

Chapter Five

Stretching

Where is the place that you can move into the landscape and can see yourself? (Steedman, 1986, 142)

Is there another way of getting in? Below us someone has stuck four sticks in the sand and, tying the corners of a tablecloth to their points, made a shelter from the sun. This is not a primitive enclosure: it has no walls, being composed entirely of windows and doors. It does not even have a roof: the tablecloth rises and falls in the wind, like a tongue, like a wave. It sculptures the wind crooning gently. This was the first desire, not to prohibit the elements, but to sound them, to enter into conversation with them ... It is late afternoon and the square of shadow it casts has moved a little way eastwards down the beach; to inhabit this dwelling, it is necessary to sit down outside it – just as the soul must pass out of the body and pass to the other side if there is to be conversation (Carter 1992, 124, quoted in Somerville 1999, 182).

I am going to ask the reader to make a stretch across two quite different parts of this chapter. The first part concerns the work of Carolyn Steedman (1986) and what she affords me in terms of a product that writes the body, making it very present, and the underpinning theory acknowledging maternal debt that enables such a writing. In asking the question ‘Where is the place that you move into the landscape and can see yourself?’ and then taking the course of a book to answer it Steedman demonstrates the range and complexity of work that needs to be done. For Steedman it involves first detailing and particularising landscapes that have been previously ‘profoundly a-historical’ (1986, 16). The need then is to develop ways of theorising what emerges from the specificity and difference produced, so that different others are enabled to start using the ‘autobiographical I, and tell the stories of their life’ (1986, 16). This necessitates, amongst other things, painfully unpicking models of mothering that seek, but nonetheless fail, to adequately define who and what she can be as a woman, and constructing more fitting accounts. It is, she says, work that has taken her many years. Indeed it is life-long work.

The stretch I ask the reader to make with me is in translating and applying what Steedman offers into a teaching practice. Any such practice would not, of course, want or expect to stand for that life-long work, but to facilitate and invite more of it. This is what the later part of this chapter and the third workshop continues to seek to do.

Landscape for a Good Woman

A book and a dream

In *Landscape for a Good Woman* - a book ‘about lives for which the central interpretative devices of the culture don’t quite work’(1986, 5) - Carolyn Steedman describes a dream she had when she was three¹. The main feature of the dream is a woman hurrying along, dressed in a ‘New Look’ beige gaberdine coat. The woman sometimes turns and admonishes, glances sometimes, and the dreamer wishes she knew whether she is supposed to follow or not. She wishes she knew what this woman was doing, and what she wanted her to do.

There are other elements – ‘the street so wide and the houses so distant across the road that it might not have been a street at all; and the houses lay low with gaps between them, so that the sky filled a large part of the picture’ (27). Perhaps because of the strange perspective and the profound sense of not quite knowing what is being communicated, the dream has remained ‘quite clear across the years’ (27) and Steedman can later use its many details to place the dream in historical time. For instance Steedman comes to understand the strange streetscape was quite close to a child’s view of London just after the second World War: ‘all the houses had gaps in between because of the bombs, and the sky came closer to the ground than seemed right’ (28). And although she was only ‘an eye watching’(142) in the dream, she can look down at her sandal and the hem of her skirt and recognise one of her two summer dresses, made of gingham, sometime in 1950, and which lasted her, ‘with letting down, until I went to school’ (32).

It is with these material details, and through the extraordinary potency of a dream image that Steedman can make (hyper)links into all sorts of areas, links both to the broad historical and cultural circumstances of the time, and to further specificities of her own and her mother’s life. Recuperating the ubiquitous presence of the War in her early childhood – bombsites, prefabs

¹ All of the quotes in this section are taken from Steedman, 1986. For ease of reading I will only refer to the page numbers of these quotes. I have used Steedman’s exact words in this way because I want to make a point about the specificity and materiality of her text.

on wasteland, ration books – she can see her childhood as ‘a point between two worlds’ (29). More particularly, memories of the post war period return her to the clue of the coat. Steedman’s mother could tear up her ration book when it was no longer required for meat, but bitterly regretted that the twenty yards of cloth needed for a New Look garment would remain outside her means as long as she had two small children. Essential for a working class woman’s upward mobility and already in short supply, the longed for fabric comes to carry the weight of a mother’s ambivalence to her daughters. The implications of her mother’s desires burgeon, for Steedman, into an exploration of both the invisible and material structures within which she and her mother shaped their subjectivities.

Desire

What if your mother refuses her gaze, turns, her attention elsewhere? Does not serve as your mirror, your nurturance, your ground of continuity of being or of the semiotic, fertile source of aesthetic meaning ungoverned by the Father’s Law? If she is no longer outside, but inside, power? If she wields power not as care, nurturance, preservative love, but as assertion, need, desire of her own? Or if she is off playing, with other women or men? Or in her own head? (Flax 1993, 67 in Threadgold 1995, 46)

Is it possible to conceive of a (m)othering where one can care and nurture and still have a desire of one’s own?

Steedman says quite simply that her mother refused to ‘mother’ her in expected ways. She understood she represented a hindrance to her mother, a diversion of funds away from the coats, dresses and skirts necessary for a woman to go out and work her way upwards in the world. And that she, Steedman, would have been a very different person now ‘if orange juice and milk and dinners at school hadn’t told me, in a covert way, that I had a right to exist, was worth something’(1986, 122).

What has been exciting and informing me for ten years now, is the very powerful way Steedman takes as a departure point her mother’s desire - a desire based on a traditional notion of lack, a proper envy, a longing for some thing one does not have. By acknowledging her mother’s longing Steedman at the same time radicalises it, puts it to work without

invisibilising it, in the expression of a very different kind of desire. Grosz describes such a alternate desire as one which

...does not take for itself a particular object whose attainment it requires; rather it aims at nothing above its own proliferation or self expansion. It assembles things out of singularities and breaks things, assemblages, down into their singularities. It moves; it does (Grosz, 1994, 165).

I was born a couple of years after Steedman, in the year of her New Look dream, 1951, and although my physical landscape in Scotland bore none of the traces of her bombed South London, Steedman's particular trajectory across a range of singularities and assemblages, mobilises extraordinary material for me. The sense of broadly sharing a time and a cultural context (indeed feeling, as if for the first time, something of the material quality and experience of a larger context) is co-constituted in the same movement as intense recognition of some of the specific details.

It's not just my appreciation in a historical sense of growing up under the same postwar state welfare and its benign paternalism, those tides of free milk, orange juice and subsidised substantial school dinners, it's that I can actually taste them, see them, and bring embodied memories of an earlier self back in to feeling.

I'm back in my first days of school, the anchoring mid morning crate of individual glass bottles, a third of a pint, creamy and rich under a shining foil cap. Some rituals of dispensing attach, lining up, proper behaviour. Remembering a complex game of doctors and nurses where I was, like Steedman's eye watching, somehow embedded in amongst the desks. (What was I learning about bodies in *that* play?) The healthy, managed body as investment for the future; the good and proper school body; the gendered body – all already coming into shape, I think now.

I must have taken heartily and enthusiastically to my interpolation for I certainly ate everything with gusto, loved school dinners and never understood why others baulked at such excellent fare as potted meat and salad. The potted meat quivered and glistened in a huge slab ready for me to dispense, as little mother, or lunchtime serving monitor, to my table of eight. Cajole and remonstrate as I might, there were often few takers. My responsibility was heavy.

As we were not allowed to proceed to pudding without due demolition of the meat it seemed to fall to me to somehow get us to the next course.

At night only my father, then, would need a ‘proper’ dinner after a sandwich lunch at the office. (What my mother ate at lunchtime I’ll never know.) But as the rest of us tucked into cauliflower cheese, there was hardly any need for my mother to remind us what delicious and nourishing food it was. We already knew how advantaged we were, knew with pride that her nutritional expertise came with the authority of a nursing background. Knew already that our father was really the one missing out.

Irigaray, talking about women’s participation in the cultural reproduction of women as a particular kind of mother, describes the prevailing discourses.

You have made me something to eat. You bring me something to eat. But you give yourself too much, as if you wanted to fill me all up with what you bring me. You put yourself into my mouth and I suffocate. Put less of yourself in me and let me look at you. I’d like to see you while you are feeding me. Not to lose my/your sight when I open my mouth to you. And that you should still remain close to me while I am drinking you. But continue to be on the outside, as well. Keep yourself, and keep me just as outside, too. Do not swallow yourself up, do not swallow me down in that which flows from you to me. I’d like it so much if we could be there, both of us. So that one does not disappear into the other, or the other into the one (Irigaray 1981, 11 quoted in Grosz 1989, 122).

Steedman say that all children experience a sense of exclusion and loss, and that lives are shaped around this sense, but she also finds childhood a rich site for retrieving vital social information that doesn’t accord with the dominant story –

In childhood, only the surroundings show, and nothing is explained. Children do not possess a social analysis of what is happening to them, or around them, so the landscape and the pictures it presents *have to remain a background*, taking on meaning later, from different circumstances (Steedman 1986, 28, my emphasis).

In different circumstances, Steedman finds contradictions inherent in any ‘good enough’ mothering, a simultaneous giving *and* taking away. Working this space between, with

multiple levels of going to and fro, Steedman looks at a process of undoing and redoing her understanding of maternal relations, so that both she and her mother can be there. Looking at processes of illusion and disillusion, and of play, which allow us to experience not only a related self and a separate self, but a self capable of being unproblematically in the company of another, subject to subject. Through the materiality of food and clothes, and exploiting the work of the image in this undoing and redoing, Steedman explores as Irigaray does the transmission and speaking of women's desire, so that both desire and language can begin to function for women in an economy of their own making.

The work of the image

My sense of mother has been subject to so much absenting – not just her physical death but the loss of all the good and good enough things between us that seemed to disappear under the weight of increasing antagonism and resentment. I so much want to deal with that differently. I want to make a mother coat and get back inside her and start over again.

My excitement at this image, the energy it provided as I was making my way through the research practices of a Masters. Fragments of the coat in progress, blueprinted images, bubbling into conversation with a group of rural women about bodies, as our talk of smell and touch triggered memories and multiple possibilities for representation.

The productive force of Steedman's New Mode Coat image is such that it carries over powerfully into the production of images of my own. The emergence of a Mother Coat image in particular proves to be a critically liberating and unsticking thing. It is an image that excites me, provides connections with the others of the research, other women, mother, other of myself. It keeps me moving on through the difficulties and demands of reworking and writing other (Mother being the first other that you encounter and the one that you go back to in working out othering and writing other).

What Steedman allows to be undone in relation to us and our mothers, and me and my mother in particular, is to move beyond the limited options of all or nothing. In my case I was able to move from a figure of interdiction (who do you think you are?) to a much earlier and unexpressed maternal figure, to a space, a relationship, practices which allow embodied selves to come into being, and offer themselves as a way of thinking.

Julia Kristeva offers words and concepts with which to explore semiotic/symbolic relations between body and language and these ideas are made accessible in English in Grosz's (1989) analysis. 'Madness, holiness, and poetry' are important sites for Kristeva, sites where what she calls the semiotic overflows, rupturing temporarily the order of a social economy and language that is masculine, oedipal, phallic – the symbolic. Understood as the unregulated drives and impulses of a pre-oedipal, pre-signifying body, the semiotic must be constrained and harnessed for signification to take place. And yet while ever it threatens to overflow, to resist a certain organisation, it constitutes an ongoing dialectic. The moments of intersection, the threshold or cusp between the semiotic and symbolic, Kristeva calls the thetic. An extraordinarily pivotal place, where one can have a foot in both camps as it were, accessing both the semiotic and the symbolic, the thetic is policed heavily by dominant cultural orders attempting to contain or exploit these excesses.

While new visions, new energies, new arrangements of the social order thus become possible, those wanting to address this nexus for radical change attest to the difficulties of recuperating that which has been so effectively culturally and personally repressed.

The regulatory processes brought to bear on the imagination render the female body other, animal, therefore abject, and exclude that body and its unruliness from the domain of the higher subject ... A woman becomes the cultural abject, identified out in her difference, solidified in her very embodiment ... as a woman she is doubly indemnified. She is the cultural abject: she abjects her own body (Smith 1993, 90).

In the beginning I worked to form a cloth by printing images of my mother. Each attempt to materialise a coat, however, produces so much pain that the imaginary garment became unwearable. A whole series evolved: too hairy, too heavy, too scratchy too tight, until I finally acknowledge there is no going back in this way. Perhaps I am the coat, I tell Margaret, and I can only remake myself? The difficulties of bringing it into being part of me abjecting the body; that I always want to leave it in the semiotic, don't want to let it come into the symbolic?

Getting in, getting out, getting through the dilemma of writing the body. Speaking of the way Virginia Woolf's writing practice mediated the distress of separation from the preoedipal bond of infancy, from her mother, from her own body, Sidonie Smith recalls for me various of

Woolf's images that convey something of a pivotal space between pre and post language (1993, 83-102). Sitting as an infant on her mother's lap Woolf feels enveloped by the large passion flowers on her mother's dress. Lying in her crib at St Ives, she recalls 'the feeling, as I describe it sometimes to myself, of lying in a grape and seeing through a film of semi transparent yellow' (Woolf, 1976, 65). The infant memory, developed into the image of the 'grape' eyeball is about sense itself - fluid, open to the multiplicity of sensations that pass between both the child and the mother, and the child and the world – colour, smell, taste, sound and rhythm (Smith, 1993, 95). Woolf writes 'I am hardly aware of myself, but only of the sensation. I am only the container of the feeling of ecstasy, of the feeling of rapture' (1976, 67).

Not in a dream but in the images of memory I both see and feel myself standing on a table having a dress cut out.

I am small. A new dress is being made. Green gingham. Standing on the table, impatient, irritable, having to stand and turn, and raise my arms, and stand and turn, and being pricked with pins and feeling intensely the cold edge of big scissors snipping next to my flesh, round my neck, under my arms, so very very close to my flesh.

How proud she was of always 'getting the dress out' with less than the instructions said. (What legacies lie there?) But on the other hand this is custom made, this is my body. This is my mother as she snips and shapes around my form for perfect fit. I have the same skin now, the same arm, neck. And how I loved those dresses.

Mother cloth and body. I seem to know the boundaries of each.

The difficulties began, I suppose, later.

Walking, relishing this knowledge, not just a truce, more a mutual appreciation; rolling the satisfactory moment round and round. This curious sense of not simply putting myself at the centre, but defining the boundaries of self; being at the boundaries and seeing, feeling what the boundaries are like, and therefore paradoxically feeling the sense of self and other simultaneously. Is this what Merleau-Ponty wanted to access with his image of flesh? He has been criticised for his privileging of the visual in a way that stops short of acknowledging a maternal debt, but I find bodily resonance in his words.

We understand then why we see things themselves, in their places, where they are, according to their being which is indeed more than their being –perceived – and

why at the same time we are separated from them by all the thickness of the look and of the body; it is that this distance is not the contrary of proximity, it is deeply consonant with it, it is synonymous with it. *It is that the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeity; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication* (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, 135, my emphasis).

Body in Place Workshop

By “body” I understand a concrete, material, animate organization of flesh, organs, nerves, and skeletal structure, which are given a unity, cohesiveness, and form through the psychical and social inscription of the body’s surface. The body is, so to speak, organically, biologically “incomplete”; it is indeterminate, amorphous, a series of uncoordinated potentialities that require social triggering, ordering, and long term “administration”. The body becomes a human body, a body that coincides with the “shape” and space of a psyche, a body that defines the limits of experience and subjectivity only through the intervention of the (m)other and, ultimately, the Other (the language - and rule-governed social order). Among the key structuring principles of this produced body is its inscription and coding by (familiarily ordered) sexual desires (ie., the desire of/for the other), which produce (and ultimately repress) the infant’s bodily zones, orifices, and organs as libidinal sources; its inscription by a set of socially coded meanings and significances (both for the subject and for others), making the body a meaningful, “readable”, depth entity; its production and development through various regimes of discipline and training, including the coordination and integration of its bodily functions so that not only can it undertake general social tasks, but also become part of a social network, linked to other bodies and objects (Grosz, 1999, 382).

Can we be embodied as well as speaking subjects? The Body in Place Workshop was intended to take a closer look at inhabiting bodies and places at their most ordinary level, in daily acts and experiences. How does one practice body awareness? And how might a

heightened sense of corporeality, our own and our environment's, be carried over into our works, our representations, our teaching? Can one raise such questions in ways that both validate lived experience and productively problematise it? Crossley, discussing this issue in relation to Merleau-Ponty's notion of flesh, puts it very succinctly

Discourse itself is a fleshy process for Merleau-Ponty. It is produced through the work of the body. Moreover, one of the chief characteristics of the body, qua active body, is that it speaks and listens, and reads and writes. There is and can be no choice between discourse and fleshiness then. They belong to each other as do legs and walking (Crossley, 1999, 51, quoted in Beckett and Morris, 2001, 37).

Outline for workshop

A two day programme was developed with Sylvia, who was to be primary facilitator for the first day's body-in-place activities. In addition to our connective practices that begin and end each workshop we constructed four modes of addressing these issues.

Senses, surfaces and traces

We would begin with some simple body centering relaxation, followed by physical exercises and games that would focus on each of the senses. Thinking about surfaces of bodies and places interacting (both the 'real' of our immediate environment, and imagined), we would ask what sensory responses there are to place, what material traces are left on us by place, or that we leave on place, as we go about daily lives.

Photo in place

Working with a visual image of the self in place (a photograph or a photograph-like construction that had both an image of the self and an image of some particular place or environment), we would attempt to elicit and identify sensory experiences, move on to physical and material traces, and then pose the question of how some of these aspects of being in place, if not necessarily apparent here, could be carried through and made more present in some way in an artwork.

A Walk and a Picnic

A third approach involved moving out into the wider landscape. In the afternoon we would drive out of town for about fifteen kilometres, towards the Warrumbungle Mountains and to the property, in the foothills, of one of the group. We would simply enjoy, and experience, hopefully with heightened awareness as the result of our earlier activities, the sensory specificities and physical material traces of a particular environment. A walk, a picnic, an invitation to spend some time at someone's place. Participants would be invited to take notebooks or artbooks, cameras if they wanted to document their responses, but the primary focus was to be a heightened physical experience in a shared group context.

Pinboarding

With these experiences to ground and inform us, the second day of the workshop was set aside to introduce and practice 'pinboarding'. Pinboarding is both a strategy and a place that seeks to be attentive to the labouring body as it articulates itself. How can we support and continue a conscious awareness of body and bodies whilst engaging with symbolic practices that historically overlook or repress the same?

Day one

The base venue for this workshop was a local primary school hall. At the time I was glad of a cheap place with plenty of room, but the strangest of sensations come with taking up temporary residence in a space redolent with quite different performances. 'Getting in' was a problem for many of us. I had been given the wrong keys and someone had to be dispatched to find the headmaster on a Saturday morning to open up for us. The overnight rain had continued, and some participants had called to say they couldn't get to town because of rising waters. The thirteen women who did manage to come however, arrived full of enthusiasm and after re locating enough adult sized tables and chairs we attempted to make ourselves at home in the vast and draughty place.

Reconnecting

As was our practice, instigated by Mary, we started each workshop with a period of re-visiting the last and anything that had arisen for participants in the intervening time. Connecting threads served to stitch one workshop experience to another. At the same time individuals might stitch themselves back into the group and the specificity of the project processes. Any

photographs from the previous workshops were returned to the group, as was any scribed material, the textual traces of our previous gathering. Reflections and comments were invited, and any contributions that women wanted to make to the joint scrapbook, in any form, were welcomed. Milling around the table, most participants would check out their photos, leaf through the scrapbook, even if not themselves pasting something in, before we took time to sit and hear in turn what each had to say. This stitching in place was very attentive to the need to support the dynamic of the group, and the individuals within it, forming, separating, reforming. The need to support a sense of continuity without covering over the obvious gaps, interventions and the way ongoing other agenda, the competing discourses of daily lives intersected with the work of the project.

How everyone loves Jennie's first time offerings that have been made in the space between the two workshops. What a shift from her earlier doubts and dissatisfaction about her creative capacity. 'I'm making so many connections -These are my donations'. There are pieces of writing, collage style paintings too, from others. And I'm so pleased to hear a beginning sense of 'us' as a collective project that is being inventively and viably constructed from outside as well as from inside. At the public meetings those who had been on the verge of joining the group, but had not, were invited to feel part of permeable boundaries, to imagine ways of staying connected and supportive. 'People who came to the initial talk stop and ask me about it. How's your Laura arty thingy going? They're really interested in keeping in touch with our progress step by step.'

Each of these returning, folding experiences was quite intense for me. They obviously functioned at one level as ongoing evaluation of the project, but I was also reconstituted anew and slightly differently each time myself in yet another nexus of facilitator, teacher, researcher, documenter. The moments of unknowing, of anticipation or anxiety being transformed by how we all sounded each other out across the space. The images, objects, ideas, as well of course, as the physical bodies each occasion produced, materially exciting me and making a mark in the structure of the day, how I moved forward.

Senses, surfaces and traces

Working through the idea that the everyday lived body that can be so easily absented, taken for granted or alternatively experienced as oppositional and problematic, Sylvia's brief has been to first locate us thoroughly in our bodies with some relaxation and breathing techniques.

Then to devise some activities that will focus on each of the senses, before going on to explore more closely surfaces and traces in relation to the senses.

In *The Absent Body* (1990) Drew Leder argues that certain modes of disappearance are essential to the body's functioning. These modes could be said to have allowed or at least made easier the Cartesian project that seemed to disappear the body's relevance altogether. In the case of the surface ecstatic body, opening and projecting onto the world via the senses entails both a necessary backgrounding of other bodily capacities and an inaccessibility to the site from which one projects. Similarly many vital processes of the interior body are unavailable to consciousness and control, and must remain largely hidden away, in depth, to protect their functioning. In the event of pain or illness, though, the body can 'emerge from disappearance to become a thematic object', exerting a power 'that reverberates throughout the phenomenological field, shifting our relations both to the world and to ourselves' (Leder, 1990, 79). 'Insofar as the body seizes our awareness particularly at times of disturbance, it can come to appear "Other" and opposed to the self' (1990, 70).

Even with a commitment to this process and long thinking about it, I know myself capable of estrangement from my own body, and certainly not practiced enough to lead the group. I expect some of the group to be familiar with body centred practices – relaxation techniques, massage, yoga, but that others may find it quite strange to be self consciously addressing the body outside of, for example, medical discourse with its emphasis on the pathological.

We lie on the floor for the relaxation, letting go as much external stimuli as possible until consciousness is all breath and body. And when we are brought back to engage with the wider world again the rain is drumming in the cavern of the vast roof, and someone swears they can locate *that sweet smell, dusty shoes, when we had to bring our sneakers to school on wet days, wet wool and old school lunches*. We explore our space - smelling, listening, looking, touching, but tasting is most of a challenge. Some lick salty skin, woolly jumper, but few risk the taste of the place itself.

Later, Sylvia has us up and moving in different ways around the room, pushing us to feel our bodies stretching, contracting, expanding into available space, reminding us of the range of possibilities. Playing *Pass the object* in a circle we move more closely to imagine the sensations and movements that come with engaging other bodies and surfaces – pass the frog,

melting ice, hot potato, handful of sand. And then, at rest again, we take an imaginary walk down the garden path. We are asked to take ourselves slowly out of our familiar territory, out of our rooms, our hall our doorways, out of our house and into the surrounds, bush, garden, street. Taking note, Sylvia says, of the sensory qualities. What do we pass through? A smell, a creak, a certain give or impediment of surface. We are asked to linger for a while, imagining ourselves in any activity that's usual for us in that place. Now think about what are the material traces of this activity on your body. Is there anything sticking to you? Have you been kneeling, brushing past? *Dirt under my finger nails, bits of blue metal, indents, mud drying on my arm, wild oats pricking the skin and mosquito bites at my ankles.*

It is clear from the easy and engaged cooperation, the richness of response, that these women inherently knew and practised on an individual basis some level of body awareness. I want to continue to keep to the fore however the difference it makes to do and name this in the affirmative company of others; the subtleties of the moves we were making in this public place, despite the fact there was no audience other than ourselves. Making this visible and audible for each other we validate it as a way of seeing ourselves in the landscape.

The work of the photo in place, however, is work that each participant initially confronted individually.

Photo in place

Eye/I: The politics of looking

A man writes 'I' as he sees, and in writing it is therefore seen. The relationship is clear. When a woman writes 'I' she must reconcile seeing with being seen, and negotiate the transposition of the first term to her own use. How is she, the object who is seen, to see herself, both seen and seeing? She cannot assume the same authority when she begins the sentence (Modjeska, 1994, 141).

The conversation I've had with Jennie prior to this workshop seems redolent of the problem women face, feeling excluded from either a satisfactory viewing or making position. Jennie tells me she has been looking at the stuff she had made in our earlier workshops. None of it was ever meant to be more than exploratory, but Jennie still felt it was terrible and maybe she was only meant to be a looker, and admirer of beautiful things. She says she's never liked

what she has made for herself – won't wear jumpers she has competently knitted, and in any case stopped when the kids came along. She's skilled in upholstery and furnishing techniques, but while she's happy with what she makes for her own home – when it comes to doing it for other people, she doesn't believe it is good enough.

Griselda Pollock (1995, 38-66) explicitly raises questions implicit in Modjeska's words. Why are images of women and children produced by women received as boring or uncomfortable or inappropriate, Pollock asks. 'Who is looking at what, at whom, and with what effects in terms of power?' (1995, 40). Who can look and who can not, and what pleasures and anxieties in looking are being managed? What terms are there for responding to the work of women which recounts their female experience? Like Modjeska, Pollock looks at women artists who make the dialectic of looking and being looked at the very subject of their work, thereby creating a range of alternative speaking and looking positions. Ways of seeing inextricably linked to the telling of stories. The Photo in Place exercise offers the opportunity to make similar kinds of intervention accessible to the group. Can both the ground and the figure be brought into critical view? Can they be made present in all their fleshy detail and having something to say?

Everyone had been asked to bring a photograph of themselves in a place of their choosing. They might have to construct such an image by cutting and pasting.

The work to be done with and through these images starts in the selection or construction, where several related issues might be addressed. The act of choosing an image of both the self and a place is to bring these two things into a relationship not normally made obvious or critical in everyday practice. To self consciously choose the image of yourself and the image of a particular environment at the same time is to hopefully disrupt the tendency to fall into the figure/ground dichotomy, where one is privileged at the expense of the other. Equally, it should unsettle any tendency to read the figure/environment relationship as if it were flat, continuous, undifferentiated as the smooth surface of the photograph.

As the subject of a photograph taken by someone else we inevitably become the object of someone else's gaze. Most importantly it is specifically a question of choice, of desire, not happenstance. Very simply, to manipulate a self image in this inexpensive and relatively accessible way is to heighten awareness of that subject/object contradiction.

Can we at the same time invoke the sensory, somatic material qualities of bodies and places in intimate relationship? We ask the gathered women:

Can you first briefly tell the story of this image or photograph?

Then try to identify the physical sensations of those circumstances, and any physical traces that might remain from that encounter of you in that particular place.

Lastly, think about how any of those traces, or physical sensations could be carried over into a work.

Seeing the self in the landscape

Jennie's work

Putting the ‘photo in place’ together has meant significant work for Jennie. When she considered her existing collection of glamorous photographs - long luxurious stretches of beach, filled with light and bright, vital colour, stylish cosmopolitan city places she’d sometimes like to return to, Jennie realised she could not reconcile these images with her complex current investments. Framing herself in this way would give no account of current bodily reality.

After rejecting her earlier ‘awful’ makings of the first workshop she has been pinning up on her wall some other things that matter to her, that inspire or engage her. There’s a poem, images of her children, a piece of fabric, grandmother’s buttons. She has been asking herself why she couldn’t celebrate and work with aspects of what she was living and doing, what she has invested in domestically, being country wife and mother. None of that was present in those other images. To produce an adequate image she would have to construct it for herself.

On transparent OHP plastic (*flimsy and transparent because that's how people say they think I am*) Jennie has photocopied a coloured drawing of her made by an artist friend at the time of her wedding. *The golden haired goddess with a great body! (And she drew me the kind of Prince Charming she imagined for me, but “he” couldn't have been more unlike!)* She has added strong mixed colours in paint to represent the water, those other glamorous environments, as well as something she describes as an onslaught of demanding issues. (*Remember I brought a simple box to begin with, how I wanted clean simple lines? This is a huge mess of everything coming in at me all the time, all this other stuff happening. It's okay, I'm dealing with it, but it comes at me all the time.*) In the background, bodies moving and dancing (*because I have a real sense of body and movement. The things we were doing this*

morning. It's what I'm doing –watching myself doing it.) In the foreground of the image there is a table with green apples spilling over, in constant abundance, and photos of the family, three small children as fairies, and husband, hovering hungrily, (and I'm the one pouring forth over them. I overlook them, as well as them looking on me. I look over them and after them all).

*I'm totally adored at home
 You're such a centrepiece
 The whole place pivots around you
 There's warmth
 And there's lots of food smells
 I consider myself a bit of a Goddess Domesticus
 I'm running the show
 Keeping everybody happy
 It's my place at this time
 It's a role I'm playing
 I used to be the tooth fairy²
 Now I teach movement
 I move a lot
 I couldn't be myself if I didn't have the movement*

*The smell of the place is pure and rich
 It's a feeling of abundance
 I've always loved the smell of food cooking towards evening
 I constantly have grease on my clothes from cooking
 Loose skin on my stomach from having babies
 A frown between my eyes*

There are other smaller works Jennie has produced as well and these she feels confident enough to offer into the group journal and scrapbook, taking up ownership of a creative space there. Her children as impish fairies; photographs photocopied and coloured and collaged. She writes beside them

² Jennie came to the town first as part of a travelling dental health team.

*An effort at creativity!!
 A touch of 'whimsy'
 In a life full of (^ good) fairies
 Who are adoring and tolerant
 Of their tired mum*

Elspeth Probyn says that particular images allow us to raise questions, to analyse facts that an image has brought forward, and it is in this sense that she advocates the use of self *as* image (Probyn, 1993, 97-98). Even as the self arises out of a situation, it can comment on its own production.

...it produces things, in the sense that it is quite an art, and an act, to make something apparent, to produce an object that will be considered as a document, to bring out of the shadows and to put forward 'facts' that, in the final instance, are never given (Le Doeuff, 1989, 106, in Probyn, 1993, 98).

By struggling to articulate, to make a place for her embodied realities within the photo exercise Jennie allows ambiguities and contradictions to begin to surface. Eager and impatient she had challenged herself to explore some of the pinboard practice we were to cover later in this workshop, and was able to model, in one, the kind of unfolding process I hoped would become increasingly visible. She works with tripled consciousness - seeing, being seen, seeing herself. Not one fixed body image, but several co existing possibilities. The golden 'bod' is intersected by loose flesh, sensual pleasure with physical cost, and the nurturing body, her own pleasure as consuming body, exists alongside the unmistakable possibility of being consumed. Everyone is inspired and impressed by Jennie's productions, both the physical and the notional. *Goddess Domesticus* becomes an acknowledged character. More particularly, several specific images that Jennie produces begin to circulate, be taken up later in various ways by others in the group.

Linked bodies

Both Lynda and Yvonne's photos in place re/mark connection with others. Lynda's connections are linear, familial, through generations, whilst Yvonne suggests a hybrid body and identity as part of a writer's group.

Yvonne's photo places her in the midst of a group of active and agentic women.

Mine's a photo of Writer's Cramp, our writing group

At our annual dinner

Wendy's arm is obliterating Betty Davis's head

It's at the Golden Sea Dragon

We enjoyed the sensations of being with writers and talking about writing

The staff are very friendly

I'm well known for my liking for screwdrivers

And thinking later about this image in terms of the viewing position it offers, the articulation of space and bodies, the proximity and interrelationship between the bodies becomes quite pointed. Indeed Yvonne presents herself very much as part of a collective. Although the task is to focus on the self in place, she uses 'we', 'our', draws attention to bits of other people intersecting, 'Wendy's arm', 'Betty Davis's head', almost as if they did indeed form one body. And the staff in their friendliness seem to be in support. Even a statement about what she likes to drink, comes, it seems, in terms of a positioning within a closely connected group, and through other people's perceptions and knowledge of her. *I'm well known for my liking for screwdrivers.*

Lynda offered an image and a situation that spoke directly to notions of continuity. Three generations pose in the churchyard.

We went on a visit back to where my mother grew up

A place called Mumbil

This is a little church

My mother's there

So is my son

Three generations

Not in the picture is her only daughter, her baby at the time, and it is around and through her little girl that Lynda recovers the sensory qualities of the occasion.

It was comfortable

It was warm enough to go for a swim in the little creek

Alison was about two years

We took her down to the creek

*And she paddled around naked
The stones were comfortable
You could walk across them without anything on your feet*

Liminal spaces

The liminal space of beach and water is a site many choose to represent. How amazing, someone says, that we are this far inland and water, beach, are so important to us.

Two of the group who have prior and developed art practice, place themselves self confidently and sensuously in this space/place. Winnicott comes straight to the point and says that in symbolic terms the seashore is the mother's body and also the site of play between mother and child (96). Sue G. says

It was at the beach

A lot of rocks behind me

I was sketching

When you're on holidays it's the main time to do any painting or sketching

The beach in my life is probably the most sensual landscape I've experienced

The warmth and the comfort

I love with the sand between my toes

There's always that wind in your hair

When you're away by yourself in the landscape

Especially that warmth

It's a really sensual thing

Carolyn has also had to 'make' herself in place, with a collage, and she too has felt the need to be near water, shore.

I've done a collage of me near the water

As you can see all I want to do is my crafts

I'm actually hidden under all these things.

Carolyn is not enfolded in the landscape as such, but covered over, obscured by the accumulated techniques and crafts that were the knowledge base of her teacher training and that she has continued to add to over the years. This new fact produced in front of us surprises Carolyn herself.

Wendy's photo comes from holiday and seaside, but it's not, it seems, the place she really wants to locate herself in. It is a site from which she chooses to articulate and gesture towards that which is either absent, or not visible, particularly home (elsewhere) and husband.

I was in Glenelg, a coffee shop on the Bay (I hate the smell of coffee). I'm looking at my husband who's there (but not 'visible' in the photo) and I love him. I'm happy. I'm tired. I'm homesick. That's all in the photo.

Offering terms such as *warm, comfy, tranquil, accomplished*, Wendy also produces ripples of complexity and contradiction that at the same time unsettle these terms.

I want to try to resist the temptation to turn these fragments, with the benefit of hindsight and author/ity, into linear and coherent trajectories. What making and reading the photo in this way can bring to the surface are the rich and complex intersections of mind/body - foreground/background - inner/outer. What gets produced in this nexus between self/place/feelings/material surfaces/memory and story is a dynamic that disturbs and refuses any absolute boundaries to those categories. It is a dynamic that is unstable, unpredictable and cannot be hurried. Working through the different stages of exploration in the exercise, it was noticeable how much time was needed to take on board these ideas and questions - a distinct lag in participants taking up each step. What was asked of the first step, mostly only began to be fully answered when we moved to the next.

Our last move is to imagine how we might work/walk/talk some of these embodied experiences into a piece. While several are just beginning to articulate the traces of that experience, nonetheless potential materials, shapes, relationships between forms that might relate to the making of future concrete works, begin to appear.

Clumps of garlic

layers

Like a voile that could overlay the story

You'd have to go round it

And be able to touch it.

Carter writes – ‘it is clear that the most tactile landscape representations are those that disclose the mobile process of physical and emotional exchange between subject and surroundings’(1991,5). This is not to abandon aesthetics, he says, ‘But to bring appreciation back to surface - a surface which, in the end, is coterminous with the place beneath our feet

and whose horizon is not over there but here where tongue and finger tip come into contact with the world (Carter, 1991, 5).

It is a good time to take these reflections with us out into part of our local environment.

Out into the landscape

Our excursion was conceived with the idea of enjoying a heightened awareness of our bodies and surroundings, exploring the ordinary everyday body in motion in ways both simple and complex. Reminding us of very simple ways of connecting with place that could nonetheless be fundamental to our cultural expression. Taking food to share would allow us to enjoy and think about food practices as acts of inhabiting, without any of us being positioned as the mother of too much or too little. We would take a walk, have a picnic, in the bush surroundings. It is not only that our visual field, as Carter puts it, ‘has its origins in a spatio-temporal experience that is mobile, even migratory’ (1994, 6) but we would be aware of orienting ourselves through smell, touch, taste, and listening as we moved through a particular environment.

Carter suggests that a mobile approach brings the ground much more usefully into our consciousness

...the ground, that is, as it surrounds us in its unevenness, rising and falling, here bending away, there rising to meet us, in every direction curved and folded.

Such a ground [...] would remain in the forefront of our interest, furnishing not only subject-matter but even a way of thinking about the nature of “place” (Carter, 1994, 6).

When it comes to leaving the hall for our expedition, the irony of our morning exercises is certainly not lost on us. We had been pretending, in the school hall, imagining walking through the water and the mud. Now, because of the continuing rain, and because the road we would take was liable to flooding at several points along the way, I had to decide whether or not we should go ahead at all. All my best intentions and desires were pointed up in that decision making moment as a kind fantasy – what I had imagined couldn’t possibly now take place. It was really clear to me that I had subconsciously opted for the most pleasant and sunny performance of selves and place. But in risking setting out what became so potent *was*

the materiality of the day's weather and the difference it made to the terrain beneath our cars and our feet. Swollen creeks, slewing in the mud, sliding down the dirt track which took us onto the property. The water was rising over the flood ways, viscerally challenging but not yet impassible. We left the cars on the far side of the last creek and made our way to the homestead in the rain, through puddles, long grass, and over the homemade footbridge, which in times like this was the only way in or out. There is a moment of intense difficulty too as the oldest of our group juggles the logistics of the journey, her heart condition and her independence. What has been a private matter becomes a collective one as we try to determine the seriousness of the situation and work out how we can assist her to the house.

The mud brick house is built on a lava flow and nestled, partially enclosed, by smaller boulders and slabs of the valley's volcanic outcrops, but we picnic inside and explore the internal surfaces instead. Mud walls and local timber. Slate and local stone. Some of the outside is inside anyway. The space is open plan, nearly round, with windows looking out at every turn. Sylvia shares the making stories of the place as we eat. We'd stay longer except we might not get back to town, and I feel responsible for all these women getting home safely. Within the dimensions of my responsibilities as organiser, and layers of concern, I feel my own body senses, my perception and interpretative skills called into overtime. We have a small child with us (zooming round and round the central stone fireplace) and a real potential for further flooding, being stuck on the other side far from homes (and medical help?). Every nuanced change in rain, water, mud, the quality of shifting light and noise outside registers.

What matters is the ground beneath your feet.

The test of imagination, ultimately, is not the territory of art or the territory of the mind, but the territory underfoot. That is not to say that there is no territory of art or of the mind, only that it is not a separate territory. It is not exempt either from the principles above it or from the country below it. It is a territory, then, that is subject to correction - by, among other things, paying attention. To remove it from the possibility of correction is finally to destroy art and thought, and the territory underfoot as well.

Memory, for instance, must be a pattern upon the actual country, not a cluster of relics in a museum or a written history. What Barry Lopez speaks of as a sort of invisible landscape of communal association and usage must serve the visible as a

guide and as a protector; the visible landscape must verify and correct the invisible. Alone, the invisible landscape becomes false, sentimental and useless, just as the visible landscape, alone, becomes a strange land, threatening to humans and vulnerable to human abuse.

To assume that the context of literature is the “literary world” is, I believe, simply wrong. That its real habitat is the household and the community - that it can and does affect, even in practical ways, the life of a place - may not be recognised by most theorists and critics for a while yet. But they will finally come to it, because finally they will have to. And when they do, they will renew the study of literature and restore it to importance (Berry, quoted in Ryden, 1993, 208).

That the excursion would provide important experiences was always an understanding. That the experiences should be so unpredictably other to my imaginings seems only to confirm the *raison d'être* for this exercise. The richness of images, sensations, stories emerging from this outing could only arise from actually materially performing ourselves and place in this way – not from a carefully controlled distance, but from an immediate if risky and contingent engagement.

People have paid attention in many different ways, and the deep impressions of the day, its visceral impact, intimate material details are both revealed and matched by a high level of storyability. When we meet next day, almost everyone has a story to tell which not only revisits details, but importantly already features their telling of the excursion story for their family or friends. Wendy has written one for the scrapbook – a story that starts with much physical detail of the journey the weather, the place, her responses, but which then allows and supports another layer of story that takes us into quite other realms. And later, pasted into the scrapbook is a photograph taken by one of the group that catches us on the bridge, on the way, and is particularly evocative for participants. Endless possibilities, someone says later, makes me think of the day, the adventure – the indecisions- the whole idea of *Lorelei*³. What stories would other people make of this, she asks. It's an image that seems to render the dynamic space of in-between, the notion of place as not something that is, but something that happens, is performed - like selves, inextricably intertwined with bodies and language.

³ Lorelei is the name of the property and of the mud brick home built by two women.

The subject brings to the world the capacity to turn the world back on itself, to fold it over itself and the world, introducing that fold into which the subject is positioned as a perceiving perspectival mobility ... Language too is understood by Merleau-Ponty according to the self- enfolding of the flesh ...Language ... is the result of or made possible by the dehiscence or folding back of the flesh of the world. (Grosz, 1994, 102).

PINBOARDING⁴

When people ask us what we're doing, one of the best ways for me to tell them is to express the pinboarding process. I've been able to take all the ideas that have been running round my head for years, and physically pin them on a board, refer to them, and develop the ideas from there (Jennie, 10/8/99).

Pinboarding is intended to offer not only a space, but a pace (attuned to one's step) and a practice that enables the ongoing challenge of taking our embodied responses into public expression. It has a physical material environment that is critical and a particular dynamic attached to it based on play in the presence of another.

Pinboarding is many things and does many things, but it is, firstly, a material holding place. Participants are asked to assemble loosely on the wall things that seem to matter to them. These things can have any shape or form. They can include any kind of object, an article of clothing, a photograph, something that has an interesting story, a thing or image that appeals in colour, design, material or manner of construction. It is not necessary to know at this stage why these things matter. Having a physical place to do the work of holding our fragile and emergent poetics as they make their way from the inchoate to the external world (and while we rush off to feed others and ourselves, pay bills and do the laundry) is integral to the process.

It is secondly, and critically, a space that allows for movement. It is most important that the pinboard items have some space between them, in the same way that one can step back and forward to the larger space of the wall to respond from different perspectives and distances.

⁴ I am indebted to Ruth Hadlow both for the term and for introducing me to her form of this practice.

It is also then allows for reconfigurations, for change, and for rendering different relationships. Participants are asked to work the space by being mobile, moving between the different parts of their board, open to emerging connections or disjunctions. In being attentive to the intervals between the pieces, we hope to hear and see new and unexpected ways in which these elements may talk to each other. New things may then appear on the board in light of new connections. Some things may want to group together, others may be made redundant. Others may over time move towards the side of the space, for an altogether different project.

It is also in this instance a collective practice, a practice of community. In addition to individuals working their own board we are also going to work across and between all the spaces by conferring as a group with each individual around her pinboard, continuing the development of relationships and ideas, shared understandings and languages.

The ‘work’

The work then is not only to sound the spaces within one’s own frame, but to be prepared to focus with one’s many senses to the possibilities within and between others’ frames. To hear, see and feel connections, dissonances, threads, images and a sense of how they might be working for them. To put your own mind and body forward to interact with someone else’s possibilities without eroding or collapsing difference.

For me, pinboard work is a means of hearing my voice/seeing my ideas in a way quite different to the sequential leaves of a book, the scrolling screen of a computer, or stuff spread willy-nilly over a worktable or floor. It is temporal as well as spatial. A slowing down process, a chance to look and listen differently to raw material and to give the creative process time as well as a place to unfold. My half formed images, ideas and inspirations can be seen and allowed to make their own cross references over time, if that’s the case. My points of reference are not inclined prematurely or by default into linear or causal relationship. Nor am I delimited and contained by notions of the private, the personal and individual (on her own, talking only to herself) that tend to imbue the journal or diary, essential as they also are. Out there, up there, visible part way into the public world, the pinboard can make a claim for a workspace that strategically exploits the public value given to work as opposed to play. And at the same time its semi-public capacity allows a material place in which partiality and a sense of the provisional can be acknowledged and valued, where thinking in public is allowed. It both tracks and allows movements across and between categories of private and public.

When first experiencing this strategy as participant, I wrote of the excitement of being introduced to a frame that relieved me of the burden of holding, without hierarchy all the ideas, objects, images together at once. I could see the form and arrangements within the space participate in the meaning-making so that the nexus of form and content one desires of the final work, is prefigured at every stage. Wendy likens the process to *joining up the dots* and demonstrates how it meets her desire to render some thing visible.

Wendy's pinboard has a provocative collection of potential ingredients. But amongst disparate samples and materials from earlier workshops some pieces stand out now as recurrent and beginning to throw out threads of possible connection. The Macquarie Dictionary stands amongst a leaf stitched to hessian, photos of other exercises, and sheets of hand writings on loose paper with pencil (*I brought my dictionary/I love books /they're literally an extension of myself/I love to read//To not be able to read would be the death of me*).

There is a photo of her owl collection. (*And then the owl, it's a different thing. I can look at an owl tearing its prey to bits and not be upset by it. They're strong; they go wherever they want. They're linked to things like wisdom and learning.*) Owls have made prior appearances in body and in writing (*Thoughts – after the group - Waiting for washing machine to finish research owls – nesting habits –painting empty nest – owlets returning. Mother and father owls. Waiting – Maybe*) but an accompanying 'owl' text is new. On a large piece of brown paper have been pasted two versions of the word owl in a play of positive/negative and back-to-front/normal. One is a sheet of white paper carrying the reverse trace of the cut out word ((*I've always been able to write backwards*). A large brown O on the right grabs the eye. Underneath is its white complement, reading the right way.

A small flip over photograph album lies open at the photo of self in place, the café with the smell of coffee she hates, a photo full of intriguing tensions, presences and absences.

Is this a desire to make sense of something that is hidden from one, the need to crack the code, to become a knower? Or is the redolence of secret society, of things to be kept secret and coded? As Wendy positions herself as both reader and writer, her doubled relationship might suggest both. Without overt reference it is possible nonetheless to imagine a potential question emerging, one that might relate as much to the problem of a woman's relationship

with the symbolic as it might to the sense of something that cannot be spoken directly but perhaps longs to be?

So much of that pinboard seems to suggest a longing to find a way to speak. And questions seem to hover in the air. *I was nervous, so lacking in self confidence, but willing and so wanting to trust this process*, Wendy adds later. *My question might well have been put - How do we join up the dots?*

The pinboard process allows Yvonne to address very particular questions of mobility and spaces in-between, engaging everyone immediately when she begins to talk us through it. She has gathered torn and folded shapes of recycled paper, yellow, green and brown, and stuck them up on the wall. A couple of snakey red fabric pieces making a kind of pathway. Big dried leaves, a feather and twigs from her garden. There's a photo of one of her cats with a story about him. A photocopy of some marbled paper with a few lines of writing from an earlier workshop. There's an accompanying large text message. *Zoe, Ruby & Merlin. Desexed and shut in at night.*

The story Yvonne tells us, since the workshop theme is body in place, is of walking round her garden - *sixteen times every morning - with my cats*. And we walk it too, as she takes us through the board components. How to tell this kind of story? The constraints, pleasures and contradictions of a particular environment, old age, replacement knees, her place and how, and with whom, Yvonne chooses to inhabit it on a daily basis. And how she chooses to represent this. How to recount Yvonne's performance? Her 'play' is as rich with nuance and complexity as it is grounded in material details. I certainly suspect irreverent and subversive intent as she recounts her relationship with her cats. We are delighted and engaged, and even as the body is made present there is an element of unsettlement that seems to challenge us to take nothing for granted.

Sue D. took time to digest the pinboard process. She had not spread out different items on the wall but had instead worked materials together into a finished collage within the frame of a picture, with many intersecting and overlapping surfaces. With the sense of completion, a busy surface, and no blank spaces between the elements it was difficult for her to articulate relationships amongst them. Later, she found ways to explore the pinboarding process within her collaging practice and contributed two pieces of work to the group scrapbook that offer a

critical insight into how the process was working for her. Each of these pieces included text within the body of the work as commentary.

The first piece took material from an earlier workshop where Sue had found herself changing and extending perceptions about the physical qualities of her place. An old piece of lace had produced complex resonances not only in relation to her sense of place, but to her sense of self. Reassembling the laciness of the lace (drawn with coloured crayon and pencils), alongside the discovery that grasses are lace-like too (she found herself twisting grasses into circles), Sue made connections between the fragility of the lace, a newly fragile landscape, and feelings of self doubt, silliness or even craziness. Her new assemblage of this material both affirmed and moved on from this discovery.

Her text, intertwined, reads

How useful and pretty the original was

Old piece of nothing

Disintegrating

Crazy seeming

Lace

Lace like grass

I twisted them into a circle, silly

Sh shh shh sh shhh!

Don't look close

Feeling a bit like my lace, that day, she confirms in writing at the top. But she has also introduced into the relationship a photograph of herself *as I used to be* with the comment that the later workshop *put ME in the expression of place*.

In a second piece, another similar assemblage of coloured crayon work, text and this time cut up photos from some of the exercises we had undertaken in the early workshops, Sue continues to expand these connections with a stronger perception of how they are being worked.

*the revelation this day was seeing how lacy the grasses are
how the veined leaves connecting are lacy maps too*

*Barbed wire grass is laced with dew
And so is the barbed wire fence
Of course spiders webs are lacy*

This started with the lace at the 2nd workshop,

And then later

Laura had these photos she took and...

When put together

- these egg shapes -

an intriguing quality of

Piece of no thing
laying

enters

The in between

Connecting bits of pieces

What is so interesting is that, as Sue uses this way of developing her ideas, what later emerges is a re-connection with her mother, with play and with bodies which materialises in the form of numerous fleshy soft dolls.

Sylvia's pinboard.

As well as facilitating the earlier part of the workshop Sylvia has elected to become participant too and she finds the pinboarding experience an opportunity to articulate a shift in her perceptions and relations to other women locally.

Living with her female lover in a small and very conservative country community, Sylvia has felt the need to be protective of her space and privacy, and has experienced isolation. Her sense of place and explorations into the possibilities of belonging have been inflected by discursive strategies that work to constitute her as strange and other. The place and space of both the workshop and the pinboard, their context and content, their dynamic of fluidity and movement have allowed other relations to be spoken. Primarily a writer, Sylvia has used mostly text for her pinboard. One visual element however is her photo-in-place, showing her

leaning against the closed gate of her property. Amongst other things it allows her to address issues of gatekeeping and boundaries in a very fluid and productive way. Inviting us into her space, it's a very powerful 'coming out' of a desiring female body that Sylvia speaks with this particular group of women.

Carolyn's pinboard experience

Carolyn has put her collection on the floor. She already has a very clear idea of exactly what she wants to make for her artwork and so the objects are largely the materials and tools to do with that. Her main reference point, she says, but cannot show, is the house of her own that she has always wanted and now owns, and is determinedly trying to restore without interference by her husband. She is going to make a model of the house using a quilling technique, one of her crafts. Also in this group of objects is the collage she made as her photo in place, and in which she represents, acknowledges herself as covered over, overlapped, almost obscured by the crafts she loves to do.

Inherent in the process of the pinboard is the opportunity to open out and unfold, for example, relationships between technique and content. What's the quilling about, others want to know, what is it that you want to say about the house? In speaking further to these reference points Carolyn struggles to articulate. The craft-covered self collage in particular seems to create an almost unbearable tension for her, bringing issues of such import to the fore that she struggles with pain and anxiety. A different perception of the function and effect of all her acquisitions of skills, a questioning of the investment she had made in them, and how she has chosen to apply them arises painfully. This new angle is layered with issues of intense privacy as self protection, the role of the house and earlier relations to home. All of this emerging in a very embodied way with tears and physical distress.

Given that pinboarding is so concerned to do the opposite of covering over and blotting out, it is an acutely pointed dilemma that arises. Moving into and sounding the spaces in-between includes attention to fissures, mapping the gaps, 'the interzones where discontinuities are suppressed' as Carter suggests (1992b,187). Previous silences may then begin to speak forcefully. But what of the pain of unpicking? The physical impact of undoing can be profound - undone in one's body, not simply known theoretically or intellectually. How do we move through this undoing and redoing without collapsing altogether? What can we do and what can we become?

Within the clearly articulated frame and purpose of the project and the way each stage of the process had been flagged in advance, there has been commitment to affording choice. No one would feel compelled to take on more than they felt they could manage. My challenge, ethical commitment and intent has been to offer challenges in a way that is both safe but productive for the individual. I have responsibility for managing the group dynamics, but everybody's contributions in this instance are couched in the same concern. Individuals in the group make enormously perceptive responses as these issues emerge, both about the content and the dynamic. Everyone is supportive and several understand and articulate really clearly their own decision to limit an issue because it was simply too painful to take on. Talking about the difficulties, the displacements, what is at stake in this kind of work, the women in the group offer a shared language, shared understanding, threads of connection with Carolyn, a way of moving on.

The work of certain images

What was so potent for me was the depth of listening and connecting, and how exciting it was that people made great stretches of poetic connections with other people's images, ideas and issues. Here the work of the body, and the work of the embodied image meet and intersect, and the field of energy, the work an image might do across the different space and nodes of that group becomes very palpable and powerful. As we orient ourselves towards each individual's work, there is much criss-crossing and cross referencing on many levels and in a way that enacts the dynamic of the pinboard itself.

Amongst a number of strong images that move amongst the group, striking us all in some way or another, images of loose flesh, stomach and stretch marks that had appeared the previous day were particularly active. Yvonne, for example, unexpectedly produces an account of her many pregnancies, miscarriages and births. She tells it in a curious style somewhere between being casually matter of fact and perhaps intentionally shocking. And later again she mentions she's had her excessive stomach chopped off.

For Catherine, loose and crumpled flesh makes a connection with an impossible iron she has constructed for the day, one made of polystyrene and netting, with nails where steam should come, one that will not iron out, over and over, the creases and crinkles of daily life.

By the time we come to Lynda's pinboard it has been an exhausting and wholly engaging experience for everyone. As we've moved around each person's workspace, and around the whole space, we've moved in and out of different positions and relations as speakers and listeners, empathisers and consolers. We have been amazed, surprised and struggled to connect with vastly different trajectories people have chosen. We have variously wept, laughed, worried, felt confused and bursting with ideas and excitement. The sense for some of something coming together and forming is interspersed with others feeling a sense of unravelling, an un-making.

Lynda's pinboard

Lynda has set up her space at the foot of the stairs that lead up to the stage, and she introduces her pinboard by saying *there's nothing there – only blank pages*. What we see is a wicker basket on the floor, a book peeking out from beneath some creamy flesh coloured calico covering. On the wall above her photo in place, photo of one of her exploratory drawings with found materials, a pencil drawing of the back door of her home. On the floor beside pieces of plain calico, lace and silk, interleaved with a collection of unmarked notebooks, papers, a scrapbook open awaiting some mark.

There's nothing there

Does that mean there's nothing to offer?

It feels as though there should be much more there on those blank pages

What's the story they're telling?

We others read the colour of her piece as flesh/body/skin. Not nothing but detail of surface, in rich interplay - paper against silk, the tooth of one paper and the line of another. Butchers, cartridge, calico crinkled. The nuanced differences of tones, what colour? Not blank but a question about the flesh - what's written on it, how to write it, on the body, through the body, how to speak the body? In the middle of our responses, Lynda asks for a break, while she dashes home to get a book she is in the middle of reading. On the cover is a woman's body and Lynda reads to us one of the poems on skin traces, stretch marks, memories and mothering.

Mary's pinboard

Mary has also decided to explore the pinboard process as a participant and the things she has put on her board relate to her existing practice as facilitator and community writer, and to

questions of writing self and community. Her work often focuses on facilitating others coming to voice and the movements between facilitating and documenting are familiar to her, but to address her own self-writing work in this way on the pinboard is challenging.

Her exploration has been affected too by the images that have been circulating. Not a mother, she feels the force of the images and experiences of mothering quite distinctly. All the talk of stretchmarks and having babies, feeling the effects on her own body of other's mothering, raising the different roles women can have in relation to each other. She reflects on this impact, how it intersects with her embodied experiences and her own representational and teaching practices. Mary experiences all of this as a kind of knot, she says later, hard to articulate at the time, and offers some journal writing she did afterwards.

My stretchmarks – the marks of the stretch I make across the space between. The stretch I make to hear your voice and speak it back to you. The stretch between my place and your place. Am I only stretch? Are these my only marks? How do I put myself in the picture when the moves are so self effacing. To put myself in the picture is such a step, such a risk of becoming not the self I know.

All these things about folds and pleats and fans and spirals and resonances and concertinas – I know all these. They're how I know my practice with others. But what of my practice with myself? - am I the brief and sudden burgeoning lichen, circling and blooming in response to rain? Am I the gum leaf, fresh, velvety, pen soaking richly into my fabric, am I the unwieldy bar, the dry curved leaf, the knot, the curl, the twist? What marks do I make, what are my movements in place? What traces do I leave – barely visible, tentative. Clumsy, almost vital marks. Tracing and mapping the marks of others, do I leave any prints, or do I fit myself so exactly to yours that I leave no trace.

Stretching

To stretch a point is to go beyond the usual limits. What are the usual limits of a body? (For a woman's body in the public domain?)

In this workshop we literally stretch our legs, to move and walk and work. Stretch arms, legs, lungs. We explore the stretch of ground as well as of body, and the stretch of our imagination. Whole body stretch, belly stretch. We reflect on the stretchmarks of accommodating and

growing another life, another body within us; on marks of time, changing evolving bodies and selves. We stretch the boundaries of self in other ways, bodies stretching to become more than they already are. We stretch to touch, to make contact with other, to reach out to something or somebody else. Stretching ways of knowing, understanding, desiring, our capacity to live as creative beings. Stretching to make our marks.

My approach to teaching the body in the landscape has tried to provide some conditions of possibility for the women to use the body in this productive way. Somerville has put it very clearly ‘Corporeality is always present in a dialectic relationship with the cultural - the body can intervene in discourse just as discourse can intervene in the body’ (in press). In this chapter, setting the women research exercises into their own lived experience in the way that we have, we engage directly with this dialectic.

The women learn to locate aspects of the corporeal and use it as an interpretative tool. We recall, construct and draw in accounts of body experiences from everyday inhabiting. The senses provide a particular category, bodily movements and actions, another. The notion of *traces* in particular, traces of exchange and mutual inscription, is offered as a major tool for reading/writing the self as an autobiographical ‘I’. The Photo in place exercise invites the women to use it in analysis of individual material they have brought to the fore; our expedition picnic follows on with an immediate *shared* experience in which they can further apply and explore these and other corporeal slanted categories (pleasure, danger, eating, driving, storytelling?)

I offer pinboarding as a site and a practice that is explicitly supportive of the body at the scene of representational work. Tools for continuing analysis honour and support the body at the scene. The women start selecting material they will work with and attend to spatial, temporal and interpersonal practices that will help develop it - learning to let work sit, giving it time to develop slowly and speak to other parts of the whole thing. We learn to allow spaces and movements for new relationships to emerge, and practice that at both the individual and the group level.

These stretched ways of working were further consolidated in the remaining workshop. Artist Ruth Hadlow was able to reiterate and reapply in fresh ways much of what we had established in the three core workshops. I had already drawn on some of Ruth’s methodologies in these

and Ruth's final brief was to assist individuals in planning their specific projects. Because of this, I have left the account of this workshop in the women's own words and it is to be found in the performance of the next chapter. I want to turn now, however, to a pivotal space at the end of the workshops which was set aside for de briefing, reviewing and consolidation before the women started to make their artworks. This process allowed us to revisit the material we had already collected and to summarise what has been important to us in the workshops.

Conversation, in all the various ways we have been doing it and tracing it, featured largely. We decide to extend that conversation to family, friends, significant others and all those who've stopped us in the street (*what's that arty thingy going on?*), to engage them in what we've been doing, feeling and exploring during the project so far. We decide to take up the offer to use the local library. The librarian, interested in having the library as the site of more community involvement, had approached me when he first heard of the project.

Would you like to use the library for a show if the artworks are good enough? There's a picture rail and a long wall space.

Well, I don't know about 'good enough', I say. That's not really the way we're approaching this. In any case what we produce might not be flat, framed, wanting to be hung on walls. Perhaps we could keep the offer open for something quite different? How would you feel about some kind of happening, instead?