

**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.