

# Topological Intimacies and Acts of Building Home

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# Abstract

Topological Intimacies and Acts of Building Home is a durational site-responsive and lens-based project documenting my family's act of building a home on a specific ecological site in suburban North Shore, Tāmaki Makaurau.

The project invites a gentle shift in place-making narratives based on the imaginings of house and home in Aotearoa. It aims to make visible the links between memory, history, place, space and belonging, to form a topological intimacy in the building of a home.

The specificity of the site leads the practice. The use of installation and interventions become way-markers and responses to the temporal shifts, affective complexities, and ongoing productive tensions. My durational lens-based methods include walking and gathering, temporary site installations, photo and video, documentation and archiving. The practice takes on aspects of social engagement and participation, engaging an audience through proximity.

I employ Donna Haraway's call to action 'Staying with The Trouble' to navigate the affective complexities of homemaking in contemporary times.<sup>1</sup> 'Staying' becomes a means to engage gentle feminist actions and rituals involving flowers and building materials to situate the trouble (home) as an active site of ongoing political and social tensions.

These 'acts of building home' with flowers and string lines aim to engage reciprocity with the land and become a conversation between the topological intimacies of the site, the house and myself. The work and investigations are underpinned by a feminist worldview that seeks to intervene with the home.

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<sup>1</sup> Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (North Carolina, UNITED STATES: Duke University Press, 2016).

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## Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the Acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed

25 June 2022

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Finally to the community of the human and more-than-human at Kauri Road. A place where, without even living there, our family have already felt welcomed.

A making of a home amongst nature  
The want to be pressed against it  
To inhabit, we disrupt; colonise  
Treading lightly, (though never lightly)  
Mechanical teeth against wood and dirt  
Dig down through layers of memory  
Then...  
We replace fallen tree with fallen tree  
Rooting them back into earth with mineral and matter  
Things too, mined from another place  
Entanglements, human, nature, machine  
Rock, sand from sea, root the house to the earth  
The new trees, become the bones  
Histories and stories enmeshed with our own  
We meet at this point  
Now we tread lightly, replenish, grow, guard, nourish  
To be pressed against it.

Tamara Nicholson

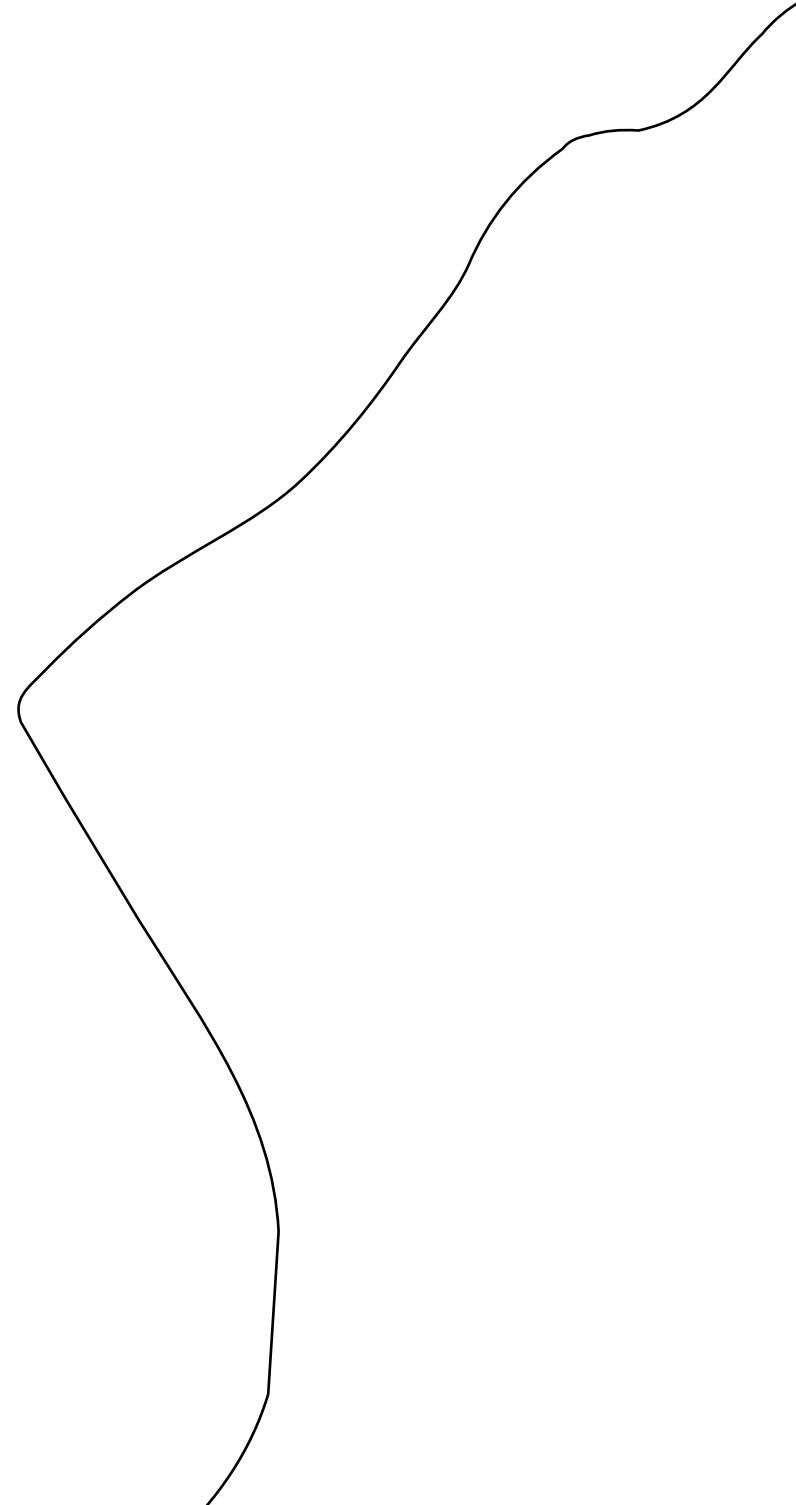




Figure 1. *Future views*, 2021, Digital Collage.

# Introduction

*I would like to suggest three fundamental aspects of house and home. First, there is the house of the body – the home of the inner realms of psyche and soul and their mysterious territories of memories, dreams, and self-definitions. Second, there is the house for living – the place of comfort, rest, and ease, of family meals, and intimacy, the setting for the dramas, passages, pains, and joys of life – which is called home. And last, there is the house of the world, the condition of interconnection with others and the built and natural environment – of being at home in the universe.<sup>2</sup>*

Building a home at 13 Kauri Road held a promise of something more, a better place to be, to dwell amongst the trees, a quarter-acre section. It was our version of the quintessential 'Kiwi Dream'. Building a house on this site, to me, offered opportunity to engage these three fundamental dimensions of home. How the home of the body harbours memories and dreams that may unconsciously guide one's path. How the house as residence holds the intimacies of private lives, animated and activated by the passages of everyday, and how the house of the world operates as a place of interconnection with one's human and more-than-human community.

My partner, a builder, would be the house-maker, and I would be the home-maker. Enacting heteronormativity and gender performance roles, highlighting the home as an intensely political site, both in its internal intimacies and intersections with the broader world.<sup>3\_4</sup>

Topological Intimacy became a methodology in my practice and research. Topos is taken from the Greek word for place — intimacy, as a close familiarity. My series of intimate acts of gifting flowers, tracing the footprint, and secreting notes into walls

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2 Thomas Barrie, *House and Home: Cultural Contexts, Ontological Roles* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2017), 175.

3 'Men Make Houses, Women Make Homes - Idioms by The Free Dictionary', accessed 10 June 2022, <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/men+make+houses%2C+women+make+homes>.

4 Alison Blunt, 'Cultural Geography: Cultural Geographies of Home', *Progress in Human Geography* 29, no. 4 (1 August 2005): 505–15, <https://doi.org/10.1191/0309132505ph564pr>, 510.



became my 'Acts of Building,' forming ritual and intimacy with the more-than-human – the earth, the bush, the timber foundations, frames, roofs, walls, and windows of the home.

Georges Teyssot's 'A Topology of Everyday Constellations' discusses the changing shape of home as a constellation of the everyday and the complex relations/forces entangled.<sup>5</sup> He investigates the home's capacity as a threshold to be flipped inside and out – reconfigured and exposing its intimacy. In my practice, I have traced and outlined the shifting relations of the home and site. Engaging the tensions operating between the periphery and the centre, suburban weeds and indigenous landscapes, and the notions of gender that play out in the shaping of house and home.

Building a conventional suburban house (or any house) is laden with affective negotiations, bargains and exchanges. You start with a vision of the finished object. Then bit by bit, you piece that idea together. "Its arrival takes time, and the time it takes, shapes 'what' it is."<sup>6</sup>

Feminist Affect theorists Sara Ahmed and Lauren Berlant consider these ideas of affective bargaining, self-formed negotiations, and orientations towards things they call 'Happy Objects' or 'Objects of Desire'.<sup>7</sup><sup>8</sup> Berlant describes an 'object of desire' as a cluster of promises we want someone or something to make to us and make possible for us.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Ahmed says that happiness is an endpoint for which we strive, rather than a state of being.

We rely on 'objects' and 'things' outside of ourselves to bring us happiness – a holi-

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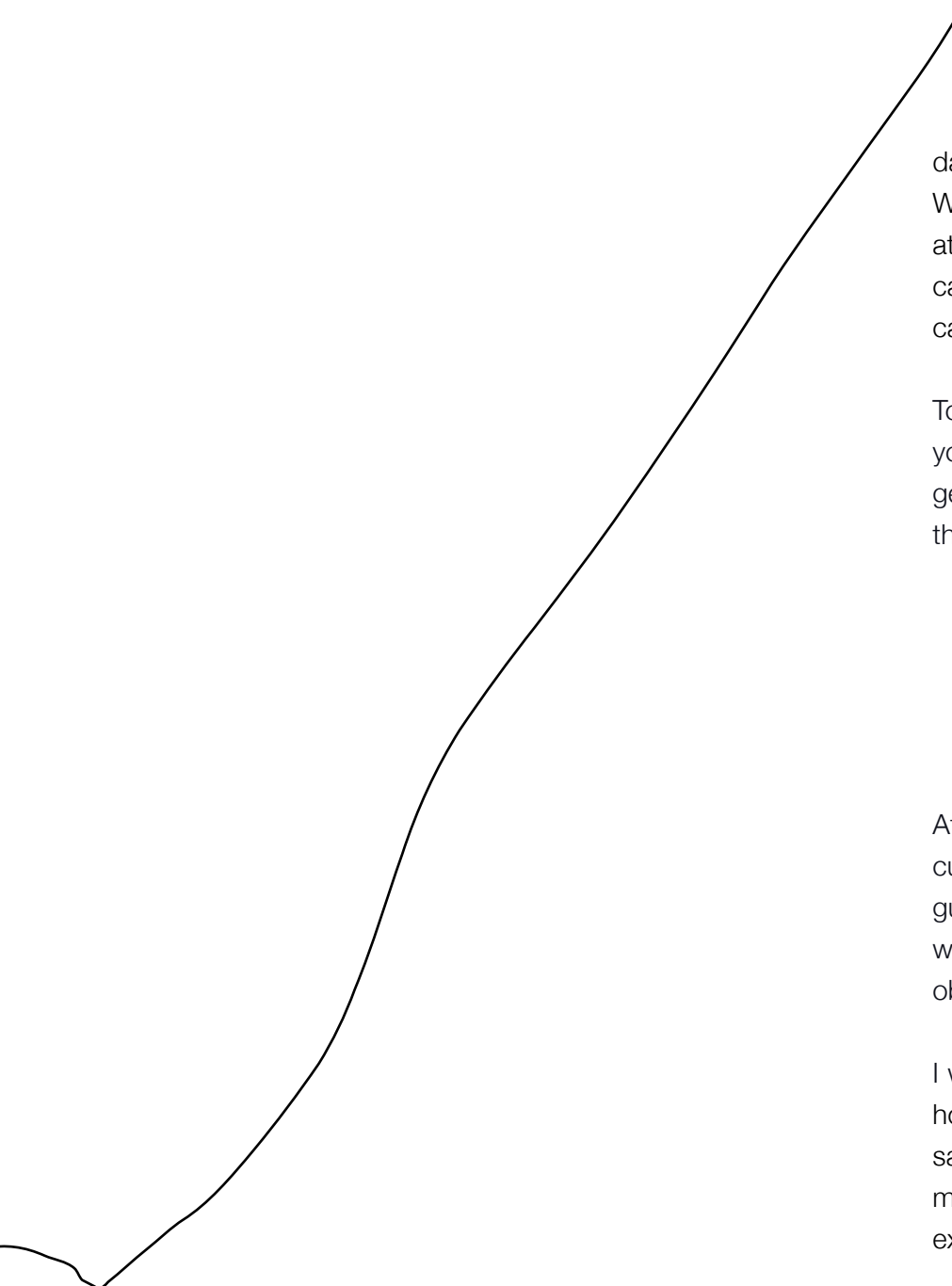
5 Georges Teyssot and Cynthia Davidson, *A Topology of Everyday Constellations* (Cambridge, UNITED STATES: MIT Press, 2013), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aut/detail.action?docID=3339577>.

6 Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (North Carolina, UNITED STATES: Duke University Press, 2006), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aut/detail.action?docID=1169326.16.40>.

7 Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham [NC]: Duke University Press, 2010).

8 Lauren Gail Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

9 Berlant, *Cruel*, 16.



day, a new pair of shoes, a new house. Ahmed calls these 'happy objects'. We face the future and these 'happy objects' with optimism, imagining once we have attained *said* thing, we will become happier, better versions of ourselves. This goal carries us through the sometimes monotony of the day-to-day, and is what Berlant calls 'Cruel Optimism'.<sup>10</sup>

To Berlant, all attachment is optimistic; optimism is the force that moves you out of yourself and into the world, bringing you closer the satisfying something you cannot generate on your own. It may be seen as 'a way of life' an object, a project, an idea; though optimism doesn't always feel optimistic.<sup>11</sup>

*"Being optimistic is ambitious; at any moment, it might feel like anything, including nothing: dread, anxiety, hunger, curiosity, ranging from a sly neutrality of browsing the isles in a supermarket to the bubbling excitement of a change is going to come".<sup>12</sup>*

At the outset of the building process, I felt this optimistic ambition that Berlant discusses, the bubbling undercurrent and excitement and change operating in its many guises. Constructing a house at Kauri Road was ambitious, and for us, as a family, we would enter into a prolonged transitional state as we dwelt between our 'happy object' and the domestic day-to-day.

I was also harbouring feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, and guilt about the privilege of homeownership. An awareness of grasping on tighter to a material commodity to feel safe in uncertain times juxtaposed the deepened desires for a better sanctuary for my family. The want of a place to be and belong, to live a slower, more sustainable existence tucked against the bush in suburbia.

How could I approach the process with care and consideration whilst wrestling with my conscience? I was introduced to feminist theorist Donna Haraway's book 'Staying

10 Berlant, *Cruel*, 23.

11 Berlant, *Cruel*, 2.

12 Berlant, *Cruel*, 2.



Figure 2. *The Trees Came Down*, Digital Photograph, 2021.

With *The Trouble*'.<sup>13</sup> The term became a call to action, to lean into the affective complexities of 'dwelling' in contemporary times. To 'stay with the trouble' means to stick with the feeling and stay present, to unpick the term's etymology – to reside in unrest or disturbance.<sup>14</sup> <sup>15</sup>

'Staying in the trouble' is residing with the political, social and colonial forces that operate in the domestic space. A home is a place of refuge but can also be a place of violence, loneliness and gendered expectation. It works in a series of forces that require you to have stayed-ness and stillness. To 'stay with the trouble' holds a determination. It is a way of resolve or a way of finding resolution, a commitment, turning disruption into something productive.

'Staying with the trouble' meant that as the project and the house grew, so did I, trusting myself, trusting the process. As the physical walls of the home went up, I worked to let mine down. I leaned into the uncomfortableness, learning that instead of 'dwelling' on feelings of land ownership privilege and guilt, I could move forward with acknowledgement, knowledge, and reparation. I could actively dwell well.<sup>16</sup>

Dwelling is not just an act of inhabiting a space; it means creating and taking care. Haraway calls this 'making kin with the more than human'.<sup>17</sup>

I wanted to make kin with the more than human inhabitants of Kauri Road. I wanted to 'dwell well' with the site before we resided. To actively engage in its shaping while

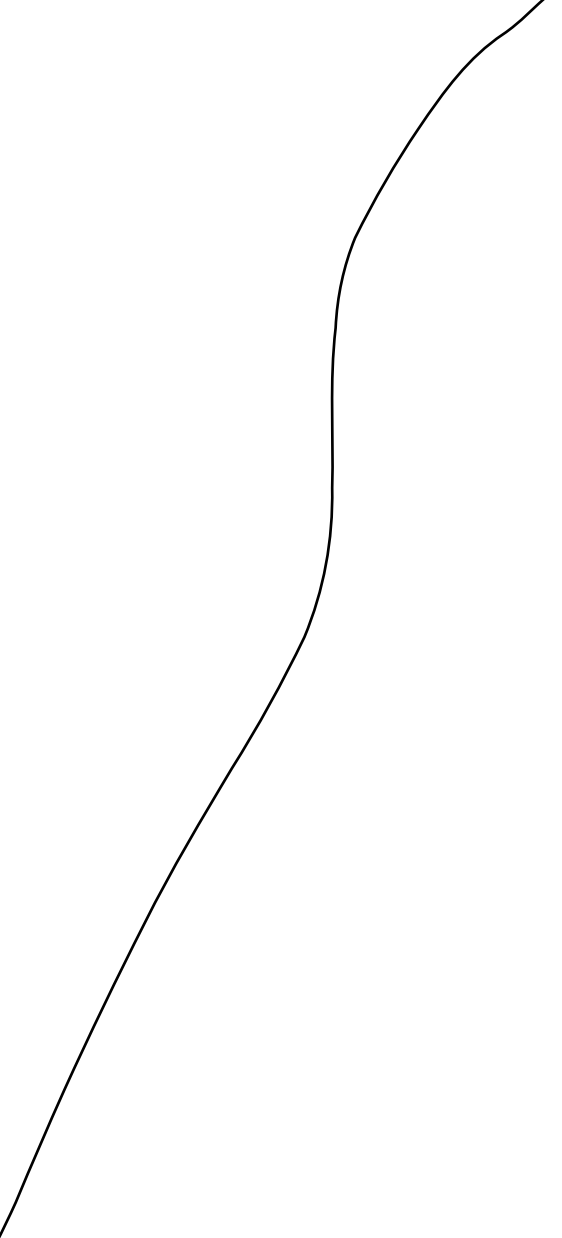
13 Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (North Carolina, UNITED STATES: Duke University Press, 2016).

14 'Definition of TROUBLE', accessed 10 June 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trouble>.

15 'Stay Definition & Meaning - Merriam-Webster', accessed 10 June 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stay>.

16 Dwelling in the thinking of or sitting with something for an extended period of time.

17 Haraway, *Staying*, 10.  
Haraway says kin are unfamiliar (outside what we thought was family or gens), uncanny, haunting, active.



letting the house and the land guide the process and interventions.<sup>18</sup> Philosopher Martin Heidegger saw building as an act of dwelling – a nurturing – enabling the world to be as it is without the need to take control, instead ‘to spare, to preserve’.<sup>19</sup> Heidegger’s form of dwelling is to remain in place – be situated in – to stay with things; dwelling is an active way of being in the world.<sup>20</sup>

Curator Hau Hanru says, “to exist is to dwell and build: to produce a space, create a place, reinvent that place, and ultimately make it into a locality. How to be in the world or ‘how to live here’?”<sup>21</sup> Kauri Road was becoming our locality. We were creating and reinventing it as ‘place’, activating its story. We were building, we were dwelling.

There would be replanting, regeneration, and care-taking once we began to reside at Kauri Road. But I wanted to find ways to form reciprocity with the site and the house as it evolved from an abstract idea into ‘being in the world’. I was interested in using gesture and ritual, and I settled on the simple act of giving flowers.

The idea of using flowering weeds in acts of ritual came together one afternoon; we were in lockdown, and I had been enjoying the unmown berms and walkways. The normally manicured patches of grass had become blooming flowers; nature left to be, that I passed when walking or on trips to the supermarket. This brought me back to a conversation with a Ngāti Whātua o Kaipara representative<sup>22</sup> in which she pointed out that a weed was only a plant growing where it wasn’t meant to be. These ‘suburban weeds’ that lurked on the periphery of the day-to-day, a product of colonisation,

18 Donna Haraway. “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective.” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–99. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066>.

Haraway’s concept of “situated knowledge” argues that the perception of any situation is always a matter of an embodied, located subject and their geographically and historically specific perspective.

19 Martin Heidegger, ‘Building Dwelling Thinking’, in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1971), 143-159.

20 Heidegger, *Building*, 143-159.

21 Hou Hanru, ‘If You Were To Live Here...’, in *If You Were To Live Here...* (Auckland, New Zealand: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2013), 1.

\_[see above] Hanru curated the 5<sup>th</sup> Auckland Triennial in 2013 which considered the idea ‘If You Were to Live Here’ engaging artists from around the globe to consider the act of Dwelling.

22 We met to discuss our project and receive Mana Whenua approval as part of our resource consent process.





Figure 3. Left over flowers offerings placed with the house poles before concrete, 2021, Digital Photograph.

would become a signifier of our human occupancy at Kauri Road.

Creating rituals and acts helped to set not only intention with my future home, they became a gentle form of feminist action. I was upending the normative building process with floral arrangements, weaving, binding, and forms of temporal site engagement.

Collecting flowers from around our current locale became a way of joining the day-to-day with the future home. The flowers – gathered from the everyday paths of walks to school and visits to friends – also became a point of tracing memory. Walking became a vital part of the practice. Travelling between our current home and Kauri Road felt like linking the liminal space between our everyday and the future. Furthermore, memories of walking similar paths, subconsciously guiding us to Kauri Road, acted as a binding of history and memory to the home.

In her book ‘Lure of the Local’, art critic Lucy Lippard states that the artists’ role is to communicate alternative ways of ‘seeing’ space and place’.<sup>23</sup> Aotearoa artist Ann Shelton does this in her project ‘Housework’ and corresponding publication ‘A Spoonful of Sugar’.<sup>24</sup> Shelton resides in a house built in 1957 by Nancy Martin, the first single woman in Wellington to obtain a mortgage and build her own home, described by Shelton as an act of staking out a humble claim to fame in a mundane and extraordinary action.<sup>25</sup>

As Shelton started to learn more about the house’s history, it led to further investigation, uncovering what a pivotal role Nancy and the house had played in the commissioning of architecture and renegotiating the modern home in Aotearoa.

Haraway says we need stories (and theories) that are big enough to gather up the

23 Lucy R. Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: New Press, 1998), 18.

24 Ann Shelton, Pip Adam, and Alice Tappenden, *A Spoonful of Sugar*, 2015.

25 Ann Shelton, *House Work*, 2014, performance, installation, documentation, variable, 2014, <https://annshelton.com/works/house-work>.

complexities and keep the edges open and greedy for surprising new and old connections.<sup>26</sup> Like Shelton's story of her home, I wanted to document and archive our journey at Kauri Road.

In the following chapter, I will discuss my personal and local history with the site, beginning with a recollection of childhood walks through the bush and then later, retracing these walks with my partner, leading us to our future dwelling at Kauri Road. I will use 'us', 'our', and 'we' to refer to myself, my partner and our children. 'We' who will occupy 13 Kauri Road, alongside the more-than-human.



Figure 4. *Dream Home*, 2021, Digital Collage.

26 Haraway, *Staying*, 115.

## A Site History

In a Pākehā desire to connect with nature and dwell at Kauri Road, we were enacting a mode of colonisation. By carrying out the construction ourselves – my partner as builder and project manager – we acted out an embedded mode of settler DIY culture, designing and building what once was the ‘Kiwi Dream’, a timber-clad house with a corrugated iron roof on a quarter-acre section.<sup>27</sup>

Nature has become a Pākehā cultural form of nationalism. A love of beach and bush – a ‘settlers’ dream’.<sup>28</sup> A desire to form a connection to the land while actively ignoring how one came to be connected to the land underpins many Pākehā experiences.<sup>29</sup>

One of the many ways to decolonise a settler mentality is to become more conscious of ‘land’ as neither just landscape nor property. Instead, the land is an amalgamation of history, culture, agriculture, and community. Knowing the history of the land, who I am, and my journey to be part of Aotearoa as Pākehā, is a form of ‘staying with the trouble’.

Like many Pākehā my relationship to place stems from childhood memories and paths. Ahmed says that the repetition makes a path of the event of the ground “being trodden” – hence the phrase a “well-trodden path”.<sup>30</sup> We can see the path as a trace of a past journey.

27 Michael Mackay, ‘DIY (Do-It-Yourself) Home Improvement in New Zealand’, n.d., 258. DIY home improvement is a significant cultural phenomenon in New Zealand. In a feature article in the New Zealand Listener, journalist Joanne Black (2005, p.13) claimed that “if England is a nation of shopkeepers, New Zealand is a nation of home renovators.”

28 Stephen Turner, ‘Settler Dreaming’, *Memory Connection*, The Memory Connection, 1, no.1 (2011): 13.  
\_[see above] A desire, or desiring, something settlers do— “our” core being—that is a condition of the possibility of remembering, and actually constitutive of collective memory. Settlement is a specific desire-drive (for land, prosperity, freedom and belonging).

29 Avril Bell, ‘Bifurcation or Entanglement? Settler Identity and Biculturalism in Aotearoa New Zealand’, *Continuum* 20, no. 2 (1 June 2006): 253–68, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304310600641786>.

30 Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (North Carolina, UNITED STATES: Duke University Press, 2006), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aut/detail.action?docID=1169326.16>.



The path is made out of footprints – traces of feet that “tread” and that in “treading” create a line on the ground.<sup>31</sup>



Figure 5. The old road that runs through the site, 2021, Digital Photograph.

*Familiarity is shaped by the ‘feel’ of space or by how spaces ‘impress’ upon our bodies...the familiar is an effect of inhabitation: we are not simply in the familiar, but rather the familiar is shaped by actions that reach out towards objects that are already within reach. We still have to reach toward those things even when they are already in reach.*<sup>32</sup>

My first visit to 13 Kauri Road felt like stepping back into a settler’s dream and a familiar memory. A sloped section backing onto the protected indigenous forest of Kauri Park Reserve in an unassuming street. Peeking views of the Waitematā and a valley full of ancient, majestic kauri. I had grown up further down the coastline, in a pole house built by my parents, also surrounded by bush. Encountering the site acted out a memory of belonging, memories of the dreamscape of Aotearoa itself; a childhood of bush and beach, endless golden summers and hours spent playing amongst the trees surrounding my home.

As a child, my dad would take my brother and me for walks in Kauri Park Reserve, which ended on Kauri Road; though just a memory, we were also walking the path of a future place in time. I later returned to the area and introduced my partner to these same bush walks. We’d walk up and down Kauri Road, admiring some of the 1960s modernist houses on the street, picking which one we would imagine as our future home. An unbeknown setting for a future intention.

Building a house had been a dream earmarked for some point later in life. But through a series of occurrences, we began to entertain the idea as we visited and fell for the site at 13 Kauri Road.

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31 Ahmed, *Queer Phemonology*, 16.

32 Ahmed, *Queer Phemonology*, 7.



Figure 6. *The Clubhouse at Kauri Rd*, 2021, Digital Photograph.

An opportune meeting with the section owner and future neighbour, Barry, meant we could make a connection and gain a small piece of the history.<sup>33</sup> Since its initial subdivision, the section had sat vacant, becoming a playground for the neighbourhood kids — home to flying foxes, BMX tracks and a clubhouse. At the lower part of the site is a small road that once connected Kauri Road up to Rangatira Road. Barry had cared for the site for almost 50 years, maintaining it, weeding and replanting with indigenous fauna.

Encouraged by the sales agent, we made a tentative offer, another party did the same. Their bid was accepted. We'd missed out. But, in a twist of fate, six weeks on, an 'out of the blue' call announced that the section was for sale again. This time we were ready, and in what felt like a star-aligning 24 hours, we found ourselves purchasing the land, becoming its future custodians. Three days later, Aotearoa entered its first national lockdown as Covid-19 took hold globally.

**Notes on a Pandemic** As a nation, we stopped, stayed in our homes, life stilled, cooked, baked, disinfected our groceries, and social interaction shifted to virtual catchups on video calls; it was 'the new normal'. The rites and rituals of family life assumed new intensity. The ideal home became one that met our most primitive craving for security and shelter whilst simultaneously offering the possibility of escape.<sup>34</sup> The imaginings of home at Kauri Road were intensified, and we too focused on the need to slow down and hold our connections with our family and environment as the most important. It fuelled a desire to create a more considered living environment for our children. Though the proposition of our envisioned home was affected by life in lockdown a year into the journey, I still didn't feel that the Pandemic weighed too heavily on this discussion. But now, two years later, we are still living an altered version of how life was before, thus feeding heightened sense of homemaking in a time of ecological stress.

Building a house never runs on schedule, but building during a pandemic has meant mounting frustrations and setbacks. Through this, Kauri Road acted as a grounding force; it taught us patience, reminding us to take each moment as it is; and to breathe.

33 Barry Brown purchased then land in 1973 after he built his own home across the street, as an architect, he had plans of building on the land but never quite made it happen. Throughout our build he has been an eager visitor, checking out progress. He seems genuinely happy with the house we've created, that we've thought of the land, and thought of the neighbourhood. Knowing his own caretaking of the land, and that he's happy with what we've done, offers a sense of comfort.

34 Isabel Allen. 'Reimagining the Home'. *Architectural Design* 91, no. 2 (2021): 46–53. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ad.2670>





Figure 7. *An Aerial View of the site after clearance, 2021, Digital Photograph.*





Figure 8. *Arial View From 13 Kauri Rd looking out over the gully to the Tāmāki Isthmus, and the Pah site 'Te-Matar-ae-a-Mana' at Kauri Point, 2022. Digital Photograph.*

## A Street History

Auckland Council protects 13 Kauri Road as a Significant Ecological Area.<sup>35</sup> The site links with Kauri Park Reserve, which connects with the Kauri Point Reserve to Soldiers' Bay coastline. At the boundary of the site sit two large kauri. They watch over the site and down the valley to the Waitematā and over a significant pā site at Kauri Point.

Over forty-nine eruptions occurred intermittently across Tāmaki Makaurau in the last 250,000 years, creating the distinctive Auckland volcanic landscape.<sup>36</sup> One of these eruptions formed the Waitematā – a drowned river named Wai-te-matā by Tama-te-Kapua, who led the waka 'Te Arawa' from Hawaii.<sup>37</sup> He placed a volcanic rock off the coast of Birkenhead, giving Tāmaki its 'mauri'.<sup>38</sup> <sup>39</sup> The name translates to 'obsidian waters' due to the sea's glassy surface resembling obsidian. Ngāpuhi later called it Te Wai-o-te-mate (the waters of death) – referencing the battles to control the Tāmaki isthmus.<sup>40</sup>

35 'D9 Significant Ecological Areas Overlay', n.d., <https://unitaryplan.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/Images/Auckland%20Unitary%20Plan%20Operative/Chapter%20D%20Overlays/1.%20Natural%20Resources/D9%20Significant%20Ecological%20Areas%20Overlay.pdf>.

[see above] Terrestrial are identified areas of significant indigenous vegetation or significant habitats of indigenous fauna located either on land or in freshwater environments. In order to maintain indigenous biodiversity these areas are protected from the adverse effects of subdivision, use and development.

36 Lucy Mackintosh, *Shifting Grounds: Deep Histories of Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books Ltd, 2021), 19.

37 David Verran, *The North Shore: An Illustrated History* (North Shore, N.Z.: Random House, 2010), 13.

38 On Te Mata or Boat rock situated off Kendall's bay viewed from the Harbour Bridge. In later times it was Ngāti Whātua tradition that the first fish caught in the season would be used as an offering and placed on the rock Te Mata

39 Translates to life-force, soul or essence.

40 New Zealand Ministry for Culture and Heritage Te Manatu Taonga, 'Waitematā Harbour', Web page (Ministry for Culture and Heritage Te Manatu Taonga), accessed 30 November 2021, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/auckland-places/page-9>. Waitamā



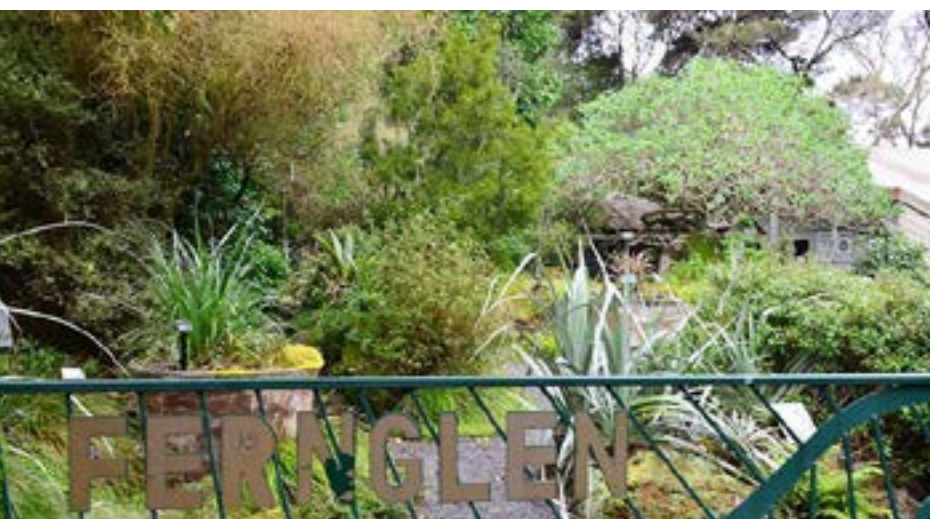


Figure 9. Aleksandar Ćirilović *Fernglen Reserve - Gate leading into the garden.*

The valley/gully is named Tawhiwhi-kareao.<sup>41</sup> At the edge of Kauri Point is the pā site Te-Matarae-a-Mana, inhabited intermittently until the 1840s, after which Te-Taoū would reside seasonally at the settlement to fish for sharks and gather shellfish.<sup>42-43</sup>

Missionaries, kauri millers and gum diggers started to settle in the Birkenhead area in the 1850s.<sup>44</sup> The steep terrain of places like Kauri Park Reserve was too hard to reach; today it stands as an example of how the pre-colonial shoreline and forest would have looked.<sup>45</sup> Despite the clay soil in the area, settlers started growing fruit, and by the 1880s, the area became known for its strawberries, which were a large part of the local economy.<sup>46</sup>

Halfway down Kauri Road is the entrance to Fernglen Gardens, which undoubtedly contributes to the street's ecological standing. Purchased by the Fisher family in 1888, Fernglen Gardens are now part of the more expansive reserve owned by the Auckland Council.<sup>47</sup>

The intergenerational family were keen botanists and regenerators of indigenous forests and bush. In the early days, the gardens were used as a place of education, hosting swimming lessons and teaching local children about indigenous flora, astron-

41 Ngāti Whātua Deed of Settlement 2011), 2.

42 Meaning Mana's brow-headland

43 Situated off Te-Matarae-a-Mana is Te Tokaroa / Meola reef – a well-known shark spawning ground. "The reef was formed more than 28,000 years ago from the final portion of an 11 kilometre lava flow that originated from Mount Saint John volcano".

44 'History of Birkenhead District – Birkenhead Residents Association', accessed 3 December 2021, <https://bra.org.nz/history-of-birkenhead-district/>.

45 Cliff Utting, 'Early Birkenhead and Birkdale', BIRKENHEAD HERITAGE SOCIETY, accessed 2 December 2021, <http://www.historicbirkenhead.com/early-birkenhead-and-birkdale.html>.

46 New Zealand Ministry for Culture and Heritage Te Manatu Taonga, 'Tribal History and Places', Web page (Ministry for Culture and Heritage Te Manatu Taonga), accessed 2 December 2021, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/tamaki-tribes/page-1>. Auckland Places, The North Shore. 5

47 'Fernglen Native Plant Gardens', accessed 7 June 2021, <http://fernglengardens.nz/>.

omy and Māori folklore.<sup>48-49</sup> It became a popular place of research for Botany students from Auckland University due to its many indigenous plant specimens from all over Aotearoa.<sup>50</sup> Now open to the public, it remains a large part of Kauri Road's community, where longstanding street members manage its upkeep.

Landmarks and familiar signs give us anchoring points.<sup>51</sup> Knowing the history of our locality and forming neighbourly connections only enhance our intimacy with the site. This situated knowledge creates a sense of responsibility to our new community, guiding us in our active state of dwelling. If 'settler dreaming' is a specific desire-drive for prosperity, land, and belonging, then 'settler awareness' could be the effect of pausing, stopping to think, thereby interrupting the economistic desire-drive of settlement.<sup>52</sup>

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48 'Fenglen Gardens'.

49 Allen Brown, 'Birkenhead Centenary', BIRKENHEAD HERITAGE SOCIETY, accessed 2 December 2021, <http://www.historicbirkenhead.com/birkenhead-centenary.html>.

50 Brown, *Birkenhead Centenary*.  
With Professor Lancaster The first Professor of Botany and Auckland University

51 Ahmed, *Queer*, 1

52 Turner *Settler Dreaming*, 117-119.

# Acts of Topological Intimacy

Sara Ahmed says lines are both created by being followed and are followed by being created.<sup>53</sup> She states that lines that direct us, as lines of thought, as well as lines of motion, are in this way performative: they depend on the repetition of norms and conventions, of routes and paths taken, but they are also created as an effect of this repetition.

Building is an act of lines and repetition, as are rituals. Creating new lines and rituals as feminist interventions with a normative act of building become an act of not only intimacy but a form of staying with the trouble.

I thought 'as Haraway' about the simple tools of builder's string line and other building materials and markers; dazzle spray, hi-viz and tarps, highlighting how, as opposed to trees, we as humans experience and manipulate our environment, perceiving the world via tools, buildings, vehicles, medicines, algorithms and implants.<sup>54</sup> I was drawn to these flat, bright, artificial colours that contrasted against the tonalities of the plants, trees and clay of the natural environment, anthropological signals of what was to be removed, dug up, cut down, or protected from the natural elements for us, the human inhabitants. I started to see the house building as an enmeshment of humans and more-than-human – relationship forming, leading me to find ways to acknowledge the tension in our engagement with the land and to honour and build reciprocity.



Figure 10. *Materials and Markers on site*, 2021-22.

I explored through different ideas and work experimentations to consider the affective

53 Ahmed, *Queer*, 16.

54 Bruce E Phillips, 'Moving and Listening in Relation to Trees and "A Wardian Case"', May 2021, 1. Phillips paraphrases this in regard to Haraway's A cyborg manifesto

tensions operating on site. Early pieces included a triptych series with the photographic image of trees chopped down printed on tapestry fabric and rug tufting with the slogan 'Happiness Around Corner'. At the point of site clearance, I spray painted 'Everything's Going To Be OK' across a barren clay building platform, photographed and filmed with a cheap dodgy drone. The work drew reference to Martin Creed's 'Everything Is Going To Be Alright', a neon work made in response to the Christchurch earthquakes.<sup>55</sup> Our land sits as part of the volcanic zone of the Tāmaki isthmus, and the sloped nature of the site meant a vast amount of retaining to secure it for the house to be built.



Figure 12. *Happiness Just Around Corner*, 2021, Triptech Series of photographs on Tapestry, Wool, Wood 50cm x 60cm



Figure 11. *Everything's going to be OK*, 2021, Video Still.  
Video Link: <https://youtu.be/2VfdqFMAhdI>

Removing the trees and the earth to create space and boundaries for our home highlighted how, as humans, we justify actions in order to manipulate our environments for our own advantage.<sup>56</sup> 'Happiness Around Corner' and 'Everything's Going To Be OK' directly responded to this conflict.

<sup>55</sup> Martin Creed, 'Martin Creed - Everything Is Going to Be Alright | Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū', accessed 8 June 2022, <https://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/multimedia/audiotour/martin-creed-everything-is-going-to-be-alright>.

<sup>56</sup> Heidegger, *Building*, 156.





Figure 13. *A Series of Mock Up's*, 2021-22, Digital Collages

The idea of using flowers as a form of gesture and ritual occurred at the time of the placing of the foundation poles. As stated in the introduction, I had spent time thinking about ways of engaging. Flowers offered a way to create ritual whilst staying with the affective tensions of our building. These flowers acted in the form of bringing a gift – a gesture – a way to acknowledge that we were guests of the land and a ‘good guest brings flowers’.<sup>57</sup>

As I started to engage more and more with flowers and suburban weeds, I started noticing more. I got excited when turning onto Kauri Road, catching some ‘big’ daisies growing on a neighbour’s berm. I would drive around with half an eye on what was flowering in the neighbourhood. This act of noticing became a small way of staying present and being in the day-to-day, as well as growing connection to our anticipated home and its neighbourhood.

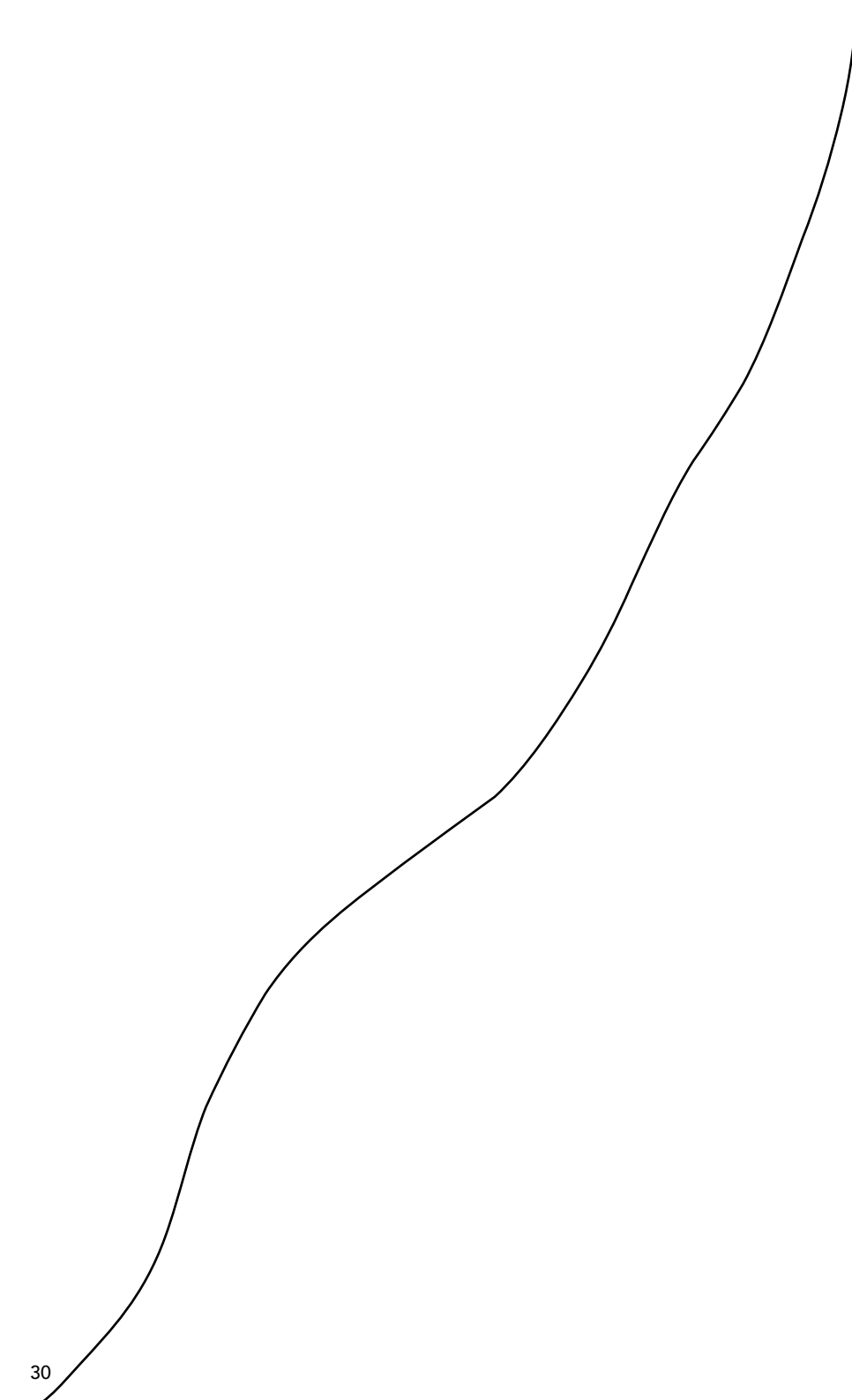
New things came into my practice, social and temporal aspects; I discovered that social acts of participation didn’t need an invitation but could instead be spontaneous.

Like the building of the house, I used a method of making plans I called mock-ups. These digital collages helped me plan how site interventions might be carried out. Sometimes the mock-ups didn’t develop into anything further and were merely procedural – a process of ‘thinking by doing’ - but were a valuable tool to work through ideas or as a leaping-off point.

In *The Reality-Based Community Journal*, Erica Balsom asked: “how might a lens take up a relation with the ‘real’ that is one of care and repair?”<sup>58</sup> Using the camera

57 Janet McAllister, ‘Bloomin’ Schemies: Dienneke Jansen’s “Dwelling on the Stoep”’, *Pantograph Punch*, accessed 30 May 2022, <https://pantograph-punch.com/posts/dwelling-on-the-stoep>. Jansen uses this term in her exhibition writing.

58 Erica Balsom, ‘The Reality-Based Community - Journal #83 June 2017 - e-Flux’, accessed 13 June 2022, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/83/142332/the-reality-based-community/>.



in my practice became an act of care as I sought to document the site's evolution, my feminist interventions and the more-than-human inter-connections of an active building site. Usually, a building site might be photographed for building purposes as proof of work for the council. Snaps might be taken to show family and friends the progress. My lens was used to acknowledge, documenting for a future archive that could be secreted into the walls.

Video and sound provided the opportunity to capture the house's pause, rest and being as it slowly formed; these felt like moments of calibration.

A method of repetition and iteration developed as each floral act gave perimeters for reenactment in recognising pivotal moments.

Though not unplanned, the acts were not led by routine calendar dates; instead, they became way-markers reflecting the stop-start nature of the project. Some acts operated in very compressed, short opportunities in time. At other points, the acts reflected the long-drawn moments of pause and waiting.

The following archive discusses these acts. The tone of writing shifts to an intimate diaristic style to reflect the different emotional highs and lows operating around each act.

## Act One -*The Perimeter*

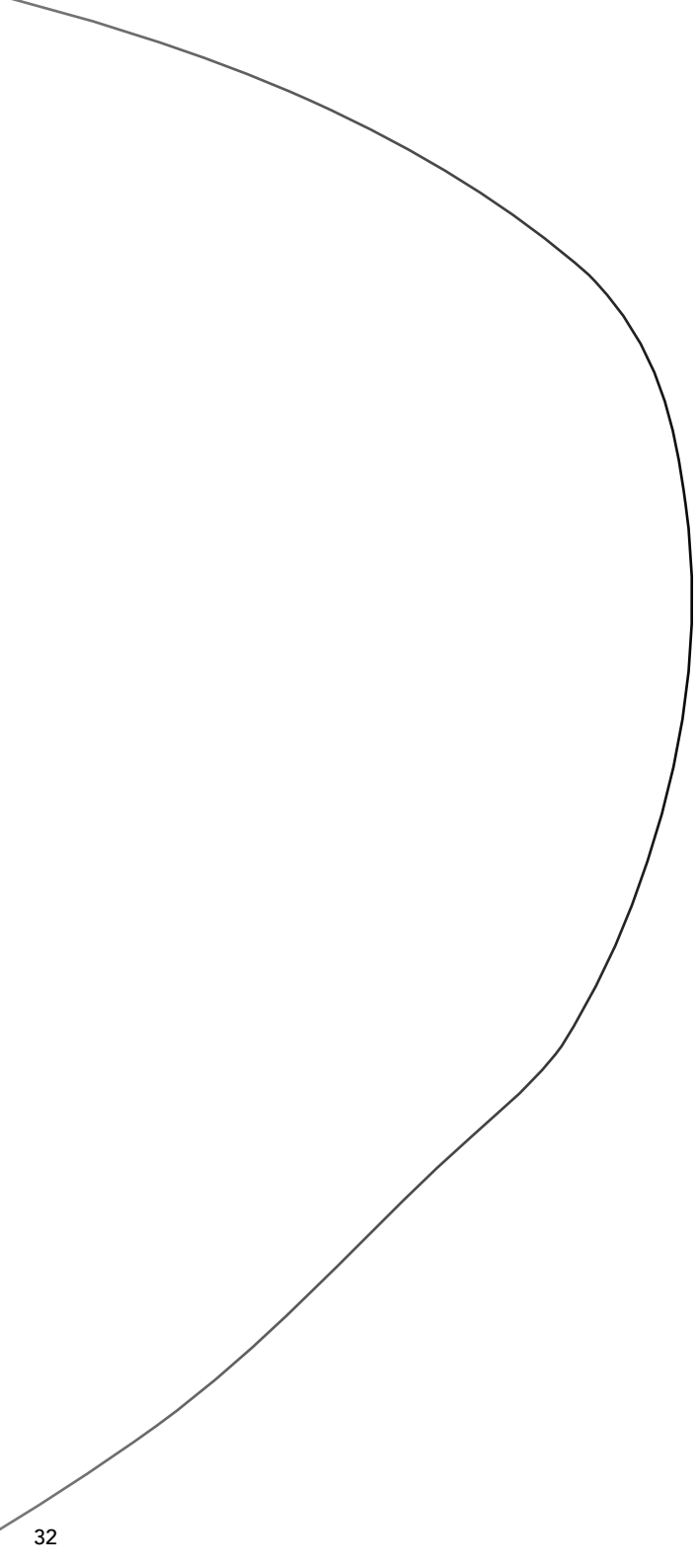
My first intervention with the site was carried out in March 2021. 'The Perimeter' is a first-person video following a neon pink builder's string line through the bush, mapping out and marking the future footprint, recording the start of the journey towards realising my family's new home — the first step in place-making-proposition to a cleared space.

Before starting the filming, I imagined a slow, methodical perimeter walk of a future place in time. Instead, what happened was me stumbling around the bush, tripping up, getting caught in bushes -- too close to the idea and with too much expectation; I asked if my partner could take over. His only instruction was to follow the string with the camera. And that's what he did, purposefully walking the messy footprint of our soon-to-be-realised house.

The string doubled over and backtracked on itself, binding tree to tree as markers of what would be removed. There was nothing linear or smooth about it. Instead, it became a marking of a territory, circling what would no longer be standing – a warning to the land of what was to come. And upon reflection, a metaphor for the next stage of the experience.



Figure 14. *Perimeter*, 2021, Video Stills.  
Video Link <https://youtu.be/eYgrzV889zs>



I showed this work at AUT's Visual Arts Talk Week.<sup>59</sup> At this point, the work had shifted from an idea of proposition to one of reflection; the site had been cleared at Kauri Road and was sitting in a state of dormancy. We waited for this envisioned future to start whilst going through the day-to-day motions.

I projected the video onto the wall through a horizontally placed 'balcony-like' pane of found glass. The glass was marked and scratched, giving a 'domestic foregrounding'.<sup>60</sup> I set a second pane of glass propped vertically on the back wall, capturing and reflecting the viewer and the bouncing light from the projection. The projection created three iterations of different clarity and sizes; on the glass, onto the wall behind and reflected the opposing wall.

I watched with interest how people interacted with the work and the space. Those who chose to enter the area created shadow and erasure in the projection. The bodies move in the room, re-enacting the human intervention on the land. Those that stayed on the periphery became the onlookers, reflected in the standing glass — unconsciously acting out the role of the neighbourhood, watching the changing landscape from the curbside.

The installation left me with much to consider in how I would go forward engaging an audience with the work.

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59 AUT Visual Arts Talk week is a group critique event that invites outside artists, curators, critics in to discuss the work of AUT students.

60 Term from AUT supervisor Kathy Holdsworth who was part of my critique group for the AUT Talk week.





Figure 16. *Perimeter-Projection*, 2021, AUT Talk Week Installation view



Figure 15. *Perimeter-Reflection*, 2021, AUT Talk Week Installation view

## Act Two – A Ritual Pause

The arduous excavation of the site commenced in October 2021 and lasted approximately six weeks. My partner left for work at the site each day while my daughters and I lived the monotony that lockdown life had become.<sup>61</sup> It was a point of feeling separated from the site; I felt like an onlooker every time I visited. This changed the moment the machinery left, and the foundation poles were placed in the ground.

The work by artists Amanda Fauteux and Miranda Bellamy, *Pinus Radiata*,<sup>62</sup> started me thinking about the past life of the pine timber that would form the bones of our home. *Pinus Radiata* is a ruthless coloniser yet a sustainable fast-growing building material.<sup>63</sup> Would these once-were-trees, the poles, frames, and rafters, recognise their kin in their new life as the bones of our home?



Figure 17. Miranda Bellamy & Amanda Fauteux, *pinus radiata*, 2021, Sculpture 6.2m x 1.5m.

<sup>61</sup> Auckland, Tāmaki Makaurau spent August – November 2021 between Level 3 & 4 lockdown. Schooling operated online.

<sup>62</sup> Miranda Bellamy and Amanda Fauteux, 'Miranda Bellamy & Amanda Fauteux - Blue Oyster Art Project Space', Gallery, Blue Oyster Gallery, 2021, <http://blueoyster.org.nz/exhibitions/miranda-bellamy-and-amanda-fauteux/>.

<sup>63</sup> Bridie Lonie, 'Becoming-Timber', May 2021, <http://blueoyster.org.nz/assets/Uploads/MABLtext.pdf>, 1.



Figure 18. *Piles of Pine at Kauri Rd*, 2021, Digital Photograph

In 'The Myth of Eternal Return', Mircea Eliade stated that foundation rituals stemmed from a belief that the house had to be animated; if it was to stand and endure, a construction needed life.<sup>64</sup> A foundation ceremony recognised that constructing a new building is an act of memory and a new beginning.<sup>65</sup> Our house would be built of 100 poles of pine. I want to acknowledge these once-were-trees as they would become what rooted our home to the earth.

I visited on a Thursday afternoon; the site was restful. Tāmaki Makaurau's lockdown status was finally easing, and my daughters could return to school part-time. It felt like the perfect moment to pause and give thanks, and there was a small window of a weekend to intervene.

Early Saturday morning, my daughters and I foraged for flowers on our street. Nasturtium, dandelions, buttercups, clover, Queen Anne's lace are in-dispersed with pickings from our garden – borage, spinach, geraniums, rosemary and honeysuckle. These were taken to the site in tin cans and jars collected from my neighbours and placed onto the foundation poles of the future house.

These sat quietly for the weekend, with us and the bush (and maybe the neighbours) as their only audience. It was a simple gesture yet a cathartic one – it timed with the end of lockdown, the end of the excavation, the end of the site desecration.

As earlier discussed, I chose to form ritual with flowers, mainly as they sat on the periphery of my day-to-day; the backyard and neighbourhood sidewalks — suburban weeds. Aotearoa artist Monique Redmond's work also engages 'Suburban Blooms', which she uses to activate quiet, repetitive social actions of gesture, gift and exchange. She is interested in the act of gesture, and how the gesture might instigate an event or propose an exchange.

<sup>64</sup> Mircea Eliade, 'The Myth of the Eternal Return', n.d., 21.

<sup>65</sup> Tracy Kidder, *House* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1999), 173.





These events of exchange ‘rely on a range of interested parties (passers-by, florists, customers, flower lovers, the public)’.<sup>66</sup>



Figure 20. Monique Redmond, *Driveby*, 2011, Digital Photograph.

My act, too, stemmed from a place of noticing, gesture and exchange, but with the timber poles and land itself.

I documented the act with photos and video. The resulting photographic images of the flowers show the black of the polythene, replicating the inky darkness of the surrounding bush, the barren site sitting as a backdrop to the high saturation of the sky, blue tarp, and flowers. I wanted to embrace a slight unease and reproduce the impenetrable nature of the native bush, the colonial gothic-ness and spiritual dis-location recognised throughout Aotearoa’s history of post-colonial literature and film as part of a settler narrative.

<sup>66</sup> Monique Redmond, ‘The Event within Temporary Practices and the Public Social’ (Melbourne, Deakin University, 2020), <https://dro.deakin.edu.au/eserv/DU:30148103/redmond-eventwith-in-2020.pdf>, 153-157.

Figure 19. *Foraging for Flowers*, 2021, Digital Photograph





Figure 21. *Flowers for the Poles 2021*,  
Digital Photograph, 1 of 3.



Figure 22. *A Rite of Foundation*, 2021, Digital Collage





Figure 23. *Flowers for the Poles 2021*,  
Digital Photograph, 2 of 3.



Figure 24. *Flowers for the Poles 2021*,  
Digital Photograph, 3 of 3.





Figure 25. *A Ritual Pause*, 2021, Installation View, Digital Photograph.





Figure 26. *An Offering-two ways*, 2021, Video Still  
Video link <https://youtu.be/YIJzIR-LxkU>





Figure 27. *A Ritual Pause*, 2021, Installation view.



## Act Three - *The Centre Piece*



Figure 28. *Webs*, 2022, Digital Photograph.

My second act with flowers occurred in February 2022. The floors and frames of the house were finally set in place, giving shape to the future living spaces.

In the first instance, I thought about recreating a collective of floral offerings, but as I spent time planning the intervention, I started to reflect on how in modern architecture, the kitchen is seen as a comfortable womb for the family, and how the home becomes configured around this communal space.<sup>67</sup> A kitchen table is a place of nourishment, gatherings, arguments, revelations, and late-night conversations, and a heavily loaded space of historical gendered expectation and performativity.<sup>68</sup>

I decided to work with just one floral arrangement; a 'Centre Piece'. In place of the imagined kitchen table, the centre of the home, the flowers would become an embodiment of space and an act of centring home.

I took a day to slowly link the flowers back to the frames of the house with my favourite building-site tool... neon pink string line. The pink string felt like tendrils pulling everything into place, starting at a human-placed centre and then reaching 'beyond'.<sup>69</sup> I was binding myself with the house; holding space, touching, forming connection.

Ahmed says that lines become the external tracing of an interior world.<sup>70</sup> I begin without an end, pause at a tangle, then add a few threads that first seem whimsical but turn out to be essential to the fabric.<sup>71</sup> Tracing our paths and acknowledging steps

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67 Shelton, (2014).

68 Ruth Thrush, 'The Kitchen as a Political Space', *Cherwell* (blog), 17 April 2020, <https://www.cherwell.org/2020/04/17/the-kitchen-as-a-political-space/>.

... [see above] "The kitchen has historically tied to the creation of an idealised kind of femininity, one that teaches women that domestic labour is a labour of love. The kitchen is a site of specifically gendered tension, a room that both symbolically and literally prevents women from leaving the world of the domestic."

69 María Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (Minneapolis, UNITED STATES: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aut/detail.action?docID=4745533.2>

70 Ahmed, *Queer*, 18.

71 Haraway *Staying*, 29.




Image removed due to copyright

Figure 29. John D. Schiff Installation view of First Papers of Surrealism exhibition, showing Marcel Duchamp's Twine 1942 Gelatin silver print. Image removed due to copyright

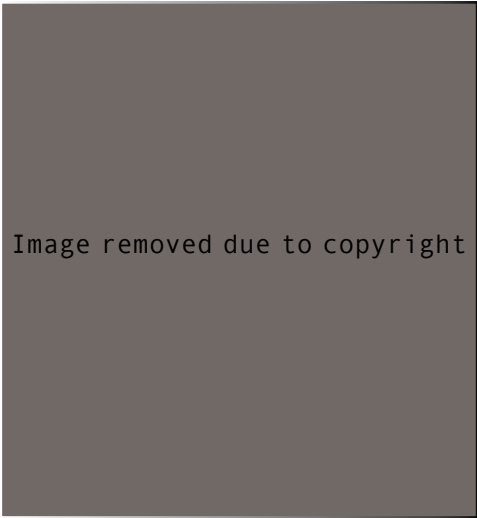


Image removed due to copyright

Figure 30. Louise Bourgeois *Spider (Cell)*, Steel, tapestry, wood, glass, fabric, rubber, silver, gold and bone. 1997.

in the processes – good and bad – hold us accountable to histories and endless possibilities, differently than if we had never formed kinships with the attachments of the more-than-human molecules.<sup>72</sup>

The weblike weaving and intersection suggest the stickiness between embodied subjects and objects, bodies, and places. The human body stretches out topographically.<sup>73</sup> It reminded me of my enmeshment with home and the feeling of being forever tethered to it (or that we are one in the same, inextricably linked); The mental load of mothering, domesticity and family life.<sup>74</sup>

The act echoed Duchamp's, 'A Mile of String' (1942), a territorialising and disrupting of the gallery space, and Louise Bourgeois', 'Spider (Cell)' (1997), a spider sculpture guarding a small room with its legs, inverting the relation between body and house by situating the female body as literally exceeding the limits imposed by the house or by domestic space in general.<sup>75</sup>

The intervention was left in place for a week, those working on site had to navigate the strings occupying the main living space. Their final construction task of the week was placing the roof rafters onto the house's frame. My work, 'Centre Piece' sat while the rafters were set above it. It was a monumental moment as the collaboration of timber assemblages recognised their final form.

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72 Haraway, *Staying*, 116.

73 Eva Hayward, 'Spider City Sex', *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 20, no. 3 (November 2010): 225–51, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0740770X.2010.529244>. 231.

74 Liz Dean, Brendan Churchill, and Leah Ruppanner, 'The Mental Load: Building a Deeper Theoretical Understanding of How Cognitive and Emotional Labor Overload Women and Mothers', *Community Work & Family*, 25 November 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2021.2002813>.

\_ [see above] A form of cognitive and emotional labour 'The Mental Load' involves making sure everyone is emotionally and physically catered to and includes the cognitive mapping out of family requirements, and a mothers' tendencies to retain a 'consciousness of' their child's needs whilst ensuring the household functions.

75 Jack Halberstam, 'Unbuilding Gender', *Places Journal*, 3 October 2018, <https://doi.org/10.22269/181003>. o



*Figure 31. Men At Work, 2022, Digital Photographs.*



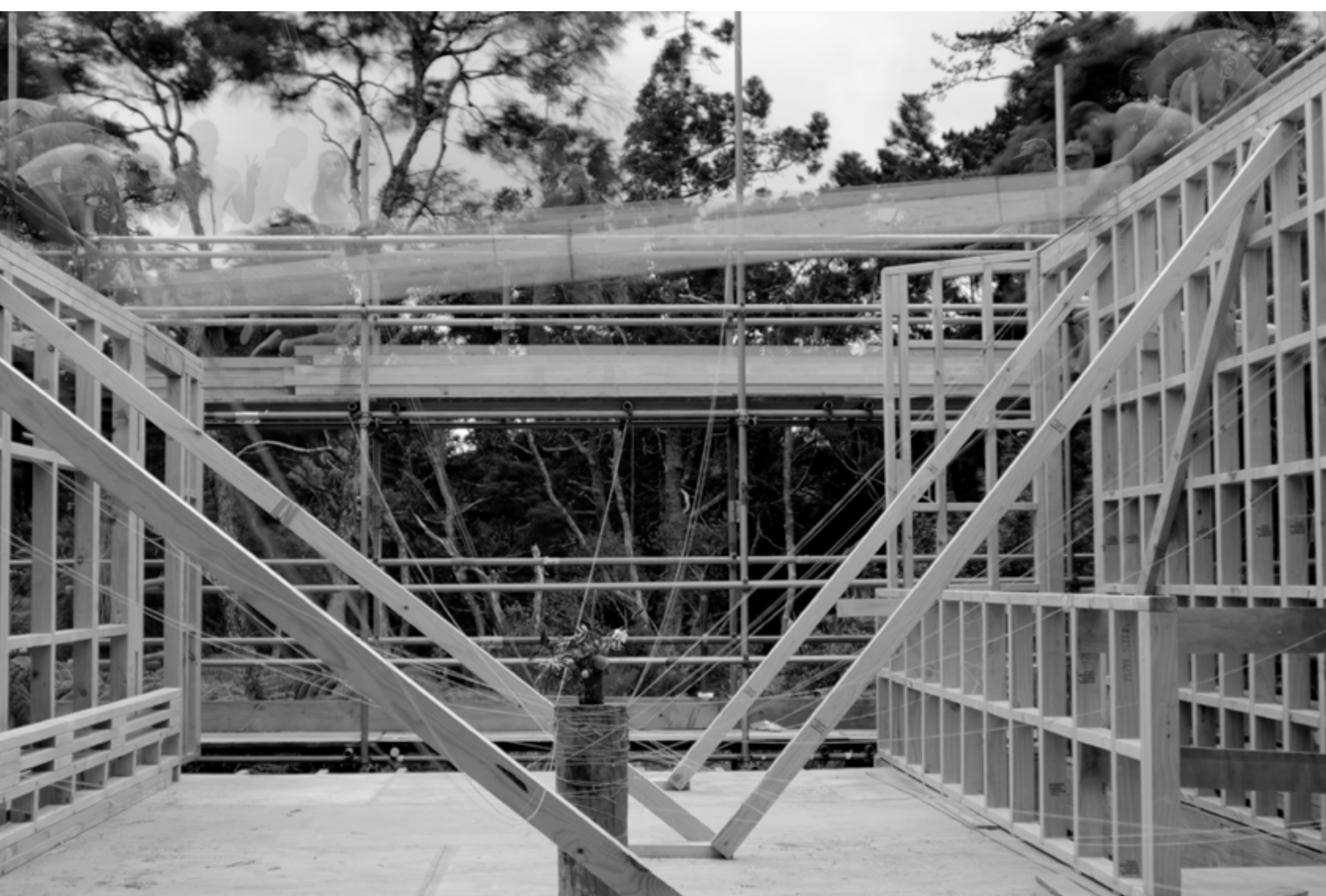


Figure 32. *The House Takes Form*, 2022, Digital Collage.











Figure 35. *The Centre Piece*, 2022, Installation View.



## Act Four -*Flowers to the Frames*

In March, the roof went on, and the framing was wrapped in weatherproof building paper. The house closed in, forming a skin and sealing the interior home environment – a shutting out of nature. This time floral arrangements were made with material scattered around the site; offcuts of pine, wire, pipes, bent nails, nuts, and bolts. My foraging for flowers extended further, from an empty section next to my parents' home (they live locally too). From my favourite Beach Haven coastal bushwalk, where one avid gardener was holding onto her slice of land by keenly planting flowers against the protected bush area.<sup>76</sup> I also gathered flowers from the berms along Kauri Road, recognising that we were slowly becoming part of the street.

The arrangements were temporarily tucked in amongst the closed-in frames of the house. This time I had to keep moving them as the house was active with builders, plumbers, and electricians, all navigating the wall cavities to install the hidden mechanisms of the house.



Figure 36. *Flowers onsite ready for arranging*, 2022, Digital Photograph.

76 This also has me thinking about how Suburban gardeners often battling it with indigenous bush, holding onto colonial notions of lawn and garden.



Figure 37. *Flowers for the Frames*, 2022, Installation View.



Figure 38. *Flowers for the Frames*, 2022, 1 of 5.





Figure 39. *Flowers for the Frames*, 2022, 2 of 5.



Figure 40. *Flowers for the Frames*, 2022, 3 of 5.

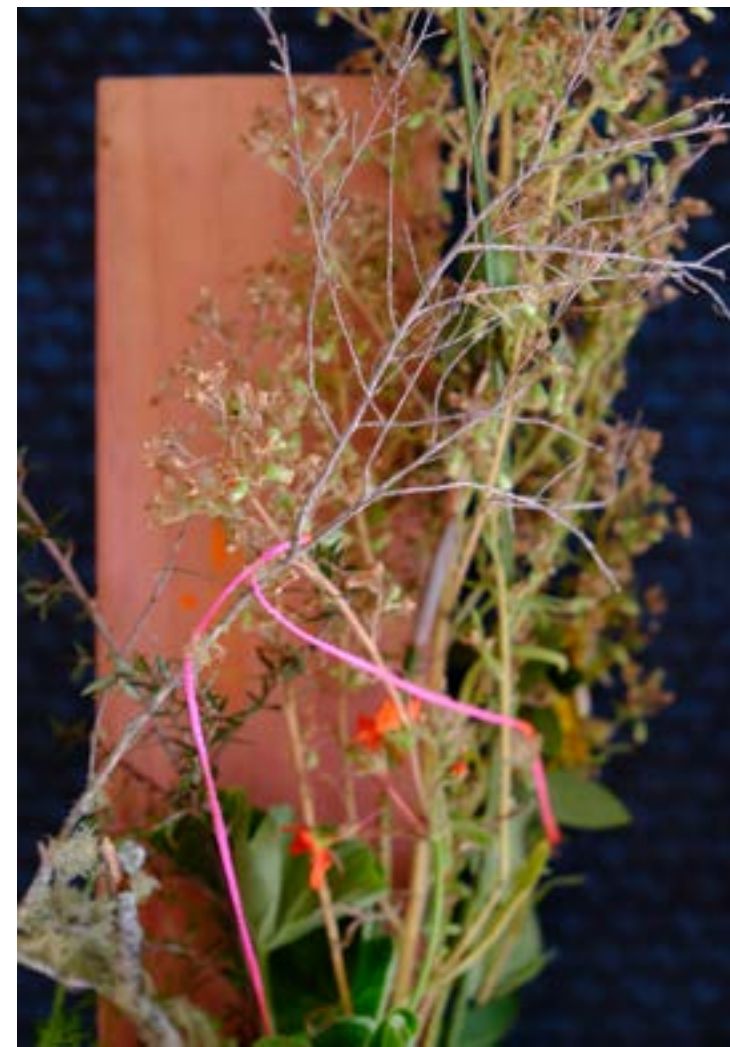


Figure 41. *Flowers for the Frames*, 2022, 4 of 5.





Figure 42. *Flowers for the Frames*, 2022, 5 of 5.

## Act Five - *Flowers to the Trees*

Along the front of the roof line, a makeshift scaffold was erected, becoming the high point of the house. I thought of the European tradition of ‘topping off’, a custom of attaching a tree to the house’s highest point during the building process. The ritual stems from the pagan notion that the frame is alive. ‘Having taken wood from the tree, builders brought the tree back to the wood’.<sup>77</sup>

I bound flowers with fallen wood from surrounding trees. My partner and his apprentice set them out along the roofline, framed by the treetops and the sky. My own ‘topping off’ ceremony – the tree became the house, and in ritual, the house could become the tree.<sup>78</sup>

The building team had become eager participants. In the foundation act, when I left some test flower arrangements onsite, my partner told me how his apprentice diligently spent the afternoon picking up flowers that had fallen off the poles, placing them gently back in place. On making an accessway for a large delivery, one team member built a bridge to the house and added some leftover dried flower arrangements to the entrance. They would take photos and videos of the installations, ask questions and became willing participants in the art project coinciding with their work environment.

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77 Kidder, *House*, 173.

78 Kidder, *House*, 173.





Figure 43. Adam and his apprentice place flowers along the roof, 2022.



Figure 44. *Flowers to the Sky*, 2022, Installation View.





Figure 45. *One of the builders adds flowers to his bridge access,* 2022, Digital Photograph.



## Act Six – *Flowers for a Future Archive*

As May arrived and we waited for gib wall lining, I took the opportunity to leave something in the cavities of the walls – as a form of archive. I decided on photographic images to stand in for the flowers themselves. Photographs of past floral gestures and digital collages created from active moments onsite were folded and placed inside archival plastic sleeves, which I then bound with the pink string line. Binding these images to the house was not only an act of binding our journey to the house but also a gift to future occupants, in itself a sad premonition that decay and wear will take over at some point, and the walls would need to be removed, or the house would one day no longer stand.

Again I thought of Monique Redmond's work 'A Floral Gesture', a short run of risograph prints left in public locations like florists and libraries, invites passers-by 'to take a flower'. Redmond folds her documentation into a form of gesture, takeaway gifts that stand in for the gifting of flowers actual flowers.<sup>79</sup>



Figure 46. Monique Redmond, *A Floral Gesture*, 2019, Risograph Prints.

These onsite acts live on only in their documentation and are buried under the wall linings. These images are my gifts to the house and to an unknown future person in time. As the dwelling becomes overlayed with domestic life, the act of habitation takes over.



Figure 47. *A Future Archive*, 2022, Installation View





Figure 48. *A Future Archive*, 2022,  
Installation View, Digital Photograph.





Figure 49. *A Future Archive*, 2022, Installation View, Digital Photograph.





Figure 50. *A Future Archive*, 2022, Installation View,  
Digital Photograph.

## Act Seven - *An Iteration of Site*

The following section discusses an archive of acts and a propositional gallery installation plan to consider how documentation of onsite acts can be transferred into the gallery space.

An installation practice onsite and in the gallery holds and marks space. Like the 'white cube' of the gallery, a building site is empty, devoid of the everyday, a cleared space to highlight only that which is operational and temporarily in the space. Both sites offer the potential for intervention.<sup>80</sup> An empty, freshly painted house interior sits waiting for domesticity to arrive. The white wall of the gallery counters the domestic, instead acting as a public transient space that always operates 'under construction' in its topology.

In my proposed installation, I have selected two video works. These videos will be projected in large 1:1 scale onto the walls of the gallery, expanding the gallery space and extending through the picture plane.

The videos act as a holding space for the future home — windows, which one can stare at, as the view. It is not merely an aperture toward an exterior. It defines many opposite sets of spaces: the exterior and the interior, the private and the public, domestic and social, family and community.

The tarpaulin, both cocooning and protecting the house, has essentially blinded the window, allowing a counterfeit 'virtual' spectacle to appear.<sup>81</sup> The tarpaulin acts like a diaphragm or the house's skin, an intersection of the more than human, shifting and moving in its topology. The slow movement gives a sense of breath, rest, and sharing of the exhale and inhale — a topological intimacy in a public space.

The frond of the nikau crosses the threshold of the pane-less window space and pre-

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80 Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, Expanded ed (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

81 Teyssot and Davidson, *A Topology*, 252.





Figure 51. *The House Breathed*, 2022, Video Still  
Video Link <https://youtu.be/oTPwlpxi7w>



Figure 52. *Transference*, 2022, Video Still.  
Video Link <https://youtu.be/FCyFzZxLPbI>





empts a sealing of the house from the environment.

This also creates a doubling at the intersection of nature and the domestic space. In Georges Teyssot's 'Topology of Everyday Constellations' chapter on 'Windows and Screens' he describes how a window without glass panes leaves just an aperture, bay, or gap in the wall that lets one look through.<sup>82</sup> The opening functions as an apparatus of vision — as an eye. And if the window can be an 'eye', the eye is then a window, an aperture, a lens to look through.<sup>83</sup>

Along with the large-scale video works discussed above, I propose to install object, actual wheelbarrows containing a sampling of the suburban weeds left to bloom around the construction perimeter of Kauri Road. Television monitors will be placed in the wheelbarrows amongst the flora, playing a selection of videos from the site. I draw comparison to Nam Jun Paik's immersive installation 'TV Garden'(1974), an uncanny fusion of the natural and the technological, where he fills a whole space with live plants and video monitors.<sup>84</sup>

In discussing the work of Nam Jun Paik, art historian and curator John G. Hanhardt says the concept of the moving temporal image is a crucial modality through which artists articulate new forms and strategies of image-making; video art imitates nature, not in its appearance or mass, but in its intimate "time-structure".<sup>85</sup>

To extend on Hanhardt's concept, I enjoy using static video (or moving stills) to capture minor, seemingly insignificant occurrences that become affect-laden and allegoric in a public installation. On a large scale, this creates an immersive experience for the viewer.

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82 Teyssot and Davidson, *A Topology*, 252.

83 Teyssot and Davidson, *A Topology*, 254

84 Nam June Paik, *TV Garden*, 1974, Color video, with sound, 29 min., with minimum of 30 television sets, and live plants, Variable, 1974, <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/9537>.

85 John Hanhardt, 'NAM JUNE PAIK', NAM JUNE PAIK, accessed 26 May 2022, <https://www.paikstudios.com>.

Image removed due to copyright

Figure 54. Nam June Paik. *TV Garden*, 1974, Installation View.



Image removed due to copyright

Figure 55. Doug Aitken, *Erasure*, 1999, Installation view.

A good example is Doug Aitken's video installation 'Erasure' (1998),<sup>86</sup> which comprises seven wall-sized projections forming an affect-laden, temporal holding space for the viewer to meander through.<sup>87</sup>

Moving to the location of the gallery offers an opportunity to 'arrive back to the art space', allowing breathing room away from the house, where at times, I have struggled to separate the art project and the life project. The gallery enables a public intimacy and exposure of private space, a sharing beyond the homesite.

Bringing the work to St Paul Gallery Three replicates a long rectangular living space of a domestic house. It becomes a holding space for Kauri Road by suspending the tension, proximity and proposition that have operated on site. The gallery affords its own sense of place-making as a kind of memorial, forming a new type of dwelling in the installation. This, too, becomes a way of 'staying with the trouble' as the 'acts of building home' migrate into public spaces and afford new trajectories to engage the archive of works in new settings and conversations.

Installation creates a place to dwell and a place to stay. The site of the gallery becomes folded into the act and continues the durational aspects of the work — iterations of the work transition into the future, keeping the documentation alive. Thus, the documentation too becomes an act.

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86 Doug Aitken, *Eraser*, 1998, Video installation with seven channels of video (color, sound), seven projections, three-room architectural environment 15:08 minutes/loop, Variable, 1998, <https://www.dougaitkenworkshop.com/selected-works/eraser>. Footage of a trek the artist undertook on the island of Montserrat in the West Indies made a year after an eruption of the Soufriere Hills volcano displaced most of the island's residents making large parts of it uninhabitable.

87 Joachim Jäger et al., eds., *Beyond Cinema: The Art of Projection: Films, Videos and Installations from 1963 to 2005: Works from the Friedrich Christian Flick Collection Im Hamburger Bahnhof, from the Kramlich Collection and Others: Curated by Stan Douglas* (Ostfildern : [London: Hatje Cantz ; Art Books International, distributor], 2006), 44.



Figure 56. *Doors and Walls*, 2022, Digital Photograph.

## An End & A Beginning

From the first steps of tracing the periphery, the placing of flowers, the disruption with string lines, to the sealing of images into the walls, the home has been shaped around and continually flipped through a series of feminist acts that became holding spaces for the broader fundamentals of house and home.

Slowing down, pausing, and acting with reciprocity allowed a noticing of, an enmeshment with, the site through documentation and installation practice.

Intervening at the point of construction has meant sharing these acts with a building community previously may not have paid this kind of attention, potentially leading them to altered interaction with future projects.

The home space is one of temporality, in which people move and shift between different spaces through different times, and at some point, the building may no longer withstand and be cleared for something new. In his book 'Architecture Of Happiness', Alan De Botton foresees the home's decline operating from the moment a house is completed. It already alludes to a sense of pre-emptive sadness as the decay impatiently waits to set in; when will the first marks of lived-in-ness appear? Marks on the walls? Stains on the carpets?<sup>88</sup> Thus the house of residence is always under construction and maintenance, if not, it then slowly slides towards a state of disrepair.

The image of the home remains an integral part of cultural and emotional economies.<sup>89</sup> Yet, we seem divided between an urge to override our senses and numb ourselves to our setting and a contradictory impulse to acknowledge how our identities are intertwined with our dwellings.<sup>90</sup> Dwelling is an ongoing effort to find a place in the world and that/ is never fully achieved.<sup>91</sup>

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88 Alain De Botton, *The Architecture of Happiness* (London ; New York: Hamish Hamilton an imprint of Penguin Books, 2006). 12

89 Ariel Handel, 'What's in a Home? Toward a Critical Theory of Housing/Dwelling', *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* 37, no. 6 (September 2019): 1045–62, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2399654418819104>. 7.

90 De Botton *Architecture*, 10.

91 Handel "Home?", 7.





Figure 57. *A House Half Built*, 2022, Digital Collage.

Moving to Kauri Road holds an ongoing shift in responsibility. How can I continue acts of care and ritual in my new residence? How will I ‘stay with the trouble’? ‘How will I dwell well’? And as the acts move from the site of the build to the site of the gallery, it opens a new set of questions. How do I preserve these acts outside of Kauri Road?

In ‘staying with the trouble’ I can hold space for conversations that sit in residence; political aspects, gender roles, and the hangover of colonisation embedded in Aotearoa’s settler mentalities. ‘Staying with the trouble’ sticks with both Ahmed’s theory of ‘happy objects’ and how the home site still operates around a view of heteronormativity, property, and propriety, and Lauren Berlant’s notion of ‘the good life’ where one imagines a better point in time whilst wilfully ignoring the everyday ecological, social, and political crises.<sup>92</sup>

At the time of writing, Kauri Road is still a propositional residence. We are closing in on the moment that ‘there becomes here’. Though I never saw the project ending with a ‘completed’ house, I now see this idea of a finished house differently. I see 13 Kauri Road in a constant state of becoming, an active space of building and dwelling, because a home is never really complete and we, as humans are never fully in the world, thus making dwelling a never-ending movement.<sup>93</sup>

The temporal structures of past, present, and future shape our relationships with place, and this project has acted in a way that has acknowledged these structures as integral to the construction of a home. The acts and rituals have served to form an intimacy with the house, in a way that I would not have experienced otherwise. I can trace its corners, thresholds, and in-between spaces without yet residing there, affirming what is truly special about truly knowing the topology of one’s home.

92 Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 31.

93 Handel, “Home?”, 4.

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ter%20D%20Overlays/1.%20Natural%20Resources/D9%20Significant%20Ecological%20Areas%20Overlay.pdf.

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## Exhibition Documentation



As proposed, the exhibition of works was held in St Paul Street Gallery 3 and closely followed the outlined plan.

Two video works - '[The House Breathed](#)' and '[Transference](#)' - were projected at each end of the gallery. 'The House Breathed' filled the entire gallery wall, creating an extended space beyond the confines of the wall.

['The Guests Are Almost Here'](#), a wheelbarrow filled with foraged suburban weeds surrounding the video work 'Perimeter', looping on a 24-inch monitor. The weeds were gathered from the empty section next to my parent's home. This work provided the only audio to the exhibition space, being a repetitive scrambling through the bush, which cut off intermittently.

A final act was carried out after the initial submission of this exegesis; The poem 'A Making of a Home' was etched using a Dremel into the stairs at Kauri Road. A laborious task carried out over three days, to be eventually hidden by the flooring overlay. This would be the final act before our residence. The resulting work was photographed and reproduced at a 1:1 scale, printed onto vinyl, and hung on the gallery wall as part of the exhibition.

The exhibition was held over four days in August 2022. SPSG3 emanated an empty domestic interior, where the visitors to the gallery site unknowingly acted out the role of Kauri Road's human participants, casting shadows and movement within the works themselves. Some watched, unaware of their role in the installation; others were active participants, experimenting with their bodies in the projections.

The showing of the work fell at a particularly poignant and pivotal moment in time. As a family, we had temporarily moved to my parent's house, which sits at a geographical midpoint between our family home of the last 15 years and the incomplete house at Kauri Road. The site that had been 'Home' and the site at Kauri Road sat empty and silent whilst we navigated the transition between the two. The installation came to echo this point of exchange.

Figure 58. Exhibition at St Paul St Gallery Three 2022



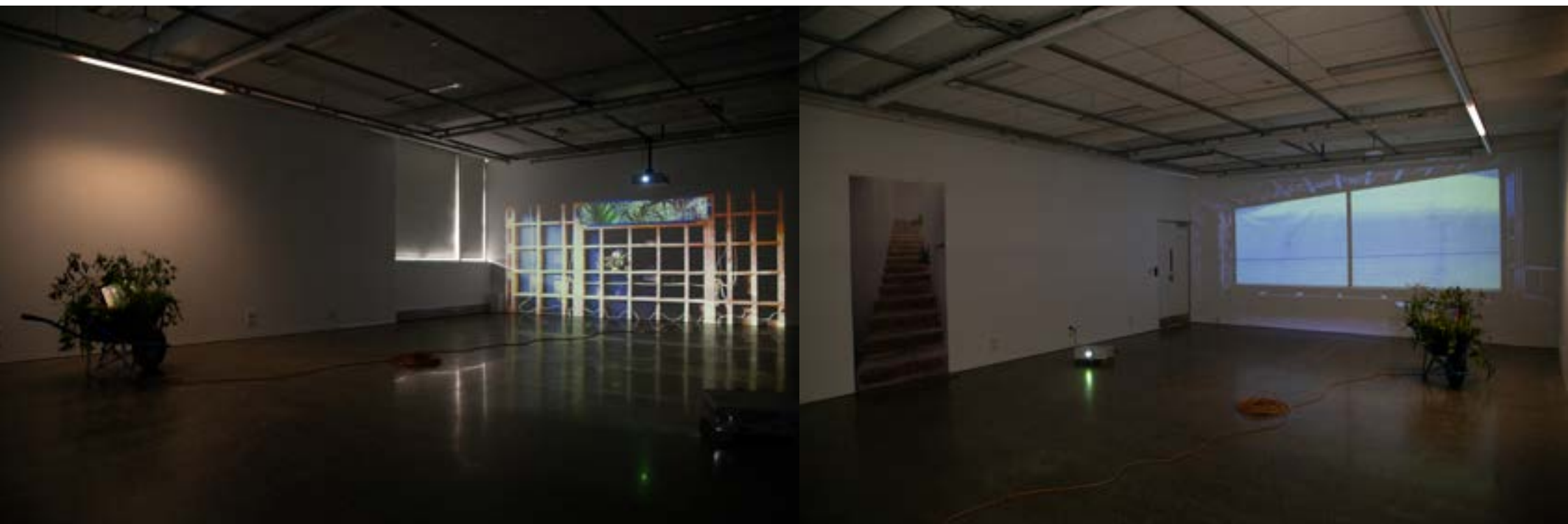


Figure 59. *Exhibition at St Paul St Gallery Three 2022.*  
Images by Emily Parr



Figure 60. *Exhibition at St Paul St Gallery Three 2022*



Figure 61. *Exhibition at St Paul St Gallery Three 2022*







Figure 64. *'The Making of a Home'* 2022  
PVC Vinyl Banner 1250 x 2700m



Figure 65. *Exhibition at St Paul St  
Gallery Three 2022*  
Image by Emily Parr





Figure 66. *The Guests are Almost Here*, 2022.  
Looped Video, Suburban Weeds, Wheelbarrow, Orange Worksite  
Extension Chord. Video Link <https://youtu.be/H6EkHt1OOtg>



*Figure 67. Audience Participation, Exhibition at St Paul St Gallery Three 2022*



## An Epilogue

We moved into 13 Kauri Road on the 20th of August 2022 – two weeks after completing this Master's project. We ran lights off car batteries for the first month and carted water inside from a makeshift outdoor tap. Since then, we have slowly continued to add the modern amenities generally taken for granted, especially in suburbia. Whilst the house is still very much 'under construction,' it continues to become less of a building site and more of a functioning home.

As we live our day-to-day at Kauri road. It continues to evolve and form around us, and as we settle into our new dwelling place, layering our stories and memories, we also become part of its topology.



Figure 68. *Indoor Outdoor Flow*, 2022, Digital Photograph.