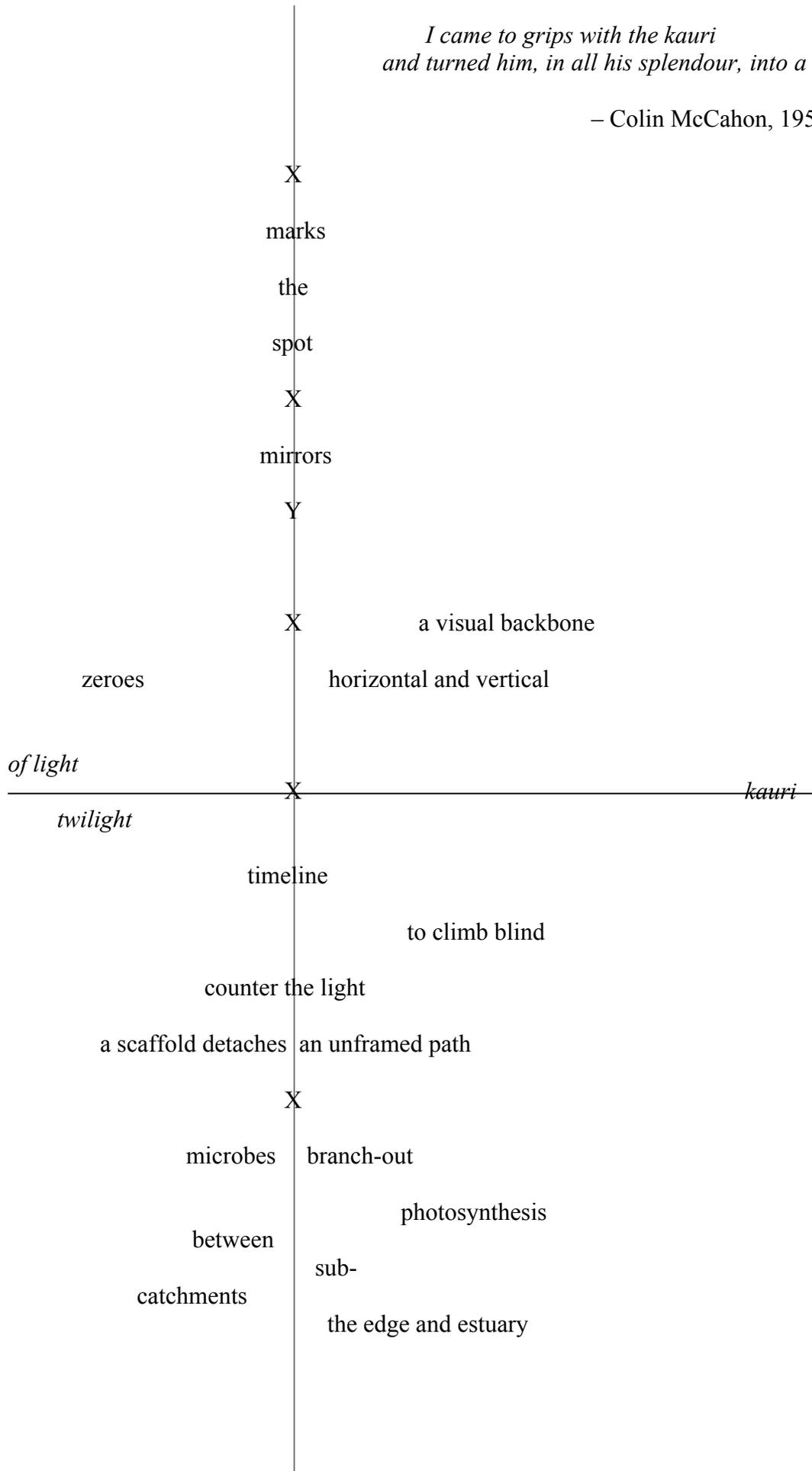


Kia Toitu He Kauri

*I came to grips with the kauri
and turned him, in all his splendour, into a symbol.*

– Colin McCahon, 1957



X

pathways
pathogens

an imprint

surface sediment

X

a constant *flow* *of light*

~~*zero light : holey light*~~

~~*framed light : filigree*~~

~~*light : threaded light*~~

~~*first light : inner light :*~~
~~*outer light : outlined light*~~

~~*said light : dead light*~~ ~~*syllabic light swallow light*~~

~~*born light*~~ ~~*bone light : alone light*~~

~~*aligned light*~~ ~~*lateral light : broken*~~

~~*light : street light*~~ ~~*neon light : head light*~~

~~*sun light*~~ ~~*star light : moon light*~~

~~*ritual light : sacred light*~~ ~~*secret light : tangential light*~~

X

~~*absentia light : mint light*~~ ~~*mineral light : scalloped light*~~

~~*saline*~~ ~~*light*~~

~~*opa*~~

~~*line light*~~ ~~*open light : single light*~~

~~*straight light*~~ ~~*scattered light : crushed light*~~

~~*shadow light*~~ ~~*clear light*~~

X

~~*wave*~~ ~~*light : lapping light*~~

~~*falling light*~~ ~~*travel light : talk light*~~

~~*sent light*~~ ~~*digital light : past*~~

~~*light*~~ ~~*present light*~~

~~*faint light*~~ ~~*green light : go light*~~

X

~~*ghost light : land light*~~ ~~*liquid light : draw light*~~

~~*enter light : half*~~

~~*light*~~ ~~*seent light*~~ ~~*slant light*~~

~~*shive light*~~ ~~*sans light*~~

~~still light~~ : black light

white light

X

left
a sou'-west squall

cut
then right

between top
and toppled

horizon

X

centre line
criss-
crossed signs
scenic drive

Y

shape-shifting

helix

shards of summer's

soil-borne scent
New Year's a matrix

pod-

cast traces

arcs

X

stands

for

kauri

sky

high

dead

centre

X

stands

symbolic

a skeleton in nature

X

Y

Z

Kia Toitu He Kauri – (Keep Kauri Standing) : An Afterword

whāngaia te mauri / hau o te kauri

Agathis australis is commonly known by its Māori name *kauri*. In New Zealand *kauri* are considered to be taonga (treasures) of the Māori ancestral spiritual world and are of significant cultural importance to all New Zealanders. They grow in only one place in the world, the northern part of NZ, and in the context of this poem, the Waitākere Ranges of West Auckland.

Historically commercial harvesting has seen vast tracts of *kauri* felled and today less than one percent (7000ha) of the original *kauri* forest remain. Most recently a new threat has emerged – *kauri* dieback, a microscopic, fungus-like organism called *Phytophthora taxon Agathis* (PTA), which attacks the roots and trunk of *kauri* such that they starve to death. Because of the multiplicity of spores involved with the disease, and no known cure, mass extinction of the trees is very much a reality unless a collaborative scientific approach is embraced. To think of the northern forests without *kauri* would be unimaginable for most New Zealanders.

As a child growing up surrounded by *kauri*, I often climbed and walked among them, exploring and studying these rangatira (chiefs or leaders) of the forest. Today I live in my family home in the Waitākere Ranges – a networked ‘wood wide web’, among the same trees, where they have watched me grow, as I have them.

Sixty-seven years ago while living in Titirangi’s French Bay, arguably NZ’s most foremost painter Colin McCahon captured the elemental symbolism of the *kauri*. As art historian Gordon Brown relates, ‘McCahon adopted the habit of rising early at dawn, and would then contemplate the bush, such that the forms of the trees would dematerialize while his sense of spatial depth diminished’. At its most intense, McCahon likened this illusionary effect to that of the blind man mentioned in Mark’s Gospel, who on first receiving his sight, saw ‘men as trees, walking’. His meditation on the expansive tree canopy with its multiplicity of light and line resulted in an exploratory abstraction of signs and symbols. As McCahon said in 1957, ‘I came to grips with the *kauri* and turned him in all his splendour into a symbol’.

The phrasing and structure of ‘Kia Toitu He Kauri’, riffs on reading McCahon’s correspondence and viewing his Titirangi *kauri* paintings which express McCahon’s unique vision of the Waitākeres and his pressing meditation on the fragile but dynamic biodiversity of our ecosystem.

The poem’s layout attempts a vertical and horizontal scaffolding, while language is floated in space. The branched strike through lines attempt to disseminate language and light, and the ‘X’ stands vertically along the skeletal spine as a pictorial, elemental mark, or as local conservationists have termed – ‘tree death markings.’