

Sustaining Māori indigenous performative knowledge: Engaging practices that foster *ihi* within a contemporary dance theatre context

*Ko Tarawera me Hikurangi ngā maunga
Ko Puarenga me Te Raparapa ngā awa
Ko Te Arawa me Ngatokimatawhaorua ngā waka
Ko Te Pakira me Matawaia ngā marae
Ko Te Arawa me Ngā Puhī ngā iwi
Ko Tūhourangi Ngāti Wāhiao me Ngāti Hine ngā hapu
Ko Sophie Williams toku ingoa*

Sophie Williams

The University of Auckland

Abstract

In this article I explore the creative potential of Māori indigenous performative knowledge such as *ihi*. My research investigated personal experiences as a performer and choreographer during the creative process, exploring and engaging with practices that foster *ihi* within contemporary performance. I draw on practice-led research methods in the choreographic and performance process of creating a duet called *Ngā Whaiaipo o te Roto - Lovers of the Lake*, performed in the Auckland Tempo Dance Festival (Williams, 2012). By exploring Māori concepts of performance within contemporary dance practices, I explored the potential to sustain indigenous knowledge, meanings and connections in how Māori cultural concepts are transferred into a theatre context.

Prelude

I sat in the front row of the studio finishing my notes, catching my breath. My co-choreographer and fellow performer reached over to me and placed his sweaty hand on my left leg and whispered, ‘We were good, that was good feedback don’t worry’. As the next group of performers prepared themselves on stage, the dryness in my throat forced me to cover my eyes with my hands, swallow, and take a few seconds to reflect. I heard the drumming start, but rudely still had my eyes covered by my hands. I heard the voice over, ‘it’s the typical Cook Island Māori

way!’ I opened my eyes, and saw three Polynesian women in front of me, standing in their feminine poses, wearing white skirts made out of hula-hoops.

I glanced around at the other performers and choreographers of this Auckland Tempo Dance Festivalⁱ, Freshⁱⁱ and Primeⁱⁱⁱ programme sitting as the audience, observing their eyes watching the performance. As the drumming faded out and the dancers returned to their feminine poses from the beginning, the applause from the audience started to force an awkward ending to the performance. The dancers shimmied out of the skirts, while the choreographer made her way to the stage. Before the festival director could facilitate the feedback process, someone from the back commented, ‘Hmmm I’m not sure, are you worried the two shows are too cultural?’

I couldn’t even comprehend the question myself. All I knew is that a feeling of defensiveness started to emerge within me. I glanced over to the festival director who had a look of contemplation, then a frown of confusion. She put down her notebook and replied, ‘I don’t know what you are trying to say? What do you mean by too cultural?’ I was so flabbergasted from the question myself I couldn’t even open my mouth. I thought, ‘Should I defend my culture, my work as a choreographer and performer? What did she mean by that comment first?’ I was about to say something, but then the festival director stood up and turned to all the Fresh and Prime performers and choreographers. ‘Cultural or non-cultural I picked you all based on your concepts and performance. I’m not worried about anything’. There was an awkward silence. I glanced back at the woman who made the comment. The room seemed tense, I returned to my notebook and started to scribble meaningless shapes, filtering this lady’s odd comment.

Introduction

The focus of this article is an exploration of the creative potential of Māori indigenous knowledge, within the creative process of creating a duet work *Ngā Whaiaipo o te Roto—Lovers of the Lake* (Williams, 2012, 2013). I begin by offering a background to this practice-led research I conducted within my graduate study at The University of Auckland, commenting on my experiences immersing myself in a predominantly Western institutional setting that is very different from my home environment in Rotorua. Drawing on Kaupapa Māori research methodologies within practice-led research allowed me to bring together Western and Māori research approaches in the dance studio, as I will discuss below.^{iv} These reflections lead me to consider significant experiences in my upbringing that then informed my

creative processes as a choreographer and performer. As the prelude above indicates, presenting the duet and receiving feedback in different contexts, deepened my understandings as my research developed. Thus I discuss the feedback process and return to consider the performances in the Tempo Dance Festival. Throughout this article, I integrate descriptive accounts. I focus on the Māori performative concept of *ihi*; a difficult concept to define, Rua McCullum (2011) describes *ihi* as “a discernible cold chill spreading through your upper spine, raising the hairs on the back of your neck, whilst watching a performance” (p. 96). Such qualities resonate with Nathan Matthew’s (2011) description that, “*ihi* is a psychic power that elicits a positive psychic and emotional response from the audience” (p.10).

In my recent experience of the Tempo Dance Festival showing of both the *Fresh* and *Prime* works, I felt as if I had to question my own dance practices in relation to my Māori cultural heritage. I have never had to explain or justify my culture or where I am from before. My *whānau* (extended family) live and breathe our culture everyday. It is not something we think about but what we do through our daily lives. Transitioning from the influences of my home Rotorua, dominated by Māori cultural values and moving to Auckland city and the contemporary dance environment that are influenced and dominated by Western culture, I have struggled to find a balance of both cultures within my contemporary dance practice.

During my first two years of the undergraduate dance studies programme at The University of Auckland, I consciously made sure that my contemporary dance and *Kapa Haka* (Māori cultural performing arts) practice were left in separate locations. During these early years at university I choreographed, performed and completed works that drew on experiences that were not from Māori culture. When the university year ended I returned home to perform and learn from my *whānau* and *Kapa Haka* tutors over the summer. It was not until I and other peers from The University of Auckland helped choreograph a Samoan, Māori, cultural inspired performance that also drew on Western ideas. Only when this work was performed at the Taiwan International Dance Summit in 2012, that I began to understand why I might be purposely avoiding integrating my two cultures together.

I realised that I was worried about how I could integrate the two cultures that I am most influenced by, and how this would be achieved in a culturally appropriate manner. I had witnessed many choreographic works, professional and through the undergraduate programme at university, that attempted to integrate

Māori cultural concepts and Western contemporary dance practices. It was through my own self-reflection and these observations that I became concerned about how Māori cultural values were carried through into Western contemporary dance works. I noticed a favouring of Western cultural ideals. The valuing of Western ideas over Māori concepts and values has been a concern planted within my understandings of dance, performance and creative practice.

When I return home to Rotorua, my whānau quite often share and discuss stories about the revitalization of *Te reo Māori* (Māori language) that was once prohibited in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Discussions also rise concerning the process of regaining land that was once confiscated by the Crown (the New Zealand Government), and more specifically to our *iwi* (tribe or extended kinship group) and *hapū* (sub-tribe or kinship group). These stories and political expressions are also produced through some of our aggregate items performed on stage as a Kapa Haka group. From these experiences, I am often reminded of the cultural and ethical considerations that need to be apparent within my creative dance practice. Therefore, the way in which I make decisions when integrating Western ideals and Māori cultural values becomes a heavy responsibility on my shoulders. This research stems from experiences such as my upbringing where my Māori cultural heritage and my intentions are constantly being negotiated through my contemporary dance and creative practice. As more artists, educators, researchers and students draw on aspects of Māori cultural values and ideas within contemporary dance, I aimed to explore how I as a dance practitioner, considered the cultural implications and ethical considerations within my choreographic and performance process.

Te Hau Kāinga—The Breeze of Home

As outlined above, I have been involved in Kapa Haka within my hapū for several years and I have continued to travel home to practice and perform with my whānau even while studying in Auckland. During Kapa Haka practice with Tūhourangi Ngāti Wāhiao (the Kapa Haka group I belong to) in 2013, we were learning the words and actions of the *whakawātea* (the choreographed exit aggregate performed by a Kapa Haka group). It was a hot day and everyone was short with each other. Our tutors were not happy with our execution of the *whakawātea*. I remember stopping and starting over and over, our tutors changing their minds, ‘start again, no change that action, boys to the front, no go back to the back’. The *whakawātea* was about four ancestors, who were also at the time being carved into wooden panels. These

panels would be placed around the stage for the 2013 Te Matatini National Kapa Haka Festival in Rotorua^v. We had been given the *whakamārama* (explanation or clarification) about the whakawātea. However, I got the feeling that our tutor thought we still did not understand what we were performing about. He told us to take a lunch break, to go down to Te Puia, a New Zealand Māori Arts and Cultural Institute in Rotorua, and watch the carvings being carved.

“Look at how the carvers move when they carve the wood. Ask them to tell you why they are carved in that way, shapes, eyes, body, look at the physical aspects of each carving”, our tutor instructed us. We did what we were told. We asked about the stories and why some were carved with bigger eyes, one with two heads and one with no body. The carvers stopped working and started to unravel the stories. I initially thought going to Te Puia was unnecessary. It was not until I walked back into practice that I understood and started to connect and better understand our movements to the words, actions and facial expressions of each ancestor. It was this process, that allowed me to return to Kapa Haka practice and draw from a spiritual understanding and connection to the meaning and portrayal of the whakawātea.

The process of going down to Te Puia with the Kapa Haka group and witnessing the carving first hand was a practice that I found I was able to transfer into the choreographic process. Katerina Teawia (2011) explains how Pacific people often carry and pass indigenous cultural knowledge through oral, visual and embodied traditions. Her ideas could be likened to the practices within Māori culture, such as the passing of knowledge through the carvers to the Kapa Haka group. As carriers of particular knowledge, the carvers shared the history and characteristics of each ancestor with us as a Kapa Haka group. The significance of this process meant that Māori knowledge was gathered in a way where, we as performers and choreographers had to physically visit the place where the panels were carved.

Later, standing in the dance studio in Auckland, I recalled the experience of visiting Te Puia with my Kapa Haka group. I thought of the conception of our piece, *Ngā Whaiāipo o te roto—Lovers of the Lake*. This dance was to be based on a story familiar to myself and co-choreographer and dance partner, about two ancestors, Hinemoa and Tutanekai. The story illustrates Hinemoa’s journey as she swam across the lake to be with her lover Tutanekai. We had all these big ideas for the dance, many of which came from filming scenes for our projection images on the

shores of Lake Ohinemutu. I remember thinking, ‘Maybe we should just go home, get out of the studio, out of the city!’

Visiting the environment where the story of Hinemoa and Tutanekai took place enabled me to connect to the physical feeling of my experience in this location. For example, the temperature, the texture of the sand underneath my feet, the freezing water against my body as I stood in Lake Rotorua, and the gusty wind ripping the *korowai* (cloak ornamented with feathers) off my body. I believe these experiences had the ability to foster a deeper physical understanding of Hinemoa’s journey to cross the lake.

When my dance partner and I revisited locations in Rotorua we became more familiar with how to enter the water, stay warm in the water while waiting for the perfect time to shoot the footage, how to fold and control the *korowai* in the wind. The shiver that shot up my spine when I walked into cold water still resonates in my body. I can still feel the gust of wind that rippled through my body, tangled my hair in my face, taking away my vision. The hot sand from the thermal heating below made my toes flinch and curl up in a way that was not necessarily aesthetically pleasing, but was something that I could quickly re-enact through an embodied sensation.



Photograph 1: Sophie Williams, Rotorua Ohinemutu; footage part of *Ngā Whaiaipo o te roto* film projection, Rotorua, New Zealand

Without physically being in the environment where Hinemoa and Tutanekai’s story took place, I believe I could now describe and imagine what these places looked and felt like, but this would only scrape the surface. Smith (2002) outlines how “experiences become transformational because they are embodied moments

that shift our day to day movement patterns into another, an-other way of moving” (p. 137). Smith’s ideas could relate to my experience of this environment first hand, I felt I was able to embody the story, understand my character Hinemoa further and return with this experience to the studio. Reflecting on the idea of experiencing place and environment, I found that I had to recall feelings of a certain moment, of how the environment affected my body kinesthetically. For example, when I returned to the studio I needed to recall the feeling of walking into the lake, and the shiver that grew from a slight chill to an overwhelming adrenalin rush through my body.

These tangible experiences are what I drew from as a choreographer and performer. There were no physical training or technical movements I could easily go back to. I believe this contributed to the choreography and fostered *ihi* within my performance. However, the challenge was to recreate these experiences and dialogue with *ihi*, without the direct environment influences. My dance partner and I had to transfer this experience into a studio context and choreographed movement; this became a working process that required a lot of patience from us both.

With these experiences, my dance partner and I were able to explore how returning to a certain location may impact on our choreographic practice. Through experiencing Hinemoa and Tutanekai’s environment, we had the intention of building a relationship in this location that could then be carried through to our performance. This concept could also be considered within a performance such as ours, which reflects and draws on Māori cultural concepts. I felt that these ideas could be adopted within our choreographic process to provide guidance when working with Māori indigenous performance concepts (Bacon & Midgelow, 2011; Matthews, 2011; Sharples, 1985).

One of the obstacles that I faced was that although body memories may have allowed me to connect and reflect on my diverse cultural and dance experience, I still resorted to my habitual way of moving and thinking about movement, plastering such movements into my choreography and onto the site. Dance scholar Sherry Shapiro’s (1998) theory, around body memories holding life experiences or habitual movement, reminded me of our choreographic process and, more specifically, my own creative practice. Throughout the choreographic process there were many times, I felt confused about what movements were authentically coming through my *wairua* (spirit)^{vi} and body, drawn from the experiences within the environment I was in. My dance partner and I were not discovering or exploring

new movements, new settings or state of relationship with each other, but we were returning and recycling movements that felt comfortable because of our habitual state of mind and the environment we were situated in at that time.

As a consequence, in this research I focused on how to explore movements, choreography and performance practices that are drawn more from my own lived experience, rather than from my body memories or technique I have learnt through studio environments. Throughout the choreographic process my own ‘lived experience’ had been the source of creativity and developing my own dance vocabulary. Perhaps Anna Pakes (2006) analysis of how the “improvising dancer relies on technique and familiarity with particular ways of moving born of extensive training” (p. 91), could suggest that the environment and mind set in which I have been conditioned to dancing and stimulating choreography through technique or studio based classes, could in turn influence my decision making when creating movement. It was through those lived experienced moments down at the lake where I had no time to ‘think’ about whether a movement was authentic or not, but ‘moved’ in a way that was practical and truthful to my wairua, body and feelings at that time.

This choreographic practice led my creativity as a choreographer and performer to somewhere that was not necessarily comfortable for me. I had to change the way I thought and responded to stimulating movement. Practicing these methods may seem simple to embody in a performance, studio setting or stage. However, experiencing this first hand I was able to grasp a tangible experience of what Hinemoa, my character, may have endured. This was where I experienced authenticity within my performance. I believe that these moments enabled and fostered the beginnings of ihi within my performance.

He mahi urupare—feedback process

From the outset of the choreographic process I had consciously planned to prioritize feedback sessions as a way to further develop the piece. Initially I sought feedback from my own whānau and friends, as well as from university peers and lecturers.

I have observed that the hardest audience to impress is often our own whānau and friends. My dance partner and I travelled back home to Rotorua and had organized a showing of the duet for our whānau. These people taught us everything we know about Kapa Haka and Māori culture. There was no room for misinterpretations; they were very familiar with the story of our piece. I remember

feeling very intimidated and nervous as more whānau walked into the dance studio. After my dance partner and I welcomed them into the space and spoke about our *kaupapa* (topic or theme)^{vii} for *Ngā Whaiaipo o te Roto*, we performed. We then gave them the floor and waited for their *kōrero* (responses).^{viii} Aunty spoke first, “I’ve never seen the story performed like that in my life!” I couldn’t quite tell if that was said as a good or bad comment. She continued, “We always sing about their love for one another and show the beauty of Hinemoa. Never do we show her struggle or how she may have felt in the cold. I’m so emotional right now. Thank you. What a privilege to witness that”. They spoke about the connection my dance partner and I shared together, and raved about the video projection. I asked why Kapa Haka performers from home only show the beauty of Hinemoa and received the response: “Well it wouldn’t have been like *Baywatch*. She would be cold, her hair would be messy and she’d be frightened”.^{ix}

Feedback is a practice that has already been established within the Aotearoa dance community. Perhaps it is through seeking feedback from people outside of the dance industry, such as whānau in Rotorua and *kaumātua* (elders)^x, a Māori-defined and apportioned position), that another element is added to our performance process and presence. The decision to seek feedback from whānau and *kaumātua* also connects to the *Kaupapa Māori whakawhanaungatanga* methodology this research has taken (Bishop, 1998; Mane, 2009; Smith, 1999). *Whakawhanaungatanga* reflects characteristics of kinship, and the relationships between the researcher, research participants, environment and cosmos, all aspects that were encouraged throughout this research process (Bishop, 1995). By creating a relationship between my dance partner and myself as the performers and our whānau from Rotorua, this process opened up and led to discussion, advice and questioning of the choreographic process, and embracing of their perspectives as well as my own. As a dance practitioner and researcher, if I am unable to justify myself to *kaumātua* and whānau, then I know I have misunderstood something along the way. The opportunity to have this relationship allows me to ‘check-in’ with the perspectives of my Māori community, who may not be familiar with the contemporary dance scene, however provide expertise and suggestions in areas such as Māori concepts and stories. As the researcher, co-choreographer and performer, I had to continuously remind myself to carry through a critical indigenous methodological approach (Freire, 1970; Smith, 2005).

This research prioritized the input and guidance of *kaumātua* and whānau from Rotorua. This meant that if I was unsure of any information I was given

through feedback or informal conversations, if I needed a second opinion around how I was incorporating Māori ideas and concepts into my choreographic process, these concerns would be clarified, through a process of discussion and conversation with kaumātua and whānau (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). Enabling this dialogue for feedback, advice, suggestions and personal input allows whānau members from home to feel some ownership of and input into the process, research and end product of *Ngā Whaiaipo o te Roto* (Bishop, 1996; Mane, 2009; Smith, 1999). Through our inclusion of this process, whānau and kaumātua members become aware that this research and choreography belong to our people, our ancestors Hinemoa and Tutanekai and others who have contributed throughout the process. Throughout our Kapa Haka practices, on more than one occasion, kaumātua came to guide, share their knowledge and give feedback on our performance. I believe that kaumātua are one of the most valuable sources of our Māori indigenous knowledge, throughout our journey; their approval, support and encouragement are of high importance when performing and drawing on Māori indigenous knowledge. The knowledge and stories they shared were the moments I felt I learnt the most. The knowledge of our ancestors, being passed down from our kaumātua is not offered on a regular day basis; therefore this process is extremely valuable and treated with the upmost respect when an opportunity arises, either during or outside of Kapa Haka practice.

In addition to valuing highly the input of whānau and kaumātua, I was also keen to gain the perspectives of someone who was technically trained and had experience within the contemporary dance scene. I drew on feedback from a lecturer in the dance studies programme at The University of Auckland who had expertise in contemporary and ballet dance. This meant that she brought knowledge that my dance partner and I had not yet acquired, and I believed this particular feedback could potentially assist our choreography and performance, and challenge the movement technicalities of dance technique. However, as discussed above, I felt it was also important to share this process with my kaumātua and whānau. This meant that there were times when I wondered if the choices I was making, in relation to gaining feedback within the choreographic process, would be considered culturally appropriate to *tikanga Māori* (correct procedures)^{xi} (Bishop, 1998; Smith, 1999).

Our lecturer's experience and expertise made me expect suggestions and advice about aspects such as the technicalities of our movement, the flow of transitioning into each section and our positioning in the space. Susan Foster (2010)

comments, “[c]ontesting the assumption frequently made by [...] students, among others, that there exists one single standard for technical excellence” (p. 25), I reflect on our experience with our lecturer’s feedback. I was surprised that, after we had shown her the first stage of the duet, she had questions about our performance quality. She questioned the performance quality of our facial expression, eye contact, the relationship between us and even the feeling we were trying to project when in stillness. This was not the type of feedback I had expected.

I was quite worried that the absence of performance presence captured her attention. My dance partner had his own agenda about the choreography being aesthetically pleasing to watch, understood and connected with the story; whereas I had my research agenda. This choreographic process had supposedly contributed towards fostering *ihi* within my performance. If our lecturer could not feel or did not experience *ihi* through the performance, then had this research not achieved what I had set out to do? I shared my concerns with my dance partner, and we came to the conclusion that we were more focused on executing the movements ‘correctly’, in this particular feedback session, because of who our audience was—our contemporary and ballet trained lecturer. We had been rehearsing prior to this feedback session trying to get the exact counts of every movement and every pointed or flexed foot, purely focusing and valuing the aesthetics of our choreography. Kaepler (2003) states that “aesthetic principles are cultural values” (p. 161). Perhaps the assumptions made by my dance partner and I—predetermining what our lecturer would value—did not reflect on any of our Māori cultural values or philosophies of carrying *ihi* through our performance. On reflection, our assumption did not align with the methodology of applying a phenomenological approach to our choreographic process (Barbour, 2005; Fraleigh, 1991; Rothfield, 2005).

Reflecting on this experience, I acknowledge that my presupposed ideas almost defeated the purpose of what a feedback session encompasses. The experience forced my dance partner and I to reflect on our own decisions, shifting our attention to a different way of thinking and preparing for our performance.

However, the experience also raised further concerns. We had created this work, mastered the counts and movement technicalities, but our *ihi* was absent. After the feedback session with our lecturer, I realized that perhaps *ihi* is not something you can always possess within performance? The preparation and practice of concepts and values that stimulate *ihi* prior to this particular

performance were not carried through when we showed the duet to our lecturer. The preparation process when rehearsing for dance technicalities such as counts, movement quality transitions and timing for *Ngā Whaiaipo o te Roto* seemed like a natural instinct and custom of my dance partner and me. Perhaps the value of practicing these dance technicalities prior to performance, could also be given the same respect and value in practicing our Māori cultural practices that stimulate and prepare ourselves as performers in any setting, for any audience?



Photograph 2: Sophie Williams Rotorua, Ohinemutu; footage part of *Ngā Whaiaipo o te roto* film projection, Rotorua, New Zealand

The exploration of feedback has allowed me to look from the perspectives outside the rehearsal process and performance. Drawing on the experience and knowledge of communities such as whānau from Rotorua, The University of Auckland Dance Studies lecturers and students, Tempo Festivals, directors, performers and choreographers can inform and help us reflect on our performance, and use feedback as a valuable practice. The process and practice of feedback prompted the question: Does feedback directly foster ihi within my performance? My response to this is yes, it does. At every feedback session I was able to understand and grasp the performance aspects that make up and project ihi. I became more aware that ihi cannot be taken for granted within performance: I, as a performer, cannot automatically tap into this conscious state of ihi preparation. Time is required to find ways that draw me into this spiritual realm of ihi. However, I also question if ihi can be overworked and forced into a performance,

as a result becoming plastered onto the performance? Exploring different interpretations and perspectives of these two different communities, has provided meanings and understandings to further understand Māori ways of knowing and doing that foster ihi within my performance.

Tempo performance: Engaging practices that foster ihi within contemporary dance theatre contexts

In this research, I explored the practice of particular approaches and tasks with the intention of fostering ihi within my choreographic process. The ideas and experiences of returning to place and environment, and the exchange of diverse conversations around feedback from different audiences, are approaches and tasks that stimulated and contributed to the creative practice and fostering of ihi within my performance.

The complications of what ihi entailed in relation to my performance experience on the first performance night, requires unpacking to better understand what may have been neglected during the preparation for this particular performance. As the performer, co-choreographer and researcher, I had to question my own performance experience and the choreographic process of *Ngā Whaiaipo o te Roto*. I had researched and experimented with these practices that supposedly fostered ihi within my creative practice, so inevitably I felt somewhat heartbroken walking off stage less than satisfied, from the first performance night of the Fresh Cuts show in the Auckland Tempo Dance Festival.

When my dance partner and I had time to reflect on this particular performance, I asked him what was different compared with when we performed the piece to our whānau? He replied, ‘We should have come together and at least done a *karakia*’ (prayer). Undertaking a *karakia* before walking on stage, was not the only way of enabling my dance partner and I to possess or project ihi within our performance. However, after this conversation, I realized that we both had not carried through the values of our Māori knowledge, tikanga and practices. There may have been distractions throughout the day that influenced how particular decisions were made. We had prioritized and worked so hard on carrying these values through during our creative choreographic process, and questioned why these distractions deconstructed our way of preparing and centering ourselves leading up to this particular performance? *Karakia* was not a creative task used in the choreographic process to specifically foster ihi within my performance, but it was a way we used to draw energy, acknowledge our ancestors, whānau and focus

on our surroundings and purpose of the performance. We had neglected to carry this attitude and way of thinking all the way through to walking on stage. The preparation with lighting and projection technical difficulties, on the day, had consumed a lot of our time and thoughts. I could easily allow these factors to be the reasons why we were distracted. However, this is the nature and environment of contemporary dance performance and we did not prioritize or carry our Māori cultural values and ways of preparing, doing and knowing. Distraction and excuses disconnected our performance and ihi on stage and between each other.

Establishing a healthy relationship between my dance partner and I, other Tempo performers and Tempo crew had never been a priority. And, yes, this is a core value—whakawhanaungatanga—that we had upheld within our creative and feedback processes. Taking time to do a karakia—acknowledging tūpuna (ancestors), whānau and *Atua* (ancestor with continuing influence or supernatural being)^{xii}—had been left at the door when we walked into the theatre, despite these values being things we had been taught through our upbringing, discussed and researched throughout the choreographic process (Bishop, 1995; Mane, 2009; Smith, 1999). On reflection, I realized how easy it is to misunderstand or abandon the values of Māori cultural knowledge, whether that be through a different environment or the influences of others.

These Māori ways of doing and knowing mentioned within this study did foster the understanding and meaning of how I as a performer can stimulate ihi. I had practiced, put time into sifting through and connecting experiences and meanings from my Māori cultural heritage and established and made meanings of these approaches. However, the realization of practicing these approaches and tasks led me to believe that, because I had practiced this, ihi would inherently transfer to my performance. The environment and mind set in which I have been conditioned to dancing, stimulating choreography and preparing for performance could in turn influence my decision making when creating movement or preparing for performance.

Through this particular performance I learnt that ihi was a performance presence that could not be inherently expected to be present within my performance. I acknowledge the subjectivity of ihi and this claim could be argued otherwise. One could question my abandonment of practicing Māori cultural concepts leading up to the performance. Perhaps the idea of practicing how to transfer and consider Māori cultural performative knowledge within my performance preparation could enable a better understanding of the procedures

needed when preparing for a performance within a contemporary theatre context (Matthews, 2011; Richards & Ryan, 2004; Royal, 1998; Sharples, 1985; Whitinui, 2008). Through this performance process, I was able to clearly identify that I, as a performer, do not always project, feel or consciously think in an ihi state through my performance. This method of stimulating ihi, off or on stage, is a preparation that perhaps needs to be practiced and carried up to the very moment I walk on stage, and even then ihi is not guaranteed.

The time and effort I put into applying my Māori cultural knowledge into practice, is only a fraction of what is involved. Māori cultural knowledge is described as an embedded way of knowing and doing. This idea can be transferred into Māori contemporary dance by doing simple things such as karakia at the start of the performance, acknowledging ones who have passed, such as our ancestors Hinemoa and Tutanekai (Buckland, 2001; Sharples, 1985; Whitinui, 2008). Throughout this research process an open dialogue between all involved has been a priority. However, this was not evident between my dance partner or I on the day of this particular performance. On reflection I feel that the concept of ihi needs to be carried through the entire choreographic process, inclusive of the performance, maintaining the idea of ihi as part of everyday life.



Photograph 3: Sophie Williams Rotorua, Ohinemutu; footage part of *Ngā Whaiaipo o te roto* film projection, Rotorua, New Zealand

In the second performance I was adamant that the mistakes made on the previous night would not be repeated. My dance partner and I came together and started to talk about who we represent and what *Ngā Whaiaipo o te Roto* entails. I, as a performer, had to consciously shift my method of thinking away from

expecting I was guaranteed ihi within my performance presence, because of the time I put into the choreographic process; the approaches and tasks I used within my process had to be practiced in order to foster ihi. Rulan Tagen (2013), indigenous Native American dance practitioner, researcher and director of *Dancing Earth* gave her keynote address, ‘Dancing earth: The continuum of dance as embodiment of inter-tribal knowledge’, at The Kowhiti Dance Symposium: Atarau—A Beam of Light. Illuminating Indigenous Terrains in Intercultural Dance in 2013. In this keynote she described the notion of recycling knowledge, whether that be ancestral knowledge or cultural performative knowledge. Tagen referred to the ideas and concepts with which we have stimulated movement as a way in which we have recycled knowledge from our ancestors and environmental surroundings.

In relation to Māori indigenous performative knowledge such as ihi, this concept could be likened to how I am transferring my own knowledge that has been given to me by whānau, kaumātua, and tutors from my Kapa Haka group, Tūhourangi Ngāti Wāhiao, into my own contemporary dance practices. I have experienced various contemporary dance technique classes and theatre shows both in University and Aotearoa dance community contexts, which reflect dominant Western ideals. Therefore Māori cultural knowledge and ways of doing, knowing and being Māori become specific ‘practices’ within a contemporary dance environment rather than everyday life, because of the unfamiliarity of the relationship between Māori and contemporary dance. These practices could be understood as contributing towards the performance of *Ngā Whaiaipo o te Roto*. However, through this particular performance process ihi required more than practices during the choreographic process. Identifying and establishing what exactly these practices were that fostered ihi within my performance became a journey itself. Perhaps, within this process I misunderstood what ihi entails and how it is stimulated for performance?

Within a subsequent research project, I discovered the understanding of the concept ihi slightly differed depending on the generation speaking about it (Williams, 2013). Through informal dialogue with whānau members, I found that an older generation appeared to understand ihi as something as part of everyday life, whereas, a younger generation seemed to believe it was also a performance specific trait (Williams, 2013). The older generation was that of my grandmother. She explained that when she cooks for whānau, her ihi and passion comes through preparing and the presentation of the kai. When whānau leave the table full and satisfied she believes this is where she feels most pleased and proud.

One may question whether my grandmother cooking for her whānau is still a performance? I understood my grandmother's example, however, I could not comprehend how ihi could be 'a part of everyday life' until this performance. Māori educationalist, Graham Smith (1992) describes Kaupapa Māori as "the philosophy and practice of being and acting Māori" (p. 1). The approaches that foster ihi become 'practices' within a contemporary dance context. However, within Māori culture, these everyday rituals such as karakia, korero and discussion with whānau are a way of fostering ihi.

Contemporary dance is often based within a Westernised setting. Therefore, transferring Māori cultural knowledge, tasks and approaches is a process that requires more thought and delicacy when integrating the two. Establishing practices that foster ihi within my Māori cultural performance was a process that needed time to find connections with my contemporary dance context and to then transfer this knowledge into my choreographic and performance process.

These performances allowed me to better understand the knowledge that was given to me by various whānau and members of my community in Rotorua. These everyday whānau rituals then became practices to include in preparing and fostering ihi within contemporary dance performance. Perhaps through these practices, drawing on the ideas and concepts of indigenous Māori cultural knowledge will naturally inform my perspective of choreographing, performing and thinking about my own ideas and concepts of Māori culture and contemporary dance.

Sustaining Māori performative knowledge

The practices mentioned within this study offer foundational ideas about how ihi can be stimulated and fostered within performance. The connections made from my experience and participation with my Māori cultural Kapa Haka group, Tūhourangi Ngāti Wāhiao, place and environment and the contribution of feedback from all the research participants within this study, I was able to make meanings and better understand the implications and value of Māori cultural performative knowledge such as ihi. Ihi is complex, and a concept that is not easily definable nor is it necessarily guaranteed within my performance.

From a Kaupapa Māori perspective these practices I have mentioned within this article have not been intensively researched or articulated within a Kapa Haka setting. The procedures present within Māori cultural heritage are practiced religiously; I understood dance, and my creative practice, separate from the

teachings and practices from that of my Kapa Haka group. Delving into Māori cultural concepts from a mindset and environment that draws mainly from Western practices perhaps shifted my understanding. Under these circumstances these approaches and tasks drawn from Māori cultural concepts, became ‘practices’ when transferred into a contemporary setting. I found that I needed to consistently ‘check in’ with whānau and kaumātua about the ethical considerations when drawing on Māori cultural concepts. Therefore, I needed time to connect and understand the value of practices such as karakia, acknowledgement of everyone within the process, and coming together to centre our attention with one another. I questioned Graham Smith’s (1992) notions around ‘being Māori’—in relation to ihi and contemporary dance, I questioned how to ‘be and think Māori’ within an environment where I have been taught and influenced to work through the lens of Western culture.

I wanted to understand how I could think the same way as I do when I am performing with my Kapa Haka group. Furthermore, I questioned whether I should think in the same way in these different locations. The processes and practices within Kapa Haka in relation to Māori cultural values and concepts have been embedded within my upbringing. Stimulating Māori cultural performative concepts such as ihi, become an inherent occurrence when I am in Rotorua, an environment where I have learnt these ways of being and everyone is familiar with them. Perhaps, the process of practicing these approaches, methods, protocols and procedures throughout my childhood, enabled me, as a performer, to connect on a spiritual performance level. The challenge is in transferring this knowledge into a contemporary setting, an environment where I have been taught otherwise and influenced by Western culture and ways of thinking. I believe that, through these ‘practices’, I can work towards allowing myself to consider my Māori culture and shift my way of thinking in contemporary dance.

A conscious shift allowed me to realize that ihi is more complicated than merely practicing methods and approaches in preparation for performance. Ihi’s density in meaning and understanding exceeds more than that of preparation and practice. As a performer, I was able to draw on these particular practices to stimulate and foster ihi within my performance. However, it was through a conscious decision to remove myself from a predominantly Eurocentric way of thinking within contemporary dance that allowed me to return to my Māori cultural way of being, practicing and thinking. This, in turn, transferred into my contemporary dance practices, bringing together cultural concepts and values from

different locations into the theatre, dance studio and genre of contemporary dance.

My Māori cultural heritage and knowledge has to be present within me, not only through my choreographic and performance process but also through my own ideas and concepts within a contemporary setting and dance. Throughout this process it is also significant to mention that ihi is never guaranteed within my performance, even with practicing the approaches and tasks mentioned in this study. This is where I believe my grandmother's understanding of ihi resonates: if ihi is not a part of everyday life, do we risk the idea of ihi not being within every performance? Does my expectation of ihi cloud my understanding of this performance presence?

Furthermore, I suggest that further research could provide a better understanding around the discourses that Māori 'naturally' possess ihi. Further research would enable performers to understand and be more informed about the cultural specificity, ethical considerations and implications of drawing on Māori cultural dynamics and practices within the contemporary performing arts in Aotearoa. Through exploring ihi within my own performance practices, the ideas around certain people possessing a 'natural' performance presence such as ihi, could suggest that it is not a question of who is born with ihi or inherits it. Instead, perhaps it is about who has access to the methods and approaches through which ihi can be sustained. Thus, I have come to understand that ihi is not a trait that is bestowed upon somebody, but a performance trait that is developed through methods and approaches. Through experience, discussion and questioning we can better understand the concept of ihi, and how this may be transferred into contemporary dance in a variety of locations and ways.

References

- Bacon, J. M., & Middelw, V.L. (2011). Articulating choreographic practices, locating the field: An introduction. *Choreographic Practices*, 1(1), 3-19.
- Barbour, K. (2005). Beyond "somatophobia": Phenomenology and movement research in dance. *The Journal of Thematic Dialogue*, 4(1), 35-51.
- Bishop, A.R. (1995). *Collaborative research stories: Whakawhanaungatanga* (Doctoral thesis University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand). Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10523/531>
- Bishop, R. (1996). *Collaborative research stories: Whakawhanaungatanga*. Palmerston North, New Zealand: Dunmore Press.
- Bishop, R. (1998). Freeing ourselves from neo-colonial domination in research: A Māori approach to creating knowledge. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11(2), 199-219.
- Buckland, T. (2001). Dance, authenticity and cultural memory: The politics of embodiment. *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 33, 1-16.

- Foster, S.L. (2010). Dancing bodies an addendum, 2009. *Theater*, 40(1), 25-29.
- Fraleigh, S.L. (1991). A vulnerable glance: Seeing dance through phenomenology. *Dance Research Journal*, 23(1), 11-16.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. London, England: Continuum.
- Kaeppeler, A.L. (2003). An introduction to dance aesthetics. *Yearbook for traditional music*, 35, 153-162.
- Kovach, M. (2009). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations, and contexts*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.
- Mane, J. (2009). Kaupapa Māori: A community research. *MAI Review*, 3(1), 1-9.
- Matthews, N. (2011). The physicality of Māori message transmission—"Ko te tinana, he waka tuku korero". *Junctures: The Journal for Thematic Dialogue*, 3, 9-18.
- McCallum, R. (2011). Māori performance: Marae liminal space and transformation. *Australasian Drama Studies*, 59, 88-103.
- Pakes, A. (2006). Dance's mind-body problem. *Dance Research*, 24(2), 87-104.
- Richards, P., & Ryan, C. (2004). The Aotearoa Traditional Maori Performing Arts Festival 1972-2000. A case study of cultural event maturation. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 2(2), 94-117.
- Rothfield, P. (2005). Differentiating phenomenology and dance. *Topoi*, 24(43-55). DOI 10.1007/s11245-004-4160-z
- Royal, C. (1998). *Te whare tapere: Towards a model for Māori performance art* (Unpublished doctoral thesis). Victoria University, Wellington, New Zealand.
- Shapiro, S.B. (1998). *Dance, power, and difference: Critical and feminist perspectives in dance education*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Sharples, P.R. (1985). *Māori dance forms and their role in contemporary Māori society*. Paper presented at the Dance and Child International Conference, Auckland, New Zealand.
- Smith, G. H. (1992). *Tane-nui-a-rangi's legacy: propping up the sky. Kaupapa Maori as resistance and intervention*. Paper presented at the New Zealand Association for Research in Education. Australia Association for Research in Education Joint Conference, Deakin.University, Australia.
- Smith, G. H. (2005, April). *The problematic of 'indigenous theorizing': A critical reflection*. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Conference, Montreal, Canada.
- Smith, L.T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. New York, NY: St Martins Press.
- Smith, M. L. (2002). Moving self: The thread which bridges dance and theatre. *Research in Dance Education*, 3(2), 123-141.
- Tagen, R. (2013). Dancing earth: The continuum of dance as embodiment of inter-tribal knowledge. Keynote presentation at the Kowhiti Dance Symposium: Atarau - A Beam of Light. Illuminating Indigneous Terrains in Intercultural Dance. Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, New Zealand.
- Teaiwa, K. (2011). 'Choreographing Oceania'. In T. Curtis (Ed.), *Islands as crossroads: Sustaining cultural diversity in small Island developing states* (pp. 143-155). Paris, France: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).
- Whitinui, P. (2008). Kapa Haka counts: Improving participation levels of Māori students in mainstream secondary schools. *MAI Review*, 3, 8.
- Williams, S. (2012). *Ngā Whaiaipo o te Roto - Lovers of the Lake*. In *Fresh* [dance showcase], Tempo Dance Festival, Q Theatre, Auckland, New Zealand, October 2013.
- Williams, S. (2013). *Embodying ihi: 1000 Lovers*. Unpublished Summer Scholarship Research Project. The University of Auckland.
- Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Toronto, Canada: Fernwood.

ⁱ *Tempo Dance Festival* is an annual festival that celebrates dance in all its forms and styles, information regarding Tempo Dance Festival can be found at: <http://www.tempo.co.nz>

ⁱⁱ *Fresh* is an annual performance platform under the umbrella of Tempo Dance Festival for emerging dance artists <http://www.tempo.co.nz/index.php/all-categories/icalrepeat.detail/2014/10/08/19/-/fresh>

ⁱⁱⁱ *Prime* is an annual performance platform under the umbrella of Tempo Dance Festival for choreographers in their prime <http://www.tempo.co.nz/index.php/all-categories/icalrepeat.detail/2014/10/10/23/-/prime>

^{iv} This research drew on my own lived experiences. While there are people mentioned in the study, I have removed names and assured their privacy is respected. Under the philosophy of Kaupapa Māori ethical consideration and care was given to knowledge within this project. Because of the nature of drawing on my lived experiences ethics approval was not needed.

^v *Te Matatini Festival*—a biennial festival between different Kapa Haka groups from New Zealand and Australia competing for ‘the honour of being crowned the best of the best’. <http://www.tematatini.co.nz/>

^{vi} *Wairua*—spirit, soul. Spirit of a person which exists beyond death. It is the non-physical spirit, distinct from the body and the *mauri*. To some, the *wairua* resides in the heart or mind of someone while others believe it is part of the whole person and is not located at any particular part of the body

^{vii} Kaupapa—topic, policy, matter of discussion, plan, agenda, proposal.

^{viii} Kōrero—speak, response, narrative, discussion, conversation, discourse.

^{ix} The comment refers to the 1990s American television drama *Baywatch* about surf lifesavers and beaches.

^x Kaumātua—elders, a Māori-defined and apportioned position.

^{xi} Tikanga—correct procedure, custom, habit, lore, method, manner, rule, way, code, meaning, plan, practice, convention.

^{xii} Atua—ancestor with continuing influence, god, supernatural being, deity, ghost, object of superstitious regard.