

EMBODYING TRANSFORMATION

TRANSCULTURAL PERFORMANCE

EDITED BY MARYROSE CASEY

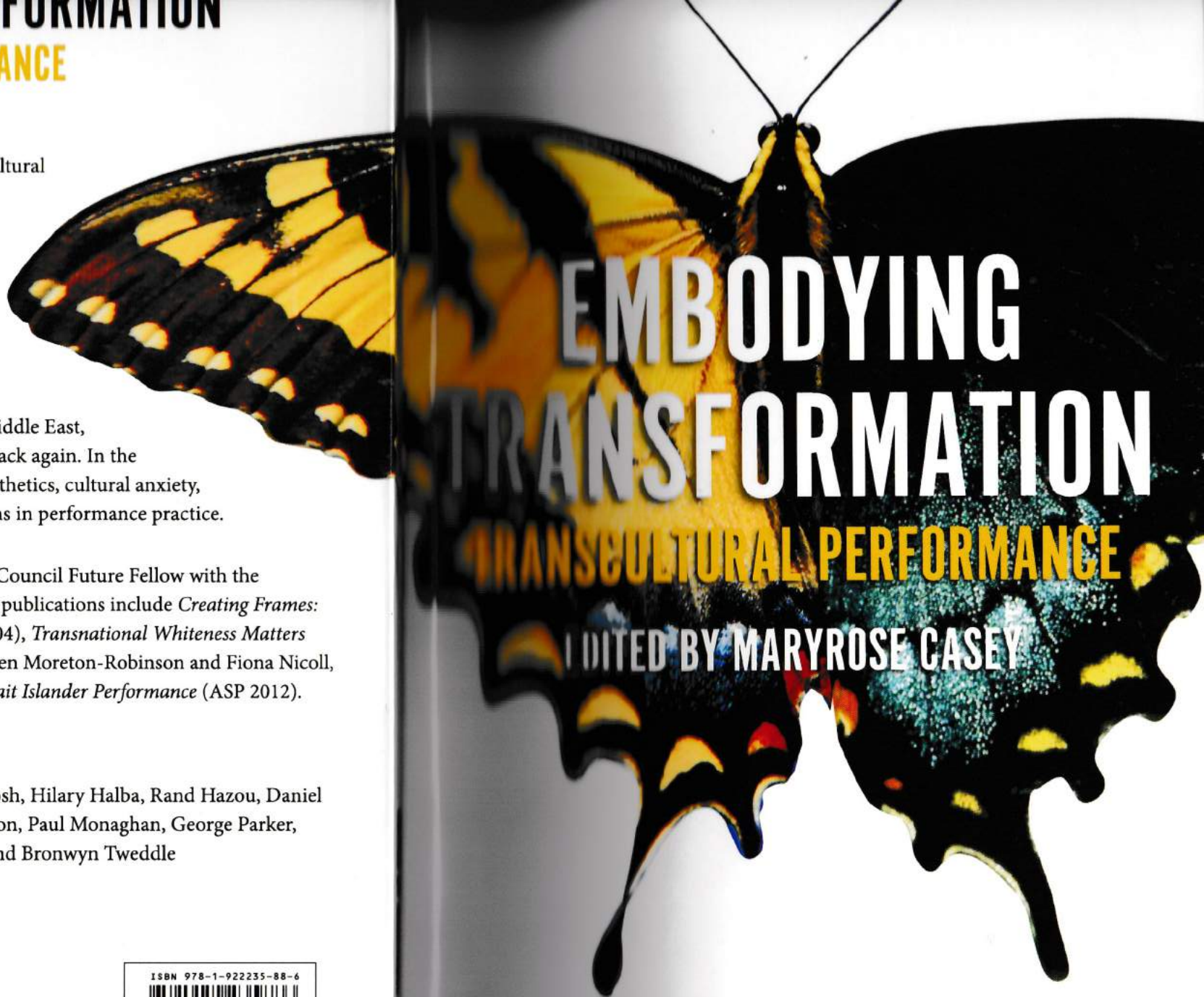
The essays in this collection explore transcultural events to reveal deeper understandings of the dynamic nature, power and affect of performance as it is created and witnessed across national and cultural boundaries. Focusing on historical and contemporary public events in multiple contexts, contributors offer readings of transcultural exchanges between Europe, Asia and the Middle East, between colonisers and the colonised and back again. In the process the authors explore questions of aesthetics, cultural anxiety, cultural control and how to realise intentions in performance practice.

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CONTENTS

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Acknowledgements	vii
Introduction	ix
<i>Maryrose Casey</i>	
Chapter 1. Arcadian scenes: Bougainville, Banks and theatrical perception in the South Pacific	1
<i>Glen McGillivray</i>	
Chapter 2. 'Notorious' mimics: Mimetic performance for entertainment in the transcultural encounter in colonial Australia.	17
<i>Maryrose Casey</i>	
Chapter 3. Embodied re-imaginings: Greek tragedy, Nietzsche and German expressionist Theatre	33
<i>Paul Monaghan</i>	
Chapter 4. Re-citing Chekhov in Canada	52
<i>James McKinnon</i>	
Chapter 5. Christoph Schlingensiefel's 'Hamlet' in Switzerland: A theatrical 'resocialisation'	69
<i>Anna Teresa Scheer</i>	
Chapter 6. Here be Taniwha: Performance research on the edge of the world	84
<i>George Parker</i>	
Chapter 7. Re-framing Pākehā narratives: Interweaving Māori-ness into performances of two plays by Gary Henderson.	99
<i>Hilary Halba and Bronwyn Tweddle with Rangimoana Taylor</i>	
Chapter 8. In a fresh hue: An adaptation of Chaturanga	114
<i>Arjun Ghosh</i>	

Chapter 9. From <i>Naga Wong</i> to <i>The Message</i> : The intercultural collaboration and transformation of Makhampom's contemporary <i>likay</i> performance	130
<i>Sukanya Sompiboon</i>	
Chapter 10. Making space for international students: In Your Own Words	147
<i>Daniel Johnston</i>	
Chapter 11. Reading Islamic Identity in Contemporary Performance Art and Reconsidering the Secular Lens of Western Performance Praxis	166
<i>Sandra D'Urso</i>	
Chapter 12. Anti-transcultural performance: Flashmobbing the Cape Town Opera's production of <i>Porgy and Bess</i>	182
<i>Rand Hazou</i>	
Author biographies	203

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HERE BE TANIWHA:
PERFORMANCE RESEARCH
ON THE EDGE OF THE WORLD

George Parker

Old European maps carried the warning 'here be dragons' to warn sailors of the dangers of exploring the margins of the known world. These days, performance artists and scholars set their sights on the 'dragons' directly or, in Aotearoa/New Zealand, we might say the aim is to seek out *taniwha* – a supernatural creature of Māori culture that resides within rivers, the sea and caves – in an effort to gain new understanding and knowledge. Through performance-as-research, artists and scholars look to the edges of culture, to the places where taniwha reside, in order to challenge what we know and provoke new ways of being in the world. For ten years, Te Puna Toi (which translates as 'the wellspring of art') in Christchurch, New Zealand has served as just such a platform, a performance research project that seeks out taniwha on the margins of the dominant culture to affect different perspectives on the lives we lead. This essay reflects on a decade of experience, particularly from my point of view, both as Te Puna Toi's manager and as a participant in many of its projects. I do this with the aim of reconsidering the role an academic performance project such as Te Puna Toi might play in the community, especially in post-earthquake Christchurch, where taniwha of a sort continue to shake us to the core, forcing us to reconsider what we know and what we think we understand.¹

1 Following a large earthquake on 4 September 2010, Christchurch experienced thousands of 'aftershocks' including several large earthquakes, which have decimated the city centre. The most destructive of these, on 22 February 2011, resulted in the death of 185 people, left much of Christchurch without essential services for weeks, and the central city was cordoned off to the public.

When established in 2001 by the Theatre and Film Studies programme at Canterbury University, Te Puna Toi was the first to offer a New Zealand-based platform for performance research. Te Puna Toi has become an instigator of conferences, symposia, artist talks, performances and archives that encourage local and international artists to come together to explore, devise, produce, discuss, write about and create experiments in the production of avant-garde theatre, performance and film.² Te Puna Toi works between theory and practice, between the local and the international, and between the avant-garde and the traditional, and is especially interested in producing new ideas about the performance of encounter and identity between cultures – in particular, between the European and Māori, but also amongst European, Māori, Pasifika, Asian and other peoples, as New Zealand becomes increasingly multi-cultural in its orientation.

The event that launched Te Puna Toi, a national conference/hui in 2001 titled 'Return of the Native', featured the performance *Footprints/Tapuwaae*, a bicultural opera that juxtaposed motifs from Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelungen* with Māori myth, including of dragon and taniwha.³ As a performer in *Footprints/Tapuwaae*, I was, at different points, the sharp end of the taniwha that swallowed the Māori warrior Tukaha and later the tail end of a dragon that duelled with the Teutonic warrior Siegfried. At both ends, and in keeping with the aims of the performance to compare and contrast but not synchronise or align European and Māori worldviews, I had the opportunity to consider the significant differences between dragon and taniwha – that these are not simply interchangeable. Whereas the dragon in Western literature is usually represented as a mythical creature of either good or evil, the taniwha of Māori oral tradition is more ambiguous, uncertain, unsettled – an ephemeral being that is there but not there. I would like to take the image of the taniwha presiding uneasily under the surface of water or land as a metaphor for the destructive and creative possibilities of Te Puna Toi; while what we think we know may be destroyed by the incisive challenge

- 2 See: www.tepunatoī.canterbury.ac.nz. Accessed: 14 December 2011. This essay is based on a paper presented at the 2011 Australasian Association for Theatre, Drama and Performance Studies (ADSA) conference at Monash University, Melbourne. The conference was titled 'Transcultural. Transnational. Transformation: Seeing, Writing and Reading Performance Across Cultures'. Thank you to Peter Falkenberg, Richard Gough, Sharon Mazer and Maryrose Casey for their input into this essay.
- 3 *Footprints/Tapuwaae*, directed by Peter Falkenberg and Tai Huata, Free Theatre Christchurch, 2001. See: www.freetheatre.org.nz/history/footprints.shtml. Accessed: 14 December 2011.

and provocation of performance research and performance-as-research, it is out of the ruins and rubble of this questioning that new understanding and a genuine sense of community is created.

Searching for and working with the ephemeral and unsettled: this is the approach undertaken in the performance research of Te Puna Toi. The project has grown, in particular, out of the performance work of Peter Falkenberg, work that 'intentionally' looks for 'the ephemeral, the indeterminate and the risky in classical and new texts as well as in devised performances' (2007, 296). In reference to devised performance in particular, Falkenberg makes a comparison with Māori culture:

Ephemerality is always being denied through text. Māori only have an oral tradition, and written fixed text – even if it preserved their own language – was used as a colonizing instrument on them. Their tradition of performance can be seen as devising and re-devising their cultural identity in a constant process through the generations. Perhaps we can learn from the Māori, and not just in New Zealand. Perhaps it is time to see devised performance as a way of keeping the freedom as well as the relevance of the art, which is always fleeting... like identity, like life (2005, 40).

Following his experience as Artistic Director of Free Theatre Christchurch, Falkenberg has directed Te Puna Toi to conduct performance research and instigate performance-as-research projects that see the margins as a profitable place to gain perspective on the way we live our lives – both in seeing the actions that take place on the margins in relation to the 'mainstream', and the 'mainstream' from the perspective of those on the margins. Performing our research deliberately on the cultural margins of Christchurch has the potential to position us more effectively to examine what it is to live here now, and post-earthquake, to rediscover what Christchurch has been and can become.

In exploiting the margins to develop new innovative practice and probing theoretical inquiry, Te Puna Toi is in keeping with its original partner, the Centre for Performance Research (CPR) based in Aberystwyth, Wales.⁴ CPR Director Richard Gough suggests the perspective of CPR is the following:

[W]e take as our starting point the position of Wales on the periphery of Europe, and transform this into a curatorial vision as we take a broad

4 See: www.theopr.org.uk/index2.php. Accessed: 14 December 2011.

look at contemporary performance work... Performance which makes the marginal central, celebrating diversity and all that exists on the periphery, on the edge, on the border between different art forms and between social and aesthetic action – that which disturbs, illuminates, challenges the norm, takes paradoxical position, is made off-centre, off-side, on purpose (Gough 2009, 26–27).

In 1999, CPR hosted the Performance Studies International Conference (PSi5). The conference was titled 'Here be Dragons', a play upon the national symbol of Wales but with a view to the idea of performance research that I have been suggesting:

Performance research is inclusive and intercultural, evolving and unsettled. It allows for new formulations and emphasizes process rather than product. It does not enshrine cultural values and pronounce upon them with certainty; rather it contests them and offers a space/site for dynamic negotiation. It includes uncertainty and diffidence, promotes experiment, nurtures a sense of becoming and evolving, and encourages reflection. It emphasizes the provisional, action with contingency, mutability – culture in a subjunctive mode (Gough 2009, 28).

In conversation with this idea and with PSi more specifically, Te Puna Toi hosted PSi9 in 2003, adopting an experimental approach that deliberately tried to unsettle the notion of performance research and conference. Titled 'Field Station, New Zealand: Environment/Performance', the delegates were selected or assigned to groups that spent a week exploring performative aspects of New Zealand, and New Zealand *as* performance: Māori ritual and tourism; settler heritage sites/sights; a South Island cooking tour; the Lord of the Rings tour; music performance in relation to Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* and the land that inspired it; The Antarctica Centre. At the end of the week, the groups were invited to present what they had learnt to the assembled conference delegates. So unsettling was this unusual conference structure that many of the regular PSi delegates did not make it to New Zealand (citing SARS and developing hostilities between the US and Iraq as reasons not to travel). However, those who attended – a remarkable mix of Māori, non-Māori New Zealanders and international artists and scholars – still recall the value of having been thus provoked into a discussion that was more direct and urgent because, unlike conventional conferences, this experiment jolted them out of their comfort zones and into a genuine engagement with their own performance as researchers.

For me it was a formative experience as a scholar and as a person, perhaps because the profound relation between the two came to match what I had experienced mostly only *in* performance – a special kind of embodiment, akin to riding a taniwha perhaps, or trying to. I was part of the ‘Tangible Heritage: Museums, Heritage Trails and Heritage Sites’ field station: a group that explored in particular the many sites identified with settler culture heritage around Banks Peninsula. We ended up crossing paths with the ‘Land: Whakapapa and Mapping’ field station, a group led by the young Māori choreographers of the Atamira Dance Company who were themselves tracing sacred and mythic Māori sites which intersected our own, such is the nature of heritage sites in Canterbury.

When I came to present at the end of the week I was confronted with the spectre of my own complacency as descendant of settlers, having to make new sense of settler heritage in the context of Māori. I attempted to do this by making a comparison in my presentation between the Pākehā and Māori sites/sights on the heritage trail: ‘There are objects and there are people; there is the tableau and there is the live body. In the museums, heritage parks and attractions, mannequins pose as settlers, suspended forever in the construction of settlement. In the Marae performance, I can see the sweat and smell the bodies. While the sites of English heritage simply explain that the English colonised this land and that Pākehā have inherited the many qualities and virtues of Western civilisation, the Māori performance appeals to me viscerally with the foot stomping on the ground and the hand slapping the body.’ And after nervously reading this all out, I registered a strange and powerful paradox. On the one hand, I articulated the simple truth that, ironically, the experience of guiding our international guests around the heritage sites had made me feel completely ‘not-at-home’, alienated from the land, but that on the other hand, acknowledging this unsettledness made me feel strangely grounded, or at least embodied in a way that went beyond my everyday experience as a participant in New Zealand culture and society.

One particular site on our heritage trail still stands out for me: a large stained glass window in the Great Hall of the Christchurch Arts Centre.⁵ I remember it vividly for the way it represented the colonial imagination of the settler, against which I could, as one of the modern progeny of settlers

5 Titled ‘Service to Humanity’, the window was designed by Martin Travers, a teacher at the Royal College of Arts in London as a commemoration for staff and students of Canterbury College (now the Arts Centre) killed in the First World War. It was unveiled in 1938. It clearly references medieval motifs and it seems likely Travers was inspired by Botticelli’s *Seven Liberal Arts* to construct a story for the English settlers that celebrated the inclusion of New Zealand in Empire.

and a performance researcher, read something else. The window depicts a nondescript island, crowded with famous English figures, rising out of the sea. A large red hydra-like creature menaces the land, held at bay by a row of identical soldiers, leaning forward, rifles and bayonets at the ready. A pamphlet on a lectern just inside the entrance marked the window as the main attraction in the Hall and explained its symbolism: the island represents civilisation, the sea is chaos and the unknown, and the creature signifies ignorance and brutality. On the island there is a four-tiered hierarchy, which is delineated by steps in the earth that spiral upwards; the top tier is occupied by a woman (humanity), her babies (the future), and she is attended by four figures (thought, truth, justice and action). At the bottom of the heap, beneath the coiling cluster of famous Englishmen is Bishop Selwyn (Bishop of New Zealand from 1841–1858). Selwyn is seen taking the arm of a Māori figure in order to lift him to the next level of enlightenment. The wealth of tradition and culture that is symbolically piled up behind (or upon) the broad shoulders of Bishop Selwyn is juxtaposed to the singleness of the primitive, unnamed Māori male. He is a generic representative – a crouching man in flax skirt with *pounamu* necklace, rising above the indistinguishable mass of the more primitive tribal community as part of a colonial process that grounds English heritage in this land.

At the time, I came to realise that such a telling of the landing of English settlers did not sit well with my feeling of being ungrounded. I coveted Māori indigeneity. My performance research forced me to recognise that I had never been settled in the way the window suggested, as the inheritor of the colonial imagination. The beauty of such a recognition was that it inspired questions where before there had only been a sense of knowing; it inspired a desire to search rather than continue to pretend to be present and whole – and surely this is the aim of a performance researcher and also of a performer. I wanted to go in search of taniwha on the edge, which in many ways was a reversal or revision of what I could see in the window. The window, drawing from medieval motif and Western/English history, depicted freedom from the evil dragon-like representation of ignorance and brutality (unknowing) that was attempting to attack the shore, the land of knowing, of civilisation, of the established power structures and hierarchy of rational, enlightened Western thought that was very much part of my identity. It coiled around the island like a snake, or a dragon perhaps, mirroring its counterpart in the sea, like the native caught between the sharp end and the tail end respectively. So, yes, I identified with the guy in the grass skirt. However, rather than being made the freeman, the whole man,

by stepping onto the island, I was far more interested in turning around, jumping into the sea and wrestling, perhaps even dancing, with the taniwha – for here be the search for knowledge.

In placing myself in the frame in this way, I do not want to claim indigeneity as a Pākehā (the Māori name for the European settlers) in the way New Zealand historian Michael King idealised in *Being Pākehā* (1985/1999). King claimed that after 150 years Pākehā should also be considered *tangata whenua* (a reference to Māori as the indigenous ‘people of the land’), a view encapsulated by the quote on the front cover of the 1999 edition of his famous book: ‘Pākehā New Zealanders who are committed to this land and its people are no less ‘indigenous’ than Māori’ (King 1999). For me, King’s conversion from coloniser to native conflates the two sides of the colonial encounter. He allows me to ‘settle’ and thus precludes my search as a non-native New Zealander for a truthful expression of my experience of my homeland. Arguably, it denies the truth of Māori experience as well, which is equally unsettled, a bicultural – and now more and more acknowledged as multi-cultural – *whakapapa* [genealogy] that is complicated by a colonial and missionary process that has interwoven aspects of Christianity into the everyday of *Tikanga Māori* [Māori custom]. Then there is the historical break-up of the former *marae*-based existence, caused by the dominance of the Pākehā socio-economic system, which has led to a profound sense of dislocation for significant parts of the Māori population. Like Pākehā, Māori are also searching for a sense of identity, and acknowledging this may allow a mutual discourse that is open and explorative, rather than geared towards the end-result perspectives that so often appear to underpin the rhetorical branding: ‘bicultural New Zealand’.

In terms of performance-as-research in New Zealand, the principles of Māori oral and performative traditions may provide a better guide to enacting the search for identity than the usual traditional Western forms of representation that dominate notions of performance in New Zealand. Falkenberg makes this point in terms of devising performance:

Perhaps instead of conforming to a fixed script which is always in danger of being frozen in some other place, time, and ideology, it is better to look for identity through a provisional art, where texts and participants become the material of performance in a dialectical process. It may be, in the present situation, that there are no pure local identities any longer – if there ever were. A country that is built upon colonization must be seen in the act of continually devising an identity for itself. How else

to represent such acts if not by following the same provisional path? (2005, 39)

This approach to performance-as-research, as a ‘provisional art’ that is devising identity, is supported by the explorative nature of performance research in regard to everyday life. For example, I recognised a similar truth as I stood in front of the window in the Hall and considered my relationship to it historically, socially and politically. The composition of the image told me that, in the past, one cultural history had replaced another in the name of civilisation. And this occurrence must be acknowledged as a critical component of our heritage. The window grounds the Pākehā identity by representing the way in which we come to be attached to the land. Looking at such ‘windows’ to the past can also illuminate a tangible link to my presence here and now. Perhaps I can see myself and perform more truthfully as a not-quite-native and yet not-quite-not-native New Zealander.⁶ This seems to be the starting point and a place to return to – forever embracing impermanence, the liminal and transitional – when considering performance research and performance-as-research.

For me, this notion has taken on a new relevance and a sense of urgency in the wake of the large destructive earthquakes in Christchurch during 2010 and 2011. Along with many others, I have been disturbed, thrown off-centre, feeling as if I am going to tip off the edge of the world to where dragons roam, or, perhaps bucked off balance by the great taniwha that battle within the belly of Papatuanuku, the earth. The earthquakes in Christchurch undermined and in many places severely damaged physical structures such as the heritage buildings that housed Te Puna Toi in the Arts Centre. At the same time, they have had a profound effect on the social and cultural structures, opening up cracks within the fabric of this notoriously conservative city, a point recently noted by journalist Adrienne Rewi in her musings about a new Christchurch event, the Festival of Transitional Architecture (FESTA) – an event that Te Puna Toi played a role in creating.⁷

6 This is a variation on the ‘not-not’ formulation generally attributed to Richard Schechner. See *Between Theatre and Anthropology* 1985: 4, 6, 97.

7 Rewi was writing in particular about the opening event for FESTA called *LUXCITY*, which saw 350 architectural students from around New Zealand descend on Christchurch to create a ‘city made of light’ in the central city on October 20, 2012. The students worked in collaboration with local businesses and arts organisations to create 16 installations generated by light. The event drew an estimated 20,000 people into the central city – numbers not seen since the February 2011 earthquake. I was an instigator of the project and my reasons for initiating it were influenced by my experience with Te Puna Toi. See: www.festa.org.nz;

Rewi suggests that the earthquakes have led to an unsettling of a place and identity considered known and understood and, in an energising way, this has reaffirmed the value of being thrown off-centre. In such a context especially, I want to ask what role the performance research of Te Puna Toi can play in seeking out, exploring and offering perspectives for a society that is, as never before, aware of the performance of its own body, its different constitutive parts and how it operates, not just geographically, but culturally, socially and politically. How might understanding and knowledge be gleaned through performance research in this crisis environment?

I believe the performance-as-research approach at the heart of Te Puna Toi can be as valuable and essential as any groundbreaking research that may emerge from Christchurch in relation to the geological sciences. Towards this end, Te Puna Toi is developing a performance research project titled 'Transitional City', which aims to formalise a number of inter-university and inter-departmental collaborations that have emerged in the post-earthquake environment. Academics from Theatre and Film Studies (TAFS) at the University of Canterbury, the Faculty of Creative Industries (including Architectural Studies) at the Christchurch Polytechnic (CPIT), and Environment, Society & Design at Lincoln University have been collaborating to transform vacant space in Christchurch through performance, temporary architecture and art. Known to the community as Gap Filler, Greening the Rubble, Arts Circus, the River of Arts and FESTA, these projects will play a vital part in the renewal of the city and will be ongoing initiatives. Sharing the title, the Christchurch City Council is using its recovery plan to describe the post-demolition period as the city begins to rebuild. Te Puna Toi's 'Transitional City' aims to learn from, inform and capitalise on these initiatives, using them as the material or foundation for additional research. By utilising the inter-disciplinary nature of performance studies, this Te Puna Toi project will approach the arts not simply as decoration to the lives we have, but as an active intervention, bringing together the interests of business, universities, government and the community to act as a foundation for the city.

While the initiatives mentioned above are frames or concepts that urban renewal projects can develop to engage with the city in transition, Te Puna Toi's 'Transitional City' will also look to commission specific performance-as-research projects that directly engage with the post-

earthquake environment of Christchurch. An early example of this kind of experimentation was *The Earthquake in Chile*, a Free Theatre performance commissioned by Te Puna Toi, which took place in and around St Mary's Church in the Christchurch suburb of Addington in October 2011.⁸ The project was inspired by the events that immediately followed the devastating earthquake of February 22. In those weeks, when homes and lives had been decimated and essential services cut off, an extraordinary, spontaneous and profound sense of community emerged: neighbours, who were mostly strangers before, cared for each other, sharing meals, resources and stories, bonded by a powerful sense of uncertainty as the earth continued to move violently and without warning. Falkenberg, the director of Te Puna Toi, was reminded of the Heinrich von Kleist short story which has at its heart an exploration of *communitas* in the wake of the destructive earthquake of 1647 in Santiago Chile. The story begins with a young man about to hang himself in his prison cell as his lover – his former pupil and now a nun – is about to be executed for the affair that led to the birth of the couple's child. They are spared when a massive earthquake destroys the city and finding each other amongst the rubble they make plans to leave. However, they come across a makeshift town on the edges of the city where the shaken residents have gathered. Comforted by the extraordinary sense of community and sharing that takes place there, they decide to stay and eventually return with the other residents for a commemorative mass in the ruins of the city's cathedral. However, the old strict values and hierarchy of the pre-earthquake society returns and the couple are eventually identified and killed.

Falkenberg, taking Kleist's story as inspiration, proposed a performance project under the same name, *The Earthquake in Chile*:

The performance could be in a church where Free Theatre actors could perform part of the plot and where after the spectacle of a quake the performers and audiences could come together in a communal meal with entertainments that would draw parallels from the Chile earthquake to the earthquakes in Christchurch and Japan. After the quake in Christchurch we all had this experience of people suddenly being changed into compassionate fellow travellers on this earth and perhaps a production and meal recreating this context could pose the

www.facebook.com/FestivalofTransitionalArchitecture; www.stuff.co.nz/the-press/opinion/perspective/7831007/Christchurch-should-be-transition-capital. Accessed: November 11, 2012.

⁸ *The Earthquake in Chile*, directed by Peter Falkenberg in collaboration with Richard Gough, Free Theatre Christchurch, 2011. Collaborators included: A Different Light Theatre Company, Tablo Theatre Company and Richard Till. See: www.freetheatre.org.nz/history/eqc.shtml. Accessed: June 14, 2012.

question how to preserve such communal behaviour even after the quake has hopefully gone through its last aftershocks.⁹

In this way, the performance offered a different approach to the numerous community meetings and forums that emerged in the wake of the Christchurch earthquakes. However, through avant-garde performance, it encouraged a similar goal: to allow and encourage the community to converse about the present and future of the city.

A key component of *The Earthquake in Chile* was the collaboration with director and performance researcher, Richard Gough, who was in New Zealand to celebrate Te Puna Toi's 10th year. Gough brought to the project his considerable research into the rituals around food and eating and devised concepts within the performance that allowed the audience to become participants in the experience.¹⁰ The action began in the church, with the audience taking the part of the congregation in a Catholic-inspired mass that introduced and played upon the Kleist story but with references that alluded to Christchurch. Following the ritualistic procession of a choir dressed in the garb of the old Catholic church and a reading from the Book of Revelations (Verse 17: The Whore of Babylon), a sermon from the chief priest (played by the author) referred to this city of 'Christ's Church' as being like a whore ravaged by the disease of moneylenders – an allusion to the suburban malls that were considered by some to be responsible for urban decay in Christchurch pre-earthquakes. The chief priest found a symbol for this notion of the city as a whore in the form of a young nun, played by an actress who was brought in from the vestry and seated in front of the gathered congregation. His vengeful sermon was then interrupted by the actor playing the young tutor, who made as if to hang himself in the back of the church. However a simulated earthquake (a loud, low vibrating hum generated by an adapted sound system) in the chapel interrupted this action and the congregation/audience were asked to calmly exit the church.

Once outside, the audience was directed into the church square and led through a series of interactive performances that were based around the Free Theatre's performative research into people's behaviour post-earthquake. They were divided into groups and sent to different tents to hear and participate in diverse stories from post-earthquake Christchurch, and initially invited to recall experiences via the performer's own reminiscences.

9 Peter Falkenberg, email message to the author, 3 March 2011.

10 Gough is well known as a director and performer. His performances relating to food and the communal rituals around eating having been performed in Europe, North America and Asia.

For example, my own performance in the tented village was presented in the form of a blind prophet presenting visions of past and future, and drew upon my experience of seeing a heritage building being torn down in the seaside suburb of Sumner where I live, a building that also housed the iconic pizzeria The Ruptured Duck. The performance featured a table in the middle of a tent at the front of which stood the well-known Ruptured Duck sign that I had managed to salvage from the demolition site. The audience stood around the table as I, positioned under the table, began a poem that reflected on my experiences of seeing the destruction of the Ruptured Duck. I eventually broke through a trapdoor in the middle of the table, which was covered by an old map of central Christchurch, and served pizza to the audience on the trapdoor – that is, on a representation of the inner city grid.

This performance was not simply a lament to the natural and man-made destruction of the city; it referred to the potential creative future of the city as well. The experience of having seen such destruction, and talking about it with others who were present, created a kind of rapture: I was enthralled by the demolition of the once solid structures that orient daily life; the experience had an extraordinary effect on my sense of permanence and place. Witnessing the removal of your community's identity is very disturbing and unsettling, and yet the conversations in and around this destruction suggested an almost unconscious desire to preserve some sense of this heritage, an appreciation of its importance in defining an identity that had previously been taken for granted. A sense of community seemed to have been provoked by these acts of destruction. It was as if those present stood transfixed, wanting to record – with the naked eye and camera – some essence that might be maintained and transposed into the new community emerging.

During this performance, the poem upon which the action was based shifted from reflections about the destruction of heritage in my own neighbourhood, to the wider destruction of heritage in the inner city. In Christchurch, 80% of the city's inner city building stock has been removed, leaving large blocks of barren land. On the one hand, entrance into this 'red zone' was, and continues to be, deeply disorienting, especially for someone who is familiar with the city, recognising the street name or intersection but with a sense of being in a completely other place. On the other hand, the play of light in places apparently never seen before is strangely uplifting. This new light illuminates different ways of seeing the city and its future; the light provoked in me a spontaneous need to talk about what might eventuate, as the memory of what was began to slip away. Even now, a year later, as you move around taking mental pictures of what

is fast disappearing, or trying desperately to remember what has already been removed, a creative process is provoked, one that has you babbling to whomever you meet in the red zone about what was of value before and how it might be considered in the development of a new urban environment. Much like the Rilke poem in which he marvels at the fractured torso of Apollo in the Louvre, an appreciation of the beauty and play of light of this ruin may be the foundations of new understanding leading to change for the better: 'For here there is no place / that does not see you. You must change your life.'¹¹ It was with this poem that I ended my performance in the tented village of *The Earthquake in Chile*.

While these initial individual performances sought to provoke memories and experiences of community related to the earthquakes, as they progressed around the various stations the audience were encouraged more and more to become co-performers in the action. Seated at a ring of tables around the church bell tower, the audience had to share tasks in order to collect food. Later, the audience was invited to sit at a long, narrow table and feed their neighbours while sharing stories of the earthquakes, and these interactions established a form of *communitas*. The performance ended in the church, reflecting the end of the Kleist story, where the initial sense of community in the wake of the earthquake is shattered by the brutal return of the old order, with a vengeance.

If the overwhelming response to *The Earthquake in Chile* is anything to go by, the aim of invigorating a sense of agency in the current Christchurch environment was achieved. The numerous messages we received were typified by one letter to the Christchurch *Press*, which referred to 'the opportunity to grieve for our broken city' as well as the 'space to tell some of our own quake stories' and 'imagine a new future' (Hales 2011, 16). The responses suggested the timing of the performance – something that caused some doubt and anxiety among the participants – was in fact ideal. The timing was such that memories of the earthquakes were still raw enough that people were open and searching as never before, and yet they were not so raw that the performance would provoke the trauma the original event had incurred. This was important because the aims of the performance were to seek out in the experiences of the earthquakes those acts of community that were so profound they might be preserved and poured into the foundations of a new city. Thus, the experience offered an outlet for both emotional and rational responses: a way to work through

the still-present and ongoing trauma of the event through the sharing of stories and experiences, and a platform to consider what might be used in the building of the new city.

The Earthquake in Chile is a great example of the way performance-as-research can effect a sense of community through the avant-garde. Eminent New Zealand historian Jock Philips described the performance as 'one of the more remarkable theatrical "experiences" which I have had', and went on to suggest it was a 'Pākehā ritual' that was 'intensely meaningful' to the Christchurch community. *The Earthquake in Chile*, building on the invaluable experience of Falkenberg, Gough and their collaborators, brought together the two sides of the Earth, Wales and New Zealand, bridging the Pacific and the Atlantic and the experiences of those operating on the margins. The performative research that ensued created a kind of equilibrium in a place where the earth was still moving. As Te Puna Toi moves forward with its plans for the 'Transitional City', these kinds of projects show the active role the academy can play in community-building. Through performance-as-research, the academy is able to draw on international theory and practice to inform ongoing efforts to develop resilient twenty-first century urban environments, and the material collected from such experiments can also feed back into the academy for the betterment of the community. Like a taniwha beneath our feet, the avant-garde can provoke ruptures, expose fissures and force open a consciousness of ourselves performatively, creatively and communally.

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