Motor Memory: Re-working the Past.

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Johnathon Daniel Haslem Titheridge

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Abstract

Taking my own personal history as a starting point this paper will look at how we inherit culture and in turn shape it through the stories and objects that drive its formation. This extends into how these objects proliferate within our culture and the way in which the passing of History impacts on the way we view them and as a consequence ourselves as individuals and as a group. Identity is then passed on through generations through the act of storytelling, and this process is integral to this research paper.

This is also a personal journey, taking place in varying sites, from a rusting car hulk in a back yard in North Canterbury, to a University in Wellington and another rusted car, which has gone through a strange restoration. The Morris Minor has been embraced as a narcissistic object that I have chosen to double in order to explore my individual and wider national cultural history and identity.

One of the key themes of this inherited identity is largely based around Nostalgia for an ideal past. This ideal is a fiction, a layering of intended futures as well as a selective past. This works in the same way as the modern artistic preoccupation with gothic histories, but instead of a positive ideal we have the creation of a basement of horrors that lurks beneath the surface. Be it positivist idealism or Gothic inversion, one way of focusing on the way these fictions differ markedly from the reality of the objects existence, is to show the artifice of the stories told by enhancing the components of the story that are already exaggerated, for the Morris Minor this means getting as far away from its existence as a rusting hulk in the backyard as possible.

The longing for a past that may or may not exist, is less important as existing in reality but instead for what these fictions supply in their retelling. The concept of the Uncanny is integral to this retelling of memory, in that through a memories reanimation it can only approximate the original event leaving

gaps for circumspection and invention. This retelling necessitates a reorientation in the relationship between the teller of the tale and the listener and between the viewer and the object viewed.

The research culminates in the alteration of a Morris Minor to appear as one continuous surface. The intention of which is to engage with the differing versions of the objects past through taking an active part in its reconstruction as artwork with the aim of reassessment not only of my individual approach to the object but also the viewers.

List of Illustrations

Chapter 1.

Introduction

This essay will delve into the formation of New Zealand culture through its stories as well as the material manifestations of these narratives in the form of cultural artifacts.

These stories and artifacts are at once actively created as well as inherited, in a constantly recycled version of "Who we are?" as a nation and as individuals. This identity is sold not only to others in the form of cultural objects of significance but to ourselves as a people.

When looking at the formation of 'Who we are?' the cultural and individual cannot be separated completely as the two are not mutually exclusive but exist within an interwoven fabric of subjective, deeply personal memory and experience and a wider context of shared cultural memory.

The narratives that surround these objects of identity, individual and cultural, both establish a sense of self whilst simultaneously pointing to that creation as a fiction.

This multiplication of stories and viewpoints within a single narrative is precisely the way in which the personal narratives run throughout this essay. This doubling is also expressed in the objects tied to these narratives, in terms of alteration and restoration telling an alternate story alongside the dominant perception of such objects.

The Research will be primarily of a pictorial nature and will include art objects primarily of a vehicular nature as well as filmic representations of New Zealand.

In telling a story we pass it on to others. With each retelling comes the refining and omission of disinteresting or irrelevant non-fictional points and sometimes-added fictions. Fact and fiction intertwine to the point that we cannot discern the truth or falsity of the story told. Objects as well as individuals usually dominate and drive these stories situated firmly in site or location that ties them together.

The primary object in this research that is important within both individual and shared cultural memory is the Morris Minor automobile. As an object it alludes to a rich motoring history of automobile production sales and trade in this country, as well as an ideal working model of trade and cultural relationship with our 'mother country' Britain.

This object also negotiates a line between a history of neglect in terms of consumer items and the nostalgic response such items trigger as a way of defining who we are as a nation and allows the opportunity to interrogate the impact of history and time on this changing identity.

The Gothic as a mode of inquiry is a de-familiarizing process which attempts to render the known unknown in order to re-evaluate the position the objects of its inquiry, whilst unpacking its cultural meaning. The Gothic mode is especially popular within New Zealand contemporary art at present and the reasons for which are the subject of this essay; looking at the gothic formation of fictional narratives (Sculpture and Film) and what these narratives supply (Dislocation of cultural objects to reaffirm our selves in relation to them). This also touches on Freud's understanding of 'The Uncanny' and the physical/bodily response generated by particular aesthetic objects this then necessitates a reassessment of the objects that provoke such responses.

Sculpture, film, performance, installation drawing practices as well as miniatures and tableaus will aid me in my efforts to reassess the objects that

we isolate as indicative of our culture and identity. In approaching these objects (Film as an object) in there slightly abstracted and altered states the viewers relationship to such objects must be reestablished. In doing so establish and cement preexisting representations of this object whilst subverting this experience and denies mastery of the objects and films.

Chapter 2.

Looking back to look forwards and looking forwards to look back.

Fig. 1.
*Nostalgia Puzzle
(re-photographed)*
Titheridge, Johnathon.
2009.

*'He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself
like a man digging'* (Benjamin, 1931-34, p.576)

Nostalgia is such a large part of who we are as a country or better put how
we portray ourselves to be. From the Buzzy bee to the jandal we have
embraced numerous outward manifestations of our culture in varied and
often mundane objects. We then sell this concept of who we are to not only
ourselves but to others in the form of tourist enterprise.

This national self-definition through the embracing of imported consumer
items has also been the focus of art works such as Michael Parekowhais, The
Big O.E.

Fig. 2.
The Big O.E.
Parekowhai, Michael.
2006.

In the words of the museum The Big O.E.

> *"... reflects the errors in translation that occur when importing and exporting both culture and nature."*
> (http://www.tepapa.govt.nz/WhatsOn/exhibitions/Pages/SculptureTerrace.aspx)

The installation is a combination of two main elements: A forest of rootless pinus radiata trees and a Kombi Van and trailer all painted the same Air New Zealand Teal Green. The logs are ready for export just as the car has been imported, neither one is a native.

The work is a stalemate between our primary export pine, metonymically extending to landscape in general, and our need as a country to travel encapsulated in the car and the choice of what has become a national color due to its Air New Zealand exposure. Both car and pine share the incapacity of movement without aid, the viewer is left to traverse this space.

Natasha Conland in response to this work says. *'Parekowhai disorientates the viewer reminding us of what is native to our own culture and country, and the generalized ideas of identity rooted in New Zealand's popular culture.'*
(http://www.tepapa.govt.nz/WhatsOn/exhibitions/Pages/SculptureTerrace.aspx)

For John Berger Publicity is essentially, nostalgic - *'to sell the past to the future.'* (Berger, 1972, p139)

In this effort Nostalgia blurs memory towards the ideal and this is reflected in images and objects either created or imported. In the image supplied the Morris Minor is representative of this nostalgia, depicting the archetype of the nuclear family picnicking on the grass with the family car parked safely behind; in this case the fourth family member. The aim of such an image is to create desire to achieve this ideal.

In storing something like this we hermetically seal it, as a reminder of what it was like to feel this way or that, and also structures the way in which we approach similar representations.

In deliberately elevating an object within our culture that in some way has fallen into a kind of hackneyed or even clichéd existence.
This kitsch object is precisely so by its inability to achieve its grand aims faced with its eventual and guaranteed fall from grace.

Somewhere between valid family member and rusting hulk in the back yard reshaped as garden ornament is where this idealizing falls down. The objects reality and history as a consumer item, is cemented as is it is consumed and caste aside.

In terms of the car its physicality breaks down, it rots in the backyard and is left behind as we find other elements to elevate that define us as defined by changing tastes. At the same time as this objects material dissolution is taking place nostalgia recreates the image of the car as whole and rooted in time while simultaneously being free from encroaching time.
Memory, within my research is located within various sites. A site being generally a space that can be occupied both physically or mentally. These sites can be locations as well as objects, be it a back yard in Christchurch or

the rusting hulk of a Morris Minor that occupies it.

Christchurch and its wider region of Canterbury which some has called the Heartland of NZ gothic. With its gothic inspired architecture to its constant feature in the news as harboring violence of various levels of extremity. Christchurch's inability it seems is to coalesce its version of itself as more '*more English than England'* and with what seems to be its gritty reality.

This question as to the true nature of Christchurch, (If indeed a city can be said to have a true nature) was the focus of *'Coming Home after Dark',* at Christchurch City art gallery in 2004/5. The show named after Owen Marshalls short stories, was curated by Felicity Milburn and featured artists who had a certain dark sensibility to their work and who hailed from Christchurch or chose it as there home. This was meant to distill a regional vernacular within their works that managed to reflect the darker side of Cantabrian culture, but could it be said that all cities have there dark side. Taken further, this dark side can be seen as mere invention to avoid the very banality and benign nature of the city itself.

Chapter 3.

How Gothic is it? (Dark Beginnings)

The original question, which motivated this exegesis, was as to whether the nature of contemporary New Zealand art is coated in pretensions of a darkened gothic sensibility as a way of deriding the content and focusing on the delivery. I questioned whether or not it is in fact a lie we tell ourselves to appear more interesting if not just to others but to ourselves as a strange kind of nationalism based in fear of not only the landscape but also each other.

Through research it appeared other cultural commentators shared distrust of contemporary New Zealand's arts fascination with the Gothic on these terms.

As an example of this, In an article titled *Hello Darkness: New Zealand Gothic* by Robert Leonard that appeared in Art in Australia, Vol 46 No 1 Spring 2008;

'The Gothic is at risk of becoming a reigning truism in New Zealand art. But is it a telling term or a convenient marketing device, Zeitgeist or constricting cliché? ('Leonard. 2008 p. 89).

In the above terms, New Zealand gothic appears as a fad, something defined by mere taste and timing as apart from any determining characteristics. In order to answer these questions I need to first isolate a sense of what the Gothic is, then where it manifests in New Zealand's cultural products (Art Objects and Film), their aims and what these myths supply that an idealized nostalgic myth does not.

The Gothic (Definition)

The gothic and Gothicism as concepts are notoriously hard to pin down and it is this resilience to categorization that supplies it most of its power as a genre and goes some way to explaining its adaptability and long popularity.

An article in the N.Z. Listener *Black Celebration* (March 3-9 ,2007. Vol 207/No 3486) by Andrew Paul Wood tracks the term Gothic from barbaric German tribes of the forth century AD. As an aesthetic it sprung from the social turbulence of late 18th-century England. In literary form it was explored by the likes of William Beckford, Ann Radcliffe and Mary Shelly and puts anxiety as the modus operandi of the genre.

In an essay *Art of Darkness: A poetics of Gothic,* 2007, Anne Williams sees the paradigm attributed to the Pythagoreans by Aristotle, who quoted it in his Metaphysics as central to an understanding of how the gothic operates. According to this scheme, reality consists of the following ten pairs of opposites:

Male/female, limited/unlimited, odd/even, one/many, right/left, square/oblong, at rest/moving, straight/curved, light/darkness, good/evil.

Within the gothic there are multiple conceptions of the other which generally run parallel to the dominant discourse. In the pairings above the first component of the coupling is generally the most prominent, the second element is then the other that is suppressed. This suppression in necessary to the functioning of the primary elements dominance.

If anything the gothic modes power lies within the ability to cross these boundaries, its themes of infection and pollution bleed into this supposed harmony of opposites. Transgression of boundaries is the aim, not with the aim of breaking convention but testing its boundaries and disrupting the function of the dominant discourse.

Hello Darkness: On New Zealand Gothic (Art and Australia Magazine. Vol 46 No.1 Spring 2008, p.89) by Robert Leonard an article in Art and Australia locates the contemporary rise of the gothic as a contemporary art genre in a Ronnie Van Hout exhibition at Gow Langsford Gallery in 1992. The show, he claimed *'Heralded a gothic turn in New Zealand art'.* The works themselves were Colin McCahon inspired landscapes rendered as B-Movie sets for the unfolding of New Zealand art history. The names of deceased artists bein to populate this black and white land in Hollywood styled lettering.
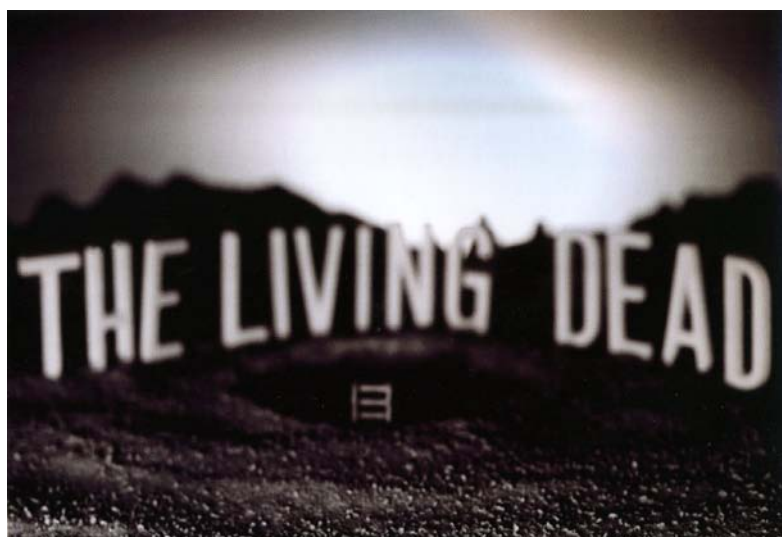
Fig. 3.
The Living Dead
Van Hout, Ronnie.
1992.

It continues by saying that the 'Gothic Turn' was partly a response to bi-culturalism. The earnestness of this discussion was a fertile breeding ground for Pakeha artists who wished to explore their own cultural backgrounds. The high seriousness and political correctness of the 90's necessitated a bit of comic relief and this goes some way to explaining the heavy reliance on irony as a device in these ventures, particularly in the work of Van Hout.

He also mentions an oft-sited 1995 documentary by Sam Neill *Cinema of Unease* ([Videorecording]: A personal Journey by Sam Neill/Top Shelf Productions. 1995) to show that contemporary art was running alongside other art forms. This charts the rise of the darker side of New Zealand film marking *Heavenly Creatures,* 1994 (Dir Peter Jackson) as the bench mark of the trend. Neill sees this through a personal journey through these films,

locates in the formation of these tales a search for NZ Identity. Belying the fact that these pasts are creative fictions that betray an obsession with fantasy.

Film such as Heavenly Creatures or any of the New Zealand films we term 'Dark' that illicit a sense of 'Unease' achieve such a response through rendering the New Zealand landscape as fearful place peopled by malcontents as apposed to the usually accepted version of NZ as 'God's Own'. These filmic representations of the 'other' then in turn become subsumed within our concept of who we are. So we affirm who we are by who we don't want to be and in this way transform ourselves into a country who can deal with its dark past without fear of looking back.

This is the Trekka, 2003-05 is a vehicular art work by Michael Stevenson which was chosen as New Zealand arts contribution to the 2003 Venice Biennale. It functions at the art fair as a wolf in sheep's clothing in terms of it highlighting an interesting point in New Zealand's automobile production history that has obscured some interesting narratives that reveal the hypocrisy and misplaced attitudes of a 1960's New Zealand government and its people. The Trekka was a move supported by the then government to establish New Zealand as a DIY country that was not dependant on importing but could manufacture and supply its own needs extending to automobile production. The Trekka was the only New Zealand produced car in the history of automobile production in this country. What this attempt at independence attempts to cover in Nationalist rhetoric is the fact that all the parts were imported pre- fabricated by Skoda from the Soviet Union. At the time the 'Red Scare' was still a commonly used phrase, but it seems cheap parts could cross ideological and physical boundaries.

Fig. 4.
This is the Trekka
Stevenson, Michael. 2003-05.
Vehicle (restored 1968 Trekka
agricultural utility); Rotating Sign
(fabric, styrofoam, aluminium, wood
frame, motor); Butter Boxes (screen
printed cardboard boxes); Trade Desk
(fibreboard, plastic, Styrofoam and
aluminium); Entry wall (cardboard
boxes, styrofoam lettering); The
Invisible Hand (Skoda automobile parts,
mechanicals, sheepskin, perspex,
marble, metal, cardboard, Slivovitz);
Towards Economic Maturity (brass and
aluminium); Smerem k Ekonomicke
Vyspelosti (brass and aluminium);
Slivovitz bottle (glass, Slivovitz, crystal
glasses, anodised aluminium)

Shift from 1960's New Zealand to a contemporary version and we see immersion in dark visions primarily to feel isolated from ourselves to reaffirm at a latter stage our sense of self through deciding firmly, what we are not.

In an article called 'Beneath the remains, what magic in myth' the author Shamin M, Momim claims

'Artists working in this mode push deconstruction and dissolution of centre, definitions of boundaries to reach the sublime terror of placelessness.'
(Shamin M, Momim, 2007, p.32)

In New Zealand's case it is ironically this lack of place that cements our sense of place, be this in film or object based artworks.

Chapter 4

Morris Minor: Its one of the family now!

Gothic Plots are family plots; Gothic Romance is family romance.
(Williams, 1995, p.17)

Literary critic Anne Williams, Art of Darkness: A poetics of Gothic (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) pp 22-3 considers the narrative core of 'The Gothic myth' the patriarchal family. Family structure and the inherent balance of power is for the Gothic mode a breeding ground for something to rile against, you needn't look further than the decadent and incest ridden family of the *House of Usher* for this or another family curse a plot device present in the often cited Horace Walpole's, *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story.* A New Zealand antecedent of this Gothic vein in literary form is Ronald Hugh Morrison. His tales were firmly rooted in what has been labeled as Taranaki Gothic, shared by Don Driver in the artistic realm.

Fig. 6.
Family Romance
Ray, Charles. 1993.
Painted fiberglass and
synthetic hair, 134.6 x
215.9 x 27.9 cm.

Charles Ray's work '*Family Romance',* 1993 depicts the nuclear family, Mother
Father, Daughter and toddler in mannequins that are all of the same scale.
The toddler and his sister take on the airy disposition of the afore mentioned
lifeless statue but it is not this uncanny quality that defines the core concept
of the work but the diminishing role of the father figure in relation to the rest
of the family through the disruption of scale. Scale as definitive of
relationships between the family members and the viewer of the work is
further complicated by Ray in a work that is relevant in a vehicular manner to
this thesis in his work '*Fire Truck"*, 1993.

Fig. 7.
Fire Truck.
Ray, Charles. 1993.
Painted aluminum,
fiberglass
and Plexiglass. 365.8

Roland Barthes in another essay '*Toys'* sees toys as reduced copies of human (Gendered) objects that aim at establishing the view of the child as another self and that self as a smaller version of the man, in his words "*a Homunculus to whom must be supplied objects of his own size"* (Barthes, 1957, p53) It complicates the relationship between the object and the viewer in that the viewer now becomes the child in the act of viewing, the truck being unable to be 'played with' but can be 'played on' by the imagination.

Fig. 8.
A loss again.
Van Hout, Ronnie. 2008.
Painted fiberglass.
Dimensions Unknown

For New Zealand Dutch artist Ronnie Van Hout this failure of Masculine Adulthood has manifested in a number of his most recent works in the loss of the archetype in the event of his fathers death. His recreation of childhood memories linked to his past. *A loss again*, 2008, is a recreation of his father's shed on the sculpture terrace at Te Papa. He restages moments in his past that are equally uninhabitable, only through zombie like re-animation as artworks.

Similarly to Van Hout through alteration of the car, I aim to retain most of the form of the original object/image but altering it to more resemble a toy, and through this the author (me) and viewer's relationship to the object is complicated. Scale again, as in the work of Ray for Van Hout has been changed to cast the viewer as child in a game of viewing, a child without memory of this object in its altered state. So it challenges the viewers' memory as to what they are looking at and warrants a reappraisal. It

presents memory as nothing other than different, rendering the blurry memory plastic. Reanimating a memory with a newly fabricated object not too dissimilar to the original.

When we look back to the past it is always an active recreation of what has transpired. This memory is active yet not always accurate. A re-animation of a cluster of images/memories that we tie together within a narrative that fills in any gaps. The teller's version of the story is strengthened each time it is told. In *How to be alone* (Franzen, 2004, p.19) these memory blockages or gaps which are either forgotten or removed are referred to as *'blind spots'*. Usually blind spots refer to an obscuration of the visual field, and just like memory the blind spot that is located in one eye is normally corrected or filled in by the other eye to create an image of continuity.

In terms of this retelling of experience I have no memories of a working Morris Minor I have to deal with my imaginings. I have a memory of a rusting hulk in the background adding to itself through more rust. Stories however are where I can relocate these memories adding to them and creating new ones.

Chapter 5.

The Morris Minor

Fig. 9.
Sir Alex Arnold Constantine Issigonis. (Portrait)
Titheridge, Johnathon.
2010.

The Morris Minor was initially designed by Sir Alexander Arnold Constantine Issigonis. Born 18 November 1906 – Died 2 October 1988. Instead of being know for the Minor he is better know for designing the Mini, launched by the British Motor Corporation (BMC) in 1959.

The Minor was launched at the Earls Court Motor Show, London, on 20 September 1948. Later models were called MM Series, Series 2 and the Morris Minor 1000(The most popular of Models). The Model I have isolated and obtained is an MM Series of the Highlight variety that has all the hallmarks of the later 1000 but with some of the design quirks related to the earlier low light MM Series as well as the Mosquito Concept car.

Over 1.6 million of the lightweight rear-wheel car were eventually produced, mainly in Cowley, Oxfordshire and exported around the world, with many variants of the original model. Production continued in Birmingham, England through to 1971 (for the commercial variants and estate only), and it remains a well-loved and collected vehicle. The very last Morris Minor (commercial) was assembled at Stoke, Nelson New Zealand in 1974. Production in New Zealand was initially imported fully assembled but then progressed to flat packed car reliant on importing of English prefabricated parts. This meant a boom for automobile production and in a post war New Zealand that was starved of new cars and the ability to adequately produce them.

Because of this it has become a symbol of our ideal working relationship with England, our desire to be recognized as an independent country and a deep-seated need to travel.

Originally the car was known as the Mosquito it was this model that first attracted me to this as a potential project. The inert nature of this preproduction car that was never produced and exists now only in photographs was synchronous with the two Morris Minor that I was the proud and neglectful father of. The mosquito and my car share the same potential of construction but lack the handwork to make them realized as functioning objects.

Fig. 10.
Morris Mosquito
Prototype Photograph. Author
Unknown. Date Unknown.

The design of this car has leant its own myths, which were my initial attraction to them. It was not an easy rise in the popularity stakes for the Minor, the first MM series Minor rolled of the line in 1948 with one of its biggest Naysayers being Lord Nuffield, the head of GM motors. He disliked both the name and the car likening it to a 'poached egg' allegedly refusing to even be photographed with the car for publicity.

Another tale of Mythic origins is related to the addition of the middle section by Issignosis in the late stages of the design process. The design of the Mosquito when viewed from the front was a-symmetrical. The story goes that after a sleepless night prior to ordering the prototype to be built Issignosis had the car cut down the middle and added a four-inch-wide plate spanning the middle of the car from nose to rear.

The Mosquito is at once a prototype that has been made and will never be replicated but also an object in process it is somewhere between the finished product and the rusting hulk.

The Minor was in essence a popular British car aimed at the family market and it is its popularity that has secured its place in history. The minor is now embraced retroactively as a symbol of the 'Way we were' reliant on its ability to typify "Englishness." (Pender, 1995, p.7)

Chapter 6.

Collecting Broken Cars

Fig. 11.
Christchurch New Zealand, My fathers Backyard and one of my Minors.
Titheridge, Johnathon. 2004.

The primary meaning of the gothic romance, then, lies in its substitution of terror for love…(it is) dedicated to producing nausea, to transcending the limits of taste and endurance, crimes to satisfy the hunger for "too-much" on which he the [the author] trades. (Fiedler, 2001, p.24)

This is an image of one of three Morris Minors that I personally own. It could be said that the two cars in my father's back yard in Christchurch and the one I have here in Wellington, as a kind of votive object to the others constitutes a collection. Like all collections they are based on a form of lack or a perception of lack. Mike Kelly wrote on his conception of lack as expresses in a doubling in *Playing with Dead Things on the Uncanny:*

> The fetish, an exaggerated replacement for something that is repressed from consciousness, is subject to these same doubling procedures. The compulsion to repeat results in the fetish being collected and hoarded. This kind of collection is called the fetishists 'harem'… It cannot be denied that collecting is based on lack and that

is sense of lack is not satisfied by one replacement only. In fact it is not quenched by any number of replacements. No amount is ever enough. Perhaps this unquenchable lack stands for our loss of faith in the essential. We stand now in front of idols that are empty husks of dead clichés to feel the tinge of infantile belief. There is a sublime pleasure in this. And this pleasure has to suffice. No accumulation of mere matter can ever replace the loss of the archetype. (Kelley, 2003, pp.95)

Fig. 12.
Trademe Morris Minor
(Photograph) Anonymous Trademe Seller.
2009.

Fig. 12 is an image of a Morris Minor I purchased from Trademe with the intention of transforming it into an artwork. I chose this object because of its existence between the polarities of working model and ruin.

It is representative of lack in terms of its inability to function as a working car due to neglect and to my lack of knowledge necessary for a restoration process to begin. This perceived lack necessitates compensation and thus generates a need to fill this gap.

As a site for performance of various kinds of lack the Morris body is full of potential, it can function as a container or repository for a past ready to be reclaimed or any number of intended futures, be it a continuation of the

restoration work already done, further neglect, or complete destruction at a wreckers. The object implies a direction but not the co-ordinates.

The car has at some point had time invested in it. Rust cut out and panels replaced, the entirety of the rear has at some point been replaced. It is a half finished project that I have inherited by choice, a choice informed by an obsession tied to lack. It is the continuation of a displaced lack, mirrored in the two potential projects rotting the Christchurch back yard.

Appropriate measures have been taken to heed the process of dissolution of the object through rust. Removing the paint and rust patches from the metal in order to prime them, effectively erasing another's neglect. In a way working against time and adding to the time already invested in the car paradoxically through erasure.

This history of restoration and eventual neglect establishes a relationship between the car as an inanimate object and the restorer. What motivates the restoration is always different as is the level of restoration achieved.

The point at which the enthusiast or lover is of interest is in the switch from a perceived healthy relationship with an inanimate object and one that is taken to the extreme. I certainly have a particular interest in the Morris Minor but I wouldn't like to call it an obsession. Denial is a stage of obsession, not wanting it to be seen as one, normalizing the act through denial of an unhealthy attraction to the car or be it any other substitute

My obsession has been a long one and has its roots in familial history. Starting with my deceased Grandfather who whilst married to my grandmother was having an affair with a one legged lady. The knowledge of this affair only came to light, as often this knowledge does in the advent of his death and through discussion at his funeral. The presence of the woman made known not so much by what she brought with her but what she didn't, her leg. Through discussion more information came to light of this woman;

she had lost her leg in a car accident when she had wrapped her Morris Minor around a power pole. From these auspicious beginnings began my interest.

In terms of this, this project has been motivated by this lack of knowledge and potential for its learning. A potential that I have made steps to realize. The boot of the car was the first resolved, (materially that is) surface. I did this mainly as a way of making a pun that pokes fun at the viewing of the object. The way our eye drools over a smooth finish, casting the viewer as voyeur in my own private relationship with the car made it public. This obsession is formalized in the eyes of someone looking in from the outside of the process and shared through touch.

Rust is the remembrance of not only an ageing process in that exposed metal is eroded through the contact to air, the direct result of a history of neglect. This causes a discoloration as well as areas that rise and stand proud from the rest of the metal it surrounds, appearing to be adding to itself, when in reality the metal expands and rots at the same time. This time cannot be observed in front of the eye, only through its result over time. Paint is used to slow this process, as a protective shell for the bare metal also covering the trace of all the work that has been done.

Chapter 7.

EXPERIMENTS IN TIME.

As a child I used to freeze toys in water and then remove them from the freezer and place them in the warm air outside to watch them melt. Like a mammoth suspended in ice the block suspended time only to renew it through the movement of the frozen water when melting.

Restaging this childhood memory as an experiment (all be it a bad one) in ways of rendering time be it through film or through objects. Time in relation to the car is either related to the work invested in its restoration or in the idea of corrosive rust that is not visible to the naked eye. Neither of them have the self-reflexivity to really ask questions of time, or the way in which we view and approach time and how and why as a culture we have let the car become part of our social and historical fabric. But what they do, do is let the process of time passing observable by the eye, unlike the process of rust or freezing.

Fig. 13.
Heman
(Video Still)
Titheridge,
Johnathon.

This engagement with time that is observable to the eye was continued in the sculpture below. Through the artifice of false ageing I was able to caste an

everyday object, (Scales) as though it was chipped and worn from a lifetime of misuse. The object itself was made of plastic and so wears very differently over time but the attention was to give it an almost toy like semblance in order to change our preconceptions about its materiality, adding the pathos of time and ageing to a 'lower' material that is commonly regarded as throw away.

Fig. 14.
Scale Model
Titheridge, Johnathon.
2009.

Chapter 8.

The Uncanny

(...) I thought that I might bestow animation upon lifeless matter; I might in process of time (although I now found it impossible) renew life where death had apparently devoted the body of corruption. (Mary Shelley, Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus, 1818)

Fig. 15.
Bandaged Finger
Titheridge, Johnathon.
2009.

The uncanny is commonly apprehended as a physical sensation arising from an aesthetic encounter. Somewhat reluctantly Freud wrote on aesthetics due to the fact that it overlapped with feeling and that this response to art works needed to be understood.

"It may be true that the uncanny is nothing else than a hidden, familiar thing that has undergone repression and emerged from it." (Kelley, 2003, p73)

The uncanny like the gothic, is a modern preoccupation expressed through New Zealand contemporary art, both also hinge on a return of the repressed

and is founded in perception of surface that obscures what lies beneath. For Sigmund Freud this was realized in the division of Ego and Unconscious minds. The unconscious being the primordial, repressed animal nature of the individual that is the foundation stone for the formation of the ego or conscious mind.

Another marked thread, which arouses the uncanny within Freud's concept is both a borrowing of E.Jentsch's case studies. He quotes that instances of the uncanny arise from, *'Doubt as to whether an apparently inanimate object really is alive and, conversely, whether a lifeless object might not perhaps be animate'* (Freud, 1919, p.135)

He goes on to locate this within Waxwork figures, dolls and automata and extends into manifestations of madness within individual persons, which render the subconscious into the realm of the conscious.

As a personal example, During a summer job working in a canning factory I had a direct experience of the uncanny when confronted with the reattached finger of a work colleague. (For a full account see the appendix) Fig. 15 is of my finger that was badly cut on the metal of the car, strangely on the same day of writing down the story.

The literal translation of the German word for the uncanny; Unheimlichkeit, which literally translates as 'un-home-like-ness' was picked up on by Gavin Hipkins in his series of, photographs titled 'The Homely'.

The most recent example of exhibition centered around depictions of the uncanny would be, *The UNCANNY (the unnaturally strange)* an exhibition held at Artspace in Auckland, between 20 July and the 20th August, 2005.The press release states

"The exhibition presses against materiality, its slipperiness and meaning, particularly the considered transformation of substances into the realm of the

unnaturally strange'. ()

It is also connected to deja vu, the feeling of having been here and done that except that the ability to recall the previous episode is not achievable, except as Mike Kelley says *'as an atmosphere that was creepy or weird'* (Kelley, 2003, p178) . It is in this way that the sensation of the uncanny is located not just within the person but shared by the aura of the object be it a film or sculpture that is interacted with. These objects seemingly dead share with us a strange animation that approximates life but somehow is dependant on 'you' the viewer. In terms of the Morris Minor, the loaded meaning the object usually carries for many viewers of the object is complicated by its alteration. Through reflection/diversion (Both Gothic Tactics) this object takes on a certain aspect of unease or strangeness. We attempt to infuse the objects with our stories and projections but find its surface to smooth to effectively fix anything too.

The main uncanny effect is located within the idea of the 'double' or the doppelganger. The creation of which is meant to insure the immortality and acts against the assurance of death. This doubles creation for Freud is located within

> *'the soil of boundless self love, the primordial narcissism that dominates the mental life of both the child and primitive man, and when this phase is surmounted, the meaning of the double changes: having once been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death..."* (Freud, 1919, p143)

This is of utmost importance to the final treatment of the Morris Minor. In rendering it round without edges and toy like, I represent the object as a memory or memory form, soft and blurred round the edges like the soft focus of a sepia photograph. The softness of the forms negates our ability to hang memory on the objects as it is a new object. It points to our memory but

subverts this process through represented in a guise that is wholly different from the way in which we normally perceive it takes on an entirely different aspect.

Chapter 9.

Sublime

> *'No Passion so effectively robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear. For fear being an apprehension of pain or death, it operates in a manner that resembles actual pain. Whatever is terrible with regard to sight is sublime too, whether the cause of terror be endued with greatness of dimensions or not; for it is impossible to look on anything as trifling, or contemptible, that may be dangerous. (...) Indeed terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently, the ruling principle of the sublime. (...)* (Burke, E. 1757 Pp.53-4)

The Sublime like the Uncanny as an experience is conceived as a bodily reaction to an external force that robs the mind of its intellectual faculties. Burke's conception of the Sublime differs from the goose bump inducing reaction to an uncanny object is a response to the perception of potential pain or harm.

Experiencing the sublime in relation to the landscape is your realization of personal insignificance in relation to the scale of the world around you. Artists when first depicting New Zealand's landscape experienced and depicted the New Zealand landscape as such, a place of creeping dark bush that envelops the viewer, similar to McCahon's landscape paintings informed by the likes of American Abstract painters of the likes of Jackson Pollock.

McCahon attempted to clear the New Zealand landscape of the effects of Human involvement; he then repopulated them with words from the bible. As the canvas's grew in scale so did the ecclesiastical potency of McCahon's sentences. This process continued up until his death from alcohol induced dementia, which left his ghostly shadow to lurk across the New Zealand art landscape. This shadow was most loudly pointed out and simultaneously mocked by artist Ronnie Van Hout in the already mentioned series of

McCahon inspired photographs, which featured miniature recreations of the dead artists landscapes

The miniature and the sublime share an indeterminacy of scale that complicates the ability to establish a bodily relationship to its depiction.

Fig. 16.
Mini Morris
(Photograph)
Anonymous Trademe Seller.
2009.

This is a picture of a Morris Minor that I purchased from trade me and is an example of how photographs indeterminacy of scale can lead to false assumptions about the object. The image of the isolated object supplies no other object for comparison of scale be it a ruler or any object, and so is little wonder I received in the post a smaller than anticipated model of a car.

This mistake did not make me feel foolish as I engaged with the level of care attributed to the presentation of the object for sale; The fake setting with its curved horizon line, the shallow depth of field that blurs both background and foreground adding to the confusion of scale and the clear definition of the image. The clarity of the image when juxtaposed with the detail of the model, which only approximates the level of detail in real life, leant an uncanny feel to it. The only scale referent we then have for the photograph is our own bodies, increasing the scale of the car to a size that will accommodate our bodies. The difference between this image of a miniature and the image of

the same car in the Christchurch back yard is the fact that the microcosm of the world in which the car occupies in the later is supplied to us in the form of the backyard, including fence and fake grass. Our ability to imagine a (bodily) relationship outside of a conceptual one is then disallowed, this however is not the primary intention of this image but more, how this recreation pertains to my memory of the backyard.

Fig. 17.
My Father's Backyard
Titheridge, Johnathon.
2009.

This recreation of my father's back yard in CHCH is an example of a site that the French philosopher Michel Foucault would term a Heterotopia. He wrote that, Heterotopias;

> "*are something like counter sites, a kind of effective enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites which can be found within the culture are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their relation to reality*" (Foucault, 1967)

The miniature backyard, like the 'heterotopia' point to a corporeal understanding of the site depicted but deny it as the human body is unacceptable to its scale. Instead it provides access through a purely

conceptual engagement, similarly to the way memory and the spaces linked to it can be recreated physically or mentally, but as recreation are incompatible to embodiment.

Fig. 18.
Ship in a bottle.
Titheridge, Johnathon.
2009.

In this image of the ship in the bottle I deliberately manipulated the indeterminacy of scale in relation to the photograph in order to place the object in a limbo space.

Much like my Fathers backyard it is the double of an object located in my memory. This object comes from my Grandfather (fisherman) and is a miniature boat inside a bottle that he kept on the mantelpiece. Being a commercial fisherman and sailor for most of his life and covered in tattoos[1] in long stretches out at sea the resulting boredom would necessitate an exercise of hobby to spend time. As a child it puzzled me as too how this object was able to fit within the bottle as the neck made it impossible for its mass to pass through. In this way it functioned in the realm of magic which is in term the realm of the imagination

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[1] Another way of telling stories with illustrations on the body itself.

The Miniature recreation of my Fathers back yard inclusive of Morris Minor or The Ship in the Bottle it is an affirmation of the corporal body through its denial of occupation. The boarded up car like the miniature cannot be occupied by a physical being, they are left to delight in the surface.

Cars pride themselves on the 360-degree visibility they offer, this also coincides with the need to control the area around the car that the individual dominates. In this way the driver is placed in the direct centre of his or her universe, with the added illusion of control. Here the body of the car becomes an extension or surrogate for the body and our investment of consciousness into it. It simultaneously affirms our sense of self by locating us as apart from the other drivers and thus an individual.

Chapter 10.

Attraction and Repulsion

Boarded up windows in a house usually imply that nobody is home, when you board up the windows in a car is it the same. It is rendered Un-drivable due to a restriction of vision. It denies the mastery of space around the car afforded the driver and also denies the ability for someone outside of the car to look in.

By boarding up the windows, a mind inclined to the darker side of abstract thought could surmise you are trying to hide something. It lets the imagination fill in the empty space and dependant on the tone of what is looked at e.g. the condition and the context in which it is looked at.

In terms of the car I have covered the interior both in order to protect it from dust when sanding the exterior but also to block the inside in order to focus on the outer. An invitation for sensory (touch and site) involvement in the surface with the interior left to the viewer's imagination. Both surface (exterior) and interior obscure their nature as well as history, in the pursuit of an enhanced and exaggerated form of automotive voyeurism

A car like the home is the focus of the gaze and when occupied the apparatus that supports the gaze[2]. We spend most of our time looking out from our car at others cars. In this way when looking the exterior is rendered purely surface, and the obscured interior a home for potential narratives.

The seeming opposites of attraction and repulsion has been the reason liquid as a general substance has featured so prominently within the artworks produced this year (primarily within the film work) because of the links to bodily fluids and the abject.

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[2] Hence the New Zealand obsession with 'Sea Views' when purchasing a property or house.

Fig. 19.
Self Saucing.
(Video Still)
Titheridge, Johnathon.
2009.

Milk as a liquid is one that is attractive aesthetically with its opaque nature and density but also potentially abject over long exposure to air. When it curdles and moulds so it is in essence as attractive as it is potentially repulsive.

Liquid as a substance is difficult to categorize, as it seems more of a quality than a substance. Its nature, is defined in movement, for example the stillness of a lake is disrupted by the solidity of a thrown rock. It has no form of its own but is defined in its relationship to other 'solid forms'.

Running/falling liquid is outlined by the form of the surface on which it moves, and by watching the liquid we are one step closer to touching the surface but with our eyes. This is of course a possibility but this sensory confusion is a main selling point of new technologies.
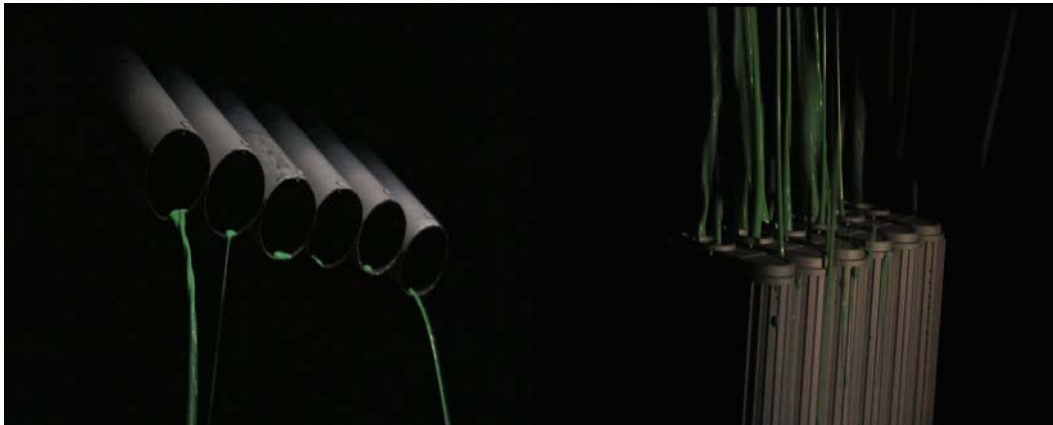
Chapter 11

High Definition the world it Supplies

Fig. 20.
Pipes
(Video Still)
Titheridge, Johnathon.
2009.

Fig. 21.
Stacks
(Video Still)
Titheridge, Johnathon.
2009.

The green milk works were a knowing shift in production value from Standard Definition to High Definition. From what is seen as the past-outdated mode of digital video to what is marketed as the future of not only home entertainment and movies but also the way in which people detail and record their lives on a home hobbyist level.

The main purpose of this embracement of technology is to subvert this current evolutionary obsession in order to reveal what it attempts to obscure, its opposite; stillness and death.

The *Dripping Goo* works, were the first produced as part of the research. As artworks they seduced aesthetically whilst raising the question of who or what is pouring this glowing green liquid in the surrounding darkness. Isolated in darkness another way of de-centering a viewing subject and rendering the space around it void.

This idea that High Def is more real than real is an interesting proposition, it elevates the medium above reality proper. In filmic terms it has the sole ability to describe in crystal clear clarity that is both Murky in terms of

Standard definition and the world that surrounds us. But in order to do this it has had to supplant and enhance parts of the world around us with computer generated effects.

In regard to the Milk works it was precisely this assurance of reality that I relied on in these works that would ground and let me reflect when this was added to sci-fi or horror that are genres that rely on fantasy. The lack of texture that I bemoan makes the level of realism these films aspire too unrealizable. Even the strangest of Sci-Fi must be grounded in a solid and fixed reality no matter how far removed this is from our own, in other words a logic to the world. The smoothness of the object in the real world is what we want but not a virtual one, film work needs texture.

Fig. 22.
La D.S.
Orozco, G.
1993.

"I think that cars today are almost the exact equivalent of the great Gothic Cathedrals: I mean the supreme creation of an era, conceived with passion by unknown artists, and consumed in image if not in usage by a whole population which appropriates them as a purely magical object." (Barthes, 1957, p.88).

Not much has evolved as far as physical make up of the car; it still round as ever if not more so, resembling more and more a bubble. Mark Kingwell in an essay titled *Against Smoothness* in Harpers Magazine, 2000, marries human technological development as reflected in the level of smoothness achieved in consumer items :

"It would not be an exaggeration, in fact, to make smoothness a gauge of progress in human affairs, just as for most people, it provides a measure of the success they enjoy in life.' (Kingwell, 2000, p.15)

This smoothness becomes associated with progression both technological and ideological, the constant refinement of culture in the form of smoothness of design in direct opposition to the roughness and danger of nature. The curved edge belies the nature of the car that at high speed can injure and kill.

The myth of smoothness in automotive design is the focus of Roland Barthes short essay on the Citroen DS from the collection, thanks to the dove tail assembly of Cars such as the DS for Barthes were evolving to *'a world above nature with a perfection that points to an absence of origin'.* This was achieved *'less by substance than by the junction of its components* (Barthes, 1957, p.88).

This informs the final presentation of the Morris Minor. Accenting the dovetailing of the original design of the object, the gaps between the round curves are sealed over to achieve a homogeny of surface as if it is a singular mass. The denial of origin is reflected in the apparent effortlessness of the surface, amplified in the in the finished product through the choice of 'hammered steel' spray paint. Although sprayed it has the appearance of beaten steel as if it has been hammered from one large piece, this being an absurd impossibility in terms of the limitations of my body as well as the physics involved. This subversion of the materiality of the object in turn lends it an intentional feeling of the uncanny, which is dependant on the experience of viewing the object more so than the words put to expressing it.

Chapter 12.

Conclusion

The iconoclast, the one who feels compelled to destroy images, knows:
statues invite violence. Like the vampire, they desire a violent death to
relieve them of the viewer-projected pathos of their pseudo-life.
(Kelley, 2003, p178)

The primary object that motivated this essay as well as the research proper was a Morris Minor in a state of disrepair, purchased from the Internet. It was this neglect that appealed as a site for restoration; the promise of learning was contained in its rusty shell.

It seems fitting then that in conclusion we find that object in much the same position as when it was acquired. The surface of the object has been changed notably, but it still lacks the parts necessary to function for its purpose as an automobile. Without a use it begins to take up space and its alteration to one smooth surface further amplifies its redundancy.

The hand of the restorer, that has passed over the surface a hundred or more times in a careful and considered way are the same hands that will return it to original state. Not in a physical sense but in terms of the cessation of its care that will result again in its degradation. Another then is necessary to protect this object by taking it up as their own as a project, but whether or not this will happen is unknown.

Time again is the deciding factor, and it seems in finality that the meaning of the double has changed. The objects true nature is its impermanence, meaning it is dependant on relationships outside of itself to continue its existence. These relationships come out of desire to see something in a different light and a sense of value in doing so not for what it is but indeed what it can and cannot be and sometimes shouldn't be.
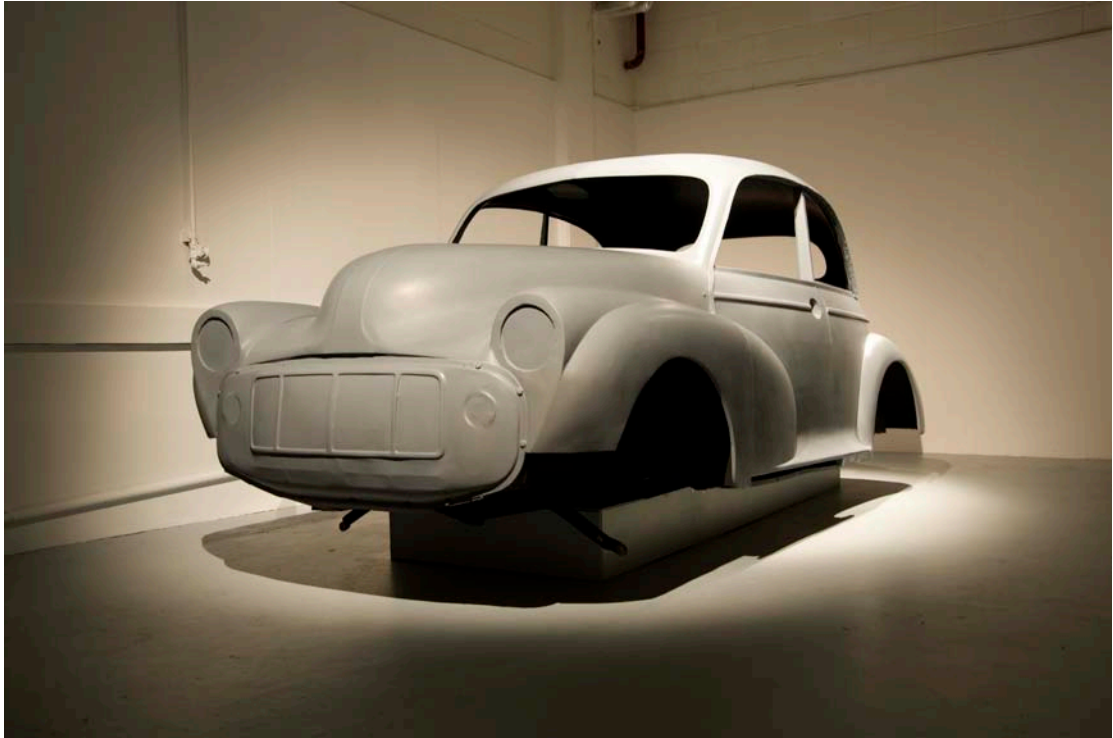
Fig. 23,
Fun Ho!
Titheridge, Johnathon.
2010.

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Appendix

1.   Artworks 2009-10

Pipes (It Lives, part 1), 2009, 2.53mins. Dual Screen Hi Definition Video Work.

Stacks (It Lives, part 2), 2009, 2.53mins, Dual Screen Hi Definition Video Work.

It Lives, 2009, 10.57mins Hi Definition Looping Video Work.

Green World, 2009, 4.17mins, Hi Definition Looping Video Work.

Puzzle, 2009, Still Image, Nostalgia Puzzle, Paper, Table.

Ship in a bottle, 2009, Still image, Ship in a bottle.

Depth Ship, 2009, 1.04min, Hi Definition Looping Video Work.

Headlights, 2009, 46secsHi Definition Looping Video Work.

Fathers Back Yard, 2009, Miniature, Model Morris Minor, Flock, Plastic, Light, Table.

Scale Model, 2009, Wood Base, Plastic Scales.

Weta, 2009, Hi Definition Looping Video Work.

Bug City, 2009, Hi Definition Looping Video Work.

Heman, 2009, 3.15mins, Hi Definition Looping Video Work.

Presenting...Courtesy Car, 2009, Installation Image, Print Factory, Astro Turf, Jacks, Morris Minor, Cardboard, Bin Bags.

Morris Minor Family Drawing, 2009, Pencil on Paper.

Alex Issignosis Drawing, 2010, Felt tip on Paper.

Shady Car, 2009.

Self Saucing, 2009, Hi Definition Looping Video Work.

Fun Ho!, 2010, Restored/Modified Morris Minor Series 2.

2.   Story of the finger

True Story:

In about 1996-1997, I can't remember which; I was employed for the summer at a canning factory. I worked both summers so it may have been either one of these summers that this story occurred. This was not the only time I had worked in a factory, the second was in a print factory. The work itself wasn't memorable as it was so mundane and repetitive, comprised of the same action repeated ad-nausea and added to the memory repertoire for some point later on in life that may or may not ever occur. As yet my call to arms for these redundant acts of metal forming has not been sounded.

What I have been left with though is a repertoire of more memorable events with co-workers that I have retold on multiple occasions for multiple reasons. At times I tell them to impress with the oddness of the tale and the persons within them, but mainly I think I retell them because of the general oddness of the event itself and the telling is some form of confessional that I hope will in some way give me clarity in terms of the reasons that propel such acts of randomness. What follows is an account of one such random occurrence, it involves an elderly work colleague, a can welding machine, the loss of a limb followed by the reattachment of the limb. It is a work story.

The Machine

First I must describe the machine. A conveyer belt that transports rectangular pieces of aluminium that are curled into the cylinder but has not been sealed and so is still open. The purpose of the machine is to seal this so as to make the can. The top and bottom of the can will be added later. The machine though needs help, so that the cans do not bank up, so with the addition of a human worker the unsealed metal can be transferred from the conveyer to the press and then back onto another conveyer to be transported to the next machine. The only difficult part being that when placing the aluminium in the machine that presses it the edge of the metal is intensely sharp and the clamps on the machine come from above and below the sheet of metal to hold it in place. These sharp edges are covered by the top and bottom of the can when completed but as I said earlier we are a stage or two before this. Back to the process, we now have a sealed can, with no bottom or top it is still in the machine and so the human operator must repeat the step of placing the aluminium in the machine but in the reverse order. So instead of inserting we remove the can and place it on an opposite conveyer belt to be carried on to the next stage.

I only had to work on this machine twice, and it was on this site that I heard this story.

The finger

In that the machines all do different things people were attracted to them in different ways and so as humans do, people became strangely territorial.

Management made an effort to circulate the staff around the various machines in order to discourage complacent working methods. Unfortunately due to the level of confidence (Not Skill) that was needed to work on some machines and not others this rotational system was loosely implemented. The machine described in length above was operated by an elderly work colleague of mine and during one of these stints at rotating work she warned of the possible dangers of working on the machine. As I said before she related to me the dangers of the point at which the machine clamps onto the top and bottom of the metal. This the exact point she said is when you pull your hands away from the machine, and in the story all of this was going as per usual, place the metal, removed her hands and the clamps come on. Such is the nature of repetitive action that the brain comes to a point when it is not needed anymore disengages and the motor memory of the action kicks in. Consequently any thought for how dangerous the machine might be to work on goes with it and so in the automatic act of removing her hands from the metal a lapse in concentration meant she may have held on a tad to long, removing her hand from the metal but leaving her finger in the drum of the soon to be sealed cylinder. She admitted feeling no pain but instead looked absently at the place where her finger used to be, such is the nature of shock. All throughout the telling of this story she had her hands firmly set in her pockets. She continued to relate how they had found the finger quick enough to have no problems reattaching it. This was the point that she removed her hand from her pockets and elevated the finger in question. She began to wiggle the finger and relate how that she had lost the movement from the knuckle and so the finger moved like a helicopter from the joint. The point at which the finger had been cut was slightly ridged with the scar tissue, the skin leading into the hand itself was the pink hue of healthy human skin but north of the scar was a slightly bluish tinged addition. Not the bluey green of horror films but more subtle in appearance. I do not mean to say that this is the point that was disturbing it was the size of the finger that was disarming. The skin slightly wilted the finger itself seemed to have lost a large amount of its mass, almost similar in shape to a pen life. Not unlike a shrunken head, it lacked moisture and so appeared waxen not unlike a prosthetic but what kind of trend had inspired this strange form of body art. It is the stark juxtaposition of finger to the rest of the hand that impressed itself in my mind, the rest of the body growing old around the already dead object.

The rest of the memory is blurred except the detail of that one bluish slightly shrunken finger the rest of the world melting away around it, pointing out from my memory straight up.

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