



Ka Haka

**Empowering Performance:
Māori and Indigenous
Performance Studies
Symposium**

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Introduction

SHARON MAZER

What's hot in contemporary Māori and Indigenous Performance Studies? How do performances do more than entertain? That is, how can they be seen to have, and to convey, power: social, cultural, political and personal? What power(s) can be attributed to performance, and how can performance be seen as potentially empowering of people(s) in terms that are both affirmational and activist? These are the questions we asked of the artists and academics who will be joining us for *Ka Haka Empowering Performance: Māori and Indigenous Performance Studies Symposium*, hosted by Te Ara Poutama (AUT 8-9 September 2016).

This special issue of *Te Kaharoa* sets the stage by offering participants a platform to begin exploring possible answers in advance of the Symposium. In *Professing Performance*, Shannon Jackson says

In sum, performance is about doing, and it is about seeing; it is about image, embodiment, space, collectivity, and or/orality; it makes community and it breaks community; it repeats endlessly and never repeats; it is intentional and unintentional, innovative, and derivative, more fact and more real. (2004, 15)

Here, we have asked participants to stake a position in a 'conversation' (in Jackson's terms) about the relationship between performance and power in the development of Māori and Indigenous identities, cultures and communities.

There is an enormous, as-yet largely untapped, body of knowledge stored within Māori performance, from the traditional to the contemporary, and from the popular to the

avant-garde. In *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, Mexican-American performance scholar Diana Taylor reminds us that 'Performances function as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity' (2007: 2). For Taylor, 'Part of what performance and performance studies allow us to *do*, then, is take seriously the repertoire of embodied practices as an important system of knowing and transmitting knowledge' (26, italics in original).

Both in this issue and in the Symposium, academics from Auckland University of Technology, from Auckland and Waikato Universities, from San Francisco State University and Regent's University London, and from Te Wānanga o Aotearoa and Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiarangi are sharing their thinking and working their ways into this internationally recognised interdisciplinary frame in order to build our more local understandings of how the performances we create and study serve both as repositories and as sites for transmission of cultural knowledge, and as such can be seen to contribute to Māori and Indigenous development. We hope in this way to provoke distinctive new ideas about the relationship between performance and culture.

What follows are papers and images developed by participants in anticipation of their presentations at the Symposium. Some of the papers have been written formally, others as personal reflections on the performance of power in relation to their own artistic practices. We begin with Robert Pouwhare's passionate reclamation of the power of pūrākau, stories once told by the ancestors to be told again via new media in order to re-activate the connections between the old world and the new. Rosanna Raymond presents an essay in images and words to show how a body – her Polynesian body – might be seen to create a powerful place for convergences: between past and present, between Europe and the Pacific, between art and the academy – for VA'rt. As a dancer, Cathy Livermore describes her vision of the power of ihi, wehi and wana,

awakened and activated in Māori and Indigenous performance. Sophronia Smith tells the story of her tipuna wahine, Te Aitu o Te Rangi, setting her before us as an icon of strength and emblem of the power of performance to stand up to both colonialism and patriarchy. The idea of mana wahine is carried through Maree Sheehan's evocation of two pioneers of Māori popular song: Moana Maniapoto and Hinewehi Mohi.

From the other side of the stage, Dione Joseph reminds us of the power and responsibility assumed by theatre reviewers, whose critical responses – the stories they tell of performances – shape audience perspectives and extend the work done by artists to build communities. Te Rita Papesch and I take sides in the current debate about 'decolonising the stage' by looking at two examples of what might perhaps be called 'syncretic' performances: Kapa Haka on the Te Matatini stage and Free Theatre's *Footprints/Tapuwaē*. Turning to Hollywood, Jani Wilson argues that the power of Cliff Curtis' screen performances can be effectively traced to his experience as a kaihaka, and she proposes new theoretical frameworks that can turn a Māori lens on Western theatre and film. Social and personal histories are intertwined as Eddie Madril traces the history of Hoop Dancing as a hybrid performance practice and makes his case for its power to maintain and celebrate the traditional while engaging successfully with the contemporary world. Valance Smith takes up the challenge of finding new ways to preserve and build upon tradition, in his discussion of his '(trans)indigenous' collaboration with Eddie Madril. Stirring performances of what it means to be young Māori men and women in the 21st century are, Mark Hamilton observes, made from mixing and matching diverse practices and traditions in ways that are simultaneously disciplined and liberating. This issue closes with images from Mika Haka's recent collaborations with young people, whom he calls 'emerging leaders', underscoring his commitment to what Pare Keiha calls 'emancipatory entrepreneurship'.

Seen together, these essays and images do more than set the stage for two days of talks and performances. They represent our commitment to building an ongoing conversation about the power of Māori and Indigenous performance and Performance Studies to recall the past into the present as a way of transforming the future for ourselves, our communities and our world.

In closing, I want to thank Paul Moon for his precise and generous assistance with developing the papers that follow, Pare Keiha for provoking the event and insisting on (near) perfection and the authors who have put their knowledge and experience to the task of articulating the power of performance.

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