

Chapter Three

Voicing

Sunday 22 July,

As I woke up fuzzily this morning to my clock radio, what cut through my half sleep and began to take some form was a male Scottish voice. Even before I had any sense of the words the timbre, lilt and intonation were stirring my body, tugging at those libidinal investments formed long ago in place and time and circumstances quite beyond my control. At the same time as the Scottishness of the voice was registering, I was piecing together the fragments and clues of this speech act as 'sermon'. In fact it was a conference presentation in Australia, but it was theological, and it was the ex Episcopal Bishop of Edinburgh speaking (Holloway, 2001).

I am wide awake and listening now, not from any personal sense of faith, but because of the apparently radical critical nature of this man's articulations. 'Dancing on the edge of his church', he talked about the outside, the margins, homelessness, placelessness, his own 'expectant uncertainty'. But most compelling was his description of driving late on a summer's night along a stretch of coast road, east of Edinburgh, that I know very well, that was home once. The light of mid summer Scotland – ten o'clock at night and the quality of daylight, the smell of hay and flowers and now and then sea. Looking across the stretch of water that is the Firth of Forth to the Paps of Fife on the far side, and beyond these hills perhaps the mountains proper. As he described the music of the Planets on car radio, and his compulsion to thrust his fist out of the window and yell YES, in sheer affirmation of the joy of being, I could be precisely there in geography and in spirit.

Strange that his speaking of placelessness and homelessness should reach me through such particular embodied emplacement, from the actual geographical description, to the way it was already encoded for me anyway in the quality of his voice. Strange that I should feel so enabled to savour the sense of my self in that place physically and yet be at such a distance. Until I think of place embedded in me, and articulated through me in the same way, enfolded in my vowels, the architecture and choreography of mouth, muscle, teeth lips tongue, soft palate, as well as memory. Strange that when I had physically last been in that very place, my own father's speech acts, awkward, anxious, uncertain, threatened, could have so immobilised

me, physically and psychologically, and threatened to collapse my sense of self. I think about how this man's words are located in that whole patriarchal history of the voice of the father. I'm grateful for the stance he claims to make now, 'from the edge', but nonetheless for a man to speak from the margins is not the same as it is for a woman. There is nothing self evident or simple, it seems, about this thing called voice.

The way in is (not) straightforward

Dear Margaret

I am now alone in the writing process and I don't seem to know how to do it.

The way into any kind of selfconscious 'telling' or making can sometimes seem so difficult. Where and how to begin? I struggle to find a voice that can speak of what has taken place without becoming entangled in that kind of 'proper' authoritative writing, prizing objectivity, transparency. I feel its power, and become immobilised, stuck.

I had an e-mail from a friend as I sat trying to make yet another start to writing. She caught me weeping with despair at not being able to articulate what I had done in my major data collecting project. Everything I did in that project was passionately enacted, supported and underpinned by what seemed strong material practices and experiences, and equally strong theoretical understandings. In the necessary process of undoing and redoing for the next stage of my own (academic) making, though, I kept forgetting where and how to set off - from this body, this moment, this context - despite this being one of the most central issues I addressed in the project. It makes me realise anew how entrenched the difficulties can be and what a challenge women may be asking of themselves in coming to voice differently, in or out of academia.

One participant said anxiously at the beginning of the first workshop of the project – *This isn't going to be like school, is it?* I felt I understood her immediately. My own sense of inadequacy in relation to formal systems of knowledge had only begun to change through exposure to practices and theories of life writing within a Women's Studies course, ten years ago. I was greatly excited and enabled by explorations into language, discourse and power that exposed the way 'meaning and value are produced rather than simply given' (Kirby, 1991, 5). I was shaping critical tools to rethink my past learning experiences. The notion of a subject-in-process made a great deal of sense. But I was missing material flesh. I could only

process these new ways of thinking in and through my body, questioning them in terms of what difference they made to my understanding and inhabiting of skin and bone and breath. Where was/is tangible matter in the shape of a body in contemporary feminist theory?

Elizabeth Grosz suggests that a noticeable preference for 'notions metonymically related to the body - subjectivity, self, identity', is understandable. Either feminists are very wary, from past contaminations, of dealing more directly with a body so limited by patriarchal discourse, or, in their enthusiasm for the undoubted usefulness of many theoretical paradigms they have also taken on the "supra -corporeal qualities" of those paradigms' (Grosz, 1991, 1). The denial by some feminists of a material fleshly body can be absurdly complete, as Vicki Kirby illustrated. Seeing this 'improper' body being carefully excised from a discussion of Irigaray at a philosophical conference, Kirby wanted to ask 'What does the nomination "biological or anatomical body" refer to?' and tells us that

the speaker dismissed me with a revealing theatrical gesture. As if to emphasize the sheer absurdity of my question, she pinched herself and commented, 'Well, I certainly don't mean this body' (1991, 7).

The body, 'the real', and a concept of voice connected to body continue to constitute a problem for many. Kamler (in press) finds the metaphor of voice counterproductive in developing socially critical writing pedagogies – 'because voice itself is a metaphor of the body – located in the throat and vocal chords – and therefore difficult to disconnect from the body of the person writing' (45). 'If this text is not located or identified as part of her body (her voice) it may be less easily confused with her' (Kamler, in press, 197). Is there another way, in both writing and pedagogical practices concerned with writing selves and writing other(s), that these ambivalent and anxious-making relations between body, self and text can be embraced and made productive?

I weep and tears re/mind me of the struggle to speak the body differently. Armstrong talks about crying as the production and material evidence of pain.

The precipitation of mental anguish runs down the face as a fluid, pain's material form secreted from the body ... A tear is expelled ... as an *expression* of the body but it is not mere salt water because it *is* grief, and without the tear grief could not find expression, nor could grief begin to understand itself (1993, 181).

And I read the stuff of tears as instance of the body as a point of mediation –

A point of mediation between what is perceived as purely internal and accessible only to the subject and what is external and publicly observable, a point from which to rethink the opposition between the inside and the outside, the private and the public, the self and other, and all the other binary pairs associated with the mind/body opposition (Grosz, 1994, 20-21).

Bodies and minds are neither two distinct substances, Grosz claims, nor attributes of a single substance, but somewhere in between these two alternatives (1994, xii). But there seems to be no terminology for a relation between two ‘things’ which presumes neither their identity nor their radical disjunction. A useful model for Grosz in this rethinking is the Möbius strip, the inverted three dimensional figure eight, which has ‘the advantage of showing the inflection of mind into body and body into mind, the ways in which, through a kind of twisting or inversion one side becomes another’ (1994, xii). It provides a departure point for exploring the complex co-constitution of bodies and cultures

problematizing and rethinking relations between the inside and the outside of the subject, its psychical interior and its corporeal exterior, by showing not their fundamental identity or reducibility but the torsion of the one into the other, the passage, vector, or uncontrollable drift of the inside into the outside and the outside into the inside (Grosz, 1994, xii).

Making such a lived body the departure point, the mode of thinking, making, representing, can be vertiginous, dizzying, perched on the brink of both clarity and unintelligibility. Leder’s experience is immediately recognisable to me.

As I go through the day, my extended body ebbs and flows, now absorbing things, now casting them back onto shore. I do not notice my body, but neither do I, for the most part, notice the bed on which I sleep, the clothes I wear, the chair on which I sit down to breakfast, the car I drive to work. I live in bodies beyond bodies, clothes, furniture, room, house, city, recapitulating in ever expanding circles aspects of my corporeality. As such, it is not just simply my surface organs that disappear but entire regions of the world with which I dwell in intimacy (Leder, 1990, 35).

On the other hand focussed attention on the fluidity of world/body relations is more than some can bear. I sometimes feel myself caught up in the kind of dynamic explored by Deleuze and Guattari, where ‘subject and object are series of flows, energies, movements, strata, segments, organs, intensities – fragments capable of being linked together or severed in potentially infinite ways other than those which congeal them into identities’ (Grosz, 1994, 167).

There is no hierarchy of being, no preordained order to the collection and conjunction of these various fragments, no central organization or plan to which they must conform. Their “law” is rather the imperative of endless experimentation, metamorphosis, or transmutation, alignment and realignment. (Grosz, 1994, 167).

Experiencing the connecting and disconnecting between people and things and images and ideas at such a speed can invoke a kind of synaesthesia. For me that is a precarious position, dizzying with speediness and a kind of madness of possibility, exciting but not coherent. I remember my first attempts at writing up my Masters thesis, a chapter on coming to voice! How I was almost beside myself with the doubledness of it all, a fairground nightmare in the hall of mirrors. The difficulty of finding a coherent way in. I sent you what must have seemed like, and certainly to me felt like, a chaotic jumble. And you replied with both thoughtfulness and poetics, grounding yourself first in body and place, and in so doing, helped me to ground myself. You wrote:

On Christmas day I had my first encounter with words when I went with your writing on my habitual walk down to the harbour and sat on the sandstone sculpted by the lapping waves, cushioned by a bed of needles from the casuarinas and in the shade of their sighs.

In some liminal seaside place, you settled down to read with a mango, a stray seagull, and, settling into place, writing and body, found the words to respond to my shifting images, erratically jostling each other. To the sense of me as the person writing - emerging, disappearing, sometimes so tentative as to lose and frustrate you, sometimes strong and clear, sometimes strong enough to shock you. Sometimes you wanted ‘more birth, the words to be born clearer, stronger’ and sometimes you wanted ‘less ideas crowding in to the beauty and strength of the central images’. It wasn’t just the enabling power of convincing me I did in fact have central images, was working with complex writing, but that you actually enacted, modelled, performed that critical question in voice, of writing the body. Your own place,

body, interests and issues were expressed in the text alongside mine, in relation to mine, in ways that allowed us both to be there, subject to subject. That was the most enabling thing.

Later you talked of my difficulties hearing my own voice and developed the practice of taping. And it was in the safety and homeliness of your room at work, with its nettle tea and rice crackers, that you invited me to risk using my ordinary conversational voice as the starting point of satisfying writing. By taping a conversation in which I could say anything I liked about my work, in any way, you allowed me to hear my own voice, value it, and make that the beginning of a text.

Later still we examined those practices of domesticity and re working the maternal within our supervisory relations, unsettling traditional paternal teacher/student roles. Looking at enabling practices of food and space and time, as well as writing practices. How we worked, when we worked, boundaries, making the boundaries operate differently, reading things differently, reading against the grain, and having alternative ways of moving through all of those things. So that we could take the space between us and ask what we could do with it together. We both managed to be there. Then I could go away, not only with material tools and practices like using the tape recorder and later the cut and paste practice, but also with that larger invitation to mother myself, care for myself. I begin to understand that care of the self as taking responsibility for myself and my own work, without feeling necessarily isolated, alone; beginning to understand the ways self-writing is inextricably bound up with self/other relations and ethics; the ongoing process of unpicking and remaking those relations.

Here was another way of understanding subjectivity 'as fully material and for materiality to be extended and to include and explain the operations of language, desire and significance' (Grosz, 1994, 210), and one that at the same time offered the potential for change. As you said, it's about inhabiting in a particular way, so that the maternal no longer becomes the invisible ground on which all knowledge is founded but becomes the knowledge in itself.

As a collaborative performance paper demonstrates (Somerville & Hartley 1997), a refusal of conventional models of mother and the supervisory relation can make visible material embodied practices that can be related to the work of producing alternative academic texts. A different pedagogical practice, negotiating the possibility of us both caring and expressing our own desires, has productive and disruptive possibilities in terms of forms of writing and

representation. The alternative forms can of course be realised in other representational practices. So when I ask - What practices and art forms can bring us to an articulation that includes me/you/and the environment within which we dwell? What are the material practices that we can bring to our various given realities? I know they are going to draw on those modes of organisation that continue that work.

Workshop One, Day One

Voice

Venue/Home

The square building we are going to use for the first workshop could be any suburban house. It sits on a corner site, just one block west of the town's main street, with a low brick fence and a shin-high gate. Brick verandah at the front, wide steps up leading to french doors. This is the C.W.A. Hall, the Country Women's Association, and protocol, or habit, I'm not sure which, ensures its eyes are veiled, the curtains drawn closed, when you arrive and leave. Stepping inside the glass door, I turn to the left and begin the first sweep open of the curtains, knocking knees on the boxed timber bench seat that runs along the wall under the windows. Around the corner, tables are flat packed and stacked against the wall under the next set of windows meeting up with the huge brick fireplace. Sunlight streams in now across the honey colours of the unencumbered timber floor. A double-barred fire exit on the other side of the fireplace. We might need to open it later if it gets too hot. A tiny stage sits in the corner, just room for a piano, before I turn along the far end of the hall. The portrait of the Queen behind the wobbly towers of plastic chairs will have to come down, along with a few other slightly flyblown official texts, to make way for our butchers' paper. There isn't as much available wall space as I first thought, when I take account of the entrance and the wide roller door hatch onto the kitchen.

I switch the urn on, on the way round, offloading morning tea onto big kitchen table. Cool, airy, weird, because everything about it speaks a simple homely kitchen, worn, dated but familiar, but the scale seems all wrong. An ordinary domestic cooker is flanked by a huge garbage bin; there are vast pale green formica worktops, cupboards with essential hardware rattling around.

Bench seating all the way down the remaining wall will make workbench space, and participants will be able to put some of their work up on the wall above. I've brought a moveable stand that we can write on up in front of the whole group and everyone can help set up tables later as we need them.

Who

I had given the project a name, *Expressions of Place*, and advertised widely for women with a desire to make such expressions. There were so many responses initially I thought we would be overwhelmed. The project asked for considerable commitment however. It would take eight months and had four different stages.

Firstly I asked that the women would participate in a series of workshops where we would explore useful tools and strategies for getting started and developing a creative project. For a number of weeks following the workshops women would need to work independently to experiment and research projects beginning to take shape for them. We would come together again for regular sessions to support the completion of the artwork or works, and finally would collectively plan and produce a public exhibition of material and works from the project.

Now Mary and I put out a semi circle of chairs for all the women who have returned their consent forms and said they'll be here. Maz, Margo, Barbara H and Barbara P, Catherine, Lynda, Robin, Sue D and Sue G, Susan and Carolyn (mother and daughter), Dell, Judy, Wendy, Rita, Marilyn, Jennie and Yvonne. While many of the group are in their middle years, the youngest woman participating is in her early twenties, and the oldest are in their seventies. I am so relieved that the number of those actually committing to the project has settled to this manageable level. In all the various teaching contexts, over many years, with groups in this small community, I had never before had to be concerned about the logistics of large numbers. Was it the way desire was foregrounded, I wondered, that brought such a response? More than forty women had turned up for an information session in this same room. Heady conversations and excitement continued long after I'd finished my part, until I begged everyone to go home. Others came to a daytime meeting. I received endless phone calls; held animated conversations in shops and street. There were unsolicited gifts of writing, poetry, images from women not choosing to come, nor really knowing what the project is to be about exactly, but seeming to see me as a site, a receptacle for their makings.

While Mary and I have planned and checked and double checked the way we have integrated our ideas and intentions for the day, we are very aware of how different it will be for the women, who will have so much less to grasp hold of in this beginning. Mary is a major collaborator in this project, and will be the main facilitator for this day. Sylvia will be here in the background, to find out more about the project. She recently became involved when we were looking for a workshop facilitator and she has offered to lead one of our sessions in a later workshop.

We start by giving a map to the day.

Programme for the Day

9.00 Welcome and Introduction to the Project and this First Workshop

What's your forté

Object/Place

10.45 Morning tea

11.00 Scribing

Further development of scribing

Reflection

12.30 Lunch

1.00 Review and Scrapbook entries

2.10 Shorthand image for/from the day

2.20 Object - return

2.35 Note about notebooks

2.40 A last word

2.45 Items etc for next week

Beginnings

How to start representing ourselves in an embodied, emplaced way?

Armstrong strongly suggests that if we are to think about a different aesthetics and a different pedagogy then discourses that are as different as possible from the usual are going to be important (1993, 185).

The invitation is to not only develop artworks about the places in which we live, but to document and make public in a group exhibition, the experience of the process and its outcomes. We want to offer ways of articulating particular points of view, distinctively

personal worlds that say something about who we are, where we are and what matters to us about how we are, or can be, in this context. The challenge of *putting ourselves in the picture* will happen at multiple levels, and will be a question of not just being included but being inclusive. It will be important that our representations be able to cohabit without losing their individuality, and we want to invite our audience in with an immediacy that engages them as correspondents.

Implicit in notions of starting with voice is the understanding that we may not necessarily be clear about what it is we want to say, and in any case

Neither self-expression and ‘voice’ nor the practice of forms constitutes on its own the basis for an adequate pedagogy. Those with ‘something to say’ need information about **how** things may be said (Medway, 1988, 93, quoted in Hutchison, 1999, 141).

Discovering what we want to say and how we want to say it in the same move requires inventive strategies.

Movements

In designing the workshop series Mary and I wanted to pay critical attention to the pattern of movements within and between workshops, and over the whole project. We wanted to play out many movements between form and content, between the group and the individual, between text and image, conversation and text, between known and unknown, between the everyday and the extraordinary. Crossing and recrossing boundaries and hopefully unsettling categories in the process.

We particularly wanted, throughout the workshops phase, to think about the movement from conversation, carefully hearing others and being heard, into other material forms of communication. Identifying and accessing individual qualities of our own and other voices we would explore how those qualities might be made present in texts, by which I mean not only written texts but the art work itself, whatever medium. In the ongoing movements between the individual and the group we want to think very closely about the collaborative nature of coming to voice, to disturb notions of the lone ‘hero’ artist, to suggest that all of that making is done in some relation to community, never an isolated act.

Documentation

In thinking about alternative forms and practices, a group scrapbook practice which Mary introduces is essential to the project. It creates a *shared* resource and document to our journey, and an ideal form for the conjunction of our respective representational styles. We have a huge blank book ready to go, a visual diary, in which we will document the workshops through our joint and individual contributions, through words, images, drawings, photographs, whatever means arise. A collective journal from the whole group, we keep this from the very first day. While it does not displace individual journal diary keeping, it does aim to invoke a more complex dynamic between public and private conventions and forms, and to call attention to itself as an embodied text.

Mary's scribing practice, a low tech, pencil and paper manual practice of recording sensitively what is being said, is a learning process we all participate in, simultaneously contributing to the documentation of individual and group voices. Mary has written comprehensively about her development and application of these practices in Bolitho & Hutchison, 1998, and Hutchison, 1999.

Assumptions

At the same time that we consciously offer opportunities to explore new and probably unexpected tools and practices, it has been important to re assert that we are not going to be teaching specific visual arts or craft techniques in the usual sense. It is my conviction that everybody already has enough diverse construction skills of the material kind to participate as a maker in this project – regardless of how individuals perceive their art background. I believe that everybody already has, within them, and between them, the grounds of a making – in terms of knowledge, ideas, story, memory and imaginative material and that we will be working towards bringing that to the surface, rendering it as surface.

What's your forté

We intend to model this approach from the beginning and the very first thing we do is establish a textual and collective account of the resources people bring with them. Asking the group 'what's your forté', 'what are your making skills', Mary scribes responses straight onto butchers' paper that everyone can see.

*Buttonholing binding the edges tidying up reducing selecting layering building making a mess
 sorting colours texturising blending synthesising measuring constantly analysing recreating
 confining and constricting refining spilling out attacking classifying creating reading
 renovating restoring experimenting messing organising complementing What a wonderful
 brain and eyes we have prioritising sidetracking finding out (about yourself) taking risks
 learning playing a part putting yourself on the line letting go pushing the boundaries*

*drawing the line nailing constructing gluing stapling assembling stitching cutting collaging
 darning knotting knitting weaving constructing sentences condensing extracting holding
 expanding flowing editing moving concluding revising repeating drafting cursing unblocking
 the block*

Despite modelling some suggestions - gluing, stapling, hammering, it was surprising that there were some very abstract notions presented at first. Moving from a comment such as *what a wonderful eye and brain we have* to a concrete action was quite a first shift for some. With another simple shift again the group produced some important statements. Lessening the gap between form and content, making the form of the language fit the intent of agency – we make a first essential move.

I turn a blank page into a picture

I turn a flat space into a 3D one

I turn a blank space into a saleable item

I turn found objects into sculpture

I turn a pile of daggy old wool into a jumper

I complement old furniture with new coverings

I turn grass into a lawn

Coming to voice – Talk to text via the object.

In this first workshop, the principal concern was a movement from talk to text. In fact there were three movements involved, all mediated and facilitated in the first place by an object of memory, place and desire.

We had asked everyone to bring an object from their own lived environment that they find fascinating, appealing or significant. We are each going to introduce ourselves through this

particular object, around the circle, saying a few sentences about ourselves, where we live, about the object and its significance. This gives everyone a manageable and grounded starting point, yet one that has expansive possibilities. A concern for the object's material qualities, its very 'thingness', and the way it can inflect, intersect and influence the kind of voice we produce and the kind of meanings we make, critically underpins my thinking, and is something the project will attend to with increasing detail.

Mary and I will be catching and recording some details of what people say. Later in pairs, we will all learn some of Mary's simple scribing techniques and we will take turns to listen and record more of each other's object/place story. There we will be paying attention to those specificities of rhythm, of colour, a turn of phrase, a certain style that marks an individual voice. Lastly we'll play with extending those texts, following up some of their particular qualities, pushing their physical form to further express aspects that have engaged us.

Place/object introductions

As people spoke round the circle with their objects Mary records – a phrase or two, a sentence perhaps - writing them up in large texta on big sheets of butchers' paper, out in front of the group so it was immediately rendered visible as they spoke. We didn't ask people to pay too much attention to the process just at that stage, but modelled it for the moment.

Marilyn lives on the outskirts of Coonabarabran.

*I brought along a piece of my bark
I've got a tree in the backyard that sheds bark
I've always admired the shape and the colour
I use the colour and shape in my painting
The tree has gradually unfolded*

Linda lives in town, very close by to where we are now.

*I brought this little man
He's a connection with my past
He comes from my father's family
He's always been there
He's made out of pewter
And he doesn't stand up very well*

I don't know where he's come from

Dell lives in the smaller village of Binnaway, about half an hour's drive from Coonabarabran.

I brought some flowers from my garden

I love my garden

I look out across the river and farmland to the Warrumbungles

I've tried to colour coordinate with the background so it all blends in

Barbara P lives on a property out of town in the Purlewaugh district.

One is an old scrapbook that my mother made

She had a fascination with Shirley Temple

She made it during the Depression

And it's made of brown paper

The other is a rock

Inside was a beautiful leaf fossil

The museum said it was formed before the Continental drift

We are so transient

Catherine also lives on a farming property on the edge of town.

This I find fascinating

When I was clearing out the cottages

I found these old irons

It's been fixed with wire like everything on the farm

There was every iron that had been there for the last fifty years

Sue D has a bush block on the Highway north of Coonabarabran

I brought a piece of quartz

My place is made out of sandstone and quartzstone

On a moonlight night, or even a starry night

You can never get lost

The ground glows

Maz lives in town, and introduces herself through a lacy cloth

This belonged to my great grandmother

*It sits on top of the autonola
A photo of great grandmother holding me sits on top of that
I like to know where I came from*

Sue G lives on a farming property, also in the Purlewaugh district.

*I brought a piece of sandstone
particularly pretty coloured gum leaves
and a piece of bark
They represent the bush to me
I like to be in amongst the trees
I'm not a rosella, I'm a tree or rock*

Judy has travelled from her farm at Coolah, some distance from here. Her home is on the market, her husband wants to retire to the coast, so she is in a rather uncertain space, and has begun going through her things.

*I brought my poor weathered loved bear
My grandmother gave him to me - I had him as a small child
And my daughter loved him too
He's been in the garbage can in the shed
with the Barbie dolls*

Robin lives just out of town, and she also is in-between homes at the moment, minding some one's else place and belongings.

*I've chosen a rock
I'm not sure if it's petrified or not
Oftentimes I want to pick it up and touch it
It's like a chubby little fat foot
I love the texture of it, the shape of it
I don't know where it comes from*

Rita lives in the village of Ulamambri

*I brought a weed out of my garden
My garden is full of weeds
Because I've been out of action*

Barbara lives in town, again not very far from the hall
I brought a dull boring old mug
Because I live in a dull boring old suburban house
But the first thing you do when someone walks into the house
Is offer them a cuppa!

Margo

I brought a little painting
I love it because of the space and freedom
I see it every day, as I go through the door
I think it might have painted by Ray Croft

Carolyn

I just brought along a picture of my new abode
It's been a life long dream of mine to have a place that was just mine
With a picket fence
I have the house
And I have the picket fence

Jennie

I really love the design of my wallet
Which my husband bought for my Christmas
And I couldn't throw the boxes out
I love them
They're really how I'd like to be - and my house
Classic, clean, uncomplicated

Susan is Carolyn's daughter and is living with her at the family home at the moment

Mine is a pillow
Which my Mom made for me
It's smooth and textural
My favourite colours - blue and green and pink
And it sits on a chair in my bedroom

Wendy

I brought my dictionary

I love books

I love to read

I can't play scrabble without my dictionary

To not be able to read would be the death of me

I like the texture of books, the size the shape, the feel

Yvonne

I bought a book lately about crystals

That's inspired me to get out all my crystals

I also got out a little bit of potch

It's what opal is found in

We used to go to the Grawin where you don't wash,

use water - where you have a mine

Several women said at the time they had agonised about what they were going to bring. *I didn't know what to bring until I saw everybody else's*. Some, either from lack of time or an understanding that there was no right thing to bring, had simply acted intuitively and brought whatever came immediately to hand. Others brought two or more things and struggled to choose within the framework we provided. Allowing only a few sentences to speak initially helped make limits and materialise a manageable starting point.

I had understood from my own past participation in workshops, what a strange experience it is to foreground personal significance in this way. Simply being asked to make a particular choice, to identify our own desire or what appeals or fascinates – what moves us – can be challenging in itself. Radley points out that

What has been called a process of 'singularization' of objects (Kopytoff, 1986) is linked to power relations in society as to who may determine what is to be removed from the sphere of exchange (of wear and decay) and declared significant (and permanent) (Radley, 1990, 52-53).

What I hoped would become apparent, however, was that across the range of objects each was just as capable as another of opening up rich individually different stories, and that while each object was *very* important in its material specificity in a way it was also, contradictorily, an almost arbitrary choice. By asking them to speak to the object in this way from the very start, I hoped to begin to engage with a pattern of paradox that would be invoked throughout the project.

Show and tell

‘Show and tell’ is an important practice for me. I first took serious note of it in a workshop for textile artists that was called ‘exploring edges’ and was interested in bringing inside, subjective material out into the work. We were all asked to bring objects of significance to the class, and then to work with drawing exercises in relation to these objects. As I carried out the directions I felt the full bodily impact of that voice that says, this is not your medium, you are not qualified, not trained to do this, you cannot get it right. Getting it right, of course was nowhere on the agenda for the class, and as we pinned some of our work on the wall and took turns to talk to it and each others, something of a seachange occurred for me. A collective care modelled by the teacher, who took each piece seriously and responded thoroughly to its specificity, and what that drawing seemed to do and say. The act of listening and attending to the other, the demand it made on one was very participatory, and the large size of the group, the time it took to play this out, emphasised this. One young woman was highly irritated by this process, too much talk and not enough doing, although she was very engaged and enabled by what others said when it came to her turn. For me the commitment was reassuring - I and my work would be included in this care.

What I was most aware of was the extraordinary movement that was enabled for me, from the acute anxiety of performing myself as I drew, to the sense of the work out there on the wall, received into this particularly safe environment as a related but independent object, which was mine but not me. How exactly the particular ways of talking, listening, attending to both the object’s and my drawings’ material qualities combined to achieve this was not clear to me at the time. In order to better understand something of the dynamic at work, and to be able to develop my own pedagogical practice in the light of it, I go looking for literature about ‘show and tell’.

The term comes from early childhood education and I find that the practice of inviting children to talk about an object they have brought from home is also often called ‘morning talk’, or sometimes ‘news’. It is largely understood in schools as primarily the opportunity for a speech event, fostering language development. Although the underpinning intention seems to be teaching a sense of language as object, the role and status of actual objects in this process seems to be highly ambivalent.

While much ‘morning talk’ research focuses on linguistics, a study by Kamler, Maclean, Reid and Simpson (1994) looks at the role of morning talk in the construction of gendered subjectivities in the first month of school, and thereby brings the object into critical view. Mrs T, an experienced and capable teacher, has reservations about morning talk but feels obliged to practice it. She doesn’t like the ‘show’ part at all, the bringing of objects, as she feels it becomes competitive. She prefers to emphasise the ‘tell’ part. As more and more objects are brought, however, and come to dominate morning talk, the team are forced to consider the discrepancies between Mrs T’s declared aversion and a quite different practice.

Not only is bringing an object shown to attract approval and attention, movement instead of stillness (children are invited to go up and show at least the teacher if not the whole circle) but the teacher is drawn into complex gender discourses attached to some objects, when otherwise the environment has been, the authors say, remarkably free of gendered talk. Most startling are the ways in which the research shows the teacher, despite her best intentions, blurring the boundaries between object and female child. The teacher’s talk and behaviour surrounding dolls in particular is shot through with ambiguities and contradictions, the authors detailing the way physical qualities of the object are at the same time critiqued and elided with the girl teller. It is not only what is being talked about that is up for evaluation, but everything about the speaker - speech, appearance, clothes, face, hair, bodies. For the boys, although many gendered assumptions are made, there is not the same confusion between object and child. The report makes it clear that the children themselves do not say very much about either the things they have brought or about anybody else’s. It is Mrs T who does most of the talking, who has almost ‘total control of the overt comments on and judgements of items. This can be seen as ‘a “readerly” power of reception which counteracts the “writerly” power the children have as producers’ (Kamler et al, 1994, 146). Nonetheless, morning talk, the report suggests, can be seen to provide a space for children to engage in discourse structures:

The teacher is not only showing the children how to construct a representation of a field, she is also showing them how to evaluate the information provided, how to take a point of view that defines some aspect as interesting and important, and others as less so. She is thus helping to construct the students' subjectivity by showing them how to become part of this evaluative field, this way of looking at things (Kamler et al, 1994,147).

Armstrong talks about the way 'men and women enter into language, into the symbolic, in different ways and on different terms: as Cora Kaplan has argued convincingly, girls enter into language circuitously, with more complex negotiations with repression and absence than boys do' (1993, 185). She wonders if, as a consequence, girls are asked 'to take the strain of language, to tolerate linguistic ambiguity, uncertainty, paradox' (1993, 185). She suggests that if women indeed *are* at this specific cultural moment hypersensitive to contradiction and ambiguity then it might be politically expedient, a responsibility in fact, to play with such contradiction, to explore and exploit it as critique (Armstrong, 1993, 186). The Kamler et al study offers me a very material account of the way girls' relationship to both talk and objects is imbued with ambiguity and contradiction. I understand that the girls, in many 'object' instances, though not all, are being reminded of a material and fleshly substrate to language in ways that boys are not. It makes clear to me how much the material matter and detail of the object *matters* in this constructing of language and subjectivity, and how one might fold this process of show and tell back on itself with a disruptive and critical intent.

Whether participants came with anxieties of a being a good and proper participant, and getting it right, whether they had started with scant concern for their own attachment or feelings or whether they were overwhelmed with possibilities, their ultimate choice was fascinating to the whole group. Even in these short fragments the richness of what is being said is evident, and one tastes the emerging stories which already are engaging the group. In later workshops we look in detail at ways of becoming more skilled and open to the object's material qualities, its mediating and embodied capacities, what it allows in terms of intersections of matter, memory, desire, place. But we concentrate in this instance on an interpersonal exchange, the role we can play for each other in beginning to flesh out language's materiality.

Two - Scribing Pairs

This next movement is designed to make a conscious shift into a connected activity, a negotiated exchange. Something has been raised to the surface, but the process of developing it and bringing it fully into the world is going to be a collaborative effort. We move from speaking out to something closer to a conversation.

We asked the women to form pairs. Each would take their objects and spend a few minutes continuing and expanding whatever had been raised in that first limited telling. One partner would speak, and the other partner would write, catching the individual nuances, a turn of phrase, some of the actual words rather than just the gist of the expanded story. Mary already had modelled the process in recording the fragments of each story on butcher's paper, and further suggested listening for particularly evocative terms, a characteristic rhythm or syntax that the speaker employed.

take it in turns to scribe and tell

about 3 mins. each telling

scriber takes down teller's 'story' using line breaks, in teller's speech

scriber helps teller keep talking - only if necessary - don't interrupt flow

at end of telling scribe reads back what she has caught - ask for corrections, clarifications, any missing bits - about 3 mins

point of checking is to refine or modify - don't start a new line of story

teller to be comfortable with what is written

Partners could ask questions to draw the other's story out if need be. They would check with each other when they had finished to ensure they had scribed the salient points and had not interpreted or added anything of their own that was different from the speaker's. The teller had the opportunity to say no that's not quite what I meant, or what I said. When they had confirmed that the text on the page was to the satisfaction of the speaker, the roles were reversed. And through having experienced it from both sides, listening and being heard, I hoped the implications of such strategies would be felt.

Learning to capture both the form and content for each other in this simple way provided material resources to work from, palpably there and in the world. At the same time the reciprocal arrangement insisted that each attend to the other, and be attended to as subject with

something valid to say. For anyone with a tendency to disappear the self in the cause of the other, to give their empathetic all to everyone except themselves, there would be no avoiding their own words and stories. Those who might feel themselves to be so different that the gap between self and other is unbridgeable, could not help but feel connected in the intimacy of having an other's words flowing through the body, entering, exiting, visibly reforming through hand and pen. And vice versa.

This is a reinvestment in women's talk. A refusal to keep it out of writing as something separate, devalued or derided. When constrained only and always to the moment, to the present, and leaving no tangible trace, how can it contribute to our understandings of either the past or a future? In materialising it in this way, we aim to produce something other than patriarchal fantasies or terms of reference, ambivalence about our capacity to be subjects, as our representational tools.

When we came back together after this exercise, we asked everyone to share the developing story they have heard with the group. This allowed another different opportunity to hear and experience one's own story and words. Mostly the response was one of addition or further refinement, but rejection and confusion were there too, for one or two who were surprised and challenged by what they themselves have raised.

Emerging stories

Jennie had brought some small boxes and she talked in her brief introduction about how their appeal was in their clean, uncluttered lines, being uncomplicated, simple and that was how she wanted her life to be. The boxes refused to be anything less than evocative however. Jenny's description of retrieving them from the attic only added to their sense of possibility, all the more redolent, for me, of Bachelard's (1969) work with spatial contexts of memory and imagination. What starts to be rendered in her talk is some ambivalence in how she feels about being what and where she is. We hear about her work before she married and became a mother. She came from the city, she didn't particularly want to live in the country. We hear her tell the importance of her house, her spaces, the way her belongings are arranged (*as if they might still, after all, be in the heart of the city, not the country*), the way they say something about who she is.

Jennie said later *Those boxes weren't important to me, but they really hit the nail on the head about how I feel, and yet they weren't important, they were just something I grabbed. If I'd thought I was going to open myself up that quickly, felt it had so much significance, I never would have brought that. I would have brought something far less personal, and yet I thought that I had.* It might have seemed like Pandora's box at first, insides spilling out.

Dell's bunch of flowers from her garden created a wonderful image of connectedness as she talked about the way she had colour coordinated her garden with the further surroundings and then the distant mountains beyond so that you can't tell where the house and garden merge into the landscape. This image becomes intensely powerful when it is revealed that the garden belongs to the house she was born in, that she sleeps in the room and the bed she was born in. An extraordinary sense of continuity is made apparent through the simple bunch of flowers.

Rita's weed allows her to engage in a story about a difficult knee replacement, about pain and frustration, how she can't get out to weed her garden. How this affects the way she inhabits her body and her spaces, how her boundaries are changed, and how places and relations are altered, makes a number of connections across the group. Adding up all the new hips and knees, there is a very clear materially rendered account of the idea that bodies can no longer be regarded unproblematically as fixed and bounded entities, but are at the same time very specifically located and inhabited. The possibilities of exploring this further through an attention to specificity, to location, and to relations between different bodies and materials seem implicit in this story.

*Amongst other things I have always wanted a picket fence
 My husband is a timber cutter and he always said –
 Yes one day we'll have a picket fence
 So I knew we'd never have one
 Second thing I always wanted was my very own house
 To paint it however I want it
 But my husband is outspoken and
 Tends to override what I want
 Because he can't visualise my ideas
 When I saved up and bought this house
 And had the picket fence built*

*My husband wanted it painted blue
 But I dug my heels in
 Knowing it would look terrible
 And painted it cream
 Now it looks perfect
 Which makes me
 Even more determined
 And think that I am capable
 (even of painting a fence)*

In Carolyn's second telling, elaborating on the house photograph she brought, the picket fence really comes to the fore, as does a very strong sense of both tension, and of a determined but ongoing struggle not to have her desires or her aesthetics undermined or dictated.

A brown paper scrapbook devoted to Shirley Temple, evoking unfulfilled longings and desires, and the subsequent hard country life of her mother, is so powerful for Barbara P it has to be put aside. She tells instead of an incident in her own farming life. Times are very difficult on the property and when a stone is thrown up and badly damages the tractor it feels like the last straw. Barbara fears her husband reaching breaking point as he confronts the damage. Picking up the stone however, they discover it has split open to reveal an exquisite fossil. Rare, beautiful, and representing a time almost inconceivably distant, before the continental drift, it evokes for Barbara issues of transience and being. The sense of both physical struggle, and a struggle to make meaning with both available discourses and the material stuff of her environment is very strong.

Three -Further investigation/development of text

Everyone was asked to choose some text from what had been produced so far to investigate and develop further. This time the invitation *was* to elaborate the text, enhancing, drawing to the surface and playing with striking aspects, but through various ways of manipulating form. It could be their own words or those of somebody else, provided permission was sought to use and play with that text.

Mary modelled some techniques of playing with the voice of the text, which crossed boundaries between how we normally perceive writing and how we perceive an artwork or a

visual image. There were many graphic examples on hand to demonstrate what different effects could be achieved. First there were possibilities of playing with the rhythm, size, grammatical form of words, making breaks, re arranging parts, changing the pace of the text. This could include changing how the words were arranged on the page, the thickness of the pen, whether you write sideways or off the page or round in a circle. Going further still, there was a question of introducing different materials, textures, offering papers with different surface qualities, for gluing, tearing. Demonstrating how a figurative image could be produced, drawn, with words. Crossing and recrossing, doing and undoing, we hoped to disrupt the conventional oppositions constructed between image and the text.

Look at material on walls/tables for ideas

you will need to copy out the text you want to work with

cut up and rearrange text

re-order without cutting

the style of writing -size, thickness of pen - may be used to bring out meaning

Think about the sound and shape of words, can we do anything with these?

Does the text go in a straight line?

can we make or break rhythms and patterns (making & breaking - eg. 'ing' words)

and change the voice of the text in this way?

try repetition

try the shape of a map (see examples)

look for contrasts and similarities

Put your final version on a loose sheet

It is a process of undoing and redoing

Undoing and redoing

Later, women in the group tell how demanding this whole process was when first asked of them. It was harder still when they were asked to develop their own tellings or someone else's, with their permission, of course, into another piece again, in this part of the work.

Raising textual consciousness in this way, emphasising a collaborative relationship (with the visual and textural) might make visible and problematise the categories of verbal/visual

relations which we have inherited in western phallogentric culture and on which we have based our notions of communication and interpretation. We are looking for different kinds of visual/verbal relations whose ways of behaving don't depend on one displacing the other, either by direct appropriation, or by deep suspicion and antagonism directed to the other. These are relations which invite consideration of multiple other communicative strategies bodies can and do deploy, relations which understand bodies communicate *as* bodies.

'Neither word nor image comes to us without particular material context, rarely without material embodiment' (Loizeaux, 1999, 96). In this instance the bodies, places, experiences of these women provide the material context, and making that central, unavoidable, is challenging.

The fact that many women choose to work with material that is the *other's* story I understand as another indication of the degree of difficulty. The permission giving, in the first instance through our response, and in the second through the individual negotiations, creates a space in-between, a compromise that is manageable. The process seems safer than starting on their own material. The boundaries have in any case been made somewhat porous. Because they have shared in the production of a piece of writing, there is some considerable investment or interest in that emerging story. It has been ingested.

The finished products are pasted into the group scrapbook right way, continuing the sense of creating resources for each other. It is an important step, having such material presence in the world. *Something that seemed like such a challenge at first suddenly became our first work of art. And Mary's quiet confidence made us feel we could all do it. The sense of play was really surprising and liberating.* And the playful evocative forms are able to render new and interesting aspects to stories without being in any way absolute or fixed.

Examples

Yvonne brought some pebbles and polished stones as her object. In the very first telling she spoke of the place where she and her husband had mined opals and collected these stones. As she elaborated her story it began to appear as if it were a story about her husband, who had been dead for many years. He had been a frustrated geologist, and it was he who introduced her to rocks. By the time we got to the third stage of play, Rita, who had scribed for Yvonne, developed a piece that seemed full of complex suggestion. There's an enigmatic and

overarching repetition of the phrase *In the beginning* (with both its biblical overtones and conscious story telling conventions). A book on crystals, to be read, looms large, mid space. The strongest image, however, seeming to compete for our attention - is a toppling gravestone complete with voice bubble from the grave. It is counterbalanced by Yvonne's declaration that her interest in rocks has now faded and what she really likes to do now is drawing, painting and writing.

Sue D. found Carolyn's picket fence a compelling feature as she scribed for her, and she further evoked its physical form and presence by cutting up the text of the story into strips, and turning them into palings of the fence. We need to turn sideways to read the text on the fence, being led, possibly allowed entry to at least the doorway of the house. Different signifying codes and conventions are invoked about bodies in particular relationships - spatial, cultural, architectural, linguistic. Carolyn speaking, as it were, from the form of house, and particularly from the fabric of the fence as if it might be from the fabric of her own body, has a striking effect.

In a somewhat similar way Barbara uses Dell's words to draw her view onto the outside world. It invokes so many possibilities for the viewer. It is as if we actually enter Dell's space, her house, and are invited to look as though through her eyes, in a physically rounded, embodied way. Again, Dell's 'I' is made to speak out from every surface, walls, curtains, pelmet, garden and mountains beyond, and we are necessarily there too. The heightened sense of uninterrupted flow between different surfaces, materials, bodies perhaps, taken up from Dell's coordinated garden plantings with landscape beyond. But at the same time the curtains participate in a certain kind of framing and boundary, between inside and outside, and the production of volume and space. This is no flattening out. There is every suggestion for me, that somehow behind me, in this view, if I turned around, I would take in the bed Dell was born in. The presence of *four grown boys* might also suggest Dell's embeddedness in the frames of mother and family.

Quite palpably it raises questions about the framing of the view, active constructions on both Dell and Barbara's part.

Renegotiating Boundaries: Fences, frames, boxes

I have wanted to suggest that the frames, fences, boxes, and the play the women have had with them are indicative of a complex interest in shifting boundaries. There is no simplistic one directional, or reductionist sense of oppression or containment, but quite different expressions of the ways selves and subjectivities can be seen as imbricated with spatial forms and practices. Once seen, these relationships can be further explored and Dell, for one, made very apparent how useful *all* these initial images continued to be, how it was possible to move amongst them, trying them on for fit. While Dell started in this first workshop by expressing a sense of almost seamless continuity with her environment, two examples from later workshops show how she had also taken note of both the notion of fence and of container, and how they continued to inform her.

It was two months later when Dell put the picket fence image to work. In an exercise based on three quick paper works, playing with our own body shapes, Dell produced first a little old woman with a mob cap and a bonnet, saying, *That's me - I'm a little old woman, who's highly predictable, boring, running out my life in the way it's always run out.* The next was a lively, exhilarated woman, going *whee!* short skirted, dancing, and Dell said *that's how I really want to be.* And in the third she represents herself *sitting on the fence.*

After this contemplation of options and fence sitting, Dell took the opportunity in yet another exercise to examine forms of discrete spatial containment. Through images and forms of a pocket (interestingly claimed from a heavy duty apron shared by Dell and the five men in her family) she looked at the notion of her bed as pocket just for her body, and discovered she had made special places, pockets in the garden for her specific pleasure.



At the end of the first day we move into words again and ask everyone for a word/image from the day's experiences. These are immediate and, for some, tentative responses, but in keeping with our commitment to embodied practices, we will make opportunities to reflect again after a time for digestion and absorption.

Word for the scrapbook to end the day

moving emotions

making connections

feeling comfortable

searching learning extending

Ted

just wing it!

ownership embroidery freedom

making magic

crystals domestos picket fence rock shape spiral

lovely images

aptitude or ? ineptitude

anticipation interest confusion

techniques

inspired

stretched

fascinating

excited

all of the above

Jennie later described what a critical difference the experiences of this first day made to her in producing tangible resources that were eminently useful to her. *I thought I was manually capable of doing things, but I didn't understand how to interpret all the thoughts I had. But that's just made me realise how easy it is. If you can put it on paper, how easy, how significant it is. Those few words just put together, can just... It shocks! I didn't really expect! To get something solid for myself off those words was just such a connection.*

Others echoed too the importance of the form, how Mary made *words sound like poems*, how shocked they were *at how our interpretation, our spoken words turned into something poetic and artistic*, when they didn't think they were capable of writing in that way.

By the end of this day the first examples of playing with forms, and discovering how that changes how and what the work means, are now tangibly present in the group journal, a large artist's visual diary. The book's combined material features all start to insist on the body as an active presence. The different tooth of drawing paper, the smell and feel and look (see how it bleeds with this paste and that ink), its manual assembly (we have pasted and placed as we go but there will be revisits and photos to add later - layout that raises issues of relationship - spatial, temporal, interpersonal), its weight, size and awkwardness in handling all demand attention.

A fundamental argument is being made about the importance of these features not being peripheral and expendable, but integral. It is not just a question, as Loizeaux points out, of reclaiming attributes - presence, female, corrupt, insurgent - attached to both body and image, that have been historically derided and seen 'as the enemy of word and the abstracting, transcending values attached to it' (1999, 94). We should insist on examining an interactive and dependent relationship.

Individual and group voices, handwritings, newspaper clippings, drawings and cutouts, collage: images, texts and image/texts that are inseparable - these are movements from one state to another and back again – just as our activities during the day have all taken place within different relations of self /other – from group to pairs to individuals to group again. This shifting dynamic problematises any easy linear logic of progression or of boundedness and easy categories.

Carolyn commented on both the way her perceptions about others and the way she categorised them had been dramatically altered by the activities of the day. *Looking at the different people when we were each talking about things and trying to put them in little boxes. I decided I'd put everyone in a little box and one person I found most amazing because I had had her in this little box as long as I'd known her. And she was nothing like that when she actually came to talk about how she really felt.*

She, like others in the group, was fascinated *how all that came from objects. That was the other interesting thing. Getting to know something about somebody by using that method, just by bringing an object.*

Voicing

Coming to voice has been a difficult process for me. For me, experience is often emplaced and embodied, hard to trace and translate when dominant masculinist models of public expression leave little or no room for such expressions. It has been particularly hard when many of my specificities of place and body are to do with the maternal and the domestic. The challenge has been to bring the significant meaning making that I do with my lived experiences of home, of children, of being mothered and being mother into academia as valid and vital ways of understanding, interpreting and contributing towards a new idea being in the world. It has required inventive practices.

The women in the group already have many ways of expressing themselves but these are outside the public domain, all effectively undervalued. Gardening, the production of food, childraising, homemaking, work done invisibly in relation to community and environment, are some of the many different kinds of productions. When it comes to making expressions in the public domain, whether it is the production of Art or thesis writing, we all need strategies to help us make the transition.

Each chapter is hard to begin, but coming to voice starts for me with conversation, with my flesh and blood body in a material place orienting myself in some way towards an other. Tape recording, transcribing, scribing and journalling provide me with ways to initially make text that retains some qualitative traces of that talk, and in this instance journal and letter writing take me into the space of the thesis in an embodied way to connect with the body of the reader. I continue to use different writing techniques to express different voices of my own, to bring in other voices, including those of theorists, to sustain that conversation into the public domain. I use conversation, and the way women's lived experience is embodied in their talk, to help the women make their own transition into the public domain.

An object is brought from home into the semi public and transitional space of the project. The conversation stemming from that object is translated into various forms that are given semi public space. Even as the women make their initial voicings, these are given large visible

presence as they are scribed onto big sheets of paper on the wall. Voice to voice, voice to text, voice to graphics - the women learn ways to compose and recompose possible voices that will continue to carry the qualities they want into the public arena. Through learning to listen in a particular way, to scribe and to play with different forms, they assemble a number of writing techniques and material resources. These already begin to occupy a particular transitional space in the semi public document that is our collective journal.

The movements through the workshop bring to the fore, without judgement, a range of relationships, of material qualities, interests, attitudes, forces and desires from everyday lives. The women learn that within the practices of reciprocal care offered by the workshop they can experiment safely with what they want to say and how they want to say it. It is evident that this is a challenging, effective, and fascinating process for most. Unpicking, examining different relationships to other, to community, to place through different reactions to and sensibilities of objects will continue to be important in our unfolding project.

I briefly referred to some of feminist theory and praxis that helps me through the difficulties, as I try to embrace and make productive ambivalent and anxious making relations between body/self/text. Feminist work such as Grosz's which attempts to articulate non dichotomous understandings of the body has been vitally important. I understand, however, that what has given me the most useful material means to move forward productively is a praxis based on an overt re visioning of the maternal, alterity considered through the practices and reflections, material experiences of self/mother relations. As I write it becomes clearer just how much it constitutes an ongoing project, and in the following chapter I go on to explore material/maternal relationships in some detail.

Chapter Four

Gathering

8/10/98

My mother offered threepence for the first daffodil, sixpence for the first swallow. She counted the garden snowdrops each year, and the nestlings that were reared in various vantage points of our third of an acre block. Together we picked and weighed the redcurrants, experimented with wild elder flowers and berries overhanging the fence, and on long Sunday walks foraged the hedgerows and fields for mushrooms, blackberries, or wildflowers to be 'discovered' and pressed between the pages of the children's encyclopaedia.

My parents had carved a new building space from the corner edge of a once lordly estate, now whittled away to some rather lurky woods which unevenly, and sometimes only thinly, harbour the remaining coach house within. My father had read to us, 'Paradise Enow', as he bought the land and had the house built, his own 'Shangri-la,' and he took it as a bitter irony that no sooner had we taken our bite, than an immense council housing development sprang up alongside. Before, when we had lived in a neat terrace on the other side of the estate, our street had stopped at the edge of the same dank green spaces. It had always been a slightly scary bicycle ride through them to play with friends who lived in the coach house. Vast cracks threatened to rent apart this rambling building; its stables, storerooms, sculleries. It was undermined by a great riddle of coal shafts and seams, and in the distance the cooling towers of the steel mills belched; industrial heartland of Dickensian proportions groping into the remnant farmland of west central Scotland.

The original manor house was long gone. Apart from the coach house only the sandstone ice house remained, a cross between a dungeon and a mausoleum. But we searched for tiny wild strawberries under the rhododendrons, through abandoned gardens, and between the gravestones of aristocratic pets. Full sized etched and carved headstones flanking a long grassed rectangle. My adult eye scans for a clue, tries to read the indeterminate shapes under the green clothing - courtyard, avenue, foundations, sunken garden?

I am looking down from my child's niche high in the oak tree – where for some reason it was the place to take Saturday morning rolls, warm fried egg in a soft floury bap.

Recently I've been looking at the work of Patricia Macdonald who takes evocative aerial photography over different parts of Scotland. What she has been trying to do is to give some visual imagery to something she claims that Scottish people know but don't articulate – perhaps because it is on the very edge of language - the sense of many layers of different meanings, events, and times accruing in the landscape, human and non-human, and accruing at the same time in our flesh, our sense of who we are.

Strangely, hers is a bird's eye view that doesn't suggest mastery, the universalizing, colonising gaze, despite the unique and privileged perspective from the air. The images I am thinking of as most potent have no traditional horizons as reference points to elsewhere or beyond. One's view is drawn directly downwards, and the distance is used not to bask in separation or transcendence, but to regard an entirely different relationship. For in her photographs what she reveals, as Neal Ascherson describes in his introduction, are human settlements like a sort of lichen in the crevices of the rock. What is suggested very powerfully is that we are both rock and stone and lichen and are not, either more or less. The shapes and patterns we discern through the stories of geology and geomorphology, geography and climate are there to be read. Moor or mountain, raised beach or bog, there are great complex tales of unrivalled geological diversity, folded, thrust, worn and wearing in such a way as to reveal previously unheard histories. And etched into that flesh

...every cut and dyke, every digging and rig, every hut-footing and posthole, fort-bank and cattle path, tractor-mark and lawn-mower swathe and chariot rut seems to have left its trace (Ascherson, in Macdonald, 1989, 14).

In thinking about what Macdonald offers me in developing theoretical understandings about the everyday body in place, it is this layering and sedimenting she makes visible that I find very powerful. A kind of memory bank that includes and evokes both the collective and the individual without collapsing either. The particular expression is important, the form/content nexus very appealing; Macdonald's individual mark-making commenting on mark-making itself. A movement between macro and micro, an interplay that disrupts the privileging of particular scales and forms of being, yet worked through the specificities of those particular

Scottish surfaces. Our mark making mingles with that of time, weather, animals; the folding and shifting of a surface constituted by many other factors as well as our own habitation. In what other ways can such stories sit together, be explored and told, without erasures?

By the time I was a teenager I was writing essays on the satanic mills and Wordsworthian angst-ridden poems on the loss of the swan pool (one swan hung grubby white, tattered, on the fence), the pond being filled in for yet another housing development. Being formally trained in the canon of English Literature I became distraught at the suggestion we were all bound to participate in the sense of loss Wordsworth articulated in *Intimations of Immortality*. A loss of intensity, of creative energy that existed between me and my world, as far as I could see. Could forewarning prevent this, I wanted to know? Can I stop this happening to me? I had no tools then to critique his notion of body as a prison house for the soul, to ask - which body? Nor did I discern the elision of the maternal body in Wordsworth's account of coming into life and into living creatively.

I still want to be able to meet the questions and return with some integrity the gestures that any particular landscape provokes. In looking for a non-colonising response to place that will travel with me across places, that is at the same time attentive to difference and specificity, it seems appropriate to make a number of different returns. I want to find some way of expressing the to-ing and fro-ing, as in an attempted conversation, without overlooking the privilege of being able to do so. Locating some of the practices that belong to this strange space between body, place and language means rearticulating and bringing to the surface my own ways in. In both theoretical and personal specific terms I explore a recuperated maternal practice. In revisiting my mother's mediating practice between me, the natural world and the symbolic ordering of that world, I want to think about alternative processes and forms of mark making.

Scotland

I went to Scotland alone, specifically to explore some places that seemed to be important in memory, or which, like my birthplace, might possibly have left traces on me that I couldn't remember. I have always envied those people who can reach right back into early childhood memory; the play of particular light, the touch or smells or sounds that etched themselves on infant being, that marked the interface between self and world. My only two images come from much later, when we no longer lived on the island of Arran, but returned for visits, and

these memory images are of looking out from inside, somehow prevented from both being in the outside, or seeing myself in that landscape. Feeling the loss of material story from early years, not being able to access sensate memories and affect of early environment, I wanted to be there again. I wanted to listen with my whole body to the landscape, to the colour, to the shape of the hills and the smell of the sea, climbing it, lying on – wanting cold and wet and sun and wind and salt to somehow speak to me. Not knowing what it was going to say or tell me, but listening, looking, laying out my senses to try and catch the breath of the place.

Exploring along the edges, of skin, of place, of being both home and not at home at all. There was a sense of looking for traces of an earlier me, and that out of the landscape itself and a few hazy mother stories and maps combined I would be able to bring such a self into view; but I had no idea how that might happen. It wasn't, however, in roaming around the cottage in the hills where my mother lived before I was born. Nor in sitting mulling over mother stories outside the cottage hospital where she worked sometimes and where I came into the world. (She'd be out with your father fishing, in the rowing boat, after he'd finished the day at the bank, my aunt said, they were so poor, and someone would hail her with a loudspeaker, because they needed her at the hospital. They thought she was wonderful, you know.) It was something that came immediately and intuitively to hand. A kind of gathering process.

Single road snaking precariously along beside the water, past steep banks of full flowered rhododendrons and patches of extraordinarily high and strident young bracken, long crisp succulent stems that soften into unfolding fronds, slightly furred now with pale green tight curls ribbed with brown. These tightly backed onto sandstone escarpment, where dark invisible water roars down from mountains above, and then seeps out into marshy seaward side of the road. Here swathes of wild yellow iris, which must love wet feet, occasional fuschia, pink foxglove, bluebells. I stop to explore a little this lush boggy green down to seawater's edge. Bluebell and foxglove again, a sort of yellow cowslip, deadly nightshade even and I feel tiny tugs of recognition. Gives way to pink tufted thrift against silver rock and pebble shore.

Stony beach at Machrie is windy and cool, sharp air against my skin although the sun shines. A large jelly fish is tumbled on to the rocks, and I mean to go and have a closer look, but it disappears and must have made a getaway. Oystercatchers, sad and plaintive, and some other smaller version running along the stony edge. The beach is strewn with different seaweeds,

moulded and felted to tumbled stones. Skin I think at first, creamy, translucent. Filo pastry. Some brown and orangey wrinkled and papery. I collect some up, with a few shells. Sheep wander freely and all the gorse (and heather not yet out) is waving little flags of fleece. They seem to be moulting, not shorn and I gather warm sheepy bundles, pressing them to my nose. This is something I know, and relish. Rich brown birds with deeply speckled breasts, streaked under the chin nervous in the gorse bushes. Thrushes? It's been so long.

What is this little brown bird, dead in the middle of the road? Warm, but completely anonymous. And what are those strange scratchy creaking bird cries that tantalise from a sea of buttercups and daisies. A ground bird, grouse or pheasant, I reason, but I want to know with my whole body.

I buy myself a bird book. It had been twenty five years since I had been in this country and many things once familiar were strange again to me. But it's only when I come by chance across a wild flower field guide - a great unwieldy heavy book quite unsuitable for the traveller - that some other, more complex connection rather than just the need to name and know seems to stir. The book resonates so powerfully I have to buy it. Despite not really understanding what was happening, it suggests other ways of being there. I stop straining for ways in, stop feeling a not-knower, and begin to gather with pleasure and to engage more deeply and productively with what is around me. I draw and describe what I encounter on my walks, search out wild plants and foods to prepare as meals. There are brief but deeply satisfying interactions when I come across others apparently doing similar things.

I've always been powerfully seduced and often delighted by such objects as maps and field guides, but never understood quite how they worked upon me. Ryden, speaking of maps, says 'much of the fascination lies in the fact that they are simultaneously distillations of experience and invitations to experience' (Ryden, 1993, 23).

I bring little gatherings home from the day's outing, but the flowers have wilted by then and are just about impossible to track in the book (which is too heavy to take with me) so now I draw and take notes. There's so much pleasure in this process, seeing differently, with care. Drawing takes me in closer and closer and I love what I learn from both this and the book about moving between the particular and the general. But I can only do one or two a day because it becomes so expansive.

On one walk I exchange words with an older woman and a younger companion collecting tufts of cast fleece where it has snagged on stone walls at the edge of the tiny airstrip. Sheep rub by on their wander down to the shore. She tells me she used to do this as a child in Inverness, that she would take the gathered wool to the mills, and be given yarn to knit with in return.

A fisherman hauling lobster pots down to the water greets me very directly, and alerts me to an oystercatcher on her second attempt to nest among the white pebbles and drying tangle of seaweeds. *There she goes*, he says, *I've been watching her - keeping an eye on her. Her nest is right on the seaweed line; she's got two eggs in it, it's the second time. She had three eggs at first but something like a crow took two and she abandoned it then. She's very canny, she doesn't go in it when I'm there but she goes up towards it.* I didn't know they nested on the open shore and I too worry about her now. We discuss seaweed - the sea lettuce is good, just deep fried, he says, till crispy, really nice. And there's dulce, but no-one likes to eat that it seems, too bitter. He goes on to tell me about his plot down the road, growing organic vegetables and delivering boxes round the island; some go to Glasgow, too, to hotels and restaurants. We have a rich conversation about potatoes. He tells me about the herbs he knows on the island, sweet cicely, wild garlic, thyme. Worked for a while on Green Island off Cairns. His cousin sent him the Bush Tukka book afterwards.

I'm re connected and it's food and the community of growing and making and everyday inhabiting and subsisting that makes it possible to story myself here. I had thought about the community necessary for a certain kind of storysharing and that there would be no-one here who could be that for me, but it only seems to be a matter of declaring myself.

Colonsay, Sunday. - Miserable and raining, but I'm going mussel gathering regardless. I asked Charlie about the best place and time. Tomorrow at twelve, he says. Go down tomorrow at twelve. Port Lhob. Keep to the Ardskenish side of the bay. May gives me cooking instructions - Just scrub them, and put them in salted water, might have to do it a couple of times. Boil for a minute maybe. If they don't open don't take them, eat them. I'll need to get salt.

The pleasure of walking in the light rain, it's so wet underfoot anyway. It's a long walk, crossing the back of the bay working out what kind of terrain -the bog seems to run right to the foreshore. Where to begin? Shellduck babies rush out to sea in panic while parents lure me

in opposite direction. Right down to the lowest tide mark and work back? I make my way tentatively along the bay edge. The rain falls across my face, and there are edgy puddled patches of soft sand, that sink me and suck me deep enough to make me wonder how safe I am. But there they are, under the seaweed skirts of the rocks they cluster black and gleaming. There are cockles too, and better still loveliest enteromorpha, wonderfully lusciously green, waving its edible fronds. Very damp and pleased with myself, I find a single rock oyster on the Strand on the way back. Dinner is becoming sumptuous. I'll deep fry the enteromorpha, steam hogweed shoots and toss in butter.

Getting salt, I waylay a white haired woman outside the shop. Is she Jessie Mc Neill. No she's Reena Frith. Why? I wanted to ask her about seaweed. What, carragheem? Oh you'll have to get that round the western side of the island. You need to know what you're looking for. Not everyone likes it. She asks me what I've been eating, how I've been preparing it, and she tells me her grandfather used to keep a pot of vinegar by the fire. He'd heat a poker up in the fire, heat till red hot, then wind the seaweed round it - you'd have to be careful, mind, then plunge it into the vinegar. It was absolutely delicious.

When I eat, my shellfish have tiny grey pearls in them.

Eating Place¹

Food is necessarily associated with the mother from the moment of birth; the baby is nourished and sustained by milk from the mother's breast, milk that is part of the mother that becomes not part of the mother; milk that the baby takes into itself that becomes part of itself.

It is food, what is taken into the body, along with excrement, what is expelled from the body, which calls into question the borders of the body. How can we be bodies separated from our mothers when it is her body which we eat? Her fluids become ours. How can we imagine ourselves as separate bodies when we eat that which is not-us, which in turn becomes us? How can we imagine ourselves as separate bodies when we expel part of us, which in turn becomes not-us? (Oliver, 1992, 71)

¹ The ideas expressed below have been jointly explored and written collaboratively in a paper also called Eating Place. 'Eating place: Postcolonial explorations of embodiment and place', Margaret Somerville and Laura Hartley, is to be found in the *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, Vol.21, No 3, 2000, and I am writing these ideas freely in the following section.

Insofar as food participates in these originary qualities of the mother and yet has a life of its own, it becomes a transitional object in the space of play. As transitional object it is the specific materiality of the food that comes to the fore, its smell, its feel, the texture of its skin, and how it is embedded in and related to the material qualities of the place from which it comes.

Winnicott develops the enabling concepts of the transitional object and space of play in the following way. If the mother can provide an *almost* complete continuation of the baby's experience of having its needs met as quickly as they are expressed, she will afford the infant the illusion that her breast, or its equivalent, is almost as indistinguishable from the infant as the womb environment was. The baby's experience then is that it has the power to make present, create, the milk, breast, clean nappy and so on.

The mother's task then becomes one of gradually disillusioning the infant. At the same time as the mother's adaptation may become less and less exactly matched to the infant's demands, she may facilitate or support the baby assuming rights and control over some special object other than her breast. In an industrialised western culture it might be a soft toy, a piece of cloth, a blanket edge which becomes much loved and handled; perhaps mutilated, a *transitional object*.

Whatever this object is, that Winnicott calls the transitional object, it must not change unless the baby changes it; it must survive all that loving, and 'it must seem to the infant to give warmth, or to move, or to have texture, or to do something that seems to show it has vitality or reality of its own' (1971, 5), so that it occupies a space somewhere between the baby's inability and its growing ability to accept reality. Still within a 'holding' environment, the baby experiences, is allowed, an intermediate object, which it can begin to contemplate as the possibility of something not-me without actually being *challenged* as to whether it is of itself, or outside and separate; whether it 'found' the object as one that already existed, or whether it 'created' it.

While the transitional object is the material thing that may come to represent the mother for the child, it's not being the breast or the mother is just as important in the mediation of separation. It is necessarily physical and has a life of its own, yet participates in the smells,

tastes, touch, feel of the mother. Through its ambiguity it participates in a space of becoming, where the subject is neither separate nor connected, but both.

The potential space between mother and child is at the same time a very material and specific environment. It matters how things go materially between mother and child in the space of play. In such a space that is both material and potential, Winnicott sees the space of creativity that we continue to access lifelong, in the ongoing challenge of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated, and of sustaining ourselves as unique individuals within a community of others to whom we are connected.

Winnicott says ‘The place where cultural experience is located is in the *potential space* between the individual and the environment (originally the object). The same can be said of playing. Cultural experience begins with creative living first manifested in play’ (1971, 100). The contradictory interplay between separateness and union, the both/and possibilities between mother and child, expressed in the transitional object and the space of play, extend all the way to an interplay between individual and community. It is there ‘between originality and the acceptance of tradition as the basis for inventiveness’ that transformations can take place (Winnicott, 1971, 99). It is a space, Winnicott claims, that most wish more access to and it is in this sense that Armstrong sees the transitional object as ‘the primal experience of culture, the beginnings of representation and its phantasmic mobility and resourcefulness’ (Armstrong, 1993, 183 –184).

Winnicott’s notions of play and the transitional object, along with my experiences of ‘being in the world’ in Scotland, offer the opportunity to inflect some very detailed understandings of how things matter, in a way that is crucial to a feminist agenda of putting the self in the picture. Together they allow me to think of ways of both experiencing *and* representing a self in place – how women in projects such as Expressions of Place might both explore and articulate their embeddedness in the world, in relationship; how they might claim a voice and a production that is their own, whilst acknowledging the participating agency of ‘other’, human and non human.

Australia/ Developing a group practice

When I returned to Australia I found myself thinking much more about gathering as both practice and concept. I talk to Sylvia and Patsy about the idea of gathering as a kind of stitching. Between garden and hedgerow, wood and the farmland; across time and memory even between continents. A creative movement between the specific and the general, the intimate and the immense, between differences as well as similarities, between mother and daughter, woman and the world. Sylvia tells me it makes her think of when she was a child and was learning to sew. Taking a flat piece of material and learning to gather. Gathering was always the initial part of creating something. You took a one dimensional piece of material and you threaded it, so that it gathered and became three dimensional. Of course, smocking! It became a series of folds. (*I think of the folded rock of Colonsay and Arran especially where geology students go from all over the world, because it has the most densely 'folded' and 'intertextual' geology in the world, folded and refolded, every era, event and substance making its appearance.*) Learning to smock: you gather and adjust the folds to accommodate a body, and then you make patterns over and across the folds.

The gathering/making nexus is so important and potent to me. As I gather up images and practices that spring from that, it is like gathering together both a community of practice and practices of community. I think of my neighbour's map, an ordinary road map except that he has marked on it every quandong tree he has ever come across. He is participating in a story that comes powerfully from his mother's childhood. A sickly child, she claimed that, being left to her own devices under the quandong trees, she discovered their vitamin rich fruits on the ground and began to thrive. The long weekend in October has become a ritual gathering time for his extended adult family and friends, and I now join in too.

I understand my neighbour Mac's gesture as an attempt to restore that layer of story and experience, traces of life, movement, history, which have been so invisibilised in contemporary maps, and which reach out to others so differently. Unless they are generated from aerial photographs and can show, like Macdonald's work, a landscape being *performed* continuously by things and people, conventional modern maps exteriorise the viewer, make it difficult to remember there are any bodies involved at all. Early maps, as Ryden reminds us (1993, 22-52), were complex witness to much more personal and communal experiences. Perceptions and understandings came from borders and markers already physically available – approached on foot and grasped with hands, eyes and mind. Yet, at the same time, as much

map marking arose from lived bodily experiences in the course of everyday life and work, maps were also a powerful and explicit expression of dream and desire.

‘Maps were once drawn, and even today are interpreted, according not only to what is objectively out there but also to what we wish were out there, or hope to find out there’ (Ryden, 1993, 24).

It seems to me Mac’s altered map is as much a link to imagination, and to imagination’s wellspring in the maternal, as it is a shorthand collection of landmarks to a very detailed embodied experience. Mac’s pencil marks – x marks the spot - simply don’t mesh with the scale or logic of the underpinning modern map. They can only hope to trigger an invisible internal map with a huge amount of layered contextual detail and a mental re run of the history of that first discovery – a very precise time, as well as stretch of road, and a particular grouping of trees. (Quandongs form in complex parasitic relation to other types of trees and are difficult to differentiate from their host unless they are in fruit.) At the same time every precise remembering is also triggered by, and triggers, the almost mythical mother story that has been rooted in Mac’s imagination and telling for seventy years. I have come to notice he finishes his gathering each time by making a little walk alone, strewing some quandong stones as he goes.

Gathering and making practices alike have shifted my sense of how I move about and am in the landscape, how I use the things of the landscape and texts connected to them. Winnicott has suggested that the original transitional object, far from being repressed, from going underground (as Kristeva suggests of the abject), gradually loses meaning only as it becomes diffused over ‘the whole intermediate territory between “inner psychic reality” and “the external world as perceived between two people in common”, that is to say, over the whole cultural field’ (Winnicott, 1971, 5). It does not go inside. It is not abandoned as such, not forgotten or mourned, but finds itself resonating from potentially any part of the objective world, wherever matter ‘matters’. My understanding is that we can continue to benefit from the mediating capacity of such objects whenever we engage specifically with the nature and behaviour of people and things, attend to how things go between me and you, me and it.

The challenge is to provide learning experiences and spaces which can perhaps amplify their resonances, and create opportunities to attend closely and open ourselves to them.

The Material Play Workshop

In the second workshop of the *Expressions of Place* project we meet again at the CWA Hall. A week has elapsed since our first coming together and the focus of this day-long workshop is material of place, found organic materials. My purpose is to think about quite simple yet radical ways of making serious play with leaves and twigs. To explore possibilities of extending and thickening, and perhaps reworking responses to country, to place, to self, some of which had begun to emerge already in our work and play with conversation and text.

The question set up by this day, although not necessarily answerable in the same time frame, is to what extent we can activate the dynamic of the transitional object and the space of play in relation to organic materials of the natural environment. And to what extent that in turn enriches, unsettles or reworks a relation to 'other' and ourselves as 'other'. The first difficulty is in admitting or allowing, as adults, the material to be transitional for us. If we come to be able to use material such as leaf, or seed – can we then extend from there to larger structures and forms of being?

Exercises and practices I had experienced as a participant in a class given by artist Ruth Hadlow were particularly useful in allowing my adult self to both listen differently and to talk back in the face of compelling yet apparently self contained, perfect and unapproachable beauty.² I hoped by combining some of these exercises and experiences with more of Mary's skills in providing tools to work with language, we could suggest patterns and practices demonstrating where and how *meanings* can be remade. These were structured into a programme for the day that moves through five main activities.

² In a 'masterclass' for textile artists, 1998, Ruth Hadlow offered ways of developing a creative relationship with the natural environment, challenging stereotypical views of landscape. Going out to work in the bush one day, we turned aside from a panoramic gaze of the local 'Lookout' to work out of sight in little dips and hollows, with whatever natural materials were around us as well as our minimal toolkits. Ruth had been working on bypassing the rational, accessing the subconscious by having us draw with grasses and twigs, having silent conversations with each other by means of those materials, but it was a shock to realise how difficult it was to respond in person, on the spot. How internalised the separation had become. We might move in, walk in, live near and admire our 'natural' environment, but make a direct aesthetic gesture in its midst, towards it, with its own material? What I might have done unselfconsciously as a child, playing in the dirt, making a daisy chain, initially seemed immensely difficult. I considered it a great achievement of the process that, working directly and intimately with the stuff of that place, I allowed myself to make that response.

1) Reconnecting and Scrapbooking

The beginning of the day looks back as well as forward, and we establish a particular pattern of exchange, both collecting comments and reflections from the previous week from the group and returning material such as text and photographs that were made during the last workshop. The scrapbook's role in this exchange becomes apparent, and we map out the movements of the day ahead of us.

2) Walk and gather

We will be exploring nearby parkland to gather materials to work with, and after our physical gathering, a brief 'memory' gathering exercise.

3) Silent play

Two exercises working with our gathered material are intended to heighten our awareness of its physical qualities, including and in particular its capacity in these circumstances to bypass the rational and allow memory and subconscious to surface

4) Show and tell Development

Through scribed show and tell in pairs, followed by a simple associative writing piece, and a group show and tell, we hope to model movement into the symbolic in a way that retains rather than erases the quality of what is brought to the surface.

5) Bringing one's own tools and materials into the play

Through a series of quick exercises, familiar tools and techniques are incorporated into the process of play.

Reconnecting

That recognisable transitional object, the teddy bear, had even appeared in our first workshop. Reluctantly packing up the family farm for sale, before retiring to the coast, Judy had discovered Ted, bagged and stored in a garbage bin in the shed. A gift from her grandmother to herself, and then passed on to her daughter, Ted had been around for fifty years. His very threadbareness was redolent not only of the love and connectedness between the generations of women but also of a family lifetime connection to the farm now coming to a close. The ripple effect of these conjoined notions of connection and loss had made such a mark on another participant that between the workshops she had written a story from Ted's point of

view. Presented as a concertinaed fold-out booklet, it turned out to be a poignant story about ageing, changing bodies and desire, the question of what next? And as it happened, in its content, its form and it being volunteered as the first ad hoc contribution to the group scrapbook, it carried us all through that strange movement of connecting with where we had been in the first workshop, and beginning again into the unknown. It illustrates the way working in groups and pairs creates resources for each other all the time; how the processes of play, and of sharing and exchanging, enable new things to enter the world.

For other participants the space between had been equally productive and digressive. Rita had woken up at two o'clock one morning with a 'whole story' pouring out. *I thought about a much more relevant object. The whole story, I nuttered it out word for word.* Several had been thinking about *all the wonderful things that people had brought, the connections between people's objects*, had expanded on what they had written, or had reflected on how the process had unfolded for them.

I didn't have much idea what to bring, until I saw what everybody else had.

I just kept thinking of the quartz and the moonlight, looking at the rocks, more aware.

Walk and Gather

Once we had reconnected as a group, briefly foregrounding some of the experiences and practices from the first day that we might carry lightly with us, we took a walk in a nearby park, with the intention of gathering some materials to work with. The park, beside the new bridge, beside the river where I had talked with some of these women before, was only two blocks away from the CWA Hall. We took cars though, mindful of the way Rita and Yvonne had discovered that they had had, between them, five replacement knees.

It had been important for Mary and I to walk the area beforehand, checking it out with our bodies first, thinking not only about the body of the place but about the particular bodies of eighteen or so differently aged and abled women: how we might get around together.

Downstream from the bridge, the play area, the benches where the highway travellers pause, eat and making a brief resting place, the managed sense of the place begins to diminish. Tiny gullies and erosions intersect the progressively uneven ground and make their way down to the riverbank, where the more agile might hop down to miniature beaches. In the long grass a tiny plank bridge hides. Geese cross from the grain silo on the corner, and formal tree plantings

peter out well before the adjacent high fences of the depots and council yards begin. Plane trees give way to eucalypt, wattle and low scrub. Boxed hedge and guttering give way to gravel, timber edge, and finally dirt and dust.

Approaching the park in this way produced new perspectives for me. Not just ways of seeing the place itself, but of thinking about how hidden this necessary preparation, (a pleasurable labour, but work nonetheless), would be. The question of how to unfold an issue, a movement, was always given great care: how are we bringing people into this experience, Mary and I would ask each step of the way? But setting up something as apparently simple as a walk and a gather as a structured experience makes palpable a very particular kind of mediation. The park, everything it contains, already exists, without of course any intervention or input from Mary and I, yet for most of our group there will be a sense of ‘discovering’ it, we are sure, and we intend to produce that sense. At the same time, there is an underpinning belief for me that what we are doing is remembering what is already in some ways known.

Our aim on the workshop day was to observe and gather materials that appealed to us. I heard myself say ‘think about as broad range of shapes, textures and colours as possible’. But I imagined it was more likely to be a visceral pleasure, an inchoate response to some inherent beauty or connection that would find us things; grey and spotted duck feathers, seed pods like miniature mace, the unmistakable elegant curve (slightly nibbled) of archetypal eucalypt, so thick, so waxed, so long, wonderfully coloured.

Someone said as we started out ‘I don’t think we’ll find much here’, but quite the opposite was true and soon I heard

You would not believe what I’ve found here

It’s a good shop here

It’s like going snorkelling!

That sense of a whole other world experience of richness and surprise was very profound amongst the group. They were so surprised. It’s as much about seeing as gathering – once you start gathering you start seeing differently. Once you’ve allowed yourself to respond to the more obviously exquisite and familiar forms there seems to be an expansion of possibility - the crumbling quality of chocolate rich friable soil, the almost disintegrated fluff of a plane tree seed pod exploded, a curling crust of something unknown exuded from tree trunk.

I want to make our labour visible yet it seems awkward to do so. One never demands of the child, as it takes possession of its first transitional object, whether it creates, discovers or is allowed this object. The question must not be asked - this *not* challenging being fundamental to the process of tolerating ambiguity, and becoming able to accept similarity and difference. Can the same be said of this park work? And of other learning situations? The way this particular mother-work inherently lends itself to silence might well account for why I was so reluctant initially to acknowledge a pedagogical role for myself. Much in the same way as Leder is concerned with the way phenomena of disappearance, essential to the body's functioning, can appear to support Cartesian style oppositions of mind and body³, the way the necessary ambiguity of that founding space of paradox permeates all our later learnings, makings, cultural activities demands a critical attention and care.

As someone admired a beautiful circle of trees Margo tells a story of Sunday morning tai chi *in the middle of those trees, meditation through movement, karate on valium*. People pausing at the park want to know what we're doing (*we're with this art group*) and the motley collection of geese draw out a string of pleasures, anxieties and theories. *Enjoying ourselves like children* we collect both story and a wonderful range of material.

On returning to the hall a brief writing exercise is set. I ask everyone to think about a place they know well, and what its particular materials are, visualising it first then recounting as much detail as possible. The writing flows, everyone remembering richly.

Silent Play

We have heaped the tiny stage in the hall with wonderful scented blossoms, leaves, twigs, bark, stones, earth, feathers, pods, seeds, pine cones. Grey blue green aromatic gum leaves with velvet undersides brush with the yellow fuzz of acacia, but lovely as this array is, we want not only to enjoy it but to put it to work.

Conversations without words

I pair people off, and ask them to each go silently and select one handful of one material from our collection. Still in silence, the pairs will find a space on the floor where they take turns to

³ Leder argues that the mind body/dualism may emerge out of, and be continually sanctioned by, our experience of the body disappearing and dysappearing, when '...the body forgotten in its seamless functioning comes to attention particularly at times of breakdown or problematic operation' (1990, 127).

place and respond with leaf or twig, communicating, building through and with their materials. They can break up their material or use it however they like. With words not able to dominate, the communicative capacity of the materials takes on a new dimension. Not only is one drawn deeper and deeper into the detail and richness of every quality of this material, it seems simultaneously able to elicit thoughts, feeling, memories, information in excess of itself.

A silent conversation takes place inside a kind of bubble mutually created between the three - the material, and the two people. In turn each woman lays a piece of her material down and the other person responds with a piece of their material. If you haven't experienced this it is not easy to imagine the intensity or scope of the experience. And looking at a group of people engaged in this activity tells you very little except that they are very deeply engaged. Mary described it as the roundness of concentration.

What might go through your head? You may be sitting with a stranger, or someone you hardly know, in what becomes an intimate experience. You each have a little pile of material. She may have little twigs, you may have leaves. The first gesture is made, a piece laid, and what is your response? How will your piece sit with hers, what's in your gesture, its direction, its tone? Will you lay in alongside, pick up a cue of colour, of line, of empathy (entering deeper with every move into another detail and aspect of your leaf, her twig). Are you bored with the direction she's taking? Are you thinking, where can we go next? Can you construct/find/trust that you have any understanding at all in common apart from sharing this small journey across the floor? That's only one of the layers going on. Somehow your head is thinking a thousand other things at the same time.

Sitting at the point of something emergent, not requiring justification or articulation. The experience of closeness, exchange. The complex co presence of very particular materials and qualities you have been working with, and the surfacing of material from the inchoate. Here Bachelard's exploration of the poetic image intersects very productively for me with my understanding of the work of Winnicott's transitional object. Like the transitional object, 'the poetic image has an entity and dynamism of its own; it is referable to a direct *ontology*' (Bachelard, 1969, xii). As the transitional object subsequently resonates from the material world, so the resonances of a poetic image 'are dispersed on the different planes of our life in the world, while the repercussions invite us to give greater depth to our own existence'

(Bachelard, 1969, xviii). If we allow ourselves to experience the reverberations of the image phenomenologically, letting it bodily sound and reverberate us, the reverberations bring about a change of being. ‘In the resonance we hear the poem, in the reverberations we speak it, it is our own. ... It is as though the poem through its exuberance awakened new depths in us...[it] sets in motion the entire linguistic mechanism. The poetic image places us at the origin of the speaking being’ (Bachelard, 1969, xviii-xix).

Wendy said it was amazing to experience. *Not a word being spoken, but whole volumes.* And although Wendy describes her relationship to books as a lifeline, I want to think she’s referring to the notion of volume too, bodily volume. Something made palpable, fully experienced as real, yet not produced in words.

Discovery drawing

A move to use the materials a little more self consciously still assumes a very fragile and tentative process. It continues in silence, but still in terms of a conversation. Working separately this time, participants return to the object they brought in the first workshop. They are asked to spend a minute or two reviewing the qualities of their object, their doiley or rock, box, bear or old iron. The qualities might range from content-based stories, memories, feelings, to form-based texture, shape or colour. Then with two or three organic materials instead of spoken words, pen or paints, they make a small play on the floor with those materials in response to the object’s qualities.

The notion of this as a play, as a ‘discovery’ draft is really helped by the apparent familiarity and disposability of materials like leaves and twigs. There is no baggage attached, as there might be to tools that seem to belong to a formal discipline; no need to say I can’t draw, sketch. On the other hand, that familiarity is already and at the same time being displaced and complicated, nuances discovered as the material is used to ‘talk back’ to the other object. Having only fifteen minutes to respond to the object of our choice also helps to put one straight into the place of play, bypassing the rational and accessing the subconscious or semiotic.

There is only smell and rustle, and deep intensity as mini installations, scrawled, sketched, neatly drawn or doodled appear across the timber floor. Winnicott says such spaces of play are the places from which categories emerge - a kind of melting pot, or a quantum scenario.

Whilst in the midst of this particular kind of play nothing is predetermined; categories are dissolved, disassembled. Only on leaving do they take their particular shape in the world. I want to strike a complex balance between savouring the dynamic of that play, when anything is possible, and the playful acceptance of the possibility that materialises on the floor when time is up. To that end I take photographs of these draft ideas, to return later to the women, and we move very carefully into ways of developing some of their possibilities into a more solid form, without losing the quality of playfulness.

The delicacy is about a movement into the symbolic in a way that retains rather than erases the quality of what's come to the surface. That does not judge, that understands and expects this experimentation to be barely intelligible to ourselves at first, let alone others. That is why silence has been so important, but also why considered forms of show and tell are used to model a movement into an external shared world.

Show and tell Development

Development through scribing in pairs

Mary reminds everyone of the scribing process, and what might be slightly different this time. Again participants take turns to hear each other for a few minutes, talking about this discovery drawing experience, and make a record of what is being said. The scribe may need to ask pertinent questions to elicit further information, and may need to check back with the speaker more frequently. As the speaker is still making explorations, opportunities to add on or modify evolving ideas are important, without the scribe introducing their own ideas. At the end scribes give speakers back their words.

Through cluster writing

A movement back to working individually involves taking, without too much deliberation, a word or phrase from our own telling that seems to stand out. This word or phrase becomes the nucleus for some associative writing. With the word in the centre of a sheet of paper, writers take off in tracks or clusters of association, moving around the nucleus as new strings of connection suggest themselves. Going with the rhythm of thoughts, with sweeps and curls, not constrained by the usual textual progression across and down the page, this forms another

kind of discovery drawing. Quick and condensed, this kind of poetic personal research may generate new elements in a telling.

Group show and tell

Before we disperse the temporary installations and clear the floor, we invite any of the women to speak about their constructions now, if they feel they can or want to. The invitation to speak also takes us into a very particular movement around the pieces on the floor. We tread with caution, take up paths and gaps, and manage to form and reform inventively as a group within whatever spaces are available around the speaker and her work.

It was an unexpected bonus that the first show and tell could articulate so clearly the kind of transformation of categories that becomes possible in such spaces of play. What has come to surface in this listening /resonating process is intriguing. Sue D. had first brought a piece of quartz from her place, to introduce herself and her bush block. The rock's hard, bright, and glinting qualities fitted well with the sense of a place solid and secure as well as magic. Sue had also partnered someone who had brought a lacy cloth, and had played with text that considered the form and story of that cloth. She had, in her own supplies, an old piece of lace, but it was only with the introduction of some delicately traced, lichen covered, twigs into her exercise that a completely new view emerged. What emerged for her was a total surprise. *I had no idea my landscape was so fine and lacy. I'm surprised at making something so lacy and fragile.*

She found herself then intuitively twisting lacy feathery grasses into loose circles too and, later still, used the photographs of these drafts to discern other patterns and insights. Here she discovered a critical intersection, a layer of complexity and unsettling that she was to take on into her work, both metaphorically and literally. Adding to her perceptions of her place, herself, and the materials and techniques with which she represented that.

Jennie's object was a box that suggested a classic simplicity and elegance that she would like to have in her life and domestic surroundings. She had used a selection of crisp white flowers, pebbles and brown dried leaves to respond to it. In her play, cross referencing the different qualities of the box with the materials, she had also produced new understandings. While the flowers were *for freshness, perfection and brightness*, and the pebbles *for superstition and well-being*, the dried and decaying leaves allowed her to speak of a previously invisible and unacknowledged *fatigue*.

Margo finds her selection of material so fortuitous, affirmative. Her object was a painting which seemed to suggest freedom and flight, and here she says, *I picked this up off the floor, just as it is, it just said 'seagull'*. Indeed we experience her sketch with pebbles, long waving papery grasses and rib-like fibres as being almost on the verge of speaking for itself.

Catherine's piece too, drawing on both formal and affective formal qualities of her object - an old fashioned flat iron, found in an abandoned homestead - takes only a little telling for us to arrive at a shared intelligibility. Arranged with white pebbles in a triangle echoing the iron (*stones for weight*), infilled with a pile of rust brown fibres (*dried pine needles for energy*) and with a bunch of white flowers at the heavy end (*flowers for previous owners*), it sits evocatively between an echo of the iron itself, and a kind of memorial. (*When I return, now, to a photograph of this piece after Catherine's ensuing work on loss and grief, I find it strongly resonant of graveside, with floral tribute, and somehow the word gravitas emerges and wants a presence.*)

Wendy, referring to her book as significant object, and to writing and reading, makes her materials sur/name herself. The letter A in silvery wattle is flanked by two contrasting pieces of greenery. *Me in natural form*, Wendy says and because it is so literal we read it. The letter shape itself suggests home and house, and, with its two side pieces, doorway, portal. Questions of being at home, in language, in place, in name, *putting the self in the picture*, hang, unspoken, in the air.

Bringing one's own tools and materials into the play

The last part of the day was intended to lightly draw the women's existing making techniques and tools into the same dynamic of play. Everyone had a small toolkit and supply of materials, depending on their interests, and to make use of these *experimentally*, three exercises were planned inside tight time frames of about twenty minutes for each activity. I hoped the limited time would discourage thinking, for the moment, too much about traditions or expectations attached to any techniques. Some had little confidence in their chosen medium, and others a strong sense of the conventions of a particular form. These exercises were intended as samples, play, still about process and possibility (including the useful experience of finding out what doesn't work) rather than any finished product. The time frame alone simply wouldn't allow that, and while I imagine some may be liberated by this, for others the experience would prove quite challenging.

The first exercise asked everyone to take a piece or pieces of environmental material and experiment with how they could physically incorporate it into their usual materials and techniques. For the writers and painters it found them working on or with entirely different surface interactions, ink on bark on succulent leaf, or building organic material into a painted surface for example. Barbara H took a large gum leaf and blanket stitched along the outer edge to wonderful effect. Others also stitched, wove or applied.

The second exercise was similar, but instead of taking plant material, the group was asked to use some text, some written material and experiment with applying their techniques to that. *Find a bit of text you don't mind cutting up, think about patching it, knitting it, or constructing with it in some way.* Last of all, I ask *Think about what you've discovered or enjoyed in different makings today. Return to your object and make another response to it using your own materials.*

This last return to more familiar making techniques seemed to bring anxieties. Doubts and self judgements intervened for some and the discourse of the successful finished object seemed to assert itself. Some were puzzled by what they produced and didn't know how to respond to it. Some were frustrated at their efforts; one said she hated what she had produced. It is a space of few words however, as participants digest their individual experiences. It had seemed important to open up and make visible and tolerable a process of risk, of not knowing, and of gradual unfolding. To consider play as a form of knowledge itself. There's some discussion about the importance of using what we've discovered productively. About honouring the labour of preliminary workings out and, implicitly, the traces of the labouring subjects in those products.

I do not want to underestimate the potential unease, a possible sense of our 'being' being undone in some way⁴, but to reconceptualise and rematerialise this as an elasticity, a revisability. Can we tolerate the incomplete for a while, be prepared, for example, to sit with a sample or a self in process, in transition? Can we move away from responses of right or wrong, success or failure, to thinking what does this *do*, what have I learned about how this material behaves, how does it make me feel? As much as anything these last activities ask

⁴ One participant clearly expresses what is at stake for her in terms of self writing when she notes beside a photograph of herself, taken during these activities, *YUK! Me I mean. The others in the frame are good women – I.*

participants to own or develop, begin to name their own critical criteria and goals, as part of the process of putting the self in the picture. If this is *not* what one wanted to work with, it provides an opportunity to reflect on what one does. To take advantage of the particular possibilities that this intersubjective mode allows, ‘a context with others in which desire is constituted for the self’ (Benjamin, 1986, 92).

The hardest thing for me at the end of those exercises was to resist being interpolated into a traditional and reductionist role of teacher as predominantly nurturing mother, there only to meet the needs of the other. I felt I had to resist strongly perceived absences – of technique, of experience, of knowing, of talent – with anything other than a clear indication of where we would go in the next workshop and how to prepare for that. Although there was a demand for me to do so, to fill up the place of the other’s desire for her, this would have denied us both the possibility of an independent desire.

At the end of the day

At the end of the day we ask everyone if they have a comment, a word even, to reflect on the day. It is an act of drawing us together again, and of articulating a safe holding place, as it were, for the uncertainties, the becomings and undoings of the day. We gather up these offerings.

finding your medium

ideas

reference points forms

movement

New ground

discovery

abundance

experimenting

making connections

communicating

the familiar’s become strange

(the strange hasn’t become familiar)

gathering - wool gathering
 surprise - I would not have thought at breakfast this morning
 lovely outdoor activities
 big mess
 learning to be patient
 confining yourself to one thing
 being precise
 I just want to do this all day
 some confusion
 I don't know I can't - I can
 to create you need to go through new ground
 disturbing
 revealing - things you haven't thought about

Gathering

What do we want to take with us, and what will carry us over into the public domain?

We gather food, flowers, objects. We gather thoughts, memories, images, stories and ideas. We gather together in different ways – as pairs, as a group, working alone but in the company of others.

Each chapter also starts with a process of gathering for me. I aim to be eclectic, open to the unexpected as well as drawing together material that was consciously collected as data. It starts with a physical collection. Photographs, transcripts, the group journal, research notebooks, a drawing, a scrap of fabric, a scrap of theory marked by a yellow sticky book tab. On the biggest expanse of paper I can find I give myself permission to name and gather in a mud map anything and everything that wants to come together and associate. Workshop themes and details jostle with fragments of narrative, memory, and theory and even before I have finished gathering, patterns, shapes and relationships have begun to emerge.

I use gathering in many different ways in both my own and the women's makings. It is a process of bringing different things into different relationships, as a way of both conceptualising and being in the world. We put ourselves in relationship with inanimate

objects, with non human living things, with other people, with other of our selves. The most ordinary material forms of collecting and gathering up can relate to different ways of seeing, different practices of care and sustenance. Surfaces brought thoughtfully together, into contiguity, may form an elastic and revisable relationship (much as the gathered and smocked folds of cloth stretch to accommodate an active growing body). It is a practice that can make material sense of relationships between the particular and the general, the one and the many, tradition and singular practice, inner and outer. And in the material play between it has the capacity to produce the new.

In the first part of this chapter I identified a maternal practice of gathering mediating between self, the natural world and symbolic ordering of that world. Consciously exploring how and where that practice continues to resonate, I considered practices of mapping and gathering, everyday materials and creative acts associated with them that seem to be involved in the negotiation and transformation of categories. Drawing on Winnicott's enabling concepts of the transitional object and the space of play I have been attentive to the ways in which very ordinary materials can bear traces of, and evoke, a paradoxical relationship between self and (m)other, that in turn allow us to think of non hierarchical ways of being in the world, tolerating similarity and difference 'in the same breath'.

Secondly I have sought ways, pedagogically, to *amplify* the resonances of this maternal debt, exploring spaces and practices in which to listen and feel for these resonances, encouraging participants to become aware of sounding and being sounded. It has been important to make physical and temporal space for participants to sit with newly heightened senses - of complexity, of paradox, of possibility. Being in the moment of this experience in order to partake of it full bodiedly - sensually, epistemologically, interactively, separate yet connected. Being prepared to savour the flux of memory, emotion, bodily sensation, thought, fact - all potentially contributing new and perhaps transgressive data towards an understanding or expression yet to be made.