

# An Afakasi In K-Pop

A choreographic exploration of K-pop as an Afakasi

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## Abstract

This research aims to explore the experiences of being an Afakasi within K-pop, specifically through a choreographic practice. The related performance titled *Front Door, Back Door* is a physical expression of some of the reflections from this research, as well as prompting provocations from the performance itself. Existing as two main films and an interactive installation, the performance intends to explore what it means to engage with a culture while being of another, fuelled by my own personal engagement with the Korean culture as someone with Samoan Heritage. Some of the concepts that this research engages with are that of culture, belonging, hybridity, identity and the Afakasi experience, as well as being influenced by a variety of artists, choreographers and academics.

This research is conducted through the *String and Shell* methodology. A method that has been coined personally, it utilises stage named *'play', 'revise', 'reimagine'* and *'settle'*. These steps are defined and explored, and how these stages differ depending on whether working with choreography, production/post production or installation. The relation to other existing ideas such as authentic movement and gamification is also established and explored.

Many artists from multiple disciplines have served as points of reference that my work and research is in conversation with. Neil Ieremia, Lemi Ponifasio, Charles Koroneho and Sori Na have shaped some of the choreographic decisions made within the work. Production and Post Production influences can be seen from artists Phillip Deouflé, Bill Viola, and a collaboration between creatives Bailey Sok and Sean Lew. Artists that were involved in the creation of the Korean installation *Mangrove Knock Knock* (2020), *Layover* (2019) and the general design concept of maximalism are also influences on the installation presented.

*Front Door, Back Door* utilised elements such as spoken word and poetics to express the reflections of my research, and the specific choices and hidden elements (established as easter eggs) are also defined in this thesis. This encouraged further reflections on the overall notion of being an Afakasi in K-pop, and how my indigenous identity might be shaped, altered or shifted by my engagement with another.

## Key definitions related to this research

Below are some important terms that may come up throughout this research. While they will be defined throughout, a brief understanding right from the beginning of this research may be beneficial.

**Afakasi** – a Samoan term that translates to 'Half-Caste'. Usually used to define someone of Samoan and European ethnicity

**Palangi** – a Samoan term that refers to someone that is European or white

**Vā** – A concept found in many Pacific cultures, Vā is translated to mean 'the space between'. To further define this, Vā exists between either tangible or spiritual relationships, such as between a brother and sister or the living and the dead. It is a concept that can have an impact on relationships, spaces and experiences.

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Fa'afetai.

감사합니다.

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# Contents

Abstract and Key definitions.....	2
Acknowledgements.....	3
Figures.....	iv
1. Introduction.....	8
2. A Vast Ocean of Knowledge.....	12
2.1 Introduction.....	13
2.2 Afakasi?.....	13
2.2.1 Born Afakasi.....	15
2.2.2 Samoan Dance.....	17
2.3 Connection to Culture/Cultural Disconnect.....	18
2.3.1 Hybridity.....	19
2.4 K-pop, Idol Culture and Dance Culture.....	21
2.4.1 K-pop, Global and in Aotearoa.....	22
2.5 Identity Theory: Social vs Cultural.....	24
2.6 Gamification.....	25
2.7 Interactive Installations.....	26
2.8 Conclusion.....	27
3. The String and Shell Methodology.....	30
3.1 Practice-Led Research.....	32
3.2 Strand 1 – Choreography.....	36
3.3 Strand 2 – Production and Post Production.....	37
3.4 Strand 3 - Installations.....	40
4. Riding the Wave of Those Before Me.....	43
4.1 Choreography.....	44
4.2 Film, Production and Post Production.....	47

4.3 Installations.....	49
4.4 Artists.....	52
4.4.1 Lemi Ponifasio.....	52
4.4.2 Lana Lopesi.....	53
4.4.3 Pipilotti Rist.....	53
5. The Voyage.....	57
5.1 Film.....	57
5.2 Poem.....	58
5.3 Footage Part 1.....	60
5.4 Footage Part 2.....	62
5.5 Spoken Work.....	65
5.6 Secondary Film.....	69
5.7 Interactive Installation.....	71
5.7.1 Samoan Side.....	72
5.7.2 Easter Eggs.....	74
5.7.3 K-Pop Side.....	76
5.7.4 Easter Eggs.....	79
5.8 Covid19 Impacts.....	79
5.8.1 Non-Physical Impacts.....	80
5.8.2 Physical Impacts.....	82
5.9 Reflections and Final Thoughts.....	83
6. Conclusion.....	86
7. References.....	90

## Figures

Figure 1 Samoan side wide shot - (Lee, 2022).....	7
Figure 2 Samoan mood board – (Lee, 2022).....	11
Figure 3 Instagram story screenshot.....	15
Figure 4 String and Shell art 1 – (Whitehouse, 2022).....	29
Figure 5 String and Shell art 2 – (Whitehouse, 2022).....	31
Figure 6 String and Shell simplified – (Tuimavave, 2022).....	31
Figure 7 K-Pop Waredrobe – (Lee, 2022).....	42
Figure 8 Layover - (Artspace Aotearoa, 2019).....	51
Figure 9 Mirror close up – (Lee, 2022).....	55
Figure 10 Poem Film Frame – (Tuimavave, 2022).....	59
Figure 11 Natural film frame – (Tuimavave, 2022).....	61
Figure 12 Make Up film frame – (Tuimavave, 2022).....	61
Figure 13 Costume – (Tuimavave, 2022).....	63
Figure 14 Film frame pose – (Tuimavave, 2022).....	65
Figure 15 Dark film frame – (Tuimavave, 2022).....	70
Figure 16 Light film frame – (Tuimavave, 2022).....	70
Figure 17 Desk – (Lee, 2022).....	72
Figure 18 Desk wide angle – (Lee, 2022).....	73
Figure 19 Secondary Film on desk – (Lee, 2022).....	73
Figure 20 Bible and clothes – (Lee, 2022).....	74
Figure 21 Red book – (Lee, 2022).....	74
Figure 22 Brown Flower – (Lee, 2022).....	75
Figure 23 Samoan Flag – (Lee, 2022).....	75
Figure 24 K-Pop Side – (Lee, 2022).....	76
Figure 25 K-pop lightning – (Lee, 2022).....	76
Figure 26 K-Pop clothes rack – (Lee, 2022).....	77
Figure 27 Snacks – (Lee, 2022).....	78
Figure 28 Lightstick – (Lee, 2022).....	78
Figure 29 Makeup – (Lee, 2022).....	78
Figure 30 Laptop close up – (Lee, 2022).....	88



When I discover who I am, I'll be free  
(Ralph Eddison, 1952)

## 1 Introduction

My instinct when beginning this introduction is to introduce myself as Cat Raynel. It is my nickname and my New Zealand Pālagi father's last name, and the one I commonly use in my day-to-day. My name is also Catherine Tuimavave. In the legal sense, and whenever I embark on a journey to better understand my Samoan heritage, my Samoan surname is the one that I begin to use at the forefront. Both are me, and I am both, but my connection to the 'Tuimavave' in me often wavers and fluctuates.

Perhaps unsurprisingly enough as a dance student, I spend a lot of my time dancing. Throughout the period of this research, I have been at the peak of my K-pop engagement outside of my studies. Dancing for two different K-pop dance teams, along with projects both for studios and personal, a lot of my time has been spent dancing, with a high portion of that being related to K-pop. Korean culture has always been something that intrigued me, and perhaps the guilt of my Samoan culture laying to the wayside eventually led me to this research.

In order to even begin to unpack this research, I acknowledge my position as an Afakasi (half-caste in Samoan). The experiences that come with being mixed-race fuel a lot of the challenges for me that involve my 'indigenous identity'. In addition to this, growing up I lost contact with my Samoan side of the family around the age of thirteen, which further propelled an already precarious sense of belonging.



And so, I ask the following key question for this research: What can it mean to explore aspects of K-pop through my position as Afakasi through my choreographic practice?

I have decided within this research project, that a physical creative practice is something that would help express some of the reflections I have had within my research – I am a dancer after all. I have settled, after shifting ideas a little, that I would put on an installation. The installation titled '*Front Door, Back Door*' has been designed to be set up somewhat like a lounge, divided into a Samoan side and a K-pop side – two sides of culture I straddle while engaging in Western-influenced contemporary dance. There are additionally two films that are referred to throughout this research as the 'main film' and the 'secondary film', that have played on loop throughout the entirety of the installation. One film exists as an earlier draft of the main one on the big screen, that has then been altered to be played as a standalone film on a small laptop on a table on the Samoan side of the space. The other main film was played on a large projection in the centre. This creative practice has prompted and has been spurred on by a large amount of my own personal reflection, and I would argue that my research would be altered significantly should I have decided to not go ahead with a creative practice. It is also through this creative practice that have I coined my own methodology - The String and Shell methodology. While it intersects with other already existing methods of research, I delve into and describe my own means of creating and crafting within that chapter.

My research has prompted what for me are side-questions, such as 'what is the Afakasi experience?', 'what is the New Zealand K-pop scene?', 'how do I navigate my identity?', and while I cannot address a lot of this through my creative practice in this research, I have attempted to explore some of these questions through my practice and in later chapters here.

This research can be seen to be significant both on a personal and wider level. It is, I propose, clear that this research is deeply rooted within my own struggles and journey. However, as is widely known and other research has already shown, what is often coined as 'the Afakasi struggle' (that I personally experience) is not a particularly new one. Many face common issues when dealing with one or more cultures, and my intentions here have been to add a distinct experience into what is already widely written about within academia from authors such as Margaret Agee, Phillip Culberston, Homi K. Bhaba, Lana Lopesi and many others. As a dancer, from the point of view of someone who explored it through dance, I would argue that my outlook again is something that can provide more context to the Afakasi experience. The same too can be said I propose around this research engaging between Afakasi and Korean pop culture (namely K-Pop). At the time of carrying out this research, I have not come across any literature or cultural practices, in regard to an Afakasi's experience in relation to Korean culture.

I have submitted for this research: an installation, including two films (as mentioned), photographs of the installation and these films here in this exegesis. In this exegesis I have attempted to construct in conversation with my practice, attempts to conceptually dig around in relation to the research I have done. The following chapters in this exegesis cover: a methodology chapter that explains my approach of 'String and Shell'; a literature chapter in relation to conceptual perspectives that I propose this research attempts to activate and reflect on; a chapter on other artists that details some of the inspirations in relation to my creative practice; and a discussion that aims to reflect on what I did within my creative practice and what I have uncovered through it.



## 2. A Vast Ocean of Knowledge

O le tele o sulu e maua ai figota, e mama se avega pe a ta amo  
fa'atasi  
My strength does not come from me alone but from many  
(Samoan Proverb)

## 2.1 Introduction

Afakasi (Samoan for those mixed race), like me exist within a unique cultural space that poses certain challenges. K-pop (Korean pop) is also a unique culture, and I intend reflect on how the two worlds might intersect with one another, due to my own personal investment in each of them. This literature review will attempt to contextualize and be in conversation with my creative practice. To do this, I am more specifically looking within the New Zealand K-pop dance community, and what impact that may have on my own indigenous identity as a New Zealand-born Afakasi. I will attempt to reflect on these and their potential relationship here through concepts such as diaspora, hybridity and identity theory, and additionally the notion of gamification. And so this literature review also seeks to explore not only the underpinning ideas of each, but additionally its existing applications within a performance and art context.

While research does already exist on each of these topics individually, I propose the mix of them is unique and original here. Additionally, the impact K-pop has on indigenous identity is an area that has little information, a gap within academia that I intend to begin to bridge through my research.

## 2.2 Afakasi?

As mentioned, the term 'Afakasi' in the Sāmoan language translates to 'half-caste' or 'mixed-race' in English. While the term itself does not hold any derogatory meaning in its direct

translation between languages, the issues and struggles associated with the word heavily tie into common racial issues that those of mixed race may experience. Afakasi like me can often struggle to identify with one or more of their cultures, often existing between two worlds (Bush-Daumec, 1996). This struggle and uncertainty of where they/we belong commonly lead to feelings of isolation, feelings that between their two cultures one cannot be claimed by or claim to belong to either (Sofala-Jones, Hali F., 2016).

While this is not the case for all Afakasi, research already exists that prompts the notion that isolation and a lack of belonging is a common theme amongst some. A study by Phillip Culberston and Margaret Nelson Agee (while focused on the male Afakasi perspective) compares similar and differing experiences on the Afakasi identity, and is applicable beyond just the male point of view. Some of their participants claim that due to not being 'full' of one culture, they question "how Pasifikan they were" (p. 85, Culbertson, Agee, 2007). Concepts of not being 'full' are of interest within the identity struggle Afakasi face, and from where these concepts are pushed upon them will be further unpacked.

Beyond themselves/ourselves, outside influences and responses can create a sense of doubt regarding where they/we stand. Just as how in certain circumstances Afakasi can be praised for being the bridge between two or more cultures, it can just as quickly shift to not being proper or full enough of one race. This can foster feelings of insecurity as to how they/we are perceived at any given time, an unknown affirmation or "blame and humiliation" from outside eyes (Culberston et al, 2007, p.52). Both outward and inward influences on their/our identity may shift how Afakasi identify within the world depending on circumstance and their/our surrounding environment, with a sense of cultural belonging constantly shifting depending on one's "imagined national identity" (Kenix, 2014, p.553). In particular it is these withstanding factors and struggles of identity that underpin my own research regarding my indigenous Afakasi identity, and are undoubtedly intertwined with my journey that will be further delved into.

Afakasi being 'not enough' or lesser than a full Samoan is not an uncommon notion. While advocates attempt to fight for the ideal that Afakasi are true Samoan's no matter what, even on my own social media posts such as the one below come up unprompted.



Utilising the format of a common meme, the above post is making a joke out of a pronunciation error that an Afakasi might make, and specifically using the term Afakasi as an insult in "you Afakasi". While not targeted at any one person, seeing media such as this from my own peers builds on the idea that some unfortunately push, that Afakasi are not full and therefore not Samoan enough.

## 2.2.1 Born Afakasi

Today in Aotearoa/New Zealand's modern demographic, 66.4% of the Pacific population are considered New Zealand born, and within this, 40.6% of the Pacific Population in New Zealand identify with two or more ethnic groups (Stats.govt.nz, 2018). The Pacific population as per the 2018 census records show that the Pacific population makes up 8.12 percent of the overall population. Ultimately, a generous portion of the population has identified as being mixed race and may find themselves experiencing identity struggles to manage their differing cultures. Agee et al (2013, p.28) talks specifically of this, naming it "the New Zealand-born identity crisis".

So why might we specifically look at the Aotearoa Afakasi demographic?

Beyond how the specific region of Aotearoa situates itself as my own ethnicity, and therefore at the forefront of my research, information that already exists out there offers insight specifically into the struggles of New Zealand-born Afakasi, and how the migration of Samoan families to New Zealand have meant specific struggles for those of mixed descent that have grown up here. "Higher prevalence of mental health disorders among the New Zealand-born population are not well understood. Fingers are often pointed at acculturation, socio-economic disadvantage, and a 'loss of identity and social support' (Agee et al, p.50, 2013). Being Aotearoa-born compared to Samoan-born Samoans means a drastically different environment surrounding them. This environment can be seen to foster conflicts regarding culture and identity, as they bridge fa'a Samoa ('the Samoan way') and the European ways of living (Samu, 2003, p.74.) Aoteroa-born people of Pacific descent like me must "construct" their/our identity (Agee et all, 2013, p49), and to do so may be a difficult task away from what some may consider their/our true 'homeland'.

With this said, author Lana Lopesi discusses the connectivity that this day and age now offers in her publication False Divides. Just as how one might see the ocean as separating,



Lopesi suggests that thanks to the digital ages and the internet that we are more connected than ever. She discusses a particular moment that stuck with me. She recalls on a trip a plant that she recognised while away, sending a photo over Facebook Messenger in which she was able to converse with her Grandmother back in Aotearoa at the time, about a plant used in her Samoan family. She reflects that “the distance shattered” (Lopesi, 2018, p. 100). The ability to connect at the touch of our fingertips might ease the vast distance some may feel, and is a new way to look at the diaspora that many Afakasi finds themselves in.

## **2.2.2 Samoan Dance**

Dance within Samoa is well-known to be a major part of the culture and can exist as a means of reinforcing cultural tendencies, self-expression, and maintaining tradition (Georgina, 2007). The dance floor can exist as an extension of the expectations and appropriate ways of behaving, for example, “the dichotomy between Siva (graceful, proper dances) and ‘aiuli (clowning)” also reflects on expectations within the Samoan culture beyond the dance (Georgine, 2007, p.83). There is a range of traditional dances that have been modernised to be performed today, most commonly seen within a festival context. Delving in-depth into one specific type of Siva (dance), the sasa, is a style of dance that might prove to hold significance within this research topic – hence my engagement with aspects of it at times in my choreographic practice.

To describe the Sasa, it is a dance done sitting down, that consists of clapping, striking, and accompanied by singing (Moyle, 1988). The Sasa movement is inspired by the everyday tasks and daily life within a Samoan village (Radakovich, 2004). Performed by both males and females, movement differences between the two genders are usually minimal, and the dancers are accompanied by percussion instruments as they make their own rhythmic movements also (Radakovich, 2004). Siva Samoa is another widely known style of dance.

'Siva' in the Samoan language means 'dance', and 'Siva Samoa' is commonly used to describe the specific style of dance associated with the 'Tauluga' (Radakovich, 2004, p. 7). The Tauluga itself is largely improvised and is usually performed by someone of a high ranking within the village (Shore 1982, Moyle 1988, Linkels 1955, Radakovich, 2004), with a focus on graceful movements.

Just as previously mentioned factors can be used to scale how 'truly' Samoan one might be, dance can also be used by Samoans to gauge others of their culture (Chun, 2000). These festival spaces may prove to be just that, a space in which knowledge and experience (or lack of) might be used as a means of judgment. However also argued is that festival spaces can create a 'home' within New Zealand (Mackley-Crump, 2015), could the festivalisation of dance in New Zealand prove to be the middle ground in which Afakasi can experience culture outside of 'the motherland' that they might not properly see as home? It is within these spaces that I have been exposed to my Samoan heritage, through dance specifically, and often in performance groups that were in these festival spaces.

For the purposes of my own research, I will be utilizing Samoan dance as my main means of connection to my Samoan culture and my sense of engaging with it has on my indigenous identity.

## **2.3 Connection to Culture/Cultural Disconnect**

This space within literature, where communities exist beyond the borders of their motherland yet maintain cultural consistency is called the 'diaspora'. While the term 'diaspora' used to be specifically used in regard to Jews being dispersed from their land, today it is used more widely used to define any type of group scattered from their land, now heavily relating to terms such as immigrant, overseas community, and ethnic community (Grossman, 2019).

Discussions of hybridity often are explored within this diaspora, as these are the spaces that have strong communities away from the land, and where multiculturalism and its issues may be more prevalent. The Pacific diaspora here in New Zealand exists as migrants have built strong communities and sustained cultural identities beyond their Island homes (Papoutsaki, Strickland, 2009, June).

While the diaspora exists as a very real space for many communities, there have been criticisms and warnings regarding the undertones that may come along with the term. Author Christian Karner warns to not be complacent surrounding exclusion, using the connection to a different homeland as a means to divide and label migrants as “other” (Karner, 2007, p.79). In another vein, Karner (2007) calls attention to the term and the unspoken assumptions that can underpin it. Notions of “origins” and “true belonging” (Anthias 1998: 571, 577) can also exist as a means of division within the community, and may more specifically be an area that Afakasi and other mixed-race individuals navigate. These are all relevant and prominent issues to be considered within this research, as my connection to my Samoan culture exists within this diasporic space.

This connection or lack of connection is what I propose is an underlining aspect of my research. With my own position as the researcher being within the Pacific diaspora, understanding it and the underlying notions within the concept can be seen to naturally play a role within my work, especially in understanding my indigenous identity and my relationship with it.

## **2.3. Hybridity**

Within literature in this field, the terms ‘hybrid’ or ‘hybridity’ often comes up. Hybridity as a concept exists within Post-Colonial theory, referring to a blend of cultures in one sense, and

explored most famously by theorist Homi K. Bhaba (2012). His work details that hybrid culture “does not depend on the persistence of tradition; it is resourced by the power of tradition to be reinscribed through conditions of contingency and contradictoriness’ (Bhabha, 2012, p. 2). Within this, Bhaba argues against the fixed nature of identity, but rather suggesting that a continual reconstruction exists within a hybrid context (Clothier, 2005).

The idea of hybridity goes hand in hand with the notion of a ‘Third Space,’ also defined by Bhaba (2012). This space exists as a place that ‘hybrids’ can make an authentic and unique claim to, a space that is beyond just a combination of two cultures (Clothier, 2005). This space is informed by, but disrupts tradition, and is adapted to fit the climate and environment (ibid). “In this in-between place, traces of formative cultures can be located, but there will always be aspects that are specific to the hybrid” (Ibid, p. 48)

This perhaps is contrasted by the work of Bakhtin, as they describe hybrids as “double voiced,” “double accented,” and with “two individual consciousnesses” (1981, p.360). Does hybridity within cultural identity exist as two separate consciousness as Bakhtin suggests? Or does cultural hybridity suggest a new space all together such as described by Bhaba’s theory? Stuart Hall, an identity theorist, aligns more with the concepts of Bhaba. His work suggests identity is construction, a process that is ongoing and always in process, not something that can be “won or lost, sustained or abandoned” (Hall 1996: p.6– 7). He talks of identity being conditional, positional.

Just as my research situates itself within the Pacific diaspora, if applying these theories of Bakhtin or Bhaba, I find that the differing theories, being “two individual consciousnesses” (Bakhtin, 1981, p.360) or making claim to this unique ‘third space’ shifts my relationship with my culture.

On the one hand, Batkin's theory I argue is isolating. Being of two identities suggests a separation and split within oneself. Bhaba's notion of the third space on the other perhaps promotes harmony of cultures within oneself – the idea of a third space can be isolating in a different way, from the two (or more) cultures that one might hail from, again revisiting certain exclusive notions discussed prior. For me I have often experienced both of these independently and simultaneously, depending on the contexts I encounter.

## **2.4 K-pop, Idol Culture and Dance Culture**

K-pop, short for Korean Popular music, is a genre of music originating from South Korea and South Korean culture. Its influences lie in various styles of music, stemming from all over the world (Timothy, 2016). The more modern rendition of what we today call K-pop came about with the formation of one of the first K-pop groups, Seo Taiji and Boys, being the first group to pioneer rap along with dance music to the industry where ballads and trot were the popularised style at the time (Suh, 2013). This shift in attention towards the teenager and young adult demographic brought the group's large popularity and shifted the genre closer to what we see it as today (Cho, 2012).

Synonymous with K-pop music, is the K-pop idol culture. Artists within the genre are referred to within this subculture as K-pop idols, and commonly exist as idol 'boy groups' or idol 'girl groups'. Their role in the industry since the genre modernised, goes beyond just music. They act as entertainers, engaging with variety shows, K-Dramas, films, fan events and more (Padget, 2017). Many issues underlie the K-pop industry and criticism comes from both inside and outside the industry. K-pop companies are criticised for "manufacturing a steady stream of teenage idols" (Shin, Lee, 2017, p.14) as well as the conditions they work in and their lack of autonomy despite being celebrities. John Lie (2015) discusses below the lack of individuality idols experiences, stating that

They execute what has been conceived for them; they wear what they are told to wear, they sing what they are told to sing, and they move and behave as they are told to move and behave (p.176).

Additionally, to the criticisms outside of the industry, many idols have filed lawsuits against their own agencies for various different reasons. These lawsuits show no signs of dwindling despite the government attempting to put in place terms that protect idols, it only further proves the variety of issues within the beloved industry (Padget, 2017). Despite this, the subculture remains strong and loved within the teen and young adult age demographic, with elements such as dance bringing together those within the fandoms. Author Michael Fuhr (2015) expands on the notion of dance within K-pop, stating that

Die-hard fans spend hundreds of hours reproducing the original dance moves to learn each tiny gesture and facial expression of their idols, to organize themselves in peer-groups, and eventually to perform the cover dances on private or public occasions. These fan practices demonstrate that the K-Pop dance elicits active participation through its kinesthetic qualities. (p.112)

As someone who engages with this culture and sub-culture, understanding this world of K-pop is crucial to this research, particularly how the culture has dominant holds within dance communities and within people of similar age to myself.

### **2.4.1 K-pop, Global and in Aotearoa**

K-pop has had considerable popularity internationally, with a global reach that goes far beyond Korea, particularly among youth. We have seen as recently as the past couple of years, K-pop idols are making their way to mainstream Western events. Major K-pop

boyband 'BTS' were nominated and won 'best group' and 'best K-pop' awards at the MTV VMA's (video music awards) in 2021 (McClellan, 2021), K-pop girl band BlackPink in 2019 performed at the famous American music festival Coachella (Brown, 2021).

This concept of the Korean Wave or Hallyu is "the international popularity since the late 1990s of Korea's popular cultural products such as television dramas, films, music, fashion, and computer games" (Jung, p.74, 2015). With K-pop's global reach, it has even been making its way here to Aotearoa, with interest in K-pop and Korean culture only growing as the years go on (Craymer, 2021). We now see large-scale events, such as K-Fest, K-Culture, and showcases at Armageddon (2021) that serve as spaces for K-pop and Korean culture to be celebrated (Kculture Festival, 2021)

K-pop dance in Aotearoa is also a large and growing community. KDA is a group that hosts a weekly event in which anyone of any ability can dance to songs they know in central Auckland, teach classes of newly released K-pop songs and choreography each weekend, and can be found competing with their 'idol' groups at the aforementioned events. KDA overall prides themselves on "creating...videos and projects to provide a platform for dancers of any skill level to be celebrated, and the opportunity to freely express themselves through dance no matter how others perceive their dancing skill" (KDA NZ, 2021). In addition to KDA, Crave is another Aotearoa based K-pop Cover group that formally owned one of the first successful K-pop studios (Te, 2017), and now works primarily as a group that competes, makes videos, guest stars, judges, and even hosts some events. En Beat academy is also a lead player in the Aotearoa K-pop community, priding themselves on an elite dance education facilitated by qualified teachers, and offering classes alongside K-pop that are a requirement in order to do justice to the hip-hop foundations that often underpin K-pop (Enbeat Dance academy, 2019). With founder and main teacher Rina Chae organising K-pop dance groups, her expertise in the K-pop industry herself allows her to bring a highly valued perspective into the New Zealand K-pop scene (Simich, 2019).

With the size of the K-pop community here in Aotearoa, I personally have engaged with these groups to varying degrees. As someone who also performs, competes, and teaches within these communities, acknowledging the effect on the Aotearoa K-pop scene is important and key to understanding my identity and my personal ties to the Korean culture. It serves as a part of my sense of referencing in this research, as so far mentioned.

## **2.5 Identity Theory: Social vs Cultural**

Social identity theory exists as an individual's self-understanding and concept in relation to their perceived social group membership (Turner, John; Oakes, Penny, 1986). Within this theory, the idea of interpersonal versus intergroup identity comes into play in relation to one's behavior and their shifts. This is along a spectrum, with interpersonal behavior being solely based on the individuals' characteristics in relation to them and one other person, while intergroup behavior is the shift that may occur when the individual is amongst more than two people within a certain group (Tajfel, H., Turner, J. C., 1979). Cultural identity, on the other hand, exists as "an individual's identity as a member of a group with shared characteristics, which often (but not always) include racial, ethnic, or geographical origins" (Unger, 2011, p. 811). As author John Tomlinson discusses, cultural identity prior to the era of globalisation, is something that people just had, as a way of inheritance or connection to the past and tradition (Tomlinson, 2011). This in turn is the idea that one's cultural identity was a treasure of communities, something that could be lost if not for its preservation (Tomlinson, 2011).

With these two differing concepts of theory, for me I propose they play an evident role in the way in which my relationship between K-pop and my indigenous culture intersect in this research. With one perhaps playing more on notions of social identity for me, and the other



upon the cultural for me, and both intersecting through my choreographic and installation practice, I intend to explore this through this research.

## **2.6 Gamification**

While gamification is a trend as of late within the academic world, the theory and concept itself is not a new one (Fels, Seaborn, 2015). The act of 'gamifying' something, essentially is to add to a task gaming mechanics, that shifts it into a space where engagement is enhanced and a reward to any degree is received at the task's completion (Hamari, 2019). A task gamified is supposed to act upon the human desire, played upon by certain game elements (Salier et al, 2017). These game elements are often listed as different amongst scholars, however, most agree that they include points, badges, leaderboards, avatars meaningful stories and teammates (Salier et al, 2017, p.373).

And so, how might these elements be utilised, specifically in an artistic context?

While gamification is commonly seen in more business applications such as marketing, I argue that there is plenty of room for its application in a performative and artistic context. Little research exists on it currently. I would put to the fact that in art, choreography, or performative based arts, there is not necessarily a task that needs gamification to be completed like one might have in a different context such as education. However, gamification can also be seen to be playing massively on human instincts, behaviours and desires, and gaming elements that encourage engagement and creative involvement is a tool that I intend to utilise as a more comfortable way for others to directly engage with my research.

The gaming elements that I expect to be most relevant to my research are meaningful stories and the element of easter eggs, as mentioned in the previous chapter.

'Meaningful stories' can be seen to be a narrative approach that 'draws players in'. While this element is one of the only ones that is not directly related to a player's performance, this is one that I would propose is intended by me to be a crucial element within my research, and potentially any application of gamification to an artistic field. This element is what can be seen to add greater meaning to a quest or task, and therefore an encourage greater than just completion for the sake of completion (Kapp, K. M. 2012). This idea of meaningful storytelling is what I would argue is also what adds to the significance of an easter egg in creative projects that involve forms of games. To build on my brief explanation in the last chapter, an easter egg is a term which describes when a message, an image or a feature is hidden (usually within a video game or piece of software), and is undiscoverable unless certain actions or series of actions are taken by the player. Without the story or narrative behind it, the little hidden bits of information or inside knowledge would have next to no relevance to the 'player,' or within this instance, the viewer.

With these particular elements in mind, I intend to utilise the already existing research to help aid in the effectiveness and the way in which others can engage with my own.

## **2.7 Interactive Installations**

There is substantial research done on art installations, as well as specifically the purpose and benefits of interactive installations. "Artwork becomes interactive when the audience participation is an integral part of the artwork" (Ahmed, 2018, p.243). The added element of audience interaction can alter the artwork (or within this context the performance), whether with direct shifts within the art, or the way the art and audience relationship shift. Within my

research, out of the three different ways that interactive art may work as outlined by researcher Salah Uddin Ahmed, my work would most likely I propose fall under “audience interaction with the artwork for user experience and being a part of the artwork expression” (2018, p.245). This can mean that within this interactive framework, the audience's interaction involves being within the piece to some capacity.

Additionally, there is other relevant research regarding specifically the place technology has within these installations and art. “ ‘Digital interactive artwork’ or ‘Interactive digital artwork’ as some others name it refers to a genre of artwork which are interactive and where digital technology is an essential component for the creation of the artwork” (p. 243, Ahmed, Salah Uddin, 2018). These concepts, while specifically written about in this case in an artistic context, can similarly be applied to a performing arts context. Which I propose of this research, where the art may sit within a more physically performative space.

## **2.8. Conclusion**

This literature review attempts to look at in greater detail what it is to be Afakasi, a particular focus on identity and what issues might arise as a result of being mixed race. Within their navigation of that, there is also information regarding the diaspora, and how one might navigate this in-between space away from the homeland. A related notion is that of hybridity, and theorists Bhaba and Bahktin both have different outlooks on cultural identity and how one might engage with their in-between positionality. This review also discusses the impact of K-pop, the idol and dance cover culture, and its role here in New Zealand.

The critical theories that I expect this research to lean heavily on are identity theory, more specifically social identity theory and cultural identity theory. My engagement with K-pop and my indigenous identity are examples of these theories respectively and will prove crucial as

this research continues. Finally, this research, as it engages with a practical element, also discusses gamification theory, and the current information that exists about the use of gamification and interactive installations within an artistic context

Although ample research exists on each of these ideas on their own, more research is I propose required on the area in which all the ideas intermingle, to fill in the gap that my initial area of inquiry brings to light.

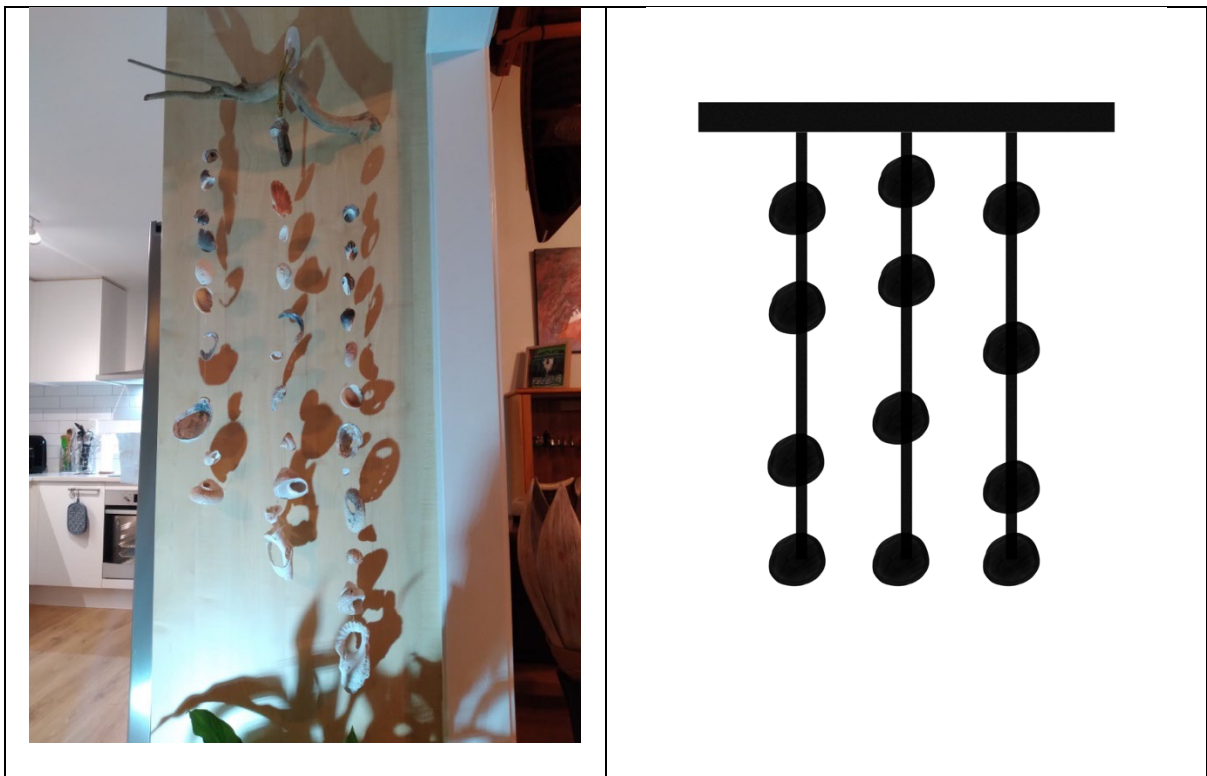


### 3. The String and Shell Methodology

More of me comes out when I improvise

(Edward Hopper)

The methodology I have engaged with in my research is actually inspired by a piece of art in a close family friend's home. Handmade, the piece brings together the natural and literally ties it together with the artificial. Initially, I was drawn in by the metaphor and direct comparison that could be made to my work - the natural shells being my indigenous identity, the artificial being how I see my engagement with K-pop running throughout, and the driftwood at the very top being a figurehead of me – which I hang up through my Palagi and Western contemporary dance and art engagements.



Upon further inspection, I propose that this piece of art is also a visual framework for my methodological approach within my artistic research (Slager, 2021). As the simplified illustration of the string and shells shows, if the driftwood is the desired final result, the shells

from the bottom to the top are the series of steps that have led there, with each row representing, in this case, the three areas I have divided my work into.

It is not uncommon for researchers within this terrain to coin their own methodology. Examples of this are researchers such as Adrienne Tucker in her research *Algorithming Choreography* (2020), who in her research on algorithms, considered and coined her own methodology as an algorithm of its own. I argue that this personalisation and reimagining of existing methodologies comes from the with the nature of making, and within my process it only felt natural that when my research did not fit within an existing methodology, that I defined my own. I will further delve into what each step has looked like for me within these three different areas of my research, and how they may be similar or differ from one another. However, before this I wish to more broadly touch upon some already existing methods that my work engages with.

### **3.1 Practice-led research**

Creative practice-led research acts as a methodology in which the practice that leads to the final product is seen as valuable, where the practice is a “conscious exploration” (Nimkulrat, 2007) – I also see it as artistic research, where my creative practice is a critical practice in itself (Slager, 2021). A creative practice-led approach is well-known to usually involve the documentation or reflection of the creative process, a final product followed by an analysis and contextualization of the said final product. This is all in the hopes of answering the overall area of research – just as I have attempted to do with this research. An idea offered by dance writer Susan Leigh Foster credits dance as being useful in arranging the body, oneself, and their surrounding society (Foster, 1996). With this idea at the forefront of my creative explorations, it may be no surprise that a practice-led approach, more specifically using the tools of improvisation has been one of the key methods in which I have crafted my



work. Authors Shirley McKechnie and Catherine J. Stevens details strategies that I have done here through movement, via Western contemporary dance:

Complex dance vocabularies challenge the view of human memory as a storehouse of linguistic propositions. Creating and performing dance involves knowledge that is procedural (implicit knowledge or knowing how to perform various tasks) and declarative (explicit knowledge or knowing about states of affairs such as dance and phrases of dance). The inspiration for phrases of dance material may be a concept, feeling(s), a space, texture, rhythm, lilt or sound. Contemporary dance declares thoughts and ideas not in words but expressed kinesthetically and emotionally through movement. (2009, p.45)

This research paradigm (practice-led research) is well-known to engage with much unspoken knowledge in its explorations and sharing's through something that simply cannot otherwise be documented or presented. As of recent, a practice-led approach has become a for researchers like me an empowering method of inquiry that provides innovative approaches in a variety of different creative approaches (Smith and Dean, 2009), and is what I would argue is a key method within my research.

Returning once again to my coined methodology 'string and shell,' practice-led research, I would like to offer a brief description as to what each shell represents. Loosely, each shell is a point of action down the string that is the timeline.

### 'Play'

Play is the bottom most shell and is a time purely of creative generative experimentation. Inspired by what I myself have tended to gravitate towards first, the 'play' stage creates a period in which expectations are low and therefore the pressure to create recedes. It is most often, in my case, filled with plenty of improvisation and for lack of better terminology - messing around, usually filmed or written about after as a means of documenting the work

done. Filled with mistakes and occasionally some successes, this time is reserved for the first steps towards the final goal.

I propose that 'play' has a key space in my choreographic process due to the contemporary education I have received. Choreographer and practitioner Sarah Knox was my first choreography teacher within the contemporary dance space, and I recall being heavily equipped with a wide range of choreographic tasks, means to push these tasks, and tools to aid me in approaching ideas from many angles. Meg Stuart serves as another point of reference for this part of my process. Something I found interesting was Stuart's approach to her ideas within her creative process. In an interview, she stated that we sometimes do not "honour" our good ideas by "acknowledging or pushing them forward" (Stuart, 2010). She continues on to say that ideas that come to us also speak to who we are, as there is a reason why an idea or image has an impact. Her willingness to experiment is something I intend to push in my own practice, and this 'Play' stage exists as the space to do that.

#### "Review"

The next shell up I have labelled as 'review'. This period can occur anywhere from right after 'play', to a couple of weeks after, depending on what is felt is needed. During this time, time is spent reviewing either footage or written text regarding the previous stage. It is at this time that I decide on whether alterations might be made for the next stage. This can be anything from certain restrictions in an attempt to guide movement a certain way, to finding a single moment and attempting to continue down that train of thought.

While I would argue that the 'play' and 'review' stages can go back and forth for as long as a researcher may want, within my own work I found I only went through each stage once in regard to my choreography, my postproduction work, and my installation work.

#### 'Reimagine"

The third shell represents this stage of reimagination. From the last stage, taking that more refined point of view, one can action those changes. While this stage feels similar to 'play', I have found the more focused ideas that I now have at this stage brought on a different mindset. Concepts in this stage, I find personally, are quicker to materialise and comparatively unwanted concepts are equally as quickly moved away from. It is here where I can better define what is wanted and unwanted, and something that no longer related to my key question can either be adapted or shifted away from, and concepts that prompt more thinking in the realm of this research can be followed through with. This stage of my research felt more fast-paced, far more decisive, with clearer intent and direction as to what I wanted.

#### "Settle"

The fourth shell, occasionally the most difficult stage of the process for me, is the stage in which final decisions are made. Whether it is choreography that is defined and then memorised, postproduction portions that are colour graded, or installation items that are finally purchased, this stage acts as a time where bigger and more impactful decisions are made. This stage to me has often felt like the chaotic visions could finally settle, as often I have often uncovered idea upon idea to follow up with. This stage has provided a sense of calm for me that has meant I can focus on reflecting on the work I am producing even further than the previous stage for me, and give attention to finer details of each creative area. In this stage I have continuously reflected on my key question and the range of potential meanings and questions it generates for me in my practice. This is where I have attempted to resolve how I present my work and what creative approaches for me activate some of the key concepts in this research. Some potential meanings include how does the work engage with key cultural concepts like the Samoan notion of vā in relation to my installation work.

With a brief description of what each stage has meant for me and my creative practice, this, I propose, allows me to analyse the strands of the piece, more specifically, the choreography, the editing, and the installation, as follows:

### **3.2 Strand 1 – Choreography**

Most, if not all of my movement that has eventually been shown in my performance work has stemmed from improvisation. Improvisation as a tool acted as a stepping stone to other ideas, and usually laid the groundwork during the ‘play’ stage of my process. One practitioner compares improvisation to meditation, stating that allowing yourself into that space means “you dare feel lost and to keep on being open to what might come” (Johnson, p.84, 2020). In addition to the openness of ideas and possibilities, it is also a stage of embodiment in which a dancer uses their body to think (Kirsh, 2010). This expansiveness, as mentioned prior, has acted as my starting point into my research, drawing directly from the personal – so as to explore the personal.

Improvisation is often utilised in an attempt to access one’s ‘authentic self’, through ‘authentic movement’. Defined as accessing one’s conscious or unconscious thoughts, feelings and impulses through movement, it “can be translated to mean truthful movement, or truth through movement” (Young, 2012, p.5). While one might raise the question as to what ‘authentic’ and one’s ‘true self’ really means, for instance in perhaps relegating it to a positivist binary classification of subjectivity, I argue that has for me ultimately been as an attempt by me to access my ‘indigenous self’, that promises to go beyond Western conceptual binaries towards a Pasifika ecological perspective where everything is interconnected and flows fluidly in its interconnections. Whilst perhaps in a different context this ‘authentic self’ might be called upon to shift into something else, the framing in which I set my research up I propose attempts to place ‘indigenous’ and ‘authentic’ as synonymous

with one another, and in this case, I have found that much of my improvisational movements have been geared in this direction in an attempt to connect with my Samoan culture in particular.

Authentic movement can also be seen to call back to a similar notion that practice-led research encourages. As Mary Starks Whitehouse says,

It was an important day when I discovered that I did not teach Dance, I taught People. I did not know it but it was the beginning of a sea change... It indicated a possibility that my primary interest might have to do with process not results, that it might not be art I was after but another kind of human development. Perhaps there was something in people that danced, a natural impulse, unformed and at first even fugitive... Then it occurred to me to ask what it is that man does when he dances, not only as artist but as man... He expresses that which cannot be put into words: he gives voice to the ineffable, intangible meaning and condition of being alive.

(Whitehouse, 1969, p.59)

With emphasis upon the process a dancer engages with and is experiencing, Whitehouse for me here references that meaning can be more than the physical steps, but the process and the concepts embodied by said dancer. It draws on the inner, and through other stages of my methodology I propose it is later refined in my making process, as mentioned above.

### **3.3 Strand 2 - Production and Postproduction**

In addition to my dance choreography I have chosen to engage with filming and postproduction strategies. This is due to my own choreographic interests in these areas and the potentialities in how they can activate and be generative in relation to my key question

and conceptual concerns. The process within this area of my research differs slightly from my choreographic process. The 'play' stage within this realm has usually involved playing with the camera. It has sometimes intersected with the 'play' stage of my choreographic process, and it would be an experimentation for both movement and cinematography.

When it has come to filming, taking my movement out into whatever space I have been in has usually shifted it into 'something else'. I have initially started with some improvisation at this stage as well, for a few different reasons:

- a. I have wanted to test some shots.
  - i. Too often I have filmed and returned to my editing software, only to find unusable footage for one reason or another. I now dedicate time to ensure certain things are turning out in ways that I intend them to. I test a few angles, make sure things are in focus, and that nothing is blocking the shot unless intentional.
- b. To get familiar with moving in the space.
  - ii. This particular research has had me dancing within the forest, and so in an attempt to get myself used to the surroundings and the flooring, I have improvised various scenarios. For instance, doing choreographic floor work, traveling phrases, jumping and kneeling, and testing everything in order to see what the bounds were, and in turn how far I could push them.
  - iii. Additionally, as a safety precaution with the unlevel ground, I have tested and trialled certain things to see what is possible.
- c. Happy accidents.
  - iv. In the past, I have found that some of my favourite moments are the ones captured by accident, that also engage with and generate conceptual insights that help to propel my artistic research approach, and so as my creative process continues to evolve, I have attempted to 'best utilise' my time

and potentially capture more of these happy accidents while testing and playing as I initially start my filming.

With these moments on camera, I have usually felt comfortable to shift to the 'review' stage immediately after filming. Whether filming in blocks of 20 minutes and then watching it back, or shooting in 30-second intervals before reviewing, it has usually shifted faster for me through the process than either my choreography or my installation work has.

Once in the editing software, I would argue that my 'play' stage here has taken on a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology exists as a methodology which examines a person's lived experience, and in its truest form is often seen to not know where it will lead (Mooney, 1962). It is without direction initially due to it being a conceptual strategy that focuses on the present, and develops "unpredictably" (Fraleigh, p.11, 1991). This unpredictability is what I now would argue is how my 'play' stage has been framed. Raw footage has just be imported into my editing programme, and has been then ordered and reordered by me with no proper plan – in what some may describe as a random playful way. I have not worked with a storyboard, nor have I imported the music track into my video work until later in the editing process. It has been the feeling of what footage has made sense next to one another, in relation to a sense of poetics (Bachelard, 1994) and the conceptual focus of this research where I have thought a sharp cut to black fit, or when one move has happened to look like it flows to the next despite what has been physically done when filming. Phenomenology holds itself to being the philosophy that it is not a reflection upon a pre-existing truth, but rather the bringing what some argue as 'the truth' into being (Fraleigh, 1991). It is within this postproduction process that I access this phenomenological philosophy, before following through with the other shells - review (looking at a rough draft), reimagine (changing cuts based on new elements such as audio, new footage etc) and settle (committing to final edits, colour grading, watching from start to finish without interruption).

### 3.4 Strand 3 - Installation

The final strand, installation is where I have chosen to assemble and present my videos and objects together in order to activate my critical concerns and explore my key question. Just as the previous strands, the shells, whilst the same, mean something for me slightly different in regard to this particular area of my creative process. The 'play' stage, upon reflection, is what I would call the stage in which I was drafting, drawing, and even attempting to digitally construct. It has ideas that have not been hindered by the physical I propose – whether that be the location, or the physical objects that I have placed into the room where I have chosen to assemble the installation.

The 'refine' stage and 'reimagine' stage are areas that I have gone back and forth on depending on what I have had available to me when developing this installation for this research. Borrowing relevant items and brainstorming potential ones has meant that I have constantly been in a state of recrafting, shifting and altering the imagined space. Having conversations with peers and my supervisor has also contributed to me evolving my decision making here.

'Settle' has really been the time in which I was finally in the exhibition space (that is also a dance studio), and set everything up and allow it to be viewed by the final date of the showing. After the extensive time spent in the stages of the other shells, when it has been time for me to get into the space there has already been a noticeably clear idea for me of what has been needed. It has been also at this stage that I have been making definite purchases, asking for final specific items, and creating my catalogue so that everything within the room is justified in relation to my research focus.

This overall strand can be seen to play upon the concept of Gamification, more specifically the concept of 'easter eggs'. Gamification acts as a methodology in which elements from a game are utilised so as to engage the audience (Marczewski, 2013), while Easter Eggs



specifically exist as hidden elements that are implemented, particularly in relation to pop culture, and are most commonly seen in software and videogame contexts (Mago, 2019). As previously stated, everything within the space has been purposely placed and justified by me. The room is intended to be more than just what is at first visible, in relation to what things are included, where they are, why they are there, and whether they are in full view versus not, and why. Items specific to the video are in the room, both hidden and not, and the audience I propose can be rewarded by actively engaging with the space by opening boxes, flipping through books or sipping at the tea provided. The 'easter eggs' are there to add to the experience, and I aim to add further reflections around my research focus.



## 4. Riding the Wave of Those Before Me

Creativity is contagious, pass it on

(Albert Einstein)

This chapter acknowledges many of the artists and specific works that my research is in conversation with. Drawing parallels between some, and more subtle notes from artists overall, I intend in this chapter to go into some greater detail into what has prompted some of my decisions within this research. Dividing into three sub-sections, as that is how I have viewed it throughout this process, I will discuss these in regard to choreography, production/postproduction, and installation.

## 4.1 Choreography

One of the first artists I would like to introduce is Neil Ieremia, founder of the New Zealand contemporary dance company Black Grace. Black Grace and their works have often served as a point of return for me ever since being introduced to them as I entered the contemporary dance space. Their focus on Western contemporary dance with Samoan fusion often sits close I propose to what I aim to showcase myself, both choreographically and conceptually. Pieces such as *Crying Men* (2018), and *Vaka* (2012), like many of their works draw inspiration from the indigenous identities, whether the Samoan heritage of the founder Ieremia, or the surrounding identities of being within Aotearoa. However, in relation to my own research, I would like to draw attention to a specific work, *Verses*.

*Verses* (2020), ended up being performed as *Virtual verses* (2020) due to Covid19 lockdowns and restrictions. What came from *Virtual Verses* however is something I can draw many parallels to within my own work. The choreographic movement of hands and arms can be seen similarly within my work, with my own choreography depending on arm movements as drawn from Siva Samoa. With close framing, quick cuts, and a strong voice-over serving

as the main audio for the first portion of the piece, the flow of my choreography depends on and is framed by similar elements. The performer from approximately 2:40 also mirrors some choreographic elements drawn upon in my own work. Some Hip-hop like isolations can be seen, a casual-ness that perhaps comes with being in one's own home, and cuts of more serious choreography mixed in with the pedestrian are all things that I as a performer resonate with and see my work in conversation with.

And so how might my work differ?

While Black Grace works within a very similar realm of Pacific experiences, my work engages with what I would consider a foreign identity. The two identities in question can be opposing, and therefore I propose to offer a unique sense of juxtaposition. My choreography, whilst similar in many ways (specifically in question to Virtual Verses), I would argue plays on intimacy and straining this connection more so than what Black Grace has done. With parallels seen in the flow of a piece, I also see differences in how that flow is utilised to send a message. Both conceptual and choreographically, I aim to shift my work slightly so as to shine a light on a slightly different Samoan experience than that Ieremia is showcasing.

Another choreographic artist I acknowledge in relation to my research is Charles Koroneho. Specifically in his work *Post Hori-Entalism* (2001), in which I drew many parallels from and utilised in my own research. His choreographic choices of framing in particular are what I argue have influenced my work the most. Within this video work, there are extreme close-ups of elements that showcase his undeniable indigenous culture. Dark hair, the feathers in his hair, and his lips were all shot at an extreme close-up angle. He does little movement within these shots, rather letting the frame sit upon his features with nothing to disguise them. This is a clear parallel to my own work, in which I too draw attention to my key facial features through the use of extreme close-up. My work builds on this idea by establishing my features, but also within the same film and utilising the same style of shot, altering my

features as well. Later in his work, he frames his movement to only showcase his torso and waist, with choreography heavily in his arms and upper body. This is another moment of influence, as later in my film I also focus in on this area of the body. While I may not know the intentions behind his choreographic decision, my aim was to, after only revealing smaller portions of my face prior, reveal more of my body physically, but not completely. Koroneho's work has offered (and I expect for my future endeavours will continue to offer) a key way of expressing my indigenous identity. Through this means of showcasing visual features, my work has departed from his by also capturing the alteration of these features, choreographing in these moments so that his techniques better fit my own research.

Within the same vein, choreographer and founder of MAU dance company Lemi Ponifasio is a creative that my work sits alongside. Ponifasio founded MAU in 1995, and is credited with grounding his work within Māori and Oceanic cultures while drawing on his influences in Western contemporary dance and Japanese Butoh. Drawing on a variety of knowledge and experiences, he is widely regarded in Aotearoa and Europe for his approaches to theatre, installation, and performance. His specific work, *MAU: House of Night and Day* (2020) is one that I particularly engage with, and one I discuss more in-depth in my final chapter due to it being an influence after the creation of my work.

Others that I would like to note are artists that sit a little closer to home for me. Fellow up-and-coming creatives such as Victoria Medina, Anton Pulefale, Ankaramy (Anks) Fepulea'i, and Funaki (Naki) Taulanga, are all artists I wish to credit. Victoria and her work *Judibana* (2019) was one I had the opportunity to perform in, where she had a fusion of her Columbian culture and contemporary dance. Naki, Anks, and Anton are artists that while I have not had the opportunity to work with much, engage with many concepts that sit within a similar field to mine, and have influenced how I engage with this due to each of us existing alongside one another in the University space. Growing up in the Pacific diaspora, while all four of us may target a similar topic, each one draws upon different experiences that come from our

varied upbringing. All of these artists, I would argue, were some of my first experiences of Pasifika culture and Western contemporary dance combined, and have largely shaped how I access those experiences within my research, both past and current.

'Street style' choreography is something that has naturally slipped in to influence much of my instinctive movement vocabulary. A choreographer of note that I argue this stems from is Korean Hip Hop artist Sori Na. Her emphasis on not only fluidity, but a casual and pedestrian sense of movement is something that is adopted into my own style, and elements can be seen throughout this piece within the films I have shown. With K-pop's dependency on many Hip Hop elements, this avenue of movement is something I gravitate to and draw upon, both in reflection of myself but also in reference to K-pop. For my research, my style of movement is in conversation with Sori Na's and builds upon choreographic choices propelled by my personal experiences to shift it into something other. Her specific choreography to *Praise the Lord* by ASAP Rocky (2019) exists as an example of her choreographic style I have described above, and where some of my choreographic influence has come from. Specific to my work, her choreographic influence is present, but conceptually I aim to use my movement as a means to access my own culture.

## **4.2 Films, Production, and Post Production**

Some of the work that my film process engages with is that of Bailey Sok and Sean Lew. Their most recent collaboration, a choreography performed to the song *Wants and Needs* by Drake (2021) showcases a film set within an office, in which they themselves were set as office worker characters. It is this use of narrative as a role within the work that my own piece similarity draws upon. Within my research, my secondary film is the film that showcases a greater sense of narrative that for me draws influences from Sok and Lew. Setting the scene with audio that describes a large amount of K-pop rehearsals, the following dialogue shifts the work into a Samoan contemporary space, and the viewers are

able to follow along with my movement as if I were the main character within this story. Just as Sok and Lew have utilised choreography to amplify this narrative, I have intended to do the same. My work differs visually in terms of chosen dance style, and conceptual narrative. Their work is produced with notions of 'higher production' in mind, and I would argue has been aimed to relate to a larger audience than that of my very specific work. However, the underpinning uses of narrative within a dance work can be seen to be similar between theirs and mine. I propose that my smaller-scale use of narrative also has the potential to be pushed to the larger scale that Sok and Lew do within their piece, and that may shift my piece into a different realm of thinking with a differing audience or audience reception.

Philippe Decouflé and his work *Le P'tit Bal* (1994) serve as another point of influence for my research. In particular, his editing choices are what I would like to draw attention to. The visuals match the audio, whether that is the physical choreography, the timing of cuts, or what fills the frame. For example, in the intro and in a portion in the middle of the song, when there is only the instrumental of the accordion and no lyrics, the accordion player is what is shown to the audience. Additionally, there are some repeated lyrics in the song, that are matched with repeated cuts on the beat. It is this purposeful editing that I have adapted into my own piece. My intentions for both films have been to have choreography match the audio in regards to meaning and actual sound, but also that the flow of the audio might be matched with timed cuts, either to other footage or to black. I propose that my secondary film aligns more with this particular work from Decouflé, as both feel closer to what I envision a music video might look like. My research overall engages with differing concepts and ideas - but Decouflé's influence can be seen I propose in the editing of my final videos through elements discussed above such as timed cuts, decisions on what the audience sees, and how the choreography that matches the flow of the audio.

Within this chapter, I also want to acknowledge video artist Bill Viola. Viola has served as one of the initial points of departure when I first began my work on my research. His



grandiose use of video and light, an example of this is his work *Ascension* (2000), has been something that I have wanted to attempt to replicate, and at the start of this project, I had intended to utilise projection to attempt to access some of the grand and dramatic visuals that Viola produces. As my work has developed, a large-scale kind of projection or film no longer fit what I wanted to express, and so I have attempted to shift away from works such as *Ascension* and began to encourage the small and the intimate. However, it could be argued that subtle nods to Viola's work can be seen in the final piece, with the projection of the main film being large and central to the piece,

### 4.3 Installation

As this research serves as one of the first times I have directly attempted to engage with interactive installation work, I have drawn upon a few different things to serve as a point of reference, in perhaps a slightly different way to how I have been influenced in the choreography and in my production, as follows.

First and foremost, one of my clearest places of reference is from a Korean Exhibition titled *Mangrove Knock Knock* (2020). A collaboration between artists (names of artists not known), this work had each artist set up a room to mirror their working space or bedroom. Decorated in each artist's personal style, viewers were invited to wander between the rooms and engage with the objects within. The rooms were staged as if someone had just stepped away, and looked lived in rather than items in the room being inorganically displayed. While I, unfortunately, cannot garner much from the exhibition website due to a language barrier, I have uncovered a video of someone attending this piece in the early stages of my research, and credit this work as being the beginning ideas of my own piece despite the language barrier. Just as *Mangrove Knock Knock* showcased an organic sense in each room, I too have wanted to implement that within my installation space. Having the items within the installation as things that the audience can engage with has also been a decision I have

made based on the influences of *Mangrove Knock Knock*, and I have attempted to employ a sense of the personal and intimate from aspects of my own daily life within my work also. The pieces differ in context of course - while *Mangrove Knock Knock* I propose was an inside look into how some of the audience's favourite artists might live and work, my piece I argue proposes a physical representation of the divide of my own identity, and while it certainly attempt to draw on elements of my own upbringing and home, it has certainly not, nor have I intend it to be, an exact replica of my living room.

Another source of influence for me in this research is this decor style of *Maximalism*. As the popularity of minimalism appears to have departed in recent time, maximalism has been described as a way to define an eclectic home, filled with an array of items, colours, and patterns. While I cannot exactly pinpoint any specific works that I engaged with that introduced me to this concept, I propose that my own understanding of my research is what has led me to this style of decorating. My research, being as personal as it is, has felt heavily loaded and full of information to unpack for me. This sense of there being a lot has prompted me to feel as though I have wanted the installation to mirror this sense of chaos and busyness. Within my own work, perhaps more so on the 'Korean half' of the room, I have staged a sense of clutter by using multiple K-pop albums in stacks, filling the tables and spreading things out all through the room, engaging with some of the ideas that maximalism prompts. My performance intends to build onto maximalism with a sense of specifics, in terms of my split cultural theme and selection and locating of videos. Despite trying to fill the room as much as possible with coloured lights and a many variety of things I could find, for me I have aimed to propose that the room's clutter is all still relevant to my research. Every item can be linked back in one way or another to my research I propose (for instance if a lamp for lighting is in there, it has a bamboo stand and is placed on the Samoan half). Whether it is linked to my engagement with Samoa or Korea, the idea of maximalism is intended to be kept restrained to my personal representations of these identities.

A more specific example of an installation my work has attempted to be in conversation with is *Layover* (BC Collective, Louisa Afoa, Edith Amituanai, 2019), presented in the gallery of ArtSpace Aotearoa.



This work can be seen to talk to the Samoan diaspora, and what defines a space of home when culture is in motion constantly. *Layover* included photographs that captured the 'traditional' Samoan home, physicalised elements of the culture and values within the space, and had cultural items on display within the exhibition as well. I propose my research very heavily aligns with what this work reflects on, by engaging with similar concepts of the diaspora, culture, and where one finds themselves within that. My research I propose builds on this, by engaging the audience through an interactive element of the installation. While I also aim to capture the Samoan home in a particular way, my research contrasts this with my engagement with Korean culture, and showcases that within my installation, and its situating within a dance studio, where I have danced in for the last 3 years, adding a another layer of my personal context here. I propose that this aspect of my work reflects on Korean

art writer Miwon Kwon's (2004) call to situate an art work in relation to cultural and political contexts, rather than it being a 'wrong' or a 'right' thing to do.

## **4.4 Artists**

### **4.4.1 Lemi Ponifasio**

Lemi Ponifasio, while his work is not something I intended to directly be in conversation with, to me it seems important to reference the intersecting fields that his work engages with. MAU: House of Night and Day (2020), has been a large-scale installation put on at the TePapa Museum, and acknowledges over 30 years of MAU, the international theatre and creative forum he founded in 1995. He is credited as being internationally acclaimed, his work intersecting with various areas such as culture, activism, philosophy, and challenging tradition.

House of Night and Day utilized some of the elements I also have within my research. Beyond intersecting concepts of culture, this work was a large-scale installation that also included a projection that showed a culmination of the previous works of MAU. The projection being as large as it was meant that those engaging with the installation were completely immersed in the space, also paired with a soundtrack that added to this immersion. Ponifasio also had sporadic live performances within the space throughout the time of the exhibition, and it is claimed to be "his living archive" (Te Papa, 2020). In conversation with my work, I propose that I draw on similar elements to try to create an immersive experience, shifting the space that it might also be performative, such as projection and audio. While Ponifasio plays with the size so as to accentuate the expansiveness of MAU and his collection of works, my installation on a smaller scale plays with a sense of homely-ness and intimacy, and so utilises the space as he does, just in a differing way.

## 4.4.2 Lana Lopesi

Lana Lopesi is another influence that while references to her work are not obviously present, I argue it would be remiss of me to not acknowledge the work she has already done on the topic, specifically through a feminist lens, hence bring her work up again in this exegesis. Lopesi and her notions resonate with me as we share the Afakasi struggle. She claims that while in most spaces she is ‘unapologetically Pacific,’ she is also a white-passing Afakasi, and so is often found striving to prove a sense of ‘Samoaan-ness’, which is something I feel I relate to both personally and in my work.

Her work ‘Bloody Woman’ is also an interesting collection of essays that detail a lot of cultural information and her own ways of navigating it. Particularly her essay regarding how she came to understand Vā specifically sits solidly with me, as someone who also initially did not understand Vā in the academic contexts I continually came across.

Her influence, while less in the physical sense of the performance or research, underpins and encapsulates many of my own thoughts and feelings about the topic of Samoaan-ness, being Afakasi and the being a Samoan woman.

## 4.4.3 Pipilotti Rist

A Swiss female artist, Pipilotti Rist has been well-known for her feminist works, Rist’s engagement with installation art and video art is of important note when also viewing my own research. Specifically, her work Sip my Ocean (2017) is a work that I propose offers many

thought-provoking ways in which an installation can be engaged with, and draws on elements that I considered for my own work, as well as things I would like to shift for any future installation works. Her use and unique placements of projection means that the audience can not only actively engage with her video art, but that they in fact directly alter how it might be viewed as a whole. A viewer's shadow might be cast on a projection on the wall, projections on the floor being walked on, or even her art being walked amongst to me showcases a purposeful thought to how the audience sits in relation to her exhibition and what role they play beyond just an outsider looking in. This idea of an audience being more than just someone on the outside is something that I also contemplated in the making of my work. With my want for an intimate installation, how the audience engaged with the installation is something I had to consider, and certain choices such as using my personal laptop, the home-like setup, tea and food on offer, were all attempts to achieve this concept of the audience being a part of the piece that Rist also achieves.

Also in this work, I propose that Rist engages with the abstract in a similar way that my research engages with poetics. While nuances might be explained, ultimately the space is set up so that the art can be viewed and interpreted by the audience in their own way. Just as in my work, while in this chapter I have had the opportunity to explain some of my decisions, the installation is set up so that the audience may take away their own understanding of the piece.



## 5. The Voyage



This chapter looks to discuss and contextualise my decisions that were made in regard to the films, installation and some other elements that all made up the final creative work in this research. Breaking down the text I used within the piece, I intend to explain some of the thoughts behind my choices, as well as some of the intentional and unintentional outcomes. Also, within this chapter I will attempt to detail what has been placed in the installation as well as why.

To create and perform for this project during a period of time in which some strict Covid-19 procedures were in place, I discuss some of the impacts, both physical and non-physical, that it has had on my research. I will also explore here how the viewers were impacted by this, how for me this research has been impacted overall, and how certain elements such as the Vā of the space were shifted in this chapter. I will also take the time to acknowledge some of the inspirations that I had, whether I had them prior to starting or found them during or after this process in what this creative work has for me activated and called into being for me in my reflections on it.

## **5.1 Film**

Within my creative presentation, there are two film elements that can be viewed. The first is considered the 'main film' and has been projected onto the large screen in the centre of the room, with seats facing towards it to further press the idea of it being a main focal point in the room. The second is played on a laptop, with a seat situated so that the viewer would have their back to the 'main film' playing on the screen.

Whilst I will further elaborate on the reasoning behind their positioning later within this chapter as it pertains to decisions made regarding the installation aspect, the content filmed

is for me I propose a key component in my analysis and discoveries throughout my research. As stated in my methodology chapter, much if not all of my choreographic material is improvisation. Whilst I have filmed choreographed moments, the improvised movement is something I argue to be a more 'authentic' exploration of self (as discussed in my methodology chapter) in addition to phenomenologically engage with, and so is what I have gravitated towards when editing.

## 5.2 Poem

The 'main film' as it is opening has the final stanza of a Korean poem performed in Korean, with the English translation shown visually on the screen. The poem's stanza is as shown below,

<p>We all long to be something. You, to me, and I, to you, long to become a gaze that won't be forgotten.</p>	<p>우리들은 모두 무엇이 되고 싶다. 너는 나에게 나는 너에게 잊혀지지 않는 하나의 눈짓이 되고 싶다.</p>
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The Flower, Chun-soo Kim

We all long to be something.  
You, to me, and I, to you,  
long to become a gaze that won't be forgotten.

*Figure 1: poem text*

While other analysis of this poem often comes to the conclusion of a romantic gesture, without the context of the rest of the poem, this lone stanza from the poem's ending stood out. I have been drawn to a variety of things and will break those down next.

*"We all long to be something"*

This longing is something commonly felt within the Pacific diaspora, and within my experiences as Afakasi, longing to be is both a driving force and a large source of guilt. While longing to be one, it simultaneously leads me to think of the Westernisation of myself whilst growing up, as though I has been longing to be something, however in this case it has been 'something else'. This single line seems to encapsulate the two opposing identities I wished to be, longing to be accepted as Samoan, and also wishing to be seen as

westernised enough to be desirable within a dance and performing community in which Pacific representation is minimal.

*“You, to me, and I, to you”*

This line, is something that I appreciate the use of both in first and second person. If viewed from the start, this sentence would be one of the very first things heard by the audience, and directly referenced to them, connecting them into this world that I has been creating both within the film and around them. With the video on loop, I have aimed for it to act as a little reminder of their position within this work, that they were welcome to engage with my own story, directly and personally.

*“Long to become a gaze that won’t be forgotten”*

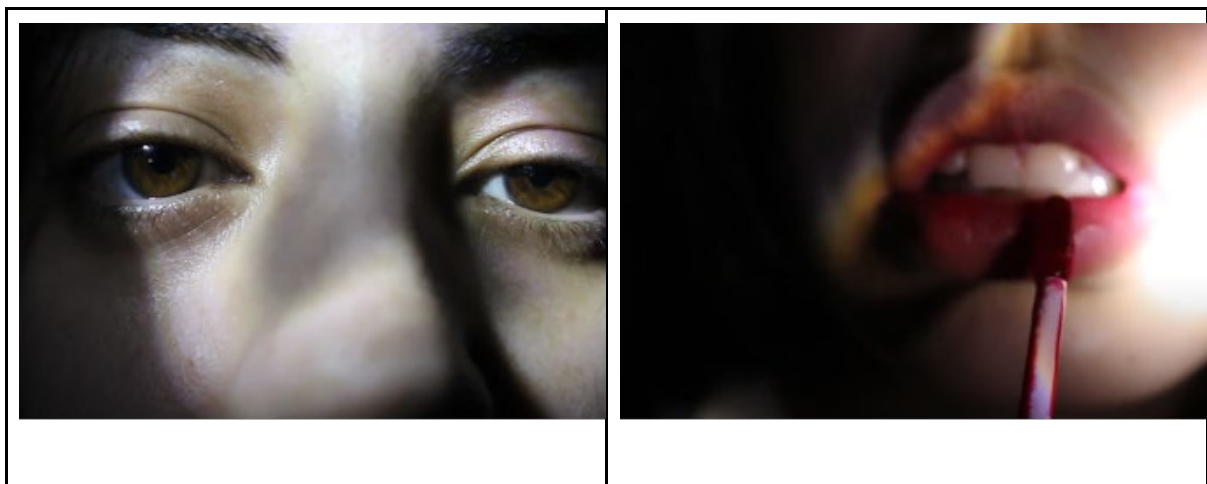
This line concluded with a similar notion to what I have felt throughout my research. Whilst I long to be seen as who I am, an Afakasi that engages with the K-pop culture whilst still on an indigenous journey, throughout every stage of said journey there is a wish to be seen and heard, however that journey and this identity develops.

This poem, spoken in Korean, is a mirror of the spoken word that is later presented. Whilst the spoken word is presented in English, it tackles a uniquely indigenous point of view and references my Samoan side, whilst this first poem is a nod to my interest in Korean culture.

### **5.3 Footage: Part 1**

The 'main film' initially features extreme close-up shots, at first framing traditionally 'Samoan' features about myself. Within and out of focus shots of my brown eyes, my nose, the texture of my dark hair, it has been an immediately intimate look at me in my natural state. It then transitions into what are still close shots, but of myself being made up. Putting on makeup that I would commonly wear for a K-pop performance, there are shots of me applying and shots of my features that mirror the beginning frames, however with pinker lips or highlighted cheekbones, and even a fresh manicure (see fig 2 and 3). This can be seen to be in conversation with the videographic strategies that Koroneho has generated in his video, discussed in the last chapter. These mirroring, and yet differing takes have been intended to highlight what I have experienced when entering the K-pop performing realm. It has not been a complete shift, but I propose a shift and change of my features to accommodate a performance, and it has been this concept that I have wanted to physically explore and embody.

The act of putting on makeup in and of itself is not specific to K-pop, and in fact any performance of any genre often required me to heavily apply makeup and alter my appearance in some way, however I have personally found that my time performing in K-pop the 'visuals' of the genre play a heavy influence all the way from the top idols down to what I has been involved in as a dance cover performer.



The extreme close-ups and blown-up zoom into features have also been a specific choice. Throughout the filming and editing process, for me, it has felt intimate and personal, with no one else viewing my footage other than a select few. However, in the preparations for the performance, seeing the footage on the large screen, it has still felt intimate in a separate way. It has been very confronting for me, possibly even uncomfortable, revealing that much of myself whether the shot has been in focus or not. I would argue that this captures a similar feeling that I feel when revealing that I am a Samoan-born New Zealander that cannot speak Samoan, or a K-pop enthusiast that has little knowledge of Korean culture. It feels like an odd mix of embarrassment and relief for me to be so intimate in revealing these details.

## **5.4 Footage: Part 2**

The main film then goes on to display more. More movement, more of my body, however still a cropped framing that did not reveal much more than up to my neck or past my knees. This initial decision has been made with the intention of by the very end of the film finally revealing my full self as I have completed my choreographic exploration of identity, however with my journey still feeling incomplete, I have decided to maintain the cropped frame for the entirety of the film.

I showcase improvised movement that matches up with a spoken word piece titled ‘

Being Afakasi’, that has been written and performed by Grace Taylor, another Afakasi artist in the creative space. Moments of darkness and absence of movement have been edited in so as to accentuate what has been spoken, and as previously discussed in my methodology chapter, all movement has been initially filmed without audio. I have found that throughout my process, this has been the best way to access my authentic self and therefore authentic movement, whilst engaging with other theories and artists within the realm of my research.

The movement, the editing, and my attire are all intended by me to accentuate a personal feeling of fragmentation. My reflections on my identity, whilst still continuous, have revealed a broken and confused sense of self that I have only just begun to sift through. It has been an ever-shifting experience, and I would argue that this odd sense and mix of enjoying K-pop, the guilt of engaging with it and the understanding and slow acceptance of myself is highlighted by the following below: movement, editing, and attire.

#### Movement - Siva but make it K-pop



My movement, whilst soft and fluid as how the Siva movement I have learnt are, there are juxtaposing moments of sharpness and Hip-Hop inspired groove that can be seen in moments through my torso and arms.

#### Editing - make it snappy

I have edited all the footage with the main goal being to best match the footage to the audio. This meant matching the flow of the spoken word to the cuts of the footage, having moments

of darkness to accentuate what was being said, and matching motions of movement to the meaning of the poetry. Because of this, the final product has also ended up amplifying this sense of fragmentation. The cuts between the shots are sharp, with no fading between frames. The cuts to black are abrupt, and the footage is a jumble of in and out of focus shots. This editing has been a purposeful attempt to express more beyond just what is filmed, but to portray a feeling and a vibe similar or at least in reference to what feelings I have been engaging with.

Attire - K-pop on top, Island time on the bottom

I have specifically decided on a piece from each side of my identity during this part of the film. This is for me a small nod towards the two differing versions of myself that I have established in the footage prior, as well as a personal acknowledgement of what I would wear if asked to present myself in these two separate ways. A tight fitted turtleneck is worn on my upper body, and a white lavalava is worn wrapped around my waist, which I have intended to give contrast to the dark background, as well as perhaps be a metaphor for my Palāgi heritage.





Overall, the main film has aimed to display the coming together of what I have defined as two separate parts of myself. Two halves of a whole. I have wanted to create an intimacy, an uncomfortable revealing and confrontational exploration, and best share these thoughts, feelings, and emotions with the viewers.

## 5.5 Spoken Word

In terms of my incorporation of Taylor's poem as the main audio for this second part of the 'main film' the piece for me is included here with the intention that it talks to the experiences of one being half Samoan and Palāgi. This personal account from Grace Taylor is something I draw many parallels with within my own experience. It has resonated with me, and I have found that the struggles she has spoken of mirror my own. Unpacking a few lines, the poem starts out quickly addressing a common struggle almost immediately.

*"This white skin, nurtured in a brown community, struggling to find unity within me"*

White passing within a dark-skinned community is a similar setting in which I myself grew up. It meant often overcompensating in my behaviours in order to make up for what I lacked visually. Joining Pacifica dance groups, trying to read Samoan literature, labelling Samoan food as my favourite, it has been all to deepen the claim on my culture I struggled to hold on to .

The choreography in the film during the line is drawing on the word 'nurtured', my arms swinging around the hips and womb area. The womb is where I naturally link a nurturing sense, and so when I had found footage of myself improvising that swinging motion it felt as though it quite fittingly matched the audio. Additionally, my Samoan heritage is from my mother's ancestry, and so discussing being Afakasi occasionally brings my ideas to a maternal frame of mind, It is on the word 'me' that my fists come together on top of one another. This movement felt like a strong sort of motion, a full stop of the choreography. It is a strong kind of declaration that this journey is about me and my identity, and so the closed hands and sharper motion matched this notion.

*"Bouncing from one skin to the next, putting my culture on to fit in with the rest, trying to not be the minority in a vain attempt to have them accept me"*

Culture has been something that I shifted between, altering, and amplifying certain aspects depending on who I has been around and who I wanted to fit in with. 'Putting it on' has been usually accentuating my Samoan-ness once again, since I found that through the schooling system and my white-passing meant that I has been usually assumed to be Palangi already.

On the phrase "putting my culture on", the film cuts to a close-up shot of my hand running along the top of my lavalava, from one side to the next before tugging on where it is tied.

While this choreography is pedestrian, it is a nod to the wavering sense of belonging I often feel as an Afakasi. Checking the security of the lavalava is a metaphor for the insecurity of my Samoan identity, the running of my hand across the lavalava being as though I am ensuring that it is still on me, that I am still who I claim I am. On the words 'accept me', my hand lays flat across my hip, with my arm around me. This choreography is another instance of security, acting as a hugging motion to match the acceptance talked about in the poem.

*"Even within my own family, racism spoken from the mouths of my own blood, saying as a joke, saying it with love, no, don't be so naive to think I don't know it's about me you speak"*

In my childhood, it was common at family gatherings that everyone, besides me, could speak the Samoan language. Whilst it meant that I normally felt alienated, it was often easy to tell when something was said in regard to me. The body language would shift, and eyes would be on me. Sometimes there would be pity in the fact that I was not Samoan enough, sometimes there was praise for something such as being so good at English. Family gatherings were often an awkward space to navigate. Both physically, as I never knew where to situate myself for a conversation that I was not going to participate in, and also mentally as I took in snippets and fragments of the encounter.

The movement on 'spoken from the mouths' is an isolated chest motion with a hand that copies it. Although the poem talks about racism spoken from one's own family, the comments I grew up hearing often felt as though they came from a very personal place, and so my movement draw from the heart rather than referencing my face or mouth. The motion also pairs up with the flow of the poem, with "spoken", "from the", and "mouths" each having a movement to accent the words. I also made the decision to cut to a black screen beginning from the word "no", as all the poetry after talking of how it is me being the one the family

talks about is a very real and personal experience that I have also dealt with just as Taylor has.

*“I’m half Samoan, say it loud, say it proud”*

It is after the fact of using this audio, having it repeat whenever it has been in the editing software, on loop while I set up the installation, even hearing it once again as I write out the dialogue for this research, that this now feels more like a mantra, or some idea to live by. The way Taylor delivers this line is powerful and confident, and while it can occasionally feel like borrowed confidence, I find over time I am slowly shifting into a space where I am not only proud of being Samoan and being Palagi, but being proud of the fact that I navigate both, rather than reserving my pride for one or the other.

Within the film, this is another moment that cuts to darkness. These words are a strong declaration that is most likely more a mantra for myself than it might be for anyone else watching it. It felt like a very personal need to have that be its own, clear-cut moment in the piece, something that I required to hear not just as someone researching this, but as an Afakasi in general.

*“Then again, I remember wanting my mum to be around me as if she was a ticket to prove that I’m from a Polynesian family”*

It would usually be a Pasifika performance, rehearsal, or school event that I would hope for my mother to stay around. It was verification that I was what I claimed to be, since I felt as though I could not prove it on my own, especially since I could not speak the language.

The motion of one hand circling the other flexed hand is a movement that references the words “around me”. It is a Samoan movement often performed in a siva, that I have retained and recalled while improvising, and with the outstretching hand acting as me, the circling had referenced my mother being around as proof of my claim to a Samoan heritage.

The Afakasi experience, while I know it is something experienced by many who navigate two or more cultures, sometimes feels to me as though it is isolating. While I used this text because it has been relevant, powerful, and spoke to me, I also argue that I have used it because of the ‘seen’ feeling it has given me, and should it be viewed by others, a similar feeling I intend to offer. Many of the movements, despite initially being filmed without the spoken word, have been purposefully paired and matched with phrases and concepts within the poem, to add to the nuances that Grace Taylor discusses and input my own experiences, expressed through movement, alongside hers.

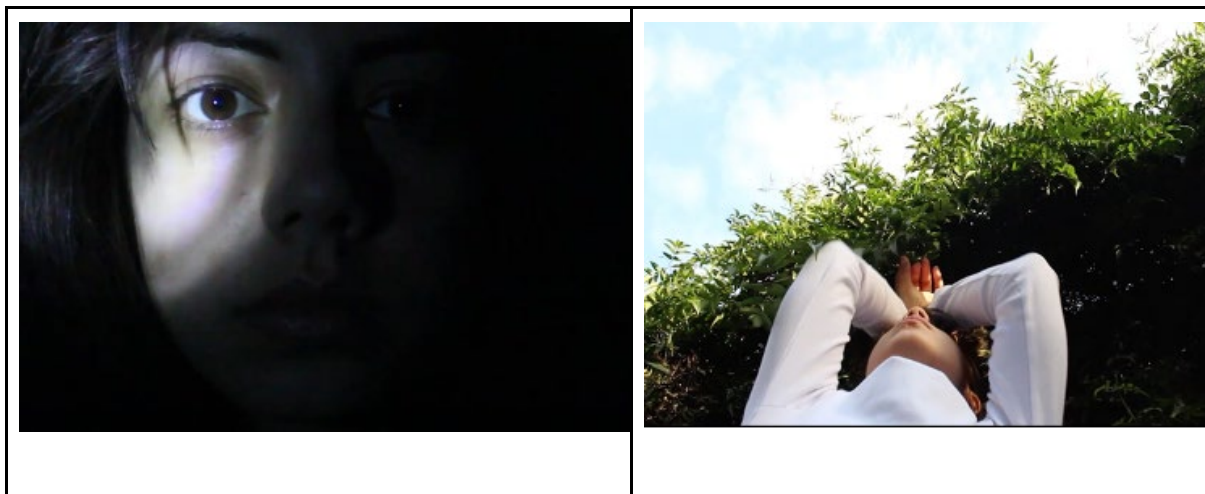
## **5.6 Secondary Film**

The secondary film that I have played on a laptop in one corner of the room has been in fact, my initial plan for the overall film component of my creative practice. With its acknowledgement of the time I give to K-pop through the voiceover and short, fast snapshots of K-pop rehearsals, followed by an exploration again through an improvised and adapted version of siva movement, I would argue it still contains the core elements of what the main film ended up portraying. Whilst I had been still happy for this film to play a part in my performance, I shifted away from it due to my own developments as an artist and how I have found personal resonance with exploring ideas about being Afakasi, while being influenced by K-pop. I wanted to push the boundaries of my creative process, in terms of where I have been before and where else I could possibly navigate my practice through these themes, and shift beyond just a visual performance of movement on a screen. I have kept this video in the installation because for me I intend it to offer a conversation with the main video, as a way of providing some background to my affective and daily engagements

behind the other video (with me preparing my work, rehearsing, and so forth). This can be seen to also promise a sense of 3-dimensionality to my engagement within the focus of this research, and my exploration of practice around my key question. Showing it on a laptop has been intended by me to propose an intimate engagement with these themes for the viewer. It is my own personal laptop that the viewer sits in front of, and they are therefore invited to see what I see, and sit where I sit.

*Going for something new in my creative process.*

While both films stem from the same research, I argue that the framing of this secondary film has led it into a different space than what I had initially. As mentioned, the secondary film were the first workings of my research into a physical performance. The music used within this] has a more relaxed tone, with elements of repeated guitar and bass, paired only with soft backing vocals, I propose that this made the music very similar to what might be the instrumental to any common pop song, and therefore easily listened to by most. The footage is all shot during the daylight, has more colour in general and is brighter overall. These visual and audio differences shift this into a different, more lighthearted take on the same topic, an earlier and more innocent or ignorant version of myself during my research.



My previous work engaging with research and more specifically expressing my reflections and discoveries through film have often resulted in a final product similar to what this secondary film has become, only with less nuance and potential layers of meanings and questions I would argue. With clear influence from a musical track, edits that were also informed by the music and a little narrative to tie the film together, I propose it is a product of my research that feels comfortable and easy to view. This may be in part to the music, as mentioned prior, being similar to a common instrumental, and also in part as to the flow of this video being similar in nature to how one might see a music video – beginning with contextualising, before leading into a song in which visuals match. The type of movement used in the secondary film is also, I propose, more easily digested and is perhaps less layered with meaning than my main film is. The sustained movement that matches the lifts and dips of the music means that the movement despite being influenced by siva, is showcased in a more westernised way. However, I have wanted to challenge what I have been previously comfortable with, which is why in the main video, there is a substantial portion of the film involving the spoken word. I have also never really engaged with extreme close-ups until pushing my creative practice in this new direction, and some more raw and uncomfortable emotions for me have been able to be expressed, rather than a previously more easily digested commercialised depiction of my research I suggest.

With this said, this secondary film I intend can be seen to serve as a checkpoint for my understanding and emotions at the time of researching through my practice, and as stated earlier, has offered a different perspective on the core ideas that both videos targeted.

## **5.7 Interactive Installation**

The installation in which the films have been set up in is intended to be a continuation of the research done within the films. With one half divided into a ‘Samoan half,’ and the other into

a 'K-pop half,' it is a physical representation of the cultures I engage with and identify with. The entire room has been intended to be filled with items that referenced certain things, in a fairly chaotic and busy style that calls to the ideals of maximalism. These items are perhaps something seen in the films, commentary on a stereotype etc. These are what I have considered easter eggs, and the audience has been encouraged to open, touch, and engage with anything in the room.

### 5.7.1 Samoan Side







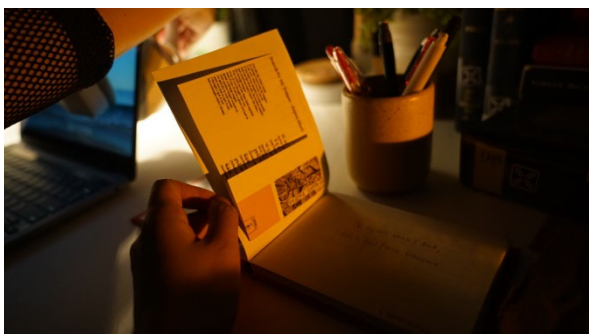
Visually, the Samoan half has been designed to play on 'the natural'. Brown and tan tones are prominent, with some accents of bamboo wood. While there is greenery within the room, I have specifically chosen for it to be fake, plants, plastic - just like the slang used to call someone a fake indigenous person (i.e. a 'plastic Samoan'). Lavalava of an assortment of colours are hung at the back of the room, some worn personally and some not. Additionally, upon the tables is Samoan literature, stacked up on top of each other, however, can be

opened and read if the audience desire, with a mood board filled with various pictures and memories tucked in the back. Food on this side is provided in the form of a banana loaf, pre-cut and with plates available for serving. The lighting is a bamboo wood lamp, and a small 'sunset' light that is tucked away so as to bathe part of the space in a warm light.

Despite the overall idea of the installation being a homely set up, this side has for me ended up looking like a desk. It's clean and organised, and can be seen to mimick the Samoan household that I once has been a part of.

### 5.7.2 Easter Eggs

On the Samoan side, should the audience members have decided to, a white box placed on the table contains dress clothes and a bible resting on top of it. This is in reference to the strong spirituality that has been within my Samoan household when I lived in it. Religion and church played key roles in my childhood, however as I grew away from it so did my reach for religion, and so packed away were what I considered church clothes along with the bible.



A small red book, placed beside where the laptop is situated on the desk, contains some previous work related to culture that the audience could flip through. While it is a small journaling of my concept, tasking, reflections, and inspiration for my second-

year Bachelor's degree choreography piece, the information I propose is relevant to my current research and is available to look at and read if the audience wishes.

Within the drawer of the small table on the Samoan side, if opened one may find a headpiece that can be worn in a Samoan performance. The brown tones can be seen to blend with the draw, so if not opened far enough it might be considered empty, but the brown pacific flower may be pinned to a Pacific performer's head and is in reference to my own time involved with Pacifica performances in school.



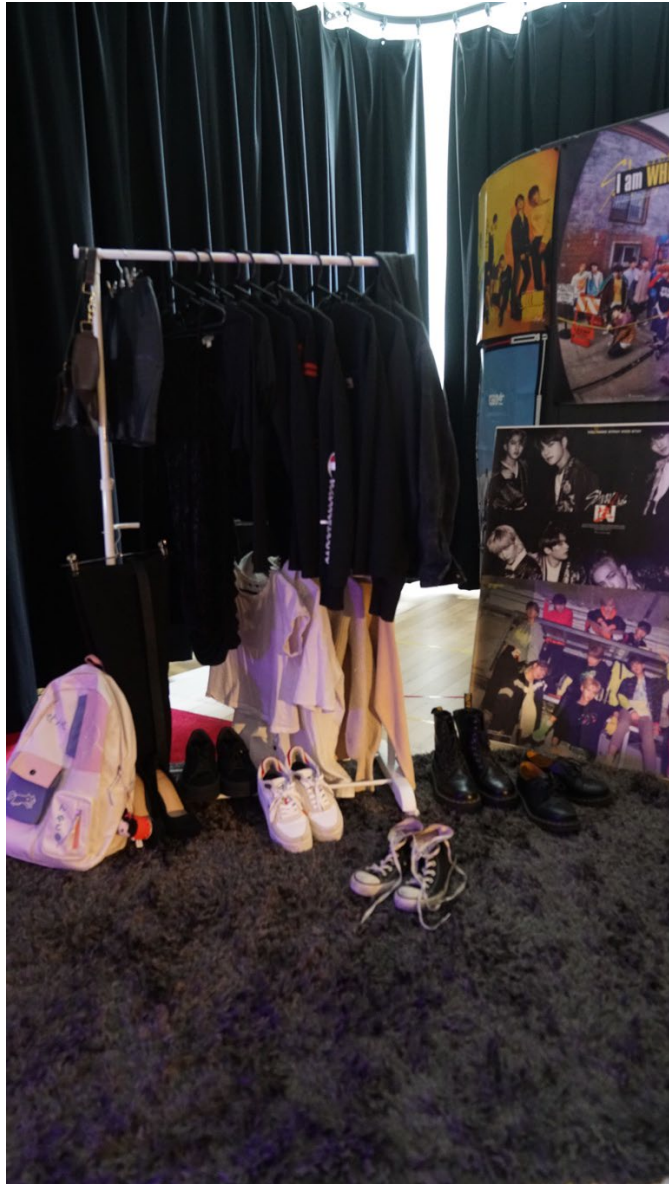
On the bench in the back corner of the room, if the seat is lifted the audience can find loose, fake, flowers filling up the space. Whilst the contents may have been jostled through the performance, at its very start it has been arranged with a small blue square

in the top corner, and red flowers throughout. With smaller green flowers in a specific formation within the small blue square, it has been made to be a replica of the Samoan flag - but only if one already knows what the Samoan flag looks like.

### 5.7.3 K-pop Side



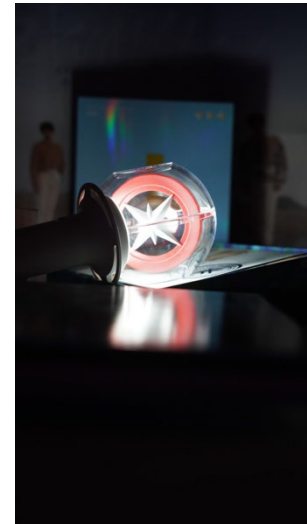






The K-pop side, in comparison to the Samoan side, is intended to be more chaotic. It had more physical items on this side - a commentary on the culture that I have a more dominant interest in. There are far more pictures and posters, all of which

were of K-pop idols and did not necessarily show any of my personal engagement in K-pop. Makeup is displayed as if I would have been in the middle of putting it on, and K-pop albums were stacked messily both on the tables and on the floor. Other books are placed on the desk, once again available to the audience to look through, and in the back corner on a rack were a variety of clothes that I have worn for K-pop performances, with shoes and accessories littered around that space. The food provided is small Korean snacks, all packaged foods. A small chocolate cake-like food, a little jar of Korean candy, and some sweet crackers were displayed on a tray for the audience to take.



The lighting I decided on for this side of the room is intended to have a more 'commercialised' look, so as to play on the commercial aesthetics often found throughout K-pop related cultural practices and expressions of materiality. LED lights in a strip are wrapped around the table, and a small pink neon sign placed amongst the K-pop



albums. K-pop light sticks (small handheld lights that many K-pop bands design specifically for their fans to use at concerts) are also placed amongst the items on the table.

## 5.7.4 Easter Eggs

If the audience has chosen to look closely at the makeup scattered on the table, one may decide to pick up one of the lip products on the table, which is the same as the one used within the main video. One might also see the Korean skincare products if they looked at the packets of sheet masks laying down or picked up the small container of moisturiser to look closer.

There is a Korean language textbook placed amongst a lot of the other things cluttering the table. Kept close by is a notebook, and if looked through, the audience might find my short and unsuccessful attempt at teaching myself Korean. Whilst only a few pages of the book are filled, handwritten in pencil were my notes that correlated with the first few lessons in the language textbook.

Again, within the language book, if one opens it, they might be able to see more closely the bookmark used in between the pages. It is a performer pass to a 2018 K-pop competition, one that myself and my teammate placed first in. It was our first ever K-pop dance competition, and I have kept the small card as a memento of the occasion.

## 5.8 Covid19 Impacts

This video installation has been created within a time when Covid19 restrictions were still in place and quite strict. It has meant limiting the audience to only being a few or so people at a time, with no publicly advertised exhibition, and there have also been time constraints on how long those individuals can spend in the installation space together. It ultimately has

meant, I suggest, that my original vision for what my installation would be has been vastly different to my original intentions (which was earlier on planned to be a form of 'escape room' that required groups of participants), and I intend to delve into what shifts had a positive and negative impact on the work.

### **5.8.1 Non-Physical Impacts**

With the installation being an interactive one, I had initially intended for the audience to flow in and out at their own pace. People could sit in the various chairs and benches provided, enjoy food and drink, and feel welcome enough to sit in the space for a considerable amount of time before filtering out. I intended it to mean that they would have the time to view every nook and cranny of the room for all the intended easter eggs, explore the sense of Vā I propose the work is intended to activate in the present, past, and between spectators, each other, the space and I, and to view the film as much as they wish. Of course, due to Covid19 restrictions, this has ended up not being what occurred. (As implied, only two to three viewers were present in the room at one time, and had a time restraint of twenty minutes.) While the space is still set up as though it is going to be viewed by many, the reality of only a couple people in the room has, I suggest, an impact on the work and changed it. I propose it has made the viewing experience somewhat intimate, but also individualistic, activating the Palāgi cultural norms adherent to my upbringing, and one can argue typical of colonially founded institutions like the one the work is presented in.

This 'pretending' could be seen (despite being initially unintentional), as a direct metaphor for my feelings within the Pacific space, and more widely the Afakasi experience. With the hardships that come in relation to being a part of two worlds, one might experience the pressure to fit themselves within one or more of their cultural stereotypes to feel included.



The idea that there is more food than two people can eat, more chairs, more drinks, all made the space feel a little offset, and mirrors the pretending or at the very least, overcompensating, that I know myself as an Afakasi has done in order to try to fit in.

Additionally, the lack of people within a space that has been initially intended for many I would argue has a severe effect on the Vā. Teu le vā, or Vā, is described as the relationships and the space between (Anae, 2010), and while it is a Samoan term and is a core value within the Samoan culture (Setefano, 2002), has its stake in many other Pacific cultures. Vā exists between various relationships, between brother and sister; parent and child; host and guest; living and dead; one and their environment; with the divine; with nature. While I do not propose that the smaller audience has had a negative impact on the Vā and the energy within the space, I would argue that it has shifted it into something other than what I have initially intended, which can have an effect on how the overall piece might be viewed. Whilst on the one hand the two or three viewers may have an intimate experience of the performance (as implied above), the space perhaps feels for me as though it requires the energy of more, and leads to an uncomfortable sense of intimacy - something that is already touched upon by the film itself as discussed earlier. Just as the Vā may have been impacted, another Pacific notion similar is that of Tā (Mahina, 2010). With Tā being time, Covid19 also impacted this as noted in the paragraph prior, and shifted how my work has engaged with this Pacific concept.

The smaller audience that the piece has been exposed to also means that within the space has been a vacuum of limited opinion. If the installation was instead available to a large audience, I would expect that conversations from a wider range of understandings might have been more likely to occur. Knowledge, stories, and nods to the familiar perhaps would have occurred and been talked about, which is a key type of interaction that has been

missed within this showing of the piece. But perhaps in irony, this unintended outcome can be seen to activate the sense of alienation many of us, Afakasi and Samoan alike often express feeling in Palāgi institutional contexts like this.

## **5.8.2 Physical Impacts**

Due to covid restrictions, there have been more physical and logistical restraints on what has been possible also. With the specific restrictions placed upon the university building, it has not been possible to have outside visitors in the building, nor have viewers close to each other for this work, nor has it been particularly easy to get assistance in bringing many of the large pieces of the installation in beforehand. Despite wanting the installation to be set up as a homely room, to physically bring in items such as a couch, coffee tables and so on by myself had been unrealistic, both due to personal coordination and the aforementioned building restrictions. It meant that despite my ideals, I have had to slightly alter and shift to appropriately work under these constraints (i.e., instead of a couch from home, the couch from the building has been borrowed).

Other, smaller, details of the performance have also been altered due to Covid19. One example of this is the tape on the studio floor. The tape set in the space has been used as a social distancing guideline, and I have decided not to tamper with those. Despite placing rugs and furniture within the room, the tape can still be clearly seen in parts. While again, I would argue that it might not have a negative impact upon my work, it has been an added detail that may affect the interpretation of my work due to the context and time that the work has been installed. One reading it could generate on the other hand could be a geometric abstract interpretation of Samoan patterning, as though the Korean pop influences, Western

Palāgi institutional frameworks and fa'a Samoan (Samoan ways of life, often traditional) are blended together as a metaphor on the floor – a happy accident perhaps?

## **5.10 Reflections and Final Thoughts**

Through my research, the main research question has hung over my head. While I would certainly argue that this is an ongoing research question, ever-shifting, and may never have a clear-cut answer, I would like to discuss some reflections that are the beginnings of an answer.

It has been clear to me that my engagement with K-pop and all its areas is a prevalent thing in my life. The number of rehearsals, performances, and the songs I listen to, it is undoubtedly the dominant culture out of the two in question. Many of the relationships I have today are because of K-pop, through the dance community and generally. Many items for the installations were far easier to source for the K-pop side, and the research that has been to be done in regard to Korea or K-pop came easier because it has been less confrontational. Also of note is that my initial instinct at the start of my research has been that K-pop did have an impact on my indigenous identity, and more specifically a negative one. I thought that it took too much of my time while I guiltily left my Samoan-ness on the side lines. In reality, while my interest in my Korean culture undeniably is a stronger force in my life, I would like to propose just as displayed in my installation that they co-exist.

Through my research, I have re-established a sentiment that I had once previously held, however wavered on. Back in 2019, I received a research scholarship and went on to complete research on being Afakasi. It had been a piece of research that was titled Dear

Catherine Tuimavave and focused on dance as a means of connecting with my Afakasi side, and more heavily delved into being a white-passing Afakasi specifically. During the research, I criticised my own approach to connecting with my culture and called myself out on my privilege and lack of effort. At the time I felt as though I was not doing enough, and that I clearly had to continually strive to do more, however, I propose that after my time spent on this research, my mentality has shifted. It is no longer such a black and white outcome of 'I need to try harder', but rather there is a more comforting sense of 'I belong, regardless', and I would argue that this is thanks to the research that this work intersects with for me. Afakasi women such as Lopesi and Taylor, while acknowledging the struggles, still proudly boast that they are Afakasi, and their energy has been infectious through my work. Koroneho and his work also exudes a sense of pride in appearance, regardless of how those stereotypical features might be perceived by others.

Overall this research, while confrontational at times for me to do personally, has felt more therapeutic than any other type of research that I have done on being Afakasi. While I see that my engagement with K-pop and Korean culture is prominent, I have come to a proposition that just because it is dominant this does not mean that it is damaging for me and the rest of us. Additionally, my Samoan heritage cannot be stripped from me, regardless of how I look, behave, or speak, and so while I may have personal guilt to continue to understand, it is something that I still unapologetically be when I am confident enough to step up and claim it.



## **6. Conclusion**

Culture is not made up but something that evolves which is human

(Edward T. Hall)

Overall, what I have found through my research, as briefly touched upon in the previous chapter, is that my perspective has certainly changed over time, and I expect will continue to change. My reflections and findings are that whilst my engagement with K-pop is dominant, my interests are my interests, and do not need to be labelled as destructive or not. My journey with my Samoan heritage is separate from my engagement, and as stated before, while there is guilt there, I think I do not need to hold myself so strictly as so limit my engagement with other cultures.

My creative practice as a whole has certainly shifted during this research. Coining my own methodology has helped to solidify the ways in which I work, and whilst I knew prior to this research that I wanted the material to be confrontational and raw in its own way, the final performance is definitely something that I have never quite worked with before. The different stages of 'play', 'revise', 'reimagine' and 'settle' exist as the core framework I followed, with it slightly shifting depending on whether I was working with choreography, production/postproduction, or the installation. Additionally, engaging with the concept that my research covers in ways beyond just a dance performance is an attempt to have the material and content expressed so that anyone could have access to. The installation, the films, a mix of text and spoken word, many of these are elements that I have either worked with very little or not at all, and so by challenging myself to create something accessible to as many people as possible, I expand my own creativity and way of working.

It is through this String and Shell methodology that leads to the final product. Two films, an interactive installation and the discoveries that have come along with it. In my chapter prior, I have gone into detail as to how I have used the poetry and spoken word within my performance, explaining some of the poetics behind my movement and how I intended them

to fit with the audio. I also discuss some of the actual details of the installation and the concepts that prompted them, as well as delving more into some of the influences that lead to certain decisions or ideas in my work. Finishing off with some concluding thoughts and reflections that my creative practice encouraged,

The final performance *Front Door, Back Door* played heavily on elements of hybridity, showcasing the two identities as side by side visually, but also divided. This mirrors the hybridity that I discuss in the literature review, and is an element of being mixed race that resonates with me. My work also intended to activate the Vā. A concept I had, if I am reflecting honestly, avoided in the past due to my not fully understanding it. It now, however, has played a key role in the way in which my work has come about and also the way in which my work has been received. The space, the people, my own position and everything in between has all contributed and shaped my research, and lead me to my current conclusion as stated above.

I would argue that while there is little representation within academia, these experiences are certainly something that occurs and therefore should be explored within an academic space. This research sits more specifically within a Westernised academic context, and my exploration of culture through a fusion of contemporary dance and indigenous dance I argue reflects on the colonial Palāngi space in which this research takes place. As my own personal position with my identity sits closer to my Palāngi heritage than it does my Samoan, much of my engagement with indigenous concepts feel to me as though they are only grazing the surface, and it has overall been a very personal exploration in general. I propose that I might further this research not only by leaning heavier and delving deeper into Samoan and Pacific ideas, but also by bringing in other indigenous voices that might add their experiences and voices. This work is the type of project in which every day I am still experiencing and engaging with the ideas constantly. It is a lived in type of research, and I expect that I could even branch out further, in regard to myself and others.



I leave you with something I said, and thought, at the very start of this research. I am Cat Raynel, but I am also Catherine Tuimavave. My research reenforces the idea that one can exist beside the other, that both have value and both are on their own journey. They are not mutually exclusive, and so I am eager to carry on with my research as I continue to claim my Samoa-ness as my own.

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