

***Lending Traditional Māori Artistic Structures to Academic Research and Writing:  
Mahi-Toi***

Jani K. T. Wilson, Te Ara Poutama: Centre for Māori and Indigenous Development /  
Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand  
The IAFOR International Conference on Education – Hawaii 2018  
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**

Māori (Indigenous New Zealand) researchers may have one or many mahi-toi (artistic) talents. All mahi-toi are ideas brought from the conceptual world to the physical realm by mahi-ā-ringā (work with hands), and the practitioner is the conduit. When the mahi-toi practitioner is also the researcher and vice-versa, the vernaculars in both circles enrich and give structure, depth and stability to each other. Despite divergences in materials and technologies across the disciplines, when traditional processes - such as carving, weaving, through to performing and composing kapahaka (Māori performing arts) - are placed side-by-side, the parallels between them are unmistakable. Every practice has distinctive pre-production, production and postproduction phases that have survived long artistic histories. Setting the mahi-toi practices beside writing and researching lends an artistic, structural, theoretical and analytical framework that may be useful for both researchers (Māori and non-Māori) and mahi-toi practitioners, and particularly for practitioners who make the transition to academic research and writing. As an emerging academic and traditional arts practitioner, I had an epiphany as to why my writing and researching was not to the standard of my artistic practice: I was not translating the fastidiousness, self-editing, self-criticism, and caution taken in my arts into my writing and research. Focusing on poi, this paper explores Mahi-toi as a scaffolding for a theoretical framework and writing structure for Māori scholars – and it is hoped, beyond Māori - in arts disciplines.

**Keywords:** mahi-toi – poi – research - process

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum

[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## Ngā Wāhine o Ngāti Awa

Wāhine mā, wāhine mā o Ngāti Awa *Women of Ngāti Awa*  
Kia pumau ki tou āhua, ki tou rēreka *Stay constant to your characteristics,*  
*your sweetness*  
Pākahukahu te tinana *Your lively body*  
Whirikoka tou mōhiotanga *Your strong thinking*  
Waiatatia te rōreka *Sing your melodiousness*  
Whakatīeke! *Expand your self*  
E pātaritarihia e *Be alluring*  
Momo whakaheke o ngā tīpuna wāhine *The inherited qualities of*  
*O te iwi e the women in our tribe*  
Ko Wairaka, te tīpuna *Wairaka, the ancestress*  
I hoea te waka tapu o Mataatua *Who paddled the Mataatua canoe*  
Ki runga e te kuia e *Above us, the respected woman*  
Kia Whakatāne au i ahau, wāhine mā *Let's be like her, ladies*

These are the lyrics to the first verse and chorus of a poi I wrote for my sub-tribe (hapū) to perform at our recent bi-annual tribal kapahaka (Māori performing arts) festival, Ngāti Awa Te Toki (Te Toki). Te Toki is a moment where we aim to increase the profile of the tribe through a strengthening of the subtribes. The festival is both a celebration and opportunity for each sub-tribe to showcase their kapahaka prowess through our distinctive styles, and sub-tribal dialects of te reo Māori (Māori language, voice). Meanwhile, we all vie for top kapahaka status.

The poi entitled *Ngā Wāhine o Ngāti Awa* which means ‘Women of the Ngāti Awa tribe’, is an important part of structuring the framework I refer to as Mahi-toi. I am developing Mahi-toi – literally working with the hands - into a range of mātauranga Māori (traditional knowledge) based tools centring traditional Māori arts to aid the transition from practice to research, and perhaps vice-versa. By unpacking any mahitōi as a means of understanding the depths of one’s ‘taken-for-granted knowledge,’ this paper presents where the Mahi-Toi research idea is at currently. However, it is not complete and needs much more thought. This paper was written primarily to open the research space to Indigenous arts practitioners to think through their artistic practices as a research methodology framework.

A good majority of Māori (Indigenous New Zealand) researchers have one or many mahi-toi (artistic) talents. Mahi-toi are ideas brought forth from the conceptual world into the physical realm through the hands (mahi-ā-ringā). Thus, the practitioner is the conduit through which the idea travels into being. At times the mahi-toi practitioner is also a researcher. The artist (ringatoi) brings with them empirical and physical knowledges and must learn the vernaculars in the research paradigm to satiate the academy. Therefore, both the practice and research languages enrich each other, and gives reciprocal structure, depth and stability.

Despite divergences in materials and technologies across the disciplines, when traditional artistic processes - such as carving and weaving, through to performing and composing kapahaka - are placed side-by-side, the parallels between them are

unmistakable. Every artistic practice has a distinctive pre-production, production and post-production process that has survived long artistic histories, some for millenia. Setting the mahi-toi practices beside writing and researching lends an artistic, structural, theoretical and analytical framework that may be useful for both researchers and ringatoi, and particularly for those who make the transition to academic research.

As an emerging academic and a traditional arts practitioner, I had an epiphany as to why my research was not to the standard of my artistic practice: it was because I was not translating the fastidiousness, self-editing, self-criticism, and caution taken in my arts into my research approach. Once I modified the approach of my research to how I conduct my artistic practices, I began to see discernible development in my academic writing and a more considered research. Focusing on poi, that is the instrument – a soft ball on the end of a woven cord - *and* the dance, this paper develops Mahi-toi as a research structure for Māori and Indigenous scholars, particularly those who work in the arts. It is hoped that in making parallels between the rigors of poi and the thoroughness of research that practitioners will be inclined to research, and to lend it the vernacular and attributes that research needs to attract and build a more diverse academia moving forward.

### ***Mahi-toi Evolution***

I designed Mahi-toi out of a lack of theoretical and methodological relevance with film studies for myself and my Māori and Pasifika cohort, most of whom departed from the discipline or from tertiary studies completely. Because my doctorate was equally in film as it was in te ao Māori (the Māori world), it was thought that my work would best connect with post-colonial and kaupapa Māori theories. Both trajectories had limitations in key areas for the distinctively sub-tribal thesis I had planned, and thus, I decided to search out and design a theoretical framework that worked for me. In the initial experimentations with mahi-toi, I concentrated on two types of traditional Māori weaving – tāniko (fine-finger weaving) and later kete muka (flax-fibre basketry) (Wilson, 2013, 2017). With tāniko, I focused on mahi-toi as an analytical framework, and later used kete muka as a structure for academic writing. For this paper, I evolve Mahi-toi further, into a research structure, and I focus on poi. I selected poi because, like research, there are multiple, complex layers to the preparation, composition, and the performance, which if omitted or done out of sequence will affect the execution of the overall item. The central components of research are compared to the various stages in the poi production process, namely the pre-production, production, and post-production phases. I will distinguish these fundamental stages in poi and briefly parallel them with an equally structured research process. It is hoped that in thinking through these processes that more traditional artists will make a transition from practice to structure research through the use of mahi-toi, as well as reaffirm identity. This holistic approach is one way Indigenous scholars can thrive in education and our long-term survival in the academy.

### **Film Studies**

I want to briefly contextualize how Mahi-toi came to being from film theory. Film analysis – in the most basic of terms – is the examination of a film or its parts, and

considers every element that constructs the diegesis, the world specifically constructed in the film, and how it fits together (Hayward, 2000; Horrocks, 2004). Some analysts concentrate on the audience's psychological responses to films (Lacan, 1949; Lacan and Wilden, 1968; Metz, 1974, 1977); others compare the filmmaker's intentions against the viewer's perception of realism (Bazin, 1967, 1971; Kracauer, 1960, 1960a) amongst many other elements. As undergraduate students in film studies at the University of Auckland, in the largest Polynesian city in the world, my Polynesian cohort and I could not relate to the primarily European theories, and were unfamiliar with the culture and history presented in lectures. Furthermore, there were very few positive faces like ours on the screens, and none at the lectern. Māori educationalist Kathie Irwin (1992) said the "real power lies with those who design the tools" (p. 5) and that we (Māori) need to empower ourselves by constructing our own academic apparatuses. I gladly accepted Irwin's challenge because Māori are underrepresented in film studies. Consequently, I aimed my doctorate (2013) at rousing Polynesian film studies students to post-graduate level by developing tools designed to encourage a meaningful attentiveness to film studies by framing film theory, audience and history in culturally relevant ways. Doing so challenges the status quo at the same time as satiating the academic requirements of the University.

### ***From Rangitūhāhā***

The search for 'something else' and 'something us' took me to Te Kete Aronui. Te Kete Aronui is believed to be one of the three baskets of knowledge retrieved by Tāne Mahuta (god of the forests, birds and creatures) from the twelfth heaven (Te Rangitūhāhā). To Māori, Te Kete Aronui is the basket containing the arts, peace and the senses (Best, 1995; Morrison, 1999; Moorfield, 2005; Fraser, 2009). Timoti Kāretu's (2008) definition is particularly relevant here:

[Te Kete Aronui] is the kete of the intellectual and the philosophers... and the philosophers of the Māori world were equally poets and philosophers anywhere [...] The body of language is being added to constantly with new compositions of haka, waiata, waiata-ā-ringa and poi, as well as short stories, the odd novel and play, and articles on various topics (p. 88).

Kāretu explains the intellectual and the creative as the same person. Te Kete Aronui is a fundamental cord connecting mahi-toi to academia, and it is a suitable, mātauranga Māori-centred way of thinking through art and the artist as the conduit simultaneously. This, is the distinction between Mahi-Toi and practice-led research and research-led practice that is becoming increasingly popular in the creative arts (Candy, 2006; Smith and Dean, 2009; Haseman, 2006; Bolt, 2007). By thinking about film analysis through the pre-production, production, and post-production phases of a film, it meant the research literature about the film's background, about what appeared on the screen, and about the reception to each film was approached deliberately and with more depth. Importantly, the Mahi-toi approach, shown below as a film analysis tool in relation to Lee Tamahori's *Once Were Warriors* (1994), means there are parameters within the structure and processes of the practice itself to keep the film analysis contained within the production process.

## Once Were Warriors

Pre-Production	Production	Post-Production
Lee Tamahori: Award-winning TV commercial maker with aspirations to make action films; influenced by Western films, American ghetto and Road Movies	Aimed to create a “purely NZ space;” sets were a selection of decayed, urban, and ghetto looking areas around Auckland	Line around the corner at distributor’s office after first Cannes viewing
Alan Duff novel adapted to screen but rejected by NZFC, but after Riwia Brown rewrote it and back by Māori ‘leaders,’ <i>Warriors</i> went to production	Used special gauzes to take out pastel colours, and to add bronze tones to the casts skin	Film won over twenty awards
Predominantly Māori crew and first full-Māori-cast feature since 1930	Low-key costuming for the majority of cast, except for the ‘designer gang’ who were embellished	Curtis received a Hollywood ‘Calling Card’ for his performance
Cast well-known Temuera Morrison and Cliff Curtis, and London trained Rena Owen	Upward tilts used so Jake would appear more bulky	Māori scholars pounced on the opportunity to respond stirring the Māori audience for the first time since <i>The Te Kooti Trail</i>
	Fighting sounds heightened to increase impact of ‘beatings’	
	‘Warriors’ shown working-out in peculiar places and times	

Image 1: From *Whiripapa* (Wilson, 2013, p. 200).

Mātauranga Māori is full of profound, often hidden, beautiful and ancient theories that are discernible in our arts. For example, our weaving (raranga) is symmetrical, geometrical, technical, environmentally conscious and sustainable, and beautiful. Rituals were performed over a woman’s womb in the hopes she would conceive a weaver (Mead, 2003) because the practice shows patience, dexterity, and knowledge of the environment, and the ability to follow process. As I will show, poi follow particularly indepth patterns and processes that can be thought through as a research structure. Ultimately, it is fundamental to unpack the mahi-toi process to perceive the practice from a theoretical perspective and then to use it in that form to structure the research more comprehensively.

### ***Poi***

All mahi-toi come from Te Kete Aronui, and thus hinge on wairua, the spiritual paradigm. Tāne Mahuta procreated with Pakoti, a highly regarded type of flax, and they begat Harakeke, a flax best used for weaving (Shortland, 1998). He also had

offspring with Hine-te-repo, including Raupō or bulrush (Huata, 2000). Harakeke and raupō are two of the main materials in the traditional construction of poi (Paringatai, 2004). For the harakeke construction, muka is extracted from the flax-fibres, and is woven together to form a type of cloth called tāniko. This durable material is used to cover the ball on the end of the cord. Interestingly, the use of these types of flaxes for fabrics is a distinguishing factor between Māori and other Pacific peoples (ibid, p. 17). Because poi were completely woven from plants, they belong to Te Wharepora, the weaving house. Expert weaver Erenora Puketapu-Hetet (1989) explained that bending and entwining the fruits of his body, raranga breathes Tāne Mahuta into a new form. Although reshaped, his mauri is present in the art and thus, weaving comes from wairua. In modern times, materials have altered for convenience, accessibility and sonics, but the cord remains woven. Raupō poi are, however being revitalized in some areas, particularly in the Tainui tribes.

Aside from being part of Te Wharepora, poi is also part of Te Whare Tapere, the performance or entertainment house, of which kapahaka is an intrinsic part. Poi – as single short and long, double short and long, and quadruple long - is an important element, as I will show. Poi were initially used as a battle training aid to keep the wrists supple for weapons used by both sexes (Paenga, 2008). The distinctiveness and beauty of poi lead to it becoming a performance item for women. In today's context, the drilling aspects remain as most of the movements rely on the wrists and syncopated timing. Historian James Cowan's (1910) observation of early 20<sup>th</sup> century poi was that:

The “dancers” do not really dance, but stand in rows and twirl the light poi balls (made of dry raupo-leaves) over their heads, from side to side, beating them at intervals on their heads, breasts, shoulders, and even their feet, all in perfect time to the rhythm of the song or musical accompaniment (p. 149).

The focus was on timing and twirling. However, now that poi is predominantly practiced by women there is an added element of showing femininity to distinguish their performance from the ferocity of the men in their item, the haka. Competitive poi, like the other kapahaka items, are attributed to Tāne-rore who is represented in the trembling, known as wiri, of the hands. Wiri personifies heat rays detectable at distance on a summers day, as Tāne-rore performed haka for his mother Hineraumati, the goddess of summer. The wiri therefore is used as a euphemism to “signal that summer has returned” (Paringatai, 2004, p. 18). Despite the swinging and twirling of poi, the quivering element is retained and noticeable across kapahaka to sustain the wairua of Tāne-rore and Hineraumati. The wiri too, is a major distinguishing factor between Māori performance arts and that of our Pacific cousins, as is the use of poi.

### **Mahi-toi: Making Art**

Poi is more than swinging balls on the end of a cord around. There is a very complex and multifaceted process. Here, I sketch out a simple framework to show how Mahi-toi works between poi and research. I need to clearly stipulate that this section is neither exhaustive nor a ‘how to write/choreograph a competitive poi’ guide. It is simply the scaffolding of the workings of poi – some on the composition side and some on the performance side - to show the depths and layers of poi. This section

encourages mahi-toi practitioners to use the fastidiousness required of their chosen art to the rigors of research.

### ***Mahi-toi: Preparing the Art/Research***

- Theme
- Conceptualisation
- Visualisation
- Plan (timing etc)
- Resources
- Material Preparation

#### Theme

Poi themes are predominantly based on birds, geographical locators such as the ocean, rivers, lakes, plants, and important women. The poi theme is the constant through-line that keeps the narrative moving forward, and are equally obvious in the actions. For example, when a poi is about a bird, the actions will include a lot of flitting in the feet, and/or movements to symbolise flying. There can be a lot of toe pointing, bending at the hips, and head movements. As the lyrics in *Ngā Wāhine o Ngāti Awa* indicate, I based the song around the attributes of the strong women of our tribe, highlighting Wairaka, a very important ancestress. The performance reminds us of what her important characteristics were, and encourages our women to hold onto and enact those attributes.

#### Conceptualisation

With the theme in mind, the composer (kaitito) considers keywords and phrases appropriate to the theme and to where the performers connect. Fundamental at this initial stage is timbre and tempo. The keywords and phrases I was thinking through were breathing life back into some of the characteristics of Wairaka, and thus in *Ngā Wāhine o Ngāti Awa*, I aimed for brightness and decided to make the tempo relatively bouncy. Wairaka essentially saved the tribe by paddling the Mataatua waka (canoe, vessel). Women were not permitted to paddle, because the responsibility was so heavy. When the men had left the women and children anchored in the bay to do some reconnaissance on the land, a storm brewed and became treacherous. Wairaka stood, took up the paddle and said to the gods “Kia whakatāne au i ahau!” which means ‘let me be as a man!’ Her legacy is that she defied the lore for the future of our people. Indeed, Wairaka is a very important ancestor.

#### Visualisation

At this stage, the composer and choreographer can start thinking of the poi in its completed form. There are a range of decisions to make at this stage, most importantly is considering how the words, actions and choreography could best display the theme. Will there be many hits in the poi? Or would less hits and syncopation better fit the theme? In *Ngā Wāhine o Ngāti Awa*, it was decided to include the men in the song at the very beginning of the first verse as it was important for them to show their support for the women in retracing the important qualities of Wairaka. Some of these included defying lore, strength and precociousness, difficult to show at a slower tempo.

### Planning

Planning is essential to competitive poi. Here, the choreographer needs to think from the polished performance into short, teachable, and learnable snippets. A fixed performance date means specific milestones need to be plotted out realistically to ensure it gets to the stage. Other aspects that need planning are the chords, the 'hook', verses, chorus, and pre-chorus. Together they must build the narrative to an apex.

### Resources

The obvious resources are poi, but implicit resources are the historical materials that need to be correct to be representative of the sub-tribal history. Subtribes sometimes have different versions of stories and the history needs to be checked with elders to ensure accuracy. During the composition of *Ngā Wāhine o Ngāti Awa* the central character was another ancestress, Toanātini. In a short conversation with my elders, it soon became clear she was not an appropriate ancestor to personify in this format, and Wairaka emerged as the hero. Notably, the neighbouring tribe, Te Whakatōhea, believe their ancestress Muriwai to be the woman who saved the women and children that day. Regardless, it is important to ensure the history is underwritten by elders for sub-tribal credibility and fundamental to the judging table who are commissioned to follow-up on the facts.

### Material Preparation

Historical materials, chord progression, and the overall sketch of the song need to be organized into a narrative with a clear through-line. The contemporary materials for poi (wool, sponge, scissors, plastic-bags, thread, glue) are easy to source, but take time to prepare. Some kapahaka teams purchase their poi ready-made, while others use the time of making poi as an opportunity for building relationships/connections (whakawhanaungatanga)

### *Pre-research*

What learning can be transferred from the pre-production of poi to research? Like this brief outline of the pre-production phase of poi, the theme, conceptualization, visualization, planning, resources and material preparation of research is extremely important. Decide on the theme of your research, by considering and its place and function in academia. If your research is going into a journal as an article for instance, reading previous publication publications by the publishing organization can help build the concept. Planning and in particular, timing should be considered realistically so the reading phase will be sustained, focused, yet wide and current enough to be innovative. As a narrow plan to keep the research simple, one primary resource is closely considered and one secondary for counterpoint. Any further resources should be considered in relation to reaching the apex at the appropriate point of the project which could mean recruiting trusted people for critical tasks and/or feedforward (material preparation).

### ***Mahi-toi: Doing the Art/Research***

- Do
- Review/revisit concept
- Edit/re-edit
- Complete



### Do

Compose the song; get the 'hook' into the chorus to ensure it is the catchiest segment, and potentially the most pleasurable to perform. Add the verses, generally a tone or two below the chorus, so that the song builds. Integrate the pre-chorus, if necessary. Put together a sketch of the actions; matching the hits, swings, and body movements with the words, and consider how the men may best be integrated into the choreography. This is the trial and error phase, and one must make mental notes about plans A, B, and C in case certain actions do not work or cannot be performed with grace level across the performing group. Present the song and actions to a trusted source or two, ideally with skills in poi. I had planned a beats section at the end of *Ngā Wāhine o Ngāti Awa*. This was a strategy because no group had performed one at any of the previous festivals, and it stood out amongst the others.

### Review/Re-visit

Review the song, actions and choreography according to the feedforward, and whether it is at a level the group will be able to master in the allotted timeframe. Constantly refer to the initial theme and concept, and make decisions about the feedforward to drive it towards them.

### Edit

Seasoned performers are able to identify when words, harmonies, actions and choreography do not line up. They are exponentially meticulous about their mahi-toi. The audience, consisting of seasoned performers are considered closely during the editing stage, and is fundamental to getting the poi to the most competitive standard possible. Edit and make changes with the audience in mind.

### Complete

The poi is performed for the intending group, then their learning begins. The words and tune of the song are learned, easily done if the tune and hook are simple and catchy. The actions are learned hit-by-hit, swing-by-swing in the order of the performance. These are drilled until uniform. Choreography is introduced, and the men are integrated to compliment the women's performance. Discipline is crucial when moving a poi item to the competitive stage. This can be the toughest phase emotionally because the order of the final women's line-up can be organized based on who performs the poi the best. Theoretically, women who execute the best poi performance require the least polishing work. There needs to be openness to adjusting elements if after extensive drilling, too many women cannot execute the moves. Complete the draft.

### *Research*

What can be learned from the poi production process that can be used as part of a research method? As in poi, the research needs to be *done*. According to the coordinates in the research plan, search for keywords and phrases in the primary and secondary resources. Follow the rabbit holes and make short notes, particularly about what and who you discover for the first time, and particularly for trajectories that support and negate your view at the start (match up). These may encourage other readings. Be open to discuss the main findings with trusted interested parties for thorough feedforward (edit). Make the necessary mental adjustments to the concept according to the feedforward (review/revisit). Having completed the reading, what is

your main point? What are the five main findings that you want to underline in this research? Why these points? Edit accordingly. Mistakes and all, complete the first draft of your publication (complete), then edit. Does it fit and flow together properly? Are your points covered, supported and highlighted in the draft? If so or if not, edit again.

### ***Mahi-toi: Releasing the Art/Research***

- Last looks
- Release
- Debrief

#### Last looks

By this stage, the group has learned and practiced the song, actions and choreography, and practices take place as noho (to stay, sleepover, sit), where all performers sleep at the marae (traditional sub-tribal residence) to gel the team together. Noho are generally supported by family members who work tirelessly in the kitchen to ensure the group focuses on getting the bracket polished. Harmonies are woven into the vocals to best emphasize, highlight and beautify certain words and aspects of the song. Close attention is paid to the levels of the poi so they appear tidy, well-drilled, and attractive as possible from every angle. This also extends to the exactness of the body such as toe points, swinging of the hips, the exact timing of head movements to show a consistent level of discipline. Performers will eventually practice in piupiu (flax kilts) to familiarize themselves with how the item will feel, sound and look, and to practice the very important return of poi back into the waistband (a dropped poi means the loss of valuable points). Last looks are the important dress rehearsal, where the whole bracket is performed for supportive critics, usually the extended family, a last opportunity for improvements. Sometimes dress rehearsals are recorded and the team engage in the analysis of their performance.

#### Release

Performing the poi on the competitive stage can be both gratifying and terrifying. This moment is an opportunity to see the audience's response, to convey the life-force (mauri) and spirit (wairua) of the sub-tribe. Wairua is the last component the performer brings to poi because she conjures up the qualities and characteristics of the hero represented in the song. She makes way in her skin for the ancestress to use her body for the duration of the performance. Performing on the competitive stage is more often a rush and a relief. Months of sacrificing nights and weekends with family and friends, culminates in a twenty-seven-minute performance on stage. Because of this, coming off the stage is intensely emotional.

#### Debrief

Performers are their own worst critics, and each performance is an opportunity to take learnings from this campaign into the next. This could be as practical as plotting out the practice schedule better or organizing a roster of helpers in the kitchen, or to discuss funding applications or to conceptualize the bracket for the next campaign together.

I have only lightly sketched the process of getting a competitive poi to stage. Despite its brevity, it is easy to identify how intricate competitive poi is and the level of

commitment required.

### *Post-research*

The first draft of the research, in whatever form, is edited until there is an obvious narrative flow and the loose ends are tidied. Once the edits are complete, allow objective others to read it, and according to their trusted recommendations, make last edits (last looks). Release the article to the potential publishers and await feedback. Once received, make the recommended amendments. Celebrate one's accomplishment whilst making mental note of how the journey through to the next potential article will be improved through the learnings of the submitted work (debrief). Embrace the next research project.

### **Conclusion**

This twofold article has only explored the potential of Mahi-toi. Its advancement relies on critical feed-forward by Māori arts scholars or researchers who may argue, debate, consider or apply it. Critiquing, questioning and rigorous testing are important components of developing Mahi-toi as a potential trajectory for creative people entering research, and vice versa. Mahi-toi practitioners are privy to procedures, rituals, structures and a specific language that academia can be enriched by, if given space. Mahi-toi such as poi are exhaustive practices that are heavily reliant on research, patience, clarity of mind and physical endurance. The poi overview was a simple sketch that cartographed some readers through a mahi-toi practice for the first time, and showed poi as a complex and multifaceted tradition, practice, performance and framework. At the same time, it aimed to proffer insights into the Māori world. Besides the framework, I also outlined important learnings that can be transferred from mahi-toi to arts research. The first is the need to connect with Te Kete Aronui, to breathe a concept to life, and to produce and analyse the piece using the threepronged, three-dimensional production-phase format. The second learning is to use one's chosen mahi-toi as the basis of a robust, systematic research structure. These learnings were delineated to show one way traditional Māori artistic practices can be utilised to frame how Indigenous cultural concepts can help shape academia in the future.

### **Acknowledgements**

Mahi-toi's development was very generously supported by the Māori and Pacific Post-Doctoral Fellowship at the School of Art & Design in the Department of Creative Technologies at AUT. Its ongoing evolution will now be carried by the Department of Māori and Indigenous Development, Te Ara Poutama. I have been very fortunate to receive ongoing support by the Pro-Vice Chancellor Māori, Pare Keiha who allowed me to present at the IAFOR Conference on Education, in Honolulu, solely for the advancement of our many Māori students. Māhi-Toi is off these pages and into my classrooms. Lastly, I acknowledge my parents, and all of those whose lives were devastated by the Edgecumbe/Patutātahi floods (April 2017), for their resilience and resolve to fight the Bay of Plenty Regional Council for their part in allowing the Rangitaiki River to overflow and destroy our little town. Kia mate ururoa koutou katoa! (Fight like a hammerhead shark).

## References

### Film Cited

*Once Were Warriors*, 1994, dir. Lee Tamahori

### Publications

Bazin, A. (1967). *What is cinema? Vol. I*. Trans. Hugh Gray. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Bazin, A. (1971). *What is Cinema? vol. II*. Trans. Hugh Gray. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Best, E. (1995). *Maori Religion and Mythology: Being an Account of the Cosmogony, Anthropogeny, Religious Beliefs and Rites, Magic and Folk Lore of the Maori Folk of New Zealand. Part 2*. Museum of New Zealand.

Bolt, B. (2007). The magic is in handling', Bolt, B., & Barrett, E. (eds) *Practice as research: Approaches to creative arts enquiry* (p. 27). London: IB Tauris.

Candy, L. (2006). Practice based research: A guide. *CCS Report, 1*, 1-19.

Fraser, T. N. (2009). *Māori-Tūhoe epistemology: Stages of sustaining tribal identity through Tūhoe performing arts*. Unpublished thesis PhD (Education Studies), University of British Columbia: Vancouver.

Haseman, B. (2006). A manifesto for performative research. *Media International Australia incorporating Culture and Policy*, 118(1), 98-106.

Hayward, S. (2000). *Key concepts in cinema studies* (Second ed). London: Routledge.

Horrocks, R. (2004). Why study media production? in Goode, L., & Zuberi, N. (Eds.). (2010). *Media Studies in Aotearoa New Zealand*. Albany, Auckland: Pearson, 18-31.

Huata, N. (2000). *The rhythm and life of poi*. Rosedale, North Shore: HarperCollins.

Irwin, K. (1992). Becoming an academic: Contradictions and dilemmas of a Maori feminist. *Women and education in Aotearoa*, 2, 52-67.

Kāretu, T. (2008). Te Kete Tuawhā, Te Kete Aronui-The Fourth Basket. *Te Kaharoa*, 1(1).

Kracauer, S. (1960). *Theory of film: The redemption of physical reality*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Kracauer, S. (1960a). *Basic concepts. From theory of film, excerpted in film theory and criticism*. Oxford: University Press, Oxford.

- Lacan, J. (1949). The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience. *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture. A Reader*, 287-292.
- Lacan, J., & Wilden, A. T. (1968). *The language of the self: The function of language in psychoanalysis*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Mead, H. M. (2003). *Tikanga Māori: Living by Māori values*. Wellington, New Zealand: Huia Publishers.
- Metz, C. (1974). *Film language: A semiotics of the cinema*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Metz, C. (1977). *Le signifiant imaginaire: psychanalyse et cinéma* (Vol. 1134). Union générale d'éditions.
- Moorfield, J. C. (2005). *Te Aka: Māori-English, English-Māori Dictionary and Index*. Longman.
- Morrison, A. (1999). *Space for Maori in tertiary institutions: Exploring two sites at the University of Auckland* (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Auckland, New Zealand.
- Paringatai, K. (2004). *Poia mai taku poi. Unearthing the knowledge of the past: A critical review of written literature on the poi in New Zealand and the Pacific*. Unpublished Master's thesis (Arts). Dunedin: University of Otago.
- Puketapu-Hetet, E. (1989). *Maori weaving*. Auckland: Pitman Publishing.
- Shortland, Edward. 1998. *Maori Religion and Mythology: illustrated by translations of traditions, karakia &c., to which are added notes on Maori land tenure*. London: Longmans, Green, 1882; reprint, Christchurch: Kiwi Publishers.
- Smith, H., & Dean, R. (Eds.). (2009). *Practice-led research, research-led practice in the creative arts*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Wilson, J. K. T. (2013). *Whiripapa: Tāniko, Whānau and Kōrero-based Film Analysis*. Unpublished Thesis, PhD (Film, TV, Media Studies), Auckland: University of Auckland.
- Wilson, J. K. T. (2017). Developing Mahi-Toi Theory and Analysis. *MAI Journal* 6(2), 116-128.