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The art of living

Retro-gradient jives

An exegesis presented in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of

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James Tapsell - Kururangi

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*What is forever ash, if it ain't living ?
Id 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.



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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.

Ko te wai anake o Te Mokamoka te aū ana. It is only Te Mokamoka River that moves. ³

I-ngā-rā-o-mua is a Māori phrase which is key to how I view the world in Aōtearoa. It's meaning encapsulates an enduring presentness which has remained constant as the celestial beings described in our oral histories. I liken the phrase to the flow of a river. Like Ngāi Tahu scholar Te Maire Tau states, it is a way of understanding the ontological and epistemological foundations for Mātauranga Māori.⁴ Longing, not for the past, but our particular way of deeply viewing the world, imbuing it with meaning. *Ko te wai anake o Te Mokamoka te aū ana* is part of a Ngāi Tahu oral history. An account of defeat, as two survivors reached chief Moki at Kaikoura.⁵

Tikanga is the pathway that does not have to be walked alone. I'm listening for the Waiapu, walking toward the mouth, Uncle John describes something distinct, red, he isn't certain; but it looks like a bone. The bones are buried in the hills. There are no sounds of fishermen, no Kahawai, no one of Ngāti Porou descent. I heard the Waiapu when it weaved through the rocks at the base of Hikurangi. A sea gull cried at dawn where the Waiapu bed lay empty. The pine trees filled the river with silt. The rua don't speak, or sing, they're subterranean storehouses at the Kururangi homestead, they have no voice. I don't know how long the whenua at Poroporo Road had been calling to me, that my grandfather Boy Boy had been speaking.

³ (Tau, 2002).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

Tikanga is a quiet place where the oral histories⁶ from Uncle John were handed down to me. I'll describe the sound. At first his voice is gruff, filled with questions, why I did not let him know. Soon, Uncle John is speaking, his voice is low and monotonous, the waves crash so heavily at Rangitukia sometimes they peak out the recording. Our footsteps are not in synch, the dissonant timbre is brilliant white, a morning tone quiet after a long week of rain.

⁶ Writing in the *Journal of New Zealand Studies*, Te Maire Tau highlights the lack of writing and research which has been undertaken on understanding Māori oral histories. Interpreting Māori oral histories is a contentious issue. Salmond argues that they are difficult for historians to understand. As does Te Maire Tau, highlighting that oral histories should not be placed in relation to time, but instead sit within a cultural context; a woven network of natural phenomena, sacred and common space, a way of grieving. Moreover, both Salmond and Judith Binney, New Zealand historians have recognised the unique, holistic nature of Mātauranga Māori. As stated by Binney... *Māori oral history is not merely another source of information, nor even of perception. The purposes of the oral narrative tradition are to establish meaning for events, and to give a validation for the family's and the group's particular claims to mana and knowledge.*

ii. 1442 Hinemoa Street



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Last year, I returned home to visit my own family homestead in Rotorua. We had sold my childhood home during the past summer, to a man from Tāmaki Makaurau who also bought the neighbour's property. He had converted both properties on Hinemoa St to Airbnb's, leaving them for the most part unchanged. I am haunted with the task of contending with our contemporary politics, legacies of past socio-economic reforms, The Mother of All Budgets, Rogernomics, while grieving my loss of home. Observing the tempest, discomfort and disconnection while longing to return to my past. Disconnected, and feeling like a tourist in my own home town. Discomfort, the unearthly outsideness, so out of place within New Zealand.

⁷ A view from my childhood bedroom toward the living room when I stayed at the Airbnb in 2017.

*Perhaps we need to understand how it is that we live among the ‘algia,’ the longing itself, which is always a longing for a world yet to come. This is a much more difficult and unsettling task: we have nothing clear to return to.*⁸

The garden and lawn were unkempt that my grandmother and I would tend. Magnolia buds frail with the June frost, whose white blossoms littered the front yard in August. Fat, ripe, yellow lemons left unpicked by the visitors. Mailers collected. T.V antenna sagged, weighing in the cold winter’s day. However, the damp ridden bungalow still maintained a sense of home. The ambit of feelings abandoned as our family moved are similar to the observations of Rhodes scholar Andrew Dean. Writing on his own his home in Canterbury, Dean argues that our contemporary politics in Aōtearoa are not immune from nostalgia.

*Politics is so much about feeling. I wonder if my first political experience was trudging my way home from my new school in late summer, cricket bag on my back, in the norwest wind. There, feeling a belatedness I did know had existed. I longed for a utopian past, and wished for a world in the present that had seemingly departed.*⁹

As I daydreamed in the front living room, the complex dynamism moved in, comfort found in the afternoon sun as the loss of my home passed. Nostalgia quells my discomfort and disconnection, a brief interregnum.¹⁰ Dean holds nostalgia responsible as the world looks toward the future. Living with our romantic visions of pastoral nationalism, summers spent playing cricket, clouding our present squalor. Dreams of a fairer New Zealand, of freedom for an individual, to live and choose his own family’s history.

*Nostalgia, as in a form of historical longing, represents the precise inverse of this. It is an attachment to things as they were, and a failure to reckon with the real conditions of life. In this sense, it is written off as a false consciousness, a mystification, a recherché dream.*¹¹

⁸ (Dean, 2017).

⁹ (Dean, Autumn, 2017).

¹⁰ “It seems that political struggle is back, acting as the bridge between a persistent sense of unfairness and that the hope for something better, helping solve the antagonism between the historical and the utopian. The word interregnum implies that we are in a time of uncertainty, a space between dominant ideologies.” (Godfery, 2016, p.16-17).

¹¹ (Dean, Autumn, 2017).

We no longer live as neighbours to the Qunlins, or across from the poverty-stricken flats. A sober, empty neighbourhood with two new Airbnb's. Fresh asphalt. Drains laid. As the central building district extends. My visit to the Airbnb just one of the many, like other travellers staying a night or two and leaving for new visions.

iii. Poroporo Road



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Is it a queer dream for an artist to dig for his sovereignty? To plot a piecemeal description, at another abandoned home, a past family history. Hereumu Station runs the ridge alongside the Waiapu Valley. Our land, on Poroporo Road, had been combined with the neighbours as a measure against the dwindling township and loss of community. The Kururangis, the Johnsons, the Haigs, Mena, Boyboy, Lassi, Sally, my grandmother and grandfather, mother, and her two brothers, John, Peter, had all left, or died, many years ago.

Below the orchard I search for the rusted tin buried by my grandfather Boyboy had hid to protect from his peers. I dream that I will find his collection of prized galaxies and milky-ways in the rubble of the Kururangi fireplace. I walk towards this dream guided by my mother, *across the small stream, in the shade of the pines*. I feel the damp earth rise as my Uncle John dutifully observes my rêverie.

¹² *Walking across the dry Waiapu river bed at dawn as Uncle John cooked sausages near to the second homestead at Tiki. We had stayed the night in a Jucy Campervan.*

Is it dangerous for a nation to fashion an image of home independent from the present? A contemporary politics which ignores the art of dreaming, ignores the past history of Aōtearoa?¹³ Max Harris, in *The Journal of Urgent Writing*, argues about the danger of nationalist dreams.¹⁴ Harris writes on our nation's aspirations which he grew up with in New Zealand. A dream of an egalitarian nation, a classless society, which had the time and place to dream. Time to dream at the beach. A dream for individuals of homeownership. A place for everyone in Aōtearoa to be spend with family. *A national dream is not just a piece of the past or piece of the present. It is not a fragment of identity. It is a national vision that connects with people.*¹⁵

Māori were once an a-historic society whose visionaries, Tōhunga did not look at the future, but read the signs within their world to guide them. Their ancestors lived within their land and they spoke of them in the present.¹⁶ Our loss according to Andrew Dean was not our ability to dream, but our loss of sense to connect with our surroundings and our failure to recognise the socio-economic issues that face New Zealand. As too for Max Harris.

*We are drifting as a country without the depth of commitment needed to address interconnected long-term challenges... we need to get into the clouds – the space for dreaming – to see our own Long White Cloud has lost its shape. Clarity about our country's vision can also help to tackle the urgent challenges of our time.*¹⁷

I still dream of marbles left long ago in isolation. I pick the clear glass world in which I hear my uncle's conversations. I rummage through his stories of how it used to be. I walk amongst the subterranean storehouses of forgotten homes and place names, a land of the long white cloud. Aōtea-roa.

¹³ Max Harris, writing in *The Journal of Urgent Writing Vol. 2*, argues that a national dream must address contemporary Aōtearoa. A nation working through decolonisation, and an ongoing process and wealth inequality. A gambit of urgent socio-economic issues. (Harris, 2017).

¹⁴ (Harris, 2017).

¹⁵ Ibid. P..279.

¹⁶ "... tohunga such as Ti-aro-rua maybe seen as fortune-tellers or seers... This is not the case, because the way in which Māori constructed time meant there was no such thing as the future and past as these ideas are understood today. In the passage above (Hāpopo), the tohunga is not so much gazing into the past as reading the present." (Tau, 2002, p.70).

¹⁷ (Harris, 2017. p. 282).

2. An Intercity busRide



The protagonist of the bus ride is my autobiography, loss a queer passenger who keeps me company. My concern, the grief I feel stretched along the undulating asphalt. I travel on the bus, and loneliness takes hold. My desire is to make the bus ride a conceptual score. A ride home that anyone could undertake, but it operates only for me—the maverick. The script burns upon my arrival, fuel to the loss of childhood home. Hell, there is no family home! All that lives is a new type of currency, built on our desire for domesticity. My family home is now an Airbnb.

This work draws upon the final scenes of director John Schlesinger's 1969 film *Midnight Cowboy*.¹⁹ As its protagonist Joe Buck (Jon Voight) cares for his friend Ratso (Dustin Hoffman) and his dying wish to travel to the Florida Keys, Ratso's body slowly fails and dies on route. The bus ride is not a happy one. There is nothing romantic or heroic as Ratso dies. Joe is dressed in his cowboy shirt falling helpless as Ratso pisses himself, coughs, and his fever rises.

The bus ride is my first attempt at a time-based passage. I dislike describing it as time-based, rather it is an attempt to demarcate a duration to grieve, to be a passenger. It sets in motion a radical shift in my

¹⁸ [Video Still]. In (Schlesinger, 1969).

¹⁹ (Schlesinger, 1969).

artistic practice to include the amalgam of feelings that empathically equate each passenger as an equal.

My time-based approach to artistic practice responds to a similar journey taken by American sculptor Tony Smith. I had encountered the sombre ride, in a seminal critical essay on Minimal Art by Michael Fried.²⁰ Driving down the unfinished New Jersey Turnpike, sculptor Tony Smith took in the painterly experience one evening:

*I took three students and drove somewhere in the Meadows to New Brunswick. It was a dark night and there were no lights or shoulder markers, lines, railings or anything at all except the dark pavement moving through the landscape of the flats...*²¹

My own bus ride, began with my boyfriend dropping me off at the train station. I found a seat at the front and settled in. I occasionally recorded the intercom announcements and sent snapchats to my love. The other passengers are wholly unaware that I need them. The manifest, a few tourists speaking in German, the odd kuia, street kid, and all of the others I have forgotten. The six-hour trip travels the central plateau from Wellington to Rotorua.

The unstructured characteristic of a bus ride leans toward a theatricality for Fried which seeks to account for the entire situation as the work of art. Degeneration an axiom of literalist art which for Fried, is an inherent hostile condition the further artists like Smith constitute their essence as art.²²

Marking a duration, a passage of time, becomes the first part of the Airbnb work. I left my boyfriend and our honeymoon is over. I felt torn between grief and love, loss and longing. The bus ride democratises the passengers, the bus ticket, the sunset, velcro curtains, mincemeat pies, cabinet food, highway restrooms, the smell of sulphur, all become equal parts of the artwork. The bus ride also operated on a metaphysical level.

²⁰ (Fried, 1967).

²¹ (Wagstaff, 1966)

²² Ibid.

What was Smith's experience on the turnpike? Or to put the same question another way, if the turnpike, airstrips, and drill ground are not works of art, what are they?—What, indeed, if not empty, or “abandoned,” situations?... on the turnpike by the constant onrush of the road, the simultaneous recession of new reaches of dark pavement illumined by the onrushing headlights, the sense of the turnpike itself as something enormous, abandoned, derelict, existing for Smith alone and for those in the car with him.²³

We had stopped for lunch at the Flat Hills Cafe, again in Turangi. Dusk, sunset along State Highway 30, greeted by the familiar foggy farmland of Reporoa. Tired and restless, we pulled round Fenton St into the Visitor Centre in Rotorua. Mum waited opposite at the Sir Howard Morrison Centre once known as the convention centre. The bus continued on to Auckland.

²³ Ibid. P. 6.

3. FUN-RAZAR 2017



FUN-RAZAR 2017 involved me trying to sell the contents of my studio as part of the year-end MFA crit. The contents of my studio had been drifting amidst the shared space. I took all the items outside prior to the critique, and stuck the Tino rangatiratanga flag up with masking tape. Then I wrote in chalk “FUN-RAZAR”. I sat down, ordered online from Pizza Hut, and chatted with any students who turned up. FUN-RAZAR 2017 was my attempt at fundraising towards my trip to Mexico for my cousin’s wedding. I appreciated that I could conduct my art critique by selling my collected undergraduate art supplies, in one fell swoop. My supervisor had recently told me to clean up my studio. I advertised the event on the university notice boards.

A fundraiser allowed me to have some fun making art. I wondered if a fundraiser could be framed as art. This was my first attempt at bringing a practical aspect of my life into what I made. I tried to make a work located in the present, addressing what I was facing, and that was needing money. On the day, I

decided to sell everything: library books, my friend's exhibition catalogues, my grandmother's letters, a flower, my own books like Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, a lamp, a tripod, some speakers, my old computer, and perhaps even myself if anyone had asked, but they did not. I wanted to demonstrate that life is not simple, just like the contents of my studio: a bit of everything, not compartmentalized.

I wanted to sell the contents of my studio to become a nomad. Could I be a nomad owning all this material crap? I had been speaking with Muhammed, his origins from a Northeast African population who was once nomadic. His parents were second-generation city-dwellers. When I reference nomadism, I think of curator Nicolas Bourriaud's 2009 exhibition for the Tate Modern, called *Altermodern*. He defined the *homo viator* as the artist in our globalised world.²⁴

The artist becomes 'homo viator', the prototype of the contemporary traveller whose passage through signs and formats refers to a contemporary experience of mobility, travel and transpassing. This evolution can be seen in the way works are made: a new type of form is appearing, the journey-form, made of lines drawn both in space and time, materialising trajectories rather than destinations. The form of the work expresses a course, a wandering, rather than a fixed space-time.

I also was aware of Bourriaud's observations of the nineties artists whom he classified as "relational aesthetics."²⁵ I was reading Continental Philosophy at this stage. I am sure Derrida was not far from my mind.²⁶ A deconstruction of any institution starts from within. However, once the fundraiser began, I wondered what it would mean to take money from people. Then the work would be a monetised argument, Capitalist, and so on. I did not want to talk about making money. I also did not have time or could be bothered going to the bank to get cash.

²⁴ (Tate, 2009).

²⁵ (Bartholomew, 2009).

²⁶ "The very condition of a deconstruction (of the archive) may be at work in the work, within the system to be deconstructed. It may already be located there, already at work. Not at the centre, but in an eccentric centre, in a corner whose eccentricity assures the solid concentration of the system, participating in the construction of what it, at the same time, threatens to deconstruct. One might then be inclined to reach this conclusion: deconstruction is not an operation that supervenes afterwards, from the outside, one fine day. It is always already at work in the work. Since the destructive force of Deconstruction is always already contained within the very architecture of the work, all one would finally have to do to be able to deconstruct, given this always already, is to do memory work." (Derrida, 1989, p.73).

I had romanticised going to Mexico for my cousin's wedding. In November, I would leave for L.A. In Mexico, I wanted to walk in the desert and I did not know if I would reach spiritual enlightenment if I owned all this stuff, it was like Marie Kondo and her method of decluttering on steroids.²⁷ Performance artists including Allan Kaprow, musician John Cage, and the happenings of the 1960s were influences on FUN-RAZAR. I remember an image of Kaprow's happenings, a lawnmower in the middle of a loft from his Spring Happening²⁸ FUN-RAZAR 2017 did not make me any money. My boyfriend at the time turned up half-way through and was heart-broken. Not prepared to see me discard all my belongings, he felt I was leaving him behind. Nonetheless, I failed to sell anything, which I didn't expect.

FUN-RAZAR 2017 involved a succession of increasingly disconnected events. The pizza delivery guy turned up, so my classmates stood in the cold wind and ate. I usually don't eat that many carbs so I wasn't too interested in pizza. My boyfriend and I kept on tearfully fighting about the prospect of a long-distance relationship. I did not know what to say to my classmates, so I just made weirdly vague statements, including that their bids weren't high enough. One student was annoyed that he had gone to get money at the ATM and I wasn't trying to be intentionally deceitful. The work quickly transformed from being all fun and games to a group of people feeling it was a joke at their expense. I should have known by the title.

FUN-RAZAR 2017 could be viewed in the context of the increasing dematerialisation of my practice. Perhaps something to do with artefacts, instead of rushing into the gallery with a readymade. I was selling things off, but not, but still thinking about it. Maybe the most important part is the hesitation.

²⁷ (Kondo, 2015).

²⁸ (Kaprow, 1966).



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²⁹ *Greyhound pit stop along Route 10 Palm Springs on the way to my cousin's wedding in Mexico, an extended durational work to consider a foreign geopolitics to my own.*

4. Two afternoons spent in Mexico City, 2017



Artist Andrea Fraser lifted her green skirt revealing her underwear to bemused museum goers blindsided by her critique within the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao.³⁰ This erotic performative persona is documented in *Little Frank and his Carp* (2001), a performance disrupting the standard ambience of the gallery.

My own *Two afternoons spent in Mexico City 2017* consists of two ephemeral performative durations taking place in the local tourist economy. One afternoon of a similar erotic nature to Fraser's work, was spent at the Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporáneo in Chapultepec Park. The second, an exhaustive task of navigating a Wikitravel guide to the outskirts of Mexico City. Visiting the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacán. Both afternoon's epicentres are cultural landmarks. However Teotihuacán is a historic national archeological site whereas the Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporáneo is post-modern museum filled with the contemporary works of international artists like Anri Sala.

³⁰ (Fraser, 2001).

Two afternoons spent in Mexico City, 2017, part one began by following a loose guide from Wikipedia. I awoke, dazed from sleeping in, and ate *huevos pochados, pimientos, epazote y verdolagas* at Lardo in La Condesa, a gentrified Western restaurant. I embark on my trip to the Pyramid of the Sun with the ethos of taking only ‘local transport’. Halfway there I get lost at the Metro Station *Canal del Norte* which I had mistaken for *Autobuses del Norte*. No Pirámide. I decide to buy a lot of food and wander the nearby district, with a stockpile of chips, a Subway chicken sandwich, plain biscuits, and four litres of water. As my Wikipedia guide informs me, there are no stalls at Teotihuacán. I return to the station a little worried as it is now late afternoon and take a direct line to the correct station. I give some of the biscuits to a couple of elderly ladies while waiting for the bus out and they gave me a piece of candy. The bus ride out is equally nerve racking as the passengers include solely Spanish-speaking locals, which I cannot, and so depend on cues from the women. I eventually arrive with only an hour left and scale the Pyramid of the Sun. Listening to the dogs bark, I wondered why I bought so much food. I made it for sunset.



Two afternoons spent in Mexico City, 2017 part two involved a recommendation from my friends Nancy and Israel who live in Mexico City. Nancy, the sister of Oscar and partner of Sarah, a work colleague from New Zealand. It begins with a brief visit to the museum counter of the Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporáneo. I show my Student ID to the host as evidence of being a tertiary student, and gain a complimentary pass to the museum. I watch French artist Anri Sala’s video work *Ravel Ravel*

Unravel shown at the 55th Venice Biennale for a short period. The music reaches throughout the museum. As I reach the main atrium, I take out my iPhone and record the drums of Sala. Soon my attention shifts to the sexy security guard as I voyeuristically observe him. The security guard and I exchange a brief conversation as he informs me I am not allowed to record any part of the exhibition. I then leave the gallery and sit between two speakers, on a bench, looking out into the trees of Chapultepec Park. A handsome man and his pedigree dog pause at one of the trees. I draw in my diary a ring for my lover. I return to the gallery and briefly speed through the remainder. I pass Peruvian Martin Chambi's photographs of the Andes and the gift shop. I watch the shop clerk take one woman around the ceramics and generic timepieces. I walk out without purchasing anything.

Two afternoons spent in Mexico City, 2017 does not attempt to actively critique the tourism economy but rather takes part within that context, with awareness of the performative antecedents such as Fraser's. *Two afternoons spent in Mexico City, 2017* asserted my acceptance of the unavoidable tourist traps and the comfort found within the institutional architecture of tourism. The performative gesture however disheartening, was central to my negotiation of making art while in a different country. As such, Mexico's political discourse was unfamiliar. Therefore, I took on the role of gallery-goer and tourist in the final week in Mexico, homesick for my boyfriend.



5. Sun cake 2018



This is a sun cake. What do you need to make a sun cake you might ask? The main ingredient is that it must rise with the sun. However, no one who ate the cake asked that question. Some even had two pieces of vegan, gluten-free cake. I thought it tasted like cow hooves. I had burnt it by accident. While busily cleaning the communal kitchen, I had forgotten about it. It formed part of my concerted effort to be more empathic, one of the credo I was living by for Ramadan.

Sun cake rises with the sun. It could be any cake really, although I think it is better if it is yellowish as it aids the name. The ingredients are as follows; corn flour, coconut sugar, curry (that gives it the mystery), oil, brown sugar, vanilla bean paste, baking powder, Himalayan pink salt, soymilk, a lemon, and more brown sugar to drizzle, to cover up the fact that you burnt the cake.

Sitting on a damp hill on a grey day, some crouched and others asked what the sun cake was about. The antecedent was another participatory durational work. I intended to conduct a convivial trip to the Newtown Smartwash, guided by the premise that I needed to wash my car. *Carwash* drew upon the

theatrical genre of tragedy, specifically Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.³¹ It addressed the vulnerable space of heartbreak, as I had recently split from my boyfriend and spent two weeks living a nomadic life between my car and art studio. I envisioned the journey as a theatrical staging using the backdrop of Newtown, my ex as the ghost, a haunting which remained absent from the work. At that time, I was so upset I could not talk about the spectre and simply spoke of the need to clean my car. *Carwash* exposed the passengers to my conflicted feelings around the politics of love through my inability to communicate the grief I felt.



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Sun cake was a fourfold artwork whose artifice, the cake, represents the longer duration I spent fasting over the course of Ramadan. Fasting is a linear endurance process encompassing a month as I observed my own strict but secular rituals for Ramadan. Secondly, grieving, or learning to grieve involves the act of self-love. Thirdly, the sharing of food with others. Finally, *kanohi ki te kanohi*, an exploration of the Māori phrase which literally means face to face, a vulnerable encounter, or facing up to one another.

³¹ (Shakespeare).

³² *The Pre-Raphaelite painting Ophelia (1851-52) by Sir John Everett Millais, is an image of love which informed my envisioning of Carwash.* (Tate, 2018).

In considering the sharing of food and social practice, I found a useful reference in *Concoction*, a dinner hosted in Wellington in December 2014 by Elbow Room Gallery.³³ I had been invited by its curator Catherine Hunt to attend at 17 Whitmore Street, 450 meters from the Beehive for their temporary occupation of vacant office space, yet I was unable to attend. *Concoctions*' invitation to participate, however, extended my interest in rituals and the politics of sharing food. Not unlike relational works such as Rirkrit Tiravanija's serving of pad thai in his 1992 work *Untitled (Free)*, negotiating roles of artist and cook.³⁴ Differentiating the sun cake is perhaps the fact that the power relation was not exploring a social or curatorial phenomena, but a reflective look at the largest aspect of the ecosystem, the sun.

Within Māori cosmology, how Māui slowed the sun is a significant narrative in which he and his brothers brutally restrain Rā, the sun. *Sun cake* was a proposition to ask why Māui slowed the sun. The story begins with arguing Māui had slowed the sun as it moved too fast, leaving them with not enough time in their day.³⁵ Culturally, beyond mythology, Māori observe the ritual of fasting when dealing with a sacred passage of grief. What did it mean to study a weather phenomenon for an extended duration? What would it reveal about our ecosystem? My study of the sun, was not to essentialise my relation with the sun, but a temporal study of the allegorical narrative. A study of taking things more slowly.

³³ (Elbow Room, 2015).

³⁴ (Bourriaud, 2002).

³⁵ (Rautapu & Reedy, 1993).



36

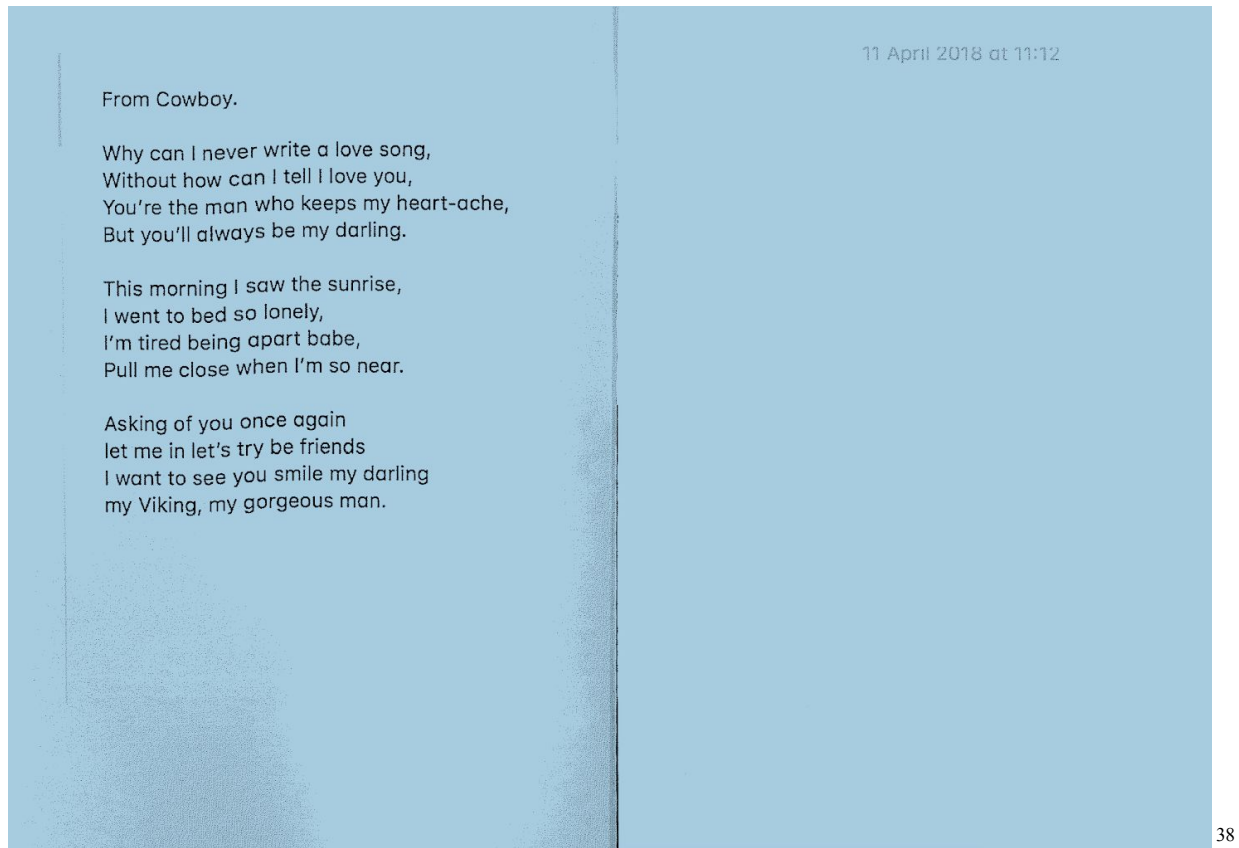
Kanohi ki te kanohi takes ownership through the practice of kōrero. It factors into my desire to meet someone face to face and take the time to listen. Importantly, it is a further development in my artistic practice to work in a vulnerable space and learn. My own shared ritualised encounter a serendipitous outcome of the *sun cake* and fasting for Ramadan. My friend Muhammad was practicing Ramadan and I learned much from him about fasting. I was particularly intrigued by his own family history, from a North-eastern African nomadic group who like Māori passed their histories orally. Listening to Muhammad I discovered the rituals and beliefs of his Islamic culture. He would not drink water during his fast. He would read the Quran over the period of Ramadan. Studying the sun, Muhammad would pray when the sun reached its zenith and again when his shadow doubled in length in the afternoon sun.

³⁶ “TAKEN4ARIDE” was a zine I made post Carwash, it documented the missing discourse as a visual diary.



³⁷ Spread from “thirdpersonobservations.” One of a series of zines which I called fun writing, this one documenting a week during my practice of Ramadan.

6. A Love Song 2018



A love song was one of the last text messages that I sent to my boyfriend after a long summer break-up. I sang the love song for my MFA thesis presentation many months later. *A love song* is not a thesis presentation. But the love song spoke to me. It spoke of how my lover always wrote effortless ballads. It addressed whether these feelings of heartbreak, of past love could be sung for my thesis presentation. I asked if a love song could be political? I thought of my time spent in the sun lamenting my love, the time I spent fasting, of being alone and strumming my guitar.

The primary precedent for a love song is a scene from *Beatriz at Dinner* by director Miguel Arteta.³⁹ I watched the 2017 film on the way home from Mexico aboard the American Airlines Dreamliner, after a long month of feeling homesick for my love. Beatriz (Salma Hayek) a holistic medical practitioner

³⁸ Spread from the zine “Am I a flower or a gardner?”

³⁹ (Arteta, 2017).

sings *Las Simples Cosas* a love song midway through a fairly despondent evening. Set in the hills of Los Angeles, Beatriz's rich hosts do not share her grief for *Las Simples Cosas*, simple things like her pet goat, killed by her neighbour. *The song talks about how we always want to go back to the places where we loved life, but, all the simple things are now gone.* *Beatriz at Dinner* had an uncanny resemblance to how I felt. I felt my love slip away. I could empathise with the fictional character's innate kindness and could sympathise over the loss of her hometown.



40

A love song was my first attempt at translating a textual work, *Am I a flower of a gardener* from a score into a performed work. Through practice, it was constructed from three basic chords on the guitar. G, AM, D. A humble composition which required many hours to get good enough to share with others. *A love song* allowed me to experiment musically with a cathartic process of grieving. *A love song* although durational was performed, as I sat in the audience, my voice a soul felt country twang.

A love song's lyrics speak in several registers, with the intention of creating a layered approach which might be addressed through each reading. Poetically, the song operates as a everyday country song which speaks to my longing to be with my lover again. Politically, the performance tries to transcend the rigour of the institution; informed by the desire of avant-garde artists to challenge why life, or the living become compartmentalised outside of the institution. *Why can I never write a love song, without how can I tell I love you?*

⁴⁰ (Arteta, 2017). [Video Still].

The avant garde set one kind of art against another; an art of shock and challenge and life against an art that presented and preserved ideals of beauty that were found only in frames and nowhere outside of the gallery. Their art had something in common with storming the Bastille or overthrowing the clergy. If the gallery was a place of meaning and beauty, why was it in there, pictured and distant, and not out here, in the lives of people. ⁴¹

⁴¹ (Corballis, 2017). Issue 5. P.12. [Editorial].

7. Tropical Lab 2018



In Singapore, this photograph becomes enigmatic without the oral histories that I grew up dreaming of with my mother. A young woman from Aōtearoa, teacher at the New Zealand Air Force school at Tengah Air Base. Oral histories to explain a row of unknown faces, a photograph of well-dressed school children. They take me out to roam the island's outer districts and market stalls, toward where my mother once lived in the hulking colonial bungalows.

I travelled to participate in the annual University exchange, with La Salle College of the Arts *Tropical Lab 2018*. A collaborative art making venture with various affiliated universities from around the globe. Although I was apprehensive to a growing sense of being a lab rat and a certain exoticism that the name implied. Going on holiday was a nice image after the past months of heartbreak. However, I responded instead to the complexity of making work under the guise of a convivial atmosphere which promoted community enjoyment without addressing the fact of Singapore's Colonial history.

Prior to my departure, I had interviewed my mother over FaceTime about her period living in Singapore, long before I was in the picture. She had nostalgically recounted her admiration for Lee

Kuan Yew's legacy as Prime Minister.⁴² I listened to her descriptions of the houses she lived in and the care she enacted when teaching the schoolchildren. Although the oral histories she shared were not passed on through this single exchange. I had listened to her stories of the animals, sights, smells, food and life she led since my childhood. Our house had been filled with artefacts from Singapore, prized lamps, our imported red Mitsubishi 2 door coupe, and several large clay pots.

My mother's oral histories informed my research interests prior to departure. I attempted to read Lee Kuan Yew's autobiography which in brief told of the atrocities committed by each wave of colonisation. Further that he was subject to growing up in Singapore. I felt further anxious with the task of making anything for La Salle and could only ease that feeling by remembering my own mother's time there.

To relieve some of the growing tension I felt toward being a lab rat in a social experiment, I looked to Claire Bishop's article *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics*. Bishop was critical of Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics*, arguing that his observations did not address the political nature of socially engaged art practice. Moreover, Bishop's article specifically criticized the laboratory paradigm which had been a ubiquitous phenomenon throughout the late 2000s, taken up by curators like Bourriaud.

There are many problems with this idea, not least of which is the difficulty of discerning a work whose identity is willfully unstable. Another problem is the case in which the 'laboratory' becomes marketable as a space of leisure and entertainment."⁴³

In a similar vein, Vera Mey, an independent curator and fellow Wellingtonian, had written of her time spent at Nanyang Technological University as curator of residencies. *Notes from a De Institutional Reflection on Exhaustion and Exuberance*⁴⁴ tells the reality of the exhaustive task of hosting visiting international artists. Revealing the mechanisms of power and labour force needed to facilitate a residency in Singapore and the dangers of exoticising the spotlight.

⁴² (Lee, 1998).

⁴³ (Bishop, 2004, p. 52).

⁴⁴ (Mey, 2017).

Over the few years I spent in Singapore, I witnessed the encroaching colonial apparatus of international projects, which aimed, and still aim for the circulation of globalisation in a world where research is something sandwiched between the arrivals gate and time spent by the swimming pool. ⁴⁵

Running was a performative ritual that I undertook most mornings, perhaps an endurance work within the tropical heat. My mother, a keen runner, had recommended running as a way to acclimatise, a fond memory of hers was running through the jungle with the Hash House Harriers. I ran from our accommodation on Upper Wilkie Road and would trudge my way past the Raffles Hotel where she had once celebrated a Christmas dinner. A slower stagger past the Carlton that I had booked for her stop over. Then I found my way to the glimmering first world nations gem Marina Bay.



As I slowly got to know the local shops near Upper Wilkie Road, I visited the local screen printer shop and had a T-shirt made, choosing my favourite photograph she had taken while living in Singapore. The white sportswear and picture of orchids was rather unflattering to my physique, so I decided to cut the arms off. I only wore the t-shirt once and spent the other days venturing out to the local pools and gyms to swim. Each day I rose later and grew more exhausted from walking in the Singapore heat.

⁴⁵ (Mey, 2017).



La Salle College of the Arts is a sleek and stark, glass-clad modular building. I spent most days outside the institution observing and taking note of the locals. I also wrote a short text work which I read for the presentations. I took part and enjoyed getting to know the fellow participants on our day excursions. I wandered intermittently in and out of the air-conditioned studios and watched the other artists work on their pieces for the culminating exhibition.

im a long way from home, looking for aroha, still, getting to know you, was a three-line prose poem printed in the map for the exhibition. It was not intended as an institutional critique but a considered reflection on the desire to point out the time it takes to get to know the social paradigms of a country. It reaffirmed my conscious decision to be generous in the participation of Tropical Lab. Finally, a note to myself of the reason I visited Singapore, to follow my mother's former life and gain a sense of what it was like for her to live there.

8. Nans home, work in progress

*Is the ordinary life a matter of meaningless drudgery, something to be saved by an injection of art's beauty, or is it already filled with the meanings people make for themselves?*⁴⁶

This is an exploratory proposition to write in the process of making art, of living with grief, amidst observing the torpor of my grandmother's home. I know that it is not the home, 30B Grey St, which is the proprietor of this present grief but viewing it through the passage of time. Facing the conditions of the present moment imbues the two-bedroom house with meaning, for a clear view of the present requires myself to disregard the past artefacts and common housewares to consider how it is being held in place.

My grandmother's home, I-ngā-rā-o-mua is once again a way of viewing our past as in front of us. Taken literally it is my grandmother's home as the thing in front of me. I-ngā-rā-o-mua also for Te Maire Tau meant viewing our ancestors with us as part of our present.⁴⁷ I do not however view my grandmother as a kitchen table or lemon meringue pie, but rather it is through sharing her oral stories with the visitors of her home which keeps her in present company. When I returned home last year to visit the Airbnb I went to visit my grandmother Jean. She recounted how New Zealand grieved for the first Labour government's prime minister Joseph Savage. Her oral history informed me that at each station as the train arrived, a solemn procession of New Zealanders came out to mourn.

Taking the plane, I will depart on Sunday and spend a week at my 30B Grey Street, in Glenholme, Rotorua. I will spend a few days living in the house, and then leave again on Thursday. I wonder if the durational passage of time is similar to the passenger of grief that travelled with me to Mexico and to our family homestead? I will make meaning through the ritualised performance of baking in the kitchen, lying in the sitting room and sleeping in the bedroom that I shared with my nan as a child.

⁴⁶(Corballis, 2017). Issue 5. P.17. [Editorial].

⁴⁷ See Ibid.

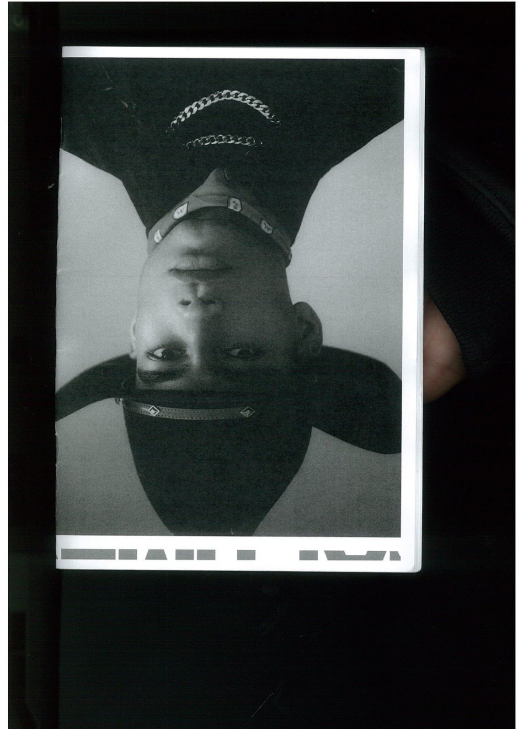
What are the shortcomings of privileging a politics of grief? A politics of grief takes care. It demands aroha of and for myself, self-love, and care for my family's oral histories. It takes me to my grandmother's home where I will have to live with the grief of her absence. It is a provocation to live in our contemporary longing for a politics which addresses what is directly in front of us. That is not a dream, or a lingering tenant but simply taking stock of what is left in her house, in my life, and in through living.



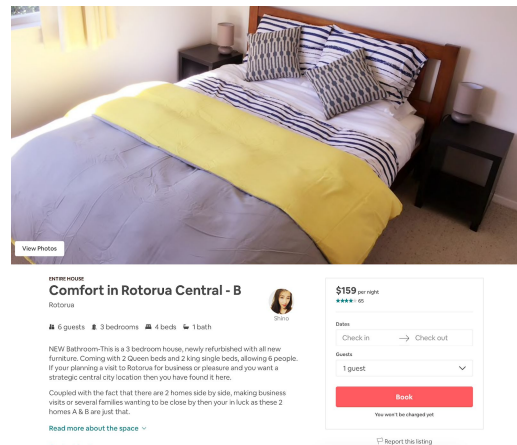
Appendices

A zine series was an experimental series of intertextual writings. A personal mode of writing which consisted of part autobiography, conceptual score, poetry, and automatic writing. The catalyst for the series a collection of fragmented notes on my iPhone. Documenting the week spent homeless in my art studio. An eleven-part series was created, the emphasis on a punk attitude of rapid, unedited, raw material. Carried in my grandfather's brown leather suitcase with gold pocket watch given to me on my 21st birthday.

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1pu3K0g4OYF0XWGG3FfUv2HbMZtkN41cX?usp=sharing>



<https://www.airbnb.co.nz/rooms/13803619>



Semester 1 Progress Report.

*Playing on a shitty blue portable speaker,
Alice Cooper's No More Mr. Nice Guy,
1973. I've got a bad reputation and I don't
know why...*

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0qveozZiZS4ZWdaaTNydWIKQ3I2dEtXTEtzZDlBdEJFeElV/view?usp=sharing>

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF CREATIVE ARTS
TOI RAUWHANGI

197.811 Master of Fine Arts

SEMESTER 1 PROGRESS REPORT

Student Name	ER
Student ID	131342 five one
Working Title of Thesis	i haven't changed my idea
Programme	Master of Fine Arts
Report Period	26/02/18 - 1/06/18
Supervisors	Martin Patrick, Sherron Te Ao

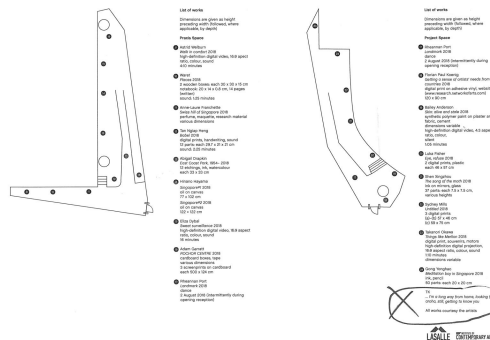
PART 1: To be completed by student (attach additional sheets if necessary) and emailed to each supervisor by 7 June 2018.

Briefly outline the developments you have made in your research since entering the Thesis year. Include creative works, exhibition projects, presentations, events, publications etc. that you have developed and presented in this report period.

i still don't think he is, but he's obviously a picture. Well, when observing him, he lives himself with a cup of tea. People generally fumes. He, when observing, is soft spoken.

[Tropical Lab 12 Sense List of Works].

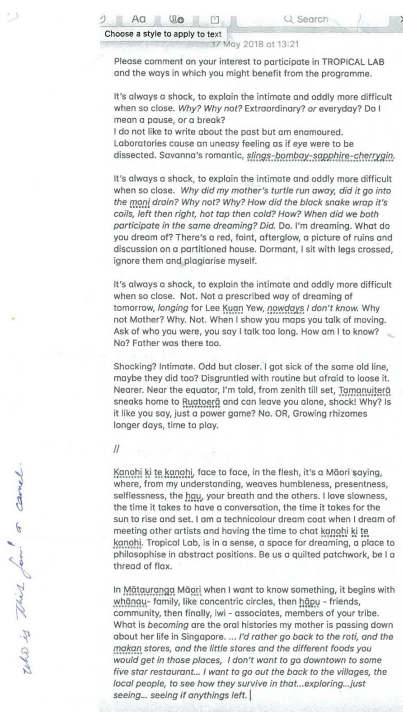
<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1t0vBnmrooBc9nKdyttGdrLKjHpwkVDCr>



Performance script.

[Interest for participation in Tropical Lab 2018.]

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1nSz0uVZ7nBkV-ZCtvzX9YXr1Xey8Yncs>



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