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fluid/s:
come, piss, spit; rivers, lakes, sea

exploring queer, brown, male identity in Aotearoa/New Zealand
through abject,
queer, feminist, and decolonisation theory

Elton Irvine
2021

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And a special mention to pams, for my nerves.

I use English and te reo Māori, providing translations for all te reo, maoridictionary.co.nz. Aware that most New Zealanders understand the majority of words included, not providing full translation of words errs, for me, on being hostile; does including translation for common words suggest the reader knows nothing? Is this just as hostile? I do not translate my mihi.¹

Māori writers writing in the dominant language English use literary strategies which ensure that our texts are transmitted in the way we want them to be. Many Māori poets ... writing in English, incorporate aspects of oral literature into our texts or use the various genre of oral literature as a foundation for contemporary texts.²

I have adopted Phelan's notions of the performative, the performance is the art, the *here and now*. The intangibility of odour, the crackle of my voice, the silences between words, the light on my skin. I have repeated only one performance, by the request of the audience. I have only recordings of tests, so I can see what I look like in a space, how I sound. These are not documentations of the acts.

The "tracelessness"³ of me in a room without you.

To write about the *there and then*, whilst "cancelling the tracelessness," the writing becomes performative, your reading becomes the performance. "Repeated words to become performative utterances, rather than, ... constant utterances."⁴ Odours form within, the warmth and weight of my body, the stink of my breath, hot, and sweet.

¹ Mihi, acknowledgment, to greet; here as a pepeha, an introduction acknowledging identity and heritage.

² Powhiri Wharemarāma Rika-Heke, Margin or Center? "Let me tell you! In the land of my ancestors I am the Centre": Indigenous writing in Aotearoa, in *English Postcoloniality: Literatures from around the World*, eds. Radhika Mohanram and Gita Rajan (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1996), 155.

³ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), 149.

⁴ Phelan, *Unmarked*, 149.

He mihi.

Ko Taupiri te maunga.

Ko Waikato te awa,

He piko he taniwaha, hei piko hei taniwaha.

Ko Tainui te waka.

Ko Tāwhiao te tangata.

Ko Tainui te iwi.

Ko Ngāti Hine te hapu.

Ko Waikere te marae.

Ko Ngāti Hine te wharenuī.

Ko Elton ahau.

the river and me

introduction and abstract.

father (the sailor)

river and sea – of change and of fucking

lover (but his hair)

lake and swamp – of family and of infection

brother (me)

stream and mist – of me and of longing

other (sleeping bag zips)

of others and me

mother(s fingers, elegant, upon me)

of cleanliness and of conclusions; and of a pause

If I stand, my feet bare: my toes short and stubby gripping; the skin betwixt toes still moist from bathing, the *brevibacterium linens* create that familiar cheesy stink, the dead skin paste to be wiped, with water wrinkled fingers, from between these wet toes.

If I stand with one foot in Te Ao Māori⁵ and the other in Te Ao Pākehā⁶ does the line between the one and the other cut directly through my cock?

Splitting the seam of my scrotum, that most delicate of stitch: a soft leather purse; delicate treasures carried, delicately. The raphe of my scrotum marking the line where two halves fused in the embryo, now becomes the line where two worlds converge.

These two worlds splitting up, slicing my cock in half, well, more to the left. Following up the swirls of hair on my gut, viscera spilling, fluids leaking and spurting, a soft wet bleed and a fall, and a squelch. Cleaving my sternum, crackling at the bones of my trachea, sound stifled and released. Running up, clack-clack, clack-clack, clack-clack (perhaps, as a child spinning in mother heels upon hardwood floor?) through my spine.

From the hang of my pouch: from the intimate fold of my exit, to my entrance.

⁵ Māori worldview which acknowledges the interconnectedness and interrelationship of all living and non-living things. Māori, the indigenous peoples of New Zealand.

⁶ Pākehā world view. Pākehā, Māori for New Zealanders primarily of European descent.

Splitting my lips, clattering my teeth my tongue slithers in two, words said and unsaid;
unfurling my philtrum, slicing through the split in the cartilage of the tip of my nose;
through the nasal bone, eyes river with tears, mourning those odours lost, and found.

Between my eyes: mono brow of my worried adolescence now gone, through the train
track stitching of scar tissue, through my ever thinning, ever retreating hair, to the top
of my head, I am unsheathed.

If I stand with a foot in each world I am cut, the fluids of my body spilling out, pooling
at my feet. A cleaved line slicing.

To place myself rigid between, straddling these seemingly disparate worlds, I am
severed, I am torn in two. But my body is not rigid, it curls and it folds: it stretches, it
droops and flexes, it expands, out, and beyond.

My body is fluid.

With my feet in the silty shores of the river, the chill and murk swirling about me, I
move out further, feeling the current push me, that taniwha⁷ pull. My scrotum
shrinks, delicate treasures sucked in between muscle and skin. My body shudders as

⁷ Taniwha are supernatural serpent like creatures, inhabiting bodies of water and caves. Protectors, and marauders; allegories of danger.

I move out further, nipple deep, the cold and the darkness swallow me, as my feet lose traction to the buoyancy of me.

I am awash now, as I wend, I meander, pulling at earth, carving through rock.

And I drink from this river, my head bobbing in and out of the water, I am not drowning
I am consuming, I am drinking, a thirst to my dry bones, marrow is dust - I am filling myself up until I sink, anchor soft, to the bottom of the this river.

Aligning queer, feminist theory, and the abject, to explore decolonization of self, in Aotearoa.⁸ I imbue myself with Tangaroa,⁹ I become what is his, my body becomes water, the scents, the feel of weightlessness. The taste upon lips, at back of throat, and the desperation, and the crushing embrace.

⁸ Māori word for New Zealand.

⁹ Tangaroa, Māori god of the sea, lakes, rivers and all creatures within.

I have stepped into this water, cautious, tentative - I just know there is a broken beer bottle laying, taniwha tooth sharp, to find the soft of heel, the slice of arch, or to halt the wiggle of toe. Beer bottles thrown from cars as they cross the bridge. Five concrete feet stomp between this bank and the other - five stitches to staunch what seems like a cut in the earth, an open wound, a gash.

And as children my father, the sailor, now the helmsman, on warm summer afternoons, would navigate the boat up the river, avoiding known tree stumps and shallows, meander, bend, reach. Steering the boat into alien vistas, views of things familiar, yet unseen. Houses caught between the highway and the river, men glimpsed as a child, sun warmed daydreaming. We have snuck past their façades, to see the machinations of their lives.

We would go upriver, he would turn the motor off, then we would drift.

And my father the sailor, would deftly tie rope to our life jackets, and gleefully throw us in. The sailor now becomes the fisherman, and we, it seems, the bait.

And with bated breath I am naked before you. The hum of air conditioning unit expelling air: the din of life outside, inaudible to the thud, thud, thud of my heart, and the rush of blood hot and red as I inhale, air rushed past vocal cords, *Come!* “Oral traditions remain the most important way of developing trust, sharing information, strategies, advice, contacts, and ideas.”¹⁰ My words fill the room. I claim this air, with my breath, between vibration of cords to hammer of drum, stapedes, incudes, mallei.¹¹ And these words unfold, these worlds they unfold between us.

Between little silences.

Between little spaces.

Filling the air between you and me.

¹⁰ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2021), 15.

¹¹ The bones of the human ear, plurals of.

Black ink on paper, my words read by the voice in your head. These words that fall from my mouth stick to these pages: mouth warmed honey, amber as kauri gum, bleeding sugary viscous, flies stick, caught in my beard. These words are my own, but are not of me, a language once foreign, my mother's mother's tongue has dried up, fine powdered pinks and purples blown back down my throat, inhaling dust. "The past, our stories local and global, the present, our communities, cultures, languages and social practices - all may be spaces of marginalization, but they have also become spaces of resistance and hope."¹² Add three parts dust of ancestors tongue, one part river water, and a nest of the pīwakawaka¹³ to make a poultice. Smear paste directly inside of mouth and about lips, ensuring to push paste past the uvula.

Fill me, my tongue will remember.

Being pulled along, coerced, gently by this river, floating past; our faces hot from the sun and the fear of the unknown, water warm as piss in a pool – past the backyards of men who have filled my child daydreams, the shame of thought, the shame of a rush of blood. Shame, and water, and my body have been close allies. "Shame's potential resides precisely in its uncertainty – in the moment of semiotic vulnerability, or a state of indecipherability, in which one is a floating sign, disattached."¹⁴ Of bathtime and

¹² Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 4.

¹³ Pīwakawaka being the fantail, the nest referring to Kōhanga Reo, the Māori language initiative, grounded in Māori principles and ideals, founded in the 70's.

¹⁴ Erin J. Rand. *Reclaiming Queer: Activist and Academic Rhetorics of Resistance* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2014), 90.

warm water and the shock of a child's erection, Maru¹⁵ can feel me getting hard inside of him; I have words for it now, for the feel, and of water, for the pleasure of my body.

These words borrowed from others define me, I am of the river, the river is me.

This river is change, it is in a constant state of flux, my saliva pools; my mouth is a site of both entry and exit, of desire and repulsion. "In topological, as well as functional and conceptual terms, the mouth is an in-between locus not only in terms of consumption, but also in terms of communication and emotional engagement."¹⁶ My mouth the site of change; my words activate, filling those little spaces of air, and time, and place. At moments seeming still, waiting undercurrents tugging at my feet, at my limbs. At times tumultuous, cascading, dashing heads against rocks, spewing forth, spittle in eye. Flowing, surging out, me the river, is met by me the sea.

The rhythm, that fuck push-pull: currents swift, under and over, waves crescent and curl and crash. The mouth of the river, my mouth open, and ready. "The mouth is especially privileged [...] it functions both introspectively and extrospectively. It is a primordial link [...] connecting perceptions from the inside to the outside."¹⁷ The boundaries of my body shift and eke out beyond me, beyond the brown of my skin, stepping,

¹⁵ Maru, the Māori god of fresh water.

¹⁶ Lorna Piatti-Farnell, *Consuming Gothic : Food and Horror in Film* (Palgrave Gothic. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 35.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1994), 99.

slipping out,
the eel-slick-slip-quick,
stepping out of one formal constraint in which our bodies inhabit this colonised world.

Where the river meets the sea, fresh water meets salty, that sweaty salt skin taste, the hot burn and choke of cum down my throat. “Such sites of partial disjunction can cause the interior order of a previously fixed conceptual arrangement to escape its confines, to trace a creative line of escape.”¹⁸ The severing of self in two; of self from self. Eel and stingray and crabs fall from my openings. My mouth the site of exit, of departure, but from what? And to where?

If I am the river, this river is me, where do I begin and where do I end?

Tangaroa and Maru playfully fight over my body, caught within rip and surge of wave, their essence flowing freely through my exits and entries, my belly distended, filled to grotesque with their salty viscous, their fluid swarming with the microscopic: algae, protozoans, bacteria, viruses. The gods of my pre-colonised people are inside of me, eel slip and wheke¹⁹ grip: my insides writhe, filled beyond discomfort, beyond pleasure. I am filled to bursting again. My body is a hīnaki.²⁰

¹⁸ Simon Bignall and Daryle Rigney, *Indigeneity, Posthumanism and Nomad Thought: Transforming Colonial Ecologies* (Rowman and Littlefield International, 2019), 173. Writing here, of deterritorialising, Bignall and Rigney see a shifting of the core structure, of indigenous concepts and being, combining tradition with new ideas. Adaption and modernisation.

¹⁹ Wheke, Māori for octopus.

²⁰ Hīnaki, Māori traditional eel net.

My first sexual experience with another was with my cousin, I was six, he a year younger. Our skin still smelling of chlorine, eyes still red from that burn; summer's days in his family's pool. He had a deftness, a dexterity suggesting I was not his first. Surrounded by his collection of found soda, and beer cans, and a fleet of Matchbox trucks; the feel of his diddle, hard in my hand, like a little sausage, that had spent too long on the BBQ. His lack of foreskin making it feel like I was rubbing a finger. Top(ping) and tail(ing) in his bed, here, I learned the difference between circumcised and un.

Done, he reverses his prized truck *du jour*, parking it on his bedside table, vrrrr... meep-meep-meep- hiss! I lay there, ravaged with guilt, tingling with longing found. Years later, after this childish amusement, I would find myself trying to find the courage to tell my mother I thought I had AIDS.²¹ The Kaposi's sarcoma lesions I had seen on the skin of men, famous, and in TV soaps, dark bruise like marks on pasty skin, skin hanging from bones, over-ripe plums thrown against wet grey sheets hanging upon a rusted deck chair.

I have a third nipple, tracing down my milk line, small patch of darker skin, that I thought was Kaposi's sarcoma – twelve year old me trying to tell my mother I was going to die.

²¹ Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome, used to reference the later stages of HIV – Human Immunodeficiency Virus.

Tangaroa ravages me, his depths consume me. See that water there, where the waves don't break, that seemingly still water there. A taniwha lies waiting, just there, with talons sharp and fast. The taniwha wants me, longs to envelop, to penetrate my being. "The subject's relation to its body is always *libidinal*: that is a necessary condition of its ability to identify the body as *its own*...the body and its various organs and orifices are always psychically or libidinally mapped, psychically *represented*, as a condition of the subject's ability to use them and to include them in his or her self-image."²² The seductive fuck–pull of danger: Tangaroa calls and beckons, he sees my youth turgid and persistent. I want him to fill me, salty to the taste, to feel him inside of me, all about me. The eagerness of youth found me in many situations, my fourteen year old body tangled in nets, hair becomes seaweed, my mouth fills with sand.

Watching these people wither in our lounge room, me, in front of the TV, with "its capacity to manufacture subjectivity itself,"²³ crossed legged and filled with terror as Eve²⁴ (the first woman) is cast out to die: the decay of handsome upon glossy pages of magazines. Tangaroa grasps my youthful terror within his fingers, paranoia and fear, desire and guilt, "...the protocols and phobias around contagion may be one of the most important ways that abjection is instituted and lived out."²⁵ My ten year old

²² Elizabeth Grosz, "Notes Towards a Corporeal Feminism." *Australian Feminist Studies* 2,no.5 (2021), 8.

²³ Simon Watney, *Imagine Hope. Social Aspects of AIDS* (London: Routledge, 2000), 125.

²⁴ Eve van Grafhorst, the first child to contract HIV in Australia, I was ten as I watched her ostracisation, no school would accept her, as her family emigrated to New Zealand in 1988 ,dying in 1993.

²⁵ Cathy Waldby, *AIDS and the Body Politic: Biomedicine and Sexual Difference* (London and New York: Taylor & Francis, 2005), 45.

body wrought with anxiety, I would look at my belly, dark blemish yet to sprout hair, and catastrophise; my actions as a child, things that happened to me, still happening shifting into adult me, riddled with threat, threatening life itself, threatening masculinity.

My spit is the river.

My cum is the sea.

I find myself, my body, on the shore of this lake. My corporeal being surging with blood, a constant state of flux, between pasts known and un; folding upon itself as the tendrils of the sea anemone, that soft finger suck, furling and unfurling into the present, into the future and back again, “time is not an absolute concept, but a relative one that is culturally conditioned.”²⁶ Māori perception and concepts of time are not linear per se: informed by and in observance of the past, maintaining culture, through language and traditions, at the same time endeavouring to secure a future for subsequent generations . The folding back, and unfurling into. The opening of a sail to be caught by Tāwhirimātea,²⁷ these uncharted expanses, creases of skin, become cartographical lines, each mound a mountain, each crevice a valley, every opening a cave; beware the obsidian teeth of Hine-nui-te-pō.²⁸ Every fluid a nautical adventure.

This is who I am, where I am from.

²⁶ Kevin D. Lo, Carla Houkamau, “Exploring the Cultural Origins of Differences in Time Orientation between European New Zealanders and Māori” *NZJHRM*. 12, no. 3 (2012): 105.

²⁷ Tāwhirimātea, Māori god of weather, including thunder and lightning, wind, clouds and storms.

²⁸ Hine-nui-te-pō, Māori goddess of death and the underworld. The demigod Tāne, attempting to obtain immortality, is crushed to death entering a cave, entering her.

I was three when I knew I was gay, well, not that I loved cock: the weight, and the smell, and the sweat, and the taste, and the heft of a man; but that I was different, and that different was, maybe, not ok. My father, the sailor, with his hands as big as tree stumps crashing in the surf, with his strangely olive skin, ships sailed and men fucked, galleon perhaps, a proud Kiwi, but don't you dare call him Pākehā, he is not a white flea on a pig's back.²⁹ His olive skin strange because he was so vehemently not brown.

I knew I was Māori when I was maybe twelve. Tan cord trousers, a bit thread bare on the knees, but they still made that sweet cricket chirrup sound as I walk. Home job bowl haircut - maybe not a bowl, more of a boy's bob, hiding the scar on my forehead, hiding the dirt behind my ears. My hair freshly washed with that Apple shampoo smelling like a room filled to bursting with just halved Granny Smiths, swinging in time to the – *vip vip vip* – song of my tan corduroy pants.

Dawdling, I am separated from my family, and I lean over the bridge rail to watch the river slither beneath my feet. I am caught up in the warmth of the sun, apples everywhere, and the sack shape in the water... Is it kittens long since gasped? Or treasure long since forgot?

²⁹ Chris G. Sibley, Carla A. Houkamau, William James Hoverd, "Ethnic Group Labels and Intergroup Attitudes in New Zealand: Naming Preferences Predict Distinct Ingroup and Outgroup Biases". *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy* 11, no. 1 (2011): 201–220. The re-othering? of the majority; the word Pākehā is still considered a pejorative.

I would have most likely let a wad of spit fall from my mouth, watching the river pull it under.

Then I hear someone yell, *Jump! Nigger!* the sound tapering off with the passing car. I look around, not to who said it, but to whom it was said.

And I am alone on this bridge.

He wants me to jump.

I am the nigger.

I can trace my blood back to the beginning, back to the nothing, my skin brown, nose flat from a thousand million greetings, past – present – future, supposed markers of a Māori identity. I have my birth father's smile, broad and full, a smile that has gotten me out of more trouble than in, depending on one's meaning of trouble, my mother's hands elegant, flittering nervously about my body, and my stepfather's sneeze, bold, punctuating any space.

Yet the boundaries of family traverse the home, the feeling of belonging and/or unbelonging. Moving beyond whānau³⁰ and whanauanga,³¹ shifting away from

³⁰ Whānau, Māori for family group, extended family, birth.

³¹ Whanaunga, Māori for relative, kin, blood relation.

biological unit, into cultural identity.³² My parents died when I was fifteen. A seventeen year old man colliding into my family in wet weather; his hair shiny from that misty rain, rain more like heavy clouds, dusting everything, with little glittering orbs; and the smell of his hair, grease and smoke, and the smell and taste of his cock.

But his hair.

The grease of his hair catching the light, soft curls nestle at the nape of his neck; his flaxen hair, not flaxen blonde, but that waxy inky sheen of the twists of the stem of the flower of the flax plant.

My parents reaction to me coming out, his *fucking faggot* of a son, cleaved, detached me from my family for years, the seventeen year old careening my family into calamity, my boyfriend.

Tane Mahuta³³ stands above me as I lay on the shore of this lake, his embrace, roots slowing, entwine, a grip firm and insistent, pulling at me, pulling me under; and everywhere, seeking our nutrients from my every orifice, from my every pore; he is inside of me. My blood pooling where the weight of me sinks into this earth; of my body, tangled in this. Severing of cord and rope has left me adrift.

³² Leo Bersani. *Is the Rectum a Grave?: And Other Essays*. (University of Chicago Press. 2010), 9.

³³ Tane Mahuta, Māori god of the forests and all of its creatures.

My practise has (d)evolved into the performative; from the examination of the abject, our bodily wastes made palatable. Where once photographs of collected images of urine: seven years of finger and toenail clippings falling through pins, six weeks of semen collected, pressed between squares of acrylic.

Now stands spoken word, and performance: examining sexualities, familial dynamics, and historical trauma. Things that happened –still happen– happenings of the past, folding into the present, words expose my brown queer aging body, “...the violated body is often the evidentiary basis of important witnessings to truth, of necessary testimonials against power.”³⁴ My (step)father, the sailor, becomes a metaphor for post-colonial trauma, things happened, happen still. The sailor also an allegory for loss and desire.

Memories of time spent on and near the water with my family; the beach is a site of ambivalence for me, the only time we went there was on occasional Sundays, eyes still red from tears, mother’s bruises not yet that piss yellow, and mimeograph ink purple – haemoglobin, biliverdin, bilirubin.³⁵ Trying to have fun on the beach, mullets pulled from net, stunned.

Initially wary of the autobiographical: not all bodies, but my body – not my body, but what a body can do. The trauma (happened – happening) allayed, evaded with the creating of the fictional, names changed, innocence exposed. Imbricating sexuality

³⁴ Hal Foster, “Obscene, Abject, Traumatic”. *OCTOBER* 78, Fall 1996, pp. 107-24 (1996): 123.

³⁵ The medical terminology of the colouring of bruising, purples and reds, to greens, to yellows.

and trauma, flax fibres tangling with hair. The un/folding of time, and place, and space, into the now, "...the queer artist works with rather than against failure and inhabits the darkness. Indeed the darkness becomes a crucial part of the queer aesthetic."³⁶ Things that shouldn't be spoken about, darkened houses, doors quietly closed; pencil in hand, curtains drawn discreetly. Betwixt folds of skin, beneath the weight and the sag of flesh: odours familiar and ripe, moist.

Examining our corporeal selves, stepping beyond bodies and their capabilities, into what we are capable of doing: happened – happening – (will) happen. Avoiding linear narrative and temporality, folding upon, weaving in and out, stripping away meaning to give meaning, "...is a process of visualization that, precisely in the act of producing visibility, allows for a collapse in the signifying conventions ... staging such a collapse of syntax ... as makes possible to produce a distance that interrupts the performative repetition of social norms."³⁷ Standing naked in a room, stripped of façade;³⁸ the odours of my body, bacteria meets sweat, meets you. I fill every edge, every corner, every fold, every hole. Laid bare, I am exposed, my nakedness at the same time makes intimidating and vulnerable. My stink and my words give meaning.

I am inside of you.

³⁶ Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*. (Durham [NC]: Duke University Press. 2013), 96.

³⁷ Renate Lorenz, *Queer Art: A Freak Theory* (Bielefeld : Transcript, 2012), 138.

³⁸ I am acutely aware that our bodies, although naked, are still loaded with meaning, contexts piled to the roof: gender, race, age, ability, health. Here, I seek to strip what I can in reference to our clothes, our controllable facades. Of our socio-economic status, and preferences in taste, and style. A blank canvas per se.

The folds of my skin, the male body prone, not any body, but my body, defenceless and naked, "Exploit[s] the normative ontological foundations of the masculine form within its primal anxiety: ...radically sexualize and reveal bodily penetrability as a central mode of male *and* masculine bliss. Queer... gains a meaning of a deliberate failure of straight masculinity."³⁹ Watch your footing, O! Sailor! About this cave! It has teeth! And they are sharp! My body sags, my belly third trimester; the fat upon my pectoral muscles, it droops, as breasts .

The past becomes the abject, happened – happening – (will) happen, memories surge: waves of the sea crest and trough, curling, folding upon itself, with those tree stump hands of his, "Backward feelings serve as an index to the ruined state of the social world; they indicate continuities between the bad guy past and the present; and they show up the inadequacies of queer narratives of progress."⁴⁰ Is my body a metaphor for colonisation as well as a product of it? Chronicles of shame and regret and failure; weaving: cross legged, deft fingers ,and the sound of *tarawhetewhete me te kata*.⁴¹ Moments in time, performance not seeking atonement, words not pursuing redemption; this happened to me.

³⁹ Çakırlar Cüneyt. "Masculinity, Scatology, Mooning and the Queer/able Art of Gilbert & George: On the Visual Discourse of Male Ejaculation and Anal Penetration." *Paragraph* 34, no. 1 (2011): 99.

⁴⁰ Heather Love, *Feeling Backwards: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 27.

⁴¹ Chatter and laughter, in Te Reo Māori. (Māori language).

I am the lake, this blood is mine.

My spit is the river.

My cum is the sea.

I grew up between the Waikato river, Lake Waikare, and the Whangamarino Wetlands; in a workers cottage, of an orchard; rows upon rows of trees, trunks gnarled and ancient to a child. Plums, apples, pears; but don't go near there, that mass of growth bigger than my father, where the three slopes of the dell converge, a brown watered pool seething with peril, cutty grass pulling as you slip under.

The edges of the wetlands eaten into by farmland as much as the swampy, sodden earth could yield; slicks of rainbow sheen, bacteria processing minerals; the murk and the smell, fetid. The still water rotting, at the same time teeming with life. Twenty five metres in and you are overwhelmed by the suck of earth and water under foot, the pull and scratch of branch, unaware of the red, bleeding from your arm. Twenty five metres in and you are enveloped. Every bodily fluid a nautical adventure. My body seeps, it oozes, blisters weep. I too, teem with life.

A doctor, whilst recording my sexual health history, once asked me, *How many sexual partners have you had?* And I was wholly confused.

I don't understand the question, I reply.

I was born erect. Do I count that?

My mother's pussy being the only vagina my cock would be in.

Do I count my cousin, when I was six?

Do I count my high school friend? Coming straight and hard at me on Saturday nights, alcohol giving us both daring, furtive fumbling's become more brave, more adventurous, with each weekend. Wracked with guilt come Monday morning, he was straight - back to his girlfriend, and away.

Do I include my first illicit meeting with a stranger? The streetlight, perhaps, giving away my youthful frame beneath my black hoody and jeans, that black eel slip slick quick, between shadows, between the cracks in the door, between fourteen year old me standing, knees trembling, and cock hard, and him.

Or seventeen-year-old me, full of bravado with skin so smooth and all of my teeth; accepting beers and playing pool, and laughing. We end up back at his, his breath hot and sweet, saying no, hands and tongue and cock persistent; I guess I owed him something for the drinks.

How many sexual partners have I had? In my teens and twenties I could have three to five a day, trysts most public, pocket sized interactions that would sate me for minutes, leaving me starving.

And the price for my seemingly insatiable appetites: a dripping cock, pus leaking and drying to my jocks, tenderly peeling fabric from skin. Lovers left empty. The burn of infection, piss, hot and caustic. And I feel like I've had crabs for decades, a colony, per se. My nervous disposition lends to un-salve-able maladies.

From the first sailors, coming in hard and salty and tasting of rum, riddling with syphilis,⁴² to me. Between sex and shame and pleasure and guilt.

And the sailor, my father, had a secret family we only discovered after his death. A blonde wife and sandy blonde-haired children. A woman loving - rugby playing son, he could be proud of, not like me, his nose too flat and skin too brown, *useless fucking maori - fucking faggot of a son*. His other wife he adored, only ever raising his hand at her to toast her beauty.

And he must have been so tired, each day, from keeping so many secrets, he seemed to have very little left for us. My father had a secret family, and I think it was ours. His other family only finding out about us, his shame, after his death.

And the doctor asks, *How many sexual partners have you had?* Five thousand I guess.

And she unblinkingly responds, *Have you ever been a sex worker?*

⁴² Diane Hanham, *The Impact of Introduced Diseases in the Pre-Treaty Period 1790-1840* (Christchurch, University of Canterbury Press, 2003), 12, 23, 24. Hanham outlaying syphilis being one of the first products of encounter between Māori and early traders/settlers.

Everybody pays, I reply, I have caught her off guard and we both laugh knowingly, one way or another, *Everybody pays!*

These wetlands, this swamp, my fingers and toes wrinkled to folds, my body afloat. Fiction folding into fact, time unfurls, folds onto itself. Moss and lichens cling to my body exposed, I am sodden. I stagnate and am in-flux. “What is disturbing about the viscous or the fluid is its refusal to conform to the laws governing the clean and proper, the solid and the self-identical, its otherness to the notion of an entity - the very notion that governs our self-representations and understanding of the body.”⁴³ I have shifted from solid, my skin no longer holding me in, gaps in the weave, the slime of the eel ooze at the corners. But I am not in motion, not curling, heaving, and surging as the sea- thrusting and penetrating and enveloping as my sex. My body is not carving out the earth, currents pulling under, pushing forward as my spit, my words spat out, falling, cascading from my mouth. I am not pooling amongst the roots of the kahikatea,⁴⁴ branches of genealogy hacked and severed, my body offering life for another.

I am water in everything, sodden, the fluids of my body seep, ooze; and fats congeal, my semen crusts upon my belly; was once on my chin, in my eyes. My fluids all powerful “[are] not so much one of *influence*, ... as one of *exfluence*, of *excorporation*,

⁴³ Grosz. *Volatile Bodies*, 195.

⁴⁴ A coniferous tree endemic to New Zealand.

a general anxiety about flux and fluidity, an unease not only about what comes out of the body but also about the ways bodies themselves originally come out.”⁴⁵ Not absorbing; not just absorbing, but exuding, a relocation of fluids from one to the other, the warmth of a popped abscess in mouth, the burn of semen in the back of throat, the transference of infection.

This infection is me. My body slithering with pathogens, with waning urgency of my desires and wants. I am the crust of a cold sore, herpes labia, labialis. Just beneath, the golden yellow slip - not eel slip - of pus and blood and impurity. “That which is marginal is always located as a site of danger and vulnerability.”⁴⁶ The ever delicate line between layers: virus, skin, infection, wound, healing. At once dangerous and in danger. I slough my skin. As my body naked, laid bare, I am prone, my nakedness, repulsion and attraction, brown skin against these whitest of walls. I am open and ready to transmit.

I am the swamp, bury your wood in me.⁴⁷ Hine-i-te-huhi⁴⁸ envelops me, my body becomes hers, my cock inverts in these frigid waters, from phallus to yoni. “The threat

⁴⁵ Calvin Thomas, *Male Matters: Masculinity, Anxiety, and the Male Body on the Line* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 13-14.

⁴⁶ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, 195.

⁴⁷ Caroline Phillips, Dilys Johns, and Harry Allen, “Why did Maori bury artefacts in the wetlands of pre-contact Aotearoa/New Zealand?” *Journal of Wetland Archaeology* 2, no. 1 (2002): 55. Examining wood preservation, they conclude that burying wood in swamps “contribute(s) to the conservation of the artefact, and secondly, that wetlands offer safekeeping and storage capabilities.”

⁴⁸ Hine-i-te-huhi, Māori goddess and personification of swamps.

of the collapse of the masculine into the abjected feminine threatens to dissolve the heterosexual desire. It carries the fear of occupying the site of homosexual abjection.”⁴⁹ She slides into me and I into her.

My ancestors, blood beyond blood, have known the touch of the same, sexual identities unconstrained by western Judaeo-Christian morality, homosexual, and multiple partnering was evident pre-History⁵⁰. Have me, come by the boat load, and come and come again, always wanting more, “the more sexually resonant figure inscribed within the representational archive of the Pacific is that of the male body”⁵¹ and that “it is the body of the European male, not that of the native female, that incites the most interpretative anxiety”⁵² Māui⁵³ fucks me, then I him. I am filled with his essence. His mischievous smile, my cum on his chin. A cold sore, crust like a cornflake, my infection, my pus smeared across his lip.

I am this swamp, this pus is mine .

My blood is the lake.

My spit is the river.

My cum is the sea.

⁴⁹ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 205.

⁵⁰ Clive Aspin & Jessica Hutchings, “Reclaiming the Past to Inform the Future: Contemporary Views of Maori Sexuality” *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 9 no. 4, (2007): 416.

⁵¹ Lee Wallace, *Sexual Encounters: Pacific Texts, Modern Sexualities*, (London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 1.

⁵² Wallace, *Sexual Encounters*, 21.

⁵³ Māui, demigod, folk hero and trickster in Polynesian mythology

I have pissed myself in a gallery, as a twenty year old - skin so smooth and with all of my teeth - an art school friend and I, along with countless other indigent youth, would sip pinot and eat cheese and get drunk. In line for the only toilet, I could wait no more, that comical dance of a child, knees together, holding myself, the “uncontrollable flow”⁵⁴ dark stain of shame and relief, hot and wet, permeating my defences. I am adrift. I am washed over, washed clean by this stream.

This stream is me.

My mother was twelve when she first masturbated.

Her limbs long and awkward; not as awkward as the question, *When did you first masturbate?* popping up on her phone, a message from her second born child.

The tentative thumb touch, arrow pressed, send - am I really asking her this? I hesitate, an odd feeling of anxiety nestles, the flittering pīwakawaka alights here, within the dark wet hollow of my sternum.

There is a patch of lawn, a patch of land on this land I rent, this land owned by another, on this land that was owned by others before.⁵⁵ It is only about forty centimetres by

⁵⁴ Grosz. *Volatile Bodies*, xiii. Examining gender and sex; the differences between, and in-between, Grosz writing here of the female body, and its leaking's and flows. The binary significations of difference blurred I become the feminine, golden cascade hindered by my clothes, rivulets down my leg.

⁵⁵ Aimee Carrillo Rowe, and Eve Tuck, “Settler Colonialism and Cultural Studies: Ongoing Settlement, Cultural Production, and Resistance.” *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 17, no. 1 (February 2017): 4. Land referring also to water, the sea, the sky and underground. Land is my ancestor, I am from it. “Land is memory, land is curriculum, land is language.” The river runs through me, and I through it.

thirty, and I'm not sure how deep it goes, but I'm reclaiming it as my own. By pissing on it, as a dog would piss to mark its territory, yellow stream of hot urine, my cock browner than the comically jandalled tan line on my feet, my feet standing before this piss stained land. That is my own.

My mother is a part of my own masturbation story.

I was four.

Overzealous bath time found soap, the smell of lux, rainbow swirling bubbles, milky clouds forming about me. The soft – yellow – jelly touch as the bar sits in water for too long, the soap slipping, eel slick quick slip, between my hands. The soapy liquid finding its way past my foreskin, down into my urethra.

My mother there, and me here.

This long before the pheromone stink of my sex, the chlorine bite of my come, the parmesan cheese muskiness of my foreskin, that stale piss stink.

The soap had found its way into my urethra and it burns.

Four year old me, standing in front of my mother, bath water dripping from my body, panicked eyes imploring desperately for help, as I open the towel, flasher style, with a wild burning between my legs.

Mummy it hurts.

As I piss on this constantly wet patch of dirt; it never sees the sun it but is dry from summers breath, my own breath hot with desire, and stinking of tobacco smoke and beer, my spit slick with wanting. And you come and you come and you come, and you take and here I am, ready for more.

And I'm standing in front of my mother, looking down at diddle and she says, *There's nothing I can do!*

And in my room I am left with the pain and I am opening my urethra, thumbs on either side of the glans, looking in for answers. I squeeze the spongy shaft of my tiny four year old penis with my tiny four year old fingers, pinching at the pain. And I come, and I come, and I came again.

And every time I stand before this piss stained earth of mine, I think of first times, first encounters with others, first encounters with self. And I think of sex and desire and wanting and shame and fucking.

And my mother.



Image courtesy of author.

This land, a darkened earth, grass browned, shadows of me, I have been here! This earth here belongs to me. “In the process of settlor colonialism, land is remade into property and human relationships to land our restricted to the relationship, of the owner to his property. Epistemological, ontological, and cosmological relationships to land are interred, indeed made pre-modern and backward. Made savage. Indigenous peoples must be erased must be made ghosts.”⁵⁶ The traces of me, dirt soiled; the faint smell of ammonia; Papatūānuku,⁵⁷ knows the weight of me - I are from her, am of her – the smell of my body upon hers, the scent and the taste and the warmth of my fluids. This urine-stained earth is my ancestor.

Rivulets running down my leg; the stream feeds into rivers and lakes; flattening the curl of my leg hairs, a reservoir of piss in my shoe. Colonisation is a “structure, not an event”⁵⁸ As the first whalers and sealers, coming hard with tobacco and rum and syphilis. The one god comes to civilize savage tongue and hearts,⁵⁹ the crack of the cane stifling the exaltations of gods before.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang. “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor.” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 5-6.

⁵⁷ Earth mother in Māori mythology, personification of the earth.

⁵⁸ Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event*. (London: Cassell, 2011), 163.

⁵⁹ Ranginui Walker. “Reclaiming Māori Education.” In *Decolonisation in Aotearoa: Education, Research and Practice*. Eds. Jessica Hutchings, and Jenny Lee. (NZCER Press: Wellington, New Zealand, 2016): 20. Anglican missionaries arriving in New Zealand, 1814, saw the assimilation and the civilisation of the natives as “predicated on notions of racial and cultural superiority.” .

⁶⁰ Walker, *Reclaiming Māori Education*, 24. Māori language, was eventually phased out and outlawed in schools, children being punished with violence if they spoke it. Māori were “schooled” to be agricultural workers and home help; factory workers and wives.

He likes the way I swing my hips,⁶¹ within these walls as white as my skin; luminescent, you are shadows, greasy fingered smudges against my whitest of white.⁶²

As things that are of the body are still me, I am of this earth, it is of me. “The other is constructed through certain practices of knowledge production which legitimise domination; at the same time, however, this (political, economical and cultural) hegemonic intention makes the resulting epistemological practices appear “plausible” and “useful.””⁶³ Give me a plough, I can till this piss soaked earth, the muscles of my back remember this toil, sweat upon brow, salty to the taste. Give me your millet seed,⁶⁴ I can grind it into dust to make bread, the heat from the oven moistening my upper lip. Golden yellow, salty to the taste, devour me. The separation slow and tight as a gripping tree root, the suckers of the wheke, the death roll of the eel, consumed, one mouthful at a time.

⁶¹ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, "Kaupapa Māori Research" Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision, in *Kupapa Rangahau: A Reader, A Collection of Readings from the Kaupapa Rangahau Workshop*, eds. Leonie Pihama and Sarah-Jane Tiakiwai, and Kim Southey. 2nd ed. (Te Kotahi Research Institute: Hamilton, New Zealand, 2000), 48. Smith stating the New Zealand school system de-legitimised most aspects of Māori learning/knowledge, “only permitting ‘the more attractive’ items such as performance and artistic endeavours” in the 1930s.

⁶² Tara McAllister, Joanna Kidman, Olivia Rowley, and Reremoana Theodore. "WHY ISN'T MY PROFESSOR MĀORI? A Snapshot of the Academic Workforce in New Zealand Universities." *MAI Journal: A New Zealand Journal of Indigenous Scholarship* 8, no. 2 Te Kotahi Research Institute, Hamilton, Aotearoa/New Zealand. 2019) McAllister et al, outlying the lack of Māori lecturers in New Zealand universities. All denoting the systems of, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "othering," making less than; the savage and the saviour. The event was the arrival of Pākēha to New Zealand; the processes used to deem separate, to make separate - to cleave tongue, to remove Māori from themselves, their land, and culture - the system.

⁶³ Oscar Thomas-Olalde, and Astride Velho, "Othering and Its Effects: Exploring the Concept." In *Writing Postcolonial Histories of Intercultural Education*, eds. Heike Niedrig and Christian Ydesen. (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), 30.

⁶⁴ Paul Wolff Mitchell, "The fault in his seeds: Lost notes to the case of bias in Samuel George Morton's cranial race science." *PLOS Biology* 16, no. 10 (2018). Mitchell exploring Morton's method of measuring brain capacity with seed, a process with which Morton used to justify the subjugation of the "inferior" races.

My urine once was inside of me, a part of me, golden arc; a burning urgency pinched, released, finding the corner of the bathroom, splashes upon the toilet floor. My fluids, “Detachable, separable parts of the body ... retain something of the cathexis and value of a body part even when they are separated from the body. There is still something of the subject bound up with them-which is why they are objects of disgust, loathing, and repulsion as well as envy and desire.”⁶⁵ But what when my body is detached from itself, from my ancestors and beyond. My piss marks territories. This land lays claim to me.

My piss is the stream. This stream is me.

My pus is the swamp

My blood is the lake.

My spit is the river.

My cum is the sea.

⁶⁵ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, 81.

Uenuku⁶⁶ rises, his feet upon my body, his toes gripping my skin. My skin silvery, glassy, polished to sparkle by the many hands of my gods. I am slipping into translucence, a ghost of my former self, now invisible in spaces I once filled with my being. Hine-makohu⁶⁷ is here too, her fingers moist and cool to the touch in my mouth, inside of me, churning my insides, filling me with longing.

My hair is seaweed, holding tenuous against the force: the fuck-push-pull, the violence of the sea; strands of me on my pillow, floating to desktop, finding everywhere to be except on me. “The way to deal with the asymmetries and violent frenzies that mark the present is not to forget the future.”⁶⁸ Indeed, as the opening and the closing of the sea anemone, the folding and unfolding of the present, past, and beyond. I am the rain. Persistent and withholding. I am the reflection, refraction, and dispersion of light in water droplets. I am an omen. I am Uenuku. I am Hine-makohu.

⁶⁶ Uenuku, personification of the rainbow. Whilst aware of the symbolism of the rainbow, adopted by the LGBTQ (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender, Queer) social movements, here I adopt the pre-history belief of the rainbow being a sign, a marker, an omen before encounter.

⁶⁷ Hine-makohu, Māori goddess, who manifests as mist.

⁶⁸ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. (New York and London: New York University Press, 2019), 96. Muñoz here proposing queer “brown” futurity activated to “resist the perils of heteronormative pragmatism and Anglo-normative pessimism.”

Of light and laughter, a childhood; histories unfolded, picked at, like a scab, past the smiling faces upon photographic paper, shiny and oily to the touch, whorls of fingers; scratched, clawed and scraped to the underneath. “These places of possibility within ourselves are dark because they are ancient and hidden; they have survived and grown strong through darkness. Within these deep places, each one of us holds an incredible reserve of creativity and power, of unexamined and unrecorded emotion and feeling. The woman's place of power within each of us is neither white nor surface; it is dark, it is ancient, and it is deep.”⁶⁹ Whiro⁷⁰ is here, talons blacker than night and sharper than taniwha’s teeth, we have fallen, tumbling, cascading into Taiwhetuki, a cave so deep, harbouring maladies and ill-will, Uenuku, holds my body steadfast, torn, momentarily, perhaps eternally between two worlds.

The crevices of my body, the jetsam son becomes the widow to the sea. My mother’s hands elegant, flitting, hazel, brown and green eyes darting. My mother smelled of blood, fecund; old towels cut into rectangles, hang, waving upon the clothesline - bemused me as a child - the traces of my mother, blood in the bowl, dark odious stain permeating the water, against the white of the porcelain. The traces of my mother washed away.

⁶⁹ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press. 1984), 36-37. The gendered idealisation of creative sources, here adopted to my own, the darkness of histories.

⁷⁰ Whiro, Māori god of darkness, the embodiment of evil.

Proposing a queer futurity that is not here yet, that queer itself is not here yet,. “The here and now is simply not enough. Queerness should and could be about a desire for another way of being in both the world and time, a desire that resists mandates to accept that which is not enough.”⁷¹ So too, the “Post”-Colonial?⁷² Happened, (is still) happening, (will happen?) Seeds are in my hair, picked out by the flitting pīwakawaka; mother’s flitting, fussing fingers. Dirt, black as dry blood under my finger and toe nails. The tentacles of the wheke grip deep inside of me, the knot, and the slither, and the eternal menace, and toothy grin of the eel.

Slithering– slip –the soft cheek suck sound– slick –the barely audible snap of precum between thumb and forefinger– quick –sliding, slithering, from me to another.

⁷¹ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 96.

⁷² Rowe, and Tuck, *Settler Colonialism*, 7. Post is a “vexed” term, the shifting of colonialism into the past risks “reifying the myth of the disappearing -native- and the naturalized settler.”

how to steal a canoe leanne betasamosake simpson

kwe is barefoot on the cement floor
singing to a warehouse
of stolen canoes

bruised bodies
dry skin
hurt ribs
dehydrated rage

akiwenzie says, "it's canoe jail"

the white skin of a tree is for slicing and feeling
and peeling and rolling and cutting and sewing
and pitching and floating and travelling
akiwenzie says "oh you're so proud of your collection
of ndns. good job zhaganash,
good job"

kwe is praying to those old ones by dipping her fingers
into a plastic bottle of water
and rubbing the drops on the spine of each canoe

soft words
wet fingers
wet backs

akiwenzie and kwe are looking each canoe in the eye
one whispers back, "take the young one and run"
kwe looks at akiwenzie

akiwenzie takes the sage over to the
security guard and teaches him how to
smudge the canoe bodies, fake cop is basking in guilt free importance

kwe takes the young one off the rack,
and onto her shoulders
she puts Her in the flat bed and drives to Chemong

she pulls Her out into the middle of the lake
sinks her with 7 stones just enough to
fill Her with lake and
suspended Her in wet
kwe sings the song
and She sings back

bruised bodies
dry skin
hurt ribs
dehydrated rage

kwe sings the song
and She sings back

akiwenzie means old man, *zhaganash* are white people, *kwe* means woman in Anishinaabemowin or Ojibwe⁷³

As the body, so too the canoe, skin bruised, muscle and bone left aching, and betrayed. An object to some, is not just so to others; a living, breathing thing, “Our taonga are not just wooden objects or aesthetic heirlooms, they speak and represent our origins, our beliefs, our very foundation on which we order our lives. We believe that our taonga possess a mauri or life force and wairua, spirit, all of their own.”⁷⁴ These canoes are barely living, barely breathing. The Waikato River is my ancestor, every bend and pause, every drop and fall, and every rapid. The river is my blood. The mountain reaching up to the sky, bodies buried at the foot of the hill, Taupiri is my ancestor, the dirt is my skin.

⁷³ Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. “how to steal a canoe” *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 38, no. 1 (2018): 24-25.

⁷⁴ Arapata Hakiwai, “Taonga Māori Conference: New Zealand.” *Cultural Conservation Advisory Council*. (Wellington, N.Z.: Dept. of Internal Affairs, 1990), 116.

Canadian First Nations poet and academic, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, writing of the trauma of things stolen, a paradigm shifted, heaved upon a flatbed truck. To steal back that which was taken. The mixing of indigenous language and English; the language of her colonisers, “Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of ‘truth’, ‘order’, and ‘reality’ become established. Such power is rejected in the emergence of an effective post-colonial voice.”⁷⁵ The coloniser becomes complicit, the security guard, as implicit as the language, adopting rituals of spiritual cleansing, the smoke of smoldering sage enveloping the bodies of the canoes. They shall be cleansed. Hushed words of incantation, words complicit in the rewriting of histories, re-righting, of wrongs.

Time folds, and unfolds between the past and the present, songs of prayer connecting histories with the now; the cold of the warehouse floor, the cold of the museum, “The point at which society moves from prehistoric to historic is also the point at which tradition breaks with modernism. Traditional indigenous knowledge ceased, in this view, when it came into contact with 'modern' societies, that is the West.”⁷⁶ The quiet hum, barely audible over whispered words and breath, of air being pumped through pipes within the bowels and the hearts of museums. Words sung, unstifled, paste thick and musky, petrichor, softer than breathe. Words breathed – warm air blowing life back into, animating the inanimate; as the sea surges, so too these words.

⁷⁵ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. (Brantford, Ontario: W. Ross MacDonald School Resource Services, 2011), 7.

⁷⁶ Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 55.

An unfolding, retelling of a fiction or nonfiction, a story of first encounters and of longing and lust and being spurned. In her debut work, *Sweetness*,⁷⁷ New Zealand director, Rachel Davies' use of dubbing, is at first unnerving, a man's voice; quintessentially white New Zealander, with the twang and lilt and rise and fall inherited from the English, left to brew, to steep, to become its own, in this remote colony. Words spoken by a man, a young woman's face, blur the boundaries of the already ambiguous identity of the narrator.

Matter becomes a question of materialization; the materialization of the body becomes a question of the performativity of gender; the performativity of gender becomes a matter of the citation of the regulatory norms of sex. It is through these regulatory norms that the body is materialized as sexed and gendered, though these are articulated with other regulatory norms which materialize the body as 'raced', classed, aged, etc. The possibility of resistance comes from the repetition involved in iterability and citationality.⁷⁸

A woman's mouth moves, a man's voice is heard. The feminine with the masculine, or more, the threat to the masculine by the feminine. The binary of gender is challenged through imagery, the content, the language becomes the object of sexual abuse, of sexuality, and of the ache of desire.

⁷⁷ Rachel Davies, *Sweetness*, 1992, Creative Film and Video Fund of the QEII Arts Council of New Zealand, the New Zealand Film Commission and Television. New Zealand, Colour 16mm, 8 minutes 30 seconds.

⁷⁸ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. (London; New York Routledge, 2015), 57.

First times, “unbelievable ... it was a revelation,”⁷⁹ the narrator is being groomed by an older man, under the guise of learning, the role of scout leader becomes that of the predator. From the pool, bodies glistening, to the slither of sleeping bag zip, “The abject is of what the body falls away from it while remaining irreducible to the subject/object and inside/outside oppositions. The abject necessarily partakes of both polarized terms but cannot be clearly identified with either.”⁸⁰ Of young a boy masturbating, if there is no semen, is the abject present? The abject exists within the action, and the context, the subject is young boy masturbating in front of older man, the object is the boys pleasure and desire, his longing and subsequent heartache after “aging out” of the scout masters preferences, the scout masters desire the action.

⁷⁹ Davies, *Sweetness*, 3 minutes.

⁸⁰ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 192.

A desire to rewrite - re/right of the future, for lamentations, of the past, no matter how vile, to a matter of fact documentation of sexuality. Australian queer artist, Adam Seymour's, *HOMOlita*, is at once confronting and whimsical, words said that should be unsaid,⁸¹ the sexuality of children, coupled with seemingly innocent illustrations.

9 years old.

Being a younger brother meant that I was always forced to go along with the older boys to sleepovers and birthday parties. At night my brother's friends would wait until he has asleep to slide under the covers with me. We would 69 and fuck and play with slipping our cocks into each other's butts. Not being able to come meant this could last for hours.⁸²

The slither of a sleeping bag zip... The rush of blood with anticipation, curiosity gives way to desire, a craving for pleasure and excitement and to discover, to uncover, the unknown. We all have bodies, all of our bodies leak, and ooze, and squirt! "We might welcome the identification of homosexuality with sameness by insisting on the radical potential in that identification: the potential for our having a privileged role in demonstrating how a sort of impersonal narcissism can break down the defensive formation of the self-congratulatory ego, a breaking down that must take place if a

⁸¹ Yuval Gozansky, "Showing Puberty: Overcoming the Taboo in Children's Television". *Sex Education: Sexuality, Society and Learning* 18 no. 5 (2018): 557. Gozansky outlaying the two dominant approaches to child sexuality, the adoption of "abstinence is best" policies of conservative cultures, within the school curriculum, if there is any at all, and a more comprehensive approach, equipping children with knowledge, conservatively, focusing on Sexually Transmitted Infection prevention, unwanted pregnancy, and a more comprehensive understanding of sexuality and positivity, based on the principles that children are the "rights holders" to their bodies and are entitled to knowledge and education about their bodies and their sexualities.

⁸² Adam Seymour, *HOMOlita*, (Rural Ranga: Melbourne, 2014), 9 years old.

fundamental restructuring of the social is ever to take place.”⁸³ A sameness in longing and even un-longing, in indifference.⁸⁴ Seeking a homogeneity of otherness, could we collapse all into desire? That longing, a constant craving, an unquenchable thirst, no sea could sate.

4 years old.

My cousins and I used to have sleepovers on the fold out sofa - three of four of us buried deep in pillows - and after lights were turned out we would play a game called ‘Ice-creams’ where we’d crawl underneath the sheet, one at a time, to taste one another’s ice-creams, each foreskin concealing a different flavor. The cones were hard. Never soft.⁸⁵

The corruption of the symbolic, innocence is at steak, (sick), to be consumed, teeth gnash and grind, sinew sucked from between teeth. Haumia-tikitiki⁸⁶ and Rongomātāne⁸⁷ gorge themselves on my body: things seen, popped in mouth, my eyeballs yield their forty four years of fruit; my other orbs, stringy, salty and metallic to the taste, the soft wet crack of my bones, marrow sucked, to pick me from their teeth, my pubic hair as floss to get the extra stubborn parts of me.

⁸³ Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave*, 33 -34.

⁸⁴ Karli June Cerankowski and Megan Milks. *Asexualities : Feminist and Queer Perspectives*. Routledge Research in Gender and Society (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 34. Exploring asexuality via queer and feminist theories, I am aware of the identifying of self through a sexual act, eking out self is fundamentally about what kinds of sex are recognizable as political. And acknowledge those that do not seek sexual satisfaction with another.

⁸⁵ Seymour, *HOMOlita*, 4 years old.

⁸⁶ Haumia-tikitiki, Māori god of uncultivated food.

⁸⁷ Rongomātāne, Māori god of cultivated food.

The desire to devour another, “Implicitly, ... questions the very limit of human-ness: to consider eating another human is to realise how fierce the will to live is.”⁸⁸

Consuming another, each other, as an ice cream, lick - suck - bite. The will to fuck, to experience pleasure the same as the will to survive?

The tastes of cocks I have had inside of me, oral fixation, the stink of piss and cum and sweat, smegma pungent to the smell, parmesan cheese, fish, and stale piss, the odd taste under a foreskin, licking a battery, slightly metallic and surprising. “Pleasure and ethics, sex and eating, are all about breaking up the moralities which constrain us.”⁸⁹

The surreptitious amusements of a child, my cousins diddle in my hand; the electric tremor of excitement as my friend, drunk, reaches for my cock, the longing for more, the unknown stranger in a toilet cubicle, he could have been my father’s age, an internal emptiness, fill me, I am open, I am ready, I am hungry.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Elspeth Probyn, and Natalie Foster, *Carnal Appetites: FoodSexIdentities* (Taylor & Francis Group / Books, 2000), 90

⁸⁹ Probyn and Foster, *Carnal Appetites*, 77.

⁹⁰ Aware that I am not critiquing other performance artists, instead, examining the performativity of language: the waxing lyrical, whispered incantations, words on paper, the use of lowercase a disavowal of hierarchy. The perceptual incongruence of the spoken word and video. The economy of language, a matter of fact-ness, partnered with drawings, confronting and naïve. All three artists address similar themes to my practise, the use of language, and actualisation of such allows the work to exist without the artist, it is not ephemeral, it is not an event in time, at a certain place. It has life and agency beyond the moments of conception. But the words. The words. Places conjured, I can feel the cold of the warehouse floor on my jandal tanned feet, the slither of a sleeping bag will forever conjure images of scout leaders, and children fellating each other.

To be fluid, to slip eel slick quick in the in-between; not between the cracks, unnoticed, but tongue slipped in urethra, slipped between lips, every fluid an adventure, “The body is quite literally rewritten, traced over, by desire. Desire is based on a veritable cartography of the body (one’s own as well as that of the other).”⁹¹ Mapping the space between myself and my mother, in a futile act of purification. I am naked again, it is cold in here, and my mother is washing me clean.

Mother’s hands as lover’s hands. Skin slippery, that eel slick quick slip. Hands that have slipped over thousands of bodies, as a boy my mother cleaned after other people’s parents from 7 a.m. until 2 p.m., then two hours at the college, cleaning after other people’s children. Her uniform at the aged care residence, teal, her ample bosom and curves, running with a milk filled cup.

As a mother washes a child, did I ever get a hard on when she changed my nappy? Was I aroused by my father’s touch? “The question thus turns on the relations among memory, event, and desire: is it an event that precedes a memory? is it a memory that retroactively posits an event? is it a wish that takes the form of a memory?”⁹² Even thinking about this makes me recoil, typing upon my laptop, a cringe so deep I can feel it inside of me, an odd clenching of an opening, closing. To think the unthinkable, things said, unsaid.

⁹¹ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 56.

⁹² Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (Routledge: New York, 2009), 153.

Of desire, and history, of belonging, and family and beyond, of the sailor, lost to the sea. People are only ever washed by their mothers, as adults, because of some sort of trauma, a spinal cord, snapped in two, clack clack, clack clack, cutting control from the controller. Or a brain injury, a bruise so deep it reddens the grey matter, haemoglobin, biliverdin, bilirubin. Or a body wasted away, ravaged by disease, sunken eyes and cheekbones sharp; ghosts of people, handsome withered to nothing, the ultimate price of pleasure, skin hanging from bones, over ripe plums thrown against wet grey sheets hanging upon a rusted deck chair.

My mother's hands washing me clean of my sins, "dirt offends against order,"⁹³ I am sanitized, made pure, at the same time soiled, and stained, corrupted. Collapsing love into sex, intimacy into fucking, my father's strong hands, as big as tree trunks crashing in the surf, hold me. Through desire and flesh, I am loved. "Rather, poetry is giving a name to the nameless, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action."⁹⁴ These words, upon page, falling from open mouth, filling the spaces between you and me.

⁹³ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: an Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 2.

⁹⁴ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984), 37.

These words are markers. The word river is a monument for a river, the word mother, a memorial to my mother.⁹⁵ These words slither in the between, “‘we’, indigenous peoples, people ‘of colour’, the Other, however we are named, have a presence in the Western imagination, in its fibre and texture, in its sense of itself, in its language, in its silences and shadows, its margins and intersections.”⁹⁶ These borders become blurred, vibrate with agency as the boundaries of the abject slide: viscous juices of fecundity, decay, and the in/between, ooze and seep out and in. The marginalised of the other inhabiting these liminal spaces, eked out beyond, that eel quick slick slip of the queer other, this brown skin, this aging body, shiny from, and stinking of fuck.

These little spaces, black ink on paper, from my mouth to here. I literally read each sentence out aloud, over and over, shifting and shaping, sliding around syllables, the natural pause of my breath, comma, the pace of a sentence, comma, how it sounds is as important as what is being said. Words slip, they fall, sometimes taking days, others as quick as an eel.

Language is the key to being fluid, sliding in, sidling in. Slipping naked from these waters, my body slippery, my testes inside of me, the water is cold and my cock is just skin and a tangle, as a slug that has slithered through hair. The boundaries of my corporeal being are blurred, things happened, happening, (will) happen. I am the river,

⁹⁵ Laurie Anderson, Lecture 3: *Rocks* / *Laurie Anderson: Spending the War Without You*, by Mahindra Humanities Centre, Harvard University, Thursday 15th April 2021 9:00, 11 minutes 20 seconds.

⁹⁶ Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 25.

this river is me

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List of Performances:

i called him my j.c. (*captain james cook fucked me in the arse and i loved it*), 2019, Site specific performance. Massey University.

young nick's head (*was the best i ever had*), 2019, Site specific performance. Massey University.

glory holes (*with savealoyes*), 2019, Site specific performance. Massey University.

skulking (*about the city, sober as fuck, i'm looking for vomit, and it's saturday 1a.m.*), 2019, Performance, photographs of vomit, and prepared meals.

my mother (*was twelve when she first masturbated*), 2020, Zoom performance.

still hands, stiller still., 2020, Zoom performance.

a sexual health nurse once asked me (*how many sexual partners have you had?*), 2020, Zoom performance.

the jetsom son and the widow to the sea, 2021, Site specific performance, Massey University.

between little spaces, 2021, Site specific olfactory performance.

whiter than white, 2021, Site specific performance, Massey University.

mother's hands (*as lover's hands*), 2021, Site specific performance, Massey University.

