



Performing the Hyphen

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ABSTRACT – Performing the Hyphen – The goal of this paper is to present a decolonising research methodology. The first section of this paper problematises western knowledge production, using Aníbal Quijano's colonial matrix of power. The second section theorises how an epistemological pluralism that is critical, decolonising and performative could address western knowledge production and the colonial matrix of power. The third section discusses how this methodology has been applied to Butoh to develop Critical Butoh. The final section presents *He rawe tona kakahu / She wore a becoming dress*, a Butoh performance exploring the intersection of gender and colonisation, as a practical application of this methodology.

Keywords: **Decolonisation. Butoh. Epistemological Pluralism. Colonisation. Māori.**

RÉSUMÉ – Représenter le trait d'Union – Cet article vise à présenter une méthodologie de recherche décolonisatrice. La première section interroge la production du savoir occidental faisant usage du concept d'Anibal Quijano de matrice coloniale du pouvoir. La deuxième théorise la manière dont un pluralisme épistémologique critique, décolonisateur et performatif pourrait répondre à la production du savoir occidental et à la matrice coloniale du pouvoir. La troisième examine comment cette méthodologie a été appliquée à la danse butô pour développer le Butô Critique. La section finale présente *He rawe tona kakahu / She wore a becoming dress*, une performance butô qui explore l'intersection entre genre et colonisation en tant qu'application pratique de cette méthodologie.

Mots-clés: **Décolonisation. Butô. Pluralisme Épistémologique. Colonisation. Maori.**

RESUMO – Representando o Hífen – O objetivo deste artigo é apresentar uma metodologia de pesquisa decolonizadora. A primeira seção problematiza a produção de conhecimento ocidental, usando a matriz colonial de poder de Aníbal Quijano. A segunda teoriza como um pluralismo epistemológico que seja crítico, decolonizador e performativo poderia responder à produção de conhecimento ocidental e à matriz colonial de poder. A terceira discute como esta metodologia foi aplicada ao butô para desenvolver o Butô Crítico. A seção final apresenta *He rawe tona kakahu / She wore a becoming dress*, uma performance butô que explora a interseção entre gênero e colonização como uma aplicação prática desta metodologia.

Palavras-chave: **Decolonização. Butô. Pluralismo Epistemológico. Colonização. Maori.**

Performance is an act of intervention, a method of resistance, a form of criticism, a way of revealing agency. Performance becomes public pedagogy when it uses the aesthetic, the performative, to foreground the intersection of politics, institutional sites, and embodied experiences (Denzin, 2003b, p. 9).



Image 1 – Miss Texas. Source: Photograph by Craig Thomson.

Decentring the Settler

Māori and indigenous education scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith states that it was through the western construction of the concepts of line, centre and outside, which were used to define the spatial relationships of colonisation, that indigenous space was colonised (Smith, 1999). The centre, the place of power, was claimed by the coloniser. Therefore, as sociologist Avril Bell has found, writings about how to re-structure these colonising relationships have coalesced around the ideas of recentring and decentring (Bell, 2008). As a white woman who is a United States citizen descended from settlers from Germany, the first believed to arrive in 1751, I have chosen to respond to this call and work on what Bell describes as “decentring the settler” (Bell, 2008, p. 853). In 2008, I facilitated the development of a performance project that examined the intersection of gender and colonisation, employing a decolonising epistemological pluralism that I had developed through my practice as an artist and performer. This performative research project was undertaken with Anahera Gildea, a Māori writer and performer from the *iwi* (tribe) of Ngāti Raukawa ki te Tonga. The outcome of our research was *He rawe tona kakahu/She wore a becoming dress*, which was performed for 17 and 18

April 2009 at the Film Archive in Wellington, New Zealand. The performance, for simplicity, will be referred to as *He rawel/becoming dress*.

In the presence of audiences at The Film Archive in Wellington, through the use of visual methods – specifically Butoh dance and video projections – Māori performer Anahera Gildea (Ngāti Raukawa ki te Tonga) and I, a white American woman, were able to create a public performance of decolonisation. During *He rawel/becoming dress*, an hour-long Butoh performance, Anahera and I peeled away the layers that encased us as women on different sides of the indigene-coloniser hyphen. To create this performance, we employed ways of knowing that arose out of our lives – Nichiren Buddhism, Critical Butoh, decolonising and critical theory, and *Mātauranga Māori* – and used these lenses to create a multi-faceted performance of gender as refracted through the colonial matrix of power.

This article focuses on the methodology I developed to conduct this research. My methodology, a decolonising epistemological pluralism, acknowledges that colonisation and its power relations permeate every aspect of being human and, therefore, employs a mix of knowledges, including indigenous, creative and spiritual, to transform mind, body and spirit. It finds that to decolonise western knowledge, knowledge production needs to be performative – that is, something must be done – and transformative – something has to change.

Because I chose to locate my research in Aotearoa New Zealand, I adopted a transnational lens to examine my position in regards to the relationship between coloniser and colonised, settler and indigenous peoples, in former British settler nations of the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. A common feature of transnational literature is to place the relationship of settler and indigenous peoples within the frame of nation-building and the nation-state. It is important acknowledge that the status of indigenous peoples is different than that of other racial and cultural Others because, at the heart of their status, is the issue of sovereignty rather than differential belonging. However, it is also just as important to state the obvious: “the nation-state itself was an export of Europe” (Anderson, 2000, p. 383). Thus, there is an inherent tension between the nation-state and indigenous peoples. During an interview, Bonita Lawrence, Mi'kmaw indigenous studies scholar, expressed it this way:

Never is the issue of what are we going to do about the existence of the United States, the existence of Peru, Bolivia, Columbia, you name it, the existence of Guatemala, of these settler states. The cases are different because of different experiences of colonization. But, in practical ways, what do you do when the existence of Canada means that our identities are always on the verge of extinction? (Thorpe, 2005, p. 6-7).

A re-definition of the settler nation-state does not necessarily have to be viewed as a negative event, but could be envisioned as an opening up of a new way of being in the world, an opening up of the potential to build peaceful and just societies. Such a perspective is more likely to be adopted when the rise of the nation-state and modernity is not viewed as a decisive step in the march of human progress. Sociologist Edgardo Lander asks the thought-provoking question what if “[...] colonialism, imperialism, racism, and sexism were thought of not as regretful by-products of modern Europe, but as part of the conditions that made the modern West possible” (apud Walsh, 2007, p. 228).

The rise of modern Europe brought into being what Quijano calls the colonial matrix of power (also called coloniality). Philosopher Santiago Castro-Gómez states that coloniality references, not a historical period, but “a technology of power” (Castro-Gomez, 2006, p. 218). This colonial matrix of power functions in four different domains: the appropriation of land and exploitation of labour; control of authority; control of sexuality and gender; and control of knowledge and subjectivity (Mignolo, 2007). These domains “are interrelated through *knowledge, and racism and capital*” [italics in original text] (Mignolo, 2007, p. 478). This is how Lander can assert that colonisation, imperialism, racism, and sexism are constitutive of western modernity, not merely unfortunate by-products that need to be mediated while retaining the framework of western modernity.

From this standpoint, returning to the dilemma of settlers in the former British settler nation-states, it is now possible to imagine that an engagement with indigenous peoples and their call for recognition of their sovereignty could pave the way for a re-construction of settler societies that is not based on modes of domination and oppression. Yet having an understanding of the positive potential of redefining of the nation-state in former British settler societies and transforming the relationship between indigenous peoples and settlers only fosters the desire to move in such a

direction. The question of *how* still remains. As stated above, the colonial matrix of power rests on knowledge, capital and racism. While acknowledging their interconnectedness, my research focuses on responding to the hegemony of western knowledge and how it might be de-centred through the use of a decolonising epistemological pluralism to become part of what physicist and eco-feminist Vandana Shiva calls “a plurality of knowledges”. Through my analysis of *He rawe/Becoming Dress* offer a preliminary model of a decolonising epistemological pluralism that is critical and performative.



Image 2 – Foundation garments. Source: Photograph by Craig Thomson.

A Decolonising Epistemological Pluralism

My research methodology developed through my practice as an artist and performer. This methodology seeks to overcome the dualisms that are the foundation of western knowledge. Eco-feminist Val Plumwood finds that “Western thought and society has been characterised by a set of interrelated and mutually reinforcing dualisms” (Plumwood, 1993, p. 443) that “are conceptual responses to and foundations for social domination” (Plumwood, 1993, p. 444) and intertwine with Quijano’s colonial matrix of power.

This dualistic thinking that forms the foundation of western knowledge allows it to claim universality and to rank all other knowledges on its own epistemological scale, which places the knowledge produced by white, Europeans at the top (Grosfugel, 2009). As the basis of all modern western thought, this concept of universality permeates the sciences, social

sciences and humanities (Castro-Gomez, 2006). Because of this, Mignolo, Castro-Gómez and Grosfugel call for “epistemic decolonisation” (Mignolo, 2007, p. 485), that is, the decolonisation of western knowledge.

Through the use of epistemological pluralism, my research is my attempt to work towards this goal of epistemic decolonisation, which, in turn, I believe will work towards de-centring the settler. While I have been analysing this knowledge dynamic through the lens of the colonial matrix of power, it has also been examined by various philosophers of science. Joseph Rouse describes how the sciences deny legitimacy to other knowledge production systems as “epistemic sovereignty” (Rouse, 1996, p. 30-33) and Stephen Healy finds that there is an interdependence between ‘epistemic sovereignty’ and the political culture that supports it: “‘political hegemony’ and ‘epistemic sovereignty’ turn out to be two sides of the same coin with the pre-eminence of vision assumed granted by the latter a key to the legitimation assumed by the former” (Healy, 2003, p. 699). Similarly, in the social sciences, Castro-Gomez finds that “[t]he taxonomies elaborated by social sciences were...not limited to the development of an abstract system of rules called ‘science’”, but these taxonomies constructed ‘mechanisms of power/knowledge’ that functioned both representationally and materially” (Castro-Gomez, 2006, p. 213-214). Healy offers “epistemological pluralism...as a step in the direction of reconceptualising knowledge and, consequently, reconfiguring the relations of power of which it is part” (Healy, 2003, p. 693-694). Epistemological pluralism, which promotes “the deployment of all relevant knowledge, perspectives and viewpoints” (Healy, 2003, p. 697), doesn’t deny the value of scientific knowledge, but merely understands that there are many ways of knowing the world (Healy, 2003).

Thaddeus R. Miller et al., a group of researchers from various disciplines, find that epistemological pluralism produces “a more complete understanding of complex issues”, but “may require continual negotiations” between differing knowledge systems and that, therefore, “requires both an attention to collaborative processes and a certain set of skills to enable group introspection” (Miller et al., 2008, p. 12). As an artist, I have collaborated with individuals from different disciplines; different cultures, races, classes and nationalities; and different genders and sexual orientations. What I have found to be essential for the success of such

collaborations is that the process is critical, decolonising and performative. While there is cross-over in these terms, as discussed below, each does not necessarily imply the other and each privileges something different.

Criticality

As critical pedagogy theorists Joe L. Kincheloe and Peter McLaren point out critical theory is not a single unified theory, but a pluralistic approach that makes space for disagreement and contestation; that is continually changing and evolving; that is held together by the search for “[...] new and interconnected ways of understanding power and oppression and the ways they shape everyday life and human experience” (Kincheloe; McLaren, 2005, p. 303, 306); and that seeks to create change and to transform society (Kincheloe; McLaren, 2005). I have chosen to use the term ‘critical’ simultaneously embracing this lineage while inscribing my own meanings. There are four dimensions that I ascribe to the term ‘critical’.

The first is a concern with an analysis of issues of power and justice. In their discussion of critical methodologies, communications scholar Norman K. Denzin and higher education professor Yvonna S. Lincoln define critical research as consisting of “a set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible” (Denzin; Lincoln, 2008, p. 5). Further, it seeks to create a space “where the work of resistance, critique, and empowerment can occur” and that this space is collaborative and dialogical (Denzin; Lincoln, 2008, p. 5).

The second is the recognition of how I as an individual am part of those larger power relations – a microcosmic expression of the macrocosm – and that I not only reflect upon my imperatives and assumptions (Kincheloe; McLaren, 2005) but also strive towards a self-criticality to unseat the ways in which these larger relations are inscribed on my being and being-in-the-world.

The third, drawing from the meaning of critical as essential or crucial, finds that it is crucial for me to assume responsibility for how my being and existence interacts with the currently constructed power relations, and the acceptance of that responsibility demands that I act in ways to transform

that construction. What I choose to think, say and do matters and, therefore, become acts that are critical.

The fourth is critical as in 'critical mass', the ability to sustain a chain reaction. It is necessary to work towards building communities that can support and sustain on-going efforts. To do so requires those of us coming from hyper-individualistic western backgrounds which privileges the individual to learn how to think as a 'we' and 'us', not just 'I' and 'me'.

Decolonisation

As with critical theory, educators Beth Blue Swadener and Kagendo Mutua find that decolonising research does not adhere to 'a single agreed-upon set of guidelines or methods' (Swadener; Mutua, 2008, p. 33). In fact, it cannot do so and remain decolonising. Decolonisation must be localised and "[...] grounded in the specific meanings, traditions, customs, and community relations that operate in each indigenous setting" (Denzin, 2005, p. 935-936). Anthropologist Anna Tsing frames local as "acts of positioning within particular contexts" (apud Conquergood, 1995, p. 138). While there is not a common method, there is a common purpose, which Linda Tuhiwai Smith states as:

The decolonization project in research engages in multiple layers of struggle across multiple sites. It involves the unmasking and deconstruction of imperialism, and its aspects of colonialism, in its old and new formations alongside a search for sovereignty; for reclamation of knowledge, language, and culture; and for the social transformation of the colonial relations between the native and settler (Smith, 2005, p. 88).

I approached decolonisation by using Michelle Fine's frame to "work the hyphen" (Fine, 1994, p. 72). Educators Alison Jones and Kuni Jenkins find that the "[...] shared indigene-colonizer/Māori-Pākehā hyphen not only holds ethnic and historical difference and interchange; it also marks a relationship of power and inequality that continues to shape differential patterns of cultural dominance and social privilege" (Jones; Jenkins, 2008, p. 473).

The strength of working across the hyphen is that there is the recognition that there are two distinct positions; one doesn't collapse into the other, but together they define a relationship. Working across the hyphen not only works against the Enlightenment-driven concept of

universality, but is a step towards de-centring the western. The coloniser is no longer defined alone, but in relation to the indigene. Looking across the hyphen is also implicit in this relationship. Traditionally, it is the coloniser looking at and defining the indigene, and the indigene responding to that gaze, but what if it is the coloniser who is gazed upon by the indigene and who has to respond to this indigenous gaze?

While working on the *Nō Nāianeī/From This Moment* project, which was a cross-cultural comparison of colonisation from the perspective of Māori and Chicano¹, our group of collaborators found that it was impossible to talk about Māori and Chicano without also talking about Pākehā and Anglos. Yet we also noted that white people could talk about themselves without ever referencing Māori, Chicano, Black, etc. It was at this moment that it occurred to me that this is the essence of white privilege – remembering Mignolo’s intersection of colonisation and racism. White people can define themselves as they choose and without ever having to reference the values and judgment of their Others. As Memmi said, the coloniser is part of the group whose “values are sovereign” (Memmi, 1965, p. 12), and because of this, they don’t have to develop double-consciousness.

In her essay, “Signifying Self: Re-presentations of the Double-Consciousness in the Work of Maxine Greene”, educator Denise M. Taliaferro offers a new way of understanding W.E.B DuBois’ use of double-consciousness in which he describes the situation of the African American as:

[...] gifted with second sight in this American world – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity (DuBois apud Taliaferro, 1998, p. 90).

Taliaferro notes that double-consciousness emerges “[f]rom an oppressed positionality” that “[...] is founded on the ability of the person to see Self through the eyes of the Other” and “has been characterized as an unfortunate, tragic burden” (Taliaferro, 1998, p. 92). While still recognising the negative impact that double-consciousness has had on

African Americans, she also, through drawing on the work of arts educator Maxine Greene, has come to recognise that:

[...] double-consciousness need not only be a burden, but might be a virtue as well. And, it need not be only a situation of blackness, it can also describe, albeit differently, the experiences of [...] any of America's oppressed. Not only that, but we should all seek to understand it and those who have escaped the pain of splitting soul should surrender to the possibility (Taliaferro, 1998, p. 90-91).

Taliaferro's 'virtuous' double-consciousness is an apt tool to dismantle our inner colonisation, our individual colonial matrix of power – double-consciousness as a personal tool of decolonisation. "Those who have escaped the pain of splitting soul should surrender to the possibility" is a call to white people to look *at one's self through the eyes of the others*, to measure one's self by the tape of the Other's world. Taliaferro's later discussion of bell hooks' essay, "Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination", clarifies how white people generally don't see the terror that whiteness causes in the minds of black people nor do they see how they, white people, exist in the imagination of blacks (Taliaferro, 1998). Taliaferro extends this discussion beyond the American black-white racial discourse when she states that her call for the development of double-consciousness is the same as postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak's call to "holders of hegemonic discourse" to "learn how to occupy the subject position of the other" (Taliaferro, 1998, p. 95).

It needs to be noted that few are exclusively privileged or oppressed. For most, one's positionality with regards to the hyphen depends on which relationship is under scrutiny. For example, as a woman I am the oppressed in the male-female hyphenate, but as a white settler woman, I am on the privileged side of the coloniser-indigene hyphenate. Further, my oppression as a white woman is distinctly different than the oppression of a Māori woman. This difference, caused by the intersection of gender and colonisation, became the central issue of investigation in the performative research that culminated in *He rawel/becoming dress*, which will be discussed later in this article. What is perplexing is that, for whatever reason, while I as a woman am forced to "occupy the subject position of the other" with regards to patriarchy, I don't automatically "occupy the subject position of the other" with regards to my Others. My whiteness and how it exists in the

imagination of my Others remains untouched unless I actively seek to understand it from the positionality of my Others. The question then is how do I as a white woman develop double-consciousness with regards to my whiteness? Taliaferro points back to Maxine Greene:

Maxine identifies her situatedness as white and woman, and it is from these positionalities that she uses her imagination to get in touch with alternative realities...Maxine, instead, uses her imagination in such a way that does not victimize the Other, or assume to be the Other. Rather, she extracts from the other's experience that which leads to some broader understanding of self. This is her cultivation of a positive and powerful double-consciousness, one that gives credence to the dialectical rather than the oppositional nature of Self and Other (Taliaferro, 1998, p. 95-96).

For Greene and Taliaferro, it is the imagination and the arts that can facilitate the development of double-consciousness. Art historian and critic Grant Kester, drawing on Kant, Schiller, Hutcheson and Shaftesbury, sees "the aesthetic as a unique form of knowledge" (Kester, 1998, p. 8) that "can overcome the boundaries of conventional thought" (Kester, 1998, p. 12) and explains that "[...] the aesthetic is linked to the social and the political through its function as a mediating discourse between subject and object, between somatic and the rational, and between the individual and the social" (Kester, 1998, p. 8). The aesthetic is able to visualise and embody both what is and what could be: "[t]hese aspects combine to provide the aesthetic with a unique ability to identify and describe the operations of political, social, cultural, and economic power, while at the same time allowing it to think beyond the horizons established by these forms of power" (Kester, 1998, p. 8).

Performativity

Drawing on this power of the aesthetic, beginning in the 1970's, there arose an activist model of art that used art practice to interrogate these power relations (Kester, 1998). Simultaneously in the realm of qualitative research, there arose questions about representation and reflexivity that made space for new and innovative ways of conducting research (Denzin; Lincoln, 2003). Arts-based research was one of the methodologies that developed as a result of, as activist, artist and author Susan Finley describes, the activist turn in social sciences and the search to make research

participatory and relevant to the researched and their community (Finley, 2005). Kester finds that this “activist aesthetic [is] based on performativity and localism” and describes performativity as “a practice that is adaptive and improvisational rather than ordinary and fixed”, concluding that “the work of art is less a discrete object than it is a process of dialogue, exchange, and even collaboration that responds to the changing conditions and needs of both the viewer and maker” (Kester, 1998, p. 15). Likewise, in his discussion of performance ethnography, Denzin states that there is no division between doing and done, performativity and performance (Denzin, 2003b).

Similarly, though coming from a performance studies perspective, Dwight Conquergood sees performance “(1) as a work of *imagination*, as an object of study; (2) as a pragmatics of *inquiry*...as an optic and operator of research; (3) as a tactics of *intervention*, an alternative space of struggle” (Conquergood, 2002). Further, the strength of performance as a research tool is that it utilises three kinds of knowledges: (1) “knowledge that comes from doing” or accomplishment; (2) “knowledge that comes from contemplation and comparison” or analysis; and (3) “knowledge that is tested by practice within a community” or articulation (Conquergood, 2002, p. 152).

My performative approach, therefore, is a weaving together of these threads and defines an epistemological pluralism that is performative as one that uses the aesthetic and imagination to create spaces of resistance and intervention; is adaptive and improvisational in order to be grounded in and responsive to the local; and does not separate knowing from its context, knowing from doing and doing from done. Moreover, performative research challenges what Conquergood calls “the hegemony of the text” which “underpins the supremacy of western knowledge systems by erasing the vast realm of human knowledge and meaningful action that is unlettered” (Conquergood, 2002, p. 147). Conquergood finds that “by embracing *both* written scholarship *and* creative work” [italics in original text] a re-alignment of “texts and performances in horizontal, metonymic tension” (Conquergood, 2002, p. 151) can be achieved. The recognition of the validity of non-textual modes of expressing knowledge is required to fully embrace epistemological pluralism where different knowledge systems have different ways of expressing knowledge; this is particularly true of

indigenous knowledges which have traditionally been embodied in oral traditions and customary arts.

In summary, my research is guided by an epistemological pluralism that seeks to dismantle the colonial matrix of power and its dualisms that underpin the hegemony of western knowledge. Through a performative research process, it casts a critical eye on power relations as they manifest out in the world and reproduce themselves inside me in order to work across the hyphen and decentre the settler. As a result of my decolonising work in the Chicano community in Southern California and learning on a personal level the importance of being “culturally responsive” (Denzin; Lincoln, 2008, p. 6), I have been deeply committed to grounding this research “in the specific meanings, traditions, customs, and community relations” (Denzin, 2005, p. 935-936) of Māori. For this reason, my research is responsive to the research principles of Kaupapa Māori.

Māori and indigenous education scholar Graham Hingangaroa Smith states that Kaupapa Māori, which is Māori-directed research, seeks “[...] to create the moral and ethical conditions and outcomes which allow Māori to assert greater cultural, political, social, emotional and spiritual control over their own lives” (Smith 1997, p. 456). Kaupapa Māori places Māori at the centre (Smith, 1997). Its imperatives are the survival and revival of *te reo Māori* (Māori language) and *tikanga* (Māori culture) in conjunction with the struggle for *tinio rangatiratanga* (Māori autonomy) (Smith, 1997). Kaupapa Māori is neither monolithic nor static. It has great breadth, being used in a variety of contexts and disciplines, articulating and clarifying itself with each new application. These varied articulations aren’t necessarily at odds with each other; they merely reflect the diversity of Māori and their contexts (Bishop, 1998).

As a white, American woman conducting research with a Māori woman in Aotearoa New Zealand, I took a two-prong approach to guide my interactions with Kaupapa Māori and *Mātauranga Māori*. First, I educated myself about Māori, focusing on their culture, history and political thought. I did this not only through written texts but through lived experiences, which meant I had to be willing to assume the unfamiliar – for a white person – position of being in a situation where my knowledge and points of reference were not necessarily valid. I engaged in Māori settings where, for a time, I was uncertain about what I should be doing

and uncomfortable with that uncertainty. I did not seek to become an expert on anything Māori – I did not feel that this was my place. Instead I sought to gain a respectful understanding; that is, I sought to have enough cultural understanding that I could interact comfortably in a Māori context and that I could, when working with Māori in Pākehā contexts, (hopefully) create a measure of Māori-friendly space.

Second, I used the knowledge and understanding I had gained to align my research with Māori values, ethics and aspirations. I used the insights of Kaupapa Māori as they pertain to keeping power relations in the forefront of my mind, specifically, how Kaupapa Māori seeks to deconstruct the hegemony of western knowledge and the academy which “have disempowered Māori from controlling their own knowledge” (Smith, 1992, p. 2). It is with this imperative in my heart that I developed the decolonising epistemological pluralism that Anahera and I used for our performative research project. I developed this methodology – and its theoretical foundation – as a way to positively respond to and begin to address Māori concerns about western knowledge production and academic research. To ensure that that Māori values, ethics and aspirations were an integral part of my research, I conducted my research under the auspices of Te Kawa a Māui/School of Māori Studies.



Image 3 – The Bride and the Black Widow. Source: Photograph by Craig Thomson.

Critical Butoh

What Tatsumi Hijikata and Kazuo Ohno uncovered in their movement investigations called Butoh was local and global at the same

time. They were responding to local conditions: the westernisation of Japan, World War II and the dropping of the atomic bombs, the renewal of the security treaty between U.S. and Japan, rural poverty, societal conformity and suppression of self, ethnic self-loathing, and the rise of a materialistic, consumer-oriented culture. These local conditions were an expression of larger, global issues: war and militarism, dominance and defeat, occupation and assimilation, materialism and technology, individuality and conformity, orientalism and exoticism, catastrophic loss and reclamation.

What is remarkable about what Hijikata and Ohno did is not in the external outcomes or the specific content of their dances; it is the development of a process that allowed the performer to find the hidden levels in her/himself and her/his society. Toshiharu Kasai, a Professor of Clinical Psychology who has developed a Butoh dance method for psychosomatic exploration and integration, calls this “body archaeology” and sees it as something that is unique to Butoh in relation to other dance styles (Kasai, 1999, p. 310). Thus, the skill required of a Butoh dancer is to find the essence of one’s own psycho-social experience within the context of one’s own culture. In this way, Butoh is not a Japanese dance form. It is grounded in the experience of the dancer and his/her historical, material, social, political, cultural time and place. However, as Toshiharu Kasai emphasises the Butoh dancer does not seek to portray his/her “internal experience into its visible manifestations” but rather seeks “simply to experience it and allow this to arouse motion” (Kasai and Parsons, 2003, p.259). This arousal of motion is facilitated through the finding of what I call Butoh Space. Butoh Space is the lived experience where the boundaries between mind/body, self/others and self/environment are erased and from which it is possible to create authentic movement, where the quotidian experience of self, time and space is altered.

Broadly speaking, a Butoh performance has the qualities of non-linearity, time-shifting, shape-shifting, beingness and nothingness. The Butoh performer’s movements are suggestive of things coming into being, decaying and disappearing into nothingness. The Butoh performer’s body tries to hold conflicting states of being in the same moment. When working with other Butoh performers, there are moments of connection, consonance and counterpoint.

Critical Butoh, developed by William Franco and me, is a body-based methodology that draws upon Butoh, Butoh Ritual Mexicano, critical and indigenous theory, humanistic Buddhist philosophy and installation art. It is body-based in that the only way to learn Critical Butoh is through the bodily experience of finding Butoh Space. Critical Butoh is a method of inquiry that is committed to the following principles:

1. Critical Butoh is a body-based practice that is critical, decolonising and performative

Critical Butoh embodies criticality, decolonisation and performativity. Critical Butoh

does (performativity) its critique, resistance and transformation (criticality) of the colonial matrix of power (decolonisation) through the use of the body-based aesthetic of Butoh. Butoh is a body-based practice where knowledge and knowing emerge from an excavation of the performer's body; Denzin defines knowing as "those embodied, sensuous experiences that create conditions for understanding" (Denzin, 2003a, p. 192). Environmental philosopher Ronnie Hawkins reviewed the recent research in neurology, biology, psychology and cognitive science to find that that linguistically-based rationality emerges out of the body and that "our abstract concepts are largely derived from our experiences as embodied beings" Hawkins (2009, p. 102). Such findings support the validity of this body-based practice.

2. Critical Butoh is a body-based exploration of the Cultural Interface

Torres Strait Islander and education researcher Martin Nakata in his book, *Disciplining the Savages: Savaging the Disciplines* describes the Cultural Interface as this:

The Cultural Interface is constituted by points of intersecting trajectories. It is a multi-layered and multi-dimensional space of dynamic relations constituted by the intersections of time, place, distance, different systems of thought, competing and contesting discourses within and between different knowledge traditions, and different systems of social, economic and political organisation (Nakata, 2007, p. 199).

By placing our Butoh work within the Cultural Interface, we provide a theoretical and lived context for our body archaeology. Our bodies are sites

onto which these ‘intersecting trajectories’ are written. Critical Butoh at the Cultural Interface not only seeks to mine how our bodies have been so written but also seeks new ways of re-writing our bodies and by extension, the Cultural Interface.

3. In Critical Butoh, process and product are inseparable

As our purpose is to transform ourselves and society, we need to use processes that support this goal, not ones that re-inscribe western dualisms and existing power relationships on us and our work. As a practical guide, Critical Butoh uses educator Tsunesaburo Makiguchi’s concepts of “beauty, good and gain”:

‘Beauty’ (and its opposite) is a measure of partial, sensory response within an individual. ‘Gain’ is the measure of a relationship that extends and expands the total vital experience of the individual (‘loss’ is that which shrinks and limits this). ‘Good’ is to the life of social collective what gain is to the life of the individual (‘evil’ is the societal equivalent of individual loss). Grounded in these definitions, Makiguchi’s reordering of ‘beauty’, ‘gain’, and ‘good’ – which, taken together, constitute his understanding of ‘value’ – represents concentric circles of expansion from within the life of the individual to the life of the community (Gebert; Joffe, 2007, p. 74).

Critical Butoh seeks to create beauty, good and gain not only in its artistic product, but also in the processes that bring the product into being.

4. Critical Butoh is strategic about what is created and where it is performed

The topics that our work addresses, of course, arise out of our and our collaborators’ interests, but there is reflection on the wider and deeper meanings and implications of undertaking such a project. Again, there is no separation or conflict between individual and community; both are privileged. Similarly, we carefully consider the location, as in country and city, and the venue within that location not just with regards to aesthetics, logistics and marketing, but with regards to its place in the world, its history, economics, politics, culture and people. There has to be a congruity between the place and the work; they have to listen and reflect back to each other. The place and the work have to support each other and become more than they would be alone.

5. *Critical Butoh is a collaborative practice*

Critical Butoh seeks to build community through its process of Butoh training and performance creation. To this end, Critical Butoh uses a collaborative approach. Collaborators are sought when only the merest idea of a project has formed, not once the creative vision has been seen and clarified. Then, the task becomes finding people who are interested in such an investigation and, once found, the group explores the question and together shapes the direction of the exploration and develops the creative vision.



Image 4 – Dressmakers’ Dolls. Source: Photograph by Craig Thomson.

He rawe tona kakahu / She wore a becoming dress

Anahera’s and my performative research project was *He rawelbecoming dress*, which was developed using the aesthetic of Butoh as our primary research tool. Our efforts to create an artistic outcome, a performance, were what allowed us to uncover the hidden dynamics of our lives as a Māori woman and an American woman and how those dynamics both reflected and confronted the larger societal forces of which our lives are a part. As Denzin writes, “[P]erformances make sites of oppression visible” (Denzin, 2003a, p. 192). Remembering Kester’s power of the aesthetic, the aesthetic also allowed us to find new ways to reconfigure these dynamics, to challenge and transform what we experienced and perceived as their negative aspects; our Buddhist practice also guided us in this process. However, the performativity of our performative research project is not

limited to the actual artistic performance, but applies equally to how we conducted our research: we did, we experienced, we performed our research process. Denzin finds “performed experience as a way of knowing, as a method of critical inquiry, and as a mode of understanding” (Denzin, 2003a, p. 192).

On 17 and 18 April 2009, *He rawel/becoming dress* was presented at the Film Archive in Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand. The theatre was transformed into a high-end fashion catwalk with five video projections. It was a multi-layered event that interwove Butoh dance, grotesque fashions, video projections and a live DJ mix. *He rawel/becoming dress* was an hour-long Butoh performance created and performed by Anahera Gildea and me. William Franco was the Production Designer. Janet Dunn was the Costumier. Bex Weatherhead was the Lighting Designer.

He rawel/Becoming Dress was built around the ideas of a fashion show and the matryoshka, or Russian nesting dolls. Anahera and I were the models, going down the runway in different fashions; simultaneously, we were characters acting out their drama on the stage. We began the performance wearing all the fashions/costumes, layer upon layer. The removal of each layer of fashion/costume was done in full view of the audience and was not a seamless strip but rather a struggle and challenge to break free. Our fashions/characters were:

Author	Anahera
Matryoshka	Matryoshka
Miss Texas	Mother
Black Widow	Bride
Executive	Dusky Maiden
French Maid	Ballerina
Dressmaker’s Doll	Dressmaker’s Doll
Costume-less	Costume-less

He rawel/becoming dress grew out of Anahera’s and my standpoints as a Māori woman and a white American woman investigating the intersection of gender and colonisation. Using Critical Butoh, we were able to interrogate our personal worldviews as they interacted in the Cultural Interface. Though *He rawel/becoming dress* was personal and idiosyncratic, it was, through the power of the aesthetic, suggestive of something larger. It

was a public performance where we invited the audience into a universe where questions were raised and ideas contested. It was a lived, shared experience that sought to transform the experience of being women and of being women on different sides of the colonising relationship.

While Anahera's and my performative research project looked at our lives as women, the focus of our investigation was gender as one of the hierarchies of the colonial matrix of power (Grosfugel, 2009). Grosfugel finds that the colonial matrix of power accorded white women "[...] a higher status and access to resources than the majority of men in the world (who are of non-European origin)" (Grosfugel, 2009, p. 20). While white women are oppressed by western patriarchal society, they also are the carriers of white privilege. For these reasons, while *He rawe/becoming dress* is concerned with gender, it is an interrogation of the relationship between a white woman and an indigenous woman; it is a body-based exploration of the hyphenate of coloniser woman-indigenous woman, white American woman-Māori woman.

As discussed earlier, the colonial matrix of power permeates every aspect of being human. Through the hierarchies of knowledge and language, it colonises the mind. Through the hierarchies of race, sexuality and gender, it colonises the body. Through the hierarchy of spirituality, it colonises the spirit. Therefore, our research project used a mix of knowledges that addressed all three levels of mind, body and spirit. Our shared knowledges included western decolonising and critical theory that focused on transformation of the mind; Butoh, the body and Nichiren Buddhism, the spirit. Additionally, as Māori, Anahera integrated *Mātauranga Māori* into our epistemological mix.

In the setting of a fashion show catwalk, we 'modeled' the fashions that embodied what made us feel discomfort, despair, dread, fear and even hatred at being a woman. Under the lights of the catwalk, we illuminated the darkness of being a woman that we carried inside us. We interrogated the messages about female roles and feminine stereotypes that we had received as girls growing up on different sides of the hyphen in different countries. In the presence of our audience, we traced our differing female *whakapapa*, our differing genealogies as women – what had been given to us, what had been left to us, what had been handed down to us – that shaped how we responded to the male gaze, felt about our bodies, and

expressed and repressed our sexuality. We piled them on our bodies all at once and then stripped them away, broke free from them and emerged naked, transformed, reborn.

At its most basic level, *He rawel/becoming dress* was a public performance of decolonisation. During this hour-long Butoh performance, Anahera and I peeled away the layers that encased us as women on different sides of the indigene-coloniser hyphen. To create this performance, we employed shared and unshared ways of knowing that arose out of our lives – Nichiren Buddhism, Critical Butoh, decolonising and critical theory, and *Mātauranga Māori* – and used these lenses to create a multi-faceted performance of gender as refracted through the colonial matrix of power. In other words, *He rawel/becoming dress* was about the transformation of the mind, body and spirit.

In regards to the use of Nichiren Buddhism, I was responding to education theorist Riyad Ahmed Shahjahan's request to "address the question of spirituality in research" (Shahjahan, 2005b, p. 703), using Burman's definition of spirituality as being "about connection and making these connections" (Burman apud Shahjahan, 2005b, p. 689). Similarly, Smith finds that the "[...] arguments of different indigenous peoples based on spiritual relationships to the universe...have been difficult arguments for western systems of knowledge to deal with or accept" (Smith, 1999, p. 74). Shahjahan also writes of the necessity to problematise how the western view separates one's personal spiritual transformation from social transformation "because it unconsciously assumes that there are two different domains of transformation" (Shahjahan, 2005a, p. 233).

The inclusion of Nichiren Buddhism as one of Anahera's and my ways of knowing was a clear statement that spirituality had a legitimate place within our performative research project. Further, Anahera and I approached our performative research project with the understanding that, for us, the success of *He rawel/becoming dress* hinged on our own inner transformations. Through our performance on stage, through the stripping away of our layers of fashions, we revealed not only what we felt to be our greater selves but that of the audience as well. We were able to do this through the aesthetic of Butoh.

Critical Butoh provided us with a physical practice and process to enact this transformation in our bodies as well as a means to communicate this transformation through performance. The power of the Butoh aesthetic arises out of its quest for authentic movement. Authentic movement arises out of Butoh Space, which is the lived experience where the boundaries between mind/body, self/others and self/environment are erased and from which it is possible to create movement where the quotidian experience of self, time and space is altered. Bodies are sites onto which the intersecting trajectories – the historical, material, social, political, cultural time and place – of the Cultural Interface are written. Through using Butoh's body archaeology, Anahera and I sought to mine how our bodies had been written. Then, through our performance, we enacted a re-writing of our bodies and made it our offering to our audience.

Decolonising and critical theory supplied us with the analytical tools to frame this transformation within a theoretical construction that made power relations visible. Through our Buddhist and Butoh practices, Anahera and I uncovered unacknowledged aspects of our lives as a Māori woman and a white, American woman. Through the use of decolonising and critical theories, Anahera and I were able to understand these idiosyncratic aspects of ourselves in relation to the wider societal power relations and issues of social justice.

The ways in which *Mātauranga Māori* was part of our epistemological mix is less straight forward. Through our willingness to consider gender and colonisation from a spiritual perspective as well as political, social and historical, we had made a place for *Mātauranga Māori* in our performative research project, and Anahera certainly used it as a tool in her work on *Herawel/becoming dress*. Because Anahera and I never had a direct conversation about how we could use *Mātauranga Māori*, I acted from my own beliefs about how I should engage with *Mātauranga Māori*. I used my knowledge and understanding about Māori culture, history and political thought to align my research with Māori values, ethics and aspirations and conducted my research under the auspices of Te Kawa a Māui/School of Māori Studies. It is in these ways that I find that *Mātauranga Māori* was an integral part of the creation of *Herawel/becoming dress*.

Herawel/becoming dress was more than a performance. It was a performative research project. My thesis posits then that one way to change

the map that has colonised indigenous space and has placed the settler at the centre is through a multi-level exploration of the terrain that the map has claimed. Performance studies researcher Dwight Conquergood uses Michel de Certeau's aphorism, "what the map cuts up, the story cuts across", to describe the relationship between "between two different domains of knowledge: one official, objective and abstract – 'the map'; the other one practical, embodied, and popular – 'the story'" (Conquergood, 2002, p. 145).

Based on the findings of Anahera's and my performative research project, such an exploration needs to:

1. reconnect the story and the map
2. include knowledges that were not used to draw the colonising map
3. employ a mix of knowledges to change mind, body and spirit

It has been my intention in both the creation of *He rawel/becoming dress* and the writing about the creative process and performance to show that reconnecting the story and the map aids in dismantling the dualistic thinking that underpins the colonial matrix of power and its hierarchies of knowledges. Whereas the colonial matrix of power seeks to create dualisms and hierarchies, reconnecting the story and the map emphasises the interconnectedness and interdependency of life and knowledge. Further, the story makes space for the aesthetic, for the imagination, as well as the lived and the doing. Reconnecting the story and the map is another way of stating that to decolonise western knowledge and research, knowledge production needs to be performative and transformative, as well as critical and analytical. Building on previous work and confirmed in this project, I believe that performativity and transformation, criticality and analysis all need to be present. Performativity simply means something must be done, some action beyond theorising must take place. Transformation requires that something has to shift, change, be different than it was at the beginning. Criticality and analysis ensure that there is an understanding of the wider context of colonisation and its power relations. Together they form a holistic approach to decolonisation.

In writing about *He rawel/becoming dress* and the decolonising epistemological pluralism that gave rise to it, I am making an offer. I believe

that the principles, ideas, concepts and tools that we used and that have been detailed in my thesis have the capacity and flexibility to be used in many different settings, including those far removed from creative endeavours. While I intend to conduct additional research to continue the development of this methodology, I hope that others who have vastly different knowledge sets than I will see the value of this methodological approach and adopt and adapt it to their research projects as well.



Image 5 – The French Maid and the Dusky Maiden. Source: Photograph by Craig Thomson.

Note

- ¹ The term 'Chicano' 'came into widespread usage in the 1960's as part of the Chicana/o civil rights movement. Unlike the ethnic description 'Mexican American', these terms signaled a decolonizing political ideology critical of anti-Mexican sentiment and melting-pot ideals of assimilation into Eurocentric culture' (Pérez, 2007).

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