

HAMSTER ONO



The concept for this cover was conjured naturally from reading *Vanishing Point* by Jessica Maclean, whilst channelling the spiritual realm associated with Hine-nui-te-pō. I wanted to envision a lucid image, in which our bones float within the protection of haehae lines, surrounded by mangopare and vibrational markings. Whakapapa is not linear, it is like a web, and I wanted to represent this, as well as a psychic force merged with the earthly. Our bones are sacred, we move within positive and negative spaces, and in the black and white there is balance.

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# Gulabi

## Balamohan Shingade

The artist had given the iridescent nugget an Indian name: Gulabi. It was the size of a fist and had pinkish patches on its brown body. Like sarus cranes, the students crowded over Gulabi, encircling the tiny body.

“Is it a precious stone?” Kabir hesitated. “Where did you find it?” He thought it was extraordinary, this dappled thing on the linoleum studio floor. It reminded him of finches’ wings. Others were predictably less enthusiastic, wondering more about the classroom’s extraordinary curiosity over this ordinary object.

Ms. Menon reminded her class that it was A Cold Reading, and that although the artist was present—a fellow student of Kabir’s whose artwork was today up for critique—she was not-to-speak. The group, with their heads cocked, began pawing and prodding for meaning, as if to startle Gulabi into saying something for itself.

Searching his affections as he looked at Gulabi, Kabir was reminded of a story he had heard three years ago about how Ms. Menon cried at Ralph Hotere’s painting—the one with the orange cross on a black background—when she’d moved up to Tāmaki Makaurau in the 80s. Kabir had grunted at the time and said that the painting had nothing to do with it. “Besides,” Kabir had said, “she was pretty bummed about her break-up.”

That was a long time ago, when he was an expert on causes-and-effects, and when his thoughts regularly regressed into questioning moods and attitudes—a kind of Global Scepticism, doubting whether anything at all was possible to know. But he didn’t know what to make of that story now because he was also becoming quick to be moved by the littlest artworks like Gulabi.

Art was becoming a matter of faith for Kabir. By that, of course, he didn’t think artists were saintly or their work worthy of worship. After all, this artist was his classmate, not some titanic figure who, by divine inspiration, invited Gulabi to this scene. And he sure wasn’t going to prostrate to Gulabi, though it appeared to be a small goddess of freckled things.

Kabir’s conversion of faith, his kind of belief about art, had nothing to do with faith *in* things—like altars or artworks—but was rather an experience of fidelity, which was closer to the root meaning of the word. He trusted that if he stayed with it long enough—that if Gulabi somehow became a part of his world and his life-story—then yes, a new experience, and a new kind of knowledge, and a new form of life and living was possible. Anyway, all he

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meant by Art & Faith was that he could now believe that Ms. Menon was moved by a painting of Hotere’s, just as he thought it possible for him to be moved by Gulabi.

“Matter is Vibrant,” Jimi Hendrix said, bringing Kabir’s mind back into the classroom. Nobody knew Jimi’s real name; he’d named himself when his hero died in 1970. Jimi had signed up to art school in his 60s. He’d taken up container gardening since falling out with his eco-community up North and was trading in exotic succulents from the seventh floor of his Durham Lane apartment.

“Gulabi is a communicable thing,” he continued. (Jimi was a Post-Humanist.) Squatting and hugging his knees to his bearded chin, as if listening in to Gulabi’s own experience of itself and the world, he said, “This is Vibrant Matter. I mean, Gulabi exerts influence on us ... you know? Even a stone has Buddha-nature.” (Jimi was also Buddhist.) Trees and trash piles, scrap metal and stacked tyres, spools of thread ... these were among Jimi’s favourites in his repertoire of objects that had thing-power. They were his go-tos, which he threw together in a collisionist description of the world to complicate the terms of Life and Matter. He saw the whole world as different modifications of the one same substance—God or Nature. (Jimi was also a Spinozist.)

Only Jimi knew how these theories fit together, how he reconciled whole worldviews that were separated by centuries and continents. But it consoled Kabir, who liked Jimi’s idea that all the stuff of the world—sentient beings and people and all—were just different improvisations made from the same tune.

To Kabir, Gulabi seemed no less or more Vibrant than the speckled floor on which she and Jimi sat. Or the fluorescents flickering overhead, which cast inconstant shadows under Gulabi. And yet, Jimi was uninterested by his linoleum seat or the tiny darkness that cushioned Gulabi on the floor. From what Jimi said, you’d expect him to be euphoric! Excited by everything as if wide-eyed on Yellow Sunshine, twenty-four-seven.

Although Kabir believed Jimi’s borrowed truths—that Gulabi and All Things were “ontologically one, formally diverse”—it didn’t solve for him the problem of how Gulabi the Sculpture was a meaning-making thing. Jimi may have solved the ontological problem of What is Gulabi? But what about the epistemological? What to make of Gulabi? What new knowledge and experiences was Gulabi inspiring? Of motley and miscellaneous things?

Outside the art school, Kabir kept with him a fraternity of the faithless, at least when it came to the experience of art. They were his family and his oldest friends—taxi drivers and teachers, construction workers and computer programmers, accountants and advocates. On their iPads, like illuminated manuscripts, they recited their morning prayers sent directly to their inboxes—news from the World Wide Web. As if counting on their rosary beads, they tallied the daily disasters and the number of deaths. They’d always been enchanted by data neatly organised into tables and graphs, and with these old techniques, they predicted new futures.

Kabir's schoolmate Chen believed in Progress and saw the mysteries of life as problems-not-yet-solved. For personal motivation, Chen liked to read memoirs of entrepreneurs and sportsmen. "These are True Stories," he reminded Kabir. Even Kabir's oldest friend Maya, a medical scientist, saw beauty as part of our evolutionary impulses—something neurological. Maya described the world as a post-truth nightmare, *Kali Yuga* or an Age of Darkness. She'd returned from volunteering in a devastated United States, helping scientists counter disinformation about disease, disinfectants, and death. To defog her mind and to seize hold of objective truth, Maya stopped reading novels. She gave up poetry as a protest against fiction. She became A Disciple of Evidence and mortgaged her version of truth to facts and figures. In this world of unbelievable reality, ruled by orange-robed and orange-faced men, the fraternity found fiction impossible to accept.

Maya and Chen were not the only ones to denounce art. The less assertive members of their fraternity experienced Art as a form of leisure and light entertainment—something non-committal. Prime Minister John, who they'd voted in previously, declared that fiction writers had little insight on reality. Now their new Government asked them to be Thankful for Art without exactly knowing why. Perhaps the usefulness the fraternity saw in art was the escape it gave them from the drudgery and the dreadfulness of daily life—an ameliorative for troubled as well as ordinary times. If reality belonged to the STEM-disciplines, then unreality was for Art.

Facts hadn't quite won over fiction in Kabir's search for truth and knowledge, for ways of existing and relating. It wasn't that facts did not matter; it was just that wherever Kabir looked, he couldn't find The Fact of the Matter. Whatever he pointed to as a fact required specifying the terms and the frameworks of interpretation. What he saw was a cloud of fictions from which a fact was made solid, and he sometimes preferred the alternatives: The fact of stars he interpreted instead as the fiction of pin-pricks on a blanket that covered over the sky, or the looseness of a knit that let some light in. The fact of The Big Bang he interpreted instead as the fiction of a collapsing god, who ought to be put back together through ritual. The fact of tides he interpreted instead as the rising and falling of a great being's breath, and amidst this, a person was an insignificant nose-mite.

The fact remained that in Ms. Menon's class, Kabir was becoming compelled by the little Gulabi. Was it because of Jimi's interpretative charity? He felt embarrassed at the thought of sharing with the fraternity the alteration and affection he felt by this dappled thing.

It wasn't that Gulabi compelled Kabir to see life differently—not exactly, and besides, that would be too much pressure on a single art object. Ongoing and over time, it was a slow and subtle attunement to the world. It was about the training of the imagination for epistemic performance. The cumulative effect of looking, feeling, thinking, relating ... hopefully to make a more sensitive person of him.

It often happened that Kabir entered a critique doubtful and dreading, as if needing to draw blood from a stone. But the alchemical process of attentiveness and the artwork's influences meant that, like with the grace of the Gulabi, he became enamoured and convinced of the thing's loveliness.



Gradually, the artwork appeared anew. Ms. Menon encouraged a parrying of tid-bits and talk, and the resonances that her students found, she collected and coaxed into a polyphony: A conversation, and in the end, a conversion.

If facts were an orientation to what existed, then the faith in art and belief in fiction that Ms. Menon was cultivating in Kabir was in order to look at the-situation-of-things from the standpoint of That, which did not yet exist or need not exist. And That, which needn't or didn't yet exist, was something that could reorganise his experience of the world. After all, Kabir's search was for an experience of an un-alienated life—this was his version of truth; truth not as correctness but as a disclosure—an experience of intimacy and a true or ethical way of existing and relating.

Ms. Menon often said, "art is not about representing the world; it's about the experience of truth in the world." Gradually, the interpretation of such fictions began to soak his experience of life all the way through.

Among his classmates were a few other faithfuls who were all in some way searching for a different way of living, with newfound attentiveness to life and not-yet-existing-things. Jason was knitting scarves the colour of sky, the length of which he determined by measuring the distance from the earth to above the weather. Agnes dressed as an astronaut and was raising geese in moon-like habitats on her farm, taking them on expeditions and training them to fly. Elsewhere, Shannon was speaking the lyrics of a waiata to his geese, and also to chickens, a swan, a rabbit, a wallaby, and a donkey. And Józef was filming happenings on the concrete yard below from the 9th floor window of his tower block—dogs crossing the street, Marian the dentist returning from work, the butcher delivering meat to his neighbours.

In all these instances of artistic adventures, the prerequisite was faith. The faith was that the artists could, through their practices, repair their alienation and restore their presence in the world. Faith was about their inner relationship and orientation to existence, as something operating in the lacuna of becoming. It had to do with the way they re-organised their experiences and made sense out of a world of sensible objects, sentient things, and relationships.

And so, faith underpinned this orientation to Gulabi. Kabir committed to pay attention to the speckled body, to attend to the stone. He trusted Gulabi, not because he already knew what the iridescent stone had to say, but because there was an as-yet-undefined meaning and experience that Gulabi could open him out to. His trust was an entrusting, as an active commitment to the Other. Kabir was The One Who Trusted, and who already ventured, somehow beyond or independently of the available evidence, in his very believing that Gulabi may be relied on for meaning-making.

The artist, if she chose to, could have added one-hundred fictions to the Greatness of Gulabi—stories about the ways in which Gulabi was worlded, stories about her coming-into-being. She could have revealed that Gulabi was a process-driven artwork of casting a rock and carefully replicating it in the thousands. Or that in fact she inherited Gulabi as an heirloom from her late grandmother. Or that it was really a thing uplifted from the Arctic and coloured by the northern lights, a journey taking her a full year. Or even that Gulabi fell from the sky.



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ark oin in me re coil in

here we are again

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guh guh, my bliiiiiiiiiiii**

disaccoscentivates

# ELLO GUV'NAH!

this performance this  
performance goes for  
twenty minutes for twenty  
minutes wherever we are  
wherever we are when the  
alarm ringsssssssssuhs  
is when the performance  
will end.

Time begins now.

Subject to change  
a worm divination  
to digest  
to extract  
Sch

to digest  
**Schlop!**

[illegible][illegible]

Let's imagine, for a brief moment, that I am wearing, a tie-dyed onesie.  
Let's imagine, for a brief moment, that I am wearing,  
a tie-dyed onesie. Slowly, unravelling my  
pedestrian clothes. One-by-one. Gradually revealing  
my beautiful. Worm - like. skin. Beautiful, worm-like,  
skin. Beautiful worm-like in. Beautiful worm-like

**act**  
**3**

An act of levitation. An act of divination. An act of SSSOIL! An act of SOIL-ING!

An Act of COUGHING  
an act of COUGHing

An act of Coughing!  
An act of Coughing!

**SOIL LOZENGE-Ahhhhhhh**



**SOIL LOZENGES**

# Gulp.

Down, in me. Moist. Risiing,  
DOUBLE Penetration... mEET, in my GUTS! soil lozenge!  
Where the little ant is formed. mEET, in my G  
Soil lozenge. Cool!

refreshing.

The beginning of autumn.

Blue sky.

Crisp.

Sun out. A cold citrus bite.

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soil, think soil, think so*





# Hey, Don't Settle For Walking: Video Art and Engine Sport in Aotearoa

Theo Macdonald

An artist hired me and a friend to travel to Bluff. We were to film his vintage motorcycles racing in the Burt Munro Challenge. He'd once paid an ad agency to put together a video. They had produced three minutes of slick digital graphics. He wanted something more committed. The bikes in question were Velocettes built in the interwar period. Unlike a new Kawasaki, you can see the innards and identify the consequence of each stutter and revolution.

Following each race day, my friend and I wandered the barren streets of Bluff. Both of us grew up in Wellington. I don't drive but like many I have lived my life in cities structured around private vehicles. Starting from the harbour, the houses disperse as you walk up the hillside to the lookout. The sky above the port turns a sluggish orange and looms over the town police car parked outside a hotel bar.

The metaphors conveyed through motors are entwined with New Zealand's colonial values of resilience, community, and industry: Motorbikes and cars sustain a national belief in the rural identity as a unifying experience. For this reason, I am interested in the cultural significance of motoring in Aotearoa, particularly the visual conventions of rural and urban motoring. Vehicles appear in the video artworks of Rodney Charters, Florian Habicht, and Alex Monteith. Through this subject matter these artists reflect and question the pictures many New Zealanders use to describe themselves.

Colonial identity is wedded to the image of the frontier. Endless highways bisect controlled pastures, yet New Zealand considers itself a society wrestling with an untamed landscape. In North America, Australia, and Aotearoa, the settler mythology of the man alone permeates nationalist literature. An isolated existentialist rides the wilderness to avoid the moral contradictions of genteel society. The death of the American West was marked onscreen by the arrival of the steam engine. This industrial interruption obsolesced the horse and wagon trail, and delivered civilisation to the purportedly uncivilised. The frontier seemed lost until the arrival of the motorcycle. The public travel of trains was bypassed in favour of private luxury, and New Zealand adopted Hollywood's characterisation of the biker as a piston-powered pioneer.

Rodney Charters recorded *Film Exercise* (1966) with his father's wind-up Bolex camera.<sup>1</sup> Supposedly the first video out of Elam, it was shown at the Sydney Film Festival and gained Charters admission to London's Royal College of Art. The film opens on a woman watching waves at a West Auckland beach. A bearded beatnik pulls up on his motorcycle and the two ride through Titirangi to downtown Auckland, then to a student party in Grey Lynn. The man abandons the woman inside and she returns to the bike, caressing it as the headlight beams.

Charters made *Film Exercise* in the throes of the counterculture.<sup>2</sup> The short's sensitive masculine hero, solemnly licking his rolling papers in the sands of Whatipu Beach, redeploys the rebel features of Marlon Brando. Charters is hip; from beginning to end he knows foreign cinema. The opening pan, of the woman watching the waves, nods to two Italian movies; Antonioni's *L'avventura* and Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* (both 1960). The final shot, following the credits, is of the student crew taking a bow, silhouetted like the dancing plague victims at the end of Bergman's *Seventh Seal* (1957). Fifty years have turned *Film Exercise* into the nostalgic memory of a time when cinema bikers emblematised a life lived outside society; a life lived on the frontier.

My brother rides his motorbike in Wellington, but when he travels outside the city he takes the car. At the Burt Munro Challenge most of the bikers were pushing sixty. The men wore battered leather clipped all the way to their salt-and-pepper beards. One old guy strutted around the pit in a luminescent blue cravat. He fancied himself a cowboy. When I finally saw him race, he lost.

Alex Monteith's *2.5 Kilometre Mono Action for a Mirage* (2011) depicts a rider executing a sustained wheelie along the coastline at Muriwai. Monteith's fixed camera frames the misty scene from a distance. At the start the only movements are the ebbing of waves and the gliding of birds: Aotearoa of an imagined prehistoric age. The rider takes shape as a sliding mark on the horizon. The dot expands as it drifts toward the camera. The stunt's spectacle builds for fifteen seconds before the rider zooms beyond the frame.

With duration and composition, *2.5 Kilometre Mono Action for a Mirage* references the iconic entrance of Sherif Ali in *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962). Appearing on the horizon, Ali (Omar Sharif) rides his horse toward the camera with glorious patience. The static Lawrence observes Ali's adaptation to the unyielding Nefud desert. As David Lean adapted images of the Wild West to his World War One biopic, Monteith adapts this metaphor to the beaches of Aotearoa. She sees the myth of the Kiwi frontier, and identifies the depth of this archetype's inheritance.

Theo Macdonald

The bike exemplifying the Kiwi frontier is inverted by the road as tribute to New Zealand industry. If a city is imagined by spaghetti junctions, then the asphalt highway cutting through hillsides is the city imposing itself on the countryside. This manipulation of the environment affirms colonial authority. The linear road subdues the unruly landscape.

**Image:** Alex Monteith rigging the bullet camera onto Shaun Harris's motorcycle during the production of *Looping manoeuvre with Shaun Harris and onboard dual-cams for two-channel video installation* (2008).



In Bluff, there was a three-store complex. A liquor store in the middle and on either side a bar. That was it. The night before the final race we went to the bar on the right. On the walls were photos of sharks strung up like ducks. The locals were talking about who had caught the sharks, when, and so on. The bartender saw me listening and told me it was bullshit. The shark photos were all printouts from an Australian website.

Alex Monteith's practice frequently incorporates politics connected to indigenous land disputes. *1020 meters in 26 minutes Waitangi Day Auckland Harbour Bridge Protest* (2008) is a dual-channel video installation documenting the protest against Transit New Zealand's decision not to fly the Tino Rangitiratanga flag on Waitangi Day in 2008.<sup>3</sup> The protesters form a slow procession driving over the

1. Robert Leonard, "City Mission," Robert Leonard Contemporary-Art Writer and Curator, 2015, <http://robertleonard.org/city-mission/>.

2. Tim Corballis, "Unseen City (City Gallery Wellington 21 November 2015 – 13 March 2016)," Circuit Artist Film and Video Aotearoa New Zealand, posted January 14, 2016, <http://www.circuit.org.nz/blog/unseen-city-city-gallery-wellington-21-november-2015-13-march-2016-0>.

3. "1020 meters in 26 minutes Waitangi Day Auckland Harbour Bridge Protest," Alex Monteith, [http://www.alexmonteith.com/work\\_detail.php?id=47](http://www.alexmonteith.com/work_detail.php?id=47).



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Auckland Harbour Bridge, many bearing the Tino Rangitiratanga flag. Monteith films with two bullet cameras mounted to her own vehicle participating in the motorcade. These cameras film the surrounding landscape, the sky and sea, as they watch the mass of dissident action. Refusal to participate in the convenience of highways is a rejection of colonial imposition.

Monteith engages with similar issues in *Passing Manoeuvre with two motorcycles and 584 vehicles for two-channel video installation* (2008). Two motorbikes, each filmed by a camera mounted on the other, lane split on a highway. Filmed from rear and front mounted cameras on each of the two participating motorbikes, the circuitous highway appears all-encompassing, suffocating. The cars passed by these bikes are impotent. In *Film Exercise*, the road splits open the Titirangi bush. These curving pathways offer adventure as the natural environment becomes a permanent background. For *Film Exercise* the question of environmental manipulation is in the past. The road is an institutional comfort. The maintenance of these roads demonstrates the establishment's economic stability.

Stuffed in a hillside ditch at the first race, I trained my camcorder on a ruddy-faced man perched on a tree stump. As each bike whizzed by he'd kick up his legs and laugh, morphing from Kenny Rogers into an Enid Blyton character.

Public transport charts the borders of the city. Without bus and train infrastructures, participating in your rural community means owning a car or motorbike. This community-forming function is doubled by vehicles being central to annual events like Field Days and the Burt Munro Challenge.

Florian Habicht's *Kaikohe Demolition* (2004) explores the eponymous Northland town's regular demolition derby. The subjects of this documentary enjoy the freedom to own and the freedom to destroy what they own. Demolition derbies are the contact sport that comes with the threat of explosion. In this Northland town destruction is a communal activity. Habicht interviews derby participants at the Ngawha hot pools. Chest deep in restorative mud, the drivers

ruminate on competition, family, and labour. Their vehicles are decorated with Batman logos and pirate flags; they are vigilantes and bandits doing battle in the pastoral colosseum. The derby commentator remarks that a driver who has dressed his car like a police cruiser is asking to be victimised. Drivers reveal ingenious tricks of the trade, like using a chainsaw to exaggerate the tread of your tyres. All this muddy intimacy gets broken up by painterly shots of the landscape; the mountains brood over endless misty paddocks. A demolished vehicle slumped amongst weeds is a reminder that many Kaikohe residents live in poverty. In Habicht's articulation of rural lifestyle, the private car represents all facets of citizenry; humour, competition, struggle, and politics.

Alex Monteith exceeds motorcycle as content and embraces the motorcycle as methodology. This methodology is consistent with her broader practice, which has also seen elaborately staged actions employing surfers, sheep, and jet planes.<sup>4</sup> The rural communities present in Alex Monteith's body of motorcycle-

**Image:**  
Florian Habicht,  
*Kaikohe  
Demolition*  
(film still), 2004.



4. Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, "Alex Monteith – Govett Brewster Interview," YouTube video, 5:18, October 14, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sruG9TzbVFM>.

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centric video installations (2007-2011) are national, rather than local. These collectives are created around vehicles, not mediated by them. They are the skilled professionals and enthusiastic amateurs who form New Zealand motorsports. The motorsports community engages enthusiastically with Monteith. Her work has been positively reviewed in an issue of *KIWIRIDER* Magazine<sup>5</sup> and records from *Kiwi Biker Forum* online document Taranaki bikers planning to head along to the launch of Monteith's *Accelerated Geographies* at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery.<sup>6</sup> Through collaborating with this community, Monteith creates work that encourages an appreciation of the community's skill.

Motoring in the metropolis is dictated by zebra crossings, stop lights, and the highway patrol. Like spray paint for a tagger, delinquent driving allows city-dwellers to imagine asserting themselves upon this bureaucracy. For an urban viewer, the violence of *Kaikohe Demolition* is a catharsis. Adrenaline kicks in with the smack of collision. Lingering images of churning mud and smoking fenders are scored to hair metal blasts. One driver says the thrill comes from "the expectation of the unexpected." To win, you have to avoid being hit without depleting your petrol allocation. The victors possess resilience.

Before the final event begins, the track manager demonstrates the threat of real danger by announcing a brief list of rules. "No hitting the driver's door, that's a no-no." As the battle unfolds, a few driver's doors are hit and a few engines catch aflame. During a ride through Kaikohe, Habicht and his guide see a car using a bifurcated van as a trailer. "You wouldn't see that in Auckland," remarks the guide. The ability to drive as one wants is antithetical to the rigid bylaws of city driving. Florian Habicht has conjured up a pastoral utopia for metropolitan petrol heads.

The metaphor of driving as catharsis resonates particularly for young men. In *Film Exercise*, Rodney Charters employs advertising's language of montage and archetype. His eye is for texture, from tumbling sea foam to a shiny wing mirror. An impression is built of the motorcycle as a

tool for youth seeking to straddle the liberty of the countryside and the activity of the city. The camera cuts constantly, isolating and juxtaposing familiar images, from criss-crossing power lines, to a couple dwarfed by gargantuan cliffs. The motorcycle is, like the sea foam, a sensual object to be visually consumed. It throbs between the legs, the moment of release captured in the burst of exhaust smoke.

At the Burt Munro Street Race we hid behind a stack of tyres in borrowed fluorescent jackets. I had my camera fixed on one rider as his wheel jammed and the bike flipped. His body crumpled as he hit asphalt. A representative from the race commission demanded I go to the head office. They thought the rider would die and then I'd have made a snuff film at their event. I waited at the office for forty minutes until they confirmed he was alive.

Video art disentangles the commercial media compositions that dictate local values. The most reliable myths are embedded in our cars and motorbikes; they pander to the dream of the New Zealand frontier, necessitate the highway's subjugation of landscape, maintain rural communities, and imagine catharsis within urban and suburban lifestyles. Mass-market images of private vehicles maintain conservative national beliefs in a singular colonial identity, a New Zealand of shared principles. This Kiwi universalism suppresses dissenting politics, particularly those that dispute the settler fiction of New Zealand as post-racial, progressive, and morally pure.

In the video artworks of Rodney Charters, Florian Habicht, and Alex Monteith we see private vehicles in conflicting roles. The specificity of each filmed community denies broad sentimentality, unlike an instalment of Hyundai-sponsored *Country Calendar*. Under an influx of urban living, Pākehā New Zealand seeks images of the rural nation within which settler identity was first imagined. These artists produce images with a depth and rigor missing in commercial production. In particular, through Habicht and Monteith's representation of vehicles and their human collaborators, we bear witness to the ongoing damage of colonial industry.

5. Dave Cohen, "Alex Monteith's Need for Speed," *KIWIRIDER*, 2008, 12.

6. Goblin, September 21, 2010, 7.14 p.m., comment on surfchick's thread, "Kiwi Biker in big exhibition, Shaun Harris, Kiwifruit, Enigma, Shane, Paul D," Kiwi Biker Forums, September 3, 2010, <https://www.kiwibiker.co.nz/forums/showthread.php/128093-Kiwi-Biker-in-big-exhibition-Shaun-Harris-Kiwifruit-Enigma-Shane-Paul-D>.















# Notes Toward Memory-Knowledge, or, The Pruning of Magnolias Happens Earlier Each Year

Jane Wallace

To begin, I wrote down a line from a book I love, but this return was false. I thought it was about the interstice between one subway stop and the next, a meeting of two unlikely points, a meeting of two lines on which things roll back and forward, never making the same exact journey twice. I have this idea that there is something like a pearl hidden at the gap between these two channels of busy-ness, wedged between a handrail or something. A kernel, shiny and slippery and valuable and lost. The pearl is a vessel for a memory that must exist on some kind of moving axis, a jewel of information that appears as needed.

I am wondering how this type of nebulous image might be a way to reconsider how we come to knowledge. I want to consider how memory and fiction might be a way to destabilise singular narratives. Through the lusted lens of the pearl, I hope we might find a way to accommodate the ways in which knowing and learning can be slippery and multiple too.

## Memories To Increase Proximity

My grandfather owned a string of camera shops throughout the country. As a result, we have always had large boxes of tiny film slides and old developed negatives in paper envelopes around home. Despite having never met him, these images and their leftovers have always helped me to meet with this man. I can remember a moment and become close to a person I do not know by a shared encounter with these materials. Here, I am thrust into a meeting that takes place both in the past and future, and also, not at all.

I move cities in the middle of the summer and I go for a run around a new neighbourhood. I don't know where I am, but the heat makes the jasmine sweat, and suddenly, my memory allows me to be in two places again. At night, I fall asleep, and the train going through my industrial neighbourhood is the same noise I slept to as a kid. I think of Eileen Myles telling us

about the cleverness of Ginsberg's boxcar boxcar boxcar, and the significance of that sound redoubles in my mind.<sup>1</sup> By sifting through superficially disparate memories and connections, I am able to transform discomfort or unease into a new memory. When I think more about this, I imagine laying a mesh of bright things over the top of a city I do not know. I shroud the city with the beauty of sounds and textures and words that I've collected for this day. The mesh is a way in—a back entrance to a place that is not yet home. I use the mesh as a sieve for my own pile of memories of other places I have lived, and in doing so, am able to destabilise the unfamiliar feeling of being in a new place, and introduce myself to this locale on my own terms.

## Public / Private

I am thinking of a conversation where I learned that public art is generally commissioned with a finite period of maintenance in mind. Presumably, after this time frame, it is accepted that the work will be decommissioned or upkeep will cease and the work will deteriorate. When I think of an artwork that is long-lasting, I think of sculptures installed on street corners, in parks or gallery pavilions. I think of colonial monuments erected and maintained long, long past the point at which it has been recognised that this memorialisation can be re-traumatising.

When I first moved to Ōtautahi, I thought a lot about how no one really walked around the city or to work. I also thought about the historic and ongoing prevalence of public sculpture trails and festivals in the city. I thought about gusting down Moorhouse Ave in a fast car on a Friday night and wondered if there is a fundamental disconnect between public sculpture and prevailing ways of using public space. I am thinking

Jane Wallace

now about how the population of Ōtautahi has become accustomed to permanence as a temporary fiction. Perhaps now we are predisposed to understanding memory as a porous substance. Where would the gatekeepers go if the gates are turned to gauze?

At the dawn of the canonical contemporary in Aotearoa, Wystan Curnow wrote in a book titled *New Art* that, "when we make memory public we learn that it is fallible."<sup>2</sup> This observation was a justification for documenting an artistic movement that was increasingly site-specific and ephemeral. Though the art-making Curnow is referring to could be seen as mostly concerned with a personal, private, or contingent experience, the commentary around it was predicated on circulating these experiences in a way that enabled a return to these events in the future, if one was looking. A performance artwork or temporary installation would never be as fleeting as it might have seemed because of its immediate and inevitable preservation through various forms of media; everything other than that in which it was produced. The work would be suspended somewhere between layers of photographs, advertising materials, and newspaper accounts, held hostage to publicly circulated and corroborated forms of knowledge.

There seems an inverse relationship here, where we perceive events that are deliberately situated in a short moment of time and space as needing to be stretched longer and thinner so that they occupy more time in our collective consciousness. All the while, artworks that appear to be made for longevity actually experience a public amnesia because they are all around and taken for granted.

1. Eileen Myles, "Repeating Allen," *The Importance of Being Iceland* (California: Semiotexte, 2009), 292.
2. Wystan Curnow, *New Art: Some Recent New Zealand Sculpture and Post-Object Art* (Auckland: Heinemann, 1976), non-paginated.

### Forgetting & Fictioning

I am thinking of sites and events that are discreet yet still visible: A shop fronting inhabited by a rotating lease sign / a new business begun and failed, time and energy absorbed back into the fabric of the street / public sculptures vandalised and decommissioned / a bus route rerouted so that the unfamiliar journey home becomes normal and the old spiral through the hills is something of a daydream.

To be amongst others and sharing the experience of a commute or a suburb allows for the delegation of the task of remembering. Buildings and structures that we flow in and out of—those that support movement and change like public transport, airports, schools, municipal buildings, supermarkets, car parks—are agents for a false sense of inevitability. How do we hold onto the constantly amorphous nature of the city and the world? It is in the minutiae that life and feeling belongs. These signs, characters, utterances, and constructions build the rhythm of everyday; a swelling composition of people and objects that are constantly in flux, even as it feels it will all stay the same.

Is it wrong to make something up if it diverts us to a new place? In her essay, “I Must Explode,” Gwynneth Porter writes that, “there is also room, rarely-used room, in art writing practice for silence, for stupidity, humility, not knowing, not engaging with what could be frowned on as general verbiage.”<sup>3</sup> Often, it seems that knowledge is a concrete thing, but it is more exciting to envisage what could happen if we allow for many ideas and memories to coexist even, or perhaps especially, if they are contradictory. Disagreement is where we can locate the pivot points of knowledge, where the story could twist or become unmoored. These points are useful because they are the

sites at which two things can be true at once. Maybe instead of feeling stupid when presented with tension, we can let it settle, and embrace that emotion, though it might be uncomfortable.

When memory becomes fiction and knowledge becomes unstable, the empirical value ascribed to knowledge becomes unstuck too. Here, evaluation of this knowledge is not overshadowed by its truthfulness, but can instead be guided by the ideas it contains—the biases, language, or assumptions—and where they have all come from. Fiction, therefore, allows us to work out a condition which might not yet exist. Through validating and vocalising forgetting, fixity is revealed as no longer an essential characteristic of knowledge. To forget is to stutter or trip, to externally signal that knowledge has lapsed. The tongue and the mind feel around for the words that fill in this gap. So while the act of remembering is imperfect, what cannot be decisively known can be suggested by fiction.

Forgetting could be a way to reposition experimental ideas, not as the production of new knowledge, but as a way of thinking that is continual. Moreover, by acknowledging forgetting as an equal counterpart of remembering, we might be able to subvert feelings of shame or embarrassment associated with not knowing. Not-knowing can be repositioned as an inextricable part of learning; full of potential. Centralising this imperfection of communicating memory could be a way to resist knowledge as an end product. By this, I mean that I am thinking about how knowledge can be de-instrumentalised. The way we expect to learn is based on pre-packaged information which can be digested, assessed, and ticked off. It is hard to remember how to learn for the joy of the process. I talked with a friend who had an artists’ residency which emphasised its open-endedness; there

was no required outcome of the residency, and this meant that their time could really be used as a testing ground for lots of new ideas and thoughts—not all of which would be fertile. Their inquiry was guided by building relationships and memories with others, learning from failure, shared ideas, and the intimacy that emerges from this kind of vulnerability around knowledge.

In my experience, vulnerability is recognising the instability of your own knowledge or feelings. Here, it is possible to concede that you may not be unequivocally correct, but that this does not mean you must be silent, or that this vulnerability is at the detriment to what you do have to offer. I guess what I am hoping for is that in knowledge that is publicised and circulated, particularly in relation to stories about ourselves and others, art, and the city, we might allow a little more vulnerability to seep in. To make fictions and false things in place of certain, singular narratives is crucial for undoing the binary of agreement and dissension in relation to knowledge in contemporary culture. We cannot thrust around the same block forever. Instead, a method that is vulnerable, and thus multiple, fundamentally alters the divide of right and wrong.

Tonight, everyone on my street is listening to heavy metal. The house over the fence is practicing the drums. The railway crossing bells make that tired clang. I think of strange coincidences and the ways in which things can be simultaneous and accidental and no one ever knows. I think of the afternoon where a woman picked up a lost cellphone on the street just as it began to ring. It’s her friend on the other end, calling for someone who does not know they’ve lost their phone just yet. And I think about that incident a lot; inconsequential in the end, but impossible all the same.

3. Gwynneth Porter, “I Must Explode: Art Writing and Tactical Practice,” *Endless Lonely Planet 2* (2012): 255.

# Vanishing Point

Jessica Maclean

He kokonga whare e kitea, he kokonga ngākau e kore e kitea.  
*A corner of a house may be seen and examined, not so the corners of the heart.*

A haughty look, a proud heart, and the lamp of the wicked are sin.  
**Proverbs 21:4**

Martin Jay describes Descartes’ metaphysical dualism as the point at which, “the radical opposition of viewing subject and viewed object supplant earlier ontological ways of being immersed in the world.”<sup>1</sup> Such a metaphysics results in various “scopic regimes,” which privilege the eye as providing direct access to the world, and collapse seeing into knowing. Knowledge is yoked conceptually and linguistically to sight: I see what you mean; my perspective is such-and-such; you’ve lost sight of the bigger picture; seeing is believing. The viewed object is **known**, or at least, reduced to the knowable through the gaze of the viewing subject. The gaze mediates the supposed ontological distance between the two, but (from the viewer’s perspective, anyway) is strictly one-way; the abyss may gaze back, but does the painting?

// sight mediates the distance between us  
but we **touch** that which we are a part of /

The opposition between subject and object underlies both the act of scientific observation and seeing more generally, all the while bearing a relation to knowing and understanding. It suggests the possibility of direct and objective access to an external and knowable reality, without the messy entanglements of subjectivity and the ever-present whiff of complicity.<sup>2</sup> What illicitly escapes scrutiny in scopic regimes is a metaphysical hierarchy in which some **physical** sense coupled with rationality is taken as the basis for knowledge. According to this kind of Enlightenment thinking, we come to belief and understanding through observation and reason. God is dead. Beliefs may be either true or justified, but must be both to qualify as knowledge.

Let’s not forget that the oppositional binary of subject / object is also the basis of the colonial project. As Lewis Gordon reminds us, racism is the fundamental denial of reality; the reality of the humanity of the Other.<sup>3</sup> Much easier to cause harm to those who are seen as both wholly separate and in a lesser category of being; an attitude frequently taken against Nature.

// i came, i **saw**, i **conquered**  
but o god  
i’m going to have to stop eating meat /

The radical disjunct between subject and object lies in stark contrast to the relationality inherent in a Māori cosmogony. According to the taxonomies of whakapapa, there is no fundamental distinction between the human and so-called natural worlds, and more importantly, there is little distinction between the physical and spiritual realms. So it is not so much a matter of **belief** when it comes to wairua, but a matter of knowledge. It is a particular

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kind of knowledge about the world, one borne of a particular ontological immersion in the world. This immersion gives rise to a different sensorium, which goes beyond the physical; a stance clearly at odds with a scientific perspective. But one needn’t necessarily be **aware** of something to be affected by it.

For those of us unpracticed in certain arts, it is perhaps while sleeping that the spirit realm—everywhere coextensive with the physical one—is most accessible. Understood as the byproducts of memory consolidation, or the subconscious presenting aspects of itself to the dreaming mind, many dreams seem easily understood without recourse to wairua. Other dreams remain mysterious, beyond the power of words to convey. Some dreams convey useful information; there is a particular dream I have that always precedes a fever. In that case, it is not so much the narrative of the impending-fever dream that imparts the message, as the feelings and sensations. In other cases, the narrative can, with a little elucidation and a lot of hindsight, be revelatory.

When I was on the cusp of adolescence, I had a series of dreams that felt very much like nightmares. Over a period of about two weeks, every night or at least most nights, my younger brother would die in my dreams. The most horrific element of the dreams was not his death, however, which took a variety of forms, but the indifference of my family to it. Increasingly frantic, I would scream at them, to no avail. How could they not hear me?

In waking-life during this period, my parents and sisters walked up the road to get fish and chips for dinner. I was alone with my brother for perhaps twenty minutes. I am doing the dishes. I hear my brother stumbling into the kitchen behind me. I turn to look and

ohgodohgodohgod  
hisfaceisblueheisnotbreathing  
and

and

and i watch the movie

she calmly, slowly even  
moves behind the boy  
they look so much alike  
she clasps her hands around him  
she jerks really hard  
out of his mouth shoots this massive piece of orange  
and they collapse on the lino and they’re crying and crying

FUCK YOU O ORANGE  
MAY YOUR ANCESTORS  
BE SHAMED AND DEFILED  
EVERMORE WILL I DEVOUR  
THE FLESH OF YOUR CHILDREN

The dreams stopped after that.

1. Martin Jay, *Essays from the Edge: Parerga and Paralipomena* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 53.  
2. For example, the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle implies not only that the act of observation affects what is observed, but that reality may not exist until it is observed.  
3. Lewis R. Gordon, “Bad faith and antiblack racism: A study in the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre,” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1994), 98.



So how is it that we can have spiritual experiences, including certain dream states? I am coming to believe that sensoria are more culturally than physiologically determined; it is clear that science still understands little of the physical senses available to us humans, let alone any spiritual ones. Research suggests that humans, like bees, birds, and whales, possess the capacity to sense the Earth’s magnetic field. One recent study found that volunteers, when placed in an artificially created and manipulated magnetic field, exhibited neurological responses that suggested the brain was paying attention to changes in magnetism. These volunteers did not consciously sense anything, but electroencephalograms showed brain activation consistent with sensory perception.<sup>4</sup>

Explanations for this phenomenon vary, but regardless of the mechanism it seems this sense is not experienced consciously by those who were tested. Indeed, blindfolded volunteers in earlier experiments were more able to accurately point homeward than when not blindfolded, suggesting that the conscious mind may actually interfere with this sensory modality.<sup>5</sup>

Or could it simply be that we have lost touch with this sense, including the very awareness that it exists? Atmospheric conditions cannot always have been conducive to sighting the celestial objects relied upon by ancient Moana-nui-a-Kiwa navigators. Could it be that lore, rituals, and incantations that pertain to this craft involved sensitising oneself to magnetic fields?

rongo: to hear  
to feel  
to touch  
to taste  
to **perceive**

The difficulties involved in translating concepts into other languages assume a new dimension when we consider that the constituent components of phenomenological experience might differ between peoples, based on ontological difference. The privileging of the mind, of consciously-directed thought, of language, and the denigration of the body, of feeling and sensing, and the utter denial of wairua; auē, te mamea! This is the ontological violence done to our ways of being immersed in the world, which restricts the very possibilities of being.

One domain from which this ontological violence has been defended is that of kapa haka. Some criteria by which performances are deemed superlative are ihi, wehi, and wana. These terms are impossible to explain except by way of comparison and metaphor, which can at best provide only glimpses into a Māori world-view. Ihi is akin to the psychic force that the performer is able to exert, which draws an affective response from audience members. Wehi is the response of the audience members to the ihi of the performer/s. Wehi has physiological, cognitive, emotional, and psychic components; blending a Romantic understanding of the sublime with the experience of frisson may begin to capture a sense of this. Wana is a term I am having trouble with. As I understand it at the moment, it is the state of being that results from a kind of sympathetic resonance between ihi and wehi, and thus performers and audience are united in wana. Taken together, ihi, wehi, and wana replenish the mauri, the unique and essential life force possessed by humans and other entities.

I am not suggesting a physical mechanism is responsible for experiences such as prophetic dreams, or ihi, wehi, and wana. Indeed, I find materialist attempts to reduce the numinous to the physiological both a colonial assault on Māori (and other) ontologies, and profoundly misguided even in the absence of malicious intent. But this is not to say that there are no physiological correlates to spiritual experience either, because we remain integrated beings whether we are aware of it or not. Our wairua has a deep connection to the body but at times

4. Connie X. Wang et al., “Transduction of the geomagnetic field as evidenced from alpha-band activity in the human brain,” *eNeuro Journal* (March 2019).

5. R. Robin Baker, “Human navigation and magnetoreception: the Manchester experiments do replicate,” *Animal Behaviour* 35, no. 3 (1987): 691-704.

takes its leave, which is why one must never abruptly awaken a sleeping person. It departs permanently once the mauri has been extinguished, (eventually, all going well) leaving no trace of itself in the physical remains. It still exists though; mine will journey north ki Te Rerenga Wairua one day, my bones, too, shed amongst the bones of my kin.

// hurl me north  
and i will leave flax-tied knots to show my passing  
// lest my wairua accidentally wander into some house and thus render it tapu  
// which of course is no more and no less than  
the presence of some spiritual force such as i /  
let doorways face north /  
north to te aka  
downwhichwedescend  
// perhaps some descendant will sense my passing on a moonless night  
a warmer current of air or water, distinct from the cold around it  
pausing for a moment to wonder /  
then  
hurl me west  
and wait, wait awhile  
o sun,  
let us go down together/

Atua and ancestors await me there, but they are to be found here too. The resonance between magnetoreception and wairua is instructive; both pertain to invisible energies and forces, the sense experience of which may resist conscious or linguistic expression, remaining at the level of instinct and intuition. Just as the volunteers who sensed changes in the magnetic field around them, and just as the volunteers who more unerringly pointed homeward when blindfolded, one may not necessarily consciously experience spiritual presences, events, and forces, but this does not mean we are not affected by them.

For those who do possess an awareness of themselves as beings with a spiritual element, and moreover those with culturally sanctioned means of understanding and expressing spiritual experience such as ihi, wehi, and wana, the spiritual dimension of life is not only rich, but life-affirming. It’s not for nothing that many statistics correlate a spiritual practice with quality of life. Yeats wrote that the centre cannot hold, and yet a century later we remain trapped in the widening gyre of our time. Without an acceptance of the spiritual dimension to life, there is no centre. Ignored, the spiritual organs begin to submerge themselves deep within, but like the lotus seed they wait, ready to bloom at the merest hint of warmth, and light.

The vanishing point, where the perspective projections of lines in three-dimensional space meet, directs one to the correct angle from which to view the world-as-image. But as I see it, the vanishing point is where logic and geometric reality break down, where parallel lines truly converge and overcome their ontological divide at the point of infinity, ever racing towards a boundless horizon.

// don’t tell me gods don’t exist  
just because  
**you’ve never met one /**

# About the contributors

**Erin Broughton** is a graphic designer based between Ōtautahi and Ōtepoti.

**Brian Fuata** is an improviser.

Brian recorded a structured ghost improvisation; transcribed twice—once using Hamish's ear, the other using a U.S. transcription company. Erin entered the recording holding two transcripts, perhaps as hand rails oiled by the tension between emotion and formal education. Encounter Erin-as-conduit on pages 8-12 in this volume, and the [audio](#) at the Physics Room's website, on the publication page for *HAMSTER* 6.

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**Jessica Maclean** is a seedling of Ngāti Kahu, Ngāti Hine, Clan MacGill-Eain and Clan Ō hEaghra. Borne along by various winds and tides, she came to rest in Ōtautahi, where she has remained since.

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## THE PHYSICS ROOM

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