed up in the Gardens of Spain, the voyeuristic element of the novel takes over, and shame can be overcome or added as a playful element: “There
is no room for coyness or embarrassment here. Seeing guys either striding or sidling back to the front desk, either swinging it left and right or cupping it in protective hands, adds to the titillation” (NGS 12). That shame operates as a strong authoritarian mechanism in all aspects of David’s society is further stressed in the text when David focuses on the sexuality of his own “well-put-together body” (NGS 16) and his “sense of unbounded confidence” (16). The free play of his ambiguous sexuality is set in stark contrast to the conventional concept of sexuality and the masculine body of his culture, and this discrepancy leads us to question the rigid ideological constructions behind the “idle small-talk” (NGS 34) and the “image of patriarchal masculinity” (68) with its “semblance of decorum” (174): “[A]s far as sex is concerned, I am unashamed. But this I do not see in the mirror. All I see is how I present myself to my world. A tilt of face, a mask of light, a lift of eyes here, a smile of shyness there. We are people of many lives and of many faces. Compartmentalised, we allow the people in each of our lives to see only what we want them to see” (16).

If vision is ‘steamed up’, new possibilities and new perspectives open up because, as David explains, “[i]n this place imagination is as potent an aphrodisiac as the reality. Imagining someone looking turns us all into performers. Turns us on. Cranks up the exhibitionist nature. Makes us strut and sprout” (NGS 8). The text thus provides the reader with an obstruction of conventional (heterosexual) vision and makes room for an altered vision, “one filled with expectancy” (NGS 9), and the reality of gay sexuality, for the “potency of The Steam Parlour lies in its promises, the infinite possibilities” (11). And it is at these points in the narrative that blurred vision and the nondiscursive converge. The following passage illuminates this idea clearly since words are lost in steam and the final image encourages the reader to engage in and visualise “this place of flickering magic” (NGS 11), to fill in the gap of what is not seen and not said, for David withholds the information of who enters accompanied by a cloud of steam with the opening of the door: “Who knows who will come through the door? Someone youthful, bringing hope. Someone strong, bringing power and domination. Someone handsome, someone to worship. Someone pliant, bringing succulence. Someone smiling, bringing love. Someone shining, bringing destiny. Someone. Anyone. A hiss. An eddy of steam. The door opens” (9). The intersection of vision and steam propels David to a state of heightened sexual awareness and arousal. The swirls of steam allow him to focus on the missing element that his body desires – the orgiastic completion figured by the male phallus – just as much as they wrap him and the other men in anonymity: “I take the
The Succulent Stranger looks at me. His gaze is enough to tell me he is interested. Suddenly he gets up and walks out the door. For a brief moment his profile is wreathed in steam, showing a jutting cock. Time to go after him” (NGS 204). The wet tiles covering the walls function as spectral or distort ing mirrors and lull the men in an air of queerness; faces and bodies are enveloped in indefinability, fragmented and enigmatically kaleidoscopic: “When I open my eyes again the light dazzles. And suddenly I see my naked reflection shooting off the glistening octagonal walls like a steel honeycomb. The uneven planes make my face sphinx-like, shimmering, remote” (NGS 13).

The free play of male bodies is nevertheless confined to the underground milieu. David’s masquerade and his desire not to grow up become all the more important as the novel makes clear that David’s coming-out renders him vulnerable in a society still characterised by homophobia and gay bashings. Telling the truth transforms him into “a Changeling Prince, a thing of wolverine ugliness” (NGS 76) and separates him from his home and family, “The Ship of Dreams [which] rolls in the swelling night tides, snapping the canvas, trying to pull away from its moorings” (76). The text thus unveils the homophobic gaze of David’s culture, its hostility towards queerness, its “most intense consciousness of the object, which is experienced as disgusting. […] [A]ttention is most likely to be referred to the source, the object, rather than to the self or the face” (Tomkins 2008a: 356). When David walks by a group of streetkids in front of The Fuck Palace, “they look at each other and roll their eyes. Another fruit, another homo” (NGS 50). His parents hardly make an attempt to hide their feelings of contempt for their son, though they control their feelings of disdain in the presence of other people. Hence, family meetings hover between open disgust and the sham of family idyll, a situation David longs to flee and be magically saved from: “Then it comes out of nowhere. ‘I despise what you’re doing, David. I can barely cope with your being a homosexual. But what you are doing to those little girls and to Annabelle defies decency.’ Oh Miranda, bring your wand and save Daddy” (NGS 172). Although the narrative portrays David as desiring a pristine fairytale land as his “memories are filled with Annabelle […] [and] made of nostalgia about past nights” (NGS 89), of dreams about the “glistening Ship of Dreams” (89) and “Tinkerbell to sprinkle fairy dust” (89), the confrontation with the disgust and scorn of the people close to him lead David to overcome feelings of shame. Rather, the text indicates a turn away from the social conventions guarded by shame; David does not “guard his face and his eyes from looking and being looked at.”
Instead of hiding, he confronts his father head-on; the text thus unmasks the homophobic objectification directed at David when “[i]t is time for me to face down my father” (NGS 172). Even though David’s mother takes sides with his father and insists contemptuously that “you are wrong. You hear me? You are wrong. […] I wish you had never been born” (NGS 173), David stands up for himself “[d]uelling in the rigging” (174) in his quest for a fulfilling gay identity amidst homophobia: “Suddenly my mother stiffened. Gave a small bird-like cry. She must have seen, over my shoulder, Chris sitting in the car. She pushed me away. Clutched at my sister. Went down the hallway. Away. My father imprisoned me with his eyes. ‘You’re always welcome, David,’ he said. ‘This is your home and we are your parents. But your mother and I do not want any of your fairy friends around.’” (211) Always at risk of being subjected to shame by the open hostility and disgust of his parents, David eventually succeeds in embracing a homosexual relationship with Chris, for “by triumph of tenacity and will, male to male relationships can, and do, last” (NGS 64).

The novel thus discloses the many layers of shame as “a mechanism for the preservation of social norms […] [and its] powerful negative sanctions against the transgression of shared social norms” (Tomkins 2008a: 404) and makes us aware that homosexuality need not be closeted or connected to feelings of shame or disgust. Rather, the narrative opts for an alternative focus, for the main figure of the text finally asserts his gay identity and realises that he “must let that Ship of Lost Dreams go, watch the sails unfurl with moonlight, and bid God speed as it sets its course to that second star on the right. They must go their way and I must go mine” (NGS 301).

### 3.3 Beyond “the Slow Silent Choreography of Sex”

The novel’s solution represents a divergence from both the purely physical sexual encounters David seeks in hidden places like the Gardens of Spain and the storytelling of his life as a Peter Pan experience. David comes to realize that being gay cannot be displaced to a secret Neverland made of secluded gardens surrounded by night or beaches he flies off to, all those places and “playgrounds of our innocence” (NGS 243) with “mermen in the sparkling water” (248), of “wonder” (247) and a “whole world of games and power […] where one man meets another […] [and] we are free to be what we want to be” (248). David comes to realise that homosexuality can

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92 Quotation from *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* (NGS 204).
neither be confined to the anonymity of The Steam Parlour nor is it to be viewed as simply a question of sex. The novel thus portrays The Steam Parlour as a stepping stone, as “part of the freedom I sought, but I have discovered there is a world beyond. I have to find it and my place in it. Acknowledging that I am gay is just a start. Being gay is something else. It is not just about sex or having sex. It’s about being a whole person” (NGS 296). And so Ihimaera disentangles homosexuality from a silent netherworld existence and releases it into a world of “silver glitter” (NGS 269) and “dazzling light” (269) as represented by Chris, the gay ballet dancer and “vision of magic” (269). Through David’s quest, the novel moves queerness from the underworld of gay cruising and anonymous sex to the beginning of a new story. The relationship between David and Chris, not only includes the physical-sensual connection, it represents the need for the story of a new queer masculinity as indicated by the following passage that ties the sensual understanding of their bodies to the words of love: “Each kiss drank of his lips, the honey of his mouth, as if endeavouring to coax out his mysteries. […] Waiting for that unconscious tremor which is the sign that the way is open. Then, ‘I love you,’ he said” (NGS 208-9).

Nights eventually breaks with David’s identification with one of The Lost Boys or even the figure of Peter Pan himself. Neither can homosexuality be kept in a dream-like parallel universe nor gay identity understood as a flight from the conventional happy family idyll. Unlike Peter Pan who is left behind by all those returning to the real world and growing up, the figure of David shows that growing up is necessary in order to eventually join two different identities – growing up in the sense that homosexuality is not to be rendered to some secret place “hidden away behind decorous silence” (NGS 272) but to be lived openly. Only then will David no longer be torn between being a father and being gay. Acknowledging his gay identity and the relationship with Chris has broken up David’s marriage with Annabelle and their family; but paradoxically being one of The Lost Boys doesn’t necessarily mean being lost. Rather, just as Peter Pan always remains an opaque figure “between existing categories” (Kavey 2009b: 78),

93 Te Ao Marama as a metaphor of a new world order and of cultural and political empowerment for the tangata whenua is thus extended to the gay cause as well. Just as Te Ao Marama, The World of Light, emerged from the separation of earth and sky, Nights posits a space for gay men and women in New Zealand society which is then transformed in The Uncle’s Story to incorporate gay Maori men and women, too. The image of Te Ao Marama has also been used in respect to knowledge: “In the acquisition of knowledge, one progresses from a condition of ignorance or darkness to enlightenment (Aomārama)” (Barlow 1991: 4). Through his process of growing up and breaking away from the Peter Pan model David gains such a new knowledge and is able to acknowledge his identity as a gay man and a father. The transformative potential of Te Ao Marama is also reflected by the title and narrative structure of the novel from nights spent in the Gardens of Spain to “the first day of the rest of our lives (NGS 130) and then “straight on till morning” (303).
the final scenes of the novel insinuate a process of weakening a strict opposition of the two categories. Chris’ remarks imply that David can be a father and gay at the same time: “Sometimes I wonder about you,’ he says. ‘Keeping me in one box and the girls in another.’ He waggles a finger: naughty, naughty. ‘Well, it isn’t going to work.’ […] Bright shining Chris. He is getting the measure of me. Forcing me to grow up” (NGS 279).

As the novel explores alternative sexuality and a different image of the male body through the fictional double of the Peter Pan frame, Ihimaera’s narrative opts for a break away from the wishful subtext David constructs in order to come to terms with his homosexuality and the resulting changes after his coming-out. It is no longer the hidden world of gay cruising that attracts him magically nor the conventional concept of a family that appears as “a journey to Never Never Land, a journey of confusion, anger, silent rages and frigidity as we tried to prop up the day-to-day structure of our lives” (NGS 141). When David goes on a journey to visit Charles, his desire to fly away from his life is made clear: “I have always loved long journeys. The mere act of leaving accustomed surroundings with their own known context is a release from real time, real life. You can place that accustomed life on hold, freeze it, secure in the awareness that it will be there waiting for you when you come back” (NGS 212). And yet, the journey also represents an exploration of new or alternative possibilities; “[e]very journey thus becomes an opportunity to explore your parallel lives, those other, optional lives which have always been there too. The rooms inhabited by the other people in your life. Where the beds are made, waiting for your return, for you to come back” (NGS 212). It is time for David to cut himself loose from those spectres, grow up and return to reality. That new reality, though, doesn’t have to be bleak but can be just as magical as the dreamy fantasies of the Gardens of Spain and the happy family in The House On The Hill.

The narrative thus resituates sexual identity and claims a space for queerness which – just like David’s shadow – sets itself free from a closeted existence and moves on to merge with reality, a reality that nevertheless can incorporate the “fairy dust” (NGS 302) David has desired for so long. In this sense, Chris “disintegrates in a shower of glitter” (NGS 300) during his trapeze performance at the end of the novel which celebrates “the heroism of being gay” (299) as David discovers it is “[t]ime to start looking” (296), to create a new ‘fairy’ story and to pass the old one on: “Chris, a radiant angel, an icon of hope. At the Hero Party I am among my kind and this is where I want to be. All these brave gay men and lesbian women, all seeking a brave new world. […]
We have to go out and claim a space and build it. That is the way when the phoenix is born” (300). The old fairy story is nevertheless given up reluctantly in favour of the new ‘fairy’ story; certain overtones of melancholy mark the last passages of Nights when David pays a visit to Annabelle and the girls. Although he is full of hope at the sight of his ‘other’ journey when he passes on the Peter Pan narrative to his girls, his last remarks are also characterized by anxiety. The transition to the desired or imagined world, in David’s case from a closet situation in a largely homophobic society to the creation of an equal and free gay space, is represented as a difficult journey. The question whether David will eventually and fully emerge from his ‘hiding place’ lacks definite solution: “I CANNOT STOP the habit. […] This driving across the city to watch the house where my little princesses live. Watching from the darkened street, guarding them while they dream, just in case. […] It’s the second star from the right. […] So listen to Daddy: You must go on straight till morning, darlings. Straight on till morning” (NGS 301-3). In Nights in the Gardens of Spain, the journey has just begun.

3.4 From Nights in the Gardens of Spain towards a Queer Maori Perspective

It could be argued that Nights in the Gardens of Spain marks a step away from Ihimaera’s previous writings in that it is apparently not concerned with Maori culture. However, Nights may be read as a text resounding with “multiple masks for its author” (Roussos 2005: n.pag.), while one minor character of the narrative already inscribes the step from a queer Pakeha perspective towards a queer Maori angle. The intermittent series of encounters between David and a gay Maori man, a friend of his he nicknames The Noble Savage, reveal a shift in emphasis, for the question of family and genealogy is obviously of much more importance to The Noble Savage than it is in Pakeha culture which generally pays individualism a greater tribute. The figure of The Noble Savage points to a concept of the body that asserts the communal implications of gayness. Though Nights hints at a group identity the gay cruisers share as they are bound together by their common use of towels and soap and their quest for fast and anonymous sex for instance, be it through active participation or passive voyeurism, the novel mainly traces David’s individual search for a personally fulfilling gay masculinity. David certainly mentions that “[t]he steam drifts about us all” (NGS 119) thus revealing an affinity or spiritual kinship between his fellow cruisers, but his quest for identity finally propels him towards a loving relationship with ballet dancer Chris, “a beautiful angel” (300) and
role model for all those like David seeking a new queer self-confidence. In *The Uncle’s Story*, Ihimaera deepens the idea of a queer genealogy only partially broached in his previous fiction, as we will see. The engraving of the flesh is thus intricately entwined with the creation of communal identity. While *Nights* portrays David as ‘scorched’ and only gradually able to assert his identity, Michael goes a step further in *The Uncle’s Story* in search of a model that incorporates homosexuality into the Maori community.

In another respect, David’s descriptions of and his attraction to The Noble Savage, “[a]ctivist, outspoken and out front, [...] a strong voice working with the Aids clinic, health authorities, city fathers, Prostitutes’ Collective and whoever else will listen” (*NGS* 17), a “gay icon of Polynesia” (17), may function as an ironic comment as “they have been written by a writer whose work has consistently dismantled such simplistic categories of identity” (Tawake 2000: 170). The figure of The Noble Savage may also work as a reminder that, although the postcolonial can no longer be seen in terms of binarisms as it kaleidoscopically embraces a multitude of blurred categories and identities, some binary constructions are still perpetuated such as the fantasy of “the mysterious and exotic Other” (Roussos 2005: n.pag.) which, for example, crops up in art or tourism. 94 Along these lines, David describes The Noble Savage – whose “face gleams like a bronzed sculpture” (*NGS* 235) – as “brand new, as if he has just stepped out of a Gauguin painting, straight out of Eden” (16), wearing “a red flower behind his ear in unaffected delight” (16) or “a piece of lustrous green jade” (64); “[h]is eyes are

94 In this respect Graham Huggan has criticised the tendency in postcolonialism and postcolonial studies towards an “increasing commodification as a marketable academic field” (Huggan 2001: 3) through a “fetishising process, which turns the literatures/cultures of the ‘non-Western’ world into saleable exotic objects” (10): “Reconstituted exoticisms in the age of globalisation include the trafficking of culturally ‘othered’ artefacts in the world’s economic, not cultural centres. These ‘new’ exotic products (African statues, Pacific Island necklaces, Indonesian batiks, and so forth) are characterised, not by remoteness but by *proximity* – by their availability in a shop or street-market or shopping-mall somewhere near you” (15). This process of marketing the ‘exotic’ and blurring and turning ineffective postcolonialism’s stance of resistance, intended shifts of perspective and empowerment of marginalised cultures, also includes, according to Huggan, a commodification of literatures, postcolonial writers and postcolonial theory (Huggan 2001: 4). In the context of tourism, Tongan scholar Konai Helu-Thaman draws attention to the paradox relationship between the survival and empowerment of indigenous Pacific Island cultures and their commodification in the tourism industry: “Today, stripped of much of their land or environment, cultural survival for many island peoples is often tenuously based on such touristically saleable aspects of their culture as song, dance, and handicrafts, rather than on the more productive environment-based aspects” (Helu-Thaman 1993: 106). As a consequence, in the wave of tourism, its reliance on exotic products and stereotypes such as “idyllic paradises” (Edmond 1997: 9), lula skirts, flower garlands or the “sheep-obsessed archipelago at the bottom of the Pacific” (Williams 2004: 18) as in the case of one of New Zealand’s tourist images, “[p]eople, their beliefs and values, tend to be missing from these discussions. This is most unfortunate because much of our cultural knowledge and heritage are found not in books but in people; when we talk about cultural heritage we are talking about people, not artefacts. [...] The process of commodification of island indigenous cultures and their natural resources will increasingly become the trend of the future, as we grow to like and eventually need the products of our own exploitation” (Helu-Thaman 1993: 110).
glowing and his grin is as bright as the sun. In his emerald-coloured pareu he looks as if he has been born with the dawn” (128). The effects of colonialism are therefore still a political issue: “His politics make him unavailable to whites. It is bad enough to be gay in his cultural milieu, but it is doubly disempowering to have a white lover of either sex. He cannot afford an ambiguous credibility. His people have already been fucked by whites. First as imperialists. Then as second-class gays within our own white-driven gay networks” (NGS 17). Yet, David also admires The Noble Savage for another reason: David’s “heart catches at his strength” (NGS 233), that is, not only at his physical strength, but at his prowess in general, for he doesn’t hide his homosexuality from anybody, not even his family who consider it “just a momentary aberration” (234), supports the gay cause openly, and attempts to find new paths that will bring together different identities, in his case Maori and gay. In contrast to David who mostly expresses himself through the ambiguous story of Peter Pan in a nostalgic-melancholic way and only slowly ‘grows up’ or moves on to blend his different lives, The Noble Savage doesn’t see himself as one of The Lost Boys confronted with a situation that finds its metaphorical counterpart in “the American aircraft carrier and its destroyer” (NGS 166) drowning “a thousand butterflies” (166). Instead, “[h]is is a new gay tribe working to uplift the causes of all Maori and Polynesian homosexuals, bisexuals, transvestites and lesbians. They are chanting as they come forward through their own homophobic world as well as ours. They are saying to us all, gay and straight: Move over. We’re coming through” (NGS 64). Through the figure of The Noble Savage, Ihimaera thus implies the importance of the ‘new gay tribe’, of family and genealogy, of bodies being tied together over past, present and future, and of multiple identities, all of which are explored in depth in The Uncle’s Story. Furthermore, The Noble Savage in Nights chooses to be both Maori and gay by agreeing to an arranged marriage in which his gayness won’t be suppressed, and which gives him the chance to carry Maori cultural values into the future, for “[w]hy shouldn’t gay single men be able to marry and have children?” (NGS 234):

Married? The idea is not preposterous because I can see that The Noble Savage would make a wonderful father. His body is carved from earth and sky. Its angularity is made for holding children. Its strength for sheltering a family. [...] ‘The choice not to be selfish, as your society is, David. If I was to choose between being Maori or being gay I would have to choose to be Maori. That is how I was born and that is how my people will bury me. Not as a gay person. But as one of the iwi. I guess, when it comes to the crunch, my cultural registration is more important than my sexual registration after all.’ (233-5)
The question The Noble Savage raises in *Nights* nevertheless defies easy answers and refers to a complex cultural and philosophical frame, for sexual and cultural identity seem to be bound to a redundant bipolarity in Maori culture, at least when it comes to issues of gay identification. Starting from his attempt to reconcile the opposition of homosexuality and fatherhood in Pakeha culture, Ihimaera imaginatively weaves together gayness and Maori culture in *The Uncle’s Story*. His protagonist in *The Uncle’s Story*, Michael Mahana, suffers seriously from the oppressive binarisms and the severe hostility homosexuality is met with in Maori culture. While *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* confronts the reader with an intricate web of shameful feelings and exposes the instillation of shame in the discourse of homophobia, *The Uncle’s Story* explores modes of fear implanted in Maori culture that work in order to restrict and suppress homosexuality. But just as shame has to be considered a highly complex amalgam of feeling that may also work in positive directions, fear produces a cluster of multifaceted and even paradoxical feelings. By countering fear and exploring its dynamic range, *The Uncle’s Story* creates a cosmos of alternative sensuousness in its exploration of a queer genealogy of feeling that is deeply entwined with the flesh.

### 3.5 *The Uncle’s Story: Warriors*

Warriorhood – “a cornerstone of Maori culture” (Schulze-Engler 2007: 53) – and its redefinition from a gay perspective play a significant role in Witi Ihimaera’s *The Uncle’s Story*. Michael’s coming-out at his sister’s wedding sets in motion a struggle that had been abruptly ended and wiped from the Mahana family’s memory after Uncle Sam’s sudden death almost three decades ago. With Michael’s quest for stitching together Maoriness and homosexuality, Sam’s story unfolds and paves the way for Michael to re-script the warrior and genealogy concepts of his community and to reposition homosexuality within Maori culture.

The fact that Witi Ihimaera unearths the story of Michael’s gay uncle Sam who has been eliminated from the whakapapa, the ancestry, of the Mahana family parallels the current phenomenon of the resurgence of the term ‘takatapui’ (an intimate friend or companion of the same sex, nowadays often used for ‘homosexual, gay’) and the reconfiguration of homosexuality in Maori terms. The stern homophobia of Maori culture represented and countered in *The Uncle’s Story* is also unmasked by contemporary criticism. Indeed, Maori culture may not always have been as essentially
homophobic as Ihimaera’s portrayal indicates. Jessica Hutchings and Clive Aspin thus maintain that “[t]hanks to research into Māori sexuality, we know that homophobic views […] do not come from our ancestral past. Rather, they are the views of imposed colonialisist regimes and have no place within contemporary society” (Hutchings and Aspin 2007: 20). The homophobia gay and lesbian Maori are met with in their own cultural frameworks may just as well be the outcome of a “history […] filtered through colonial, heterosexual eyes” (Hutchings and Aspin 2007: 15) and “[t]he prevailing Victorian morality that colonisers brought with them” (17). The findings of recent criticism thus “give support to the claim that Māori society was tolerant and accepting of diversity and difference, especially that which was based on sexuality and sexual expression” (Hutchings and Aspin 2007: 16). Even if, historically speaking, Maori culture embraced diverse sexual identities, it is also implicated in the conflict of identities and stories. In The Uncle’ Story the valued traditions of whakapapa, genealogy, and warriorhood seem to collide with Sam and Michael’s homosexual identity. Particularly the significance of family, one’s ancestors and the obligations that come with Maori whakapapa apparently build a stark contrast to homosexuality that seems to be more easily incorporated to the concepts of individualism and individual lifestyles in western or Pakeha society. As a consequence, homosexuality in Maori culture is subject to different cultural values and conceptualisations. Although David is confronted with homophobic ideological constructs in Nights in the Gardens of Spain, his homosexual identity is not presented as such a grave opposition to his social and cultural environment as is Michael and Sam’s homosexuality in The Uncle’s Story which “focuses on the tenuous if not tense relationship between handed-down cultural values, especially the warrior tradition, and homosexuality or gayness” (Riemenschneider 2000/2001: 148), between tribal relations and the takatapui of the tribe.

Michael’s family history is inextricably linked with war and a warrior tradition that constitutes war as an experience fundamental to masculinity and mature manhood.95 Michael’s grandfather Arapeta, a distinguished soldier of the Maori

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95 The histories of Maori soldiers fighting in wars, especially the fate of those serving in World War II and Vietnam, have been a prominent subject in recent fiction and historical revision from Aotearoa/New Zealand. Alistair Te Ariki Campbell’s poetic sequence Gallipoli and Other Poems (1999), for instance, commemorates his father, among others, who fought in World War I, whereas his Maori Battalion: A Poetic Sequence (2001) delves into the minds of soldiers fighting in the Maori Battalion in World War II, a past that is also thematised in Patricia Grace’s narrative Tu (2004). Sam’s devastating experiences in Vietnam in Witi Ihimaera’s The Uncle’s Story (2000) are mirrored in James George’s novels Hummingbird (2003) that presents us with Kingi’s war experiences in Europe and Ocean Roads (2006)
Battalion, “[u]p in the front” (*TUS* 38) and “[a]lways ordering” (38), invokes “the tapu of Tumatauenga, the God of War” (42) and the spirit of his warrior ancestors when he sends off his son Sam and his friends Turei and George to Vietnam:

‘Ka tuwhera te tawaha o te riri, kaore e titiro ki te ao marama. When the gates of war have been flung open, no man takes notice of the light of reason. This ancient proverb comes alive again today with the decision our three boys have made to fight in Vietnam. It is good to see three of this generation carrying on the tradition of their forebears from the Maori Battalion. Boys, we who are left of the Maori Battalion salute you for your courage and your valour. You, my own son, will maintain the fighting spirit that will ensure that the Maori does not become as weak as women.’ (42)

In Arapeta’s world, the body of the warrior is defined and inscribed by the wounds of war and “the ideals of heroism and personal sacrifice” (*TUS* 171). Every male Maori has to prove his manhood and add to “our reputation as fearless in the face of battle” (*TUS* 40); only then is a man worthy of the warrior status and his body sacred. The warrior ideal is thus not only connected to physical strength. Arapeta also conjures up a strict and inviolable reign of patriarchy and sacredness with the warrior’s body. He himself embodies this concept of heterosexual masculinity that mingles fighting skills and the sacred, procreative nature of man, for “[a]ll his life he had been the king, he had been the man, and he had laid claim to the title by virtue of his physical prowess” (*TUS* 253): “Arapeta was the man […] Some people thought he was more formidable than his older brother, Bulibasha. Strong as an ox. Never gave up. Stubborn as. Fast with his fists” (138).96 Compared to the ideal of the Maori warrior as manifest in Arapeta’s world view, men like Sam and Michael do not fit in. On the one hand, Sam and Michael live in the shadow of their family’s long military tradition. Michael has pursued a university education that is quitted with underlying contempt by his father Monty,
named “after the battle at Monte Cassino” (*TUS* 15) and gunner in the Army, because Michael has “taken after his mother’s side” (15), and Sam’s generation grew up with the overpowering image of their father warriors: “All his life Sam had heard the old stories of the Maori Battalion’s exploits. At every retelling the stories had become more epic – and Sam and his generation had diminished at every telling” (41). On the other hand, Sam and Michael forsake the status of warriors through their homosexuality. They are feminised and reduced to an inferior position, or even to nothing, ceasing to exist, for “many people associate being gay with being weak” (*TUS* 195). After Sam had been disowned and vilified by Arapeta as “son or a man” (*TUS* 261), it was therefore up to Arapeta’s younger son Monty to continue “the warrior blood of his ancestors” (15), serve in the army and restore “the family honour” (15). Along those lines, homosexuality is perceived as both a corruption of the warrior ideal and a threat to the patriarchal order of Maori culture and punished relentlessly. Accordingly, a man who loves other men erodes the patriarchal and sanctified order of things and exposes himself to becoming noa. Noa largely denominates the condition when tapu has been removed; it refers to the neutralisation of a formerly sacred and protected entity that becomes ordinary and vulnerable:

> Tapu is pervasive and touches all other attributes. It is like a personal force field which can be felt and sensed by others. It is the sacred life force which supports the mauri (spark of life), another very important spiritual attribute of the person. It reflects the state of the whole person. In fact life can be viewed as protecting one’s personal tapu and in doing so one is looking after one’s physical, social, psychological and spiritual well-being. (Mead 2003: 46)

> The male body with its procreative potential plays a non plus ultra role; the body of a man “with the full inward thrust of his penis” (*TUS* 219) is the sacred site of whakapapa and cultural memory ever since the beginning as the novel’s references to Maori mythology show:

> The *mana* of a man, his value in Maori culture, was in his fighting power and his warrior tradition. It was all symbolised in a man’s cock. It, as much as the fighting club, personified all that a man was. With both, man was made sacred and woman profane. This had been the way since the beginning of Time when Ranginui, the Sky Father above, was set apart from Papatuanuku, the Earth Mother below. Ever since, the roles of men and women had been preordained. Indeed, all the Gods were male until Tane decided to make a woman out of the red dust and mated with her. Male to female union was therefore sanctified by the gods. Any other kind of union could never be countenanced; it transgressed the order of the Maori world, it transgressed the *tapu* nature of man. The consequences were too fearful to contemplate. You relinquished the mana, the tapu, the ihi or the life force and the wehi or dread that the dynamic of being a man depended on, to maintain your power relationships with the world. You brought noa upon yourself, the loss of sacredness, and, without sacredness, you were prone to punishment, dishonour, banishment and death. You also brought this on your partner. (*TUS* 155-6).
When Arapeta, Sam’s father, finds out about his son’s relationship with fellow soldier Cliff Harper, his exclamation discloses that Sam – by falling in love with a man – has violated the beliefs and traditions of his culture and corrupted both his status as a man and the sacredness of his body: “Your ancestors are crying in their graves. Can you hear them, son? You are supposed to be a warrior. Instead, you are a woman. You deny yourself the rights, the mana, the sacredness of man. You also deny yourself all those privileges that come to a son born of rank. I am ashamed of you. I am disgusted with you” (TUS 257). Arapeta thus treasures a warrior ideal that turns the men into “opponents” (TUS 43), places Sam at the other end of the line and eventually cuts him off. In a world in which the strength and sacredness of the warrior body are the ideals every man and every following generation are supposed to comply with, a man who loves another man can only become an outcast and opponent who has to be broken and relegated to silence:

‘In traditional times, son, people like you never existed,’ Arapeta said. ‘They would have taken you outside, gutted you and left your head on a post for the birds to eat. Men like you abuse the sperm which is given to man for only one purpose. The very sperm that died inside my mates when they were killed on the battlefield. The sperm that is for the procreation of children. Don’t you know that the sperm is sacred?’ Sam bowed his head. It always started like this. Ever since he’d been a boy, Dad had always begun his punishments here, at the dinner table, in front of Mum, Patty and Monty. […] Mum gave a small cry as Dad stood up and jabbed his finger at Sam. ‘You are an affront to your iwi. You are an affront to all that I and my Maori Battalion mates fought for.’ (TUS 257)

As genealogy and its continuation figure prominently in Maori belief, homosexual men are considered a destructive force and, as a result, subjected to restrictive prohibitions, vilification, exile and invisibility: “The male was high and sanctified. Woman was low and common. How much lower were men who loved men” (TUS 219). Hence, Sam’s question simply breaks off just as his family’s genealogical line of the first-born will end with him. If the love between men dares to speak its name,97 if homosexual men stand up for themselves, they are cast out, left to fend for

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97 Working from the assumption that “the relations of the closet – the relations of the known and the unknown, the explicit and the inexplicit around homo/heterosexual definition – have the potential for being peculiarly revealing, in fact, about speech acts more generally” (Sedgwick 1990: 3), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick points in her analyses of 19th century literature to the ways silence may very well be telling, in the sense that the unspoken establishes knowledge. “The love that is famous for daring not speak its name” (Sedgwick 1990: 67) is textually hidden and such strategies of disguise may be read as deliberate while the secret content may, in the course of reading, be decoded and disclosed. Then, “secrecy itself becomes manifest as this secret” (Sedgwick 1990: 74). The famous line taken from the poem “Two Loves” by Lord Alfred Douglas has become one of the catchphrases in queer theory and gay rights activism. Compare for example Sedgwick 1985: 95, Sedgwick 1990: 74, and Wharton 2003. The original poem is furthermore of interest because it hints at the instrumentalisation of shame in the discourse of
themselves, or are, as in Sam’s case, “[e]xpunged from memory. Deleted from the text” (TUS 322):

My grandfather [...] had tried to remove Sam physically from the family and to obliterate all traces of him. [...] Grandfather Arapeta had consigned Uncle Sam to Te Kore, The Void. He had disconnected him from the umbilical cord of whakapapa, and sent him falling head over heels like a spaceman trailing his severed lifeline through a dark and hostile universe to oblivion. This was how it was done to all gay men and women. (321-2)

When Michael makes his second bold speech at the indigenous peoples’ conference, he openly addresses his culture’s punitive hostility towards dissident sexualities and identities: “In my own country, my own Maori people are among the most homophobic in the world. They are strong, wonderful people but their codes are so patriarchal as to disallow any inclusion of gay Maori men and women within the tribe” (TUS 343). As the story of Michael’s Uncle Sam shows, there is a two-fold silence inscribed deep in the heart of Maori culture. In order to find acceptance in Maori culture, gay people have to hide their sexual registration and remain silent about it, whereas Maori culture reacts with strict silencing strategies if its gay members attempt to claim a space in it: “As long as we do not speak of our sin openly, we are accepted. But if we speak of it, if we stand up for it, we are cast out. My own uncle was cast out. I have been cast out. Many of us, in all our cultures, have been cast out” (TUS 343-4). Gay Maori men and women either conceal who they are, or they encounter utmost silence and are ostracised to “the lowest and darkest cracks between the Primal Parents” (TUS 343).

The novel thus conceives of the present as a time to catch “the lifeline” (TUS 322), break “this conspiracy of silence, this secret about Sam” (193), create new stories and write homosexuality back into the pages of Maori culture and community where it has been erased from: “In her [Auntie Pat’s] hands was the old family Bible where family births and deaths were registered. The page where Uncle Sam’s name should have appeared was ripped out. On a fresh page, Auntie Pat’s name and Dad’s had been re-inscribed. Immediately following were mine and my sister’s” (299). This ‘lifeline’ – or ‘rope’ as Ihimaera conceives it in The Rope of Man – that captures cultural re-inscription and merges Maoriness and homosexuality is further embodied in Ihimaera’s narrative technique that entangles passages focusing on the present and passages focusing on the past in order to create a fictional ‘cord’, twirling two narrative strands

love, that I discussed in respect to Nights in the Gardens of Spain. The love that dare not speak its name is hence described as the embodiment of shame (Douglas 1894: 28).
around each other. Uncle Sam’s story that has been deleted from the family’s history is thus retold in flashback passages that are interwoven with the present realities of Michael’s story in ever-tightening circles. Michael’s Auntie Pat – “staring into her memories, trying to break the constraints holding her to the present and to go, willingly, into the past” (TUS 251) – becomes the link that stitches the past into the present, recovers the “scorched and burnt” (34) diary from oblivion and presents Michael with the possibility of making ends meet, forming new stories and love links from the old. While the first part of the book focuses on Michael and the second part on Sam, the third and fourth part of the novel repeatedly jump between the present and flashback passages from Sam’s story, therefore entwining past and present. The final section of the narrative points to the future and envisions the possibility of twisting loose ends into a multi-layered cord that not only unsettles conventional categories, but also sets straight the record of the Mahana family’s whakapapa and includes new relations and links, personal, local and global.

The patriarchal warrior ideal that pervades every aspect of Arapeta’s perspective and mana, collides with Sam’s view of the world and his subjectivity. Whereas the warrior concept presents a decisive formula through which Arapeta and Monty make sense of the world, it leaves Sam and Michael puzzled and speechless. Michael, for instance, feels that “[i]t was easy to become mute around Dad” (TUS 15), for, as a skilled orator and trained soldier, Monty maintains power “[w]ith words, words, always words and, if that didn’t work, with fists” (27). When Michael goes public with his homosexuality, the cultural codes his father adheres to place their relationship under a quarantine of silence: “For a while we just stood there, a silent knot in that singing crowd. What can you say to a father who has made it quite clear that you don’t belong in his life any longer?” (TUS 124-5).

Sam, in contrast, has been “inseparable” (TUS 138) from his father all his life. And yet, Arapeta imposes an ongoing struggle and rivalry on Sam and leaves his son trailing. George thus tells Michael that

> ‘I think, in the end, that’s why Sam joined up. I think he realised if he didn’t get away from his dad and make his own way in life, Arapeta would break him as surely as if he was one of his horses. Arapeta would have a stallion on the end of a rope and in his other hand he held the

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98 The ‘lifeline’ embodied in the narrative convolution also mirrors the concept of the double spiral and the “system of spiralling relations” (Knudsen 2004: 4) of Māori cosmology: “The traditional Māori conception of development as a form of spiralling progression is frequently encountered as a major inspiration in contemporary Māori literature – and sometimes even as the matrix of the narrative – because it offers a perspective from which Māori culture is seen to carry, intrinsically, the seeds of its own continuing renewal” (5).
bullwhip. Every now and then he cracked the whip over the stallion’s head. It was his way of showing who was the master. Well, you can do that to horses, but it shouldn’t be done to a man.’ (TUS 139)

Although Sam’s decision to fight in Vietnam may be an attempt to cut himself loose, he nevertheless follows his father’s footsteps and sets standards. But again, being a warrior fighting in a war like Arapeta and his ancestors does not provide any answers for Sam, and he finds himself lost for words: “‘This has been how my father has been all his life,’ Sam thought. ‘Up in the front. Always ordering. Never asking. And this is how I’ve lived my life, like everybody else, following his orders. But going to Vietnam is something I am doing for myself. I’m going there for me, so that I can prove – ’ Sam couldn’t find the words. Prove what?” (TUS 38). During his time in Vietnam, the question whether he can live up to his father’s ideal keeps lurking in every corner, for instance in “[a]n old World War Two song” (TUS 72), and yokes him under the pressure “to perform” (77) – “[w]ould he prove to be as good as his father?” (72) “Could he deliver? Could he lead his men into battle and out?” (77).

The novel’s extensive passages addressing Sam’s war experiences reveal that, instead of turning him into a warrior like Arapeta, war “put[s] Sam into a tailspin” (TUS 59), and he can only grasp “[t]he senselessness of it all” (59). He is constantly haunted by images of his father while around him “wounds were spilling with blood” (TUS 107) and “bodies were so mangled they didn’t look human at all. Some had been fused together, monstrous creations of war with three heads and flame-soldered tentacles for arms” (118). For Sam, the challenge posed by Arapeta to become a proud warrior turns into a nightmare; the heroism and physical prowess Arapeta conjures up in his speeches are tinged with “blood everywhere, and the powerful stench of open wounds” (TUS 117) while “sheer lunacy” (116) and “sheer madness” (116) descend on this “lifetime of stark terror” (116) and “absurdity” (118):

Across the contact zone, firefights were breaking out like displays of violently beautiful fireworks. Tracers flowed back and forth. The air was filled with the noise of the ground attack, pops and cracks like popcorn popping and, every now and then, a puff and an orange mushroom explosion. […] Stumbling, Sam looked down and saw a man’s head, eyes still open, rolling in the red dust. Another soldier, coming up from behind, kicked at the head and it sailed above the ground like a bizarre football. (113-4)

Ihimaera’s valorisation of physical sensation may also contain a liberating and critical effect because Sam’s sensory and emotional disorientation caused by the impact of violence exposes Arapeta’s rational calculation. John Fraser thus argues that “physical violences in art can indeed shock one into a greater awareness” (Fraser 1974:
48), for “violence is usually the cutting edge of ideas and ideologies” (162). Just as “the ostensibly outrageous can be disturbing” (Fraser 1974: 45), Ihimaera prompts his readers to interrogate the narrow and static concepts via a language of corporeal feeling and reminds us that the body contains a vital range of possibilities that can undermine and transform rigid structures. Sam’s body is “propelled by pure adrenalin” (TUS 50) and disconnected from any logic of chronology or concept of order for “[h]e began to feel disoriented. His imagination started to play tricks. […] ‘Please God, please God, fix the world firmly again, the top with the bottom, tuia i runga, tuia i raro. Bind it so that it returns to the way it was, tuia i roto, tuia i waho.’ […] The prayer remained unfinished, the frame was burst apart. […] He felt as if he was drowning” (93). Amidst “bombings, chemicals and military firepower” (TUS 49) and “[c]hunks of meat and scattered bone on the beach” (59) Sam is unable to find meaningful answers, and they are certainly not revealed by the image of his father spurring him on: “There was no concept of time. It was winding up before him and unwinding behind him. He was running to breast some finishing tape and Dad was cheering: Go, son!” (116). The horrifying brutality of the war and the devastating effects of the cruel slaughter become unbearable for him, and he starts struggling with issues of humanity and guilt that seem to be absent from his father’s perception of war. Sam thus contemplates the inner torment caused by killing other men, for “with your first kill something died within you” (TUS 85), and he wonders if “[p]erhaps in the taking of life, watching it depart from a man who was once living, you also gave everything that was your own innocence” (85): “How do you tell a boy how to kill a man? How do you tell a boy whose only experience of killing is shooting rabbits that war makes killing a man all right? How do you get him to pull the trigger and feel okay about it?” (81). When his close friend Turei dies in battle, Sam eventually “break[s] apart with the horror of it all” (TUS 167).

Thirty years later, Michael fights a different war. Although he comes out to his family “[t]urning up like the bad fairy to spoil the party” (TUS 19), his partner Jason leaves him and one of the reasons why seems to lie in “my being Maori and his being Pakeha” (22), “[s]omething bigger than both of us” (25), as Michael remarks. Moreover, while his homosexuality puts increasing pressure on the relationship between him and his family almost to the point of disconnection as he is turned into “a man without a history” (TUS 128) who is not supposed to “come home for Christmas” (127) and even not to “come back at all” (127), he is also an activist battling for “setting up our own network” (132) amongst indigenous peoples across the world and for a redefinition of
indigenous culture in favour of differing identities with his co-activist and friend Roimata, for “with Roimata there was a promise of the new” (132). The problem is that the old stories and traditions of his culture are imbued with homophobia, and Michael has to find new stories in order to claim a space for gay people in Maori culture. In order to create that imaginative space, *The Uncle’s Story* sets out to confront the fear and panic of “eternal darkness” (TUS 160) inscribed in Maori culture and, in turn, written in the flesh “to front up to a culture as forbidding as ours” (364) and “to bind the new world’s top and bottom with light” (371).

3.6 “It’s just the beginning. It takes guts”⁹⁹ – Facing Fear and Homophobia in Maori Culture

Although Arapeta appears to be the living embodiment of a concept of mana and warriorhood tying together physical strength, battle honours and reproductive masculinity, his world is shattered to pieces with the disclosure of “Sam’s secret” (TUS 241) as “[h]is blood was pounding with anger and fear” (243). The novel presents his angst as deeply entrenched in homophobia and derived from the possible threat that homosexuality may pose to his culture and specifically to its concept of whakapapa, for how will the iwi survive in the future and will there be future generations if its children, especially the first-born male heirs, are gay and probably never have children of their own? Michael’s mother thus immediately asks her son this question after his coming-out: “Does this mean that we will have no mokopuna? No grandchildren? What will happen to our whakapapa, our genealogy? It will finish with you, Michael. How dare you be so selfish” (TUS 27).

Not only is the family’s reputation at stake inside their community, homosexuality is also perceived as a corruption of the sacredness of man, the procreative potential and the importance of whakapapa, the highly treasured bond with one’s ancestors. As a result, whakapapa is a sanctified and protected terrain of Maori culture and any presumed violation of it is countered with utmost severity. Homosexual men and women are ostracised from the iwi and uprooted from their family’s history, their traditions and cultural values even to the point that they are no longer part of the iwi’s memory, but consigned to oblivion. The relationship with Cliff Harper catapults Sam into darkness, “tumbling through Te Po, The Night, and falling through Te Kore,  

⁹⁹ Quotation from *The Uncle’s Story* (TUS 195).
The Void. He felt himself nearing unconsciousness. Took a deep breath. *Please, not eternal darkness*” *(TUS 246).* The novel thus presents fear working in a double bind: on the one hand, Sam and Michael are surrounded by homophobia and the existential fear that homosexuality may threaten the line of ancestors; on the other hand, homophobia inoculates gay Maori men and women with fear. Michael so finds the following formulation during his second speech at the Survival 2000 conference: “They are strong, wonderful people but their codes are so patriarchal as to disallow any inclusion of gay Maori men and women” *(TUS 343).*

In addition to the fact that *The Uncle’s Story* portrays a Maori family in which patriarchy and whakapapa relations deemed appropriate are shielded from any possible ‘threat’ posed by homosexual men such as Sam, the novel also exposes a traditionalist concept of mana, “the enduring, indestructible power of the gods” *(Barlow 1991: 61)* that relates to the individual’s power and authority.∗∗∗ Michael’s grandfather Arapeta is presented as such a person of authority, influence and “chieflly status” *(Barlow 1991: 62).* This personal mana, however, is tied to the wehi, “the effect that one person’s power and influence has on another” *(Barlow 1991: 161)*, an effect that may reach from respect to awe and even fear (161). The wehi thus also enforces certain boundaries and hierarchies between people; a person of great mana may therefore instil feelings of dread and fear in others as well as maintain their power through such an instillation and exertion of fear. This is certainly the case with Arapeta in *The Uncle’s Story.* His personal mana calls for a respectful subservience on the side of fellow human beings that borders on dread, fear and even terror. It is an authority that is generally neither

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∗∗∗ The word mana is used in a wide range of contexts that comprise “the power of the gods, the power of ancestors, the power of the land, and the power of the individual” *(Barlow 1991: 61).* Mana Tupuna, for instance, denominates “the power or authority handed down through chiefly lineage; that is, from the paramount chiefs and others who possessed it. The power is passed down from generation to generation. Those who inherit mana must carry out the various rituals and duties to maintain that power from the ancient ones” *(Barlow 1991: 61).* By loving a man, Sam, the first-born son, is perceived to violate the mana he has inherited from his ancestors and from his father: “You say you love me when you have abused everything that I have given you? Your manhood, your tribe, your history? You disgust me, Son, you make me wish you had never been born” *(TUS 260).* There are other overtones, however, that imply an inferiority of Sam’s skills as a warrior, at least from Arapeta’s perspective. Mana Tangata thus refers to “the power acquired by an individual according to his or her ability and effort to develop skills and to gain knowledge in particular areas. For example, a skilled warrior was able to acquire mana through the arts of combat and warfare under the code of law of Tūmatauenga, the god of war” *(Barlow 1991: 62).* After Turei, Sam’s cousin and friend, dies in Vietnam, Arapeta makes Sam responsible for Turei’s death: “I promised Lilly that Turei would come back alive. Instead, he came back in a coffin. It was up to you to ensure that my promise was kept. You should have looked after him. You didn’t. The sperm that was in him from his father has died with him, and there will be no further issue. The whakapapa from his father to him is now terminated. Because of this, I have lost mana. You have let me down. The only way you can redeem yourself is to avenge his death. When you return to Vietnam, you must take utu against those who killed him” *(TUS 173).* For further connotations of mana see Barlow 1991: 60-2 and Mead 2003: esp. 29-30 and 51-2.
countered with resistance or contradiction nor does it tolerate any counteraction and
dissidence: “Skilled soldier and skilled orator, Arapeta paused and looked around the
marae. He was accustomed to being listened to. He had learned well how to hold people
in the palm of his hand. He did everything with style and with precision. He was used to
asserting his mana” (TUS 41). Arapeta’s mana goes hand in hand with heterocentralist
and patriarchal concepts of masculinity and whakapapa lines that are fiercely guarded
from the perceived ‘transgressions’ of homosexual men. The novel, hence, examines
these repressive mechanisms of fear inscribed in the concept of mana and opts for a
shift of such conceptualisations in favour of the identities of gay Maori men and
women.

The narrative develops a series of passages that display fear as a sharply pointed
arrow perforating the flesh. This vocabulary of cutaneous penetration juxtaposes both
Sam’s and Michael’s feelings in a considerably ambiguous way. While The Uncle’s
Story scrutinises the mechanisms of fear at work in the establishment and cultivation of
genealogy in order to point to ways out of the subjection of gay Maori men and women
to fear, it also looks at the reversible and transformative potential of fear in order to
create alternative genealogies within an altered and newly envisioned Maori
community. Ihimaera thus renders the nature of the “potentially paralyzing affect”
(Sedgwick 2003: 44) of fear into a narratively productive strategy, suggesting that
“[p]erhaps there was potency in vulnerability after all” (TUS 197).

Sending Sam off to Vietnam, Arapeta counts on his son to prove himself a
fearless warrior in battle and to “maintain the fighting spirit that will ensure that the
Maori does not become as weak as women” (TUS 42). Sam is therefore required to fight
in Vietnam, but also to fight feelings of fear and not show any signs of them. Made
responsible for Turei’s death by his father – who, with Turei’s mother and practically
“the whole of the East Coast” (TUS 229) present, insists that he “would trade my son for
your son, and it would be my son who would have gone to Death” (235) – and exposed
to his father’s merciless authority, “[g]odlike, he was, in all respects, invincible” (232),
Sam feels the relationship with Harper weigh heavily on his mind. Sam and Cliff are
thus “both terrified of where we go from here” (TUS 227) – Sam even more so, for
should his father discover the secret of his homosexuality, “his rage will know no
bounds” (222) and Sam will lose everything: “He has never forgiven you any weakness,
any failing in the past. So do not expect him to forgive you for any weakness or failing
now or in the future. [...] You’re supposed to succeed him tribally and personally. If you deny him this he will give you no quarter” (222).

So, *The Uncle’s Story* illustrates what Silvan Tomkins has called “a punitive socialization of fear” (Tomkins 2008b: 943) or terror, “the intense form of fear” (932). In Tomkins, “terror is designed to punish rather than to interrupt” (Tomkins 2008b: 932) with “messages [...] too fast and punishing” (932). Maori society as represented in Ihimaera’s narrative is therefore marked by its homophobic bias, an “everlasting terror of the danger from the malevolent other” (Tomkins 2008b: 942) to say it with Tomkins, but also characterised as clinging to a certain warrior ideal and hence a set of restrictions in relation to the expression and articulation of fearful feelings. According to Tomkins’ findings, affects are also closely connected to “social influences” (Tomkins 2008b: 942) so that “[t]he socialization of fear is governed not only by general ideological dictates but also by quite specific strictures on the circumstances in which it is appropriate and inappropriate to have feelings of fear, to display them, to express them vocally, to communicate them verbally, to act on them, and to produce fear generated consequences” (946). The novel draws attention to yet another phenomenon of fear. As a warrior, Sam is not really supposed to show his fears, but, paradoxically, Maori culture in *The Uncle’s Story* generates fear in order to punish homosexual individuals and to maintain its genealogical framework. As we will see, the individual bodies of Sam and Michael are inscribed by horrifying experiences; fear manifest in the figure of Arapeta pierces right through their flesh. And yet, instead of producing a status quo statement on the paralysing effects of fear concerning homosexuality, Witi Ihimaera offers a promising and utopian vision. Sam and Michael’s bodies also face the respective terrors in order to negotiate alternative forms of cultural knowledge and identity that are based on respect and aroha instead of fear and abjection. The Maori concepts of whakapapa and mana are thus rearticulated in more flexible terms in order to incorporate the gay members of the community.

Undoubtedly, the affect of fear can, according to Tomkins, cause the individual to be “entirely captured by terror and its object. Any further action which might decrease the distance between the self and the object is stopped, and the individual is frozen in terror, immobilized” (Tomkins 2008b: 934). The suffered consequences are of course deadly:

But terror can misfire for the animal who is so immobilized that he is eaten before he can flee the predator. For man too the frozen immobility of terror may cost him his life rather than save it. Less dangerous, but no less crippling for effective escape or counteraction is the panic of
stagefright, in which the public speaker confirms his own dreaded prophecy by standing mute before his audience. (Tomkins 2008b: 934)

And yet, as we have seen in *Nights*, shame – though a negative “affect of relatively high toxicity” (Tomkins 2008a: 367) – has the potential to multiply and create an intricate play of possibilities: “Shame – living, as it does, on and in the muscles and capillaries of the face – seems to be uniquely contagious from one person to another. And the contagiousness of shame is only facilitated by its anamorphic, protean susceptibility to new expressive grammars” (Sedgwick 2003: 64). So what about fear? Does fear or terror which Tomkins refers to as “very toxic even in small doses” (Tomkins 2008b: 933) and “an overly compelling persuader designed for emergency motivation of a life-and-death significance” (933) open “powerfully productive and powerfully social metamorphic possibilities” (Sedgwick 2003: 65) just as shame is able to? If the fear-terror-response is just as toxic as shame – perhaps even more so – and linked to life-threatening situations, will it also be a decisive denominator in the formation of identity and contain the potential of new vocabularies and altered perspectives in a similar way “the slippery dynamics of shame” (Sedgwick 2003: 64) constitute them? For sure, Tomkins suggests that terror already inscribes the next step, that is, the alleviation of this state of dread and blind panic: “[T]error is likely to be of briefer duration [...] because its toxicity is such that the individual is more likely to act immediately to reduce terror. The major function of terror’s toxicity and urgency is similar to that of pain – to reduce the toxic state as quickly as possible” (Tomkins 2008b: 934). Though Silvan Tomkins refers to a universal similarity of physically visible signs of responses of fear or terror such as “the cry of terror, the raising and drawing together of the eyebrows, the tension of the lower eyelid as well as opening of the eyes, the stretching of the lips back as well as the opening of the mouth, and finally, the contraction of the platysma muscles of the neck in extreme terror” (Tomkins 2008b: 932), he is careful to suggest that fear and terror-related feelings and responses never originate from a universal source or object and never produce the same reactions or responses. Terror generally subsumes an existential threat – it “speaks to the threat of death to life” (Tomkins 2008b: 687) – but, as its ramifications appear to multiply, it may range from an experience “caused by a visible threat” (937) even to the point of “a free-floating experience without an apparent
object” (937). The triggered consequences and actions of feelings of fear and terror may just as well include paradoxical outcomes. Tomkins thus argues that “[t]error is an overly compelling persuader designed for emergency motivation of a life-and-death significance” (Tomkins 2008b: 933), it ensures “that the preservation of the life of the organism has a priority second to none” (933). Similarly, Ihimaera’s narrative also lets us “glimpse the lineaments of other possibilities” (Sedgwick 2003: 146). Perforated and scarred by the terrors of homophobia, Sam and Michael seek ways out of fear and as a result pave the way for the formation of new identities. Ihimaera’s fiction thus illustrates that affect may not only engender a variety of physical reactions so thoroughly recorded by Tomkins. *The Uncle’s Story* simultaneously raises the question of cultural concepts and patterns that may be able to counter the oppressive investment of affect. Sedgwick’s idea of ‘possibilities’ and her central question “What could I do with it?” (Sedgwick 2003: 13) certainly point to such a direction.

*The Uncle’s Story* reveals a crucial fascination with the perforation of flesh and skin that is not necessarily tied to queer eroticism, although penetration in a sexual sense is also thematised as we will see. Rather, the novel develops a peculiar vocabulary or pattern of penetration that seems to be firmly rooted in a cluster of fear and panic which, in turn, is linked to the homophobia shaping Maori culture. Michael and Sam thus find themselves subjected to the oppression of gay masculinities that appears to be maintained and controlled by a system of instilling fear. Fear slips under their skin, and the perforative properties of Michael and Sam’s bodies show that fear may be a powerful instrument of social restriction especially in a culture marked by such an outspoken homophobia as Maori society as Michael puts it frankly at the beginning of the novel: “My people are amongst the most homophobic in the world. […] I’m not supposed to exist.” *(TUS 22)*

Ihimaera confronts us with a series of terrifying nightmares and nightmarish scenes. The book begins with Michael’s decision to come out to his family and one of his recurring nightmares in which he desperately tries to run away from “the huge nightmare stallion that had pursued me all my life through countless years, countless

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101 His studies have also prompted Tomkins to note an equivocal “variability of experienced fear” (Tomkins 2008b: 936): “In an investigation of the phenomenology of fear I have also found that the experience of fear varies radically from subject to subject. Thus, one individual may characteristically feel fear in his face and stomach, another in an apparent tightening of his throat, another in an apparent band around his head, another in dizziness in his head, another in a weakness in his knees, another in a feeling of fear in his genitals, another in a feeling of fear in his anus, another in an accelerated heart rate, another in trembling of his face and limbs, another in a stiffening of all his muscles, another in sweating” (936).
beds and countless dreams” (TUS 10). Michael struggles with feelings of fear and terror that cause him to “wake up screaming” (TUS 9) after a series of physical responses shifting between reality and dream, finally releasing a single, gasping sound: “My heart began to race. I heard myself moaning, felt myself threshing, trying to run. I willed my arms and legs to pump me forward. It was too late. […] The thrum, thrum, thrum was all around me, the hooves on fire […]. The hooves descending. Slashing. ‘No.’” (10). His terror of being slashed by the fierce stallion mirrors his fear of being ousted from his family by his father whose repudiation of his son is accompanied by yet another metaphor of perforation, for “[a] star fell from the sky, puncturing the night like a needle piercing your eyeball” (TUS 20). His coming-out places Michael “in a perilous position” (TUS 9) and fills him with “that very special dread” (9) vividly haunting him in his sleep and exposing him to “explosions of fear” (263). It cuts him off from history and catapults his Maori identity into the past as his home in Gisborne starts to become a faded memory and nostalgic story: “That Maori land was the land of boyhood. Once upon a time I had been happy there. I had belonged. […] Once I was lucky enough to have a people and a valley to come home to. But that was then, when I had been a dutiful son. This was now” (TUS 199-200). Ihimaera recasts Sigmund Freud’s interpretation of equinophobia (Freud 1989) and turns the horse into a metaphor of queer masculinity. Michael’s frantic flights from the black stallion whose hooves keep slashing his skin may parallel his running away from his own homosexuality that endangers his connection to his family and threatened Sam’s life in the past. The image remains ambiguous though. Michael confronts the stallion in the final dream and fights back, trying to tame the horse with a whip. The dream may therefore express Michael’s coming to terms with his sexuality and his attempt to reconcile a Maori perspective and a gay one. However, the final dream may also be an indication that Michael has begun to fight the ghosts of the past and the oppressive forces against homosexuality embodied by the figure of Arapeta who is also related to the fierce horse by Sam’s mother Florence who calls her husband “[t]he black stallion” (TUS 99).

The narrative thus builds a crucial nexus between Michael’s story and Sam’s. The “black highway at midnight” (TUS 9), Michael’s desperate attempt to “escape from the blackness” (10), the “darkness” (9) and finally the wild rage of the stallion, refer to Sam’s story that spirals into Michael’s. Arapeta, a pitiless master to his horses, rules over the animals and people in his life with a rod of iron. By juxtaposing a metaphorical and a more physical level of penetration, the text anthropomorphises the terror
crystallised in the figure of Arapeta and the nightmarish stallion respectively, and, in turn, the genealogical connection between Sam and Michael. Not only is Arapeta “trying to get into my skin” (*TUS* 37), searching “in Sam’s eyes for his soul” (37) and “launching himself at him” (97) in Sam’s dreams, he also edges himself and his values deeply into the skin of others. Sam, for instance, remembers how his father, one of the “horsebreakers” (*TUS* 78), attempted to tame “the wild-eyed palomino” (78) horse until it was “moist from the cuts of the whip” (78), and George later tells Michael that Arapeta asserted “the strength of his […] personal mana” (235) over Sam by “always cracking the whip at him. Letting it sing just above his head, when Sam was least expecting it. Just to make him remember who was boss” (139).

The fate of “the golden palomino” (*TUS* 237) thus foreshadows the terrifying punishment Sam suffers from his father’s hands after Arapeta did to Sam what his mother warned him of, namely “sneak like a thief through your bloodstream, and enter your soul and your heart” (222) and wrest his secret from him at George’s wedding. After Sam, in contrast to Arapeta, had tamed the palomino successfully, Sam set the horse free again, “some boyish gesture” (*TUS* 79) according to his father. As a consequence, Arapeta “had to be the king stallion” (*TUS* 99) and captured the mustang again, lashing his whip at it until “[i]ts back was caked with dried blood” (98). In the presence of Sam, his mother, and his younger siblings Pattie and Monty, Arapeta shot the horse while a helpless Sam “looked into its eyes and saw a golden sun go down” (*TUS* 98). The novel juxtaposes the images of the black stallion and the golden palomino loved by Sam and violated and killed by Arapeta. Whereas Sam had to make an either/or choice between Harper and his family, between homosexuality and Maoriness, and decided to follow Harper, thus setting free his gay identity as represented by his freeing “the black mustang” (*TUS* 253), Michael is able to intertwine both identities and restrain the stallion of his nightmares in his attempt to commingle his homosexual and Maori identities in a both/and correlation.

Just as he slashes the skin of the palomino, Arapeta slips into Michael and Sam’s dreams, again scarring their bodies with “grief and fear” (*TUS* 97). In a dream, Sam thus finds himself in a life-threatening and peculiarly disturbing and eroticised embrace with his father who, in an image of penetration, forces himself through Sam’s mouth and into his body:

But Arapeta was strong and now had both hands in Sam’s mouth, forcing the jaws wider. With mounting terror, Sam heard his jawbone splinter and crack. Eyes bulging, he felt Arapeta’s left hand going down past his tongue, around his tonsils and into his throat. Then the right hand,
sliding in. ‘Open wide, son, and let Daddy in.’ The veins in Sam’s neck began to break and shred. Sweat popped like blisters on his skin. He couldn’t breathe and his heart was labouring, its pulsations bursting in his ears. He began to choke, and tried to vomit his father out of him. It was all happening so quickly: now Arapeta was up to his armpits in Sam’s mouth, the hair of his armpits grazing Sam’s lips. And Dad’s face was level with his, slick and moist in some unholy kiss. He looked at Sam — With a cry, Sam fought himself awake. (TUS 97)

With the disclosure of Sam and Cliff’s mutual love, Arapeta first slips fear under Sam’s skin, “as surely branding him as he was the mustangs” (TUS 257), then punishes Sam with his whip, and finally urinates on him and into his wounds as if he was one of his war enemies (251-2) before he leaves him to the “black whole” (254) of Te Kore: “The whip opened Sam’s skin and the pain arrested his body with shock. Florence was wailing. Patty and Monty were watching with horror. […] With a cry of horror, Sam was rolling out from beneath the arc of Arapeta’s piss. […] The world had tipped over into insanity” (260-1). Ostracised from his family and culture, Sam is then killed in a car accident on his way to meet Cliff. Arapeta buries him in unconsecrated earth and wipes out the memory of Sam from the family history, so that there is only “eternal darkness” (TUS 301) for him – until Michael turns the course of things around.

And yet, Ihimaera’s novel already and perhaps paradoxically unleashes fear and, in turn, Te Kore, in a highly productive and regenerative energy. Maori cosmology divides the world into different realms or stages of development from Te Kore, the Void or Nothingness, to Te Ao Marama, the World of Light or Being. Significantly, darkness or nothingness connotes a multiplicity of degrees of darkness (Hyland 1998: 13) and Te Kore – kore means ‘zero’, ‘void’ or ‘negative’ – already holds the promise of new potential, followed by the separation of Sky and Earth and the creation of Light (Orbell 1995: 127-8): “So, while the English word ‘void’ has only a negative ring, ‘Te Kore’ is an unbiased and productive term” (Knudsen 2004: 143). The Uncle’s Story, nevertheless, appears ambiguous about the concept of Te Kore, for it is the place where homosexual men and women are banished to after they have been repudiated and cut loose from their whakapapa relations, and Arapeta is associated with the black stallion haunting Michael and Sam with a voice that “curled out of Te Kore, The Void” (TUS 173). His homosexual experiences with Cliff, a ‘sin’ in the unmistakably homophobic

102 Margaret Orbell however mentions that “[s]ince night belonged with Papa and Hine-nui-te-pō, females generally were associated with darkness – which in ritual, oratory and poetry had negative associations with defeat and death. Males, predictably, were associated with the light – which was associated with life and success. […] Yet the darkness had great power, as women in fact did. The world after all had come from darkness, just as new life came from women, and it was darkness (and the woman Hine-nui-te-pō) that received people at the end of their lives. The powers of darkness and of light were in reality more evenly balanced in Māori thought and experience than a simplistic interpretation might suggest” (Orbell 1995: 127-8).
world of Arapeta, overwhelm Sam with “a feeling of vertigo” (*TUS* 159) and the image of him and Cliff turning the whole cosmos upside down fills him with terror: “He felt Harper’s kiss, and his heart was pounding with fear. He saw Harper’s face above him, heard himself whimpering, caught between desire and self loathing. He saw that they were both tumbling through the darkness, sending ripples that disturbed the entire universe” (160). However, just as nothingness already hints at creation, a new actual potential and energy for change seems to stem from the omnipotent umbilical of genealogy and aroha. Ihimaera’s reconfiguration of genealogy also marks a break with the dominant role of the father embodied by Arapeta and Monty – “[m]en like you abuse the sperm” (*TUS* 257) – and empowers the female principle connected with the umbilical cord. The umbilical and its clear connection of mother (the word rauru denominates the one end of the umbilical attached to the mother) and child (pito signifies the other end of the umbilical attached to the baby) thus privileges the cord of genetic relations and raises questions of gender. This is not to say that *The Uncle’s Story* tries to oust the male principle from Maori culture. Indeed, the novel seems to strive for a balance of genders by re-empowering the female element. The connection of the umbilical to the placenta also prefigures “[t]he yoking of women and land within Maori culture […] the word ‘whenua’ refers to both land and placenta/afterbirth which is buried on the *marae* to mark belonging to *iwi*, land, and place” (Najita 2006: 104).103

However, *The Uncle’s Story* hints at “a pinpoint of light” (*TUS* 246) as Sam feels himself falling into Te Kore, whereas in Michael’s nightmares the hooves of the stallion are “on fire” (10). *Nothingness* gives rise to *something* and, as an ambiguously fruitful concept, creates its own counterpart, a world full of light, therefore envisioning the transformed “sunlit space” (*TUS* 358) at the end of the narrative. Especially the figure of Cliff Harper builds a strong contrast to the dark world of fear. Sam, for instance, notices his “grove of golden pubic hair” (*TUS* 150) and points out that

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103 In addition, the conceptual correlation of umbilical, genealogy, placenta and land points to the new burial ground. Auntie Pat who has caught the umbilical lifeline thus wishes to be buried next to her brother’s anonymous grave outside the family burial ground and begin a new “family tradition” (*TUS* 303): “When I die, you are to bring me up here and bury me next to my brother. The others can go to the family graveyard if they want to. But my brother is not to lie here alone” (303). *The Uncle’s Story*, however, also explores the possibility of creating space for the deceased gay members of the tribe in the family cemetery. Michael therefore leads a group of gay and lesbian Maori to the marae in order to bring back the body of Waka, a young gay man who died of Aids, to his family and place of belonging: “It is Waka’s right to be buried in the place where he was born” (*TUS* 364). Again, the novel emphasises the importance of tribal connections and the marae, one’s place to stand, of family and “*Papatuanuku*, earth mother. It used to be traditional for the placenta of a newborn child to be buried in the child’s tribal area so that the newborn would later know that he was truly part, truly nourished, and truly born of that place” (Hulme 1981: 302).
Harper’s “hair was spun with gold” (255) and that “[g]leams of gold scattered through the night” (68). Michael sees Carlos in a similar light and associates his new love, who, in contrast to Michael’s previous Pakeha boy-friends, turns out to have Maori whakapapa, “with green fire” (TUS 127), “scattering the lights with his exuberance” (31). With Cliff Harper, Ihimaera creates a particularly “fearless” (TUS 251) homosexual man who readily takes on Arapeta, “the king, […] the man” (253), and the “virtue of his physical prowess” (253). “[R]eady this time to knock him senseless and blow all he represented to kingdom come” (TUS 253), Cliff’s light dazzles Arapeta: “‘This boy is without fear,’ Arapeta thought. ‘I do not intimidate him.’ Cliff’s eyes blazed in the sun and Arapeta, blinded, put up an arm as if to protect himself” (209). But Cliff is not the only fearless character in the novel. Indeed, the text heavily relies on a number of characters that, even if penetrated and almost paralysed by fear or terror, confront and fight those feelings and, thus, turn a perceived weakness into strength and a transformed idea of mana. In this sense, a homosexual man can just as well become a person of authority so that the concept of mana is no longer tied to heterosexuality, patriarchy or war, but to one’s personal strengths, abilities and warrior spirit. After all, the negative affect of fear raises a possible jumble of optimism in reference to its inherent pessimism: “[T]he human being […] strives to minimize and reduce negative affects and to maximize positive affects, but quite different aspects of the ‘same’ activity, e.g., of his job, may instigate negative and positive affects” (Tomkins 2008a: 77-8).

The fear of being hurled into Nothingness, of being forgotten and erased from whakapapa and memory pierces the characters’ skin and triggers off a cycle of loss and forlornness in a world that has been subjected to upheaval. Sam, for example, gets caught in the vortex of “some dark hole in space” (TUS 259) resounding Arapeta’s voice while his life seems to disintegrate before his eyes:

And it seemed to Sam that he was racing against Time. The clouds were storming through the night sky, shredding the moon, ripping it to pieces. But the faster he sped, the slower Time became. The clock ticked past the minutes, but every minute became an hour. The closer they came to the farm, the further away it seemed. […] There was no going back. He had to keep on going forward and hope against hope that there was a way of escape from whatever destiny lay in front of him. And, if there wasn’t — (244)

Now, as Tomkins points to the significance of the affect of shame in the processes of identity formation, for “[s]hame turns the attention of the self and others away from other objects to this most visible residence of self, increases its visibility and
thereby generates the torment of self-consciousness” (Tomkins 2008a: 359), we can assume that fear as well can be a stimulator of identity because it reminds the individual that the self, that life is existentially threatened. On the verge of a dissolution of the self – and in The Uncle’s Story Sam and Michael feel that their identity as Maori is wrested from them – the fear imparted to them in order to displace homosexuality surges and is rechanneled to new and life-affirming directions. Facing Arapeta’s bullwhip, the novel’s symbol of terror and its skin-perforating force, “Sam began to fight” (TUS 259): “With a gasp of wonder, Sam realised that no, he didn’t feel sorry. He didn’t feel ashamed. […] It was the first time he had stood up for who he was and for what he had become […] Ten lashes – and at every lash, the rebellion in Sam rose until all he felt was a seething rage against Arapeta and all he represented” (259-60). Although Sam faces his father and encounters the fear of being hurled away from his family and roots, his story nevertheless does not end happily. “[E]xiled” (TUS 262) and “banished” (262), “without a country” (262), Sam decides to go after Cliff, but is killed in a car accident on his way.

Three decades later, Michael and his allies begin to fight the homophobia lurking in Maori culture and “set everything right” (TUS 263). His journey to Canada thus retains a threefold agenda: first, to move Maori and indigenous peoples into the 21st century by asserting their sovereignty and cultural links; second, to claim a space for queer Maori and indigenous men and women in their common whakapapa; and third, to find Cliff Harper, tell him about Sam’s fate, “to let the story have its completion” (TUS 335) and return the greenstone pendant to the love of Sam’s life. Parallel to the surge of rebellion Sam felt in the past, Michael takes his life to new directions: “But something was closing behind me – the way I had been, the seemingly dutiful son leading a dutiful life – and a new Michael was emerging” (TUS 310). Surrounded by the few people of their new gay tribe and connected to a new whakapapa, Michael finds the strength to perform and make his “way to the podium” (TUS 343), to speak out and tell others about himself and the story of his Uncle Sam without being paralysed by fear as in Tomkins’ stagefright example (Tomkins 2008b: 934). “The fear [that] turns your blood to ice” (TUS 262), that perforated Michael and Sam’s bodies and almost separated them from their whakapapa “lifeline” (322), is severed from its poisonous fatality and transformed into new performances and diversity. The novel’s gay and lesbian figures thus claim the stage in order to “accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative” (TUS’
323) as Roimata puts it in a nutshell, and to redefine Maori culture as well as create alternative cosmologies for indigenous peoples – be they queer or not.

3.7 Towards a Queer Genealogy

Roimata and Tane’s suggestion to create “a great new gay family, a wonderful new gay tribe” (TUS 296) not only includes an alliance of gay people within the Maori community, but also a genealogical dimension. Tane, an elaborate version of The Noble Savage in Nights, thus proposes a model beyond heterosexual norms that merges tribal values with the realities of gay Maori men and women so that they are able to live according to their gay identities and, at the same time, get married and have children. Tane himself – as already indicated in Nights in the Gardens of Spain – agrees to a taumau, a traditionally arranged engagement and marriage, with Leah who respects his gayness as part of his identity and his sexuality as “a strength of its own which you can bring to a relationship not only with me but with any children we may have” (TUS 295) as Leah phrases it. Queerness would therefore not only be inscribed in the tribe by cultural reformulation of traditional concepts and by a gay community asserting their identities, but also on a more concrete, genetic level so that even if the children have different sexual identities for themselves “they will be gay by genealogy through their fathers and mothers” (TUS 296). Confronted with Tane’s idea that he should “consider such an arrangement with Roimata” (TUS 294), Michael expresses reluctance to the issue as does the end of Ihimaera’s novel in respect to such a yet utopian conception, for “[w]hatever was going to happen to Roimata and me, marriage, children, would be in the future. And it would have to take into consideration the fact that I had decided to let Carlos into my life” (363). For the moment, Michael has accepted his role as a leading figure in the gay community bridging the gap between gay and Maori culture and passing on the story of his Uncle Sam who “could become a pretty potent symbol” (TUS 294) of a new gay warrior spirit. Begetting a gay tribe constitutes “some ideal that might exist way in the future, if ever” (TUS 296), although Michael already considers Tane’s proposal, joking that “‘[m]y life is already ratshit. One extra thing on top of it won’t make it any worse.’” (296) Indeed, just because the gay Maori community is not yet consolidated by genealogical ties in a genetic or biological sense does not mean that it is not connected by a common whakapapa idea. Just as Maori cosmology orbits whakapapa as one of its most important and potent concepts, whakapapa presents a
distinct angle for the characters in the novel from which to view the world. And just as fear perforates their bodies, the notion of whakapapa is engraved in their flesh and it presents the central epistemological nexus of relation and intertwinement. The Uncle’s Story thus establishes a genealogy of feeling that interweaves the characters’ bodies through past and present even before the “brave gay tribe” (TUS 365) will create its own blood ties.

The few blood ties – Sam and Michael’s family relations for instance – the gay tribe can already rely on are extended by love ties or, as Michael and Roimata term it at the conference, by “aroha ki te iwi, love of the people” (TUS 325). Fuelled by a need to accommodate gay Maori men and women and a more understanding and respectful stance towards alternative identities, the novel posits aroha as binding the “strange tribe” (TUS 365) together and as a rejection of the unforgiving love, the “cradle of aroha” (27) full of homophobia represented by Arapeta. “[I]t’s a strength” (TUS 195) that is able to spiral the stories of the past to new ends and beginnings in the present and to find “a kind of friendship, a kind of reconciliation with one another” (358). In respect to the spiritual roots of this feeling, Cleve Barlow points out that

[a]roha is a sacred power that emanates from the gods. [...] What is aroha? Aroha in a person is an all-encompassing quality of goodness, expressed by love for the people, land, birds and animals, fish, and all living things. A person who has aroha for another expresses genuine concern towards them and acts with their welfare in mind, no matter what their state of health or wealth. It is the act of love that adds quality and meaning to life. (Barlow 1991: 8)

But the narrative also conceives of aroha as potentially already residing in the heart of human beings and written or inscribed into their flesh – irreversibly, more deeply and, to far more positive ends than the fears and terrors of homophobia. Hence, aroha reaches outward and inward in The Uncle’s Story; it originates from within a person and moves outward and into or under the skin of another person. Witi Ihimaera takes the Maori concept of aroha and remoulds its pillars of love, respect and genuine sympathy into a new foundation for cultural survival, anti-discrimination and respectful incorporation of gay Maori men and women into the tribe. Similarly, Cleve Barlow points to the all-embracing and unprejudiced trajectory of aroha: “A person who claims to possess the gift of aroha demonstrates this love by sharing it with all people and without discrimination” (Barlow 1991: 8). Fear is thus broken and reformulated into an affirmative position that not only embraces queerness through the creation of a “tribe

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104 Cleve Barlow also suggests that aroha moves beyond the skin: “Love is not skin deep like the tattooed face of a chieftain, but swells up continually from the depths of one’s heart” (Barlow 1991: 8).
of men who love men and women who love women” (TUS 365) within a transformed Maori community, but also asserts gay love as a sensual potential negotiating epistemological question of memory, identity and belonging. Ihimaera’s agenda of change is further underpinned by the process of transformation and creative potential already inscribed in the Maori notion of aroha (Barlow 1991: 8). Certainly, family relations and a resulting physical resemblance tie the characters together. When Michael first looks at the photograph in Sam’s diary, he knows immediately that “Sam was the one looking straight at the camera. He had the Mahana way of standing, balancing on both feet, leaning slightly forward, ready to take on the world. The same positioning of the head, slightly tilted to one side, wary but watchful” (TUS 34). Cliff Harper is also taken aback by Michael and Sam’s resembling features with Michael looking “so like Sam” (TUS 354). Michael notes a similar likeness between Cliff Harper and his son Cliff Sam Harper: “The son, not the father. With the look of the father, made from the same clay” (TUS 338). The text, nevertheless, goes far beyond biological or genetic links through a vocabulary of aroha inscribed in the flesh, or, better, existing within the heart and therefore within the flesh.

In contrast to the darkness Arapeta confines Sam to, Harper and Sam’s relationship is filled with the glow of aroha, connecting them mentally, as well as physically through a “physical pulling in” (TUS 69), in “the warmth of the sun-dried skin grazing the other” (62). The love between them does not follow the pattern of words, it rather propels them to an awareness that the connection between their bodies might be just as meaningful as words, and perhaps even more so: “It felt right not to talk. It felt good just to be. Sometimes there was no need to fill the air with words” (TUS 68). Just as the image of Sam “remained on his retina” (TUS 55) and thus engraved in Harper’s flesh, the touch of their bodies moves beneath the skin changing their identity irreversibly: “When the kiss came, Sam felt the electric shock of it go right through his body and somebody said Yes inside him, somebody who had been locked up all his life in a room with a closed door” (154). Portraying the love between men as penetrating the flesh in a metaphorical as well as physical sense, Witi Ihimaera points to the importance of sensual perception in the formation of identity, for through the confrontation of fear a new Sam (and later a new Michael) emerges. The novel thus juxtaposes the sexual image of penetration with Sam’s fear of falling into The Void. The love between the men nevertheless penetrates the flesh more deeply than fear and merges the shadows into light and hope:
Then, across The Void, a pinpoint of light. Something began to build in Sam, something made up of Cliff’s rhythmic movements. He opened his eyes and saw that Time had stretched and expanded. Go fast, the old man motioned, before the rains come. In front of him was a temple, and voices were calling, Haramai, Sam. [...] Harper was lunging now. Going deeper. Sam saw something sliding down the pillars of the temple, coiling wet and glistening. You and me, cobra, let us enjoy our brief moment in the sun. A saffron-robed monk was kneeling before Sam and suddenly Sam began to feel a sun exploding within him, showering Te Kore with light. Cliff was in orgasm, his body shuddering and spilling over. The shock of it forced Sam to breathe out, let go – and he reached a kind of understanding. A moment of revelation. He opened himself up, made himself vulnerable. With a groan he too was pulsing a river. [...] Nothing else mattered, past, present or future. All there was, was now. This was the secret embrace at the end of the day. And they had found it. (TUS 246-7)

Through the figure of Michael, the narrative points to a similar focus on identity that is constructed or set free with the feeling of another man’s touch or the act of homosexual love, so that the self is transformed, shaking off all former constructions and inscriptions of masculinity and fear. All the dark horses and kings of the tribe, all the mechanisms of fear and patriarchy as represented by Arapeta, will never be able to reverse this process of creating a gay identity. The spell of their power has been broken as the ironic intertextual reference to the famous nursery rhyme suggests:

There was no going back. Having a man inside you changed you. It was as if the penetration reached not only some physical centre but also some small room within which your identity lay. The masculine identity of the man inside the room had been constructed by his society. His very being had been imprinted with codes which guided him and said, ‘This is what a man does and this is what a man does not do.’ Being made love to by a man was, I knew from my own first experience, a kind of crucifixion of all those hopes and dreams of living as others live. Whoever you were, it shattered your room like an eggshell. All the king’s horses and all the king’s men could never put you together again. (TUS 248-9)

The aroha that culminates in the image of gay penetration not only joins the lovers, but all the members of the new-founded gay tribe. Michael and Roimata share an ambiguous friendship in this respect that already prefigures Tane’s idea of “taumau unions” (TUS 294). Michael’s lesbian friend is thus “always helping herself to my body, leaving lipstick all over my face” (TUS 132); especially “when Roimata can’t express herself verbally, she resorts to physical stuff. Usually a furious hug and a badly aimed kiss” (349). The Uncle’s Story constructs aroha ki te iwi not only as a heartfelt mode of knowing the world, but also as an umbilical cord of feeling and a new code for the queer tribe. Instead of being “isolated” (TUS 16) as gay individuals inside the Maori community where “all the conversation , all the codes, are involved with family” (16), Michael and all the other members of the queer tribe thus also share the codes of family through the principle of aroha that manifests itself, for instance, in “the intensity of the gesture” (126), in the image of “Sam’s eyes […] glowing with love” (358) or in the
touch of forehead against forehead when Michael “grasped Cliff Harper fiercely and pulled his forehead against mine, his nose against mine in the hongi” (359).

The aroha woven into the umbilical cord linking the members of the new tribal formation and into their flesh is further expressed by Sam’s greenstone pendant he gave to Cliff Harper who, in turn, passes it on to Michael. A potent symbol in Maori culture and art, the pounamu amulet touches the skin right next to the heart, “its home” (TUS 62), simultaneously coming alive with the warmth of its wearer’s body as well as radiating a warmth of its own. On his trip to the conference and to Cliff Harper, Michael notes that “Tunui a te Ika was so hot, almost burning in my palms. It kicked and bucked, impatient to complete its journey” (TUS 314). There is an electrifying life force to it that comes alive with the touch of his body: Michael: “My fingers touched the greenstone […] It began to get warm and slid itself into my palm. […] I traced the whorls of Tunui a te Ika. The face, the body, the penis with its white marks like a comet’s tail. The greenstone seemed to come alive at my touch, glowing with contentment. I felt it trying to leap from my hands and take its place close to my heart” (TUS 290). Sam has a similar feeling when he is given the gem by Arapeta, for “the hei tiki had come alive with his body heat and found a place on his chest where it could settle” (TUS 62). In contrast to the darkness of Te Kore, the hei tiki scintillates with the promise of a bright world to come, the stone “lustrous with an inner light, as if it was bursting with happiness” (TUS 337). For Sam, Cliff and Michael, the greenstone pendant thus becomes a vivid symbol of a reformed warrior spirit and gay mana and – shaped like a man, “with its wide eyes and protruding tongue” (TUS 62), its “penis, curving around the left thigh” (62), its “whorls and spirals” (62) and the “pale spots in the greenstone spurting from the head of the penis to the hei tiki’s shoulders” (62) – it wrests masculinity from the conventional restrictions of patriarchy and develops a life of its own settled right next to the heart of its gay wearers. When Cliff passes the hei tiki on to Michael, the ties between him, Sam and Michael are strengthened just as Michael is filled with a transformed wave of mana:

105 Pounamu pendants are steeped in rich symbolism and often connected to the ancestors: “Maori pendants, known as nga taonga (treasures), are rendered in bone, shell and jade and often carry names and stories pertinent to the family and history of the wearer. Prominent designs incorporate references to the koru (fern frond), a symbol of growth and rebirth; matau (fish hook), a representation of prosperity; tools such as the toki (adze blades), a symbol of the artist; various weapons, and supernatural creatures and guardians steeped in history and mystery, such as the manaia (birdlike guardian figures), taniwha (water spirits) and Hei Tiki (the first man in the Maori world, who descended from the stars). Traditionally given as symbols of respect and esteem, today the pendants are instantly recognizable ambassadors for the Maori” (Reading and Wyatt 2006: 42).
He took Tunui a te Ika out of his pocket, lifted it up. The light glowed through it, showing its upright penis, its mana, its strength. The greenstone twisted and flashed in his fingers. […] He placed Tunui a te Ika around my neck. At first the greenstone was cold, as if only just awakening. Then it began to take warmth from my skin, and I felt it searching for a place to settle. A place from which to begin battle” (TUS 359).

Ihimaera thus undermines the dead-end character homosexuality inherits in Maori cosmology and inscribes it with a procreative potential and the ability to be part of the whakapapa of the Maori community as well as to conceive its own queer genealogical ties. Sam’s hei tiki symbolises the beginning of a new genealogy with Sam as the first gay man of the Mahana family and Michael as the first gay man of the Mahana family who speaks up on behalf of gay Maori men and women. Just because the love between men takes Sam and Michael “past the point of no return” (TUS 154), does not necessarily mean that they are hurled into an abyss. Rather, homosexuality spirals a new whakapapa into existence with Auntie Pat as “kuia for our new gay tribe” (TUS 369) and Roimata as “a fine mother for this great new tribe of ours” (370) with children “numerous – twins, triplets, whatever” (370).

3.8 New Warriors

Michael’s search for a fulfilling masculinity that includes both his Maori and his gay registration leads him to overcome the many layers of marginalisation. His lesbian friend Roimata thus points out that he has been “colonised twice over. First, by the Pakeha. Second by the gay Pakeha” (TUS 131). Not only have Maori been trying to fight the effects of colonisation and opted for an empowerment of tribal values in a society predominantly fuelled by an ideology of individualism, gay Maori men and women also find themselves in a marginalised position inside the frame of the gay community:

‘The Western model de-privileges any notions that gay men or women might have children. Therefore, the White gay species is the only one which doesn’t replicate itself. But our Maori model is a tribal one. It should therefore include the possibility of growing a tribe. Of having children. […] The issues of identity and space – of sovereignty, of tino rangatiratanga – that our people have been fighting for within Pakeha society are the same issues for gay Maori within Pakeha gay society! That gay tribe that your Auntie Pat asked about won’t just happen – it will have to be created, God dammit –’ (TUS 131).

Hence, The Uncle’s Story expresses a far-reaching agenda of change, for the fictive world of Michael largely works by an either/or ideology; it seems that there is a huge unfilled gap between two contrasting poles: “On one hand, his homosexual
orientation is proscribed by a powerful cultural prohibition, forcing him to choose between being Māori or gay. On the other, [...] there is a further pressure to reject the conception of gay masculinity constructed by the Pākehā world in order to replace it with something that is exclusively Māori” (Fox 2008: 184). Moreover, though the simplistic binary between a dominant Pakeha culture and a peripheral Maori community may be one part of the equation, it can no longer be viewed as the only key to a solution. Indigenous writers from Aotearoa/New Zealand have sought to empower and revitalise the Maori community and its cultural heritage in their imaginative attempts to come to terms with the history of colonialism and its effects upon the present. Yet, Witi Ihimaera takes the struggle for decolonisation and cultural survival to a new level in Nights in the Gardens of Spain and, more importantly, in The Uncle’s Story through an affirmation of indigeneity and, at the same time, through a transformation of some of its central concepts, thus spiralling the trajectory to new distances and dissolving binary constructions through feeling: “Maori cultural traditions are thus reaffirmed and altered at the same time: like so much contemporary indigenous writing, Ihimaera’s novel asserts the vital presence of indigenality in the contemporary world – and probes into necessary processes of change that redefine this indigenality to maintain its vitality” (Schulze-Engler 2007: 51-2). Ihimaera conceives of the postcolonial as “a much more troubled and turbulent reality” (Fox 2008: 207) and as an entirely complex convergence of different histories, truths, memories and identities that undermine any perspective sprung from one-dimensional bifurcations.

The essential clash between a traditional Maori perspective and the realities of gay Maori men and women lies, according to the novel, in the former’s strict adherence to a heterosexual warrior ideal and a patriarchal concept of whakapapa. Ihimaera thus proposes a reformation of “the lingering effects of warrior culture” (Fox 2008: 207) and the genealogical nexus that both exclude homosexual individuals. Unveiling the mechanisms of fear and terror written in the flesh by the homophobic structures of Maori culture, The Uncle’s Story delves into the ambiguous nature of affect in order to look for the positive side of the coin, that is, to confront fear and face up to homophobia. It does so by untying the warrior ideal from its military, patriarchal and silencing lashes embodied by Arapeta, “a God incarnate” (TUS 39) whose “authority hushed the world” (39), and by wresting the whakapapa concept from its narrow focus on heterosexual marriage.
The narrative thus culminates in Michael and Roimata’s performances at the Survival 2000 conference in Canada which mark a clear break with the old warrior ideal. Redrawing on the fighting spirit of their ancestors, the two feel the need to “do our usual Maori thing” (TUS 324) and “hijack this conference” (324) when it becomes clear that the conference seems to be “a jack-up” (320) infused with the funds and perspective of its patrons: “Bertram, Franklin, Lang’s grandfather Mr Pentecost and the two women elders were First Nation, but they were outnumbered on the stage by European officials of the organising foundation. [...] We’d both seen this kind of thing before. A puppet out front. Behind, people pulling the strings” (320-1). Michael and Roimata therefore take a stand at the indigenous peoples conference and confront “the orchestrated harmony established by the Council” (TUS 323) by claiming an empowered position for Maori and indigenous peoples in order to “regain our right to rehabilitate, reconstruct, reaffirm and re-establish our cultures” (326). Their bold speech – culminating in a combative haka – emphasises the need of all indigenous peoples to “disconnect from the White umbilical” (TUS 326) on a broad level, to “continue to dream majority dreams” (326) and to celebrate their common “warrior spirit” (327). And yet, that warrior spirit stands out against the warrior model of the older generation as it, ironically, comes from two outcasts, a homosexual man and a lesbian woman. In contrast to Arapeta’s and Monty’s concept of it, the warrior image needs to incorporate queer identity and, as Michael says, the “shapeshifter at work in my life, shifting the shapes according to forces I had myself set in motion” (TUS 128). And it is during their first speech that “[t]he ihi, the wehi, the mana rushed into” (TUS 325) Michael, the dynamic constellation of the life-giving energy, the dread and the value and integrity as a respected member of the Maori community, all of which Arapeta denied Sam in the past.

The novel thus articulates a need for decolonisation and empowerment, but it does so from the perspective of Michael who by way of his second speech at the conference, his role as a gay leader and the telling of his Uncle’s story emphasises Ihimaera’s conjecture “that you can be gay – and a warrior” (TUS 294). This point is further outlined when Michael asks for his aunt’s support and her “feistiness, […] [and] fighting spirit” (TUS 369). In a convergence of dream and reality, the text therefore envisions him carrying Sam’s body from darkness to light and from the past to the present and into the future, including his gay ancestor to the cultural memory of the transformed tribe: “Somewhere between Houston and Los Angeles I tapped into my
second spirit. I saw myself holding Uncle Sam’s body in my arms and carrying it through a pyrotechnic storm of lightning strikes and fluorescent gateways” (TUS 353). In the book, the stories of the past become an integral part of the present and outline Ihimaera’s agenda of claiming a seat for Maori gay men and women at the genealogical table. Ngahuia Te Awekotuku’s recent retelling of the story of her ancestress Hinemoa re-roots the less strict conceptualisation of gender roles and sexualities that seem to have disappeared from Maori culture due to colonial and missionary encroachment. She thus challenges the conventional notion of the story as a “heterosexual romance” (Te Awekotuku 2001: 2) and highlights the significance of same-sex relationships. Te Awekotuku’s story foregrounds a range of sexual identities. Hinemoa thus cross-dressed as a male warrior in order to attract another man, Tiki, the hoa takatapui of Tutanekai. Takatapui signifies a close and intimate same-sex friend, and “[t]his word has since been claimed by the Maori gay and lesbian community as our word for us” (Te Awekotuku 2001: 2). Hence, Hinemoa is portrayed as “a woman of courage and strength; a woman conscious of the many erotic possibilities offered in her world; a woman who chose a man who preferred his own sex – just as she preferred hers. A woman who was a warrior, and a lover” (Te Awekotuku 2001: 3).

Arapeta and Monty’s strictly heterosexual conceptualisation of gender and Monty’s lie that no other family member has ever been like Michael are unmasked and traced to a moral codex that is massively based on Christian and colonial notions of sexuality. In The Uncle’s Story, Michael therefore remarks: “I couldn’t even pray to God, because why pray to a god who denied his kingdom to gay men? His prophets had established homosexuality as a sin. They had all denied gay men and women a place in the main narrative of the world – God, his prophets and his followers. My grandfather had been such a follower” (TUS 321). So, instead of silently subjugating himself under the yoke of fear and its immobilising and paralysing radius, Michael’s quest to fight against the homophobic tendencies of his world leads him to include new strands to the umbilical cord and embrace the new rope that joins together all the bodies of “our new gay tribe” (TUS 369), a rope twisted by the feeling of “an extraordinary sense of aroha” (354).

The novel thus articulates the suggestion of a double umbilical. On a metaphorical level, the umbilical “lifeline” (TUS 322), created when Auntie Pat breaks the silence by telling the story, links Sam and Michael over past and present and joins them as belonging to a new gay whakapapa that was non-existent in the past when
Grandfather Arapeta had consigned Uncle Sam to Te Kore, The Void” (322): “He had disconnected him from the umbilical cord of whakapapa, and sent him falling head over heels like a spaceman trailing his severed lifeline through a dark and hostile universe to oblivion” (322). Furthermore, spiralling from the Maori umbilical outwards, Ihimaera’s novel also transcends the circle of Maori cosmology in order to suggest a far-reaching framework that articulates queerness in a context of transcultural indigeneity. Just as The Uncle’s Story expresses a need to incorporate queer stories into Maori culture and whakapapa, it also opts for a new mythology that would account for the experiences of all gay indigenous men and women. The conference in Canada thus “becomes an opportunity to explore parallel lives, those other optional lives which have always been there” (TUS 310). Lang, Wandisa and Sterling, the three gay representatives from different Native American tribes Michael and Roimata meet at the conference, introduce their newly found Maori friends to the concept of “people of two spirits” (TUS 329), “our own First Nations’ definition” (329) of being gay. According to berdache cosmology, queer people united two identities, which made them different but also “holy people. Their two-spirit identity did not bring them disapproval or denial” (TUS 330). Rather, being two-spirited “they held a respected position in tribal society. They were shamans, and they acted as intermediaries between man and the gods. Only they could go out onto the battlefield to collect the dead and carry them to the world after this one. They travelled in their dreams” (TUS 330). Their in-betweenness, Lang explains to Michael and Roimata, transcended “the laws for men and women” (TUS 330), and especially twins were viewed to be chosen: “Twins, if one was male and other was female, were particularly favoured by the gods. The male twin especially, if he became a berdache, was destined – ’Destined?’ ‘To lead the berdache tribe,’ she said” (330). Viewed from the perspective of berdache tradition, the novel implies that Michael, gay and a twin, thus inherits a sacred potential and warrior spirit he and Sam were mainly denied in Maori culture. By redrawing on the concept of two-spirited people and their shamanistic and dream travelling capabilities, the narrative reinscribes a tapu element upon the body of the Maori gay warrior, so that the fighting spirit is corroborated by a sacred as well as spiritual-mythological facet. “[T]ipped […] over” (TUS 19) by his twin sister’s chromosomes in their mother’s womb, Michael’s masculinity transcends its own gender-related fixation and inherits an in-between and two-spirited character. His abilities to visualise the figure of Sam and to feel “the presence of the past” (TUS 353), to travel between different states of reality and
between dreams, for he taps into the past through his nightmares, imply a process of resanctification and spiritual empowerment. Yet, Michael eyes this two-spirit identity suspiciously at first, commenting ironically that “[g]reat, so now I was going to become a gay Maori Moses” (TUS 330). But he soon warms to the idea and, having “grown accustomed to playing with matches” (TUS 332), he embraces his new trickster identity giving another bold speech in favour of queerness at the conference: 106

‘The issue here is that for too long all of you who come from traditional cultures have profited by the efforts of those gay men and women who, for love of their nations, developed the songs, the poems, the dances, the arts of all of us. You need only to look in your hearts to know that what I say is true. You need only to look into each other’s eyes to know that all our genealogies are intertwined with people of two spirits. But they are people who, to do their work, had to pretend they did not exist. They had to deny themselves the right to walk proud among us. You knew they were two spirited. You knew that they were giving you gifts of their talents. You knew – ’ (344).

Asserting “the achievements of our own two-spirit ancestors to all our traditions” (TUS 344) to a “hall so filled with history” (344), Michael and his friends lay the foundations of “a small tribe” (344) and define the warrior spirit of their respective cultures from a queer point of view. The warrior ideal as represented through the figure of Arapeta, the fierce war veteran, is amended and repositioned as the response of Lang’s grandfather indicates, for Lang “has shown more courage than many men in exposing himself in this battle. He and all who stand with him have exposed themselves to us. They have formed their war party and what are their weapons? Where are their bows and arrows? Where are their spears? Where are their other braves and warriors? They have brought only themselves to their battle” (TUS 345). Compared to the ear-splitting battle cries of the past, the present battle is won “quietly from the silent places of the heart” (TUS 346) and instead of painful bloodshed, it is fought with alternative genealogies of feeling and telling different stories of the past and the present. Hence, Michael, together with the new “odd tribe” (TUS 364), leads an ope, a procession of people, in order to give the body of a young man who died from Aids back to his marae and bury “our own among the people where they belong” (365). The end of the narrative puts Michael “in the front line” (TUS 351) and turns him into a queer warrior with the quest to counter fear and “culturally implanted homophobia” (Fox 2008: 187), “to construct the world again” (TUS 371) and claim a space for queer Maori, this time

106 Here, the novel may allude to the trickster figure Maui who deceives Mahuika, the goddess of fire, one finger at a time and brings fire into the world. Michael also fills the dark pages of history and the dark void Sam fell into with light, thus filling the world with light again, yet Michael is lacking the mischievous spirit of Maui or Simon in The Bone People. See Orbell 1995: 115, Hyland 1998: 31-3, Knudsen 2004: 172.
from a different perspective and hold together by the umbilical of queer whakapapa and aroha:

I have realised, Uncle Sam, that the telling of our stories will bring a location and a history to the world that we build. We who are gay and lesbian must fix the stories with firmness and solder their knots with purpose so that they become part of the narratives – the foundations, walls and roof – all peoples tell about each other. We must speak our stories, we must enact them, we must sing our songs throughout this hostile universe. We must bring a new promise to life and a new music to the impulse of history. (371)

On a more tangible level, The Uncle’s Story sensualises the umbilical by interweaving feelings – most prominently fear and aroha – into its conjecture of gay identity and, correspondingly, cultural memory that includes the experiences and histories of gay Maori men and women. Although the last part of the novel traces the ending to Sam’s and Cliff’s story, new beginnings spring from its “Liebestod” (TUS 345) – as implied by the reference to the final aria of Wagner’s opera Tristan and Isolde – and a promise of new stories arises from the old ones silenced by homophobia in the past.
Chapter 4

“But out here you get a sense of…what? Scale? Distance? No, more personal than that”107 – Sensescapes in James George’s 

Hummingbird

Sensuous imagery figures prominently in James George’s Hummingbird. In fact, the “physical echoes” (Thomson 2003: 29) prevail particularly in conjunction with recurring patterns that comprise a multitude of intricate details from the “tattooed wings” (Hum 34) of Jordan’s moko to traces left in the sand. The novel thus “demonstrates an affinity with the detail – texture, smell, taste and feel – of the land and sea” (O’Brien: 2004: 12) and condenses its numerous references to the sensory perceptions of the human body and the manifold indentations left behind in the sand or other surfaces into a fine-meshed net based upon ta moko, the tattooing practice rooted in Maori culture.108 Just as the senses are explored as a medium of constructing patterns written in the body of the landscape – ocean, sand, sky – the sensorium of the human body is mapped, leading to a convergence of body and place, of the senses and an overall ornamentation that permeate every aspect of the narrative. The patterns of moko are therefore written in skin, earth, sky and water and come alive with feeling. The mapping or tattooing of place is intertwined with the mapping of the senses so that by juxtaposing the two James George creates an overall design pervaded by the motifs of Maori cosmology in order to inscribe and continue cultural identity and memory. Body and place mount to ‘sensescapes’ and a complex set of sensuous, spatial and temporal interrelations that record the human body and its environment in texture, sound, smell and taste and activate sensory experience as a formative medium of cultural survival and identity. David Howes defines the concept of sensescape as “the idea that the experience of the environment, and of the other persons and things which inhabit that environment, is produced by the particular mode of distinguishing, valuing and combining the senses in the culture under study” (Howes 2005b: 143). Hummingbird thus illustrates the significance of bodily perceptions to expressions of culture – in the

107 Quotation from Hummingbird (Hum 154).
108 With the onslaught of colonising and missionary strategies, pukanohi, the fully tattooed face generally worn by Maori men, “was seen less and less” (Nikora, Rua and Te Awekotuku 2005: 194), while moko kauae, the tattoos on women’s chins, “continued, uninterrupted” (194); moko, though, never vanished completely and has seen several waves of resurgence, for instance, during the 19th century Land Wars (194) and in recent decades (Te Awekotuku et al. 2007: 116).
sense of culture as both shaping and being shaped by feeling – and asserts the body as an active medium in a “sensuous (re)construction of space” (Howes 2005b: 145), remembering and identity.

The reciprocal relationship between place, memory and identity formation has been a major focus of postcolonialism. The literary and imaginative creation of place and its influence on the self have become “a powerful, productive and even consciousness-raising strategy” (Döring 2008: 70) in the articulation and negotiation of the impact of colonisation and its resulting phenomena, such as displacement, rootlessness, and migration. *Hummingbird* is marked by such a prevailing sense of loss. Alternating between different voices and between the present setting of Ninety Mile Beach and flashback passages recounting the characters’ past experiences, the novel joins four individuals (not counting Leonie’s child Moana) who have all been uprooted in some tragic way: Kataraina left her family in order to become a model, but her dreams were shattered by the underlying racism she encountered in the fashion business – “the magazines didn’t want my black arse” (*Hum* 25) – and she ended up as a prostitute, giving her daughter up for adoption; surfer Jordan carries with him a picture of the Horse’s Head Nebula, a reminder of his child he never knew because he got involved in gang criminality and was sent to prison; scarred by his experiences in World War II, pilot Kingi has been severed from his whanau for almost 50 years and is “[l]ost in a promise” (*Hum* 281) to come back to Crete and the woman he loves; and Leonie arrives at the beach in search for her birth mother Kataraina, the grandmother to her infant daughter Moana whose father died in a road accident. Stranded on the lonely beach, they are all “in the midst of either coming or going, but the surfer seems to be neither. Seems almost to be hanging, like a swing bridge across a river” (*Hum* 67). In the no-man’s-land of the beach, set away from the worlds that have scarred them, the characters begin to reconstruct their world, slowly assembling the answer to the question: “But what *is* home? Or perhaps *why*” (*Hum* 66).

The topographies of home and away, of belonging and being uprooted, the cartographies of imaginary and utopian spaces, the (re)mapping and (re)naming of territories, and the localisation and (re)construction of cultural identity and context – in short, “a strong sense of place, a belief that the individual is linked to a particular area and community by mutually defining bonds” (De Lange 2008: xi) – have permeated
postcolonial fiction and theory. The authors of *The Empire Writes Back* consequently maintain that “[a] major feature of post-colonial literatures is the concern with place and displacement. It is here that the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being; the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2002: 8). “The Beach” (*NGS* 241) in Witi Ihimaera’s *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* represents such a place where questions of identity move centre stage. For David, The Beach is thus not only “a place to go on a hot summer day” (*NGS* 242) and “[t]o meet other men” (242). A place of summer fun and sexual adventures, but also a shrine “to our sexuality, our past, present and our future” (*NGS* 243), The Beach and its recreational values are also deeply entwined with the struggle of a gay minority and its visible assertion of identity. At the same time, it denominates a ground of political and historical implications, of crossing borders and claiming territories, of “mark[ing] the place with our own scent” (*NGS* 242):

Like all our beaches, The Beach is on the very edge of civilisation, out beyond the wildest dreams. Beyond constraints. Beyond respectability. Beyond the country of decorous behaviour. To get there you must drive for hours, out beyond the tall black-glassed towers and away. Past the suburban beaches with their swimsuited heterosexual carnivals, family tummy bulge and babyfat picnics. Past even the nude heterosexual beaches, bacon and eggs being burnt to a frazzle in one huge sandy frying pan. To the Forbidden Zone. The history of our beaches has always involved a pitched battle between ourselves and the rest of the world. Some lone pioneer, either in an act of frustration, foolhardiness or bravery, staked a claim for all of us many years ago by taking off his clothes. Another joined him and another, making a beachhead, establishing a camaraderie, a spirit of conspiracy of us against them. The word got around and before you knew it The Beach had a reputation. (241).

109 Christopher L. Connery sums up the occupation with space and its more concrete forms of place or landscape: “The ‘spatial turn’ has been increasingly evident in a variety of disciplines, political positions, and analytical frameworks during the last twenty years. The critique of historicism, the disappearance of depth, the general flattening out, and other intimations of the spatial are indeed defining features of our putative new era. New geographies and new cartographies have arisen to map it; the Pacific Rim is one newly imagined space” (Connery 1996: 284). Pacific writers and critics have thus asserted spatial and cartographic connections, “material and cultural geographies” (Ellis 2000: 54), both as comparative methodological frameworks as well as the constellations of shared cultural identities, histories and decolonising strategies, “a structure of shared experiences and concerns” (Armstrong 2003: 21), and underlined “a convergence of geographical and cultural maps that encompasses imported and indigenous influences and that is uncommonly cognizant of the politics of movement in and around the islands” (Ellis 2000: 51-2): “Oceania is vast, Oceania is expanding, Oceania is hospitable and generous, Oceania is humanity rising from the depths of brine and regions of fire deeper still, Oceania is us. We are the sea, we are the ocean, we must wake up to this ancient truth and together use it to overturn all hegemonic views that aim ultimately to confine us again, physically and psychologically, in the tiny spaces that we have resited accepting as our sole appointed places, and from which we have recently liberated ourselves. We must not allow anyone to belittle us again, and take away our freedom” (Hau’ofa 1994: 160). In respect to the wider context of Oceania, see also Wendt 1976, Hau’ofa 1998, Jolly 2007, and DeLoughrey 2007. Moreover, recent literary criticism has put forth new perspectives on place and nature, centring on “a productive overlap between the tasks of ecocriticism and those of postcolonial criticism” (Huggan 2008: 64, see also Huggan and Tiffin 2010).
One of the most intriguing places *Hummingbird* presents us with is the vast and open territory of New Zealand’s Ninety Mile Beach, “an alternating road of land and sea” (*Hum* 33) where the characters of the novel land. While Jordan, the tattooed man and surfer, leads a lonesome existence on the land of his ancestors, pilot Kingi literally falls from the sky, crash-landing his Tiger Moth on the “pale, thin strip of sand bordering the ocean” (7), and Kataraina seeks refuge on the beach she knows from family holidays and which “gives way to the rainbowed turquoise and emerald of the ocean” (5). The quintet is eventually completed by the arrival of Leonie and her baby daughter Moana on the almost endless line of dunes, “softest sand” (*Hum* 127) and “scattering of shells” (128) “at the ocean’s edge” (141). Like David in *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*, surfer Jordan makes a similar point about the beach where he lives in an old boat, surfs the ocean and looks after the campground. The place where land, ocean and sky melt is also turned into a place of a palpable sense of identity, and cultural tradition is continued and transformed in creative ways. While Kingi emphasises the importance of change, Jordan seeks shelter and continuity in the place of his ancestors: “‘Don’t stay here forever,’ says Kingi. ‘Maybe I belong here. Maybe this is my forever. Every night I lay my head in my grandfather’s boat, within a stone’s throw of the pā of my ancestors. Every morning I swim in the waves they swam in, fished in.’” (*Hum* 319)

The beach in *Hummingbird* is a place where demarcations are blurred – with a “[s]ea shelving shallowly from azure to inky blue” (*NGS* 245), stones “made slippery by seaweed” (247), ocean and sky merging together in the distance and sand and ocean mingling in the surf – and thus also “retains the dynamics of a formative contact zone” (Featherstone 2005: 213) as Simon Featherstone terms it in his discussion of the beach and its significance in postcolonial culture. While Featherstone largely focuses on “the liminal space of the beach” (Featherstone 2005: 223) as a place of exchange marked by the sweep of international tourism and concludes that “the discourses and transactions of such tourism have become central to the experience of postcolonial cultures – and hence to postcolonial cultural studies” (224), James George portrays an almost empty beach in *Hummingbird*, at least empty of tourists. Jordan looks after the camp until the summer, but due to the off-season “[n]o one’s been by until now” (*Hum* 35). Temporary home to the five individuals of Maori descent, the beach in George’s novel is not a tourist resort; the only tourist reference *Hummingbird* contains captures the fleeting moment it takes to photograph the beach: “A bus, decorated in a kaleidoscope of colour.
[...] Eager faces, cameras. [...] A couple of miles up the beach the bus slows, at the point he [Kingi] guesses it passes the Tiger Moth. It stops for a moment then moves on into the cold of the wind” (Hum 153). The geographic space of beaches, however, not only emerges in relation to tourism. Indeed, beaches have been prominent signifiers since the onset of colonialism. They staged the beginning of cultural contact and the “entry and consolidation of colonial control” (Featherstone 2005: 213), carrying the marks of cross-cultural encounters and power relations. In an ironic comment on the intruder on the beach, The Bone People reflects the image of traces in the sand that we already find in Daniel Defoe’s novel Robinson Crusoe. Footprints reveal the presence of the mute Pakeha child Simon and recall “the shore as both a material and metaphorical site of power and exchange” (Featherstone 2005: 212): “She [Kerewin] frowns. She doesn’t like children, doesn’t like people, and has discouraged anyone from coming on her land. [...] She squats down and peers up the track. There are footprints, one set of them. Of a sandaled foot and half an unshod foot” (TBP 15). Yet, not only do the footprints on the beach figure as a metaphor of the arrival of colonialism; they also mark a decisive step in the surveying of newly encountered land and remind us of the importance of mapping to colonial rule and the close resemblance between colonial discourse and the practice of mapping as Graham Huggan has vividly shown (Huggan 1991: 125-38). The beach in Hummingbird – and the other places the novel refers to – can be viewed as a liminal site of exchange because this territory in its state of suspense between sand, sea and sky and in its vagueness and indefinability serves as the setting of an interlocking body-space-relation that articulates and negotiates questions of cultural memory and identity. George moves sensuous experience – particularly cutaneous relations – into focus in an attempt to redefine identity through the medium of bodily perception, for just “as places make sense, senses make place” (Feld 2005: 179) and invigorate cultural survival.

4.1 Beyond the Face: Maps, Moko and Texture

Maps – particularly colonial maps – are indeed peculiar kinds of ‘skins’. Just as “[f]or centuries of manuscript and book production, books were primarily things of skin” (Connor 2004: 42) covered with leather as the prevailing and suggestive binding material, maps were at times imprinted on leather and then more often on paper amongst other materials. Going back to the Latin word ‘mappa’ and its various
meanings such as ‘sheet’, ‘napkin’ or ‘cloth’, maps formed an integral part in the extension, consolidation and maintenance of Empire, representing the world from a particular angle of power – the term ‘mappa mundi’ is a striking example. At first sight, maps appear to be accurate and even neutral, scientific modes of representation offering a sense of orientation, guidance and connection to the place or land they record in abstract miniature. Their axiomatic claim of mimesis – throughout history a basic assumption of western modes of knowing – leads to a certain inviolability as sources of knowing the world ‘as it really is’. Although they seem to stem from a neutral and objective point of view, maps are inevitably selective and inherit certain ways of seeing the world, reproducing the ideological backgrounds and serving the purposes of their creators: “[T]he ‘reality’ represented mimetically by the map not only conforms to a particular version of the world but to a version which is specifically designed to empower its makers” (Huggan 1991: 127). Thus, maps have come to serve as powerful tools in imperialist discourse and as crucial and strategic weapons in the establishment of colonialism. Cartographic outlines function as instruments of recording, exploring and expanding territories, inscribing land and places, implementing hierarchical structures, and therefore managing and reinforcing colonial power systems: “For their practices, their ways of seeing – and hence selecting – detail to be recorded, are predefined not just by the centuries-old traditions of European map-making but also by the ideology of the expansionist colonialism which they serve” (Ryan 1994: 115).

Colonial cartography, therefore, inherits a striking paradox, at once illustrating, soliciting and disguising contact. Firmly rooted in their cultural premises, western modes of mapping not only render ‘inaccurate’ alternative modes of representing place, but also largely ignore and veil that “maps are productions of complex social forces; they create and manipulate reality as much as they record it” (Ryan 1994: 116). Not only do they record land in seemingly innocent mimetic terms, they also stylise unknown territories as a void, which “does not simply or innocently reflect gaps in European knowledge but actively erases (and legitimizes the erasure of) existing social and geo-cultural formations in preparation for the projection and subsequent emplacement of a new order” (Ryan 1994: 116). In early European mapping, for instance, the idea terra australis incognita prevails (Ryan 1994: 115-30; Suárez 2004: 26-125), a concept that invited bizarre fantasies – of inhabitants with feet where their heads should be (Ryan 1994: 119) – and that, before James Cook’s journeys, also
included New Zealand as part of it (Suárez 2004: 103). The emptiness becomes a foil that has to be filled and transformed according to the modes and ideology of the imperial power. In European attempts to grasp the unknown on maps, the blank space of the Pacific is turned into the object of imagination and often constructed as some strange or even perverse ‘other’ that needs ‘correction’, this construction of the other justifying expansionist or colonial enterprises (Ryan 1994: 119-21). Through the transformation of actual masses of land into a small-scale order of signs land becomes a text that is readable, and this process of “textualization of the landscape by the explorers reifies space as a blank text, ready to be inscribed by the impending colonial process” (Ryan 1994: 126).

Yet, it is worthwhile to note that “blind spots reveal flaws in the overall presentation of the map which allow it to be read in alternative, ‘non-European’ modes” (Huggan 1991: 127), and that cartographic representations may differ from culture to culture, thus, at times, having generated misunderstandings between indigenous peoples and explorers as well as settlers in the Pacific some centuries ago. James Cook, for instance, was given a map by priest Tupaia that followed an altogether different order. The map took as its centre Tahiti surrounded in circles by a large number of islands whose distance to their centre was measured in sailing times rather than linear schemes (Edmond 1997: 1). In a similar way, Edward Shortland was forced to redraw on European standards in order to make use of sketches created by Maori chief Hone Tuhawaiki whose topographies weren’t arranged according to any kind of long distance measurements (Barton 1998: 495-6). Moreover, as a discursive practice translating place into the signs and language of miniature representation, colonial and Western maps objectify place and establish a certain distance between places and human beings, disrupting the concrete, material and sensuous relationship between people and land. Just as the *terra nullius* ideology negates the existence of indigenous peoples, it also wipes out the complex and reciprocal set of relations between indigenous peoples and the land they inhabit. The Maori concept of kaitiakitanga (guardianship), for instance, articulates a close connection between people and place. Hence, “[k]aitiaki or guardian spirits are left behind by deceased ancestors to watch over their descendants and to

110 In relation to the drafting of maps, the representation of empty land or spaces in New Zealand literature seems to tie up with the *topos* of ‘man alone’ that came up in the middle of the 19th century. This manifestation in realist fiction – “a tradition fatally associated with the outlook of Pakeha men” (Williams 1990: 16) – has also been criticized for its manifestation of an explorer mentality and its close connection between questions of Pakeha masculinity and national New Zealand identity. See Anderson 1985: 83-99 and Harris 2000: 60-72.
protect sacred places” (Barlow 1991: 34); often appearing in the form of “animals, birds, insects, and fish” (34), kaitiaki function as communicative bridges “between the spirit realm and the human world” (34) and between people and places: “Land here appears primarily as a resource (in a material as well as a cultural sense), whose integrity must be respected and protected. The sense of ownership that underlies the assumption of guardianship is therefore a sense of belonging in a reciprocal relationship between land and people, in which the land nourishes the people and the people care for the land” (Heim 2001: 300).

The hummingbird, a recurring image in the narrative, may thus be seen as such a traveller between worlds. By and large, conventional mapping creates an absence of the meaning of land to Maori just as it neglects sensuous detail – maps generally don’t pay attention to the different textures or sounds, smells and tastes that make up a place and overlook the intertwined relationship between sensory perception, place, cultural identity and remembering. James George therefore engages in a process of imagining sensescapes created by the manifold relations of feeling, spatial-temporal connections and the convergence and transformation of Maori cultural traditions such as ta moko, surfing and storytelling in order to explore cultural identity and belonging.

One of the first characteristics Kataraina notices about surfer Jordan is his moko, the pattern tattooed into the skin of his face. While Jordan is taken with her fingers plucking “an arpeggio filling the empty space between them” (Hum 34) – another pattern – Kataraina is fascinated by Jordan’s face “where tattooed wings of ink rise from the bridge of his nose, half circling his eyes. The arcs of ink echo around his lips, his stubbled chin; their deep forest tinge matches the pounamu pendant on a string around his neck” (34). Jordan’s moko is mirrored by the scars on his body, traces from a past filled with gang violence. The pattern on his skin is thus not only marked by visibility, but also by texture with “his scars changing colour with the shifting light. As if he was born with his veins on the outside of his body” (Hum 64-5). The scars turn his skin into a fabric highly appealing to touch; Kataraina therefore “leans back against the wall of the cabin, draughting his face in her mind, the way his pupils remain expressionless but

\[\text{111 Several Maori writers have thus emphasised the far-reaching connection between indigenous people and places and the significance of land, ocean and sky to cosmological and cultural values. Keri Hulme, for example, focuses on her connections – both physical as well as spiritual – to the coastal areas of Okarito and Moeraki (Hulme 1987: 1-9). Some recent literary criticism inquires into the convergence of indigenous perceptions of environment and the politics of ecological sustainability. Briar Wood, for instance, has discussed the manifestations of mana wāhine (a Maori form of feminist activism) and ecocriticism in literature written by Maori women and the emphasis given to “the necessity for holistic and ecologically aware national policies, and for the interpretation of Māori land rights as a way of protecting and ensuring the regenerative aspects of the land” (Wood 2007: 107).}\]
the map carved into his skin moves. When he seems happy the lines of ink curve into a smile, even though his lips stay still. His eyes betray no tenant; just hibernate like dark eggs, only the swirls of his moko moving” (Hum 67). Stretching, extending, contracting, and moving, Jordan’s moko can be viewed as a miniature skin map of the manifold relations in the novel – the characters orbit each other in ever smaller circles, form a community, but in the end also move away from each other to different places, at once back to the past and into the future, while the skin of the landscape is engraved and embossed by a multitude of patterns and leaves its impressions or imprints on the human body. Time is slipped under the skin and pattern transferred from one body to the next – from Jordan’s face to the ocean, from the painted cabins to Kingi’s aeroplane, from a hand to a glass pane, from skin to skin and so on. In contrast to the two-dimensional routes of the conventional map, the sensecapes in Hummingbird are modelled on tattoo, combining time, vertical and horizontal routes, penetration and elevation, contact, exchange and reciprocity.

Moko – as well as scars – inscribes cultural identity in a visible and tactile manner, “[i]t inscribes your soul, it uplifts your senses, and it changes you forever. It is the ultimate engagement of oneself with one’s body, because it cannot be removed” (Te Awekotuku 2006: 135). “[A]s an extension of the body and the senses” (Te Awekotuku 2006: 136), it involves sensory experience and functions as an expression of cultural identity and memory not just as a textual inscription upon skin or paper, but “[a]s a narrative art form, as an engagement of all five senses, moko remains a compelling visceral, visible, textual, and textured reality for Maori in this millennium” (137). As a visible and tangible assertion of identity, moko comprises a concurrence of past, present and future and in turn a multitude of cultural implications and codes: “Moko is about the future, just as it is about the past; it is a graphic accounting of memory and desire; it is an engraving, on the Māori body, of history and commitment, of loyalty and relationships” (Te Awekotuku et al. 2007: 8). The patterns encompass notions of history and belonging, of genealogical links, of community and of the cosmology and shared values that ties people together. The skin is made to “bear witness” (Connor 2004: 74) and the swirling patterns and “fantastic arabesques which are characteristic of many tattooing and skin-marking practices […] make the body into a temporal topology, folding time into the skin, unfurling the skin into time, tempting and drawing the eye to follow the complexity of their lines” (78). And not just the eye, one should add. Simultaneously, the design carved in the skin speaks of the self and individual identity;
it also expresses a concept of aesthetics and beauty while moko as a form of showing face and courage defies the repressive mechanisms of colonialism.\textsuperscript{112}

The Pacific patterns convey that the individual is a member of a particular family, tribe, or community, and may depict everything from a person’s birthplace to authority inherited and achieved. In many cases, distinct patterns are reserved for men and for women, and thus coincide with (though they do not determine or restrict the form taken by) the bearer’s mature practice of gender and sexuality. The patterns are fitted to the contours of the body and, famously in the case of Māori moko, similarly follow the shape of the face or, in Marquesas Islands tiki, cut across the shape of the face. With such bold presentation, the designs are inseparable from conceptions of beauty and adornment. But tattoo involves more than an aesthetic. The practice also conveys an ethic – of responsibility to one’s family and community – and is thus related to conceptions of the sacred and the profane and, even more broadly, to ways of recognizing the place of human beings in the cosmos. (Ellis 2008: 11-2)

Jordan’s moko in \textit{Hummingbird} reflects his genealogical connections as well as his individuality, both of which are entangled with the ocean. As a form of biographical writing, it records whakapapa relations and the place he takes his roots from. This aspect is also emphasised by the facial tattoos of Tamehana, the artist who marks Jordan’s skin: “The ink in his moko so ingrained in his skin it looked as if it had preceded him and he had just stepped into it. In every change of light he looked a different age, like he wasn’t a single man but a gallery. A history. I reached back a zillion years to recite my whakapapa” (Hum 302). Moko can thus be viewed as a language of identity and its relation to writing is even enclosed in its semantic implications. In this respect, Robert Sullivan points to “the polysemy of the moko concept – that it deals with print culture of the skin and the page” (Sullivan 2005: 12) as

\textsuperscript{112} Despite attempts by the colonising power or by missionary endeavours to restrict and banish tattooing practices, moko and tattoos on other parts of the body have survived and are celebrated today as unique art forms of cultural identity and empowerment. In stark contrast to Alan Duff’s novel \textit{Once Were Warriors} and Lee Tamahori’s film adaptation of it which depicts Maori tattooing “as confined to the past except for inauthentic gang copies” (Ellis 2008: 21), Jordan in \textit{Hummingbird} receives his moko as a form of spiritual and physical renewal after years of gang violence, crime and prison. The inauthentic “tats” (Duff 1995: 73) and “replica of olden-day moko” (181) punctured in the skin by electric needles are countered by the close relationship between the tattoo artist and Jordan and the time they spend together to find the perfect design for Jordan’s face, a design that not only represents a continued link to his ancestors and origins, but also reflects his personality and soul: “Tamehana prompted me with questions – nothing that required a yes or no answer, just little openings for me to tell some moment of my life. As if he was using them to map out a diagram for some structure he was building” (Hum 303). Jordan’s moko thus mirrors the waves of the ocean, the colours and tides of the sea, for he is a surfer and “sea child” (Hum 304), and it also proves that Maori tattooing is a living tradition, a mode of communication and belonging. The authors of \textit{Mau Moko} therefore conclude that tattoo is far from being a relict of ancient times; “Te hunga ora, the living moko community” (Te Awekotuku et al. 2007: 147) recognises tattooing as an element central to Maori life and culture, and tattooing as well as uhi (chisel) work have seen a revival in recent years (Nikora, Rua and Te Awekotuku 2005: 203, see also Thomas 2005: 8). The extensive research project carried out by Ngahuia Te Awekotuku and others shows that “[o]ur traditions did not die, nor did they disappear. Mataora – the living face continues with vigour, force and pride” (Nikora, Rua and Te Awekotuku 2005: 197): “For us, it is more than skin deep; neither pumped in, nor painted on, it is a resonance through the blood that rises to the surface, it stains the needle and blends with the ink, it marks the chisel; it moves with heart rhythm and breath. For the wahine mau kauae, tāne rangi paruhi, Māori mau moko, it is about life” (Te Awekotuku et al. 2007: 209).
“[t]he ‘ta’ in the Maori ‘ta moko’ means print” (12) among others. And yet, although the patterns of moko clearly work as signs conveying meaning, they also transcend the textual level and move to a level of texture, thus challenging the senses: “Despite these rich meanings, tattoo may not be assimilated into any language, whether pictographic, logographic, or script. Tattoo is an analogue to language and forms a vital means of signification; but it is not reducible to writing, and the patterns exceed any lexicon” (Ellis 2008: 12).

The person who undergoes the process of having his or her face or skin tattooed encounters a range of feelings – most prominently pain. Just as moko transforms the skin, it also involves a transformation of the self through painful sensations when the skin is repeatedly cut; the process of marking the skin confronts the self with the intensity of pain and challenges it to endure and overcome it. In the initiation ritual “from being unmarked to marked” (Nikora, Rua and Te Awekotuku 2005: 197) and hence to maturity, a different body emerges and with it “marked skin, a different self” (Te Awekotuku et al. 2007: 188): ta moko creates “a sense of being carried away to another realm, of journeying to a distance place through the song, through the sensation” (188). The art of cutting lines and spirals into face and skin renders skin into a textual document of identity, but the art of ta moko also “engages all the senses, every single one, on a number of levels, and in a number of ways” (Te Awekotuku 2006: 122): the pain, the rhythmic sound of the chisel, the smell and taste of blood, the healing process and the emergence of a new self. “As one mode of transforming oneself forever” (Te Awekotuku 2006: 122) it challenges both the sensory perceptions of the person inside the second skin of delicate patterns and of the onlooker, the person outside. Moreover, the pattern etched into the face and the scars rising on the skin engage the senses through their texture, most prominently the sense of sight and touch. Ta moko enhances the human body, sensitises and engenders greater sensibility just as much as it maps the skin and writes maps of cultural identity and memory in the flesh in a “quest for self-knowledge and self-creation, for beauty, potency, and pleasure”

113 Juniper Ellis notes that – due to its textual implications that inscribe skin with meaning – tattoo has engendered “continuing speculation about how that language works and what it expresses” (Ellis 2008: 12): “At least as far back as 1769, when Cook and his traveling companions import the Tahitian word tātau into English as ‘tattoo,’ observers attempt to read and the designs, to make the patterns speak” (12). However, tattoo “was not, as most nineteenth-century western observers considered, a form of graphic art but a ritual” (Edmond 1997: 71). “[T]attoo”, Ellis thus observes, “shapes language, identity and property, beauty, ethics, culture, and sexuality and gender” (Ellis 2008: 14).
114 Tattooing represents “a transitional ritual” (Keown 2005: 120) and cultivates the human body “to reconstruct individual identity according to the requirements of the social milieu. Within Polynesian cultures the marks it made on the skin were secondary to the proof it offered of socially salient transactions having taken place” (Edmond 1997: 70-1).
(Shusterman 1997: 177). In *Hummingbird*, Leonie is fascinated with Jordan’s moko and compares the sight of it with “looking down into the ocean” (*Hum* 129). Its visibility is accompanied by its tactility. Kataraina thus makes sense of Jordan’s scars by tracing them with her hands; the story they tell comes to life through the sense of touch:

> She looks along the lines of his scars, navigating them. One beneath his ribs, like a skeleton of a leaf burned to ash, the other a couple of fingers’ width from his left nipple. She runs the tip of her little finger over it, as if it is a socket into which she can press a plug. Some electrical connection that will flicker him into life. Or as if someone has tried to pull out his heart from the inside. (*Hum* 135)

As an art form, tamoko and its patterns are embedded in the wider context of Maori art and cosmology. Eva Rask Knudsen points out that the inward and outward movement of the circular koru (spiral) pattern presents a distinct and prominent element of Maori art forms such as weaving, carving and tattooing (Knudsen 2004: 23-4). The patterns tattooed in Jordan’s skin thus extend beyond the face; they reflect the patterns of Maori cosmology and – as “[m]oko and ta moko […] are essentially about engaging, and exciting, all the senses” (Te Awkotuku 2006: 137) – therefore a way of feeling oneself through the world. Indeed, Kingi’s face is not tattooed; his moko is inscribed into the sky, recording the psychological scars of war as well as mirroring the bodily scars caused by guns through this specific Maori form of remembering:

> But all we could see were vapour trails, hundreds of them, circling, radiating like some vast network of arteries. […] I took off my RAF cap, stood looking up at the trails. The signatures of the moment, the autograph that would speak forever of the summer and autumn of 1940, signed on the parchment of the sky. I sat, then lay in the grass, my arms out from my sides, just another cross in the grass, in a field where others would be raised or fall. Staring up the tattooed sky. And I knew then that that was my moko, the Battle of Britain moko. (*Hum* 119)

James George transfers moko from the face beyond the human body and transforms the design into a unique form of mapping the cosmos and reinvigorating the

115 Maori artist Darcy Nicholas underlines the close connections between the different modes of creative expression in Maori culture: “We record our history and culture through carving, weaving, facial and body tattooing, traditional ritual, song and dance, the movements and the words repeated over and over again as rhythmic incantations until they form part of our soul. In this way, each hill, mountain and river and every other single feature of the land has its own story and is included in the oral history of our people” (Nicholas in Reading and Wyatt 2006: 12). Motifs or patterns like the koru (spiral, fern frond) or matau (fish hook) that provide a fundamental part of whakairo, the ornamentation closely associated with carving, also form essential facets in the art of ta moko and the research of the authors of *Mau Moko* shows that a lot of tattooing artists found their way to ta moko through the art of whakairo: “[W]hakairo was the most significant for the tā moko beginner. For a select few already highly competent in carving wood, tā moko extended their skills and provided a new creative challenge. As a discipline, whakairo provided the basic building blocks needed to understand the human form, the history and whakapapa of specific designs and the placement of these designs on particular areas of the body or head” (Te Awekotuku et al. 2007: 118).
wounded and scarred individuals. The contrast to the conventional map becomes all the more apparent by the juxtaposition of the oppressive geographies of prison. Jordan distinguishes the prison cartography of signs, gestures and details, years of recording, reading the world inside the prison walls and looking for orientation and a safe passage in a potentially hostile territory from the creation of specific cultural patterns and the reciprocal permeations of aroha he finds at Ninety Mile Beach:

In prison you learn to value the tiniest things. A single tea bag or cigarette, a smile from someone who will only be your friend until the smile fades. You watch for the smallest details, like a map reader. Sense the shape of things in the most infinitesimal of snapshots, the axis of survival turning on the ability to discern the elements of a shifting landscape. A knife poised over a piece of pumpkin on a plate, or destined for your lungs. A shadow at the edge of the latrine doorway: is it a trick of the light or a fight to the death? But not here. None of that stuff belongs here, within the touch of stream water. Within reach of her music. (Hum 289)

The moko design comes to embody the individual self as a “personal text, a form of marker or signifier” (Te Awekotuku 2006: 128) and reconnects the individual to “the traditional repertoire of design forms” (128) and the wider context of Maori culture and cosmology. Just as every single word is written on a page, the text of *Hummingbird* establishes a frequent system of patterns as well as a constant emphasis or focus on them.116 Moko is reconfigured as a cultural code and a mode of inscription that – etched into the landscape – leads to the reclamation of place from the colonial construct of terra incognita or terra nullius to a remapping according to a Maori perspective.117 By tattooing landscape, *Hummingbird* reworks moko as a medium of cultural identity and memory and gives landscape a new ‘face’ and the human body a place on it.118

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116 Hanne Birk’s reading of the James George’s *Hummingbird* merely focuses on the textual qualities of moko as a kind of language or code representing cultural memory, or, as she terms it, as “leitmotivisches Signum der Erinnerungsdarstellung” (Birk 2008: 204): “Darüber hinaus können mokos und deren kulturelle Bedeutung […] auch dadurch zur Darstellung gebracht werden, dass deren Beschaffenheit und Erinnerungssemantisierung im Sinne eines Leitmotivs in ein, die gesamte Romanhandlung strukturierendes, Netzwerk von Schriftzeichen und Inscriptionsmetaphern eingebettet werden und dieses zugleich dominieren” (203-4).


118 As suggested by its semantic richness, tattoo – and ta moko – includes a high level of flexibility and has been used in a variety of contexts. Intricately interwoven with the histories of colonialism and imperialist oppression, but also with issues of modernity and global exchange, in short, with “cross-cultural interactions” (Thomas 2005: 10) in and outside the Pacific, tattoo has been asserted “[a]s an art that continues to travel throughout the Pacific” (Ellis 2008: 25) and connects the indigenous peoples of the Pacific Islands as “one of the longest-standing and most dramatic forms of such culture transfer” (25): “Tattoo no longer conveys just the way things are, but also the way things were and the way things might be. The prophetic or visionary aspect of the art comes to the fore. Tattoo proclaims loyalty to lines of descent and affiliation that contest the new colonial boundaries drawn across the sea. Tattoo becomes a sign of protest, a banner of a sovereign people of the land” (25). See also Wendt 1996 and Sullivan 2005.
Not only are the patterns or specific forms ‘written in’ the skin or the landscape the characters inhabit brought to the reader’s attention as particular textual signs, they are coupled with the sensual perceptiveness of the characters as well, that is, they are constructed by sensory experiences and highlighted by the physical perceptions of the protagonists of the novel. The extent to which a tattoo may exceed its linguistic ramifications is further highlighted by the detail that tattoo not only involves a kind of surface marking of the skin. Rather, the colour is mingled with the skin and is hence not merely a text or decipherable code, but viewed as a skin upon skin. *Hummingbird* thus depicts the tattoo on Jordan’s skin as “his second skin of scars and stitches” (*Hum* 83), and Juniper Ellis gives a striking example of this sensuous dimension of tattoo:

Tattoo’s embodiment of culture is tested in a particularly vivid manner in the Marquesan practice of repeating the tattoo until pattern is obliterated. The resulting field of dark pigment, where the entire body is blackened, takes tattoo’s signification to an extreme. The patterns are tattooed into the flesh in layers so that they can no longer be distinguished; the body is wrapped not in images, not in text, but in a solid second skin. (Ellis 2008: 26-7)

As a result, cultural identity and memory are coupled with sensuousness, so that James George’s novel illustrates what David Howes has called “the knowledge of the world one acquires through one’s skin” (Howes 2005c: 27) – and, of course, other sensory organs. *Hummingbird* unites “perceptions with moral and cosmological values” (Howes 2005c: 28), moving back and forth between text and texture. When Kataraina returns to the Ninety Mile Beach after many years, she “walks across the wet sand to the turf where she clasps a fold of her dress between thumb and forefinger and steps into the shallows, taking the wave tips against her bare thighs. She raises her face to the wind, catching its touch on her cheekbones, and shutters her gaze, clothing the world with a slip of her eyelids. How long has it been. How long has it been” (*Hum* 5). The pattern of “her footprints” (*Hum* 5) on “the ribs of sand” (5) is thus inseparable from Kataraina’s bodily feelings – walking over the sand with her bare feet, seeing her traces in the sand, scuffing barefoot at a footprint, feeling wind and water on her skin – and comes into existence through her physical sensations as she “steps back into her own imprint, heel to toe. Rocking back and forward, engraving her mark” (5). The sense of memory

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119 “Skin is the boundary between the self and others, between the individual and their society. It shields the self from the world and holds in the contents of the body, mediating that traffic between inner and outer worlds which constitutes the individual’s sense of selfhood. It expresses the self’s inner state and registers the way in which external reality impinges on the self. In Polynesian societies the skin’s functions of protection and mediation were traditionally reinforced by the almost universal practice of tattooing which added an extra layer, as it were, to its defensive integument, wrapping, sealing and defending the body against spirits and enemies” (Edmond 1997: 205).
hinted at through her attempt to make one of her footprints more permanent is strengthened when Kataraina discovers “a faint tapestry of footprints beneath her own” (Hum 6) and later touches a “scratched and pitted table” (6) in one of the cabins. The sensation of the touch of wood, “her fingertips running across its face” (Hum 6) brings about a fleeting moment of reminiscence of her family, a whanau that has eventually disintegrated: “There’s a faint hint of voices, snatches of movement at the edge of her eyes. Glasses chink, a mother’s grin, a father’s cigarette-stained laugh. A brother’s silent face. She steadies herself, closes her eyes and nods” (6). The insightful and epistemological dimension of the fictional network of patterns engendered by physical perceptiveness reveals itself even more memorably in one of the passages of Kataraina writing in her diary. The action of writing is paralleled by a strong focus on Kataraina’s sensory experiences; the immediacy of physicality hence sheds a different light on the textual existence of the sign, the pattern: as much as the sensual perceptions trigger off a process of inscription, of creating patterns through imprints, they moreover fuel a level of cutaneous understanding, a physical process of constructing meaning and knowledge in reference to cultural memory and identity. If the footprints and other patterns written in surfaces can be read as signs encoding specific traces of cultural identity, then the constructive quality of the senses stimulates an impromptu understanding of these traces that goes beyond a rational interpretation and assigning of meaning; rather, the cultural legacy, the precise cultural perspective makes itself ‘felt’:

This morning, when it was still dark, I walked up the beach for half a mile or so. Then I sat in the sand, waiting for the light to come up behind me, looking back along the sand at my footprints. When the first light came I walked down to the shallows and scooped up a couple of handfuls of sea water, then carried them up the sand and tipped them into my footprints. Leaving a speckled pattern, like words on a page. I knelt, taking the wet sand onto my fingertip. Sometimes I dream: I’m sitting cross-legged in front of you, holding one of your hands like it’s treasure. Looking into your face, moving through the lines of it, the creases. Like the lines tattooed into your own Nana’s skin. But not ink, just years. I reach out, run a finger down across them. You don’t say a word. You just let me touch, feel, on and on. […] You just sit there, letting my fingers find every inch of you. Every second of your life, carved into your skin, your pale grey hair. Painted into your grey eyes. (Hum 29)

_Hummingbird_’s narrative structure – similar to the overall structure of _The Uncle’s Story_ that shifts between Michael’s story in the present and Sam’s story in the past – follows a rhythmic pattern that appears to be modelled on the double spiral, the frequent pattern of Maori culture that also marks a prominent motif in Maori tattooing. The dark ink swirls written in the flesh ambiguously let the unmarked parts of the skin emerge and recede from the tattooed parts. Moko plays with the ambiguity that the skin has been incised and ink inserted _under_ its surface while the tattoo seems to be
displayed on the surface of the skin. At the same time, its patterns frame the skin and create the impression that some parts of untattooed skin appear to emerge between the swirls of ink whereas the pattern of scars literally stands out from the skin’s surface. Alternating between flashback passages focussing on Kataraina’s, Jordan’s, Kingi’s and Leonie’s respective pasts and the present reality of the book at Ninety Mile Beach in September 1990, the “quilted” (O’Brien 2004: 12) narrative composition largely resembles the complex and different strands of a moko pattern and the two entwined strands of the double spiral. The present is thus repeatedly interrupted by snatches and sprinkles of memories that are, not unlike the element of time and past slipped under the skin by tattoo, cut into the fictional present. James George develops a striking double of both graphic patterns and their ‘physical’ implications. While the text never loses sight of the textuality of the patterns, George also creates an affective multitude of sensuous miniature patterns that work as a mode of communication and connection between the characters and often mark the transition between flashback and present reality. Kingi’s touching a pattern of oil stains in the sand, for example, is juxtaposed to the image of “the sky […] black with parachutes” (Hum 21) and gliders “spilling men like eggs” (21); the war memory then gives way to a flashback centred on the marks of prostitution ‘staining’ Kataraina’s body and soul. The sensuous ramifications of indentations, imprints, textures, feelings, sand, water, and so on permeate *Hummingbird* form an intricate series of patterns that is transferred from skin to skin. From Jordan’s facial moko to the lines of water on Alissandra’s body, from Kingi’s moko in the sky to the vines painted on his aeroplane by Leonie, from the traces in the sand to the patterns of sound in the air, and from the fingerprints on the cabin window to the drop of milk on Kataraina’s lip that Leonie rubs into the lines of her hand, moko is transformed into a communicative design that maps the characters’ worlds and creates communal and reciprocal relations. If the spiral composition of the novel reflects the incisions and marks on the characters’ bodies and souls – the scars caused by the trauma of war, loss and cultural alienation – then it also mirrors the ever-tightening relationships of their small community and the healing process coupled with writing in the flesh. Just as “[t]he marked skin means memory, means never being able or willing to forget” (Connor 2004: 86), and thus offers a connection to the past, it also offers “a promise of reversibility” (90) and regeneration, therefore pointing towards the future:

If time writes the skin, then the skin can also be thought of as writing time. Assailed by marks, the skin possesses the capacity to regenerate itself, to grow out of, as well as into disfigurement. The skin marks time partly by effacement: by the healing of lesions, and the reassertion of the
surface against every assault. The skin’s way of writing time is indeed to write it out. The skin is a soft clock, which we wind up whenever we mark it; for when we mark the skin, and await its healing, we can make time run backwards. (90)

In addition to the skin’s capacity to heal itself, the patterns in the novel take on a healing function and mark a process of cultural regeneration and reinvigoration. The final chapter “Hummingbird” spirals back to the beginning of the fiction and to the promises made. Kingi flies off and back to Crete in his ‘tattooed’ aeroplane and Jordan’s death causes “the circle [...] to join up” (Hum 339), preventing Kataraina’s reunited family from falling apart so that whakapapa continues: “Leonie glances up the slope to where Kataraina sits writing, smiles, seeing for the first time perhaps the echo of her in Moana’s face” (338). Kataraina appears to find the home she’s been looking for all those years since she left home in her new responsibilities as a mother and grandmother to Leonie and Moana, taking on the role of her grandmother and spinning the pattern forward.

Just as Jordan’s skin is mapped by the circles of moko and mirrors the landscape of the beach and especially the waves of the ocean, for “[t]he etchings in his skin radiate in the sun, as if a stone has been dropped into the pool of his face” (Hum 36), the novel conceives of geographical space as a body engraved with lines and figures, a spatial body whose skin is explored in its textural qualities and thus opposes the measurements of linear distances and two-dimensional abstraction that characterise western mapping, or, as David Howes puts it, “[j]ust as the landscape may resemble a body, the body may seem like a landscape, with its own hills and valleys and rivers” (Howes 2005c: 33). Hummingbird focuses on the human body as central to cultural expression and to the negotiation of identity, memory and place. Similar to the sensuous trajectory of ta moko in respect to identity and cultural remembering, the novel seeks to create landscape as a sensuous construct filled with patterns reminiscent of ta moko. The map Hummingbird imagines thus involves what Steven Feld has called “a multisensory conceptualisation of place” (Feld 2005: 182) that – in contrast to the visualism embedded in the Western concept of the map – draws attention to the multi-sensuous detail of Ninety Mile

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120 A striking example of the predominance of visualism in Western culture can be seen in European landscape painting and its subgenre of “world landscapes (Weltlandschaften)” (Gibson 1989: xx), a genre that surfaced in the 16th century and enjoyed increasing popularity during the 17th century. The “vast panoramas” (Gibson 1989: xx) of ‘world landscapes’ appear to mirror the earth and “dazzle the spectator with a rich profusion of natural scenery” (xx); they present the onlooker with an all-encompassing, omniscient overview of a seemingly endless landscape; the world appears to stretch out in front of one’s eyes: “Although details are rendered with meticulous realism, the view is not native topography but a substantial segment of the earth itself. The sense of vastness is enhanced by the unnaturally elevated horizons of these landscapes and the clarity with which even remote regions are often shown” (xx). This
Beach and the alternative patterns that add to the map’s sensuous, cultural and mnemonic densification. Indeed, the landscape in *Hummingbird* retains cutaneous characteristics. Just as human skin presents itself as a liminal space, holding together the various parts of the body – muscles, bones, organs – and at once oddly vulnerable to various forms of penetration and capable of moving beyond itself, touching and forming scar tissue for instance, the surfaces of the landscape appear to impinge on the characters in the novel. Place and protagonists themselves are thus subject to multiple permeations, indentations and incisions. Simultaneously, the ‘skin(s)’ of the landscape solicit(s) cutaneous contact, touching, penetrating, connecting and interrelating the human bodies. The skins of George’s fictional rendering of Ninety Mile Beach melt into one another; there are no clear-cut demarcations that separate ocean from land or sky. Indeed, sea, sand, sky, wind, sun and so on are situated in a state of constant touch and blurred contours similar to the fact that the human skin is “the medium of passage and exchange, with the attendant possibility of violent reversal or rupture” (Connor 2004: 65). Similar to the encircling and connecting nature of the skin and the flesh because “[t]he other sense organs exist as particular kinds of convolutions or complications in the skin, the labyrinthine turning inward to produce certain kinds of sensitivity – the scooping out of the mouth, the whirling of the ear, the knotting of the sphincter” (Connor 2004: 34), the ramifications of sensuality and sensitivity foster a variety of interrelations and exchanges. “Like running sandpaper across wood” (*Hum* 225), the waves of the ocean eat away at the sand, either taking it with them or washing it ashore and Kingi “heads […] toward the dark of the sea, feeling the land let go” (219); the sea catapults its “salt spray” (221) into the sky and the air which in turn carries the scent of the salt water across the beach; the sand travels across the land “as if the sand is attempting to cross to the other sea” (153). In the same way that the natural elements mingle and release touch upon each other they crucially penetrate, affect and connect the characters of the novel. For Kataraina, “[t]he sensation [of sunlight] sets a tiny candle of a smile alight” (*Hum* 11) and under the shower “[h]er body [becomes] an aqueduct, an arch of water” (12). Similar to the way Jordan looses himself in the touch of water, Kataraina lets “the ocean find me, all of me” (*Hum* 29). The natural phenomena therefore proliferate, interrelate, connect and imprint the skin and the body as Jordan’s surfing experience shows: “The wind whips against his face, the waves scuffling into fountains of spray, veiling anything more than a few inches from where his painting subgenre may thus be viewed as an indicator of the increasing imperialist and colonialist endeavours of European nations at the time.
toes front the board” (Hum 65). The ‘touch’ of the landscape joins the characters and is turned into an affective bond that materialises a sense of family and interrelatedness. One such example can be detected in the water imagery that is not only comprises Jordan’s face, but constantly resurfaces as a mode of physical connection: “A soft rain” (Hum 87) leaves its mark on Jordan and Kataraina’s faces and manifests their growing love when Jordan rubs one of Kataraina’s tears from her skin “into his palm, taking this tiny piece of her into the lifelines in his skin” (88). Leonie hums a “rainsong” (Hum 97) “into the falling water” (97) that reconnects her to her mother Kataraina, and Kingi and Jordan deepen their friendship in a “fine mist of rain” (285) whose “moisture [Jordan squeezes] through the gaps between his fingers” (285). Sensuous detail thus crystallises affection and a reaffirmed feeling of belonging and community, “a fire […] to thaw something inside” (Hum 155) themselves:

A hummed melody, her arms circling Moana. Jordan searches for the chords within the pages of his fretboard, sifting major from minor. His fingers slip from change to change like water on a garden terrace. He rings her voice with his hands, the music echoing against Leonie’s face. She moves from humming to singing. […] Leonie begins to step around the table, Moana’s hand in hers, the child a rustle of rhythm on the tabletop. Kingi beckons Kataraina with an exaggerated stretch of his hand towards her. She nods, does a rather rustic curtsey, takes his hand and they move together, over the dew-wetted grass. (294)

The affinities between the body of the place and an actual human body are emphasised and alluded to in a number of passages; especially references to a body’s physis, to skin and bones deride the somatic characteristics of the landscape. Yet the body of the landscape is far from paradisiacal. Rather, the place bears the historical traces of the transformation and change undergone through time and years of colonisation. In this respect, it reflects the characters’ woundedness, the psychological – and physical – pain they have suffered.121 Kataraina, for instance, reflects on her long

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121 It may be argued that James George’s novel continues prominent themes that characterise many fictional works by Maori writers and shows “just how adhesive and persistent traditional elements can still be” (Evans 2007: 186): “The effect of this kind of detachment is of writing almost entirely constructed by the received conventions it is worked in. We can see this in James George’s novels Wooden Horses (2000) and Hummingbird (2003): strongly romantic, lyrical works in which ‘Māoriness’ is denoted by characters’ names, their status as victims of a destructive urban culture, their ‘natural’ recourse to rural and beach settings as an antidote to that culture, the theme of recuperation and, in the first novel, the suggestion of some essential, untamed primal quality denoted in the horses of the title. ‘Māoriness’ here is something lightly applied like make-up – a series of inflections that stand in for the hard work of establishing a fully imagined world; too easily, by gesturing at meanings and values by now an unquestioned part of our dominant culture, these gestures claim seriousness of purposes and significance of theme on the basis of an aestheticised, performed indigeneity” (187). Hummingbird certainly builds upon a contrast of the devastating effects of urban landscapes and the recuperative potential of the countryside and the beach; moreover, the narrative clearly joins the line of other works that imagine a process of recuperation from the traumatic consequences of colonialism to cultural empowerment and reaffirmation of Maori values and concepts. Yet, to argue that Maoritanga reveals
absence and her words “‘[t]here’s not much of you left, is there’” (*Hum* 6) may apply to herself as much as they mirror the situation of her surroundings: “There is an old jetty a couple of hundred yards to the north, a ragged troop of posts, half of them crumbling into the waves. [...] To the east beyond the dunes a steep hill rises, its southern face half-missing now, broken off. Through a gap in the next spine of sandhills there is a hint of green – cut grass, not wild” (6). The idea that the landscape contains a ‘face’ is emphasised repeatedly, and it is worth noting that James George transcends common meanings such as ‘surface’ or ‘front side’ by linking the features of the place to a design of patterns chiselled into its skin, thus echoing the art of ta moko of traditional Maori culture. Kataraina “descends the face of the dune” (*Hum* 7) and “sits on the sand, her back against a pale log, its skin bleached to bone” (137). Another time she looks “over the encircling trees to the hill, its broken face bronzed by the setting sun” (*Hum* 12), a ‘face’ “on the now-naked landscape beyond the hill where once forests had grown” (66). Sand dunes are conceived as “sleeping figures” (*Hum* 18), Jordan surfs the ocean’s body and in the end his surfboard “slip[s] from wave to trough, become[s] part of the skin of the sea” (335). Pilot Kingi contemplates his past “searching for the colours of other seas in the face of the water” (*Hum* 153) and steers his aeroplane across the celestial membrane. The whole ‘body place’ encompasses sand, ocean and sky, therefore providing the ‘flesh’ of a body that is ‘written in’. In this respect, the body of the place may not only be stylised as a material surface for genuine inscription, but, by its close affinities to somatic features and details, also be linked to mythological concepts as it becomes clear in allusions such as “the hill of our ancestors watching over us” (*Hum* 23). Although the novel never explicitly identifies the elements of the landscape with their mythological embodiments, most prominently Ranginui and Papatuanuku, sky father and earth mother, the fictional conceptualisation of them in terms of body and skin certainly allows for a reading of the novel according to these
aspects of Maori mythology and cosmology. Indeed, the guitar Kataraina discovers in Jordan’s boat already prefigures the connection of the human body and the body of the land personified by Papatuanuku: “She walks down the stairs, pauses a moment, then opens the blankets to reveal not a sleeper but the body of a guitar. Its body is carved with intricate patterns. The neck is inlaid with jewelled lettering, mother of pearl, spelling out the word ‘Papatuanuku’ from the twelfth fret to the second” (Hum 14-5). The physical allusions thus point to the transformative energies of Maori culture. Just as the children of Rangi and Papa were conceived “in a world of darkness that inhibited growth, progress and an increase in knowledge” (Walker 1992: 171) due to the union of sky and earth and their separation by Tane-Mahuta, a cheeky and cruel act, marked the arrival of light and growth in the world, so is moko transformed into an all-encompassing design and rite de passage to cultural regeneration, communication and community. Through inscribing the place’s skin with a variety of spirals and circles, George creates a striking cartographic connection, giving New Zealand landscape and the cosmological embodiment Rangi and Papa a new postcolonial ‘face’ while releasing the communicative implications of contact, touch, empathy, and reconnection.

Now, to offer a coherent impression of the ramifications of the sensual images through the narrative would probably necessitate quoting from almost every single paragraph as George heavily relies on a repetitive composition reminiscent of oral traditions and story-telling. It makes sense to create a short lexicon subdivided into the main sensual categories the novel explores and their relation to the pattern evoked by traces, lines, circles, and spirals imprinted upon landscape and skin. Although touch and vision seem to occupy a lot of space in Hummingbird, it would perhaps be preposterous to categorise George’s use of sensory images into a hierarchy. Even if descriptions of taste or smell may frequent the text to a lesser extent, they nevertheless involve a dense pattern meandering through the book. The fact that I categorise the sensual imagery of Hummingbird according to touch, vision, sound, smell and taste is not meant to suggest that James George’s novel proposes a type of hierarchisation of sensory perception. It is

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122 Cleve Barlow clarifies the Maori concept of wairua (spirit) which also encompasses geographical entities: “The Māori believe that all things have a spirit as well as a physical body; even the earth has a spirit, and so do the animals, birds, and fish; mankind also has a spirit” (Barlow 1991: 152). This is further emphasised by the incorporation of embodiments of earth and sky to whakapapa lines: “Since everything in the world was alive, and all living things were related, there was no distinction of the kind found in Western thought between nature and culture. The natural world and human society were inseparable from the beginning because the sky, Rangi, is the first male and the earth, Papa, the first female” (Orbell 1995: 11).
rather the case that the sensuous images and characteristic patterns are composed by various bodily impressions that coincide simultaneously:

The air is warm against her bare skin, a light dusting of rain. A paper-thin film of water graces the deck and she revels in its touch against the soles of her feet. She raises a foot, lets it draw back, her toes carving a fleeting circle in the water. She thinks of the morning she arrived here, shedding her sandals above the water’s edge. A few paces, to the boat’s stern, taking the faint rainfall in her pores. She turns to face it, closes her eyes, seeking it only with her tongue. And in its succour she begins to move her hands, her fingers casting raintrails on the spruce boards beneath her soles. Her feet begin to move in concert, and she allows the rarity of a smile; a real smile, an inner smile. Straight lines – how she hates straight lines. (Hum 287-8)

In contrast to the ocularcentrism of western mapping and the predominance of the visual in western culture – objects such as telescopes, binoculars or octants or expressions such as ‘world view’, ‘perspective’ or ‘point of view’ indicate the prevalent position of sight – *Hummingbird* gives sensory perceptions other than the visual scope. As Kataraina’s tactile exploration of the scars on Jordan’s skin shows, vision is not the only sense tackled by the tattooing of skin and the tattooing of place. Patterns are also mapped by way of texture and their involvement of touch. Through its focus on the tactility of circles, lines and spirals etched into skin and place, the novel illuminates the significance of touch to Maori cosmology and undermines the sense of distance established by the visual frame of the map by asserting touch as an essential motif in the construction of patterns and place and reaching beyond a notion of the world as ‘seen’ through its “multisensory conceptualization of place” (Feld 2005: 182). Transcending the visual, the narrative offers a vocabulary of touch revolving around words such as *hand, finger, feet, skin, touch* or *feel* among others. Just as “[o]ur environments, whether natural or built, tattoo our skin with tactile impressions” (Howes 2005c: 28), *Hummingbird* uses sensual imagery of feeling to establish skin and place as patterned according to the design of moko. The sensory medium of touch thus reveals patterns and traces imprinted upon a multitude of surfaces. James George repeatedly explores the image of indentations created by touch. At the beginning of the novel, Kataraina leaves a trail of footprints in the sand, “then steps back into her own imprint, heel to toe. Rocking back and forward, engraving her mark” (Hum 5). In a similar manner, Kingi stands on the beach, “rocks forward and sinks his toes into the sand, braces his bare feet against the withdrawal of the waves” (Hum 12). The patterns of footprints are further emphasised as pathways connecting the characters; the imprints, therefore, create a communicative texture that is made even more permanent by repeated touch. Kataraina feels “a faint tapestry of footprints beneath her own” (Hum 6), Jordan steps “into their
footprints in the sandy soil” (325), and Leonie and Moana feel their way through 
Kataraina’s footprints left behind in the sand: “Leonie rises and takes Moana’s hand, 
and they walk down across the scattering of shells, finding the trail of Kataraina’s 
footprints. […] Moana puts a foot in one, has to stretch to the next and almost falls. 
Leonie takes her hand again and they bookend the prints, following the record of 
Kataraina’s passage” (128).

The importance of the tangible texture of the patterns is further pointed to by 
“that fingers-to-the-world sense” (Hum 75), literally speaking. The overall design that 
extends from Jordan’s facial tattoo to a multitude of surfaces is held together by the 
sensation of touch and rendered graspable through the image of hands and fingers. Just 
as fingerprints are defined by distinctive and individual patterns, Hummingbird creates a 
unique Maori design along the lines of touch. Kataraina thus “stretches her fingers 
across the glass, bisecting the spread of the ghost hand. The fingerprint maker’s shadow 
is more recent than she had first thought” (Hum 10). The image is taken up again later in 
the narrative when Kataraina leaves “her liquid imprint” (Hum 140) on the glass after 
she has imprinted her face with water, echoing the waves of Jordan’s moko: “Kataraina 
runs the tap over her hands, […] catches droplets with one hand, then raises it so the 
water slips into the other. Her hands are like a loom weaving thread into fabric. 
Kataraina tilts her head back and lifts her wet hands to her cheeks. Her eyes close. Her 
face is tattooed now, like Jordan’s. Not with ink, but with water” (140). Spiralling to the 
past, George’s novel extends this image of tattooing skin by way of touch when 
Alissandra and Kingi print each other’s skin with grape juice: “She laughs, bends and 
dips her hand in the juice then touches it against the tip of his nose, running her wetted 
finger in a circle up over his forehead and across his cheekbones. […] He slips down 
her length again, this time cupping his hands in the liquid of the vat, then he runs them – 
soaked now – up over her contours” (Hum 198). In a complementary fashion, the skin 
of the place is tattooed by the touch of the characters. Leonie imprints the beach 
“sprinkling water, making tiny furrows in the face of the sand” (Hum 274), while 
Kataraina carves “a fleeting circle in the water” (287) with her toes. Kingi, in turn, 
traces “a few drops of oil-stained water blooming among the shells. He crouches, runs 
his fingers over their indentations in the sand” (Hum 20). Hence, Hummingbird 
illustrates that cultural knowledge and identity can be established by sensory 
perceptions. The sensations felt on the skin reflect the patterns of Maori cosmology in 
the same way as the ability to and the sense of touch construct those culturally specific
patterns: “Jordan opens his eyes to daylight and slips on his wetsuit. He blinks his way into the first of the waves, reading the undertow like a blind man following signposts etched in Braille. A touch of the sea floor against his palms. A handful of sand then a kick away” (Hum 70).

Moreover, moko renders cultural connections and identity visible; it changes a person’s ‘look’ and appearance and moves cultural connections into the spotlight. James George thus captures the visibility of the patterns by exploring the nexus between visual perception and the design of imprints carved into skin and landscape. Some words that repeatedly emerge in this context – and I’m sure any reader of the novel will be able to add to the collection – are look, glance, gaze, see, watch, stare, focus as well as eyes, window, reflection, glass and surface. The visibility of traces left in the sand and other indentations is constantly alluded to through the characters of the novel. Kataraina thus interrupts her walk “to glance back at her footprints” (Hum 5) or sits “in the sand, waiting for the light to come up behind me, looking back along the sand at my footprints” (29). Pilot Kingi “looks down the beach to the trail of footprints leading to the distant shallows” (Hum 308) while another passage significantly draws attention to his visual perception of Kataraina coming down the slope of the hill: “He […] looks between the dunes to where there is a flicker of movement against the hillside. He eases his glasses forward onto his nose and peers over the rims, watches Kataraina inch down the slope. She stops, her outline still enough to be carved on the hill’s skin. Brushstrokes of toetoe frame her. He focuses on her footsteps” (13). Jordan, in turn, looks at the pattern of tree branches painted in the sky and “examines the network of wooden veins above him” (Hum 310), which is mirrored by Leonie who “turns away to look across the ripples of sand to the distant waves” (338). The genealogical tie between Kataraina and Leonie is emphasised by the pattern in the grass when Kataraina “looks into Leonie’s eyes for a moment, then down towards where her feet tap a honeycomb of prints in the dew-wetted grass” (Hum 321), whereas Kataraina and Jordan are bound together by the visible fingerprints on their cabin windows: “She looks back up at the window, discerning a hint of fingerprints on the glass. Two, three. She lays the diary on the bed, rests an elbow on the windowsill and stares into the prints, then through them to the dune beyond, with its thin papering of marram grass” (10). Her focusing “the same faint circles over the pane as in her hut” (Hum 14) is further taken up again when she watches Jordan’s figure against the moonlight; again, the passage clearly highlights the visibility of the textured pattern Hummingbird creates and emphasises through
sensuous impressions: “She pauses at a flicker of movement, her eyes slowly composing Jordan’s imprint against the edge of the moon’s circle. She moves on again, the blanket pulled high around her shoulders, angling herself so the light is behind him, his legs dangling from the jetty over the lighted water as if he could leave his footprints on its surface” (79).

Visual and tactile sensations are further accompanied by impressions of sound, smell and taste in order to establish and transfer a coherent pattern to bodies and landscape. In addition to the visual and tangible characteristics of the footprints, circles and traces marking place and skin, Hummingbird forms a semantic cluster around the senses of hearing, smell and taste reconfiguring sound, voice, chords, scent, taste and so on as both writing and recording the framework of design. Surfer Jordan thus cuts into the ‘flesh’ of the ocean with his board and tattoos it with circles and lines, “drawing in the scent of salt on the wind” (Hum 33) and opening “his lips to taste then slides once more beneath the waves” (33). Jordan sets raked leaves on fire and “the smell of burning” (Hum 64) connotes his tribal relations of Te Aupōuri, the people of the smoke (62). In one of the passages focusing on the past, Kingi traces Alissandra’s “indentation, her scent in the fabric” (Hum 200), a scent he has kept in his memory. “[T]he scent within him” (Hum 219), “the perfume of grapes” (219), finally takes him on an audacious journey, “a genuine, soaring triumph of cheek and imagination” (Thomson 2003: 29) fuelled by the pattern inscribed on the surface of his Tiger Moth. The pattern of the many footprints mapping the beach are further emphasised by sound; the novel repeatedly records “the sound of scuffing feet” (Hum 68), “the sound of Kingi’s footsteps” (62) or “the whisper of her footfalls on grass” (175). Moreover, music figures prominently in the narrative, filling the air with patterns of chords and voices that tie the characters together. Jordan often plays “the same broken circle of melody” (Hum 63) on the guitar that is passed from one character to the next, “filling the empty space between them” (34) with patterns of sound: “They pass the guitar back and forth across the table, each laying a hint of themselves into its wood, the echo of its strings. Kataraina’s playing is rhythmic, a pulse that moves through her shoulders and her tapping foot. Jordan’s playing is single notes or partial chords, three- or four-string arpeggios, nothing held for more than an instant” (69). The sense of pattern that marks the book reveals a crucial connection to cultural memory and identity that was lost and is now being recaptured. Along those lines, Kataraina “taps her knuckles against the boat’s raised hull, hearing in the echo of the wood more snatches of her corner of its history
drifting back to her” (*Hum* 14), and playing the guitar wraps “herself in a quilt of chords, retracing the outlines of passageways she has allowed herself to forget” (15). The sense of loss and cultural estrangement is countered by the patterns of Maori cosmology; sound and taste, for instance, revive those patterns and fuel communication and community. Kataraina begins to “sense the pattern in the voice” (*Hum* 131) of Jordan’s melody, Kingi remains fascinated by the sound of “[t]he faint swirling of the juice” (169) under Alissandra’s feet and Jordan is roused from his solitude by Kataraina’s singing: “A breeze comes from the ocean, carrying a voice. Feminine. A humming. The texture of it is alien to him after these months alone” (40).

4.2 “The circle now complete”\(^{123}\) – Community, Boards, Planes, and the Pathways of Cultural Remembering

Although the ink patterns in Jordan’s face are irreversibly cut into the skin, many traces and indentations in *Hummingbird* are not permanent, but temporary traces written in the surface of the landscape or on the skin of the characters. Imprints on water, sand and sky remain only for a moment and vanish with the next just as “[p]laces are not entirely fixed by the sea: they do move” (Hulme 1987: 3) – and with them the patterns. In contrast to Jordan’s moko and the scars on his body, the moko on the skin of the landscape does not last. Along with the disappearance of the imprints due to tides, rain or wind goes a feeling of loss set off by the impact of colonialism on Maori language and culture. The novel, for instance, mentions that the characters “kind of got out of the habit” (*Hum* 39) of speaking te reo, and this sense of loss and displacement is further illuminated by Jordan when he tries to find a hold in the sand that constantly slips away from him and with it the imprints of his body: “He closes his eyes, feels his body slipping against the dunes, against the pull of gravity. He digs both hands into the sand beneath him, trying to halt his slide. Then he lifts them out again, allows himself to slip further. A lost cause. It’s only sand after all” (*Hum* 154).

By confronting readers with a multitude of sensuous details and appealing to their sensitivity, the novel urges them to develop a sense of connection. However, George also frustrates these efforts and makes us aware that an intuitive, corporeal understanding of cultural contexts may derive from deception because some meanings remain inevitably unreadable, imperceptible and lost. Cultural meaning thus slips away

\(^{123}\) Quotation from *Hummingbird* (*Hum* 278).
and may be forgotten, the signs merely hinting at something that is no longer there.\textsuperscript{124} In addition, it can undoubtedly be argued that James George creates a stark contrast between the unhappy “lousy place[s]” (\textit{Hum 37}) of cityscapes and the wide open spaces of the country and so opens the backdoor to a certain form of binary construction. Particularly the figure of Kataraina confronts the reader with such a position: “She had wondered if the first explorers had stood in their canoes and marvelled at that same sight. […] When the ocean and the pasture gave way to cityscape she leaned back and closed her eyes. She wasn’t interested in the shadows of buildings” (\textit{Hum 37-8}). Similar to the marks of exploitation etched into the skin of Ninety Mile Beach, the effects of urbanisation – gang violence, criminality and prostitution – mark Jordan and Kataraina. Kingi, in turn, spent most of his life away from home and Leonie was given up for adoption and raised by a Pakeha family. The novel thus jumps from Ninety Mile Beach to Sydney, from Cambridge to Crete, from prison to the moon, from the Horse’s Head Nebula back to the beach and beyond. Even New Zealand seems to move in this turning cosmos of ever greater distances, for Jordan “once read that New Zealand is slowly drifting north and in around thirty million years we’ll be crossing the equator” (\textit{Hum 54}). Severed from meaningful connections and family, the characters seek for a place to belong in their complex realities. However, the small community they form in the middle of sand dunes, vast ocean and sky is also a community in transit – Jordan dies, and Kingi, Kataraina, Leonie and Moana move on. Not completely isolated from the influences of modernity, the beach is a place of transformation – elements of Maori cultural heritage are remodelled and reinterpreted in order to form a meaningful picture in the present and for the future. In this vast universe the patterns create contact and skin relations; in addition to their visible assertion of cultural identity they point to the significance of personal relations and reciprocal touch as exemplified by the many sensory images: “\textit{A person needs friends, and family too. People to look after you. And more important – people for you to look after. That’s what everyone needs}” (\textit{Hum 56}).

\textsuperscript{124} The fleeting patterns therefore locate phenomena such as discontinuity, loss and the caesura caused by colonialism and its effects and may be viewed as referential structures, referring to pasts, meanings, traditions and values that are no longer there. Similar to Derrida’s concept of the trace as “the disappearance of origin” (Derrida 1997: 61) and “the mark of the absence of a presence” (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in Derrida 1997: xvii, translator’s preface), moko in \textit{Hummingbird} carries the marks of disruption and temporality and the characters are “unsure of the way forward or the way out” (\textit{Hum 287}). This feeling of discontinuity and distance, however, can be re-coined; the ephemeral traces point to a process of transformation. Moko is no longer tied to the human face, but becomes an overall design that takes one away from home and creates new places of belonging. Principles of Maori culture are thus remodelled and adapted to the changing realities of the present, “orbiting […] from place to place” (\textit{Hum 311}) and towards “[a] new frame” (327).
Moreover, *Hummingbird* emphasises the ability of the body as a sensuous vehicle of permanent recreation. No matter how fleeting the patterns and indentations inscribed in the landscape are, they can always be rewritten through the constructive potential of the interplay between sensory experience and cultural memory, perhaps even to the point that the signs themselves do not carry meaning, but the sensory perceptions that surround and evoke them. The traces, however fleeting, record the characters routes, the places they stand on, go to and come from, as much as their distances from each other. These imprints mark the land’s body and work as a statement of re-exploration of a place that has formerly been colonized. In contrast to Robinson Crusoe’s uttermost shock and fear after discovering footprints of an ‘other’ in the sand, the patterns in *Hummingbird* become a design of communication, of connection and relation between the characters of the novel. In this sense, *Hummingbird* may not only be read as an attempt to visibly reclaim the New Zealand map from a Maori perspective, but also as an expression of renewed whakapapa and aroha relations that materialise in an affective conjunction of Maori tradition and bodily sensitivity. Kataraina finds “a trace of a path, her footsteps setting free a wave of rust-coloured leaves” (*Hum* 12), a path etched into the ground by the feet of others, and then retraces Jordan’s presence by following his visual and audible pattern in sand and air: “When the rain eases she walks up the streambed to the boat and climbs the ladder. There are wet, sandy footprints on the deck leading to the cabin’s open door. The rain paints the cabin’s overhang with threads of silver. She unwinds their fibres with her eyes, sensing at the same time a drift of guitar from within” (42).

In this respect, James George follows *The Bone People* and *The Uncle’s Story* and their respective visions of the reciprocal relations engendered by aroha: *Hummingbird* thus explores the implications of community, love and mutual concern and envisions a newly found sense of belonging. The specific cultural patterns of moko inherit and engender communal repercussions – in the sense that they tell the stories of the wearer’s community as well as his own and are of communal significance because the tattooed person takes on a communal identity. The patterned face or sensitised body is thus also an expression of new responsibilities, caring and concern and – not unlike tatau – moko mirrors such relations:

So tatauing is part of everything else that is the people, the aiga, the village, the community, the environment, the atua, the cosmos. It is a way of life that relates the tufuga ta tatau to the person being tataued and their community and history and beliefs to do with service, courage, masculinity, femininity, gender, identity, sexuality, beauty, symmetry, balance, aptness, and other art forms and the future because a tatau or a malu is for the best of your life and when you
die, your children will inherit its reputation and stories, your stories, stories about you and your relationships. (Wendt 1996: 19)

Moko constitutes an integrative and “strong and forceful way of communing with people; asserting a relationship with the world, with society” (Te Awekotuku et al. 2007: 150). “[A]n account of the individual’s interaction with the world” (Te Awekotuku et al. 2007: 151), moko is about “the most personal threads” (Hum 318) at once deeply engraved in the flesh and radiating from it, similar to the swirls, lines and hooks etched into the skin and the raised scar tissue due to the healing process. In contrast to the communal importance of tattoo, the wounds of the past have triggered off isolation in *Hummingbird*. Kataraina’s “‘me’ stayed hidden” (Hum 27) because she “locked the door long ago” (27), Jordan “was never one for building or crossing bridges” (54), and Kingi has shrouded himself in an impenetrable armour: “Love, such a transparent word, a naked word, and he was never transparent in love. His body was, his skin against their skin, but nothing of his core was ever naked; it was always hidden by the shell he wove about himself like the frames of his aeroplanes” (186). By resituated the communicative implications of moko the novel breaks these armours and transforms the patterns cut in the flesh into a relating design of aroha and mutual concern. Particularly Leonie and Kataraina seem to set communication and relations in motion. Kataraina forces herself through Jordan’s restrictive prison cartography and his “envelope of the jailhouse” (Hum 287): “Her entry into him, when it is he who thinks he enters her. Tasting him, slipping deeper within his private places, his denials, his secrets than any other. […] But now, she has opened the door to his cell and marched on in” (288). Leonie, in turn, breaks Kingi and Kataraina’s respective outer shells. George’s cutaneous imagery reveals Leonie’s journey beyond Kingi’s outer surface and inside his heart via the touch of skin: “Leonie reaches out and runs her fingers through it [his hair] down to his crinkled brow, the scuffed sand of his cheeks. He looks at her with that sense of vast distance he carries. She remembers once seeing an old black-and-white movie about journeying to the centre of the earth, where the travellers came upon an underground ocean stretching as far as the eye could see” (Hum 278-9). Her ‘tattooing’ his aeroplane binds the small community together and effects new relations, lending Kingi new wings. Leonie and Moana thus ‘fly’ with him over the beach, “the two comrades in his infant squadron tailing him across the sweep of sand” (Hum 277), before he takes off in his repaired and repainted aeroplane. Thus, “[b]y reinforcing the skin, tattooing encloses and multiplies the person” (Edmond 1997: 205) and strengthens
interrelations and communal involvement; the pattern is widened and extended just as the footprint moko on the faces of sand, sky and sea is via the relations, connections and feelings of the novel’s characters:

Jordan has trailed the three at a distance, stepping into their footprints in the sandy soil. Two women and a child, another trinity of sorts. [...] He picks his way forward, stopping at the touch of a nikau leaf against his bare arms. He smiles. Now the girl with the sand-pebble eyes of so long ago has a girl of her own, and she in turn a girl of her own. Mothers, daughters. Lifetimes of unshared memories between them. He eases his own prints between theirs, careful not to overlay Moana’s, remembering for a brief moment, his cheek once set against a pregnant woman’s body, sensing a tiny pulse within. He blinks his eyes to the warmth of the earth beneath his toes. (*Hum* 325)

*Hummingbird* creates a striking nexus between bodily perception and cultural memory; the intertextual references to stories or concepts from Maori mythology are thus sensualised and reconfigured through the human body. Just as Maori cosmology is marked by a striking focus on the human body as a shape of representation and embodiment, remembering the stories of one’s ancestors comes alive with visual, tactile, auditory, olfactory, or gustatory experience – in short, with a whole spectrum of feeling the novel puts particular emphasis on. Cultural knowledge takes effect and is established by the body; the body, in turn, becomes the medium of negotiating cultural memory as well as identity.

In addition to the novel’s juxtaposition of Jordan’s surfing and the practice of ta moko, surfing retains a further element of remembering in respect to Maori culture. When Jordan hurls himself into the waves on his surfboard, his board together with his body is converted into an uhi, a chiselling instrument cutting patterns into the skin of the ocean. The invisibility and uncertain nature of the water implies a certain permeability to cultural knowledge and the inscription of “living histories” (Ellis 2008: 11) through ta moko: “Jordan lifts his tattooed chin to the air, opens his lips to taste then slides once more beneath the waves. He dives, kicking with his feet, cutting through the sea’s skin and into its veins” (*Hum* 33). Surfing, however, was deeply rooted in the indigenous cultures of the Pacific Islands and formed an integral part of cultural practice throughout this “large world in which people and cultures mingled unhindered by the kinds of boundary erected by the colonial powers in the nineteenth century” (Edmond 1997: 2). As a matter of fact, surfing had already been practiced as a sporting activity in a number of Pacific Island cultures, way before Europeans made their voyages to the Pacific. Though the precise time of origin remains a mystery, the general assumption holds that initial forms of surfing already existed almost 4000 years ago (Finney and
Houston 1996: 21), and appear to have already been practiced at the time of early migration to and settlement of the Pacific Islands (21). Surfing was done in various forms and it seems that especially the indigenous people of Hawaii and Aotearoa already practiced advanced forms of surfing using long boards that allowed them to ride the waves standing up (Finney and Houston 1996: 23-4). In contrast to the 20th century emergence of surfing as recreational fun or competitive sport, surfing was “a sport girded in cultural and religious significance” (Nendel 2009: 2432). George’s novel reclaims surfing from the “dissipation of it as a deeply spiritual practice into a competitive American sport” (Nendel 2009: 2441) and resituates Jordan’s body – tattooed and tattooing the ocean – as a medium of cultural identity and memory repositioning surfing as a sensuous experience steeped in cultural and spiritual meaning.

Similar to the decline of moko due to the influence of missionaries and colonialism, indigenous surfing practices disappeared: “Soon after the arrival of alien explorers, traders, and missionaries – and all the ills and opportunities they brought – surfing began to decline. For nearly a hundred years it was dying a slow death” (Finney and Houston 1996: 13). Though moko practices continued and survived to a great extent, the impact of colonialism and Christian mission on surfing was almost fatal; eyed suspiciously by missionaries, surfing practices were subdued gradually as Pearson explains in the case of Hawaiian surfing: “The missionary attitude to surfing was usually negative. The missionaries were strict Calvinists to whom carefree enjoyment of anything was viewed with suspicion. Surfing, involving as it did sex, gambling and

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125 Finney and Houston differentiate between the bodyboard “also known as a belly board or a paipo board” (Finney and Houston 1996: 23) and long boards. In Aotearoa, whakaheke ngaru (the Maori term for wave riding) was done with the aid of canoes, boards (kopapa) or bags made from kelp (poha), but body-surfing also existed (Warshaw 2005: 409).

126 Tracing the beginnings of modern surfing in the early 20th century, Jim Nendel points out that “as the sport became more and more commercialized, it followed in the developmental path of American competitive sport. Surf competitions and even a professional circuit followed by television audiences, sponsorships and world championships now dominate the casual observer’s understanding of the sport. Little is spoken concerning the ancient traditions, rituals or religious significance that even Kahanamoku and Blake [Duke Kahanamoku and Tom Blake, both considered early 20th century surfing pioneers] held essential to the experience of surfing” (Nendel 2009: 2443-4).

127 In particular reference to indigenous Hawaiian surfing, the spiritual and cultural implications of surfing – its mythological and spiritual background, its associations with betting (Finney and Houston 1996: 47) and its importance as a courting ritual (38) – were viewed as opposing the religious and moral codex established by Christian missionaries and western newcomers to the Pacific Islands: “The religious connections of surfing led to banning of the practice in the 1800s through the influence of Christian missionaries in the islands. […] In addition to the religious connection and gambling, early missionaries abhorred the sexual connotations associated with the sport. Surfing through legend and in practice held great status as a formal and informal courting tool. Chiefs and chiefesses would often use their surfing prowess to gain the attention of a favoured suitor” (Nendel 2009: 2434).
neglect of domestic and religious duties was abhorred” (Pearson 1979: 32). Similar to Hawaii, surfing seems to have disappeared in Aotearoa due to the impact of the missionary cause: “[I]n the late 1800s, Calvinist missionaries arrived from England and, as part of their proselytizing efforts, effectively brought an end to Maori surfing, just as Hawaii-posted missionaries had done a few decades earlier” (Warshaw 2005: 409).

Tying together ta moko and surfing, Hummingbird positions the body in its sensuousness as loaded with cultural knowledge. Stripped of its modern associations with competitive professionalism, surfing is conceived as a recreational sport that affords Jordan with a spiritual reconnection with the ocean. The recurring passages throughout the novel depicting “the surfer’s shadow captured within the fabric of the water” (Hum 37) draw attention to the sensuous connection between ta moko and surfing and indicate a sensualisation of cultural memory. Just as surfing represents a sensuous rediscovery or remapping of space, it also works as a moment of physical liberation and redemption for Jordan. The “deep spiritual connection to the water and the waves” (Nendel 2009: 2433) Maori held and still emphasise finds expression in the act of surfing. Building a bridge between the surfer, the natural phenomenon of the ocean and the ancestors who crossed the ocean with canoes and settled Aotearoa, surfing contains a spiritual, religious, mythological as well as historical dimension. The trickster Maui, one of the most prominent mythological figures in Maori culture, may very well be seen as a surfer. Believed to be a stillborn child, his mother cut off some of her hair, wrapped him into it and left him to the ocean. Protected by guardian spirits of the sea, he miraculously survived “wrapped in long tangles of kelp” (Alpers 1986: 28-9) “which had kept Māui afloat and alive” (Hyland 1998: 22) on top of the waves just like a surfboard would carry the surfer across the waves. Surfing merges the body and the ocean and may afford the surfer with a holistic feeling: “Due to the significance of surfing in respect to physical prowess and religious observance, the act of surfing carried with it opportunities to experience oneness with the world and especially the ocean wave. ‘Dancing’ with this ‘natural energy form’ allows the dancer to share an intimate rapport with nature” (Nendel 2009: 2434). Hummingbird illustrates such a

128 At the beginning of the 20th century surfing was reintroduced in New Zealand “when Duke Kahanamoku – the Hawaiian Olympic swimmer now revered as the father of modern surfing – demonstrated board riding to the Maranui Surf Lifesaving Club at Wellington’s Lyall Bay” (Woods 2004/2005: 76). Its revival in New Zealand went hand in hand with the developments in surf life saving (Pearson 1979: 37-43). From then on, surfing became a popular sport and has been embraced again by Maori culture: “With those origins and a natural affinity for ocean sport, it’s really no big surprise that Maori have embraced and excelled in ‘surfing’” (Woods 2004/2005: 76). Artist Aaron Te Whanatangi Kereopa, for instance, draws on Maori carving traditions, mythology, whakapapa and surfing culture among other elements in his surfboard sculptures (Ryan 2011).
unison of body and sea, surfer and ocean when Jordan “waits for the next wave and leaps into it, letting the wave’s body carry him for a second, doesn’t attempt to fight its muscles with his own” (Hum 149). It almost seems as if there are no boundaries between him and the ocean while feeling himself through the patterns of waves that are mirrored by the waves of his moko:

The wind whips the waves into sheets, unfurling above and around Jordan as he lies on his stomach on the surfboard. He raises his head, the swells such that he can’t see more than a few metres in any direction. He closes his eyes, navigating his way through the maze of waves by instinct. He hoists himself up, raises his arms outward. A cross of shadow on the waves. A shout wells up inside him and he lets it out, his voice vanishing in the hammering surf. (Hum 143)

The physical experience of surfing involves an “interaction between man and the natural environment” (Pearson 1979: 79) that dissolves the usual binaries of the human-nature-divide or the subject-object-divide. It may afford the surfer with a physical experience of “an actual blending with nature” (Pearson 1979: 79), but it also probes into the formation of self and identity, retaining a “self-actualizing potential” (83). *Hummingbird* thus moves between passages that portray Jordan as completely embedded in the ocean becoming one with the waves – even almost invisible in them – and passages that focus on his cultural identity. Surfing defines his self “just as he emerges each morning from the sea’s grasp” (Hum 67) and just as the ocean tattooed in his face adds to his self. In this respect, James George may also refer to surfing as a form of creative self-expression and definition of the self through testing oneself and probing physical limits (Pearson 1979: 83). The narrative takes this transcendence of boundaries when the body merges with the surfboard and the sea to life’s ultimate limit when Jordan falls down the hill, ‘diving’ into an imagined ocean (Hum 329).

Moreover, surfing ties together Jordan and Kataraina who fall in love. *Hummingbird* thus explores surfing as a multilayered mode of cultural remembering, not least because of its reminiscence of its former practice as a courting ritual (Finney and Houston 1996: 38, Nendel 2009: 2434). Kataraina, for instance, lets a handful of sand trickle down in front of her face and watches Jordan’s wave riding “through a curtain of sand” (Hum 37) which, in turn, emphasises the close resemblance of surfing to ta moko practice and to its sexual connotations: “Within minutes he is in the waves, entering them with the gentle timing and ease of a lover slipping within the skin of another” (37). James George intricately interweaves aroha and texture and creates a multitude of permeations that pervade skin, ocean and sand among others. Although Jordan and Kataraina are both marked by a certain lifelessness inside – “there’s this hole
in me” (Hum 56) – they affect each other, stepping into each other’s territory, touching each other’s existence: “Jordan appears on the dunes, sketched against the sky […]. If she tried, she could care maybe a little. If he signalled to her that caring was a language he understood even just a few words of” (67). The importance of texture and feeling to cultural memory permanently mapped by the extensive patterns alluding to ta moko and embodied in the act of surfing is again illuminated by the following passage. By interweaving cultural memory with a dimension of feeling, the narrative here establishes sensory experience as “meaningful in itself” (Classen 2005: 2):

He lowers her, then pulls her to him again, still inside her, still part of her in this moment, this one endless moment, while the touch of raindrops mingles with her fingerprints on the skin of his back. […] He dips into her again and again, as if she is a wave. Her teeth are against his cheek, her voice whispering words he does not need to unravel into whole speech. Into logic. His body is held now – between heartbeats – by this woman who says she’s going home. To this man who has no home but the ocean. (Hum 155-6)

This dimension of immediacy and transcendence of words, becomes very clear in other passages portraying surfer Jordan. At these points, the narrative constantly leads the reader to moments of incommunicability, to moments where the physical action, the sensual experience of surfing cannot be adequately verbalised; rather the text incorporates a somewhat diffuse and vague quality. Yet, the indistinct element of the narrative doesn’t necessitate an imprecise meaninglessness of the physical act of surfing. Instead, the sensory experiences and the uncertainty of the text open the focus to epistemological insight and traces of cultural memory. When Jordan sits in the sand, scanning the vast, empty beach, everything around him seems faded, blurred: “Nowhere is there any evidence of other people. Neither a fence, nor marker post. Even the few tyre tracks have been blown over by the sand-seeded wind. A lone pohutukawa has a foothold on a small ridge, its overhang painting the gold of the beach a darker hue, as if a shadow tree, attached like a Siamese twin, grows in the sand” (Hum 33). In these hazy surroundings, the surfer longs for a certain indefinability, escaping even the lightest shadow on his skin by “avoiding even the suggestion of leaves on his skin, wanting only the invisibility of water” (Hum 33). Life has turned him into a loner, displaced and scarred him to the point that he became “a fortress, a pā on a hilltop, crowded with fences and guards” (Hum 288). Riding the waves on his “fibreglass shell” (Hum 66), surrounded by “waves scuffing into fountains of spray, veiling anything more than a few inches from where his toes front the board” (65), he is swallowed by the ocean and becomes part of it. Surfing thus functions as a way of losing oneself and one’s identity
in the waves that embrace Jordan like “blankets he beds himself within, where his body turns to shadow alone” (Hum 67). Paradoxically, it also takes Jordan’s body to extremes and sets him free, leaving him “upended” (Hum 66) in “nothing but spray” (66) when the waves crash over him, stimulates sensuous perception and negotiates culturally significant meanings and identity. Interwoven with tā moko and reminiscences of its former cultural significance, surfing crystallises pathways of cultural empowerment that encompass an alternative understanding of self and place as intricately bound together. Through the touch of water and sand the ancestors are always present, tangibly affecting and embracing the human body: “[Jordan] lifts his chin out of the water for an instant, as comfortable with the touch of waves as a child would be with its mother” (Hum 307). When Jordan “twists, rolls over and over, lets the oxygen drain from his lungs” (Hum 33) and draws “in the scent of salt on the wind, opening his pores to the air” (33), the sensory experiences enhanced by surfing pave the way to a new sense of home and communication. Freighted with the patterns and meanings of Māori culture, surfing is redefined as “the center of a circle of social and ritual activities” (Finney and Houston 1996: 27) and the narrative visualisations of Jordan “riding the current back in, looking for that one homebound wave” (Hum 33) open up the pathways of cultural remembering and an altered concept of identity that like the chiselled patterns of tā moko extends beyond the self: “The air is cold when Jordan lifts his head out of the waves, colder than the water itself. He turns and watches a wave come to him, over him. He stands treading water, his hands and fingers radiating outward, casting lines of droplets” (149). Small-scale topographies and individual imprisonment are consequently substituted by a conceptualisation of the human body as an open network of various routes, alternative patterns and multi-layered sensations – the human body becomes embedded in the wider context and radius of community, family and aroha because “[n]one of that stuff belongs here, within the touch of stream water” (Hum 289).

A similar movement away from abstract notions of human existence is represented by Kingi, trained pilot and aeronautical engineer. All his life he made sense of “the world in terms of geometry. Of structure. Angles and plane surfaces. Topology and topography. That the world could be explained if we drew enough lines, calculated enough degrees of rotation. Explain how one thing fits into another, how things connect or separate” (Hum 281). Yet those highly rational, scientific and largely Western-derived methods of gaining knowledge could only provide coherent truth “[e]verywhere there was no human touch” (Hum 281) and led him to alienation, severed him from his
“father’s hand […] and his whole world” (110) and made him “[l]ost in a promise” (281). *Hummingbird* therefore resituates the human body in a corporeal and tangible economy of personal relations, sensuous contact and connectedness that is already indicated by the references to moko patterns, to lines and spirals that reach inward and outward:

In prison you think in inches, because that’s all you’ve got. Whole continents could fit in match boxes and you’d still appreciate them. But out here you get a sense of… what? Scale? Distance? No, more personal than that. Out here you get a sense that everything’s part of a string. Even if it’s a few million light years away. A sense that you can reach out and touch the air that touches the sand that touches the sea that touches the sky that… (*Hum* 154).

Incorporating the story of the mythological figure Tawhaki, *Hummingbird* intertwines cultural knowledge with the sensuous experiences of the characters, specifically with the tactile act of painting through which the characters of the novel feel “the strange new motifs etched into the aeroplane’s skin” (*Hum* 149) and reconnect with the past – the mythological cosmos of Maori culture as well as Kingi’s memories of his love Alissandra whom he met on the island of Crete during World War II – in order to reposition Maori cultural values and beliefs in the present and create meaningful ties for the future. Kingi, or “Von Wreckedoften” (*Hum* 80) as Jordan calls the pilot, crash-lands his Tiger Moth on Ninety Mile Beach and attempts to repair it in order to fly to a reunion of his military comrades and then to Greece. In the mythological stories – the myth exists in “differing versions in many parts of Polynesia” (Orbell 1995: 195) – Tawhaki’s “main exploit is to climb to the skies” (193) on tendrils. Often associated with natural phenomena such as thunder and lightning (Orbell 1995: 194, Alpers 1986: 121) as well as healing powers or death, Tawhaki journeys to the skies to find his wife (Orbell 1995: 193-4) in some versions of the mythological story. James George recreates the mythological story in close symbiosis with the sense of tactility as presented through the act of painting, and again with the visual sense as the narrative repeatedly focuses on the characters looking at the aeroplane’s new skin. As Constance Classen points out, “writing is tactile in nature. The etymological meaning of the verb to write is to scratch. This makes writing like an inscription on skin (for what do we scratch more frequently?) – an analogy supported by the fact that the parchment once used for writing in Europe was made out of animal skins. Writing might even in certain circumstances be done directly on the body or, indeed, tattooed on the skin” (Classen

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129 The wairua or spirits of the deceased were believed to ascend the “pathway to the stars” (Orbell 1995: 194).
2005: 6). *Hummingbird* enacts a striking analogy between the painting process as an act closely related to the sensorium of skin and the aeroplane whose skin is decorated with leaves, branches and vines. Whereas in the myth Tawhaki is shown the way to the skies by his grandmother Whaitiri, the tendrils that lead to the skies in the novel are created by Leonie’s “first brushstroke on the aeroplane’s fuselage” (*Hum* 149) and come to life through the touch of skin on skin, that is the surface of the Tiger Moth, and the interaction of brushing the plane with paint and the image of the pattern. Hence “Leonie taps the brush’s wooden tip against her cheek, squinting her eyes to seek connections in the half light between each of the lines she has drawn” (*Hum* 149) and:

Kingi appears on the track, walking at his usual brisk clip. When he sees them he slows and stops, then comes forward again. They stand waiting for his reaction. He walks along the plane’s length, then steps back a few paces. He crouches, running a finger across his chin. A branch sweeps along the fuselage’s length, leaves sprouting. The branch itself is blue and the leaves gold. A fine background of green, the brushstrokes no more than wisps, like the paintings on Japanese pottery. He stays on his haunches for a moment then stands, walks to Leonie and holds out his hand. She passes him the brush. He dips it in the tin, the blue, and walks around to the other side of the aeroplane and begins to paint. Leonie reaches for another brush. The two of them move around the aeroplane, tattooing its parchment with new life. (149-50)

By the touch of the characters’ brushstrokes the Tiger Moth is inscribed or tattooed with references from Maori mythology and turned into a vehicle of cultural memory that reconnects Kingi to his ancestral roots and carries him back to the skies on his journey to Crete. The process of transforming the Tiger Moth into a web of vines not only revives the stories of the past, but also touches off communal ties. The act of scratching plant pathways into the surface of the aeroplane – “Kataraina with Kingi and Leonie, all painting the aeroplane” (*Hum* 150) – turns the characters of the novel from solitary individuals into a family, tied together by the communicative medium of storytelling. Sitting in the newly painted Tiger Moth, Kingi passes his story on to Kataraina, and again the full force of cultural memory is revealed by a tactile experience, the feeling of the rising sun on the skin:

In a grounded aeroplane generations older than the passenger who sits with him in the dark, taking in each stanza of his story amid a descant of waves. Of a priest who travelled by biplane, oak desks topped with scrawled treatises on flight, of aeroplanes folding up like broken children’s kites. Of grapes and the woman who tended them. Drew nectar from their flesh; her own flesh and compassion drawing an essence from him he had denied he possessed. When the story is finished she opens her eyes for the first time in an hour, turns to look at the first hint of sunrise over the hill of her ancestors. […] She leans back, taking the new sun against her left temple. She settles back, closes her eyes to the double horizon of wings beneath and above her and glides away into a sky of dreams. (*Hum* 282)
The impact of sensory experience upon the creation of cultural memory is further emphasised by Kataraina’s visual impressions of the painted patterns on the Tiger Moth when she takes a closer look at the intricate web of motifs. Her visual sense irreversibly imprints the image of the painting on her mind and preserves it in her memory, always to be remembered. The past is thus sensually reconfigured:

She flicks on the torch, reclaiming the Tiger Moth’s body from the night, tracing the web of lines painted onto the aeroplane’s hide, following each avenue, each tributary, seeking the source. She finds rows of painted leaves, a snatch of grass, tree roots. A pale structure appears, with a river flowing through its arches. Then a woman’s face, her hair becoming the leaves, becoming the river. No, not leaves – vines. She douses the torch beam, seeing the face now only in her mind. Then she switches it on again. On and off, on and off. The face painted now in her memory. An image that can’t be blinked away. (Hum 279)

Some legends mention the metamorphosis of Tawhaki from man into a bird which enabled him to fly up the skies (Orbell 1995: 193). The Tiger Moth the characters transform through their touch thus becomes a bird that returns Kingi back to the air and refers to the novel’s title, the image of the hummingbird. The image of the bird is also taken up by the feather that is passed from one hand to the next in the narrative. Again, the narrative draws attention to tactile impressions and ties cultural knowledge to sensual experience: “[Kingi] leans forward over a small heap of shells, reaches and lifts a gull’s feather in his fingertips. ‘The story isn’t written forever,’ he says. ‘Sometimes the Minotaur can walk free from the labyrinth.’ Jordan looks down at Kingi’s hands. At the pale feather rippling in the sea wind. Kingi hands it to him. ‘Or fly free,’ he says.” (Hum 305). The Tiger Moth therefore – moths often indicate death in Maori culture – prefigures the transition from death to life as it marks the first part of Kingi’s journey and brings the stranded individuals together to form a community in the act of painting.

The image of the hummingbird, however, remains ambiguous throughout the novel – similar to the circumstance that some moth species closely resemble hummingbirds. The repeated, dictionary-like image of the sphinx moth macroglossum stellatarum juxtaposes both moth and hummingbird and Kingi, the pilot of the Moth-turned-bird, contemplates the double reality while water runs along the skin of his arm: “He clasps his singlet in one hand, droplets of water running down over his withered

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130 “And h Hu hu beetles or moths tapping on the window mean someone is dying. Moths are interesting. It is thought that when someone dies, they make their way down to the far northern tip of New Zealand, to Rerenga-wairua (the leaping-off place of spirits) at Cape Te Reinga. […] [E]ventually the spirits arrive at Te Rerenga-wairua, slide down the roots of the last pohutukawa tree in the land, into a kelp-fringed hole in the sea, and make their way to the borders of the night” (Hulme 1984: 32). James George’s imagery of the tree branches painted onto the Tiger Moth and Ninety Mile Beach, located on the northern top of New Zealand’s north island, thus point to a sense of mourning. George, however, reverses the journey of the dead as Kingi travels to the sky and back to Crete to keep the promise of the past.
‘Sometimes we mistake a moth for a hummingbird,’ he says. ‘We don’t take the time to see all that the moth is.’” (Hum 310) Although Kingi’s journey to Crete and therefore to Alissandra may come true – the novel remains open-ended in this respect – Jordan’s hope of rebuilding a family, of reconnecting with his past and leaving his solitude behind, all symbolised in his hope that “[p]erhaps Pōrangi Sam’s old boat does get to sail after all” (Hum 325), are shattered by death because he gives his life in order to save Leonie who almost falls down a hill slope when she “reaches for the feather” (327) that had been passed from Kingi to Jordan, then to Kataraina who had stuck the feather into Moana’s hair.

Cultural renewal and building a family manifest in the metaphor of the hummingbird remains a dream for Jordan. While all the other characters connect with the traces of their past on an interpersonal level – Kataraina reconnects with her lost daughter and granddaughter, Kingi flies off to Crete in his Tiger Moth – Jordan’s vision of his stranded boat sailing again slips away from him just as the roots slip out of his hands after he saved Leonie from falling down the hill. His death is mirrored by the encyclopaedia entry on the sphinx moth, a species of moth which by way of its size, colour, proboscis and wings closely resembles the iridescent bird and is “[s]ometimes mistaken for a hummingbird” (Hum 340). In Maori mythology, moths often symbolise the souls of the dead. Yet, the novel’s ending should not be viewed as a bleak comment on hope and cultural survival, for Jordan’s death is far from senseless. His death transforms Jordan into a bird and into a sign of life, for he restores the “[t]wo women and a child, another trinity of sorts” (Hum 325). Having saved Leonie, Jordan loses his hold and falls off the top of the slope like a seabird nose-diving into the ocean, thus completing the metamorphosis from moth to hummingbird and from death to life: “The aches in his neck and shoulders and forearms slip away, as if he is back in his ocean, within his bed of water. His upper body opens out like a wing, his mouth gasping a last gift of air before he returns to his home in the waves” (Hum 329).

The elements of Maori cultural memory such as the bird and the feather that refer to the story of the mythological figure Tawhaki or the ocean, home of the ancient Maori tradition of surfing, are therefore transfigured into elements of hope and re-embodied in the present by the juxtaposition of the tragedy of Jordan’s death and the touch between Kataraina and Leonie’s hands. Here again, James George makes us aware of the texture of cultural memory and identity by paralleling Jordan, the tattooed surfer, the moth and the touch of skin, all of which point to ta moko as a tangible form
of engraving the flesh since the wounds cut into the skin were often filled with soot made from a specific type of moth: “For pigment to colour the larger body pieces, the principal basis was the āwheto or hōtete, the larva of the moth Sphinx convolvuli, known by the Māori as pēpe. It was infected with a parasitic fungus, Cordiceps robertsii, which interrupted the creature’s life-cycle and turned it into the ‘vegetable caterpillar’” (Te Awekotuku et al. 2007: 32). The death of the sphinx moth prefigures life in the sense of feeling, tangible flesh written in by the patterns of tā moko that speak of touchable, “visual, and often visceral, memories” (Te Awekotuku et al. 2007: 89) and “a dynamic assertion of identity” (152). Cultural memory is thus transfigured into an image of tactility just as sensory perception proves to be highly constitutive in the process of reviving and remodelling Maori culture: “Leonie’s eyelids fall. Her hand reaches for Kataraina’s, finding warmth even amid its trembling. Warmth enough to almost wash away the terrible jolt of Jordan’s body hitting the deck of his boat” (Hum 329). Jordan’s sacrifice turns him into a bird as well, diving in flight into the ocean, because his dying restores Kataraina’s newly found family almost broken again by Leonie’s “dropping the feather” (Hum 327). Touching “the smudge of these fingerprints on the window” (Hum 330) as her “hand taps against the window pane” (330), Kataraina later traces the patterns that Jordan left behind. With the traces resembling tiny “footprints” (Hum 330) rises a personal as well as a collective history, and the memory of Jordan is kept alive in the juxtaposition of sensual perception and the patterns people leave behind: “‘They tell a history,’ says Kataraina. ‘Like the old days. Tell where someone has been. What they’ve been up to. Where they’re going.’” (330) James George therefore conceives of the human body not only as a visible marker of cultural identity and memory, locating histories, whakapapa and mythology via the flesh, but also as an active agent engaging with the world and transforming those cultural legacies to new ends. Through its permeability, sensitivity and capability of moving beyond itself, the human body is vigorously involved in the negotiation and renewal of the manifold patterns of Maori histories and cosmology and implicated in the community by creating new connections, ends and beginnings:

Leonie steps closer, almost within Kataraina’s breath. This child with her own child. A whole history strung like flax strands in front of her. A foot now above hers, an arm around her waist. Her head tilts to lay against Kataraina’s neck, cheek against cheek. Breasts against her, against her own breasts, the child able to feel the nearness of them, the history of them, hers – for the first time. (Hum 322).
Conclusion

In Witi Ihimaera’s The Rope of Man (2005), Tama Mahana, journalist and anchorman of a TV news programme called Spaceship Earth, orbits the globe via his studio spaceship in order to cover current events worldwide and report to humankind. Just as his ancestors crossed the Pacific Ocean in their canoes, navigating the Pacific Islands on their journey to Aotearoa, and “lifted songs above the waves of the greatest and deepest ocean” (Sullivan 1999: 111), so does Tama voyage the universe when “the portals would slide open, revealing the stars above and the glowing green of earth below” (TRoM 183). Ihimaera’s narrative thus extends the struggle for decolonisation beyond local New Zealand realities and Pacific routes to global pathways. While the tensions created by colonialism linger on in the present, the “postcolonial/global moment of decolonizing and affirmative countercreation” (Rob Wilson 1998: 11) is fuelled by a “sense of oceanic community” (Edmond 1997: 2) and a sense of shared identity that includes the realities of indigenous peoples worldwide. The novel therefore points to the intricate networks and relations that not only include Oceanic genealogies and weave Maori and Pakeha into a “blended, laminated” (TRoM 320) rope, but also entwine them with global ramifications and contexts:

The lives of two peoples had become inextricably entangled so that it was predicted that within two generations every New Zealander would have some Maori blood or at least a Maori relative within the New Zealand family. […] And no matter how wide out we went, an invisible umbilical cord would always connect us to Aotearoa. We would never be lost. […] New Zealanders are taking their place in their own land and throughout the world. Wherever we meet, we cry, sing and chant our songs through a hostile universe and, when we gather together, it is like a tribe around a campfire telling our stories of the iwi to each other. […] New Zealanders are still in the process of becoming. The next great transformation is about to begin. Dreamers, awake. (320-2)

The interrelatedness of people and places across time and a sense of shared histories, realities and genealogies (be they by blood, adoption or heart) are a central concern of much contemporary fiction from Aotearoa – Ihimaera’s and George’s novels illustrate this aspect vividly. A similar approach characterises the imaginative works by Robert Sullivan and other Pacific writers. Whetu Moana (2003), an anthology of Oceanic poems edited by Albert Wendt, Reina Whaitiri and Robert Sullivan, reflects the multiple currents, interrelations and thematic affinities of Oceanic literature.

Since the so-called Maori Renaissance of the 1970s and 80s, the scope has been opened and new challenges and topics have emerged that go beyond the relations
between Maori and Pakeha. A vast expansion of topics and themes marks recent fictions by writers from Aotearoa/New Zealand. Recent examples of Aotearoa’s literary scene range from the impact of the destructive forces of war on three generations of a family and their struggle for love and trust across time and space in James George’s *Ocean Roads* (2006) to an intricate tale of art forgery, a bold coup of theft and the many layers of identity in Paula Morris’ *Hibiscus Coast* (2005). Chris Baker’s *Kokopu Dreams* (2000) imagines a futuristic New Zealand whose population has been almost wiped out by a virus. The novel portrays one man’s journey across this gloomy land inhabited by the magical and terrifying creatures from Maori legend. The story of a tourist venture of a small Maori community at the turn of the millennium is at the heart of Patricia Grace’s *Dogside Story* (2001), while the mysterious-murderous lives of four women of a family and their search for home in contemporary society are depicted in Kelly Ana Morey’s *Bloom* (2003). The assertion of Maori values is thus coupled with a growing complexity of identities and also a criticism of some aspects of Maori culture. The narratives discussed here display a crucial need to empower Maori perspectives, but they also suggest that these frameworks have to be transformed, reinterpreted and adjusted to different realities and angles. Contemporary fictional explorations “seek to redefine Maori identity of the present, distancing it from rigid traditions and stable narratives yet at the same time spiralling back toward core values that are retrieved and then reaffirmed in new forms” (Della Valle 2010: 203).

Surely, a preoccupation with the aftermath of colonialism and the marginal position of Maori culture within New Zealand society remains a decisive element of the fictions I have discussed in detail. Resistance and decolonisation provide vital facets of the fictional frameworks as the trauma of the colonial past still runs deep. In *The Uncle’s Story* Michael and Roimata thus urge their audience at the indigenous peoples’ conference to “[m]aintain your sovereign goals, do not let go of your inspiration, hold to your strength” (*TUS* 326-7) because indigenous peoples still struggle with disempowerment and the destructive effects of colonialism on their cultural heritage: “We have been dispossessed. We have been marginalised. In many places our cultures, yours and mine, have been destroyed. We occupy the borderlands of White society. We live only by the White man’s leave within White structures that are White driven and White kept. Our jailers might be kindly, but they are still our jailers” (326). Maori empowerment and sovereignty are crucial topics in the novels and many characters in the narratives convey a sense of loss and cultural uprooting. Central concepts and
principles of Maori culture are thus propelled to the foreground in the writers’ fictional critique of the colonial past and its effects upon the present and their quest for decolonisation. Keri Hulme interrogates the repressing and violent repercussions of the “godzone babyltalk” (TBP 32) and the colonial aftermath and attempts to retrieve aspects of Maori cultural heritage and mythology in order to create new ancestors for a more inclusive future society. A similar sense of re-centring elements of Maori epistemologies marks Ihimaera’s The Uncle’s Story and George’s Hummingbird. Both fictions rely on prominent facets of Maori tradition in their vision of Aotearoan/New Zealand realities. While Ihimaera emphasises the importance of the umbilical and its genealogical, ancestral and communal connotations, James George transfers Maori tattooing and its subtexts of whanaungatanga (kinship), whakapapa and belonging beyond the human body and transforms the moko designs into a unique form of mapping the cosmos and reinvigorating the wounded and scarred individuals. By tattooing landscape via a focus on sensory experiences and feeling, Hummingbird reworks moko as a medium of cultural identity and memory, gives landscape a new postcolonial ‘face’ and the human body a place on it and undermines colonial maps, those peculiarly paradox kinds of ‘skins’ that illustrate, solicit and conceal contact.

Apart from mythological content and recurring patterns or concepts of Maori cosmology and art such as ta moko or spiral motifs, all novels display a shared interest and affirmation of whakapapa and aroha relations that foreground the relevance and continuity of the past, but also stress the necessity and potential of transformation and change in Maori culture. Embedded in this context, the human body becomes a similar vehicle of interrelations and connections in respect to cultural identity, belonging and memory. My project has therefore traced the investment in feeling and sensuousness and their implications of cultural identity and memory of selected fictional works scripted by Aotearoan writers. Not simply a decal of colonial oppression and its lasting effects, the human body is posited as a means of active agency in the mediation and transformation of cultural legacy, contemporary realities and identities. Flesh and skin as well as feeling, emotion and sensuousness are propelled to the foreground in the novels and develop a life of their own, that is, the human body is not only posited as a graphic signifier or cypher inscribed by specific cultural codes in order to outline and represent cultural identity and belonging. Rather, it is actively involved in the translation and metamorphosis of cultural identity and memory in that it illustrates feeling and releases a spiral of physical-emotional investment. What the fictions show is
that the human body is a sensuous construct and that feeling may be just as much implicated in the negotiation of cultural identity and histories as the inscription of the skin is. The Maori concept of ta moko which renders the flesh into a textured and textual creation is a beautiful example because it moves the human body centre stage in the act of perforating the skin and slipping specific cultural patterns into the flesh, challenging the body’s sensitivity. Open to sensuous inscription, the body is turned into a threshold that releases manifold sensuous and ‘touchy’ impulses as well as communal implications “like transfers, leaving our patterns upon each other” (Kawana 2005: 20).

Although *The Bone People* emphasises the need to resituate the past in the present, it already insinuates a break with the past and remodelling of certain tenets of Maori culture. The mauri Joe retrieves from the old canoe is therefore relocated to Kerewin’s new spiral home and Kerewin, Joe and Simon become the bones and ancestors of a new kind of iwi, one that still acknowledges genealogical ties but is also held together by adoption and aroha. In *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*, Witi Ihimaera even turns away from Maori themes and makes the struggle of gay Pakeha David the sujet of his novel. David’s creative nick-naming the people around him shows that there is a multitude of possible ways to make sense of the world, and being gay and a father may be one of them. Indeed, David has to juggle a variety of ‘personalities’ – husband, father, university professor, son, homosexual cruiser, boyfriend – until he finally ‘grows up’ and merges homosexuality and fatherhood. Ihimaera’s *The Uncle’s Story*, in turn, emphasises the necessity of reformulating central principles of Maori culture in order to incorporate such alternative realities. The Maori notions of whakapapa, warriorhood and mana are wrested from their patriarchal framework and remodelled in favour of the takatapui, the gay members of the tribe, through a wider context of aroha, respect and even possible genealogical outlines. Michael thus twists a new rope that confronts the homophobia of certain quarters of Maori society, empowers gay Maori men and women and connects them back to their families and cultural heritage. At the same time, Ihimaera opts for the creation of global indigenous networks and an empowered position of gay indigenous people inside those networks. This amplified radius is also mirrored in James George’s *Hummingbird* which extends the ta moko ritual beyond the face and changes it into an overall concept in order to create new homes and places of belonging in this wide open cosmos. The narrative catapults manifold patterns, circles and traces into the universe and stresses transformation (even in the face of loss) as the vital principle to propel the patterns of whakapapa, aroha and identity outward to new
places and forward into the future to new connections, repercussions and possibilities. The novels consequently show that a postcolonial resolution is therefore still in the making, but it is by far not their only concern. Moreover, recent works thus emphasise “the need to question postcolonial clichés” (Kennedy 2008: 112) and engage with those set patterns in a humorous and satiric manner. Ihimaera’s witty nicknaming convention in Nights or Patricia Grace’s ironic portrayal of Dion’s activist rhetoric – “[w]e got to decolonise ourselves, unpick our brains because they been stitched up too long” (Grace 2001: 146) by “all this other rubbish dumped on us by missionaries and colonisers” (146) – reminds the readers that we easily accept the categories of the postcolonial perspective and close our minds to new possibilities of moving forward: “[A]ll the kids are doing is shouting around the place about everything instead of getting on with their studies. You can’t switch on television without seeing this niece or that nephew marching down city streets with a lot of untidy mates waving flags and holding up rude signs” (146). Imaginative works therefore reflect the growing diversification, conflating tendencies, and complicated, muddled, and entirely fruitful energies and “interconnected epistemologies” (Wilson, Şandru and Welsh 2010: 5) of contemporary Maori culture.

Fittingly so, the human body illustrates these dynamic energies. The novels show that the human body appears to be a central mode of expression and significance in Maori culture. Permeable and inscribable, it locates and materialises history and the reverberations of the colonial past. This is perhaps most prominently shown by The Bone People which relates the scarred and mutilated human body to the impact of colonial violence and the unequal power relations of Aotearoa/New Zealand. A similar sense of scarification, both corporeal and mental, surfaces in the fictions by Ihimaera and George. Jordan in Hummingbird, for instance, is marked by a history of gang violence that has left its traces on his skin. More importantly, the narratives trace sensuous processes of corporeal cultivation and change, of working through complex situations of marginalisation, loss and pain. The narratives so explore the transformative potential of the human body and the dynamic and liberating energies of feeling. The human body is envisaged as a living entity and vital medium of contact, exchange, interrelation and transformation. Permeable to historical and cultural circumstances, it also retains a certain uncontrollability. This uncontrollability is already reflected by the indeterminate, tricksterish nature of the fictional characters, their Maui’an wiliness, the Peter-Pan-like indeterminacy, the shamanistic reverie, and their in-betweenness. The
Bone People confronts the reader with a cycle of pain, violence and disaffection that strikes deeply into the flesh. The painful corporeal manifestations of colonially induced aggression and disaffection evoke counter-strategies and a process of metamorphosis in order to instigate reconciliation. Keri Hulme thus turns the violence that cuts and hurts the flesh into a process to uncover the bones that materialise ancestral and tribal relations, place a hook in the heart and release aroha. Feelings of aroha strike at the body and simultaneously at the heart, initiate healing, regeneration and communal frameworks. The textured map of the flesh is posited as a means of transformation to plant, locate and release feeling, to foster and feed the heart of the iwi. The Bone People therefore contains a double or spiral movement inwards to dig up the bones of the ancestors and outwards to touch off renewal, interrelatedness and involvement. Hulme’s fiction may also touch, affect and force us to confront and interrogate the violent mechanisms and unresolved aftermath of the colonial past and find new patterns of respect and responsibility. The characters are thus resuscitated from death and move toward extended family relations via the manifold permeations of pain, skin, bones, flesh, breath, touch and aroha. Aroha involves both the individual and the whanau and fosters reciprocal and more inclusive patterns of identity and community that is complemented by the bones of the ancestors and the skeletal structures of new spiral homes.

A similar movement toward more inclusive and alternative frameworks can be detected in the other novels. Both Nights in the Gardens of Spain and The Uncle’s Story unmask the oppressive affective impact of feelings of shame and fear and their implication, silencing effect and authority in homophobic world views. Feelings of shame and humiliation pierce David’s body in Nights and make him acutely aware of himself so that his body is defined by the heterosexual norms of marriage, masculinity and fatherhood and ‘scorched’ by his homosexuality. However, Witi Ihimaera juxtaposes the contrasting worlds of family homes such as The Ship of Dreams and the secret underworld of The Steam Parlour in an intriguing spectacle of shame and shamelessness. The Gardens David cruises on his nocturnal quests for anonymous gay sex are offered as an ambiguous and heterotopic place of transition and freedom: there, the dynamic intersection of male bodies, steam, voyeuristic elements and sensual-emotional affect is of great potency and forms an undermining counterpart to the inscription of queerness with feelings of shame. David eventually leaves the secret steam rooms in order to ‘penetrate’ the world and define his homosexuality. Nights
unmasks the implication of shame in marginalising structures and simultaneously opens up its unsettling possible effects. Ihimaera thus disentangles homosexuality from its silent netherworld existence; on his quest for a fulfilling gay identity David confronts the social conventions guarded by shame head-on and begins to create a new ‘fairy story’ that includes his role as a parent. The Uncle’s Story, in turn, counters homophobia from a Maori perspective. Michael and Sam are haunted by the overpowering concepts of warriorhood and masculinity in their culture: the punitive threat of being ousted from the whanau and eliminated from whakapapa hurts and terrifies both of them. Like a sharp arrow perforating the flesh, fear grabs hold of their bodies. As the indicator of existential threats, fear, however, may stimulate the affirmation of identity and the creation of new cultural frameworks within a newly envisioned Maori community. The text underlines potential counter-actions unleashed by fear and foregrounds characters that resist the paralysing effects of fear or terror, fight those feelings and instigate a transformed idea of mana. On the premise that aroha permeates the body in more creative and respectful ways, The Uncle’s Story weaves love ties into the genealogical umbilical of the tribe so that the central tenets of Maori culture such as warriorhood, family, and genealogy are reformed to incorporate homosexuality. Ihimaera remolds the concept of whakapapa so that the dead-end character homosexuality inherits in Maori cosmology is countered by procreative marriage alliances. Homosexuality is therefore inscribed in the tribe by a wide ramification of aroha relations and the bloodlines of queer whakapapa.

The significance in Maori culture of the involvement of the human body in communal, genealogical and ancestral contexts is further highlighted by Hummingbird. George transfers the manifold spectrum of the historical, genealogical, communal, individual and cosmological connotations of moko patterns from the textured miniature map etched into Jordan’s face to the vast fictional universe of the novel. The narrative’s sensuous imagery that ranges from numerous sensory perceptions to multiple patterns of texture, sound, smell and taste merges the human body, skin(s), feeling, and spatial and temporal interrelations into a fine-meshed net of ‘sensescapes’. Sensory experience is thus activated as a formative medium of cultural survival and identity in order to overcome displacement and rootlessness as it evokes an intricate series of patterns that is catapulted from skin to skin as a mode of communication and connection between the characters. In the no-man’s-land of the beach the characters begin to reconstruct their world, slowly assembling alternative pathways of home and belonging. The
multisensory conceptualisation of moko takes on a healing function and marks a process of cultural regeneration and reinvigoration, spinning the pattern forward. (Human) skin becomes the medium of touch and exchange: duplicating the manifold patterns of Jordan’s moko through the tattoos on the landscape and the Tiger Moth, the human body sets off a corporeal and tangible economy of personal aroha relations, sensuous contact and connectedness. Via a fictional investment in an affective interplay (patterns and traces touch the human body just as much as it is involved in creating, transforming and afflicting them and affecting the world around it), George thus conceives of the flesh as an active agent engaging with the world and spiralling those cultural legacies to new ends. Through its permeability, sensitivity and capability of moving beyond itself, the human body is vigorously involved in the renewal and remodelling of the manifold patterns of Maori histories, cosmology and community.

The thematic spectrum of the human body, feeling, cultural identity and memory remains both open-ended and certainly not restricted to the fiction genre. Indigenous films and plays, for instance, imagine the human body in multi-faceted ways, encode and posit it as the location of issues of cultural identity and memory. Their sensuous impact and affective-emotional investment that also includes audience participation has not escaped recent criticism on New Zealand film (Fox, Grant and Radner 2011), for instance. One example of such cinematographic exploration can be seen in the film series *Aroha* (2001), a six-part anthology in Maori language which investigates a thematic range of the multiple ramifications and forms of aroha in contemporary New Zealand society. A number of plays experiment with corporeality and juxtapose feeling, emotion and physical performance by focusing on such aspects as soundscapes, physical action, and audience involvement. Artistic activities therefore work on “the premise that various aspects of Māori marae ritual *per se* are highly theatrical and can therefore be incorporated into contemporary dramatic performances” (Keown 2007: 208) and feature an exploration of “ways of changing not only the content and language of Māori-themed plays but, more fundamentally, the nature of the theatrical encounter itself” (Gilbert 2001: 348).

The basic premise of Theatre Marae is that European concepts of theatre are secondary to Māori protocols. The welcoming and performative codes of the marae, or meeting house, the heart of Māori community, became the model for this encounter. Thus, for the duration of the performance, the theatre adopts some of the characteristics of the marae: the audience are asked to remove their shoes, and the play-going experience begins with a mihi (chant) and a karanga (call or summon) and ends with a meal that becomes a kind of gathering (hui). Speech-making is an important part of the theatre, with the audience being given the opportunity to reply. Theatre Marae thereby alters the status of the audience from the Western theatrical norm of
unacknowledged and silent observers who judge the performance, to that of participants in a ritual, collective experience. (348)

Hone Kouka’s play *The Prophet* thus incorporates elements of the traditional protocol of the hura kohatu ceremony (a whanau gathering held one year after a person died for the purpose of unveiling the headstone, remembering the deceased person and reaffirming family relations) to the structure of the play and combines them with waiata (song) and karanga (ceremonial call or welcome). In addition, Kouka’s play appeals on a highly physical and emotional level through its inclusion of the rhythmic sounds and movements of basketball which the protagonists frequently play.

Therefore, writers do not only seek to transform existing categories in their works and open them for Maori perspectives as well as specific cultural concepts and actualities, but also appear to be interested in tangible investments in worlds of feelings and sensuous-emotional impulses in order to negotiate and convey those cultural frameworks and epistemologies. We are certainly required “to read differently – with a side-glancing historical eye. This very process of reading asks that we also become witnesses to these events, witnesses who also must see the need for social change in the places where we live and the places we are connected to by capital” (Najita 2006: 185). Susan Najita thus argues that “[o]ppositional narrative has the potential to radically and non-violently change readers from the inside by producing shifts in desire. […] In typical oppositional narratives, the storyteller seduces the reader/hearer into perceiving from an oppositional point of view” (Najita 2006: 183). Just as much as the imagined human body is actively engaged in change and therefore more than a witness of colonialism and its aftermath as well as the constrictive effects of ideologies and unified world views, the fictions involve readers in their worlds of feeling(s), ‘grab’ hold of them and make them conspirators in the struggle for alternative ways of life.

In this sense, the fictions are not simply about feeling, nor do they merely contain embodiments of feeling, touch, physical sensations. Indeed, they are also tangible, touching, piercing, imprinting, intensifying, soliciting feeling, snow-ball ing in many directions, endlessly transforming, and always invested and investing in new ideas, new questions, new outcomes, continuously spiralling inwards and outwards, creating permeations and repercussions. Feelings “illuminate […] both our power to affect the world around us and our power to be affected by it, along with the relationship between these two powers” (Hardt 2007: ix). They reflect cultural realities just as much as they may be instrumentalised in order to convey certain ideological
frameworks, but also to interrogate those frameworks and urge us to find new concepts that echo complex and alternative identities and perspectives. In this sense, feeling is anchored in specific cultural actualities while it simultaneously locates cultural realities and may give impulses to transform those realities.

The human body therefore not only locates the symptoms or possible corporeal responses of affects and feelings – skin blushing with shame, limbs frozen from terror or the tickling sensations of skin contact – or works as a performing cypher of cultural identity. Indeed, the fictions highlight the body’s capacities to feel, to act, to reach out, to connect, and to get involved, in short, its abilities of active agency both physical and mental and its “bodily capacities, affective capacities to act, to attend, to feel, to feel alive” (Clough 2007: 29). The human body is therefore not simply a passive entity inscribed by its cultural surroundings or a self-contained thing by itself. The fictions show that the individual is never entirely separated from the values of Maori culture and the complex genealogical, personal and collective relations of whanau and iwi. Just as the writers locate the human body on a map of feelings that range from pain, agony and loss to shame, fear and suffering as well as from the textures of the flesh to empathy, aroha and a regained sense of belonging, the body is envisaged as the resourceful medium of communication and interrelation in the wider context of community. Permeable and vulnerable to feeling, but also capable of affecting and reaching out to other human beings, it is situated in the manifold layering of the “arboreal and rhizomatic forms” (DeLoughrey 2007: 163) of whakapapa and communal as well as interpersonal involvement, negotiates the diversity of contemporary identities and remolds the multifaceted spirals of cultural memory. Feeling has contagious, electrifying, communicable, intoxicating and creative effects: its eruption makes us aware of our own complicity in ideological constructs, it calls on us to question and dismantle the categories and frameworks we live by, and it urges us to be more sensitive to alternative perspectives, consider possibilities of transforming existing cultural contexts and find new concepts in order to move forward toward a truly decolonised, complex and integrative mosaic of present realities.
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