The use of Māori and Pasifika knowledge within the everyday practice of commensality to enrich the learning experience

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ABSTRACT

Aotearoa, New Zealand, is both a bicultural nation and a multicultural society, so the need to prioritise culture in design pedagogy and practice is not only palpable but well overdue within our creative tertiary institutes. Diversities are acknowledged as highly valuable within higher education, but when they are explored as non-western cultural and creative practices, they are still sidelined as optional, or as extensions to the current teleological pathways carved out within tertiary design curricula and practice. Building on the 'Indigenous Wisdom' framework outlined in the emergent design provocation Transition Design, this research introduces how an appreciation of cultural acumen can benefit, enrich, critique, and radicalise current design thinking, process and praxis. This study will discuss both Māori and Pasifika world views and ideologies and illustrate how these can enrich and enable design education. The aim of this paper is to highlight an appreciation for the reciprocity and respect imbued within *kaupapa* Māori and the Pasifika ideology of *ta-vā* (time and space) and how these considerations can enhance the discipline when they are purposefully, knowingly and respectfully imbued in design thinking and praxis. This research specifically focuses on the establishment of connections as essential to both the discipline and the teaching and learning experience. To achieve this, this study will introduce commensality, the coming together around a table to break bread and boundaries, and place it within the framework of Transition Design. Having gained an appreciation of Transition Design, Māori and Pasifika world views and ideologies, and commensality, this research will exemplify instances where students have combined these considerations to enhance their design solutions, and also where pedagogy can be used to specifically enhance teaching and learning by enabling an appreciation of cultural identity and social connectivity within the learning space.

"It has come out of hiding and is now in the bright light of day" (Mead 2003:23).

Introduction

Building on Transition Design's belief that an understanding of Indigenous knowledge can enable twenty-first century societies to better conceive solutions for sustainable futures, this research introduces how the symbiotic relationships embedded within 'Indigenous Wisdom' can benefit, critique and radicalise current design pedagogy, thinking, process and praxis in their quest to achieve this. This study discusses both Māori and Pasifika world views and ideologies and illustrates how these can both enrich and enable design as it grapples to engage with global issues of sustainability, inequity, wealth disparities, poverty, food quality, production and distribution, consumption and manufacture, social isolation, and individual and community health and well-being, which are now described within Transition Design as 'wicked problems'. Wicked problems are thought to be complex, interconnected, multi-scaled problems that are quite possibly not solvable, or are not 'fixed' in the historical way that design has viewed the linear trajectory from problem to solution.

Anthropologist, historian, artist, teacher, writer and prominent Māori leader, Hirini Moko Mead, argues that moving Māori knowledge forward is becoming increasingly important and it therefore needs to be understood, discussed, debated and passed on to others (Mead 2003:23). This study agrees with Mead and suggests that for design to participate in this discourse there is a need to enhance the discipline's understanding, awareness and respectful engagement with diversity. This paper combines Indigenous knowledge with the Transition Design framework of Cosmopolitan Localism, through the everyday act of commensality as an act of social connectivity. This approach aims to highlight the reciprocity and respect imbued within Indigenous practices and ideologies, and to illustrate how these can enhance design education, thinking and praxis when they are purposefully, knowingly and respectfully imbued in the theoretical frameworks and processes of the discipline. Along with an appreciation of *kaupapa* Māori as Māori values and collective philosophies, and the Pasifika ideology, of the Theory of Reality, *ta-vā,* (time and space), this research aims to use the everyday activity of commensality to develop new approaches for design that are culturally empathetic and respectful but, as importantly, increase opportunities for social connectivity.

Having gained an appreciation of Transition Design and Cosmopolitan Localism, and acknowledged the relevance of Māori and Pasifika world views and ideologies to design, this work concludes with examples of student work in which these considerations have been combined to enhance students' appreciation of social and cultural interconnectivity within their design solutions. These examples also show where within pedagogy an appreciation of cultural identity and social connection within the learning space can be enhanced.

Transition Design and Cosmopolitan Localism

Transition Design is a new area of design research, practice and study aimed at initiating and facilitating societal changes and transitions within complex systems towards more sustainable futures. Transition Design acknowledges that we are living in transitional times and takes as its central premise the need for changes and shifts that are mindful of past, present and future generations. It asserts that design has a key role to play in this negotiation. Transition Design applies an understanding of the

interconnectedness of social, economic, political and natural systems to problems, at all levels and scales of space and time, in ways that aim to improve the qualities of life. As a provocation it aspires to both develop new tools and approaches that can be used by transdisciplinary teams and also educate new generations of designers to join these teams. Within the Transition Design approach there are a number of 'streams of thought' that aim to enable unwrapping, analysing, forecasting, backcasting, new knowledge, and reimagining, or speculating about, pathways and strategies to positive futures.

Transition Design considers past experiences and knowledge as critical to the establishment of "solutions in the present with future generations in mind" (Irwin, Kossoff & Tonkinwise & 2015:3) and this paper offers examples in which the constructs of Cosmopolitan Localism, Everyday Life Discourse and Indigenous Wisdom evidence this. Coined by Wolfgang Sachs, a German activist and educator, the term Cosmopolitan Localism borrows Highmore's description of the everyday as, "place-based lifestyles in which solutions to global problems are designed" (Irwin *et al.* 2015:3). Irwin *et al.* (2015) propose that everyday lifestyles, although critical to understanding diverse societies and cultures, are often the forgotten contexts when attempting to understand the forces that mould our everyday behaviours and perceptions. As noted at the outset of this paper, Transition Design proposes that everyday life and lifestyles can offer a primary context within which the design for sustainable futures and an improved quality of life can take place (Irwin *et al. 2*015:8). This study specifically focuses on the use of social, cultural and emotional connections, as imbued in Māori and Pasifika cultures, as beneficial to design pedagogy and praxis, and combines these with commensality as an everyday context to illustrate this.

Commensality as an act of social connection

The word commensality refers to the everyday practice of coming together around a table to eat. It is a social act that traditionally involves rules of organisation, hierarchy, solidarity and boundary (Kerner, Chou & Warmind 2015:13). Until recently this has been one of those words hidden in academia, but this paper asserts it is time to shed some light on the advantages of reinstating commensality within a modern society that, this investigation posits, is plagued with issues activated and/or compounded by loneliness and a lack of social connectedness that can lead to poor health and well-being on varying scales. As far back as the seventeenth century anthropologists have discussed commensality as having beneficial influences on establishing, maintaining and enriching social relationships among people. Although food is and always has been something that connects people emotionally and can bring them together, it also has the potential to teach, inspire and engage people in new and exciting experiences. Over the last few years new discourse concerning food, food issues and alternative food cultures has grown in both number and prominence (Fischler 2011:529). In the face of both a globalisation and homogenisation of food, the universal marketing supporting this, and the explosion of instances of eating disorders and allergies, a public awareness of food experiences as a source of cultural identity, individual and collective health along with holistic well-being and communal welfare has taken root. As a part of this growth, gastronomic tourism has also grown in popularity and offers significant support to local economies and to the development of cultural visibility and sustainability. So, with food acknowledged as a significant element within personal and cultural identities, new forms of communication and interaction with specific foods, food groups and food experiences are being developed. In the face of these developments this research seeks to step back from the considerations

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of what food is being prepared or eaten, or indeed how this food is being prepared or eaten, to explore what benefits lie in *who this food is being eaten with*, known as commensality.

The word commensality comes from the Latin *commensalis* which combines the terms 'com' (together) and 'mensa' (table). A number of the founding contributors to anthropology and sociology; Robertson Smith (1846-1894), Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) and his nephew, Marcel Mauss (1872-1950); purported food and eating as fundamental to addressing social issues, albeit mostly from a specifically religious or ritualistic aspect. British social anthropologist, Audrey Richards (1899-1984), was critical of this limited demarcation and took a broader more inclusive view of societal hierarchies and demonstrations of how commensal behaviours and interventions mirrored communal structures than what had previously been, in her opinion, a discussion of "the mystic and religious communion of society at large" (Richards 2004 [1932]:108). In the 2015 book *Commensality: from everyday food to feast*, Richards' classification of commensality was further expanded by Kerber, Chou and Warmind (2015) as they investigated commensality through the lenses of history, politics, gender, culture, technology and economies. This broader discussion enables an appreciation of commensality as a social act that includes a plethora of people, cultures, food, rituals, time and space. Kerber *et al.* (2015) discuss commensality as a window into the ever-changing social models of culturally diverse communities through their expressions of organisation, behaviour, hierarchy, unity and definitions of inclusion and boundary.

Indigenous Wisdom within Transition Design

Indigenous societies have lived sustainably in place for generations informed by local place-based knowledge. Transition Design recognises that it has much to learn from the symbiotic relationships between human and the environment held in these cultures. Both *kaupapa Māori* and the Pasifika ideology of *ta-vā* (time and space) speak of interconnected and symbiotic relationships and include the necessity to respect and be responsible for not only the bonds held between humans, but between humans and nature, and between humans and things. Both cultural beliefs view relationships as spatial entities in which the essence of what can be either tangible or intangible relationships are housed. Tongan academic Hūfanga 'Okusitino Māhina posits that within the meaning of *Ta-vā* "all things, in nature, mind and society, stand in eternal relations of exchange" (Māhina 2010:174). Māhina explains that within Pasifika cultures people move through time and space with a specific and quite sophisticated understanding of the journey.

> People are thought to walk forward into the past and walk backward into the future, both taking place in the present, where the past and the future are constantly mediated in the ever-transforming present (Māhina 2010:170).

The Māori proverb *hoki whakamuri kia anga whakamua*, walking backwards into the future, also explains that by remaining tethered to and informed by the past a more enlightened, sustainable and inter-connected pathway to the future can be achieved. Within these examples of Indigenous Wisdom lies an appreciation of a temporal and, importantly, an eternal connection to both people and place. Tēvita Ō Ka'ili argues that Pasifika peoples emphasise *vā* as a relationship held in the in-between and as fundamentally different from the popular western notion of space as an empty expanse or an open area between two points (Ka'ili 2005:89). Similar interconnectivity exists across time and space within

Māori ideology. Social anthropologist Amiria Henare (2005) explains that within Māori ideology, knowledge, spoken of as *taonga* (treasure), is a relationship between or a connection of, subject and object and culture and nature, and that it also contrasts the Western concept of space as separation. It is with an appreciation of these concepts and for the existence of both tangible and intangible spaces and relationships that this research connects Indigenous Wisdom with the everyday activity of commensality to achieve a pathway towards positive social connections and improved individual and collective health and well-being. These are all fundamental within the beliefs and practices of Māori and Pasifika cultures and this study seeks to engage with these attributes as agency for the development of new approaches to design, as purported by Transition Design, in which the everyday human need of respectful, inclusive connections to others can better be served.

The impact of Indigenous Wisdom on commensality

Interconnectivity is highly valued within Māori and Pasifika cultures. Building on Ka'ili's description, these relationships can often be considered as eternal, or unbreakable. The phrase for this in Samoan is *teu le vā* and can perhaps be described as an extension of *Ta-vā*. Both *Ta-vā* and *teu le vā* represent very fluid, nurturing and shared spaces in which negotiation, transformation, similarity and difference exist in symbiotic but not always symmetrical relationships. Similarly, Henare (2005:3) states that, "In the Māori world, people and things have close relations that collapse spatial and temporal boundaries". Within Māori traditions the everyday activity of a shared meal centres on *kai* (food) but can be demonstrated by the Māori values expressed in *manaakitanga* – hospitality, kindness, generosity and support. The root to this word is *mana* (respect) which is tied to the act of reciprocity in both Māori and Pasifika cultures. In Samoan, *toana'i* also offers an appreciation for the symmetries and asymmetries of giving and taking within a shared meal. Like commensality, both *kai* and *toana'i* are fundamentally acts of social connection and generosity and are imbued with reciprocal respect and an appreciation of social structure, sharing, care, communication and community. *Manaakitanga* is also an important value to be included within the spaces created for teaching and learning. When combined with other values, such as *whanaungataunga* (collaboration) and *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship and well-being), the roles of caretaking and guiding that these values offer in the educational space, become clear. Building on a student's *whai mātauranga* (curiosity), a mutual respect for who individuals are and what they bring to this space is coupled with an understanding of the binding relationships of *whanau* (family), and *whanaungatanga* (shared experience) and expressed to them as the essence of the learning experience.

Using the everyday activity of commensality to frame Indigenous Wisdom and Cosmopolitan Localism, this study compares traditional, historic and contemporary behaviours involving shared meals to gain an understanding of reciprocity, generosity, respect and gratitude. It also asks how Indigenous knowledge can be combined with the everyday activity of commensality, as an act of social connection, to enhance student awareness and respect for diversity. Equally as important, the study also asks how design education can participate in that discourse. Along with an appreciation of *kaupapa* Māori and the Pasifika ideology of *ta-vā*, time and space, this research aims to use commensality to discover more culturally empathetic, inspired, and respectful approaches for the discipline of design that increase opportunities for social connectivity.

The Everyday Connection

Transition Design takes the stance that everyday life is an important yet often overlooked context for understanding society (Irwin *et al.* 2015:3). This study incorporates commensality as its everyday context for inquiry and expands on the adage that *we are what we eat* to assert that we are also *who we eat with*. To quote the French philosopher, Michel Montaigne, "One must be careful not so much of what one eats as with whom one eats. There is no dish so sweet to me, and no sauce so appetising as the pleasure derived from good company" (cited in Fischler 2011:531). German sociologist, philosopher, and critic Georg Simmel (1858-1918) provides a succinct analysis on the magic of the common meal by explaining how the act of coming together to eat turns the act of eating, considered as an act of exclusive selfishness, into a "togetherness seldom attainable on occasions of a higher and intellectual order. People can gather together at the common meal and there lies its sociological significance" (Simmel 1997 [1910]:131). Simmel establishes that the value of commensality is not only associated with formal, ritualistic or ceremonial occasions; "It actually is an essential dimension of the common meal and it could even be said that it finds its most salient expression in that particular daily occurrence" (cited in Fischler 2011:531).

In New Zealand a just-released 'Dinners Make Families' survey undertaken by independent researcher Sarah Woollett, and commissioned by My Food Bag and the national newspaper outlet Stuff, revealed that of 521 children and 630 adults, "79 per cent of kids wish they could have more dinners together as a family" (Keogh & Meier 2018). The word 'familial' has different boundaries of inclusion or exclusion within differing cultures, and in recent decades the understanding of a Western nuclear family has undergone criticism and change to enable it to better represent diversity. Despite broadening appreciations of what or who forms familial ties there remains an appreciation that, "there is no closer relationship than the one with the family, and that food plays a large part in defining family roles, rules and traditions" (Stajcic 2013:5). In line with this, Warmind readdresses these boundaries noting that, "Families are based on unions of people who aren't specifically blood relatives. Inviting more people into this definition opens us up to a wider social commensality" (cited in Sogaard 2015:107). Commensality, to eat in the company of others, is also thought to be a strong expression of trust and togetherness and speaks to much more than just being together (Sogaard 2015:106). This study suggests that – beyond food merely nourishing the body – with whom we eat, and what drives us to come together to eat, can inspire and strengthen bonds between individuals, communities and even countries (Stajcic 2013:5). Building on Stajcic's claims, this paper places Indigenous understandings of *manaakitanga, whanaungataunga, kaitiakitanga* and *whai mātauranga* as the nexus of a deeper appreciation for the value of social, cultural and intergenerational connectivity, which we argue is essential to positive outcomes for the future.

Disconnections and Reconnections

The emergence and ongoing increase of the use of mobile phones, TV sets, and other forms of digital technology during a shared meal has added a layer of complexity to it. Recently *TechCrunch,* a leading online 'tech' news site, posted an article entitled 'I will check my phone at dinner, and you will deal with it'. The author was reviewing phone usage at the dinner table and noted of their own behaviour, "I'd pretend to read the menu or fix my napkin to just be slyly looking straight down at my device beneath [my dinner companion's] line of sight – you know the drill. And while I was doing that, I would

look around. Sure enough, there were a half dozen other people at the table around me doing the same thing" (Siegler 2011). In contrast and in response to the increase of machines, specifically digital technology, in our lives, author and academic Sherry Turkle discusses the continued power of conversation within digital cultures. While within this research paper we question the use of technology within dining experiences, we recognised digital technology as having the potential to be an affirming or positive influence on human interaction, and therefore it is not completely excluded from the notions of commensal experience. However, in her 2015 book *Reclaiming conversation: the power of talk in the digital age*, Turkle (2015:103) recounts with fondness a family dinner in which, to her surprise, technology did not feature:

> My older cousin began to tell anecdotes. When I looked around the table, I saw several of the younger children sitting wide-eyed and attentive. In this communal and natural way, the children were learning about their family. I have not forgotten this meal or the depth of feeling that was stirred. In these few moments, the past entered the present in a profound way. Even our moments of silence spoke to an experience of really being together.

Building on Turkle's words, this research proposes that beyond commensality being a social, familial and historic connector it can also contribute in the design of positive outcomes for both individual and collective health and well-being. This paper aims to bring an awareness of these opportunities through an analysis of the potential of sharing a meal to build collective well-being

Connections within Design Education

On 18 January 2018, the *Sun Sentinel,* a daily newspaper in Florida, USA, reported an instance of student activism that directly addressed the problem of cultural and social isolation within a large high school community. A small group of culturally diverse students formed a group called *We Eat Together.* The group was built on the members' shared experiences of isolation and concern for the increased segregation and exclusion that they witnessed in their school in the recent months. The students decided that with so many problems in the world stemming from exclusion, the only solution was to form relationships and, as an extension of that declaration, they concluded that all good relationships started around a table. Their aim was that no student should feel isolated. Their solution was that no student should eat alone. A teacher commenting on her observations of the group said, "It's not just about eating pizza together but how they do life with one another" (McGlade 2018). The clarity and simplicity with which the Florida-based high school students summarised this issue – which for many social services and government health care groups is complex and, at times, seemingly insurmountable – is astounding. The students acted and spoke simply of the need to form a connection between one another and, in doing so, they formed a community within the larger social structure of their school.

Building on an acknowledgment of the need to encourage connections within the educational space, this study illustrates four examples of how relationships of mutual respect can impact design education and practice. They follow a pathway from first-year through to postgraduate work. The examples demonstrate two approaches. The first is through visual narratives and symbols that articulate an appreciation of Māori and Pasifika understandings of connectivity as symbiotic

relationships of reciprocity and respect. The second is as a design tool to establish opportunities for improving individual and social connectivity through commensality. In order to enable such relationships as a part of the design process, there is a need at the first-year level to encourage investigations that can illuminate a deeper and more meaningful understanding of oneself and one's *whakapapa* (identity) as the appreciation or experience of the cultural heritage they share with their ancestors. In response to, and as a celebration of, the significant cultural diversity present, our student cohort's first-year project work was developed to assist students to gain both an understanding and an appreciation of what their cultural heritage can offer their design process. The diversity within this group includes, but is not limited to, Māori, Pasifika, Asian, Latin American, European and New Zealand *Pakeha* (white New Zealanders), as well as a growing number of international students from all over the globe. Having identified and documented a personal cultural identity, students are asked as a part of their coursework to visually articulate − using codified symbols, or their own graphic interpretations of nature, beliefs, cultural imagery, icons or memories − how their identity connects to the larger collective of New Zealand or the Pacific. To offer a way to consider this connection, the students are introduced to a quote by Albert Wendt, a Samoan poet, writer and academic. Wendt asserts:

> I belong to Oceania – or, at least I am rooted in a fertile portion of it … So vast, so fabulously varied a scatter of islands, nations, cultures, mythologies and myths, so dazzling a creature, Oceania deserves more than an attempt at mundane fact; only the imagination in free flight can hope – if not to contain her – to grasp some of her shape, plumage and pain (Wendt 1982:202).
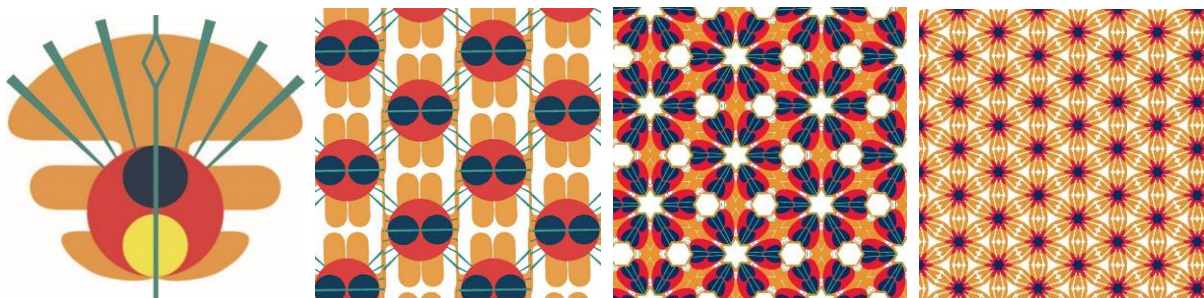

Fig 1. Examples of the design of an individual cultural symbol and the cultivation of new manifestations of it when considered as a part of a collective. (Reproduced with student's permission)

Figure 1, on the far left, is a symbol designed by an individual student as a visual representation of their self. Next to it are three examples of how that singular element may connect with larger-scaled groups. The three patterns on the right represent different degrees to which the individual feels a part of larger collectives. The first pattern expresses the student's relationship in their small design tutorial group of about 20 students. The student has represented the individual symbol of themselves as a large and recognisable element within the group. The middle pattern represents the design studio they are a part of, which numbers about 120 students. This pattern shows less individuality, but the student expressed in their reflective summary that the scale still enabled a place for individual expression. The third pattern represents the entire first-year design cohort of over 250 students that has seemingly engulfed the symbol, but the repetition and fluidity of the pattern reads as a harmonious connection between what the student summarised as kindred classmates. For some students this assignment is uncomfortable due to the introspection it requires. This experience can be difficult and at times confronting as students begin to recognise, investigate or articulate such concepts. To mitigate some of the tension or obstacles, students are enabled to connect with each

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other and studio tutors to consider their work in progress. Study and pizza sessions are held to encourage the new students to come together, share ideas and skills, ask for help and enable each other to appreciate that they are not alone in this new environment (Fig.2).

Kia Ora koutou, we are going to have a study evening on Friday in the 1st year studio space, 5pm-7pm. I'll have a few tutors there to help you out if you want to ask questions or you'd like to get help with your final submissions. This will be an informal optional tutorial. We know you are all stressed at the moment and we want to help alleviate some of the stress, there will be free Pizza and Drinks, the school reps are going to be getting numbers so that I can get the correct amount of food. Please come along and let's have a relaxed chat about your work and have some kai.
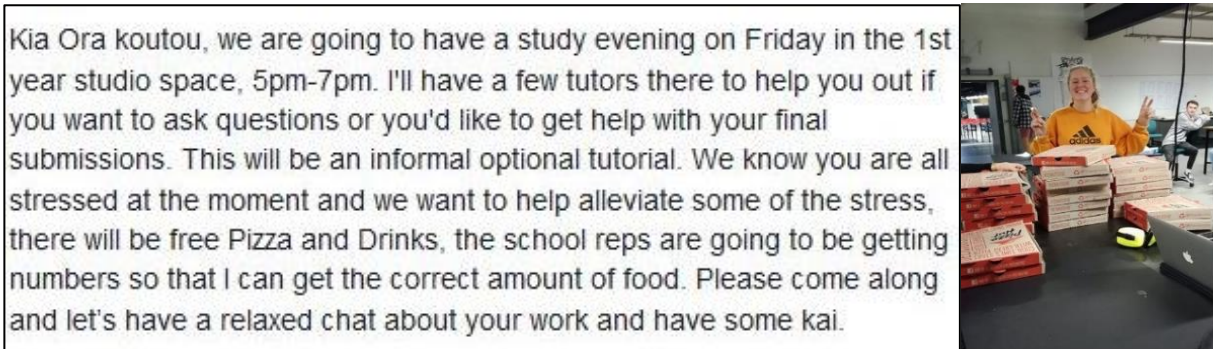
Fig. 2. A 2017 Facebook post advertising the First Year Study and Pizza sessions

With an appreciation for the *We Eat Together* initiative, the first-year programme has attempted to encapsulate the summation by a staff member at the Florida High School: "It's not just about eating pizza together but how they do life with one another" (McGlade 2018). As a part of both second-year and fourth-year core design papers, students are asked to identify and develop personal yet place-based understandings and approaches to their design thinking and practice. As with their first-year studies, an appreciation of *whakapapa* is prioritised. Building on the visual articulations of this undertaking in their first year, the students are then asked to bring food (*kai*) to class as part of their coursework. The purpose of this is to enable a connection through a shared meal where they can both give and receive something of themselves. Some students bring food reminiscent of their childhood and discuss the emotional connections to who was there when they ate it or who made it for them. Other students brought family favourites that generations within their family continue to make. Others surprised the group with culturally specific foods and unfamiliar ingredients and processes that many of the group had not experienced before (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3. Commensality between students that enabled cultural identities and legacies to be discovered and shared. (Reproduced with students' permission)

The students use the experience of commensality and food preparation to strengthen their appreciations of similarity and difference. As a part of this, a number of students considered ways in which interpersonal connections can be made across space and time via commensality through both a visual articulation and a theoretically framed research paper. Within the theoretical approach students discussed that eating and drinking require a number of key social elements such as materiality, spatial arrangement and place, bodily experiences, mental expectations, and bonding or exclusion. The students began to devise design opportunities to tap into the dynamic social dimension they now appreciate exists around food. This approach enabled the students to discuss food as more than a biological need and consider it as , ""an endlessly evolving enactment of gender, family, and community relationships" (Fahlander 2010:35).

Fig. 4. Posters designed by second-year design students that summarise their personal standpoints as designers. (Reproduced with students' permission)

Building on the shared '*kai*' experience, and to gain further appreciations of connections that can be established, students referenced Samoan academic Albert Refiti and posited that a community is an extension of our immediate family: "We should treat the family relationship as being part of a larger social extension. Being kind and understanding and expanding the precious circles of inclusion in which we function" (Refiti 2017:273). Commensality, when undertaken as a family meal, can enable a meaningful engagement and lifelong, intergenerational learning opportunities for those engaged in the group (Davis, Nansen, Vetere, Robertson, Brereton, Durick & Vaisutis 2014:73). As a part of their research outputs, students discussed – with an appreciation for *manaakitanga, whanaungataunga*, *kaitiakitanga* and *ta–vā* – how family or community-based meals can be a space that produces fluid communication. They also noted that these values and beliefs enabled the assimilation of social structures relevant to that group through reciprocity and respect of social behaviours.

As an important adjunct to the discussion, and while acknowledging that, "making time for and joining in communal meals is perhaps the single most important thing we can do – both for our own health and wellbeing and for that of the wider community" (Harris 2018), the students developed visual discussion points within tutorial conversations that considered the placement of technology within the shared meal (Fig. 4). It was apparent from the class discussions that as a cohort, the second-year students questioned technology in this particular space and discussed it as an obstruction to the social

connectivity offered within commensality. The postgraduate cohort were more inclined to critically analyse this point of view and look to find ways that digital technology could add to the interconnectivity of the commensal meal. While considering Siegler's article, 'I will check my phone at dinner, and you will deal with it'*,* the students asked how the modern day usage of technology at the table can become an extension of Simmel's assertion that, in spite of eating being an act of exclusive selfishness, coming together to eat brings about sociologically significant moments of togetherness (Simmel 1997 [1910]:130). The students further addressed both Ka'ili and Henare's explanations that relationships exist beyond worldly and conceivable boundaries. Within the class discussions the students shared that they thought that the everyday experience of a shared meal was important for fostering togetherness but felt that an appreciation of interconnectivity though *ta-vā* and *kaupapa* Māori enabled a broader approach to the design and use of such technologies than the current discourse allowed them. In a recent human-centred research study carried out by the Microsoft Research Centre, Microsoft acknowledged the existence of negative discourse about the impact of technology usage at the dinner table, but did not overtly discuss their own connection to this phenomenon. Rather they took a more detached stance, by saying : "It [technology] has been accused of encouraging unhealthy food practices, detracting from positive familial interaction and taking attention away from the enjoyment of the meal" (Ferdous, Ploderer, Vetere, O'Hara, Farr-Wharton & Comber 2016:20).

The Microsoft Research Centre's study conceded that there are efforts being made to address better health, education and mentoring of social behaviours within social eating experiences via technology, however they also noted that their study was concerned that, "what is underexploited here is the possible role and significance of technologies in contributing to togetherness during such commensal meals" (Ferdous *et al.* 2016:4). We argue that it is in this space that Indigenous Wisdom and the Everyday can harmonise, within a Transition Design framework, to ensure that the human-centred approach to the research maximises understandings and pathways to better connectivity – in a more critical, culturally informed and holistic manner.

Fig 5. Images from Smart Trays: Speculating the Future of the New Zealand Dining Experience. Victoria University School of Design, Joe Levy. Masters' thesis project, 2016. (Reproduced with author's permission)

A postgraduate project that incorporates this approach is 'Smart Trays' (Levy 2016). Joe Levy's research (2016) considers the possibilities for social connection while dining in isolation and designs digital applications that are guided by Māori and Pasifika understandings of tangible and intangible

relationships. 'Smart Trays' aimed to establish connections between place-based cultures, technology and social behaviour (Fig. 5). In doing so, this research acknowledged Aotearoa's cultural ideologies and the relevance these hold alongside the advancement of technologies and how these, when combined, can offer solutions for positive and sustainable futures.

Framed within Transition Design, this paper has introduced commensality as the everyday context from which to explore the use of Indigenous knowledge as agency to enrich current understandings of social connectivity within design thinking, process and praxis. By highlighting the understandings of reciprocity and respect imbued within *kaupapa* Māori and the Pasifika ideology of *ta-vā* this paper offers an appreciation of how the inclusion of Indigenous Wisdom can enhance both design solutions and pedagogy. Having gained an appreciation for the value of Indigenous knowledge and what it can offer the discipline of design in make meaningful connections within society, the next step in this recalibration of diversity, could be to reconsider the language and priorities used in such observations. The observation made by the Microsoft researchers presents such an opportunity.

This paper posits that the aim of the Microsoft-funded study would be better served by addressing the use of more culturally calibrated considerations within the issue of 'togetherness' that they identify. To recap on their terminology, this previously quoted statement keys us into what we argue are Microsoft's true goals, "What is underexploited here is the possible role and significance of technologies in contributing to togetherness during such commensal meals" (Ferdous *et al.* 2016:4). The oppressive language used in this statement, such as the word 'underexploited,' suggests that Microsoft's ultimate goal is not the use of technology to ensure advancements in democratised social connection or togetherness, but an opportunity to advance opportunities for technology and positive financial bottom lines. Guided by *ta-vā* and *manaakitanga, whanaungataunga, kaitiakitanga* and *whai mātauranga,* and looking to place the relationships between humans, things and nature before technological advancements, production or profit, this research posits that to better mitigate the wicked issues experienced as a result of ubiquitous computing, a new appreciation of how to frame or construct these studies is required. We argue, and conclude with the suggestion, that the Microsoft study would better be served if the preceding statement read as:

> What is unacknowledged here is the positive impact of Indigenous Wisdom, the significance of traditional place-based understandings to interconnectivity and what these offer the advancement of technology by way of their ability to establish authentic and meaningful opportunities for togetherness.

It is important in this study that whether one describes Indigenous Wisdom as traditional knowledge, First-Nation knowledge or cultural acumen, it should not be considered as singularly historic, obsolete, current or speculative. As Māhina (2010) states, and Turkle (2015) has experienced, the beauty of understanding relationships as time and space, and from a less linear and individualist perspective, is that it allows a fluidity of knowledge forwards and backwards between generations. This happens through thought processes, memories, aims and endeavours and offers shared moments of connection via negotiation, reflection, tension, conflict, harmony and change. Using the frameworks of Indigenous Wisdom and Cosmopolitan Localism, embedded in Transition Design within the everyday context of commensality, this study has highlighted a pathway to an appreciation of reciprocal and respectful connections that are imbued within *kaupapa* Māori and the Pasifika ideology

of *ta-vā* and how design can use these to enhance our lives.

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