

*Umaña Tupuna*

Dear Stronach Family,

This is, sadly yet rewardingly, the last monthly letter-home I will write for you. In this letter, I narrate how my project ended with the final presentation of the film in various settings in Rapa Nui during June and early July. Although I achieved my goal of making a film and obtained a round ending for my project by sharing the film with the community, the project, as a personal as well as professional project, is still not entirely finished. I will finish it during August and September before I start my Ph.D. During these months, my goals will be to add English subtitles to the film, create a website for the project, and make several short, unedited videos in order to share with the public all of the footage I gathered that I could not include in the film.

Early June involved the most intense stage of my project. The bulk of the work involved finishing her massive illustration (over 2 meters long by 40 centimeters wide) on Antonia's part and finishing the script and editing of the film on my part, while collaborating with Rapanui people in Santiago and remotely over email and phone. During the last week of the film's post-production stage, we also counted with the help of Antonia's brother, Joaquin, who was able to animate certain parts of the film. The film, which in a very novel manner mixes ethnographic work with the community with illustrations and animations, turned out to be a wonderful achievement, relevant both to the Rapanui community and to academia and the art community at large. On the one hand, the film made ethnographic work—generally of great interest but difficult access to the community—more adequate for the community's style and interests. On the one hand, having contributed to a nascent genre that mixes art and research, I believe the film sets a precedent for future collaborations between artists and researchers. Antonia and I like to refer to this genre as "artopology," a compound word between "art" and "anthropology," in line with the film's mixture of research, fiction, and visual art.

You can all watch the 40-minute film in the following unlisted Youtube channel: <<https://youtu.be/CAPbyj7wJwg>>. Please keep in mind that, because the film was produced with the Rapanui community in mind, only Spanish subtitles were added and only to those parts of the film in Rapanui (all Rapanui today speak Spanish, but not all Rapanui today speak Rapanui). For those of you who do not understand Spanish, my goal is to have an English version of the film by August, with English subtitles for the entire film—including the Spanish and Rapanui portions of the film.

Briefly, the film uses a fictional structure that I developed by consulting with the Rapanui people who participated in the film and referring to bibliographic material. The fictional structure involves a young man who inherits a drawing from his grandfather. This drawing is fictional but is based on the historical fact of manuscripts that early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Rapanui people made and secretly passed down kin lines. It is presumed that 8 or so manuscripts were made, all containing texts and drawings describing ancestral traditions. The drawing the boy in the story inherits from his grandfather is in fact the illustration that Antonia made and the film consists of the boy coming to terms with the drawing, which contains different

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scenes in Rapa Nui's colonial history, as he consults with several wise, elderly men and women. These men and women who fulfill this role in the film are in fact the men and women I interviewed during the project. The illustration is shown piece by piece in the film, until it is completed and shown in its entirety at the end of the film. The following is a miniature copy of the illustration made by Antonia:



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Please refer to the film, and eventually to the website, in order to better understand what each historical scene in the illustration represents and to see the illustration in a larger, higher-quality version.

Upon arriving to Easter Island in June, I rapidly began organizing the three main events I had in mind as means to present the film to various pockets in the Rapanui community. The first of these events (in fact, several events) was in the form of workshops given to eleventh grade students at the local high school. Inaugurated in 2005, the high school in question is one of several in Easter Island, but the only one with Rapanui, rather than Western, education as a priority. Antonia and I carried out a total of five hour-and-a-half long workshops with the same class. The goal of the workshop was to share and discuss the film and then produce a short, 3-minute film with the class using a similar genre as the one we used to produce our film. The first step we took after showing the film to the class was to divide the class in three groups: one group, with the most students, had the task of making a drawing to include in the film; the second group had the task of making music to include in the film; and the third group, with the least amount of students, had the task of creating a story for the film, making a script out of it and then narrating it in Rapanui. Here is a photo of two of the three groups working (the photo was taken at a moment when the music group was recording the song they prepared with the class' regular teacher), followed by a photo of the illustration that the group in question made:





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The students manifestly enjoyed the film we made and the idea of making a shorter film with them was to show them that with the pervasion of modern technology in domestic spaces, the power of audiovisual work is at the tip of their fingers as the inheritors of a very rich, yet heavily burdened ancestral tradition. Audiovisual work is a powerful tool to represent culture, in particular one like Rapanui's, where sounds and images traditionally prevail over words. Ancestrally, knowledge in Rapa Nui was passed down through oral transmission and petroglyphs and other kinds of visual representations.

To the extent that we wanted to introduce the technique of making a film to students, the workshop was very successful. The class thought that the most important theme to represent was the loss of the Rapanui language by the younger generations, which most of them attribute to the presence of smartphones and TV screens which limit the amount of verbal communication between generations in the community and which reinforce the dominance of Spanish and English over Rapanui. The drawing made by students clearly evinces this sentiment, with a violent image of a phone consuming Rapanui language as it emanates from a young person's mouth. The song—based on another song made by the same class for a school-wide event on the “day of Rapanui language” organized by the school—and the script—which narrates the story of a girl who becomes ashamed of speaking Rapanui—fitted perfectly with the drawing. I am still editing this short video and will provide it to you when I write my final reflection. Note that although the theme on which the students decided to focus is negative, the message of the film is not entirely pessimistic: the girl who feels ashamed of speaking Rapanui and is later told by her grandmother that her shame is due to her excessive use of her smartphone, retorts that rather than seeing in the smartphone the root of evil, the girl and her grandmother could work together, using her grandmother's knowledge and the smartphone's communicational and didactic potential to reinforce the younger generation's dominance of the Rapanui language. The film I made with Antonia importantly transmits ancestral knowledge in a modern format (film) and also in a modern style (the narrative and visual styles used in the film's script and illustration, as well as the animations used in the film, can all be said to be modern or even post-modern). The idea of this bold gesture on our part was precisely to give voice to the sentiment shared by young Rapanui people with us that the lore of their parents and grandparents could have a greater impact if they would be more flexible with the way this lore is transmitted. Several teachers in the high school requested copies of the DVD in order to share the film with the rest of the students.

The second event I organized was a showing of the film at Easter Island's only museum. The museum is a Chilean institution. As such, the event I organized there followed the Western protocols of academia, with an introduction on my part before the start of the film and a reception following the end of the film. As expected, the public that attended the showing (around 40 people) comprised, in general, the section of the Rapanui population that can be said to be more Westernized. Most of the participants of the film, conversely, belong to a clan known for its ancestral

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politics. Many of the people who attended the showing of the film in the museum, therefore, did not fully agree with the vision of the past and present of their culture the participants in the film shared with me. This led to a very interesting discussion at the end of the film. The attendees were very appreciative of the original work we made and we received many more requests for DVD copies of the film than expected. Two comments, on the part of important leaders in the Easter Island community, in particular called my attention. Federico Paté, known as the best performer of ancestral songs in the island, asked me to give him a copy of the film, so he could show it to his grandson. This is precisely the type of impact I wanted to generate with the making of the film. The second comment that called my attention was one in which another leader in the community pointed out that the illustration made by Antonia was an excellent way for younger people to grasp the complex recent history of Easter Island. This leader remarked on the degree of confusion there exists regarding the chronology of important events in the island's recent history and thought that the illustration ordered these events in the same way a book does, but in a way that is much more adequate for the way Rapanui people understand history. We distributed several copies of the illustration to important members of the community and plan to distribute more in the future, so that a great part of the local community has access to the illustration. Below is a photo of Antonia and me leading the discussion that followed the showing of the film:



The third and largest event I organized during June in Easter Island was meant to show the film in a strictly Rapanui context. In collaboration with what I believe to be the strongest local cultural protection corporation in the island, *Kahu Kahu O'Heru*, I organized a ritual *umu hatu* feast to thank the community for taking part in the film.



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An *umu hatu* is one of several kinds of *umu*, earth-oven food rituals, traditionally made at the end of an activity to thank one or several gods for their enablement of the activity. The ritual itself consists in cooking an entire white-feathered rooster using the earth-oven technique and handing the cooked rooster wrapped in banana leaves to a representative of the oldest faction of the community, who receives the rooster, recites an ancestral chant, and then gives a piece of chicken to each member in the ritual to eat. The way I structured the event was by first showing the film to 50 or so people who attended—comprised by members of *Kahu Kahu O’Hera* and by some of the participants of my film—and then performing the *umu hatu* ritual. The event finished with a large *curanto* (feast) for all of the attendees, which included the traditional Rapanui staples of sweet potato, taro, fish, and chicken, but also the acquired staple of beef, all cooked using the traditional earth-oven technique. The first photo below shows the preparation of the massive earth-oven which I prepared with the help of two Rapanui experts, while the second photo shows the moment when the elder who performed the *umu hatu* ritual (a highly respected old man, Niso Tuki, who participated in my film) received the cooked rooster from me:



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Like the other two events I organized in Easter Island, this event achieved its goal. The goal was to attract the less Westernized portion of the Rapanui community by making an event guided by Rapanui principles. The members of *Kahu Kahu O'Hera* who attended the event are all part of the corporation because of their important work on behalf of the island's culture, and as such are ideal persons with whom to share the communal work I made and also to use as diffusion points for the rest of the community to access the film. All of the attendees were very impressed with the film and I received several requests for DVDs and illustrations. The *umu hatu* was a beautiful ceremony and a perfect way to thank the Rapanui community for participating in my project.

In conclusion, June and early July were extremely intense and rewarding months in my project. Of course, there were many challenges I had to meet, but I will leave those for my final reflection I will submit soon. I am now back in the U.S. preparing



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the English version of the film, as well as the website. I will give you all more details about these during my final reflection.

Thank you, as always, for making my dream come true!

Pablo