

# *Performance: Ethnographer/Tourist/Cannibal*

## *Sharon Mazer*

Our origins in Rangiātea represent our collective identity as tangata whenua. 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 colonizing 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 have been mocked, have been murdered, have been jailed for contempt, but still our songs are sung.<sup>1</sup>

Careful we don't eat you.<sup>2</sup>

My current research traces the interwoven strands of Māori performance practice from Kapa Haka and tourist shows to contemporary dance. Mostly I sit comfortably in the audience or safely on the sidelines, a resolutely non-participant performance ethnographer. But during 'Field Station, New Zealand: Environment/Performance' (PSi9, 2003),<sup>3</sup> I spent three days at Rēhua Marae on my feet, practising the rudiments of Kapa Haka, an experience that included an excursion to the Ko Tāne Māori (Tourist) Experience,<sup>4</sup> where I allowed myself to be goaded onto the stage with other female tourists for a brief lesson in the art of poi twirling.



Poi Dance, Ko Tāne. Photo courtesy Dave Brennan.

*Australasian Drama Studies* (October 2011)

Despite the obvious differences between my engagement in performance ethnography on the marae (traditional meeting place) and in the tourist experience at Ko Tāne and elsewhere, the expectations underlying both were roughly equivalent: in learning, however partially, the basic elements of a Māori performance practice, I was also expected to be delving into its cultural context more deeply than I could be simply by reading books, looking at images or listening to a lecture. In this article, I explore the assumptions underlying performance-based research and participant ethnography. In particular, this article interrogates the belief that doing equals understanding, and that being a doer instead of a watcher somehow repositions the performance scholar on the correct side of the (colonial) power equation. My reflections on the role of the ethnographer in performance have evolved from a number of signal experiences over time, of which three serve as material here and are explored in turn: the three days on Rēhua Marae in 2003; the pōwhiri that was staged at the beginning of the 2008 ADSA Conference in Dunedin; and the 2009 Te Matatini Māori Performing Arts Festival in Tauranga.

In response to a provocation by the then-president of Performance Studies International, Richard Gough, 'Field Station, New Zealand' was staged as an experiment in collaborative fieldwork, presentation and performance – in essence, an investigation into the possibilities and limits of performance ethnography for which the New Zealand landscape and culture served as both laboratory and specimen. Participants were organised into mixed groups – artists and scholars, New Zealanders and international guests – who participated in what we called 'field stations'. Each group spent three days working together on specific topics: Māori Performing Arts; The Land: Whakapapa and Mapping; How Mutton Became Lamb Again; The Ice; Lord of the Rings; Sonic Nowhere; Global Academic Culture; and Tangible Heritage. Challenging the conventions of conference attendance, we invited participants to come without finished papers, to commit their particular knowledges to communal points of investigation, to find innovative ways of presenting their field stations' findings on the last day of the conference and, we hoped as a result, to carry on the conversations begun in the field into further research projects and creative work.

In keeping with the ethos of our experiment, no one was exempt from participation, and so I joined the Māori Performing Arts field station on Rēhua Marae.<sup>5</sup> Led by Taiporoutu Huata, we spent three days in relative isolation on the marae,<sup>6</sup> painstakingly acquiring a small repertoire drawn from the steps and gestures, songs and chants, found in the traditional Māori performing arts practice known as Kapa Haka.<sup>7</sup> Kapa Haka is an artificially composed performance practice, a collation of performance practices drawn from traditional sources, but also from tourist shows and the wider popular culture as a means of recuperating, reclaiming and inculcating Māori cultural

from traditional sources, but also from tourist shows and the wider popular culture as a means of recuperating, reclaiming and inculcating Māori cultural identity, of constructing an ‘authentic’ Māori way of being through doing against the pressures of assimilation over generations of colonisation. The drive toward cultural revival began in the early twentieth century as Māori leaders such as Ta Apirana Ngata and Te Puea Herangi instigated investigations of Māori arts and crafts – performance, including oratory, and also carving and weaving – through the establishment of schools and competitions; as Minister of Native Affairs, Sir Apirana initiated research into traditional performance, creating archives and opportunities for these knowledges and skills to be valued and transmitted from one generation to the next, and Te Puea promoted the performing arts by training her own group, Te Pou o Mangatawhiri, to tour concert parties throughout the North Island.<sup>8</sup> This pattern of reaching into the past, tapping the knowledge and skills of previous generations while creating performances in the present, is especially carried through on the Kapa Haka stage, to the extent that one might argue that Māori performers can be seen as performance ethnographers, if not tourists, in their own culture – that is, not only conserving but also constantly examining, revising and constructing arguments for Māori performance through the act of performing.

Our work at Rēhua culminated in a ferocious argument which we (well, I) had with one of our co-participants. We had just been told by Tai that our contribution to the closing plenary days of the conference would be to perform a brief haka pōwhiri – a dance of welcome – to usher the other returning conference participants from their field stations into the space where we would hui – that is, share the results of our three days in the field with each other. This would not only allow us to demonstrate the performance practice we had learned, but it would also provide us with a tangible experience of the practice in practice. It would bring into focus the steps, gestures and songs we had been attempting to learn, by putting them toward the service for which they were composed.

Tai’s announcement that we – our little band of Māori and non-Māori, scholars and artists from New Zealand and overseas – would perform a haka pōwhiri for our colleagues provoked a remarkable crisis. One of the overseas academics flatly refused to participate in an exercise that would embarrass him in this way. We would be exposed. We would be clumsy. We would look silly. Our colleagues would instantly see how limited our learning had been, how inadequate we had been to the task. Worse, instead of performing an understanding wrought from a deeper, more direct, visceral engagement with Māori cultural performance, we would be disrespectful in performing Māori culture so precariously. We would look like tourists. We would look like wanna-be-natives.

He had a point. In retrospect, he was right on many counts. But still we argued. Following Tai's lead, we had researched the elements of Kapa Haka, both by doing and by watching; therefore this is what we should show our colleagues. In keeping with the way in which they themselves were taught, Tai and his co-leaders had painstakingly demonstrated steps and gestures for us to imitate, and then put those steps and gestures into combinations for us to learn; they had taught us songs orally, by singing a line at a time in Te Reo (Māori language) for us to repeat and repeat and repeat. While they indulged us when we sat down to discuss what we were learning, they also expressed amusement at our insistence on analysis and even discouraged us from taking notes, seeing it as distraction and worse. As Haani Huata has said on other occasions when I get carried away in a discussion of Kapa Haka's politics: 'You think too much' – meaning, I infer, 'you talk too much'. The point for them at this critical juncture was to do, not to talk about doing.<sup>9</sup>

On the one side: somehow just to talk about such an experience of cultural immersion would not, could not, do justice to the work that we had all done. To talk instead of doing would be a cop-out; it would be disrespectful to our leaders. It would turn us back into spectators on the sidelines, cultural voyeurs posing as performance ethnographers. On the other side: we would be no better than the tourists who are enticed onto the stage by their native guides for a brief lesson, thus provoking the kind of laughter that starts from the self-consciousness of not mastering a bit of poi or haka in the moment and becomes a reification of how far 'we' who are civilised have come since we did such things ourselves.

Tai waited until we spun ourselves out. Then he put us back to work, full of the urgency that arises when all of a sudden the stakes are raised, and the performance matters more than when it was just an exercise. And we performed our haka pōwhiri. Yes, interspersed among our Māori leaders and colleagues, we non-Māori were exposed. We looked clumsy and silly, like tourists – or like Theatre academics who had drifted a fair distance from our roots in practice. Our earnest desire to perform well, or at least not to make obvious mistakes, made our lack of mastery even more apparent, and the problematics of our engagement in a cultural performance practice that was not our own were highlighted in ways that made us all tremendously uncomfortable.

But our haka pōwhiri was also an accomplishment. Rough and tentative as it was, it served to welcome our colleagues as they returned from the field. We formally opened the meeting for the next two days' encounter, our hui, and in so doing we imbued our Department's secular studio with the aura of the wharehau (Māori meeting house), setting the stage for the different kind of conversation which we desired for our unconventional conference. For the moment, at least, the doing was all. In retrospect, the experience forced us to take seriously our performance as research, in ways that we could not have

imagined without following through to the performed encounter with our returning colleagues.

But what did we learn about Māori cultural performance? What was the point of the exercise? Or rather, what points can be made of the exercise now that it is sufficiently in the past for the sting of embarrassment to have eased (somewhat)? Obviously, it was impossible for us to become competent in Kapa Haka after only three days on the marae. It could be argued that what we learned was not Kapa Haka; rather, we came to appreciate what it takes to learn Kapa Haka, and we did experience something very much like a *frisson* of ritual energy in the doing – although that could have been just the aftermath of stagefright. We got a taste of learning through practice in a language which we did not understand – nothing written or read, just endless demonstration, imitation and repetition – and the intimacy, the feeling of communality, that that way of learning inculcates. I'd like to think that we began to internalise a sense of the shape of the performance practice – aspects that are hard to inscribe, such as the way that the group breathes through a chant, so that the song never pauses, always presses forward until its end. We had to take the learning on faith, to trust that our leaders were transmitting the knowledge that they had acquired in the same visceral way. We did not understand most of what we were saying and doing, but, as we practised, some phrases were translated, some gestures were opened for examination, and some of the traditional sources for what we were doing were discussed, so that while acting in unison we began to collate ideas about what our performance might mean for us as individuals and in the collective context.

In this and other small ways, we got a sense both of the way in which cultural remembrance – the 'repertoire' of Māoridom, one might say, following Diana Taylor's conceptualisation<sup>10</sup> – is enacted through cultural performance and of the unifying power of Kapa Haka, as each of us found ourselves taking our cues from and striving to be with the others in performing what we could remember and understand of Tai's lessons. For a few minutes, as we sang and danced, we took the part of the tangata whenua of PSi9, a small, diverse but united tribe – hosts who were welcoming our guests to come under our roof and join the hui. Performing alongside Māori, in the way that Māori do, did not convert those of us who were not Māori, but we were functional in our doing; we took the stage as tangata whenua, performing our role according to the cultural codes of our place, and in so doing, we could sense how Māori can come into their roles on the marae and how their iwi-based (tribal) identities might be constructed through practising their particular performance traditions as transmitted from one generation to the next.



Haka, Ko Tāne. Photo courtesy Dave Brennan.

At the same time, as performance ethnographers we were like tourists who had overstayed the usual two hours for a show and a dinner. After all, a key component of a Māori show for tourists is the invitation onto the stage to learn a bit of poi or the haka. The leaders on the tourist stage offer translations, explanations and equivocations as they present their song and dance. They tell us, tourists, that we are coming closer to their world, coming to understand them more directly, making real connections through doing: it's a small world, after all. But unlike tourists, our experience as performance ethnographers at Rēhua was defined by silences, gaps and opacity. We got closer to the 'real' thing on the marae, but perhaps as a result, and with more honesty, we were made sharply aware of how far from it we really were.

The reflective relationship between the ethnographer and the tourist is provocative at the same time as it is troubling.<sup>11</sup> Both the ethnographer and the tourist can be seen ambivalently to approach watching and participating in performance as a way of coming to understand other peoples and other cultures. Dean MacCannell, in his groundbreaking study of *The Tourist*, discusses what he calls 'touristic shame', which he says

is not based on being a tourist but on not being tourist enough, on a failure to see everything the way it 'ought' to be seen. The touristic critique of tourism is based on a desire to go beyond the other 'mere' tourists to a more profound appreciation of society and culture, and it is by no means limited to intellectual

statements. All tourists desire this deeper involvement with society and culture to some degree; it is a basic component of their motivation to travel.<sup>12</sup>

Like the tourist, the contemporary ethnographer – and the performance ethnographer, above all – now travels at some risk of being accused of exploiting and trivialising other peoples and other cultures. Like ethnographers, MacCannell says,

[s]ightseers are motivated by a desire to see life as it is really lived, even to get in with the natives, and, at the same time, they are deprecated for always failing to achieve these goals. The term ‘tourist’ is increasingly used as a derisive label for someone who seems content with his obviously inauthentic experiences.<sup>13</sup>

If the performance ethnographer, in learning a bit of Kapa Haka, risks being seen as a wanna-be-native, then perhaps the tourist twirling a poi on the Ko Tāne stage can be seen as a wanna-be-ethnographer, seeking beyond the surface of the often highly manufactured and explicitly capitalised cultural production for something more authentic, or at least what MacCannell terms the ‘almost authentic experience’.<sup>14</sup>

At another, more recent, local conference, I again got my nose rubbed in the uneasy confluence of performance ethnography and touristic performance, as I found myself sitting in the back row of one of two buses full of Theatre academics – members of the Australasian Association for Theatre, Drama and Performance Studies (ADSA) – about a hundred of us on our way to a marae in Dunedin for our conference’s pōwhiri.<sup>15</sup> A Māori woman sitting in the middle of the bus was reminding us of how we were to act and what we could expect to see enacted, as we clutched our songsheets and practised our songs, including ‘Waltzing Matilda’. At the marae, we were formally welcomed, and after morning tea, Rangimoana Taylor spoke to us of his awakening as a Māori theatre artist. Then we got back on the buses and went back to the conference.

I confess that I felt cranky, and not for the first time. It was *déjà vu* – especially on that bus, where I was thrown back into feeling as I had on the buses that take tourists from their hotels to the dinner shows in Rotorua<sup>16</sup> – only without the jokes. Once again, I was caught in the middle of a group of foreigners being given a taste of Māori culture through a performance of pōwhiri that was supposed to be edifying, but instead was really mystifying. After all, we were not being welcomed into our conference; that had happened the night before, during a cocktail party at Otago University where the conference was actually situated. At the marae, our conference hosts were actually with us, as manuhiri (guests), while the tangata whenua – our hosts – were an elderly couple, who were otherwise not connected with the

conference, and whose names were never given to us. (How odd is that: to be welcomed without being introduced?)

This wasn't 'dial-a-pōwhiri': the genre of pōwhiri summoned up by Pākehā organisations when they want to tick the Treaty box.<sup>17</sup> It was more a 'faux-whiri': a demonstrative performance of pōwhiri staged at the outskirts of an event – in this case, far offsite – to show us how it's done. It was skilful, gracious and touching in its own way, adhering to the basic stages of pōwhiri as I've experienced them on other marae, at other times. Even so, it was not the staged coming together of two distinctly identified groups of people – a way of making ourselves known to each other for the purpose of discussing, in a reciprocal manner, an issue critical to us both.

The kaupapa (purpose) of this pōwhiri was the pōwhiri itself. That is to say, we weren't on the marae to share: for example, to debate the nature and meaning of our work as Theatre academics from different parts of Australasia. We weren't even there to work toward arriving at a mutual understanding of the conference topic – and I do recognise the irony here – 'Turangawaewae, a sense of place'. We were there to be shown Māori culture in a contained, 'safe' format that did not demand much more of us than to follow our scripts, sing our songs and leave our shoes at the door. This performance of pōwhiri was both performative<sup>18</sup> – that is, staged as a production of Māori identity – and a synecdoche – a vital part of Māori culture that was being displayed as a stand-in for the whole. It was no less powerful an experience for being problematic; it was, in fact, a profound experience for many of those present who, acting more like theatre audiences than Theatre academics, seemed all too willing to suspend disbelief.

But not me; oh no. What a wonderful opportunity for me to flex some reflexive conceits about my Māori performance research. Just as I know the difference between professional wrestling and 'real' wrestling, I knew that this wasn't 'real' pōwhiri. We'd paid for this experience as part of our conference fee; this was the 'show' put on primarily for our Australian colleagues ('Waltzing Matilda'!), in which we New Zealanders – perhaps conscious of the dire state of race relations across the ditch – had the opportunity to demonstrate our bicultural vanities ... I mean, virtues. Yes, I am accusing the conference organisers – people I respect, who had worked incredibly hard to make this conference a meaningful experience – of a kind of tokenism, of enacting the sort of well-meaning but unreflective Pākehā nod to Māoridom that has become commonplace in New Zealand, not least at my own university.<sup>19</sup> Staging pōwhiri in non-Māori contexts – and while we were on a marae for the morning, the conference itself had little enough participation by Māori otherwise – has become a way to include Māori on the platform, singing, dancing, even orating, without necessarily making room for them in the conversation that follows.



But what if this rush to judgement on my part is too easy? What if there's something really powerful and promising in the proliferation of pōwhiri, in the way its aspects now are permeated into so many facets of New Zealand culture – well beyond its origins as a Māori ritual of encounter? Perhaps, as a performance researcher, it's somewhat ill-considered for me to denigrate such a significant cultural practice as it moves along the continuum from ritual to theatre.<sup>20</sup> Following on Victor Turner's formulation of social drama, pōwhiri can be seen, in the present as in the past, to stage, contain and reconcile the crisis that erupts when the 'other' arrives at one's doorstep. But like other cultural and ritual practices, pōwhiri structures and protects the encounter between two peoples through posture, gesture and tone in ways that are intrinsically theatrical. That is, while Turner's formulation puts ritual and theatre at opposing ends of a spectrum, it is possible that in pōwhiri – as in many other ritual, cultural and traditional practices – ritual and theatre are more closely aligned than Turner's construct allows. That is, it is possible that what we often experience might not be pōwhiri *per se*, but it is not *not* pōwhiri either.<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps also, following the logic provided by Diana Taylor in her influential book on the performance of cultural memory, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, the diverse stagings of pōwhiri in multiple contexts, like Kapa Haka, can be understood as strategies of remembrance: that is, as a vital piece of the Māori 'repertoire'. From Taylor's perspective, pōwhiri might be viewed as a way of maintaining and extending a continuity of knowledge of past identity through present performance – performative but also restorative. As repertoire, the stages of pōwhiri that we find proliferating in New Zealand culture might then be analysed for the way in which they produce different meanings for the participants, depending on their positions in the continuum of cultural identity and knowledge of tikanga (Māori customs and traditions).

Ritual can be elastic. But how far can it stretch before what might seem to be a testimony to its resilience is actually at breaking point, where a key cultural practice, in breaking with the past, loses its meaning and force in the present? There's no question that the movement of pōwhiri off the marae has shifted the shape of its performance. The rules are being broken by those who are not so culturally aware, or so committed to formal cultural practice. Often, as at the ADSA Conference, we – Māori and non-Māori alike – turn up, but we don't quite know why or how we are to be there. Even so, what if, instead of being simply a sign of the contamination of Māori culture – the ongoing outcome of an inexorable compromise with the European – the spread of pōwhiri and key aspects of its performance can *also* be seen as a tangible sign of the success of efforts by Māori to revive their culture through its practices? After all, pōwhiri is still practised on the marae much as it should be. The proliferation of pōwhiri-esque performances outside the marae can be seen as a parallel development, not a substitute, and in fact,

some of these performance practices – for example, in Kapa Haka – can actually be seen to promote, protect and preserve pōwhiri as a ritual practice.

Rethinking the tourist paradigm in 1992, MacCannell notes: ‘The tourist “consumes countries” and attempts to identify not with fellow tourists but with the sedentary peoples encountered along the way’.<sup>22</sup> It is possible to see the proliferation of theatricalised touristic encounters – from stage shows to living histories – as feeding this desire for identification. The tourist who sits in the audience watching the natives sing and dance stays on what is increasingly seen as the wrong side of the exchange between European/American and native, between coloniser and colonised, between the watcher and the watched. By getting up on the stage and playing along, trying to pick up a bit of the practice – to swing a poi or dance a haka – by imitating the native performers, the tourist attempts to create a level playing field. The visible, risible failure of the tourist to imitate the native’s performance successfully is part of the game: for a moment it elevates the skilled native at the unskilled tourist’s expense, at the same time that it reinscribes, rebinarises and renaturalises the difference between the native and the tourist.



Haka, Ko Tāne. Photo courtesy Dave Brennan.

It’s a no-win situation, both for the tourist and for the performance ethnographer. It is not safe to remain on the sidelines, because, in the current academic vernacular, the position of the watcher is one of power, and it is not good to be powerful in such a way. The tourist keeps trying to surrender difference. As Dean MacCannell observes:

[T]he encounter between tourist and ‘other’ is the scene of a shared Utopian vision of profit without exploitation, logically the final goal of a kind of cannibal economics shared by ex-primitives and postmoderns alike. The desire for profit without exploitation runs so strong, like that for ‘true love,’ that even intellectuals can

trick themselves into finding it where it does not exist; where, in my view, it can never exist.<sup>23</sup>

So, too, the performance ethnographer. But here I come full circle. For how else did we, at Rēhua Marae, learn our little bits of performance except by imitating our native leaders, attempting to eliminate the differences between them and us by performing as they do? What a treat it was to work intimately with Tai, Mihi and Haani for three days, to share meals and stories, to reach across cultural difference until we were all together performing our haka pōwhiri, joined as insiders in welcoming others in from outside. At Rēhua, and in Dunedin, we earnest academics might indeed have tasted a bit of what Jill Dolan calls ‘the utopian performative’; in her terms, we might have ‘felt something of [what] redemption might be like, of what humanism could really mean, of how powerful might be a world in which our commonalities would hail us over our differences’.<sup>24</sup>

But such utopian moments are fleeting: verging on the delusional, in my experience. The instant I feel that I have become adept in negotiating across the cultural divide, I am, inevitably, confronted with a convincing comeuppance – never more so than when I attended the 2009 national Kapa Haka festival, now called Te Matatini.<sup>25</sup> Te Matatini is extraordinary for the way it brings together some 30,000 or more Māori participants from across New Zealand to perform and to witness the vitality of Māori culture, the survival of reo and tikanga post-colonisation, in and through performance – despite globalisation. On the stage we see, one after another, thirty-six groups of thirty to forty performers each, representing iwi and other affiliations in competition.<sup>26</sup> Each group performs its own tightly choreographed version of the prescribed programme, each demonstrating virtuosity in song and dance at the same time that, through that song and dance, it communicates its particular take on contemporary social issues facing Māori. That is, at Te Matatini, Kapa Haka becomes both the medium and the message for a deeply felt, intra-community debate about what it is to be Māori in the twenty-first century. That the number of non-Māori in attendance is small, and that the event makes few concessions to outsiders, heightens the sense that what is going on is a highly privileged, almost private, event, deliberately set against, but away from, the dominant New Zealand culture.

To say that I understand only a tiny bit of what’s going on during the festival is an understatement, despite the time that I have spent attending performances and practices, talking with practitioners and reading what’s available, and even taking into account the many explanations that I’ve heard at touristic performances. What fascinates me is the pattern of engagement on the stage and the interaction between the performers and the audience, especially as the latter performs in response. It is precisely because I am so far an outsider to this intense community conversation that I feel that I can

observe the dynamics of cultural performance, its theatricalities and exchanges in actions that are beyond words. Besides, I go to Te Matatini as an honoured guest, invited by Te Rita Papesch, herself a prominent performer, commentator and judge, as well as a PhD candidate working with me to weld her deep knowledge of Kapa Haka into academic form. While she is locked into the judges' booth, Te Rita ensures that I am looked after by her family and colleagues, who are vigilant, especially at Te Matatini, in trying to make me feel welcome, to keep me informed and out of trouble – for, of course, it's in trouble that I find myself, often, the minute I manage to elude their well-meaning surveillance.

Deep into the second day of the 2009 festival, I wandered off in search of a souvenir in the tents set up just outside the arena: a Te Matatini t-shirt for my daughter. Purchasing a bowl of Chinese rice at one of the food stalls, I sat down at the nearest large table, where two Māori women were also seated and, since the conversation was in English, commenced to eavesdrop. When one complained about the number of tourists staying at the same backpackers' lodge, I piped up 'that's because this year Te Matatini has been advertising itself overseas as an authentic experience for tourists', or words to that effect. A moment's silence. 'Is that what you are?', the second woman asked. 'No', I chirped, 'I'm here from Christchurch, as a guest of one of the judges, and this is part of my ongoing performance research'. A longer silence, as the hostility deepened. Then a question about the merits of the various Kapa Haka groups that was so complex that, not only could I venture no response, but I cannot even reproduce it here without calling further humiliation on myself.

Feeling thoroughly mana munched,<sup>27</sup> I retreated back to the stands, but, unwilling to admit defeat, I did not return to my minders. Instead, I found an isolated seat at the end of an empty row being saved by a Māori woman who appeared to be fully absorbed in the performance onstage. While I was still calming down, two non-Māori women – obviously tourists – climbed up the stairs and stood in front of me. 'I'm sorry but you will need to move', I said to them. Flustered, one moved immediately, apologising in an American accent, but the other stayed in my way. 'No, really', I said after about five minutes, 'I cannot see the stage'. 'I'm moving! I'm moving!', the remaining woman shouted, clearly at her limit. 'And so politely too', I shot back – not so nicely, still aggrieved by my experience outside the stands and probably displacing onto this woman who clearly was out of her depth my own anxiety at being out of mine. She moved, fleeing from me much as I had fled from my lunch companions.

Soon thereafter one of my minders called to offer me a ride back to the motel, inspiring an internal debate: had I had enough of being exposed to my own inadequacies? I stayed put, telling my self-conscious performance ethnographer self that there was no point in having come all this way if I

wasn't going to see the full show. At this point, something almost miraculous happened. The woman sitting down the row from me invited me to sit with her. She introduced herself as Kahutoi Te Kanawa and, upon hearing of my interest in Kapa Haka as a performance scholar, explained her own perspective as a weaver and her desire to see Kapa Haka employ more traditional Māori weaving patterns – circular and over-locking, instead of the loom and shuttlecock choreography that is prevalent: a brilliant insight, for which I remain as grateful as I am for the safe haven that she offered. And when her friends, Ranui Ngarimu and Waana Davis – also prominent weavers and artists, as I discovered later – returned to their seats, we settled into a (relatively) companionate conversation for the rest of the day, primarily revolving around the construction of the costumes.<sup>28</sup>

In the space of a few hours, my position at Te Matatini had shifted repeatedly and dramatically. In the end, I was not a tourist, but I was not *not* a tourist. Instead, from one moment to the next, I was almost continuously reminded that who I was to be watching (and talking) was contingent on those around me, that my understanding of myself as a performance ethnographer – not necessarily expert in Kapa Haka, but fluent in Performance Studies and as such an informed observer who could remain safely, but thoughtfully, on the sidelines – was largely a self-produced fantasy that only worked as long as I sat quietly on the sidelines, and perhaps not even then.

Maybe ethnographers shouldn't dance. Getting onstage and performing alongside the native does not necessarily redress the imbalance of power or enable the scholar to transcend cultural differences. To stand close to the objects of our performance studies does not mean that we do not objectify them, will not need to objectify them in order to perform effective critical analyses. In fact, it is possible that taking the stage alongside the native can be seen literally as a performative act of recolonisation. First we claim their land, and now we intrude into the symbolic grounds on which they perform. We upstage them, and not gracefully. At best, during PSi9, as we came to perform our dance of welcome, we discovered for ourselves its potential power and tasted its grace. But our efforts at identification taught us instead about our differences, from each other as well as from our Māori leaders, in a way that was jumbled up, less coherent than if we had stayed on the sidelines – or out of the room – while they performed. In attempting to imitate them, that is, we might be seen to have pulled them towards us, eroded the integrity of their performance just as we denied ourselves in the act. While attempting to perform understanding, what we also demonstrated was its lack.

Doing in itself does not equal understanding. And even watching, I have learnt, can be a form of doing. In fact, often what passes for performance as research looks, from the outside, as though the scholar has stepped into the frame, eliminated the distance between self and other, in order to avoid

looking at the self and the other critically. It's seductive: to get swept up in the pleasure of doing, to see oneself expressing commonality with the other by doing as much as the other – or more. I don't have to sit on the sidelines trying to figure out where to look safely. Look at me, I can haka pōwhiri! But what is often produced as a result is a kind of stasis, in which we can only praise the scholar for making the effort to be nice.

To say that the ethnographer is like the tourist, and the tourist is like the cannibal, might seem like an excessive exercise in analogising. But, in theory at least, what the cannibal is seen to do – in particular, as Māori speak of their own cannibal history – is to consume the other into the self as a way of incorporating the mana and aura of the other, of embracing as well as effacing. In *From Communion to Cannibalism: An Anatomy of Metaphors of Incorporation*, Maggie Kilgour says:

Most acts of incorporation are extremely ambivalent, taking place between two extremes whose meeting seems very dangerous: a desire for the most intimate possible identification with another and a desire for total autonomy and control over others who are treated therefore as food, so that all exchanges are reduced to the alternatives of 'eat or be eaten'.<sup>29</sup>

Maybe as performance scholars we should acknowledge rather than deny our cannibal impulses. In Kilgour's words: 'While most of us would agree with Ovid's Pythagoras that eating people is wrong, like Ovid, we are not quite sure how to avoid it'.<sup>30</sup> Performing performance as research at its best is an ambivalent, dangerous, fraught exercise. Done truthfully, with a measure of self-awareness and critical analysis, we might be able to act as actors, remain the agents of our own experiences and recognise the otherness of the others, respecting their agency in the doing. Remaining conscious of the implications of our acts of consumption – whether from the sidelines or on the stage – might provide us with a productive new platform for discussing and coming to understand cultures in performance. This means that we may expose the less savoury aspects of ourselves to the air for analysis and criticism, but to think that we can make ourselves invisible in our explorations of culture in performance is less savoury still.

\* \* \*

*This article began as a paper for the American Society for Theatre Research Working Group meeting on Performance as Research, in November 2007. It is part of a larger, wider-ranging project on Māori performance, for which the College of Arts Research Committee and Theatre and Film Studies at the University of Canterbury have provided funding and other support. The discussion of pōwhiri here was originally presented as part of a joint paper*

with Te Rita Papesch, entitled 'Māori Performance/Cultural Performance: Stages of Pōwhiri', at the Ngā Kete a Rēhua Inaugural Māori Research Symposium (2008). I owe thanks to Te Rita Papesch for introducing me to Kapa Haka many years ago and also to Haani and Tai Huata for allowing me to attend practices and for teaching me just enough to know how far I would have to travel to get anywhere. Thanks also to Will Peterson for encouraging me in the expansion of this paper, and to my two anonymous readers. I further acknowledge the contributions of Lisa Wolford and Kris Salata. All errors of fact and understanding, especially in presenting and interpreting aspects of Māori performance, are wholly my own.

#### NOTES

- 1 Pita Sharples, 'Loss and Grief – Uncensored', text of speech given to the National Association of Loss and Grief Conference (Hamilton Gardens). In *Scoop Independent News* (16 October 2006). Online: <<http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/print.html?path=PA0610/S00280.htm>> (accessed 14 March 2011). Rangiātea (often called the 'Māori Cathedral') was one of the earliest sites for Christian services in New Zealand (see <<http://www.rangiatea.maori.nz>>). Tangata whenua is translated as 'people of the land' and is used widely to refer to Māori as the first peoples of New Zealand. Tupuna (a variant on tipuna) means ancestors.
- 2 Whispered in my ear by a Māori acquaintance while a guide at Tamaki Village (Rotorua) was explaining the hangi – a pit used to roast pig along with other meats and vegetables – to about 200 tourists (November 2004).
- 3 'Field Station, New Zealand: Environment/Performance', the ninth annual conference of Performance Studies International, organised by Peter Falkenberg and Sharon Mazer, under the auspices of Te Puna Toi (Performance Research Project NZ) and the Department of Theatre and Film Studies at the University of Canterbury (Christchurch, New Zealand, 7–12 April 2003).
- 4 Ko Tāne is now called the Ko Tāne Living Māori Village Experience (<<http://www.kotane.co.nz/>>).
- 5 Rēhua Marae is situated in a residential area (St Albans), just a few blocks outside the Christchurch central business district, and as such is regularly used for meetings and events by Māori and non-Māori alike. For a discussion of the history and significance of Rēhua Marae, as recounted by Dr Terry Ryan, see: <<http://christchurchcitylibraries.com/TiKoukaWhenua/RehuaMarae/>>.
- 6 While none of us slept on the marae, as is customary with hui (meetings) and extended wānanga (educational workshops, retreats, etc.), we did not have much interaction with the other groups until we reconvened at the other end of the field station phase of the conference.
- 7 For information about Kapa Haka, Te Matatini and the history of the festival more generally, see <[www.tematatini.co.nz](http://www.tematatini.co.nz)>, and also Te Rita Papesch, 'Kapa Haka', in Malcolm Mulholland, ed., *State of the Māori Nation: Twenty-first Century Issues in Aotearoa* (Auckland: Reed Publications, 2006) 33–9.
- 8 Michael King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 2003) 338–40.
- 9 It should be noted here that many Kapa Haka performers, my tutors included, are academics in their own right, who have begun to build their own field of performance scholarship. Some fifty or so of these Māori academics came together as academics for the first time in 2010, to discuss developments at a

- conference I was privileged to attend as the only non-Māori academic: ‘A Symposium of the Māori Performing Arts’, hosted by Auckland University of Technology (2–4 October 2010).
- 10 Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003).
  - 11 See, for example, James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1997).
  - 12 Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley & LA: University of California Press, 1999) 10.
  - 13 Dean MacCannell, ‘Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings’, in *The American Journal of Sociology* 79.3 (November 1973): 592. See also Christopher B. Balme, ‘Staging the Pacific: Framing Authenticity in Performances for Tourists at the Polynesian Cultural Center’, in *Theatre Journal* 50.1 (March 1998): 53–70.
  - 14 MacCannell, ‘Staged Authenticity’ 596.
  - 15 *Turangawaewae: A Sense of Place*. ADSA Conference, hosted by the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand, 30 June – 3 July 2008.
  - 16 Rotorua is a popular tourist spot on the North Island, generally considered to be the original site for tourism in New Zealand, attracting sightseers from the mid-nineteenth century to its natural wonders and native arts and crafts. The first performances by Māori for tourists – from other regions of New Zealand as well as overseas – were presented there in 1870.
  - 17 The Treaty of Waitangi was signed by British and Māori leaders in 1840. For an overview of its history and significance as New Zealand’s ‘founding document’, and the way it has served as a vehicle for restoration and the development of biculturalism in post-colonial New Zealand, see: <<http://www.waitangi-tribunal.govt.nz/treaty/>>.
  - 18 In the sense provided, for example, by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990).
  - 19 For example, my university, having come to biculturalism fairly recently, has now instituted semi-regular pōwhiri for new staff and inserts bits and pieces of pōwhiri – a karakia here, a waiata there – in public events ranging from graduations to our recent return to campus after the earthquake on 22 February 2011 shut it down. The proliferation of aspects of Kapa Haka, and especially of pōwhiri in non-Māori contexts, is something I discuss at length in ‘Performing Māori: Kapa Haka on the Stage and on the Ground’, *Popular Entertainment Studies* (March 2011).
  - 20 See Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 2001).
  - 21 Here I am using Richard Schechner’s now well-known formulation of the paradox of performance in *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985) and elsewhere.
  - 22 Dean MacCannell, *Empty Meeting Grounds: The Tourist Papers* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992) 4.
  - 23 *Ibid* 28.
  - 24 Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope in the Theater* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005) 8.
  - 25 See <<http://www.tematātini.co.nz/>>.
  - 26 There were thirty-six groups in 2009; in 2011, there were forty-two groups and perhaps as many as 40,000 people attending.



- 27 To 'mana munch' is to claim the authority of the native – whether or not one is a native – as a way of foreclosing on further discussion; it is a native version of the silencing that capitalises on political correctness, in my experience.
- 28 Just how accomplished and prominent these women are was revealed to me only later and knowing their status has made their generosity even more profound in retrospect. Their affiliations are multiple, but Kahutoi Te Kanawa is Senior Lecturer at Te Tomu School of Māori, Pacific and Indigenous Studies, University of Otago; Ranui Ngarimu is a Senior Adjunct Fellow in Aotahi School of Māori and Indigenous Studies, University of Canterbury; and Waana Davis is Chair of Toi Māori Aotearoa, Māori Arts New Zealand.
- 29 Maggie Kilgour, *From Communion to Cannibalism: An Anatomy of Metaphors of Incorporation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) 17–18.
- 30 *Ibid* 248.