Dear Stronach Family:

This first month of full-time work on my Stronach project has been filled with exciting ideas and concrete steps toward carrying them out. After a month of preliminary work done remotely in the U.S., I returned to Santiago, Chile, in early October. I spent a couple of weeks preparing my trip to Easter Island and starting to better define the concept of *Umaŋa Tupuna*.

While in Santiago, I held frequent meetings with Antonia Lara, the digital illustrator with whom I will work in Easter Island. Though the final product of the project will entirely reflect communal work done on the island, Antonia and I felt that it was necessary to ground our ideas about the artistic methods, concepts, and tools before traveling to Easter Island. Our first step was to prepare a power point for an upcoming meeting with the editor of the press who expressed interest in publishing the project. As is usually the case, the process of explaining one’s ideas to other people enables a better understanding of them.

During my first couple meetings with Antonia before the meeting with the editor (photographed above) we struggled to find the best artistic medium and representational logic to capture the Rapanui’s felt ties with their landscape. Though the substance of the project will unravel in the field, we wanted to make sure we were using the best-suited frameworks to stimulate reflection and engagement.
during our *a’amu* [narrative] excursions and subsequent workshops. The importance of incorporating audiovisual material, with its power to stimulate the senses directly (not only through symbols in the imagination), soon became apparent to both Antonia and me. The question we therefore began ruminating on was how to amalgamate audiovisual material with Antonia’s and Rapanui children’s illustrations and with my text? We started looking for references online and at local bookstores. We realized that what we had in mind was unique—a book with a DVD where the DVD is not just supplemental to the book, but interacts with the book, to the effect that either cannot be read without the other. We found some inspiring references, but no exact references. We wanted to go further than any references we found and bridge the “reality” of a taped scene with the “fiction” of an illustrated narrative. There is a lot that a video camera cannot depict of what is real for the Rapanui and also a lot that a text captures too distantly and statically to account for the efficacy of speech in the context of Rapanui mythologizations of history. We wanted to not only mix audiovisual and textual material, but also to deconstruct each from the inside.

We finally arrived at some basic techniques and principles to this effect. The first is the principle of multimedia and the accompanying technique of montage. As anthropologist Michael Taussig (1986: 441) puts it, montage involves “sudden scene changes which breaks up any attempt at narrative order.” While we tape Rapanui narrative performances [*a’amu*], Antonia will take notes and make sketches about the content of the narration. We will later superimpose illustrations based on these sketches over the taped material in order to create the sudden changes characteristic of montage. Illustrations will appear and disappear in correspondence with the narrator’s words, in the form of dialectical images through which history is actually lived. Taped Rapanui music will be used here to add to the effect. A referent in this use of multimedia art that we found was *Mr. Nobody: Searching for Silence*, where a real person is filmed but set on a background made entirely of illustration. Another referent is the concept of children’s books known as *DVD Storytime*, where illustrations on a book come to life in a DVD (to be seen simultaneously as one reads the book). Moreover, the style of the illustrations made by Antonia will mimic the state of mind of the narrator, such that illustrations corresponding to uncertain states of mind may appear to be, say, less clear or ordered. The comic book *Epileptic* by David B., in turn, inspired this technique.

In terms of structure between rather than within scenes, I reached the conclusion that I could play with the difference of video and text in order to tell a disjointed, remembered history without loosing sight of the chronological, depersonalized concept of history common to academic writing. Though I am very much interested in developing the postcolonial view of history as pluralistic and non-teleological (see Chakrabarty 2000), I do not want to reduce the conventional way of telling history to political naiveté. Though it is true that such a way of telling history corresponds to the victor’s point of view, I think it is dangerous to lose sight of any sort of chronological concept of history. The task is not to efface such a concept of history, but to constantly critique it. Specifically, in re-telling the colonial
history of Easter Island, we will use the medium of text to tell a chronological story and the medium of video to tell the remembered, felt story.

**Figure 2.** Conceptual scheme for Umanga Tupuna’s logic. Figure made by Pablo Seward, October 2014.

We will carry forth the above structure through the principles and techniques of interactive art. Though the production of Umanga Tupuna will be interactive by virtue of being collaborative with the Rapanui, by “interactive” here I refer more to the final product. How to make a visual-textual assemblage such that every time it is read/seen the audience re-enacts it? Such a product would extend the influence of Umanga Tupuna for the regeneration of Rapanui ties with their landscape beyond the time of my project. Julio Cortázar’s novel *Rayuela* heavily influenced the scheme above. Cortázar wrote his masterpiece such that it can be read in three ways: from beginning to end as any normal novel; from beginning to mid-way (without needing to read the rest); and in a specific order spelled by the author, who instructs the reader to embark on a seemingly chaotic journey. Thus the reader influences the way an artwork is read as much as the author. My ideal goal is to develop a scheme by which the product can be seen and read differently by different viewers.

In order to achieve this, the DVD will open up to a scene of several “bubbles” floating around. Each bubble will contain a miniature illustration depicting the a’amu scene that the bubble would lead the viewer to watch. The viewer is given the choice to choose with which bubble to start, according to his or her visceral preference. Each scene will be of a chosen Rapanui oral historian, who in narrating a biographical story in the place around which the story once occurred, will be narrating, microcosmically, part of the Rapanui story as a whole. For instance, Piru Huke’s story as a self-made trash collector will allow me to explore the more general
historical theme of ecology. After each scene, the reader will be referred to a certain page on the book (specific to each scene). The page will correspond to a section in the book that will consist of a historical background of the scene. This background will explain the politics behind each scene according to a certain topic (ecology, immigration, alcoholism, heritage, etc.) and ask the audience (DVD viewer) to take a political stance on the topic. As seen in the above scheme, according to the choice (red or blue on the scheme), the viewer of the DVD will be lead to a second scene. After the end of this second scene, the audience will be directed back to the respective section of the book, where the process will repeat itself. Each section in the book will also give background on the making of the scene. The idea behind this logic is to make the reader actively engage with the cultural politics of Rapa Nui and to understand how pertinent issues are lived in everyday Rapanui life, including during the Umanga Tupuna project itself.

The editor of the press thought our ideas were fascinating and innovative. He is willing to publish the product once it is finished. We will be having another meeting with him after returning from Easter Island for the first time and before going back to Easter Island for a second time.

We are currently in Easter Island. We are in the process of recruiting oral historians and taping excursions around the island. The idea is to do umanga in each place where a narrative is told. I will buy food and travel to these places with oral historians, where we will build an earth oven, eat and feed the tupuna [ancestors] of the place, and proceed to tape the narrative. I was fortunate to have a friend rent us professional camera equipment at a very reasonable price. Thanks to the support of the Stronach project I was also able to buy extra equipment, such as ambient microphones, that will allow Antonia and me to capture the scenes with the most sensuousness as possible. The idea is to make a total of 12 scenes, but we may find that we will be able to make more. The following are scenes and oral historians that I have already defined, with their respective political topics:

- Piru Huke and trash collection: ecology
- Felipe Pakarati and alcohol-induced blindness: alcoholism
- Petero Huke and the contemporary making of petroglyphs: heritage
- Berta Hey and experience with leprosy: governmentality

This coming month will be crucial as we will continue taping and better defining each scene. For my following letter-home you should expect to find some rough cuts of some of these scenes and some of Antonia’s preliminary illustrations, as well as some extracts of the book.

Antonia and I will be returning back to Santiago in late December and spending a brief time there refining and editing the material we collect in Easter Island. We will then return to Easter Island and hold workshops with children at the Lorenzo Baeza School, from which the final product of Umanga Tupuna will emerge.
Umaña Tupuna

The ultimate idea is to superimpose illustrations of Rapanui children made in workshops over the taped material, such that both Antonia’s professional illustrations and the children’s illustrations appear on the taped material. The process of doing this will allow Antonia to teach Rapanui children about graphic illustrations, thus giving them an invaluable tool in the modern world. It will also allow Rapanui children and I to think about Rapanui cultural politics in new and creative ways.

![Figure 3. Children partaking in a special activity at Lorenzo Baeza School, where workshops will be held. Photo by Pablo Seward, October 2014.](image)

Best and thank you all for your support!!

Pablo

Works Cited


Umaña Tupuna