

Mauri Tau : Māori cultural somatics
From Nervous Systems to Global Systems

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Waerea, waerea,
Waerea e Rangi e tū nei, waerea e Papa e takoto nei,
Waerea huarahi kia puta ki te whaiao, ki te ao mārama.
Koia te mauri, te mauri nuku, te mauri rangi, te mauri tiaki mai nei
i te tangata, tūhono ki te ao,
Mauri ora te pūkenga, mauri ora te taurira!
Hā ki waho, hā ki roto,
Tau ana te ora!

Obstacles are cleared from the earth to the sky in the world of light and understanding.

The terrestrial and celestial force of life protects, connects, and flourishes in all.

The essence of the universe is present,

Vitality is in balance!

Abstract

Reflecting Kaupapa Māori research, this exegesis positions personal and collective healing, systems change and future-making as fundamentally concurrent processes best supported through a creative-led approach. Rooted in Māori ontologies and constituted by creative-led practice and embodied cognition this research discusses Mauri Tau Practices, a uniquely Indigenous, somatic-informed approach to wellbeing.

Approaching whakapapa experientially through multimodal, sensorial, creative, ethnographic, and autobiographical lenses, this (re)search explores relationships between cultural identity, creative expression, embodied cognition, decolonisation, systems change and wellbeing. Centring socio-cultural transformative potentials arising from somatic encounters of self within and as collective, it presents an inclusive, reflective, trauma-informed approach grounded in historical and tempo-spatial forces shaping wellbeing in Aotearoa. Phenomenologically informed, Mauri Tau Practices reflect a living third space generated by Māori cosmological knowledge, positioned within a postcolonial context, and developed autobiographically within a transcultural whakapapa in constant negotiation with colonial, Māori, and migrant realities. Correlations with Eurocentric feminist posthumanist theories are considered, alongside embodied, ancestral, and ecological relationships informing renewed ways of knowing that can enact systems change and future-making.

This exegesis serves as a convergence point for Mauri Tau Practices responding within a continuum of personal and collective cultural (re)evolutions. Expressed through a thematic and genealogically-informed structure reflecting a Māori way Mauri Tau Practices are emphasised as a significant creative practice-led methodology, alongside the mauritau.me website as a key creative contribution providing open public access to introductory cultural somatic practice through sound and video led by the author.

Embracing how cultural principles manifest as movement, presence, and process philosophical and methodological potentials for better wellbeing outcomes for Māori and non-Māori in Aotearoa NZ are identified. Investigating how these manifestations respond to reshaping postcolonial conditions in Aotearoa, Mauri Tau Practices situates the corporeal body as a

creative and material form with intrinsic value and intelligence to inform theoretical and philosophical discourse on future-making through cultivated embodied coherence.

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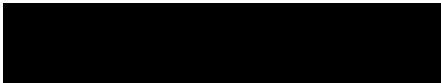
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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements) nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature of the author.

– Date: 8th October 2025

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KAUPAPA

This creative (re)search¹ began within my skin. Yet, it is not mine alone. Within my skin lives cellular memories, woven from inherited worlds that carved out ancestral pathways that have brought me into the creative potential of now. Between the lived experiences of those who shaped our past and those who will inherit our creations, you and I become vibrant materialising creative practices expressing our humanity as living artefacts within this interconnected lineage; past, present and future bodies wholistically evolving, (re)cyclically growing, shedding, composting and (re)generating.

The notion of healing is fundamental to this inquiry. So is the innate and essential connectivity we have with the taiao (the natural world), as relayed through the pūrakau (traditional Māori story) of Hineahuone, the first human created. Grounded in Te Ao Māori (the Māori world), this research engages with the interconnected nature of physical and non-physical worlds, attuning cultured bodies towards wellbeing. Embracing yet not bound to producing art-effect, Mauri Tau Practices reflect a creative, critical inquiry into the performativity of becoming as guided through Indigenous ways of being, doing and knowing.

The genesis of this (re)search emerged from both a naïve curiosity and a deep need for insight into my own wellbeing. As a solo mother of Māori and European descent, I have experienced dissonance and trauma living in the legacy of white colonial systems and white-body supremacy, patriarchy and racism. These forces, present in my family, workplace, community, and in public healthcare and the wider economic systems, have had detrimental impacts on both personal health and collective wellbeing. Grounded in the epigenetic reality of my whakapapa, this research began not from a theoretical idea, but as an instinctual, embodied response. I wanted to understand and heal so started listening deeply to my body for insight, applying what I was learning training as a Kairongoā (traditional Māori medicine practitioner) with Tohunga Matangaro Billy Tuhua (Ngāpuhi). Processing these sacred learnings while listening to the sensations of my body activated whakapapa as cellular memory. This somatically unlocked a holistic inner map that connected, guided, and supported my spiritual,

¹ Using (re)search instead of *research* is a deliberate and symbolic choice often found in Indigenous, decolonial, and critical academic writing. Its use is intended to highlight the cyclical nature of Indigenous approaches to growing new knowledge that grounds itself in traditional knowledge, ‘searching’ through ancestral knowledge to inform current knowing. This serves to challenge assumptions about what research is and does.

mental, and physical bodies (referred to as the three bodies) through an expansive and interconnected living world as (re)source.

This research is embedded in a world where Māori Atua (divine beings) are not concepts but acknowledged as living beings acting upon this world and us in relationship. This is a world where everything maintains a life force and where all things are interconnected. It was in wānanga (a knowledge-sharing encounter) with Hineahuone that Mauri Tau Practices was initiated and developed, deepening my learning and understanding about myself within Te Ao Māori. I refer to Hineahuone in such an intimate and interactive way because I have experienced and observed the affect and effect of Atua in explicit and profound ways. To engage with this research is to invite you to engage within a world you may not yet have encountered, but which is as living and true as you are right now reading these words.

Embodying an Indigenous creative practice, Mauri Tau Practices enables participants to engage with the imaginary and the performative to bridge post-colonial and pre-colonial worlds. Proposed as essential components to inform futuremaking and shape ethical approaches to systems change, Mauri Tau Practices recognises a need today for existential (re)alignment between beliefs and spirituality, thought and perception, physical expression and embodied knowing integrated culturally into personal and collective identity. This research commits to exploring and cultivating the creative potential for interconnectivity towards a just society where we can cohere together into belonging within our own skin.

Phenomenologically informed, the Mauri Tau Practices I have developed have been shared widely; first in performing arts, then within a range of contexts including community wellbeing, corporate wellness, cultural education, mental health, decolonisation processes, systems change contexts and leadership development programmes. This current online iteration, www.mautitau.me, responds to requests to create easier access to Mauri Tau Practices while increasing engagement to further deepen and evolve the associated learnings.

The whakatauaki (proverb) ‘Ka mua, Ka muri’ reminds us that we move forward into the future looking back at our ancestors. Guided by their choices and learnings, we build on what they created and left behind. Where my colonial culture practiced amnesia and disregard for ancestral knowledge (Barragán, 2023), the treasured Tongan elder, Epele Hau’ofa, described the living process of culture and traditional knowledge to me as such:

You young ones get confused between traditional and contemporary culture, thinking they are two separate things...there is no separation, they are a continuum, your traditions are merely the good ideas that have lasted, tested by your ancestors and handed down to you. And your job darling is to inherit these in good faith and then to test every single one of them and make sure they are still good ideas, still relevant and useful, before you hand them on. Put to sleep the ideas no longer useful and hand on the best ideas that will sustain future generations forward, that way each generation knows that what they receive from their ancestors are the best ideas to guide them forward and look after them. (E. Hau'ofa, personal communication, 2005)

Mauri Tau Practices is my attempt to fulfil 'my job', grounded in the dynamic relationship between people, place and memory and shaped by cycles of body-centred practice cultivating connection, rest, and reflection. (Re)searching within Māori culture underpins Mauri Tau Practices' development as both a healing process and a culturally-rooted methodology for systems change founded on decolonisation and wellbeing. Demonstrating cultural 'sensibilities' applied within creative practice, Mauri Tau Practices integrates multiple nodes of knowledge to create contextualised, resonant fields of attuned perception while somatically expressing a creative, Indigenous way of being. It remains evolutionarily responsive to the wellbeing needs of community, land, and personhood, methodologically affirming a Kaupapa Māori vision of future-making that is wholistic, embodied, and relational.

In this exegesis, *Te Ao Tawhito* and *Theoretical Rau* chapters together form the literature review, engaging both Indigenous and Eurocentric knowledge. *Cultural Creativity* and the *Artefact* outline my methodology. A non-linear, layered style of storytelling purposefully infolds (re)cyclically to weave whakapapa (reflecting knowledge), kaupapa (reflecting purpose), and lived experience (reflecting data) to capture the authentic process and distinct character of a living story evolving new knowledge through an Indigenous lens.

TE AO TAWHITO: EMBODIED CONTINUUMS

This section introduces core traditional Māori principles underpinning Mauri Tau Practices, orientating this research within the foundations of the cultural world giving rise to it. A brief introduction to Mauri Tau Practices, the focus of this research, follows.

Mauri

Mauri (life force) expresses, confirms, and sustains all aspects of Māori being. It facilitates interconnectedness while also affirming the distinctiveness of all life forms, as each living entity possesses its own mauri (Durie, 2001, 2017). As Hohepa Kereopa states, “Without the mauri, there is nothing... It’s all about mauri. That’s what people have forgotten” (Moon, 2008 as cited in Ngawati et al., 2018). I refer to mauri as a foundational language through which the cosmos speaks between all living things.

Mauri and whakapapa are inseparable. Mauri is the essential link between the spiritual and physical realms, binding wairua (spirit) to tinana (body) (Love, 2004; Mark & Lyons, 2010; Ministry of Health, 2014 as cited in McLachlan et al., 2021). Royal (1998d as cited in Ngawati et al., 2018) describes mauri as “an energy that animates and illuminates all things”, allowing spiritual dimensions to manifest materially. This energy affirms a greater reality in which Atua and tūpuna (ancestors) influence our fleshy, lived experiences. “The laws of the spiritual order can interpenetrate and overrule the laws of the natural order.” (Royal, 1998d as cited in Ngawati et al., 2018).

Mataira (2006 as cited in Ngawati et al., 2018) extends this understanding, suggesting that mauri determines the frequency of energy and gives it form and expression, be it a tree, a bird, or a person. In this way, both mauri and wairua operate as bridging forces between physical and metaphysical worlds. Hohepa Maclean (Ngawati et al., 2018) clarifies: “You can't feel mauri - it's the wairua that you feel. You know that mauri is there—you see the signs...life is the sign of mauri.”

Described as a form of individualised embodied consciousness (Apiti et al., 2024) Durie (2001, 2017) emphasises the interconnected nature of mauri, acknowledging it not only as a dynamic force within living beings but existing between, within networks of interacting relationships.

He explains: “The mauri of one object retains its momentum not because of its intrinsic qualities alone but because of its relationship with the mauri of others” (Durie, 2017 as cited in Ngawati et al., 2018). For humans, *oranga* (wellbeing) can be understood as the condition of our mauri in relation to the mauri of another and/or our environment. Durie (2001) describes variable states of mauri and wellbeing, including; *mauri ora* (flourishing), *mauri oho* (awakened), *mauri tau* (balanced and settled), and *mauri noho* (stagnant). Hakaraia (2023 as cited in Ngawati et al., 2018) affirms that mauri influences our emotions, thoughts, and perceptions, offering insight into the nature of our relationships with people, place, the wider environment and our relational wellbeing. Through self-awareness mauri provides a guide for transformation and healing.

Through embodied ways of moving we can engage *wairua* and affect mauri into a state of *mauri tau* (settled/calm vitality). *Mauri Tau Practices* fundamentally engages attention and agency towards modes and states of personal and collective wellbeing. While mauri, *wairua*, *mana*, *hau*, and other life energies exist in dynamic inter-relationship within a Māori world (Valentine et al., 2017) word limits restrict inclusion and elaboration here. Acknowledging their interdependence yet simplifying this research, mauri here is understood as a culminating expression of the state of these energies thereby reflecting wholistically the wellbeing of a subject, from which identity and connection may emerge through self-care and relational attuning.

Whakapapa

Whakapapa encapsulates the living embodiment of Te Ao Māori, expressing an expansive network embracing the creation of every living thing woven into an interconnected web of existence. Providing place and community for belonging, whakapapa describes the very nature of existence spanning past, present, and future. Preserving and transmitting inherited knowledge systems (Tau, 2001) whakapapa links us ancestrally while ontologically connecting us consciously to all aspects of the living world and the universe. Both genetically intimate and personal while cosmologically collective, whakapapa reminds us that we exist relationally, negating Eurocentric notions of individualism. Whakapapa upholds the individual through interconnectivity, because of their innate place of belonging within the collective (Hart, 2010).

Whakapapa expresses the quantum continuum of epigenetics, or blood memory, bound within our 'three bodies' (tinana, hinengaro and wairua) expressing a metaphysical phenomena of knowing that is transmitted implicitly and intergenerationally (B Tuhua, private conversation 2012). Ngawati (2018) states, "The central point of the creation theory and link between the spiritual creation and the physical creation is whakapapa. Therefore, the spiritual attributes are also inherited as are the cultural attributes of whakapapa" (p. 14).

"Whaka" implies 'a becoming', and "papa," referring to the dense form of the earth, translates as 'forming into that which is foundational' or 'the process of layering one thing upon another' (Ngata [1944] 2011, p. 6 as cited in Mahuika, 2019). Poetically embracing the physical and non-physical nature of creation, whakapapa 'carries the ultimate expression' of who we are (O'Regan 1987, p. 142 as cited in Mahuika, 2019). Shaped by ancestral endeavours, genetic codes and the lands we inhabit, while also rhizomically binding us within the cosmos, whakapapa encapsulates what is foundational to our arrival into earthly forms and places of belonging. Simultaneously whakapapa affirms a future certainty of becoming, of innate potential to create and bring new forms into existence, essentially creating the world our descendants will inherit.

Foundational to this research, whakapapa speaks to the ways in which knowledge and identity are not static but living, embodied, dynamic (re)evolutions passing intergenerationally through the metaphysical interplay of time, space, place, beliefs and the bodies that enfold them. As Māori we acknowledge that 'everything has a whakapapa' (Mahuika, 2019), be it a person, a place or an idea. This acknowledges that everything has a source, a past, a meaning shaping its existence and agency. Therefore, to authentically understand anything whakapapa is required. Colonisation has a whakapapa to Europe (Roselaar, 2017) and now has a whakapapa in Aotearoa. Our physical body too has a whakapapa to colonisation and to our blood relatives just as it simultaneously has its own extensive whakapapa inherited through Hineahuone. 'Pivotal to being human,' this whakapapa connects humankind to both the Atua and taiao (natural environment) (Sullivan, 2018).

Through its map of remembered, relational entanglements, whakapapa provides means and purpose for future-resourcing reconnection, inclusive of our connections with taiao.

Expanding notions of wellbeing to include not only humans but Papatūānuku (Earth), taiao, whakapapa tangata (people), in the current experiences of climate change and eco-genocide, whakapapa offers to restore an embodied wisdom of inter-relationality with the living world needed to support healing of the damage from our extractive, industrialised, capitalist societies (Monticilli, 2018).

Whakapapa immortalises us through ritualised practices of reciprocity. Re-membering and re-connecting underpins the vitality that whakapapa brings into the lives of people. At the same time whakapapa demands healing to generate and sustain itself. Motivated by health inequities reflected in Māori health statistics (Graham et al., 2020) and the prevalence of colonial trauma and mental health issues (Sheridan et al., 2024) this research posits the healing of whakapapa, Māori and non-Māori, as a prerequisite for creating healthy futures for everyone in Aotearoa (Gluckman et al., 2021).

Functional, educational, symbolic and embracing, it is the underlying oral, ethical and cultural practices crucial to whakapapa that have sustained the integrity of Māori through colonisation (Mahuika, 2019). Mauri Tau Practices meaningfully moves within the whakapapa of pre-colonial ways, while engaging the whakapapa of colonisation, of trauma, of our multicultural society today, and of our future dreams in an ongoing conversation through the embodied self with the whakapapa of the whenua (land) and taiao. Offering both method and motivation for healing, these practices engage with sustaining wellbeing of the diverse whakapapa within Aotearoa, NZ into the future. Reinstating ora (life/wellbeing) into our lives and communities, Mauri Tau Practices engages reflectively with diverse cultural worldviews while encouraging participants to (re)search their whakapapa and to be response-able towards weaving pasts and futures. In doing so, it aims to generate enduring legacies and resonant fields that harvest effective insights from the past and today to inform positive and inclusive future-making across bloodlines and generations.

Rongoā Māori

Rongoā Māori, Māori traditional health practices, integrates physical, mental, spiritual, and environmental dimensions mediated through wairua and mauri. Central to rongoā Māori is whakapapa. Referring to a stimulating of the senses, rongoā not only focuses on personal health

but advocates for relational attunement and reciprocity with taiao (Tassell-Matamua, 2018), emphasising the interconnectedness between humans and the natural world, as inherited through Hineahuone and reflected within the maramataka (lunar calendar).

Rongoā can refer to Māori traditions of plant medicine, bodywork, spiritual clearing and talking. Unlike a Eurocentric worldview, as noted by Durie (2003a), rongoā emphasises that health is not only an individual condition but a collective experience, where the wellbeing of the individual is inseparable from the health of the community and the environment. This holistic understanding of health engages simultaneously with physical treatment AND spiritual care (Lindsay et al., 2020).

The resurgence of rongoā Māori today represents a powerful act of cultural renewal and decolonisation. Historically suppressed through colonial legislation such as the Tohunga Suppression Act of 1907, rongoā practices were criminalised to favor Western medical models (Sheridan et al., 2024). Despite this suppression, rongoā is re-establishing a vital role in Māori communities today. Seen as an assertion of Indigenous knowledge, sovereignty, and self-determination, today rongoā ensures that Māori people have access to health practices rooted in their cultural worldview (Durie, 2003a). Moreover, rongoā Māori contributes to broader sustainability goals, advocating on environmental concerns while preserving cultural knowledge and practices. By maintaining and revitalizing rongoā, Māori not only ensure the survival of their traditional cultural methods but also strengthen their autonomy over health practices and resources (Cunningham & Stanley, 2003) empowering long-term wellbeing for people and the whenua.

As Rongoā Māori decolonises, it challenges the limitations of the Western biomedical model, and the marginalisation of Indigenous healing practices (Sheridan et al., 2024; Hart, 2010; Mackean, 2022). As Bodeker (2001) points out, traditional ecological knowledge and holistic approaches like rongoā provide culturally relevant, effective alternatives within contemporary health systems.

Mauri Tau Practices are an emergent form of rongoa responding in, and shaped by, a contemporary world to facilitate restoration of tau (balance) and ora while restoring our interconnectedness with the taiao. Developed from and alongside my training in rongoā, initially to enable my own healing, Mauri Tau Practices has evolved to offer

(re)newed applications of traditional knowledge in the modern world, constituting wellbeing. Approaching healing as a conscious composting of the past to regenerate the soils of our personal and collective social field, Mauri Tau Practices cultivates embodied care, planting seeds today to nurture the future.

Oranga

Oranga describes a qualitative state while also expressing an intentional quality of purpose enacted through cultivation of vitality. Arising relationally with whakapapa and rongoā, oranga is both means and end (Mika, 2021). Ora is an energetic expression of mauri that animates within whakapapa and rongoā as oranga (Mead, 2003; Marsden, 2003) and can be applied across various contexts to reflect vitality in different forms and subjects, such as the health of a river, a group of people, or a project. Encapsulating a state of wellbeing, oranga is rooted in the multidimensional dynamics of Te Ao Māori.

In the context of Māori healing, oranga can be used interchangeably with hauora, which refers to applied practices, such as Mauri Tau Practices, that support health and wellbeing. Thus, oranga is not passive; it encompasses an intentional cultivation and presence of a healthy and vibrant living experience (Apiti et al., 2024). The whakataukī *He ōranga ngākau, he pikinga waiora* (“positive feelings in your heart will enhance your sense of self-worth”) acknowledges this affective nature of oranga.

Oranga offers both a philosophical directive, a practical application and an evaluative framework to guide and assess individual and collective wellbeing within an interconnected field. Oranga's innate connection to mana and mauri further reinforces its significance in the Māori worldview. Mana refers to the distinct authority inherent in all living entities that is sourced from Atua, tūpuna, whenua and personal endeavours; mana imbues a subject's presence and agency, which in turn impacts their mauri. Oranga is a manifestation of the dynamic relationship between mana and mauri, and it is through the cultivation of oranga that mana is expressed and mauri resourced. Here we observe the interdependent nature of Māori cultural principles interactively affecting and affirming the other; mana, mauri, and oranga is essential for sustaining well-being and vitality within each person and by extension flows from, into and through their whakapapa, future and past.

MAURI TAU PRACTICES

- A brief introduction

With nowhere else to turn for nurturing care to calm the ‘haka-like’ energy and settle inside my skin I asked my tūpuna and the Atua to show me, with our Māori ways, how I could heal myself...Mauri Tau Practices is this pathway.

Grounded in the timeless principles of mauri, whakapapa, rongoa and oranga, Mauri Tau Practices embraces a Māori understanding of wellbeing; integrating not only individual health but collective and cultural health, inclusive of the taiao (Mackean et al., 2022).

Mika (2021) highlights Tā (Sir) Mason Durie’s life work articulating and advancing oranga Māori in a postcolonial context. Aligned with Durie’s findings, Mauri Tau Practices values immersive experiences exploring Māori ways of being, doing and knowing to inform oranga.

An interdependent dynamic process for wellbeing is acknowledged and implemented; whakapapa and rongoā mutually sustain each other, enabling the expression of oranga, which in turn sustains whakapapa and taiao through the mauri of the subject. These dynamic interconnected relationships generate a distinct field of attuned resonance informing a way of sensing and relating that moves towards knowing which is both consistent in principle yet openly adaptive to contextual application, what I refer to as cultural *sensibilities* (discussed in detail in Theoretical Rau). Mauri Tau Practices facilitates an emergent exploration of Māori pre and post-colonial sensibilities through embodied practices, acknowledging that application of cultural beliefs and practices restores oranga (Moeke-Maxwell et al., 2014; O’Hagan et al., 2012 as cited in McLachlan et al., 2021).

While grounded in Māori traditions, Mauri Tau Practices positions Māori culture not as a universal authority, but as offering a living, localised, and contextualised model of wellbeing facilitating personal and social interconnectivity. It provides practices that aim to restore Māori knowledge and decolonise Māori peoples’ health and wellbeing. Simultaneously, Mauri Tau Practices recognises broader community engagement with Māori culture in inclusive and mana-enhancing ways enables relational skills and capacities for meaningful intercultural dialogue here in Aotearoa, informing place-based oranga.

This research posits that if we cannot be socially engaged inclusively with Māori culture and peoples in postcolonial Aotearoa, NZ, then how can we authentically embrace ourselves as multicultural? Here *oranga* expresses colonial resistance by generating alternate perspectives informing future-making pathways in Aotearoa, facilitating broader cultural inter-reflection. By extension Mauri Tau Practices advocates for creatively bold and culturally innovative ways of approaching systems change guided by socio-cultural priorities grounded in Indigenous wellbeing models rather than economic metrics.

Consciously (re)turning from a cultural, political and economic hijacking of our humanity that has occurred in modernity through rationalism and neoliberal capitalist priorities (Monticelli, 2018), Mauri Tau Practices seeks opportunity for harmonising multicultural diversity into co-created matrices of sustainable cohesion, fostering future-making without assimilating or erasing cultural distinctiveness. While utilising a creative path for reconnecting with wellbeing for ourselves these practices guide participants to explore their *whakapapa* in embodied and felt experiences to meaningfully cultivate *oranga*.

An enquiry that began quietly at home has birthed the development of Mauri Tau Practices into a cultural somatic methodology designed to support wellbeing and relational engagement. Anecdotal and anonymous feedback from past workshop participants indicates that sessions are experienced as deeply meaningful and supportive while revealing profound insights. Participants have described the sessions using terms such as transformative, eye-opening, inspiring, relaxing, restorative and safe, noting feelings of being seen, understood, respected, and valued. Some reflected on increased connection to self, others, and the environment through engagement with Māori ways of being (anonymous participant feedback, ACC client, 2022).

Note that for the purposes of this exegesis, past participant reflections are presented generically and as anecdotal and subjective accounts with an aim to provide insight into how Mauri Tau Practices have been experienced in practice, while acknowledging that experiences may vary. Ethical considerations, including confidentiality, informed consent, and the potential influence of my dual role as facilitator and researcher, have necessitated this.

CULTURAL CREATIVITY:

(Re)newed approaches to creating healthy futures

Creativity is so important for it brings our people to an experience of their own mana.

(Royal 2009)

Mauri Tau Practices take form within a resonant field of cultural sensibility generated between creative practice, mōhiotanga Māori (traditional knowledge), wellbeing, the social collective and the taiao. Nicholson (2019) describes traditions of active and creative processes of coming to know that informs Indigenous wisdom, methodologies where knowledge is emergent and in relationship with experience. Royal (2009) describes creative potential for Māori as motivated by an internal quality inspired by what we still possess culturally, not by what is lost, that reacquaints us with our own mana applied in our contemporary world. This section discusses some selected (re)emergent forms of knowing developed through lived experience by me, researcher and author, working within Māori traditions and through creative practice that have emanated and foundationally informed the methodologies within this applied research of Mauri Tau Practices.

Indigenous Creative Practice and Mauri Mapping (MM)

Mauri Tau Practices have developed and been sustained through the phenomenology of my Indigenous Kaupapa Māori approach to creative practice. Auaha (to create) derives from au (“I”), ha (“exhale”), and aua (“dont know” and “to be advanced”). The creative act thus reflects a breath-like process of dynamic exchange within an interconnected field of reality, becoming in being both unknown and progressive: inhaling the collective as resource and inner provocation, exhaling inner world processes of expression translated into shared, communal spaces. Personally I experience creativity as concurrently intimately human and cosmically attuned, fostering new connections and relationships within the expression of the established universe.

Inclusive of, but not limited to producing artefact, Indigenous creativity is methodologically and epistemologically ancient and emergent, its priority residing within relational process.

Mauri, wairua, and whakapapa energise a reflexive, ever-evolving conversation through time, giving expression to co-created connections and supporting purpose and agency (Tawhio, 2018). In pre-colonial Māori society, artists were highly valued within the wider community for their creative contributions that served collective wellbeing (Mead, 2003). In essence Indigenous creativity traditionally resourced and facilitated an interconnected community within their world, enacted through a ritualised and purposeful process fostering interdependent, diverse, collective cohesion.

Earlier in my career, my ‘artistic’ creative practice was grounded in Eurocentric philosophies and ritualised modes of practice hyper-focussed on individualism, high productivity of artefact and commercial profitability defining individual value. Over time, I grew disillusioned with the dissonance between this extractive, competitive model and my cultural values and personal wellbeing. This catalysed a deliberate shift towards decolonising my creativity and reconstructing my practice grounded in Māori ways of being and knowing, inclusive of kaitiakitanga (guardianship) of the natural world (Smith, 2012). Mauri Tau Practices emerged within this development of my Kaupapa Māori creative methodology; embracing the mystery of Te Kore (the void, the realm of potential), the metaphysical agency of presence and whakapapa, guided by mātauranga (knowledge), and forged relationally through creative process into physical expression for the purpose of oranga.

Māori scholar and philosopher Karl Mika identifies Western notions of presence as fragmenting, described as opposite to Indigenous notions where presence is “ being constituted by all other things in the world” (Mika, 2017). Activating and strengthening a ‘worldedness’ that educates through physical and spiritual interconnectivity, Indigenous ‘presence’ facilitates an active mode of belonging that is given agency through creative expression within relational practice (Mika, 2017). Immersed in context and guided purposefully by kaupapa, here artistry comes to embody creative potential openly shaped through co-design and co-creation and inclusively constituted by the relational field. Grounded in this notion of presence, my Kaupapa Māori creative methodology has sought to foster rather than commodify, reciprocate rather than transact.

This shift has radically changed how I apply my creativity, and in turn influenced the development of Mauri Tau Practices. Decentering myself as sole author or authority and shifting away from commercially centred environs and agendas, while re-centering Māori

values at the core of my practice, I became more diverse and innovative. This expansion took me beyond my established identity as dancer and choreographer into emergent forms - sound installations, VR work, curating exhibitions and intercultural collaborations - paths I would not have otherwise pursued. I moved from artist to co-creator, from authority to generator, expressing form from resonance, guided by service and responsiveness, restoring creativity as healer and purposing it with sustaining whakapapa, or life.

Out of this shift developed 'Mauri Mapping' (MM), which identifies an approach to co-design through attunement guided by mauri. This process involves observing, evaluating and mapping the quality of relational and energetic conditions available to support creativity in a given context. This includes people, their relationships, the kaupapa, the environment, the available resources (material and non-material), and other emergent elements (Marsden, 2003). Grounded in oranga, Mauri Mapping facilitates authentic response-ability, prioritising caretaking of spiritual and physical connections that shape mauri to inform creative purpose. It counters extractive, transactional, or outcome-focused modes of creating, and ensures connectedness foregrounds embodied relationships and environments over fixed ideas, guiding creative expression toward authentic, emergent and transformative creative processes.

Today my creative practice is a morphing, living field, "hosted rather than controlled" (Barlow, 1991, p. 77). Integrating in cyclical iterations that move in rhythm with momentum, rest, and reflection, it supports adaptive, responsive, and meaningful evolution of best practice to ensure the most meaningful outcomes.

Mauri Tau Practices creatively emerged through lived experience, phenomenologically shaping and being shaped by a dynamic, cultural and community-informed field expressing itself toward oranga. It is an expression of my Indigenous creative practice, iteratively evolving and underpinned by a unique relational methodology, integrating Indigenous modes of presencing while responding to the demands and complexities of the contemporary moment.

Whakarongo Hōhono : A Māori sensory intelligence

Whereas Mauri Mapping describes an observable process engaging with the world externally to the body, Whakarongo Hōhono (Deep Listening) describes a highly receptive, internal orientated mode of embodied, sensory and relational inquiry informing a methodology of

knowledge-making that developed for me during this research. Grounded in Māori epistemologies while phenomenologically influenced through personal, relational, somatic, creative, cognitive and metaphysical ways of knowing, Whakarongo Hōhonu combines ethnographic, autobiographical, sensory, and spiritual insights.

Like a cellular antenna that listens with the whole being, Whakarongo Hōhonu describes engaging with full sensory and perceptive faculties involving our three bodies simultaneously receiving information. This receptivity informs and provides assessment and insight while attending to the mauri and wairua of any given context and its alignment with kaupapa and oranga; something I liken to ‘tuning into’. Requiring abilities for empathetic connection engaging into fields of resonance, Whakarongo Hōhonu ‘listens-to-recognise’ and ‘receives-to-respond’ to physical and energetic threads connecting inner and outer worlds of people, purpose, places, and non-human kin.

Facilitating meaningful engagement within entangled networked fields of relationship while intentionally cultivating oranga, Whakarongo Hōhonu forms an ethical basis for facilitating transformative shifts in individuals and communities. Whakarongo Hōhonu is not a theoretical tool but reflects an embodied way of being informing knowing with its roots lying in ‘rongo’, a multidimensional, holistic and somatic mode of Māori sensory intelligence involving hearing, tasting, touching, smelling, whole-body feeling, and extends into wairua and mauri (Apiiti et al., 2024). Rongoā practitioners’ skills lie in this receptivity and attuning with the subtle relational energies of mauri and wairua to receive and respond to tohu (signs). Rongo-ma-tane, Atua of peace and cultivated foods, resides in our traditional meeting houses, reflecting qualities of harmony and coherence that provide oranga. Thus practices of rongo, such as Whakarongo Hōhonu, reflect a cultivating of inner, personal skills, capacities and qualities for sensing to inform ora, or wellbeing.

Whakapapa, mauri and mana determine ‘rongo’ to be an expression of reciprocity. Sensing is not transactional, instead it is a facilitating of relational presence through embodied exchange that serves both people and the natural world response-ably (Apiti et al. 2024). The motivation behind ongoing research and development of Mauri Tau Practices embraces and is fuelled by the potential knowledges and insights generated through rongo. Shaping knowing and

embodied response-ability towards care, creativity, and relational attunement, Whakarongo Hōhonu deeply informs my perspectives as a human.

Engaging the tacit sensitivities of this sensory intelligence requires a surrender of rationalist, cognitive dominance maintained in Western biomedical frameworks. Whakarongo Hōhonu informs a Māori somatic inquiry facilitating knowledge as emergent and co-created, simultaneously turning inward while opening outward. Cultivating resonance through this dialogical process provides unique insight that can distinctively inform knowing and guide relational responsiveness.

Whakarongo Hōhonu is not a hierarchical model, but a relational process grounded in mutual respect, shared purpose and trust building. It challenges dominant hierarchical and socio-cultural norms, disrupting imposed patterns of authority and opening space for renewed ethical and relational modes of engagement. Healing relationships can arise through wairua connection and recognition, whether with a tangata (person), whenua (landscape), rākau (plant), Atua, or tūpuna (ancestor). Allowing time and support to follow and respond to each unique process, Whakarongo Hōhonu timelines are guided by the priority of caretaking and shaped by the authentic experiences of participants. In doing so, Whakarongo Hōhonu interrupts the obstructive pattern of compartmentalisation, fragmentation and outcome-orientation common to western ways of thinking, being and knowing, offering Māori alternatives adaptively approaching pathways of inquiry and transformation formed through intentions towards cohesion.

Whakarongo Hōhonu engages a holistic relational worldview, aligning with frameworks such as Te Whare Tapa Whā (Durie, 1994) and, more recently, a growing constellation of embodied frameworks revitalising Māori epistemologies. Where Western biomedical paradigms continue to dismiss Indigenous intelligences as irrelevant to health and wellbeing (Hart 2010; Barragan 2023), this research acknowledges Western somatic theories as a resonant field within academia where (re)emergent Indigenous intelligence and practices, such as Whakarongo Hōhonu, Mauri Mapping and Mauri Tau Practices, can now confidently express, evolving beyond marginalisation within colonised mainstream health contexts.

Mauri Hono, a mauri sensory methodology (Apiti et al., 2024) provides another example of a 'rongo' practice, valuing meaning-making through mauri and somatic attunement reflecting

personal healing through conscious sensory relationship with the taiao. Mauri Tau Practices similarly applies Whakarongo Hōhonu for this purpose while also extending its application as an embodied method of decolonisation that expands to embrace beyond the individual wellbeing pluralistic calibration into social coherence to inform systems change and future-making.

Similarly, Kiri Dell's Rongomātau methodology (2021) emphasizes a 'sensing into knowing' within a dialogical exchange between people, reflecting Indigenous epistemologies valuing embodied knowing and relational exchange. Like Mauri Tau Practices, Rongomātau cultivates fluid adaption in relation with participants' felt realities, fostering real-time co-creative responsiveness. The concept of 'cultural sensibilities' generated through coherent fields, as mentioned earlier, echoes this adaptive fluidity cultivating relational attunement between people, ideas, and environments. The TOHU framework, discussed in 'Trauma as Tohu' section in this chapter, further reinforces the norm and value when engaging with practices of rongo to somatically inform oranga.

Practiced purposefully in spaces engaged with personal, community, and systemic wellbeing Whakarongo Hōhonu constitutes an alternative method of connection, enquiry, and accountability informing healing while creatively stimulating new perspectives for change-making. Simultaneously, it disrupts hegemonic norms that continue to undermine the restoration of Māori health and wellbeing knowledge. Through modes such as Whakarongo Hōhonu, Mauri Tau Practices reconnects Māori with Māori ways of doing, being, and knowing, contributing further to building momentum toward authentic wellbeing while informing alternative pathways that can improve health and wellbeing outcomes for all New Zealanders (McLachlan, 2021).

Manawa (Pulse): a heart-centred approach.

Manawa, referring to "heart" and "pulse", informs a 'heart-centred' approach that is distinct from Eurocentric perceptions of love and romance commonly associated with 'heart-centred'. Manawa highlights 'mana' and its continuity pulsating through 'wa' (time), recognising one's 'heart' as innately prestigious and significant, to be fundamentally revered and respected relationally in continuum. Drawing explicitly and implicitly from Manawa, Mauri Tau

Practices identifies with a ‘heart-centred’ approach consistently attended to as fundamental to informing embodied relationality towards oranga.

Inside the movement of a pulsating heartbeat there is an organic and dynamic interplay of physical and non-physical materiality that moves cyclically, centering and decentering, contracting and expanding, not unlike the movement of hau (breath). Embodying Manawa, Mauri Tau Practices engages both inner and outer sensorial worlds, drawing attention to the felt movement of ourselves as we pulse in cyclical flows of exchange across the porous threshold of our skin, generating the connectivity that supports our relationality. Sensing physically and non-physically into this pulsing presence of ourselves is foundational within Mauri Tau Practices, engaging with the felt sensations of mauri and wairua while arriving into personal embodied awareness of how we move in connection to the world outside our skin from the center of our own matter.

Centering in Mauri Tau Practices acknowledges a drawing inward connecting to a rich, expansive inner world unfolding that is resourced and presenced within whakapapa. Engaging a feminine mode of being, centering fosters inner softening and receptivity physically and non-physically, allowing authentic inhabiting, mapping, and settling into our inner sensations and knowing. Giving focus to the coherence of one’s own three bodies pulsing in felt connection while supporting consciously the transformation of sensation and experience into resource engages the parasympathetic nervous system nurtured through mātauranga Māori cultivating ease, alignment, and grounding.

From this centering inward, following the organic movement of Manawa, the self naturally expands to move outward, decentering. Balancing the feminine movement inward through this complimentary expanding, masculine mode facilitates interconnectivity with ‘others’ beyond the skin. This decentering movement facilitates the connectivity informing relational attuning to cultivate community. Cyclically pulsing inward and outward iteratively informs a fluid adaptability for relating. Within Mauri Tau Practices this inherent movement of ourselves is engaged with as foundational.

Manawa, as a creative methodology brings awareness to the felt sensations at the heart of how we show up and embody connection in our lived experiences, recognising that personal identity is shaped within a broader, interconnected relational field rather than in isolation. Ontologically,

these movements are ancient and cosmologically inherited (Nicholson, 2019): from the formation of universes and planets, to the beat of our hearts, to the contractions that birth new life, to the rhythmic beating of our hands on our chests followed by the outward extension of our arms during haka. Innately integrated, these movements repetitively (re)cycle to uphold creation in wholeness and balance, reflecting taiao while shaping Māori understandings of embodied relationality informing oranga.

Manawa provides a research and creative methodology that embraces the individual and collective, the internal and external, the ancestral and contemporary, not as opposing positions, but as cyclical, interrelated, and co-dependent, or 'heart-centred'. Mauri Tau Practices creatively and curiously inhabits the known and unknown of these instinctual movements, emanating historical and imaginary sites of sovereignty, intuitive expression, and relational knowledge, enacted through the imprinted, patterned materiality of our present embodiment living in nervous systems and expressed through our fleshy form.

Contemporary somatic theory, depth psychology, Critical Race Theory (CRT), Indigenous studies, and dance demonstrate that decolonisation is not only political but also somatic, spiritual, and relational, or 'heart-centred', demanding a radical, internalized process deeply transforming how people understand themselves, their world and their relationships (Barragan, 2023). Manawa reminds us that our three bodies are not passive containers but interwoven, active creative sites pulsating knowing, feeling, and becoming to unfold an interconnected presence dynamically affected through centering and decentering forces.

Contributing to a Kaupapa Māori, trauma-informed approach Manawa articulates another Indigenous somatic methodology grounded from within, guided through connection and shaped by care towards relational repair, personally and socially.

Mauri Tau Practices seeks to foster interpersonal and intercultural dialogue metabolising as 'heart-centred' the intertwined fields of human and environmental connections embedded in our bodies' living memory, spanning both pre- and post-colonial worlds. Facilitating both a personal and collective form of intimacy within a pluralistic approach to decolonisation Mauri Tau Practices makes space for processing identity through embodied wellbeing exchanged in co-existence.

Trauma as Tohu

Embodied consciousness, as explored in theories like Panksepp's "Core-Self" and Damasio's "Proto-Self," highlights how our thoughts, emotions, imagination, and behaviours are shaped through lived, sensory interaction with the world (Korsakova-Kreyn, 2021). Negative stimuli can impact our three bodies; physiological stress responses, such as tension, combined with thought patterns and belief systems shape self-perception and contribute to dis-ease. Reflecting an intimate interconnection between emotion and motor response shaping human consciousness, mediated by both cultural belief systems and physical environment, aligns with rongoā Māori epistemology and provides the foundation for a Kaupapa Māori trauma-informed somatic approach in Mauri Tau Practices.

The TOHU framework (McLachlan et al., 2024) provides further articulation of Māori perspectives of trauma, articulated as patu ngākau, a poetic expression conveying the profound impact of traumatic experiences on the heart, emotions, and memories of individuals, families, and communities. Patu means to strike, acknowledging that trauma is a phenomena generated in causation. Ngākau refers to the emotions and memories that make up the core of a person, the embodied consciousness informing wairua and impacting mauri. By centering on the emotional impact of a person's experiences and its relation to the physical body as receptacle of our ngākau, and therefore of the trauma itself, a Māori approach to trauma healing begins within a living field of embodied, empathetic subjectivity acknowledging causation, reflecting a whakapapa sensibility.

Similarly expressing a form of embodied subjective empathy within Mauri Tau Practices, Whakarongo Hōhonu responsively facilitates progressive adaptations in the healing process to remain responsive to personal and collective TOHU as trauma patterns that may emanate from the distinct personal and collective fields generated in each group session. Resisting western clinical diagnostic approaches that erase or neglect the collective alongside the personal context of lived experience within the pathology of a person's trauma, or that isolate the individual from the collective in their experience of healing, Mauri Tau Practices alternatively provides a trauma-informed approach through a co-creative mode of embodied relational engagement. Removing hierarchies of power and expertise, instead creating horizontal modes of relationality based on authorship and sharing story, Mauri Tau Practices seeks to engage each

person's rangatiratanga (self-leadership) respectfully in a simultaneous personal and collective process of transmutation.

The TOHU framework (McLachlan et al., 2024), its name taken from the Māori word 'tohu', infers the observation of signs, symbols, and cues in our environment. Tohu can inform actions and guide directions for cultivating wellbeing in culturally appropriate ways while allowing the design of nuanced wellbeing pathways distinct from Western biomedical models and clinical treatment approaches. Mauri Tau Practices similarly draws on the manifestation and observation of tohu in the environment around and within the bodies of participants to more deeply inform a mindful approach incorporating both personal and inter-dependent experiences while manifesting insights that educate and can provide new knowledge to support healing. The spontaneous nature of tohu removes hierarchical, fixed models of knowledge, instead providing an emergent, co-creative process grounded in self-expression, mutual respect, shared purpose and trust building.

Noticing tohu fundamentally informs rongoā traditions, where signs are observed in the natural, social, physical, and spiritual environments, providing important insights into healing and wellbeing from a Māori worldview (McLachlan et al., 2024). Articulating trauma through tohu within whakapapa engages a normative, inter-relational process of 'becoming with' the field of self-perception, allowing the subject to inhabit a past 'pre-self' and a future 'potential-self' simultaneously, revealing alternative experiential states beyond the immediate traumatised condition. In this space between past and future self, the present state of self becomes emergent, embracing a creative, potentialised state unfolding and evolving to continue its trajectory 'in becoming with'. Creativity facilitates this weaving of wairua and imagination in embodied ways expressing into form and possibility. Mauri Tau Practices embraces working with this liberation from fixed pathological states into empowering and transformative modes of creativity and evolution reflecting significant implications for mana, mauri, and wairua, fostering expressions of oranga. Whakapapa further potentialises this personal transformation within this continuum of past, present, future underpinned by oranga. In this way, guided by tohu, whakapapa emboldens purpose while it affirms, protects and nurtures personhood as an unfolding process, resourcing understanding with hope through insight into intergenerational trauma in the process of healing and change-making.

In my broad observations, colonial trauma has disembodied Māori culture from its people, creating chronic states of hypervigilance rooted in historical, personal, and systemic stress. High levels of distrust and aversion to vulnerability make it difficult for Māori to feel settled and embodied in our own skins and on our whenua. Disassociation from bodies is not uncommon, shutting down sensory receptivity while locked in sympathetic nervous systems states leading to hyper-activated overwhelm. I refer to this state as a ‘haka-mode’. This ‘haka-mode’ involves embodied patterns of biological stress responses and heightened agitation and is often occurring in bodies responding to the social, cultural, economic, political, historical and systemic stress factors experienced within our current way of living, exasperated through the individualism of dominant white culture. Such conditions in general negatively effect wellbeing, proliferate mental health issues and undermine social cohesion (Gluckman et al., 2021; Humphrey and Bliuc, 2022).

While haka is a powerful and stunning cultural expression that absolutely does facilitate healing, this term gives reference for me personally to how our innate capacity to relax, integrate, and heal is obstructed when a persistent physicalised state reflecting haka, or heightened sympathetic nervous system agitation, cannot be transmuted into a different state, such as tau or moe (sleeping). Responding to this collective tohu, Mauri Tau Practices purposefully focuses on tau to liberate nervous systems and bodies from sustained, trauma-induced ‘haka-mode’.

Interestingly, when I began publicly sharing Mauri Tau Practices 10 years ago, it was perceived as unconventional. Still today for a large number of the population, Māori and non-Māori, moving and sensing the body for wellbeing purposes or somatically approaching relaxation and stress release is perceived as uncommon and ‘out there’; if it isn’t kapa haka or sport, it’s weird and therefore avoided. Yet as trauma symptoms have become more widely recognised and rongoā practices are restored, Māori are beginning to recognise our cultural alignments while opening to encountering comparative wellbeing practices such as breathing, and embodiment practices such as yoga and somatic theories. Alongside this, many participants who have experienced Eurocentric talk therapy, due to it being their only public health option, have acknowledged its shortcomings and continue to search for alternative solutions to meet their needs for healing. Mauri Tau Practices continues to evolve in reciprocity, responding to tohu of trauma, to shape its ongoing development.

An example of this is the new practice developed for the website, Manawa/Pulse, being focussed on actively energising the body to release agitation, hyperactivity, or shutdown. This responds to the discomfort of a haka-mode state observed in participants when attempting to relax and slow down and meets them in a more active state to begin their journey to mauri tau. In considering online, pre-recorded modes of engaging with diverse participants I recognised the need to provide further tools to assist participants to self-manage and ease their transition into tau.

The Performativity of a Cultured self

Creating, retaining and sharing knowledge of relationships, events, and meaning making across time and space are integral functions to maintaining social and environmental relationships for Māori (Mika, 2021). An oral culture, therefore performative by nature, traditionally enacting these relationships required modes of storytelling, embodiment and creative expression, affirming a relational, reciprocal and collective existence as representative of a good life (Best, 2005; Hēnare, 2011 as cited in Mika, 2021). Creativity and self-expression are intrinsic to participating in the Māori world, shaped by rhythms of connection, inspiration, rest, and reflection, and grounded in lived experience while responsive to the needs of people and place.

Storytelling

Storytelling acts as a repository for knowledge while being a cultural method for cultivating knowing and potentializing responsiveness (Ware et al., 2017). Pūrakau (traditional story) transmit philosophical and conceptual guidance into Mauri Tau Practices while introducing us to a wide array of non-physical entities we are in relation with. Resourcing us with the wisdom, values, and insights our tūpuna passed down, pūrakau inform, soothe, and strengthen, relationally shaping our experiences and perceptions. Their mana lies in their timeless relevance across generations.

Whakapapa kōrero and Kaupapa kōrero (Ware et al., 2017) are academic terms describing Māori modes of intergenerational sharing of stories, observations, and knowledge. They describe a mode of facilitating co-creative process guided by tūpuna through whakapapa, tuning into ancestral influence while attuning ourselves. By acknowledging the interconnected nature of personhood, resourced through accumulated memory and collectively cultivated into

traditional narratives, these kōrero support cultural integration and provide evolving layers of story and meaningful insight that enrich knowing.

Mauri Tau Practices employs storytelling ritualistically to inspire, reveal, digest, and (re)discover potential as a creative force. When all three bodies engage experientially in meaning-making, participants shape the story of themselves while contributing to the collective human story, integrating micro- and macro-level narratives as a continuum of knowing, being, and doing, reflecting and supporting oranga.

Performativity & Improvisation: facilitating traditional and emergent ways of embodiment

..somatic practices that are so closely tied to the creative process of improvisation are the cornerstone to an embodied critical inquiry method. (Welch, 2022)

Whakapapa, oranga, mauri and wairua underpin the performative nature of Māori in enacting tikanga (cultural protocols); we stand to recite whakapapa, we enact our oratory traditions of whaikorero (oratory) and mihi (greeting); we waiata (sing) to tautoko (support) speeches, we kanikani (dance) and haka to express the passion of our thoughts and feelings. Continually embodying ourselves as a representation of our ancestors, intertwining both individual and collective identity, implicitly and explicitly, our perception of self emerges, not in isolation, but interconnectively, enlivened and affirmed through embodying the living expression of our cultured representation into relational fields with tangata, Atua, tupuna, whenua and taiao, affirmed through mauri. Performativity within Te Ao Māori, while incorporating elements of entertainment, carries deeper purpose functioning as an embodied mode of meaning-making through cultural ritual. While traditional structures support the fostering of intentional presence, tikanga and mana allows for interpretive variance as an expression of spontaneous, responsive emergence and creative expression.

Improvisation similarly intentionally fosters embodied activation through the provision of structure while encouraging and embracing emergence. Functioning as a creative methodology improvisation inhabits the space between form and formlessness, structure and

unstructuredness, relationally responsive in time it reflects aspects of Māori cultural performativity. Embodying an open-ended process of creative enquiry that embraces deep listening, unpredictability and allows unexpected outcomes to emerge in relation and in response to established structures, improvisation reinforces an Indigenous way of being.

Improvisation describes a practice of exploration, where the act of discovery becomes central to the process itself (Lees, 2019). This fosters a self-perpetuating engagement with the discipline, cultivating an attentive, agile and responsive mindset that reinforces the discipline (Dudeck & McClure, 2021). By bringing mindful attention to expressing what is alive in the present moment, improvisation facilitates fluid states of change-making embracing vulnerability and trust in the unknown, allowing new information to surface, and supporting the continual redefinition of what it means to be alive now (Dudeck & McClure, 2021).

Mauri Tau Practices employs an improvisational methodology to facilitate and inspire somatic affect through movement, sound, breath, and stillness, guided by story and imagination toward *mōhiotanga* Maori. The three bodies materialise memory and lived experience momentarily, energising transformation through spontaneous expression guided by structured tasks massaged through fleshy receptacles. Acknowledging the different effects generated through the task of learning and replicating codified movement forms like *kapa haka*, Mauri Tau Practices instead centers the focus of experience inward, encouraging reflection, authentic emotional expression, and the release and transmutation of pain and tension through improvisational techniques.

Improvisation in Mauri Tau Practices is synonymous with play, curiosity, and creativity as essential qualities enacted in practice. *Whare Tapere* were traditional houses for storytelling, music, dance, song, puppetry, *tākaro* (play and games), costuming, and communal feasting (Royal, 1998). Rooted in the *whakataukī* *Kia kawea tātou e te rēhia* ("Let us be carried by the spirit of joy"), these houses fostered creative expression, joy, and collective rest, nourishing connection and communal and personal healing, transformation, and *oranga* through creative expression and play. Here, *tākaro* (play) can be understood both as an action and as a felt quality, embodying a sacred mode of being that generates creativity in relation to *oranga*.

As a performer within Charles Royal's research and re-establishment of *Whare Tapere* traditions I remember him describing an embodied process of transformation, *Whakaahua*,

which accesses the wairua dimensions of Māori, linking the creative self to the natural and spiritual worlds of Aotearoa, inviting deep expression and connection through movement and story (Royal, 2007). Improvisation was commonly utilised as part of the method to access this transformational potential.

Mauri Tau Practices draws phenomenologically on experiences within Whare Tapere to inform processes of embodied creative expression. Within Mauri Tau Practices joy, ease and curiosity are the 3 ‘rules’ guiding a participant's experience, inviting essential aspects of personhood that support the energetic quality of creativity to flow, resourcing wellbeing. Royal’s exploration of a haka that turns inward, a movement from outward performance (form) to inner truth (content), releasing what lies within (Royal, 2007, pp. 206–207) to rebalance masculine and feminine energies in haka-dance, reflects a fundamental intention within Mauri Tau Practices also. These practices seek to bring awareness and balance to masculine and feminine modes of embodiment providing a somatic-informed lens to (re)consider bodies and behaviours shaped by culture, including the culture of coloniality and the patriarchal beliefs and modes of being within this current hegemony.

Listening to the unscripted body through improvisational modes Mauri Tau Practices acknowledge this active, creative inquiry as a way of practicing surrendering consciously to the unknown, trusting in the body’s innate intelligence, and allowing knowledge to arise through movement and sensation – these practices cultivate skills that necessarily enhance our capacities for participating in futuremaking today (Barragan, 2023). Tohu guide what can be described as ‘following the wairua’, describing a spiritual, embodied process of letting go while discovering, and trusting while moving with the unknown guided by intuition and held safely in the structure of Māori ontologies and epistemologies.

Providing participants with tools enabling self-work and mutual support Mauri Tau Practices leave individuals more empowered and connected to others through the expression of feelings, imagination, and inner experiences. Improvisation therefore offers alternative modes of processing and resourcing, giving space for transformation through gesture, sound, and metaphor as well as language (Dudeck & McClure, 2021). Structured by somatic inquiry and Māori cultural frameworks towards coherence, Mauri Tau Practices demonstrably engages processes that orientate while navigating the tension between form and freedom, further offering instruction and insight towards growing capacities to engage creatively with

transformational potential in ways that can inform approaches to systems change and innovation.

Improvisation challenges assumed and embedded patterns as it fosters new ways of collaborating and thinking creatively (MacDonald et al., 2011). Practicing creativity in relational collective fields, using unscripted movement and metaphorical imaginings of Te Ao Māori, supports the rest and reclamation of our bodies from the perpetuation of colonially oppressive systems and the liberation of our embodied culture from fighting for survival. Creatively translating traditional wisdoms into urban, industrialized contexts, a world far different from that of our tūpuna, necessarily provides critical reflection and evolving knowledge that informs decolonised futures (Royal 2009).

Mauri Tau Practices emphasizes life-making over fixed outcomes, engaging co-creative relational processes that foster meaningful interconnectivity and cultivate oranga as a felt experience (Pihama et al., 2017) through improvisation. Where Western and humanist imaginaries inadequately address Anthropocene challenges, persistent inequalities, and emerging vulnerabilities (Braidotti, 2021; Niccolini & Ringrose, 2020 cited in Martin et al., 2024) this research posits such creative practices as vital for decolonisation and wellbeing. The imaginary shapes human and nonhuman flourishing: it “gives rise to particular determinations of social being, and its transformation and reconstitution underscore every change in relations between bodies” (Williams, 2007 cited in Martin et al., 2024, p. 359). Dudeck and McClure (2021) observe that improvisors are suited to the self-reflection and transformation required today, regularly letting go of the known and familiar to venture into the unknown, open to new possibilities and willing to be transformed by them.

Mauri Tau Practices is designed to cultivate this capacity.

Why Dance?

Dance is always more than physical, for me it is multidimensional, engaging spiritual, ancestral, social, emotional, imaginary and intuitive aspects of ourselves. It just makes sense to humans to dance. Before developing Mauri Tau Practices, I was already exploring whakapapa and Te Ao Māori through my body as a contemporary dancer and choreographer.

I return now to dance not as choreography, but as one of our oldest medicines. Across cultures dance has been the common cultural ritual for integrating human experience, expressing emotion, and embodying consciousness individually and collectively. The tinana, as reflected through Hineahuone, is innately designed to express emotional qualities as reflected in the taiao (Royal, 2007). Unlike exercise, dance can actively engage all three bodies concurrently and allows us to notice, move, and express beyond functional task outputs, revealing what may otherwise be ignored. Dance transmits knowledge, bridging past, present and future, while it actively facilitates personal and social health and wellbeing (Royal, 2007).

Movement is our first and primary language, through dance we enable creativity to flow into lived, felt form and presence ourselves holistically. In Mauri Tau Practices, dance is not performance for others, nor muscle-building, it is a sacred embodied conversation between the seen and unseen with, and for, self, another and the cosmos.

This dance of self is increasingly pressured in today's political and cultural landscape. In postcolonial Aotearoa, being Māori, especially visibly, vocally, and creatively Māori, can attract curiosity, but also suspicion or hostility. In this postcolonial era we are often simultaneously seen and unseen, welcomed and resisted, with our presence challenging the presumed universal authority and supposed neutrality of dominant systems. To be Māori in Pākehā and tauwi (non-Māori) spaces is to embody heightened tension, resistance, and vulnerability - the antithesis to a creative body. Even in Māori spaces, performative expression can ironically reinforce traumas of cultural dispossession.

Here, movement as a language of wellbeing through presence and agency becomes an act of survival, challenge, renewal and reclamation. Mauri Tau Practices utilises movement and dance to soothe these tensions, permitting physical expression that gives rise to acknowledgment, affirmation, release, relief, compassion, cohesion, acceptance, beauty, and joy. This is the phenomenon of dance: bringing ourselves into a state of purposeful flow. It validates intuitive, felt-sense knowing as legitimate, offering a lived, experiential approach to presence.

Embodying our identity and liberating it is not passive. It holds a mirror to structures in Aotearoa NZ that have long tried to silence Māori and in this negotiation between opening up and protection, we constantly navigate how to be and what to reveal. Mauri Tau Practices seeks to give relief from these socio-cultural pressures, inviting and allowing processes for embodied

knowing and relational care to transform people in the roots of their nervous system organisation. Dance becomes an act of *oranga*, activating joy and peace, healing and reclamation when moving in unrestricted ways that authentically respond to what bodies need to express to foster and embody positive change and healing. It becomes a return, a coming home inside your skin.

Wānanga as creative approach to learning

Wā is more a field of interconnected continuance where things interact and come to completion within a collective field of relatability not restricted to linear time (Mika, 2020).

Wānanga as a noun describes a place for higher learning and as a verb describes communal, dialogic spaces of learning and co-creation originating in Māori epistemologies (Smith et al., 2019). Wānanga prioritise embodied cognition through oral transmission, experiential learning, *kōrero* (conversations and discussions), and the interweaving of *whakapapa*, *pūrakau*, and *tikanga* (customs) to generate multi-dimensional understandings that support integration and knowledge transformation within inclusive environments.

Cultivating the intercorporeality and intersubjectivity of collectivism, wānanga embraces intergenerational and intersectional exploration of cultural concepts within a Kaupapa Māori framework. It fosters critical reflection that extends and deepens understandings of reality, supporting decision-making for future success and the creation of new knowledge. Mauri Tau Practices employs wānanga because of its essential capacity to bring individual and collective experiences into a shared learning process that co-generates cohesion and healing.

Wānanga is not a fixed process, but fluid by nature: it journeys and shifts shape and form, from empirical to spiritual, from story to policy, from evidence to performance, from report to dialogue, from protest to policy (McLachlan et al., 2024, p.2). A valuable practice for transformational experiences, a common saying is ‘take what sticks, leave what doesn’t, and trust you have received exactly what you need’, acknowledging that each learner moves at their own pace in relation to their subjective position. Recognising that each learner can also be the educator, peer-to-peer learning becomes essential to growing knowledge and shifting power structures around knowledge. Wānanga is therefore foundational to manifesting Mauri Tau Practices’s purpose.

In summation, a Mauri Tau Practices session generally employs these cultural elements and creative methodologies through embodied self-expressions within an improvisational structure. What emerges physically and spiritually within one's skin and outside one's skin through the performativity of one's whakapapa, both Māori and non-Māori, as revealed through all 3 bodies, becomes reflexive inquiry informing oranga concurrently for individual's and collectives. While not an extensive list, these fundamental creative cultural methodologies give expression and agency to the kaupapa of Mauri Tau Practices. Overlaying, intersecting and absorbing each other in responsive application, these methods combine to inform and generate embodied states of cultural sensibilities that direct and facilitate as they reveal new perceptions while building a momentum that flows progressively moulding what it engages with. Where these methods take us is for participants to discover and cohere, personally and collectively.

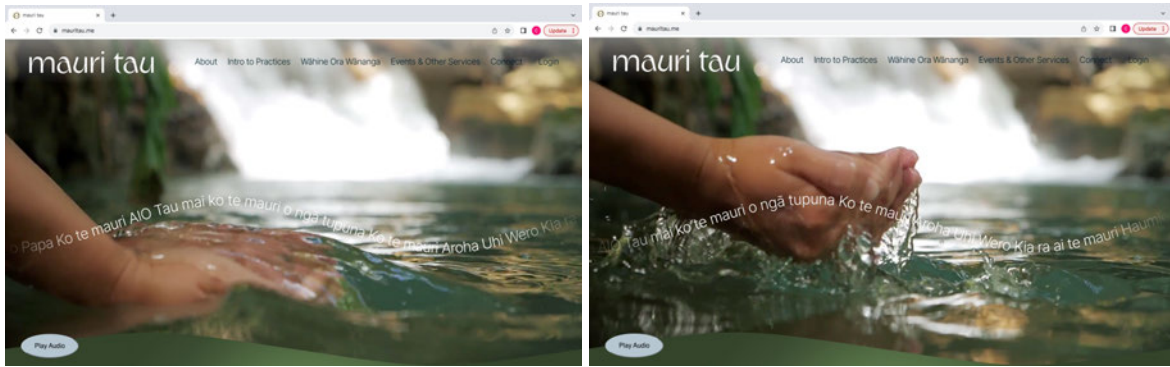
THE ARTEFACT

mauritau.me

Historically Mauri Tau Practices sessions have predominantly occurred in-person, with only a dozen of online sessions delivered live more recently, mainly responding during Covid 19. Retrospectively Mauri Tau Practices has informed my creative practice in the making of digital artworks; creatively underpinning VR film, *Manawa Hau* (2020), a collaboration between myself, Rob Thorne (Taonga Pūoro musician) and Jess Feast (Director); *Hauora Hub* (2023), a curated exhibition of Māori artistic works acknowledging the wellbeing and spiritual aspects of Māori art; *Te Huri Wai* (2021), a sound installation collaborating with Rachel Shearer (Musician and Sound Artist). In this creative endeavour the approach would be reversed, in a sense bringing my creative skills to communicate and facilitate in an online space the sharing of Mauri Tau Practices.

While discussion of Mauri Tau Practices as practice-led components of this research has preceded this section, this section affords specific focus towards the creative development of this most recent iteration and 'artefact' developed for this practice-led Masters research, the website www.mauritau.me.

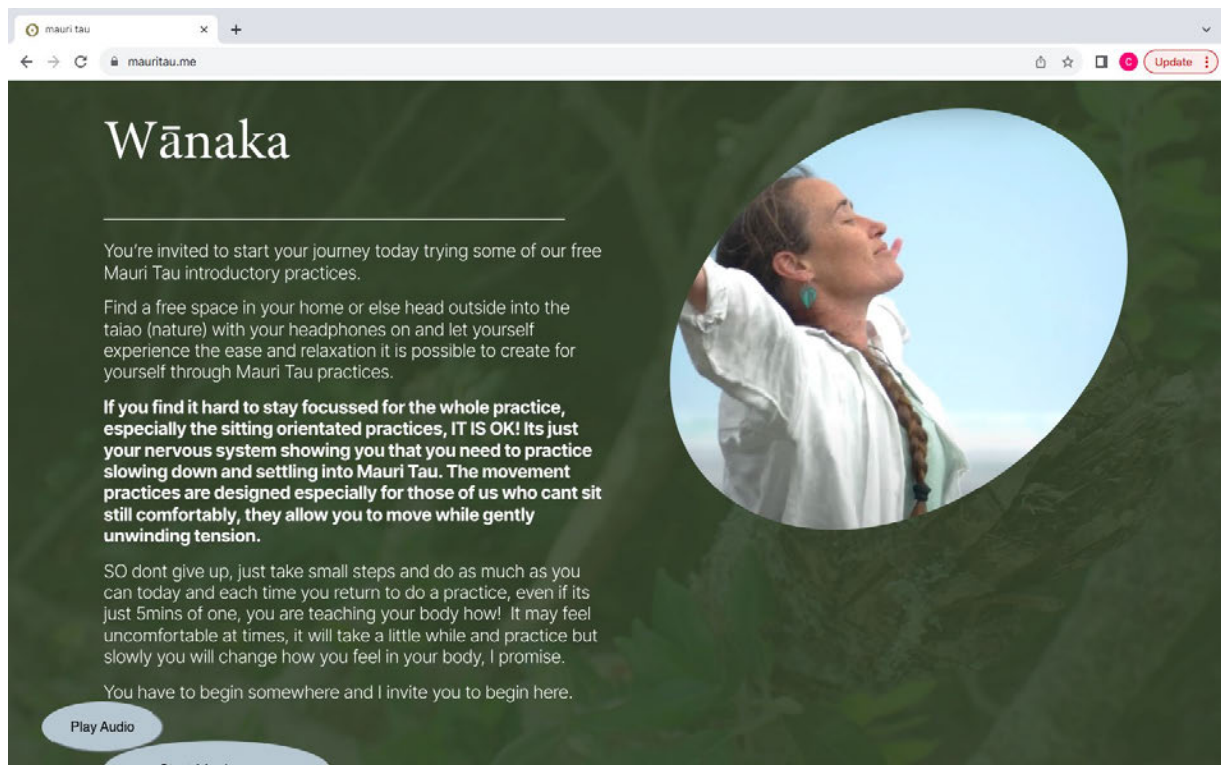
Figure 1



Note. Author’s own image, screenshot from mauritau.me, 2025.

Through a Mauri Mapping approach I observed the need and opportunity to focus on hauora for wāhine (women). Responding to ongoing requests from past participants, responding to community health and health sector needs and to the conversations and feedback from wāhine in a social context, the priorities emerging to shape the creating of the website included providing more flexible access to Mauri Tau Practices, supporting participants to incorporate more gentle, restorative and creative ways of moving into their daily lives while at the same time, encouraging place-based connection with local taiao. At the same time this website needed to respond to established sector priorities to enhance wellbeing through mōhiotanga Māori. While raising awareness of cultural somatics and the use of embodied expression as a creative and cultural mode of oranga through wananga, this iteration also identified the need to grow connectivity and cultivate confidence for wāhine to engage with their hauora through a community in practice.

Figure 2



Note. Author’s own image, screenshot from mauritau.me , 2025.

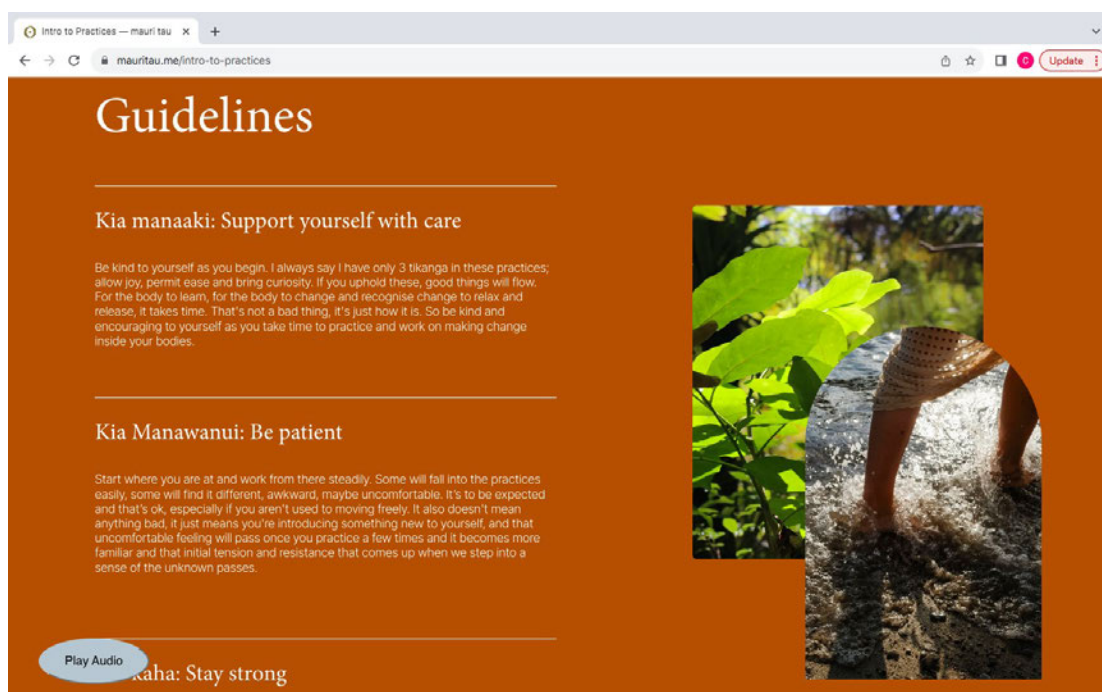
The creative team engaged to develop the website all whakapapa Māori and were predominantly female, bringing insight through their lived experiences to contribute co-creatively, an important element reflecting my Indigenous creative methodology.² Whakarongo Hōhonu shaped the project, massaging and moulding how it was led, navigating team dynamics, design of key features for the website, and how the timeline evolved responding to each person’s oranga and capacity while still meeting key deadlines and managing stakeholder relationships. This demonstrated the effectiveness of a commitment to presence, relational integrity, and designing from within meaningful connection. Despite the challenges of working across different locations and schedules, Whakarongo Hōhonu grounded relationships and facilitated an adaptive process. Ultimately, this approach contributed to the project’s success, with the majority of the team feeling inspired by the experience.

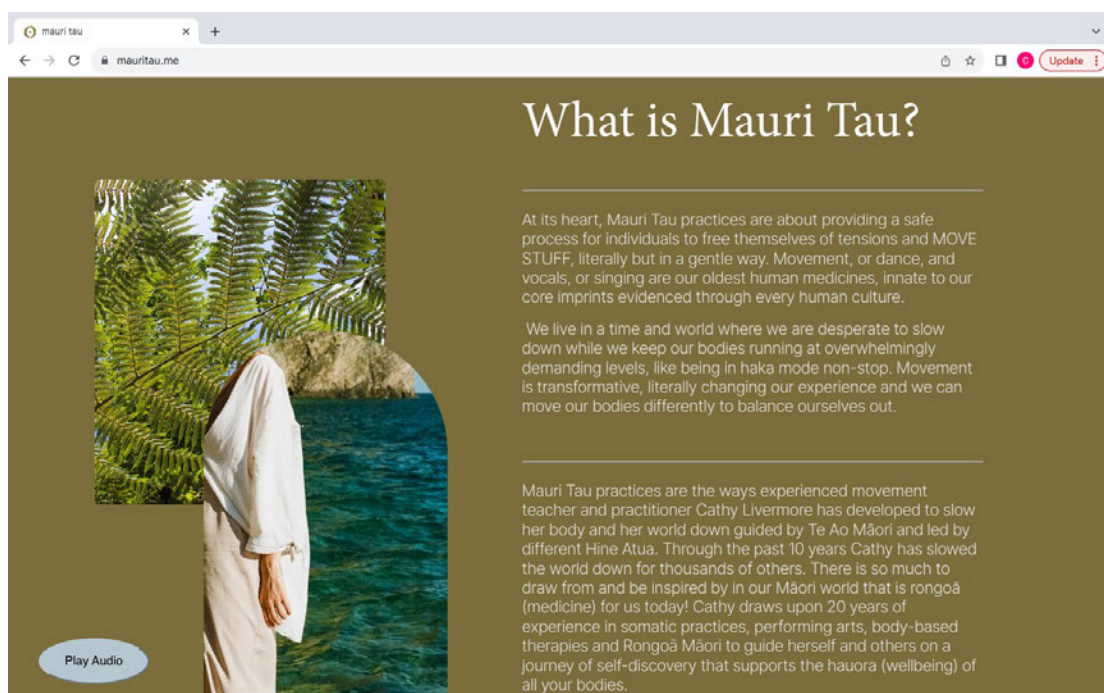
² The creative team Rachel Ruckstahl-Mann (Kai Tahu whānui) - Project assistant, Komako Aroha Silver (Ngāti Pakahi, Ngā Puhī) - Composer, Daniel Nathan (Ngā Puhī) and Tupu Films - Videographer and editor, Britt Davies (Ngā Puhī, Te Arawa, Te Afiawa Taranaki) - Web content designer and Tania Sheree Williams (Ngā Puhī) - Kaikarakia.

Attempting to move away from transactional approaches of collaboration towards cultivated spaces of co-creation, there were both successes and failures. Interestingly, team members I previously knew personally struggled to function beyond a transactional task-orientated approach, while those new to me openly engaged, reflecting throughout appreciation for this different way of working shaped by authentically relating and adapting the schedule to accommodate oranga in ourselves as we worked together. This broadly reflected a perceived vulnerability of working relationally in (re)newed ways beyond transactional norms. Retrospectively it highlights the need in our postcolonial world to avoid assumptions, even within groups sharing a common cultural identity, and recognises that different relationships require different contextual awareness and support for adaptation during changemaking. A variety of unique approaches and creative adaptability may be necessary to guide the creative, collaborative process.

Two wānanga were held to initiate collaborative relationships, bring together our knowledge and expertise to research and establish shared insights to inform the content. A trauma-informed approach was identified as the primary ethical concern which led us to prioritise mental, emotional, spiritual and physical safety for participants within the design process. Whakarongo Hōhonu remained central to how we navigated safety in the design.

Figure 3

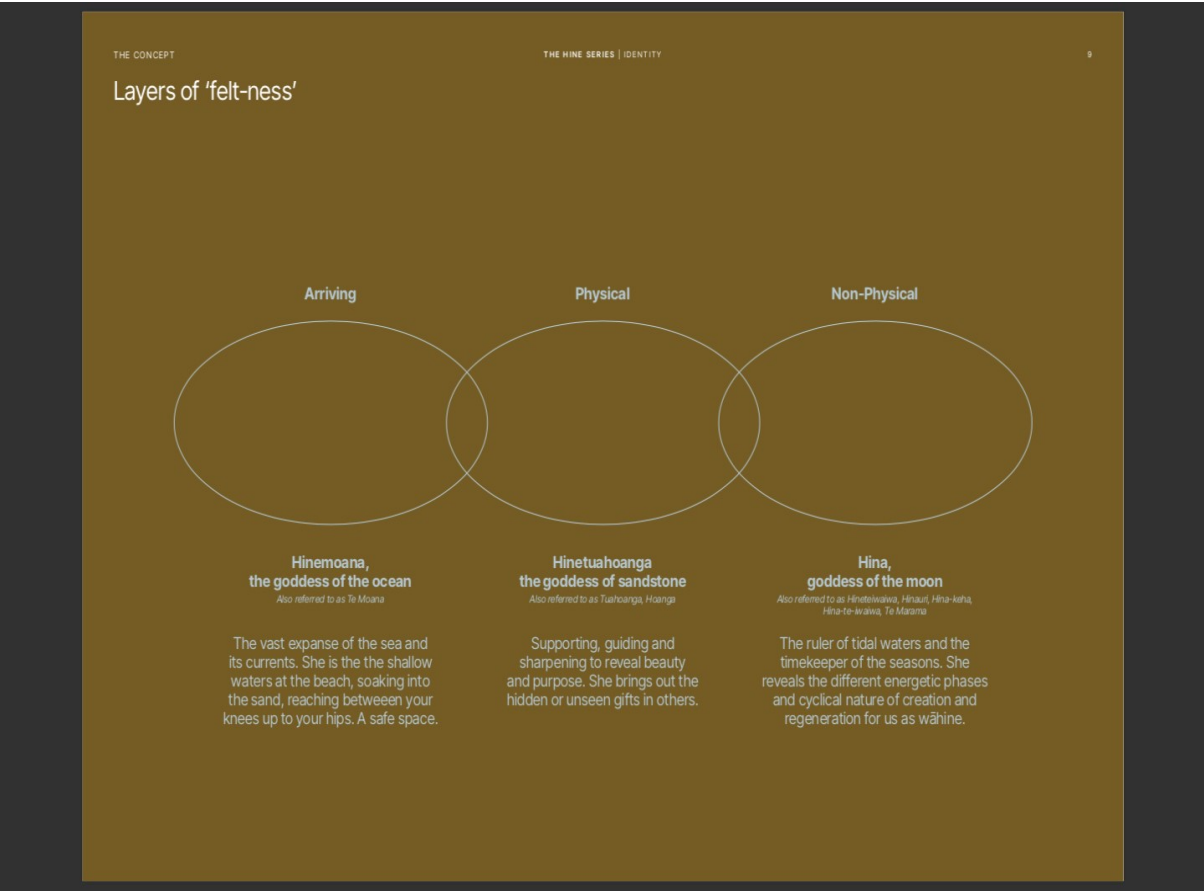




Note. Author's own image, screenshot from mauritau.me, 2025.

In considering how to ensure the safety of an anonymous and diverse audience I placed strong emphasis on the written copy throughout the website to be educational, instructional, encouraging and mindful to guide self-resourcing for safety (see Fig. 3). It was also imperative to provide clear scripting in the video resources to support cognitive engagement alongside the sensory, experiential nature of the practices. In an in-person session of Mauri Tau Practices , I can respond in real time, redirecting, soothing, and adapting as needed. In an online and pre-recorded Mauri Tau Practices session, I have no way to adapt to how they are affected. The tone in the website copy was styled to be conversational and yet informative, providing aspects of what I would discuss in live sessions while motivating participants' to surrender into the effort of the experiential learning process. The script in the video content focussed on clear direction and instruction to support and guide people's attention appropriately.

Figure 4



Note. Author’s own image, initial conceptual design , 2025.

The use of both te reo Māori and English narrations in the video resources on the website is purposeful. Te reo Māori is a language under threat, so including keeps it alive. Embracing the unique oro (sounds) of te reo Māori as rongoā quantumly effecting all 3 bodies its inclusion also facilitates necessarily the continued process of decolonisation and identity restoration through resonance and the conscious connection to whakapapa and mōhiotanga, our ancestral knowledges and ways of knowing. At the same time, recording in both languages also acknowledges the reality that many Māori, including myself, are not fluent or confident language speakers and still require English translations to access the knowledge of our tupuna. Language and sound are embodied experiences physically created and felt within our fleshy responses as well as consciously generated through thought into meaning and shaping felt experiences. Providing for the needs of both fluent speakers and early learners became an essential priority for responding to different people’s on their journey while also contributing

to the continual efforts to decolonise ourselves and the wider social systems here in Aotearoa by safeguarding te reo Māori and practicing its relevance today and into the future.

While the website content was originally envisioned as a series of open access resources based on Hine Atua (female higher beings), upon reflection it was decided that more generic introductory practices provided a safer, more accessible entry point for participants to freely engage. The potency of the spiritual agency carried by our Hine Atua and the need to ensure participants are adequately supported, both physically and emotionally, to feel safe during the experience and to integrate it afterward, informed this change of direction during the design phase for the website. While spiritual safety was a valued concern leading us to re-design a series of freely accessible introductory videos, we chose to stay intentionally connected to working with Hine Atua in the future through a designed programme alternative. Wahine Ora Wānanga was designed as an interactive program offered and accessed through the website but would require wāhine to register and would be delivered through a more guided structure to enable deeper engagement with Hine Atua (female atua) through a supported and supervised approach, delivered via monthly online wānanga.

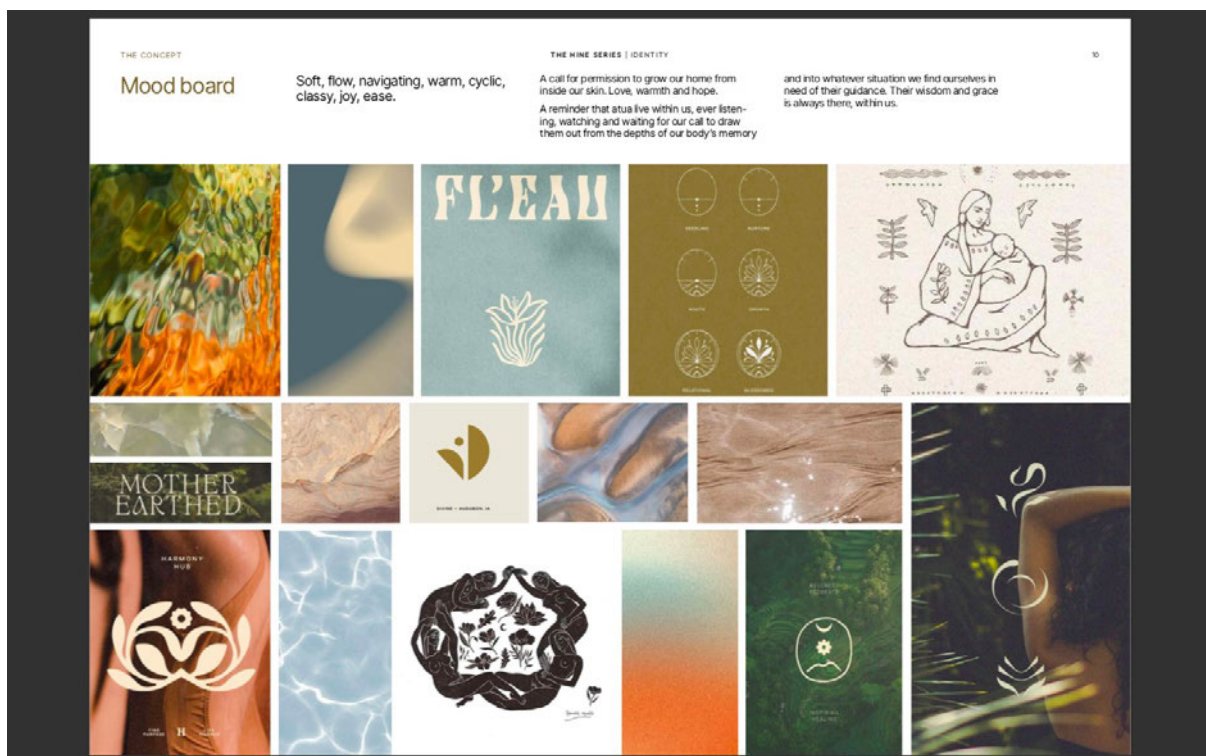
Culturally for Māori safety considerations are fundamentally important and support participants to be more at ease in engaging with their Hauora and healing. Use of karakia, a common safety protocol, is featured on the website to support participants to cultivate safety. Consideration of participant safety became more significant with the incorporation of taonga pūoro (traditional Māori instruments) in the soundscapes for the video resources. According to composer Komako Aroha Silver (Personal Communication, August, 2024), taonga pūoro carry their own mauri and wairua, and their vibrational impact on the body can be profound. While their use within live Mauri Tau Practices sessions was untested until now it felt like a natural and creative evolution to incorporate our traditional instrumentation in the soundscape to enhance support for healing through Oro elements.

To support participants to manage their experience mindfully an emphasis within written text throughout website and video scripts focussed on acknowledging encouragingly an acceptance of limitations and titration as overarching, normal priorities within wellbeing practices, without creating fear or judgement. In my efforts to address concerns and safety both on the website copy and as I instruct the practices, I am currently (re)considering whether I have

overcompensated and overloaded the experiential quality for participants with more information than required - providing too much to read, speaking too much and extending the length of the videos beyond people's capacity to focus. Drawing on anecdotal feedback from peers and colleagues I acknowledge that, by nature of my methodology, the website will continue to evolve and respond adaptively in relationship with participants as it is shared with the public.

Translating Mauri Tau Practices from a live context into a digital environment presented new opportunities alongside creative tensions. Screen-based communications demands efficiency, while Mauri Tau Practices itself requires fluidity and spaciousness, instigating new creative provocations. Responding to the challenges of sensing into relational nuances in online spaces while balancing these aesthetics became both a visual and conceptual consideration informing the design.

Figure 5



Note. Author's own image, design response to initial discussion, 2025.

In a Mauri Tau Practices session connecting with the participant is the biggest priority and can be the biggest challenge. The quality of that connection involves considerations of comfort and safety, accommodating differing levels of cultural knowledge, effectively activating the participant’s physical sensing and inner world, while aiming to bring a sense of playfulness and creativity. I often observe that participants feel vulnerable when moving creatively and engaging with sensory experiences, requiring thoughtful support to help them build confidence and participate effectively. Similar to a live Mauri Tau Practices session, we responded to these considerations employing a weaving of movement and sound, alongside colour, texture, tone, as well as language, image and story.

Figure 6



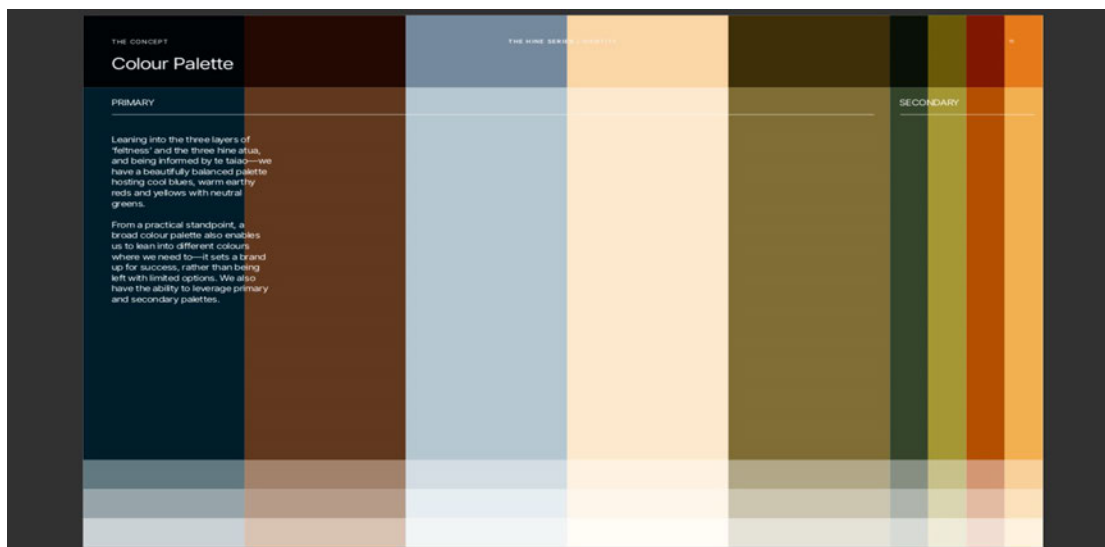
Note. Author’s own image, shaping the intentions while attuning creatively between web and brand designer and myself, 2025.

While live sessions engage similar considerations, in accommodating screen-based interactions, the creative and design outputs shifted significantly from temporary to permanent, and from predominantly oral to a huge emphasis on visual elements, while informed by cultural priorities. As an example the website sound design makes use of a new design feature, allowing us to host a spoken karakia on the home and introductory practices page while showing images of running water within taiao, to intentionally incorporate tikanga (cultural protocols) in a sensory way to engage wairua and prepare visitors for their experience. For those who may not have a karakia of their own to use in this context explicit cultural support and safety is extended. Comparatively, in a live session visual input isn't prioritised as most close their eyes, the karakia itself varies as is the way it is delivered, all responding to the moment.

<https://www.mauritau.me/intro-to-practices> Push 'play audio' bottom left corner of webpage

Decisions around colour, texture, imagery, and composition in the visual design process were understood as both generators and translators of mauri and wairua. Particular attention was given to how on-screen visual elements could convey notions of whakapapa, rongoā, and oranga to welcome and support manuhiri (visitors) without being restricted to only traditional representations through colours of red, white and black and codified symbology. This was balanced with the intention to foster joy, ease, curiosity, and playfulness, encouraging exploration and creative discovery. This led us to look to sensing connection with the taiao while applying our traditional knowledge in (re)newed ways to inform the overall design of the website, the images utilised, the selection of locations and filming process, the editing of video content as well as informing what practices I shared for the web content.

Figure 7



Note: Author's own image, Earthy but playful tones reflecting different elements were the basis for the website 2025

Earthy tones within a rainbow of colours that conveyed a lightness while settling and grounding were complimented by photos of nature and in nature and videos were filmed in a variety of outdoor environments; on the top of a mountain and by a stream for breathing exercise and moving to the base of a rakau (tree) when this evolved into moving slowly between standing and laying; being on the beach in a wide open space for the invigorating and releasing efforts of Manawa and being enveloped in the ngāhere (forest) for the skin-focused video, Tuakiritanga. Moving features and images of water were again selected because of their wairua effect, aesthetically invoking flow and cleansing, while inspiring a sense of movement and connection to taiao as a process of release and attunement.

<https://www.mauritau.me/intro-to-practices> Link to video resources page.

Screen-based interaction commonly engages people to scroll, read and watch videos, activating the hinengaro and wairua bodies more easily and posing a challenge to motivating participants to move their own physical body. In a sense, the spacious, embodied nature of in-person facilitation becomes compressed and less tangible. Motivation through play and curiosity was

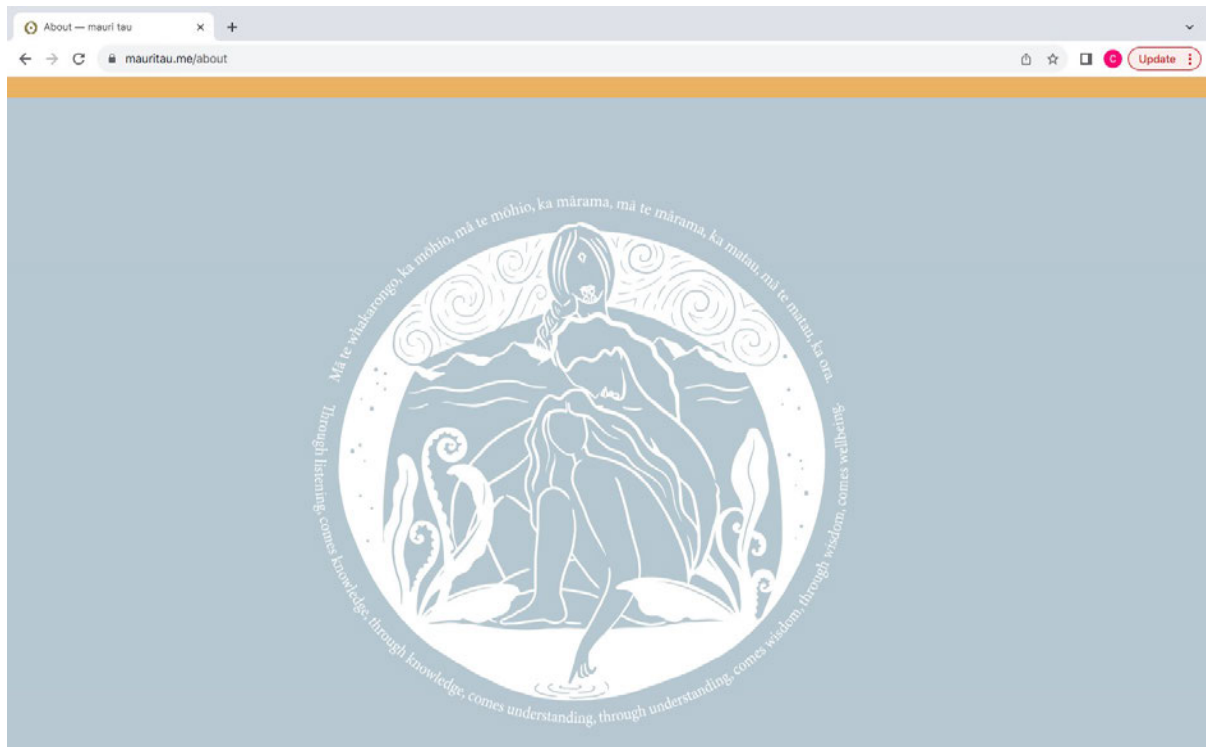
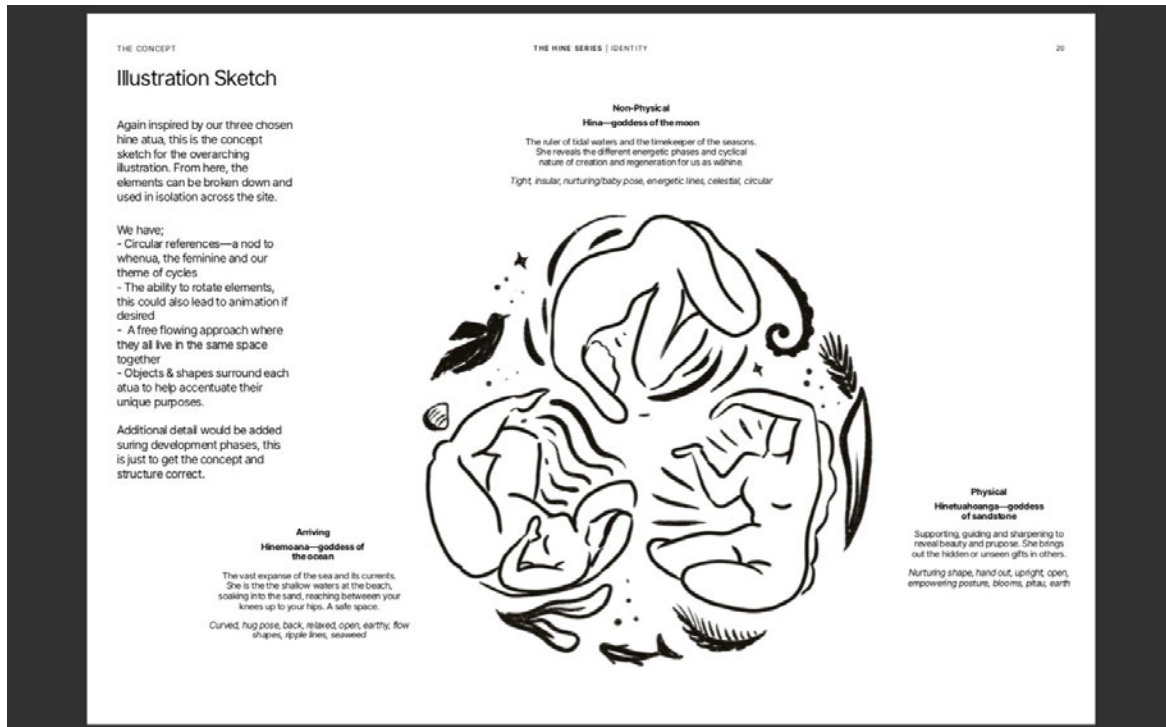
therefore important to invoke in the moving body to counter the possible resistance to physically or creatively moving. Filming outside was a considered way to encourage this and counter stagnation, invoking a more spacious imagining of bodies connected to a dynamic, energised world. Bringing the taiao in visually while also encouraging participants to take their experience into taiao spaces in their location were also incorporated.

Bringing deeper relevance to the elements of the taiao as reflection and resource was informed by the pūrakau of Hineahuone, the first human created by our elemental atua who themselves are known for being the generating forces of our physical world environment. Her story embodies the diverse life forces of the taiao, activating vitality, creativity while confirming our whakapapa connection to the natural world. Me koe aro ki te Hā o

Hineahuone; behold the beauty and greatness of Hineahuone who offers not only a model for personal healing but also a framework for relational navigation, creative expression, plant medicine use, and reconnecting with the natural world and spiritual realms while re-calibrating the nervous system into a state of mauri tau. The original and most popular Mauri Tau Practices practice developed is based on Hineahuone and I have facilitated this practice for over a decade, witnessing its capacity to release trauma, foster hope, and restore wellbeing. I acknowledge Hineahuone as being my teacher, guiding and affirming the instinctual and phenomenological development of Mauri Tau Practices implicitly, including the website.

An original logo was also created acknowledging the cyclical stages of women's lives, reflecting the sacred, holistic and dynamically evolving nature of wellbeing to embrace a sense of progressive integration reflecting a feminine pathway. Sections of the logo were cut away and repurposed across other pages, creating visual continuity while offering new perspectives on the original design. This recycling of elements generated both innovation and cohesion, allowing each page to serve a unique purpose while maintaining a resonant, unified presence across the site.

Figure 8



Note: Author's own image, Initial sketch of logo (left) and final logo image on website (right)

2025

This design detail serves as metaphor for key aspects of the overarching kaupapa, embedding the philosophical purpose of offering iteration of Mauri Tau Practices within the digital realm. Acknowledging and reinstating a feminine perception constituted by the cyclical nature of progressive integration, it embraces and encourages a re-membering, re-searching, re-instating, and re-newing of mana wāhine and Indigenous sensibilities. This logo seeks to inspire the possibility of an embodied lifetime of innovation, insight, and future possibility in continuity with ancestral ways resourced and enacted through our wellbeing.

Although I have had the opportunity and alot of encouragement to disseminate this research and practices through a commercial business model, I have intentionally chosen to not in order to generate a different field of intent ‘outside the logic of capital’ (Holloway 2002 as cited in Monticilli 2018) shaped by different knowledge systems, priorities, and outcomes. My cultural creative methodological approach recognises that relational forces shape what we prioritise, how we perceive, and what we create. This understanding has guided the creative development of each iteration in the development and delivery of Mauri Tau Practices, this website being the most recent, unfolding along an evolving pathway grounded in this relational and intentional way of being. There are already more iterations coming through.

<u>Collaborators for website</u>	
Daniel Nathan (Ngā Puhī) and Tupu Films	Videographer and editor
Komako Aroha Silver (Ngāti Pakahi, Ngā Puhī)	Composer
Britt Davies (Ngā Puhī, Te Arawa, Te Atīawa Taranaki)	Website and web content designer
Rachel Ruckstahl-Mann (Kai Tahu whānui)	Movement Presenter and Project assistant
Te Aorangi Morini (Ngāti Tamaterā)	Te Reo Translator and Māori Voice Over
Tania Sheree Williams (Ngā Puhī)	Kaikarakia

THEORETICAL RAU

Rau (leaves) provides a metaphorical reference, acknowledging theory as an aspect of this research that contributes to the functioning of the whole, much like the role of leaves on a tree. It also makes reference to weaving, another common function of rau, positioning theory not as the driver of this research but as interwoven and supportive of the overall structure and core purpose.

A Matter of Intelligence: Fleshy Informed Futures

Ko te rongō te arawhata ki te ora

Embodiment is the stairway to well-being (Taylor, 2022)

Bodies are always listening, attuning with one's environment to detect any changes. Mauri Tau Practices postulates that our futures are shaped by our fleshy, embodied realities. It positions the physical body as a creative, material form with intrinsic value and intelligence, while also recognising the necessity of embodied intelligence in informing systems change and future-making.

Somatics, rooted in Greek philosophy (Barragon, 2023), refers to western Eurocentric mind-body methods that bring focus to internal sensations of affectation as therapeutic, educational, artistic and physically expressive (Mullen, 2012). In a sensory mode that 'privileges subjective experience' (Fortin, 2002) somatics practices can shift perceptions through psycho-biological processes that provide unique data. While somatics enacts embodied cognition, Embodied Cognition theory affirms psycho-biological understandings and extends them to include relationality with the environment (Shapiro et al., 2024). This reflects aspects of Indigenous epistemology, aligning with what Dretske describes as exteroception (awareness of external stimuli) and interoception (awareness of internal bodily states) (Hart, 2010).

Through my twenty-five year career as a professional dance artist, I experienced diverse somatic modalities, including Body-Mind Centering, Skinner Releasing Technique, Feldenkrais, Alexander Technique, Somatics, Ideosomatics and many somatic inquiry-led processes applied within creative practice. Today, somatics has expanded to include trauma-informed approaches such as Peter Levine's Somatic Experiencing (SE); Sensorimotor Psychotherapy (SP), which integrates psychotherapy with neuroscience and body-based practice; and the Hakomi Method,

which combines mindfulness with somatic work. Other forms include Neurosomatic Therapy, focusing on physical release through massage, postural alignment, and movement; Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT), which uses acupressure tapping to release trauma; and EMDR, which integrates eye movement with talk therapy. All of these approaches focus on individual mind/body experience and awareness. Additionally, eco-somatics and land-based somatics explore somatic engagement with the natural world and place-based knowledge. Affective neuroscience contributes further understanding by explaining how the brain generates emotions. More recently, cultural somatics has emerged (discussed further in following section). No doubt other approaches exist, reflecting a common western epistemological trait of fractalising knowledge, a trait identified by Mackean et al. (2022), as a limitation to forming wellbeing policies.

Informed by sensory intelligence, Mauri Tau Practices reflects a somatic orientation. Countering fragmentation, as a Kaupapa Māori approach it differs by flexibly encompassing distinct and diverse focuses drawing on a range of somatic approaches concurrently and interweaving them holistically, responding to cultural understandings of mauri (Apiti et al., 2024). At times Mauri Tau Practices may take an eco-somatic orientation centred in ancestral connection or focus on the individual's three bodies, all the while integrating and adapting these somatic focuses responsively to align with the needs of each person or group. Grounded in core concepts of mauri, wairua, whakapapa, rongoā and oranga, Mauri Tau Practices integrates a theoretical or intellectual cultural framework with a deeply felt sensory experience that emerges somatically through movement, breath, sound and connection; to self, to taiao, to tūpuna, to culture and to each other.

Indigenous Australian health researcher Tamara Mackean et al., (2022) acknowledges Indigenous cultures as essential to wellbeing, offering comprehensive forms of philosophy, knowledge, and practices grounded in holistic and relational worldviews. Within Indigenous epistemologies, embodied cognition is not a supplement to intellectual knowing, it is foundational. Mauri Tau Practices as research seeks to contribute new understandings that both expands contemporary somatic theories and informs their application within wellbeing and future-making practices.

Indigenous knowledge forms experientially through the creative act of doing and sensing (Nicholson, 2019). Hart (2010) reflects on Ermine's (1995 as cited in Hart, 2010) description

of this process as “the capacity to tap the creative life forces of the inner space by the use of all the faculties that constitute our being - it is to exercise inwardness” (p.104). Mauri Tau Practices navigates an inward exploration of cultural belief systems, incorporating body-based sensing as a dynamic, creative pathway that holistically informs knowing and wellbeing. Unlike Western somatic approaches, which tend to universalise perception, Mauri Tau Practices unfolds within locational contexts of cultural and relational experience, valuing diverse personal insights as contributions to collective knowledge.

The popular whakataukākī, “Ko au ko te awa, ko te awa ko au” (I am the river and the river is me) from the Whanganui area expresses a decolonised, somatic model of health that includes emotional, spiritual, and ecological dimensions acknowledging the physical body’s intrinsic connection to whenua and taiao. Positioning individual health as directly linked to ecological wellbeing and fostering somatic perception and felt connection with the natural world, Mauri Tau Practices is centred within the deeply affective relationality between the world within and beyond the skin. Embodying a Māori somatic sensibility expressing intimate respect and reciprocity with ecosystems, guided by Atua and developed through an inquisitive, whakapapa-informed sensory ethnography, Mauri Tau Practices engages the ‘multisensoriality of experience, perception, knowing and practice’ of our embodied cultural world (Pink, 2015).

Tā Mason Durie’s Te Whare Tapa Whā acknowledges wairua as essential to health and wellbeing. Māori Marsden (1975 as cited in Ngawati et al., 2018) affirms Māori culture exists across temporal and transcendent realms, allowing for connection with the gods, not as abstract figures but as ancestral beings in ongoing relationship with the living. Henare (1988) expands: “with this understanding of culture...people refer to their taha wairua and they are profoundly influenced by it...appropriate social policy as it affects Māori people should have a wairuatanga as well as a temporal aspect central to its formulation and practice” (p. 16). Unlike Western somatic theories, a psycho-spiritual dimension of wairua is distinct and foundational to Mauri Tau Practices, positioning Mauri Tau Practices as distinct and emergent. (Hamilton, 2023).

The importance of Mauri Tau Practices integrating wairuatanga (spirituality) speaks to a central aspiration in Māori social reform. Dr. Rose Pere (1982) describes spirituality as a “dimension intended within a person from conception – the seed of life emanated from the supreme natural from the supreme supernatural influence” (p. 16). By applying psychospiritual process within a somatic framework, Mauri Tau Practices activates a bio-sensory feedback loop that resensitises

and can support integration of metaphysical realities incorporating all three bodies, thus restoring authentic experiences of our Māori traditions. Western somatics identifies with only a singular, physical body while Mauri Tau Practices demonstrates a phenomenologically informed understanding of how wairua supports connection and facilitates transitions in the body from stressed (sympathetic) states to relaxed (parasympathetic) states. This process supports nervous system regulation and the release or restoration of physical, psychological, and spiritual patterns of lived experience, alleviating accumulated tension and dis-ease.

Our unique, richly informed, and diverse experiences of personhood converge relationally, interacting in any moment as living expressions of mana and mauri, carried and transmitted through the fleshy receptacles of whakapapa. These are stories living and moving through our embodied expressions; present in our blood memories, cells, organs, fluids, nervous system, and brain. They are also stories expressed in our shapes and postures, injuries and actions, and in our thoughts, beliefs, memories, hopes, and dreams. Mauri Tau Practices creatively engages with the somatic and psycho-spiritual nature of each person's stories, providing both a personal and socio-cultural healing practice, embracing cultural identity while supporting relational balance and collective and personal wellbeing.

Glenna Batson (2017 as cited in Alexander et al., 2017) calls for a new critique of somatics in the face of neoliberal globalisation and an increasing planetary poly-crisis, addressing Eurocentrism, elitism and commodification. Mauri Tau Practices provides an alternative that proactively supports the regeneration of an Indigenous Māori somatic sensibility, valuing pūrakau while engaging with decolonisation and systems change. In cultivating personal and collective capacity for wellbeing, Mauri Tau Practices also aims to challenge the dominance of Eurocentric approaches in Aotearoa, enabling more embodied, diverse and inclusive ways of doing, being, and knowing to be incorporated into health and broader systems, while contributing to the evolving field of somatics and its potential to service better health and wellbeing.

Cultural Somatics

Cultural Somatics (CS) is a term I initially coined intuitively to describe my somatically informed inquiry into the felt experience of my culturally-shaped self. Personal experiences of

racism towards Māori and neglect for wellbeing within NZ's monoculturally-dominated public health system had detrimental impacts on my wellbeing. With nowhere to turn safely for resourcing and support, I turned to my tūpuna and Te Ao Māori for guidance and insight.

Culture lives, enacted and felt through bodies and nervous systems, cyclically and ritualistically shaping deeper matrices of connectivity flowing within ourselves, our environment, and our communities, forming purposeful and sustainable relationships. As a CS approach, Mauri Tau Practices acknowledges wellbeing is culturally mediated, sustained through the repeated embodied enactment of cultural cosmologies in practice (Robinson, 2013). Embodying traditional Māori ways of syncing and co-creating with the natural world, while engaging with the embodied systemic relationships essential to our survival, is significant given the historical marginalisation of alternative knowledge systems, which have long been delegitimised by dominant Eurocentric and colonial frameworks in Aotearoa NZ and internationally.

As a Kaupapa Māori practice, Mauri Tau Practices implicitly and explicitly facilitates and promotes decolonisation (Pihama et al., n.d.). Reflecting a feminist politics of location (Madhok, 2020), this research proposes a somatically informed approach for healing through transposing Māori cultural sensibilities into bodies within this whenua of Aotearoa NZ to transform colonial memory through personal engagement with Indigenous ways of knowing. This approach aims to engage cellular remembrance in ways that can illuminate and challenge patterns of colonial oppression, both personally and collectively, responding to the need to (re)form social connectivity and supporting renewed understandings of interconnected systems while highlighting the changes needed to cultivate social cohesion from colonial realities (Gluckman, 2021).

Encountering CS as a term in academic discourse and among other practitioners situates my research within a broader, global context, while also highlighting the deep scars of colonisation on the land, the people, and the environment in Aotearoa. Considered an academic pioneer in the field of cultural somatics, American trauma therapist and author Resmaa Menakem's "somatic abolitionism" is a guiding influence. His research reflects the metaphysical and epigenetic nature informing whakapapa, emphasising the embodied nature of colonial trauma transmitted intergenerationally through cellular memory (Menakem, 2017). Tracing the whakapapa of colonial ideology and its perceived legitimacy back to pre-colonial European socio-cultural beliefs and the legitimisation of violence and trauma (Menakem, 2017; Robinson,

2013), Menakem's perspective resonates with Aotearoa scholars such as Tina Ngata (2024) and Moana Jackson (Moon, 2022).

American scholar Douglas Robinson (2013) describes the cultural roots of the coloniser's use of ideosomatic dysregulation as a socially conditioned and purposeful practice aimed at controlling colonised peoples. Coherence that is established culturally is systematically disrupted through disciplinary pain, undermining the body's internal sense of coherence and somatic regulatory patterns as a means of control. Robinson (2013) explains how this dysregulation becomes somatically internalized and forms a self-perpetuated disciplinary pain that continues to colonize long after the coloniser has put down his whip. This internalisation of colonial violence and cultural dissonance aligns with what scholar and activist Amber McZeal (2021; Barragan, 2023) defines as coloniality: the enduring patterns of power that outlast the formal end of colonial administrations, persisting in culture, labour, relationships, and systems of knowledge. In Aotearoa, Ngata (2024) draws attention to how nation states, such as New Zealand, continue to enact dominance under the legitimising influence of The Doctrine of Discovery and colonisation. Similarly, Menakem (2017) recognises how within industrialised modernity, embodied coloniality sustains and permeates, shaping people's somatic experience in ways that reflect collective global norms while also manifesting uniquely in each individual. Together, these perspectives point to the deeply embedded, and yet predominantly overlooked somatic bodily dimensions of colonial power and its perpetuated enactment today through both societal systems and personal, internalised somatic patterns. Further, western therapeutic approaches to trauma similarly overlook and therefore fail to engage with ideosomatic dysregulation when engaging with Indigenous trauma.

Mauri Tau Practices actively recognises the epigenetic and metaphysical uniqueness of each person's coloniality, while fostering intercultural inquiry bringing awareness of personal and systemic coloniality in Aotearoa, NZ. Embodying the phenomenological investigation of reflexive expressions of cultured ideoregulation, Mauri Tau Practices, like Menakem's somatic approach, emphasises the centrality of the physical body in processes of decolonisation and healing, recognising how "white-body supremacy" is embedded in nervous systems (Menakem, 2017).

Somatic scholar-practitioner Sondra Fraleigh (cited in Barragán, 2023) highlights ‘somatic decolonisation’ as a critical method for interrupting psychosomatic imprints of colonialism embedded in the body. This aligns with Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang’s argument in *Decolonisation is not a Metaphor* (2012), urging individuals to undertake personal, embodied work rather than rely on vague or collective gestures that risk reproducing colonial patterns. Quechua and Aymara Bolivian mestizo sociologist and activist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui similarly contends that “there can be no theory of decolonisation without a decolonising practice,” (Barragan, 2023) reinforcing the necessity of embodied, lived, and context-specific action. Together, these scholars stress that authentic decolonisation must be enacted through grounded, personal engagement that attends to the ways coloniality is carried and perpetuated within each body as much as within institutions and the socio-cultural collective.

Aligning with these scholars’ applied approach, Mauri Tau Practices is grounded in the somatic nature of experiential learning, supporting decolonisation as a component of personal and collective wellbeing. Within this Indigenous cultural somatic framework, ‘being’ and ‘becoming with’ interact dynamically (Nicholson, 2019), as traditional knowledge and historical pasts infold in the present and engage with future imaginaries to shape perception and inform ways of knowing. Knowing and forming knowledge is thus understood as a creative act unfolding within the present, embracing past and future without imposing Eurocentric universalisms or excluding alternative cultural knowledge systems.

While Menakem’s somatic abolitionism focuses on the sensations of coloniality and suggests a deconstructing and removal of colonial trauma, Mauri Tau Practices differs by centring on the agency of cultural reconstruction and creativity, remembering and reinstating as a decolonising methodology to support healing. Where Western somatics focuses on individual anatomy, Mauri Tau Practices resonates deeply with the Cusicanqui expanded notion of an individual that encompasses relational wellbeing ‘in rhythm and flows of the cosmos’ — integrating family, community, land, ancestors, and spiritual realms (Barragán, 2023). A Māori pepeha (genealogical self-introduction) encapsulates a similar relational ethos, illustrating how decolonisation requires an ontological approach grounded in cultural sensibilities. Such an approach reconnects body, land, and cosmology, reawakening interconnectivity to move beyond the limitations of modernity and Cartesian dualism. To counter our attachment to the hegemony of industrialisation and neoliberal capitalism, which threaten the survival of our

living environments and, by extension, ourselves (Hines, 2023; Monticilli, 2018), the decolonisation of Papatūānuku (Earth) and our relationship with her must go hand in hand with decolonising ourselves (Braidotti, 2006).

Culture is not an individual experience, as Menakem (2017) observes, and personal wellness cannot be separated from the collective, inclusive of taiao (Hart, 2010; Barragan, 2023; McLachlan et al., 2021; Apiti et al., 2024; Durie, 2001; Mackean et al., 2022). The intertwined nature of individual and collective trauma requires a decolonising approach that recognises this interdependence, one in which healing is understood as a communal process in relation within systems change and future making. This perspective represents a radical shift from current Western psychiatric and biomedical models of trauma-informed mental health and wellbeing, which tend to individualise and pathologise symptoms and prioritise individual treatment (McLachlan et al., 2021; Mackean et al., 2022; Valentine et al., 2017). As Hamilton (2023) highlights, Indigenous healing practices often encompass “experience of the numinous, spirits as archetypes and as real as rock, living relationships with the ancestors, the living earth as an ally and physiological and spiritual helper, experience of physical purging, the sense of intracellular transformation, group synchrony, and vision and image as significant metaphoric conveyances” (Kaufmann, 2009; Starr-Karlinn, 2018; Stone, 2011 as cited in Hamilton, 2023). Such experiences reflect a whakapapa approach that honours the collective dimensions of rongoā and oranga reflecting healing and co-regulating guided by mauri.

Mauri Tau Practices, while grounded in a Māori foundation, resists isolation. Following Durie, I argue that Māori wellbeing must flourish within a pluralism that enables Māori to live, think, and act as Māori in both te ao Māori and te ao whānui (the wider world) (Durie, 2006 as cited in Mika, 2021). In this context, Mauri Tau Practices aims to facilitate intercultural engagement by opening space for non-Māori to meaningfully encounter and respond to a Māori worldview constituting decolonisation. Anecdotally I have observed Pākehā and tauīwi (European settlers and migrants) who are able to cultivate a sense of home and wellbeing on this whenua through such engagement.

Decolonisation of systems = healthy futures

Systems emerge from people’s ways of being, doing, and knowing, patterned into behaviours and beliefs, and these systems shape personal wellbeing across all aspects of daily life. The

Western biomedical model dominating New Zealand's health systems differs fundamentally in its conceptualisations of health, wellbeing, and trauma (Mackean et al., 2022) from Māori perspectives (Graham, 2020). Mauri Tau Practices positions itself in critical resistance to the monopolisation and commercialisation of wellbeing by Western medicine, identifying it as an ongoing form of colonisation that has contributed to distrust and disconnection within Māori communities, while limiting the integration of alternative cultural approaches that demonstrate more effective health outcomes (Graham, 2020).

Western psychology practitioners are starting to incorporate somatic awareness in treatment approaches in trauma-informed practice (Mackean et al., 2022), but this remains optional and notably absent within institutional training programmes. Relying on diagnostic categories rooted in Eurocentric epistemologies, such dominant paradigms maintain a hyperfocus on cognitive aspects. Rooted in vastly different contexts, these frameworks fail to meet Māori health realities or broader social needs. Despite having some of the greatest health needs, Māori health knowledge remains marginalised, often relegated to the status of 'social practice' while Western clinical practices are maintained as 'medicine' as reflected in ACC (Accident Compensation Corporation) policy, practices and palliative care practices (Durie, 1994). Western monocultural approaches often universalise experience and neglect the socio-political contexts shaping dis-ease and trauma, reproducing the very fragmentation they aim to heal by isolating people from their bodies, communities, and collective safety. For Indigenous communities, where trauma is historically, structurally, and colonially imposed, this is particularly harmful (Mackean et al., 2022). When embodied cognition is overlooked in treatment, healing is compromised. For Māori, whose trauma is inseparable from colonisation, such neglect reflects a failure to engage responsibly with context, perpetuating harm even as symptoms are addressed.

This represents a central challenge in Aotearoa. Māori culture and people are often racialised in ways that position them as a challenge to dominant Pākehā systems, resources, and norms. Rather than being supported to live as Māori, individuals and communities are subjected to regulatory and pathologising practices. A clear example is the disestablishment of Te Aka Whai Ora (Māori Health Authority) by the 2023 Coalition Government, led by the National Party, a move that has both symbolic and material implications for the support of Māori-led health initiatives.

I have encountered exclusion from public health systems when sharing Mauri Tau Practices. Despite extensive training under Tohunga Māori and decades of professional experience with bodies and movement, my knowledge is not formally recognised without Western-accredited qualifications in programmes dominated by Eurocentric ontologies and epistemologies. By defining ‘professional’ through Eurocentric criteria, institutions constrain Indigenous knowledge to hegemonic frameworks, which can perpetuate the dominance of white cultural narratives over Māori ways of being and understanding. While Mauri Tau Practices is not formally recognised as a group therapy approach, therapies such as yoga and dance are government funded as therapeutic, highlighting systemic inequities that challenge the intent of research and policy, including the Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) Act 2022 and Whakamaua: Māori Health Action Plan 2020–2025.

Mauri Tau Practices was developed to create healing spaces grounded in Māori knowledge, addressing needs I experienced as a wāhine Māori and first-time māmā (mother). Evolving from a wellbeing inquiry into a cultural somatic practice it has expanded to working with migrant communities, where Mauri Tau Practices has been observed to provide grounding, enable engagement with personal and collective trauma, and promote attunement and co-creative intelligence beyond rigid clinical models for non-Māori.

Decolonisation is both personal and collective. Colonisation impacts all participants, whether as colonised, coloniser, or migrant within colonised systems. As Resmaa Menakem (2017) notes, bodies carry these histories. Mauri Tau Practices responds by fostering reconnection with self, others, and the taiao, supporting embodied, culturally grounded approaches to wellbeing.

Sensibilities

"You don't go fishing in a cyclone because you feel like eating fish; you go when the conditions are right." Author's quote

I use the term *sensibilities* to describe a Māori method of knowing, recognising it as rooted in Māori ontological and epistemological praxis and situated within broader Indigenous knowledge systems.

The word *sensible* evokes knowledge that is "in accordance with wisdom and prudence; likely to be of benefit" (Oxford Languages n.d). As the root 'sense' implies, *sensibilities* are not abstract; they are active, embodied, and grounded in lived experience. Indigenous culture is an embodied expression of knowledge being applied, not as a fixed outcome, but as a living process of becoming - emerging from te Kore (the void) through te Pō (the nights) to Te Ao Marama (world of light) (Nicholson, 2019). Accordingly, *sensibilities* are not static ideas; they are dynamic matrices of sensed, conceptual, and energetic information interstitially formed between multiple subjective positions that are able to shift in and out of contextual relevance.

Two key understandings underpin *sensibilities*.

First, Māori knowledge, like that of many Indigenous cultures, exists within a relational, interdependent ecosystem. As Simpson (2000 cited in Hart, 2010) reminds us, knowledge is interwoven. Tūhourangi philosopher Carl Mika (2007) similarly writes that "sacredness may not be attributable to one specific essence but may manifest itself through an interplay of a number of realms... a constant folding over of states of nature such that they all created the universe and could not be isolated into their specific mechanisms" (p. 190).

Second, Māori epistemology enacts theory and practice simultaneously. Knowledge is not abstracted from life but expressed, applied, and mediated through embodied cognition as a living process of somatically-informed meaning-making. The triadic dynamic (the three bodies referred to throughout) simultaneously facilitates and documents adaptive meaning-making within complex relational fields (Royal, 2009 cited in Ngawati, 2018).

These understandings favour knowledge reflexively tethered to inter-relational contexts (Simpson, 2000 cited in Hart, 2010). Māori knowledge does not exist in absolute states, but as contextual, creative, and evolutionary processes that are interactive, participatory, and inclusive.

Informed by the practice of Whakarongo Hōhonu, *sensibilities* arise within a convergence of time, where ancestral embodied wisdom and present bodies engage in dialogue with the future. As an Indigenous technology of relationality, *sensibilities* function as connective tissue between multiple bodies of knowledge, illustrating how Indigenous knowledge systems adapt iteratively across time. They provide observable insights into co-created fields of relational attunement that are intergenerational, embodied, and grounded. Within collective relational fields, *sensibilities* influence and guide individuals and groups in nuanced ways, reflecting Māori understandings of interconnectivity and co-creation as they respond to the energetic tension or resonance inhabiting the wana, or third space.

Sensibilities become living fields of affective resonance. They carry agency, adaptively combining ancestral principles within a relational continuum that connects past and future in a dynamic cosmos. In this way, *sensibilities* bring into presence ancestral wisdoms reflecting ‘common sense’, not only personally, but also collectively and cosmologically. Within Mauri Tau Practices, *sensibilities* emerge through the engagement with traditional principles of whakapapa, rongoā, oranga, and mauri. These principles form a resonant field translatable with the embodied participant, grounding and guiding the method, and allowing Mauri Tau Practices practice to arise responsively, evolve, and settle in cyclical, reciprocal ways.

In te ao Māori, this dynamic conversation between cultural tradition and contextualised expression allows knowledge to grow adaptively through time. Without such reference to time, knowledge cannot cohere into culture nor provide timeless principles that offer wisdom.

Sensibilities, understood as a cultural praxis, can support adaptive resilience within te ao Māori, enabling its continued relevance in contemporary contexts while responding to colonial pressures that have sought to suppress or erase Māori knowledge and ways of being. I also propose that *sensibilities* can invite a way to negotiate individual and collective action while embracing the complexity of cultural diversity.

Sensibilities articulate the process of knowledge generation which has shaped this research and development of Mauri Tau Practices, embodying a creative practice informed by ancestral wisdom and evolving through co-created iterative cycles of application, evaluation, and adaptation generated in pursuit of oranga within whakapapa. Working with *sensibilities* within Mauri Tau Practices provides both creative and therapeutic effect, enhancing perceptive, receptive, and expressive capacities between diverse bodies of knowing. Embodying

sensibilities invites a slowing down, a tuning in, and a creating with rather than over. Hamilton (2023) observes that culturally informed group sessions focussed on healing have the capacity to contribute to individual and social somatic evolutions. This echoes the view that embodied knowledge is not just a vehicle for social information but an evolutionary force (Brennan, 2004; Wells et al., 2006 cited in Hamilton, 2023).

Mauri Tau Practices acknowledges the creative capacity required to transpose culture and generate *sensibilities* that support healing and future-making. Mauri Tau Practices practices cultivate adaptive, playful responsiveness while letting go of fixed certainties, enabling participants to discover and co-create shared realities through applying embodied knowledge in real time. *Sensibilities* creatively emerge from felt commonalities, conscientized into cooperative, momentary, and context-specific alignment. This alignment is not about uniformity or hierarchy but about dynamic attunement, creating the ethical conditions for transposing cultural realities. *Sensibilities* act as living interfaces between bodies, generations, and evolving ways of being, generating an ontological field that transcends linear time, decentralises authority, and invites shared accountability through aligned purpose.

In this research, *sensibilities* describe an emergent Indigenous theory and practice that privileges non-hierarchical, co-created perception. *Sensibilities* describe grounded alternatives to extractive knowledge systems, enabling inherited limitations of the colonial self to be metabolised into healing. As Rivera Cusicanqui reminds us, “It is necessary to coexist with the contradiction, and the contradiction must be converted into a purposeful referent rather than an obstacle to the subject’s integrity” (Bacca, 2018 cited in Barragan, 2023). Engaging with *mōhiotanga*, Mauri Tau Practices transposes Māori *sensibilities* while cultivating emergent ones through embodied cognition and intercultural exchange, moving toward healing and future-making.

As an Indigenous framework for change, Mauri Tau Practices embraces the interdependent nature of personal and collective health while being grounded in cultural regeneration and decolonisation. Traditional and emergent sensibilities are experienced through cultural somatic practices, transposing knowledge across bodies, times, and geographies, to support relational navigation, embodied understanding, and future-oriented practice. By holding space for inherited memory (past, including trauma), living memory (present, including dis-ease), and heart memory (future and transformational), it provides a holistic method for collective healing.

Relational accountability, a defining feature of Māori and broader Indigenous epistemologies, extends beyond individuals to encompass tūpuna, the taiao, and future generations (Wilson, 2021). The evolution and safeguarding of Mauri Tau Practices practices are reinforced within the collective resonance of Māori cultural *sensibilities*, as affirmed by Māori.

Eurocentric alignments

Sensibilities articulate Indigenous ways as embodied, relational, resonant fields of knowing contextualised through application into knowledge. Philosopher Rosi Braidotti's concept of transposition is a transformative metaphor that reflects how such knowledge may be actively reconfigured and enacted postcolonially.

Braidotti (2006, 2011a) proposes transposition as a transformative metaphor for feminist and posthumanist scholarship. Transposition challenges dominant societal narratives by fostering “other, alternative ways of knowing” and being (Braidotti, 2006, p. 6) blending critique and creativity to generate new possibilities without erasing difference. Mauri Tau Practices enacts this metaphor as a decolonising and (re)indiginizing process through Māori cultural somatics, transposing Indigenous modes of being into embodied experience to generate alternative modes of perceiving and experiencing beyond the dominant postcolonial hegemony in Aotearoa NZ. Here, the body is an epistemic site where knowledge arises through dynamic intra-action with the world (Barad, 2007) enabling healing and transformation through transduction. In alignment with Mauri Tau Practices, transposition engages whakapapa ontologically, epistemologically, and experientially, while embodying an Indigenous sensibility oriented toward oranga in response to postcolonial norms and contemporary realities. This process is (re)conceptualised by Braidotti through her engagement with difference and her commitment to developing new ways of knowing within Western philosophical and intellectual discourse.

Moving between worlds and sensing difference is a daily norm for Māori navigating the current hegemony. We embody our Māori world while transposing with Pākehā culture, negotiating and translating between these worlds. This process occurs both within our bodies and in the world around us. ‘Code-switching’ is a colloquial term describing the need to alter cultural expressions to fit into dominant societal norms. This adaptive strategy, often employed by Indigenous and other minority groups, serves as a survival tactic to navigate hegemonic racial

prejudices and gain access to essential resources, such as employment and housing (Tan et al., 2024).

Mauri Tau Practices's application of transposition exemplifies how Indigenous knowledge can decolonise hegemonic colonial frameworks while reflecting posthumanist considerations in an applied way. Reconnecting with Māori traditions through body-based practices, implicitly and explicitly engaged with the taiao, invites slow, attentive, embodied listening and learning to generate a resonant field of knowing that stands as an alternative to dominant white cultural frameworks. By engaging and honouring non-coloniser whakapapa, land, ancestors, and community with the intended outcome of healing and restoring other cultural ways, Mauri Tau Practices aims to somatically foster a criticality that disrupts colonial and patriarchal norms, generating (re)newed forms of thought, practice, and subjectivity in alignment with Braidotti's feminist posthumanist emphasis on embodied, hopeful, and healing methods (Braidotti, 2012, p. 36). Building on this, Martin et al., (2024) identify six interwoven practices of transposition: embracing alternative ways of seeing, critically assessing cultural imaginaries, preparing for creative leaps, recognizing positionality, storying the in-between space, and creating new resonances with existing cultural forms, such as wellbeing or leadership. Mauri Tau Practices demonstrates these processes non-sequentially, as interwoven, emergent dialogical threads constituted by experiential practice.

A central feature of Mauri Tau Practices is its engagement with the sacred feminine through Hine Atua, reclaiming Māori feminine knowledge and practices silenced by colonial patriarchal norms. This work (re)affirms mana wāhine, supporting wellbeing at personal, institutional, and systemic levels, and embodies a feminist ethic of reflexivity and accountability informed by whakapapa and pūrakau. In this sense, Mauri Tau Practices addresses what Madhok (2020) describes as the ethical obligation to disrupt entrenched power relations and neoliberal knowledge production, intervening in material and epistemic structures of inequality while creating openings for cultural resurgence.

In dialogue with posthumanist theory, Mauri Tau Practices rejects human exceptionalism and highlights ecological interdependence, operationalising response-ability, the ethical capacity to respond to entangled realities, through relational, community-rooted praxis. By reframing Māori cultural traditions as technologies of care and knowledge transmission, Mauri Tau

Practices offers a decolonial, place-based pathway for future-making, attuned to the specificities of Māori cultural resurgence.

This research critically reflects on whether Western posthumanism genuinely engages with ancestral and earth-based knowledge, or remains primarily a Eurocentric project. By centring Indigenous epistemologies as vital for confronting contemporary global crises, Mauri Tau Practices aims to disrupt obstructive paradigms and foster a generative exchange between Indigenous practices and feminist posthumanist thought, offering applied practices for transformative change grounded in embodiment, relationality, and cultural regeneration.

TE MUTUNGA

Mauri Tau Practices as a wayfinding practice

Mā te whakarongo, ka mōhio, mā te mōhio, ka mārama, mā te mārama, ka matau, mā te matau, ka ora.

Through listening, comes knowledge, through knowledge, comes understanding, through understanding, comes wisdom, through wisdom, comes wellbeing.

Articulating the philosophies and practices creatively developed and facilitated over the past thirteen years into Mauri Tau Practices, this research presents a practice that is well-established and yet still presents as an (re)emergent approach within dominant culture and mainstream society in Aotearoa NZ. Despite experiencing on-going systemic marginalisation and past socio-cultural resistance, its persistence and resilience reflects its inherent relevance and potential for engaging with people and communities in meaningful and response-able ways.

In summary, Mauri Tau Practices constitutes a trauma-informed Māori cultural somatic approach, offering a methodology for oranga, decolonisation and systems change through embodied creative practice. Further, in recognizing embodied cognition as fundamental to knowing and knowledge generation Mauri Tau Practices demonstrates and promotes the potent contribution of Indigenous cultural somatics to shape ethical systems across all dimensions of our social, technological, economic, environmental, and political (STEEP) systems. Demonstrating a distinct approach to knowing grounded in Indigenous epistemologies, Mauri Tau Practices emphasises the importance of enacting alternative socio-cultural lenses through Te Ao Māori to enable decolonisation informing systems change in Aotearoa NZ and to cultivate an inclusive and coherent society (Gluckman, 2021) demonstrating inclusive future-making. Centred in whakapapa, Mauri Tau Practices provides pathways to evolve beyond current states of cultural and systemic incoherence by engaging in cyclical, progressive modes of settling into ourselves and each other, reflecting wellbeing in practice.

The vital contribution of traditional Indigenous cultures, long suppressed, that continue to offer guidance and grounding in this contemporary era through ontological and epistemological robustness is highlighted. Mauri Tau Practices draws on these wisdoms, applied as emergent

sensibilities expressing Māori ways of being. Fundamentally, this research explores ‘what would we be like as a community, a society, a country or a world today if we embodied and incorporated Indigenous sensibilities within our collective systems and social values?’

As a living, localised, and enduring alternative to modern industrial European cultural frameworks, Mauri Tau Practices fosters renewed awareness through cultural restoration that extends to re-education. Encouraging awareness and accountability by Pākeha and tauwiwi for on-going colonial socio-cultural norms and systemic impacts, Mauri Tau Practices seeks to transform historical dominant narratives and liberate our current society from the obstructions of our current systemic resistance (Montecelli, 2018; Hines, 2023). Ultimately, Mauri Tau Practices positions this process as fundamental for fostering broader socio-cultural coherence and supporting inclusive, sustainable, and healthy futures in Aotearoa NZ (Gluckman, 2021).

Currently Euro-anthropocentric societies ironically remain locked in adrenalised states of survival at the most materially abundant time in history. This paradox ironically sustains chronic stress, isolation, and ecological destruction exasperated by individualism, undermining health and wellbeing (Humphrey, 2022). Posthumanist critique asks how the ‘I’ and the ‘we’ might heal within neoliberal systems that normalise violence, extraction and disconnection. Like an elder guiding a novice, Indigenous knowledge provides a stabilising counterpoint to the uncertainties inherent in dominant Western frameworks as they engage with posthumanist critiques. Mauri Tau Practices itself addresses this context by offering applied methods that cultivate the experience of resilience and coherence through embodied practices of care, grounded in the self and whānau, while extending to relational engagement with the global collective and the natural world.

To be clear, Mauri Tau Practices is not proposed here as a universal, magical “fix-it” solution. On the contrary, it acknowledges the absence of clear or singular solutions or outcomes within the complex entanglements of humanity today. Mauri Tau Practices instead positions itself within these entanglements, prepared to engage in processing and metabolising the cultural and relational constructs, as well as historical traumas, that require healing and transformation (Gluckman, 2021). While others debate and discuss, Mauri Tau Practices encourages a creative approach to knowing through embodied intelligence, generally viewed as ‘radical’ or ‘different’, to generate new momentums of innovation.

Seeking to ‘radicalise’ postcolonial societies into empathetic and coherent modes of relationality Mauri Tau Practices purposefully centres itself in the interdependent dynamics between individual and collective healing. Seeking to release obstructive patterns within the current hegemony and to challenge socio-cultural and systemic resistance, bias, and prejudice toward alternative ways of knowing, it emphasises that wellbeing is simultaneously personal and collective, highlighting the need to co-liberate, co-resource, and co-cultivate health in embodied, sustainable, and solution-generating ways. Afterall, is this not how our ancestors thrived?

The polycrises of our intergenerational making, unfolding across micro and macro scales, demand an evolutionary intelligence that embraces interconnection and interdependence on unprecedented scales. Mauri Tau Practices purposefully grounds future-making through experiential ethical processes, positing an embodied capacity for coherence as an essential skill to individually develop today. Empowering each citizen as a mindful architect capable of designing and reconstructing wellbeing within inner-world cultural environments Mauri Tau Practices recognises these co-created legacies expressing new modes of public and self-leadership as futuremaking.

While place-based, as a cultural somatic methodology, Mauri Tau Practices can be seen as reflecting global relevance. Worldwide, Indigenous peoples reclaim ancestral lands, languages, and practices, while colonisers, settlers, and migrants reckon with inherited histories. Mauri Tau Practices can be seen as a culturally informed pathway that empowers individuals to participate creatively in their healing efforts towards cultivating futures that are collectively nurtured and embraced rather than conquered and enforced.

This research highlights the importance of creative process and responsive agility, prioritising the fostering of creativity grounded in mauri and guided by emerging *tohu* rather than by pre-determined outcomes or timelines. This processual approach should not be superficially assumed; it requires the capacity to embrace the cyclical nature of learning and growth, the uncertainty of the unknown, and engagement in a co-creative dynamic with our unfolding humanity as a creative endeavour, incorporating embodied, non-rational modes of intuition, play, and spontaneity alongside intellectual modes of criticality. Many grownups need to (re)member how to do this, Mauri Tau Practices assist them.

Charles Te Ahukaramū Royal (2009) identifies the underlying idea within *mōhiotanga* Māori as an “intimate, kinship-based relationship to the natural world, to our natural environment, to the planet,” highlighting this as a key marker of indigeneity while also acknowledging its cultural capacity to contribute to:

- a creative, passionate, and storied participation in the world;
- the upholding and transmission of human memory;
- encounters with the natural world through the apparatus of the physical body;
- the balancing of rational and non-rational ways of knowing;
- the exploration of relationships between individual and collective creativity;
- ‘in-bodied knowledge’—knowledge situated within the physical dimension of the world, such as the human body or the forest. (Royal, 2009, p. 13)

Royal’s explanation of indigeneity reflects and affirms this research, similarly articulating a resonant field between people and *taiao*, past and future, and between each other in the present expressing sensibilities for today’s world. He further notes that while indigeneity alone will not resolve our polycrisis, it provides “an important thread in a range of responses to these problems.”

As *Rongoā, Mauri Tau Practices* aims to heal as it facilitates ongoing reweaving between ancestors, communities, and the natural world as we progress. In contrast to neoliberal capitalism’s addiction to overproductivity, overconsumption, ecological destruction and ancestral amnesia, *Mauri Tau Practices* aims to restore coherence by slowing down, re-focussing socio-cultural priorities on creating spaces for attunement, calibration, integration, and release.

Belonging, as expressed within *whakapapa*, informs the ontological ground of wellbeing in Indigenous epistemologies. Philosophically and methodologically, it facilitates cooperative, interdependent modes of living that sustain life. Cultural somatic practices today seek to reconstitute and deepen this terrain; repairing, restoring, or re-creating interstitial networks into life-supporting socio-cultural systems. Through *whakapapa*, *Mauri Tau Practices* engages practices of belonging, connecting contemporary relationships across time and space through heart-centred presence, embracing traditional knowledge and language while cultivating relational grounding within *oranga*.

The journey of healing is on-going; for Māori and for Pākehā here in Aotearoa, NZ. I believe such cultural, social and historical healing is needed globally and reflected across humanity. This research and the practices generated through it actively seek to engage with reimagining futures creatively while addressing the socio-cultural wounds of colonisation, demonstrating how self-renewal and cultural awareness enable different ways of meeting and functioning with each other. Personal healing and ecological sustainability remain inseparable in belonging to place and within broader systems change.

Resonating with feminist posthumanist thought, Mauri Tau Practices (re)centres the sacred feminine while decentring patriarchal and anthropocentric norms. It cultivates relational accountability extending beyond individuals to whānau, taiao, and future generations, upholding Māori ontologies and ethics. The approach demonstrates that healing, knowledge, and cultural resurgence are simultaneously embodied, relational, and generative.

Through this research, four key priorities emerge:

- **Engaging creativity as response:** Countering overproduction with purposeful expression.
- **Co-creation and attunement:** Centring wellbeing over competition.
- **Cultural healing and Indigenous restoration:** Affirming Indigenous knowledge and rights as essential to global futures.
- **Restoring feminine and ecological sensibilities:** Supporting relational, embodied, and justice-oriented approaches.

Ultimately, Mauri Tau Practices embodies whakapapa in the present, sustaining continuity within shifting conditions, restoring coherence between body, community, land, and cosmos. In intercultural applications across health, education, leadership, and the arts, this praxis affirms Māori somatic intelligence as vital to supporting inclusive, sustainable systems change in Aotearoa NZ, while contributing insights for global practices of relational wellbeing.

Global interconnectivity generates both tension and potential. So too does dance. Within the creative unknown of our gestating futures, Mauri Tau Practices prepares the ground; clearing historical debris, strengthening cultural foundations, and testing the capacity of our imaginings to weather uncertainty, pointing toward human potential to co-create resonant, cohesive fields

from which new cultural legacies can emerge. Within the soils of Hineahuone and the continuum of past, present, and future, wellbeing is already growing within us.

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GLOSSARY

Note: In cases where there is more than one meaning for a word, only the most relevant meaning for the context of this exegesis will be provided.

Atua: *Deity, supernatural being, ancestor*

Auaha: *to shape, create, form or fashion*

Haka: *to dance, to perform haka, posture dance, cultural performance*

Hau: *(while holding many varied meanings, in this context) vital essence*

Hauora: *to be fit, healthy, in good spirits, vigour*

Hineahuone: *1. first human created by Tāne and his siblings fashioned from their mother's, Papatūānuku, sacred red sands. 2. Soil, earth, sand*

Hinengaro: *mind, thought, intellect, consciousness, awareness*

Kairongoā: *traditional Māori medicine practitioner*

Kaitiakitanga: *guardianship, stewardship, trusteeship*

Kanikani: *to dance*

Kaupapa: *topic, policy, matter for discussion, plan, purpose, scheme, proposal, agenda, subject, programme, theme, issue, initiative.*

Kaupapa Māori: *refers to a philosophical framework and approach grounded in Māori values, principles, knowledge, and culture... and method for achieving goals that values community and holistic benefits over purely materialistic or individualistic pursuits.*

Mātauranga: *knowledge, wisdom, understanding, skill and in modern usage can refer to education*

Mana: *prestige, authority, control, power, influence, status, spiritual power, charisma - mana is a supernatural force in a person, place or object.*

Mauri: *life principle, life force, vital essence, special nature, a material symbol of a life principle, source of emotions - the essential quality and vitality of a being or entity. Also used for a physical object, individual, ecosystem or social group in which this essence is located.*

Mihi: *to greet, pay tribute, acknowledge, thank.*

Moe: *to sleep, close (the eyes), dream, asleep.*

Mōhiotanga: *knowledge, knowing, understanding, comprehension, intelligence, awareness, insight, perception.*

Mutungā: *end*

Ngākau: *seat of affections, heart, mind, soul.*

Ngāpuhi: *tribal group of much of Northland.*

Noho: *to sit, stay, remain, settle, dwell, live, inhabit, reside, occupy, located.*

Oho: *to wake up, arise, to be roused*

Oranga: *wellbeing, livelihood, health and living*

Patu: *to strike, hit, beat, assault, kill, subdue, ill-treat.*

Papatūānuku: *Earth, Earth mother and wife of Rangi-nui - all living things originate from them.*

Pūrakau: *ancient legend, story.*

Rakau: *tree, stick, timber, wood,*

Rangatiratanga: *chieftainship, right to exercise authority,*

Rau: *leaf, frond*

Rongoā: *1. to treat, apply medicines. 2. remedy, medicine, drug, cure, medication, treatment, solution (to a problem), tonic. 3. medicinal plant.*

Taiao: *the natural world, Earth, environment, nature*

Tākaro: *to play, wrestle*

Tangata: *human, individual.*

Taonga Pūoro: *traditional Māori musical instrument*

Tau: *to settle down, subside, abate.*

Tauīwi: *foreigner, person coming from afar.*

Tautoko: *to support, prop up, verify, advocate, agree.*

Te Ao Māori: *The Māori world*

Te Ao Tawhito: *The ancient world, referring to old traditional knowledge and ancestral ways*

Te Kore: *the void, realm of potential*

Tikanga: *protocol- the customary system of values and practices that have developed over time and are deeply embedded in the social context.*

Tinana: *the physical body*

Tohu: *sign, symbol, distinguishing feature*

Tūpuna: *ancestors*

Wāhine: *women*

Waiata: *song, to sing*

Wairua: *spiritual essence, spirit, soul*

Wānanga: *to meet and discuss, deliberate, consider*

Whaikōrero: *to make a formal speech.*

Whakapapa: *1. genealogy, genealogical table 2. Ontological framework*

Whakataukāi: *proverb, significant saying, formulaic saying, aphorism*

Whenua: *land, ground*