

Maumau-taimi: Wasting time; Being useless

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ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this 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, nor material which to a substantial extension has been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in the acknowledgements, or where I have previously written it myself under these same conditions.



Date: _____

Kalisolaite 'Uhila

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ABSTRACT

This research project is a personal exploration of how time can be enacted through various approaches in order to develop a performance process that questions cultural perception of time. New works are devised and collected using four core elements of performance including time, space, the performer's body, and a relationship between audience and performer. The outcomes present a figurative expression of time wasted in the context of performance art in Tonga, Aotearoa and beyond.

PREFACE

It took me seven years to complete my undergraduate degree. When I was almost at the end of my final and seventh year, it became evident to my mother and siblings that I probably wasn't going to ever complete my degree, so they were on my back about looking for another career, even suggesting I move to New Plymouth to be an intern at my brother's building company. At the time I couldn't reason with their way of thinking but I realize it was because they didn't see what I had been going through during those years. From their point of view I had nothing obvious to show academically, or no artistic development during those years of studying, and giving it more weight of course, is the consensus that nobody makes money from a career as an artist. Growing up I caused much distress to my family; generally I was known as the 'black sheep' so I grew into the harsh words that were constantly spoken over me. I recognize labels like that stick for life in people's eyes, so I realized that I was never expected to complete a degree, let alone continue to Masters.

Yet I always knew I wanted to be an artist. In 2010, my final undergrad year, I heard the new Arts Centre in Mangere was opening so I jumped at the chance to get my foot in the door and volunteered as a theatre usher. To finally finish my degree and end up as a volunteer usher with no pay put a lot of pressure on my wife and child but a few months in I worked my way into the Art gallery as a paid Assistant Gallery Technician. While I was working as an usher, the theatre manager took interest in my performance work and was very persistent in persuading the senior curator at the time to take a chance on me. So in 2011 I had my first solo show at the Mangere Arts Centre as part of the Auckland Fringe Festival my work Pigs in the Yard went on to win best visual art award. Pigs in the yard was a Performance work where I co-habited space with a live pig for eight days. For this work I wanted to express the status and significance of a pig in Tonga where they roam freely and looked upon as a sign of wealth compared to how they are epitomized in the western world or rather New Zealand. I mimicked and roamed around the mud like a pig and

experimented the life of a pig from a far but eventually started to connect and negotiate space between us during the day.

Still on the buzz from winning an award for my first public exhibition, I went around Auckland with my portfolio to see curators, galleries and managers to express my interests of being part of any exhibitions they may have in the near future. But my buzz was killed rapidly when no one had much interest in taking on a performance artist. One curator flicked through my portfolio and asked if there was anything I do besides performance. I felt like my work was redundant, myself feeling like a disappointment and that I had let myself down. Everything was new and weird at that time, as I didn't even know what I was to call my practice; visual art or performance art or what?! And I think some curators may have been in the same predicament. That experience didn't kill my fire though as I was a new graduate and I was very passionate about my practice. I went online and sent a proposal to The Playground NZ with success for The Performance Arcade Series during the Rugby World Cup in 2011, they specifically requested for Pigs in the Yard again which gained some media attention during my performance at Aotea Square.

The media attention meant I caught the attention of some curators and managers, some that had rejected my work earlier but nonetheless I leaped at every opportunity. I spent 2012 working to provide for my family as well as self-funding five exhibitions with five different artworks. In 2013 I wanted to know more about the body so I enrolled as a student at Auckland University Dance studies, withdrawing half way in because I suffered from depression and that's what made me decide to leave Art altogether. I packed up my family and moved to Tonga with no return. But early 2014 I received an email confirming I was a finalist for the Walter Prize Art Award and even though I didn't win, the experience was invaluable and that was the turning point that changed my heart and in a way was the sign I needed to show me that Art was not lost in me.

I accepted my offer of placement at AUT for Masters so my family and I moved back from Tonga in January 2015. It's now 2016, I'm at the end of Masters, my second child was born in March, nine years after my first child, everything seems like its coming into place however I wouldn't be me without going through the struggles along the way.



Figure 1 - *Pigs in the Yard* 2011

INTRODUCTION

After reading my background, you the reader, may have thoughts about “why was the background so long in this exegesis”; “...why did he basically have a timeline of his life after undergraduate?” Maybe there are questions like “what on earth was he doing and what the heck was he up to all that time!” I even ask myself why it took me seven years to complete my undergraduate degree, or why I mentioned some of the things I did. Was what I mentioned relevant or not? I used up an extra four years of my life of what was supposed to be only a three-year degree. Some reasons could be that I was drinking at the bar too often and didn’t make it to class or maybe I didn’t study at all and kept failing papers. Maybe I was switching departments because I wasn’t sure what career path I wanted for my future. The main idea here is that time was used but the question remains, was it time that was used well or time that was wasted? It would be easy to make a judgment from afar and this would be a perceptual experience but the actual answers are not known unless you delve in deeper into someone’s personal situation or be in a position where you understand a culture and how that society behaves.

The performance and actions Maumau-taimi: Wasting time; being useless, explores traditional Tongan and Western temporal schemes. Many centuries ago the sun was employed to cast shadows using a sundial an example is Tonga’s Ha’amonga ‘a Maui (the burden of Maui). This monument has a surface marked with lines that indicated the hours of the day. Later in time the clock was invented to measure time; its circular dial, long hands and short hands incrementally drumming seconds into hours, hours into days, days into weeks, and months to millennia. In Tonga, especially in the pre-technological era, being in tune with nature and the sun in particular, opens up perspectives on ‘time well wasted’, a concept that is central to my performance practice.



Figure 2 - Ha'amonga 'a Maui 2014

From this perspective, I want to develop performance methods that question cultural perceptions of time. Accordingly, I aim to address the following kinds of questions through my performance practice: how can the body be investigated through performance art in terms of time, space. Following on from this question: how can processes of documentation, and the archiving of cultural memory, be explored through time? From a more specific cultural perspective, I want to ask: how can performance art find the gaps, or weakness, in communication between Western and Tongan cultures, and also the strengths. Specifically in relationship to my concept of wasting time: how can 'time wasting' be 'time well wasted'? (i.e. what power relations can be expressed through objects and social hierarchies within Tongan culture?).

Through trying to master wasting-time during the year, I began to realize that time does not wait or stop at all. If you don't wake up on time to go to work you're going to be late and have just wasted time, but if you wake up on time and make it to work on time, you will have wasted your time well. In this research project I will explore how time can be articulated through multiple modes, in order to reveal and critique power relations both within Tongan culture and within the majority culture in New Zealand. Through performative experiments I will incorporate time, space, audience and the performer's body; where these four elements will contribute to questions that help develop the project in different ways.

PERFORMANCE ART

What is performance?

“Performance art is a performance that is presented to an audience, or without an audience, within the fine art context, traditionally interdisciplinary. Performance may be scripted or unscripted, random or carefully orchestrated; spontaneous or otherwise carefully planned with or without audience participation. The performance can be live or via media; the performer can be present or absent” (Loeffler & Tong 1989: viii).

It can be any situation that involves four basic elements: time, space, the performer's body, or presence in a medium, and a relationship between performer and audience. Performance art can happen anywhere, in any type of venue or setting and for any length of time. The actions of an individual or a group at a particular place and in a particular time constitute the work. Many people get performance mixed up and think it is an easy task but it does take a lot of time in thought.



Figure 3 - Mladen Stilinović, 'Artist at work' 1978

Performance artist Mladen Stilinović talks about mastering a performance that takes time and effort even if it appears to be simple. In a short text entitled 'Praise of Laziness' he argues "knowing about laziness is not enough, it must be practiced and perfected" (2013, Para 2) which makes performance seem like nothing and really simple—you can just get up and do impromptu. Even though perception tells us there has been no preparation but in fact there is a lot of work behind preparation that goes into just being able to stand in the same spot for a few hours. Performance to me is about knowing yourself; strengths and weaknesses and knowing the performance elements, with the elements you work with them just like how you live life. For example, in life we know our priorities, we are aware of issues and happenings that occur around the world but not only that; it is about trying to find ways to address social and political issues as ideas either in a subtle or a confronting way. How a performance is projected depends heavily on the four elements of time, space, body and audience and each of my performances can be concentrated on one, two or all combined, but time is the consistent thread throughout my practice.

Time

Time is very significant. Time, consciousness and existence are very important in my practice. I introduce time in my performance, because time is lived and experienced in everyone's rhythms of life. I like to experiment with time and manipulate it as long as I can in durational performances; the longest was Mo'ui tukuhausia 2012, where I lived on the streets for two weeks then again in 2014 for three months. The exploration of duration drew me to Tehching Hsieh, the master of durational performances; his extreme one year long durational performance epitomize art and life as real-time processes. I would like to try and devise a system where time can be wasted but also well-wasted, time becomes timeless. For my own understanding of time, time exists differently; when I perform I enjoy the process of preparing even if it takes night or day just sitting and observing, meditating and 'wasting' a lot of time. It may sound self-centred but this way of thinking works for me in my practice. My time is measured by shadows and nature from high tides to low tides, birds to early hours of traffic, and my time is censored by my everyday existence.

Space

In my performance work whether it's in a gallery or outdoors, I try and align my performance with activating the space, although I do prefer outdoors because it gives me access to nature. My performance work *Tangai one'one* (2015) enacts a walk around Rarotonga with a sack of sand with a tiny hole just enough for the sand to escape and leave traces as I walk the entire circular island. This happening was more than just walking, I started to build, to negotiate, connect and interact with the people of Rarotonga as I walked through various spaces. Out of respect I would ask the local people for permission to enter their personal space to collect more sand when my sack ran out of sand. In Pacific cultures space is active and belongs, it is not just empty waiting to be activated or be bought or sold. Western space is different which individuality and colonising and power takes place.

The Tongan word for space is *va*¹, *va* is about relationships. When talking about artist Sopoalemalama Filipe Tohi's work, Karen Stevenson (2015) describes how through his *lalava* (lashing) he brings two strings together into an intersection, which forms patterns. Tohi says without both strings there are no patterns so both strings have to go together. The patterns itself forms a relationship between negative and positive space. Tohi talks about his body as the central point of connecting space when he creates his lashings, his movements within the space emphasizes *tau'olunga* (dance) formality,

¹ Distance between, distance apart



Figure 4 - Sopolemalama Filipe Tohi, Lalava 2001

Tohi expresses his thoughts about lalava as follows:

I have identified a visual language based on what lalava and its patterns signify: among them unity, duality and community. I translate and expand this language into larger, three dimensional sculpture that allows viewers to enter and experience the nature of geometric patterns. By changing the scale of lines I seek to intrigue the viewer with a manipulation of space and pattern. (Stevenson, 2015:5)

My concern with space references Tohi's negative and positive space although I've altered the idea and used it as a metaphor in my performance practice where the performer and audience can swap both negative and positive space during a performance.

Body

What is Body? My perception of body is existence and this can open up to many definitions like creatures, trees, cars and buildings etc. Chris Braddock unfolds a very significant concern to my practice with the existence of non-Being, the presence of an absence (Patrick, 2013: 33). This year my focal point was on my body I wanted to test the boundaries of being a useless body and also imply wasting time and loitering through my practice this year. Bruce Nauman takes on experimenting with his body as a subject, he states that an awareness of yourself comes from a certain amount of activity and you can't get it from just thinking about yourself (Nauman & Morgan, 2002: 49). My thoughts on body are tapu² and it is to many different cultures. This wasn't the case in the beginning of my practice as you can see me partly naked in Pigs in the Yard but over time I have learnt cultural taboo's to do with body. Body is a gift from beginning to end. Since then I try not to expose too much flesh in my work as this is not appropriate to have be witnessed by my sister or any female cousins or any relatives basically by the Tongan culture, it humiliates the value of my body. My body focus rests in Polynesian masculinity: the gender ideal of male strength, movement and power – and shifting these qualities to also examine vulnerability, humility and contemplation.

² as in taboo; forbidden, prohibited, unlawful

Audience

My head is filled with the memories of my childhood experiences of both making and watching. I was born with a love of the repetitive actions of life, those actions that provide sustenance for the body and for the soul. Being an observer grounded me in many ways, so audience in my understanding is very important for the performer, this creates a relationship between the viewer and the performer. Audience can be situated in different spaces during the performance. Marina Abramovic states:

Performance is a mental and physical construction that I step into, in front of an audience, in a specific time and place. And then the Performance actually happens; it's based on energy values. It is very important that a public is present. I couldn't do it privately, that wouldn't be performance. Nor would I have the energy to do it. For me it is crucial that the energy actually comes from the audience and translates through me- I filter it and let it go back to the audience. The larger the audience, the better the performance because there is more energy I can work with. It's not just about emotions. (Abramovic & Biesenbach, 2010: 211)



Figure 5 - Marina Abramovic, 'The Artist is Present' 2010

All the performances I have devised I don't organise documentation, as in photo or video. The reason being is that I don't accept it as true to my practice. I prefer my work to be witnessed live and first hand because that is where you will receive the true value. From early stages I realised direct emotions from the audience gave me a sense of strength during a performance so from there I realised seeing something live is different from seeing the same thing on video. I want the audience to sense my presence and emotions through my actions, to be able to see and smell my sweat and every wrinkle and hair on my face. In a live performance the audience have to succumb to seeing my body together with being in the space and in the right time, those elements will etch on the minds of the viewer and that is the experience I would like the audience to hold on to. In a video, the elements of performance are not present. My performance are mostly site specific also so in most cases I will not repeat a performance in a different space.

People that were present during the performance have kindly sent all documentation I do have, and sometimes I have to reach out and find some. When I see the documentation it is very refreshing and interesting to see my work from different angles and so in a way it becomes their artwork of me. This by means of my performance is constantly contextualised from other people's perspective. Some people put quite a lot of time and effort into taking pictures of my performance. The writer Amelia Jones notes:

Here the questions of presence is approached as a fulcrum of relationships between present and past; as a means of interrogating the persistence of ephemeral and performative acts in memory, trace and remains, and as a conceptual framework for understanding performance and its documentation. (Giannachi, Kaye, & Shanks, 2012: 211)

The idea of documentation for me is a performative of itself it holds past and present so documentation captures time. I like the concept of ephemeral that controls time without a trace in my performance. Maumau-taimi was an idea that I wanted to manipulate the audience's perception of wasting time and uselessness, I reflected on how I can give the audience time and their expectation of what I will perform. When approached by spectators the question I'm usually asked is, "what's next?" "What shows have I got in line?" "Have I got any thoughts of any performances" and I give the usual answer "I'm going to waste your time".

RITUAL



Figure 6 - Kava (2015)

Kava

It was critique from kava performance piece (figure 6) where the Maumau-taimi idea was conceived. My supervisor found the performance very interesting as I was cradling, what appeared to him, as a useless stick that could have been found on the side of the road. Unbeknownst to him was my personal relationship with the “stick” that dates all the way back to my ancestors. When he looked at my kava root as an ordinary stick I felt like I had wasted my time putting effort into cradling the kava and a little annoyed that he didn’t understand just how significant this stick is to my heritage also that he didn’t recognize the difference between a kava root and an ordinary stick. This cross-cultural misinterpretation of object and time taught me a lot and made me remember how unique my Tongan traditions are and how different people from different backgrounds value different ideas and up to that point I may have been naïve to think everyone thinks the same.

The idea of my work Kava root symbolizes tradition and culture that is used for medicinal, religious, political and social purposes throughout the Pacific. In a Tongan context, a kava ceremony will often accompany important social, political and religious functions, usually involving a ritual presentation of the kava as a gift, and the drinking of the kava itself. From a Pacific perspective, the kava root has

significant value, embodying family heritage that can be passed through the generations as both a gift in time and a gift of value.

Kava, the root of the *Piper methysticum* plant, was only historically grown in the Pacific Islands. It is prepared by chewing, pounding or pulverised to make drinks that can relax a person's mind from anxiety, stress, and insomnia. Kava is a highly valued link between all Polynesian cultures as a ceremonial drink, and it is priceless as it takes a very long time to harvest. It has special significance to Tongan people because it symbolises the loyalty of our kinship to the land, the solidarity and commitment of Tongans to their country. Taumafa kava³ is the ritual or ceremony of the kava, a tradition that dates back to the tenth century. The value of Kava becomes a metaphor within my practice.

Princess Pilolevu of Tonga explains

...Kava has come to symbolise all the basic Tongan values combined in one, the land, the people, their customs, their culture, everything Tongan people hold dear. These values and virtues are constantly reinforced in Tongan society such as *anga ofa*; a loving nature, *anga faka'apa'apa*; reverence of respect, *tauhi vaha'a*; keeping up good relations, *mamahi'l me'a*; zeal and team spirit toward any worthy cause and *loto to*; a ready and willing mind. These virtues are still considered characteristically Tongan and reinforced by many rituals and performances important to the Tongan society even today. (as cited in Smith, 2011)

Although the above Taumafa kava ceremony is reserved for royal memorials it very normal for groups of men to informally gather weekly or at any casual or formal gathering to have a drink of kava. In doing this kava performance, I am aware that my body is used as the key instrument in live performance and that my movements and how I alter my body reflects a key message. From this perspective, Howell (1945) writes in *The Analysis of Performance Art*, "One needs to remember though that one's own body is an instrument". Howell highlights this idea that the body becomes the tool, an instrument to display a sort of ritual. The interpretation of the

³ Reserved only for royal memorials and governed by the royal and nobility of Tonga.

body by the audience is key for the audience to engage and experience as viewers and to understand my work.

The Kava ceremony is the centrepiece of the Tongan culture and rituals system so with this idea in mind I am enacting a secondary layer of ritual by cradling the kava root like a baby. This was a durational piece of two hours; I was occupying the space before my supervisor had arrived for critique. When I cradle the kava as if it was a baby, as if it were fragile, and needing to be cared for as a baby should be, the work expresses the same of the way I feel about kava and how traditions should be kept alive, nurtured and passed on. This secondary ritual layer is the centrepiece of my work, it keeps me reminded of Maumau-taimi and I kept getting drawn back to this moment to direct me into the future in a way is the same when I look at how the kava has survived for many centuries through many generations.

Audiences and Interpretation

In live performance the artist is generally aware of their own body during the performance and the reaction of the audience. In my case, my body is an instrument, and for me I want to be in control of my art and how people respond to it. The movements of my body are decided to some extent by the movements of the audience around the space resulting in small variations in gestures. My art is intended to communicate a message to its audience, and is layered with meaning. My goals for my art are to leave a memory of performance that will in some way enrich people's lives and give a better understanding. I want to show the importance of my message whether it is consciously or subconsciously understood and now is the right time. The same message I show now will not have as much strength in five or ten years time, simply because my art is made in context and because the context changes socially over time. The structure of the way I live today, in the present moment, decides the outcome of my work and the message, conveyed in my performance.

DURATIONAL

Extension of Time



Figure 7 – ‘Mo’ui tukuhausia’ 2012

Mo’ui Tukuhausia 2012

For two weeks of the exhibition I lived at the Te Tuhi grounds in Pakuranga, gathered bits and pieces for shelter. I was alone most of the day and friends would visit after work or university. Daily I would walk about to become familiar with my surroundings; I turned the arts centre into my own ‘canvas’. Some people would be friendly and some not so friendly. I was doing a lot of sitting, a lot of observing, just listening and being fully aware of what was happening around the area. That was when I realized that I didn’t really need to know the time, clock time didn’t exist and I was the durational body throughout this project. By being aware of what was going on around the surrounding area, I would notice life happening like clockwork that was ‘mechanized’ time. I became a shadow of time. People were constructed by time and I was moving in their shadows. They would be moving but I was moving in a different pace. I started to realize how space and the time operates by opening

and closing times and knowing who the first workers onsite to last person that closes the building. I became more alert to the surroundings and knowing the differences of each space and questioning myself whether I should activate that space as part of where I live but also as part of the exhibition.



Figure 8 - Tehching Hsieh

Ian O'Donnell, commenting on durational performer Tehching Hsieh notes:

While we are given no more than occasional glimpses into Hsieh's internal thought processes, and he is silent on his hopes, fears and emotions more generally, preferring to allow the works to speak for themselves, one message is resoundingly clear. This is the capacity of the individual to bear witness to time, stripped to its bare essentials, and to emerge fortified, even if never victorious. By becoming a 'sentient witness of time', to use Heathfield's description, time's grip on life, while it can never be released, is loosened somewhat. Hsieh's art makes a series of profound existential statements, sometimes whispered, sometimes barely audible, always multivalent, that cumulatively speak of the human capacity to be free, no matter how tightly constrained one is in terms of time, space or activity. (O'Donnell, 2014: 86)

Performance artist Tehching Hsieh talks about freethinking and will power as the key to staying focus on life and in any challenges in time. He is an inspiration to my practice; I came across his work 'The Outdoor Piece' when he lived outside in New York for a year voluntarily being homeless, this work parallels to Mo'ui tukuhausia performance piece. But the difference is the duration of the performance and the life experiences. Life is not static it's always moving, and you still have to find the meaning to life. So it becomes a process in his performance pieces. I have thought about life experiences and art, now I understand life and art is not separated, it is together. I feel more self-confident with where my process is taking me and knowing that I can see and imagine what the world is concerning and freethinking is important.

Hsieh, like so many prisoners, experienced the multiple pains of homelessness, poverty and the violence of life on the streets. These were exacerbated by the anxiety that accompanied his status as an illegal immigrant, which pushed him ever further towards the margins (O'Donnell 2014:8).

In looking back to the past work Mo'ui tukuhausia I started to unfold my ideas and moved toward art and life is not separated, this led me to explore possibilities of the four elements time, space, body and audience I started to incorporate past and present and moving towards focusing on myself and how I experienced life. Kava performance piece (figure 6) formed a happening to unwrap the idea of maumau-taimi: wasting time and uselessness this became an exchange of knowing different culture's opinion on life.



Figure 9 – ‘Maumau-taimi’, 2015

Maumau-taimi 2015

My end of year presentation maumau-taimi for 2015 was a durational performance piece for one day. Maumau-taimi was performed from dawn to dusk. I started at Albert Park at 5:30am with a prayer ritual to bless the new day and I moved from one location to another throughout the day until dusk 8:30pm. During that time I had curators that came to view my performance piece who were interested of the concept of Maumau-taimi, this performance piece opened up opportunities for me to travel to Berlin, Germany so I guess it wasn't maumau-taimi but it became time well wasted to accept this opportunity to waste time in Berlin.

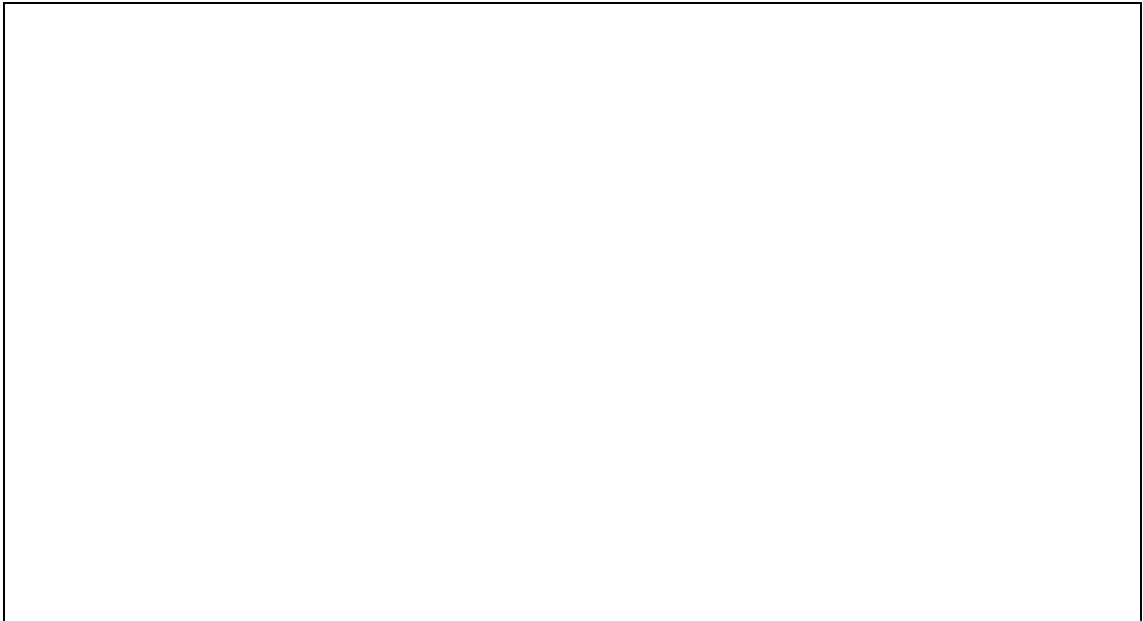


Figure 10 – *Wasting time in Berlin, 2016*

The concept of wasting time in Berlin was impossible but not only that; it was my first time to travel to Europe. In my mind I was thinking that the travel alone is going to be a durational performance piece itself. The amount of time travelling and stopovers at different countries until I reached my destination was time wasted and also well wasted. I was freethinking to various ideas of presenting wasting time I was considering to exhibit my flight tickets and boarding passes, which could be trace and documentation of time and travel. I was also thinking of nomadic people who travel and roam around seeking opportunities from different places. Time came near for the opening so I decided to follow through with the idea of being present and also the curators had organized the work to be documented live. This organised documentation process was 'a first time for everything'; I didn't agree at first but advised the videographer that it was ok to film as long as I was not aware that they are present. I was tested at every point but I remained calm and had to free think about my purpose of life and art and the reason of being here is to waste time for free.

Inhabiting Space

In this endeavor I was asked to devise a performance piece that would focus on 'Inhabiting Space' in response to Fred Sandback's minimalist yarn drawings. I was thinking how and what to approach with as a response to Sandback's drawings. I decided to focus more on my presence onsite Adam Art Gallery Wellington. I saw in this work an idea parallel to Sopolemalama Filipe Tohi's idea of positive and negative space. The curator of Adam Art Gallery requested if I could inhabit the outside space, so instead of working with yarn I chose to use fishing line as a symbol of the ocean; the pacific where I live and also because it is material "which is excellent in strength, length and abrasion resistance" (Pfeiffer, 2008: 22) to draw with in response to Sandback's line drawing. I spent most of my time observing the outside space sitting and roaming around the site before I even started to embody a plan for this response. Like any performance, it is important for me that I get a sense of the space and environment. I watch the people, look at the surroundings and feel the air. Then I go for it and let the nylon go. First I started to work with the front entrance of the gallery then moved to the sides of the building and before I realise I have circled the exterior of Adams Art Gallery with nylon and inhabited the outside space and created extra space. Sandback's drawing in my belief addresses presence and absence and also provokes the viewer to imagine or dream at the same time to make you want to engage in recreating your own space.



This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Figure 12 - Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt, 1975



Figure 11 – *In Response to Fred Sandbank* 2016

MASCULINTY



Figure 13 – 'KAPA MA', 2015

KAPA MA Tin crackers

In this work Kapa ma, biscuits are a metaphor of food and kapa/tin refers to industry made products. The text contextualizes my practice, defining my practice as a personal ritual. In this way, I can express my idea and point of view on gender, culture and identity through action. Live performance allows the artist to draw from multiple ways of thinking, seeing and what the artist understands through actions. The choices are made when and through performing, and time is not considered until the performance is finished. From this perspective, traces can be left behind as an indicator of what happened or what had been performed giving the artist the flexibility and choice to deliver his or her actions and movements around space. In this context, when I experiment with a live performance process, I work with the audience's line of sight. I prefer to perform in a state of 'hard labouring', referencing my masculinity in culture. In these artworks, I'm interested in the ways in which performance art defies strict definitions and the ways in which the artist's expression of an idea takes place before a live audience. In this respect, my performance art often occurs in found spaces with an unrehearsed approach rather than in traditional theatre buildings.

Action

Considering these perspectives on performance art, Roselee Goldberg outlines the history of performance, the styles, and the ideas behind the art and how it offers artists a voice through the use of the body to represent their work (1998: 47). Goldberg's text touches on all the different ways that performance art presents itself, which include music, dance, theatre, visual representations, video, and film. In fact storytelling and life itself is often the medium of performance art from many traditions of Performance art is often emotional and topical, frequently dealing with political and personal matters and issues such as race, class and feminism (Goldberg, 1998: 47).

Simple actions now influence my practice as a performance artist. As part of my performance I use simple objects that relate to my daily life. My focus is on Polynesian masculinity: the gender ideal of male strength, movement and power – and shifting these qualities to also examine vulnerability, humility and contemplation. I also examine how these themes are part of a poly-cultural male's everyday experience: from the slavery of the work place to the joy of holding one's child. Everyone performs often without even knowing it. Being of Polynesian descent I am continuing to make the link with western culture by using two lenses to view both cultures I've adapted into Tongan and New Zealand.

This text by Ledyard (1982) in summary outlines the origins of Tongan culture through telling of myths and legends, the influence of Europeans through early contact pre 21st century, the Tongan Kingship lineage and the traditional cultural practices of old Tonga. Within the text in particular Ledyard (1982) notes the daily practices that Tongan men take part in. She emphasizes that the lives of Tongan men revolve around the outdoors suggesting that the living space of Tongan men is the outside, "the lives of men are tied to the soil" or ha'i ki he kelekele (p.24). The book also outlines the myths and legends of the origins of Tonga, which is tied to these cultural practices of the people.

Descriptions of the typical Tongan man's life is detailed within the text, the arduous nature of the work is emphasized for example tending to the garden plots and ridding them of the forever creeping tropical weeds, and removing the large yams from the land. These tasks demand strength, endurance and patience.

A particular point which Ledyard portrays is that the enjoyment of labour intensive work by Tongan men. This is shown through singing and chanting whilst preparing of Kava (continuous pounding) and the act of removing large roots from the land. To outsiders witnessing Tongan men at work, it seems that they are fooling around; when in fact they are finding ways to make the arduous nature of their work more enjoyable. An example of this is the chanting and jokes continuously being exchanged during ngaue (work). Respect is also an important part of a Tongan man's ritual, which is shown through the attire of the men whilst working, usually wearing of mats or ta'ovalas whilst on the plantations (Ledyard, 1982).



Figure 14 – *Climate Change Action in Disaffected*, 2016

Performance artist Latai Taumoepeau of Tongan/Australian heritage, focuses on stories of both homeland by using a body-centered focal point that impersonates trained and self-taught dance, in diverse traditions of understanding and memory of her ancestors and her upbringing. She inspires my practice by just being herself as a Tongan female artist who pushes the restrictions of both cultures. Taumoepeau states,

...my perspective where I come from, an ethnic group and cultural group that is used to being exotified and fetishised and being a Pacific Islander always having the idea of the dusty maiden or the lazy islander, sitting around the beach all day, you know those kinds of stereotypes. To shifting that anthropological gaze onto a more dominant culture, a Western Culture, a European culture. Fluid States (2015)

REPITITION

Drifting



Figure 15 - *Tangai one'one*, 2015

TANGAI ONE'ONE (2015 RAROTONGA)

I will briefly outline my proposal for 2015 for Sea-Change: Performing A Fluid Continent, the second Oceanic Performance Biennial in Rarotonga; when I disembark the plane, and leave the airport, walk down to the beach to collect the first sack of sand. I carry a 10kg (approx.) sack of sand on this walk, with a hole in the sack so the sand escapes, until it runs out. Sand references the land and sea that links to the Pacific Ocean. In European cultures the trickle of sand through an hourglass is a marker of time passing. I use a trickle of sand from the sack to mark the places, which I will move through. In other impromptu, durational performances (for example, Mo'ui tukuhausia performed for the Walter's Prize) I have found that people talked to me and we shared experiences of our different countries without the apparent separation of 'performance art' from life. In this respect, Louise Steinman notes how the performer and the audience share the experience of the

live performance. This means that all kinds of knowledge are shared. This form of art is said to be living, where exchanges between the audience and the performance take place, both requiring a live audience and live performer.

When people ask me where I'm from I tell them I'm a drifter from the ocean. The notion of *maumau-taimi* in relation to the possibility of time well wasted is exemplified in a durational performance of two to three days when I walk slowly around the main ring road that circles Rarotonga Island. The website for Sea-Change Biennial, which was the Pasifika contribution to Performance Studies International states;

The Oceanic Performance Biennial is an emergent platform engaged in critiques and re-imaginings of the intersecting social, cultural political and environmental ecologies of this region.... performance work addressing site-specific themes of the unstable, mutable, adaptable, and fluid. (Fluid States, 2015, unpaginated website)

My performance commenced the day I landed in Rarotonga. I heard singing, which I thought was the radio but then I realised it was the voice of the legendary Papa Jake Numanga. Seeing his performance was welcoming and unexpected and I was to learn that everything I had planned before arriving in Rarotonga, would also take unexpected turns and detours.

I came with a different mindset to the island and when I arrived everything was different to what I thought would happen. My original idea after landing in Rarotonga was to go immediately to the beach, collect sand in my sack, and to start walking - remaining invisible from everyone at the Oceanic Performance Biennial. I expected to be able to start walking from the time I landed, but local artist Ani O'Neill and Biennial organiser told me I wouldn't make it around the whole island without being stopped with offers of help from the locals. Having this conversation with Ani was important to gain an early awareness of this new – yet familiar – environment and having her to talk with was reassuring and grounding. We then travelled to the University of South Pacific (USP), which is where I started my

journey. My original plan had been to walk anticlockwise around the island, but this changed when I decided to just go with the flow - no specific time constraints or duration - just island time. When I did start walking the streets - it was like it had eyes - every couple of metres there was always someone or something watching me as I navigated and negotiated the land. I was offered support from the local people – checking that I was always safe – as well as road workers helping me cross the busy roads. I was given directions that took me over someone else's land with encouraging calls such as "the sand is just over there", and when I asked for permission to collect sand in my bag I was told - "its yours, go help yourself, the sand will never run out". As Epeli Hau'ofa writes,

Oceania is vast, Oceania is expanding, and Oceania is hospitable and generous. Oceania is humanity rising from the depths of brine and regions of fire deeper still, Ocean is us. We are the sea, we are the Ocean, we must wake up to this ancient truth. (Hau'ofa, E. 2008: 39)

At times, as I was carrying the sack of sand I experienced both a physical heaviness, and one that might relate to this road, and a reminder that many people had walked this path before me. This heaviness allowed me to stay focused on walking to the end and to remain alert to any questions I might have along the way. The local people stopping to talk to me made my journey feel lighter - without it I would feel loneliness. The conversations with the local people - trying to figure out what was in the sack - asking me "what did the sack of sand mean?" Was I a missionary or a monk - a Black Friar? I told them I was trying to find myself - it's a mystery.



Figure 16 - IOANE IOANE, *'occupying space'*

Performance artist Ioane Ioane is a chief who influenced and inspired my practice and growth as a student, I was captivated in how he explores the spiritual and in-between natural world of space as a place of change. Ioane states;

It is in this same spirit that I create my performance works and collaborations. Preferring to call them 'rituals' or 'christenings', 'I'm not acting, there's no rehearsal, what happens largely depends on the nature of the event, the space itself and what's going on at the time. (as cited in Ioane-Tautai - Guiding Pacific Arts, 2016)

I don't personally believe in the nature of rehearsal as Ioane indicates it's not acting, "Living made artform, which practices art as living and living as art" (Kennedy & Roudometof, 2002). I mostly free think of my performance idea on what might possibly be happening but it isn't until I get into the space where the idea arrives and then it becomes clearer what I will exhibit. I generate my performance piece to relate to the place, space and people. Rehearsing takes time and the fundamental of live art into a different sphere like theater and dance which rehearsal is important to their practice. So my performance pieces are not rehearsed -- it is lived and experienced through wasting time.

Studio Work



Figure 17 – AUT A&D Talk week 2016

During this year in studio, I concentrated on the performer's body 'present and absent'. I wanted to manipulate the idea of being a spectator, which in this image demonstrates. I am actually participating as one of the audience, without the group knowing that I am actually performing. I know it may sound selfish but I really wanted to explore the relationship of art and life. This was part of the Talkweek which students get the chance to exhibit their work and for the viewers to respond and critique. This was a half a day of walking around onsite at Auckland University of Technology; we had curators and senior artists who came to criticize on our process. This was an immense obsession for me, as I wanted to hear their feedback and take notice of their views. I walked around silently throughout the critiques without a conversation or making any sound. When it came to my turn I took them outside from being inside the building and sat down for a few minutes. I waited until everyone was seated without saying a word; I attempted to lead so everybody would trail along, so once I sat down everybody who was still there sat as well. I gave them fifteen minutes of rest and then I signaled I'd come to an end and I just wasted their time.



Figure 18 - A&D Talk week 2016

I received generous feedback from my critique, yet I was a bit worried if they were truthful or were they just too exhausted to be honest, people left and only a few still remained. Nevertheless what I got out from this critique was how to value time and audience. Abramovic states;

[...] if the electricity goes out or if everybody has left the space – the performance should not finish No matter what, you have to do that period of time at this site, it is very important for your self respect. (Abramovic & Biesenbach, 2010: 211)

Whatever the circumstances of a performance's start or end, I will carry out what I have intended to present. Even if there are only one or two audience members I will keep going until I am fulfilled.

NGATA'ANGA KOE KAMATA'ANGA

End is just the Beginning

My conclusion is best summed up by one of Epeli Hau'ofa's well-known quotes:

That the past is ahead, in front of us, is a conception of time that helps us retain our memories and to be aware of its presents. What is behind us [the future] cannot be seen and is liable to be forgotten readily. What is ahead of us [the past] cannot be forgotten so readily or ignored, for it is in front of our minds' eyes, always reminding us of its presence. The past is alive in us, so in more than a metaphorical sense the dead are alive - we are our history. (Falgout, Poyer, & Carucci. 2008: 22)

Maumau-taimi/ wasting time and uselessness allows us to stop, think and act on our own free will. But in saying this, my practice addresses my own opinion and understanding of Time and how we exist through our own life experiences. These artists I have selected are inspiration to my practice and they each employ the elements of performance time, space, body and audience in their unique ways, through this exegesis research paper I have become more clearly with my own practice.

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APPENDIX 1: LIST OF WORKS

This appendix provides details to the visual documentation of performance exhibitions and residencies through the year. These works contributed to the research of my thesis.

Kelekele mo'ui The Physics Room, Christchurch (Residency Jan - Feb 2016)

Fig 19 – 21





Ongo mei Loto Performance arcade, Wellington (March 2016) *Fig 22 – 24*





Wasting time in Berlin Ifa Galerie & ZK/U, Berlin (Residency May – June 2016) *Fig*
25 – 28





Inhabiting Space (response to Fred Sandback) Adam Art Gallery, Wellington
(August 2016) *Fig 29 – 31*





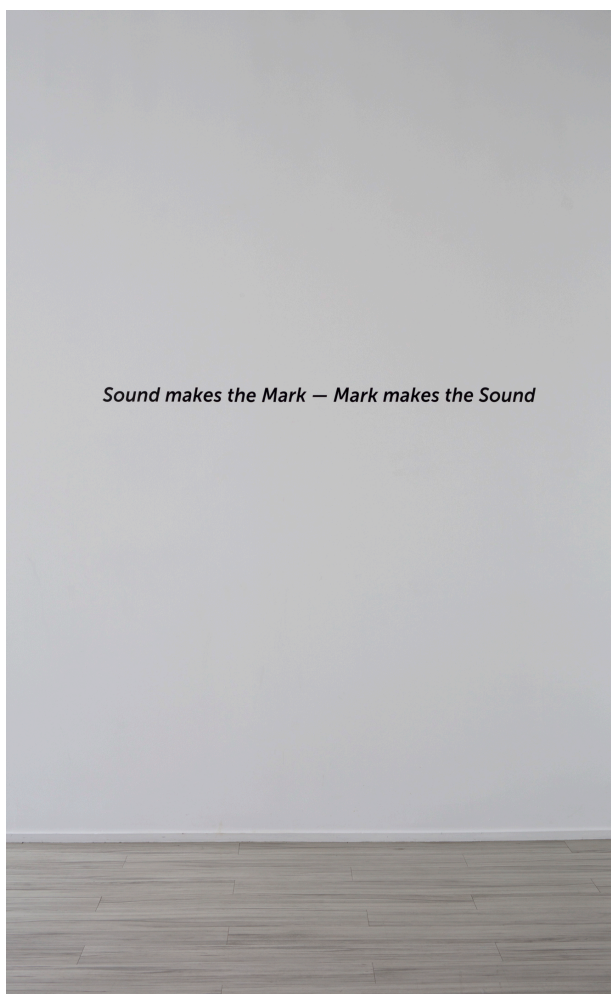
Pigs in the Yard II Te Tuhi Centre for the Arts, Auckland (Nov 2016 to Mar 2017)

Fig 32 – 35





Kohikohi Fresh Gallery, Auckland (Dec 2016 through to Feb 2017) *Fig 36 - 40*







Appendix 2: Final Examination

My final examination was also titled *Maumau-taimi: Wasting time; Being useless* and took place on the opening night of the AUT Art & Design Grad show (AD16) Friday 11th November 2pm – 10pm and Saturday 12th November 9am – 12pm.

This performance piece is a re-enactment of my everyday life and how I may be viewed daily. My performance time 2pm – 10pm, indicates an 8-hour shift that is consistent to daily hours of a full time job. The window space was chosen because I wanted to be confined to my own space but also to be present and in the public eye. My intention was not to be confrontational but rather relational. It was a space where I could be transparent and approachable both privately and publicly. I did not make contact with the audience outside the window but instead my private space was open for the audience to approach me and interact while the audience stood watching from the outside. The entrance to my space was through the main gallery entrance where I had a sign directing people to my space.

My space is empty apart from a two-seater bench for the spectator and myself within the room to sit on and the reason I used the bench is because it is a symbol of a park bench where to often a time I sit for hours merely gazing at nothing; wasting time.

Only one person at a time to enter room

W a i t

H e r e

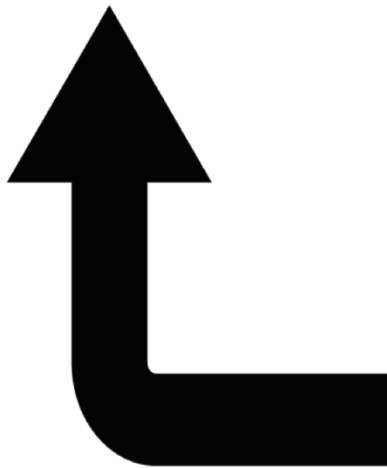


Fig 41



Fig 42



Fig 43



Fig 44



Fig 45



Fig 46



Fig 47



Fig 48



Fig 49