

Last Saturday, Ben's mum told me that she had been checking out caravans on TradeMe – not your average cheap-deal hunting, but \$100,000 high-end caravans, sneaking a peek into the otherwise unseen interiors of these portable havens. She said her realistic range was really between a few grand but it didn't hurt to see what was on offer if you won Lotto. Anyway, it got me thinking about this Disney cartoon I used to watch over and over again when I was a kid with Mickey and Donald and Goofy where their house cleverly morphs itself into a caravan, and along with it, the accompanying scenery folds inwards like a Chinese fan. What ensues in the trip along a winding mountain road is a perfect play of slapstick nonsynchronicity, exposed to the wonders and perils of a nomadic lifestyle – the 1938 short exploited the comic potential of domestic automated technology well before Jacque Tati's *Mon Oncle* (1958). Everything about this cartoon is so great; that the three protagonists were male, as was the case in most Disney classics, never bothered myself or my sisters. We knew who we were, self-assigned Mickey, Donald, and Goofy – no one aspired to Minnie-ness, that much was clear. This was how we expected to live as adults, forever on brilliant adventures, and of course, without serious consequence. After all the series of mishaps, the near-collisions, the tearful prayers, in the end the caravan would, miraculously, fortuitously, find its way to link right back to the tow-bar of Goofy's vehicle; restoring peace to momentary chaos.

At some point in our caravan conversation, I asked Ben's mum, Diane, if her car had a tow-bar for her dream caravan. Having a tow-bar was something I imagined would increase your levels of self-sufficiency tenfold – there was pretty much nothing you couldn't do if you had a tow-bar affixed to the back of your vehicle. They are never pleasant journeys when you're sweating in your friend's car, which has been weighed down to the ground with *your* glad-wrapped trailer load; causing the bottom of the vehicle to scrape the gravel all along the motorway back to Auckland. The sensation is akin to punching your friend in the face for over-extending their generosity. If you were resented, you had no one to blame. And if you threw up, you'd only soil your clothes and make it worse.

Diane said she didn't have a tow-bar and going back and forth in a caravan didn't make much sense. She would instead park the caravan at the campgrounds, which you could do for as little as \$2.00 a day – which wasn't bad if you thought about it. But what if someone broke in and peed all over the place, and then it would just sit there while the smell of pee embedded itself into the interiors of your dream caravan for eternity. Or cats even. And with cats, you're never going to win that battle. What you needed was a concrete bunker that would keep out the cats or drunken youths or woodland animals. A shelter to house your shelter, but even in a bunker, you could still expect mould, weeds, the fungus invasive and intelligent enough to thrive under your thumbnail –there are just too many forces of nature to contend with; your shelter could never be assuredly safe.

I was watching the E! Channel feature on the richest TV stars – what they considered to be the prime indicator of Jerry Seinfeld's wealth was his garage on West 83rd Street in Manhattan. The townhouse

property houses five of his Porsches, a mini-bachelor pad behind an unassuming, if strange, windowless brick façade. I imagine this is where Jerry and his buddies would have a beer, play pool, pausing occasionally to admire the shiny exterior of the current Porsche in ultimate place of pride, gleaming against the white terrazzo floors. Jerry and co. would stand transfixed, briefly, before resuming their game and witty banter.

Garages have always seemed like an especially foreign concept to me; it stems in part from having grown up someplace too hot to worry about your car crapping out in winter.

I was thinking, somewhat implausibly, if this might also have to do with why Pacific families commonly converted their garages into sleepouts and living spaces, basically anything other than an exclusive shelter for a vehicle. If, in a way, we couldn't justify the function hence the seeming extravagance – but also if our cultures, were simply not as connected to the legacy of cars historically having been highly-prized possessions, deserving of their own shelter. So, maybe they just thought that the garage was *silly*, or maybe, more likely, they needed to house their extended family. To borrow from Louise Menzies' title of her exhibition at Enjoy, *Shelter or Marquee* (2007), the question may be ideological when posed in a gallery; but in a garage, or at least between Jerry Seinfeld's garage and the converted garage, the distinction between the two seems less ideological, more determined by economic circumstance. The question is really, well, what can you afford? Nobody chooses to sleep in uninsulated garages or damp caravans unless you are a drunken youth, a woodland animal, a colony of mould, or a tangle of weeds. And whilst the whole world, the whole universe for that matter, may be depressingly defined by this contingency- *Shelter or Marquee*, suggests to me, that it is also ultimately up to us to carve ourselves up a shelter within or without it.

Kah Bee Chow