

Activating the Vā: Performance, Academia and the Sublime

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ABSTRACT

The concept of vā in various Oceanic cultures came into academic discourse among Pacific Islands scholars in the mid-1990s, but it was not until covid became a global pandemic and an academic conference focusing solely on the vā took place in 2021 that the concept became a focus of my interest. This is partly because certain rules of behavior such as ‘social distancing’ drew attention to the importance of the ‘space between’ individuals as well as the space between humans and the natural world. What exactly does vā mean and why is it so important to understand its potential? How does the concept of vā apply to culture in relation to performance, specifically the genre of dance? What about academic writing, which does not exist in a three-dimensional space? As a creative artist and scholar, I am interested in how to activate the vā in both arenas so that the quality of the outcome that results from this activation is elevated to the level of the sublime.

Keywords: performance, vā, creativity, interdisciplinarity, coconuts, Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania.

CONTEXT

Following in the footsteps of giants in the field of anthropology, I wish to acknowledge those who came before me who have given this distinguished lecture.¹ They are the real anthropologists. Though I have been mistaken as an anthropologist every now and then, my scholarly and creative work are best situated not in the discipline of anthropology, but in the spaces between knowledges, in what is often referred to as an interdisciplinary approach to knowing (Hereniko 2023; Hviding 2003).

In 1993, thirty years ago here at Kailua-Kona, Epele Hau‘ofa delivered the distinguished lecture, a draft of what was later to become one of the most quoted works by Pacific Islands scholars and graduate students. Hau‘ofa’s (2008) essay ‘Our Sea of Islands’ encouraged us to disavow the belittlement of our beloved region called the Pacific Islands. Instead of thinking of ourselves as living on tiny islands, we should focus on the vast ocean that covers one-third of the earth’s surface. From this Oceanic perspective, we are a blue continent: big, brilliant and powerful. He reminded us that our ancestors were voyagers and the ocean was their highway. Hau‘ofa’s essay seared into our minds and hearts the unprecedented act of courage that led to the discovery and settlement of the islands in the Pacific Ocean before Europeans arrived.

This legacy that we have inherited from our ancestors should also inspire us to aspire for intellectual and creative control over global knowledge of our region with the view to

representing it accurately. Here I refer not just to factual but also to emotional accuracy. The task of snaring this complex and complicated world into a nutshell is very difficult, not only because the region is vast, diverse, and constantly changing, but because this region has already been overwritten by outsiders. Seen from the outside looking in is not the same as being inside looking out. This latter point of view is what the Maori filmmaker Barry Barclay referred to as having the camera on the shore, as opposed to having it located on the ship pointing at the shore (Tuckett 2009).

There are certain aspects from within a culture that were acquired through early socialization and cultural upbringing. These embodied experiences were known and practiced by our ancestors but not always known to contemporary Islanders, especially those in the diaspora. As more and more of our elders die and take away with them ancient knowledge, more and more is lost or forgotten. Many of the concepts, ideas, and wisdoms rooted in our ancient cultures have either been forgotten or are fast disappearing, especially if they are abstract, invisible, and rarely demonstrated in a public setting. This was the case with the concept of vā.

The word vā came into scholarly discourse through an essay by Albert Wendt. To my knowledge, that was the first time anyone had plucked this word from obscurity and published it in print so it could be visible. Wendt's (1995 [1990]:15) essay, titled 'Pacific Maps and Fiction(s): A Personal Journey', refers to the vā as '... the Space-Between-All-Things which defines us and makes us part of the Unity-that-is-ALL'. A little ahead of his time, Wendt's reference to the vā was not picked up as a significant activation until several years later. I noted the word then, but did not think much of it as I did not know what it was really about. It sounded rather grand and vague at that time as no one else had written about it earlier, which meant there was not a body of scholarly writing that one could access and evaluate. Several years later, a few scholars tried to unlock the hidden meanings behind this term and to explain it.² I was aware of these developments that were simmering and causing some excitement at academic conferences but I remained sceptical of its value as a portal into understanding Oceanic worldviews and beliefs. I could not easily apply the concept to Rotuman culture as it seemed very specific to Samoan and Tongan cultures. In addition, I was too preoccupied with other interests to pursue the matter further.

And then covid hit and threw into stark relief the significance of 'the space between'. In order to fight the virus, 'social distancing' between humans became the norm. We had to be six feet apart to prevent the spread of the virus. This was not a welcome separation. As humans, we longed to be closer, to be hugged even, so that when covid was over and we returned to a former time of close proximity, we became more aware of our need for relationality, for connectedness and intimacy.

Another significant result of the time of enforced social distancing was that the natural world thrived when humans were in hiding or in lockdown. The fishes came back to Honolulu's Ala Moana lagoon, for example, and the locals started fishing in waters that prior to covid were favorite swimming spots for tourists. I noticed that coconuts started appearing on the coconut trees of Waikiki, a visible demonstration that when humans leave nature alone, nature blossoms and returns to its natural state.³ Seeing the coconuts on the coconut trees again and observing so many locals fishing in Ala Moana lagoon inspired and gave me hope. More than before, I became convinced that humans must respect and nurture the space between us and the natural world, if life on Earth is to remain sustainable. This warning was clearly evidenced by the proliferation of homeless people in makeshift tents, sleeping on wooden benches under bus shelters, or laying lifelessly in the sun or under trees. In several instances, I saw scrawny middle-aged men sprawled on the grass of Ala Moana Park seemingly half-dead, without water to drink or food to eat. It was a tragic sight to witness.

Covid also demonstrated the 'unity that is all' that Wendt articulated in his landmark essay, and that is also referred to in other writings, including a book on transcendental

meditation by the filmmaker David Lynch.⁴ We became aware, more than ever, that everyone and everything on this planet earth are connected to each other. To survive a global pandemic, we had to cooperate and collaborate in order to win the war against an invisible virus that knew no boundaries. As we became more aware of our interconnectedness and interdependence on each other, the space between one person and another, between one nation and another, between one geographical area and another, became activated. The closing and opening of borders became a phenomenon that drew attention to the *vā*.

When the University of Technology in Auckland, New Zealand, announced their conference on the *vā* in 2021 while covid was still a universal threat, they demonstrated intellectual leadership. Their attention to significant issues of concern at that moment showed us that they had their finger on the pulse of humanity. Their impressive website announced research activities and projects related to the *vā* that were timely and important. It was then that the *vā* became more than a concept of passing interest to me. It became an idea whose time had come to be activated writ large (see also Refiti et al. 2022).

When I consulted my Rotuman dictionary and discovered the word *vā* in it (Churchward 1940:342), I was surprised and excited. I was more surprised that the meaning is ‘the space between’, the exact same meaning as in Wendt’s essay. That I had grown up not hearing the word used made me wonder if it was one that the elders understood and practised, but one that was not common knowledge to children. My thinking on the *vā* since covid has intensified. Now I believe that it is one of the most important concepts Oceanic cultures can offer the rest of the world for consideration and exploration. I believe that research into this invisible, abstract, and potent concept will uncover important wisdoms worth cultivating and perpetuating for posterity.

VĀ AS THE SPACE BETWEEN

The Oceanic concept of *vā* is relational and is about relationships. It is about two or more energy fields that connect with each other. When this connection is activated, the transmission of energy in the *vā* transforms it into a site of creativity, potential, and wonder.

By way of illustration, I would like to use the example of Rotuma’s traditional dance called the *tautoga* (Hereniko 1991). The Rotuman *tautoga* was a community production danced by large numbers of men and women who performed in separate rows, five or more for each gender, with all the men on the right and all the women on the left. They all wore *tefui*, a type of garland unique to the Rotuman people (see Figure 1).

The men’s *tefui* consisted of seven star-shaped clusters of flowers and leaves joined together by a cord long enough for the *tefui* to be worn around their necks. The women’s *tefui* consisted of just one star-shaped cluster. Growing up in the 1950s and 1960s, I never asked why the men had seven clusters while the women had only one. In the 1980s, when I was on the island carrying out research, this uneven distribution of star-clusters aroused my curiosity. I decided to ask the women since they were the ones who made these garlands. One respected elderly woman replied: ‘Oh, that’s because we love our men! We give them seven and we keep just one for ourselves.’ She smiled, hoping I would not ask a follow up question. One or two said that the seven clusters referred to the seven districts on the island; when I asked the reason for the one cluster for women, they were stumped. I am skeptical of this interpretation because the *tautoga* was already in practice when the division of seven districts was formulated during the colonial era.⁵

After researching and reflecting, I believe that the seven clusters for the men and the one cluster for the women could have been in reference to the founding legend of the island, which claimed that the island’s original inhabitants arrived on a voyaging canoe from Samoa (see the narrative feature film by Hereniko [2004] titled *Pear ta Ma ‘On Maf: The*



Figure 1: Rotuman *tefui*. Source: photograph by the author.

Land Has Eyes, which opens with this founding oral tale). On the canoe were seven brothers and one sister. Is it possible that the traditional *tefui* was a mnemonic that alluded to the oral tale of how Rotuma was founded? The fact that no one on the island then or today as far as I know has this interpretation about the origin of the *tefui* makes me wonder how much knowledge has been lost in spite of efforts by our ancestors to help us, their descendants, to remember our origins.

What caused the forgetting? Why was important knowledge not passed on to younger generations? This leads me to an extraordinary poem by Joy Harjo (1983), an internationally renowned performer and writer who was also the poet laureate of the United States from 2019–2022, that highlights the importance of remembering. The poem speaks of a world that is integrated, holistic, and relational. It is a poem about the *vā* that connects everything. The poem's likening of life to a dance is also not lost on me. Is it possible then that when Rotuman men and women danced the *tautoga* with their star-shaped tefui around their necks, the hope was that through activating their bodies and singing in unison they would remember? And that in remembering, that they would become whole and connected to each other and everything again, personally and as a community?

Remember by Joy Harjo

Remember the sky that you were born under,
 know each of the star's stories.
 Remember the moon, know who she is.
 Remember the sun's birth at dawn, that is the
 strongest point of time. Remember sundown
 and the giving away to night.
 Remember your birth, how your mother struggled
 to give you form and breath. You are evidence of
 her life, and her mother's, and hers.
 Remember your father. He is your life, also.
 Remember the earth whose skin you are:
 red earth, black earth, yellow earth, white earth
 brown earth, we are earth.
 Remember the plants, trees, animal life who all have their
 tribes, their families, their histories, too. Talk to them,
 listen to them. They are alive poems.
 Remember the wind. Remember her voice. She knows the
 origin of this universe.
 Remember you are all people and all people
 are you.
 Remember you are this universe and this
 universe is you.
 Remember all is in motion, is growing, is you.
 Remember language comes from this.
 Remember the dance language is, that life is.
 Remember

When a community of fifty, or a hundred or more, perform the Rotuman *tautoga*, the *vā*, the space between, is activated. The ultimate goal in the *tautoga* is for the men and the women, the whole community in other words, to be one in spirit and to experience the 'unity that is all'. During an inspired *tautoga*, when the dance reaches the sublime, the audience shouts out utterances of pleasure: 'Marie' Marie' Marie' Maka'. A close literal translation would be 'Sublime, Sublime, Sublime dancing!' Sometimes another sentence or phrase would be added, such as 'Te la kel ma re la kel' a literal translation of which would be 'If you want us to see, then show us'. A better translation that is closer to the intended meaning would be 'Show us what you've got'. Sometimes audience members stand up and join the dancers; sometimes they proceed toward the dancers to sprinkle talcum powder (a post-contact adaptation) on their hair and necks. This way of showing appreciation probably had its roots before European contact but has evolved over time to incorporate the

influence of Western culture. Sometimes, clowning takes place as well. During a very successful *tautoga*, the space between the dancers and the spectators becomes blurred. When a *tautoga* reaches the sublime, a community's collective spirit and sense of well-being is reinvigorated and restored. The overall feeling is one of transcendence, similar to what one experiences in transcendental meditation.

Activating the vā is easier to do in a performance than in academic writing or the print medium. Taking my cue from performance, I would like to use each of the star-shaped clusters to represent relationality between energy fields informed by my understanding of and experience with Rotuman culture. I have written about how Rotuman dance forms reflect Rotuman culture (Hereniko 1991), but this paper is the first time that I have tried to uncover the origins of the *tefui* and to use it as a methodology to understand the vā.

Star 1: The space between humans and the land

The island is only 43 square kilometers, so land is scarce and paramount. People view the land very much like the way they view a human ancestor. This view is best summed up in the proverb '*Pear the Ma 'On Maf, Ka Pear ta Ma 'On 'Al, Ma 'Inejema Ne Sei Ta Nojo*', which translates as 'The land has eyes, the land has teeth, and knows the truth'.

Star 2: The space between chiefs and commoners

It is the commoners who usually dance. Paying their respects to the chiefs and important dignitaries is important and it is the custom to compose songs that acknowledge their presence, especially at the beginning of a *tautoga*.

Star 3: The space between the individual and the collective

Conformity is important in Rotuman culture. Thus in a *tautoga*, all the men move as one unit and all the women move as another. The choreography could be the same, except while the men's movements are expansive and energetic, the women's movements are circumscribed (closer to the body) and elegant according to Rotuman ideals of male and female aesthetics. Individuality is suppressed by tradition, expressed only in subtle facial and hand movements that are not supposed to make one stand out.

Star 4: The space between humans and the natural world

Rotumans believe that trees, rocks, ocean etc. have a life-force of their own. Some of these entities are also family guardians (for example, sharks, sting-rays, owls). This sacred relationship is important and honored, evidenced sometimes through composed songs and dances when these entities are personified. At other times, they are instantiated through taboo practices such as members of a family or clan being forbidden to catch or eat certain creatures.

Star 5: The space between the seen and the unseen (the living and the dead)

The dead still continue to influence the living even after they are gone. Now that most Rotumans are Christians, the old Gods are replaced by the Christian God and sometimes lyrics of songs explicitly name the Christian God and invoke the name of Jesus. Some Rotumans do not see a conflict between a lot of ancient beliefs and Christian theology, whereas many do.

Star 6: The space between the historical past and the present

Rotumans who are Christians (the vast majority) tend to think of the time before the arrival of missionaries as *ao maksul* or the 'time of darkness', and the time after Rotumans became

converted to Christianity as the *ao tafa* or the ‘time of light’ (Hereniko 1999:137–166). Time for Rotumans of old was more like a circle or spiral than a linear progression. The past is before us (*ao mumue*) as we walk back into the present (*ao fo‘ou*) and the future (*ao ne tore*). We face the past for guidance on how best to navigate the future.

Star 7: The space between the dancers and the hosts

Lyrics of the songs in a *tautoga* often allude to the nature of the relationship between the dancers and hosts as a way of acknowledging and reinforcing the relationship.

But what about the one-star cluster that Rotuman women wear around their necks during the *tautoga*?

Star 8: The space between women and men (and by extension, all genders)

In the oral tale about the founding legend of Rotuma, the oldest brother on the voyaging canoe raped the sister who was then abandoned on the island while the brothers continued their journey to Fiji. The name of the sister was Tafate‘masian, which translates as ‘Sina who radiates Light’. Is it possible that through the *tautoga*, the *vā* that was broken between the brothers and their sister could be mended or made whole again? ⁶

The *tautoga*, as it was practised in the 1950s and 1960s when I was growing up on Rotuma, was an effort to ‘remember’ through dance a world that was integrated and connected. In my animated short film titled *Sina ma Tinirau* (2021b, see Figure 2) I try to portray this kind of world that was broken and needed to be made whole again. It is based on an oral tale that I first heard from my father who was a gifted storyteller. In my version, I have improved it, made it richer, more layered, and more relevant to a contemporary audience. The structure mirrors Rotuman storytelling traditions in which the phrasing used at the beginning of the tale and at the end are different from each other but are always the same regardless of the story being told or who was telling the story. ⁷

This version of the oral tale explores the space between humans and the natural world (birds, sharks, eels, clouds, trees, etc.), the seen and the unseen, the ocean and the land, the space between different knowledges, the space between fact and fiction, the space between



Figure 2: Sina drinking *niu*, coconut. Source: SINA MA TINIRAU.

Rotuman and Fijian culture, the space between the individual and the collective, and the space between women and men. These spaces between have always been there, but in this short film, the spaces are activated through animation. As in most of my creative work, my hope is that all boundaries between and among energy fields or knowledges would disappear and the viewer would attain the emotional satisfaction that comes with the ‘unity that is all’.

THE VĀ IN INTERDISCIPLINARITY

Print is a poor substitute for a live performance. However, there are pathways for attaining a sense of the ‘unity that is all’ through interdisciplinary research and writing. The best way to elevate one’s writing to the level of the sublime in my opinion is by calling upon one or more art forms that might best illuminate the subject of study. I have found that juxtaposing the scholarly with the creative allows me to transcend the confines of academic writing that is linear, impersonal, and devoid of feeling or human connection. The result of this kind of linear and impersonal representation on a flat page is that the representation does not read or feel like it is written by a human or is about humans (Hereniko 1995). Artificial Intelligence (AI) may result in a human desire to find ways to differentiate more starkly what is written by humans from that written by unfeeling non-humans.

Some specific forms that can help to escape the stifling confines of the academic box are the following:

- poetry
- fiction
- art
- song or chant
- music
- dance
- photography
- video or film
- drama or theater
- storytelling

Writing that is interdisciplinary in nature should incorporate other aspects of representing reality beyond the rational because humans are too complex and complicated to be reduced to just a rational perspective. I believe it is at the level of the transrational that we can transcend the ordinary (McKenzie 1996). In this context, the sublime means something above the ordinary, impossible to achieve without delving into a part of our human nature that has more to do with emotion and feeling than the intellect. I also believe that it is at the level of the transrational that all boundaries that separate knowledge into disciplines disappear and we discover the ‘unity that is all’. In short, we come the closest to knowing the whole truth (instead of partial truths). This is because we have become one with everything else in the vā.

THE SEEN AND THE UNSEEN

Since I started this talk by invoking Epeli Hau’ofa, let me return to his influence on my life and my thinking about Oceania. When Hau’ofa passed away and I left the University of Hawai’i to become the Director of the Oceania Center at USP in Fiji from 2010–2012, I often felt Epeli’s presence or influence in ways that were beyond the rational. Here is one

example: toward the end of my two-year stint at the Oceania Center, the Japanese government funded a building to be used for public performances, and equipped it with a state-of-the-art lighting system that no one at the university knew how to operate. This failure to foresee the problems this would cause was a source of anxiety for those of us who had been looking forward to performing on the stage.

In preparation for the opening of the Japan Center, the Oceania Center's dancers and musicians produced an ambitious musical production called *Vaka: The Birth of a Seer*. A date had been set for the opening, the tickets had all been sold, but no one knew how to operate the elaborate lighting board that would light up the stage. As a last resort we tried to recruit a lighting designer from Australia, then New Zealand, but we could not get anyone at short notice. Opening night was getting closer and closer and still no one knew how to light the stage. Now we had only a week left. I was not looking forward to what I thought would be the most humiliating experience of my life. And then something happened that was beyond rational explanation.

I got word that a Canadian student pursuing a PhD in Fijian *meke* (dance) had arrived at the Oceania Center and was looking for me. She had heard about our musical production that had Fijian dances in it and was wondering how she could get tickets to our performance. While talking with me, she mentioned that her husband had decided to accompany her to Fiji. When I asked her what her husband did for a living, she said he was a lighting designer! What are the odds that a lighting designer from Canada would turn up at the Oceania Center at the eleventh hour and save the day? For me, that was Hau'ofa quietly working behind the scenes. After all, when he passed away in Fiji the day after I had seen him in hospital, his transition to another dimension was announced to me by the appearance of a huge brown owl in Nadi city while I was waiting to catch my flight back to Honolulu (Hereniko 2010). It was because of that owl's appearance that I felt very strongly that Hau'ofa wanted me to save his legacy (the Oceania Center). If the University of the South Pacific, where the Oceania Center is located, could eradicate the Institute of Pacific Studies that existed to promote scholarly and creative work by Pacific Islanders because it was not profitable and had become a liability, why could it not do the same to the Oceania Center?

I left my well-paid job as Director of the Center for Pacific Islands Studies at the University of Hawai'i and went to USP for two years to see what I could do. I knew I had to obey, otherwise at the end of my life I would regret that I did not heed the call when it manifested itself to me. While in Fiji, I learned from the late Allan Alo, the artistic director of the Oceania Dance Theater at the time, that Hau'ofa had mentioned his wish for me to take over from him (at least for a while) after he passed away. In my experience, such a call could cause all kinds of problems with one's loved ones or family, especially because they do not feel the same way. And they may or may not understand. To obey the call is to take a personal and singular leap of faith, believing that eventually it will turn out to be the right decision to make. This was why I felt that the delivery of the lighting designer from Canada was Hau'ofa's way of thanking me for honoring his legacy and his call to step in, brief as it was, to keep the Oceania Center alive a little longer. At this time of writing, I'm happy to say, it continues to thrive.

For me, as it is for some folks with whom I have shared this experience of feeling called to do something beyond the rational, the area around the belly button (the *na'au* for native Hawaiians) is where the truth resides. It is a powerful feeling, a prompting, believed to be a more reliable way of knowing the truth compared to the intellect or the heart even though such prompting may run counter to conventional wisdom. In the Rotuman *tautoga*, the dancing always begins with men and women moving both hands toward the belly button (*puaf heta*) where they meet and clasp each other before each is released to fall to the side. This motion is repeated for the whole song as the dancers slowly bend their knees, then return to their original positions. I believe this is the Rotuman way of honoring and

acknowledging the area around the belly button, the site from which the truth resides and radiates.

RECONNECTING WITH THE VĀ

It is a challenge to remain connected to the natural world when I am a Rotuman professor teaching in a colonial institution (the university) and living on Floor 36 in a high-rise building in the middle of a concrete jungle called Honolulu. In a way, covid was a blessing in that it forced me to reconnect with nature. The swimming pool was closed during a large part of covid, so I started swimming in the sea again and marveled at the schools of fish that were returning to Magic Island lagoon. More importantly, I reconnected with the world of trees, especially the coconut tree, which Rotumans, as well as Hawaiians, call *niu*.

Growing up in Rotuma until I was sixteen, I had a close relationship with *niu*. In fact, *niu* saved my life, literally. As the youngest of eleven children, there were times when I had to depend on the flesh and water of coconuts to survive. At the age of sixteen, I left Rotuma to pursue a Western education in Fiji and beyond, the result of which was that I lost this close connection with *niu*. The connection was always there but it became dormant, waiting to be activated again.

One morning during covid, as I was walking along Ala Moana beach to Magic Island lagoon, I thought I would see if I could still weave a hat from coconut fronds. I searched for a green leaf on the ground but saw none. I then saw a drooping brown leaf hanging from a coconut tree nearby. As I considered whether I could weave a decent hat from a drooping brown leaf, I thought I heard the tree and the leaf calling to me (see Hereniko 2023). I took out the machete and the ladder I carry in my car and cut down the drooping brown leaf. I then took the brown leaf to Ala Moana Park where I wove for myself a coconut hat. While weaving, the poem below was ‘downloaded’ into my brain.

When I'm old and drooping
 Don't walk by without saying hello to me
 You drank from me
 You ate my flesh too
 My leaves gave you shelter
 Remember?

So take a part of me
 And make me a part of you

Then feel me
 Caress me like you've never done before
 Be patient with me
 Be gentle too
 And together
 You and I
 We'll give birth to *niu* creations!

Covid activated the space between *niu* and me that had been dormant for decades. This activation has resulted in two short films I made about the coconut tree during covid. At this time of writing, I am the producer, co-director and co-writer, as well as lead actor, of a short film called *Woven* which is about an indigenous weaver who struggles to complete a

coconut leaf basket in a city that has forgotten its roots (Honolulu). I have also taken up weaving from coconut fronds again and my baskets are winning awards at art exhibitions (see Figure 3). My life has been greatly enriched because I now have a spiritual and material relationship with *niu*, an ancestor to me. Today, I am a conduit for *niu*, connected to the tree of life through the *vā*. It is because of these extraordinary experiences I have had with *niu* that I believe that the *vā*, the space between two energy fields, is a space worthy of activation.



Figure 3: The author and his baskets. Source: photograph by the author.

May your life be greatly enriched when you explore this fertile in-between space between or among energy fields that, once activated, become a site of creativity, potential, and wonder.

ENDNOTES

1. This is a revised and shortened version of my distinguished lecture delivered on February 3, 2023.
2. The research into concepts of Ta/Vā by 'Okusitino Mahina and Tevita Ka'ili was instrumental in highlighting these concepts in relation to Tongan culture. They were pioneers and leaders at the forefront of this exciting development that was making waves among academics. I also wish to acknowledge the work of Albert Refiti, Rosanna Raymond, Nālani Wilson Hokowhitu and all the young philosophers, thought leaders, performers, artists and practitioners at the Auckland University of Technology as well as other scholars in Aotearoa and Hawai'i such as Ty Tengan, for their landmark conference on the vā that took place during covid and was held in November 2021.
3. My short film titled *A Niu Way: Coconut Trees, the Vision and the Virus* (2021a) was about the return of coconuts to the coconut trees of Waikiki that are usually purely ornamental. The film can be accessed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHg5f8zn8Gk>
4. David Lynch (2006:47) mentions the discovery of this Unified Field by quantum physics, supported by scientists like John Haglin who agreed that 'Every single thing that is a thing emerges from this field'. According to Lynch, this field of pure consciousness can be experienced through transcendental meditation: 'You dive within, and by experiencing this field of pure consciousness, you enliven it; you unfold it; it grows. And the final outcome of this growth of consciousness is called enlightenment, which is the full potential for us all' (*ibid.*:48).
5. See Alan Howard and Jan Rensel (2007) as well as Howard (1970). The Rotuman website at www.rotuma.net is an excellent source of information on all things Rotuman.
6. The bond between brother and sister is a sacred one and harkens back to the first voyaging canoe on which the oldest brother raped his sister. This broken relationship translates into the brother being tasked with the role of protecting the sister's honor at all times. In return, the sister has a responsibility to always act responsibly and respectfully in the brother's presence.
7. The animated short film *Sina ma Tinirau* (Hereniko 2021b) can be accessed here: <https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/781529835> Password: Tausie.

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