

Pam Brown

Existence

from here on in
if I follow
the girl in the
 ‘your tv
 hates you’
sweatshirt as her motorcyclist
warms his darkly bubbling engine
ready to blur
into a field of speed,
it’s probably
one less path
to torpor
 for me

*

a dishwasher whirrs above me
a slab separates us — water restrictions
 mean nothing

war
is
imminent,
Sydney goes sailing

*

a thousand people

are surveyed –
how many vehicles on the freeway
that traverses the sprawl
around the swamp
we want to conserve

*

under a nasty sky,
rhetorical uncertainty
dogs me

*

the 326
is never on time.
the bus interchange
uses up
evening's best hours

*

all afternoon in a car
parked at the ferry wharf
gazing at sparkling waves,
not reading
not listening to the car radio,
just looking out at the boats
and at the sea planes setting off
and returning

*

his email began
'i thought of you
while i was
driving to Blockbuster
last night' –
now,
where is that ?

*

she says he
'takes a swipe
at apostrophes'

punch-uation ?

*

the kitchen man
agrees
it's all about oil

*

a sandwich board
outside Rose Bay Afloat
advertises the sunset bar –
'relaxed atmosphere
and tunes'

*

after not having
spoken with you
for 13 years,
now
that we've met
you've got me
reading
Deleuze & Guattari
all over again

One Day in Auckland

rice for a heartache,
sugars for hope.
can 'heartache'
have currency
in expedient times?
complementary newspapers
slide under the door,
headlines on the carpet –
last century's
roadmap for peace,
so-named by pessimists,
zapped out of Gaza
this very day.
the very very day
I've woken up early
in Auckland,
New Zealand (Aotearoa)
(why bracket that ?)
I'm seeking some dogs
from a poem
made in Auckland
by a famous American.
overnight
a fog rolled in
to romanticise
the parking stations
along Viaduct Harbour.
I second-guess

today's poetry class –
do you think of yourself
as an 'Australian' poet ?
a student will ask.
lucky or unlucky
to be born wherever it is,
some place where
peaceniks aren't welcome
and, if foreign, deported.
where drinking water
falls from the taps
like rain once fell
from the sky.
let's ask the peacenik
what he knows
about weapons.
where shrill environmentalists
run very quiet museums.
it confounds me
to come from there,
to have, simply,
been born there –
why not France ?
I yelled, at ten.
why not Italy ?
at forty-five.
why not Scotland, Mum ?
let's ask the environmentalist
what he knows about dust,
about bell jars,
about zinc black sands

under green volcanic cones.
can I imagine
where I'm heading,
where I'll end up
with this pocket-sized map
and Skytower, my landmark.
I dream my plate tectonics
to the south,
where I float
like a great big
imperspicuous slab
on these immense
asthenospheres,
I climb up crust collisions,
hoping not to drop

Mwà Vée

tontouta airport –
 funny-vowelled
 new zealanders
are greeted
 with small gifts
 of sun-block cream

kowekara –
 everyone is welcome

cyclone rewa
 pre-alerts noumea

across in sydney
 armchair agitators
 continue
 slinging off against
 the french ignoring
american revelations
 of secret pacific tests
 as late as 1991
 & “radiation experiments” –
 furtively feeding
 selected citizens
 plutonium

here
 americans (especially
 black americans)

are remembered
affectionately –
the ruins of bridges
built for WWII
pointed out
on sightseeing tours
to the madeleine
& pastis rivers
cyclone rewa
follows the little cyclone
knocking down
the big polynesian statue,
carved guardian
of the hotel swimming pool

breezes are winds
caught by
the swiftest windsurfers
contesting
imagined leviathans

placid baie des citrons –
stonefish
leave the lagoon
as soon as the sun
lights the sea
in which poodles swim
with madames who don't
but float with kickboards
flippers goggles bathing caps
like children

in misty clouds
a dramatic mountain range
scraped into beauty
by nickel mining,
west coast –
all black sand red sea

yaté-goro –
out on an outcrop
a totem
prevents shark attack

on shore the citrus-sweet smell
of crushed niaoli leaves
manioc taro green papaya
yam green coconut vanilla
hibiscus orchid
poinciana oleander

wood-panelled buses'
music booming
the pilou beat
zoom round the bays

the pilou-pilou –
trance inducing dance
the kanaké
don't perform
commercially

beachside
le snack pilou-pilou
sells frites & saucissons

a successfully
colonised island –
the jogging cycling
army navy boys
strike memorable poses
at dusk –
pontoon silhouettes

at the zam-zam store –
tin walls striped
red and blue
& savah supermarché –
tinned euro food
& heat-ruined wines

jean-marie tjibaou's
university –
a slow construction,
as slow as
independence

This poem first appeared in Pam Brown's collection *50-50* (Little Esther, 1997)

Saxe blue sky

(thursday morning)

the millennium train
whips past
the tollway to the Harbour Bridge
CHANGE GIVEN CHANGE GIVEN AUTO COINS ONLY
in bright orange
against a saxe blue sky.
the gigantic matchsticks sculpture,
one burnt, one phosphorus red and ready,
jutting up
from a closely trimmed mound of couch.
a bronze frieze in capital letters, on the corner
of the NSW Art Gallery –
CHRISTOPHER WREN, (old cosmopolitan),
(Thomas) GAINSBOROUGH –
flashes by,
seventeenth and eighteenth century ghosts,
glimpsed like brief suggestions, or notes,
as I enter the drab tunnel
towards Martin Place
on my way
to advance automation,
to sort a set of bookbinding cards
(discard, edit, or keep,
according, of course,
to a method)
cards detailed with
pencilled handwriting,

traces of colleagues

now moved on.

I remember most of them,
more, I remember their memos,
circulated notes –
our names listed,
stapled to a corner,
memo read, name ticked, then passed along
to the next name –
pre-email,
and computers then exclusive to data,
the binding card
mimicking book spines,
a card index
the instrument of record.

the train squeals into Redfern,
I emerge from the dim light
deep under the city
to see the saxe blue sky
look smoggier,
pale grey-brown on the horizon,
from here, in the inner west,
the way I walk to work,
the block – the aboriginal housing co-operative –
demolished, gone.
another set of glimpses, whisps,
traces of people
now moved on.
on this frosty thursday morning
only a small group of revenants

warming up around
a smoking 44-gallon drum.