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PERCEPTIONS OF THE PAST AND NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGY

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This essay is concerned with the way different people see the past, which parts of it are perceived as important and why, and how some of these factors relate to archaeology and the philosophies behind archaeological resource management.

Because they operate at the point of intersection of differing perceptions of the past, academic archaeology and its applied offshoot in the public sector, the state-financed New Zealand Historic Places Trust, are likely to become involved in conflicts between people and groups using differing perceptions of the past to further their own cultural, economic or political claims. In order to explicitly recognise the potential for involvement in these claims it is essential to reopen questions about different ways of viewing the past whenever circumstances within the discipline are substantially altered. We consider that the growth of public archaeology over the past decade has sufficiently changed the role of archaeology and the audience it serves to make a renewed discussion of these topics mandatory.

To get things going it is necessary to remind the reader that the events and relationships between people, ideas and institutions that constitute the corpus of the past have no set viewing point. As in the physical universe, the view of an object or event that one gains depends not only on the thing that one observes, but also on the position of the observer. Thus the present has a large part in defining the past, and what is more, the present of each observing individual or group can be quite distinct from that of another. This concept has been accepted for years among psychologists and historians (and taken to its logical conclusion in George Orwell's novel, 1984). As a construct when we talk about the past we may in fact be referring to several different levels of perceptions all of which may be held by single individuals or groups in a more or less consistent manner. These pasts are often central to the notion of identity and belongingness, defining the person or group in a social and sometimes legal context by specifying historical relationships between the individual or group concerned and other individuals or groups.

The most accessible past is that to which individuals are directly or indirectly connected being either participants themselves, or by growing up in an environment that was influenced by them.

For individuals, the personal past is one mediated by memory and includes one's own background and family history, personal experiences and those of people close to the individual concerned. This personal past has a direct bearing on the present life and worldview of each person. Thus for example, World War II would probably figure in the personal pasts of nearly all the individuals living in New Zealand at present even though the majority would not even have been born at that time. Since memory is the primary means of perceiving this past, personal pasts are perhaps the most susceptible to change. Details and incidents may be forgotten and attitudes or beliefs may change thus altering the viewing perspective of the person involved.

Where individuals are members of larger groups, these may be seen as possessing a past of their own. Such a past could incorporate the personal pasts of some (though not necessarily all) members of the group and may contain aspects of each individual's past which are common to the group as a whole. Kinship groups such as Maori hapu or settler groups tracing descent from the arrival on a single immigrant ship are examples of groups with a shared past.

A closely related kind of past is that which is assimilated rather than inherited. The individual takes on aspects of a corporate past even though the events concerned have no place at all within his or her own personal past. Many human societies are now composed of associations of a corporate nature made up of groups of non-related individuals or families. The charter of these groups is often expressed in terms of a socially perceived common past or interest even where non actually exists. Such a situation faces nearly every immigrant into a new and foreign country when he or she takes up citizenship. Other examples of this concept include the regimental histories of many British Army units or the importance of Camerone Day to members of the French Foreign Legion. The social perception of a common past is one of the strongest unifying factors within any group, a fact which is not lost upon those governments in charge of emerging nations.

Previous and existing relationships between groups defined or affected by events of the past will colour their perceptions of these events. Depending on current needs and the closeness of the individuals and groups to the events concerned, there will be a process of selective remembering (for want of a better phrase) which screens out or de-emphasises those aspects of the past which are unwanted. The romanticising of the past can be the work of those to whom its events are distant, in time or space, or else too close, in the

sense that people are reminded of unpleasant things which some might feel are best forgotten.

It often happens that those aspects of a corporate past regarded as important are part of the personal or group past of the dominant member(s) of that body. In this fashion, it is a romanticised view of the upper-class colonist that dominates the perception of the past held by the New Zealand Historic Places Trust, a perception which is expressed in concern for the New Zealand equivalent of stately homes as against places such as important traditional and historical Maori sites, sites associated with poor and working-class Europeans and Chinese or archaeological sites. In this regard it is interesting that the Historic Places Trust models itself on the British National Trust rather than the Ancient Monuments Secretariat even though, like the latter body, it has responsibility for conserving the full range of traditional (Maori), historical, and archaeological monuments in this country. The Historic Places Trust is a rather unusual organisation. While the bulk of its finance comes from a government grant, its full-time staff are permanent civil servants and it is responsible to Parliament through the Minister for Internal Affairs, it retains the (now ministerially appointed) board, member's committees, and voluntary workers of its British counterpart.

The past as presented by the Historic Places Trust generally follows aesthetic rather than historical criteria and thus serves to demonstrate the architectural and civic achievements and progress of the European colonists. There is little room in this view for consideration of the conflicts and set backs or the grubbier aspects of settlement and mercantile growth which were just as much (if not more) a part of the early colonial history of this country.

One could expect attitudes towards the past to differ between males and females, urban and rural people, racial, economic or educational groups and antique dealers or restorers of old cars or houses to the extent that their interests and consciousness of historical distinctiveness are developed.

Differences in perceptions of the past between different social or racial groups tend to be rooted in the present relations existing between them. People invest the areas of the past which they see as important with a certain amount of worth. Thus the Treaty of Waitangi is seen as possessing a measure of positive worth marking the birth of a New Zealand nation in which Maori rights were guaranteed, by some segments of the New Zealand population, whilst for others that importance is expressed as negative worth, when rights were lost.

This process of selective remembering together with the continuation of myths such as the Great Fleet and the New Zealand Moriori combine to produce a fourth kind of past: the historical myth where distortion results from the very select nature of the memories retained and the larger than life events favoured. Historical myths are usually associated with questions about the origins of peoples, nation-states, institutions or groups in a society and the relations between them. The 18th century Aryan myth, which identified the French aristocracy as Frankish in origin in contrast to the Gallo-Roman ancestry of the Third Estate and thus simultaneously explained and justified class relations in France of the time, is one such example (Poliakov, 1977). The pioneer heroics of movies such as "How the West was Won" is another.

There remains one final perception of the past which we would like to discuss, and that is the perception associated with academic study of the past in such fields as history and archaeology. Alone of all the perceptions discussed here, at least in its own world-view, it is a vehicle for rigorous academic study following established formal lines. Theoretically, the main purpose of academic study itself is knowledge as such. The stated purpose of the academic perception of the past is to enable the systematic gathering of information in written or material form from which supportable conclusions can be drawn.

Academic history can operate at all the levels discussed above from personal biography through municipal history to historical myth (see Ward's The Australian Legend) and even their debunking - (McQueen, A New Britannia).

Ideally the nature of the study itself compels anyone operating within it to furnish evidence for any statement made about the past. The academic perception is therefore at least in principle, analytical in nature. Unfortunately this institutionalised nature does not provide automatic protection from the various pitfalls to which other perceptions of the past are prone. Moreover academics as well as everyone else are part of the overall web of perceptions as individuals and members of other groups with a society and because of this often find themselves occupying rather uncomfortable middle ground in the event of conflicts in interest.

The distinction between academic and other histories is blurred when their products are incorporated by individuals and groups as part of their own identifying or justifying ideology. There is a paradox here in that the public's use

for history extends beyond an interest in the past and its lessons into the everyday struggle of personal, economic and political relations.

One could be forgiven for thinking that the academics have their own species of liability in the shape of the elitist aura of the institutions in which they work. This may be no reflection on the individuals themselves but it does produce a large barrier in the minds of both academics and those outside academia towards increased public awareness and sympathy for academic concerns. Moves from within the various learned institutions towards greater involvement or relevance with the public sector are hindered by this not altogether reluctantly accepted mantle of academic hubris which the public tends to thrust upon them.

Archaeologists because of the nature of their evidence have less scope for involvement in everyday social conflicts than do historians. The finds generally preclude identification with individuals, particular groups, tribes or specific events allowing them only to comment on the more general aspects of cultural development of entire areas and the way people lived in them (Green, 1977:7).

This does not prevent archaeologists from claiming that they can write histories 'in the general sense' for peoples, periods or areas bereft of any preserved documentation. The danger of such claims is that the general nature of the findings does allow archaeologists to create continuities in technological, social or national development where none really exists. This can lead to an uncritical involvement with nationalism through the formation of historical myths.

Although New Zealanders of European descent feel themselves to be distinctively different to Australians, Canadians and South Africans, they would be hardpressed to specify the exact points of dissimilarity. Except by contrast to indigenous Maori or Pacific Island cultures, their cultural identity is rather weakly developed, a fact often bemoaned by workers in artistic fields. Despite 'C'mon Kiwi' campaigns and the involvement of Maoris and Europeans in two World Wars, processes of national unification remain at the superficial level.

Many Pakeha New Zealanders and Maoris too, accept that the Maori past was a time of savagery that has had little influence on the development of the modern New Zealand state. Consequently, the prehistoric past of this country, its arch-

aeological sites and surviving, non-artistic aspects of Maori culture are accorded little worth by European-derived New Zealanders. For many people, especially those living in towns and cities, the past remains a somewhat romantic and vaguely Europeanised perception. Aspects of the New Zealand landscape have been grafted into a European or British framework. In this way, pa are seen as the rough equivalents of castles, and buildings such as the Waitangi Treaty House become New Zealand's stately homes or national monuments. However, for all this, there still seems to be a feeling of remoteness: people do not visit pa in the same way that castles are visited in England.

By contrast, Pakehas' pre-arrival past is accorded no small value and survives to this day in many New Zealand social and organisational institutions. Kiwis flock overseas to visit sites of significance whether they be the Acropolis, Stratford-on-Avon, Vatican City or the Marx memorial. The difference in value between the two partly reflects the recognition that Maori and European 'prehistories' are substantially different. However, it also entails a rejection of the Maori past as having anything substantial to offer the emerging nation state. It is more than a little ironic that New Zealand exchange students should have to go to a marae over the space of a week or weekend, and learn sufficient of a culture quite alien to the vast majority of them to give their overseas hosts an example of distinctly New Zealand culture.

Aspects of the past in which Maori and Pakeha cultures have shared or interacted have been ignored or dismissed. Many people often quite unconsciously assume that Maori, European and other ethnic groups have followed and in some cases still follow mutually exclusive historical paths. Such a view ignores the fact that each group, since settlement, has existed in the same space as the other, and thus relations (even avoidance) must have existed and continue to exist between them which have played a significant role in our history. The only exception to this downplaying of interaction occurs when dealing with those times when the cultures have come into direct and armed conflict such as the wars of the last half of the nineteenth century. But even here these conflicts are seen in unidimensional terms as land wars or insurrections, events that occurred in the past rather than as violent episodes in a continuing conflict over the country's means and ends. The areas of conflict and cooperation between Maoris and Europeans must have had a significant effect on the way present day New Zealand society has been put together.

People often remark, "Oh there can't be much archaeology in New Zealand ... there's nothing here." And yet this perception of little past in New Zealand is totally at odds with the massive effects of historic and prehistoric settlement on the New Zealand landscape. Almost every inch of the country has been lived on, cultivated, fought over, pillaged, sanctified, sung about in poems or portrayed in paintings. While this country's past may not have the village pageant style of Europe or the Hollywood-cheapened vitality of the American past, it is a past nonetheless and New Zealand is bursting with it. Modern New Zealand society has been and continues to be affected by it in often very subtle ways. It almost seems as if New Zealanders consciously avoid their collective past and the numerous signs it has left behind. New Zealand history as taught in schools continues in many ways to be a pale shadow of the history of Great Britain, and more reminiscent in both content and form, of the 1940s than the 1980s.

Archaeologists in New Zealand are faced by a number of conflicts involving their own perceptions of the past and those of others. There are two major conflicts which are in special need of attention. The first is a conflict between archaeologists and Maoris.

Archaeologists have an academic perception and wish to study New Zealand prehistory along traditional positivist lines. Their studies of migration and adaptation contribute to a general history of mankind and offer an interpretation of the significance of the Maori past. Their scientific enquiries are carried out and their findings communicated to the public within the colonial milieu discussed above.

Many Maoris, on the other hand, use personal and group histories to establish an identity separate from that of the majority culture and to justify the continued survival of Maori values and institutions. They see archaeology as a threat from institutions and individuals with a predominantly western ethos who wish to interpret and redefine the Maori past and thus alter its significance in the present. This is seen as a specific threat to the mana and tapu nature of the ancestors and Maori heritage (Lawlor, 1983:6-8). While archaeologists seeking relevance or public support erroneously claim the ability to reconstruct the past or to provide a validated general history for pre-colonial New Zealand, a

direct conflict of interest will remain. When, however, we truthfully admit that the evidence we usually recover restricts us to general questions about minor and technological aspects of the societies we study, we lose the general audience we covet so much.

In Australia, a debate between archaeologists and Aborigines has led to conflict over who controls archaeological sites, museum collections, archives and the resources available for academic study. Both sides see it as a battle for survival; with Aborigines using their perceptions of the past and the material remains associated with it as the basis for their claims to continued existence as a minority culture with special rights to lands and compensation; and archaeologists defending their right of access to archaeological sites as their discipline's bread and butter.

While this remained a two-way battle between Aborigines and academic prehistorians, the outcome would probably have been the establishment of a *modus vivendi* that recognised the rights of both groups. Grant giving agencies and academic institutions in fact already demand that researchers consult Aborigines and Maoris with claims to sites before they can be excavated.

However, in the 1970s, in Australia and New Zealand following a world-wide swing towards conservation legislation, the state entered the fray passing legislation to control all archaeological and historic sites in the country, vesting the ownership of artefacts in the crown, and spawning a new applied discipline of public archaeology responsible for archaeological resource management. The second conflict then is between the perceptions of academic archaeologists and those working for the state.

The whole question of archaeological resource management schemes in this country stems from a number of historical factors. The most significant of these is the sudden upsurge of interest shown by governments in various parts of the world in preservation of historic and archaeological sites and in historical public relations over the past twenty years.

The reasons for such a widespread phenomenon appear to be connected with the growth of the major conservation and environmental lobbies of the 1960s and 1970s, and, in the case of Commonwealth nations, the lessening of ties with

parent or colonising nations. This has been accompanied by a search for an indigenous identity. Coupled with this was the search by many states for something in the past that would provide a basis for social stability in the face of the confusion and widespread loss of national purpose following the rapid economic and social changes of the sixties.

The trend in increasing government intervention seems to be a reflection of the shift from the welfare state towards management-oriented government in countries throughout the world. The welfare state was concerned (theoretically at least) with the protection of the weak within society whilst allowing the various other components in it to function and interact without government interference. Management-oriented government by contrast focusses much more on active intervention in the production and supply of goods and services rather than the input of money. Sites relevant to a developing national ethos are now being managed like any other resource.

There has been a rapid increase in the amount of legislation devoted to the protection and management of sites and the formation or empowering of state organisations to locate, protect and manage historical and archaeological records and monuments. As well there has been continued government support for official histories and the development of an historical mythos for the state. This legislation includes United Nation's Conventions which according to a recent judgement of the high Court of Australia have the standing of International treaties. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent on surveys and rescue excavations in the U.S. alone.

The situation in New Zealand parallels the general case exactly: the rapid changes in economy and intensification in primary production occurred in this country at the same time as similar developments overseas. It is therefore hardly surprising that the legislative solutions proposed to protect archaeological sites should also follow overseas models. In fact, the New Zealand legislation, by controlling sites on private as well as public lands goes much further than that in the U.S. or elsewhere.

The government and the New Zealand Historic Places Trust, the organisation it has empowered to administer archaeological and historical resources through the Historic

Places Act 1980, have different needs and perceptions of the past to those held by academic archaeologists. For the moment at least there has been no overt confrontation between the state and archaeologists but the potential for serious conflict due to the divergent nature of interests and perceptions in what either group chooses to call 'the past' remains great. There is some confusion among archaeologists as to how the interests of the discipline can best be formulated and presented to the state in a way that will ensure that they continue to be consulted and that their interests are given some standing.

The government's role in the intensification of production in New Zealand has been marked. It has provided new transport and communication systems, thermal and hydroelectric power stations, exploration finance, venture and development capital, producer subsidies as well as direct involvement in forestry, coal, petrol and natural gas, fertilizers, steel and banking. In addition, government departments such as the Ministry of Works and Development, Forest Service, Lands and Survey, and Housing Corporation have many archaeological sites on land they control and operate on. Archaeologists were very active in moves to vest control of archaeological sites in the state, seeing this as a way of protecting their research materials and gaining access to funds by enlisting the aid of other government departments to control the rate of site destruction.

It is significant that archaeological sites are defined in the Historic Places Act as places which are or may be able "through investigation by archaeological techniques to provide scientific, cultural, or historical evidence as to the exploration, occupation, settlement, or development of New Zealand." Archaeological sites are here defined almost entirely in scientific terms. Questions of significance which determine whether or not a site warrants preservation have not, in practice, followed this restricted definition and scenic prominence, traditional importance, erosional state, and even personal significance to nearby residents have been taken into account.

The planning and resource management legislation of the 1970s were designed to intensify land-use by arbitrating and integrating conflicting claims on land. By preserving representative areas of landscape, wildlife refuges and archaeological sites, such legislation might allow more intensive changes or a greater rate of destruction of sites elsewhere.

It would be naive to believe that state governments devote so much money to preserving and controlling archaeological sites solely because they value the research findings of archaeologists.

We should not under-rate the importance that governments place on the creation of a national ethos or the role that historical studies and preserved archaeological sites might play in this development. With the continuing move away from New Zealand of the British economy and the weakening of emotional ties with the 'Mother Country', New Zealand is increasingly being forced to look to itself for a new concept of nationhood amongst other, predominantly Polynesian, Pacific nations. Commensurate with this, a search for a genuinely New Zealand self-image and world-view is underway among New Zealand writers and intellectuals. In such a scheme of things, perception of a new past to replace the now embarrassing colonial mantle, could have a high, if presently unconscious, priority in the minds of policy makers (if only to increase New Zealand's distinctiveness as a tourist destination!). It seems likely that the social climate in New Zealand might be becoming more receptive to such a move.

As yet these issues remain unresolved despite some debate among both academics and those in the bureaucracy set up by the state. No similar debate, however, has been carried to the overall population, and many groups with their own perceptions of the past (such as the Maori people) remain effectively excluded from the discussion.

There is no need for academic archaeologists to discontinue their studies for fear of treading on the toes of minority groups or that their results will be manipulated by politicians. However, as privileged citizens in an evolving democracy we must work to increase the level of public debate and understanding of the uses that can be made of our findings. By broadening the processes of consultation and control of historic and archaeological resources we ensure that they are used to benefit all segments of society.

We have discussed at some length, different kinds of perception of the past. It should now be realised that there are fundamental differences between them. This has to be recognised if one is to make any progress in communicating with people with different viewpoints and concerns. Now that many modern states have become active in the field of

site preservation and historical interpretation, it is essential that consciousness of the potential uses of different perceptions of the past be carried to the wider public for debate and deliberation. Therein lies the challenge to archaeology and the only way we can begin to resolve the conflicts that threaten.

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