

THEATRE MARAE

Māori theatre pedagogy in research

*Helen Pearse-Otene**

Abstract

Theatre Marae is a contemporary theatre practice unique to Aotearoa New Zealand, and this article outlines its application as an Indigenous-informed creative framework for qualitative research. As a research methodology, Theatre Marae is based in a conceptual partnership between traditional and contemporary Māori performing arts, applied theatre and the therapeutic encounter. As a form of theatre pedagogy, Theatre Marae has been applied as a decolonising strategy in ensemble work, and to craft evocative theatre that honours Māori expressions of colonisation, trauma and social justice. Theatre Marae projects have been carried out in kāinga, schools, prisons, youth justice residential centres, community centres and mainstream theatres throughout Aotearoa New Zealand. Although its creative and therapeutic outcomes are influenced by both Western and Māori psychologies and performance traditions, the underlying principles and day-to-day practice of Theatre Marae are based in te ao Māori. This configuration positions Theatre Marae as an Indigenous creative framework that is also applicable to Kaupapa Māori arts-based research.

Keywords

Theatre Marae, Māori theatre, Kaupapa Māori, Indigenous psychology, arts-based research, practice as research methodology

Introduction

Half a dozen Māori Vietnam veterans have travelled for hours to sit in a square against the edges of a darkened black box listening to words they have spoken being said back to them. A theatrical device—a haunted transistor radio—switches on by itself, tunes between stations and, in the framework of a talkback radio show, plays excerpts from interviews the veterans have given. “The government don’t really know what it’s like to be a soldier. You know . . . there’s the story out that you’re not wanted when everything’s right, but you’re the first one to turn to when something turns bad.”

A shape-shifting chorus enters from all four corners of the space at once, breaking with dramatic convention to segue to scenes set in the past and in other locations. They play an integral part, embodying moths, trees, an Iroquois helicopter, spirits, soldiers and nurses. Their movement, speech and singing helps realise the artistic objectives of the story.

Photographs the veterans have taken or collected appear on the walls, projected onto white gauze that looks like bandages or a shroud. Tears begin to roll down the faces not only of the veterans but of others in the audience to whom this story is new.

* Rongomaiwahine, Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāpuhi, Te Rarawa, Ngāti Kuri, Ngāti Ruanui. PhD Candidate, Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand. Email: h.pearseotene@gmail.com

After the performance, a long kōrero. More tears. A waiata. The following day, after staying up talking late into the night, the veterans tell me that the play was healing for them, and the story needs to be told again—but that it's a story for all soldiers, not just their lot.

This article presents a model of contemporary theatre practice unique to Aotearoa New Zealand called Theatre Marae, and its application as an Indigenous-informed creative framework for qualitative research. I arrive at this work as a Māori psychologist and theatre practitioner who has been working in contemporary New Zealand theatre and Theatre Marae for more than two decades. First, I locate the conditions for a Theatre Marae framework as part of a global movement to legitimise Indigenous psychologies and arts-based research methods within the Academy, then describe the underlying principles of Theatre Marae that are drawn from ancestral knowledge embedded in Māori language, daily customs, rituals and performances from the marae and the whare tapere. These principles ground Theatre Marae in Kaupapa Māori, while making use of complementary ideas from liberation and community psychologies, theatre craft and performance studies. The addition of these other strands into the framework reveals new research spaces drawn from traditional concepts of Te Kore—The Void, Te Wheiao—The Liminal Space, and Te Ārai—The Veil. Furthermore, the Māori word widely used for the stage, atamira, is placed aside in preference for a more flexible term: papa kōrero, an emergent space that hosts rituals of encounter, training routines, rehearsals, workshops, fora and performance seasons.

To illustrate these spaces in action, I provide excerpts, such as the one that opens this article, from my reflective journal from a theatre production called *The Landeaters*, a Theatre Marae research project that I undertook with a group of New Zealand combat veterans on their perspectives of healing after active service. From this combination of conceptual framework and observations of an actual theatre production, a picture is developed of Theatre Marae as a dynamic setting for tackling social science research that is hybridised and interdisciplinary, and privileges Māori ways of being, knowing, relating and doing.

The indigenising project

The limitations of psychology, its research methods, assessment tools and therapy models have long been argued by Indigenous researchers as a

reason for pursuing a locally derived psychology that is sensitive to customs, issues and potential solutions specific to the Indigenous context (Adair, 1999). The rise of Indigenous psychologies (Allwood & Berry, 2006; Gray & Coates, 2010; Waitoki et al., 2018) is contemporaneous with a larger postcolonial agenda among researchers to decolonise the social sciences by legitimising Indigenous research methods that “prevent the prioritisation of western ways of knowing” (Drawson et al., 2017, p. 13). Indigenous research processes are politically transparent; they intentionally pursue healing, mobilisation, transformation and decolonisation for Indigenous groups (Smith, 2012). At the same time, they resist attempts to debunk, devalue, suppress, or commodify and lay claim to Indigenous customary knowledge (Stewart-Harawira, 2013).

Indigenous principles and approaches

While acknowledging the diverse historic, cultural, linguistic and geopolitical experiences of Indigenous groups around the world, Indigenous researchers assert a set of shared principles that distinguish an Indigenous psychology from its Western counterpart. One such principle is to oppose North American psychology (Allwood & Berry, 2006). Others include holism, relationality and interconnectedness of all living and inanimate things (Archibald, 2008; Martin, 2003; Stewart-Harawira, 2013; S. Wilson, 2008); Indigenous self-determination and autonomy (Nikora, 2007; Smith, 2012; Waitoki et al., 2018); prioritisation and protection of the integrity of Indigenous knowledge (Archibald, 2008; Drawson et al., 2017; Stewart-Harawira, 2013; S. Wilson, 2008); respect and reciprocity between researchers and communities (Archibald, 2008; S. Wilson, 2008); researcher reflexivity (Martin, 2003); spiritual-physical-emotional alignment (Archibald, 2008; Stewart-Harawira, 2013; S. Wilson, 2008); accountability and transparency (Archibald, 2008; Drawson et al., 2017; Martin, 2003; Smith, 2012; Stewart-Harawira, 2013; S. Wilson, 2008); and Indigenous communities as informed, active decision makers in the research process who benefit from its outcomes and maintain guardianship of and connection to the work (Archibald, 2008; Drawson et al., 2017; Martin, 2003; Smith, 2012; Stewart-Harawira, 2013; S. Wilson, 2008).

The principles that drive Indigenous inquiry generate research aims that are inductive and exploratory (Adair, 1999), leading to qualitative methods that are applied, pragmatic and holistic (Adair, 1999; Gray & Coates, 2010). While

research design is guided by Indigenous research principles, the actual methods can be Indigenous, Western, or a combination of the two (Gray & Coates, 2010). For example, Indigenous researchers might apply linguistic methods concerned with sense making through language/semantic meaning or empirical methods that focus on the cultural distinctiveness of phenomena (Gray & Coates, 2010). Indigenous research is thus open to dynamic and interdisciplinary approaches that integrate art, science and religion, and which privilege knowledge that is embodied and a product of experiential knowing (S. Wilson, 2003); these features align Indigenous research approaches with the methods employed in arts-based research.

Arts-based research with Indigenous groups

As a system of inquiry that straddles the nexus of creativity and scientific exploration (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Eisner, 2003; Leavy, 2018), arts-based research (ABR) is a term given to a growing range of artistic tools and processes suitable for qualitative research in the social sciences—a discipline argued to be both an art and a science (Eisner, 2003). Although ABR remains underutilised in psychological research (Chamberlain et al., 2018), it has a well-documented history in community-based programmes, creative arts therapy and education programmes, and as a platform from which marginalised groups have voiced their struggles and aspirations to mainstream society. Recently, ABR has become a popular approach in Indigenous-centred participatory action research, as it allows communities to study phenomena of their choosing in their ecological context (Hammond et al., 2018). The creative practices used for gathering, analysing and disseminating data can also align with a global decolonising agenda to facilitate knowledge sharing between Indigenous groups, instead of restricting it to academic audiences and journal articles (Gergen & Gergen, 2018; Hammond et al., 2018; Napoli, 2019; Smith, 2012).

A tenet of ABR is to actively work against the researcher–participant power imbalance which has been a feature of previous social science research. A primary strategy is to privilege other forms of communication, such as dance, visual art, photography, theatre, collage and music, over the written word (Coemans & Hannes, 2017). Creative, performative, embodied techniques can open different channels for meaning making that promote diversity over generalisability and amplify alternative stories over the dominant narrative. In this way, ABR might seem an attractive option to

both researchers who are disillusioned with the constraints of mainstream methods (Gergen & Gergen, 2018) and hard-to-reach communities who have traditionally shied away from engaging in research (Coemans & Hannes, 2017). The use of Indigenous art and performance traditions in a research setting not only enriches the development of Indigenous psychologies overall, but breaks new ground in academia whereby Indigenous art is located as a legitimate research method alongside other qualitative approaches. Therefore, this is ideal territory in which to locate Theatre Marae.

Theatre Marae: Conceptual framework

In this article I outline a conceptual framework for Theatre Marae as a research methodology. The article does not seek to provide a historiography of Theatre Marae or a guide to the nuances of its practice—these aspects will be addressed elsewhere—however, some brief context is useful to situate Theatre Marae in time and place.

Theatre Marae emerged in the 1990s as a means for Māori theatre practitioners to claim space in the Wellington theatre scene (Kouka, 2007; Peterson, 2007; Warrington, 1994). It was first employed during the 1990 New Zealand International Festival of the Arts in an event called *Live at The Depot* (Glasse & Welham, 2003; Warrington, 1994). During the festival a group of Māori artists transformed The Depot Theatre into a temporary marae space and rolled out a non-stop programme of contemporary Māori plays, poetry, visual art and music. *Live at The Depot* provided a space to showcase the works of Bruce Stewart, Rangimoana Taylor, Rowley Habib, Apirana Taylor, Hone Tuwhare, John Broughton, Tina Cook, Whetu Fala, Te Rākau and Taiao Dance (Glasse & Welham, 2003; Te Rākau Hua o Te Wao Tapu, 1990; Warrington, 1994). It introduced the concept of Theatre Marae to mainstream theatre audiences as “essentially a hui – a gathering of people to share in a whole of life experience” (Jim Moriarty, as cited in Warrington, 1994, p. 40). Subsequently, the Theatre Marae concept of invoking marae protocol and symbols in the theatre has been employed by both Māori and tauīwi theatre companies, production houses and independent practitioners on mainstages around the country. As the name suggests, the philosophical foundations of Theatre Marae are to be found in both the secular and the sacred traditions of theatre and the marae complex.

Marae

In te ao Māori the marae is a centuries-old institution that is a tangible link to traditional ways of living, learning and identifying as tangata whenua (Rangihau, 1975; Tauroa & Tauroa, 2007; Walker, 1975). The term marae is drawn from marae ātea, the sacred space of encounter in front of the carved ancestral house (Buck, 1949), but is nowadays more often used to describe the entire pā (Mead, 2003). The modern marae complex that we see in Aotearoa is the tangible result of a drawing together of the sacred ceremonial sites of East Polynesia and the gathering spaces for social events in West Polynesia (Barlow, 1991; Buck, 1949; Mead, 2003).

The relationship between the esoteric and the everyday is a constant on the marae; it may be physically demarcated—for example, the tapu and noa sides of the meeting house—or invoked through the performance of certain karakia, waiata or processes such as kai to signal transition between activities. Boundaries are redrawn, relationships between hosts and visitors are reconfigured, and the marae ātea that in the morning served as the sacred space for the pōwhiri later becomes the playground for children (Walker, 1975).

Alienation from traditional lands and resources has influenced the compression of Māori activity onto the marae, so that it hosts all manner of social gatherings from baptisms to funerals and the milestones in between (Curry et al., 1979). It also hosts practices that traditionally would have occurred in other institutions, such as the whare tapere. For many, the marae has become a refuge, the last bastion of Māori sovereignty, and a space for resistance against the Coloniser and the pressures of Western living (Mead, 2003; Rangihau, 1975). It is where, for a time, one can engage in the day-to-day practices of Māori communal life (Rangihau, 1975; Walker, 1975), and participate in performances that assert a collective Māori identity, sovereignty and world perspective (Rangihau, 1975; Tauroa & Tauroa, 2007).

The marae is a confluence of the ancient and modern, a storage facility for traditions and knowledge that may still lie dormant, and a laboratory where old customs can be interrogated and adjusted, and new practices may be created (Mead, 2003). Under the auspices of Tūmataunga, the marae ātea invokes a forum for public displays of political dissent, debate, challenge and dissonance, whereby the arts of Māori oratory, literature and performance are given free rein to acknowledge, honour, grieve (Dansey, 1975), entertain and convince (Dewes, 1975). It is here that novel ideas may

be tested out against enduring Māori principles, values and worldviews, and either taken on or rejected (Walker, 1975).

Theatre

Ancient performances and ceremony have been documented throughout the world—all cultures identify some form of performance tradition: song, dance, ritual, puppetry or storytelling (Schechner, 2006). Nevertheless, the formal origins of modern theatre are commonly attributed to the ancient Greeks, where it emerged in the city state of Athens in the late 6th century BC (Boal, 1985; van der Kolk, 2014; Wickham, 1992). Between the 5th and 4th centuries BC, Greek drama was codified into three genres: tragedy, comedy, and satyr-play (Wickham, 1992). With the threat of war ever present along its borders, the theatre was the focal point for asserting Athenian identity and civic life through festivals, celebrations, competitions, poetry and political debate (N. Wilson, 2017).

Alongside compulsory military service, to attend or participate in the theatre was an Athenian's civic duty (van der Kolk, 2014; Wickham, 1992). Whether through Athens' colonisation of other states or through appropriation by the Romans, the philosophies, political systems, scientific ideas and art of this period spread throughout the ancient world (N. Wilson, 2017). Much later, scholars and artists would rediscover, revive and build upon these traditions, in what would become known as the European Renaissance, the grandparent of Western knowledge production (N. Wilson, 2017). Ancient Greek knowledge is thus embedded in the very fibre of the modern academy, the arts, sciences and humanities—including psychology and modern theatre. In the latter it becomes visible in the physical layout of playhouses, and in terminology for playwriting, stagecraft, performance and critical analysis.

Building the framework

As communal sites for ritual, festival, philosophical debate and political engagement, the marae and the theatre share qualities that enable their amalgamation into an environment suitable for Māori creative research. Such a space is characterised by exploration, risk taking, liminality and cultural hybridity. It facilitates a type of dramaturgy—the theory and practice of theatre making—that centralises Māori ways of sensing, being in, relating to and performing the world. In this way, Theatre Marae remains central to a Kaupapa Māori creative encounter that does not reject mainstream theatre conventions outright but repositions them to the

side, as useful tools to be employed when aesthetic choice dictates. With this in mind, practitioners are able to draw upon a diverse range of performance-based traditions and perspectives, in particular, *te whare tapere* and performance studies.

Te whare tapere

In pre-European times, *whare tapere* were standalone structures or designated clear spaces where community members gathered to socialise, participate in formal performances, festivities and amusements and, in some cases, to meet potential romantic partners or arrange marriages for others. Their origins are to be found in ancient *pūrākau* set in the Māori ancestral homeland of Hawaiki, specifically, the famous *pūrākau* of Tinirau and Kae (Brown, 2008; Karetu, 1993). This tale revolves around the death of Tinirau's pet whale, Tutunui, at the hands of the greedy Kae, and how Tinirau's act of revenge is achieved not via traditional warfare but by a troupe of female performers who capture Kae through beguilement (Alpers, 1996; Karetu, 1993). While the *pūrākau* of Tinirau and Kae is a celebration of *wāhine toa* who best their enemy through trickery, on further inspection it can be seen to lay out the blueprint of the *whare tapere* (Karetu, 1993).

According to Royal (1998, 2007), the activities of the *whare tapere* can be categorised under *ngā mahi a te rēhia* as thus: *kōrero*, *haka*, *waiata*, *taonga pūoro*, *taonga-o-wharawhara* and *ngā tākaro*. These activities correspond well with theatrical conventions of narrative, dance and movement, singing, music and soundscape, costume and make-up, improvisation, props and puppetry. While there still remains some mystery around specific details of *whare tapere* and, to a greater extent, the traditional travelling performance troupe, the *whare karioi* (Royal, 1998), there is enough recorded knowledge of the activities and underlying cultural concepts of these institutions to further advance contemporary Māori performing arts, and to inform a Māori theatre pedagogy for creative research.

Performance studies

While academia, government, local regulatory bodies and the media privilege text as the standard means of communication and process, for marginalised communities the written word is a reminder of an authority that excludes, scrutinises, displaces and subjugates undesirable groups (Conquergood, 2002), reproducing a master narrative of colonial superiority over its Indigenous subjects (Smith, 2012; Stewart-Harawira, 2003).

In response, marginalised cultures will subvert or negotiate the dominance of text through coded performances that simultaneously enable communication among their group and avoid detection by the powers that be, including the Academy and researchers (Conquergood, 2002).

Complementary with other ABR approaches and Indigenous research principles, performance studies challenges the traditional research preference for text as the final, master interpretation of psychological phenomena and experience. Through research activities that integrate art, scholarship and activism (Conquergood, 2002), a performance studies perspective offers a space to reveal previously subjugated, coded knowledges (Schechner, 2006). Performance studies does not have a unified system and rejects universalism and truth claiming (Gergen & Gergen, 2018; Schechner, 2006). Instead it applies an interdisciplinary focus to bring together legitimated and devalued knowledges into the space of performance inquiry (Conquergood, 2002). Key approaches include theories of embodiment (Cromby, 2015; Snowber, 2018; Varela et al., 1991) and cultural hybridity and liminality (Bhabha, 1994).

Furthermore, performance studies examines cultural products—including texts—not as static, bound objects but as live practices or performances that are ongoing and embedded in relationships (Schechner, 2006). Within the research setting, a performance studies lens imbues cultural products with an essence or presence that transcends their stillness and material constraints. This opens up a channel for relationality, dialogue and connection to occur between the work and the researcher. From a Māori research perspective, this concept speaks to the principles of *mauri*, *whakapapa* and *whanaungatanga* of all living and inanimate things. This inverts any problematic appropriation of Indigenous knowledges by Western performance studies scholars: in Theatre Marae, the agency and lens are Māori, and performance studies is a tool, rather than an organising principle.

Theatre Marae and space

Whare tapere and performance studies are two performance-based lenses through which researchers may see beyond the frontiers of conventional theatre and invoke creative research spheres imbued with *mātauranga Māori*: *Te Kore*, *Te Wheiao*, *Te Ārai* and *papa kōrero*.

Te Kore—The Void

Theatre Marae is contingent on a physical space in which performers can speak, play, argue, debate,

present, create and perform different realities. An ideal space in which to investigate new practice is the “black box studio”—a simple rectangular room painted black and devoid of the usual architectural features of the proscenium style playhouses in mainstream theatre. The lack of designated seating, auditorium, performance and backstage areas simulates an empty space, a limitless, frameless nothing or chaos, known in te reo Māori as Te Kore—The Void (Barlow, 1991). Acknowledging the existence of Te Kore also calls into being a latent potential, a something in the nothing, a double negative called “Te Korekore” (Marsden, 1975, p. 215). This anticipatory state of “the realm between non-being and being” (Marsden, 1975, p. 216) is a long-standing principle in theatre analysis, which regards the empty space as “the visual equivalent of ‘Once upon a time’” (Alfreds, 2013, p. 36), and where the simple act of a person entering that space “is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged” (Brook, 1968, p. 11).

For the workshops and rehearsal we gain access to Massey University’s theatre lab in Wellington. It is a classic black box—a void contained within four inky black walls. We spend the first few weeks doing an exercise in world making—when we play with body shapes, movement, lighting states and sound to create and dissolve different worlds in the play: the jungle, a bar in Vung Tau, a war memorial, a video game.

In a research context, the empty space afforded by the black box is closest to a hermetically sealed theatre laboratory for artist-researchers to draw out, frame, analyse and play out a myriad of storied realities—and at the same time minimise background noise:

We want to theatrically realise the internal worlds of the veterans reflected in the data: their feelings of helplessness, worthlessness, anger from being scapegoated, and of their mana being trampled on when applying for their war pensions. And the distress of having to bring up old memories to prove they were there and struggling to put them back when their case assessment is over.

We clear the floor to work out how we are going to do this. We listen to a recording of the veterans talking about being made to feel like beggars asking for handouts. Their words are forthright and defiant, their voices soft, laboured and raspy. We discuss how hard it must be for them to still carry

the burden of war, and the difficulty with which some of them breathe. We establish a blackout, wait awhile, then set a dim blue lighting state. One of the performers silently walks into the space then improvises a manawa kiore—the last gasp before death: she audibly exhales and gently collapses to the ground. One by one, each performer follows the same pattern: walk, perform manawa kiore and collapse. The centre piles up with bodies and the dim blue light cross fades into an intense red spill. An actor playing a veteran enters with an entrenching tool and mimes digging through the pile of bodies. A soundtrack of the veterans’ voices accompanies the scene, and is underscored by the repetitive clang of a hammer against steel to highlight their frustration.

Te Wheiao—The Liminal Space

Since Homi K. Bhabha’s (1994) foundational piece on liminality and hybridity theory, drama theorists have been quick to apply these notions to theatrical practice, specifically the power of live theatre to invoke a “third space” for culturally diverse voices (Greenwood, 2001). This third space nurtures innovative practice, creates alternative realities and amplifies the voices of the oppressed (Schechner, 2006). It also legitimises anti-essentialist practice, positioning Indigenous cultures and performance methodologies as fluid, modernising and able, like any other culture, to use a variety of tools (Bhabha, 1994). As mentioned earlier, liminality naturally occurs on the marae, as demarcating thresholds between tapu and noa areas or as performances of transition between activities. Theatre practitioners can apply this same notion of liminality to deviate from well-known conventions like Aristotle’s Three Unities (of time, place and action):

While the plot unfolds over a 24-hour period in a bunker, scenes intermingle with the veterans’ memories of patrolling the jungles of Vietnam and Borneo, of helicopter insertions and ANZAC dawn parades. In order to help audience members suspend their disbelief and buy into the required shifts between timeframes and locations, we establish the set as liminal space—a “no man’s land” that is unsettled and ever shifting. Scenes are constructed and dissolved through movement, lighting changes and repetitive sound cues that the audience learn to associate with a particular setting. The veterans in the audience connect with these sounds on a deeper level, recognising them as radio chatter from the Battle of Long Tan and a Morse code message from their old unit.

Some versions of the Māori Creation Story identify the first liminal state as Te Wheiao, a tiny shaft of light that sparked the curiosity of the children of Ranginui and Papatūānuku, leading to their decision to separate their parents (T. A. C. Royal, personal communication, August, 18, 2017). Other versions describe Te Wheiao as the first light, which dwelt at the edge of darkness and heralded the rendering apart of the sky and earth to bring forth te ao Mārama, the world of being (Barlow, 1991). Te Wheiao is uttered in tauparapara that prepare the marae ātea for the next speaker, and is the term given to the difficult transition phase of childbirth when a baby travels through the birth canal (Barlow, 1991). The merging of Māori and tauwi notions of liminal space evokes an investigative approach that is naturally curious and seeks to push boundaries in order to illuminate new possibilities and knowledge:

The chorus members perform a range of individual roles to realise the veterans' stories and to support the drama between the two main characters. As a united rōpū they manifest as a swarm of pūiri who symbolise the spirits of the dead. We run an intensive two-day wānanga on pūiri, wairua, kēhua and tūpāpaku. The chorus cobble together a movement palette drawn from their various backgrounds in kapa haka, ballet, hip-hop, flow work, contemporary dance and mau rākau. With this new language they start experimenting with excerpts from the transcripts; they fashion a helicopter, a jungle patrol, a menagerie and a health clinic.

Te Ārai—The Veil

From the age of the ancient Greeks through to the present day, dramatists have traditionally offered the stage to the gods, ancestors and supernatural forces to roam, play and meddle in the lives of mortals. This tradition manifests in classical plot lines that include ghostly visitations, fairy mischief or divine intervention, and in the retention of theatre superstitions such as ghost lighting an unused stage, not whistling in the theatre, and never, ever saying the official name of “The Scottish Play”. Situated between the spiritual and corporeal realms, Te Ārai is the veil-like threshold through which our ancestors are invited to permeate the creative space. It is aligned with the notion of te ao Mārama and te ao Wairua as interconnected worlds that are able to penetrate and affect each another (Marsden, 1975).

Whiro functions as a deus-ex-machina—to simultaneously complicate the story, increase dramatic

tension and provoke the characters into re-evaluating their purpose in life. As the patron of war veterans, Whiro's appearance near the end of the play clears a space for the audience to hear the chorus perform the veterans' kōrero about the ever-present threat of death: “Fear with constant attention. It keeps you on your toes. When I feel it my hands go tight, real tight on the gun. And in the chopper, just as we lift up and go over the wire, the guts feel awful . . . I've never felt so exposed and so lonely.” Whiro is not played by an actor but realised by an amalgamation of technical effects meant to stimulate the senses of the audience. The lighting operator heralds Whiro's approach as a pulsing red light, while the sound designer creates Whiro's character sound by mixing together a wobble board, the rotor thump of a Huey, and a round from an M60. He then maxes out the bass on the speakers so whenever we trigger Whiro's sound cue the floor vibrates beneath the audience's feet to suggest that Whiro is approaching from below.

In Theatre Marae, Te Ārai signifies and normalises the concept that our atua and tūpuna walk among us. It is expressed in the daily recitation of karakia that call upon ancestral presence and support for the project, and in wānanga that explore ancient pūrākau, family stories and tribal histories. Te Ārai is invoked in routines and exercises that ground the actors into a focused discipline, so they continue to apply technique and carry out the creative decisions found in rehearsal yet remain open and available to creative guidance from beyond. Such reverence emphasises the sanctity of the work being undertaken, and reifies our connection with those who went before us and the ancestral knowledge that may yet be revealed in the investigation. Te Ārai demands humility and sensitivity from researchers, and brings a sharpened focus onto our responsibilities and researcher ethics, and our place in the scheme of things.

Papa kōrero—talking place

Theatre Marae calls on the concept of world making when co-opting a venue for a theatre production. Through everyday performances of sacred and secular rituals, and the privileging and normalising of te reo Māori, the venue is re-established as a Māori theatre. Theatre Marae routines emphasise a kāinga mentality where every member is valued and has a place, and every task, no matter how small, contributes to the greater whole:

We want the company to feel safe and supported to explore, to create, to play, to offer ideas—and to not

fear failure or rejection. Workshops for exploring and improvising new material are interwoven with formal rehearsals—in a daily schedule sign-posted by karakia, mihi, warm-up routines, reflection rounds, shared kai and clean-up. Everyone shares the load—there are no stars in this rōpū.

This aims to nurture whanaungatanga and tuakana-teina, and to discourage the discord and elitism that can develop between factions of a theatre company.

In the theatre world, the stage is the closest version of the marae ātea. However, to avoid issues associated with cultural appropriation and transgression of tikanga through the misuse of terminology, the Theatre Marae stage is not referred to as a marae ātea (nor as atamira, which is in common usage these days). Instead, it is redefined as a papa kōrero that hosts the performance narrative, production meetings, karakia, creative wānanga and research, and the airing and talking through of contentious issues. During a performance the papa kōrero is the physical manifestation of te ao Mārama, where human endeavours, foibles, failings, tragedies and triumphs are played out in the airspace between earth and sky. Guided by the playscript and framed within the dimensions of the papa kōrero, the performers work on behalf of their characters to hunt down objectives, claim territory, advance the plot and, with their bodies and voices, carve out the story in the airspace between.

This carving of the air is not taken lightly, but intentionally mapped in order to cultivate a rise in dramatic tension. Theatre prizes dramatic tension for its contribution to advancing the plot to its climax and denouement. In a similar vein, a Theatre Marae approach values tension, conflict and challenge as necessary for transformation, growth and problem solving. This value underpins the feedback sessions or matapaki that are facilitated between audience and performers. Here, at the end of a performance, the house lights are brought up to eliminate any remnants of a fourth wall between stage and auditorium, and the audience and performers may choose to add further analysis, critique, interpretation and questions about the research and its outcomes:

A veteran of the Korean War stands up and thanks his mokopuna for bringing him to the show. Although he did not serve in Vietnam he recognises the story and the similarities between his experiences and those of the soldiers who came after him. . . . A woman approaches the tech desk and points to a young man standing near the exit:

“My son was in Afghanistan. He told me that what the veterans said in the play is still true today—the same thing is going on for him and his mates.” . . . On another night, a gentleman who protested in the 1960s says that the script should include an apology to the people of Vietnam.

For researchers, the end-of-show matapaki session is valuable for gauging the resonance or validity of the work from the perspective of the community. From this analysis, and if required, further work can be done to edit the script and/or refine the performance. This is a particularly valuable exercise if the play is then invited to present in arts festivals, community gatherings and conferences for special interest groups or government agencies. Presenting research findings in these spaces—the government space in particular—allows for an unencumbered transfer of community knowledge to policy makers and can help establish relationships between community members and officials. More important, however, is the ethical requirement to koha the play back to the community, who are the guardians of the knowledge, who could stand to benefit the most from the research, whose members may have collaborated in the project, and who gave their permission for the research to take place in their rohe. It is here where Theatre Marae is truly in its element, when the play is taken on to the marae or into the main house without the usual trappings of stage lighting, screen projectors, elaborate costumes and backdrops—and is stripped back to a bare space upon which an actor stands and speaks.

Conclusion

The theatre and the marae originated as two separate ancestral spaces for Māori communities to gather and participate in performances of ritual, identity, conflicting politics, celebration and commemoration. As sites for the secular and sacred, both the theatre and the marae were ideal places in which the ancients could consider and debate the deeper meanings of existence, human activity and experience. Drawn together as Theatre Marae, they permit access to a wellspring of dramatic tools, techniques and philosophies that are invaluable for applied theatre making, education, group therapy and now ABR. By unpacking the conceptual building blocks of the framework, this article has aimed to show that it is possible to centralise, foreground and privilege mātauranga Māori throughout research design, and yet still apply Western tools in a way that will not recolonise the framework. Theatre Marae does this by

assuming Māori knowledge and practices that are embedded in language and performed on the marae as its central tenet, then inviting the addition of tools that promulgate the performative, embodied, liminal and situational—tools that do not threaten but align with Māori ways of being, knowing, relating and doing in the world.

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Glossary

Aotearoa	Māori name for New Zealand	pā	fortified stronghold, village
atamira	raised platform for displaying a corpse, stage	papa kōrero	place for talking, storytelling, speaking
atua	deity, supernatural being	Papatūānuku	earth mother
haka	dance; to dance	pōwhiri	to welcome; ceremonial welcome
Hawaiki	ancestral Māori homeland in the Pacific Ocean	pūrākau	story, narrative, ancestral story that holds ancient knowledge
hui	meeting	pūriri	ghost moth
kāinga	village, home	rohe	district, region
kai	food; to eat	rōpū	group, team, collective
kapa haka	codified form of group dancing	Ranginui	sky father
karakia	invocation, spell; speak to the gods	tangata whenua	people of the land
Kaupapa Māori	Māori philosophy, standpoint	taonga pūoro	musical instruments, music
kēhua	ghost; to haunt	taonga-o-wharawhara	costume, adornments for the body, make-up
koha	gift; to gift	tapu	sacred, esoteric, restricted
kōrero	to speak, tell; story, storytelling, narrative	tauīwi	non-Māori
Māori	person/people Indigenous to Aotearoa	tauparapara	utterance at the beginning of a formal speech
mana	respect, dignity, personal authority	te ao Māori	the Māori world
manawa kiore	last breath before dying; to yield to defeat	te ao Mārama	the world of understanding, being, reality, light
marae	communal gathering place	te ao Wairua	the spiritual realm
marae ātea	sacred space in front of the meeting house	Te Ārai	The Veil, the threshold between the spiritual and corporeal realms
matapaki	discussion	Te Kore, Te Korekore	The Void, the nothingness prior to the creation of the world
mātauranga	knowledge	te reo	the language, Māori language
mau rākau	Māori weaponry	Te Wheiao	The Liminal Space, site of emergent being
mauri	essence, life force	tikanga	custom, tradition, the right way
mihi	greeting, acknowledgement	tuakana-teina	elder sibling-younger sibling; a type of mentoring system
mokopuna	grandchild/ren	Tūmataunga	personification of warfare, guardian of people and the marae ātea
ngā mahi a te rēhia	the arts of entertainment	tūpāpaku	corpse
ngā tākaro	games, sport	tūpuna	ancestors
noa	secular, not sacred, common	wāhine toa	warrior women
		waiata	song; to sing
		wairua	spirit, soul
		wānanga	space and time given over to knowledge production and transmission
		whakapapa	genealogy
		whanaungatanga	relationship
		whare karioi	travelling troupe of performers
		whare tapere	traditional house of entertainment
		Whiro	personification of evil and guardian of veterans

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