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The Physicality of Māori Message Transmission — Ko te tinana, he waka tuku kōrero*

This article explores the transmission of meaning via the body in the Māori performing arts through the medium of *haka* (Māori posture dances). Both the physical and spiritual aspects of Māori performance will be explored to determine the ideals of effective performance within the Māori world. *Haka* is an art form with various classes and subclasses; and this article describes these classes and subclasses in relation to their function and physical form. This analysis will highlight the ability and potency of *haka* to transmit social and political messages. Moreover, I will examine the specific bodily actions and movements associated with Māori performance with regard to the way in which it is used to emphasise, physically articulate and consequently enhance the verbal performance and overall transmission of meaning.

Performing arts fulfilled a wide variety of social and political functions in traditional Māori society. These functions included welcoming guests (haka pōwhiri - haka of welcome), fare-welling and mourning the deceased (waiata tangi laments), attracting a mate (waiata whaiāipo - "sweetheart songs"), giving advice or instructions (waiata tohutohu - message bearing songs), restoring self-respect (pātere - fast chants), intimidating an adversary (peruperu - war dance) and the transmission and making public of social and political messages (haka taparahi, ngeri - ceremonial haka). Regardless of function, the key aspect in Māori performing arts was the words and the message they contained. However, it was the body that was the instrument and vessel of delivery.

The haka, as one form of performing art, is a posture dance accompanied by chanted or shouted song. Haka are often performed by groups of men, and increasingly today by groups of men and women. One of the main characteristics of haka are that actions involving all parts of the body are used to emphasise the words.

^{*}Note to readers: It is the practice of this journal to italicise Māori words in text unless they are proper nouns (e.g. place names, names of tribes, names of people). Each Māori word will be translated in the text on its first occurrence; or where longer explanations are necessary these will be found in the endnotes.

IHI, WEHI, WANA

Haka is comprised of both physical and spiritual aspects. The spiritual aspects of haka and its performance are linked to various cultural concepts contained in the Māori world-view. These include the concepts of *ihi* (authority, charisma, awe-inspiring, psychic power), wehi (fear, awe, respect) and wana (thrill, fear, excitement, awe-inspiring).

The portrayal and attainment of *ihi* is considered to be the achievement of excellence in performance. *Ihi* is a psychic power that elicits a positive psychic and emotional response from the audience.¹ The response is referred to as *wehi*; a reaction to the power of the performance.² *Wana* is the condition created by the combination of the elicitation of *ihi* and the reaction of *wehi* during performance; it is the aura that occurs during the performance and which encompasses both the performers and the audience.³ These three concepts relate to Māori performance ideals and aesthetic judgement; and each must be present for a performance to be deemed excellent. Only an active performance, comprising of bodily performance, can have *wana*, provided it has *ihi* and *wehi*. A carving, for example, cannot possess *wana* for it is inanimate.

CLASSES OF HAKA

The physical aspects of Māori performance and, in particular *haka*, depend on the intent of the performance, the type of *haka* utilised and other factors such as location and intended audience. *Haka* and its traditional form and function are, therefore, not homogenous, but rather dependent upon a number of situational factors.

Haka are often erroneously referred to as war-dances. However, in Maori tradition, while some haka were used for war and warlike activity, they were also used for a number of other purposes. We can classify haka through their purposes as war dances, ceremonial performances, and as a means for message transmission.

Each class and sub-class has its own convention: its own style of actions, postures, accourrements, and presentation and these are highly contingent upon the social context within which they are performed.⁴

To provide an understanding of the purpose and function of the individual classes of *haka* and to allow the exploration of the various differences in physical form and performance, I outline the classes of *haka* below.

— War Dances

There are a range of different *haka* that bear a relationship to war, but all have slightly different functions and significances. The fiercest *haka* is called the *peruperu*. *Peru* is one of the Māori words for anger; and the doubling of the word intensifies the meaning. *Peruperu* was the true war-dance; performed on the battlefield when a war party came face to face with its enemy. Accordingly, its fierceness is due to the location of performance and the physical and mental conditioning of the performers. Awatere writes:

Hard conditioning makes the warriors physically and mentally fit to perform this dance which has the psychological purpose of demoralising the enemy by gestures, by posture, by controlled chanting, conditioning to look ugly, furious, to roll the fiery eye, to glare the light of battle therein, to spew the defiant tongue, to control, to distort, to snort, to fart the thunder of the war god upon the enemy, to stamp furiously, to yell raucous, hideous, blood-curdling sounds, to carry the anger, the peru, of $T\bar{u}$ matauenga, the ugly-faced war-god, throughout the heat of battle.⁵

Due to this, the *peruperu* was considered the pre-eminent *haka* in traditional society. The outstanding physical attribute of the *peruperu* is a high double leg jump performed in unison and throughout the *haka*.

Another type of *haka* which relates to war is the *puha*. A *puha* is a subclass of the *peruperu*, used to alarm and call kinsmen to arms. Thus the *puha* was not performed on the battlefield but at home in the *pa* (fortified villages).⁶

A war party would also typically perform $t\bar{u}t\bar{u}ng\bar{a}rahu$, a divinatory haka, (also known as $ng\bar{a}rahu$, $t\bar{u}$ $ng\bar{a}rahu$ and whakarewarewa). $T\bar{u}t\bar{u}ng\bar{a}rahu$ were performed in front of the elders and experienced warriors of the village, prior to the war party leaving the village to do battle. This enabled the elders and experienced warriors to judge from the performance whether the group, or individuals within the group, were ready to go to battle. As with the peruperu in general, the outstanding physical feature of this type of haka is a double leg jump from side to side performed in unison throughout the haka whilst holding weapons. The $whakat\bar{u}$ -waewae is also similar to the peruperu in that it is performed by armed men but, unlike the peruperu and $t\bar{u}t\bar{u}ng\bar{a}rahu$, there is no jumping as only actions involving the arms are performed. This type of haka is often performed by Ngãi Tūhoe⁹, as part of their welcoming rituals. It is used to show respect to the visitors through mock challenge.

- Multi-Purpose Dances

There are a series of *haka* that are not linked in function and that are appropriate in a wide range of contexts, but are similar in form. The first of these is the *ngeri*, which literally means to "look fierce or savage." These are short *haka* that are used as exhortations to urge groups on to the goal stated in the *haka* or the collective goal of the group. *Ngeri* do not have set actions and thus allow the performers to use any action that they deem appropriate to emphasise the words.¹⁰ This type of *haka* is usually done without weapons and when it is performed with weapons *ngeri* become instead *puha* or *peruperu*. ¹¹

Both manawa wera, which means to be excited or angry, and $p\bar{o}keka$ are similar to ngeri in that they do not have set actions. The defining distinction between them is that in Tūhoe manawa wera are performed at ceremonies connected with the dead such as tangihanga (funerals), unveilings, or tarimate (memorial ceremonies); while tarimate which are peculiar to the tribes of Te Arawa¹², can be performed at a variety of occasions.

And finally, *kaioraora* are *haka* that are used to vent hatred. *Kaioraora* means "to eat alive", illustrating the depth of feeling involved in these compositions. Symbolically, the performers would like to eat the subjects of the *kaioraora* alive. The practice of referring to your enemies as food was one of the most effective ways in which to verbally abuse a person in traditional Māori society.¹⁴

— Ceremonial Dances

In addition to war and uses which rely on the mock challenge of the warfare, the *haka* can also serve as a ceremonial dance. *Haka taparahi* — the literal meaning of *taparahi* is violent or blustering — are ceremonial dances. ¹⁵ As opposed to war dances, *haka taparahi* are always performed without weapons but have set actions that are displayed in unison by the performers. This type of *haka* is used particularly for the transmission of social and political messages, as they are composed to publicise the composer's opinion regarding current issues of importance. ¹⁶

Related to this ceremonial use is the *haka pōwhiri*, or *haka* of welcome: *haka* composed specifically for the welcoming of guests onto a *marae* (traditional area for social interaction).¹⁷ Another example of the ceremonial use of *haka* is the *hari kai* which are *haka* that are performed when food is being presented to guests on *marae*. As this brief overview of *haka* highlights, *haka* are informed by and inform traditional Māori cultural rites and accordingly have many different functions and forms.

--- Issues and Political Voice

Of particular importance is the use of *haka* as a means of addressing issues of pertinence to Māori. *Haka* and especially *haka taparahi* and *ngeri*, can be used as an avenue and forum to disseminate ideas and opinions related to such issues. In this regard, *haka* have traditionally and contemporarily been used as forums to vent frustration and to transmit political messages in a direct and unapologetic manner.¹⁸

Armstrong (1964) states that within Māori culture the *haka* is the ultimate vehicle for the delivery of a message:

It is disciplined, yet emotional. More than any other aspect of the Māori culture, this complex dance is an expression of the passion, vigour and identity of the race. It is, at its best, truly a message of the soul expressed by words and posture.¹⁹

Armstrong considers *haka* as a combination of words, posture and passion; forming an art that mirrors the identity of the entire culture. Being an oral culture, all the performing art forms were valued as oral literature. However, *haka* were pre-eminent among these. In particular *haka taparahi*, *ngeri*, *kaioraora* and *pōkeka* were employed as forums for message transmission. For these reasons *haka* has been chosen in this article to demonstrate the importance of the physical body in the transmission of ideas, knowledge and messages within the Māori world, both socially and politically.

In contemporary society *haka* are used to communicate both satisfaction and dissatisfaction. A recent case in point would be the *hikoi* (or walk, and in this context, a walk in protest) organised around the topic of seabed and foreshore ownership. Approximately fifteen thousand Māori and Māori supporters marched on the New Zealand capitol to register concern over a political decision. This walk incorporated *haka* of many types as a means of political expression.

PERFORMANCE

While the notion of *haka* as a translator of meaning is key, it is the actual quality of the physical performance of *haka* that determines the effectiveness of message transmission. Māori myth and traditions are saturated with references to the performing arts, and particularly to *haka*.²⁰ Many of these traditions not only focus on the specific composition but also, importantly, on the quality of performance and, subsequently, on whether the standard of performance was worthy of the message being transmitted. This highlights the importance placed on the ability to perform in traditional society. Good performance in Māori society is predicated on two particular attributes: the composition (created through the depth of language), and the performer (particularly the use of the body by the performer).

— Language

The first important attribute is the depth and standard of the composition itself. The type of language used in *haka* composition is known by some as *reo whakaniko* (specialised language forms), which includes the use of *whakatauākī* (Māori proverbial sayings), *pepeha* (tribal sayings), *whakapapa* (genealogy), metaphor, simile, allegory, pun and ambiguity.²¹ The *reo whakaniko* provides a sharpness of tone to the *haka*; and it allows the composer to be ambiguous in the composition and construction of the *haka* so that while those people closely connected with the issue at hand will fully understand what is being conveyed, those not so closely connected may not totally grasp the point the composer is making and, as a consequence, may not understand any criticism or hostility aimed towards them.²²

The metaphorical language contained within reo whakaniko paints the picture that the composer is attempting to portray. It is usually archaic, containing ancient words and phrases which are part of the language used in traditional ritual and ceremony. Due to its antiquity and ritualistic use, it is considered to be the language of cultural authority.²³ Such language contains important cultural concepts (social charters, lore) and knowledge (genealogy, traditions and history) and are stored and transmitted through these archaic words and phrases.²⁴ An example of this type of language is pepeha, which is a saying which acknowledges the important features of a tribe, both natural (like mountains) and human (like great chiefs).²⁵ Another example is whakatauākī, which is an archaic saying used to give instruction or offer guidance. The inclusion of whakatauākī provides the composition with the cultural authority that is drawn from tradition, while incorporating Māori cultural concepts and knowledge.26 Also contained in reo whakaniko are similes, which are likened to metaphors but considered to be not as grand. Examples of similes and metaphors in a Māori context can be found within the kupu whakarite (simile, metaphor, figurative language and figure of speech).27 In Māori society, the natural physical tribal entities (mountains, rivers, beaches) have important cultural significance as they are considered to be ancestors of the iwi through whakapapa. In haka people may be likened, through the use of metaphor and simile, to such prestigious physical entities. The effective and appropriate use of reo whakaniko requires the composer to possess a high level of understanding of the culture, the language and its uses.

--- Body

The second important component of good performance in Māori society, and most significant with regard to this article, comprises the various bodily postures, actions and formations that are employed by performers and groups of performers to aid the transmission of the message contained in the composition. *Haka* are composed in a way that firstly ensures that performers understand the meaning contained in the composition and, subsequently, allows the performers to resonate this meaning through physical performance. Complete understanding of the message contained in the *haka* can only be obtained by understanding the significance of the words and culture, and by having appropriate actions arranged and performed to reinforce those words. There should be a fierceness of action in the *haka*, punctuated by appropriate actions by the individual performer to express his own personality.²⁸ On the whole, the actions used in *haka* are strong and fierce regardless of their often friendly intent; they are expected to inspire awe and to impress the audience.

The primary goal of the physical elements of *haka* performance is to aid in the transmission of the message to the audience. Hēnare Teōwai, an acknowledged master of *haka* from Ngāti Porou²⁹, asserted that the art of *haka* performance is effective when the entire body is made to speak, "Kia kōrero te katoa o te tinana."³⁰

The *haka* is a composition played by many instruments. Hands, feet, legs, body, voice, tongue and eyes, all play their part in blending together to convey in their fullness the challenge, welcome, exultation, defiance or contempt of the words.³¹

The entire body of the performer is used in *haka*, from the eyes to the feet. The more able the performer is at using their entire body, the better the performance and in turn, the more likely its message is to be understood and considered.

There are many key physical elements that enhance the performance of *haka*, some of which have specific terms that describe the actions employed by the individual performer to enhance the performance of *haka*. These are impromptu actions used by the performer, as opposed to the set actions of the *haka* itself.

The use of hand movement is extremely significant in Māori performance. The primary action, the *wiri* (to shake or tremble one's hands), is the re-enactment of *te haka a* Tānerore from whence *haka* originates. According to tradition, Te Manu-i-te-rā or (Rā in other versions), the sun god, had two wives called Hine-raumati and Hine-takurua, who were respectively the embodiment of summer and winter. Te Manu-i-te-rā and Hine-raumati had a son called Tāne-rore. During summer when Hine-raumati is visiting the earth it is possible to see a trembling of the air just above the ground, and this is believed to be Tāne-rore dancing or performing for his mother. This quivering appearance is called *te haka a* Tāne-rore (the dance of Tāne-rore)³² and is still seen in *haka* today through the use of *wiriwiri*, or the trembling of the hands by the performers as they carry out both set and impromptu actions.³³

Another important body movement in the performance of the *haka* is the use of the feet and legs. The most common use of the feet is called the *takahi*, or stamping. The *takahi* is typically used in *haka* and *waiata* (song) to keep the beat.³⁴ Apart from the specific types of jumping, known as *pēpeke* and *whakapēpeke* (when the legs are simultaneously drawn up behind the buttocks³⁵), which are fundamental to certain types of *haka* (i.e. *peruperu*,

tūtū ngārahu and whakatū waewae), there are other forms of foot movement that can be employed by the performer. Peke or pekepeke is a type of jumping used commonly in haka performance when the performer flicks one of their legs up behind the other while jumping.³⁶ This particular action is often part of the set actions of haka and is often employed when performers are armed. Traditionally its use was aimed to intimidate an adversary by stirring up the dust and causing the ground to shake. Hiteki or hitoko occurs when the performer hops from one foot onto the other.³⁷ This term is also used when the performer walks on tiptoe, prances and struts whilst performing.³⁸ This is often seen in whaikōrero (formal speechmaking) and wero (ritual challenge to guests on the marae) as the performer mimics the mannerisms of birds or people to illustrate their meaning and to enhance their performance, for example when a speaker is comparing the actions of a person or group to the behaviour, physically or socially, of a particular bird.

The torso of the body is also a performance tool as demonstrated in *aroarowhaki*, the wriggling of the hips and the thighs, during performance. This is also the term used by some to describe the quivering of the hands during the *haka*, similar to *wiri*.³⁹ *Aroarowhaki* is often used to physically represent notions of pain and anguish, both physical and mental. It is particularly appropriate in *haka* such as *manawa wera*, *pōkeka* and *haka taparahi*. In contrast, when a *haka* performer acts in a defiant manner the torso movement is known as *mīreirei*.⁴⁰ This is used in performance when defiance or anger is the major emotion contained in the composition such as in *haka taparahi* or *ngeri* that may deal with issues of land loss or confiscation, cultural disempowerment and the social position of Māori.

The various parts of the face and its expressions are also important in the performance of *haka*. When the entire face is contorted into a grimace, this is called *whakapi*. Whakapi is coordinated with words or phrases contained in the composition that are associated with pain, anxiety or apprehension such as in *manawa wera*, *ngeri* and *pōkeka* that are performed at a *tangihanga* or related ceremonies.

The tongue has an important role to play in the performance of *haka*. The tongue represents the penis which was traditionally visible, and so the tongue should also be visible during performance. It is extended as a symbol of the performer's penis, of his manliness and his virility. Thus, female performers do not show their tongues during the performance of *haka*.⁴² The tongue's protrusion during *haka* is called *whātero* or *whātero*.⁴³ When the tongue is repeatedly protruded it is called *whātero* or *whāterotero*.⁴⁴ It must be noted that *whātero* is only used selectively to emphasise certain words or phrases as the rhythm and lyric of the *haka* must be maintained throughout. Therefore the performer will choose specific words or phrases to emphasise with *whātero*.

The tongue is also the means by which a performer can convey his thoughts to the audience through language; it is the avenue by which the thoughts of the performer can be expressed. On the *marae*, it is usually the male who stands to speak and thus to convey the issues his people bring to bear. Therefore, the collective *mana* (prestige) of the group can rise or fall according to the standard of the speechmaking. The displaying of *whātero* during performance emphasises this role of the male in Māori society as the spokesman for the *iwi* (tribe) or $hap\bar{u}$ (sub-tribe).⁴⁵

The eves are an important instrument used by both male and female performers to punctuate and add emphasis to particular words and actions. There is much that the eyes can say that the rest of the body cannot.46 In Māori culture, it is believed that the eyes are the window to the soul and so their effective use in performance is considered essential.⁴⁷ Due to this there are many terms and actions related to the use of the eyes in performance. The most prolific of these is the pūkana which is when the eyes are opened wide and the pupils dilated; sometimes known as ngangahu. Pūkana are frequently used to emphasise a particular word or phrase that the performer deems important, particularly those containing the important ideas or themes of the haka. Pōtētē occurs when the eves are closed and then opened again during the performance of a haka or waiata.48 Similar to the pūkana, pōtētē are used to emphasise particular words or phrases. However, due to the contrast created by first closing the eyes before dilating them on a specific word or phrase, this action puts more visual emphasis on the words. Whakatautau is an action that requires the women to bend their knees and close their eyes during the haka, and is similar in usage to aroarowhaki with the additional movement adding further emphasis and therefore it is used to draw attention to an important idea contained in the haka.49 Through the use of pūkana, pōtētē and whakatautau the eves are used to emphasise actions or as an action in their own right. Further to their use as distinct actions is the Māori performance convention whereby the eyes are used to follow the set actions of the haka as they are performed, thus further emphasising that particular action. 50

 $P\bar{i}kari$, or $p\bar{i}karikari$, is a combination of some of the aforementioned actions. It occurs when the performer prances about with their eyes wide (i.e. $p\bar{u}kana$) and their tongues protruding (i.e. $wh\bar{e}terotero$) making yelping noises. 51 $P\bar{i}kari$ is particularly suited to solo performance, focusing attention on the performer and the performance. An example of this would be a haka performed on the marae as part of a $whaik\bar{o}rero$. These physical characteristics serve to enhance the performance of the haka and thus they aid in the transmission of the message to the audience.

There are many actions associated with the use of the legs, arms and bodies of the performers. These actions may vary in definition and application from tribe to tribe and are sometimes only relevant to a certain *haka* or type of *haka*. They all, however, are used by the performer to emphasise the words and enhance the transmission of the message contained in the *haka*. The wide, and comprehensive, range of terms and definitions associated with various actions used in performance illustrates the importance of the bodily aspects of performance in the Māori world and acknowledges the role it plays in the functionality of the various types of *haka*.

This article has highlighted the role of the body in Māori message transmission, with particular regard to the performance of *haka*. Within all of the Māori performing arts, the most significant component is the words and, while they are extremely important, the physical actions should not overshadow the words. The message lies within the words and the actions are considered to be only a vehicle for the transmission of that message. However, to simply disregard the physical performance of *haka*, and the part the body plays in this, is to ignore an important part of what makes an effective performance. An effective *haka* is one where the message and meaning is clearly understood, therefore, the

composition must be performed in a competent and appropriate manner. These sentiments are illustrated in the *haka* Tāne-rore, which talks about the genesis of *haka* and its essential attributes:

Ko te haka hoki he kupu kōrero He mea whakairo e te ngākau He mea whakapuaki e te māngai He mea whakatū e te tinana

For the haka is a message Born of the soul Spoken by the mouth And expressed by the body 52

Note to the reader: The references below do not necessarily follow strict academic tradition in the form of citation, which would treat the informants as anonymous 'subjects' whose identity requires protection. In this article, stating the identity of the kaumātua (elders) whose views have formed this description of *haka*, is important. It is through their identification that the writer honours their knowledge and experience. Throughout this article the writer acknowledges information shared with him via end-noting.

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