

CONTESTED SITES OF IDENTITY AND THE CULT OF THE NEW

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Source: *New Museums and the Making of Culture* (Oxford and London: Berg, 2006), pp. 137–165.

In the final section of *New Museums and the Making of Culture*, I explore two prominent museums in the Pacific region that I have selected because they illustrate the highly political and contested nature of culture in particularly important and astute ways. The Centre Culturel Tjibaou (CCT) in Nouméa (New Caledonia) and the national Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa) in Wellington both opened in 1998 as self-consciously new institutions that aimed to project postmodern strategies of representation. They both responded to imperatives to interpret and celebrate national or territorial identities as well as the need to participate in reconciliation processes. However, in accord with their divergent socio-political and economic contexts, each institution has adopted a mode of representing postcolonial identity that reflects different approaches to questions of history and cultural identity in their respective colonial contexts. In the making of Te Papa and the CCT, and in their day-to-day experiences, each museum actively demonstrates that the constitution of culture — both in and beyond their physical spheres — involves a difficult, highly charged and ongoing process of negotiation.

In these two cases, representation of the relationship between politics and culture is significant, and both museums project an image of culture as being interconnected with politics. In the case of Te Papa, this focus was initiated by the state, and is connected to the museum's founding mandate of biculturalism, whereas for the CCT, cultural politics has emerged more from the recent history of independence activism against the state. Moreover, these museums can be analysed for the ways in which they attach a certain rhetorical or narrative spin to their understandings of cultural politics. The role of rhetoric is apparent in the way the institutions have been conceptualized, designed and produced, and the relationships between rhetoric and cultural politics also affect their ongoing role in the context of their communities and governing authorities. Furthermore, the connection between culture and heritage often coalesces as the central point of

crisis in regard to the broader state agenda of managing contradictions that emerge in relation to cultural politics. In this chapter I will talk about the CCT in respect of the image constructed — principally by its architecture, but also its exhibitions — for an international audience; analysing the publicity and attention to newness that has attended this process. In the next chapter I consider Te Papa in terms of New Zealand's cultural policy and its effect on the museum's exhibition and representational strategies, and explore the compulsion expressed by this new museum to be a cultural centre.

Global background and colonial histories

As early as 1977, in a document commissioned by UNESCO's International Council of Museums (ICOM), Kenneth Hudson offered a critical summary evaluation of the state of museums and the contradictions faced by this 'institution-in-process' (Hudson 1999). Predicated upon the assertion of identity politics, indigenous rights movements, and the increasingly urgent desire for relocalization that was being expressed globally at the time, Hudson identified what he considered to be the impending transformation of museums into cultural centres, while also outlining the problems implicit in this shift in focus (Kreps 2003; Simpson 1996; Losche 2003; Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat 2005: 171). UNESCO's current description of the role and function of museums can be seen to extend the line of contention made by Hudson 30 years ago. Despite privileging the production of effects of newness (which is a value generally not addressed by Hudson) UNESCO today reiterates many of the principles — and addresses some points of contradiction and contestation — that he articulated:

Museums, which are centres for conservation, study and reflection on heritage and culture, can no longer stand aloof from the major issues of our time. The museological heritage is both an actor and an instrument of dialogue between nations and of a common international vision aimed at cultural development. The latter may vary considerably in nature and form, depending on the historical and cultural context. (<http://portal.unesco.org/culture/>)

This description is fascinating for its acknowledgement of the relationship between discourses of human development (which have traditionally focused on economic and social wellbeing) and culture. Despite being asserted globally here, the connections between culture and development have historically, in the Pacific, been obscured by local and regional systems of governance. This was the position argued by a review report developed in 2004 by the Pacific Islands Forum Eminent Person's Group, which contributed to and was reiterated in the final draft (2005) of the *Pacific Plan* (developed as the key 'road map for the region' — <http://pacificplan.org>). Constituted by a core group of politicians, academics and diplomats from Papua New Guinea, Australia, Tonga, Kiribati, and

IDENTITIES AND DIVERSITY

Samoa, the group asserted: ‘Despite being an integral core to society, culture is rarely considered central to development and is sometimes considered by donors and developers as a threat to the implementation of projects’. Taking advice from this and other groups, the *Pacific Plan* contends that:

It is assumed that managers and planners have understood the role that culture plays in the communities when developing projects and programmes, yet many examples of project failures in the region are due to a lack of research and a lack of understanding of cultural principles and practices conducted at the design stage. (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat 2005: 167)

This reveals an inconsistency in understanding between the globally dominant organization of UNESCO and local structures and systems of governance. The UNESCO statement may be understood to mean that, for museums that want to be regarded as relevant and new, it is imperative to present an image of political engagement. However, the *Pacific Plan* argues that presenting an image of political investment may in fact work to the detriment of museums, because at the local and regional level, linking culture and development may be perceived as a political challenge. This does not mean that culture is not valued but that, as another working document explains, ‘The diverse cultures in the Pacific mean that cultural issues are often best dealt with at the national level. However, the various economic, social, environmental and even governance pressures impacting on the culture of all Pacific island communities are at a rate that, instead of evolving and adjusting, culture is often being eroded’ (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat n.d.: 1). This additional level of detail makes the examination of relationships between policy and other agencies of governance in New Caledonia in respect of the CCT and in New Zealand in respect of Te Papa even more useful for the purpose of elaborating on current trends in the design and function of museums globally as well as in the Pacific. Indeed, the *Pacific Plan* argues that ‘at the national level, most [Pacific] countries lack coherent cultural policy’ (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat 200): 171). As a developed and stable part of the region, New Zealand — like Australia — is exempted from this contention, while the CCT is presented as an exception to the general condition of poorly funded and underresourced cultural institutions (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat 2005: 168).

Due to their geographical proximity and differing colonial histories, an analysis of the CCT and Te Papa offers a valuable contribution to understanding the ways that museums offer a site for crosscultural exchange. They can also be contrasted with other museums and cultural centres in the region, including the important and successful Vanuatu National Museum and Cultural Centre in Port Vila (Bolton 1994, 1997, 2001, 2003; Geismar and Tilley 2003). This contrast is also apparent in relation to countries that struggle to resource a cultural centre, in Guam, for instance, plans for a cultural centre have long been delayed because

CONTESTED SITES OF IDENTITY AND THE CULT OF THE NEW

of funding problems and changing national priorities (a task force has recently discussed opening a small Guam museum branch at the airport to provide a source of income for the museum foundation) (Worth 2005).

This transregional contextualization also demonstrates how cultural institutions in the Pacific have drawn attention to the material evidence and memory of past encounters through the objects that are collected, stored, exhibited, and sometimes repatriated. These objects provide the raw matter for multiple contested narratives because, as Appadurai and Breckenridge (1992: 35) articulate, through their history of collection, they have always reflected a negotiated settlement between longstanding cultural significations and more volatile group interests and objectives (see also Peers and Brown 2003; Pearce 1992; Kaplan 1994). In seeking to describe and historically contextualize certain social and political events and frameworks that contribute to the production of the museum as an institution, building, collection and service, I explore how museums actively continue to produce the image — or system' — of culture they purvey and perhaps manage. Indeed, this culture (in both contemporary and historical forms) can be described more than ever according to the market-driven policy-speak offered by development agencies and studies, where culture is characterized as '... a complex web of relationships and beliefs, values and motivations ... a social operating system that influences attitudes, behavior and responses to change. This system operates on personal and communal levels and may be a barrier to, or a catalyst for, the development of social capital' (Jeannotte 2003: 39; Corsane 2005; see also the definition of policy as 'the governmental use of culture for specific ends'⁵ in Bennett 1999: 382–3).

Overlaid against the contemporary pressures outlined by UNESCO, as well as national governmental policies that guide the direction of exhibitions and public programmes, new museums may yet continue to function as sites of authority in their own right. They may, for example, provide a feedback loop that connects back up with these agencies and strategies of governance, to provide an authoritative comment on the development of culture and cultural policy issues — including multiculturalism and sustainability in relation to heritage sites and the preservation of material culture (Wise 2002: 223). This is certainly the case in relation to the Vanuatu National Museum and Cultural Centre, which has influenced and contributed to Vanuatu's national development in concrete ways (Bolton 1994). However, contradictions do persist, so that while new museums frequently claim to facilitate or provoke the public debate of social and political issues, or argue that they present multiple versions of interpretative texts to imply a changing or contested political context, they also tend to maintain a broad attention to identity-enhancing programmes (Vergo 1989; Boswell and Evans 1999). Attempts by museums to intensify their connection with culture is particularly evident in examples that present exhibitions of artefacts as fine art — which, according to Clifford (1997: 121), is one of the 'most effective ways to communicate crossculturally a sense of quality, meaning, and importance'. In both the CCT and in some parts of Te Papa the presentation of artefact as

IDENTITIES AND DIVERSITY

artwork has been motivated by a desire to politicize and challenge issues (such as the museum's relationship to power and authority). This link between museums and culture (as fine art) has also been amplified still further — and presented more literally — by the accumulative trend identified by Hudson (1999: 371) for replacing the term 'museum' with the increasingly valuable cultural centre label. In privileging this association between new museums and culture (which includes heritage and tradition), the connection to politics risks either dropping away entirely, or it may be made stronger and more evident because of a renewed centralization of 'cultural politics'.

Culture as resource

The definition of culture and its associated capital has shifted somewhat in recent years so that it is now understood as a resource as well as a commodity (Clammer 2005; Wise 2002; Yúdice 2003; Ames 2005; Coombe 2005). UNESCO's attention to tangible and intangible cultural heritage and discourses of sustainability (Malloch Brown 2004; UNDP-HDR 2004) indicates that globalization has enabled culture to become an increasingly important and translation-friendly resource that is connected to economic and 'social well-being' (Creative New Zealand 2003; New Zealand Government, Ministry for Culture and Heritage Te Manatu Taonga 2003; Galla 2005). The self-conscious production of heritage has in many cases also become a key component of indigenous self-determination politics (Clifford 2001, 2004: 6). Broadly defined, in this guise:

heritage work includes oral-historical research, cultural evocation and explanation (exhibits, festivals, publications, films, tourist sites), language description and pedagogy, community-based archaeology, art production, marketing, and criticism. Of course, such projects are only one aspect of indigenous self-determination politics today. Heritage is not a substitute for land claims, struggles over subsistence rights, development, educational, and health projects, defense of sacred sites, and repatriation of human remains or stolen artefacts, but it is closely connected to all these struggles. (Clifford 2004: 8)

Culture as heritage is thus increasingly recognized as providing a valuable new resource that may contribute clear and assisted development options for the national benefit and for local community development and support. Yet its function as a commodity also persists — as indicated by policy documents and statistical reports with titles such as the Secretariat of the Pacific Community's 'Economic Valuing of Expressions of Culture' (2003) and 'Australia's Trade in Culture' (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2003) — so that it continues to offer new modes of experience and new products as well as renewed labour markets and producers. A critical analysis of this is useful for isolating and understanding

how instrumental culture has become within the dominant relationships governing nation, international and domestic politics, social conflict and economic development as well as for demonstrating, as Clifford has noted, that ‘What counts as “tradition” is never politically neutral’ (2004: 8, 2000; Jolly 2001; Briggs 1996; Butler 1998). Through this study I examine the influence of new museums or cultural centres that continue to offer a dedication to pedaeoeical programmes and, in some cases, the assertion of objectivity in relation to localized communities as well as global audiences. In the following sections I consider how Te Papa and the CCT have attempted to balance the tensions arising from the complex needs of their local context with the often-competing demands of the transcultural discourse with which they also seek engagement. I argue that the relationship between governance and cultural diversity needs greater analysis, especially as the third term — heritage (with its problematic polarization of authenticity and kitsch) — has become such an increasingly valued and contested factor in discussions about self-governance, representation, and crosscultural dialogue and exchange.

Global, local, transcultural museums

By considering the effects of globalization within local contexts as depicted in the new museum-as-cultural centre, we can also see how the global and the local interconnect in more general terms and, importantly, identify where the points of emphasis or tension are placed by those responsible for producing the museum. As Clifford (1997: 126) notes, the ‘“here” matters’. Similarly, Appadurai (1996: 178) identifies locality as ‘primarily relational and contextual rather than as scalar or spatial’ (see also Robins 1999: 23). Despite offering a survey of national (or what he calls ‘majoritarian’) museums and tribal museums and cultural centres in ‘Four Northwest Museums’ (1997), Clifford claims to reject any straightforward contrast or distinction that is based on like values. Describing these typologies ‘schematically’, he explains that ‘majority museums articulate cosmopolitan culture, science, art, and humanism — often with a national slant. Tribal museums express local culture, oppositional politics, kinship, ethnicity, and tradition’ (Clifford 1997: 121). This means that tribal life cannot be ‘adequately captured by terms such as “minority” (denoting a location defined in relation to majority power)’ because these institutions both do and do not accept the terms of the dominant majority culture. He suggests that he is concerned instead with ‘entanglement and relationships’ (Clifford 1997: 11). However, these distinctions in aim and agenda become especially discernible when national and local tribal museums or cultural centres hold the same objects, or when a repatriation claim is made by a local community against a national institution. I discuss such a claim in Chapter 6 in relation to Te Papa and Te Hau ki Turanga, a Maori *wharehenui* (meeting house) that is variously described as the ‘centrepiece of Maori collection’ (Waitangi Tribunal 2004b: 588) and ‘Te Papa’s star Maori attraction’ (Alley 2004), and which was forcibly acquired in 1867. In

IDENTITIES AND DIVERSITY

presenting itself as a combination of these terms and their agendas and effects, the new museum-as-cultural centre model makes Clifford's categories appear unstable, especially as the categories he employs seem to forgo the fact that these new institutions aspire to speak of and to dominant national discourses, local interests, and the condition of transnational exchange and communication that overlays and strongly influences each of these (Chakrabarty 2002).

Marshall Sahlins (2005) contends that global and local interests are involved in a more active process of exchange and encounter than is often assumed to be the case. Arguing that these negotiations often take place and become manifest materially in local geographies, he explains that the shift in 'culture consciousness of the peoples involved something more than defensiveness. Many were seen to be actively indigenizing the global forces besetting them: turning the objects and relations of the world system toward their own projects and concepts of the good. Hence a new tilt of anthropological theory, away from globalization in favour of localization' (Sahlins 2005: 4; see also Coombes 1994: 221). Bell (2004) argues that this produces a space of hybridity. Rather than simply arguing for the possibility of a local subversion or appropriation of global resources and interests, however (risking as this does the reassertion of a dichotomy), I would suggest — following Sahlins — that something more akin to a dialogue may occur here. This would encourage discussion about the relationships between the local and global, the past and the present, the authentic and the spectacular or entertaining, and other more specialized museological and anthropological dichotomies, including nature and culture and rational 'scientific' knowledge as contrasted against 'local' or 'traditional' knowledge (Ames 2005: 47–8; Kreps 2003). This also means that instead of rejecting modernity outright, contemporary cultural centres may aim to renegotiate their place within it, in an act that Coombe (2005: 39) explains to mean that capital encounters must thereby come to 'accommodate or negotiate with the societies and worldviews of others and [acknowledge] that these dialectic transformations constitute alternate and multiple modernities'. This reconfiguration of the new museum as a cultural centre may even indicate both the political leverage (and general taste for culture and culturalism over politics) and the desire to be contemporary, relevant, and still new. This might confirm Appadurai's (1996: 1) idea that 'What is new about modernity (or about the idea that its newness is a new kind of newness)' is linked to the universal desire for such newness, as expressed by startlingly authoritative rhetorical claims; or for such modernity as a mark of progress, while not precluding the possibility of the development of multiple, jostling modernities.

In the wake of the late nineteenth/early twentieth-century promotion of education for all, and following on from the mid-twentieth-century transformations of the dominant social reform/imperialism programmes into broader based and more inclusive pedagogical frameworks (as illustrated by *The Family of Man*), the public museum continues to present itself as both the purveyor of objectivity and a potential resource for a multicultural education (Hudson 1999; Coombes

2004; Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa 2004: vm-ix). This is evident in policy documents, and UNESCO claims that it ‘can best protect cultural diversity through actions involving sites that bear witness to multiple cultural identities, are representative of minority cultural heritages, are of founding significance or are in imminent danger of destruction’ (<http://portal.unesco.org/culture/>). However, with the increasing capital accorded to culture (Yudice 1992, 2003; Clifford 2004), and as illustrated most dramatically by the debates over the IFC in New York (Chapter 4), the contemporary museum ‘is clearly hostage to ... and aware of the necessity of being seen to perform some vital and visible public function to justify its maintenance, while fighting to preserve a measure of autonomy’ (Coombes 2004: 294). Offerine a further renewal of the new museum model, then, the cultural centre concept may seek closer links to local communities to reinvigorate the relationship between representation and governmentality, through offering sites in which multiculturalism informs decision-making processes. It may also offer new forms of place-based autonomy (especially for people who have been historically marginalized by modern regimes of power). Investigating developments in the current global proliferation of museums and speculating over the almost insatiable taste for these sites, Clifford (1997: 8) also contends that: ‘Something more is going on than the simple extension of a Western institution ... museums and other sites of cultural performance appear not as centers or destinations but rather as contact zones traversed by things and people’ (for discussion of ‘borderlands’ concept see McLaughlin 1993; for ‘zone of contestation’ see Appadurai and Breckenridge 1992: 38). Echoing a now very familiar-sounding claim, Clifford (1997: 8) asserts that the aim to understand and experience museums as contact zones is ‘both a description and a hope, an argument for more diverse participation in a proliferating “world of museums”’.

The Centre Culturel Tjibaou

The Centre Culturel Tjibaou (CCT), opened in Nouméa in 1998 to provide a spectacular example of the ‘new museum’ that has attracted critical and popular interest over the last decade. Designed by Renzo Piano in consultation with the Agency for the Development of Kanak Culture (ADCK), the centre comprises an interconnected series of ten stylized *grand cases* (chiefs’ huts), which form three villages (covering an area of 6,060 square metres) (Figure 1). These huts have an exposed stainless-steel structure and are constructed of Iroko, an African rot-resistant timber, which has faded over time to reveal a silver patina evocative of the coconut palms that populate the coastline of New Caledonia.

The CCT draws materially and conceptually on its geopolitical environment, so that despite being situated on the outskirts of the capital city (on the main island, known as Grand Terre), it draws influence from the diverse Kanak communities residing elsewhere across the New Caledonian islands. The circling pathway that leads from the car park to the centres entrance is lined with plants

IDENTITIES AND DIVERSITY

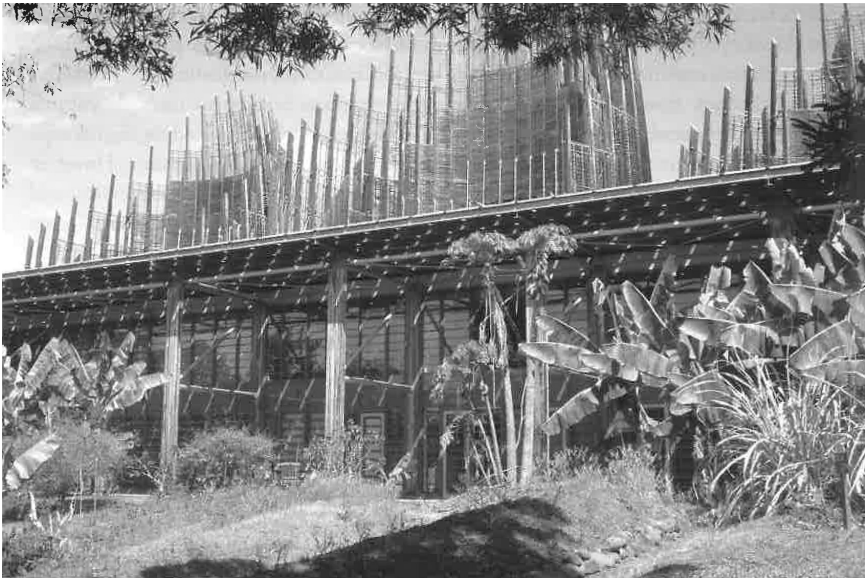


Figure 1 Exterior of the Centre Culturel Tjibaou, from traditional gardens and Kanak path, Noumea. Photograph by Kylie Message. (Courtesy of the ADCK-Centre Culturel Tjibaou/Renzo Piano Building Workshop, Architectes.)

from various regions of New Caledonia (Figure 2). Together, these represent the myth of the creation of the first human — the founding hero, Téa Kanaké. Signifying the collaborative design process, the path and centre are organically interconnected so it is difficult to discern any discrete edges existing between the building and gardens (Figure 3). Similarly, the soaring huts appear unfinished as they open outward to the sky, projecting the architect's image of Kanak culture as flexible, diasporic, progressive and resistant to containment by traditional museological spaces (Figure 4). Reflecting on the design process, Piano explains:

It dawned on me that one of the fundamental elements of Kanak architecture is the very construction process: 'building the House' is every bit as important as 'the finished House'. From this, I began to develop the concept of a permanent 'building work-site', or rather of a place which would suggest an unfinished house-building project, (<http://www.adck.nc>)

In this chapter I suggest that the centre presents an 'unfinished', transformative effect to reflect its ongoing commitment to an image of newness. This effect provides the CCT with features associated with contemporary museums across the world, showing its fluency in postmodern architectural discourse as

CONTESTED SITES OF IDENTITY AND THE CULT OF THE NEW



Figure 2 Exterior of the Centre Culturel Tjibaou, from traditional gardens and Kanak path, Nouméa. Photograph by Kylie Message. (Courtesy of the ADCK-Centre Culturel Tjibaou/Renzo Piano Building Workshop, Architectes.)

well as its ability to perform as a significant cultural actor on a global stage. While this encourages a steady flow of international visitors interested in the centre's spectacular architecture and its programmes, the constant reiteration of the new is tied to the specific political objective of reconciliation between colonizer and colonized. Fundamentally connected to the CCT's founding mandate, the ideology of the new is more than dogmatic. It is used to produce convincing symbols of national identity for a state undergoing a process of political transition, and aims to evoke a real interest and investment in an evolving public culture. The CCT's desire to be new can thus be seen to accord with its role in

IDENTITIES AND DIVERSITY



Figure 3 Looking from Kanak path into the Péruï House and cafeteria area, the Centre Culturel Tjibaou, Noumea. Photograph by Kylie Message. (Courtesy of the ADCK-Centre Culturel Tjibaou/Renzo Piano Building Workshop, Architectes.)

domestic and international affairs, and as indicating, above all else, the need for a clear articulation of cultural politics in New Caledonia – as well as the inseparability of these terms.

Geographically, New Caledonia is located approximately 1,200 km east of Australia and 1,500km north-west of New Zealand. The island nation of Vanuatu lies to the north-east. A small group of islands, the main island is about 300km long and 50km wide with a mountain range stretching across the central spine. France took formal possession of New Caledonia in 1853 and ‘overcame Melanesian resistance to make way for settlement, both convict and free. The Melanesians were displaced, mainly to the east coast and the Loyalty Islands. The first nickel rush in the 1870s brought more settlement and foreign investment. The Melanesians eventually became a minority’ (Spencer, Ward and Connell 1988: 2). As a result of both immigration (people from Vanuatu, Indonesia and Vietnam were brought in to work on European enterprises) and the displacement of indigenous people, a multicultural society emerged, with little social *métissage* (or intermixing). This is reflected in the geopolitical conditions and New Caledonia is divided politically into three ‘provinces’: the South, centred on the economically dominant Noumea, which is mainly inhabited by white people of European and other origins (but also an increasing number of other Melanesian residents as well as Asian and other Oceanian people), the North, which is mainly inhabited by Melanesians, and the Loyalty Islands,

CONTESTED SITES OF IDENTITY AND THE CULT OF THE NEW

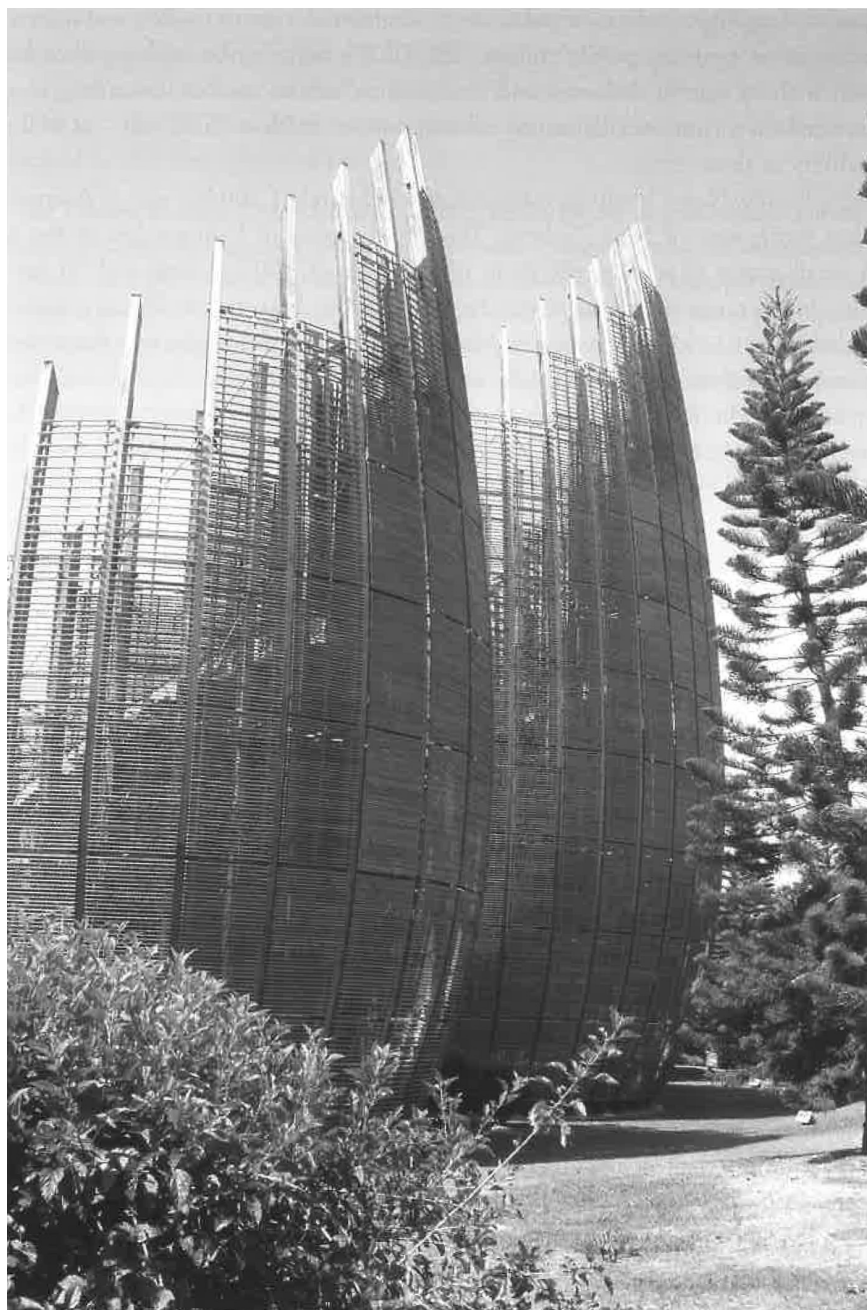


Figure 4 Exterior of the third village, including the Mâlep House, the Centre Culturel Tjibaou, Nouméa. Photograph by Kylie Message. (Courtesy of the ADCK-Centre Culturel Tjibaou/Renzo Piano Building Workshop, Architectes.)

IDENTITIES AND DIVERSITY

located to the north-east of the main island and also mainly Melanesian. The Kanak movement for independence (or for recognition of Kanak precedence and autonomy) dates from the earliest days of colonization and there was frequent violence between the French and indigenous people from the start. In 1988, after a period of acute conflict, the Matignon Accords were enacted in an effort at reconciliation (*ré-équilibre*), with the promise of greater respect and recognition for Kanak culture, new interest in a system of power sharing, and the proposal to hold a referendum on self-determination (although this was deferred by the signing of the Nouméa Accords in 1998). Since the passing of the conflict of the 1980s New Caledonia is often presented as a site of stability in the region, in comparison to neighbouring Melanesian countries like Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands (MacLellan 2005: 1). With almost a quarter of the world's nickel resources, New Caledonia has become such a valuable mining centre that it is commonly said that 'whoever controls nickel controls New Caledonia' (Horowitz 2004: 308). More recently there have also been significant constitutional changes to New Caledonia's status within the French Republic, creating 'shared sovereignty' and a new citizenship for New Caledonians.

The Centre Culturel Tjibaou and new museums

The CCT embodies many of the key components and features that have collectively become identified with a shift in the way that museums are conceptualized in the Western world. As already illustrated, this movement away from a more traditional museological approach has quickly resulted in a series of differences in the ways that museums are designed, made, experienced, and understood to function (Lumley 1988; Vergo 1989; Preziosi and Farago 2004). The CCT conforms to many of the general characteristics of new museums, as indicated by this description of the centre:

The Tjibaou Cultural centre is unsurpassed in the Pacific for its architectural splendour and its expensive, high-tech virtuosity. It sustains a singular stress on contemporary Pacific arts rather than the curating and display of older objects ... There are about thirty older artifacts in the Bwenaado house (mainly masks, houseposts, and roof sculptures on loan from European museums), but most older Kanak artifacts are still housed in the Territorial Museum of New Caledonia in town. The emphasis in the Ngan Jila (house of riches) is rather on contemporary works by named artists in both indigenous and introduced genres. According to Emmanuel Kasarhérou this is faithful to Tjibaou's vision of Kanak culture not as frozen in the past, but as open and alive in. (Jolly 2001: 434)

In many ways, the CCT can be understood as an ideal example of this new museum model because although it conforms so closely with the principles and

CONTESTED SITES OF IDENTITY AND THE CULT OF THE NEW

effects also used by many other examples worldwide, it does this for reasons that are very clearly connected to its local context, and with the conditions and reasons for its production. This means that although the architecture is breathtaking and eminently suitable for the global marketplace of postcard photography and tourist imagery, its exhibitions and programmes engage both with the complexity within Kanak communities and the broader geopolitical context of New Caledonia. For instance, while its main exhibition spaces include the growing permanent collection of contemporary Kanak and Oceanian art displayed in the Bérétara Hall and Jinu House, traditional objects of Kanak heritage on loan from the Musée de l'Homme in Paris are exhibited in the Bwénaado House. It also hosts temporary exhibitions such as *Impressions Pacifique: Estampes contemporaines* (2005), which was the result of a collaboration between the CCT and the Centre Culturel Goa Ma Bwarhat in Hienghène, and which aimed to produce interregional partnerships (ADCK 2005: 27). It promotes engagement by rural Kanak communities through outreach programmes that include artists' workshops and ingenious 'Travelling Educational Kits', which are folded-up, suitcase-sized models of the cultural centre, its grounds and its activities. These are taken to schools and community centres to show the cultural centre and its activities, to demonstrate the relationship between Kanak architecture and Renzo Piano's stylized building, and to encourage children to participate in the visual arts. It has a well resourced library and digital catalogue that facilitate access to and the preservation of Kanak cultural heritage (particularly the remaining twenty-five languages spoken across the islands) (interview with Emmanuel Kasarhérou, The Centre Culturel Tjibaou, 16 November 2005). The CCT encourages interaction with other cultural centres and museums in the Pacific region (through agencies such as the Pacific Islands Museums Association [PIMA] – and institutions including the Vanuatu National Museum and Cultural Centre; with which it discusses issues including the preservation of intangible heritage and language), and promotes dialogue between New Caledonia and museums and other cultural institutions in France and other countries.

These programmes reflect the centre's official primary purpose as expressed in its mission statement, to 'promote and preserve the Kanak archaeological, anthropological and linguistic heritage' (<http://www.adck.nc>). This shows the CCT to be concerned with creating a very particular relationship with the post-colonial politics of image-construction — a point that is significant in relation to the centre's official publicity and rhetoric, as well as for the Kanak communities that it aims principally to represent and engage with. The CCT may be seen to provide an official site for testing and holding dialogue and debate over what kinds of images and ideas may be appropriate signifiers of a renewed cultural identity for New Caledonians as the country continues to negotiate its future direction (<http://www.adck.nc>).

Before the centre opened, the Agency for the Development of Kanak Culture stated:

IDENTITIES AND DIVERSITY

The intention is not to make a static presentation of works as in a conventional museum but to make available to be seen, to be admired and, it will be said, ‘to live again’, objects that have become what the Elders have termed ‘ambassadors of Kanak culture’ throughout the world. (*Mwà Vée* 1996b: 44)

These objects are part of the ‘dispersed Kanak heritage’ that exists in museums and collections globally. Emmanuel Kasarhérou, the cultural director of the CCT, explains that an inventory was taken in the 1980s of the objects belonging to Kanak heritage that were acquired during and since the contact period by Western collectors and museums. In the consultations that followed, between the Kanak Cultural, Scientific and Technical Board (the organization that preceded the ADCK) and Kanak communities, it was decided that the centre would not actively seek the return of these objects, many of which have spent up to 150 years away from New Caledonia (and which, according to traditional beliefs, may be dangerous if the conditions of acquisition are unknown). Instead, they would be considered ‘ambassadors’ of Kanak culture, employed to ‘let the rest of the world know that Kanaks exist’ (Kasarhérou interview; *Mwà Vée* 2000: 34). The CCT is, however, committed to ongoing discussion about how these objects are conserved and displayed overseas. It is also involved in curatorial projects such as the exhibition of traditional Kanak art, *De jade et de nacre patrimoine artistique kanak*, which travelled from Nouméa to the Musée National des Arts d’Afrique et d’Océanie in Paris in 1990–1 (prior to the centre’s opening). Objects from Western collections also visit the CCT, housed for temporary periods in the Bwénaado House, where they are accompanied by a computer monitor that provides further information about how they relate to traditional Kanak systems of cultural heritage. Notably, the CCT also conducts exchanges with European museums, which seek their advice when mounting exhibitions of Kanak work. In a recent case, the CCT sent two Kanak carvers to a regional museum in the south-west of France to show by demonstration and discussion how the sculptures in their collection had traditionally been made (Kasarhérou interview).

Beyond the issue of repatriation, there are other differences between traditional Western-style museums and the CCT. Kasarhérou – who used to be the director of the Territorial Museum in Nouméa (which is a traditional, Western-style ethnographic museum with rich collections of Pacific heritage) — has engaged with this matter at length (Kasarhérou 1995: 90–5). In 1989 (the year President Mitterrand approved development of the CCT to be built as ‘headquarters’ for the ADCK) he participated in a workshop held in Papua New Guinea designed to explore the changing role of museums and cultural centres in the Pacific. At this time, he explained:

In New Caledonia many people think that a museum must keep the past but should not exhibit it. Another explanation of our difficulties in

attracting Kanak visitors is their fear of entering a place where artefacts of the past are displayed. They feel as if they were entering a cemetery where devils live. The matter however must not be forced, attitudes will change gradually. The only thing to do is to explain why it is important for the future of our cultures to have a museum. We must explain why museums did not exist in the past and why they are important nowadays ... (Kasarihérou 1992: 166)

In this same forum, the director of the National Museum and Art Gallery of Papua New Guinea, Soroi Eoe, similarly suggested that this may be a dominantly held perception amongst Pacific Island cultures, where museum collections are perceived as ‘little more than odd assortments of exotic curios ... This view was and still is reinforced by the conviction that museums are only partly the emanations of an indigenous cultural personality: they do not really meet the needs of the great majority of indigenous Pacific islanders’ (Eoe 1992: 1; see also Stanley 1998; Cochrane 1999; Murphy 2002; Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat 2005: 168). As one measure of the CCT’s success as a social actor within the local community, it seems that both the CCT and the Territorial Museum now attract larger numbers of Kanak visitors and culture workers than was the case in the late 1980s. Expanding its own agenda from ethnography to include social history and current issues, the Territorial Museum now hosts contemporary events such as *EXPO — La Violence, tu sais ce qu’on lui dit?* (2005). These examples suggest that the new museum paradigm might be more indebted to the practices of museumlike spaces – such as the French lineage of cultural centres and ecomuseums — than to traditional ethnographic museums (Kasarihérou interview). It also shows that by expanding their focus to include an interest in contemporary culture, new museums, cultural centres and other exhibitionary sites in New Caledonia are also playing a part in attempting to bring to fruition Tjibaou’s dream that the country would one day be ‘irrigated’ with ‘small cultural centres that would be heritage conservation centres and places for contemporary creativity’ (Text from Tjibaou exhibition, in the Malep House).

The political culture and personality cult of Jean-Marie Tjibaou

The focus on open configurations, representational strategies, and the general commitment to achieving a convincing, ongoing effect of newness is important for new museums at the level of novelty (as a way to keep audiences coming back and to continually attract others). In the case of the CCT, the dedication to forward-looking and nonconstant images of identity and culture also emerged as a direct extension of the ideology of Jean-Marie Tjibaou, after whom the centre was named. Leader of the dominant, pro-independence *Union Calédonienne* party, Tjibaou was revolutionary in his belief that political strength would emerge as a by-product of cultural pride. In a widely quoted statement, he argues

IDENTITIES AND DIVERSITY

that ‘the return to tradition is a myth ... No people has ever achieved that. The search for identity, for a model: I believe it lies ahead of us ... Our identity lies ahead of us’ (in ADCK 1998: 4–5; see also Tjibaou 1996; Tjibaou and Missotte 1978; Rollat 1989). Tjibaou rejected the idea that Kanaks must become ‘black Frenchmen’ in order to achieve power or authority, and he envisaged ‘a peaceful resolution of the settler-native confrontation, as long as Kanak could face France with “a firm personality”, meaning a self-confident identity rooted in culture and history’ (Chappell 1999: 377). He is remembered by many for being, at least in his later years, moderate and reformist — especially in the wake of the ethnic insurgencies that had taken place throughout the 1980s (ADCK 1998). He believed that if Kanaks worked toward unified expressions of culture, identity, and a progressive version of tradition that was not at odds with contemporary culture, they would be able to achieve political power more effectively than through any policy of direct action or further violence. Tjibaou’s pointed inter-implication of culture and politics was strategic and relevant, and responded to the fact that historically, culture has often been the ground on which Kanaks have been persecuted or attacked by the settler community (MacIellan and Chesneaux 1998: 162).

Tjibaou argued that ‘to show one’s culture is to show that one exists ... There is no cultural phenomenon that doesn’t have an institutional and therefore political impact’ (*Mwà Vée* 2000: 8). Presenting itself as an actor that contributes in concrete ways to social (and possibly political) change, the CCT was designed to embody the intent to formulate a renewed national iconography that is socially progressive as well as culturally sustaining. Despite the sophistication of this objective, it has been writ large in the massive bronze statue of Tjibaou himself that is located atop a nearby hill peak (Figure 5). From here, Tjibaou, dressed partly in Western attire and partly in chiefly garb, oversees his realm — which extends beyond the CCT to encompass the countryside around the city of Nouméa (Figure 6). The statue’s privileged location and pose confirm that the centre was envisaged as both ‘the recognition of Kanak culture and the souvenir of Jean-Marie Tjibaou’ (Kasarhérou in Jolly 2001: 432). Determinedly social realist in style, the statue reveals the potential dangers associated with the desire to produce urgently reconfigured national symbols by promoting the personality cult of Jean-Marie Tjibaou. Indeed, the specific problem here, according to Peter Brown, is that ‘in the postmodern age of multiple identities, the search to promote a particular cultural or ethnic identity seems to be a utopian if not regressive gesture, when it is not simply rhetorical and tactical’ (Brown 1998: 136). And yet, as Brown also notes, ‘this cult is also a subtle shift in significance, as Tjibaou the politician calling for independence is replaced by the image of the promoter of his culture’ (Brown 1998: 134). This shift in strategy — whereby the political is overlaid with the cultural, rather than positioned in opposition to it — has formed the framework for the CCT and for events contributing to its development, including the important Melanesia 2000 festival, organized by Tjibaou and held on the site of the CCT in 1975. The festival was

CONTESTED SITES OF IDENTITY AND THE CULT OF THE NEW



Figure 5 Jean-Marie Tjibaou statue, the Centre Culturel Tjibaou, Nouméa. Photograph by Kylie Message. (Courtesy of the ADCK-Centre Culturel Tjibaou/Renzo Piano Building Workshop, Architectes.)

designed to invest the culture of politics with ‘the art of life’ (Chesneaux 1988: 63), so that ‘Kanak political culture’ could become a more unified and effective force that had a clearer understanding of its relationship with traditional culture and custom. As ‘the first great urban cultural demonstration of Kanak culture’ that was held in ‘*Nouméa-la-Blanche*’ (white Nouméa), the festival ‘aimed at a global representation of the Kanak world and for a unified vision, yet without eliminating the particularities of each of its constituents’ (*Mwà Vée* 2000: 8; see also Chesneaux 1988: 62; Graille 2002: 9, fn 5). It sparked a cultural renaissance.

A key figure of support for Tjibaou’s legacy throughout the period leading up to the production of the CCT was Alban Bensa. An anthropologist at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales and principal advisor to Renzo Piano, Bensa reiterated Tjibaou’s fear that Kanaks would be relegated to the ‘prehistoric’ (categorized according to stereotyped historical images) (Bensa 2000: 162; *Mwà Vée* 2000: 8). He thus advocated a forward-looking ideology that avoided the depiction — and definition — of Kanaks in relation to past images only, where they can have no current agency, political or otherwise. Bensa’s role as

IDENTITIES AND DIVERSITY



Figure 6 Looking over the Centre Culturel Tjibaou from Tjibaou statue, Nouméa. Photograph by Kylie Message. (Courtesy of the ADCK-Centre Culturel Tjibaou/Renzo Piano Building Workshop, Architectes.)

advisor to the project clearly had implications in the way it came to be realized. He argued strongly against the simple reconstitution of a traditional Kanak village, which would have been either picturesque or kitsch (with demonstrable links to the Kanak villages displayed at French colonial expositions in 1889 and 1931) (*Mwà Vée* 1996a). He also rallied against building the centre as a theme-park like, and overly saturated media-enriched environment (like the Polynesian Cultural Center in Hawai'i). In recommending against a 'regionalist replica' style of design, and in rejecting the straightforward incorporation of history into the project, Bensa argued for the development of what would become a paradoxical collection of international and global features, and regional references and tensions (Bensa 2000: 162). While this illustrates a rejection of history that is closely connected to the cult of the new in general terms (and reveals the favouring of newness that is the condition of new museums everywhere), what is unique in regard to the CCT is the relationship that this had with Tjibaou's guiding philosophy of newness and regeneration (Bensa 1992).

The constitution of culture in New Caledonia: tradition, modernity and *les grands thavaux*

Renzo Piano was commissioned to design CCT after winning a competition administered by the ADCK and judged by an international panel of architects and other experts (that included the President of the ADCK, Marie-Claude

CONTESTED SITES OF IDENTITY AND THE CULT OF THE NEW

Tjibaou, the Head of New Zealand's Maori Affairs Department, Tia Barrett, an Australian anthropologist, Marcia Langton, and the Director of the Solomon Islands National Museum, Lawrence Foanoata). The appointment process reflects the desire to project an image of New Caledonia that is progressive and forward looking. The choice of Piano, which was internationally lauded, provided those involved with a sense of optimism that the CCT might achieve the effect and status of a *grand travaux* (great work), as well as the creation of a renewed and visible concrete symbol of unification — which was regarded at the time as an urgent task (Graille 2002: 6). Indeed, before construction of the new CCT began, the President of France, François Mitterrand, decreed that it was to be one of the French state's most important undertakings. It was to be the first of an elite group of significant institutions, known collectively as 'the Great Projects of the Republic', to be invested in or built outside of France (Main 1998: 9). Other 'Great Projects' in Paris include the Pyramid of the Louvre, the arch at la Défense, and the Bibliothèque nationale de France. The CCT benefited further from the popular 'hearts, minds and pockets' policies of the then Prime Minister Jacques Chirac, so that the French government not only covered the \$90 million dollars initially required for building the CCT but agreed to support substantially the ongoing administration costs of the site (Connell 2003: 128).

Given these rich expectations and resources, the CCT aimed to bridge the gap between the apparently conflicting aspirations of the French government and the desire by activists to achieve a new and independent state of Kanaky. This struggle over nationhood is represented in a biographical exhibit dedicated to the life and works of Jean-Marie Tjibaou, demonstrating the '*entanglement* of Kanak and French culture, even as it documented the racism of the French and the violence of New Caledonia's colonial history' (Jolly 2001: 434). Located in the Mâlep House (*Mâlep* means 'to live' in the Yâlayu language), the display includes photographic and textual narrative sections under the headings: 'his land, his loved ones', 'serving others, the priesthood and community works', 'a political vision based on Kanak culture', and 'the Kanak leader opens the way to a common destiny'. Very few objects are included, as is appropriate to Tjibaou's dream of Kanak culture resisting becoming caught in the past or being rendered as static. As objects that correspond directly to the as yet unattained future independent state, a 'Government de Kanaky — FLNKS' stamp, the flag of Kanaky, and Jean-Marie Tjibaou's case and passport are shown in one section. No text explains the significance of this arrangement (which would perhaps be obvious to New Caledonians), yet it refers to an important occasion in 1985 when Tjibaou went to Paris and introduced himself as the head of the provisional government of Kanaky (*Ouest France*, 25–27 May 1985 in Dornoy-Vurobaravu 1994: 11).

Bensa, who saw the CCT as 'a new opportunity to carry forward the political struggle on the cultural and symbolical front where Jean-Marie Tjibaou had so wished it could also develop', also promoted these aspirations for unification under a centralized independent state (Bensa 2000: 175). He understood that the

IDENTITIES AND DIVERSITY

building had to be convincing in a symbolic sense, as well as impressive and effective in terms of the contribution it could make to the more pragmatic development of cultural confidence in Kanak communities. It needed to provide Kanaks with an emblem of cultural identity that was optimistic, contemporary and open enough to be interpreted and appropriated widely. More than anything else, it needed to embody a promise for the future. Kasarhérou (in Losche 2003: 81) describes the resultant building in the following terms:

For the main part of JMTCC [CCT], Piano has incorporated the Kanak concept of a central avenue aligned with groups of *grand case* (Kanak chiefs' houses). However Piano has translated this form, giving it a profound new expression: the circular structures of the *grand case* soar up to thirty meters in height but they are not thatched nor are the walls fully clad. Reminiscent of (Kanak) houses but opening onto a dream of the fixture, they have a feeling of incompleteness, bringing to mind that Kanak culture itself is not static but is always open to change.

In addition to providing a physical manifestation of the ideological principles motivating development of the centre, Kasarhérou explains that Piano's building aspires to the principles of a pure architectural modernism, so that the structure appears to lift ephemerally up and away from the ground around it (Figure 7). Piano himself says 'while the form of the Tjibaou Cultural Centre may have nothing to do with local constructions, it has their spirit, without denying anything of my own modernity' (*Mwà Vée* 2000: 11). Further registering a break between the traditions of Western architectural practice and the cultural practice of the Kanak communities for whom the centre was designed, it has also been reported that Kanak visitors seem to be most interested in and respond most positively to the ground area surrounding the building, where some communities maintain traditional gardens (Kasarhérou and Mozziconacci 1998: 20; Kasarhérou and Wedoye et al. 1998). Instead of seeking a direct relationship with its immediate landscape, however, Piano chose to centralize universalizing symbols such as the atmosphere or air, and the passing breeze. His emblems of identity for the future stretch upward and away from the ground that is occupied by the participating Kanak communities. In association with the airy and expansive exhibition spaces inside the buildings, the structure manifests a beauty that challenges rather than replicates the way that the traditional (closed and exclusivist) power structures of Kanak culture have been reproduced in traditional modes of building. It supports a global image of indigenous architecture, or the revisioning of indigenous architecture according to a renewed globalized genre; and yet simultaneously rewrites the traditional pedagogical non-Western-style of authority (Dovey 2000; Fantin 2003; Memmott and Reser 2000). Consistently with this, the building appears to privilege a particular version of contemporary Kanak cultural practice that is connected to ideas of progress and development implicit within Piano's centralized Western position (Austin 1999). In his

CONTESTED SITES OF IDENTITY AND THE CULT OF THE NEW



Figure 7 Looking over the third village and across the roofline of the Centre Culturel Tjibaou, Nouméa. Photograph by Kylie Message. (Courtesy of the ADCK-Centre Culturel Tjibaou/Renzo Piano Building Workshop, Architectes.)

IDENTITIES AND DIVERSITY

critique of the building, Brown quotes from Bensa to suggest that the processes of overinscription (of both the architectural surfaces and the ways of talking about the building) have replaced the traditionally articulated form of closure with the projected illusion of ‘a non-discriminatory and “democratic” openness,’ in this building that has been ‘commissioned and underwritten by a modern western European state’ (Brown 2002: 283). In appointing Piano and building the project according to an international style of modernism (which links both typologically and genealogically back to the Centre national d’Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou in Paris), the CCT manipulates architecture ‘to appropriate the spatial power base of an old [privileged Western] regime for use in the identity formation of a new one’ (Vale 1999: 393). Furthermore, the CCTs status as a ‘great project’ evidences how:

the modern era of nation states calls for multiple allegiances and alliances, often to be upheld across great distances. Especially in cases where single states encompass multiple would-be-ethnic nations, architectural and urbanistic efforts to articulate a single ‘national identity’ are deeply controversial ... [this reflects] the need to extend international identity through staking some new claim to noteworthy modernity ... (Vale 1999: 396)

This brings us back to the anachronistic bronze statue of Jean-Marie Tjibaou, and to the risks associated with such overtly singular and non-compromising symbols of nationhood. The primary difficulty with Piano’s building is that it appears literally to seek transcendence from its present location, while at the same time it offers to overlay an international kind of architecture into the local context. This integration provides a reinscription of the local custom and culture, not by local Kanaks, but by Piano and his advisers (which is due also, in part at least, to the limited consultation that preceded building) (Brown 2002: 282; Veracini and Muckle 2002: fn. 46). Brown’s critique is not directed toward Piano’s referencing of customary Kanak huts *per se*, but at his attempt to tweak the politics internal to them. He is concerned that at a symbolic level, Piano’s design ‘updates’ the huts so they fit more comfortably within a European image of social modernity and progress (and as modelled in exemplary form by the Centre Georges Pompidou).

Piano’s imprint of unified progress and optimism for the future might thus be interpreted as problematically illustrating a direct connection to the French government’s plan to reflect the ideologies and interests of the ‘modern’ nation-state of France as the commissioning agency and over-riding authority (for the effect of this on other parts of the island’s economy, see Horowitz 2004). In this case, the modernist architecture may be understood — possibly too simplistically — as signifying a very specific political statement (keeping in mind that although Piano had won a competition held to find the best designer for the project, he already had a particular history with French institutions and government, having

designed the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris in 1977 with Richard Rogers). Not only is the Pompidou Centre an explicit symbol of social progress and an icon of modernity but it is also widely accepted as the prototype of the new museum model — a point made evident by the architects' intention to 'create a new kind of public forum, a non-monumental building of such infinite flexibility that it would be in constant process. The structure's interdisciplinary organization was supposed to democratize the arts' (Newhouse 1998: 193).

Perhaps Piano's popularity was connected to this prior experience of designing 'populist' buildings that constitute 'anti-monuments'. As the most famous of these, the Pompidou Centre has become connected to and symbolic of Paris, despite the architects' intention to provide a space that rejected the pedagogical structure and traditional hierarchies of art museums. If we compare the intention toward and effect presented by the Pompidou Centre and the CCT, we can see that not only does the CCT succeed in reflecting an image of New Caledonia that is democratic looking and progressive in outlook, but that it appears to offer a symbolic (if not thematic) synchronicity with the ideological grandeur and impressive scale of the Pompidou Centre. By asking why it was that a self-consciously new and internationalist style of museum was selected for the purpose of representing Kanak culture, it may be possible to evaluate whether the CCT as a new museum can possibly live up to the rhetorical claims made on its behalf. In epitomizing key characteristics of the new museum *so* effectively, the CCT may ultimately offer an internationally palatable monument for consumption by audiences from outside New Caledonia. If this is the case, it might confirm Claude Patriat's argument that 'out of all democratic countries, the French nation has taken furthest the assertion of an active political presence in the cultural field' as a way to ensure its authority (in McGuigan 2004: 66).

The desire for *ré-équilibrage* (rebalancing): history, politics and independence

As a result of the competing political and economic pressures historically at play within New Caledonia, however, it is simply not possible to separate the global from the local in the context of the CCT. This means that, whereas an international audience may well have been considered primary for the centre's success, it was also the result of local political action. Specifically, the decision to construct a forward-looking cultural centre dedicated to the preservation and continued development of Kanak cultural traditions emerged out of the obligation of the Matignon (and Oudinot) Accords (1988) to work toward achieving a degree of political and economic self-autonomy for Kanaks in New Caledonia. In signing this agreement, the French government undertook 'to provide for the expression and fulfilment of the Melanesian personality in all its forms' and, 'to ensure that everyone has access to information and culture' (Veracini and Muckle 2002: n.p.). The accords were seen as a way of reducing tension in the area, and of also preserving the principle (and possibly the practice) of the

IDENTITIES AND DIVERSITY

French presence (Maclellan and Chesneaux 1998: 170). They were followed by the Nouméa Accord (1998) which replaced a referendum on independence, which was to have been held that year but was postponed for another 15–20 years as part of the new agreement. This accord formally acknowledged the trauma of colonization for Kanaks, and all signatories recognized that ‘Kanak identity’ was central to a new, more autonomous territory with its own citizenship. It legislated the end of New Caledonia’s previous status as a *territoire d’outre-mer* (overseas territory) of France, and while many felt that this implementation of an ‘irreversible’ process for the transfer of administrative power did not go far enough toward achieving full *indépendance Kanak et socialiste* (Kanak socialist independence), it was generally understood as a reconciliatory gesture and precedent-setting compromise for decolonization in a multiethnic state (Chappell 1999: 373; Maclellan 2004).

Central to the accords was the recognition that political progress rested on the capacity to put Kanak culture, custom, identity and experience at the centre of life in New Caledonia. As a key signatory of the Matignon Accords (in his capacity as leader of *Union Calédonienne*), Tjibaou lobbied for these principles until he was assassinated in 1989 by a dissenting Kanak independentist, Djubelli Wea (Henningham 1992; Dornoy-Vurobaravu 1994: 10). Despite the belief of extremists that the accords would compromise the potential for independent sovereignty (*Sydney Morning Herald* 1988), the Matignon Accords established the conditions whereby indigenous culture and rights were not to be acknowledged in a rhetorical or symbolic sense only but were to become the basis for the political reconstruction of the new, multiethnic country. The close relationship that emerged between the constitution and development of the CCT and the Matignon Accords and then the Nouméa Accord (the CCT opened one day before the latter agreement was signed) was intended as a gesture of goodwill on behalf of the French government toward Kanaks. Hie ADCK was established (as part of the Matignon Accords) to be the territory’s principal cultural body and was charged with promoting Kanak culture and heritage (as the key component of Tjibaou’s vision for the future). The interweaving of culture and politics may, as such, have been officially recognized in the constitution of the ADCK, and the CCT may have been intended to open out a space for what James Tully calls a ‘post-imperial dialogue — informed by the spirit of mutual recognition and accommodation of cultural diversity’ (in Connell 2003: 141).

Negotiating new forms of cultural identity for a multiethnic state

This approach toward representing Kanak culture continues to be legitimated within the CCT on the basis of Tjibaou’s desire to create a space of possibility for the emergence of new and shifting forms of cultural identity and practice — a point that continues to be contextualized by another ongoing dialogue about the relationship between modernity and Kanak culture. And while Tjibaou’s idea

CONTESTED SITES OF IDENTITY AND THE CULT OF THE NEW

of a modern Kanak identity can be understood according to a postcolonial framework, whereby identity is historically and socially contingent and shifting (Clifford 2001: 468), Caroline Graille comments that in 1998, a curator at the CCT claimed that it would be ‘unthinkable’ for the CCT to include work by non-Kanak artists in the centre. This has since occurred, however, and may reveal a broader and more recent attempt at constructing — through the agency of the centre as a key actor in this — a ‘multicultural Caledonian identity’ (Graille 2002: 6). She argues further that:

the project to construct ‘postcoloniality’ in a multicultural context as neither a Kanak national state nor a French-dominated quasi-colony is still very recent in New Caledonia ... Local artists are only just beginning to produce ‘national’ aesthetic icons whose symbolism will necessarily break with a very Eurocentric, essentialist vision of Kanak culture as ‘traditional’/‘pre-contact’ (and thus colonized and dead), but also be very different from the colonialist vision of New Caledonia as a ‘small France in the Pacific’. (Graille 2002: 8)

This intent is evident in the general style of work included in the contemporary Kanak and Oceanian collection (many of which were commissioned by the CCT) that is exhibited in the Bérétara Hall (Cochrane 1996). The Kanak works — such as Jean-Noël Mero’s sculpture *Oubliées de l’Histoire (Abandoned by the History)* (2001) and Yolande Moto’s painting *Un Nouveau regard sur notre passé (A New Look on our Past)* (1997) — often combine aspects of traditionalism with imagery that is highly narrative in style and reminiscent of the cultural renaissance of the 1970s. While this reveals the struggle to come to terms with what it means to be Kanak in a contemporary world (*Mwà Vée* 1996b: 50; 2000: 34), it also displays the attempt to represent diversity within the Kanak community, and to recognize the immigrant groups living in New Caledonia (the population today is over 215,000 people: 42.5% are Kanak, and while Europeans form the majority, other ethnic groups include immigrants from Wallis and Futuna, French Polynesia, Indonesia, Vietnam, and elsewhere — *The World Factbook*, updated 1 November 2005). Expanding the centre’s focus on Kanak cultural heritage and identity has meant that it can focus on the intersections and crosscultural dialogue that have historically occurred between communities and cultural forms in New Caledonia. This agenda is currently employed in a temporary exhibition on Louise Michel (*Paris – Nouméa: Les communards en Nouvelle-Calédonie*) (2005). Exiled to New Caledonia for her involvement in the 1871 Paris Commune, and shown in the Komwi Hall, the exhibition uses events in Michel’s life to illustrate colonial relationships and dialogues between French settlers, convicts and Kanaks. Including artefacts such as large shells engraved with images of ‘European man’ or ‘Kanak man’, the exhibition shows how each culture represented itself and each other at this time.

IDENTITIES AND DIVERSITY

As the country grapples with the conceptual issues pertaining to representation in a national context — and how to represent diversity, the centre has become the subject of much debate amongst New Caledonians. While many support the work it does in promoting Kanak cultural identity and representing this to the world, others have criticized it as a biased symbol that is either too focused on Kanak culture or ‘not Kanak enough’ (Bensa and Wittersheim 1998: 243; Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat 2005: 168; Guiart 2001: 49). Commenting, for example, on the CCT’s perceived lack of local visitors and support — of Kanaks, for whom the Centre was built, one hardly meets any. Of *Caiaoches* [descendents of early French settlers (Maclellan and Chesneaux 1988: 145)], even less’ — local journalist Anne Pitoiset noted that the CCT, ‘established to enable and promote the cultural rebirth of the Kanaks ... has become not only an identifiable emblem of New Caledonia; but perhaps, to date, the only really internationally successful symbol’ (Pitoiset 2002; see also Maclellan and Chesneaux 1988: 145; Graille 2002: 7). Pitoiset argues that the CCTs lack of support by Kanaks is connected to its repudiation of history on the basis that it risks denying the facts and experiences of colonization. Others, she explains, see it as preaching a version of colonially constructed culture back to them (‘we do not need the Centre to know our culture’) (Pitoiset 2002). A customary chief who heads the Kanak Socialist Liberation Party, Nidoish Naisseline, has argued that it is a Kanak centre for white people, saying, ‘I have the impression that ethnologists from Paris have come here to teach us about our culture’ (in Main 1998: 9). Dissatisfaction with the CCT is not expressed only by Kanaks, and Pitoiset reports that some non-Kanaks resent the CCT as being designed ‘only for Kanaks’, whereas others wish it represented a more multiethnic population, so that, ‘When one goes into the Centre, one should have an idea of New Caledonia as a whole ...’ (Pitoiset 2002). This controversy about the representational responsibilities of the CCT has also continually surrounded festivals and other cultural events staged there, from the 1998 exhibition of Pacific art that accompanied its opening, to the highly political eighth Festival of Pacific Arts in 1999, which ‘generated protests from radical Kanak, who called it a “folklorization” of their culture’. On the other hand, though, supporters of this festival ‘saw it as the Kanak reclaiming their “place in the sun” as Tjibaou put it’ (Chappell 2001: 549).

The CCT, the overseas media and the ‘global war of images’

The depth of difference that characterized local receptions to the CCT has not, however, tended to be replicated by international commentary on the centre and its programmes (reception by the popular media has been overwhelmingly positive, however there has been some critique in academic contexts, see Jolly 2001: 440; Brown 2001). This may be because the ADCK actively solicited international press interest during the years leading up to the centre’s opening

CONTESTED SITES OF IDENTITY AND THE CULT OF THE NEW

and throughout its opening festivals. While most of this focused on the much-promoted architecture emerging on the site, the reports, if making anything other than the most superficial of comments in relation to the building, frequently correlated the emergent building with a new found peacefulness (the violent insurgencies that wracked the territory throughout the 1980s appeared suppressed to the visiting writers). Located pre-dominantly in the Arts or Travel sections of major daily newspapers, the resulting columns generally expressed the belief that the CCT was designed to function as a new emblem of hope for and belief in cultural reconciliation. In one case, the writer says: 'Just as France has designed a model decolonisation for New Caledonia, it has bestowed a jewel of a monument on its historically troubled territory' (Main 1998: 9).

These expressions of relief reflect more than just the writers' enjoyment of the new spectacle. While every country has to negotiate ongoing issues in relation to the form and content of dominant images of national identity, this process is especially fraught for New Caledonia, which continues negotiations over cultural, political and economic independence (or interdependence) while balancing the national, subnational, international and individual impulses that are associated with an increasingly globalized and transnational context. And while architecture and urban design have always performed important roles in the clarification of spatial and social order, newspaper reportage of the early days of the CCT show how the media contribute to producing or promoting particular images, a point that also demonstrates the ideological processes that are present in the production of the CCT itself. As an important form of 'publicity' (as well as a useful, albeit partial, mode of gauging public reception), media sources provide a textual archive and are significant for what they reveal about the public sphere and public culture that emerged in New Caledonia in response to the CCT. In explaining the ongoing political urgency of images, whether they be manifested in print or built form, Murray Edelman (1995: 76) says: 'Especially subtle, powerful, and common are buildings that reinforce a belief that people's ties to a historic past or a promising future are their important identities.' Accordingly, of the international responses to the centre that I surveyed, the dominant images produced by the CCT presented an idealized picture of Kanak tribal culture that is depicted as forward-focused, ongoing and part of a much greater universal continuum, but that was combined with a much more chimerical, albeit omnipresent, effect of a still-present colonial regime. This focus on the far-reaching past and future means that the interethnic tensions of the interim period — or the complexity of local responses to the centre — are not highlighted (see for example, Harley 1997; Cerebano 1998; Madoeuf 1998; McLean 1998; Power 1998; Zinn 1998; McGillick 1999; Riding 2000; Venter 2000; McIntyre 2004).

These characteristics present an image of the CCT that is consistent with Lawrence Vale's (1999) definition of a 'mediated monument'. While taking into account the point that 'architecture and design have always performed important roles in the clarification of spatial and social order' so that the built environment

IDENTITIES AND DIVERSITY

can often be seen as providing a demonstration or means to interpret national identity, Vale (1999: 391) contends that the central point of these structures is that they function as ‘monuments that are inseparable from the media campaigns conducted to construct (and constrict) their interpretation’. In these buildings, political power is often conveyed through the self-conscious construction of ‘forward-reaching symbols’ (Vale 1999: 391) that have become further animated by the publicity campaigns and international press interest associated with the CCT’s opening. In this case, the media has been particularly influential in shaping public interpretation internationally, and in paying attention to the parade of symbols produced by the opening celebrations and the initial exhibitions of contemporary visual culture and Pacific arts commissioned from across the region. For instance, in one example, the journalist focused on the genius of the architect to open the article: ‘Designed by renowned Italian architect Renzo Piano, the monument is breathtaking. It is an ensemble of villages and tree-studded areas, of different functions and different itineraries, of full and empty spaces, says Mr Piano, who this year won the prestigious Pritzker prize for his work’ (Main 1998: 9). Another journalist writes that, ‘New Caledonia’s new cultural centre rises from Nouméa’s tropical landscape like a prehistoric temple. The building’s striking architecture gives it an almost ethereal quality and the inventiveness of this design has invited comparison with Sydney’s Opera House’ (Taylor 1998: 21). Focusing thus on the synergies that appear to exist between the building and its environment in the first place, and on the relationship between the building and traditional ‘prehistoric’ culture in the second, arts columnists may contribute to the political neutralization of the CCT. This reportage risks privileging a forward-looking focus that, when accompanied by a lack of critical analysis, makes only ‘politically useful’ links to the past (Vale 1999: 391). Moreover, contributing to the validity of this argument, Vale (1999: 397) contends that ‘In the Pacific Rim of the 1990s and beyond, we are witnessing a global war of images’.

Conclusion

Driving up from Nouméa to the Centre Culturel Tjibaou for the first time, noticing how the *grand cases* look persistent and unforgiving about having forced their way through the natural vista, the centre’s pose appeared to me to be confrontational (Figure 8). Despite the CCT’s involvement in contemporary politics (and indeed, considering that it was the product of such politics) the real impact and urgency of these politics – cultural politics — struck me, and something James Clifford had said about Tjibaou vividly came to mind. He said that Tjibaou had insisted that the cultural centre be located in the hostile, settler city of Nouméa because, according to Clifford (2001: 471), ‘the pontics of cultural and political identity, as he saw it, always worked the boundaries’.

I had initially taken note of this because I had never really understood why the centre was located in such a hostile environment, when to my mind it would

CONTESTED SITES OF IDENTITY AND THE CULT OF THE NEW



Figure 8 Looking toward the centre from the *Mwaka* (traditional ceremonial grounds), the Centre Culturel Tjibaou, Nouméa. Photograph by Kylie Message. (Courtesy of the ADCK-Centre Culturel Tjibaou/Renzo Piano Building Workshop, Architectes.)

have been a more convincing gesture of reconciliation for the French government to finance the existent Centre Culturel Goa Ma Bwarhat, designed by Tjibaou, in the (traditionally pro-independence) northern town of Hienghène (Rosada and Huneau 2004). But when I saw the CCT, looming large — and looking like a series of shields (or upcast fists) that have burst through the ground and now refuse to give way — Clifford's comment about Tjibaou's statement suddenly made sense. Later I asked Emmanuel Kasarhérou for his view on this, and he reiterated Tjibaou's point, explaining that it was important that the centre be in town, as a visible symbolic reminder of the continued existence of Kanak culture (for urban Kanaks, visitors from regional tribes, and non-Kanaks). Further reading revealed it was Jean-Marie Tjibaou's idea to 'implant' the ADCK and the CCT 'in the very city in which Kanaks had hitherto been second-class citizens if not entirely excluded' (*Mwà Vée* 2000: 9). Kasarhérou also said that if the centre had been located in a rural region it would have further ostracized Kanaks by suggesting that they are linked to tradition and the past rather than the contemporary reality and changing cultural identities of Kanaks living in the city (which more and more are doing). This would have amounted to 'putting the Tjibaou Centre out of view, in your back yard' (Kasarhérou interview), rather than offering a contemporary and progressive symbol of national identity. Yet even more than this, the centre appears to stand over the city,

IDENTITIES AND DIVERSITY

holding it to account for the events of the past while also offering a progressive and spectacular symbol of identity. This image has stayed with me — of the CCT as an extremely complex case study that shows perhaps more than any others the interimplication of culture and politics, and the high stakes that are attached to the production of new museums.

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