

## Editorial

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Welcome to the third volume of *Dance Research Aotearoa*. As Special Editor for four papers in this volume, I am honoured to be a part of a process that has developed papers presented at the academic symposium, Atarau—A Beam of Light: Illuminating Indigenous Terrains of Intercultural Dance, November 6-7, 2013, for academic publication. The academic symposium was located at Whitireia Performance Centre and Te Papa Tongarewa. The symposium ran as part of Kōwhiti's Atarau Festival of Contemporary Indigenous Dance, organised by Tanemahuta Gray, Merenia Gray and Jenny Stevenson, who comprise Kōwhiti Productions Ltd., and in partnership with the Embassy of the United States of America, Creative New Zealand and Wellington City Council. Festival performances at The Opera House, Wellington included Dancing Earth (Santa Fe, USA), Baiwa Dance Company (Torres Strait Islands, Australia) and leading Māori choreographers including Tanemahuta Gray, Merenia Gray and Louise Potiki Bryant.

Atarau, the academic symposium, set out to examine, “the state of Māori and Indigenous Contemporary Dance in the 21st Century” (Atarau abstracts booklet, 2013, p. 1). Bringing together artists and academics from New Zealand, Australia, the United States of America, and the UK in order to explore ‘first nation’ cultures, it was the first time that Kōwhiti had included an academic dimension to their festival. Combining performance, workshops alongside academic presentations provided this inaugural event with a valuable collection of worldviews on innovation in indigenous dance in the 21st century. The aim was to be inclusive of a broad range of researchers in providing space and time in which practitioners and academics (some of whom are also practitioners) could meet, collide, overlap, discuss and enjoy each other’s differences and similarities. Academics, dancers, choreographers, educators, theatre critics, indigenous community leaders, festival organisers and interested public from Aotearoa, New Zealand and overseas

comprised the delegates. Kōwhiti invited Dr Peter Cleave and me (Dr Linda Ashley) to convene the symposium event. We agreed that it was an honour to be working with Kōwhiti and pushing the boundaries of how we come to know and value, in both theory and practice, the terrains of 21st century indigenous dance.

The four articles in this volume of *Dance Research Aotearoa* that arose from the academic symposium by no means represent the rich cultural range of the 19 papers and performance presentations given at the symposium. Nevertheless, the four articles do give a sense of how dance theatre, education, practice-led research and academic inquiry tread overlapping terrains as they go about exploring intercultural indigenous contemporary dance in the 21st century. Reflecting on cultural practices and theories from the past, as signposts that can inform our current and future dance research, are a commonality of these four articles.

Professor of Education at the University of Canterbury, Janinka Greenwood's article "When a ngarara bit the taniwha's tail: Education, the arts and the third space", reflects on a mid-seventies arts education programme and finds current relevance that could inform pedagogy in the arts in Aotearoa. The programme was run for over two decades by founder Arnold Manaaki Wilson and re-evaluated the role of Māori knowledge, values and arts in educational systems, basing workshops in Māori communities on marae throughout the country. Recalling key features of the project, Greenwood explores the ongoing challenges faced by arts and dance educators in Aotearoa. She gives due consideration to 'waking the taniwha', that is Wilson's model of community based, experiential learning, and developing its potential to be a pedagogical prototype.

In the article "Dance and place: Body Weather, globalisation and Aotearoa", dance-artist Miriam Marler examines the 'Body Weather' philosophy that she experienced at Min Tanaka's Body and Environment workshop in Japan in 2007. Exploring the relationship between dance and place, Marler traces threads of Body Weather in Aotearoa, New Zealand contemporary dance and makes some suggestions about the implications for its practice in Aotearoa. As she explores the struggles of locating her identity via a fusion of dance styles from different cultures "a deeper sense of home in my body and in the landscape in which I was born" (Marler, 2015, p.39 [in this volume]) unfolds through her dance practice.

Also from a practice-led research perspective, doctoral student, contemporary dance and kapa haka practitioner Sophie Williams, explores her interest in how indigenous traditions might be sustained by employing Māori

concepts of performance in Western contemporary dance practices. In “Sustaining Māori indigenous performative knowledge: Engaging practices that foster ihi within a contemporary dance theatre context”, Williams recalls and reflects on her experiences of choreographing and performing a duet called *Ngā Whaiaipo o te Roto - Lovers of the Lake* (Williams, 2012). She searches out how “the way in which I make decisions when integrating Western ideals and Māori cultural values becomes a heavy responsibility on my shoulders” (Williams, 2015, p.10 [in this volume]). At the Atarau symposium, her presentation included live performance, as did other artist researchers.

My own article “Dancing in different tongues: A surplus of meaning in illuminating indigenous terrains of contemporary dance”, challenges an assumption that seemed to underpin the Atarau symposium—that dance is a universal language. I am intent on highlighting how different indigenous dance terrains can operate not as one but as many different languages. In interpreting two indigenous contemporary dances created in New Zealand, I find contemporary relevance in applying the semiotics of C.S. Peirce; a theoretical area, albeit from the 19th century, that I feel is under-explored and holds great potential as a philosophical underpinning for illuminating and valuing intercultural indigenous contemporary dance. Pinning down what indigenous contemporary dance actually consists of was much discussed by Atarau delegates. While I offer no quick solution, I am convinced that illuminating understanding of 21st century intercultural, indigenous contemporary dance requires familiarity with more than one set of cultural values, language and belief system.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Dr Karen Barbour for her invitation to act as Special Editor for this issue of *Dance Research Aotearoa*.

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Alongside the four papers arising from the academic symposium Atarau—A Beam of Light: Illuminating Indigenous Terrains of Intercultural Dance, this volume contains a ‘looking back’ feature article and two responses. The feature begins with a reprint of an article by senior Māori contemporary dance practitioner Stephen Bradshaw, originally published in 2002—“Contemporary dance: A Māori perspective” (part one). Thirteen years ago, Bradshaw offered this valuable overview of the history of Māori contemporary dance from 1980 to 2000, posed a

range of questions about the use of terms such as ‘traditional’ and ‘contemporary’, and considered what it might mean to be a Māori choreographer.

Bradshaw states, “Tangata Māori have always been contemporary and creative. Art and dance help to form the core of our culture. In a cultural context, I don’t believe the term ‘contemporary’ has much importance or relevance” (2015, p. 78 [in this volume]). Further reviewing historical developments, Bradshaw outlined a number of inter-cultural events and exchanges, examining challenges faced by participants and indicating some of the actions arising from these exchanges. This discussion of intercultural exchange resonates with Janinka Greenwood’s considerations (in this volume), of a historical arts education programme with Arnold Manaaki Wilson and the learning such examples may offer for current contexts.

As a tertiary dance educator myself, for many years Bradshaw’s (2002) article has been the only published academic article suitable as an introduction to issues in Māori contemporary dance. Consequently I have required my undergraduate students to read and discuss this article as they engage with the performances of companies such as Atamira Dance Company<sup>i</sup> and Okareka Dance Company<sup>ii</sup>, and the many acclaimed Māori contemporary dance choreographers sharing their work in Aotearoa and beyond.

Responding generously to my editorial request to reprint his article, Bradshaw offers an update for this volume of *Dance Research Aotearoa*, revisiting some of the developments since 2002 and focussing on strategies for fostering Māori contemporary choreographers and practices, particularly strategies implemented through the work of Te Ope o Rehua<sup>iii</sup> (in ‘Contemporary dance: A Māori perspective (part two) in this volume’). In a sense then, this ‘looking back’ feature provides a broader context within which the recent initiatives of Kōwhiti Productions Ltd., and the Atarau academic symposium reside. In reflection, Bradshaw offers an extended understanding of Māori contemporary dance and practice that may serve to further discussion for future generations of dance students and choreographers, as his earlier article has done. In particular, Bradshaw suggests a focus on the actual artists rather than generic labels, and artists’ own self-definitions across the continuum of time, and embracing movement physicality and vocabulary across “aspects from *Te Ao Tawhito* (ancient), *Te Ao Hurihuri* (colonisation) and *Te Ao Hou* (contemporary)” (Bradshaw, 2015, p. 91 [in this volume], [italics added]).

To some extent, Bradshaw's understandings resonate with the work of visual arts researcher Robert Jahnke (2011), who engages with questions about the labelling of contemporary Māori visual art and the desire he expresses to advocate for artists' self-autonomy and self-expression. Challenging essentialist definitions, Jahnke suggests:

a more liberal paradigm of Māori art that accounts for multiple practices of artists of Māori ethnicity. It is one where three major currents in Māori art exist in the 21st century—*Toi tuturu*: Customary Māori art that maintains or mimics traditional visual referents; *Toi whakawhiti*: trans-customary Māori art in which the traditional referents are transformed through simplification or isolation from traditional art contexts; and *Toi rereke*: Non-customary Māori art where traditional visual referents are minimal or nonexistent (Jahnke, 2011, p. 135, [italics added])

Illustrating his argument with reference to the work of visual artists Maureen Lander, Dianne Prince and Michael Parekowhai, Jahnke's (2011) comments may resonate, or perhaps provoke contrasting understandings for Māori contemporary dance artists. Perhaps, instead of considering time frames in seeking to understand Māori contemporary dance, another option might be to consider these 21st century currents within which dance artists represent themselves. Again, as tertiary dance educator, I have been interested to observe my students' responses to their own work and to the work of Atamira Dance Company, Okareka Dance Company and other Māori contemporary dance artists, in relation to these currents—*toi tutūru*, *toi whakawhiti* and *toi rerekē* (Jahnke, 2011).

Alongside Bradshaw's updated response to his own 2002 article, acclaimed contemporary dance artist Jack Gray offers his personal perspective in a narrative essay and reflects on the challenges of what being a *kaitiaki* (caretaker or guardian) means to him as a dancer and choreographer (in this volume). Gray advocates strongly for self-definition and self-determination as an artist, drawing on the broader context of indigenous activism and land issues, and commenting on the way in which he utilises social media as a context for activism and education about Māori contemporary dance.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.atamiradance.co.nz/about/>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.okareka.com/>

<sup>iii</sup> Te Ope o Rehua: <http://contemporarymaoridance.com/>