

RESEARCHING COLLABORATIVE ARTISTIC PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT *In this paper we offer discussion of collaboration in artistic practice, based on a two-and-a-half-year-long research project undertaken by artists/researchers at the University of Waikato, working in collaboration with local performers. Grounded in kaupapa Māori¹, feminist and phenomenological research methodologies, this research project provided a context for exploring existing understandings of collaborative processes in the arts, and for immersion in and development of alternative processes across artistic mediums and cultures. Drawing on contemporary understandings of cross-cultural and intercultural practices in the arts, we discuss how shared conceptualisation of ideas, immersion in different creative processes, personal reflection and development over extended periods of time were found to foster collaboration. In this paper we will explore the value and nature of relationships within collaboration, and discuss how self-determination or tino rangatiratanga² might be maintained within the context of collaborative performance art.*

KEYWORDS

Arts research, Collaboration, Cross-cultural, Intercultural, Performance, Integrated arts.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to discuss findings from a specific research project aimed at developing shared understandings of collaborative artistic processes. In general, collaboration between artists is usually focused around a particular performance or product. While the outcomes of this research project did include the presentation of two performance art events, the purpose of this paper is to reveal and discuss the nature of the collaborative process undertaken rather than to critique the resulting performances.

We begin this paper by exploring the nature of collaboration across or between artistic mediums, and across or between cultures. Literature relating generally to collaborative practice in the arts, and specifically to the nature of cross-cultural and intercultural collaboration, is discussed. We then briefly outline the research design and methods used in each stage of this collaborative artistic research project. Presentation and discussion of experiential findings constitute the remainder of the paper, including discussion of issues arising within the research. Finally, we offer our conclusions.

As authors, we are artists, art educators and researchers based at the University of Waikato in New Zealand. We individually create through the mediums of visual art and design, sculpture, musical composition and contemporary dance choreography. Endeavouring to work collaboratively together, we worked with other major collaborators throughout the five main stages of research, in particular, with performers Debbie Bright, Kane Day, Emma Goldsworthy and Patti Mitchley. A wider group of local performers and artists also contributed to different extents within the stages of the research.³ Throughout this paper, we authors have inserted within our text-based researcher voices, our own and other collaborators' artistic experiential voices, represented through journal excerpts and quotations, video clips, photographs and drawings. These voices are woven throughout this paper in an attempt to represent those involved.

BACKGROUND

This research project grew from our shared desire to explore collaborative creative process, not merely for the creation of enhanced performance products but also to better understand collaboration itself. Collaborations in which we had previously been involved typically required the independent creation of elements for a performance event in response to a director's vision, such as choreography, visual design, sculpture or sound composition (Barbour & Ratana, 2003; Barbour, Ratana & Walker, 2003). Often the different artistic elements would come together for the first time within the technical rehearsals of the pressured production week leading up to the performances (pressure most often caused by the financial constraints of creating performance events). The artistic elements were expected to cohere successfully within this production week. However, a common experience we shared was that there was either a lack of cohesion in the performance product, and/or a dilution effect created by compromises in the artistic elements in order to achieve some semblance of cohesion for performance. Additionally, we reflected that we had not fully engaged in collaboration, but rather, we had continued to work as independent artists within the requirements of a director's vision. Further reflection led us to question whether it was possible within a collaborative process to experience self-determination or *tino rangatiratanga* as individuals or as a group.

These experiences led us to consider how we might collaborate more effectively, and specifically to the research questions which guided this project. Our general focus question was framed as: What is the nature of collaborative artistic research, across our artistic disciplines and across our cultures? Within this general focus question we asked more specifically: What collaborative processes can we develop? And: How can self-determination or *tino rangatiratanga* be maintained for artists within collaborative artistic research?

Limited research has been undertaken into the development of collaborative artistic research processes that might guide artists and performers, although there is a body of research into collaboration in other contexts. We focus our discussion of literature on research that supports collaboration in the arts across artistic mediums and cross-culturally or interculturally. Where possible, we draw on literature from Aotearoa New Zealand.

COLLABORATION IN THE ARTS

Collaboration in the arts might generally be understood as processes of co-creating within art practices (Mitoma, 2004). Collaboration involves a group of artists working together to create or achieve a common purpose, such as producing performance events, exhibitions or research. It is implicit in many processes of collaboration that it be non-hierarchical, involving shared understandings and goals, and that collaboration encompass knowledge from different artistic mediums or multiple perspectives (Asker, 2003; Wasser & Bresler, 1996). Collaboration thus involves exchanging information and sharing unique processes for art making and research within different artistic mediums, such as sound composition, dance, visual art, design, story telling, script writing and costume design (Burnaford, Aprill & Weiss, 2001; Mitoma, 2004; Wasser & Bresler, 1996). New Zealand artist Alison East described the challenge she and other artists experienced in maintaining non-hierarchical collaboration within the performance work, *Dance of Origin*:

The challenge was to create a totally integrated performance of dance, poetry and music that was built from scratch. We wanted to explore ways in which the different mediums might complement each other on stage in such a way that one medium would not dominate the others or render them redundant. It was important that each medium retain its integrity while, at the same time, presenting a whole event and a clear combined statement. (East, 2004, p. 47)

Maintaining the integrity of different artistic mediums while creating an overall performance event that presented a clear, shared statement is certainly a challenge. While aiming for integrity in each art medium, the opportunity also exists for collaborators to develop understandings of the range of different artistic practices and mediums of expression. Learning from each other, risk-taking, shared discovery and appreciating multiple perspectives are seen by some researchers as integral in collaboration (Belton & Belton, 2002; Burnaford et al., 2001; Mitoma, 2004; Wasser & Bresler, 1996). As Papastergiadis commented, "Collaboration presupposes mutual understanding, shared languages, common goals and the ability to negotiate across differences" (2000, p. 1). In some contexts, the development of shared understandings may require the translation of individual artistic processes into shared processes, and in others, the translation of shared thematic ideas into different artistic mediums of expression (Asker, 2003; Burnaford et al., 2001; Kester, 2000; Papastergiadis, 2000).

For some artists, the activity of collaboration may be a new and confronting experience (Papastergiadis, 2000), at odds with their perception of creative process as solo practice. A common image of the artist is of the "solitary figure, rebelling against social rules and pushing the boundaries of institutions" (Papastergiadis, 2000, p. 1). However romantic, this image of the artist does not acknowledge the dialogues and exchanges (even those of rebellion) that inevitably occur between artists and their communities as art is created. Engaging in processes of collaboration makes such dialogues and exchanges explicit.

Collaboration thus carries with it an implicit ethical orientation in relationship to difference. It can, potentially, work against the grain of the image of the heroic artist struggling to assert his or her mastery over a recalcitrant nature, and evoke instead a form of art practice defined by open-ness, listening and intersubjective vulnerability. (Kester, 2000, para. 4)

An ethical orientation towards dialogue and exchange across differences also fits with a commitment to sharing the artistic performances or research outcomes resulting from collaboration (Burnaford et al., 2001). Again a commitment to sharing artistic works is contrary to the solo artist's image.⁴

However, some artists, such as choreographers, regularly use inherently collaborative practices (Risner, 1995; Way, 2000). Dancers, for example, are integral to most choreographic processes, although their role and their experiences are not always acknowledged (Risner, 1995). Research exploring collaboration between dancers and choreographers reveals that the social context and the relationships developed within the choreographic process are significant for both the dancers and the choreographer (Risner, 1995). As Risner commented, "the relationships the dancers share help to define each as an individual. Therefore, it would seem appropriate for choreographers to acknowledge and nurture the social context within the rehearsal" (1995, p. 84). The social nature of choreography suggests that relationships involving trust, respect and support are important to the processes of collaboration and to the wellbeing of collaborators (Ito, 2004; Risner, 1995; Wasser & Bresler, 1996; Way, 2000).

While the research literature on process is limited, collaborative practice in the arts certainly exists.⁵ New Zealand artists Peter Belton and Daniel Belton (2002) commented that collaborative arts practices are appropriate and integral to postmodern culture. They cited the postmodern practices of eclecticism, multifaceted referencing, bricolage, acceptance of ambiguity, invitations to multiple readings and definitions, and "the disruption of culturally manufactured and invariably hegemonic boundaries" as part of creative practice in the arts (Belton & Belton, 2002, p. 7). Collaborative arts practices that do not enforce boundaries based on artistic medium or culture fit well in the context of postmodern culture. Belton and Belton (2002) offered an account of their collaborative experiences in the creation of the dance films *Henge* (Belton & Belton, 2001) and *Inside Out* (Belton, 1997). They commented that "the word synaesthetic comes to mind: that is the referencing of one sense, such as seeing, through another; sound. We see the sound and we hear the sight" (Belton & Belton, 2002, p. 2).

The aim to create a synthesis of different artistic mediums through collaboration is certainly not new. Perhaps the most extensively documented and widely recognised contributor to Western collaborative practice is that of twentieth century choreographer and producer, Serge Diaghilev (1872-1929). Diaghilev aimed for a synthesis of art mediums through collaboration and demonstrated this in the resulting artistic performances (Potter, 2003). In his work with the Ballet Russe, Diaghilev collaborated with many other artists, including Stravinsky, Balanchine, Nijinsky, Picasso and Matisse. The aim of such collaborative processes for

Diaghilev was a “total work of art in which all elements of any collaboration, at least in theory, had the single aim of expressing a unified view of the mood, the theme, the plot of the work in question” (Potter, 2003, p. 26). Such a synthesis of visual design, sound, movement and color resulted in a unified performance work in which “it is often very difficult to gauge the contribution from any one sense” (Milne, 1993, p. 88). Composer and collaborator Stravinsky commented that “to see Balanchine’s choreography of the movements is to hear the music with one’s own eyes... The dance emphasizes relationship of which I had hardly been aware” (cited in Taper, 1987, pp. 258-259). While Diaghilev’s aim was synthesis in performance, others have suggested that synthesis was only sought during the development of the initial unifying mood, thematic idea or plot behind the work of art, rather than being “generated in the actual physical process of creation in the rehearsal studio” (Potter, 2003, p. 27).⁶

Researching the art of collaboration, Potter (2003) focused on the Australian Ballet’s creative process in developing the performance work *Wild Swans*. Potter described the resulting work as having conceptual cohesiveness and demonstrating a synthesis of the arts, resulting from a deliberate studio process requiring the input of all the artists throughout the development of the work. She argued that the intense, ‘live collaboration’ in the working process of the artists involved in *Wild Swans* revealed a closer commitment to Diaghilev’s ideal synthesised total work of art. However, the dancers and collaborators in the Australian Ballet’s project noted that this kind of collaborative process was expensive, time-consuming, exhausting, and required a great deal of generosity, trust and respect. These comments perhaps reveal reasons why many contemporary artists aim towards achieving a synthesis of the arts in the development of the thematic idea, rather than continuing throughout the studio creative and rehearsal process. Certainly, this aim for a synthesis based on the initial theme rather than throughout the creative process was more familiar to us as artists/researchers. However, we still desired to explore more fully the opportunities for collaboration throughout the process of creating cohesive synthesis and integration in our artistic mediums. And, importantly, we wished to foreground the cross-cultural and intercultural nature of our collaborations, a focus not present in the literature on Diaghilev’s collaborations.

It is worthy of note that Diaghilev stood out in Western collaborative practice in relation to working across artistic mediums because he stood against the background of the Western art canon that had become increasingly separated into distinct artistic mediums, such as painting, drawing, sculpture, opera, ballet. In contrast, within traditional Māori life for example, the arts were integrated in everyday activities and events and continued the cultural practices of ancestors. Some of these traditional practices continue on the marae today, as well as at other sites. The point of relevance to our research is that the desire to collaborate across artistic mediums assumes a particularly Western separation between artistic mediums. It may be that Māori artists do not make such assumptions when creating art.

An understanding of collaborative processes aiming for synthesis provided some background for this research project. We focused more specifically on how we might achieve such synthesis within cross-cultural and intercultural

collaboration, in order to develop more effective and satisfying collaborative processes.

CROSS-CULTURAL AND INTERCULTURAL COLLABORATION

Definitions of collaboration vary across cultures and communities and the processes of collaboration are continually under negotiation (Jorjorian, 2004). However, “cooperation, sharing, trust, compromise, willingness to listen are key components to the collaborative spirit” when sharing across cultures (Libal, cited in Ito, 2004, p. 27). Asia Pacific Performance Exchange (APPEX) artist Zhou Long commented about cross-cultural collaboration that

the most important thing is not to express your traditional culture, but to work together. I believe that collaboration is an organic joining of forms from different cultures. When you work together in international collaborations, it more important to draw the spirit of your tradition and bring something else to explore. (Long cited in Ito, 2004, pp. 29-30)

Extending Long’s comments, collaboration across or between cultures can be seen as involving the sharing of unique cultural perspectives by artists working together, again within creative processes and in shared artistic performances, products or research. Collaboration thus entails exchange and transformation of ideas and practices, leading to new understandings and new relationships between collaborators. Much cross-cultural, intercultural and integrated artistic practice continues to occur in various cultural contexts (Schechner, 2002). The extensive research undertaken through the APPEX program and the Centre for Intercultural Performance (Jorjorian, 2004) provides insight. The aim of this exchange program was to provide “a space for artists and writers whose work is rooted in the local concerns of culture”, an aim that acknowledged that “global information technology and mass communication favor the interests of commerce and the power elite” (Mitoma, 2004, p. 6). A non-hierarchical structure that did not privilege any particular artistic or cultural authority was therefore established within APPEX, compatible with the collective group ethos that was seen to characterise many Asian cultures (Mitoma, 2004). Processes of co-creation within APPEX involved selected local artists from Asia, America and the Pacific working in residence together, sharing cultural, professional and personal perspectives with the group, teaching and learning new skills, experimenting and collaborating to create without a requirement to perform on stage (Mitoma, 1996). Within APPEX, the terms ‘cross-cultural’ and ‘intercultural’ were often used interchangeably, but there was a recognition that “the histories of both genre and person can be folded into an intercultural frame” (Trimmillos, 2004, p. 18). In this sense, individual artists can be seen as already intercultural or culturally synthesised, perhaps more so than they are artistically synthesised in their arts practice (Trimmillos, 2004). Some researchers have argued that perhaps a focus should be on intercultural exchanges within artistic practice, rather than intercultural performance per se (Pavis, 1996). Pavis commented:

Intercultural theatre is at its most transportable and experimental when it focuses on the actor and performance, on training of whatever duration conducted on the “others” homeground, or on an experiment with new body techniques. Microscopic work of this kind concerns the body, then by extension the personality and the culture of the participants. It is only ever effective when it is accepted as inter-corporeal work, in which an actor confronts his/her technique and professional identity with those of the others. Here is the paradox and strength of such inter-corporeal and intercultural theatre: the greater its concern with the exchange of corporeal techniques, the more political and historical it becomes ... As a result, an intercultural practice such as this can become ... a form of resistance against standardization. (p. 15)

The perspectives advanced by Pavis (1996), Schechner (2002) and writers involved in the APPEX project (Ito, 2004; Jorjorian, 2004; Kam, 2004; Mitoma, 2004; Trimmillos, 2004; and others) suggested that intercultural and cross-cultural collaborations resulting in artistic performances necessarily involved exploration of identities and cultures, and involved shifting perspectives and practices within the processes of co-creation.

Balme (1996), Ponifasio (2002) and Potiki (1996) relate specifically to cross-cultural and intercultural collaboration in the arts in Aotearoa New Zealand. To explain these processes and expand an understanding of intercultural theatre further, Balme (1996) employed the concept of “syncretic theatre”, in which new theatrico-aesthetic principles “result from the interplay between the Western theatrico-dramatic tradition and the indigenous performance forms of a postcolonial culture” (p. 180). These principles develop in contrast to the on-going traditions of both marae-theatre (Potiki, 1996) and Western theatre.

New Zealand based choreographer and director Lemi Ponifasio (2002) wrote that the term cross-cultural referred “broadly to encounters both historical and continuing between cultures. It suggested therefore, a transformation of material, beliefs, meanings, values, imagination and the customary practices of society” (p. 51). Cross-cultural performances and productions could also be described as “those which overtly draw upon the encounters between different cultural sensibilities” with the intention to re-imagine the world (Verma, 1996, p. 194).

Notwithstanding the potential for collaboration to contribute to transformation and re-imagining the world, the emergence of collaborative cross-cultural and intercultural performance has been critiqued by some as an attempt to gain political favour and funding by including the voices of minority cultures within a dominant Western Eurocentric perspective (Ponifasio, 2002; Potiki, 1996; Verma, 1996). A challenge made by Ponifasio (2002) was that cross-cultural exchange needed to occur in both directions, not only through the efforts of artists from minority cultures ‘building bridges’ between cultures, but also through artists of dominant Western cultures making the effort to step outside majority perspectives (Ponifasio, 2002).

The focus and challenges of cross-cultural and intercultural collaboration were central to our interests as artists/researchers collaborating within this artistic research project. As Māori, Pakeha (non-Māori citizens born in New Zealand and typically of European ancestry) and Asian artists/researchers and performers involved in this project, we had the intention of re-imagining collaboration across cultures and artistic mediums. Ponifasio's (2002) challenge was particularly important for our research project, given that we believed that Māori and Asian artists within our group were generally expected to participate in majority Pakeha artistic practices and research, but the reverse was not often expected. For this reason, we wished to move our research and practice outside familiar Pakeha-centric contexts (Smith, 1999). We detail our specific choices in research design and methodology in the following section.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The research design for this project grew from a qualitative research focus (Denzin & Lincoln, 2001; Reinharz, 1992), incorporating Kaupapa Māori research and Pakeha feminist and phenomenological perspectives. These research perspectives were appropriate given our cultural backgrounds as predominantly Māori and Pakeha artists/researchers and performers, and in terms of acknowledging the partnership responsibilities within Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi signed in 1840 by Māori chiefs and representatives of the British Queen). We accepted the challenge for cross-cultural collaboration laid down by Ponifasio (2002), acknowledging that we expected Pakeha artists/researchers and performers to engage in Māori practices (Smith, 1999). A brief outline of our theoretical perspectives in relation to research design and methods is provided to contextualise this specific research project, although a full discussion is not the focus of this paper.

Feminist and phenomenological perspectives focus on researching the lived experiences of those involved; in this case, of the artists/researchers and performers (Barbour, 2002; Du Plessis & Alice, 1998; Reinharz, 1992). These approaches include "an acknowledgement of the importance of the embodiment, difference and the socio-cultural context of the individual[s]" participating in the research (Barbour, 2002, p. 106). Kaupapa Māori research is related to being Māori and is connected to Māori philosophy and principles (Smith, 1990). Particularly important is that this research perspective takes for granted the validity and legitimacy of Māori people, language and culture and is concerned with Māori having autonomy over their own cultural wellbeing (Smith, 1990). Further, Kaupapa Māori research is culturally safe, relevant, appropriate for Māori, and ideally involves mentoring by Māori elders (Irwin, 1994). Bishop described it as "collectivistic, and ... oriented toward benefiting all the research participants and their collectively determined agendas" (1995, p. 24). Bishop's understandings of Kaupapa Māori research in relation to Te Tiriti o Waitangi also provided space for Māori researchers to work in partnership with non-Māori researchers (cited in Smith, 1999).

From both feminist phenomenological and Kaupapa Māori research perspectives, power can be shared amongst artists/researchers and performers to

promote empowerment, and to allow self-determination or tino rangatiratanga. Research projects can therefore be undertaken in culturally appropriate ways and knowledge can be co-constructed and consensual. Ideally, the research is then shared directly with the communities involved (Barbour, 2002; Bishop, 1995, 1996; Smith, 1999).

The research design for this specific project flowed from the processes embodied in an initial four-day hui (meeting or event) held at Te Kohinga Marama Marae at The University of Waikato. A marae is a traditional Māori building complex where people gather and live, and where the following processes can take place:⁷ traditional powhiri (ritual welcome onto a marae), mihi (introductions and sharing), wananga (discussions, sharing, learning and conferencing), noho marae (focused, residential working and living together) and poroporoaki (conclusions and farewells).⁸ The research design also flowed from feminist and phenomenological research processes involving sharing of lived experiences, collaborative decision-making and knowledge co-construction. Over two and a half years, six main stages of research unfolded. The main stages were: 1) the initial four-day residential hui; 2) on-going reflection and development; 3) a two-week intensive *Kaitiaki* performance art project; 4) ongoing reflection and development, including the creation of a Collaborative Workbook; 5) a two-week intensive *Home, land and sea* performance art project; and finally 6), the ongoing reflection and development of conclusions leading to both a seminar presentation and the development of this paper. Throughout these stages a range of research methods were utilised:

1. experiential immersion workshops in which each of the artists/researchers worked with the performers;
2. reflective journal writing and/or designs/sketches;
3. structured discussions;
4. creation of short sections of contemporary dance improvisation and choreography, sketches for sculptural art, ideas for sound design/composition, lighting design and costume design;
5. creation and production of collaborative performance art events for public viewing; and
6. development of a Collaborative Workbook collating research materials.

Throughout this research project, video and photography were used to document activities and reflective writing and sketches were collected. The project produced research outcomes in the form of edited video footage of the two live, public performance art events and the Collaborative Workbook. In this paper, however, we discuss some of our key findings from researching collaborative artistic processes.

EXPERIENTIAL FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Within this section we have juxtaposed text, video, photographs, sketches and quotations in order to represent the various artistic mediums and to allow for the expression of the artists/researchers' and performers' own words. Edited video is offered below to represent experiential 'findings', and slide shows and photographs are interspersed throughout. We do not attempt to translate these 'findings' into text, but rather choose to honour the power of embodied and non-verbal representations that express aspects of collaboration across cultures and artistic mediums, as discussed in the literature we reviewed for this research. We discuss our findings in relation to each stage of the process. In particular, we highlight the importance of relationships within collaboration, the value of moving outside Pakeha-centric practices and experiences of self-determination within the process.

Stage 1) Initial four-day residential hui

During the initial four-day residential hui, the whole group of artists/researchers and performers lived, ate and worked at Te Kohinga Marama Marae. Together, all brainstormed ideas through on-going discussions and sketching, beginning to develop shared conceptualisations of thematic ideas for researching collaboration and towards performance. Shared thematic interests developed around the image of the koru (spiral) – a common motif within traditional Māori art that we saw as embodying both our processes and our themes of negative and positive spaces, ecology, community and the life cycle. Within these themes, the group felt that both harmony and tension/conflict in collaborative research and in performance could be explored and resolved. The beginnings of a narrative around the need for land/home for community emerged to connect these themes. Even in initial discussions, the processes of hui and the research agenda itself provided themes – the process of collaborating, of developing a shared agenda, of finding a place to stand, of finding a voice or artistic medium with which to contribute – actually contributed to the thematic content for artistic development.

Alongside and feeding into the discussions, the artists/researchers worked together with the performers to develop understandings of each other's different art making processes. Specific experiential immersion sessions were allocated for each artist/researcher to work with performers in each artistic medium. All involved immersed themselves in the working process of each artist/researcher in order to gain an understanding of the processes each artist/researcher offered (see Video 1). For example, with Donn Ratana, the group experimented with becoming sculptural forms and anchored themselves to the walls and ceiling with fabric. With Karen Barbour, the group explored an improvisational movement structure to create a short section of dance in the studio and in an outdoor environment. Thematic ideas about sound and compositional structures with the composer were the focus of another session with composer Kim Walker. Within a theatre environment, the group explored lighting and spatial effects with theatre designer Michael Knapp. As we all grew to know each other better, discussion with Cheri Waititi also focused on the way in which a narrative and characters were beginning to develop from each performer's personality, role and response to thematic ideas.

Working processes in these sessions varied, reflecting the needs of the artistic mediums, the cultural background and life experiences of each artist/researcher and performer. The workshops and ensuing discussions were recorded on video and brief edited examples illustrate some of our processes.⁹

[Please click Photo 1 below to play Video 1. Stop and start at any time by clicking on the Play/Pause button.]



Photo 1. *Performer Debbie Bright and composer Kim Walker during the initial hui at Te Kohinga Marama Marae*

Throughout the initial hui, structured and informal discussions, journal writing, sketching, composition and design ideas were undertaken by the whole group and collected as documentation. Beginnings were made in understanding and co-constructing collaborative artistic processes that might be used by the artists/researchers and performers. The following quotations taken from performers' and artists/researchers' journal entries illustrate a diversity of interests and perspectives during the hui:

'Living, working eating together as process ... spending time ... When are we working/ not working? Does it matter in this situation? Really appealing – the whole experience—I'm thinking though that to make a high quality product will take a long time because it's a collaboration rather than being a choreographed work with other elements handled by other people. The other people need to experience working with us more ... Also their interests are form rather than content – how can the content be created? Is it the process of collaboration, the ecology of art we are presenting – will it be obvious that the 'pure collaboration' equates to 'pure ecology'?'
Geoff Gilson



Photos 2-4: Performers (left to right) Patti Mitchley, Dolina Weihepeihana and (below) Geoff Gilson during the initial hui

‘As a dancer I think there needs to be a strong choreographic style/focus established when we make the work so the dance is as strong as the other elements, clearly choreographed and matching the energy of the lights, sculpture and sound in the world created. I think the ideas should be pooled from what we have experimented with this week ...’ Dolina Weihepeihana

‘Just being able to run with an idea allowed me to develop ideas and then reflect afterward. Being able to talk about it in reflection allowed me to play and shape some of my own ideas ...’ Sherie Harrison

‘New – never been involved in a process where I’ve had the chance to say what a performance is going to be collectively. This is a new process that I have never experienced; even in devised work, an equal share of vision is not involved. A director takes control of vision ... (we) interpret that vision, inform it.’ Jarod Rawiri

‘One of the most significant notes from this first stage was the novelty of the collaborative process as it unfolded. While experiential sessions and discussion revealed the differences in the actual creative processes of each artist/researcher, what became clear immediately was that the creative themes for the work could and were being generated collectively by all involved: artists/researchers and performers engaged collaboratively. The hui process greatly facilitated this, allowing all to live, eat, sleep and work together in a shared space conducive to discussion, experimentation and

negotiation, and enhanced a sense of community and social ecology.’
Karen Barbour

Stage 2) On-going reflection and development

Individual reflection and development following the initial hui was ongoing during Stage 2. Meetings between artists/researchers and performers, along with discussions via email, allowed for continued shared development of thematic ideas and processes. The performers met with Karen Barbour to work specifically on developing short sections of structured improvisation and duet choreography. The performers also worked with Kim Walker, responding to excerpts of sound and compositional structures both in movement improvisation and in written journal entries. Each artist/researcher continued the development of ideas, meeting together as time permitted to discuss and document their processes of collaboration.

One initial methodological issue identified by all during Stage 2 concerned the extent to which each ‘should’ develop thematic ideas and to what extent ideas needed to be co-constructed with the whole group present. The reflective comments below indicated that this methodological issue presented a tension between wanting to share the development of thematic ideas with all involved but also to further extend thematic ideas within each artistic medium through focused development in appropriate studio spaces.

‘Looking for a common language across art forms. Bringing ideas to the group that are satisfying to me. A bit of a tension between waiting to see what evolves and offering my own ideas.’ Kim Walker

‘Having previously worked on our own as artists, we come together to collaborate. In the past, my collaborations have been me working with dancers, meeting and talking with designers and doing our work on our own, putting it all together at the end. On the first day of the hui, I worked with the dancers separately. But there was a clear group sense that we should work all together at each stage in each of the sessions, so things can really evolve collaboratively. We will do this from now on.’ Karen Barbour

‘It didn’t really hit me until I was viewing the video clip of the dancers exploring or playing with the elastic straps while I was off doing something ... They weren’t too sure about my intentions with the sculptural elements so they started to explore the materials. In hindsight if I had seen them ‘doing their thing’ maybe my sculptural ideas would have been influenced by their explorations. They were doing things with the straps that I hadn’t even thought about... Therefore, I need to have the sculptural material ready for the dancers from the beginning and allow their explorations to shape my ideas, not try and enforce my visual imagery to suit the sculpture ... develop the idea with the material and dancers. Don’t have a preconceived idea or plan, let the rhythm develop ...’ Donn Ratana

Through negotiation it was agreed that, when possible, everyone would work together, but that each artist/researcher and performer could also develop thematic ideas further with the collaboratively generated themes in mind. The practicalities of other employment and specific creative processes, such as experimentation and manipulating materials in a sound recording studio or art studio, or hours devoted to duet choreographic development, necessitated artists/researchers and performers working in their own studio spaces for some time. This allowed each of the individuals to pursue his or her own interests around the collaboratively generated themes and to then also offer further developments that each valued personally. Each individual thus had a place to stand, and role or purpose within the collaborative community. Subsequently, each was more satisfied that he or she was working to maintain the integrity of the artistic medium rather than compromising his or her contribution. For performers, consideration and research into options for their roles within the group became a personal focus. The ongoing development in Stage 2 provided an experience of self-determination that supported the collaborative process as a whole. Quotations from journals below illustrate some of the performers' experiences of the collaborative process.

'I have really appreciated the improvisation and exploration allowed in this process and the opportunity to work closely with and listen to the individual collaborators. Ordinarily when working with collaborators the dance is strongly worked on, and then layered with the other elements. Seeing how the others work I think has strongly influenced my interpretations/concepts.' Dolina Weihepeihana

'I was quite surprised last night during our discussion that Karen expressed very clearly that she was also interested in the tino rangatiratanga of each of us as individual dancers. I know she said something like this on the first day of the hui, but I couldn't take it on board. What does it mean to help fulfill someone else's vision in dance, music, sculpture, art, costume or lighting, yet also fulfill my own vision for myself, for what I want to get out of it? So what do I want to get out of it? The opportunity to be immersed in dance; to be paid for my time and talent, to be in a position to influence the final product, even perhaps the music, art, sculpture etc., as well as the dance. Words escape me over the privilege and fulfillment of a dream.' Debbie Bright

The collaborative creation of a short duet with performers Patti Mitchley and Kane Day and choreographer Karen Barbour provided an opportunity to specifically explore movement in depth over a longer period of time. This collaborative process and duet choreography became the basis for subsequent duets extended and developed with different duet dancers throughout the research. Perhaps more importantly for the performers, the relationships between performers deepened and assisted each performer and collaborator to find his or her place within the process and his or her role. In the context of the duet created between choreographer and performers, self-determination began to be clearer to all, as

Patti's journal quotation illustrates below. Kane indicated that he began to feel more confident in working with others throughout the process.

'Self determination in this context for me – be open and try new things. Learn, share, be expressive. Value my own input – confidence. Be myself within the creativeness – to offer my own angle.' Patti Mitchley

'Feeling a bit intimidated being among people who do it [art, performance] as a living. I guess that set up my persona within the context, the quiet one at the start ... but it was cool to work with each person, learning off others, being chucked in the deep end and learning to swim.' Kane Day

'We dancers had quite a lot that we came up with individually and bounced off each other. Sometimes we'd claim things individually, but mostly as a group.' Emma Gamley

'It is interesting that each of the collaborators perceived that who the performers were mattered immediately to what the work would become. This is crucial to me too, as a choreographer interested in relationships between people.' Karen Barbour

[Please click Photo 5 below to play Video 2. Stop and start at any time by clicking on the Play/Pause button.]

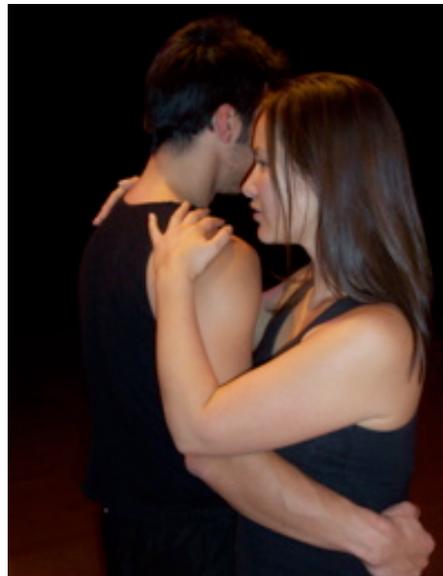


Photo 5. *Performers Patti Mitchley and Kane Day negotiating duet choreographic relationships*

Kim Walker described the sound score he composed after experimentation during Stages 1 & 2 as follows:

‘Sound ... was created to provide a textural base for the performers, light and set designs to move in and out of. The piece balances sounds from the natural New Zealand landscape with more humanized electronic sound displaying at times the harsh contrast. Included in this soundtrack is taongo puoro performed by Richard Nunns.’ Kim Walker

Stage 3) A two-week intensive *Kaitiaki* performance art project

Working over an intense and focused two weeks, the artists/researchers and performers developed the thematic ideas generated in Stages 1 and 2 into a collaborative performance art event called *Kaitiaki. Reasons to Care* (Barbour, Ratana, Waititi & Walker, 2004). This work was performed for the public on Friday 10th and Saturday 11th of September 2004.

[Please click Photo 6 below to play Video 3. Stop and start at any time by clicking on the Play/Pause button.]



Photo 6. *Rehearsing for performances of Kaitiaki. Reasons to care*¹⁰

Quotations from journal entries below demonstrate growing understanding of the collaborative processes as they further developed during this stage. Performers articulated their appreciation of the importance of valuing each other and the relationships between people within collaboration, as well as valuing self-determination within the process. Importantly, passion is evident in the written language about both thematic ideas and process in creating performance art work.

‘Experiencing biculturalism through tino rangatiratanga – self determination, in our collaboration – has to be this way. Great to be delving into something so close to my heart as the NZ environment,

which I have made work about previously. Passion in the group is obvious, so passion of what we create will be inherent.’ Geoff Gilson

‘I enjoyed this process – it was the first time I had acknowledged the collaborative process as needing to be included and treated as a worthy research process. Taking time to acknowledge other people’s abilities and talents fully as well as letting their working process to be included in the development of this piece allows other worlds and takes of worlds – to be seen. This includes, for me, the necessity to be fed by other art forms as well as developing new angles on performance and space.’ Vicky Kapo

‘For me this was the collaboration. A chance to work with both my passions – visual art and dance ... I felt that our collaborations across the disciplines were made through friendships. Friendships were created, developed and enhanced during this project.’ Emma Goldsworthy

Stage 4) On-going reflection and development, including the creation of a Collaborative Workbook

Following the performance event, the artists/researchers and performers continued discussion and analysis of their experiences, developing new understandings together of the nature of collaborative process. An afternoon hui was held at Te Kohinga Marama Marae for artists/researchers and performers to meet and discuss methods of representing the research findings. The outcome of this hui was the creation of a shared Collaborative Workbook compiled by the artists/researchers and performers. Quotations from journals, sketches and photographs below illustrate some of the processes. It was evident in reflection that collaboration was a novel process for some artists/researchers and performers. The following quotations provide more detailed expressions of experiences.

‘I thought about attachment, being attached, connected. The elastic session with Donn, how we tangled and were restricted. How, when engaging in collaborative process when we let go of attachment to the outcome (of the show), we were able to let ideas flow more freely. All of the creative forces had the opportunity to express their own visions and within the unfolding of that, the unique and profound moments were born. Through letting go we were able to be open to the processes of improvisation and build ideas.’ Patti Mitchley

‘Collaborative work can happen in this way if everyone knows their contribution, their self-worth and their self-determination has a place in the creation and performance of the work – where a point comes where nothing is owned by the individual, trust and belief thrives amongst the group to achieve the collective performance, the collective achievement! Collaboration enables you to get to have a

relationship with others but not have to know every personal detail of them so that they are stripped of their privacy and personal story but where they are prepared to share themselves in whatever capacity to work towards accomplishing the making of the art form or artwork, its development, its evolvment and finally its completion.’ Cheri Waititi

‘Collaboration for me is letting go of any final image that I initially have about sculpture and dance. You’ve got to let the idea grow, keep the creative process moving in as many directions as possible. And we need to be involved with the other artists even if it is only as an observer. It’s like being at a noho marae where you get to know each other really well. Your ideas are not just shared for a specific time, it’s being discussed all the time ... this is your life.’ Donn Ratana

Stage 5) A two-week intensive *Home, land and sea* performance project

In a final two-week project, the artists/researchers and a larger group of performers worked intensively to create and produce a further exploration of the thematic ideas of this collaborative research project. The resulting performance art work, *Home, land and sea*, was shown to the public in the Hamilton Gardens Summer Festival in February 2005.

[Please click Photo 7 below to play Video 4. Stop and start at any time by clicking on the Play/Pause button.]



Photo 7. Performers in *Home, land and sea*

Journal quotations show further reflection on the processes of collaboration. In particular, main points that can be identified included: that the whole group began together to collaborate; that the whole group contributed throughout the process;

and that the process was as valuable as (and perhaps more valuable than) the performance.

[Please click Photo 8 below to play Slide Show 1 of sketches and photos. Stop and start at any time by clicking on the Play/Pause button.]



Photo 8. *Emma Goldsworthy and Hannah May with Donn Ratana sculptures*

‘One of the strongest senses of purpose or intuitions about creating collaborative work that I have, is that we needed to begin together at the same place and time, and collectively allow an image or idea to emerge, in which we all have interest. My task then, as a choreographer, is to explore this image or idea through relationships between people or ‘performers’, in the environment or ‘world’ of the performance. Each of us has an equally important task within the development of the work. There is a respect in each other as artists, and trust in allowing each person to develop and fulfill their own creative needs through developing the image or idea of the final performance art work.’ Karen Barbour

‘The whole collaborative process was like baking a pie ... we all knew we wanted to create this delicious pie ... that everyone collaborating would be a part of making to baking and from the start to the finish ... to experiment and explore and mix, knead and trial bake until we knew we had a recipe where, in performance, people would be able to view the making of the pie, encouraging a need to be close to touch its texture and to smell its aroma and lastly taste its flavor. So it was up to the team of collaborators ... to bake this pie in a way where relationships flourished between all ...’ Cheri Waititi

‘Realizing that the process is more valuable and really experiencing that ... as personal growth ... and all the skills that you maintain throughout. Realizing that the best way you can collaborate is by knowing your own strengths.’ Patti Mitchley

Performers were photographed by Cheri Waititi during Stages 3, 4 and 5 and the following slide show illustrates some of the collaborations to enhance performers’ roles through the development of facial art designs. The design process enabled the performers to collaborate directly with Cheri as their roles and personalities became clearer in relation to the themes of the performance.

[Please click Photo 9 below to play Slide Show 2 of designs and photos by Cheri Waititi. Stop and start at any time by clicking on the Play/Pause button.]



Photo 9. Performer Patti Mitchley’s facial art design by Cheri Waititi

Following this extensive research project, we also collaborated in discussing the nature of our own collaborative research in the arts. We developed a visual representation of our collaborative processes as we experienced them (Figure 1). Our experiences were a result of the initial hui immersion experience, ongoing meetings, workshop and discussions, performance events and understandings of different artistic collaborative processes that developed between the artists/researchers and with the performers. The arrows in Figure 1 indicate that the processes of our collaboration were on-going. Of particular importance too, was that prior to any performance output we collaborators might cycle through stages in the process more than once and that a performance output might not represent the final stage of collaboration.



Figure 1. *Our collaborative processes*

In the final section of this paper we discuss our shared conclusions.

CONCLUSIONS

In general, our conclusions were broad and we hope they will provide some useful insight for others, although we do not anticipate that our processes will be relevant to every context of artistic collaboration, especially given the need for culturally diverse approaches (Jorjorian, 2004). In response to our research question concerning what collaborative processes we could develop, we concluded that collaboration throughout the entire process was crucial for us, as represented in Figure 1 above. Collaboration developed from the initial shared conceptualisation of ideas, through immersion workshops, reflection and developmental stages into performance and back to shared conceptualisations again. In terms of the literature discussed, we focused on processes aimed at producing a synthesis of the art mediums, based on shared themes and shared creative processes (Asker, 2003; Belton & Belton, 2002; East, 2004; Kester, 2000; Molenda, 1994; Papastergiadis, 2000; Potter, 2003). Within this focus, we aimed to work with a deliberate workshop and studio developmental process that involved all being present during development where possible (East, 2004; Potter, 2003) rather than working independently on elements contributing to a shared theme. We also aimed to provide a culturally appropriate context outside of Pakeha-centric practice, with the intention of supporting artists/researchers and performers to negotiate roles within the group.

We now draw some conclusions in relation to our general research question: what is the nature of collaborative artistic research, across our artistic disciplines and across our cultures? Firstly, the framing of this research project within kaupapa Māori research and feminist phenomenological perspectives was appropriate for the artists/researchers and performers involved (Barbour, 2002; Bishop, 1995, 1996; Jorjorian, 2004; Ponifasio, 2002; Verma, 1996). The process of the initial hui at Te Kohinga Marama Marae provided a beginning for the research outside of the

Pakeha-centric focus of much research, although still within the context of a research environment. This was perceived by all to offer a safe and yet focused context from which the research could begin. These initial processes also provided an appropriate beginning context for cross-cultural and intercultural collaboration. We suggest that the research design and the methods (Barbour, 2002; Bishop, 1995, 1996; Smith, 1999) of the project supported collaboration in a number of ways. Through the initial experience of living together within the context of noho marae, artists/researchers and performers were able to begin developing relationships on professional, artistic and personal levels within a culturally safe environment, and supported by the mentoring of Māori group members Donn Ratana, Cheri Waititi and the marae whanau. Over the two and a half years of collaboration, regular formal and informal meetings allowed these relationships to develop further so that awareness of and respect for artistic, personal and cultural differences could grow. Secondly, the focus on lived experiences throughout the process meant that there was opportunity within the research project for immersion in workshops in which sharing, experimenting and creating was the focus. Following these experiential immersion workshops, personal reflection in journals and during structured discussions provided the opportunity to express and share experiences, allowing for relationships to deepen as different artists/researchers and performers provided support to one another. Thirdly, by providing experiential immersion workshops in different artistic mediums and contexts, each artist/researcher and performer was able to express his or her existing understandings in the medium/s most familiar. Additionally, each person was also able to develop new understandings and had the opportunity to contribute to the development of themes and ideas in new artistic mediums. Fourthly, by providing shared, collective processes and themes, each performer and artist/researcher was enabled to negotiate his or her roles and to benefit personally, as will be discussed in more detail below. Our perspectives and methodologies led to research outcomes that were co-constructed and collaborative, including two public performance projects, *Kaitiaki. Reasons to Care* (Barbour, Ratana, Waititi & Walker, 2004) and *Home, Land and Sea* (Barbour, Ratana, Waititi & Walker, 2006), a Collaborative Workbook, a seminar and this paper.

A perhaps unsurprising conclusion was that our collaboration took a great deal of time and commitment to negotiate across artistic mediums and cultures (Himmelman, 1993; Papastergiadis, 2000; Wasser & Bresler, 1996). Dialogue and exchange were crucial, particularly given that the nature of the social, cross-cultural and intercultural relationships developed was important in terms of performers' and artists/researchers' self-definition (Risner, 1995). This collaboration required respect, trust and integrity on the part of all involved (Ito, 2004; Wasser & Bresler, 1996), and time was also required to foster such relationships to support collaboration. While we were not significantly limited by time within the context of this research project, we acknowledge that time is often a major constraint for professional and community artists.

Finally, we asked the specific research question: How can self-determination or tino rangatiratanga be maintained for artists within collaborative artistic research? Within this process, we discovered that fostering self-determination or tino rangatiratanga within the collaborative process involved negotiation by all

participants with the group as to how they could contribute to the development of shared thematic ideas, as well as how they might maintain integrity themselves and within their artistic mediums or performance roles. Initially, self-determination related to the group as a whole determining the processes and thematic focus of the research in order to develop a synthesis of artistic mediums and to commit to cross-cultural and intercultural practice. Consequently, integral to our understanding of collaboration was engagement by all in shared agendas throughout the whole process. At times, developing a shared agenda meant letting go of a personal theme, idea or outcome, being involved with other artists/researchers and performers, being 'fed' by different artistic mediums, and letting the idea grow, as Donn, Patti and Vicky commented. However, as the collaboration developed, each person found opportunities where he or she could contribute in more specific roles, and offer suggestions related to particular aspects of the process or particular artistic mediums. Early in the process, Debbie reflected on what it might mean to fulfill other artists/researchers' and performers' visions, as well as her own. For Debbie, Jarod, Dolina, Kane and Emma particularly, the opportunity to contribute to the development of themes, ideas and outcomes was novel and required confidence in order to try new things and to offer suggestions. The fostering of relationships and the development of an individual sense of self-worth, as well as an appreciation for the diversity of cultural and artistic practices, was important for all involved in working towards individual self-determination within the collaboration.

The findings from our cross-cultural and intercultural collaborative research in the arts confirmed for us that collaboration required a focus on creative processes rather than only on the performance product, and required the fostering of relationships between those involved. We appreciated that collaboration was a cyclical process that was valuable in itself. Finally, collaboration as we experienced it led to performance and research outcomes that demonstrated synthesis in artistic mediums. Collaboration also involved the development of valued personal, professional and artistic relationships within a diverse community of artists aiming for self-determination and giving voice to shared agendas. Collaboration provided a context for our community of artists to contribute to personal transformation and to re-imagine our world.

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¹Kaupapa Māori research asserts Māori philosophy and principles, values Māori people, language and culture, and is collectively oriented toward shared agendas benefiting those involved (Bishop, 1995; Smith 1990; Smith 1999).

²Tino rangatiratanga may be broadly understood as the right to self-determine the actions and future plans of a group. However, this broad understanding does not fully capture the depth of the surrounding concepts and practices of Māori worldviews from which a full understanding of tino rangatiratanga arises. Rangatiratanga refers to chieftainship and approximates to oversight, responsibility, authority, control and sovereignty. The word tino is an intensive or superlative, meaning very, full, total, absolute. So tino rangatiratanga approximates to total control, complete responsibility, full authority or absolute sovereignty.

³Although this research project has been 'written up' for publication by authors Barbour, Ratana, Waititi and Walker, the research project itself was undertaken in conjunction with major research collaborators and performers. Additional collaborators involved in some stages of the research were Julie Barbour, John Davies, Michael Knapp and Zoe Timbrell, and performers Te Rawhitiroa Bosch, Ardre Foote, Emma Gamley, Geoff Gilson, Sherie Harrison, Horomona Horo, Vicky Kapo, Te Kaahurangi Maioha, Hannah May, Chris McBride, Kerry McMurdo, Jarod Rawiri and Dolina Weihepeihana.

⁴Interestingly, this common image of the solitary artist parallels with a popular image of the lone researcher working independently to create knowledge (Wasser & Bresler, 1996). This image of the researcher has also been challenged, as recognition of the social nature of research and of collaborative research processes has developed (Wasser & Bresler, 1996).

⁵Within New Zealand, literature in this area is limited, although the value of collaborative arts practice is endorsed in a number of contemporary, educational contexts, including the Ministry of Education's the *Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* document (2000), and the writing of arts practitioners, colleagues and researchers (for example: Asker, 2003; Burnaford et al., 2001; Molenda, 1994; Ponifasio, 2002; Potter, 2003).

⁶The understandings of collaboration discussed and demonstrated by Diaghilev can be contrasted with the work of choreographer Merce Cunningham and composer John Cage. Artistic elements in their final performance work were developed completely independently and brought together in the final rehearsal, often deliberately to maximise chance happenings. In this process, the mediums of music and dance simply occupied the same time and place (Cunningham, 1993; Potter, 2003).

⁷ We acknowledge the support and guidance of Ray Gage and the whanau of Te Kohinga Marama Marae during this initial four-day hui. We also acknowledge funding from the School of Education Research Fund.

⁸ The value of ritualized processes around working, eating and living together has been acknowledged in arts research contexts in other cultures also (Jorjorian, 2004; Wasser & Bresler, 1996).

⁹ Sound throughout these edited video clips was composed and recorded by Kim Walker. Live sound in the *Home, land and sea* video clips was performed by Kim Walker with Chris McBride and Horomona Horo. Video documentation of the initial hui was undertaken by Sherie Harrison, of *Kaitiaki. Reasons to care* performances by Mark Abernethy, and of *Home, land and sea* performances by Sasha McLaren. All video editing was undertaken by the authors. We acknowledge funding from the following organisations for the two performance art events: The University of Waikato Cultural Committee Te Ohu Tauahurea, The Hamilton Community Arts Council, Trust Waikato and support of the WEL Trust Academy of Performing Arts and the Hamilton Garden's Summer Festival Trust.

¹⁰ Photo 6 was taken by documentary photographer Brian Perry. All other photographs were taken by Cheri Waititi or were taken from video footage.

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