

Relational Encounters in Urban Public Spaces: A Feminist Posthuman Autoethnographic Becoming of a Site-Specific Performance

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Abstract

This paper presents a reimagining of urban public space through a site-specific performance. The work is transdisciplinary, engaging architecture and art practice, and is documented through a feminist posthuman autoethnographic approach. Urban spaces are reimagined through coalescing the author's performative encounters, informed by collaborations with female Ewengki/Evenki shamanic practitioners from northern China, and female Rongoā Māori healers in Pōneke Wellington, Aotearoa, New Zealand. The performance, Healing Matrix, unfolds as a journey, traversing tangible and intangible relations in public spaces at the edge of Te Whanganui-a-Tara, Wellington Harbour, where the city meets the sea. Complex moments of becoming are drawn out as the performance moves around the harbour's edge, captured through feminist posthuman autoethnographic techniques: through mapping sensory impressions, improvisations, presences of other-than human entities, such as Taniwha (spiritual beings), and the researcher's embodied shamanic perceptions and experiences. These techniques are influenced by the female indigenous Rongoā Māori and Ewengki/Evenki collaborators. The research subjectivity is decentred, and intricately connects to a relational, embodied collective of women, colonial urban sites, indigenous multi-species traditions, and technological entities. The Healing Matrix performance attempts to capture complex relations within urban public spaces that are present at the cusp of awareness. In encountering these evasive conditions, and giving agency to them, the work suggests new ways in which urban public space might be understood. This paper positions feminist posthuman autoethnography as a way to understand such complex relations, emerging from creative performances, and shows how these might prompt a reimagining of urban public space.

Keywords

relationality; urban public space; Feminist Posthumanity; autoethnography; site-specific performance.

1. Introduction

This paper presents a reimagining of urban public space through the making and documenting of a site-specific performance: Healing Matrix (2024). We explain how the work engages relational becoming, an interconnected scientific and artistic way of knowing, supported by feminist posthuman discourse. Subjectivities within a feminist posthuman context are decentred, transcending the colonial 'man-centred' perspective. The work deploys a

mix of architectural and artistic practices in this 'decentring', engaging drawing, performance, site-specific writing and autoethnographic practices. Healing Matrix sought to uncover conditions that are peripheral, indeterminate—suppressed by colonial influence. It engaged feminist practices, influenced by indigenous Ewengki/Evenki and Māori Rongoā, and included multi-species influences as creative agents within urban spaces, in a series of site-specific events responding to Te Whanganui-a-Tara, Wellington Harbour.

The performance is part of a larger body of work researching the agency of creative practice to encounter intangible, suppressed conditions. Healing Matrix demonstrates how a process of creating and thinking can be deployed as a tool to reimagine urban space, using feminist posthuman methods and documentation.

Site-specific performances allow an exploration of relations that are hidden to colonial perceptions of urban space. What if creative works draw out not only precolonial histories and narratives, but also situated practices of decolonising? How might these complex relations connect with contemporary urban life? These hidden relations emerge through making creative work and documenting it in multiple ways, incorporating artistic and architectural, shamanic, autoethnographic influences. These diverse forms of creating and documenting creative work allow tangible, visible, sensorial aspects to be captured, but also allow intangible relationships within space(s) and place(s) to emerge. This form of performance, merging artistic, architectural and shamanic practices, thus becomes an ever-evolving creative research tool, through improvisation, self-reflection, and collective inquiry. The Healing Matrix performance in Te Whanganui-a-Tara involved a series of events in the dynamic zone between the city and the sea. In this dynamic spatial environment, performers performed a series of acts in relation to suppressed cultures, such as Taniwha water spirits, using experimental artistic and architecture practices influenced by shamanic Ewengki/Evenki and Māori Rongoā healing rituals. This paper presents the philosophical perspectives and feminist

posthuman autoethnographic approaches within this site-specific performance and suggests its creative research agency as a way to inflect or reimagine urbanity.

1.1. Research Background

The research builds on the researcher, Shannon (Ningfei) Xiao's collaborative experiences with female shamanic Ewengki/Evenki practitioners in China¹ and Māori Rongoā healers in Aotearoa New Zealand². The term 'shamanic healing' in this article refers to traditions which evolved from matriarchal spirituality, when a 'shaman' or healer enters an altered state of consciousness³. These shamanic traditions serve to establish - or reveal - connections with spirits in specific spaces and environments. The performance was carried out in Pōneke Wellington to prompt critical engagement with a space charged with settler colonial influences and indigenous Māori traditions. It explored the agency of shamanic healing to reorient, heal, and reimagine this colonised space, while also coalescing new concepts and methods of transdisciplinary creative practice, as a tool to rethink urban public space.

The performance pays homage to the story of Ngake and Whātaimai, the Taniwha, water spirits in Māori traditions who inhabit Wellington Harbour, and intertwines the researcher's personal journey from China to Aotearoa (see figure 1). Performers created a space with birch bark pieces, which are considered spiritual creatures by Ewengki, along with sounds and objects found along the shoreline. Participants engaged with various plants, waters, and supernatural

1 - The Ewengki (also known as Evenki, Ewenki) is a transnational indigenous tribe that traditionally nomadized between China, Russia, and Mongolia. A group of Ewengki inhabited the forests of the Great Xing'an Mountains in China. The term 'shaman,' which has gained global recognition, originates from the Tungusic languages, possibly from the nomadic Ewengki or the Manchu people in Northern China. Under the Chinese policy of urbanisation of the Ewengki people since 2003, most of Ewengki people were instructed to settle in Aoluguya, Inner Mongolia, China (Kolás and Xie, 2015). Now the name 'Ewengki' is widely used by local museums and documentations in Inner Mongolia.

2 - Rongoā is the traditional Māori healing system and practice among the indigenous Māori of Aotearoa New Zealand. It includes a variety of practices and places a strong emphasis on the spiritual aspect of health and well-being. Tohunga (a role similar to an Ewengki shaman or a Christian priest) were often responsible for Rongoā, especially its spiritual aspects.

3 - Anthropologists and historians seeking cross-cultural categorization have applied the label 'shaman' (or 'neo-shaman') to practitioners worldwide who, like classic shamans, use altered states of consciousness or engage cosmic energies in their work (Sansón, 2017). In this context, 'shamanic healing', as discussed in this article, encompasses specific practices from Ewengki shamanic traditions, Māori Rongoā Tohunga healers, and traditional Chinese medicine.

beings by referencing traditions of speaking and weaving from female Māori Rongoā healers. These acts were carried out during the performance, caring for the health and wellness of participants and all parties involved, within the local environment.

The research engages diverse voices in scholarly thinking on feminist posthumanity, as well as autoethnographic writing and recordings of the Healing Matrix performance. These methods captured the researcher's sensorial experiences, improvisations, and relationships with other-than-human entities, such as Taniwha and Birch Bark, involved in the public urban space where the sea meets the city. The results of this research are presented in a first-person perspective to emphasize the interconnectedness of creative research and its collective authors and influences.

1.2. Feminist Posthumanity and the Relational Becoming

The 21st century has seen a re-evaluation of the Western humanist ideal of 'Man' as the universal measure of all things. Feminist scholars, for example Rosi Braidotti (2013) and Donna Haraway (2016), have questioned this construct, asserting a broader spectrum of subjectivities to more meaningfully reflect the multiplicitous posthuman condition of contemporary life. According to Braidotti, a seminal feminist posthuman thinker, subjects encompass both living and non-living entities that are affectively embedded within contemporary complex systems, exhibiting dynamic relations with the world. Drawing from Braidotti, subjects in posthumanity form a relational community, described as nomadic, a transversal fluid assemblage of 'becoming' intertwining scientific and artistic ways of knowing, with inspiration from indigenous nomadic society (Braidotti, 2019, 2013; Deleuze & Guattari, 1980). This way of becoming emerges as a flow of changes and shared understandings of humans as a species (Braidotti, 2013). This perspective, influenced by scholarly discussions of coloniality and feminism, recognises the limitations of man-centred theoretical discourses and the suppression of sexual differences and cultural forms (Spivak, 1993). It encompasses discussions on agency, incorporating that of women, non-humans (including animals), machines—and even inorganic and cosmological entities, such as the earth

(Åsberg et al., 2018). Haraway (2008) describes a process of becoming of relations, where knowledge emerges by way of embodied encounters with multiple species. Especially in environmental and spatial contexts, situated knowledge of such encounters are experience-based (Haraway, 1988; Wilson, 2017). These concepts are widely discussed and applied in creative research that involves human and other-than-human actors, and their technological representations (Madsen, 2023). Contemporary research on de-colonisation also integrates indigenous and multispecies traditions in urbanised environments (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Attebery, 2020; Hokowhitu, 2023).

Posthuman ideas provide potentials for decolonising colonial perceptions of urban space, and also open up opportunities to expand embodied knowledge of urban space. Aotearoa is a settler colonial nation, where holistic and Māori experiences have historically been excluded. Feminist posthumanity is a way to critique and reinterpret these colonial spaces, through a focus on interconnected, relational becoming. This relational focus is evident in research led by women and indigenous people, in Ewengki practices of moving in and perceiving dynamic forms of spatial environments (Zhu et al., 2018; Safonova & Sántha, 2013), in Māori Rongoā practices of speaking and feeling the spirit realm (Mark, 2012; Salmond, 2012), and in the Māori concept of 'mauri' (life force) and the Chinese concept of '气 (qi)', (life force of the cosmos) (Engels-Schwarzpaul, 2018; Morgan, 2009). These research modalities deviate from the traditional ethnographic treatment of indigenous and cultural practices as stable and unchanging, highlighting the meaning of living traditions within public urban space.

Our research draws from relational aspects in architecture and art discourse, which has sparked widespread discussions, particularly a renewed interest in indigenous practices and their distinctive forms of engagement with space and place. Samoan architectural scholar Karamia Muller (2012) has described the relational aspects of space in her drawing practice as an act framed by indigenous Samoan migration history in the modern world, mapping ancillary structures and tangible and intangible elements in her drawings, extending them beyond traditional western architectural

tectonic representations. In the context of contemporary art, Bourriaud (2002) underscores an open and participatory relationality between the viewer and the art/artist in his work *Relational Aesthetics*. An example can be found in 'The Artist is Present', a performance by Marina Abramović (2010). This work involves a meditative act in a public space, drawn from Tibetan spiritual practice, that invites the viewer to gaze into the artist's eyes and to become a palpable/perceptible presence within the artwork.

1.3. Feminist Posthuman Autoethnography in Reimagining Urban Public Space

Our research draws from some typical examples of feminist posthuman autoethnography in encountering various women, communities, cultures and environments. For exploring environmentally safe and socially just space, architecture and art theorist Jane Rendell (2018) refers to her way of auto-biographical writing as an act of caring—a way of feeling and being with the site—by employing the posthuman scholar Donna Haraway's concepts of 'thinks-with', 'makes-with', and 'becomes-with' (2016). Journalism scholar Katie Warfield (2020), provides another example: Her work focuses on improvisational representations of her communication with Muslim women community, recording the performance of women's cultural identity through interviews, talks, conversations, and personal reflections. This approach captures knowledge through posthuman collective recording, and is carried out by following ethics of caring for her participants. Another example of feminist posthuman autoethnography is the expanded sensory experience in Rea De Matas's (2019) practice, in which she weaves together her own stories and perceptions with those of participants, drawing from cultural and embodied ways of encountering contemporary festive environments and cross-cultural events. These examples highlight feminist posthuman perspectives that coalesce the researcher, participants, and the representation of cultural practices and environments, utilising first-person autoethnographic documentation techniques.

In an urban and spatial context, drawing inspiration from feminist posthumanity and adopting a decentring approach to designing and documenting, the Healing Matrix site-specific performances allow complex relations

to be navigated. The decentring approach necessitates ways of design that encompass managing, presenting, and negotiating relations, of species' co-existence in urban and built environment (Hocking, 2017; Nicenboima et al., 2023). Drawing from these concepts, feminist posthuman autoethnography is used in our research to capture collective relationality in urban spaces through embodied experiences, recordings, and reflections on cultural practices and creative events. The Healing Matrix performance engages with this collective relationality through my encounters and shamanic perceptions in the streets, the harbour pathway, and green spaces of Te Whanganui-a-Tara, Wellington. The nuances of this relationality emerge from a feminist posthuman autoethnography, capturing my relations with other women, and other diverse human/non-human entities and communities which I refer to as feminist posthuman subjects. These creative events and autoethnographic techniques prompt ways to transcend anthropocentric, man-centred perspectives in architecture and artistic practice.

2. Performing the Relations - A Feminist Posthuman Autoethnography in Reimagining Wellington Harbour

Posthuman techniques, such as those suggested by Braidotti (2011), inform encounters with plural cultural identities. In the Healing Matrix, these enable diverse social/environmental relations in settler colonial public urban space to be explored. Māori researcher Glenis Mark provides support for these encounters, by exploring ways to understand the collective future of indigenous healing traditions (Mark, 2012). I am also pursuing these ideas; through exploring relational characteristics in my performances, I practice a set of narrations of my own embodied experiences together with real-world interactions with the 'other'—multiple relations of environmental conditions, shamanism, healing, other women, and other-than-human entities, such as Taniwha—and avoid romanticising or appropriating them by falling into theoretical self-referential obsessions. I adopt an autobiographical tone, to make myself accountable for nomadic shifts and performances. By contemplating ontological relations as both a creative practitioner, non-Ewengki/Māori researcher, and a feminist engaging with female indigenous practices, I define the self in my autoethnography as (an expression/a reflection/composed of) plural voices of the embodied collective. In my practices,



Figure 1. Performing along the Wellington Harbour. Source: © Sophie Jerram.

this collective assemblage claims a space of difference beyond colonial perceptions (Spivak, 1993, p.19 & 77) and re-assembles possible 'other' paths of becoming (Braidotti, 2013, p.140). I have defined my research in this way, as feminist posthuman autoethnographic research. I am grounding this nomadic depiction of the feminist posthuman not only in a cartography of thinking, but also in a way of (my) knowing, creating, and writing, in conversation with the collective others.

I am aware of the risk of normativity of subjectivities that assimilate all sorts of new discourses (women, indigenous, and technological subjects) (Braidotti, 2011, p.37; Haraway, 1988). Thus, the examination of how scholarly perspectives

shape my ideas and creative process is also explored in my autoethnography. These perspectives aim to uncover how scholarly viewpoints influence our being and becoming (Corson & Schwitzman, 2018), and prompt critical inquiry into 'mainstream' disciplinary discourse of identities and subjectivities within urban space. I draw insights from traditional indigenous practitioners and actively engage in specific practices of shamanic healing explored by those practitioners, embodying collective participation, discussion, and reflection. Through these, I hope to transcend my selfhood and represent my encounters from a relational perspective, presenting diverse ontological and cosmological subjectivities of the feminist posthuman. In my performance, I ask myself:



Figure 2. Building Ewengki houses. Source: Mani Nigelai Kederin, photo by Lishui Qian.

Which entities are encompassed in dialogues of shamanic healing, considering the diverse voices of histories, presences, and imaginings of the site?

What happens when my embodied experiences are considered in conjunction with other women, diverse ethnic communities, indigenous multi-species traditions, and technological entities, in a process of encountering, through a site-specific performance in public urban space: Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington Harbour's edge?

Can the experiences emerging from this embodied collective performance provide new relational understandings of public urban space?

2.1. Drawing the Taniwha of Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington Harbour

Excerpt from conference talk, Birkbeck, University of London, online from Aotearoa (Xiao, 2024)

The starting point was when I was drawing some kind of imaginary creatures, when I journeyed with the moving visuals, sound, and the movement of reindeer bell and drums, the landscapes, and the birch bark houses.

This is a kind of spatial experience generated by the shamanic ritual of consciousness journey during my fieldwork experience with Ewengki people since 2019. (see figure 2)

From the urban streets to the hidden forests on the northern borders of China. Around The diverse pine trees and birch trees, streams, ringing bell of the reindeer, and the space enveloped in birch bark.

Walking with the guidance of Mani, the indigenous Ewengki woman. She showed me a photo of when she was building a space with birch bark before, gathering materials and performing a shaman song. There are many uses for the bark: building houses, boats, creating shamanic ritualised space... Women also use it to create artworks since the times of the matriarchy centuries ago.

She said that the bark is spiritual, everything is spiritual.

Excerpt from conference talk, Lisbon Faculty of Fine Arts, online from Aotearoa (Xiao et al., 2024)

This performance takes place along the edge of the Wellington Harbour, in Wellington the capital city of Aotearoa. We led the performance visitors to walk along the harbour shoreline and at the same time, we performed and made music together in the environment at sunset, with the weather of a typical dramatic windy day. I titled this event 'Dialogue Before Sunset', with intention to blur the boundaries between light and dark, the visible and the hidden, and past and future narratives within this urban space. I guided the visitors to perceive the hidden lines—the old shoreline before colonisation, and the streams now flowing under the city: What we were walking on used to be water. (see figure 3)

I collaborated with the bark creatures to extend my intention to feel the presence of these entities.

...

The performance is a reaction to the mysterious Taniwha, Ngake and Whātaimai, which is a supernatural totem in Māori traditions, a human/non-human creature, evolved from male life in water to female birds. It also represents a geological urban area around the harbour where I live. I curate this cityscape as a relational subject, and it can be encountered, sensed, drawn, written, and performed. I drew this subjectivity referring to my cultural experience of a Chinese dragon and gendered experience of female birds in my surroundings. I sensed it within my living environment, its essence with the winds, the earthquakes, the ocean waves, the movement of qi and mauri, both life energy, and the visuals from digital media and sounds from speakers and baskets woven from native plants. It is also performed in my numerous conversations with these women, Mani, Paula, Tanya, and many others. I learned from their practices and constantly explored this subjectivity of the colonised harbour.

Taniwha is always accompanying us on this journey, no longer limited to the past, but also living in the urban present, or a traditional form of Māori knowledge for the future.

Excerpt from diary, Te Whanganui-a-Tara (Xiao, personal communication, October 2023) "Taniwha/ Miramar?"

...I can sense Taniwha somewhere when I was walking near my surrounding, Miramar Peninsula, where the Taniwha Whātaimai's body lies. I can even sense the past lake and the vibrant life. I know there's plenty of mysterious biological creatures around the sea, and I am learning slowly to get familiar with them. This is a totally new world for me, New Zealand, Aotearoa. My understanding of Taniwha identity is just deeply personal and is much like my uncertain identity here: a Han Chinese female collaborating with Ewengki and Māori women, doing things in Aotearoa. What can a Chinese tau-iwi (non-Māori) do with an Aotearoa Taniwha? What can I contribute to my discipline?

Living and moving between cities, I am always too anxious. This is why I need healing. It is like one of my Rongoā friends said, 'I think the healing is also in music, in the harakeke weaving. You should come to our gathering and experience it!' I remember what Paula, my Rongoā healer, reminded me of: 'The Taniwha is everywhere!' I should think less, and just explore more of the surroundings and develop the project and find more support. I'll see the light.

Excerpt from fiction of mixed memory of conversations with Mani, Paula, and harakeke flax weavers (Xiao, personal communication, November, 2023)

Shannon: Among the Ewengki, is there a saying that space is built around trees?

Mani: This statement is not correct. In the forest, there are trees everywhere.

Shannon: Oh, the space is surrounded by trees.

...

Shannon: I want to engage with the Taniwha of Wellington Harbour, trying to feel it in this space and place. I'm going to create a symbol of spiritual connection.

Paula: I just want to tell you, the Taniwha is everywhere, and you can feel your Taniwha everywhere with being mindful.

...

Shannon: I love your weavings.

Weaver: It's like breathing, it's a way of finding my relationship with the harakeke leaves. You can weave many patterns through this relation.

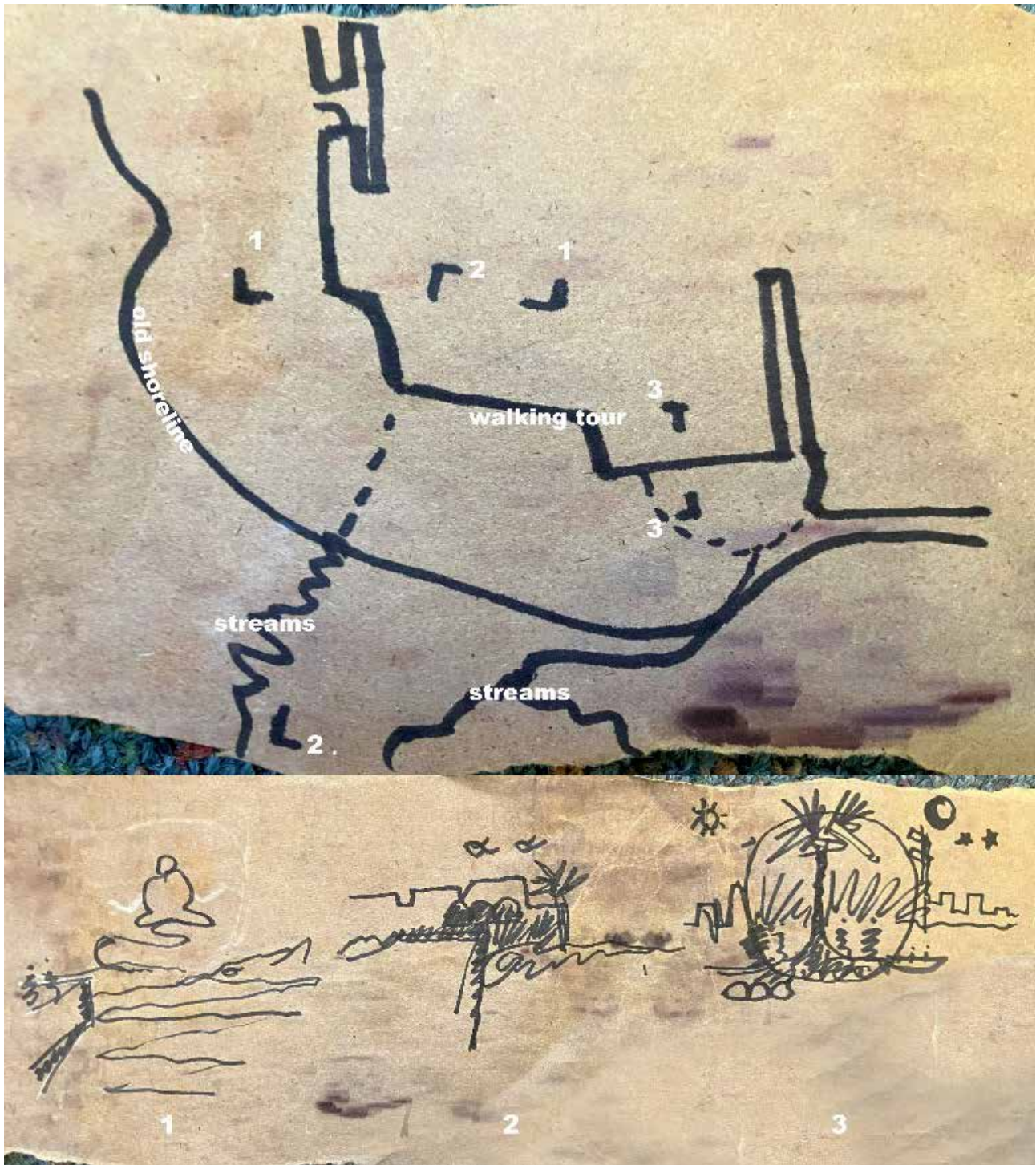


Figure 3. Drawings of the Taniwha along the harbour path and hidden waterways. Source: Ningfei Xiao.

Shannon: *like... a Taniwha?*

(After a while, Shannon's weaving is complete.)

Weaver: *Beautiful! Can I take a photo?*

Shannon: *Sure! Thanks! I will use some of my kono (flax basket) to hold my bark creature!*

2.2. A Sensorial Becoming

Excerpt from public speech in the beginning of the performance
(Xiao, personal communication, February 2024)

(After Paula's karakia—prayer, ritual chant)

...I would like you to take three deep breaths: breathe in, breath out; breathe in, breath out; breathe in, breath out; Let's start the journey...

(Held the bark in a harakeke basket, and led visitors to walk to the harbour area) (see figure 4)

...

Excerpt from conference talk, Birkbeck, University of London, online from Aotearoa (Xiao, 2024)

I photographed many natural birch bark and Ewengki treated bark to capture its spiritual essence, sewing it together with reindeer strings. The movement and augmented visuals of the tree bark merged with the sounds, emotions, and other intangible beings from the forests when I was wandering in the streets and the bush in Aotearoa.

I designed a mysterious creature in curved and organic form... journeying and violently fluctuating within the timescales, when I was seeking for healing and practicing the rituals as a newcomer in my current city Pōneke Wellington.

At that time I transited from the massive lockdown in China to a new land, my mind was filled with anxiety and fear,



Figure 4. A harakeke kono (flax basket) holding the bark. Source: Victoria University of Wellington.

yet my feminine body and spirits held a sense of wonder. I created the virtual journeys in my dreams by practicing healing.

Excerpt from conference talk, Cambridge University, online from Aotearoa (Xiao, 2024)

In this performance, we blended improvised sound and spatial installations through walking and perceiving in dynamic spaces inspired by female Ewengki traditions. (see figure 5) ... We performed a spatial installation around my body and at the end we co-performed a space in a garden by speaking and weaving with the native bush referencing Māori women's practices, as a way of performing the subjectivity of the Taniwha of the harbour.

Today is the universal full moon phase, just like that performance day. And I think it is a good time to read and play a little bit with a writing of what kind of space we performed together. Excerpt from 'Dialogue Before Sunset' album track release (Xiao, 2024):

Beneath the Māori, Chinese, and universal full moon, above the earth and water, around the wind, after the rainbow, and just at sunset.

Many beautiful beings once thrived around the Waitangi stream, now flowing on the surface of Waitangi Park again. Tī kōuka (cabbage tree), Harakeke (flax), memories of Te Aro pā (village).

Our journey continues in a space woven from the birch bark, her karakia (Paula's prayer), people, plants, kai (food) in kono (basket), melodies and chords, shaman drum and bell, dance beats, industrial sounds, companion, adventure, doubt, fatigue, fear, joy, calm, saltiness, and sweetness. The cityscape of the harbour.

Excerpt from interviews with Paula (Mac Ewan, personal interviews, October 2023)

Shannon: ... also at the end of the performance, I also would like to invite some visitors to come by and join me, maybe to do something around the trees or maybe to produce some sound. Should I also do something for them like before and after this, for the visitors to join me in this performance.

Paula: I think it's important that you all do a karakia before with intentions, and then you close it down with a karakia. Use a way of prayer in any culture, so it gives it closure and it finishes and then you can walk away safely.



Figure 5. Performing sounds and spatial installations with the bark, harakeke kono, and surrounding harakeke plant at the bush gardens. Source: screenshot from 'Dialogue Before Sunset', film by Lu Pang (Pang, 2024).

And that could come through many ways: light, wind, water. And there'll be many birds and plants. You just gotta be open to seeing and then being mindful. I think it's really important.

(I thought, oh, I should open my senses to the encountering of other beings...)

2.3. An Improvisational Becoming

Excerpt from conference talk, Lisbon Faculty of Fine Arts, online from Aotearoa (Xiao et al., 2024)

I documented this performance by improvisational way of film, music, poem, photography, drawings. And also, we documented and developed it referring to the comments, the experiences from our participants, indigenous women collaborators, and further audiences. Now I retell the story, I tell it from an improvisational way of perspectives, from myself and our human and the non-human we interacted with by practicing traditions employed by women.

When I document this in the feminist posthuman autoethnography, the subjectivity in my research is always

de-centred. Those voices, conversations, helped to redesign my methods and became new subjectivities in this colonised urban space. The co-existence of Taniwha, plants, streams, feminine energies, diverse cultures, cameras, and speakers is present within our complex relations in this man-made urban environment.

Excerpt from anonymous reviewers 1 (anonymous reviewer, personal communication, February 2024)

I felt lost and free. Tawhirimatea (weather) rocked. Aniwaniwa (rainbow) was the star of the show. #1 I saw the Harbour settle when you did your thing ...I loved how we participated. #Our whenua (land) needs more of this. Thank you for the experience.

Excerpt from anonymous reviewers 2 (anonymous reviewer, personal communication, February 2024)

I felt like we became a band of nomads performing calming rituals—we developed a strong 'thing' together—time + place—and the bark paper + sound—created a bond between us against the wind.

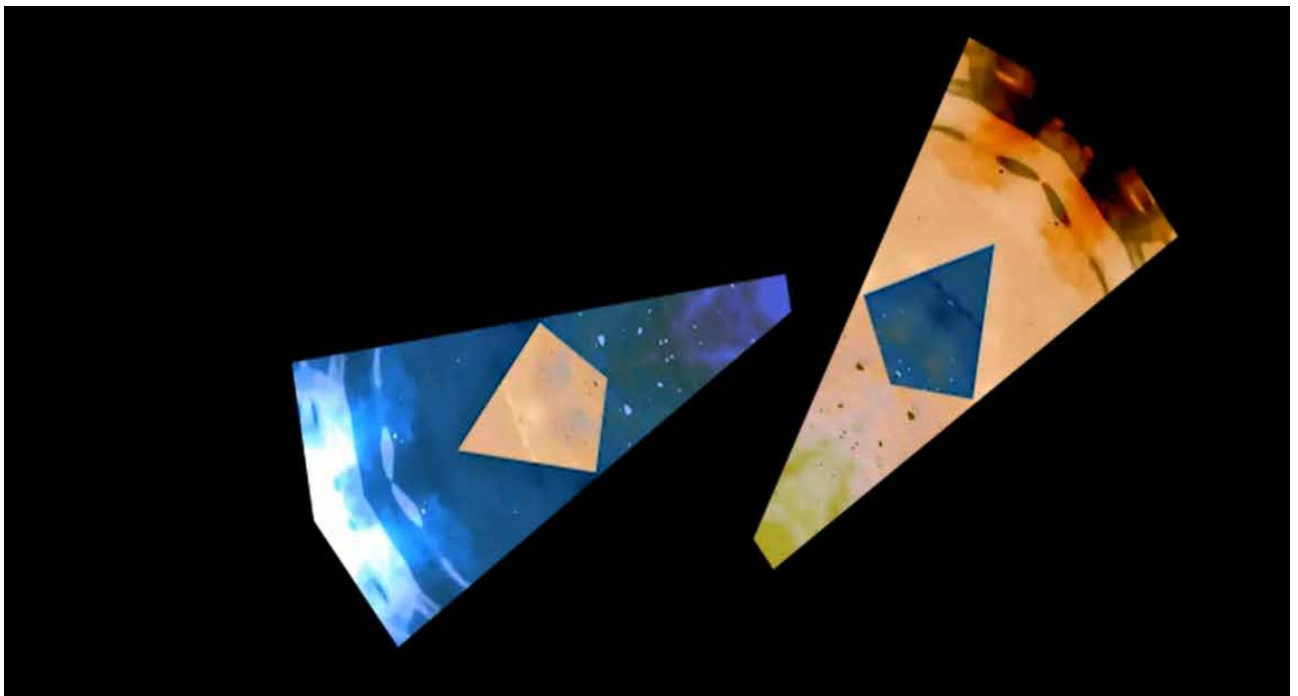


Figure 6. Digital weaving 'Ngake and Whātaimai'. Source: video screenshots that Tanya Ruka produced based on the sound production of sunset and full moon celebration from the performance, and the digital performance of her encounters with Taniwha (giant stingray, water, and sky) (Ruka & Xiao, 2024).

Excerpt from anonymous reviewers 3 (anonymous reviewer, personal communication, February 2024)

HT(Shannon) plays her harmonica and then holds it up so the wind can play it back in a kind of call and response. This is one of the more moving moments in the journey; it really feels like some nature spirits have come out to play...

Excerpt from reviews by one of my collaborators (anonymous reviewer, personal communication, February 2024)

There are some special moments today, especially the rainbow and music we played together...

Excerpt from anonymous reviewers 4 (anonymous reviewer, personal communication, February 2024)

And we were all connected as the land, wind, and the skies...

Excerpt from personal reflection of shamanic healing (Xiao, personal communication, December 2023)

...Some scholarly written examples, such as *The Shaman Tree* (Safonova & Sántha, 2012), helped me realign with my goals and values. Reflecting on encounters in a land where the cultural influences are a matter of mixture, I was drawn to the ways researchers use multiple senses in data collection. They retold the story with the photos they took when visiting a modern Ewengki hunter-gatherer village in Siberia. The indigenous people's acts can tell stories. These researchers recorded every interaction they made with daily objects, trees, rivers, sky, referencing shamanic gods/goddesses. In the end the photos of those objects became a new way of knowing related to a different kind of cosmology in modern worlds. To delve deeper into the philosophy under the methodology, I reflected on De Castro and the thinking around a cosmological perspectivism. De Castro suggests in shamanism, 'each species is equal (in the sense that there is no species-independent, absolute point of view), but different (for this does not mean that a given type of being can indifferently assume the point of view of any other species)' (De Castro, 1998, p.107). Is it true?

Under the night sky, I was jamming with my harmonica while, after practicing Qigong, an ancient Chinese healing practice of coordinated body-posture and movement of qi. A past dialogue with my local filmmaker friend who studied

Chinese philosophy and worked on wetland conservation topics, came to my mind - the mauri is somehow the qi. I felt how my circulation of the instrumental sound successfully joined the universal life force, the qi, or the mauri in my surrounding environment of the city, becoming my version of prayer and a way of connecting with the cosmos. From the ethnographic discussion of a formal shamanic ritual, I recalled that the decoration of shamanic costumes embodies not only the material form, but also 'the supernatural essence of the spirit-helpers' (Dobzhanskaya et al., 2022, p.2). The bark that was transformed in collaboration with Ewengki became my spirit-helpers, while the essence of the cosmos, the birds, the wind, the waves, the moon, the modern landscape path, became the spatial expression of my intention of Taniwha in a shamanic way. The sound I was circulating connected this bodily and cosmological space in a methodological, and relational way, in Braidotti's (2013) sense. My fellow buskers performed their acts by playing ancient music scales on their instruments, which I wove into the performance with my harmonica, the reindeer bell, and a Māori way of whistling, creating an experience of fusion - a posthuman agency in the city. Perhaps, in the cosmos, each species' agency is equal, and in some mysterious way, the same.

In this moment of reflection, I became aware of the influences shaping my method: post-anthropocentric design theories and the ancient-futurist potential of art practices. My current work is an opportunity to understand the multiple agencies of my current space and place, Te Whanganui-a-Tara. For us as urban dwellers and migrants in the shared world with both Māori and colonial history, an improvised dialogue between the memories of my encounters and the post-anthropocentric urban present will happen.

3. Conclusions

3.1. Encountering Relations – Site-Specific Performances in Urban Public Spaces

My journey of reimagining Te Whanganui-a-Tara, Wellington Harbour through modalities of becoming—interconnected scientific and artistic ways of knowing—in the Healing Matrix performance, opens a pathway towards exploring the rich picture of feminist posthumanity and opens alternative methods and concepts in artistic and architectural practice, countering a colonial 'man-centred' way of knowing and

creating. These alternatives are distilled from a creative response to a settler colonial urban space. Relational ways of understanding Te Whanganui-a-Tara's culturally charged city and harbour space, through a focus on embodied collectivity, have been presented. These interweave feminist architectural and artistic practices with autoethnographic narratives and embodied knowledges of caring and serve to form relations with 'decentred' research subjectivities in the public urban space of Te Whanganui-a-Tara. The Healing Matrix performance embraced feminist posthuman subjects, including women, multi-ethnic communities, multi-species, and technological relations within the space. This approach transcends the colonial man-centred perspective, to prompt a decentred approach to architecture and art practice, exploring our embodied encounters with species and public spaces, to reimagine the embodied collectivity of the urban present. Inter-cultural shamanic traditions can assist in the critique of ongoing effects of colonisation, providing cultural solidarity against colonial perspectives (Mark, 2012). By embodying sensorial experiences drawn from female shamanic traditions, the Healing Matrix research creates new possibilities for performers and researchers to embody and reimagine other-than-human realities in urban public spaces. An improvisational approach to designing and documenting research, intensifying embodied collective experiences and creations, provides a way of understanding urban public spaces through giving agency to multiple social-environmental relations that could otherwise not be captured. The sensorial mapping of visual and aural experiences, touch, atmosphere, emotions, stories, and their intertwining with text, pictures, sounds, drawings, actively encounters tangible and intangible conditions in space and place.

3.2. Research Ethics and Further Thoughts

The integration of feminist practices and traditions, by indigenous and non-indigenous women in a colonial man-oriented space, is the result of ethical considerations within feminist posthumanist thought. Through exemplifying a collaborative and participatory approach to creative research, integrating traditional knowledges of shamanic healing and Rongoā Māori, the Healing Matrix engaged respectfully with multi-ethnic communities and multiple entities. This

transdisciplinary, creative performance, based on principles/ techniques of architecture and artistic performance, has privileged feminist and indigenous women's practices, with ethical considerations of caring for both human and more-than-human entities and communities. I actively engaged with both female Ewengki and Māori spiritual practices during research, incorporating concepts of caring and healing shared between shamanic traditions and feminism. These provided a form of collective wisdom giving agency to tangible and intangible, multi-factorial and multi-entity voices. I hope that together, these shared voices, explored through creative performances, prompt ways of giving agency to hidden, complex relations within public urban spaces, and make them accessible for a collective reimagination of those spaces. The Healing Matrix performance, and its feminist posthuman autoethnographic documentation, suggests new ways to understand public urban space. It allows encounters with unseen conditions of cultures suppressed by colonial influence, and has only made some initial steps in this direction. But we as authors, hope this research will serve as a resource for amplifying the voices of embodied collective experiences in public urban space.

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