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The art of living

Retro-gradient jives

An exegesis presented in partial fulfilment of
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*What is forever ash, if it ain't living ?
I'd forgotten how to be kind,
Acting sad, being*

*Smoke signs baby
It's been a while
I'd change my clothes
I'd be aaaaaa
Off somewhere, listening
Retro gradient jives...*

*Where can I say, gay asylum?
Presenting frowns, clean cut
Acting sad, being*

*Can't colour words to suit
Ash,
It's when lost alive,
Given light speed
Retro gradient jives*

Abstract:

Is there an art to living? To make meaning of the sober experience, the shortcomings of my present life. These works, albeit tell of the grief, love, longing, loss, dreams, of living. I try to resist the retrogressive forces of our contemporary cultural, social and political maelstrom. Explored through a series of performative and durational lived works; *1442 Hinemoa St* 2017, my childhood home is now an Airbnb, an observation of the domestic home and the surround neoliberal forces in Aōtearoa. *Poroporo Road* 2017, a journey taken with my uncle to find my grandfather's tin of buried marbles, ontologically observing the Māori ritual of tikanga. *An Intercity Bus Ride* 2017, a queer passage of grief. *FUN-RAZAR* 2017, a convivial fundraiser with a latent nomadism, negotiating dematerialising art practice. *Two afternoons spent in Mexico City* 2017, participation in the tourism economy of Mexico City. *Suncake*, 2018 a ritualised sharing of cultural ecosystems. *A Love Song* 2018, a musical cathartic embodiment of grief. *Tropical Lab* 2018, a study of my mother's oral histories and geopolitics of international socially engaged residencies. *Nans home*, an epistemological study of living. I document my humbling experience of what it has been like to frame life as art.



Just after the sun had set behind Pihanga, Walter returned with one fish and started to wade back. At that moment Lionel and Frank, having had no luck, returned, stowed the boat away and were walking along the track on the opposite bank.

“He’s certainly a bit close to the rapid,” Frank answered.

“Anyhow he’s done it before and he’s a strong wader,”

The words were hardly out of his mouth when Walter fell flat on his face. He was on his feet again in the instant less than knee-deep. Such a slip up in shallow water is so commonplace that the two watchers were no unduly concerned. Still they waited to see Walter home, if not very dry.

“He’s taking his rod down,” Frank said.

“Perhaps he’s lost his wading stick and is going to use the butt instead,” Lionel replied.

A full minute went by and Walter faced upstream and resumed his journey. He had taken only a couple of steps when he fell again, probably tripping over one of those boulders for the light was falling fast.

“Come on!” cried Lionel.

“Quick, we must get across to him. Frank, you bring the rope, I’ll wade to the island.”

At some risk Lionel waded across above the near rapid. Walter was on all fours trying to crawl into slower water but he was obviously unable to get a grip on the greasy rocks. Before Lionel had reached the island the force of the current had swept Walter into the rapid. No power on earth could have saved him. His body was found the following afternoon at the Duchess Pool, near below the Parade.¹

¹ P. 107. Hickling, H. (1988). *Freshwater admiral : Fishing the tongariro river and lake taupo : Consisting of freshwater admiral* (Sporting heritage series, no. 4). Auckland, N.Z. : Halcyon Press.

The previous excerpt recounts the final moments of my great grandfather, Walter Linton before he drowned in the Tongariro River. Walter was an avid Trout Fisherman and manager of the Dalefield Factory in Carterton, Wairarapa. My grandmother, Helen Jean Linton spoke fondly of her father's many accolades, proud winner of The Bledisloe Cup at the London Dairy Show for "the best exhibit of Dominion Cheddar Cheese", and further winner of The Hansen Challenge Trophy from the British Dairy Farmers Association.

On the bottom shelf of my grandmother's bedroom cupboard are a row of photo albums, each labeled with our names, James, John, Peter, Mary, The Lintons, The Reids, The Kururangis. I have returned home, to grieve and sit alone in her room several months after her passing. No longer am I greeted by her conversation and able to listen to her recount the many oral histories at the dining room table. Tucked into the album, I find the story which tells of my grandmother's loss of her father, a photocopied page narrated by Vice-Admiral Harold Hickling.

The dining room table cover is green, faded from the sun, I tried to find another for my own table. The fringe is edged with looped green cotton forming soft tassels I brush between my fingertips. Sovereignty over the domestic home is a privilege that lies flat, outstretched, draped over the four corners. Soon, the centrifugal forces that support the conversation around our family's grief will be overturned. No longer can I listen to stories of my great grandfather Walter, drift with the currents, as day's ebb with the fading matriarch.

Grief is not a happy story, it tells of tragedy, of loss and emptiness. My grandmother's house will soon be subjected to the same neoliberal forces that commodified my childhood home into an Airbnb. The archetype of the domestic house or family home allows a private domesticity, an atmosphere of time spent in the kitchen, or in the living with family. Love, lemon meringue pie cooked before arriving home, banana cake sliced in half to share. I *long* for time alone and travel home. I *dream* of places we no longer own and hold onto love.

It is nine kilometres from the Airport to the house. The home is held only by my request and has already begun being stripped of unwanted items. The grief I feel is not a measurable distance or a duration held for a couple of hours, at days length. It is a short drive to his childhood home, a brisk walk to our new abode, a crawl as I roam my family histories.

Is the sense of grief that I have described for my grandmother something to be understood as something only pertaining to my family history? Could it be a shared longing for the past? Similar to which is reflected in our current contemporary politics in Aōtearoa. Lamenting past political dreams of a fair free nation, and an egalitarian vision of home and sovereignty for the individual. Longing, is an underlying tenant of Mātauranga Māori. It can be a Māori phrase, i-ngā-rā-o-muā, an enduring weaving of the past into the present. What is the art of dreaming? Dreams are powerful political ideology which shapes the way nations live. For an artist it is a queer question of living with his emotions. Living with his family's oral histories. I grieve the loss of my grandmother and watch her home slowly become another. Observing the surrounding maelstrom of contemporary politics. Taking notice and resisting any conclusion.



² Ngutu Awa, the river mouth of the Waiapu at Rangitukia. Uncle John and I had walked together along as I took a sound recording of the waves crashing.