Chapter One

A Woman's Fate ?

An Introduction

I am pregnant with certain deaths
of women who dreamed that the lover
would strike like lightning and throw
them over the saddle and carry them off.
It was the ambulance that came.

They Inhabit Me
by Marge Piercy
from *My Mother's Body*, 1985

This thesis is about re/membering. I have used a feminist biographical research method to explore women's experiences of discourses and storylines that shape subjectivity. Dominant discourses mediate between the self and the social world an individual inhabits, instilling subjectivity with a sense of gender identity and class. Actual flesh and desiring bodies are the places where these negotiations occur. Here on the printed pages, women's lives take shape in the text through stories told and retold, in anticipation that life experiences, effectively silenced or elided by dominant narratives, might be revealed. Folded within is the quest to imagine a woman's place beyond the determination of discourses and practices hinged to woman as a fate of gender. The thesis is framed by fragments of women's life stories obtained from a biographical project consisting of two series of community workshops that are the heart of this research.

The contemporary social environment in Australia in 2005 is represented by a deceptively egalitarian and tolerant image of social differences and gender equity. Yet, I recall Adrienne Rich's words in *Of Woman Born,* that it is dangerous for women to tell our daughters they can be anything they want to be, without speaking honestly about the difficulties they might encounter (Rich 1985:248). While possibilities available to Australian women are undoubtedly greater in 2005 than when Rich wrote in 1976, social dynamics continue to be underpinned by persistent patriarchal values and practices that are recreated by dominant discourses. Identifying these resistant practices remains as challenging, dangerous, and necessary, as Rich explained it in 1976:

> It is one thing to adjure a daughter, along Victorian lines, that her lot is to "suffer and be still", that woman's fate is determined. It is wholly something else to acquaint her honestly with the jeopardy all women live under patriarchy, to let her know by word and deed that she has her mother's support, and moreover, that while it *can* be dangerous to move, to speak, to act, each time she suffers rape - physical or psychic - in silence, she is putting another stitch in her own shroud. (1985:248)

I am concerned about the apparent complicity that Rich is alluding to when women do not speak about violations or difficulties they experience, and pass on untenable dreams in their silences. Indeed, my interest in doing this research stems from the numerous occasions when women have told me stories about life experiences they have rarely, or even never spoken about before.

Claiming this thesis as a place for women to speak life stories, and to speak my own, is an act of subversive desire to reaffirm that the personal is political. When Jocelyn Scutt wrote *The*

Sexual Gerrymander in 1994 she said there was a need 'to see that the private lives of citizens are part of the public world, of the standards set in the public world and the events that occur "out there"' (1994:268). No less today than in 1994, there is a 'need to remember that what happens to each of us in our private lives, directly affects and is affected by what happens to all of us in the public sphere' (Scutt 1994:268). Claiming this thesis to tell women's stories is also an opportunity to reconceive and celebrate women's lives, because taking the opportunity for women to speak about their lives is not only dangerous, as Rich suggests above, it can also be the 'gift of language' that has the potential to re-image self outside of paralysing stereotypes (Grosz 1989 cited in Bartlett 1998:3). This is a call for 'an active subject-subject relation between women' (Grosz quoted in Bartlett 1998:3).

Women have always told stories. Through conversations and gossip, in the telling and retelling of myths and fairytales, in the passing of traditions orally, or sharing family history, information has been handed between women. The resilience of information passed this way is apparent in recurring themes and persistent reinterpretation of folklore consistent with dominant cultural values. Women's informal networks that were once a significant aspect of everyday life for passing information and learning have fallen into disrepute with increasingly regulated education and busy lives. As specialised knowledges proliferate, heuristic learning and the sharing of personal stories are devalued as anecdotal. Phallogocentric knowledge is established in a scientific approach to learning that obscures its inherent reliance on narrative (Game and Metcalfe 1996:84), in spite of storytelling having been the primary mode of teaching, entertainment and sharing since ancient times (Levy & Murphy 2001:vii). Women's everyday experience is lost as a source of knowing in this approach. Elizabeth Grosz (1995:123) argues that the devaluing of women's experiences contributes to 'the containment of women in men's conceptual universe' through the privileging of theory. Grosz (1995:123) explains that theory as it is now understood constitutes a refusal to acknowledge other ways of reasoning. Framing this thesis with life stories, family stories and tales of legendary women is an attempt to demonstrate how women's experiences of the everyday are a rich source of knowing with potential to contribute to social research.

In my research and thesis making, the telling and writing of stories is a method of inquiry in itself, a method of knowing (Richardson 2000:923). Anne Game and Andrew Metcalfe (1996:65) also argue that storytelling is an accepted method of research for sociologists, who like historians *are* storytellers but 'tell stories as if they weren't storytellers'. The problem for sociologists and historians, according to Game and Metcalfe, is the fear that 'storytelling were

a less rigorous and honest pursuit than theirs' (1996:65). Stories are considered unreliable. Game and Metcalfe (1996:82-85) argue that the telling and retelling of stories mimics a quest for order that is evident in ceremony, ritual and celebration as well as in the conventions of sociology, anthropology and history. They suggest that the quest for order generates a separation of the sacred and the profane that is maintained by the rituals and methods of these disciplines and religious practices alike (Game & Metcalfe 1996:84). Storytelling can reveal the silences and erasures that protect 'order' by acknowledging that discourses are *storylines*. I have used stories in this thesis as both a method of eliciting data and also as a way of re/presenting it. Storytelling challenges 'philosophical models and frameworks that depend on the resources and characteristics of a femininity disinvested of its connections with the female, and especially the maternal' (Grosz 1995:123). Stretching generic bounds by using self-reflexive, and creative storytelling might also resist what Liz Grosz (1995:123) refers to as the en/closure in hegemonic academic discourses and men's conceptual universe. My approach is informed by feminist poststructuralism that sees subjectivity produced discursively, through power relationships, and language informed by embodied experiences of social structures (Weedon 1997:19). The poststructuralist concern with 'the plurality of language and the impossibility of fixing meaning once and for all' (Weedon 1997:82) motivates my use of the s/lash to signal the complexity of meanings inherent in words on these pages.

I conceived of a series of *Lifestory Workshops For Women* as a way of collecting stories for the biographical research project. The Workshops were an adaptation of memory work and its derivative collective biography, which are storytelling methods and an appropriate means of data collection and research methodology. I had participated in a weeklong collective biography workshop arranged and facilitated by Professor Bronwyn Davies on Magnetic Island, prior to the Lifestory Workshops. During that week I had experienced the unfurling of stories tucked away in memory, and the work of the process in reshaping notions of authority. I hoped to minimise the hierarchical separation between myself, as researcher, and the participants in the Workshops, and to foster a warm and friendly environment conducive to the sharing of life stories. Jenny Onyx and Jennie Small (2001:773) assert that collective biography has the potential to 'break down the barriers between the subject and the object of research,' and this aspect appealed to me.

Bronwyn Davies uses a four phase approach to collective biography that extends earlier work by Frigga Haug (1987) and is clearly summarised by Jenny Onyx and Jennie Small (2001:779). The phases are not a strict blueprint but provide a framework of basic tenets that

can be adapted to different kinds of research projects (Onyx & Small 2001:778). Briefly, the group chooses a topic and discusses it between them in the first phase, which is conversational, drawing on everyday knowledge and personal stories. These stories generally emerge from the participants' own memories. Onyx and Small (2001:779) call this *talking story,* and they note that the stories that emerge from the talk often take the participants by surprise. The second phase involves writing up the personal stories that emerge in the discussion (Onyx & Small 2001:777). The third phase is the reading of written stories followed by further discussion. Onyx and Small (2001:777) outline a series of approaches to guide critique of the stories in the group and these include clarification of the memories, identification of similarities and differences, noting clichés and other indicators of taken-for-granted aspects and social meaning of the events. The group discussion then focuses on other aspects of the memory story particularly looking for social meanings, also looking for silences in the story and finally the memory may be rewritten (Onyx & Small 2001:777). Davies' last phase involves theorising the relationship between the 'common sense' in the memories, through group discussions and intertextually with academic literature (Onyx & Small 2001:777).

My approach to collective biography and memory work differs from the approaches used by others including Haug (1987), Davies (2000b), and Sondergaard (2002), in that it is not a collaborative research project where each participant is a collaborative researcher with a joint report as the intended outcome. The group work in the Lifestory Workshops primarily involved the talking story and writing phases overlaid by frequent discussion. There were no specified outcomes for each of the participants.

Many of the stories used in this thesis were written as a result of collective biography. They contribute to a genealogical project in the mapping of a personal, scholarly journey out of an inherited field of enquiry. Yet they map no definitive route. Sometimes new directions are suggested or unexpected stories reveal where reflexive scholarship has taken me on lines of flight (Davies 2004:3). In naming the thesis genealogical I want to draw attention to the importance of inter and intra generational knowledge links between women – intellectual, social and familial knowledge. These links are not a linear progression but comprise a disordered sharing of information and experiences between generations of women, researchers and among peers, weaving knowledge that is pliant.

The purpose of the stories in the thesis is multi-layered though each one carves a place representing the *whereness* of women. Susan Hawthorne (2002:36) uses the term 'whereness' as an explanation of an actual place that has implications for subjectivity, and she writes that, 'awareness of physical location [is] an important element in the construction of the knower's sense of self in colonised cultures'. In this instance I hope to show how women know the place where they perceive themselves to be/long in hierarchies of gender and class, with the stories representing the trace of actual bodies in the text.

There is slippage between the stories of the women who participated in this research and my own stories, with moves between empathy and shared understandings through many degrees of sameness and difference, in a way that produced chaotic data including tears and laughter. Elizabeth St Pierre refers to data such as emotions, dreams and the sensual as data that transgresses the relationship between herself and her participants:

> Since my study focuses on the construction of the subjectivities of these others, it necessarily examines the construction of my own subjectivity that was folded into theirs in particularly fruitful and disturbing ways. (St Pierre 1997:177)

Likewise, my place is evident in this thesis: and my stories about the research journey also become part of the process because, as Sidonie Smith explained at The Third Conference in The Series of The International Autobiography and Biography Association that was held in Melbourne, July, 2002, a thesis is a piece of biographical work.

There are various ephemera represented in the thesis: photographs, newspaper images, email and dream stories are interspersed in the text, and each chapter is introduced by stanzas from Marge Piercy's poem 'They Inhabit Me' taken from the collection *My Mother's Body* (1985). The layering of stories, references and resources is intended to mimic how individuals make meaning from disparate sources, intertextually and intersubjectively. The Interleavings either side of the chapters are my musings about the compliance expected of women and the accompanying erasure of their volition. They are my personal responses to the process and situations I encountered on the research journey.

There are many voices and stories to follow. They tell some twenty different women's experiences, and are presented in various genres, creative writing, self-reflection, conversationally, in theoretical perspectives, and my fieldwork observations. Some blurring of the voices is intended through slippage in my use of pronouns and tenses and there is a

purposeful anonymity through the use of pseudonyms. Anonymity belies the value I place on the stories of each individual woman, my esteem for their courage and my desire for women to be able to safely speak their experiences out loud. Stories that were written by the Lifestory Workshop participants or myself are italicised, while recorded and transcribed dialogue is prefaced by the pseudonym of the speaker, followed by her dialogue, which is indented and italicised. This method of reproducing recorded speech on the printed pages is similar to that used by Game and Metcalfe (1996:119), who give 'a new line to pauses'. Arranging the speech on the page with an appearance similar to that of a play script or verse goes some way to acknowledging that these conversations were not entirely offhand or random, but were purposeful, even if quite informal.

I hope that my maneuvers with speech, stories and anonymity will enhance fluid multiplicity of experiences and not conspire with invisibility because I do not mean to suggest that women can speak in one voice or that women's experiences can be generalised. Rather I am looking for resonant themes and storylines that shape subjectivity, or were shaped by particular discourses.

A personal background

Researching women's untold stories became my passion after numerous experiences in the past when women revealed to me previously untold stories. This often happened following groups I had facilitated, when women had come together for a specific purpose such as taking control of certain stages of their lives, for example planning and preparing for a child's birth, for information about breastfeeding, or women seeking support in finding a way to live outside an abusive relationship. There were also times in the company of women friends that I have been surprised by resonances when stories or longings were spontaneously shared. Often the stories I heard resonated with my own experiences and I have puzzled over the different routes that steer women through similar situations. It seemed that we all had knowledge to contribute to each other's understandings, and in the sharing, confidence blossomed in the integrity of our individual experiences both lived and desired. Certain situations appeared to foster intimate sharing and easy talk. When women were comfortable with each other and felt safe then surprising conversations often took place.

Once, soon after I graduated from Women's Studies, I invited some women friends for lunch to celebrate International Women's Day. It was pouring with rain and so we sat inside, snuggly dry on lounge chairs gathered around a table laden with food and glasses of wine.

We toasted women's achievements, and our own, but then our talk turned to longings. Perhaps it was the wine that loosened our tongues, perhaps the rain enveloped us with melancholy, but it was Karen who raised it first. Eventually we each admitted to a longing to belong that we said gnaws at us.

(I call it the quest to find the place in myself that is home, a comfortable relationship between my own sense of self and that enigma, identity.)

We also talked about depression, and we shared our experiences. And we wondered why. We spoke in learned tones about culture and politics, about the poles of spirituality and science. Then someone said that disconnection is a part of our essentially white and middle class community.

(I think we mean loneliness.)

We were sad about emotional distance in our families and busyness in our lives. About the drive to individualism and lifestyles that fuel only the consumer economy but leave us cold. About image that can be bought and thrown away, we say. About identity that is less about who I am, than who I can afford to be.

(About emptiness, I think to myself...)

I haunt the quiet spaces of my own imagination with doubt. Searching for answers. I dream fitful dreams that are coloured by a longing to be/long, for an identity grounded in historical time and space. I think I mean connection.

I am sodden with a mixture of grief and fear in my own unbelonging. I am soaked through with it. It's a drenching that reaches my raw nerves. My whole self is saturated with a wetness that seeps right through my flesh to my red in-side.

You cradled me to calm the tears, and you rubbed my belly, reaching deep into its soft recesses, and a vessel appeared. A strange and empty vessel, but a vessel for sure. It was so completely empty that it was a gaping hole. I am horrified to find my interior so empty that it exists only in absence. No bones, no spinal cord, not anything to suggest what is missing. No

traces of blood or urine or faeces, no eggs, no womb, no warmth. Completely barren with no means of connection I think.

My fingers smoothed across your abdomen feeling your sameness, your difference from me. Down across your belly, I trace a knot of scar tissue. An emergency caesarean you say. You only cry when I ask about the baby who wouldn't come. She couldn't come. Placenta preavia they told you, when they told you anything. 'We have to get your baby out or he'll die.' Then they left you on a trolley in the corridor with your strange name on your wrist and your lover (thankfully). 'That's queer', they said, 'not a man anywhere to be seen'.

They left you there for six hours. You were afraid that your child's life was slipping away with each convulsive heaving of your body against the part you had grown to nourish her, your baby girl, stuck inside you.

They didn't care when they cut you open. They took no care, 'where's the father?' But there were no man's eyes, no need to disguise the violence of surgical routines.

My fingers trace the knotty rope of scar tissue as it disappears into your hair.

It was dangerous by the time the surgeon came. Fear had hooked you now you were a mother and both of you were in their hands. They couldn't do that before.

The knot is tight up and down your belly.

'She's not the type for bikinis', they think aloud when they finally decide they can make you wait no longer.

I rub the folds of your skin they pulled back in haste.

Six hours, not only the baby was in distress. Your lover, frantic not wanting to leave your side, not wanting to distress you more by screaming at your side on their closed ears, their narrow minds.

Knots? lumps? who cares? who is there to care?

A rough seam, white like skin isn't, a winding thread of unfeeling. Your blood soaked the sheet. Tears wet the pillow, salt on our fingers, damp on your flesh, it's a razor edge that bites.

Sometimes we thought we were two parts of one. Like twins, of a psychic fusion. We finished each other's thoughts and understood without words. Told each other's stories from a place of knowing.

Her fingers traced the curvature of my spine counting spaces between vertebrae, '2,3,4, that one ... 5, that's the one'. Barely can I feel her fingers on the skin pulled and tucked into numb folds of my seam. Neat and taut it disappears, inside outside, almost imperceptible now. But there's not much flesh in your back.

I felt it you know, when they pulled and cut the disc. And I heard some fucking bloke in the theatre comment on my slim figure, 'not bad after four kids', he said 'bet hubby's happy'. I heard him.

They're pretty rough when they open you up. I felt it, their violence, I felt it then without pain. I couldn't cry out. I had no movement. I wondered where it had gone, my will over my flesh and vocal chords. But their anaesthetic didn't subdue my hearing, or my seeing. I screamed in terror with my eyes at the nurse beside me checking the flow of anesthesia. She looked directly into the fear, and with a peculiar recognisable knowing, she silently closed my eyes just before they rolled me over.

Your scar on your belly, mine on my back. I used to think we were a patched quilt, the rough seams always an interruption to the ease between us. The first time my fingers found the scar tissue I was shocked, I tried to hide my response, but you were already crying. The soft warmth of your belly folded into itself, pulling tight convulsions of your skin into a knotty rope. Tight unfeeling convulsions, frozen.

You celebrated your daughter's birth and I, my recovery. And our joys were knitted with the remnants of violence in the lining of our guts. We shared a common pain left by violence but it wasn't spoken, not for a long while, even though a remnant of fear still inhabits me. It was an 'un'known factor in our lives, untold, and unimagined. Yet, it shifted the shape of self-knowing.

We know ourselves through relational processes, through our connections and disconnections with others and the negotiations we embody, between discourses representing practices of self and how these are spoken into being. There is a labyrinth of discursive routes drawing the self this way then that through education, health practices, friendship and responsibilities all contained in a gendered frame. Social narratives are 'shored up' by heteronormative discourses that pilfer the possibilities of a women-defined knowing of Self [1] because heteroreality is predicated on masculinity as the norm. Elizabeth Grosz (1995:113) explains the difficulty for women in masculine culture saying that women are disconnected from the possibility of a woman-defined understanding of self. In a discussion of Plato, Derrida and Irigaray, Grosz uses the notion of chora to explain women's disconnection based on 'a founding concept of femininity whose connections with women and female corporeality have been severed, producing a disembodied femininity as the ground for the production of a (conceptual and social) universe' (Grosz 1995:113). Women's difference is understood as *lack*, as *not*, or *other* and there is no language to speak women's experiences, or a woman-defined Self. Tensions are created in the reconciliation of these issues individually, in personal dialogues with stereotypical images of selves entangled in a culture that makes claims to equal opportunity, multiculturalism and diversity while white, patriarchal, Western, middle class heterosexuality is treated as the norm. Each of these descriptions obscures inherent diversity that, when revealed, exposes the universal as an image, a structuring veneer. The image of universality is an archetype of normality, ordinariness, the everyday or the familiar. It is a unifying myth of cohesion that elides the hierarchical structures of class and gender shaping individual experiences.

Beverly Skeggs (1997b:1) uses the phrase *the performance of respectability* to refer to a standard of middle class behaviour and morality that is a mechanism used to regulate and position dangerous classes, including working-class women. Respectability, Skeggs writes, is one of the most ubiquitous signifiers of class (1997b:1). Conformity displayed by the performance of respectability masks transgressive experiences, leaving them to exist spectre-like in women's self-representation where their influence can often go unacknowledged. A liberal framework, and the language of choice, hides links between class, gender and subjective experiences of everyday life. I am interested in the articulation of gender and class through the so-called performance of respectability and the supposedly stable subject position it shapes.

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[1] I have borrowed the term 'woman-defined Self' from Janice Raymond (2001:59), who writes that women are man-made because their lives are ruptured from their female origins and they are thrown into the disjunctions of heteroreality.

The closed circuit

Vivyan Adair (2001:452) explains that conformity to social mores, the perpetuation, and justification for systems of stratification and domination, are achieved through a closed circuit that fuses together systems of power, material conditions and bodily experiences. Drawing on Foucault's arguments in *Discipline and Punish,* Adair argues that, 'we become subjects not of the sovereign but of ideology, disciplining and inscribing our own bodies in the process of becoming stable and singular subjects' (Adair 2001:454). Adair goes on to suggest that traditional theories of class (Marxist and Weberian) are insufficient to account for the intersection of power, material conditions and bodily experiences (Adair 2001:452). In her discussion about the bodily inscription of poverty in America, Adair points to the need to interrogate how discourses are inscribed on actual bodies and how 'systems of power produce and patrol poverty through the reproduction of both social and bodily markers' (Adair 2001:452). Listening to women's life stories can provide clues to these processes and the work of ideology[2] by tracing storylines and bodylines[3] that shape the knowing of self.

Adair (2001:467) comments that while poststructuralism and discursive critiques raise awareness of the body as a text inscribed by power relations, there are limitations to these approaches. Critical interrogation, Adair argues, is the precursor to challenging systems and discourses that have physically inscribed infamy on poor women's bodies in the marks of degradation such as in clothing, ill health, exhaustion and characteristics such as shyness (Adair 2001:466-7). Considering work by Lois McNay (1993 cited by Adair 2001:467), Adair makes the point that discursive critique is most useful when the understanding it produces fosters women's agency to challenge and change material situations. The Lifestory Workshops were not intended to be a direct challenge to the participants' lives, though it is my intention in this research to challenge discourses that maintain inequitable conditions through the suppression of possibilities. I want to reveal the work of dominant discourses in the shaping of women's experiences, and to look for women's active presence in untold stories. This is intended to disprivilege the patriarchal construction of women's lives as lack

[2] My approach to ideology is cognisant of Derek Layder's (1994:26) explanation that 'ideology refers to beliefs and values (and the practices they embody), which may serve to legitimise power relations in an indirect and manipulative manner. On this definition ideology serves to justify the inequalities created by power relations (and the means through which they are secured) by 'covering over' or disguising them. In this sense, ideology masks the exploitative nature of power relations and represents them as 'natural' and 'inevitable'".

[3] I am indebted to Margaret Somerville for her work regarding 'bodylines', where she explores how the lived body can be brought into discursive relation with contemporary theoretical formulations (Somerville 2004).

and liberate women's fate from a subordinated position fixed and determined by the cultural product, gender.

Patriarchy–capitalism

I falter over my use of the word patriarchy, it's a contested term. In *Profit and Pleasure,* Rosemary Hennessy (2000:26) refers to patriarchy as a 'struggle concept' that she says is both contested terrain and politically urgent. Hennessy (2000:26) comments on the critique of patriarchy as a universalising concept by poststructuralists or postmodern feminism. However, like Hennessy (2000:26), I do not think it is useful to view *the* patriarchy as a fixed unchanging system of oppression that is one central explanation for social production. Instead it is important to understand that while systemic structures like patriarchy and capitalism persistently organise people's lives they do change and manifest differently across time, because they are historically and differentially inflected. It is a challenge to keep track of the chameleon faces of the pervasive system of social organisation that I will continue to refer to in this thesis as patriarchy.

In the twenty-first century patriarchy finds expression beyond the rule of fathers, and as Maria Mies explains in *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale* (1998:37), it is experienced broadly as male dominance in social and institutional organisation and most recently manifesting in capitalism. Robyn Rowland and Renate Klein (1987) assert that 'it is power rather than difference which determines the relationship between women and men' (1987:275). Understanding patriarchy as arising from its economic base helps to avoid any justification for the exploitation of women as a biological necessity (Mies 1998:37). Rather, as Hennessy (2000:23) explains, patriarchy involves 'the structuring of social life – labor, state, and consciousness – such that more social resources and value accrue to men as a group at the expense of women as a group'. However, oppressive relations are complicated as bell hooks (1989:21) points out, because they involve interlinked dominations resulting for example, from different life experiences at the intersection of class, race, and gender. Social relations are further complicated by emotional attachments and stereotypical gender expectations formed in the structuring of social life. Drucilla Cornell (1998), Rosemary Hennessy (2000), bell hooks (1989) and Harriet Bjerrum Nielson (2003) all allude to the complexity of these relations. Bjerrum Nielson (2003:71) suggests that, 'both the persistence and the undermining of patriarchy have their allies in the inner world of emotions'. In other words, the resilience of patriarchy appears to be fabricated in emotions that arise from the embodied learning of interlocking hierarchies including gender and class.

Similarly to patriarchy and capitalism, gender and class cannot be thought of as fixed and unchanging. Elspeth Probyn (2001), writing about social class in the daily newspaper *The Australian,* when I was beginning this research, made claims about changes in social attitudes to class. Probyn wrote that we must get away from abstract arguments about class since we don't really know what class is, 'we [also] don't know how class viscerally enters into bodies, or how aspirations are curtailed or extended by cultural and economic capital' (Probyn 2001). Probyn was alluding to the move away from strictly Marxist determinations of class based on the ownership of labour and surpluses (Hennessy 2000:10; Mies 1998:13), and raising questions about how individuals learn class implicitly in the embodiment of certain dispositions and preferences. This is an issue I explore.

Unpicking the closed circuit

Class and gender are not immaterial structures, but in the context of individual lives have consequences that are experienced and embodied by real flesh and desiring women. Subjectivity thus involves fluid and multiplicitous responses to hierarchies of gender and class. Carolyn Steedman (1986) makes a connection between class, gender and sense of self in her book *Landscape for a Good Woman.* Steedman also uses a biographical approach to frame her discussion, and she writes that 'class and gender and their articulations, are the bits and pieces from which psychological selfhood is made' (1986:7). The problem of unpicking disparate influences on self-knowing can be approached using poststructuralist theory, which Bronwyn Davies explains offers the possibility 'of seeing the self as continually constituted through multiple and contradictory discourses that one takes up as one's own in becoming a speaking subject' (2000a:71). Discourses associated with class and gender necessitate personal work including emotional, moral, care and relationship work, all of which are themes that emerged in this research.

Emotional selves

In an intuitive, if not also a rash moment some time ago, I told my supervisor that my thesis is about love and pain. Love and pain are interwoven emotional and physical responses to complex and intersecting, embodied relations - they are not locked in binary opposition. Love and pain are subjective experiences that traverse physical, emotional and psychic pathways of the self. Love and pain are in continual ebb and flow within me throughout my life. Of course, 'about love and pain' was only shorthand. Now the shorthand forewarns of subjective bias and the likelihood of messy complications. Back then the shorthand represented the first buds of insight that were emerging from my exploration of a possible relationship between the

elision and suppression of women's life experiences and stories, and the durability of patriarchy's gendered hierarchies that is the essence of this research.

Respectable selves

Beverly Skeggs' (1997b) work *The Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* is based on an extensive twelve-year research project, and is a useful resource for my work. Skeggs critiques the performance of middle class behaviour as a signifier of class, emphasising the inability of that performance to account for working class women's experiences in a stabilised, conservative and moral framework. Skeggs concludes with some suggestions about studying class:

> To study class should create a displacement of the categories of knowledge themselves. It should mark the production of different rhetorical spaces, generating a space where women like those of the study [working class] can be heard and listened to, at least where they can no longer be ignored. These are not just a group of women studied in isolation; their experiences and interpretations challenge many assumptions reproduced through feminist theory. I hope they can no longer be ignored, made invisible, deconstructed to irrelevance, dismissed as part of a redundant concept, or pathologized as just another 'social problem'. To silence these women through theoretical debate, which can conveniently ignore their inability to fit either their social positions or the categorizations designed for others, is to commit yet another act of symbolic violence. (Skeggs 1997b:168)

Skeggs' approach outlined above has informed my approach to class, in the need to displace categories of knowledge, produce different rhetorical spaces, challenge theoretical approaches, and to keep women's voices audible. The emulation of middle class values by the working class is referred to as the performance of respectability by Skeggs. The performance of respectability involves a temporally based cluster of discourses prescribed by middle class(ness) that exist like a benchmark of appropriate behaviour. Respectability relates to social, cultural and economic capital, and disguises social narratives about morality that are a function of middle classness. Respectability informs performances of self that are class(ed) and impact on self-understanding.

Caring selves

The complexity of intersections between patriarchy, capitalism and gender becomes more apparent when dilemmas associated with women's negotiations between unpaid and paid work, the public/private divide, are examined. The family is a common site of this intersection and is the subject of critique in Alison Mackinnon's (1997) book *Love and Freedom.* Mackinnon (1997:243) reflects on women's difficulty in reconciling their primary

responsibility for unpaid family work with professional careers, and she expresses the hope that young women (of the 1990s) will be able to leave behind the dilemmas their mothers and grandmothers experienced similarly, in reconciling love, and freedom connoted by access to paid work. While Mackinnon (1997:243) writes that young women are, 'refusing to choose between love and freedom, they lay claim to access to all aspects of their subjectivity' she also expresses her fear that in spite of the possibilities created at the end of twentieth century, 'in the domain of sexual discourses, however, the future constantly threatens to become the past' (1997:245). Indeed, Mackinnon's fears are shown to be well founded in research that conclusively indicates that women do continue to face difficult dilemmas between paid and unpaid domestic work (Franzway 2001:115). Responsibility for family continues to rest primarily with women, in spite of women's increased participation in the paid workforce. My concern in this research is not with the problem of women's access to paid work but with the emotional investments that overlay responsibilities traditionally tied to what is thought to constitute *women's work* that impede significant changes to oppressive relations. Affective ties often bind women to oppressive situations they feel powerless to change.

Disconnected selves

Paradoxically, women give up voice for relationship in the reconciliation of the personal and the social, an impasse that Carol Gilligan calls 'getting civilised':

> The growing body of work on women's psychological development when joined with the burgeoning knowledge about race and gender, has opened to our inspection a central paradox of human development: the tendency to give up relationship for the sake of having 'relationships'. This paradox explains how psychological health, which depends on relationship, comes into tension with the reproduction of patriarchal and racist societies and cultures, which depend on disconnection and dissociation. (Gilligan 1997:28)

This paradox produces the performance of respectability, which is a representation of self that exemplifies the attempt to reconcile the manifestations of social structure, and agency 'respectably' putting the desire for relationship in tension with silences necessary to maintain relationships. 'Getting civilised' is integral to the performance of respectability, and a question at the heart of my research, *how are class and gender embodied, and meshed in emotional entanglements?* One of the participants in my research explained the paradox of relationships this way:

welcome Claire

> *yeah I think communication becomes so heavily dependent too ...*
> *on opening up and revealing,*
> *and yet we spend a helluva lot of our time avoiding that very thing.*
> *so you can live in a relationship for an awfully long time,*
> *and really not communicate much,*
> *and not know really much about that other person,*
> *because its pretty scary stuff,*
> *because you are opening yourself to potential rejection,*
> *and, all sorts of things.*

I wonder what 'sorts of things' underpin the paradox of relationships?

My muse

I found a muse for this work in a spectre, that elusive ancient pagan concept of *Wyrd*, understood as destiny or fate. Words used for Wyrd in Norse, Old Saxon and Old High German all derive from the same word, an ancient verb meaning, *to become* (Branston 1993:62). Wyrd, briefly, in the Old English or Anglo-Saxon and, in the Germanic cosmology, has to with the World Tree Yggdrasil and the Well of the Wyrd that is, 'a non-linear time concept of "that-which-is"[4] connected with ancestral memory, deeds, spinning and weaving' (*What is Wyrd?* 2003 online).

It is thought that Wyrd was ultimately suppressed or subsumed by Christianity in the form of the Christian God. However, in the time of conversion to Christianity, God was considered as being subject to Wyrd, an all-powerful destiny and originally pictured as a woman (Branston 1993:56-59).

There are thought to have been three figures called Fates, at least six thousand years ago and they were the ancestress of Wyrd in the Greek mythology. The Fates were known as the Moirai sisters (Branston 1993:65). The three sisters were 'specially concerned to give defeat or victory in battle' (Branston 1993:61). The three sisters were the daughters of Zeus and Themis and they represent the power that determines the lot of humans from birth to death (*What is Wyrd?* 2003:1 online). They were Clotho, who spun and represented the present,

[4] That which is: relates 'now' to the past, and to the future, hence fate, in the sense of becoming, is not foreclosed but simply a product of the process created out of the past (*What is Wyrd?* 2003).

Lachesis who measured and thread, and represented the future, and Atropos, who snapped or cut the thread and so ended man's (sic) life, represented the past (Branston 1993:64). They have been associated with the course of lifetimes and the phases of the moon, and hence the division of time into units, or months (Branston 1993:66). The powerful figures of the Moirai are glimpsed from their obscurity across time, in references to Wyrd in Beowulf, Chaucer, Shakespeare's Macbeth and Holinshed's Chronicles (Branston 1993:63). The story of the Moirai was suppressed and reconfigured into Christian shapes where their spectral influence remains, though barely acknowledged.

The Moirai are my mentors for this thesis journey that is an exploration of the past, and of opportunities, and the connections between these two in the present. The Moirai bring to the notion of fate a perspective that is mobile and cyclic in the way of transformation from one state to another. Wyrd is a reminder of women's agency and the capability to direct the course of life. Yet, this legendary tale also warns that stories about women have a tendency to disappear. Re-visioning women's stories is an aspect of this research. Not only re/thinking and re/telling but telling the untold, exploring the unknown and unexplained to divest the familiar of its privilege and re/member Self. To speak out is risky business, and as Carolyn Heilbrun (1989:20) reminds me, safety and closure have long been considered the ideals of female destiny.

Safe places

I wanted to create a warm and friendly atmosphere for the Lifestory Workshops where stories could be told without stifling expectations. The most enabling writing and biography workshops I had attended had provided such an environment or retreat space. In this space I hoped that the women participants would be able to explore their life stories in spoken and written words from their own embodied memories, their own woman's experience. Ursula Le Guin writes that this is unfamiliar to women, indeed it is a wildness:

> the experience of women as women, their experience unshared with men, that experience is the wilderness or the wildness that is utterly other - that is in fact, to Man, unnatural. That is what civilization has left out, what culture excludes, what the Dominants call animal, bestial, primitive, undeveloped, unauthentic - what we are just beginning to find words for, our words not their words: the experience of women. For dominance identified men and women both, that is true wildness. (Le Guin 1989:163)

Le Guin also explains that, 'where I live as woman is to men a wilderness. But to me it is home' (1989:162). It was that comfortable feeling of home that I hoped to create in the

Workshops so the women's memories could unfurl from their hiding places (Davies 2000b:14).

Le Guin suggests wild and disorderly places as the kind of space where women can let themselves comfortably go, without restraint. That was the feeling I wanted to bring to the Workshops to foster sensual pleasure in the telling of stories.

It's almost a year now since the first series of Workshops began, it's another autumn. I chose reddening leaves as a motif for the Workshop series. The leaves came to me as a photograph, autumn leaves from a maple that grew in the back garden of the home I left, and finally sold (severing ties), to begin this research. My neighbour, that dearest of friends, my former lover picked the spray of leaves the first year I was gone, and scanned them. The image arrived via email, unfolding onto my screen one cold homesick day through a veil of tears. Later the actual leaves arrived in an envelope and now they're BluTacked on the window frame in my office at the Fiery Cottage[5]*. As the colour fades, the leaves become fragile remnants that remind me of the past.*

The spray of autumn leaves was picked from a tree that I especially loved, it was the focal point of my garden in Victoria Street. Beneath that tree on hot summer days I would often sit in the cool, and sometimes entertain friends. My neighbour often climbed the scaffold of ladders we erected over the fence while we were deciding the fate of our relationship and considering the permanence of a gate. We'd meet under the maple after long workdays to share tea and biscuits and comfortable afternoon talk, and we'd rest in the big garden chairs. Birds came in the afternoon too, king parrots, lorikeets, and when no one was around, the cockatoos would fly in to feed from the birdhouse or drink from the sandstone bath. But mostly the moist afternoon air would refresh and soothe our spirits and as the year passed scent drifted from the roses, or wattle or pungent ivy flowers. The canopy above was emerald in October, red in May then a sparse bower of bare branches during winter. The tea was always served one day from my kitchen, other days from across the fence, with whatever was left of afternoon sun. When our kids arrived they would join us briefly for a biscuit or hello, then drift off inside, or over the palings, to other houses, to schoolwork or friends. The ambience under the maple was 'home'. In the haphazard mix of shadows and light were both

[5] The Fiery Cottage refers to the old Firewarden's Cottage on the margins of the university campus. It houses office space including mine, and it is the place where a Women's Research Group regularly met during my candidature. We shared talk, text and food that together nourished my learning, my heart, and my body throughout the process. Our 'learning' in the Cottage is the subject of a joint conference paper (Somerville et al. 2004).

creature and people comforts. There was a table, and a candle hanging low in a lantern from a branch above, the birdbath and a generous sized feeder. Cut into the lawn was a sandstone block scooped out and filled with water for frogs and lizards. The cat would entangle herself around my legs to be close, and then she would race to hide in the long grass away from my dog, Misty. But Misty was easily fooled because she was intent on the biscuits. Really, the maple was the heart of the garden that at a glance was only a suburban backyard let go. I called it affectionately, my beer garden, though I hardly ever drank beer there. It was named in memory of my parents, who died too long ago.

When I was a very young child, dad would sometimes drive us way out of town on Sundays, so that he and mum could have a drink together in the beer garden of a country pub. That was in the days when Sunday trading was a service provided for travellers and not much else was open, no petrol stations, no bakeries, no cafes. Sunday trading was only legal outside city limits.

We kids weren't allowed in the beer garden but I knew exactly what it was like, because mum told me. There were lots of tables and chairs, and a wall or lattice trellis enclosed the area from view of the road. Palm trees and bougainvillea vine grew all rumple tumble over the fence and spilled down onto the paving stones. Most likely there were violets and daisies and I hoped there were primulas because they were mum's favourites. It was refreshingly cool like a roman courtyard without the pool, and the drinks came in glasses with frosted writing and numbers on the side. I wished I would hurry and grow up so I could go in, but instead we kids waited with ice creams and drinks outside in the dusty carpark and played on the swing. There was always a swing. Every pub fifty miles out of Sydney had a swing - from Wallacia and Picton, to Bulli and Gosford.

When I called my own cool, green sanctuary 'the beer garden', everyone laughed. Indulgently. In any case, the autumn leaves are an ambivalent motif. I chose them because they made such a pretty picture and I wanted the brochure advertising the Workshops to be welcoming and beautiful. I blurred the image on the scanner, fading the edges of the fallen leaves to accentuate the shades of red, the colour of blood in stages of d/r/ying. Later, the spray reminded me of home, of love, of memories, of changes in process, of the passage of time, of retreat and regeneration, and boundaries that are hard to negotiate, and the fragile essence of certainty.

My neighbour is glad I used the photograph as the motif of the Workshops, perhaps pleased to still have a place in my life, and a hold on new memories I'm creating.

This story threads back forth, picking up images from the past, other places and situations. Laurel Richardson refers to such an approach in an article entitled, *The Politics of Location: where am I now?* in which she considers the implications of the past on the future (Richardson 1998). I see my story telling and writing as Richardson explains storytelling, as a quest for 'the emotional truth of the experience' (1998:5), that I also seek through the unfolding of time and location. Stories held in memory are a chrysalis. Given the chance, they unfurl in the telling like Chinese whispers,[6] sometimes unravelling unpredicted emotions or going in directions previously unimagined. That is why memory work as a precursor to writing stories is an appropriate method for this research.

When I advertised the Lifestory Workshops I kept the information as general as possible to allow women to interpret it broadly. I thought that if women had any interest in reflecting on their lives then my advertising material might encourage their participation. My desire for women to tell their stories willingly over-rode any interest in exploring life storytelling as therapy or empowerment. I remembered women's eagerness to talk about their lives when they are not under any pressure to do so. For that reason I excluded two groups who responded to my advertisements for participants in the research project. Two women phoned on behalf of client groups, the first was the coordinator of the Aboriginal women's housing group and the other a criminologist who wanted me to do the Workshops with women in prison. I suspect that the collective biography research process could be a worthwhile method to work with either of these groups of women, however self-selecting participants were a high priority for the purpose of my study based on my experiences when women willingly offered their life experiences in conversations between small groups of women. I felt that a woman's individual decision to participate independent of any other authority was crucial.

A trace of fear

By my own hand I reach into uncertainty, searching absence, obscurity, and silence in beginning this thesis, this story, which is also my story, this thesis as creative, feminist resistance to taken-for-granted ways of knowing. I remember bell hooks (1989:12) words that, 'only as subjects can we speak. As objects, we remain voiceless'. I wonder if I am reaching into the darkness that Irigaray refers to as some kind of madness where she asks if women

[6] A game that involves passing a message from person to person orally and observing how it is embellished or changes in the repeated tellings.

might find the abandoned imaginary and the symbolic of life in the womb and the first corps-à-corps with the mother (Irigaray 1993:15).

I am encouraged by Margaret Gibson's (2001:18) words that, 'the beginning of a piece of writing or thesis is always spectral'. 'Indeed,' writes Gibson, 'foundations create spectres while they are in turn created by spectres - myths, phantoms, dreams, traumas, unaccountable debts, repressed (yet acknowledgeable) debts, and guilty consciences'.

What are these debts? How will I account for them, the debt I create in my creating? Is it debt because of the limitations, that which will not become a part of this work but must be left out? Can the debts be acknowledged and accounted for?

Mapping the way

I have framed my analysis around two linked focus areas of identity construction that mediate culture, two strongholds of gender ideology, the family, and class consciousness. Class and family are traditionally linked by patriarchal/capitalist dependence on the unpaid and low paid work of women, especially emotional and care work, and they are intertwined. Julia Kristeva (1977 cited in Moi 1986:145) says that class is the logic of production and family, the logic of reproduction. My discussion will focus on the subject's quest for unity and coherence through negotiations around disparate experiences, looking also at both the apparent lacy seamlessness of subjectivity and the c/lash of rupture. My stories will consider issues identified in the Workshops, such as shame, benevolence, tolerance, responsibility, and strength, including ambiguities and ambivalences that are part of everyday life. These are emotions or attributes that naturalise the familiar, according to Rosemary Hennessy (2000:231).

This first chapter has introduced the research and provided an overview of my road to this beginning. Chapter Two catches hold of my approach to the research project, data collection and analysis. Chapter Three explores stories from the biographical research project associated with family life. Chapter Four explores embodied learning of social class and its links with gender. Chapter Five discusses aspects of learning the presentation of self as coherent and stable. The chapter looks at discourses and practices that emerged from the Lifestory Workshops and it focuses on experiences that have the appearance of coping, continuity or conformity. Chapter Six discusses experiences when coherence or stability was ruptured. Chapter Seven reflects on the overall process with an emphasis on possible approaches to dismantling un/acknowledged fears that keep some embodied experiences hidden and silent.

My passion to understand

I want to understand how discursive practices that classify are embodied and become taken-for-granted, it is as if they viscerally shape women's subjectivity and the knowing of self.

I am concerned about the structuring power of discourses of *social class* that pivot on middle class conceptualisations hidden in everyday knowledge, the taken-for-granted, and especially how this structuring of power accommodates the shape shifting of patriarchy to maintain the oppression of women as subordinates.

I want to articulate and promote marginalised stories told by women that demonstrate women's subjectivity, agency and struggle, and reveal subjective experiences that differ from dominant discourses. These rarely attract attention except when essentialised as pathology (ill health), deviance (inappropriate behaviour) and fetishised or demonised (multicultural difference).

I want to reverse the listening hierarchy.

Therefore the following questions frame this research:

1. What is the relevance of *the performance of respectability* in the lives of individual women and to broader social life?

2. Can the concept *class* be adequately re/conceived to acknowledge the fluidity and pervasiveness of the ordering and self ordering that are inherent in the taken-for-granted?

3. Is the keeping of secrets and discourses of shame and ir/responsibility related to women's performances of respectability?

4. Is women's life story and memory keeping relevant to the refocusing of women's self-reflexive gaze, and thus self-knowing, to positions that do not reproduce the dominant conception of women's self as either peripheral, other, or pathological?

5. How is silencing achieved?

I wonder what kinds of things will become audible and visible if women embark on a process to open up experiences locked in memory? Will it be possible to denaturalise the split that renders some experiences of self silent and defiles woman as lack?

❖

Deflowering

Whose blood is this?
Who's blood there on the sheet?

What stain is this?
What trace of pain reveals her loss?

Who let the blood?
And who is she
from in who flows an ambiguous,
no, an ambivalent
turmoil, for forty years?

(give or take a few)

Where is she?
Still saturated with her incompletion
and loss?

Who,
Is she?

Chapter Two

Dis/orderly Conduct

I am cat. I rub your prejudices
against the comfortable way they grow.
I am fastidious, not as a careful
housewife, but as a careful lover,
keeping genitals clean as face.

I turn up my belly of warm sensuality
to your fingers, purring my pleasure
and letting claws just tip out.
Are you the daughter of the fierce
aria of my passion scrawled on the night?

They Inhabit Me
by Marge Piercy
from *My Mother's Body*, 1985

There was little silence in the Lifestory Workshops. 'Let's find a quiet place to write', I said, 'or you could work in pairs tell each other stories, ask questions and write later?'. 'We'll talk', they said. Some eventually did go off to a quiet place and write, but most of the women sat in pairs and told each other stories, asking questions, going deeper and further into each other's lives. And laughing. This is what the women enjoyed doing the most, telling their stories out loud in conversations stamped with laughter. The Workshop tapes are frequently indecipherable with laughter, or the chatter of voices one overlaying the other. It was very disorderly conduct.

I made my plans for this research in a dis/orderly framework right from the start. I have been driven by a passionate desire to give importance to the kind of stories women have told me furtively over the years. Stories that often begin with 'I never talk about this'. It is the context of these stories that intrigues me, how particular experiences fold some stories into the untold. Sometimes I am inspired by ideas I see clearly out of the corner of my eye but other times I am driven by an uncomfortable prickle, niggling or intuitive feelings. I wanted my methodology to be sufficiently flexible to be responsive to these spectres that wash in and around me, alternately irritating then provocatively out of reach. Isn't that how we make new knowledge as individuals, by the learning that results from disparate processes bombarding the senses? I am committed to methods that are flexible and emerge from my questions. Niggling feelings contain a kernel of the unknown, a seed of knowing trying to germinate.

Initially my main concern was to use methods that would not objectify my participants. I was looking for methods that did not rely on elitist hierarchies. I didn't want to overlay the data with theory but rather to find themes in the data to link and compare with theoretical perspectives. Theories and concepts can tip the balance of power in favour of the dominant group by evading experiences that do not have a corresponding authorising narrative, according to Beverly Skeggs (1997b:167). Skeggs explains that some concepts build more responsible knowledge because they 'do not impose their frameworks onto lived experience but are generated from it' (1997b:166). This was my aim.

Bronwyn Davies (2004:4-5) further explains that sense making processes are neither transparent nor innocent, and using poststructural research practices involves breaking open those processes and describing evidence of how sense is made. This chapter attempts to begin that process by untangling various threads of the research to display with the benefit of hindsight the disorderly processes that have woven this thesis in a feminist framework.

Planning the Lifestory Workshops

The Lifestory Workshops were the significant focus of the research project and yet they were not in and of themselves the only significant source of data. Data is a concept that refers here to the many influences that have contributed to the outcomes of this research. In this research, strands from the women's stories and conversations in the Workshops became the warp woven with the weft of my responses to stories and other data input, or was it the other way around? Positioning myself with the threads of influence embedded my experience as researcher within the fabric of the project. Like the Moirai who were also weavers, decisions were made, threads chosen and cut with particularity I will explain now.

Choosing the venue for the Workshops was a crucial aspect of providing, without considerable financial expense, the environment I wanted to create as a retreat space. Remembering times in the past when women had told me stories, I recognised that *telling* depended on the opportunity to be heard, the time and a suitable place. Permission to speak was implicit in the intention of the Workshops, but the twin elements, the authority to tell stories and the opportunity to be heard, were central to my design of the Workshops.

In her book, *The Allegory of Female Authority,* Maureen Quilligan (1991:xiv) goes as far as to relate *being heard* with authority, an attribute that fosters successful writing, 'in order to write successfully, one needs not only the authority necessary to write, but also the authority necessary to be heard. One needs to have access to – if not to be located directly within – the center of dominant power' (Quilligan 1991:xiv). While the women all had skills and education that gave them access to aspects of dominant power, I believed that a women-only space and time would provide a sanctuary of sorts, a buffer from dominant modes of power and discourse such as criticism, and foster confidence in their authority to tell life stories.

Eventually I chose the meeting room at the local Women's Centre for the Workshops. The Centre had recently moved into a semidetached cottage well located in town. There was a warm atmosphere in the Centre and a friendly welcome from the staff. The main meeting room adjoins a kitchen with comfy chairs, a heater, and facilities for making hot drinks. A wide opening separates the two rooms, with lounge seating on one side and a large laminex table surrounded by chairs in the kitchen area. It is a homely place.

The Centre relies on volunteers to provide activities for local women and so I proposed that the Lifestory Workshops be incorporated into their programme with a clear statement of my

purposes. In making the Workshops a part of their programme I would be supporting the work of the Centre by providing a free activity and at the same time I thought that being under the umbrella of the Women's Centre might encourage women's participation in a way that my working as a lone researcher might not. In the end numbers were equally divided between those who responded to my advertising and those who found out about the Workshops directly through the Women's Centre. I have since wondered if my affiliation with the Women's Centre was also a deciding factor for women who may have been interested but chose not to participate because of a lack of understanding about who and what is a 'Women's Centre'.

Women's history in women's hands

Naming the Workshop series 'Women's History in Women's Hands' was another purposeful, metaphoric maneuver. It was important to me that the participants felt their own agency in the activities. They could craft their stories in ways that were meaningful to themselves for their own purposes. The most treasured family keepsakes have often been hand made by women and passed down through generations still bearing traces of the original owners. I felt sure that stories told by women about their own lives, in their own words, would be marked by the imprint of their hands.

The image of 'women's history in women's hands' reminded me of the very moving speech Toni Morrison presented when she accepted the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. The speech retells a folkloric tale about a woman who is elderly and blind. The woman is approached by a group of children who tell her they have a bird in their hands, and they ask her if the bird is alive or dead (Morrison 1994:13). The woman, who is renowned for her wisdom and intuition, takes a long while to answer, but finally she gives a stern reply because she thinks that the children are trying to trick her, 'I don't know whether the bird you are holding is dead or alive, but what I do know is that it is in your hands. It is in your hands' (Morrison 1994:11). Though the old woman is chiding the children she is also making a point that they have certain opportunities within their reach and various choices available.

Morrison explains that in this telling of the story she reads the bird as language and the woman as a writer, and then she works through possible explanations for the interaction between the children and the woman. However, to begin with, Morrison (1994:13) explains her version of the story, saying of the old woman, 'being a writer, she thinks of language

partly as a system, partly as a living thing over which one has control, but mostly as agency – as an act with consequences.'

The Workshops offered the participants opportunities too. When women decided to join the Workshops and knowingly take part in the research project their participation demonstrated a willingness to reflect on their own experiences. Toni Morrison (1994:22) says that meaning made through writing 'secures our difference' but the extent to which telling and writing life stories would secure women's difference was something I could not predict. I had no way of gauging what kind of experiences the participants would relate, except that I would suggest topics to begin the discussions. What might be discussed was an unknown, and I wanted to resist my expectations directing the conversations. The old woman, in the first instance of Toni Morrison's folk tale, was constrained as much by her preconceptions as by her inability to see. I wanted to avoid that. The participants each held a bird I could not see in their hands. What were these birds, what flights would they take?

In fact in Morrison's tale, the children do not have a bird in their hands. The story highlights that possibilities and storylines are limited when interpretation is constrained by suspicion, fear, expectation, or the familiar. Later in the speech, Morrison talks about other scenarios of interaction between the old woman and the children drawing attention to the importance of perspective and experience to the interaction. The tale illustrates the making of meaning intersubjectively, the links with memory and experiences passed through the generations.

Taking another view, Morrison explains that the children are not trying to trick the old woman but want to learn from her experience. When the children reply to the old woman they explain that she can tell them 'what only language can: how to see without pictures' (Morrison 1994:28). Experience passed on this way is a gift to both giver and receiver, in the willingness to listen, as much as in the desire to share knowledge. Morrison (1994:15) explains that familiar systems of language and other dominant cultural practices powerfully police ways of thinking to block and exclude transgressions and render speechless and inaccessible, the voices of intuition. Morrison says that choice made within constraint is tongue-suicide and leaves a void. This, I felt sure, was relevant to the stories I had previously heard in confidence and I hoped might be revealed in the Lifestory Workshops.

Untold stories exist in a void, though silence is a response to many things. Silence can be a result of fear such as Morrison's tongue-suicide, or the silence she says is 'deeper than the

meaning available in words' (Morrison 1994:24). There is a third dimension to silence I want to add to Morrison's two in approaching the Lifestory Workshops. Luce Irigaray (1993:11) suggests that 'female potency' is insufficient to satisfy female desire after the laws of the fathers are met. This rings true for me, that women can't always find the strength to follow their own pursuits or to speak out, because they are occupied in meeting patriarchal expectations. To speak about their own life experiences women are potentially called upon to push through these limitations - to find the appropriate words and language, the courage to speak in their own voices plus the strength and time to do so. I aimed to open up possibilities by minimising expectation, knowing that the sharing of our stories would be an opportunity for each of us.

I was looking for ways that would give the participants in the Workshops an opportunity to experience the nuanced, complex, mid-wifery properties of language (Morrison 1994:15), as a way to find life stories. I thought the women might find the language to speak their experiences and the courage to do so, given time out in a safe place. I am also looking for ways to access the nuanced, complex, mid-wifery properties of language myself, to speak and write my stories and my thesis.

The Lifestory Workshops

I held two series of Lifestory Workshops in one year. The first was a daytime group that ran for seven weeks, two hours per session but it usually stretched out to three hours with a long morning tea break. The second series, some months later, was held over four Saturday afternoon sessions of three and one half hours each. Again there was reluctance to finish up and go home at the end of the session.

The first morning of the first series of Workshops I wasn't sure what to expect. About fifteen women had phoned me in answer to the advertisements and I knew that ten women intended coming. It was a cold Monday morning.

May 2002

I think for longer than usual about what I am going to wear to the first Workshop. Then I realise that it's not the weather that's bothering me. I am searching my wardrobe for the right clothes that will give visual consistency to vagrant[7] *elements of myself. I realise that clothes*

[7] vagrant: wandering, roving, inconstant, unsettled (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles* 2002)

are one of the tools I personally use to cohere, to fabricate a coherent self-image. I want to be at ease, to be 'myself' today. I am mindful of not wanting to alienate the women who are coming to work with me. I don't want to confront them. I want these women to feel safe not challenged, and to have confidence in my integrity. It's crucial that they can be at ease with me (are they spending longer than usual choosing clothes today too?) I want them to know the deep respect I have for their willingness to come to these Workshops and to share their stories with me, and that I won't patronise or exploit them. I want them to know these things without words (though I also plan to tell them).

I can't remember what I finally chose to wear. I only remember my thinking about it. I do know that I often go to work more dressed up than I went to the first Workshop. I think I dress up for situations where my intuition warns me that I'm unacceptable and I suspect that I use clothes as a form of protection and legitimation.

I realise my deliberations are about me not the women who are coming. Me wanting to fit in, me wanting to get it right, me wanting to be acceptable. To be acceptable frames my desire in some tension with respectable. When I work at being respectable I feel like a fraud dressing up the real me. I wonder about this me I so obviously consider 'not respectable'? Where or how or why did I learn these things that seem instinctual?

Will I find a way to speak 'a real me,' and what about the women coming to the Workshops?

The participants

On the first Monday morning the room was soon crowded with more women arriving than I had expected. From the relative anonymity of individual telephone conversations women materialised and actual bodies filled the rooms to overflowing causing confusion and a cacophony of voices. Nevertheless, we settled in, making newcomers welcome and the noise quietened to a buzz of friendly chatter. Some of the women already knew each other.

Margot is confined to a wheelchair, which at first presented an unexpected problem in the narrow corridors and cluttered rooms. We brought her around through the kitchen and made her comfortable, widening the circle to include the bulk of the chair in the opening between the two rooms. The only child present was a preschool boy who sat at his mum's feet and often eyed the dish of lollies on the low table. Women arriving late sat on the lounge room floor and the atmosphere was somewhere between warm and stuffy as the temperature in the

rooms rose, jumpers were peeled off, and perfume and body smells mixed. The gas heater was very efficient. Several times the door opened tentatively and another woman would pop her head around saying, 'I'm sorry I'm late, but can I come in?'

In the introductions on that first morning and in the weeks that followed I discovered that two women were of European birth and immigrated following World War Two. Another three were of British birth, one was a New Zealander and everyone else was born in Australia. Two women were born and grew up in the local region. Ages ranged from nineteen to early eighties. All the women told the group that they were mothers, except the nineteen year old. Jenny is the mother of eight children. Margot was a ballet dancer for most of her life. None of these women had fulltime paying work. Half of the women were not living in a marriage type relationship and, half were in a marriage type relationship with a man. Three of the women were born prematurely and two women weighed only two pounds at birth. Margot was wrapped in soft cotton wool at birth and placed in a shoebox because she wasn't expected to live. One woman was a much less confident English speaker than the others. Two of us wore purple boots the first day and one woman had to leave early for another appointment.

Beginnings

The first day was an introductory session and I had decided that I wouldn't record it. In the first half of the session I explained again, as I had individually on the phone, my aims and about the need for the participants' consent to record the sessions and also my intention to use the transcripts as data for my research. I also invited the women to ask questions. The main questions were to do with privacy and sharing personal information. One woman was concerned that others were approaching the Workshops as therapy. Another said very little but I could see that she was also uncomfortable with the conversations. She told us that she had had an interesting life with many varied experiences that she wanted to write about, not 'personal' issues or for therapeutic reasons, just for interest sake. I felt sure that both she and the woman worried that life storying was therapy would be unlikely to continue.

One woman explained that she could not continue because she had just been offered a fulltime job with work on Mondays. Still, that left nine women, and another who had phoned and was coming the next week and another who had phoned but hadn't turned up yet. Then another woman arrived unexpectedly the following week. Over the weeks numbers fluctuated, but there was a core group of ten women who signed consent forms and in spite of some absences completed the first series of seven weekly Workshops.

Although I wanted the women to take the authority to tell their stories, I also wanted to unsettle layers of authority and hierarchy beginning with the participants and myself as researcher. Authority is sometimes presumed, or taken-for-granted leading to deference. As researcher I saw my role as facilitator of the Workshops, but not as a teacher. Taking the role of a facilitator rather than assuming an authority position such as teacher, I came to expect a degree of chaos and excess that was, at times, a challenge for me to manage, though it was also a great joy and a privilege. There was diversity among the women who all identified the local area as the place they currently call home. The first session was all excess.

As the weeks passed the Workshops were often marked by excess. Laughter, for instance, would erupt and take over the entire conversation. The Coordinator of the Women's Centre joined the second group because she said she had heard so much laughter in the first group. It wasn't always that what was said was funny, perhaps it was relief at saying the unsaid, or perhaps the laughter was part of the rebellion involved in saying the unsaid, or adventuring into unexplored territory (Adair 2001:466). Elizabeth Grosz (1989:44) explains that laughter is the most primitive instance of the semiotic, the psychical trace of the semiotic in vocalisation and for me the ease and laughter were encouraging. There was also chatter, murmurings, and sometimes sounds of disagreement. Voices were a song, each with a tone and cadence of its own. On several occasions tears were shed and hands held in comfort, but overwhelmingly the tone of the Workshops was set by laughter and animated talk.

Embodied knowing

Memory work aims to bring knowledge housed in the body to conscious awareness. Susan Griffin points out that the body has knowledge of experiences, a decisive awareness of influences that interact and interconnect with it (Griffin 1995 quoted in Baker, Jensen, & Kolb 2002:23). Physical experience, Griffin explains, precedes language and uses the body as metaphor (Griffin 1995 quoted in Baker et al. 2002:23). The silencing of some experiences lodged in the body is not necessarily an overt, discernable act but can involve a degree of unconsciousness about what is not said and not heard. One of the participants speaking about deafness, drew my attention to this when she said, '*one is mostly blissfully unconscious of what is beyond your hearing*'. Likewise, unawareness is sometimes blissful but unlike the silence of deafness, silent embodied stories may be experienced as a physical discomfort whose origin is frustratingly difficult to identify. Silence is not necessarily a known absence but it marks a space where *possibility* is constrained. Bodily responses, like sweating, dry mouth, heart pounding, yawning or other sensory symptoms and emotional responses are

often indicative of experiences that are silent and as yet unnamed, just beyond conscious awareness. In Julia Kristeva's terms, these responses refer to the underside of a stable coherent subjectivity, what Kristeva calls the abject (Kristeva 1982 cited in Grosz 1989:72). Liz Grosz explains that the abject 'attests to the impossibility of clear borders, lines of demarcation or divisions between the proper and the improper, the clean and the unclean, order and disorder' (1989:73).

According to Grosz:

> Understanding abjection involves examining the ways in which the inside and the outside of the body are constituted, the spaces between the self and the other, and the means by which the child's body becomes a bounded, unified whole – the conditions under which the child is able to claim the body as its own, and, through its 'clean and proper' body, gain access to symbolization. (Grosz 1989:71)

For women trained to think within a patriarchal framework, achievement of coherent subjectivity requires work to render inappropriate experiences silent and abject. The abject inhabits the boundless realm of memory that is reflected when people speak about memories *flooding in.*

It can be difficult to access stories and experiences that are abject because it is a paradox to speak the silent even though embodied. Margaret Somerville explains that it is a performance for women to make visible in their stories what would normally be invisible (1999:207). Margaret[8] explains that the abject is an active space of inhabiting and necessarily the invisible ground on which all thought and action are based. This inhabiting is a performance that is gendered and the act of inhabiting is knowable through the body (Somerville 1999:207). However, bringing the abject into view can objectify memories if they are kept at a distance, in a sense disembodied. I hoped that when new memories slipped into conscious awareness those encounters would remain embodied. Gillian Swanson[9] seems to be musing over this issue when she asks how is it possible to find these encounters in memory, 'where, then, do we find the traces of another sort of memory, as constitutive of a subjectivity whose meanings are founded upon corporeal materiality, the relation of the encounter, dimensions of the intimate being which can only exist in the incomplete spaces of the intersubjective?' (Swanson 2000:122).

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[8] Margaret Somerville is my primary supervisor and my use of her first name is intended to avoid depersonalizing the teaching and learning interaction I was involved in with her. I do this out of my respect for Margaret and in recognition that her recent work is concerned with the disappearance of the embodied individual at the site of their work (see Somerville 2003).

[9] My reference to authors by first and last name in the first instance is also intended as a mark of recognition of the actual individual in relation to their work.

Memory work releases experiences but helps to un/think or re/think the familiar and taken-for-granted and bring forward abject experiences secreted in the body. Memory work and collective biography strategies like those I developed for the Lifestory Workshops, straddle the inner and the social, the personal and the collective, by accessing everyday experiences from their traces in embodied memories. Frigga Haug (1987:14) writes that memory work is 'explicitly presented as a bridge to span the gap between 'theory' and 'experience'.' Haug and her colleagues were interested in memory work to explore the 'how' of women's lives, 'the process by which women become part of society. We sought to identify the ways in which human beings reproduce social structures by constructing themselves into those structures'(1987:43). Accessing embodied memories through collective biography helps to make visible the act of inhabiting the abject by straddling the rational and the emotional.

Writing and memory

The participants coded remembering and self-reflection as indulgent - it was an activity they expressed as being a rare pleasure. This in itself must have had implications for the decisions of women to attend and those who might have seen the advertisements and decided against it. It suggests to me a willingness on the part of the women who did participate to cross thresholds and their perception that they had the time and the space in their lives to do so. Or at least the willingness to make the time and the space. They all had certain experiences *kept* in conscious memory that they wanted to write about and they came to the Workshops with the desire to develop these into interesting stories.

Rose described memory as a pool that is not often accessed because most of the time life is busy and you just have to get on with it. This meant, for Rose, that memories of past experiences existed in the background of the everyday, she thought that opening up to the past happened by association, whenever memories were triggered and were then irrepressible.

***welcome* Rose**

> *It isn't necessarily into an empty pool that you can actually open up,*
> *sometimes it almost has to be when it occurs,*
> *when there's a trigger,*
> *whatever the trigger was,*
> *that was the trigger.*

In the second series Claire made a similar observation that the complexity of lived experiences is necessarily lost in the need to impose order on everyday life to cope.

Claire:

The complexity of life is a rich tapestry,
the ups and downs and the poor times and the hard times,
and in a way,
they're the stuff of life that makes it interesting,
It would be so bland without them,
and I think sometimes,
to deal with those complexities can be just too complex,
we do it in our minds,
we somehow need to reduce and simplify things,
and make them in a box
and set them in concrete
and it's a constant juggle for me in a day
to try to balance those,
to not get lost in the complexity,
yet not to over simplify those things,
try to make them less concrete.

The women were suggesting that there is a need for order to manage disparate experiences to accomplish the performance of the feminine subjective.[10] The image of the pool, which is fluid and expansive, is in telling contrast with the fixity of what can be coped with on a daily basis, packed 'in a box'. This echoes Margaret Somerville's (1999:206) discussion of the paradox involved in making the invisible visible, such as in the performance of self where the choice is either to be the objectified or the objectifier. For the Workshop participants there was an inherent paradox in juggling the everyday where it is necessary to keep complexity to a minimum while not completely ignoring the diversity of life experiences.

[10] In using the terms 'feminine subjective' or 'feminine subjectivity' I have borrowed from Gillian Swanson who explains modern subjectivity as dialogic, with an inherent constitutive instability, that is aligned with the feminine (2000:112). 'Feminine subjectivity is a motif', writes Swanson, 'that differs from traditional masculine notions of the subject as fixed and hierarchically located' (2000:112). While the feminine subjectivity is mobile and historically constituted, it is not necessarily a woman-defined Self or woman-defined subjectivity, but rather it relies on the notion of inherent instability that is seen as a feminine trait. I am purposefully drawing attention here to the difference that exists between femininity/feminine subjective and woman-defined Self.

Whereas studies that look at women's embodiment of feminine subjectivity tend to focus on pathology and problems, my interest is in the ways that women who apparently cope with paradox maintain the semblance of coherence and unified subjectivity. I wondered about the mechanisms that allow women to juggle the paradox and disparity that is necessarily an aspect of being 'other' within the dominant patriarchal culture, within which the everyday and the familiar develop around the male – female binary.

Telling stories – not secrets

Using memory work and reflecting on life experiences is often like stepping into unfamiliar territory that has been locked out of reach and can be personally challenging as Frigga Haug comments:

> Since we are accustomed to using rapid repression, obliteration and forgetting, to maintain our equilibrium, this attempt to step back into the past, to make the unconscious conscious, both calls into question our normal ways of working over events in consciousness, and threatens our stability as people. (Haug 1987:48)

I didn't want the women to open up painful memories but I hoped they would share perceptions and life experiences, at their own discretion. Nevertheless, as Frigga Haug (1987) suggests, it is inherently risky reflecting on your own life, and although I didn't set out to look for secrets in the Lifestory Workshops, secrets soon came up. I was looking for the life stories that pack secrets in silence and each week I would suggest a topic to open discussions, for example *the first day starting school.* Frigga Haug (2000:157) recommends keeping the topic general and allowing more specific stories and questions to emerge from the discussion. The women responded by offering their memories or asking questions to clarify what I had in mind. Often the questions changed the focus of the discussion and stimulated stories that took individual tangents. During the discussion each participant would recall a particular memory sparked by the topic and the rest of the group responded with questions for clarification and interest. Usually the ensuing reflections became the basis of a story that was later written. Taking a flexible approach to the topic of the written stories was a departure from the collective biography methods developed by Frigga Haug (1987) and Bronwyn Davies (2000b) where the stories are reviewed in relation to the focus area of the group. Both approaches value the individual stories but the significant difference was that in the Lifestory Workshops I encouraged the participants to follow through their memory stories independently of the topic that was the original focus of the session.

Secrets

I rarely raised particular issues other than the week's topic. The issue of secrets and shame for instance came directly out of the group discussion in the first taped session, and it was a recurring topic. When a theme such as secrets came up it was generally that related theme rather than my initial topic that women wrote about. Some stories were motivated by the emotions the women remembered in the telling. For example, after the first day of school memory work, Bea raised the issue of secrets, but anger is the main theme of her story.

welcome **Bea**

I was such an angry girl,
and basically because I had no access to any information,
just no control over your life,
like each time we moved house it was never discussed.
I mean, I remember coming home from school one day
and there was a removalist truck with all our stuff getting piled on it
and I'm going to a new address.
I was just so furious for years and years...

Kaye responded to this story explaining that her family was shrouded in secrets but presented an image of the perfect family, like the Brady Bunch she agreed, at the suggestion of another participant. She spoke of her frustration at not understanding her family and implicitly knowing that she could not ask questions,

welcome **Kaye**

that little girl is so angry,
it doesn't matter what she feels,
she just goes white.
Like everything she reads,
every book she reads, they work it out,
the Famous Five work it out,
every book she reads they work it out,
um but not this one,
she doesn't,
she just can't work it out.
Like you know, who helps?

a helpful mum?

No!

The movement of the women's conversation from the topic I suggested, to the issue of secrets and anger, is an example of how rough edges were exposed in the memory work producing the 'jagged stuff of personal lived experience' that Onyx and Small (2001:776) explain is possible using collective biography strategies. Some of the women expressed confusion over why their families kept secrets and there was an uneasy sense that, '*you never know what might be in them*'. Bea's and Kaye's words (above) indicate that there is anger, frustration, and a clear sense of powerlessness in their memories of childhood that are wrapped in an image of the perfect family.

Researcher not teacher

It is because there is an unspoken fear of secrets and of the emotions that pack them in silence that I was careful not to knock too heavily on the women's pasts but instead lead them gently in the direction of experiences and stories to tell, other than the ones they first remembered. I became increasingly aware of the need to provide a reliable framework for the Workshops so the women could tell their stories, be heard and responded to, and each have the opportunity to speak. It was only when I became more confident of my ability to facilitate this interaction without taking a prescriptive authority position that I began to offer life writing techniques that the women were looking to me for.

Most of the women happily spoke *about* their emotions but they wrote *descriptions* of those emotions rather than writing from the embodied experience. It was much less familiar for women to write their own experiences from their embodied perspectives and unravel the experience that produced the emotion than it was to describe or write as though from outside themselves. Although it was the re/membering of experiences that interested me, and I didn't want to privilege writing over telling, I began to use life writing exercises to extend the collective biography framework and stimulate memory in different ways. However, I soon discovered that many of the women were looking to me for *ways of writing*, they wanted life story writing methods and had come with the idea that writing was an important skill they needed to learn *before* they could tell their stories.

Although I avoided taking an authority position, I was responsible for the group even as it developed a momentum of its own that included my participation. I can now identify my aims

and the process that evolved as a feminist pedagogy where I encouraged the women to challenge notions of authority relating to how to speak, who can speak, what they can speak, from where they can speak, and deciding to speak by listening to their internal censor and speaking about that. Most of the women were familiar with the message that good girls were to be seen and not heard.

A feminist pedagogy

Pedagogy is an unfamiliar word to me, but my dictionary explains it is the art or science of teaching (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles* 2002). Patti Lather (1991) speaks about pedagogy as a process that has emancipatory potential when the learning is interactive rather than transmitted. This emphasis on process accords with my approach to my research and analysis in which one aspect of knowledge that is being produced is how that knowledge is produced and how I as researcher am embedded in it. Lather ponders her own use of the word pedagogy and quotes an article by David Lusted in 1986:

> Why Pedagogy? Lusted defines pedagogy as addressing "the transformation of consciousness that takes place in the intersection of three agencies – the teacher, the learner and the knowledge they together produce" (p3). According to Lusted's definition, pedagogy refuses to instrumentalise these relations, diminish their interactivity or value one over another. It, furthermore, denies the teacher as neutral transmitter, the student as passive, and knowledge as immutable material to impart. Instead the concept of pedagogy focuses attention on the conditions and means through which knowledge is produced. (Lather 1991:15)

In my relationship with my supervisors, the concepts teacher, learners, knowledge, were and are, approached flexibly to facilitate learning that is interactive and experiential. Tai Peseta noted from discussions with PhD candidates that they often perceive the PhD process 'as a disembodied project' (2001:84). I wanted to avoid disembodiment from my own scholarly journey and I was anxious to bring my own experiences to the learning, even with the institutional academic constraints that are necessary to produce a written text in a specified period of time. Similarly I strived to encourage an interactive, intersubjective approach to activities in the Workshops.

After each Workshop session I reflected on the discussions and my own feelings and planned the next week in response. For the short time of the Workshops, at least, this way of working seemed to be liberating for the women, and in spite of my responsibilities it was also liberating for me as I was not constrained by rigid plans. Learning was an interconnected process achieved through shared experiences and the crystalline growth of knowing built from

the nexus of conversation. This weekly time at the Lifestory Workshops in the safety of the Women's Centre became a place for play and friendship as well as a place where risks were taken and learning took place, and all the women could speak out loud.

I recognised that encouraging the participants to think about their life stories in new ways was a responsibility that also involved some risks and I recalled the dramatic story about a woman named Hypatia who was dismembered alive for teaching independent thought (Lopez McAlister 1996:1). Hypatia was a Greek Philosopher who lived from 370-415 A.D. Lopez McAlister says that chunks of Hypatia's flesh were disorderly when her body was thrown into the street for a public burning. Her screams reverberated and the smoke signals rising from her charring flesh were 'warning to future centuries of reformers and healers that they must hush their knowledge if they wished to avoid burning as heretics or witches. If they wished to stay alive' (Lopez McAlister 1996:1). This ancient story resonates throughout history and even today because women have been decisively hushed.

Silencing

Silencing relies on the myths of patriarchal ideology that sexual identity, family and affective ties are natural and biological, eliding the very important knowledge that these are cultural products of the heterosexual imaginary (Hennessy 2000:150). This naturalisation of gender attributes produces conflicting emotions that Tillie Olsen (1980) identifies as obstacles to women coming into their own voices as writers when she talks of the interweaving of fear and love. Fear because 'how could it be otherwise... constrictions ... reprisals, penalties and for the writer-woman, founded fear ... power of validation, publication, approval, reputation, coercions, penalties' (1980:258). These issues remain real for academic women wanting to speak all sides of the research and risk the repercussions but they were also real for the Workshop participants some of whom were coming to writing for the first time. Olsen also speaks about love 'the need to love and be loved' as an encumbrance to speaking/writing, and she says 'taking for one's best achievement means almost inevitably at the cost of others' needs' (1980:258). I feel a pang of poignancy in my own struggle with the idea that I need to constrain my mother-self to speak in an academic arena and out of my neglect, risk the withdrawal of my family's love. The elision of competing storylines robs identities and memories of their history and context, privileging dominant myths and blocking the possibility of conceiving experiences in alternate frameworks.

Crossing boundaries

Informal discussions with peers and other students allow new ideas to freewheel and develop intersubjectively. Conversations with my friend Janeen, for example, have fostered significant reflexive learning for both of us. Our friendship formed in the beginnings of our feminist PhDs, but our conversations happen via email now that she's moved away with her partner. We share the troubling waters we negotiate in writing our dissertations, just a few words now and then. We also share a passion for feminist scholarship and we often question our sanity (half joking, half serious) when we stumble in the process of finding our academic feet. We use email to share our learning and ask each other questions. Her recent email restored my spirits and a case of writer's block.

> *19th May 2003*
>
> *Hi Phoenix*
> *I saw a quote today that made me think of you, which in turn inspired me to continue on. It is so much easier to be enthusiastic about the thesis when I think of it in terms of feminist inquiry that is vital to the way that I live my life and possibly others as well. Anyway, here is the quote.*
>
> *'Arguing that libidinal pleasures are extended to all forms of human expression, Irigaray proposed that adult women should confront patriarchy by engaging in autoerotic practices, in lesbianism, in exploring the whole terrain of the body. This would enable them to think thoughts, to speak words that are contradictory, 'somewhat mad from the standpoint of reason, inaudible for whoever listens to them with ready-made grids, with a fully elaborated code in hand.'*
>
> *the last part of the quote comes from 'This Sex Which Is Not One' p29.*
> *anyway, thought the bit from Irigaray was a wonderful image. You (and maybe me) are standing there, somewhat mad, while thesis supervisors/markers with grids stand by, attempting to impose order to the important chaos that we are trying to create... (or have I just gone completely nuts??)*
> *Have been reading about women and popular music, (including Madonna) and puzzling once again about the essentialist/bodiless debate, and trying to work out what I really think about it. Hate the way essentialist is used as an insult like 'tart' or 'idiot'.*
>
> *anyway, hope you are goin great!*
> *j*

Janeen and I share a concern to explore issues of women's voice and subjectivity. Our conversations are important to us both, not simply for the friendship but also in being heard and feeling understood. That is important because as her message points out, and Irigaray warns, women's voices are likely to be inaudible from the standpoint of reason because as Irigaray says, women's words are sometimes contradictory.

The fear that feminist scholarship or speaking in a different voice is dangerous echoes the thoughts raised by participants in the Lifestory Workshops that women must suppress some experiences so they can cope with the everyday. Irigaray's (1993:20) words ring in my ears, that woman is outlawed, silenced and in giving up their female genealogy women are disconnected from m/other/women, women are severed 'from the roots of their identity and their subjectivity'. Again the threat of exclusion or expulsion is implicit in the need to be a subject that is object.

In *Fields of Play,* Laurel Richardson (1997:51) expresses her frustration with the minimisation of feminist thought and the erasure of feminist scholarship, saying that 'exclusion is multi-tiered'. Richardson writes that 'feminist thought had already been minimised in sociology – worse, depoliticised, stripped of its radical implications, sanitised into "'sex roles" or "sex and gender", or "gender / family / work"' (1997:51). To undo traditional ways of knowing is difficult, whether in academic work or, for instance in the Lifestory Workshops because it is both experimental, and challenging to habitual ways of being. Unfamiliar methods exist in an overlap of opposing perspectives and constitute a performance played out on invisible borderlands[11] mapped across familiar hierarchies of authority. Borderlands are places where competing influences overlap, where colonisation and resistance meet in the making of coexistence and where new knowledge can potentially be made. This thesis is a borderland.

The familiar and the everyday are protected by myths of patriarchal culture that are very resistant in the way of habits that have become naturalised. For instance, sexist perceptions imbue notions of place and activities with a resilience that is sometimes expressed in a quiet and perhaps even unconscious exclusion of women and girls from places and activities traditionally considered male. This kind of exclusion can be difficult to identify and name but it can be tracked back from uncomfortable feelings and revealed in storylines that emerge from the writing of free association (Miller 1994:37), or stream of consciousness (Millner 1992:34). Cork Millner (1992:33) has written that stream of consciousness composition is an unstructured writing activity that forces the writer to swing into a creative mode. Stream of consciousness writing gives importance to intuitive knowing and is a tool that can release inspiration and intuition (Millner 1992:34). I take this approach to tease out uncertainties, for

[11] Gloria Anzaldua explains borderlands in the Preface of *Borderlands=La Frontera* (Anzaldua 1999) 'the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between shrinks with intimacy'.

instance in journal writing and to *write my self* into understanding of troubling events or experiences, such as in the following story which I developed from stream of consciousness writing about two separate situations. The story illustrates the resistance to change implicit in well-established habits.

The father was in charge of the garage, he was at home there. It was a double garage, finished before the house, before the money ran out. Not only double but plus a bit, with carports under the extended roof on both sides and storage lofts above. On the whole it was much bigger than many homes, even the builder said so. This father agreed to give one of the lofts to the children as a cubby. It was a precarious play space in any sense of the word. Solid timbers supporting the roof sloped sharply down from the peak to the gutters on the outside, and inside there was not quite enough height to stand upright without bumping heads on the rafters, even in the middle. There were few footholds in the loft, just a grid of beams to walk on and, down the centre sheets of flooring made a flat space to sit or play.

The loft cubby was almost reached by a ladder from inside the garage. It required a certain degree of courage to negotiate the distance between ladder top and hard secure flooring. There were spiders there too. They were mainly large huntsmen who fell out of the trees and sought new homes under the iron roof. They grew plump and fearsome in the shelter of crevices and timber joins. It was a frightening experience when a child disturbed one of these spiders and it would come rushing out of its hiding place. This frequently happened when an outstretched arm was reaching for a toy fallen on the places in between the beams that made the roof below.

It was after such an experience with a spider that the almost-too-old-for-dolls girl hurried back down the ladder juggling a basket of her dolls. She just dropped the basket at the bottom of the ladder and ran into the house sobbing about the spider that had run up her arm, over her head, and down her back. It must have been then that My Child fell onto the garage floor, but no one knows for certain, children's playthings are often difficult to contain and keep in order. The girl's brothers left their half-built projects on the benches and even on the speedboat that was also housed in the garage. Crucial parts of various constructions were often left in the vice for weeks waiting for the time or inclination to return. The youngest son would even hide his plastic dinosaurs in strange places because dinosaurs did indeed inhabit obscure places in his imagination. So sometimes, the father was quite unexpectedly attacked by Tyrannosaurus Rex. One day when he reached into the bag of rags intended for wrapping

engine parts and wiping his greasy hands, an encounter with the dinosaur left deep scratches on the rough skin of the father's big square fingers. Other times when he wanted a particular tool, the father had to search around the shelves at child height, or search among items like old telephones or bicycles in various stages of deconstruction, left scattered in disarray.

The dolls escaping the spider-infested loft were another matter. The fact of finding My Child dishevelled on the garage floor was his primary defence later when the father finally had to admit his hand in the dollies' disappearance. At first there was only silence and a period of absence before it became apparent that the dolls were nowhere to be found. Nothing else was missing, the father had just tidied up the garage one day.

It was My Child who was first reported lost some time later. Every cupboard and nook of the garage was searched, then the entire house, before the father finally owned up. My Child was actually gone, not lost, really she was exiled. She was thrown out to the Salvation Army Op Shop with the entire basket of the young girl's dolls. He had just packed them all up and dumped them in the bin at the supermarket carpark.

My Child was the most special of all the dolls. She had barely any distinguishing facial features, but she was beautiful. She was soft and she was cuddly and she was an extravagant gift from Nana who knew she was dying and would buy no more gifts. My Child arrived on the girl's third birthday with a trousseau of handmade clothes and real baby knitteds. From that day until the girl started to perceive she was growing up, she and My Child were constant companions and by then Nana was already dead.

It was too late by the time the girl and her mother realised the fate of My Child and all the others. She was gone. Perhaps she was sold, sent to another home and given a new identity but whatever happened, the girl never saw My Child again.

The mother knew this was a violation. It was an act of sneaky, silent aggression, carefully disguised. She was reminded of it later when all of her children were grown up and she went back to university. I don't know why she hadn't noticed women's studies dropping out of gender studies immediately. How could that happen? She saw 'gender', kept reading 'women and gender', kept thinking 'feminist'. How did she fail to see that women's studies was being disconnected from its politics? This new word 'masculinities' had moved in appropriating

women's studies and feminism was muscled out, quietly at first. Ultimately no one could fail to see that the political was gone.

She saw it clearly for the first time at a Conference, a Gender Studies Conference, in the Plenary Address. The Coordinator of Gender Studies (a man) made the summation that women's studies + studies of masculinities = gender studies, the fore of new academic discourse. He made the equation neatly and no one argued with the mathematics. It was in the silence that she found the reshaping of feminism as another theoretical option, a discourse, a choice. The politics were only to be found in absence.

She was sickened that day, just like the day she realised My Child was gone. Her mother always used to say, 'watch out for strangers' but she knew it's the familiar that's dangerous and you have to watch in your own backyard. Her mum would say 'don't take sweets from men', but the forefathers had already concealed the work of enticement in her longings. Now fore reminds her of foreskin and penis and the force of masculinity disguising as love. It dominates and betrays with sickly sticky promises in the whispering of untruths at moments of vulnerability. It chokes women's voices. Such as at a Conference where women came to speak, only to find that the father had arrived first and was again in charge of proceedings, only this time he was wearing new clothes.

The colonisation of the space that had been made for women's studies is misogyny in a new disguise but still a recognisable performance. New disguises but the same old bad habits.

Stream of consciousness to collective stories

Surprising links between personal experiences and broader social practices are often revealed in stories developed from stream of consciousness when metaphoric associations and connections draw on embodied knowledge and experiences that are not explained by dominant discourses. Stream of consciousness writing brings emotional investments and unexpected aspects to light.

Rosemary Hennessy (2000:231) makes the point that by looking at 'the "excess" that is often "experienced" as an inchoate effect of not belonging, of not fitting in, or not feeling at home within the terms that are offered for identity', there is the possibility of unlearning, and renarration of (sexual) identities that have been reified within an imaginary conception of a middle class society. When identities that are promoted by dominant culture do not reflect

lived experience, then, Hennessy (2000:231) explains, they are misrecognised. Hennessy's proposal to give importance to the inchoate effect of not belonging is a step to counter the trend for individualism to serve the needs of consumerism, neoliberal and global economic trends. Indeed, a focus on individual difference can fuel separations and divisions in the name of individualism and is significant to the undermining of collective agency through the dissolution of a sense of community. Hennessy (2000:228) appeals to the necessity of a sense of community to consolidate political and social change through a critique of ideology. This problem of self and community is raised in the work of other theorists from various theoretical and academic persuasions, including Leigh Gilmore (1994), Jeff Archer (1997) and Derek Layder (1994) as well as radical feminists including Renate Klein (2001).

Critical reflection of experiences (as happens in the development of my stories from stream of consciousness writing) reveals the work of ideology as it is experienced in human relations and made meaningful in language, consciousness, identity and discourse (Hennessy 2000:19).

In the introduction to her discussion *Memory and Methodology*, Susannah Radstone (2000) explains that there has been recent academic interest in memory as part of the necessity to develop methods that deal with ideology and the take up of ideology by individuals:

> in relation to the continuing struggle to develop, move beyond or supercede work on ideology which failed to explain both the *relation* between dominant social ideas and the 'internalisation' and, as feminism argued so many years ago, how it is that subjects come to capitulate to their own subjugation. (Radstone 2000:11)

These issues are often revealed in subtle nuances that emerge when stories are contextualised by the familiar and everyday. However, untangling embodied storylines from habitual and familiar responses can be difficult because ideology naturalises experiences.

The familiar and the strange

Julie Kaomea (2003:15) says processes that make the familiar strange are a way of seeing beyond everyday perceptions, beyond recognition of the familiar to deeper levels of awareness. For example, 'art and literature employ a variety of defamiliarising techniques to prolong perception, attract and hold our attention' (Kaomea 2003:15). Defamiliarising is forced on the reader because of a need to grapple with language more strenuously and more self-consciously (Kaomea 2003:15).

In the Lifestory Workshops conversations often challenged familiar patterns of understanding because of the disparities in life experiences that came up. I also used specific approaches to defamiliarise remembered events. I encouraged the participants to approach their memories creatively, for example, I suggested an elderly woman who was having trouble getting started to write her stories as letters. I encouraged another woman who considered herself a conversational storyteller to tape record conversations with her grandson, and listen to the tapes for ideas to build the stories she wanted to write. In these instances it wasn't the actual text of the writing that mattered, but finding ways that suited individual women to bring embodied stories to mind and enable them to move to more authoritative positions.

I also encouraged women to write stories about memories they didn't give importance to but had spoken about in conversation. I suggested they use these as places to begin stream of consciousness writing to see where that memory took them. For instance Margot had talked about stealing alcohol from her parents' cupboard when she was a young child and Jenny told a story about nun's underwear drying on the line near her school. These stories were very evocative and opened up new experiences and memories with greater enthusiasm and interest.

Anthropologists make the exotic familiar by their immersion in foreign cultures so they might understand what first presents as incomprehensible customs and differences (Martin 1987:3). Just as the simple act of having a time and a place to talk about their lives was quite foreign to the Workshop participants so my move to fulltime internal study has been the doing of this in my life, making the exotic familiar through immersion. I have immersed myself in the unfamiliar culture of academe, and in juxtaposition to it, is the domestic culture I have lived until recently that becomes increasingly strange.

Perhaps it would have been an easy transition between these two, or perhaps the strangeness of one and familiarity of the other could have simply melded in a borderland, had it not been for an extraordinary series of crises affecting my grown up family since I left my home and responsibilities as primary caregiver to do this research. At first, events that took place seemed simply tragic and unfortunate, if not extraordinary in frequency. Then, when Sam, a close extended-family member, was murdered in the Bali bombing [sic], this wasn't only a family tragedy. Her murder was a part of an international event named *terrorism*, with political repercussions. We weren't alone feeling the impact. Much of Australia was touched and thousands of people have been involved in the whole spectrum of related events after Australians were blown apart in Bali. Gruesome death details and mourning were made public.

The personal became a spectacle that was excessively public and found meaning in the rhetoric of anger and war.

In the aftermath of the bombing, news commentators were quick to name this a definitive national event which had both international political significance and intimate, personal impact for many Australian families. Australia, it was said, lost her innocence and the victims were linked with themes of nationhood as they were inscribed by discourses of Australianness. The right to escape and play in exotic tropical places and carefree vacations was framed as integral to Australian culture. Much was made of the victims' innocence and in spite my family being touched personally, I found myself positioned as *other* by the nationalistic outpouring because I could not identify with the Nation epitomised as feminine, innocent and violated by terrorists.

June 2003

The magnitude of the bombing as an international event galvanised difficulties my family had experienced in the previous year and brought my role as an anchor in the extended family sharply to my awareness. In hindsight the centrality of my motherly role was previously obscured. The repercussions of the bombing reverberated among the family because of the loss of two mothers, one mother who is physically absent and the other mother whose life is fading away with grief as she drowns in a nightmare that may never end for her.

I am the absent mother. I am both at the centre of the family yet physically absent now for the first time in my own children's lives. From this distance the domestic environment is both familiar and increasingly strange and now the university where I have been finding a place as student is again in stark contrast with my mother-self. Unlike my student role, my mother work is not a role, neither is it a performance. It is a well established and familiar way of being in the world. It is integral to my understanding of myself. Rosalind Pollack Petchesky (1998) writes that motherhood is a basic precept of patriarchal ideology and within that, '"motherliness", a state of being and not just a social role or relationship—is the primary purpose of a woman's life' (1998:262). The state of 'motherliness' develops from the social construction of motherhood confusingly entwined with individual experience creating a self-conscious knowing of interrelatedness, internalised responsibility and emotional dependencies (Pollack Petchesky 1998:262). My mother work rests on an ambivalence created by social responsibility and personal desire. Now, as I look with stranger's eyes in every direction, I am aware of an un/familiar place I occupy, I am the mother who is both central and absent,

neither one nor the other. And yet it is a place that encompasses both, producing anxiety in me. Where do I belong?

Margaret Somerville (1999:196) asks the question in *The Body/Landscape Journals*, 'How can woman-as-mother inhabit the landscape when she is the landscape? Where is the home for mother when mother leaves home?' Nowhere is home now and as I think about the familiar and the strange, about bridging disparity and the question of belonging I have been nudged into thinking about a sea change to make an escape. I long to escape from the confusion surrounding Sam's murder and the im/possibility of continuing my research. A sea change is exactly what I need. I want to be in a place where I can walk into the wind and feel the weight of my own body forging ahead and supporting me, where waves can break over me messing my hair and leave my skin caked in a protective film of salt. Where bare toes can sink into the sand as if about to take my aching body to rest, somewhere I might find stability and strength where my muscles can let go of the grief. I want to get away.

The concept of sea changes has become an Australian tradition reflected in the movement of a significant percentage of the population to the coastal fringe (Salt 2001). Sea change expresses the desire for escape, for unfulfilled longings, holidays in exotic places, or retreat from busy lifestyles. It is a trend that facilitates coping with the disparities of modern life, including the desire for lifestyle and income, or the search for improved health. Sea change increasingly involves bridging different ways of life with access to the best of two worlds. It is a discourse grounded in the myth of middle class Australia and the consumer-speak of lifestyle choices. Bernard Salt (2001:76,80,94) refers to this in *The Big Shift* and he observes that popular sea change destinations are not moves *away* from city culture but are moves that take the lifestyle benefits and culture available to professional workers to trendy attractive locations, generally on the coast, commuting distance from congested cities.

In the introduction to *A Sea Change: Australian Writing and Photography*, Adam Shoemaker (1998:10) also reflects on the Australian way of life. Shoemaker claims that Australian society has never been static but has encompassed deep-seated change in response to historical events that have precipitated the reinvention of national symbols, practices and occasions. What deep-seated change will come from the bombing I wonder, for the nation, for my family, and for me? Speaking of the collection of articles in his book Shoemaker concludes:

> they leave us no doubt that Australia can only be defined – if that is what is desired – by its multiple personalities. The paradox is this: change is the constant; transformation is the unifying feature. (Shoemaker 1998:11)

I am not convinced that change and transformation are positively linked in Australian history or in the lives of individual Australians seeking sea changes. The notion of sea changes creates a borderland between ways of being that skirts the difficulty of confronting disparity in lifestyles and desires. In comparison, unpredicted, sudden change is a destabilising confrontation with the *unfamiliar*, or the *other*. All around me I see fear and suspicion in response to the bombing. Virginia Olesen (1992:214) writes that extraordinary events alter 'reality with regard to taken-for-granted groundedness' and have repercussions to the transformations of self that the lived body is continually involved in. Olesen draws attention to the intertwining of body, self and the role of reflection as it influences personal change. Reflection on extraordinary events is influenced by stories and emotions that develop from the collective response because 'the body is at once part of the environment and constitutes a lived environment for self" (Olesen 1992:214). Extraordinary events such as the bombing of the Sari Club in Bali precipitate self-change as a personal response, and also as part of a collective process that inflects individual responses (Olesen 1992:214).

August 2003

The weight of competing responsibilities in my body is exhausting, so I have developed an obsession with imposing order. It's an attempt to manage the complexity of the data and find meaningful ways to stay afloat with my research. I colour-code my files to make life easier. Green is for supervisors' copies, purple for my odd bits of writing, yellow is theorists and theories, and so on. That's one layer. I have a separate file box for articles not completely processed, waiting to be entered into EndNote. It gets heavier. The filing cabinet safely locks away all my Workshop related material, my notes and handouts, transcripts. I have plastic pockets for poems, newspaper articles, drawings and photographs. There are piles on the floor for each of my analytic categories. Unfortunately they collapse with an unruly disrespect for my needs because I can't pin some articles down to one idea or just one pile. The notes on the computer threaten to overtake my knowledge of file management, but at least I can hold the paper copies in my hands.

My ability to create order allows my PhD work to keep moving forward in the turbulence washing around and within me. I make timelines, draw mud maps, and visualise ideas that threaten to drift away like helium balloons escaping my clutch. I ache for seclusion, space,

and disentanglement but instead I impose order on my multiple personalities and allow the *dis* to juxtapose with the *order*. Finally I escape to the sea to work with minimal interruptions and in the solitude of a deserted beachscape I think I can manage. I am afraid my dis/orderly framework will implode on me and I seek ways and words to pin it down while I deal with the unexpected emotional trauma. How can I continue? How will this work be named?

In the Preface of *Memory and Methodology*, Susannah Radstone (2000) describes such methods as mine as being hybrid, whereas Rosi Braidotti (1991:13) argues that bringing together unsynthesised elements as she does looking at women and philosophy, is a process of carefully considered nomadism. Braidotti (1991:13) explains that the separate entities cannot be systematically brought together into a continuum but can best be approached at their intersections.

September 2003

I could describe this research as *eclectic*[12] but I am reluctant to describe the process in one word, however succinct that word might be (and eclectic is succinct), it is currently a popular term. I am afraid that to use a single word is to be complicit with the power of discourse to bring order to dis/order, and bring unification to multiplicity. Even a word that encompasses diversity in its meaning might too easily brush over the range of styles, emerging methods and critical perspectives I have used, and too simply disguise the challenges of thinking/seeing with many I/eye/s, and hearing many voices.

But I *want* to use eclectic. It's a word I admire. Though I am not always clear about its meaning I delight in the feel of it in my mouth as it escapes imagination and finds shape, even as it produces repetition in its clipped sounds with the movement of my tongue.

Actually, eclectic is more appropriate for a completed piece of artwork or research, where the mix of genres and tools is finally known, not for beginnings like mine that are unpredictable and nomadic incursions into meaning making, where the methodology emerges in response to the developments of the research and the unexpected.

[12] Eclectic 3. 'that borrows freely or is derived from various sources or systems; broad rather than exclusive in matters of opinion' (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles* 2002).

October 2003

Eclectic, hybrid, nomadic, but is it madness, I ask myself, as I have before. Is it madness that I can't keep the impressions from this dis/orderly research external to my body's functioning? Different impressions are crosscurrents that collide and jar me. Sometimes my head wants to explode and blow the fragments of knowledge (and the ache in my head) into oblivion. Curious! The dictionary tells me that oblivion derives from the Latin word meaning forgetfulness. While my research is about memory my body aches to forget. Do some things have to be suppressed to perform and to avoid madness?

I realise that it is not memory that is being peeled back in layers, but intersecting storylines that have carved disparate meanings in my flesh and the lives of the participants in the Lifestory Workshops. Can I make visible the layers of meaning that fill my head with conflicting and confusing impressions?

Liberation or dis/orderly conduct?

Patti Lather (Lather 1991:13) names an uncertain framework as liberation when she writes that, 'the courage to think and to act within an uncertain framework, then, emerges as the hallmark of liberatory praxis in a time marked by the dissolution of authoritative foundations of knowledge'. Yet, remaining open to unpredicted influences is a disorderly research praxis. However, I am convinced that through critical reflection of emerging storylines the imposed nature of order will become more transparent to reveal the ideology and discursive practices that silence transgressions in the fabrication of stability, coherence or unification.

Opening up, peeling back, dis/mantling and unfolding layers of meaning from representation in discourses, social narrative and everyday life, feels like shedding skin/s that flake off after the d/r/ying of sunburn. As I expose my raw flesh, will you still love me, and know me, (I write an impassioned letter that's never sent, to my children), will you find me in the ruins and the fragments that are mother, woman, student, other? Or will you misrecognise me?

I sift the fragments of stories for resonances, listening for discourses that are taken-for-granted. These are experiences and practices I will unpick to trace body/story lines of connection and the dominant discourses that overlay them. It is dis/orderly conduct.

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AUSTRALIANS
TOGETHER
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Patriarchs' Desire
Bringing me home after Bali

How many times these months have I laid my sorrow
in the soft hollow of your shoulder?
And you, sweet, caring you,
you wrapped an arm around me
to shield the mourning?

How many times did you find me just beyond some corner,
as I was gathering up my tears and composing my face?
Then you'd sigh, and fold my sobbing to your chest.

You hadn't noticed
my feminist passion houses grief,
my inadequacy in preventing war
and the bombing of innocents,
my unwillingness to accept thieves,
and others, who steal life.

You don't recognise me now.
Am I only becoming to myself?
You try to puzzle me into a whole,
but can't you see?
these are the snatches left by man(s)laughter,
and my longings are scattered on polemic ground.

You hold my fingers in your hand...
and say, 'it's not enough'.

If you watch my teeth grey,
hear their chatter in your ears,
if my head is placed in your lap,
and a tongue bitten off dries in your cheek,
if my heart is lain at your feet,
would that satisfy your desire?

As you gather all the losses,
wrap fragments in this country's flag,
when you plan your war against terror,
don't think,
not for one moment,
that you're bringing me
home.