

house. An hour passes, an hour and a half. The shock of the setting and the unfamiliar language begin to distract from the time. A growing feeling between the visitors and the hosts begins to take hold of you.

Later a young Maori tells me that he thinks this is an unnecessary affront to uninitiated Pakehas, that it could all have been done much more quickly and comfortably. I disagree. I think the shock is necessary to bring everyone back a step or two from the everyday world to a common starting point.

The starting point, once we've got ourselves bedded down and well fed, is a hundred meetings with people from all over New Zealand, encounters over the pillow with the head nearest to your own sleeping place on the floor. But soon, because of our late arrival, we sleep under the embracing ribs of Ngatokowaru, many of us not sure why we came or what we want of this weekend.

Saturday morning: we talk not about television but about Ngatokowaru. Martin Winiata describes the traditions of the marae. The carvings on the walls are described by the man who carved them, Martin's brother Hapai. The emphasis is on the spirit and the spirituality of the place. For many of us a gradual slowing down into another rhythm is taking place and we feel stirrings of a deeper understanding of what it is to be Maori.

But there are those who think we are wasting our time. We should instead be talking straight away about how the Maori-television relationship should be improved. Others of us disagree. Before we can talk about changes in television involving the Maori we need to know and feel something of the culture we are talking about. The business should come later.

It does. A battery of proposals already discussed by a number of television personnel is offered to the gathering. For example a daily five-minute Maori news bulletin, the appointment of a Maori liaison officer at television centres, improvements in the scheduling of Maori related programmes, the possible establishment of marae at the main television stations. Other ideas – the recruitment of more Maori into television, more money so that more dramas involving Maori can be produced.

There is a chilling change in the atmosphere when one young Maori gets up to introduce matters of urgent concern to Maori people. According to older people present he has spoken out of turn. He is interrupted whilst still on the floor. He stands aside, bowing to marae protocol. The Pakeha understand not the words but, very clearly, the mood. That, at least, is an advance.

Later another young Maori questions the value of a hui such as this. What are such hui achieving, he asks. We have had three now and what have we got to show for them? Again some of us disagree. There are more Maori related programmes, if badly scheduled. There has been more Maori drama. But most important, those of us television workers who had not been on a marae before are at last beginning to understand.

And yet this young Maori does have a point. A lot more should be happening by now. Like recognising and accepting in television that the Maori is more than another special interest group. That the Maori is the major minority group of the New Zealand population. That the Maori needs to have a more representative slice of the television cake. That the Maori culture is dependent for its survival on the survival and regular use of the Maori language. A language that is used keeps the culture it articulates alive. A language that is not used takes the culture it articulates with it into the museums. At present television, the most powerful communicator, does not use the Maori language. It relegates it to the status of an annual ornament.

The problems facing the Maori people outside the protective walls of Avalon cannot be resolved until this most powerful machine shows that it accepts the Maori segment of its audience as a segment that should be given the dignity of proper representation and access.

One or two people left the hui before it ended because they felt it was not achieving enough quickly enough. Most came away exhilarated by new-found meanings of Maoridom, warmed by the hospitality of the people of Ngatokowaru, and rather disturbed by how much they discovered needs to be done.

HUGO MANSON



*Maori influence is already being felt in television thanks to the efforts of such people as Brian Morehu Macdonald (left) from Country Calendar, Ivin Kiripatea, ex-Kaleidoscope and now freelance, and Perry Maitai, a Hoha researcher*