

UNORTHODOX ASSISTANCE: NOVALIS, MĀORI, SCIENTISM, AND AN UNCERTAIN APPROACH TO 'WHAKAPAPA'

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Die Natur ist eine versteinerte Zauberstadt
([Scientised] nature is a petrified, enchanted city) (Novalis)¹

The reductionism of Western science is well noted among several Māori academics,² who describe in various ways its methodical tendency to dissemble an organism and isolate its parts. The reductionist nature of the method of science then informs the practice, so that the manifestations of science – its latest innovations, evidenced in biotechnology, cloning, stem cell therapy and so on – become an overriding concern for these academics. Rightly, the effects of those innovations on Māori spiritual and physical realms are addressed, to the extent that they may constitute extensive submissions to governmental bodies. How effective these submissions are is open to considerable speculation, particularly when it is acknowledged by many of these same writers that those ministerial and judicial bodies are incapable of understanding the dilemmas posed by the effects of reductionist scientific practice on the Māori world. The Māori world, in the main, is left to wait until it is confronted with yet another scientific advancement or technology, and the rush to counter its *modus operandi* begins again.

In this article I will not be presenting any empirical data showing whether Māori embrace science or not, or whether they agree with various manifestations of scientific reductionism – biotechnology, stem cell research, cloning and so on. Instead I seek to address how a traditionally Māori term can be reduced in scope, especially when a traditionally holistic term, which may be abstract in its nature, is coopted by scientised discourse. I am not merely arguing that the term becomes reductionist, however; I also maintain that the object to which the term refers is narrowed considerably from its

¹ Unless otherwise noted, translations of Novalis' works are mine.

² For Māori descriptions on the reductionist nature of science, see: Melanie Cheung, "The reductionist – holistic worldview dilemma," *MAI Review*, 3, 2008. Accessed February 28, 2010; available from <http://www.review.mai.ac.nz/>; Jessica Hutchings and Paul Reynolds, "The Obfuscation of Tikanga Maori in the GM Debate," *Kaupapa Māori*, n.d. Accessed February 28, 2010; available from <http://www.kaupapamaori.com/>; Donna Gardiner, "Hands off our genes: A case study on the theft of whakapapa" (Masters thesis, The University of Auckland, 1997)

previous holistic sphere to a utilitarian, categorised, and prescriptively scientific world. To help me begin the task of critique I will be resorting to a quite disparate source of help that at first glance seems incompatible in most conceivable senses with my own culture. This unusual assistance comes in the form of Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis). He is unusual insofar as he does not immediately spring to mind for most Māori who are strategising to recognise hidden colonising practices. However, an enchantment of Novalis is that he wrote more than two hundred years ago about the effects of a so-called scientising discourse that exalted the subject over the object. Typical of the German Romantic movement to which he belonged, he proposed a view of the world that endorsed tentativeness. He could not have predicted the extent to which scientised discourse would become dominant, but all the same his poetry and *Märchen* are particularly useful tools for the colonised inquirer. In his poem *Wenn nicht mehr Zahlen und Figuren*, Novalis sounds a cautionary note that draws Māori attention to subtle hegemonies. In that warning he suggests that there is a far greater origin to even abstract ideas than the currently held subjectivist one, and that the language that refers to those philosophies holds not only the precise brilliance of the Enlightenment but also the ethereal shadow of uncertainty. He signals that a word relates to objects in the world in a much grander way than any reductionism would allow.

A serious reading of his poem would compel us to look at well-used Māori terms and consider how they might be interfered with by a static, objectified world. In this paper I discuss an application of his poem *Wenn nicht mehr Zahlen und Figuren* to the term 'whakapapa'. If we take the markers arising from his poem then it becomes obvious that even that term, which is understood to mean so much, might now be dominated by a scientised worldview, one that narrows its scope considerably. Resonating in many ways with the earlier Johann Georg Hamann, and presaging Martin Heidegger, Novalis seeks to reorient the world away from conventional Western metaphysics; he differs from Hamann and Heidegger in his more moderate approach to the validity of science, but he still provokes modernity's discomfort by interrogating the colonising nature of scientism, especially in modernity's confrontation with the specific nature of objects and the terms that relate to them.

It is tempting to think of the method of science *proper* when hearing the phrase 'scientising discourse', where an obvious, numerical capture of a term occurs. Prior to that interpretation of 'scientising discourse', I argue, resides a primal, basic view that arranges things in the world in a neat, prescribed and orderly way. A deeper reading of Novalis reveals this ontological presence of what is now thought of as science. Hence for indigenous peoples, an aspect of colonisation is the way language is dominantly posed as an inert, mechanical tool for conveying and exchanging logical ideas. Objects in the world – concrete and abstract – can then be described with congruent, symmetrical language. Māori language revitalisation strategies have often focused on resurrecting the precise, correct usage of words to refer to such phenomena in the world. To achieve that, language is treated to linguistic rigour:

We need to treat language as part of a culture, a system of knowledge, and look at the structure of that knowledge as it is *codified* (author's own emphasis) in the structural formulas and the vocabulary of the language. That means examining the semantic organisation of the vocabulary and of discourse.³

The linguistic study of language is a scientific study of language. Karetu and Waite have noted its influence on Māori language, and assert that "Fortunately, those who developed the writing system were good linguists – their legacy is a system founded on scientific principles."⁴ Language may also be subject to a more temporal and spatial precision. For instance, legislating for the use of Māori language, namely through the Māori Language Act 1987, secures it within a seamless world where, at certain, exact points, one may legitimately use the language but may not in other contexts. In welcoming ceremonies to greet overseas dignitaries or for the beginning of sports events it is similarly prescribed. Even where the language appears to provide a nice flourish in academic writing, and is then abandoned in favour of English, it is confronted with a specific boundary that it may not overstep.

³ Andrew Pawley, "Can the Maori Language Survive?" In: *Hurupaa* 10, 1989, p. 21

⁴ Timoti Karetu and Jeffrey Waite, "Te Reo Māori" In: *New Zealand Official Yearbook 1988 -1989*, (Wellington, Department of Statistics, 1989), p. 219

Yet such views of, and approaches to, language were not universal. Māori were traditionally clear that language, and the objects it referred to, had much greater depth than that proposed by linguists, policy makers and legislators. Kereopa noted from his own experience “when you go to talk to the pipis or you go to talk to the trees, you have a transformation in the type of Te Reo you use. You need that so the pipis or the trees can understand you.”⁵ Other commentators have observed that language is implicated with mauri and other so-called spiritual institutions.⁶ Yet problems seem to arise for Māori with the constant positioning of language, and the objects it refers to, as scientised phenomena. It is at this point that one can refer to some unorthodox assistance and, on the heels of that, some creative discussion about what those objects are, together with the names for them.

1 ENTER NOVALIS – WENN NICHT MEHR ZAHLEN UND FIGUREN

Novalis has remained comparatively unknown in the English-speaking world; then, if he is known at all, it is generally as a poet rather than philosopher. However, the deep significance of philosophical Early Romanticism, surfacing since much of its text has been translated into English and French, is now challenging that strict literary approach with the result that “a genuinely philosophical Novalis has started to emerge.”⁷ This approach Novalis would have endorsed, given his own belief that “Every science will be poesy – after it has become a philosophy.”⁸ Poetry could only be manifest after philosophy had been made romantic; that is, following the potentiation of philosophy from the pedestrian to the mysterious. Indeed it was this resistance to what Novalis considered an Enlightenment-driven banality that led him to write his poem *Wenn nicht mehr Zahlen und Figuren*.

It is best to consider this poem in detail if there is to be a deeper understanding both of Novalis’ critique and his simultaneous development of apparently obvious, self-evident phenomena so that they take on an enigmatic gloss. At first glance the poem just seems

⁵ Paul Moon, *Tohunga: Hohepa Kereopa*, Auckland 2003, p. 134

⁶ Rangimarie Pere, *Ako: Concepts and learning in the Maori tradition (Working Paper No. 17)* (Hamilton, University of Waikato 1982); Heddell Raerino, “Te ku o te kupu” (Masters thesis, The University of Waikato 2000); Te Ahukaramū Royal, *A modern view of mana*, 2006 (accessed November 15, 2007); available from <http://www.charlesroyal.com/assets/apspaper.pdf>; Carl Mika, “The Utterance, the Body and the Law: Seeking an Approach to Concretizing the Sacredness of Maori Language” In: *SITES: A Journal of Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies* 4, 2 (2007), p. 181

⁷ David Wood (Ed.), *Novalis: Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, Albany 2007, p. x

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 125

to warn against a dominant tendency of Western man to describe objects (and hence nature) through numbers. This plain analysis is not incorrect but is somewhat incomplete because, for language, the implications are more profound. Moving to the poem:

Wenn nicht mehr Zahlen und Figuren
Sind Schlüssel aller Kreaturen,
Wenn die so singen, oder küssen
Mehr als die Tiefgelehrten wissen
Wenn sich die Welt ins freie Leben,
Und in die <freie> Welt wird zurückbegeben,
Wenn dann sich wieder Licht und Schatten
Zu echter Klarheit wieder gatten
Und man in Märchen und Gedichten
Erkennt die wahren Weltgeschichten,
Dann fliegt vor Einem geheimen Wort
Das ganze verkehrte Wesen fort ⁹

The first stanza is certainly clear that the materialist practice of describing nature quantitatively is to be avoided. More intriguing, however, is the etymological relationship between the noun “Zahlen” (numbers) and the verb “erzählen” (to tell a highly concentrated story), suggesting that the process of telling such a story is, by its very nature, imbued with numbers. This form of “erzählen” manifests Novalis’ unease with the almost contractual nature of telling a linear story – that ‘this’ is built logically on ‘that’ – resulting in a tightly controlled version of language. In such a version of language, the story itself is constrained so that it lacks spontaneity and creativity. In short, although a highly valuable tool for modern man, ordinal language is not poetic.¹⁰

Language in its modern form may never have been intended to be poetic, and modern humanity could then argue that technological progress would be hampered by poetic language. Yet Novalis’ “Poesie” is not restricted to rhyme; it is much more to do with

⁹ Novalis, *Schriften 1: Das dichterische Werk*, (Ed.) Richard Samuel, Hans-Joachim Mähl and Gerhard Schulz, Stuttgart 1960, p. 344 – 345. See also Peter Dane’s translation of Novalis’ poem at the beginning of this book.

¹⁰ Most of Novalis’ philosophical work is located at the intersection of academic prose and poetry (e.g. *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*). He also frequently employs aphorisms in order to avoid “Systemphilosophie”.

raising the threshold of scientific discourse so that humanity cannot be so complacent with its knowledge of the world. It is far less a genre of language than it is an activity, the outcome of which may include rhyme. In his *Schriften* he states that poetry is “the art of rendering an agreeable way displeasing, making an object strange and yet familiar and attractive – that is the romantic way of the poetic.”¹¹ However, his retort to modern humanity’s insistence on quantifying language – which is an overstated form of his appeal to ‘familiar’ and ‘attractive’ – is revealed in an examination of the phrase *Schlüssel aller Kreaturen*, in which he points to the unbridled outcome of such discourse. At first glance the phrase, taken together with the words preceding it, highlights the dangers of viewing numbers as keys to all creatures. Additionally, though, the use of the double genitive sounds a dual caution – that, alongside the assigning of numbers to creatures, there is always the hegemonic danger that those creatures that have been subjected to quantification then assume that tradition themselves. Creatures can assume that discourse either knowingly or unwittingly to the extent that it becomes completely normal to them. It is a warning echoed by Freire, who was scathing of self-colonising practices:

Submerged in reality, the oppressed cannot perceive clearly the “order” which serves the interests of the oppressors whose image they have internalised. Chafing under the restrictions of this order, they often manifest a type of horizontal violence, striking out at their comrades for the pettiest reasons the oppressed feel an irresistible attraction toward the oppressors and their way of life. Sharing this way of life becomes an overpowering aspiration. In their alienation, the oppressed want at any cost to resemble the oppressors, to imitate them, to follow them.¹²

In essence, Novalis was warning against that which was made explicit by Freire nearly two centuries later, although his injunction was not delivered for an indigenous audience.

¹¹ Novalis, *Schriften 3: Das philosophische Werk II*, (Ed.) Richard Samuel, Hans-Joachim Mähl and Gerhard Schulz, Stuttgart 1960, p. 685

¹² Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London 1970, p. 44

The remaining stanzas to the poem require some excavation to unearth their relevance for indigenous peoples. The second stanza points to an emotional reading of the world, which, according to Novalis, is of primary importance – again, as opposed to a view of the world that is dominated by logic and scientific rationalism. An emotionally charged nature is a theme that recurs in Novalis’ works; for instance, in the tale of *Hyazinth und Rosenblüth*, in which Novalis poses nature as capricious but rational according to its own, largely unknowable fashion of self-organisation. Nature can gossip; it can at one moment be beneficent and the next hostile. In the tale, Nature is rarely rational along the lines of human expectation, but nevertheless possesses the ability to speak. In another passage of *Die Lehrlinge zu Saïs* nature is described as a self-generating ongoing conversation between all beings, and so engages in its own activity. Language for Novalis, then, is far less a tool than an event, over which humans have limited agency. Even when humanity does speak it is in the voice of feeling and emotion. Reflective of the romantics’ belief that eros is the creative principle, and of the need for poetry to bring this fundamental principle into being, those who love and sing are able to know more than the apparently deeply learned.

According to Géza von Molnár, allowing an emotional and spiritual relationship with the world, Novalis, in opposition to the Enlightenment, advocates a moving “between the spheres of subject and object.”¹³ The unity inherent to holistic perception had been lost through the categorisation of nature by man; this can be likened to a kind of ongoing dissection of nature into disciplines, which Novalis terms ‘Zergliederung’, which he compares to the diffraction of a light beam that is sent through a prism. Like Goethe, Novalis was concerned about both the methodology of Newtonian natural science and its tendency to split up into various sub-disciplines that would, in turn, lose sight of nature as a whole and by which both scientific and spiritual disintegration would occur. Von Molnár continues that “the original unity found in the state of nature would have to be used as a point of reference if new and different combinations are to be effected”,¹⁴ arguing that the strands of the soul have been fragmented with the process of categorisation and that, in both cases of fragmentation (of the spiritual and of nature),

¹³ Géza von Molnár, “The composition of Novalis’ *Die Lehrlinge zu Saïs*: A reevaluation.” In: *PMLA* 85, 5 (1970), p. 1012

¹⁴ *Ibid*

creativity is possible only if humanity is able to view nature as the unifying point for all these categories, beams or strands.

The third couplet - *Wenn sich die Welt ins freie Leben/Und in die Welt wird zurückbegeben* - reflects the Romantics' stance that human life is characterised by freedom, affecting choices in thinking and in lifestyles. Binary oppositions are warned against in the following stanza - *Wenn dann sich wieder Licht und Schatten/Zu echter Klarheit werden gatten* - and indeed the only clarity that one has of the world is allowed through shadow. Again, poetry for Novalis was instrumental in unifying these oppositions, largely because the language of poetry was emotional, multi-faceted and inclusive and capable of overcoming logical binaries. Out of respect for creative freedom, Novalis remembers and anticipates a time when the world was not known and expressed through logical language: a possible return to this time would be "heralded by the melting of the winter ice and the return of the flow to the world."¹⁵ Progress for him is not a solidification of knowledge or a static wilderness of fact but an ever-changing interplay of light and dark. Perhaps unexpectedly, such a state of being is progressive - it allows a more realistic view of the world.

The medium of poetry is fundamental to Novalis' remaining two stanzas. In these he names poetry directly - *in Gedichten* - as a means by which language may best be maintained and used. Through poetry one is able to tread the path of nature as a subject. The poet is finally able to utter the Word of wisdom, evident in the stanza *Dann fliegt vor Einem geheimen Wort/Das ganze verkehrte Wesen fort*. Here the sacred word is used in conjunction with *Einem*, alluding to a process or being that is sacred and ineffable, one that is given special significance through the capitalisation of the usually banal indefinite article 'einem'. In the context of Novalis' poem it assumes a quality of uniqueness, the all comprising only One which is another way of putting his notion of pantheism, a cosmological view which recurs frequently in his works. A sacred word is given effect through the gathering of opposing dualities such as light and darkness, which will occur by considering a world without measured edges. It is through this, Novalis believes, that

¹⁵ Joyce Walker, "Romantic Chaos: The dynamic paradigm in Novalis's Heinrich von Ofterdingen and Contemporary Science." In: *The German Quarterly* 66, 1 (1993), p. 49

the hitherto wrongly perceived nature of being will be dispelled, and the newly transformed being will be moved towards the sacred.

2 THE EFFECT OF SCIENTISING DISCOURSE ON MĀORI TERMS: 'WHAKAPAPA'

The discourse of whakapapa is now tightly bound up with the scientism that Novalis talks of, and is given properties by researchers and scientists.¹⁶ It does not have to be specifically described in scientific jargon to be caught up by the science that Novalis speaks of; it merely has to be projected as 'object'. The flurry of names equated with whakapapa – 'gene', 'genealogy' – is evidence of the scramble to accord phenomena their rightful place where, according to Novalis, everything will finally fit a schema if the defining of these objects is undertaken with some uniformity. The opportunity for the scientised framing of objects to occur, for Māori, may have stepped up a notch with recent innovations in the discipline of scientific research. For instance, the Human Genome Diversity Project, which set out to establish genetic origins and variations on the basis of research into indigenous peoples, was so roundly advocated by scientists because the notion of the body as a genetic resource had already been assumed. The Project would be vigorously resisted by indigenous peoples;¹⁷ however, indigenous condemnation to it would occur mainly because it posed indigenous peoples as resources, not due to its fundamental reductionist view of the body.

The scientism that Novalis speaks of can only take place after the Māori self has been constructed, or constructs itself, in particular ways. The Māori place in the universe, the self in relation to the other and in conjunction with the environment, is all-important as a starting point for a discussion around the scientism of whakapapa, for a conscious description of whakapapa may or may not contribute to an overall advancement of an objectified worldview. Traditionally Māori enjoyed a holistic relationship with the world,¹⁸ which depended on a reciprocal connection with the environment. The colonising practices of those introduced institutions that would nearly destroy those traditional

¹⁶ It is beyond the scope of this chapter to delve into the historical influences that have led to the scientising of Māori terms, whakapapa among them. Law, education and medical science have all particularly contributed to an objectification of these terms and a silencing of those meanings that do not correspond with a scientised regard.

¹⁷ See the Mataatua Declaration 1993 for an example of indigenous resistance to the HGDP.

¹⁸ Maori Marsden and T. A. Henare, *Kaitiakitanga: A Definitive Introduction to the Holistic World View of the Maori* (Wellington: Ministry for the Environment, 1992); Cleve Barlow, *Tikanga Whakaaro: Key concepts in Māori culture*, Auckland 1991; Linda Smith, *Decolonizing methodologies*. Dunedin 1999

practices, such as health, education, and law, have been well described in other literature.¹⁹ An approach to the body as a solely physical, solid entity would underpin the assumptions of those institutions: those who had committed a criminal act or were seeking title to land had to be present in the courthouse; those who were ill had to be displayed before the medical professional; and those being educated were compelled to present themselves to watch and be taught. Furthermore, empiricist methods and pedagogies, perceivable by the senses, would then form the basis of further interactions with that body: the criminal would be questioned, or the land would be clearly and tightly delineated; the sick body would be observed and diagnosed; and the learning body would be encouraged to focus on recollectable knowledge.

The introduction of language as a precise representational phenomenon is similarly intent on framing objects in the world with exactness. Alongside a belief in English as a naturally accurate (and superior) language,²⁰ the idea that language generally should point to an object and frame its identifiable components with certainty would become more tenable than one that posed language as a less than straightforward, or sacred, event. Those objects that the language referred to, even abstract phenomena, could also be conceived of easily, with no more thought around their composition necessary. Whether those terms have been deliberately reconceived so that they reflect an objectifying agenda, or whether they are just a side effect of an overwhelmingly objectifying philosophy, is uncertain. What is more important is that even abstract terms would be subject to certainty. They would be dredged out of their fuller context and moved into a world that could treat objects to a sharply defining illumination. Let us now turn to a discussion of how whakapapa has been treated to the scientism that Novalis warned of.

3 WHAKAPAPA'S COOPTION BY SCIENTISED DISCOURSE

The recent ACART discussion document, which amongst other things sought views on Māori attitudes towards infertility, revealed an approach towards Māori terminology that

¹⁹ Mason Durie, *Whaiora: Māori Health Development*, Auckland 1998; Moana Jackson, *The Maori and the criminal justice system*, Wellington 1988; Ani Mikaere, "The balance destroyed: The consequences for Māori women of the colonisation of Tikanga Māori" (Masters thesis, The University of Waikato, 2003)

²⁰ See for instance Carleton's comments in the House of Representatives: "They could never civilize them through the medium of a language that was imperfect as a medium of thought. If they attempted it, failure was inevitable; and civilisation could only be eventually carried out by means of a perfect language" (New Zealand Government, *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates* (Auckland 1867), p. 863

was defined by a scientific endeavour. It is unsurprising that the document would aim to categorise the word whakapapa. The second paragraph begins with "Knowledge and protection of whakapapa is a key concern that has been expressed to ACART... Some Māori are concerned that whakapapa would be disrupted through the use of some assisted reproductive procedures."²¹ In that context the word whakapapa could conceivably be understood in a broad sense, although to the writers whakapapa has to be firstly known in order to be fully itself. However, the paragraph continues:

The HART Act requires that information about donors be kept by providers and the Registrar-General of Births, Deaths and Marriages. The Act specifies that ethnicity and any relevant cultural affiliation must be recorded, along with, in the case of Māori donors, the donor's whānau, hapū and iwi affiliations.²²

What is important at this point is not the document's focus on infertility but its implied substitution of the term 'whakapapa' with 'genealogy'. It is suddenly revealed as an object, transportable towards its substitute term genealogy. It has become reduced from locating itself in a holistic discourse to one that enables the process of linear categorisation. Even in the word 'genealogy' there exists an etymological trace that favours a directly causal description of 'kinship', evident in its focus on 'generation' or 'race',²³ with that definition underlying the accepted method of ethnographers.²⁴ With the creation of whakapapa as methodical kinship, some very central Māori tenets and philosophies were simultaneously created, to the extent that their reinvention is now almost unquestioned. Almost subtly, whakapapa was coming to be thought of as a biological event.

If Māori writers on the area of whakapapa are similarly describing whakapapa, then they may simply be choosing that route. The reasons for this are many: they may not wish to disclose any deeper nuances of the word for cultural and intellectual property reasons; in

²¹ Advisory Committee on Assisted Reproductive Technology (ACART), *Consultation on the Use of In Vitro Maturation in Fertility Treatment: Discussion document* (Wellington, ACART, 2009), p. 10

²² Ibid

²³ Charles Onions (Ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, Oxford 1966

²⁴ Mary Bouquet, "Family Trees and Their Affinities: The Visual Imperative of the Genealogical Diagram." In: *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2, 1 (1996)

the case of research, they may be attempting to render the word, among others, acceptable for a Western context; they may believe that to introduce the more profound 'traces' of the word would be destructive to certain people in the community from which the word derives, and so on. All of these reasons are underpinned by the desire to allow the true depth of the word to flourish in the private domain that Māori occupy. In that sense the word has a subterranean life on the one hand and a public, politically useful life on the other. In the public domain the word becomes the term of convenience for what is essentially an object, and the users, and their communities, have some agency over the matter.

Nevertheless, the precise problem with the scientism of a word – particularly when that word is not already explained as possibly occupying not only another meaning but also another space – is that it is supported by all hegemonic aspects of colonised life. While we may not consider the dominantly objectifying definition for a word to be on the colonising agenda, it does suit the coloniser that there is universal acceptance of that static view of a word and the object it relates to. Thus, as already indicated, major colonising institutions enjoy and draw constantly on the discourse of scientism for their survival. Additionally, there is a seduction in the apparent symmetry inherent to explanations that embody a sense of finality. The comfort that accompanies those explanations, it will be remembered, is one that Novalis warns against as accompanying the 'keys to all creatures', where the keys become 'of' all creatures. A not untrue, but a particularly scientific, rendering of whakapapa emerges symmetrically in the following utilitarian description:

In a commonly applied form, that of recording human descent lines and relationships, whakapapa functions as a genealogical table or family pedigree in which the lineages connect each papa or layer (a metaphorical reference to each generation of a family).

The extent to which this underlying theoretical rationale for human whakapapa applies to the nonhuman has hitherto remained unexplored, at least in the published literature. To understand the meaning of plant and animal whakapapa requires knowledge of not only plant and animal names

but also their accompanying narratives. Typically, these take an allegorical form in which explanatory theories as well as moral principles are explicated. In its totality, Māori use of whakapapa and narrative creates a “metaphysical gestalt” or whole, integrated pattern, for the oral communication of knowledge.²⁵

Such explanations, and even others that try to envisage whakapapa as being related to other traditional cultural institutions, as “It is safe to assume, however, that both [whakapapa and mauri] enliven each other, for if to possess mauri is to be alive, then this requires the belief and practice of whakapapa”,²⁶ suggest that whakapapa steps in to fulfill a function. We can see in the example above that whakapapa “records” something, “functions as” something, and “applies to” something. In the second illustration, whakapapa “enlivens” something. Whakapapa is a useful, or in the second instance, necessary event. The productivity of the verbs used in the first example expedites the “oral communication of knowledge”. The authors later consider the use of whakapapa as a “taxonomy”,²⁷ at which point we see an obvious movement of whakapapa into the strict discourse of science²⁸ – specifically, into the specialized area of the genetic modification of organisms. Novalis might have participated in this discussion by adding that whakapapa has been phenomenologically and linguistically solidified, and that it has become part of the “petrified city” that he refers to. In its usefulness to modern reification it is examined, regarded and represented as a tool to come to know the world better. Its properties have also been fixed and its subsequent clarity allows one to know the abstract object that it represents better. We therefore know the natural world better because we believe whakapapa is the taxonomical framework that groups it for us.

It will be remembered that Novalis advocated linguistic and epistemological cautiousness, largely because he, along with other German Romantics, believed that nature was in a constant state of change and that both its origin and aim remained mysterious. Even the laws guiding the everyday physical world could only be described in formulaic ways and

²⁵ Mere Roberts et.al., “Whakapapa as a Māori Mental Construct: Some Implications for the Debate over Genetic Modification of Organisms.” In: *The Contemporary Pacific* 16, 1 (2004), p. 1

²⁶ Mika, p. 186.

²⁷ Roberts et.al., p. 7.

²⁸ The writers intend for this discussion around whakapapa to occur in a scientific context.

be partly understood in their essence. Biological nature in particular had to be related to within the bounds of emotional knowing, which could be informed by elements of rational knowing. That nature is beyond the control of humans belongs to most of his works, which transform the world into a mysterious life. The fixing of constant attributes, he argued, ignored the flux and creative freedom of nature and would easily lead to self-affirming complacency. The world is known, by that method, and need only be thought about again to the extent that one has to continue to add to knowledge through that scientised method. When the world is subject to an overtly scientific method – a term that derives from ‘science’ as it is currently thought of – it is merely treated to another expression of grouping and objectification. For Novalis, then, the scientific method could only exist because of that initial drive to scientise the world, although identifying a philosophical ground of science does not mean that science, modernly and conventionally thought of, should be ignored. This is especially true as science now forms a meta-narrative in research and technology, and has secured ‘whakapapa’ within its field of influence.

One scientific term that is often directly equated with whakapapa is ‘gene’. More commonly ‘ira tangata’ is cited in connection with gene, but one does not need to search too extensively to find whakapapa mentioned as well.²⁹ In such cases the Māori term is thought of as adaptable, and arguably is endowed with the fluidity that Novalis anticipated. However, a move within a discursive field – or, towards a more thoroughly scientised interpretation – is the only movement allowed for the Māori term. It is as if those Māori terms are only important to the extent that they merely support their Western equivalents in prescribing a particular view of the world.

The prescribed travel of the traditional term within the field that scientism operates is obvious when there are links made between empirical knowledge and whakapapa. Barlow notes that “whakapapa is the genealogical descent of all living things from the gods to the present time; whakapapa is a basis for the organization of knowledge in respect of the creation and development of all living things.”³⁰ Again, whakapapa is connected to

²⁹ See: Hirini Mead, *Whakapapa and biotechnology. Te Ira Tangata*, 2004 (accessed 25 June, 2009); available from <http://www.bioethics.org.nz/publications.human-genes-whakapapa-feb04/html/page2.html>; Aroha Mead, “Human Genetic Research and Whakapapa” In: *Mai i Rangiaitea*, (Eds.) Pania Te Whāiti, Marie McCarthy and Aroha Durie, Auckland 1997

³⁰ Barlow, p. 173

knowledge; the emphasis is on knowing whakapapa in order to generate knowledge. The kind of knowledge anticipated here is scientific knowledge, generated by thinking of whakapapa as a known tool. Whakapapa here has to be known; it must be the produce of a conscious human activity. It might simply be summarized that whakapapa was created by humanity. The anthropocentric attitude towards whakapapa denies any belief that whakapapa exists before or independently of our consciousness of it. This may occur also through the use of metaphor, where an essentially scientific discipline – in this case, linguistics – is given Māori credibility by assimilating Māori ideas of whakapapa into the birth of “language modalities”:

The following analogy may be used to describe [the] entire evolutionary process. The oral-culture of pre-European Māori can be termed as the ‘Mother language’ (te whaea o te reo tupu). This term is encapsulated through the myths and legends of Papatūanuku or ‘Mother Earth’, as well as, the established international term of ‘Mother Tongue’ used by Linguists and Educationalists alike. As a consequence of European contact and amalgamation, the language changed to adopt the new mode of discourse through the means of a written symbolic system. There, it is appropriately called the ‘Father Tongue’ (te matua ā-tuhi). Thus, a marriage of the old and the new was consummated. In the following years, the offspring (or bi-products) of this language relationship are called the ‘child progenies’ (ngā uri o te reo Māori), these can be termed the ‘language modalities’.³¹

Drawing on names, either literally or metaphorically, to explain the phenomenon of whakapapa is a natural outcome of its scientised treatment. At times the attempt is made to describe holistically whilst genealogical names are denoted. In the Report of the Royal Commission on Genetic Modification the following comments were made:

To Maori this duty [of kaitiakitanga] is easily explained by tracing whakapapa (genealogy) up through the ancestors, to the Gods, and ultimately to Papatuanuku, the Earth Mother, and Ranginui, the Sky Father.

³¹ Mark Laws, “Māori Language Integration in the Age of Information: A Computational Approach” (Ph.D. diss., University of Otago, 2001), p. 2

By going sideways in these kinship links, Maori trace descent lines for all living creatures and so have to honour them as kin.³²

A focus on identifiable, explicable beings is primary in this explanation of whakapapa, and indeed it appears to be of concern to many similar documents. The writers do acknowledge the holistic relationship with the environment, but can only do so by referring to those beings listed. The list of those beings as constitutive of whakapapa is the sole descriptive resulting in whakapapa becoming concretised by a focus on the beings that apparently constitute it in its entirety. As a commonsense approach to whakapapa this may be of obvious help to those who learn and practise recounting whakapapa, but it may also lead to confusion, where the *concreteness* of whakapapa is equated with the *concreteness* of other entities, such as 'genes'. When that misunderstanding occurs, 'whakapapa' is listed as being affected because it is the 'gene' that is being affected with the patenting of life forms. Their equivalence is not immediately acceptable, however, particularly when they are asserted to so neatly fit onto each other.

4 RESOLUTIONS PROPOSED BY NOVALIS: AN APPLICATION TO 'WHAKAPAPA'

Most of us would be unwilling to disregard the benefits of scientising discourse in favour of an entirely nebulous one. Novalis was aware of the dangers equally inherent to such an extreme approach. Himself a scientist, he knew that an entirely emotional view of the world was not key to, as he would have it, an "absolute universal science."³³ Indeed, in relation to any strict formation of fragmented disciplines, he stated that "It is entirely due to a lack of genius that the sciences are separated.- The relations between the sciences are too intricate and distant for the intellect. We owe the most sublime truths of our day to such interactions between the long-separated elements of this total-science."³⁴ It was his ambition to unify all the so-called sciences - which include philosophy and the arts - into "the perfected form of the sciences."³⁵

³² Ministry for the Environment, *Report of the Royal Commission on Genetic Modification: Cultural, ethical and spiritual issues*. 2002 (accessed February 28, 2010); available from <http://www.mfe.govt.nz/publications/organisms/royal-commission-gm/chapter-3.pdf>

³³ Wood, p. 49

³⁴ Wood, p. xxix

³⁵ *Ibid*

But if whakapapa has been made into a scientised phenomenon due to the introduction of an overwhelmingly rationalistic, as well as empiricist, focus by colonisation, then how might that be countered? Novalis' fundamental decree, that there is delusion in thinking of things in the world as fully and finally defined, is one that provokes most discomfort, but it is perhaps his most strident warning to societies that are becoming highly technological. Discussions from a vantage point of authority, where the surface meanings for terminology are all-important, appear to come under attack from Novalis, who, in relation to the practice of conversations about nature, noted that "He who speaks of nature 'existing', necessarily takes us too far, and while striving for truth in speeches and dialogues about nature we go further and further away from naturalness."³⁶ *Whakapapa* might be substituted to form the subject of that assertion; similarly discussed, we have control over not just the term but such discussions also mislead us that we know the activity or the phenomenon with confidence.

Novalis then makes some recommendations regarding the place of science, and these might be applied to the current dilemma with some creativity. The final stanza of his *Wenn nicht mehr Zahlen und Figuren*, we recall, predicts that the task of the poet or storyteller is to scatter the nonsensical with potent language. Here we see him not decrying the merit of the scientific word but the cultural and social belief that it is the only word of validity. This 'potent' word is to be sourced locally. It is a spiritual word. That is, the word 'whakapapa' might be made potent again by referring to its local context(s) and spiritual essence. Importantly for Novalis, this was to assist in

... giving the ordinary a high meaning, the habitual a mysterious appearance, the known the dignity of the unknown, the finite an infinite air - [by this] I romanticize. The reverse operation relates to the higher, unknown, mystical, infinite - it becomes logarithmized through this connection and acquires an ordinary expression.³⁷

³⁶ Christian Becker and Reiner Manstetten, "Nature as a *You*. Novalis' Philosophical Thought and the Modern Ecological Crisis." In: *Environmental Values* 13 (2004), p. 105

³⁷ Novalis, *Schriften 2: Das philosophische Werk I*, (Eds.) Richard Samuel, Hans-Joachim Mähl und Gerhard Schulz, Stuttgart 1960, p. 545.

This process of romanticising relies on the method of potentising, which itself, according to Novalis, is a result of "science [as] the dignity of the proposition."³⁸ Science aids a higher meaning of a word by lifting it to more potent realms, but this is not meant to indicate that science will only ever raise a word to its own knowable discursive field. On the contrary, science plays a pivotal role in elevating the word to a more unknowable territory. It may also lower a term if social and institutional forces have moved it into the totally abstract, and so a term may be brought back into the linguistically comprehensible sphere for humanity,³⁹ with room provided for it to retain its own mystery.

Novalis offers some solutions for an overly scientised interpretation of whakapapa. I have argued that whakapapa has been oriented to fit the overall colonising agenda of the West; its liberation from that can take place with some of its other meanings, together with some creative elucidation of the social and cultural beliefs that Māori hold. An obvious problem with colonisation is loss; however, there are, equally, opportunities to creatively theorise about those areas of change, as very little remains certain. Affected groups are then able to creatively deconstruct apparently obvious abstract concepts. We may therefore approach whakapapa imaginatively, in which case we need to conceive of the term as inhabiting an unknown region. If whakapapa is posed in that way, then it becomes clear that it occupies a realm additional to its simple translation as 'genealogy'. Perhaps the greatest clue to its profound sense lies in its etymological meaning which, according to Hudson et al, relates to "the word 'papa,' a word for ground or solid foundation and 'whaka,' referring to the transitional process of 'becoming'."⁴⁰ What is revealed in the use of that word is a view of the world as inhabiting a state of becoming; the ground, an embodiment of certainty, itself is then in a state of becoming and so it moves through different forms of solidity. Certainty is never solidified, is never finalised; this view of the term 'whakapapa' seems to fit with the overall belief that even identity is in a state of flux⁴¹, and also that apparently 'concrete' institutions, such as whanau, are in a constant act of transformation⁴². There is a certain degree of emotional turmoil inherent to that reading of 'whakapapa': that there is no certainty to it forces humanity to a

³⁸ Wood, p. 49

³⁹ Katie Terezakis, "Against Violent Objects: Linguistic Theory and Practice in Novalis." In: *Janus Head* 10, 1 (2007)

⁴⁰ Maui Hudson et.al., "Whakapapa: A Foundation for Genetic Research?" In: *Bioethical Inquiry* 4, 1 (2007), p. 44.

⁴¹ Melinda Webber, "The multiple selves and realities of a Māori researcher" In: *MAI Review*, 1 (2009). Accessed February 28, 2010; available from <http://www.review.mai.ac.nz/>

⁴² Mason Durie, *Ngā Tai Matatū: Tides of Māori endurance*, Melbourne 2005

position of parallel relationship with it. Shifts in its stability likewise produce changes in the human form, including the body's emotional form. 'Whakapapa' in a social sense, though, is intrinsically necessary for Māori because in its mystery it ensures that one may dwell within the interplay of things in nature, with that interplay being fundamentally unknowable. This location within nature does not occur through any fixed natural 'law' but because nature's self-organising activity, at times perceptible but often not, ensures that humanity's own mystery is retained, along with the self's relationship with nature.

Aspects of certainty remain in that continuous transforming state of being, however. To begin with, we can be certain that the term is never completely knowable – we can be certain that there will be nothing but change, and even with its genealogical portrait 'whakapapa' throws us into doubt at times. Even within the genealogical names themselves, upon which a contemporary rendition of whakapapa is founded, there exists uncertainty; a person could be possessed of several, additional names, and they could be transmutable, to begin with, and even the name, when recited, could inhabit a different ontological 'field' when uttered by various individuals. The sureness rests in the form of the names, however, so that often there will be a concurrence between those who are reciting genealogical names, and the attempts on the part of those reciting the names to have them down correctly.

5 CONCLUSION

It is hardly surprising that, as whakapapa existed before our knowledge of it,⁴³ we could never be certain of its essence, and of its actions on the individual and the environment. Novalis undoubtedly would have advocated a tentative approach towards our explanation of the term. He attempted to present a schema in which things would not be given over to self-evidence. It is this aspect of his works that could hold most appeal for Māori. Although he is unable to explicitly tell Māori how to go about resisting a plain depiction of their spiritually charged traditions and terminology, he is capable of assisting with their current, reconstructive approaches to language. It is perhaps unusual to resort to a Western theorist for that assistance, but his allure lies in his thorough awareness of

⁴³ Leonie Pihama, "Tihei Mauri ora: Honouring our voices: Mana Wahine as a Kaupapa Māori theoretical Framework" (Ph.D. diss., The University of Auckland, 2001)

the indiscriminate uptake of Western scientising philosophies. However, he also advises us to temper our wholesale rejection of those modes of thought. Thus the potent word of whakapapa includes remnants of both the unknowable and the workable.