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Performing Māori: Kapa Haka on the Stage and on the Ground

Kapa Haka is generally understood as a traditional Māori performing art, having acquired a certain status as a classical form like Bharatnatyam in India or Shakespearean drama in England and its (former) colonies. The Kapa Haka tradition is a post-colonial invention, embodying a repertoire that acts as a medium for preserving and promulgating evolving ideas of contemporary Māori identity even as the original ritual practices it represents appear to recede from living memory. What happens if we consider Kapa Haka also as a “popular entertainment”? Kapa Haka is a performance practice that has become ubiquitous in the New Zealand cultural experience, perhaps to the point where its original politics, and potential to produce deeper social meanings, might be seen to have been diluted over time. But, this article argues, Kapa Haka’s social significance is rooted in the way it sustains the links between past and present and in how its audience “acts back” – that is, in the reciprocity between the group on the stage and the groups on the ground. As a popular entertainment, the Kapa Haka performance plays continuously through the rupture of colonisation, enacting community, communality and interconnectedness – of iwi (tribe), whakapapa (genealogy) and turangawaewae (landedness). Sharon Mazer is an Associate Professor of Theatre and Film Studies at the University of Canterbury (Christchurch, New Zealand) and author of Professional Wrestling: Sport and Spectacle (University Press of Mississippi).

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Kapa Haka has not only become a way for Māori to preserve and develop our language and cultural practices, but just as importantly, through our performances we could speak to each other in ways that remained relatively intact and outside mainstream Pākehā discourse, even though we were no longer on the marae in the way we used to be.¹

A national culture is not a folklore, nor an abstract populism that believes it can discover the people's true nature. It is not made up of the inert dregs of gratuitous actions, that is to say actions which are less and less attached to the ever-present reality of the people. A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence.²

Viewing *Kapa Haka* as a formal performance practice arising at the intersection between ritual, theatre and sport, I have argued elsewhere that Māori performers can be seen as performance ethnographers in their own culture, as such not only conserving but also constantly examining, revising and constructing arguments for Māori performance through the act of performing as Māori.³ Here I want to explore the more popular, populist aspects of *Kapa Haka* as it has moved from the festival stage into other arenas, carried away from its ritual, cultural and political roots and becoming a signal part of New Zealand social identity, experience and practice. In particular, this essay considers what happens when the highly structured and codified performance on the stage is met by relatively *ad hoc* eruptions of reciprocal performances in the audience – that is, when the spectators “act back.” With the proliferation of *Kapa Haka* performances in increasingly diverse contexts, what might have become fixed in the past – in the sense of being frozen, but also in the sense of being corrected – continuously overflows in a most untidy manner into the present.

Kapa Haka is most often seen as the primary form of Māori traditional performance but it is actually an artificially composed formulation of Māori performing arts. It is a collation of performance practices drawn from ritual and other traditional sources, and also from tourist shows and the wider popular culture as a means of recuperating, reclaiming and inculcating Māori cultural identity, of constructing and enacting an “authentic” Māori way of being-through-doing against the pressures of assimilation over generations of colonisation. As such, *Kapa Haka* can be seen as a theatricalisation, not simply of the “native” (as Christopher Balme, following Edward Said, has suggested⁴) but of colonisation itself from the perspective of the colonised, the Māori, who created this new performance practice as a way of maintaining ownership and agency over their traditional forms of expression and also over the evolution of their identity as a post-colonial people.

Kapa Haka is an “invented tradition,”⁵ a contemporary performance practice that collates, codifies and aestheticises a constellation of traditional elements, from ritual to entertainment. It was developed from the elements of Māori protocol, in particular the *powhiri* (ritual of encounter) and the concert party (performances given for guests on a *marae*, the traditional meeting ground for Māori). The individual practices that make up *Kapa Haka* have long histories, but *Kapa Haka* – *kapa* means line or row, and *haka* means dance – in its current

form took centre stage relatively recently, with the first national Māori Performing Arts Festival in Rotorua in 1972. The performance is both theatrical and sporting, a competition for prizes and a demonstration of physical prowess at the same time that it is also a display of artistry in song and dance. Now called *Te Matatini* (meaning, the many faces) and held every two years,⁶ the *Kapa Haka* festival has grown in size, with some 30,000 (mostly Māori) people attending the 2009 event in Tauranga and perhaps as many as 40,000 attending this year in Gisborne (16-20 February 2011). Both are towns in the North Island of New Zealand. But the shape of the performance itself is much the same as it was four decades ago. Teams of thirty to forty men and women each, representing *iwi* (tribes) or *rohe* (tribal areas), compete, one after the other, in tightly structured and timed twenty-five minute performances for prizes based on their mastery of language and for their performance of set pieces: *whakaeke* (entrance), *waiata-a-ringa* (action song), *poi* dance (with balls on string), *moteatea* (chanting), *haka* (men's dance) and *whakawatea* (exit). As a competitive act, the *Kapa Haka* performance is highly regulated, and its rules are debated widely and fiercely during the regional competitions that lead-up to the national event.

At *Te Matatini* there is a strong sense that each *iwi* is performing its identity as *iwi* at the same time that it is performing its definition of what it means to be Māori for everyone else. The bodies and actions of the performers are focused on performative affirmation: "This is who we are, and we know who we are because this is what we do; we act now as our ancestors did before us, moving and singing together in groups, not as individuals, united in spirit and unified in form." Taken as a whole, then, the *Kapa Haka* performance evokes an idealisation of community. Following Victor Turner's discussion of the stages of social drama, it can be argued that *Kapa Haka* performs a kind of redress against the breach caused by colonisation, and in so doing provokes an experience of *communitas* (ideological if not spontaneous). It makes for performers and audiences alike a reification of Māori communality and collective identity.⁷

Kapa Haka and its constituent practices seem to be everywhere these days, often in contexts that are flung farther and farther from the *marae* and well and truly outside Māoridom. It's not just the All Black football team's *haka*, or the tourist shows in Rotorua.⁸ To be a New Zealander, whatever one's background, now means being familiar with the basics of Māori culture, to be able to say "kia ora" (hello) when necessary and, if not to be able to sing and dance along, at least to be able to position oneself appropriately on the sidelines while others perform. Schools across New Zealand, even those without Māori students, have *Kapa Haka* groups that perform at assemblies. Community organisations and civic institutions add *karanga* (call), *haka* (dance) and *waiata* (song) into the start of events such as flower shows, arts festivals and citizenship ceremonies, events that have little to do with Māori culture and with few Māori present. Even at my own university, staff are now regularly invited to *waiata* practices and expected to be ready to perform in periodic *powhiri* (ritual welcome) for new staff and to join the singing at the start of European rituals such as orientations and graduations – although most of us, in avoiding these events as a rule, have managed to go a long time without learning our university's *waiata* as well.

That key aspects of *Kapa Haka* are now being reproduced in the same halls and fields that only a few decades ago were at best indifferent to Māoridom may indeed be a testament to the success of the festival in fulfilling its original objectives and to the resilience of the Māori people. But it may also demonstrate the facility of dominant cultures – in this case, *Pākehā* (i.e., non-Māori, specifically of British descent) – to absorb contrary discourses and, it seems to me, to turn their signal features, their calls to political action, into affirmations of the status quo. These injections of fragments of Māori protocol into the everyday life of non-Māori New Zealanders may retain the aura of ritual or, at least, a kind of ceremonial seriousness, but they are theatrical symbols for the acceptance of biculturalism, a way of publicly performing an embrace of the Treaty of Waitangi, the agreement signed by the British with Māori leaders in 1840 that is considered New Zealand's founding document.⁹ As the contexts in which one experiences *Kapa Haka* multiply, it is *Kapa Haka* that becomes the common ground shared by all New Zealanders and, for non-New Zealanders, comes to stand as a synecdoche for New Zealand culture.

The proliferation of Māori performance and its infiltration into the far reaches of non-Māori daily life, could not have been imagined in 1972, when the first national *Kapa Haka* competition was launched as a platform for preserving and enhancing Māori language and culture through performance. At the time, it was a radical intervention against more than a century of colonisation, a demonstration of the renewed vitality of *te reo* (language) and *tikanga* (cultural knowledge) in the face of legislative and socialised suppression, a performance of redress. Speaking to the “National Association of Loss and Grief Conference” (in Hamilton, 2006) about the Government's move to claim title to the Foreshore and Seabed, the Honourable MP Dr Pita Sharples, who also can be seen performing regularly with his *iwi's Kapa Haka* troupe, Te Roopu Manutaki, noted:

Our origins in Rangiatea represent our collective identity as *tangata whenua* (people of the land). An identity that over the generations perhaps well-meaning missionaries, evangelistic settlers, paternalistic anthropologists, ethnocentric educators, vote-catching politicians and all manner of other players in the colonising project, have sought to suppress, deny, dilute and eradicate. Our language has been smothered almost out of existence. Our traditions and histories have been held up for ridicule. Our *tupuna* (ancestors) have been mocked, have been murdered, have been jailed for contempt, but still our songs are sung.¹⁰

Writing from a less explicitly polemic, *Pākehā*, perspective, historian Michael King describes post World War II New Zealand as a confrontation between two competing worldviews, or “myths”: for Māori a renewed valuing of *whakapapa* and *turangawaewae* as centred on the *marae*, and for the *Pākehā*, “the matching myth was that New Zealand had the best race relations in the world, a verdict *Pakeha* politicians trumpeted at every possible opportunity.”¹¹

Because, especially in the early years, Māori performed almost exclusively for other Māori at *Te Matatini*, two outcomes may be perceived: the one, inside the arena, a performance of reintegration; the other, against the unseen, but still powerful *Pākehā* (non-Māori, European) world beyond, an ongoing recognition of schism.¹² The national festival is essentially a private event held in a public arena, in which outsiders, such as myself, are relatively rare and isolated. Over time, the festival has, almost by default, become one of the primary sites both for reaffirming and for redefining Māori cultural identity through song and dance, but even more importantly, it provides a vital meeting place for a conversation that is set apart from, and if my observations of tourists at the event are any indication, largely unintelligible to, the outside world.

Retrieved from the elements of Māori ritual protocol and traditional performance practices, as part of a larger political movement, *Kapa Haka* is not in itself “ritual performance” – although one might argue that as it stages the revival of Māori language and culture it ritualises Māori resistance to the dominant *Pākehā* culture. That is, *Kapa Haka* in performance at *Te Matatini* is not the same as *powhiri* on the *marae*. It is theatricalised, performed on a stage facing an audience, and because it is performed in competition, with judges scoring each aspect as well as the whole, it is also experienced as sport. The festival stage is a site for affirmation and of challenge: “Take the stage, demonstrate your individual spirit in unity with your peers, show your prowess in song and dance, face the judgment not only of *kaumatua* (elders) but also of *iwi* (tribes) across the country, honour your *iwi* and your *tupuna*, and prove both your own worth and that of the people you represent.”

Still, the *Kapa Haka* stage is not a *marae*, the locus for the ritual of encounter and heart of Māori communal life. It is a proscenium-arched construct modelled on the European stage. The instructions to perform “as-if” on a *marae* echo Stanislavski’s “magic if,” as though the performers were not only entering “as if” onto a *marae* but also, upon entering, becoming “as if” Māori in an older, pre-contact sense. That is, the theatrical mechanism of “as if” offers performers a tangible way to internalise a kind of Māori-ness, invoking in themselves the spirit of their ancestors and the Māori they might have been had the British not landed on their shores. Considered from this perspective, *Kapa Haka*’s Western theatrical frame is not simply an unlucky residue of colonisation. Neither is it a sign of trivialisation, or evidence that the purity of native performance has been irrevocably tainted by the encounter both with European settlers then and with globalisation now. It is part of how the performance of tradition moves effectively between past and present, enabling Māori to find ways of acting in the here and now without losing sight of the past.

Retrieved from the remnants of Māori ritual protocol and traditional performance practices, composed in opposition to colonisation and as a way of re-collectivising those who had lost their vital connection to their tribal homelands after migrating to the cities,¹³ the *Kapa Haka* performance can be seen to be tinged with nostalgia, what Alan Filewod identifies as “a longing for a fantasised authenticity, for a lost historical experience that can only be recovered

through the nation-building projects of popular art and mass politics.”¹⁴ It bears some of the impetus of agit-prop, in Filewod’s terms, proposing “a reconstruction of the real” wherein the broken line between the pre-colonial past and post-colonial present may be reconnected in performance. In the relative privacy of the arena, as group after group of Māori take centre stage over the days of the festival, *Kapa Haka* holds the *Pākehā* world at its margins. It performs a kind of “social totality,” in Michael Warner’s words: its “sense of totality is brought out in speaking of the public, even though to speak of a national public implies that others exist; there must be as many publics as polities, but whenever one is addressed as *the* public, the others are assumed not to matter.”¹⁵ As both medium and message, *Kapa Haka* can be seen as a kind of call, if not to arms then at least to social activism. On the festival stage it is a cultural war fought by performative means. As such, the *Kapa Haka* festival might be seen to create, and for the duration of the event, at least, to sustain a counterpublic, in the terms outlined by Michael Warner, a space “of circulation in which it is hoped that the poesis of scene making will be transformative, not replicative merely.”¹⁶

The performance we see at *Te Matatini* takes two years to come into being. The thirty-five or so groups who compete during the festival are drawn from a series of regional competitions, at which they arrive only after months of meeting to compose, choreograph, design costumes, rehearse and perform in community halls and concert stages around New Zealand. The process is intense, highly argumentative in ways that are productive not only of finely-honed songs and dances but also of collective agreement about the nature of the performance to come, and it is entirely performative. Group members develop and learn the words and moves through a process of mimicry and repetition. The leaders sing a line, the group sings back; the leaders perform a few steps and gestures, the group copies. In effect, this process of rehearsal and performance means that as the group works to remember and to reproduce the song and dance they are preparing to perform, they are also working to recall, to instil into their bodies, and thus to recuperate the cultural traditions along with the history and the identity the performance represents. They are simultaneously practicing and memorialising being Māori.

This is “repertoire”: cultural memory working at a deeply embodied level, recalled, preserved and transmitted in performance, in the way Diana Taylor describes in *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*.¹⁷ But in the Māori context, *Kapa Haka* also acts like the oral tradition known as *whakapapa* – the word means (broadly) genealogy and is conceptually central to Māori identity and culture. Joseph Selwyn Te Rito, citing Sir Apirana Ngata, says that *whakapapa* “exists as a genealogical narrative, a story told layer upon layer, ancestor upon ancestor up to the present day.”¹⁸ There is, in addition, an aspect of *turangawaewae* – the tracing of one’s familial and tribal passage from an ordinary mountain, river, lake or other ground to the place where one now stands – resonant in *Kapa Haka*. *Whakapapa* and *turangawaewae* are both oral traditions, primary components of the *mihi* (greeting) spoken in the early stages of encounters, exchanges or debates. Like *whakapapa* and *turangawaewae*, *Kapa Haka* is a vehicle through which the memory of one’s personal and social history is made present in performance – a

way of carrying knowledge of the then and there into the here and now and, in so doing, ensuring its preservation for future generations. In the years since the first festival, coming together to practice *Kapa Haka* has become another way of practicing tribalism, even if participants no longer maintained active connections to their *iwi*. Indeed, over time, *Kapa Haka* has not only served as a substitute for *iwi* and the practices that formerly served to reinforce *whakapapa* and *turangawaewae*, it has actually played a role in rebuilding and reinforcing the value of these vital components of Māori culture and identity.

To act Māori is not quite the same as to be Māori. The presence of non-Māori on the stage is a reminder of this. But the ethos of *Kapa Haka* is such that one cannot quite be Māori without acting Māori. The terms of the performance are transmitted from one generation of performers to the next, in groups over time, in the same way, and these days often at the same time, that knowledge of *te reo* and *tikanga* are inculcated. The older generation teaches and judges the current crop of performers, while their children watch and mimic and wait their turn. This means that the continuity of language and cultural knowledge becomes part of the larger performance at *Te Matatini*. Everywhere one looks, everyone is performing *Kapa Haka*.

Michael Warner says: “a public [...] unites strangers through participation alone, at least in theory.”¹⁹ There is something of this effect in the *Te Matatini* Māori Performing Arts Festival. But Māori are not strangers to one another. They are *whanau* (family); they recognise each other as distinct *iwi* and *hapu* (tribes and subtribes). The act of *powhiri* – the ritual of encounter that welcomes guests and, for the duration of the engagement, lifts the taboo attached to strangers and binds all comers together under the roof of the *tangata whenua* (hosts) – is enacted formally as the competitors, commentators and judges *et al.* arrive. And then it is reiterated, cited and performed theatrically as each group steps onto the stage. As a result, the performance is, essentially, one of ongoing recognition: “You’re Māori? Me too! Cher bro!” Participants come together as if for a *hui* (a traditional meeting), for a performative debate about the particulars of being Māori then and now, on a ground that has been made, through *powhiri* and through performance, temporarily common.

In competing with each other for prizes, *iwi* replay their historical conflicts, the often brutal wars for land and *mana* (power, status), as performance within the theatrical frame. Each large group at once distinguishes itself: “We are Waikato or Tuhoe or Ngai Tahu, and this is how we do the *haka*,” and affirms its part in the whole. But in this, the performance of the *haka* (a dance that remains explicitly confrontational as a precursor to violent conflict) becomes the vehicle for political expression, as in 2007 when the debate over the Government’s appropriation of the foreshore and seabed was raging.²⁰ The *Kapa Haka* performance also reveals its original constitution as a staged resistance to the after-effects of colonisation and urbanisation.²¹ This is an artificially constructed performance practice, produced according to rules that are modelled in part on the gymnastics competition at the Olympics. This is clearly not what the Waikato or Tuhoe or Ngai Tahu do when they are truly at home. Not really.²²

Critical to the successful *Kapa Haka* performance is the *whakaeke*, the entrance of the team onto the stage “as if onto a *marae*” – that is, each team must demonstrate its knowledge and respect for one of the most critical aspects of Māori protocol, the peaceful encounter of one *iwi* with another. The encounter on the *marae* is direct: the hosts (*tangata whenua*) stand in front of their *wharenui* (main meeting hall) and, as their senior woman calls (*karanga*) and a group sings and dances (*haka powhiri*), the guests (*manuwhiri*) respond with their senior woman calling and the group walking slowly towards their hosts across the grounds until the two groups meet. On the festival stage, each group begins its entrance as *manuwhiri*. Their lead woman *karangas*, and they promenade from stage right to centre, facing stage left as if towards an unseen group of home people who are welcoming them, calling them on; then turning to face forward, they erupt into a full frontal *haka powhiri* – that is, as they turn, they seem to transform themselves from guests to hosts. They literally take to the stage and make it their own, directing the rest of their performance to the spectators (and judges) seated in front of them. From the start, then, the *Kapa Haka* performance explicitly opens itself outwards, from the ritualised encounter between two *iwi* to a confrontation between a group representing an *iwi* and the diverse spectators on the other side of the proscenium arch.

The audience responds in kind. In spite of the festival organisers’ best, repeated efforts to stop them, at the start of each group’s performance, there is a flurry of action on the ground. Small groups – generally identifiable by their matching t-shirts and jackets as the families and friends of the group about to perform – stand up, hit their chests and chant a *haka mihi*, a *haka* of greeting and challenge that halts the performance. It demands mutual recognition, and breaks the fourth wall of the stage from the outside. The audience is not supposed to do this. Its performance of the *haka* is suppressed by the festival organisers because, they say, it disrupts the flow from one group to the next, makes the days that much longer and distracts the performers, who are supposed to be intensely focused on their own actions. But there is more to it, I think.

Appearances to the contrary, in performing their *haka*, the spectators are not actually opposing the group onstage. Rather they are egging their team on: “Do your best! Make us proud! Don’t come home without a trophy!” The *haka* the spectators perform, however, is not quite the same as the *haka* that is performed on stage. It is not a “performance” in the theatrical sense, but rather closer to a “performance” in its original ritual or everyday sense, more communicative than aesthetic. The spectators’ *haka* is a bit rough, ragged even, lacking the sharpness and formal unity that we see on the stage. It is clearly not “composed” or “choreographed.” The words and actions are being pulled from memory in the moment and fuelled by the proximity of the spectators to each other, their immediacy. The performers onstage are in costumes designed to emblematised their *iwi* affiliation and to emphasise their collective unity while being pleasing to the eye; the spectators may be wearing t-shirts in support of their team, but they are dressed in such a way that they wouldn’t look out of place at McDonald’s afterwards.

Because the spectators' *haka* retains its status as action, it carries with it the potential to rupture the represented 'real' of the *haka* onstage, to expose the limits and fallacies of the theatricalised *haka*. In the moment, we see the proscenium arch for what it is: a symbolic boundary, a mark of colonisation. Framed by this arch, teams are expected to perform to, but not with, the audience. The sequence of events on the (European) stage is fixed, and its eloquence is rehearsed, not improvised according to traditional practice as part of the patterned exchange between *tangata whenua* and *manuwhiri*. The *Kapa Haka* performance is thus frozen somewhere between past and present, and this effort by the audience to reach back through the frame reveals the struggle to perform cultural meanings effectively in the present tense.

When closed within its preordained, composed and choreographed framework, the theatricalised performance has a crispness and force that the spectator-performers cannot match. But in making the structure of the performance and its theatricality visible, the spectator-performers remind other spectators (as well as the judges, the commentators, and those watching the televised transmission on Māori TV) of *Kapa Haka's* artifice and its status as a not-quite-post-colonial artform. It is shaped as much by European theatrical and musical traditions (those guitars, and now the ukuleles!²³), and fed by touristic practices, as by the protocols governing encounters on the *marae*. When the audience gets to its feet it is possible to see a spontaneous celebration of the culture's revival in remembrance of what has been (almost) lost.

This is never more apparent than when the members of the audience perform a *haka* (or several) at the end of a team's presentation. The exit from the stage is no longer as codified as it once was. Groups tend to perform their grand finales and then file off upstage left without much fanfare. So when the spectators on the ground begin to perform, they are often looking at the backs of the departing team. The *ad hoc haka* acquires the effect of recalling the team to the stage, as if for an encore, except it is the audience performing while the performers are caught in a kind of limbo, having done with the stage and yet not quite returned to the everyday. What can the performers do? They no longer have script. Their time is up. There is no more performance for them to give, and left standing under the proscenium arch, they are not in a position to follow Māori protocol otherwise. All they can do is wait for it to be over, then walk away. The audience, too, can only carry on so long before the inertia of the event overtakes them as well. For a moment, we have the potential to see the gap between the performance of protocol in *Kapa Haka* and its enactment in everyday life. And then the next group is announced, a different group of spectators rises to challenge, and the cycle begins again.

Still, this song and dance, performed onstage by one group after another and met with repeated performances by the audience (other performances in the arena include groups of retired competitors in the stands who break out in song and dance during lulls in the competition, a hip-hop stage set up behind the foodstalls where young people combine breakdance moves with *haka* and rap with *waiata*) constructs a conversation amongst Māori, for Māori, about being Māori. As it generates a present performance from past traditions, *Kapa Haka*

explicitly enacts and engages its audience in rehearsing ways of dealing with contemporary issues without losing sight of its position in the wider New Zealand society. Set on the stage that has been inherited from the British coloniser, in an arena that is only given over temporarily from its more ordinary use as a rugby ground, the *Kapa Haka* performance is a kind of call and response in the flow of performances from the stage to stands and back again, that in Māori terms might be understood as *utu*, which means (roughly) the performing of reciprocal actions such as, but not limited to, revenge or debate.

In this way, *Kapa Haka* becomes more than a performance of nostalgia. It is a play of recognition, a kind of “you’ve shown me yours, now I’ll show you mine” where the right to stand up and be respected as Māori is always at stake. While most of the *Kapa Haka* performance can be seen as song and dance, a contestation of claims to and celebration of virtuosity for its own sake, there are still moments when the original intentions underlying the form are recalled to the stage and reignited – as when the judges take the stage and, before announcing the winners, offer their own performance of acknowledgement, or when the current hosts hand over the role to the next hosts. And when the winners are announced, the triumph transcends the stage. The audience’s *haka mihi* offers more than congratulations. It promises more than a party after the festival and a determination to win again in two years’ time. It returns the performance to the grounds as something lived day by day, to be carried out, if not into the streets, then back into the homes, to the schools, community halls and even to the *marae* from whence it came. For a moment, or two, the performance of *Kapa Haka* is not a casting back in time, but a looking forward to the next time, to taking the stage once again. It seems almost utopian, this vision of a stadium full of indigenous people, singing and dancing their way past the deprivations of colonisation and, via the magic of a theatricalised restoration of tradition, facing up to globalisation with their localised identities as *tangata whenua* somehow remarkably intact.

And when we, most of us not Māori and not wanting to become Māori (which is not possible, in any case), solemnly take our places in our University’s *powhiri*, when we sing our *waiata* to welcome new staff or congratulate our graduating students, what are we performing? It’s too easy to be sceptical, to see our performances as the final stage of political correctness: either naively attempting to cross the cultural divide, to imbue ourselves with indigenous spirituality, to make ourselves at home while making nice with the natives (more easily done when the natives aren’t present to contradict) or cynically substituting a perfunctory performance for redressive action – a kind of reconciliatory “acting” instead of doing what is right. This is an insidious way to view the proliferation of *Kapa Haka* into our everyday lives and, does not do justice, I know, to the many New Zealanders who have faithfully embraced biculturalism, learning *te reo* and absorbing the lessons of *tikanga* into their contemporary routines. But I wonder always, if I’m stepping into the spotlight to sing, then whom have I pushed into the shadows, and to what effect? My performance only makes sense in the context of *utu*, if my call brings a response, if reciprocity is both the process and the outcome. We are not so far past the post-colonial that we can take such things for granted.

The popularity and proliferation of *Kapa Haka* in the 21st century could not have been imagined when the first groups took to the national stage in 1972. Then the precarious state of Māori language and culture demanded action. What is most remarkable is that a key aspect of that action was theatrical as well as political. The *Kapa Haka* we see now looks as if it has always been this way, an ancient native tradition translated onto the European stage with its original values intact. That it is, instead, an invention wrought from the devastation of colonisation, an enactment of redress, and presented as a celebration of survival should not be forgotten as it crosses the stage and circulates into the main streams of New Zealand culture.

Coda

This essay was initially drafted in the lull between two major earthquakes here in Christchurch, the first on September 4, 2010 and the second, far more damaging quake on February 22, 2011 (three, if one counts the major aftershock on Boxing Day). The revision process has therefore been repeatedly rocked by thousands of aftershocks. The University of Canterbury has been closed since February 22, and we are only now beginning to regain access to our offices and contemplate the re-start of teaching, largely under tents. The biggest step to date towards what is being called “the new normal” has been on Friday March 11, with the return of College of Arts staff to a corner of the otherwise cordoned campus, where we met in a tent called “Big Top Too” for a briefing by the University’s Senior Management Team.

All of this would be unremarkable (except perhaps for the tent) if it were not for the fact that we were welcomed, as if as a matter of course, with a *powhiri*, which was, we were told afterward, being performed to invoke the “spiritual dimensions of the Arts community.” Upon entering the tent, we saw a small group of Māori staff (with one Pacific Islander and a *Pākehā* woman who lectures in Māori) standing as *tangata whenua* in a row behind the lectern, facing the rows of seats. We were greeted, as *manuwhiri*, by the Acting Assistant Vice Chancellor (Māori), who delivered a lengthy *mihī* in *te reo* that, he explained in English later, was thematically centred on “paying tribute to the power and prowess of Ruamoko, the god of earthquakes.” The Head of Aotahi, the School of Māori and Indigenous Studies, followed with a *karakia* (prayer). The ten or so “natives” facing us sang a brief *waiata*, and our Pro Vice Chancellor (a recently arrived American) pressed his nose and forehead in a *hongī* with the AVC (Māori).

The hundred or so of us watching offered nothing in return. We gave no speeches, sang no songs; there was no line-up for each of us to *hongī* our welcomers. No *haka mihī*. In the end, as we sat silent, our Māori colleagues took their seats amongst the rest of us. And then again there we were – Māori and *Pākehā*, *tangata whenua* and *manuwhiri* – not really meeting each other halfway, not quite at home under the big top, but not quite not at home either, waiting together, uneasily, to learn what was in store for us next.

¹ Te Rita Papesch, "Kapa Haka: From the Margins to the Mainstream?", (paper presented at the *New Zealand Postgraduate Conference*, Victoria University, Wellington, 20-21 November 2009).

² Frantz Fanon, "On National Culture," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (NY: Columbia University Press, 1994), 44.

³ See: Sharon Mazer, "Performance: Ethnographer/Tourist/Cannibal," *Australasian Drama Studies* (forthcoming, October 2011). Parts of this essay were first developed in "Acting Back," (paper presented at PSI 13, New York University, November 2007) and in "You Talkin' to Me? Eavesdropping on the Conversation at *Te Matatini* Māori Performing Arts Festival," (paper presented at PSI16, York University and Ontario College of Design, June 2010). This research was supported by a grant from the College of Arts Research Fund (University of Canterbury). My deepest gratitude goes to Te Rita Papesch, who introduced me to *Kapa Haka* many years ago, and who has informed my understanding, and tolerated my limitations, at every stage. My thanks also to Greta Bond whose careful reading at a critical juncture has, I hope, saved me from some of my worst inclinations. The many wobbles – theoretical and intellectual – that remain are fully my own.

⁴ For a discussion of the *haka*, in particular, as a syncretic performance art arising out of colonisation, see: Christopher B. Balme, "Hula and Haka: Performance, Metonymy and Identity Formation in Colonial Hawaii and New Zealand," in *Humanities Research* 3 (1998): 41-58. Also by Balme: *Pacific Performances: Theatricality and Cross-Cultural Encounter in the South Seas* (Basingstoke & NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

⁵ Rustom Bharucha, "Notes on the Invention of Tradition," *Economic and Political Weekly* 24:33 (19 August 1989): 1907-1914. Bharucha developed his ideas about traditional performance following Eric Hobsbawm and Ranger, editors of *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

⁶ For information about *Kapa Haka*, *Te Matatini* and the history of the festival more generally, see www.tematatini.co.nz. The PhD thesis currently being developed by Te Rita Papesch, "Creating a Modern Maori Identity Through Maori Cultural Performance" (Theatre and Film Studies, University of Canterbury), promises to be the first extensive scholarly study of *Kapa Haka* as a performance and cultural practice.

⁷ See: Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications., 1982).

⁸ For a look at the All Blacks performing the *haka* see: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z4LNjNXt1yM>. The *haka*, as a performance of readiness to do battle (initially between *iwi*, or with the British, now between teams) has been linked to New Zealand rugby almost from the beginning of British settlement; *Ka Mate* has been the signature of New Zealand's national team, the All Blacks, from their foundation in the early 20th century and even earlier, in their first incarnation as the New Zealand 'Natives' in the late 19th century. See: http://www.rugbymuseum.co.nz/asp/container_pages/normal_menu/rmArticle.asp?IDID=137 and <http://www.allblacks.com/index.cfm?layout=haka>. For an authoritative history of the *haka*, see: Timoti Kāretu, *Haka! The Dance of a Noble People* (Auckland: Reed Publishers, 1993). Rotorua is generally considered to be the original site for tourism in New Zealand, attracting sightseers from the mid-19th century to its natural wonders and native arts and crafts. The first performances by Māori for tourists – who came from other regions of New Zealand as well as overseas – were presented there in 1870. See, for example: Margaret Werry, "Tourism, Ethnicity and the Performance of New Zealand Nationalism, 1889 – 1914" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2001) and Paul Diamond, *Makereti: Taking Maori to the World* (Auckland: Random House, 2007). For an anthropological perspective on the *haka* in contemporary New Zealand, see: David Murray, "Haka Fracas? The Dialectics of Identity in Discussions of a Contemporary Maori Dance," *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 11:3 (2000): 345-357.

⁹ The Treaty of Waitangi was signed by British and Māori leaders in 1840. For a quick overview of the Treaty's history and significance as New Zealand's "founding document" (often equated with the US Declaration of Independence, for example), see: <http://www.waitangi-tribunal.govt.nz/treaty/>.

¹⁰ Dr Pita Sharples is an educator and activist turned politician, co-founder and co-leader of the Māori Party, and a Member of Parliament for Tamaki Makaurau (Auckland City). He also

performs regularly at *Te Matatini* as a member of Te Roopu Manutaki. See: "Sharples: Loss and Grief Uncensored," *Scoop Independent News*, 16 October 2006, <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PA0610/S00280.htm> (accessed 11 March 2011).

¹¹ Michael King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand* (Auckland: Penguin, 2003), 469-470.

¹² Here I am again relying, obliquely, on Victor Turner's formulation of the stages of social drama (breach, crisis, redress and reconciliation or recognition of schism) in *From Ritual to Theatre*.

¹³ Michael King discusses the effects of urbanisation and the testing of relations between Māori and Pākehā throughout his *History*, in particular in "Return of Mana Maori."

¹⁴ Alan Filewod, "Modernism and Genocide: Citing Minstrelsy in Postcolonial Agitprop," *Modern Drama* 44:1 (Spring 2001): 92.

¹⁵ Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," *Public Culture* 14:1 (2002): 88.

¹⁶ Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics" 49.

¹⁷ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2003).

¹⁸ Joseph Selwyn Te Rito, "Whakapapa: A Framework for Representing Identity," *MAI Review* 2007 (article 2) <http://www.review.mai.ac.nz/index.php/MR/article/viewFile/56/55> (accessed 10 June 2010).

¹⁹ Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics" 56.

²⁰ See: <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PA0610/S00280.htm>.

²¹ See Michael King, *History*: "From the time of World War II, however, most Maori families underwent a third migration, which took its members from small, largely rural communities into the towns and cities of the nation, where the living conventions were defined by Pakeha" (472-3).

²² Here, I am echoing, without necessarily agreeing fully with Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal who, in his 1998 PhD thesis, "Te Whare Tapere: Towards a New Model for Māori Performing Arts" (Dept. of Theatre and Film, Victoria University) and thereafter, argues that the real "traditional" Māori performing arts, must be discovered and developed not on the festival stage but in the *wharenui*, or meeting house, of the *marae*.

²³ Guitars are, of course, a European import but have become so ubiquitous on the *Kapa Haka* stage and elsewhere that they are jokingly referred to as a "traditional instrument"; recently ukuleles have also become popular, often used to provoke laughter in the audience. The music in *Kapa Haka* works between a Māori tonal scale and structure and the European, often taking tunes from popular songs as a starting point for new compositions in Māori. Some of the fun at *Te Matatini* is, as a result, playing "name that tune," as I overheard some older Māori men doing repeatedly in Tauranga (2009): "Oh yes, those great Māori composers, Simon and Garfunkel," and a bit later, "ah...that's that young fella, what was his name, oh yes, Prince!"