

# “THERENESS”

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## Implications of Heidegger’s “presence” for Māori

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### Abstract

For Māori, the philosophical consequences of colonization are a hugely important issue, due to both the subtlety and the omnipresence of Western metaphysics. In this article I refer to the “metaphysics of presence” through one major Western thinker—Martin Heidegger—who identified “presence” as a problem for the West. He proposes that the metaphysics of presence underpins every perception in the West and that it is the fundamental mistake of philosophers since Plato but becoming ascendant with Aristotle. I identify the points of relevance within their claims and refer them to a Māori understanding of absence. I also consider the more affective nature of Western presence, which Heidegger refers to but which must be theorized by Māori. In the first instance I place particular emphasis on the ironies implicit in writing about metaphysics for the Māori writer in the academy and for the things being represented in that writing. Finally, the metaphysics of presence opens up possibilities for its own instability; this Heideggerean “saving power” is discussed in Māori terms.

### Keywords

Māori, presence, absence, metaphysics, colonization, representation

### Introduction

In indigenous forums, one commonly hears talk of a Western tendency to fragment the world, to

think of the world as inanimate, and to dispel any fearful discussions about mythical thinking. These concerns appear to be at the base of Western thought, but in fact they disclose

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something much more fundamental. At the very foundation of these worries is a unifying metaphysics that Fuchs (1976) describes as possibly “the oldest and most dominant trend in the history of western philosophical thinking” (pp. 3–4), one that rests on the assumption of the thoroughgoing presence of something. Heidegger identifies this concern early on in his writing and calls this “metaphysics”, as shorthand for a ground of ontological assumption that underpins all thinking and conceptions in the West and that prefers the presence of an object. He saw it becoming especially evident in Aristotle and its manifestation in how an object would be thought of *as* this or that, in advance. Although philosophy has been at the forefront of active thought, he argues that its ability to contemplate its own self-sufficiency, and hence its own limitation, is compromised by its urge to replicate itself as a logical and rational orientation towards things in the world.

For Māori, the purely yet socially related philosophical repercussions of colonization have yet to be fully speculated on. I raise the issue of Heidegger’s “metaphysics of presence” here to consider how it may have diffused itself throughout our representation of things in the world—or, at least, to theorize about how we have been relentlessly encouraged to represent things in the world in line with that metaphysics. I propose that Heidegger sketches a useful critique for a Māori approach to a problem that colonization itself does not want us to think about, and discuss in his wake the hidden relations to things. I also describe the paradox of even writing about this problem as a Māori writer within academic text, and conclude by suggesting, albeit briefly, that there is a poetics that runs counter to the metaphysics of presence which may provide some respite from its overwhelming demands.

### **Addressing the ultimate ground: Heidegger’s metaphysics of presence**

Māori (and indeed the West) have long been forced to participate in a project that stresses the clear, unequivocal and detached representation of an object. In a social or postcolonial sense, this decree runs counter to the reality of indigenous experiences which need to be expressed in their lived, emotional breadth (Koptie, 2009). A pursuit towards the single identity of a thing, however, is not necessarily an indigenous or Māori one; moreover, it has a long and privileged genealogy in the West. For those reasons alone, the relentless call to focus on one object, rather than “trying to understand the full context of things” (Fixico, 2003, p. 2), could be challenged on a number of theoretical grounds within a particular discipline. Here, the discussion takes a turn towards the metaphysical, because it is the most initial ground of perception that gives rise to the belief that clarity can be obtained. This originary cause needs to be challenged as a founding problem of colonisation, even if, as Kant would have it, it cannot ultimately be known. It may be necessary for Māori to employ various tools to excavate into this particular ground.

The German philosopher Heidegger is concerned with the corrosion of Western thought to what is thoroughly “there”. In this respect, he is useful for those indigenous writers who are interested in critiquing a most complex and originary problem that started in the West and may have infiltrated indigenous modes of representation of the world. “Metaphysics of presence” is a phrase first used by Derrida (1982) but it was identified conceptually at an earlier stage in Heidegger’s works. According to Heidegger, Western philosophy has established a mode of perception that relies on Being as a present revelation. Because Being knows no limits (apart from “nonbeing” [Fuchs, 1976, p. 7]) and is thoroughly present, only that which is in the “here and now” participates in Being. That is, only an entity that is

present is a manifestation of Being. Moreover, and more importantly for my interrogation, Being is utterly positive and exclusive of what is not present. Thus, as Fuchs continues, “that which was, for example, is given in the mode of having-been”. Our immediate thinking of an idea is evidence of the presence of Being. Truth is then seen as a manifestation of presence. To exemplify what it means, Peller (1985) provides an example of a tree:

In the metaphysics of presence, meaning is ultimately determinate and positive. The concept tree, for example, is believed to refer to some self-present source—“it’s really out there”—so that the concept is differentiated from other concepts not by merely being different from them. Instead, a plenitude, a substantiality of being is assumed to fill up the realm of treeness. This plenitude then pushes other concepts out of the realm by giving positive content to the concept “tree.” Language or thought re-presents the self-present source. (p. 1169)

Heidegger, like Peller, takes a bold step and deliberately moves the issue beyond the mere abstract. The metaphysics of presence is the ultimate fixation of the West and is largely inescapable in all its current forms of language and concept. Māori vigilance at this point may be drawn to how the West requires Māori individuals to both perceive and represent an object in its most basic sense. When a phenomenon such as whenua (land) is to be discussed, for example, then dominant Western practice encourages us, even in that briefest moment of our attention to it, to apprehend it *as* whenua and nothing else. This representation appears to be straightforward but from a Māori worldview it may constrict whenua in its essential wholeness, not just our perception of it. In that sheer, fleeting instant, whenua becomes a product of “thereness”: it is communicable as a smooth and unproblematic entity.

We can glean some background detail for this deep Western tendency in Heidegger’s

discussion of Aristotle. For Heidegger it is ultimately Aristotle who reifies a thing in light of its properties. Aristotle gave rise to the idea that a thing is present as a set of components. Nature itself is confused with artefact and so becomes thought of as something formed by an artist (Glazebrook, 2000), rather than that which was earlier believed to come to presence through the original sense of physis (to spring forth). Aristotle, the forefather of modern science, encourages a thing to be known in advance *as* this-or-that. In other words, we approach nature already knowing the things that lie in it: here Heidegger refers to the ancient Greek term for “mathematical” (μαθηματικά/mathemata) and argues that humanity has already *posit*-ed the appearance of things. Science is hence *posit*-ivist. It is in relation to Aristotle that Heidegger (1967a) coins the phrase “present at hand” and draws an association between modern man’s tendency to identify with the idea of what is utterly *there* and an entity that becomes an object of theoretical consideration. This is “a derivative kind of encounter” (Wheeler, 2014, n.p.) in which an entity is contemplated in its conscious distinction from other things. Wheeler explains that Aristotle had laid the foundation for this thinking by proposing that “every meaningful appearance of beings involves an event in which a human being *takes a being as*”. Knowing that a thing *can* be taken *as* this or that in advance has preoccupied Western humanity’s orientation towards the world. Just as importantly, it limits the potential of Western thought. With the push to posit a thing as a “thorough” entity in its visibility, according to Heidegger, Western thought lost its ability to reflect in an authentic manner.

While I am loath to reduce the scope of this problem to Western institutions—after all, it may play out also in the most private and individual moments and dialogues—I have observed that it is particularly prized in those formal settings. Returning to our example of whenua: in the Waitangi Tribunal, which is a Western body set up to hear Māori claims

against the Crown, Māori notions of things (but also that initial Māori orientation towards an object that I have just spoken of) are reduced to manageable entities. If I am asked to provide evidence about a block of land, I am asked to do something even before I talk about land itself: I am asked to take on a notion of an object as utterly undistracted or uninformed by other objects. I turn to that object with the expectation that it will fulfil its role as an object. Then my attention turns to whenua. I represent whenua on the basis of that assumption of the nature of an object. Whenua as a phenomenon then has no relationship with other entities for that short time. In relation to that second stage—where one discusses whenua *as* whenua with clarity—Park (2006) identifies that “the grievous losses that Māori have suffered since the treaty, while sited in the solid surface of the Earth that we call ‘land’, have been much more than the loss of ground” (p. 242). Whenua thus potentially concludes by illuminating no more in the world than “land”. We can see here a peculiar assumption about language, where terms reduce two different things to refer easily to each other. Language itself, a product of the presence that Heidegger warns against, is a crucial element in the representation of the thing as highly present. Te reo Māori acts in these instances in concert with a Western expectation that whenua be depicted as a highly positive and articulable “thing”. Similarly, in colonizing discourse about Māori, language is predetermined to meet that broad expectation of presence; examples of this fixity occur in such terms as “tangata” which will preferably mean “him” (Pihama, 2001) and also “ia” which will conform with the anticipated equivalent of “him” or “her” (Mikaere, 1994).

### ***Language in itself: Everyday representation***

Let us consider language as an actual phenomenon, however, and move away from linguistic examples of colonizing discourse. Here we

are talking about language in and of itself. Language through the metaphysics of presence is meant to be purely a communicative device. Where Jeffries and Kennedy (2008) argue for the deeper aspects within Māori language as “manifestations ... of the intrinsic relationship between tangata whenua ... and the rest of the natural world” (p. 10), the metaphysics of presence assigns it a particular role: to talk with ease about a phenomenon at any one particular time. Language itself in this sense is no other entity apart from linguistic. It is made to bolster Western humanity’s “fascination with epistemology” (Guignon, 1983, p. 13) and to have value through its ability to point clearly at an entity. Despite “a piece of writing or a speech ... [having] its own mauri” (Smith, 2000, p. 43), language is viewed as merely a useful tool at one’s disposal. With this intangible colonization that I have discussed in mind, one may suspect that the very initial stages of Māori creation, for instance, which are often cited in various academic texts, have been made into complete and self-sufficient phenomena. They are present entities in that they are brought out as distinct ideas that encompass distinct things. In that act, which engages with some of our most original entities, language refers to those things in that vein and is posed as an object.

Yet a Māori inquiry into language might indeed show that it is a phenomenon *within* which one operates, not a useful entity that one draws on as a user. Language, as Heidegger (1978) has it, is “appropriated by Being and pervaded by Being” (p. 237); it is grandly the “house of Being” (p. 217). For Māori, *language* would have *us*; *we* do not, first and foremost, have *language*. Language in the colonial sense, though, is already opened up as a highly visible entity that is at our behest. Another problem arises here for the Māori critic, which I return to later: the language of this sort of representation does not allow a critique of itself. It cannot “get at itself”. Māori academic Sheilagh Walker (1996) cites a “spiritual disease” and terms it “internalisation of colonisation” (p. 122),

which is relevant for our discussion because colonization can take the form of preventing us from voicing a deep problem through conventional language. Prescribed language forces one's attention to what lies immediately before the self, even if it is an idea, but it also prevents reflection on itself. We are left with sheer speculation to deal with the possibilities of that colonial metaphysics as it involves Māori, with the language we use to do so working against us.

The prospect that an object can be discussed with finality hence plays an important part with presence, and arguably Māori terms recoil from its influence. My suggestion here that language itself can *react* is not accidental, because it is commonly cited by Māori that language has its own spiritual essence (Browne, 2005; Pere, 1982). Hence even "kaupapa", which is often thought of as a type of crux, refers to a hiddenness of a final ground because it signifies quite obscurely an initial *disclosure* of that finality—Papatūānuku (Earth Mother). Royal (2000) explains the significance of "kau" as "appearance". It is certainly a term that has meaning in a rational sense, but equally it is an ontological one because it suggests that the self can comport itself towards that ground but not arrive at it with total self-assuredness. "Papatūānuku" is innate to the term, through its "papa" component, and by its own "flaring up" adds a tinge of mystery and vitality—to both the situation in which it is uttered and the utterer. "Kaupapa", along with other Māori terms, contains to itself its own independent yet relational activity; moreover, the self is called to enter into that activity in its own uncertainty.

### **The inescapable metaphysics of presence: The irony for the self**

Heidegger (1971) asserts that "it is language that tells us about the nature of a thing, provided that we respect language's own nature" (p. 146). The idea that language is merely a way of conveying intellectual meaning runs counter to that

other view of language Heidegger is proposing. Although the self-evidence that he alludes to here might also display itself for Māori in carving and weaving, it is most clear in language because language is the most common (but, again, not universal) form of communication. In rational, academic writing, the expectation that a thing will be represented clearly takes priority, leading Heidegger to deliberately resort to more cloaked, even obscure, language. Even in asserting that there are problems concerning the rational representation of the self, one is forced to resort to rationalism's tools, and there are certainly difficulties that lie in wait here for the Māori academic writer in particular. After all, in describing the difficulties that I go on to discuss in this very article, I am coming to a conclusion about metaphysics. I am thus professing to explain the metaphysics of presence, and am thereby a victim of the metaphysics of presence. This, according to my own speculation, creates a paradox for me.

When discussing colonial attempts to block Māori speculation on metaphysics generally, it is the relegation of Māori metaphysics "to the flames" (Hume, 1902, p. 165) that I am mainly concerned with, although a Māori metaphysics could only be immolated because of a pervasive disregard of mystery to begin with. The Western trajectory of thought that has resulted in such a strong focus on presence represents such an extreme concern for Heidegger that he says bluntly, "the forgottenness of Being is the forgottenness of the difference between Being and beings" (Heidegger, 2003, p. 364). Modern philosophy is largely to blame here, and Heidegger's resistance to what he tacitly sees as the comfort felt by contemporary philosophers may serve also as a warning for the indigenous writer. It is the nature of this disturbing bequest for Māori, who continue to be colonized by that inheritance of "sheer thinking" (Bowers, 2007, p. 8), which arguably threatens a Māori inquiry into any original laws of mystery. Ahekanew, Andreotti, Cooper and Hireme (2014) state that one remains, because of modernity, within

the linguistic, epistemological and ontological realm of Western thought, despite one's efforts against that. Their argument can be transported into the area of metaphysics. Here, if Māori *are* to think of metaphysics as mysterious at all, then such thinking should only centre on a rarefied study of a set of laws. The laws themselves are not phenomena that have a material impact on anything.

If this were not complicated enough, as a Māori writer engaging in philosophy I am proposing a relationship between self, thing and metaphysics which is not the innocent, solely intellectual exercise that the West insists it is. Marsden (1985) argues that the certainty of perception is counter to a more contradictory Māori apprehension, with “abstract rational thought and empirical methods [not being able to] grasp the concrete act of existing [for Māori] which is fragmentary, paradoxical and incomplete” (p. 163). Marsden's use of the word “abstract” poses a conundrum for the Māori writer because he or she might be forced to engage with highly abstract principles in order to understand and reflect on the vagaries of colonization, despite certain problems innate to that exercise. If this is the case, then the challenge for the Māori writer generally will be to describe or talk objectively about the phenomena—we might metaphorically say “rise above and gaze down upon them”—while ensuring that he or she, the writer, remain related to those phenomena through whakapapa (genealogy). This edict is a metaphysical one, and requires no mean feat of judgement, given the necessary rationalism of the academy. Alongside the fact that Western metaphysics separates out disciplines according to Aristotle's categorization (Wildcat, 2001a), or dichotomizes between religion and science and thus spirituality and logical truth, it also distinguishes between things as the basis of its rationality. This is perhaps at the root of the metaphysics that Wildcat addresses, and may prove to be the greatest challenge to a Māori holistic metaphysical approach to things. A Māori representation of an entity should

ethically depict staying with that entity as active interpretation of whakapapa (Mika, 2014), thus ensuring that both the self and those things retain their connection with each other and their own inherent integrity.

I suspect that a curious paradox therefore opens up for the Māori philosophical writer, who may set out to address colonization using rational language but is also responsible for apprehending things in their full obscurity and then describing them in that vein. A rationalistic view of the world is therefore not one thoroughly privileged by the indigenous writer. Yet quite simply the academy demands the presentation of a rational argument. For the indigenous writer, I assert, this poses not just a theoretical problem but more importantly a constitutional or bodily one, if we are to allow for an holistic argument that proposes that writing itself has a deeper impact on the self, as well as what is written about, than we realize. The form of colonization that a rational ordering of things in the world requires, so that those things can then be written about, is quite often at the forefront of indigenous concern due to the constricting nature of the exercise. Thus the split between the metaphorical and the literal that Cajete (2000) identifies as having occurred in Western society is also one that threatens the indigenous writer as he or she thinks and writes.

### ***Writing within (but against) the metaphysics of presence***

What consequences does all this have for the Māori self, and his or her wellbeing? Edwards (2005) raises the issue in light of Heidegger's insistence that we have become conditioned by the metaphysics of presence. That is, in stating whenua as an utterly *there* phenomenon, we are doing the same to ourselves. In respect of Heidegger, Edwards (2005) notes this problem in the following terms:

And when I conceive of myself as unconditional, or as conditioned only by myself

(ethically, they come to the same thing), I am cut free of everything that might actually matter to me, except myself ... a kind of radical egoism [is produced]. (p. 465)

In practice, traditional notions of selfhood as largely submerged within, and often eclipsed by, other things are threatened, with the Māori self forced to be present in its bodily entirety in various institutions, including educational, judicial (Mika, 2007) and medical. Ways of expression have to agree with the highly visible: one is questioned in a court, is asked to provide information about one’s tribe in government departments, and is asked to write an essay, and is only acknowledged if one’s answers are logical. In that light, answers correspond directly to questions, one’s tribe is brought into glaring focus, and the writing of an essay has to draw on what was established truth and must be on guard against irrational representations of phenomena.

In philosophical work it is common for the philosopher “to return to the beginning moments of his [or her] own philosophic work” (Fuchs, 1976, p. 2), as if one can identify one’s own self with complete assuredness. For the indigenous person, though, the self is not so concretely identifiable by the self. In other words, the self does not represent or replicate him or herself for his or her own detached speculation. This difference between Western and Māori notions of the self opens onto wider speculation about time and space, for the Western tradition would have it, à la Descartes, that the self perceives itself because the self is thinking. Māori self-perception, on the other hand, is dependent on the materiality (not necessarily the visible presence) of other things in the world, such as maunga (mountains), awa (rivers) and so on. In other words, as I propose that I am from a particular iwi (tribe), for instance, my utterance is rendered *essentially* uncertain by the nature of all things that come to bear on me in that saying. Thus, an assertion that the self makes is tempered by the very

materiality of other things that are altogether veiled.

The activity of writing is therefore fraught due to its potential for the writer. The indigenous writer (and other writers) is located *within* the sphere of thinking and writing rather than somehow transcendent to it, even if he or she is gazing down dispassionately upon the subject matter to discuss it rationally. Thinking in any one particular way has consequences beneath just the intellectual reception of text on the part of the audience, as Royal (2005) points out when discussing the frontal sensory realm (aroaro) of the body:

texts—and latterly screens—serve to narrow the aroaro. Consider what happens to our bodies when we spend some time either reading texts or sitting in front of a screen. This experience, the physical position, narrows and sharpens the aroaro. The more time and the more often we do this, the more the aroaro becomes fixed in a certain shape and the less “omni-directional” we become. (p. 16)

It could be argued that the representation of something based on its positivity divorces the self from other things in the world and runs counter to the integrity of a thing under regard. Any proposition about the world also relates to the wellbeing of the thinking and writing Māori self. Wildcat suggests that the consequences of not retaining this admittedly complex activity are dire for those in the sciences. Although Wildcat (2001b) intends to focus on the sciences here, I would extend his argument to the more primordial Western metaphysics of clarity in general:

We are surrounded by a society of metaphysical schizophrenics: people who do not see the phenomenal world for what it is—a living, complex reality with multiple dimensions. A good number of these metaphysical schizophrenics are scientists and engineers who have, with considerable harm to their person

(or personality) as human beings, convinced themselves that their feelings or emotions have no place in their objective science. (p. 116)

The differences for indigenous peoples generally, between the Western notion of schizophrenia on the one hand and indigenous perspectives on spiritual apprehension on the other, are vast and are beyond the scope of this article. We may take from the above assertion of Wildcat's that, in this case, schizophrenia is a problem, and that it can be metaphysical, or prior to one's overt behaviour and thus be unseen. There is a bodily price to be paid if this reading of schizophrenia is correct. One could argue that it is not just the pure sciences that effect this loss of wellbeing: it is a general adherence to a metaphysics "in which the origin itself is designated as pure, simple, normal, standard, self-sufficient and self-identical" (Biesta, 2010, p. 75).

### **Disturbing the metaphysics of presence: Counter-colonial poetics**

Perhaps the metaphysics of presence, however, can be momentarily disturbed. In conjunction with his critique, Heidegger (1967b) argues that a crucial questioning of Being has been ignored in favour of the study of highly evident beings and their truthfulness. In pre-Socratic approaches, Being was favoured as a process *within* which one inquired; one operated at all times as part of the revealing and concealing nature of Being and was thus preoccupied with its possibilities. This misunderstanding of Being, however, that became clearest with Aristotle "has been unable to radically pose what Heidegger calls the 'basic question' or 'fundamental question' (*Grundfrage*) of philosophy" in that "it has never really inquired into the origin of its own 'rationality'" (Backman, 2005, pp. 175–176). Heidegger offers a solution when he says that the poet "harnesses the lightning flashes of the God, compelling them into the word, and places this lightning-charged

word into the language of his people" (cited in McNeill, 2013, p. 227), suggesting that it was not logical discourse that equipped a thing to manifest in its own way and in its own time.

By "poetics", Heidegger (1971) means a kind of thinking that is at once critical and anticipatory. He calls this "meditative thinking", but we should be careful not to construe "meditative" as "transcendental". On the contrary, meditative thinking is tinged with both rational and emotional speculation. Heidegger calls for thought that accounts for a *Destruktion* (destruction) of ontological assumptions as well as an anticipatory prospect of "dwelling" among things in the world (Heidegger, 1971). What is important for Heidegger, in a questioning of both a problem and a prospect, is the need for renewed reflection on Being—how one is thrown into the world in all its possibilities. With "thrownness" come all the attendant anxieties of the self in the face of the vast world: the fact that one cannot know things in the world with total certainty is itself cause for what Heidegger calls *Angst*.

I suggest that this continual process of thought is linked with colonialism for Māori, and propose that the phrase "counter-colonial poetics" is just as apt as Heidegger's *Destruktion*. Counter-colonial thought or poetics, like Heidegger's *Destruktion*, holds both a critical question and a possible response, but it takes into account a Māori metaphysics for doing so. A Māori recounting of metaphysics values the void as highly as clarity (Mika, 2012), and the void, as much as clarity, imbues things in the world. Marsden (2003) observes that *korekore* (Being or voidness) is so thoroughly negative that it becomes partially positive. In a conceptual sense, this may mean that one cannot know the void; it exists, and to that extent is positive, but it is also beyond our cognition. But the void may indeed be speculated on. It is paradoxically both material ("thing") and withdrawn or absent ("no-thing"). It relates to a thing that we perceive, which despite appearing before us also contains to itself a hidden aspect.

The speculating Māori self resides among the force of this void, which is inextricably linked with the presence of a thing, and the void has the potential to forever render the thing beyond the self's cognitive reach.

Thus there are repercussions from the void for one's current, contemporary apprehensions and representations of a thing. For other indigenous writers, the link between ancient metaphysics and ongoing transformation is a real one: as Maffie (n.d.) explains, the primordial force Teotl for the Aztecs "continually generates and regenerates as well as permeates, encompasses, and shapes the cosmos as part of its endless process of self-generation-and-regeneration" (n.p.). Deloria (2001) defines power as "living energy that inhabits and/or composes the universe" (p. 23) and place as "the relationship of things to each other", and is clear that they have an interaction such that personality itself is "the substantive embodiment, the unique realization, of all the relations and power" (p. 145). The phenomena exist beyond the self's comprehension but have bodily consequences for the self.

The proposal that metaphysics is both material and void is itself a counter-colonial one. It asks, in the fashion of Walter Mignolo (Merrell, 2006), for an alternative mode of thinking that not only poses the void as an antidote to presence but also creates a new foundation of thinking that encompasses both void and presence. We are hence met with Heidegger's (1977) "saving power" which notes that highly present, technological thinking exposes its own possibilities for further thinking, despite itself: it is possible that the metaphysics of presence itself has begun the poetics of its own critique. In our act of identifying the possibility for thought in the metaphysics of presence lies the potential for the destabilizing of the solid body of assumption that is the metaphysics of presence—not simply because we are proposing a void (and hence an antithesis to presence) but because the void has a continual pull on the self. The void hence places limits on our certainty of

an object: the phenomenon whenua (to return to our earlier example) is placed beyond our horizon of thought, and our representation of it takes that concealment into account. But this does not preclude our speculation on the draw that whenua holds for us through the pull of the void. A counter-colonial poetics is hence an ethics of uncertainty that calls for our tentative questioning around colonizing metaphysics and, at the same time, the possibilities of an object as it brings us to its attention.

There are some more solid ramifications that emerge from this poetics. Because we are talking about a poetics of caution, there is a limit on our knowledge of even the full extent of a colonizing problem. Unknowable, however, does not mean *unthinkable*, and it is the obscurity that thought points out for the Māori writer or thinker that is important. Counter-colonial thought brings back an intention to read an object in terms of what it may withhold from us, even where that withholding force is thoroughly unknowable. It is possibly the darkness behind the glaringly evident object that draws us on to continue thinking. For that reason, counter-colonial poetics, entertaining as it does the withdrawn possibilities of an object and its relationship with all other things, is a continuous project. It may be either an individually sourced one or one that asks for collective input. Moreover, counter-colonial poetics requires some speculation about itself, and so is the object of its own possibility.

## Conclusion

How broadly and deeply Māori intend to interpret the effects of the metaphysics of presence is up for Māori to decide. Any such *démarche* is not, of course, one that Heidegger could—or would probably have even wanted to—dictate. Where he is indeed useful is in his illumination of a problem that is itself characterized by absence and that tends to swim in and out of clarity. For the Māori speculator on the

colonialism of Western metaphysics of presence, the language that he or she is forced to resort to compounds the problem it poses. Additionally its implications, I have argued, must be accounted for at every step in terms of its impact on other things in the world besides the self. Although Heidegger can in principle indicate that this is necessary, and even provide Māori with detail on its origins and its general workings, it remains the task of Māori to continuously and critically flesh out the full philosophical and concrete influences of what I have argued is a persistent horizon of Western thought.

## Glossary

### German

Destruktion	destruction
Grundfrage	fundamental question

### Māori

aroaro	frontal sensory realm
awa	rivers
ia	him and/or her
iwi	tribe
kau	appearance
kaupapa	crux
korekore	Being
maunga	mountains
Papatūānuku	Earth Mother
tangata	person
tangata whenua	original people of the land
te reo Māori	the Māori language
whakapapa	genealogy
whenua	land

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