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To cite this article: Carol Brown & Fiona Graham (2017) The Pā Collective: Developing Dramaturgical Intersections, Collaboration, and Performing Layers of Place Post-Empire, Contemporary Theatre Review, 27:2, 263-274, DOI: [10.1080/10486801.2017.1298099](https://doi.org/10.1080/10486801.2017.1298099)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10486801.2017.1298099>



Published online: 18 Jul 2017.



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The Pā Collective: Developing Dramaturgical Intersections, Collaboration, and Performing Layers of Place Post-Empire

Carol Brown and Fiona Graham

*Pā, pā
Pah pah pah
Papatuanuku
Rising from the ground
Through the silt-ash strata
Searching her lost home.
Standing on the edge of the
Swampy muddy wetlands
Looking up the hillside
At the green green grass.*¹

PAH was a place responsive performance and exhibition created by the Pā Collective for the Auckland Arts Festival, 10–15 March 2015, at the Pah Homestead in Auckland.² *PAH* took place in the context of broader attempts to shift grounds for choreography, theatre, and inter-disciplinary performance in New Zealand, and in ways that escape the traditional stage and Western European aesthetic concepts. Largely defined through ongoing practices of questioning, seeking, unsettling, and activating, this work, with its openness to altered times and spaces, was researched onsite and integrated the audience as witness through a long-term project composed of a series of elements: a performance in

situ; an exhibition of paintings, an installation, and a photography and videography exhibition.

Once a common structure in New Zealand, pā are Māori shared group settlements, often on hilltops and fortified. The Pah Homestead is a colonial heritage building built on the site of a pre-European pā that is now home to the Wallace Arts Trust and Art Gallery. In the final phase of development the collaborators agreed upon the name Pā Collective to suggest a way of working at the location that challenged individual authorship and acknowledged the layers of its history. In aligning with contemporary methods for decolonising histories, places, and peoples in New Zealand, such naming carries a doubled significance.³ Pah and Pā are anglicized Māori and macronized Māori (the ā signifying a long vowel sound) terms respectively. In *PAH* the place responsive event, we played on these words through the chant or moteatea: ‘pā, pā, pah pah pah. . .’ cited above. This chant was composed by Gillian Whitehead in collaboration with the performers, dramaturge, and choreographer during a Noho Marae (a residency at a traditional Māori meeting house) at Star Gossage’s whanau’s (family’s) Marae at Omaha, north of Auckland (see [Image 4](#)). As a form of oration that transmits history, this chant is an embodied expression of a land-based dramaturgy in New Zealand, and it engages with a ‘relationscape’ of

1. Text chanted by Nancy Wijohn in *PAH*, dir. by Carol Brown with dramaturgy by Fiona Graham, Pah Homestead, Auckland Arts Festival, 10–15 March 2015, Auckland, New Zealand.
2. *PAH* (2015), for recordings of the work see: ‘PAH [Extracts]’, *Vimeo*, <<https://vimeo.com/134899055>> [accessed 10 May 2016].

3. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd edn (New York: Zed Books, 2012).



Image 1 Kelly Nash, *out the Window, Bone, Breath, Feather*. Photo © Solomon Mortimer.

entangled and troubled histories (in Image 1 Kelly Nash performs inside the chant).⁴

This project conceived new interdisciplinary relationships through a collective ownership of the composition process and a co-imagining of the significance of the performance location. It was premised on a choreography of relations that crossed times, ‘species’ of space, and cultural understandings of place through a polyrhythmic re-imagining of site as ‘dancing-place’ (see Image 3, *Dancing at the Crossroads*).⁵ In titling the work *PAH* the artists asked how they might challenge the history of the Homestead to recover the concept of group ownership embedded in the term Pā. The project included a composer, choreographer, visual artist, dramaturge, designer, curator, producer, dancers, musicians, and sound designer. In this practice-as-research reflection we examine how the *PAH* project became a catalyst for new dialogues between the land, the architecture, and the contributing artists through three different phases of development.

Janet Frame observed, ‘[w]hen I think of a place I think of it in its layers of time’.⁶ If, given the contemporary situation of New Zealand, which is undergoing processes of decolonisation, these layers are experienced as shifting, haunting, and frictive, then the Pā Homestead as performance site becomes a place of multiple embodiments and forms of corporeal presence. This writing after the event of a layered practice investigates the archeology of time within site-specific performance to explore how past histories inform the present and how present actions can speak to the past. In this project, the Pā Collective created meetings between *the host* (the house), *the ghost* (historical moments), and *the witness* (the audience), terms first introduced by Cliff McLucas to describe the relationship between place and event.⁷ With *PAH*, the ghosts re-inhabit the host to disrupt and fracture established histories. The audience become witness to these meetings, discovering new connections between the different layers of time. As McLucas observes, these intersections can be created by political choices that celebrate, confound, and criticise location, history, function, architecture, and microclimate. In paying attention to the impact of human forces the Pā Collective aimed to create a deliberately unsettling exchange between artists, place, and audience as an act of repair in post-colonial times.

The foundation of *PAH* emerged from patterns in the landscape: the traces of the movement of tidal waters left on muddy foreshores and the shapes of the bones of extinct birds found buried in the earth. Choreographer Carol Brown and composer Gillian Whitehead established interconnected forms between dance and music, drawing attention to these traces of the ‘temporal duration of life, making it felt’ through visual scores.⁸ Intersections between the music and choreography unfolded through mobilising these scores using a system of call and response. The emergent material became structured through formal patterns that overlaid multiple rhythms reflecting the deep time of extinct birds (moa) and the Cycladic time of the tides. At the same time the artists’ disciplinary differences and distinct ways of working began to influence dramaturgical assemblage. Composing alone, Whitehead finalised a notated musical score that

4. Dione Joseph, ‘Close Encounters with Pā’, *The Big Idea*, 18 March 2015 <www.thebigidea.nz/news/interviews/2015/mar/161659-close-encounters-with-pah> [accessed 20 March 2016]; Erin Manning, *Relationstapes: Movement, Art Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009).

5. Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* (London: Penguin, 2008); Kelina Gotman, ‘The Dancing-Place: Towards a Geocultural and Geohistorical Theory of Performance Space’, *Choreographic Practices*, 3.1 (2012), 7–23.

6. See Janet Frame, *Janet Frame in her Own Words*, ed. by Pamela Gordon and Denis Harold (Wellington: Penguin Books, 2011), p. 152.

7. Cliff McLucas, ‘Ten Feet and Three Quarters of an Inch of Theatre’, in *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation*, ed. by Nick Kaye (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 125–38.

8. Carol Brown and Gillian Whitehead, unpublished research notes, *out the Window Bone Breath Feather* (Auckland, 2013).



Image 2 Nancy Wijohn and Katherine Hebley in *out the Window, Bone, Breath, Feather*. Photo © Solomon Mortimer.

the musicians then learned, interpreted, and practised individually before performance at rehearsal. During rehearsal Whitehead would change small things in the notated score, but the basic composition was more or less there before dancers and musicians came together. This process, following the conventions of classical musical composition, enabled Whitehead to write undistracted by the studio process, and it also enabled the musicians to be employed on many projects at the same time. The music was recorded for Brown who then responded to the score through choreographic collaboration with the dancers over several weeks. This intersection between the two art forms meant that the dance followed the structure of the music and its organisational signposts determined the choreographic form. In one attempt to challenge this way of working, Brown and Whitehead set up possibilities for improvisation between the musicians and dancers. The physical movements of the instrumentalists – a cellist and a clarinet player – and the way they played (standing or seated) provided an opportunity for the dancers to intervene, to become purposefully entangled. Cellist Katherine Hebley, for example was seated on the floor and ‘held’ by dancer Nancy Wijohn, who played with her (see [Image 2](#)).

Deleuze has written that the edge is where events occur: ‘events are like crystals, they become and grow only out of the edges, or on the edge’.⁹ In this practice boundaries became blurred and performers moved beyond their comfort zones to work at the edge of their artforms and experience. The dancers experimented with breath and voice while musicians explored body contact and movement. Dancers and musicians became engaged in a negotiation through which their movement and music changed each other. These intersections created a fluidity and integration between the different art forms. The dancers were ‘singing into the cracks’ and the musicians were ‘leaning at the edge of the crater’.¹⁰ Working into these cracks the collaboration resisted an illusion of unity and harmony between art forms. Rather, it sought to create spaces at the edge of encounter, where actions of entering, meeting, and parting played out through manifold tensions, affects, and sensations.

Working with dramaturge Fiona Graham, the second phase of the development process was a

9. Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. by Mark Lester and Charles Stivale (London: Athlone, 2004), p. 12.

10. Brown and Whitehead, unpublished research notes.



Image 3 Haanz Fa'avae Jackson, Zahra Killeen-Chance, Kelly Nash, Emilia Rubio, and Nancy Wijohn, *Dancing at the Crossroads*, PAH. Photo © Solomon Mortimer.

site-specific research performance titled *out the window bone breath feather* at the Pah Homestead.¹¹ This is a grand colonial house that is now an art gallery at the edge of Auckland where Whitehead was artist in residence (see Image 4, Pah Homestead). Whereas the first phase of performance research had happened in a black box performance studio, the new site for the process was a colonial heritage house. The original intentions for the work emerged without specific consideration of site or situation of performance. However, with Whitehead's residency there was a serendipitous offer from the House to become not just the host but also the subject. The next layers of the work emerged through a sustained research collaboration exploring the colonial history of the house and its pre-colonial past as a seasonal pā. This was not to leave behind the original intentions founded in patterns of tides and the artefacts of bones but to suture these sources with the layered histories of Aotearoa (New Zealand), where archaeology and architecture combine and where questions of housing, homelessness, and property value were increasingly debated.

Dancing at the Crossroads

Now working with three musicians and four dancers, the artists began to use the established material to compose an ambulatory performance where the audience journeyed through the house and gardens as participants and witnesses. At this point there were new connections as dramaturgical choices engaged with the architecture of the house, the history of the site, and the stories of people who had lived there across times. A backdrop to the making of this work was a rapidly developing housing crisis for Auckland as the city population expanded and property prices grew exponentially. The cycle of boom and bust for Auckland's housing market since early settlement, and the problem of homelessness and poor housing conditions for many in the city today, contributed to the work becoming increasingly focused on how and by what means we 'arrive', 'host', 'settle', 'un-settle', and 'leave'. In particular, we were drawn to the history of how the land changed hands and ownership.

It appears that the land the Homestead is built on – known as Monte Cecilia since 1913 – was first inhabited by the Wai-o-hua tribe of which Tamaki o Kiwi was the last leader. The current Pah Homestead is built on a ridge that once hosted an extensive fortified pā. Whataroa Pā (meaning 'long store') was one of a series of seasonal sites for the

11. *out the Window, Bone, Breath, Feather* (Pah Homestead Auckland, 2013). See 'Out the Window, Bone, Breath, Feather', *Vimeo*, 24 January 2014 <<https://vimeo.com/85009648>> [accessed 10 May 2016].



Image 4 *Pah Homestead*. Photo © Solomon Mortimer.

Wai-o-hua people before they were systematically overwhelmed by another iwi, Ngati Whatua around 1750. Since the demise of Wai-o-hua people in this area, the land had lain empty for some time before early European settlers to Auckland became interested in it; at this stage it was renamed ‘Uinui Block’.¹² It was ‘surrendered’ by Wiremu Hopehona to land dealer and auctioneer William Hart in 1845 for two pairs of boots, two pairs of trousers, and a horse, a deal that was subsequently legitimated by the crown as a land purchase in 1847.¹³

Hart almost immediately set about building his homestead on the site of the former Pā. The site of the original Pah Farm Homestead is the same location as the subsequent one, a much more ostentatious Italianate mansion built by James Williamson and completed in 1879.

Once built the house was passed between different notable Pākehā (non-Māori) Auckland families through times of fortune and bankruptcy until it was purchased by the Catholic Church in 1913. Since that point, it has been used as a convent, a school, an orphanage for girls, and emergency housing for new immigrants and homeless people until, in 2006, Auckland Council bought it from the Church and restored it. The current ‘tenant’ is

the Wallace Arts Trust, founded by one of New Zealand’s major arts benefactors, Sir James Wallace.

Unable to ignore these stories, we became interested in how we might illuminate the present by drawing on this past ‘to make a future worth hoping for’.¹⁴ The original idea for the work, a dance-music event that played with being on an edge, changed to accommodate these narrative layers. Layers of time and the memories of the house as host were plundered to create a repertoire of images that connected with distinct phases of the house and land’s history. This cultivated an awareness amongst artists and audiences of our inhabitation of the present as haunted by presences from the past: *Ghosts inherit the moment because the moment is everything*.¹⁵

Through a collaborative dialogue the artists attempted to weave a multi-sensory journey using music, dance, text, and space so that the audience could become active participants in the re-remembering of the house and land’s contested and layered histories. This included juxtapositions and cross-cutting between narrative layers and between what was ‘of this place’ from the indigenous position of tangata whenua, and what was brought to and imposed on the place, through colonial settlement.

12. G. G. M. Mitchell, *The Pah Story* (unpublished manuscript, Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Auckland, 1959), p. 4.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

14. Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Experiments in Ethics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 2.

15. David Howard, ‘The Ghost of James Williamson 1814–2014’, *Landfall*, 229 (Autumn 2015), 20–32.

In this context the idea of the house as *host* is questioned as it is also a site of erasure. This work required a delicate balance between the different elements to sustain multiple interpretations, and provide clues rather than answers. Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks have described such performance work as ‘the latest occupation of a place where previous occupations are still apparent and cognitively active’ and as involving a ‘friction’ between what is ‘of the place and what is brought to the place’.¹⁶

Reaching for the sky
In the dark dark night,
Ashes in her hair
Stone on her tongue
Singing to the ghosts
Through the cracks of time
Calling through the cracks
To wake them from sleep
Pā pā,
Pah pah pah.¹⁷

The dramaturgy brought hidden layers of meaning into tangible presence. As in the delivery of the chanted text (*moteatea*) above, the performers sung into the cracks between colonial, settler, and Māori narratives of history un-settling stable narratives of place. Choreographed actions, music, and image created a hybrid composition of diverse situations that overlapped and interfered with each other. The house, with its colonnaded Italianate porch entrance, sweeping wooden staircase, bronze grill vents circulating breaths from room to room, curved bay windows from Germany, panelled walls, kauri floorboards, carved doors, Victorian cornices, and marble fireplaces carved by ‘anarchists from Carrara’, was co-imagined as a space of many thresholds. To pass through these thresholds with voice and music was also to metaphorically ‘see’ through layers of the past, to what lay beyond or outside of the received history of settler culture, to ‘wake them from their sleep’.¹⁸

In *PAH* there was a central juxtaposition between inside and outside as windows were used to frame different kinds of watching and seeing. These intersections between inside and outside shifted the power relations associated with the direction of the gaze as the audience at times became observed by the performers who looked in

on them from the windows. The artists aimed to create a direct engagement where the audience became active witnesses rather than passive spectators. In this version an actor, Peter Tait, became the catalyst, moving people around the house while evoking different historical moments. As ghost, land agent, and realtor he sought to negotiate with his audience about their possession of the unpossessable. Constantly appearing and disappearing, he was on the edge of the main action, often seen outside the house, unhoused and unhomely (see *Image 5*).

The performance moved through spaces, from the grassy bank outside the house, to the driveway and portico, through many different rooms (ballroom, drawing room, former convent cells), staircase, and landings, to the garden and into the park beyond. In this way the visitor as witness was invited to put together her/his own version of its layers by composing her/his own journey through them. There were intersections which became influenced by changes in light, wind, and unplanned audience encounters. Audience feedback praised the meeting between past, present, and future, and the sense of a simultaneity of times and spaces, that this created. As one person wrote: ‘it was very ethereal and evoked spectral presences of what was, is and will be – absent presences that are alive in us and the world around us even if we are unconscious of this’. Audience members also enjoyed the interplay between different performance elements: ‘I loved the moments where the performers and musicians were physically integrated, for example the flute and the dancer and the gorgeous breath sequence.’ They valued the experience of becoming active participants in the work and direct engagement with the performers: ‘I felt gently guided with a mix of knowing and unknowing about what was happening.’¹⁹

The third phase of development began when the project was chosen for production in Auckland Arts Festival during 2015 as part of a suite of works titled *Close Encounters*.²⁰ The curation of this series emphasised location-specific art practice that involved audiences in an intimate encounter. Brown and Whitehead searched for a visual artist

16. Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2001), p. 111.

17. Chanted text spoken by Nancy Wijohn, *PAH*, Auckland Arts Festival, 10–15 March 2015, Auckland, New Zealand.

18. Performance texts, *PAH*.

19. Audience feedback, unpublished email communication with the authors (Auckland, October 2013).

20. *PAH* (Auckland Arts Festival 2015) was performed by Haanz Fa’avae Jackson, Zahra Killeen-Chance, Kelly Nash, Emilia Rubio, Nancy Wijohn (dancers/actors); Katherine Hebley (cello), Luca Manghi (flutes), and Andrew Uren (clarinets). It was produced by Esther Roberts. Sound design was by Russell Scoones, costumes by Sean Coyle, and performance design by Grant Hall.



Image 5 Emilia Rubio and Peter Tait, *Out the Window, Bone Breath Feather*. Photo © Solomon Mortimer.

whose work could provide another ‘voice’ within the work, allowing the walls to speak differently, contrasting the imperial pretensions of the colonial architecture with a sense of whenua (land) and people (tangata whenua and manuhiri). After seeing her work in the *Five Māori Painters* exhibition at the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, they invited Star Gossage to collaborate. Gossage’s work has been described as ‘registering intense psychological and emotional states’ as well as her deep connection with her land.²¹ Her paintings are peopled with ghostly women who seem to float or be in the process of emerging from the ground or swamp. Brown was drawn to this work for its sense of the body as part of a landscape that is in process; Gossage’s figures extrude from the earth, arms elongated, they squat or huddle, sometimes they lie on the earth; groups of women appear as ensemble configurations suggesting at times a sense of inhabiting place and belonging and, in other images, exile and dereliction. The fit between the

architecture of the house and the paintings was not intended to be one of assimilation but of contrast and dialogue between different concepts of place and narratives of inhabitation and occupation as well as their corollary sense of loss of place and homelessness. Brown and Whitehead were interested in how Gossage’s work invites ‘ghosts’ or presences of the past by creating a kind of dream state.

Through Gossage two more artists became part of the collaboration, Sean Coyle as performance designer and Grant Hall as designer and co-curator of the exhibition. Now facilitated by producer Esther Green, the artists came together with sound designer Russell Scoones at Star Gossage’s Marae (ancestral house and ground) for a long weekend and began to experiment with new images, movement, text, and sound. The Noho Marae provided an opportunity for all of the collaborators and some of the performers to come together, get to know each other better through shared experiences, and develop the work. Being invited to do this at Gossage’s Marae brought the creative team into dialogue with her source material

21. Virginia Were, ‘Profile Autumn 2015’, *New Zealand Art News* (Autumn 2015), p. 77.



Image 6 Zahra Killeen-Chance, Kelly Nash, and Nancy Wijohn with projected images by Star Gossage, Omaha, Noho Marae. Photo © Solomon Mortimer.

as well as cultivating a sense of attunement to the ecology of the performance collaboration. During this time there was a fluid crossing between artists: Gossage painted whilst the dancers moved; the dancers offered their skin as ground for paintings of plants and birds; Whitehead developed a vocal rhythm using the text developed with the dramaturge; and the photographer worked with Gossage's paintings as projected images on the dancers' white shirts and bare backs (see [Image 6](#)).

A shared performance vision and collaborative identity for the Pā Collective was however difficult to achieve given the distinct practices of the artists involved, their physical separation, and the way these played out through their diverse media. The artistic collaboration developed through different processes that ran like tributaries towards the production deadline, sometimes converging and other times going in their own directions according to the demands of the media and the artists' proclivities. Brown collaborated with the dramaturge and dancers to weave more historical references through the dance, the musicians re-learned and practised the unchanged score individually, and Gossage made the paintings in her studio.

We aimed to unsettle expectations and create new ways of seeing. As the dramaturge Ruth Little has written: 'we are always looking at the nature of being out of balance. That's what's so brilliant and beautiful about dance it's the most complete

expression of what it is to be unbalanced.'²² However, the dominant code of the house as monument created an aura of expectation of a linear narrative. Working in a context that was part-gallery, museum-house, and heritage icon brought up issues about what it means to be site specific. What does the concept of the house as museum and/or gallery do for live performance? Boris Charmatz suggests that the museum always creates a narrative, and that it invites the visitor to see performance through a particular historical frame, in our case nineteenth-century colonial New Zealand.²³ But we sought to free the narrative by riffing on the hidden stories of children, ancestors, animals, novitiates, and the homeless, to create a place of complex temporalities. Live performance here became a condensed contemporary moment marked by multiple pasts.

PAH was intended as a multi-sensory encounter that was not hermetic, and that allowed visitors to access the work in different ways. They could be drawn through the house by the music of cello, flute, and clarinet; follow the directive of dancers' eye contact and beckoning gestures; be attracted to

22. See Little qtd. in Katalin Trencsényi, *Dramaturgy in the Making* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 246.

23. Boris Charmatz, 'Manifesto for a Dancing Museum', [borischarmatz.org](http://www.borischarmatz.org/sites/borischarmatz.org/files/images/manifesto_dancing_museum100401.pdf) <http://www.borischarmatz.org/sites/borischarmatz.org/files/images/manifesto_dancing_museum100401.pdf> [accessed 7 October 2015].

the paintings by Star Gossage hanging in the rooms or Solomon Mortimer's small black and white photographs of contemporary homeless people; or be commanded lightly by guides ringing a brass bell. If the role of choreography is in part to direct the audience's attention through movement, then *PAH* wove a sequence of interactive moments between audience and performer through multiple levels, focal lengths, and degrees of kinesthetic empathy, and this invited audiences to see differently as well as creating an altered sense of place. The dramaturgy for this involved a negotiation of the body of performer and audience member as many-timed. Shifting between the present and multiple pasts, at times the work leant towards a time that was pre-Māori, the time of the moa as well as post-settlement, whilst maintaining an awareness of the present moment as it arose in the liveness of the encounter of performance.

At the same time the collaborative nature of the process exposed artistic differences. The process involved a negotiation of spaces (inside, outside, physical, and imaginary), places (gallery, garden, and house), histories (pre-Māori, pre-European, nineteenth-century settler culture, twentieth-century modernism, and the decolonising present), timings (the complex musical registers of Whitehead's music, the pacing of the choreography, the exhibition-time of the paintings), bodies (performers, audience, research participants, and past residents), and differences (as Pākehā, Māori, and English co-authors). Rather than blend these differences into a *gesamtkunstwerk* or total work of art, we were interested in allowing these differences to be co-present. To allow for gaps, cracks, inbetween spaces where difference was unresolved, held in tension, and negotiated through ruptures, breaks, and discontinuities in the choreography and music. Our collaboration was a process of differentiation rather than unification.

In *PAH* the dramaturgy of performance is negotiated by participants who encounter different mythical, historical, and invited personae along the way:

the Seer
 the immigrant
 the runaway
 the homeless
 the orphan
 the stateless
 the child
 the religious sister
 the novice
 the guide

the gardener

Drawing on the land and house's history, the performers developed surrogate selves through a process of 'I' and 'Not-I'. Stories from past residents about the history of the house enabled the performers to construct their own personae. Working with these stories of how residents came to the homestead and inhabiting these through choreographed gestures, actions, and improvised play, enabled each performer to develop a journey through the work that was particular to their imagined, yet historically-researched experience. In this way the performers' personae became entangled with the history of the house and land in the present. At the same time, transitional objects, such as a large patchwork blanket, a cello, and a pile of sticks became significant objects in that they breached the divide between inside and outside, present and past, the imaginary and the real.

The bi-cultural foundations of the house required a careful negotiation between an indigenous Māori cosmology and a European Pākehā one. This was evident in the archival and oral testimonies that were used as source material for the development of the performers' personae. The personal testimony of an orphaned child, Charles Waddington, found in the archives of the Sisters of Mercy (informing the development of Haanz, the younger male actor's role), provides an example of the shadowlife of the house that our research uncovered:

Not yet ten, the boy left the convent still terrified he would be pursued by Mother Superior wherever he went. In contrast, he was not anxious about the examination in the friar's cell; nor were the other boys, it seemed. In any case, subjugation in the convent was so complete that no child would be capable of formulating a complaint, let alone delivering it.²⁴

Waddington's traumatic memory is referenced in the choreography of subtly accumulative brutality (an austere woman commanding a younger man-boy to kneel and repeatedly hit himself): a twitching, nervous clicking of fingers and sudden turns of the head, and a vigilant watchfulness. Other testimonies accounted for the presence of spirits that were alive in the house – 'the Māori feel them and

24. Charles Waddington, *Dear Great Grandson* (Rakaia, New Zealand, 2009), p. 17.

the Pacific Islanders see them' – in particular a woman with children on the balcony and a nun upstairs. Former residents admitted that the house had an unsettled feel and that 'a lot of blood was shed on this land between Māori'.²⁵ Previous residents expressed a sense of unease beneath the surface but also a desire to present their experiences in the house in a positive way, as it had been a place of respite where families could recover before moving on.²⁶

Through the dramaturgy we attempted to attune the audience to the tones of these memories. Following, roaming, squatting, and pausing, in close proximity with the performers, they witness the performers' embodiment of memories through their own corporeal demeanour and lexicon of acquired postures. They rested and listened through a simultaneity of multiple 'here and nows'. This process aligned with the collective's reluctance to 'settle' and occupy the place of performance, to command attention by fixing the relationship between audience and performer, and to resist an authoritative point of view. In this way the event was fleeting and ethereal and yet it proposed an ethics of listening to absences. These lacunae were acknowledged by the central device of singing into the cracks and moving in the spaces between notes.

Cathy Turner finds in the work of Donald Winnicott and object relations theory a useful way to combine the 'host' and the 'ghost' without assuming either the 'irreversible fragmentation' of deconstruction or the 'false resolution' of integration. She looks to the inter-subjective experience of the 'host' and the 'ghost' in site-specific work as, like the relationship between primary carer and child, a space where the distinction between outside and inside is not explicit but a negotiated threshold:

While theatre in a theatre building establishes a relatively unchallenged environment, within site-specific work the precariousness of all play (because of its relation to the real) is foregrounded. Site-specific work is not without its own ways of 'holding', but it plays at the edges of the frame, exploring the boundaries of the 'potential space'.²⁷

The precarity of playing at the edges of the frame was made manifest in *PAH*. The tensions between performance, exhibition, and concert and their different modes of spectating and listening were not necessarily resolved in this work. In inter-disciplinary site-specific work, bridges are formed between diverse elements, and multiple interpretations of the work and the meanings of place flourish. However, just as the performer–audience relation shifts through different focal lengths and degrees of proximity so too do relations between audience members, who form a provisional community of differences.

The experience of looking at paintings is different to the experience of encountering live performance, and different again when bodies are placed into the space of objects. Gossage contributed four 3-metre drop linen paintings that hung in the ballroom (see [Image 7](#)). Using deep ochres, blues, and reds these vibrant works stood out as dancing objects. The performers' 'commanding' of audience attention risked the possibility that the paintings became backdrops to the live action. However, the precise hanging of these works allowed for movement over, under, and around. Gossage's figures of women, children, and ancestors comingled with the active presence of the performers (see [Image 7](#)).

As mentioned previously, our participatory-audience were at times directed to move by three performance guides (see [Image 8](#)). Dressed in white calico Victorian undergarments, their demeanour and instrumental role as performers required them at times to be foregrounded as 'hosts', moving the audience from outside to inside, down the stairs, out to the balcony, and arranging them in the drawing room before finally drawing them outside to witness the performers disappear down the bank. These navigating interventions were calculated to facilitate dramaturgical transitions without dominating the performance. The host dramaturgy guided 60 people through the weave of music, dance, and art. They offered visible signposts for the audience journey but then stepped aside for the performance (see [Image 8](#)).

At the Pah Homestead the dominating collaborator was the house itself as it framed artistic contributions and audience expectations. In the final performances the ghosts re-entered and demanded recognition; traces of their narratives, their voices, their movements combined to create a place of many layers. Our research revealed that the land was a site of loss, hardship, and abuse as well as a place of refuge. *PAH* attempted to hold all these experiences through splicing between movement qualities and traces of text. The juxtaposition of text and movement on the stairs during the section titled *Tidal*

25. Oral interviews conducted by the authors at the Monte Cecilia Housing Trust, Mangere, Auckland, 4 November 2014.

26. *Ibid.*

27. Cathy Turner, 'Palimpsest or Potential Space? Finding a Vocabulary for Site-Specific Performance', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 20.4 (2004), 373–90 (p. 379).



Image 7 Kelly Nash, Haanz Fa'avae Jackson, Nancy Wijohn, and Emilia Rubio with the 'sixth dancer' paintings by Star Gossage. Photo © Carol Brown.



Image 8 *PAH*, performance hosts, Jazz Ofamo'oni and Isabel Shore. Photo © Solomon Mortimer.

developed from a legato cello melody in which rising and receding waves of spoken memories created clashing images and a sense of discomfort as the ghosts ran up and down the stairs and across landings and corridors. Individuals that had lived and worked in the house recognised these moments and commented that their experiences had been validated.

Through the paintings by Gossage, and the dancers' imagined movements of the moa birds, the land re-entered the house.

The realization of any artistic project is preceded by a diversity of possible outlines, multiple attempts and states of development, as well as moments of choice or rejection. This project, through its three

stages of development, invited a thinking through different disciplinary techniques and processes as well as layers of history in relation to a particular site, the Pah Homestead. But rather than presume that the performers and visitors were entering a pre-existing site, complete with a colonial narrative of patrilineal origins and ownership, we reconceived the site as a location of many layers (a muddy wetland, a terraced garden for kumara beds, a ground that moa crossed, a refuge, a Pā, an orphanage, a convent). The working process, premised upon a choreography and ecology of relations between the imagined and real histories of people, birds and place, instigated a coming-together of many layers, with audience as witness.

To conclude, we return to the initial provocation of our choice in naming the work *PAH* and the

collective Pā. For Māori, naming one's geography of belonging, river (awa) and mountain (maunga), is as significant as one's name. If sites are peopled places with resilient memories that survive their different repurposing through pre-colonial, colonial, and decolonising processes, as Whataroa Pā, Pah Farm, and the Pah Homestead, then they are also potentially 'dancing-places' where, as Kelina Gotman explains, ties to land, relationships between families and communities, and cultural differences can be played out, moved, and marked in space and time.²⁸ In cultivating land-based dramaturgies that are responsive to human and non-human histories of inhabitation we are co-imagining a future. A future that attends to the resonances of the past and how these are played out in our relations in the present.

28. Gotman, 'The Dancing-Place', p. 8.