

I have had three experiences in the last year that have changed the way I experience cars.

1) The daily grind. Commuting between the inner city suburbs and Manukau, or Titirangi and Manukau, or Titirangi and Parnell. Never before had I driven so much, with such routine. Driving became a fixture of my everyday, a mundane reality that required careful planning to make comfortable. I would depart each morning with a hot creamy coffee, a piece of peanut butter toast balanced on the lid of my keep cup. Despite the lid, my cup holder has espresso-brown residue in and around it, and despite my best efforts to remove it, my passenger seat remains marred by a dark spherical stain, the greasy shadow of a particularly good pie. As these grisly leavings reveal, I was forced to carry out all manner of my daily activities while waiting in traffic.

2) Visiting LA, the so-called City of Angels that is really a city built for cars. Never have I felt more exposed as a pedestrian, nor more stunned by the audacity of men behind wheels. Equally, never has driving been more thrilling – and I was just a passenger. A recurring theme of the trip was just how accurately Hollywood directors had captured the anarchy of driving in LA, where every cruise down the freeway really does feel as though it could be your last.

3) The third experience took place just last night, when I finally watched the original *Fast & Furious* film. Despite their professed love for cars, Vin Diesel and company seem to treat them as infinitely disposable objects. This makes sense for a man who lives his life “a quarter mile at a time” – he loves cars not for who they are individually, but for the experiences any powerfully built car can provide, for the speed and ferocity he can achieve on four wheels.

*Poppy* represents all of these experiences as she critiques them. Time spent in a car is both a pain and a convenience. Car ownership offers freedom while simultaneously tying us down, bleeding us with maintenance, insurance, parking fees and fines. Having a car may rescue us from the isolation of suburban or rural living, but it also shields us from other bodies, allows us to travel between scenes in a private bubble – albeit one made vulnerable in a different way by all the other fragile bubbles speeding around it.

For Karl, his car performed multiple roles, as I suppose cars do for all of us. She – and I’m told she was always a she – not only came with him but transported him between homes, from Matamata to Auckland to Hamilton and all the journeys in between. She never crashed, but was crashed into many times. She did break down, more than once, but always in the right place at the right time, all happy kismet attributed to her. A few years ago, she even became the site of a one-night exhibition, with artworks made in her honour, sausages cooked over a barbecue in an art gallery carpark to feed her admirers. When the night was over, the artworks she held were incorporated into her body, becoming just another part of her, fading in the sun to become just a backdrop to a commute.

Am I writing a eulogy for a car? If so, I am struggling to do *Poppy* justice, because to me, she was just a car, albeit one my mate was weirdly enamoured of. Despite her aesthetic quirks (a single white door, a studded steering wheel) and her owner’s incessant posting of her picture online, I wouldn’t recognise her in a parking lot – I can barely recognise my own car amidst the ocean of hatchbacks in the St Lukes carpark. For me, a car is just an object, not infinitely disposable, but certainly interchangeable. It’s a safe, boring place to spill coffee on my clothes and chuckle at a podcast while I wait to get on the motorway, or it’s a scary place where knuckles turn white on the steering wheel as we careen down the 110. I don’t love cars; I am simply grateful for the way they take me from A to B.

*Poppy* is not an exhibition about cars. It's an exhibition about a specific car – but it's also about Karl. It's an exhibition that seems to pose the question, is it okay to be sentimental about a car? But instead of an answer, there is just Karl.

*And here she lies, her final exhibition. Instead of artworks becoming a part of her, she has been transformed into a series of new objects, honoured in a new way, cherished always.*

Lucinda Bennett