

*A personal response to the photography of Edith Amituanai,*

*Louis Skoog*

Here I am. Walking through town on my way home from school. In uniform, headphones on. It's Friday afternoon and I have until five thirty to play Fallout 3 on my brother's laptop, when he comes home from smoking weed at Jackson's house. Nevertheless, I will make a labyrinth of the world in between school and home. I am listening to Philip Glass's *Offering*, the one with the dusty saxophones. A gentle ride pattern comes in and the orchestra swells. I cross the road by the construction site; a tunnel is being dug beneath the national war memorial. I kick up the dust.

At the end of a wide suburban street there is a little group of shops, where we'd sit and eat fish and chips with our cousins who we saw once a year over the summer holidays. Aunty Rachel had given us her credit card. The four square man spun on his battered axis while we spent more than we were allowed. I smell the inside of my grandmother's car and pull on the root of my memory. Get yourself together! We are going to drive to Long Bay. My brother is having a turn at playing with my little cousins. I'll walk along next to the ocean for a bit, watch Jon swimming in the waves.

The living room of my aunt and uncle's house is like this living room, the sunlight coming through the sliding glass door and illuminating the empty space. There used to be a stack of DVDs next to the couch, and we'd eat chips out of a big ceramic bowl with green stripes while we watched *Flight of the Conchords*. One of us would make a mess on the grey carpet, then Mum would say 'well', and it'd be time to leave. But she would've had more to drink than Dad, so Dad would drive us home. I fall asleep in the car, listening to the Hendrix CD my uncle lent me, head nestled in the arm of the door.

We shared headphones on the drive up the coast to his parent's beach house, squashed in the backseat with all the luggage. We watch *Scrubs* and *SpongeBob* on the bottom bunk, after playing spotlight in the neighbour's yard, who yelled at us for being on his property. On our way to swim in the lagoon we walk on the grass to avoid stepping on the hot pavement.

We were older, and on our own, when we came back there again. The neighbour's yard had a cactus in it, so we stole it and tried to turn it into mescaline. I am sorry I loved him. We were not friends again.

I grew up in Kelburn. If I was home alone then there was always something in the fridge I could put in the microwave. I had shoes to wear. We listened to BBC Radio 4 to avoid unwanted dinner table conversation. Mum came home in the company car. The rubbish went out every Monday night, and I'd take the opportunity to put my headphones back on and walk around the block a couple times.

So I am wary to feel too much in response to these photographs. These West Auckland kids are, in most ways, not like me. I was life's cherished and delicate child. The children that walk the streets outside Edith Amituanai's driveway on their way to and from school are more than just a vehicle for my remembering of summer holidays with my family. To reduce them to a catalyst for my own memory of a distant, far different and more comfortable childhood would be to take away the reality that Edith Amituanai gives them through these pictures.

But it is my childhood, primarily, that opened me up to them. I hope the freedom that Amituanai captures and imbues in these kids from West Auckland through her photography, as they walk in between worlds, is preserved beyond the bounds of these images. I hope too that I can one day perform as freely as they do. Most of all, I hope that my continued presence in the here and now does justice to all of our memory. I will try my best to feel what the world feels.

All the same, I allow myself a moment of solitary nostalgia.

Here I am.