

Chapter One

Introduction: The Absent Body

Walking and breathing deeply. I am getting to know the breath of this paddock too – the different movements of air around its slopes and wrinkles, pockets of vegetation and river edge. Anticipating patches of cool relief and pleasure.

Wind on skin. The scabby fox the dogs killed the other day is beginning to crumble, smelling so pungently I take a different route around the quince. The digestive process, like the enzymic one, comes unasked, unprompted. Walking in and out of consciousness of body, surroundings; slipping in and out of last night's writing thoughts to the pleasure of two hawks poised in the tree ahead (Journal, Autumn 2001).

Walk/talk – so many possible spaces to make meaning, embodied connections. Walking talking writing. Thinking of texts which perform this function, and what the women in the arts and craft group say and do. In a Masters research project I completed some years ago I was passionately concerned with the question of absent bodies - physical flesh and blood bodies, particularly women's bodies – where, why and how they were being excluded in dominant discourse. In 1990 I had come back to study as a mature age woman and found myself excited and challenged to bring some of the embodied knowledge I had accrued and applied in years of mothering and making - food, gardens, textile art, home in a new country - into (patriarchal) academic knowledge-making. The postgraduate Women's Studies course raised more questions than I could possibly have imagined. Starting a research Masters in 1991, I plunged rather boldly into the negotiations with corporeality that have been central to second wave feminism. I was engaging in particular with a problem which was being articulated precisely at that time, and which Margaret Somerville recently described as the problem of the (dis)appearing body (in press).

Negotiating corporeality.

It is at the site of the body that feminists from a range of disciplines have met, attempting to understand and disrupt the power relations that have coalesced and flourished there, through a masculinist Cartesian view of the body as 'merely' natural, an unproblematised subordinate to mind (Bell, 1999a). Since women's oppressed position in the social order had been justified

as the natural outcome of biological sexual difference, disturbing the taken-for-granted relationship between biological sexual difference and women's oppression has been a key theoretical and political strategy for feminist theorists (Somerville, in press). Within this political impetus is the belief that in understanding sexual difference, we can come to better understand the category of difference itself, and better challenge modes of knowledge that seek to fix people, things and places in hierarchical relations.

The status quo

An increasing number of feminists have remarked on a paranoid and paralyzing anxiety that has emerged about any aspect of body that could be construed as essentialist (Kirby, 1991, Bordo, 1993; Bell, 1999a; Somerville, in press)

Feminism could be described as a discourse that negotiates corporeality, what a body is and what a body can do. Nevertheless, the specter of essentialism means that the biological or anatomical body, the body that is commonly understood to be the 'real' body, is often excluded from this investigation. The increasingly sterile debate between essentialism and antiessentialism has inadvertently encouraged this somatophobia (Kirby, 1991, 4).

Contributing to this somatophobia is the way relations between body and language have been characterised in poststructuralist theory. The work of Foucauldian scholars in particular is characterised by an epistemology of the body as produced by, and existing in, discourse (McWilliam, 1996). Somerville points out that in Elizabeth Adams St Pierre's (2000) valuable summary of contemporary feminist poststructuralist theory, there are only two references to 'body'. As 'language, discourse, rationality, power, resistance and freedom; knowledge; truth; and the subject' are identified as the key philosophical concepts of this version of poststructuralist thought, Somerville concludes the body is effectively absented as a site of analysis (in press).

Drew Leder (1990), whilst advocating the notion of *the lived body* 'that lives and breathes, perceives and acts, speaks and reasons'(6) explores the several ways in which the body is both normally and necessarily absent from conscious experience. He elaborates how in certain situations, both pathological and normal, the body is clearly experienced as absent or *apart from* the self. Leder alerts us to the ways in which phenomena of *disappearance* (the body

forgotten in its seamless functioning) and *dysappearance* (brought to thematic awareness at times of breakdown or problematic operation) can together appear to support the Cartesian opposition of mind and body. He describes how the human body can be seen to efface itself in the use of language:

In reading, I do not attend to my eyes but from them. I do not attend to my mouth when speaking, or my ears when hearing, but from them to the articulated meanings. At the same time as these organs focally disappear, the rest of the body is often placed in background disappearance. The minimal materiality of linguistic signs demands only a minimal though intricate use of the body: small gestures of the writing hand, a swift scanning by the eyes, subtle movements of the lips and tongue (Leder, 1990, 122).

Leder suggests that it is from the immediacy of these bodily phenomena that the Cartesian dualism is continually sanctioned. He describes a circular self-fulfilling pattern:

Our cultural belief in the disassociation of mind from body leads to an increase of disassociative practices; we are encouraged to abandon sensorimotor awareness for abstracted mathematical or linguistic forms. This in turn intensifies the day-to-day experience of mind as disembodied, confirming the initial cultural premise (Leder, 1990, 152-153).

The scope of the problem

In the process of tracing the body in feminist poststructural research, Somerville reviews forty four articles that comprise *Feminist Theory and the Body* (Price & Shildrick, 1999). She finds that the vast majority of articles continue to theorise a discursive body. Those few which do address questions about the lived body demonstrate how difficult it is to give ordinary states of embodiment a presence in the text. The occasions in which lived bodies appear in texts about bodies are rare, Somerville suggests. They seem to slip from the scene almost as they appear.

I am particularly interested in Helen Marshall's article 'Our bodies, ourselves: Why we should add old fashioned empirical phenomenology to the new theories of the body', because it is a maternal body she wishes to speak. Marshall is concerned that so much attention is paid to theory and 'so little [attention] paid to the lived experiences and data' (1999, 64). She too wants to get lived bodies back into theory. 'We talk endlessly about how to theorise the body

... We do not, on the whole, talk about how the body is experienced as a way of getting a better theoretical hold on the concept' (1999, 64).

Marshall suggests a phenomenology of ordinary experiences of the body may be useful, and demonstrates by using her experience of pregnancy. She alerts us to two different kinds of data she is using. First there is the formalised second-order construction, already at a late stage of reflection, of the experience of pregnancy, written during pregnancy. The second data comes from an edited set of informal notes on how she experienced the birth of her daughter, written two hours after the event (Marshall, 1999, 66). The implication is that these informal notes make present her embodied experience in a different way. I look especially closely for the way in which she deals with this latter material. I look in vain. There follows seven pages in which there is no reference whatsoever to the birth of her child, until a very few lines before the end, as part of an extended reference to a sense of geometry.

In the days following the birth, this extraordinary geometry was recreated every time I handled my baby and smelled again on her my interior scent, first encountered when the waters broke (73).

This is the *only* mention of Marshall's birth experience. She concludes by saying that corporeal feminist theory needs to pay more attention to naïve accounts of experiences, because it is so difficult to name our bodies and what they do. In an extraordinary move, naming her body seems to be precisely what she omits. Her lived body is written over and out.

What is needed

New theoretical conditions are required to acknowledge and bring to the fore the lived body whilst also placing it within a critique that refuses to replicate the dualisms that feminist theory has managed so well to question. The work of Elizabeth Grosz is the most often cited as providing these conditions.

Grosz's intention is to work across the binary mind/body divide and to refigure the body so that it moves from the periphery, from its subordinate position in relation to the mind, to the centre of analysis (1994, ix). She aims to develop some kind of understanding of *embodied subjectivity*, of *psychical corporeality* (1994, 22) in which the body can provide a pivotal mediating point from which to rethink all the binaries that are associated with the mind/body

opposition (1994, 20-21). Grosz works to establish models, concepts, categories and methodologies that make visible co-constitutive interactions of psychical, social, and material elements that both produce and are produced by bodies. The Möbius strip is the model Grosz uses to show ‘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 is a model that also allows us to rethink inside/outside boundaries, the relationship between a subject’s psychical interior and corporeal exterior (xii). Her notion of an open materiality reconfigures the body as indeterminate, incomplete, capable of being inscribed in many different ways, but never simply ‘a blank slate, a page with no “texture” and no resistance of its own’ (1994, 191). In this approach she sees the possibility of articulating the specificities of women’s bodies without reductive recourse to biologism or essentialism. As Somerville describes,

...corporeality is always present in a dialectic relationship with the cultural. Just as we can theorise that language is always already there, we can also theorise that body/matter is also already there, and the body can intervene in discourse just as discourse can intervene into the body (in press).

The Indefinite Article; a body

In *The Indefinite Article; a body* (Hartley, 1995) I focus on the related issues of how one speaks a feminist aesthetics and politics that avoids simply reversing the phallogentric, and, in theorising/writing bodies how does one speak/know a distinctively female corporeality. I use my own lived body experiences and those of a group of women outside academia to seek out productive sites of intersection between contemporary body theory and practice and whatever ways we have developed to speak our selves and bodies in the meantime. My concern was to further open up questions about the production and dissemination of embodied knowledge, the possibilities of producing alternative texts which do not erase/absent bodies.

Emergent strategies

The writings and particularly the teaching practices of Somerville, Davies and Holloway in a Women’s Studies Course (1990) had provided an enabling conversation and opportunity to participate in a search for a range of alternative body theories, forms and strategies with which to do this work. Emergent practices came from the life writing and collective biography work of this course, and from the gestures being made in a research group that extended these

explorations less formally (the notion of developing a safe place in which to risk thinking aloud).

The Glasgow Herald. It was on the edges, the margins that I learned about life. My mysterious, invisible life-giving inner self, as well as worms. Mum told the story in little diagrams in the space between the print, later I knew she knew because she was a nurse. Then, she was my mum and she could draw. She was an artist. The best bit, the best bit was turning delicate drawings into fantastic fairies. Ovaries and uterus, for that must have been what they were, became swans and ballerinas and fairies with gauzy wings. People might not quite understand, she said, if we leave them as they are, lets turn them into something else. And I was allowed to choose, to help (Hartley, 1995, 5).

Talking overtly about the body, my body, our bodies, can now be named as one of a number of methodological gestures (Somerville, in press). These include unearthing bodily and embodied experiences in memory and diary, using the body at the scene of work (including the work of research and writing) as a strategy, and naïve accounts of experience which bring together phenomenological accounts of the body with contemporary reconceptualisations such as Grosz's. What I had decided to do was put bodies right up front, and ask a number of women to join me in a series of conversations based around our experiences of our bodies.

The women I spoke with were involved in a local arts and crafts group in a rural community and had a non-academic interest in their own various kinds of makings. We took, very loosely, one of the senses each week as a starting point for an hour's group talking and in addition to the transcripts from these conversations, I used autobiographical material from memory work, journal writing and ongoing responses to the transcripts.

While I suggested smelling, touching, tasting, hearing and seeing, as themes each week, I was quite unprepared for the ensuing dynamic that defied discrete topics, any sort of ordering or containment, that spilled, criss crossed and multiplied, making a life of its own. A conversation on smell, for example, leads to perfumes, relations with husbands, granddaughters and selves, homosexuality, constructing identities and sexualities, exhibitions and installations, gardens and lingering memories of the dead. A woman tells in graphic detail how, on the way home, she stops out of sight behind a shed to inhale the smells of a newly baked loaf of bread. Pushing her face close to the bread she sniffs starvingly what her diet

denies her. We discuss food and cooking, cutting up rabbits and children, depression, dreaming, painting and the difficulty of articulation, of putting ourselves in the picture. I too was struggling to access in both theoretical language and in conversation with these women, appropriate words for my own embodied life experiences.

The slippage, the sideways move is made in the women's talk. Barbara describes wanting to paint - 'it's just a sensual feeling', she says, 'the feel of the brush and the paint'. Someone else says they can actually taste it, they want it so badly, just to put it on paper, just to paint. Naming this seems impossible without the slippage, the merging of categories - we not only talk of tasting paint, but of devouring books, and babies' bottoms, like hard-boiled eggs.

Barbara: The first time I cut up a skinned rabbit I couldn't put my knife in because I thought it was a real live baby.

Laughter

It just looked like my kids looked – skinned rabbits, when they were born

Laughter

And I had this skinned rabbit there and I put the knife in and I was really gentle.

Kristeva's concept of the abject (1982) helps me to articulate the body in this talk. Aspects of our bodily flows and products that normally invoke disgust, distaste or anxiety express the abject. Abject body imagery resonates through their talk - spilling guts, crap, tears, sick.

When Sandi tells the story of the high forceps delivery of her first child, it threatens to erupt quite differently in a number of directions and other productions – the 'bad' patient, the silencing of her own body knowledge, the painful mystery of the nurses' complicity in this. Most tantalising, however, is the powerful sense of rewriting and resisting those discourses with a sheer excess of bodily fluid which has to be heard above or despite them, and which she comes to claim positively as her own.

Sandi: I was really stressed. I'm a stressful person – and the stress was making me accumulate urine. This is what happens to me. I've known it ever since. But they wouldn't believe. Until I was nearly hysterical, with the agony. I said my bladder is going to burst – I was really almost screaming by this stage. So they put a catheter in, and it overflowed a proper size bucket.

Women's work, curiosity, pain and pleasure in negotiating bodily boundaries

Going beyond the clean and proper body, these women seem to acknowledge and certainly wonder at the possibilities of that which is in excess of the proper, or biologically bounded and contained body. They wonder at the complex embodied relationships between self and other, in excess of either 'the self' or 'the body'. As the women, in the space of these conversations, make use of blood and guts, aborted foetus, haemorrhages, miscarriages, urine, death, tears, even the exchange of clean spit, I read them putting the abject to work in critical re-workings of the self. It opens up a potential space to question available discourses, their failure to adequately account for women's embodied experiences.

the space between mothers and children

What is unmistakable throughout the conversations is the importance of the space and relations between mothers and children and children and mothers. Here the work of Donald Winnicott (1971) intersects very fruitfully with Grosz' refigurations of the body and her sense of the in-between. Winnicott's experiences as clinical child psychologist led him to major reservations about the way psychoanalysis overemphasised the inner world of fantasy, of psyche, and underestimated the significance of the physical maternal and material environment. His concern was with the material bodily experiences between specific mother and child, the precise material context. His work offers the opportunity to think about embodied experience of the maternal in ways that are both theoretical and grounded, specific and general, and outside the usual pathological terms of reference. Winnicott's notions of the transitional object and the space of play allowed me to acknowledge the importance of the maternal in the constitution of subjectivity and creative capacity of individuals and hence, ultimately, cultures.

Winnicott's notions allow me to think about what kind of alternative maternal relations underpin our talk, informing and supporting the worlds that the women and I bring into being. It became clear that the women in these groups were making highly productive use of the space between mothers and children and children and mothers. It was a position from which they raised and commented on a wide range of issues. The desire, the drive to create, and its associated pleasures and anxieties, cropped up all the time. The production of artwork is interwoven with the production and sustenance of life through babies and food, and complex acts of producing selves and others. Many specific mother child relations are referred to, but some actually speak of the ambiguous both/and space between separateness and

connectedness. It is out of this ambiguous talk/space of the maternal that these women could conceive of themselves as productive desiring beings.

Isobel Armstrong (1993) also uses the maternal and the space in between and adds to the ability to theorise the maternal as a creative space. She suggests this as a powerful site from which to re politicise the aesthetic – which is, she says, ‘viscous enough as a concept already: the *process* of creation, the art object, the experience of its reception, the theorizing of it as concept and praxis – all these are comprehended in the term *aesthetic*’ (Armstrong, 1993, 175).

The ambiguity and paradox to be found, created, and most critically, tolerated and put to work in the space of play (originally between mother and child) is vital to cognitive experience, Armstrong argues.

...our play is *play*, not simply subversive linguistic play, but the transformation of categories which constitutes a change in the structure of thought itself: it is not only an aspect of knowledge but the prerequisite of political change (Armstrong, 1993, 184).

If one can find ways of entering that space the potential for disrupting and changing as well as affirming categories is huge and radical. It means, Armstrong says, finding new modes of aesthetic production and dissemination – networks, informal groups –circumventing commodified processes, not as elitist avant-garde but as populist, accessible to ordinary men and women. It implies profound educational change. Armstrong’s challenge here is particularly pertinent to the transitions I make between my earlier Masters thesis and this present research. Although the space of the conversations offered women opportunities to voice their embodied experiences, it hardly constituted the public domain for them. While the thesis provided something of a public place for these experiences, it was a very limited space. It was achieved, at least in part, by reading against the grain. It is not one to which the women themselves, as subjects in the research, realistically had access.

How are women such as those in my conversations to develop their own places in the public domain? I understood these women to be using irreducibly contradictory embodied experiences to make sense of their world. The discourses generally available to them made it

difficult to articulate, and certainly did not facilitate bringing these experiences critically into public expression. The women ask how they can put themselves in the picture. There is a challenge which is at once personal and political, putting their embodied selves to work in artworks that participate publicly in cultural production.

My concern now is that the kind of work I engaged in there, embryonic as it is, can be folded back into non academic lives to proliferate other places, strategies, and embodied presences. The women in a sense have lent me what they can of their bodies to make something present and palpable, and I would like to return that gesture – by teaching what I have learned about embodied knowledge making and the work of producing alternative texts.

How can we put ourselves in the picture?

Embodiment and emplacement

The women I work with come from a rural environment – a community with a history of working on the land. The external environment plays a large part in the lives of many in this community, and the women express their attachment and relationship to it by painting landscapes. As earlier work with these women revealed, the lived body is potentially there at the site of productive work, including this work of representing place. (Threads of corporeal presence I traced in the use of the object could be discerned in the handling of materials, the sensual and sensory qualities of paint, including the actual and metaphorical consumption of paint.)

I return to Somerville's suggestion that certain indirect 'slanted categories' enable access to lived body experience, and allow us to bring it into discursive exchange with contemporary theory. Where the body is actually present in the text of the women's talk, it is embodied through the senses. In order to elaborate this presence in a pedagogical practice, to bring embodiment to the fore as a way for the women to 'put themselves in the picture', I consider the senses and other categories in body/place relations capable of doing this foregrounding.

senses and place

The category of the senses is one that Steven Feld and Keith Basso make central to their collection of ethnographic writing on place (1996). Based on thinking that 'to be in place is to know, is to become aware of one's very consciousness and sensuous presence in the world'

(9), Feld and Basso invite contributors to explore, in close cultural detail, ways in which places are actively sensed. Feld's own paper considers an embodiment flowing from an acoustic orientation specific to place.

In 'Waterfalls of song', Feld asks 'But what of place as heard and felt? Place as sounding or resounding?' (1996, 94) in the water dominated landscape of a Papuan rainforest. The Kaluli people hear much that they do not see, and both the way sound is diffused through the rainforest and the way the water flows through the land is experientially embodied for them as the pulsating flow of the voice through the resonating body.

Feld reminds us of ways sound permeates and resonates in the body, including the bones and viscera, and why hearing and voicing link the felt sensations of sound and balance to those of physical and emotional presence. 'Sound, hearing, and voice mark a special bodily nexus for sensation and emotion because of their coordination of brain, nervous system, head, ear, chest, muscles, respiration, and breathing' (Feld, 1996, 97). Making sound involves almost the entire body in some way.

Moreover, hearing and voice are connected by auditory feedback and by physical resonance, the immediate experience of one's presence through the echo-chamber of the chest and head, the reverberant sensation of sound, principally one's own voice. By bringing a durative, motional world of time and space simultaneously to front and back, top and bottom, and left and right, an alignment suffuses the entire fixed or moving body (Feld, 1996, 97).

Feld's extensive analysis of the complex way the Kaluli fold their lived experience of place back into practices and concepts of *hearing, listening, and voicing* argues the potential for a particular embodied knowing. From my perspective it is political as well as aesthetic. Sounding becomes a condition of, and for, knowing that is then performed and folded back into the landscape (in this instance, particularly in song). As Feld points out, 'as place is sensed, senses are placed; as places makes sense, senses make place' (1996, 91). It implies a reciprocal interanimation rather than inscriptions through power. Considering voicing in this way is not to produce an essentialist, or mechanistic account of body but to bring an aspect of body knowledge back into dialogue with questions of discourse and theory.

Place as body

Paul Carter's notion of the *sound-in-between* (1992 b) brings issues of voice and space embodied in performance into a cross cultural context. Although his work does not specifically address gender, it also invites me to consider alternative ways of listening and speaking, and extends to sounding the landscape. Carter considers the detail of the terrain and proposes we approach *terrain as body*. Begin to move, says Carter, 'and a world where images were juxtaposed yields to one where objects continually elide and fold into, beneath, over and round one another' (Carter, 1994, 6). Carter's concern (1991, 1992b, 1994, 1996) is that a flattening out and disembodiment of the terrain, physically or in imagination, results in the occlusion of other histories and other ways of inhabiting. This may take place at many levels: in the way we build homes, roads, in our written representations and histories of the landscape, and including the physical surfaces and forms of painting which rely on particular assumptions about depth that come with a two dimensional framing of place.

Carter brings an appreciation back to *surface* (1991, 5). He makes a relationship between the surface of representations, our own body surfaces and the surface of the landscape - the possibility of productively engaging with difference within and across uneven terrain. Folds and irruptions, uneven textures of a topography are at once physical, sensual, embodied, and culturally experienced. There are important issues of desire implicated in this thinking - how to proceed through the landscape with care and desire, and imagination; how to manage desire itself. How to move lightly in a way that opens us to the complex details of the very ground beneath our feet. My interest is in the everyday embodied and emplaced experiences of rural women including my own (flattened out, covered over by many different medical, scientific, academic, historical and official discourses). Carter's work suggests new manners of orientation, of everyday way-finding and a way of seeing connected to the spaces of everyday life. I consider what it might mean to put female bodies, desires, and lived experiences into relationship with the physical and cultural topography in this way.

The river itself, sometimes there, sometimes not. It's fluid fluctuation, its space betweenness. Today it is brown and slow. I learn to wait and be still, to see softly instead of struggling with a choice – life at its edges, on its surface or within. A momentary shaft of sunlight dissolves all boundaries, etching a body of exquisite details in their place (Journal, 10/12/ 01)

maternal and place

Luce Irigaray's writings on the relationship between the maternal, body and place yield many images and concepts that enable the lived body to be both expressed and put to work theoretically. Principal amongst these is the notion of *body as place* and a number of writers elaborate different aspects of this and other categories arising in conjunction with it. Edward Casey (1997) summarises a general thesis from Irigaray's work. 'For Irigaray, there is no being in place except for a being who is already differentiated in accordance with bodily specificity – and deeply saturated with sexual history' (Casey, 1997, 323).

the sexually differentiated body and (its) place are so intimately linked as to be virtually interchangeable. The point is not just that there is no place without body, or vice versa, but that body itself is place and that place is as body-bound as the body itself is sexually specific (Casey, 1997, 265).

Place, and being in place, is to be understood as something sexually significant to begin with, in as much as the mother's body provides the first place for the child, for the other.

The maternal body as first place

It is Irigaray's argument that while the corporeal has been assumed and used in men's thinking about being in place, the corporeality invoked is not tangible, but philosophical, masculine and in denial of a founding corporeal site – the maternal body. Grosz (1993) gives the detail of Irigaray's critique of Merleau-Ponty's corporeal model as an example. Irigaray claims this model, privileging vision above all other senses, is derived, in its metaphors of fluidity and absorption, from the amniotic element that makes a place for the child in the mother's body. In Irigaray's argument the womb and the earliest relations between mother and child provide a state that preconditions vision. If this is acknowledged a more complex corporeal model may be allowed in which the tangible, as the necessary accompaniment of the earliest sensations, takes on new significance, as does colour, and also hearing, bound up as it is, for Irigaray, with the maternal voice.

Irigaray goes on to describe the consequences of erasures and disavowals of a maternal debt. The body of the woman/mother is appropriated as the very corporeal horizon of existence for others, but consequently leaves her no place of her own.

The maternal-feminine remains the place separated from 'her' place, deprived of 'his' place. She is or becomes the place of the other who can't separate himself from her. Threatening therefore – without knowing it or wanting it to be so - with what she lacks: a place of 'her own'... It would be necessary for her to re-envelope herself with herself, and at least twice: as she who is woman and as she who is mother, which implies modifying the whole space-time economy (Irigaray, 1984, 18, in Grosz, 1989, 174).

Irigaray concludes that a new conceptualization of place is required in order to intervene in these relations, and that the notion of interval will be central to such a conceptualisation. A 'between', a third term is required which could act as the relation of the enveloping body to its limits, so that movement between the enveloping and the enveloped body is a possibility for both men and women.

Casey finds expansive possibilities in the way Irigaray takes the specificities of the female body to critique the notion of *chora*. In classical philosophical terms *chora* is linked to maternity as 'mere housing, receptacle, or nurse of being rather than coproducer' (Grosz, 1994, 5), as well as to notions of place with similar qualities. From Irigaray's notion of *chora* opening up productively onto regions and worlds, the relations between the sexes, even the divine, Casey takes up the idea of *making room for place* - place in the body and as the body, places between bodies (1997, 330).

Grosz, in 'Woman, *chora*, dwelling' (1995) takes this up in terms of *inhabiting*. The feminist project, as Grosz sees it, is 'to return women to those places from which they have been dis- or re-placed or expelled, ... and produce the possibility of occupying, dwelling or living in new spaces, which in their turn help generate new perspectives, new bodies, new ways of inhabiting' (Grosz, 1995, 124).

Somerville profoundly undoes the erasures and denial of emplacement in *Body/Landscape Journals* (1999), and particularly in her last chapter 'Houses; and the performance of home'. There she writes about the idea of exile from both home and language and discusses the undoing of body/self as mother. She goes on to explore acts and notions of inhabiting which remake her home/place/self relations. These include daily practices of walking, gardening, cooking, eating, doing housework, conversations and exchange of stories as well as the

process of writing about, and reflecting on and with these experiences. For me this constitutes a potent category of *the everyday*, one in which I can physically and theoretically bring my own embodied lived experiences to bear.

There is little in the literature that likewise considers a productive category of the maternal alongside everyday lived body/place relations. The category of the everyday, of the ordinary in relation to place is something that is yet to be seriously addressed by non Aboriginal Australians, David Malouf claims (2000). Peter Read (2000) has addressed stories of belonging from white Australians and, elsewhere, place writers such as Berry (1981), Lopez (1998) and folklorist Kent Ryden (1993) focus on everyday specificities and narratives of place, but none have any specific relationship to the maternal.

Despite an extensive interest in body/place relations across a number of disciplines, the lived body continues to be 'an absent presence' in much of the literature (Nast & Pile, 1998, 16). When the maternal, body and place do sometimes come together as the subject of research in feminist geographies, the pattern of analysis is similar to that in the literature of feminist body theory. Robyn Longhurst (2001), for example, devotes a chapter to thirty pregnant women's experiences of being in public places. While messy bodies are made very present, this work describes a negatively experienced abject maternal; withdrawal from the public sphere, and shrinkage, not expansion of a life-world.

It is in the light of this absence of the lived body that I do this work; work that is a shared exploration of strategies that exploit and develop the productive capacity of the maternal body in relation to women's placemaking. I propose to develop and examine ways in which rural women retrieve and name their lived embodied experiences of place and put them to work critically and aesthetically in art works that will take up a place in the public domain.

I want to suggest at the outset the mediating co filtering process that exists between my own learning and teaching experiences, and those of the participants. I want it to be clear that the pedagogical relations of the project are not conceived as if between knowers and not-knowers. I propose to work across different skills and experiences, troubling the way reductive and dichotomous models of female subjectivity are reproduced within and through much educational practice as well as other discursive practices.

In this thesis I draw on the work of a Pilot Study, autobiographical material, and the work of a community arts project to explore the question of how we can put ourselves in the picture of place.

Chapter Two describes the Pilot study that I take as my departure point. As local women artists from my small country town community take part in placemaking activities centred on the town bridge, I hold a number of informal interviews to discuss what role the bridge and their paintings of it play in their sense of place. Textual analysis of the conversations allows me to consider ways in which the women both absent and make obliquely present their embodied experience of place. I identify slanted categories of presence that could serve as points of exploration and development in an alternative artmaking project.

Materially, metaphorically and theoretically, the bridge serves as a site of 'in-betweenness'. The work of this project is developed very much in relation to these women, but not only to them. The pilot study bridges between past and present work, for me and for the women who choose to join me in the new place of the project. I will propose a way of working very different to their usual practice, and with a wider group of women, and this requires some crossing over.

Chapters Three, Four and Five take their structure from three workshops that are core building blocks in a subsequent nine month arts project. The *Expressions of Place* project focuses on voice, body and the materials of place as a way of addressing the question 'How do we put ourselves in the picture of place?'. Women are invited to use these foci to develop artworks (perhaps for the first time) about the place in which they live, and to document and make public the process as well as the resulting artworks.

In *Voicing I* introduce the women of the project and the first of the practical strategies to bring the women's everyday embodied and emplaced experience into the public domain. Specific objects of place help carry us across a space between the oral and the textual. I use conversation and the way the women's lived experience is embodied in their talk to create material resources. A pattern of recurring and overlapping movements is established - crossings between conversation and text, word and image, self and other, between animate and inanimate, individual and community.

I use notions of 'show and tell' to raise and examine issues concerning the ways women enter into language, and autobiographical material explicitly links the process of writing a thesis with the strategies of articulation addressed in the project. In developing the theoretical grounds for this work I am returned to the conditions that enabled my own academic production and begin to think about the pedagogical practices which emerged from an overt revisioning of the maternal.

In Chapter Four, my focus is on materials of place, and a strategy of play developed from material, maternal practices that mediate between self, the natural world and the symbolic ordering of that world. A concept of *gathering* provides the framework within which I bring my own past and present relationships to place and mother into relationship with Winnicott's (1971) concept of the *transitional object*, and within which I also structure the workshop activities. Gathering becomes a process of bringing different things into relationship, as a way of conceptualising and being in the world.

With this notion of gathering I explore the potential negotiation and transformation of categories that can take place in play - with materials as readily available as leaves, twigs, and ordinary everyday objects from a domestic environment. I suggest that by creating conditions in which participants can have heightened access to the subconscious, (memory, emotion, images, facts), through these materials, one amplifies the resonances of potential other voices within the self. Disparate items form and reform patterns of connection, are given other possible embodied shapes. The ground is prepared for the emergence of potentially new and disruptive forms of understanding.

Chapter Five is concerned with body movements that focus a body in place, going on to develop accounts of body experiences from everyday inhabiting. *Stretching* provides a conceptual framework in which to trace and reflect on mobile processes of physical and emotional exchange between bodies, human and environmental. I explore a number of material practices that can track, hold and facilitate the working through of some of the shifting structures of a self embodied, emplaced, in complex relationship to other.

The chapter covers a trajectory of activities which moves from heightening awareness to sensory experience, to the traces we leave on place and place leaves on us, to facilitating the interpretation of those traces – reading our bodies in place for individual and socially coded meanings and significances. Finally, it considers particular spatial practices that hold and

support the articulation of new configurations of meaning, directly relating to the making of new works and texts.

Chapter Six offers two performances which explore ways for women to conceive, consolidate and begin to circulate the *public* forms of their expressions. The performances are presented and reflected upon as different but interdependent aspects of a self-conscious placing in the public 'picture'. The first of these is a verbal presentation made collectively by the project participants one evening to a public audience. The second refers to the exhibition of visual artworks. Both in their own way are complex 'show and tell' and I suggest that what they show is the creative and generative potential of women's embodied knowledge and a vital way of expressing women's lived experiences in the public domain.

This is situated knowledge, not necessarily applicable to every rural situation, and provides an account of only white European women's experiences. Although the project was open to any woman in the community, women from the Aboriginal community interested in art making projects and with whom I had worked previously, were already participating in an Aboriginal Studies Art course at the time. No women of the very small Chinese community expressed an interest in participating. Nonetheless...

We are in a fertile landscape, wary, longing, filled with the situations of consciousness (dreams, cant, obsessive scum of language, allusions, slips, memory, week old dialogue, scraps of lust and scraps of theory) (DuPlessis, 1990, 114).

Chapter Two

The Bridge

15/3/98

I have spread my cloth, a large and bleached sheet of thick white cotton, over the rusting camping table. Two directors chairs, a flask of hot water, tea-bags, coffee, mugs, milk, biscuits, and a folder of photos of the old bridge.

*My interview spot is in a prime position facing, and not too far from, the new concrete bridge. The immediate site around the bridge is raw and somewhat desolate, still draped with workmen's orange tape, but here under the plane trees of the park, a sense of dignity and beauty pervades and despite the disparate sounds of morning business, both animal and human, the experience is oddly one of stillness. The huge broad leafed canopy overhead filters bright strong sunlight from the blue beyond it, and through some unfortunate but unbidden association the trunks of these gracious trees recall the once popular childhood pastime of painting by numbers. Where the outer bark has been shed, mostly on the north facing surfaces, an underlying limey skin is organically spotted by sharp edged patches - greys, greens, silver and soft reddish brown. Plane tree - commonly known as the London Plane. *Planatus, Acerifolia* - non Australian deciduous tree to twenty-four metres. Thought to be a hybrid of *Orientalis* and *Occidentalis* and used for over two centuries in many cities as well as London as a tree remarkable for surviving smoke and city pollution. Big round seedpods drop dangerously around me. Crash, clunk. Geese are honking somewhere beyond the bend of the river, a mob of cockies screeching and more bird noise than I first realised. Away from the work site the banks of the river are lush and green after the rain. The trees stop and the bank falls, rolls quite deeply, down to the water.*

Until recently, both the river and this bridge had seemed quite unremarked in the day to day public life of this small country town where I have lived for the last twenty years. From time to time the river does flood, rising quickly and cutting many out-of-town roads for a day or so. Indeed, my first arrangements to start interviewing a number of local women here at the bridge were completely frustrated when neither I nor they could make our way through the waters flowing fast over submerged causeways. Yet it's a short drama and, just as the water level

drops almost as quickly as it rises, the scenes and senses of excitement, the heightened engagement with this bend in the river, that dip in the road, a particular culvert or crossing, soon are recuperated into the background of an otherwise uninterrupted movement across the landscape. Ten kilometres out of town the same river, bounding our small property below the town dam, is sometimes only fitfully present. Rising nearby, in a small but dramatic mountain range surrounded by vast western plains, its clear waters muddy and shrink in the long dry summers, sometimes slipping altogether below the sandstone shelves and the small black boulders to leave only a soft and thinly felted mantle over the river bed. In town, immediately under the new and almost seamless concrete bridge, even now after the rain it seems barely there. Wide and shallow, it is broken by untidy heaps of rubble and the broad tracks of heavy site vehicles deeply inscribed on the riverbed and banks.

I have come here to talk to a number of women artists about their participation in recent placemaking activities that have been occasioned by the replacement of the old town bridge. I have known these women artists for many years, indeed the connections with them and their art practices have been a considerable part of what has sustained me in making a sense of belonging, as a migrant, in the small outback rural community of Coonabarabran in New South Wales. Most of the women are unwaged, mostly mothers with grown families now, pursuing their art or craft for pleasure and relaxation more than for profit, exhibiting in local group shows and at the agricultural show. Two or three are recognised as having achieved a level of excellence and having talent that they could have taken further in other circumstances.

Artmaking has been the space in which we have negotiated our differences and similarities and across which we have constructed many conversations and attempts to understand and connect with each other. My strong Scottish accent is unavoidable, but my practice in textiles, whilst it also marked me as different, offered a point of exchange. Painting has long been the predominant art form in this community and such textile practice that existed when I first came to live there was not connected with artmaking. But my arrival in Australia in 1976 had happily coincided with concerted efforts to establish new textile practices in Australia. Practitioners brought from overseas to teach weaving and tapestry techniques, for example, were also disrupting received notions of what constituted Art. My skills in these areas meant that our small rural community could offer one of only two certificated TAFE weaving courses in New South Wales outside the metropolitan area, and my individual art practice was encouraged to thrive in this context of burgeoning interest.

When art and non vocational textile classes finally disappeared altogether from local adult and further education programmes, a number of women marked out a time and space for themselves, meeting and working together one day a week at the church hall. Amongst the whirr of spinning wheel, the scrape of pastels, the clink and swish of brush in water jar, there was always talk. It was there, and in a particular set of conversations with these women some years ago, that I explored the terrain of relationship between language, body and subjectivity for a Masters thesis (Hartley, 1995). We had talked very loosely over a number of weeks about every aspect of the body imaginable, and discourses of mothers and mothering quickly rose to the surface to be negotiated, reworked, undermined or reaffirmed. As did discourses of production - of self, of other, images, text and art. Inspired by Grosz's challenge to think through the body, I hoped to see what ways these women might be living bodies as the very stuff of subjectivity (Grosz, 1994, vii). Grosz claims bodies are centres of perspective, insight, reflection, desire, agency:

Bodies are not inert: they function interactively and productively. They act and react. They generate what is new, surprising, unpredictable. (Grosz, 1994, xi)

I wanted to ask if we could speak the body differently, if there were ways of constructing alternative discourses to those which would discount, diminish, exclude corporeality's place in theories of experience, or which presumed to set male bodies, with their unexamined assumptions of neutrality, as a universal standard. In their turn the women artists posed me a critical question about their productions – 'How do we put ourselves in the picture?'

Rita complained *They keep telling you to put yourself into the work, into the picture, but they never really tell you how to do it.*

And Barb had said

It's the same as when you think of a picture or something that you'd like to paint and you can see it as vividly as anything but when you actually put it down it comes out nothing like ...I was trying to explain something the other day and if you could use movie special effects, you know those ones they use in movies

Well I could see it as plain as anything while I was trying to explain it but I couldn't put the picture into words. If I had all the special effects that movie makers have I could have.

We had talked at the time of the difficulties of accessing sources of knowledge, of knowing what we knew but not how to bring it to the surface. As Somerville has pointed out ‘For women to make visible in the landscape, or in their stories, what would normally be invisible, is already a performance’ (1995, 170). Irigaray has written extensively about the ways in which woman is a place for the child or the man, and never for herself, how she is appropriated as the very corporeal horizon of existence for others, and consequently cannot be seen as occupying a place of her own. To make her own place it would be necessary for women ‘to re-envelope herself with herself, and at least twice: as she who is woman and as she who is mother, which implies modifying the whole space-time economy’ (Irigaray, 1984, 18, in Grosz, 1989, 174).

Implicit in this project, for Irigaray, is a renegotiation of the mother-daughter relationship. As long as the maternal role is reductively conceived as only the preservation and care of others, the daughter has no basis for a feminine identity that can be in excess of that, agentic, with a desire of her own. Irigaray concludes that a new conceptualization of place is required in order to intervene in these relations, and that the notion of interval will be central to such a conceptualisation. A ‘between’, a third term which could act as the relation of the enveloping body to its limits, so that movement between the enveloping and the enveloped body is a possibility for both men and women.

That some of these local women were quite passionately involved in visually representing the bridge offered me an opportunity to reconnect with them and to consider developing a project which might respond to current challenges of articulating body/place relations.

It had been clear for some time that the existing bridge would eventually have to go, degrading faster than it could be repaired, under the combined traffic of local, tourist and, most notably, jumbo sized interstate freight vehicles. The highway, of which the bridge forms part, is the Newell Highway. Its metaphorical and practical line goes right through the middle of Coonabarabran. On one side is the eastern coast where the majority of Australians live, and on the other side is the great emptiness where the Australian imagines the ‘other’ of the outback.

For travellers, tourists, this point makes a convenient if brief resting place in a journey that begins and ends elsewhere. For those who live in the area, the question of their own

movement to and from major cities is usually a matter of access to the east. The Oxley Highway breaks away from the Newell just outside town, making its way as best it can to the coast, in much the same track Oxley the explorer made in 1818, after being frustrated in his attempts to head further west towards his imagined inland sea. Most of the present routes to Sydney and Newcastle are those used by the first trickle of squatters making their way variously and with difficulty over the mountains to search for more grazing land. The interstate road haulage simply thunders through.

The state and future of the bridge were being used by both sides of an acrid and still ongoing debate over a town by-pass, with many different investments in a number of intersecting discourses now all too familiar to small rural town communities when economic progress is linked to the commodification of place. But my attention was seized by the artists' enthusiasm, which seemed about the bridge as object completely in itself, regardless, almost, of its function. *I just love bridges*, someone exclaimed, *we should go down and paint it before it's gone*.

Bridges

There are some bridges that turn the heart inside out. Intimate or immense, they draw you into their being, or themselves into yours, in a way that seems quite unaccountable. A pull exerted on the collective and individual imagination. Exhilaration, longing, triumph, fear, sometimes simultaneously. Certainty and uncertainty held together in, for some, almost unbearable tension. (A friend tells me of a bridge where they provide escorts for terrified drivers.) Separation, connection, spanning, crossing over. Over centuries and many cultures we have been fascinated by the possibility of their poetics, their capacity to mark the bringing together of the separate, the movement across, transition, change, the space between.

The bridges of my youth were arched stone

Achingly beautiful in their simplicity

And rigour

Legacy of a Roman Empire

To be found in almost any Scottish city town or village

But hewn out of the bone of the place

Still attached to skin

Which, in lonelier parts,

*On moor and mountain stream,
Only seems to stretch and fold a little.*

There is of course the always underlying possibility of failure, the falling into the real or metaphysical chasm, death.

There are about 800 timber bridges in NSW, according to the RTA, and the great bulk were built in the 1920's when loads from Ford Model T's were all that were anticipated. These aging bridges are rotting, yet they are being asked to carry today's 42-tonne trucks. They are being replaced at a mere 10 a year because there are no funds. The politicians would prefer to spend out taxes on populist causes. Shire and RTA engineers have to try to sleep at night, wondering how long it will be before a loaded school bus following a heavy truck crashes into a chasm caused by bridge failure (McColl, 2000).

Bridges were once a trope for the soul's dangerous passage to the afterlife – the difficulties and risks yes, but with the hope of getting ahead, getting on, getting over, too. Judith Dupré (1997) describes how medieval religious orders made full public use of the concept of preparing the way to heaven, relying on donations of the faithful as the church oversaw a rapidly expanding infrastructure and a voracious demand for new bridges. Monks were also responsible for the protection of travellers, both merchants and pilgrims, of which there were thousands, and hospitals and shelters built by the brotherhoods soon proliferated at river crossings. In parts of Europe even bridges themselves became fully inhabited - complex, concentrated versions of a city, social and commercial hubs sometimes complete with piazza.

In *Building Dwelling and Thinking* Heidegger (1978) attempts to put these complex properties of bridge, material and symbolic, to work in extending his ideas about dwelling, home, modes of 'being' in the world. The bridge works to both 'gather' and 'unfold,' in space and time, bringing into relationship the specificities of its own environment –water, banks, land – with human subjects using it, the divinities (even though we may choose to ignore or deny that, Heidegger says) and the histories and possibilities of many other bridges and many other crossings. In this gathering capacity the bridge allows a site, a location. The bridge and location co-constitute each other, thereby clearing and creating a specific space, which simultaneously unfolds.

A space is something that has been made room for, something that is cleared and free, namely within a boundary, Greek *peras*. A boundary is not that at which something stops but as the Greeks recognised, the boundary is that from which something begins its essential unfolding (Heidegger, 1978, 332).

Homi Bhabha would call this a transitional space and has pointed to postcolonialism's interest in all manner of movements, passages, crossings over and the spaces in which they take place. They are, he says, moments 'of transit where sense of space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion' (Bhabha, 1994, 1). Such transitional spaces seem to be able to hold the whole social field together, not only by relating subjects to each other, but also, critically, to the external world of objects and other beings, a kind of third space 'where subjects come together and interact, and occasionally leave transformed', where boundaries, socially and semiotically 'get drawn, erased, shifted, and reinscribed' (Kirby, 1996, 152).

The Bridge

The bridge over the Castlereagh River at Coonabarabran had gathered me into its body when I accompanied the group of artists who planned to paint it. The women had taken their cameras to make preliminary studies, and in case the bridge disappeared before they organised their painting. Intrigued initially by their enthusiasm, I soon found myself beguiled by the wonderful patterns of timber underbelly, the light playing through the criss-crossed trusses, overlaying each other in infinite permutations as I moved in and out of shadow and sunlight. So many possible perspectives. I had no intention of making a painting, but I became concerned with the problem of framing it through the camera lens. Where did it begin and end? Crawling under, hanging over its rails, backing and advancing I found it hard to decide. The bridge drew in a long line of nearby trees, elegant in their winter bareness. A red semi-trailer approached. Underneath, traces of partying were scattered in the shadows, cold fire and litter, while pristine white ducks bobbed round the piers.

Later, I was equally curious when the management body overseeing the replacement organised a celebration of community ownership to attend the opening of the new bridge. Economic issues had been identified as the major concern to the main stakeholders and the design, materials (concrete precast), and installation procedures were chosen to facilitate the

least possible disruption to either local business houses or highway flow. This had gone well, but some closing endorsement from the local community seemed necessary. Competitions to name the bridge and committees to plan activities the whole town could participate in were facilitated. As the project manager described to me later, returning the finished product to the community in a naming or opening ceremony always makes a suitable closure, and the fact that the bridge was to bear the name of a prominent Aboriginal woman Mary Jane Cain, suggesting more positive relations between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal inhabitants, was, he said, a great bonus. In his terms, he had ‘squeezed the maximum juice out of the orange’.

A great cross section of the town turned out for the event and a considerable number travelled far to be there, to hear the talk of reconciliation, the knitting back in of the local, the regional, the cultural, the commercial, into the repaired fabric of the national highway. But while in many ways the day was a huge success I regretted the fact that, without exception, the day was planned and run by men. Federal, State and local politicians, executives of the Road Traffic Authority, councillors, representatives of the Aboriginal community, Lions Club members who organised a ‘Family Day’ as part of the celebrations - all men. The only obvious disruption to the day was also a male performance. A lone and dramatic protestor, decked in army uniform, sword waving, astride his horse, did a spectacular dash across the bridge. The local vet, an ardent promoter for a town bypass, made reference to Captain de Groot of the New Guard, who waylaid the official opening of Sydney Harbour Bridge in March 1932, by charging the ribbon at a gallop, hacking at it with his sword and declaring the bridge open on behalf of the decent and respectable citizens of New South Wales. This was to show, de Groot said later, that ordinary people could not be pushed around.

Painting the bridge

I wondered where women were in all of this. So invisible in this public performance, and in some way absent too, it seemed, from their artworks of the bridge. The women had expressed such passion about it when it was about to be demolished, and yet the subsequent paintings conveyed so little of that emotional bodily investment. As such rich and layered meaning-making accrues to the town bridge, suggesting the construction of a landmark, it invites renewed questioning. What is it exactly that is marked? And what function does that marking serve? Since the bridge is neither dwelling nor landscape, can it, does it bear traces of a desire for being at home in both? And if so what are the implications for women and their productions?

I asked the local artists if they would come and talk to me at the bridge, about the bridge. I said I was interested in exploring notions of home, place and belonging and wanted to hear why the bridge appealed to them, what had motivated them to paint it, and was interested in whatever they had to say about it, any stories that they had. While several claimed to have really rather little to say about the bridge and others feared they would not be able to help, seven women from the Arts and Crafts Society joined me in individual conversations at different times under the plane trees, and seemed as curious and willing as ever to entertain the possibility of connection and exchange.



Conversations (making and unmaking common ground)

As each conversation opened it was expected that every artist would frame her response differently in the light of her own personal history and experience. I was unprepared, however, for the degree to which there was such a shared dependence on mostly unelaborated and interchangeable notions of ‘history’ and ‘past’ as an explanation for what might have been conventionally understood as an aesthetic gesture. These terms were used liberally, but so vaguely and without any fleshing substance that it seemed that the bridge itself was dematerialising into mere oldness rather than becoming more present and meaningful. It was only when the woman who had been most passionate about the bridge suggested that her response might be somehow improper, because she was a relative newcomer, that I began to hear more clearly the ways in which some of the women were relating their responses to

questions of their authority to speak. Here I look first at ways in which some of the women locate themselves differently within, and negotiate, what might be seen as discourses of origin.

Firstly the woman who constitutes herself as a recent arrival in town raises the subject of not being ‘born and bred’ in the place she currently inhabits. Secondly a woman makes intriguing play with the whole notion of linkages between kin and place when she describes her own presence there as a ‘fluke’. And in a third instance a woman who names herself as a first settler descendant seems to both invoke and yet shrug off the cultural weight of official records and histories.

I loved that bridge. That was Coonabarabran's bridge. I mean I've only been here, what, six years next month, so it's not as if I was born and bred here. But, no I loved that old bridge. Maz, speaking here, is the one who declared her love of bridges earlier and who proposed the painting of the bridge, even though she herself works in media other than paint. She seems to raise a number of questions. What is the amount of passion and attachment appropriate or allowable to one who has ‘only been here six years next month’? In Maz’s comparison with one ‘born and bred’ I sense some exclusion from the authority, authenticity inherent in the term, with its overtones of lineage and tradition, yet there is also a certain defiant something else that is alluded to in reiterating her love, and which for the moment remains unelaborated. Does the bridge stand for Coonabarabran? It was after all ‘Coonabarabran’s bridge’. And if so does the bridge represent a longing to belong? Or a vehicle for Maz insisting on her capacity or right to belong?

I wish I had my grandfather here. Because do you know my grandfather was born in Coonabarabran? He left when he was about twenty. But he used to sit me on his knee and talk about Coonabarabran and bushrangers and things. I mean I didn't ever know I was going to be living here. It's just a fluke I came here. A lot of people think that I've been here for ever. Or my parents have. My parents never lived here. My grandfather, I could have asked him about the bridge.

As I listened to Sandi, I felt very strongly that she enjoyed playing with notions of linear connection and origin in quite disruptive ways. After invoking and describing assumptions about a continuous family presence in the town, Sandi seems to relish pointing out that although her grandfather was born there, neither she nor her parents ever knew the place or lived there, and that her grandfather left ‘probably at the turn of the century’. She makes a

pleasure of coincidence, a tantalising contradictory sense of pattern. Although on the one hand her living there is a 'fluke', she tells me that when she discovered the property her husband had bought was in Coonabarabran she 'just about fell through the floor' – 'I thought it must have been meant to be'. At the same time however, it seems that the grandfather is the one with legitimate authority to speak, and both his age, his being dead, as well as his maleness, are linked to the images or stories that count.

Stories that count

Norma, however, does claim that her family has been here 'for ever', and as Norma, accompanied by her adult daughter Bronwyn, talks with me, I am struck by a number of impressions. It immediately becomes apparent that Norma has sought stories for me in a much more historical sense than I had imagined - by approaching her aged mother rather than relating responses to the bridge that I had hoped would be her own, more immediate, ones. Although not physically with us, Norma's mother has a strong presence, and for a large part of the conversation it seems that Bronwyn is both present and absent too. I had expected to talk to Norma and Bronwyn separately. Bronwyn is not actively included by her mother in the conversation, but seems quite comfortable with occasional reinforcement of her mother's story if there's a space. Later on I find myself working quite hard to include Bronwyn as an independent contributor, and to keep her in the conversation when I feel there is a hierarchy at work with her mother joining in and adding to her daughter's answers. We do make our way, in the end, towards a more equal three way discussion, where it becomes noticeable that the content and quality of our talk has shifted considerably, but I start, where Norma locates us, with her Mum.

Well Mum might remember something.

I've never belonged anywhere else and Mum hasn't belonged anywhere else, see. And my grandparents and great grandparents sort of thing have all been here. But she'd only just woken up and I said mum do you remember anything about the bridge and she said, 'Well that's the only thing I can remember was Theodore getting drowned. He was my grandfather's cousin. Theodore Slattery was his name, he was so drunk he clean missed the footbridge wandered down into the river, and even though he was a marvellous swimmer he drowned!'

The first crossing across the Castlereagh was down there at Nandi, and that's where the old Field cemetery is. My family was one of the Carlows and their graves are right out on the Dandry road, and between the Fields and the Carlows were the first here. We've been here for ever. But that should really be in the archives - all that is history - shouldn't it. But I've got all my family history at home. It's all written up.

In these two sections of transcripts which, along with the above impressions, I have taken as a starting point, I find the talk located unmistakably in genealogical connections going back over generations to early settlement. However, although my first response was to imagine an uncritical deference to the (masculine) authority of official records, with written histories being privileged over the oral, Norma seems to suggest an ongoing oral practice involving the women of the family. Is this subtly subversive? As well as following what Norma is doing with genealogies and story, I am intrigued by the relationship Norma draws between various landmarks and texts, as she moves from river crossing to cemetery to individual graves and then to the emplacement of this, as 'history', in material texts, and finally the physical location of these texts themselves. Before I look more closely and separately at these issues as they appear in the conversation, an account of the emerging field of public history proves useful.

Tom Griffiths has written extensively about the history of Australian History and a broader historical cultural investment in 'the past' in *Hunters and Collectors* (1996). Reading this I began to understand how powerful and how imbricated are the various strands involved in what Griffiths calls 'the discipline of memory' (1996, 195-218). Griffiths tracks the tensions, similarities, competitions and ultimately the interdependence of popular historical consciousness and the professional and academic discipline of Australian History which had established itself by the end of the 1950s. Some of the tensions he describes are between amateurs and professionals, between concepts of progress and preservation, between orality and literacy, and a particular anxiety that arises in the distinction between memory and history.

Memory is fluid and personal, whereas history is a collective and public activity that requires verifiable sources and institutions for its transmission. Memory is expected to be first hand, whereas history is second-hand no matter how 'primary' the source. But memory is also social. It is most suspicious to historians when it ceases to be personal and becomes communal, when it reaches back beyond a

lifespan and becomes handed-down rather than actually lived. It then offers itself as history, but it is neither recollection nor research (Griffiths, 1996, 197).

Many of these tensions remain, but might be seen to be coming together in a potentially productive way, Griffiths claims, in the relatively recent field of public history. Public history has an extensive interest in local and oral history and in the preservation, restoration and interpretation of historic relics, buildings and landscape. It has the capacity to link the writing-down and preservation of memory with the preservation of the built environment, but equally the potential to raise questions of ‘what to do with memories to make them active and alive, as opposed to mere objects of collection’ (Frisch, 1981, 22, quoted in Griffiths, 1996, 218). Griffiths points out that it was in rural Australia first, and most audibly, that such jostlings were played out in Heritage issues of the built environment. Little wonder then that Norma, whose ancestors have been included in a number of histories by both amateur and professional researchers, expresses such strong traces of these discourses and their inherent tensions in her talk when I seek her place stories.

Genealogies and story

The appeal to Mother, the sense of oral, and handed-down memory rather than her own, offers itself as a kind of history but in uncomfortable relationship to something understood as proper history, what is in ‘the archives’. Griffiths acknowledges that ‘In local history, one’s social being is inextricable from one’s history. But it is more than that: it is one’s qualifications to write at all’ (1996, 216). Griffiths writes about the anxiety felt by professional historians, moving into this intimate and previously marginalised world, but does not directly address the question of bodies or embodied relations. How might women, already displaced and absented multiple times by patriarchal and phallogocentric frameworks, articulate themselves in these circumstances?

Norma makes her mother the starting point, the source of story, and continues, by frequent reference, ‘but Mum said’, to draw her into the conversation. I begin to experience Norma’s mother made present, brought into the conversation by Norma as a materialising and inclusive act rather than perhaps only the deferential one I first took it to be. This in turn gives quite a different emphasis to Bronwyn’s presence and the sense of matriarchal line, through grandmother, mother and daughter, that Noeline Kyle notices as the bonding work between women ‘that is important in maintaining family cohesion and continuity’ (Kyle, 1994, 67).

However this alternative linear tradition seems to contain, at the same time, its own hierarchy of presence/absence.

Placemarks - Marks, places and the 'written-up'

Norma also talks about the relationship between family history and writing in this quote.

But I've got all my family history at home. It's all written up.

And although it's hard to tell exactly what kind of history this is, I think its location 'at home' is critically revealing. It's not simply at home, but at home 'somewhere', as Norma suggests when she forgets, or perhaps refuses to recall, a certain detail, and says

Oh I'll have to ask Mum again - I've got it all written down somewhere.

The lost quality of the written text sits in contrast to the implied availability and accessibility of Mum, her memories and knowledge. For me the displacement acts quite bizarrely as if the text has been swallowed up somehow in the recesses of the domestic, under the cushions, behind the sofa, gathering dust, unread, in some dark corner. It seems that even in invoking or perceiving a certain kind of historical vein, with its attendant facts, Norma nonetheless ends up trailing off and abandoning it, by becoming vague, displacing it, removing it from the possibilities of conversation whilst signalling this other embodied resource in her mother. If I can imagine Norma scanning the cultural and physical landscape for traces of meaningful story, she checks out the gravestones, the texts of family history, but ends up with the body of the mother.

Moving away from the topic of the bridge itself, and away from notions of either handed down story or history, we end up in talk that focuses much more materially on Norma and Bronwyn's own memories of place. These are experiences that they thread back and forth between them, that are particular and mobile. Norma looks around her and reflects on the park itself, recounting different times and events as a child there that flesh out some of the circumstances of her childhood. When she's had her say Bronwyn picks up the thread of play and swings, and takes us in her talk to an entirely different part of town, and particular trees that were her playground. *I like the old trees.* They both like old trees, and we're out of town then with Norma regretting another stand cut down.

Bronwyn: *Well I went up Dalgarno Street the other day. You know these trees we used to put ropes on and tyres and swing on 'em when we were kids. Up as you turn to go down to the old railway. I like the old trees.*

Norma: *I love all the old trees. I love the old trees as you go out on the Ulamambri Road. There's some beautiful big trees there, and there was some beautiful ones on the Baradine Road, and one day I went out there and they'd cut them down and they were all gone. They must have been hundreds of years old, beautiful trees. I was so angry, but it was a bit late then to protest when they were gone.*

Norma: *Another thing we used to do a lot when we were children - we were easily entertained in those days because we didn't have television - five cornering. Now a lot of people have never heard of five cornering*

Bronwyn: *We used to always go up to the cemetery and go five cornering*

Norma: *and my cousin's wife in Sydney she said I've yet to see a five corner, what is it, what is it? We used to go every year, five cornering*

Norma: *Well there was a big old tree in front of the hospital and we used to eat the nuts off it when we were little*

Bronwyn: *oh yeh we used to - monkey nuts.*

Norma: *monkey nuts!*

Bronwyn: *It was a beautiful tree and they cut it down*

Norma: *The tree's gone now*

Bronwyn: *It was a beautiful tree and I can remember being a little kid and we used to go up and pick all these little pine nuts up and eat them, and they were lovely.*

Norma's genealogical connective work is echoed in a rather more formal way by Rita, who when asked what was in her mind when we all went down to the bridge, says *I think any of the old things should be recorded, photographically recorded, the same way that I'm copying all our old family photos.*

I immediately recall Rita's photographic family history project. Two images come to mind. One is the book of cross referenced files she has produced but the other is a large blue supper cloth with family photos directly exposed onto the soft draped fabric, and I remember her delight in making this in a textile class I taught.

Memory, physical as an embrace, is different to history, with its powerful capacity to dematerialise and abstract. Yet photography seems to be a part of both. It is the creased image of a loved one in an inside pocket, but equally the alphabetised file of pictures in a library archive. Occasionally I stop to think about the fate of all those photographs forever passing out of living memory. What happens to them when there is no-one left to remember? Either the image will emerge into history or – and this must happen more often – it will fail to and be lost (Ferran, 2000, 8).

Making memory communal – doing the home-work

Noeline Kyle points out just how much work is being done for and about community by family historians, more than three-quarters of whom are women. Kyle says ‘Family history enters the realm of community through its focus on a network of families and familial relationships and its *raison d’être* which essentially is of and about people’ (Kyle, 1994, 73). Rita’s family history project mentioned above regularly takes her driving, drawing, talking, visiting both familiar and previously unmet relatives all over the region. While her elaborate cross referenced files and photographs speak much more of archival material than physical embrace, I wonder if the embodied qualities are what she sought to capture in the line drawing she made of the bridge.

When Rita arrived she asked if I had seen the remains of the bridge stacked up *-They’re all stacked up just off the highway. It’s like the bridge is there in bits and pieces, all the old timbers.* I had seen it, and found it quite a wonderful reconfiguration, a very different but powerful presence. The fact that Rita raised this image suggested to me that she had experienced something of this herself, and that she was on the verge of articulating just that. We look over my photos of the old bridge, its rough hewn and rounded underbelly contrasting richly with the stark blank concrete structure before us now. The old timbers crisscrossed in wonderful patterns. Rita produces the word ‘character’; I talk of how the shapes, colours and shadows please and engage the eye. Rita comments that I was much more thorough than anyone else and that I must have had something in mind when I positioned myself so intimately under the bridge. I want to think she understands and recognises my pleasure. But it seemed more of a question than a comment, a challenge even, for it was Rita who asked the question of how to put oneself in the picture.

What words did I have, then? They seem equally limited, and perhaps were necessarily so, since I did not want to overwhelm the space between us with my ideas rather than hers, even if I had been able to. How could I describe how the bridge's body took me in and so engaged my whole body? I only repeat, I love the underneath, it looks so attractive, interesting to the eye.

Yes, all this woodwork, and yet to see it in that little pile out there now, you wouldn't know. For Rita, whatever was there is so diminished now as to have escaped us altogether. And for me I now feel the lack of appropriate words for the possibilities, the materiality and sensuality, felt, evoked in the photographs, and in the fleeting moment of recognition I perceived in our opening exchange. For Rita and I the difficulties of hearing each other across a space are, I believe, countered by a real longing on both sides to do so, and by accrued and valued moments of exchange or mutual recognition over a long acquaintance. I have introduced her to techniques of photographically exposing onto silk and other fabrics, she has shared her expertise on local orchids, although she will say very little about her practice of tending and protecting, over many years, a small reserve of native flowers. We have approved together, knowingly, the wonders of her rows of bottled fruit. At the last minute of our conversation Rita recalls that once she helped make an audio visual tape based on the river and all its places. A gesture across the space that meets and connects with possibility. 'Towns on the Castlereagh'. I haven't seen it, but it seems enough that it be offered.

Sandi also comments on my style of photo taking. She likes the different things I've caught, a red truck crossing, a collage that takes in the trees beside the bridge, the underbelly shots. She notices particularly the difference it made to physically explore, move around over and under the bridge when most stood at a distance to get their sense of the bridge.

Yeh well see you crawled all over the place and laid down and did all sorts of things, I just stood there and took a photo, oh I took a few.

Now, with the images in front of her, she echoes the pleasure of detail, exposure, the aesthetics of unconcealed construction

You can see what work goes in to making it, though. It's like in a shearing shed, you know, isn't it. Each piece is put up by men, so they've just got their own character. It's all so intricate.

This sensuousness is so understated and minimal in relation to the bridge that I struggle to understand where the energy has gone. Why is it that the bridge evaporates in talk, or is it simply that it has already been displaced? It seems important here to think about this in terms of displacement rather than lack, because I know that whenever I make that slide into absence, it brings my words to a halt, in a way that is quite opposite to my experience of the conversations. Despite the perceived difficulties at the time in eliciting material clues to the meaning-making the women were doing in relation to the bridge, the conversations were rich and rambling, taking us to all manner of other sites, times, experiences and dreams, and throwing up things that materialised in a way that the bridge simply refused to do, either in talk or in the artworks. How can I give an account of this?

the (dis)appearing body

In a review of the body in feminist poststructuralist research Somerville (in press) discusses the problem of the (dis)appearing body. She starts by locating the (lived) body in various texts just as it is (dis)appearing from view. She describes the difficulties in bringing the lived body into discursive relationship with theoretical formulations of the body when it is already such a slippery body. Somerville goes on to identify theoretical gestures, methods and analytical categories in her own and other Australian researchers' work that have enabled the lived body to be foregrounded in body/place relations

Somerville suggests that certain indirect analytical categories may enable more access to lived body experience and develops the notion of 'slanted' categories. 'Slanted' categories might include 'the senses', very specific body attributes, categories of the body such as pain and pleasure. These categories can be named within a methodology that conceptualises bodies 'as having productive power, not only as being produced within texts but as producing texts' (Somerville, in press). This gives me another way of negotiating displacement (as well as understanding my own body's animating capacity in relation to these conversations)¹. It also makes sense of both the attraction and the slipperiness of a number of Elspeth Probyn's categories whose usefulness I explored in relation to the conversations.

¹How to negotiate both the positive and constraining aspects of the body's potential to animate in conversation? I am aware of how productive face to face bodies can be in producing talk, tapes, text, ideas, but also aware of the way Rita, for example, looks to me for an answer. I understand that in the past my teaching body has animated the body of Rita the student, and it obviously continues to do so to some extent as I solicit this talk as researcher, but I am working towards producing a different balance in our relationship, a different way of us both relating to our own and each other's bodies. I don't want to be the sole source of animation but only enough to make a space and context for Rita to bring quite different animating elements to the scene.

Probyn's strategy in body/place theorising is to work with the *desire to belong*, a *desire* for attachment 'be it to other people, places or modes of being' (Probyn, 1993, 19). She develops a notion of 'becoming - other' in which the desiring body, moved to connect up with other 'bodies', to become more than it already is, is in a process of becoming - other.

Simply put, a body, moved by desire, propels itself into networks and milieux of bodies and things. In turn, the milieu must be conceived of as a dynamic area of social action. In Deleuze's description, "a milieu is made of qualities, substances, forces and events; for example, the street with its matter like paving-stones, its noises like the cry of the merchants, its animals like the horses yoked, its dramas (a horse slips, a horse falls, a horse is beaten...)" (1993:81). As a concept, the milieu begins here to take on its full importance; it is the ground of desire, a ground that must be rendered in the very detail of its singular qualities (Probyn, 1993, 49-50).

Is this also a way of locating the body slipping from the scene, (dis)appearing? A category so slanted it looks at bodies as they intertwine with various elements of their milieux, and attempts to locate them through whatever they are linking with, rubbing up against? Probyn's suggestion that we pay more attention to the ways 'bodies become hyphens' (1996, 54) and Somerville's focus on sideways categories that, critically, articulate the lived body actually at the scene of writing and speaking, both offer ways of putting these conversation texts to work.

The sideways move

Taken at a slant it seems a very rich and complex use of the bridge that Maz unfolds. Her talk is full of different crossings over – real, imagined, longed for, feared. Tracking the possibilities of back and forth, she evokes the excitement of movement, and vehicles that have the potential to transport her.

Maz tells me that since I phoned to make the arrangements she's been thinking about the bridge and trying to work out what it does means to her.

I just love bridges, so long as they're old. It just means the past to me, I don't know. My past means a lot to me. Not that it's been overly exciting or anything - I mean going back to my childhood.

As soon as she *does* go back to a childhood memory, however, its intensity, sensuality and excitement are exactly what strikes one. The semi-trailers that fascinate her roaring and rattling across the bridge remind her of staying at her aunt's place.

Like that road, and the bridge there, would be the train track and the house would be probably where these two trees are just here. It was that close. And I mean every time one went through of a night time the house would shake. Almost sounded like it was going to come through the house and you just waited for the crash. But of course it never did! Even that was exciting, even though it was scary, it was exciting.

Horses and buggies on the other hand take Maz to an imagined past and allow her to articulate a sense of self out of place and out of time, 'braindead' she suggests.

It would be nice to know how many buggies, horse and buggies went over the bridge and the people who were on them and the people who lived then. I'd love to go back to then I really would. Old bridges speak of the past because I believe I was born in the wrong century. I feel one day I would like to get my brain active again because it's been dead for too long. If I ever do what I want to do, I'd like even to look back into the Kings and Queens of England. I'd like to be able to work all that out, and know who was who, because I've read a lot of history novels. And just keep it up for me, you know.

Although the bridge is Maz's departure point, it soon connects up with horse and buggies, trains and semi-trailers, leaving itself behind. In a pronounced play between memory and history, Maz seems to suggest longings for a different form of connectedness. While one bridge story takes us to Maz's childhood, another to distant history, yet another seems to articulate an instance of bridge-crossing as both somehow vitally necessary yet enormously difficult. It is interesting that in this instance there is a failure of mediating transport. Maz has only her own body to take her across.

Maz remembers another bridge from her past where she used to go when she needed to escape the demands of mothering and family life. She describes how she enjoyed just sitting being in its presence. But when the car broke down one day she had to cross the bridge to get help and was struck with terror at the thought of crossing the bridge.

It was shocking. It took me ages to get up enough courage to take the first step onto that bridge. I had the most incredible fear of having to walk across that bridge. I don't know what it was, but it was just this horrible fear.

Whatever significance the bridge holds for Maz in this instance is felt in visceral bodily terms. Knowing in her body all the difficulties of moving, crossing, keeping going.

Before she leaves Maz tells me she has been reminded of a wonderful dress that belonged to her railway aunt. Her last story is about this dress, its adventures and history, as well as its fabric, its buttons, its current fragile condition and the need to take care of it. I remember at the time I was intrigued and excited by this but must have labelled it as 'out of place' and allowed myself to think of it as somehow separate and different. Now I think about how far the metaphors of transport have carried us both, and at what point we arrive. Perhaps I can understand this story as the most effective rendering of a physical, embodied material presence and sense of connection that Maz variously sought to express.

Margo too effects an extraordinary set of displacements. Like several of the women she points out that even the old bridge was not in any sense ordinary, and that the river crossing had moved over time, as had other quite large infrastructures like the airport. The airport rather than the bridge itself provides Margo with a vehicle that, like the semi-trailer, has particularly engaging qualities, and leads to several stories that take us into the air.

Rags and muslin

I really love flying. A friend started me off because when I was about seven they took all of us children for joy rides in their Tiger Moths. And when Sue was four, and there was a Tiger Moth in the district I took her up and Peter nearly slayed me because he said he didn't care if I never came back but what was I doing taking Sue up in one of those rag things. But then they're mostly canvas. You could poke holes in them with your fingers, they're just sort of muslin with glue on. But I love them to bits.

This is no ordinary vehicle of desire, no ordinary means of getting about, but one that doubly unsettles the notion of stable common ground. We are not only taken into the air, but in something simultaneously flimsy and delightful as a 'rag thing'. Later Margo talks of materialising a dream, however briefly-

I once had a couple of flying lessons. I had this mad dream you know. It was fifteen years ago. And I would have been about fifty nine. They said I had better do it before I was sixty after that it was getting a bit late. I never really thought I would be piloting a plane in the

wild blue yonder, you know, and flying off to far places, not that. But I did have a couple of lessons.

And materialises for me in her wonderful flying stories a thickness, a skin, a surface, the possibility of emplacement in the apparently bodiless air (*and he says good, now turn the engine off. I said you're joking! He said, no, no. He said, turn it off, you won't fall out of the sky. So I turned it off and we didn't fall out of the sky. You don't even lose any height really, you just go on skimming along, gently*).

I find the contradictory combination of displacement and material detail very provocative.

This is double, triple displacement in a most subversive way - air and ground turned on their head, stopping and going, dreams made real (and subsequently undone, because someone in the family needs the money). Fifteen years later, the few lessons Margo had continue, she says, to give her great pleasure.

Back on ground - the other side of the bridge

Margo is well aware of social displacements, exclusions and separations, that 'over the bridge' can signify. When Margo and her husband retired from farm life and moved into town they successfully maintained important contact with old friends. It was only when they moved across the bridge that all that changed.

It's more of a gap than you might think, really. When we lived at the top end of Edward Street our friends from the bush, they used to come to town and do something and then they'd call in on their way home and say hello. But when we moved across the bridge they never did that any more. It's mainly just sort of isolation and it's definitely because it's over the river, although this river has never been a real barrier.

Many Aborigines live on the other side of the bridge too, and proper paths or pavements peter out before they get to their houses up the hill. Margo describes the walking track going past her house and how

Lots of times they'd stop and have a little party in our bush, you see. They were fairly noisy sometimes, fights and loud noises. But a couple of times it was these little heaps of clothes would sort - they'd just sort of nest there - and then they'd go on.

It is through walking this track that she can tell of the way a local creek, despite landfill and determined building, insists on springing up in new and inventive ways (*Because its very hilly you know. You can't make the same ordered little front yard, and the water will make its own track through whatever you're doing anyway*). And as we return our attention to the bridge

we recall the traces of temporary camps and parties under the old spars and wonder how long it will be before the new bridge comes to be inhabited in the same way.

It is here in stories that are not about the bridge that a sensuousness emerges, and body is made present in very ordinary everyday acts or gestures of inhabiting.

Walking

When Margo was younger it was walking in places that connected her.

On every side of town you can just walk about quite freely on the crown land and there are wildflowers special to every side of it, and I've walked everywhere.

I know lots of the flowers that grow here. There's what they call pink Boronia. I'll talk about this bit of the bush in particular. They grow up here but not thickly, but they do grow, and there are lots of little orchids that you can find, lots and lots and lots, and there's one little yellow one that's a donkey orchid, and then there's the little single one, and they come in blue pink and white, those dear little things. And there's another one, they flower in January, towards the end of January, and I call them chocolate flowers. They're little purple orchids and they smell like Cadbury's chocolate.

I know what goes on on that side of town as well! And what grows at the sandstone caves. There's a pink myrtle there that grows nowhere else in the world, did you know that?

This particular walk/talk with flowers, more than any other part of our conversation, is intensely animated and animating. It resonates with, and draws together, other fragments of other flower talk, as a category that invites further analysis. Margo tells how, on her walks, she monitored the degradation of wildflower habitat and urged offending local authorities to be more responsible. Rita, drawing, photographing, identifying and physically tending native orchids in the area has quietly made a material difference to their ongoing presence as well as adding to a body of knowledge. Almost everyone, I realise, has had something to say about flowers or trees, and in the context of care and concern. I begin to recognise the critical importance of such flower talk making its way into, and leaving such rich detail in the transcribed text. A moment of the (lived) body appearing at the scene of writing as Somerville suggests? In other instances of the conversation it was made light of, and sometimes dismissed almost as quickly as it presented.

Flowers and trees

Flowers in fact are almost the only point of connection that Mavis offers me in our conversation and they seem to offer complex if sideways comment on issues of bodily presence and absence. While I start with the bridge, Mavis refuses it as any kind of departure point. Unlike the other artists Mavis proclaims the new seamless concrete structure quite categorically a vast improvement on the old – she is glad it's gone. My efforts to put *any* bridge to work are dead-ended and she tells me she hasn't after all done a painting of the bridge. I wonder why she is there to talk to me, since she seems so resistant and I have to work quite hard to find any sense of place she is prepared to talk about. When I push her, she takes me to her own place, and spots where she took her children and then grandchildren. She speaks very perfunctorily of some creeks, springs and dams, and then a cave, *it's got a special type of creeper that only grows around the cave. There's about six bushes.* Then she volunteers *another particular facet-*

The people who first settled on our property in 1910, they came out from England, and the wife planted all these summer crocuses. And in the summer, in a particularly good season, a wet summer, these summer crocuses will flower. One year I went round and brought a bunch home and painted them. And I thought of that woman who planted them all those years ago, and obviously the bulbs have spread and multiplied.

Mavis is particularly puzzled and upset that the flowers have not appeared this year, although it's been the right sort of season. In light of the way Mavis suggests the multiplying crocus as trace of a woman in the landscape, there is a particular poignancy to this, compounded further in her final comments. At the end of our short conversation, off tape, and insisting that I promise not to tell anyone else for a while, Mavis reveals her husband is selling the farm and they are retiring to the city.

Sandi tells me she wouldn't even paint or photograph the bridge unless there were trees there too – *It would mean nothing without trees in it, to me.* She couldn't live somewhere where there weren't trees. She had commented wryly on the kind of catastrophe story that everyone can name and share – *Like when the Wellington Bridge collapsed. I mean that was just monumental, really. When that truck went over it and bits of the overheads, the whole bridge collapsed – and the way it enters the collective consciousness, as she says, in a 'monumental' way.* Her own monument, however, will be altogether more subtle, hardly distinguishable to the untrained eye, requiring very specific local knowledge.

Like for instance there is one tree on our place, and as you know it's got a million trees. It's a slightly different species from most of the trees, and I love that tree. It's pretty ordinary looking, but that's where I'm going to have my ashes scattered.

This becoming-tree, a linking line that Sandi seems to make effortlessly between bridge, tree, death, resting place, ashes, herself reincorporated back into the landscape, makes a different reading altogether, for me, of her paintings. They are peopled with specific individual trees she says she has 'taken a real fancy to', trees she has also written poems about, and each one of which, I would suggest, marks Sandi obliquely putting herself in the picture.

Textual Practices

In the context of Lesbia Harford's poetry, Drusilla Modjeska brings to attention the long textual association between women and flowers in western traditions, and how Australian women poets found native flowers enabling an alternative articulation of body (Modjeska, 1985, 34-36). In lyric poetry, imagery from nature and the language of flowers has been used for centuries to describe the 'curve of female sexuality' (1985, 34). 'But if we consider how vulnerable, passive, fragile and silent flowers are, we see that the metaphor is always subliminally degrading' (Kaplan, 1975, in Modjeska, 1985, 35-36). Modjeska illustrates how Harford takes up the 'otherness' of a native lily, for example, to make an active, sexually passionate and specifically Australian image that contrasts with the purity and passivity of its European counterpart.

In *Body/Landscape Journals* Margaret Somerville describes the wildflower painting of Kathleen McArthur as 'not only an act of desire, of love and of female productivity, but a strong political gesture, both in the movement of the private female aesthetic into the public realm and in her increasing involvement in political campaigns to save the places where the wildflowers grew' (Somerville, 1999, 159).

Alternative textual practices that offer women a point of articulating an agentic body/self are important, but it is more complex than just shifting the emphasis from one side of a binary to the other. The challenge of finding a practice that can work the in-between space will be explored in more detail later in the thesis.

Practices of care and desire

I talk with Margaret about the negative stereotyping of flowers, and of women working with flower images, but the significant roles flowers play in place practices are much more interesting. Margaret reminds me of the role flowers play in the tending and tidying of graves, in enabling readings and writings of people embedded in place (Somerville, 1994). I talk of how aware I have become of the increasing appearance of simple roadside monuments marking a fatal accident - often only a bunch of flowers pinned to a fence post or a rusting wire, but carrying such condensed meaning and story, such presence. They have become so much a part of this rural landscape. As I pass by I read body/place simultaneously, looking for the detail in the landscape, a culvert, a narrowing of the road, and un-ironed bend, perhaps the particular slant of setting sun or the sudden emergence of a kangaroo or emu. Feeling my own body change in attentiveness, not just to imagining what happened then, to whom, and why, but bringing all these relationships sharply into focus of the here and now. The (imaginary) hermetic seal of the vehicle (and body) disrupted, become porous, inside and outside seeping into each other. I hear that these sites engender other behaviours, and that council workers exercise great discretion around illegal shrines, mowing carefully around, sometimes doing maintenance, and at the very least allowing the subtle pressure exerted on the line of roadside verge.

My place practices - the body of the researcher at the scene

When I track what I do and have done, as a migrant white woman, to create a sense of being at home in a strange landscape, it starts by embracing fundamental aspects of inhabiting in an almost excessive way. My first moves were to get my hands deeply into the dirt, making a vegetable garden that was a frenzy of exploration. What would grow, when and where, how; what creatures I encountered along the way. Immersing myself in processes of production and reproduction, animal husbandry, the production of food and fibre and cloth, as well as mothering and physically building a house.

Building a mudbrick house allowed me to engage intimately with some of the specificities of material place - the mix of the dirt, the lie of the land, the climate and weather patterns, the angle of winter sun, as well as issues of mark making on the landscape. It also allowed me to recognise and observe the way residual traces of other places, other ways of inhabiting, seep in and participate in the process as particular features and references.

Reflexive journal writing, and life-writing research practices brings to light not only more details of my maternal practice in relation to my own children and the making of home in this place, but on the way a young sister, emigrating later, constitutes me as mother and home. Moving between conversation and writing I discern different practices and textual traces we use in creating familial story and myth in a new country. Observations reveal the rituals of an annual holiday site at the coast where our growing families meet year after year, as another means of creating links between places and bodies, laying down a pattern of connection for our children too, a sharing of story and place.

That holiday relationship at Red Rock in Coastal New South Wales is further developed when I join Margaret Somerville there in a combination of subsistence practices, textual reflection and performance which explores inhabiting place and discourse. In conversation with local Indigenous people, we explore 'living off the land', gathering and hunting bush food and preparing a feast with all the food we collect. We document our research through journal writing, photographs, recorded conversations, memory work. A scripted performance piece is developed as a dialogue between us, and performed for the Yarrawa people who have shared their story and knowledge with us. Further performances, responses and self reflection are layered into a written paper as we relate the intersection of various theories that help articulate the experience.

Through a notion of extending geographies, I journal and reflect on my growing repertoire of place through personal relations - taking up the moves of friends and family as both reason and means to explore new sites. The conversations, journals and unpublished writing of another migrant woman provide an initial route-map into both physical terrain and others' ways of making sense of place. Evolving a series of expeditions and exchanges with artist Lou Rozensteins, I physically explore our respective home landscapes and country new to both of us. By recording our experience of place through our different art practices, a collaborative visual diary, correspondence and recorded conversation, we explore the ways we connect and disconnect with the landscape, its discourses and representational theories.

Attending to place in these ways invites a practice of return. As well as returning in memory and writing I make a physical journey to places in Scotland that have significance for me, renewing my lived experiences of those places.

The bridge

I have been returned to a great iron bridge over the Firth of Forth, the landmark of my father and grandmother's country, a great body of water and all sites along its edge. East at the great estuary mouth Aberlady Port Seton Prestonpans Cockenzie Cramond Queensferry, over the bridge and up the other side Wemyss Elie Anstruther Crail. You could see across the water to the Paps of Fife from my grandmother's house in Edinburgh. Just like a woman's breasts, my grandfather would say. And the inside of the house was forever reaching out to all these other places. My grandmother painted them all, on canvas, paper, great round beach stones, hooked into woollen rugs with a sackcloth backing - the harbours the boats the salmon jumping upstream at Cramond. You could walk from there right along the coast, right under the huge bridge itself. We'd catch crabs under the rocks with a bent hook, buy fish straight off the boats and later when I set up my own household we lived behind John Brown's smoke houses on the local harbour.

He'd tell me when the herring were going to be ready for pickling. I'd go in for weeks and he'd say not today, not today, I'll let you know. And then suddenly he'd say –Today's the day - here they are. And they were just plump, just right.

What these place practices and the bridge itself offer is a way in which both the women and myself might explore and express our productive and embodied connections with each other and with place.

Bridging

As a site of 'in-betweenness' the bridge at Coonabarabran presents an opportunity to address concerns with the specific ways women enter and participate in processes of cultural production, their desire to represent themselves as agentic subjects in time and space, with a view to understanding movements and practices that could better materialise that desire. Within broad categories of caring, preserving, reproducing – aspects of the natural environment, patterns of family relationship, to each other and to place – there are some quite specific links the women make to connect themselves to landscape and to bring an embodied sense of self and place into articulation if not representation.

Trees and flowers are important recurring links which do this work, at different levels, for most of the women. There is Mavis's concern with the multiplication and survival of the crocus, responding to changing temperatures and moisture, suggested as an ongoing trace of

woman in the landscape. Margo calls upon different senses, including taste, and her whole bodied mobility in walking to bring flower, self and different sites simultaneously into view. Norma and Bronwyn's tree talk involves embodied memories of earlier selves, and through the tree/play, and particularly tree/food (five corners and pine nuts) they trace out patterns of similarity (between themselves) and difference (to a Sydney cousin, who doesn't know what five corners are). For the first time Norma seems to centre herself in the landscape as a knower in her own right.

The particular tree that will mark Sandi's presence/absence in the landscape, memorialise her when she is dead, is *a slightly different species from most of the trees*. Sandi's concern to include, not just trees in her paintings, but what she sees as idiosyncratic features of individuals, suggests not only an intimate engagement with her environment but perhaps a way of exploring difference that could be further developed. Such wide and different use of aspects of the organic environment suggests these materials could provide a basis for complex inquiry.

Maz's use of transport metaphors offers some clear suggestions as to how such categories might be usefully developed pedagogically. Hyphens that are clearly experienced first hand and part of her immediate world have high levels of energy and life of their own, and provide access to embodied memory - in contrast to the abstracted horses and buggies which seem to consolidate a sense of being out of time and place. The trajectory of trains and semi trailers also draws in other material components of a milieu, such as the dress, an object redolent of body, female body, that helps place Maz as active, desiring, positive participant in stories of continuity and connection. The sensory qualities of these objects (I include the rag and muslin Tiger Moth in this too), if they are real and present to their owners, and part of their everyday milieu, would provide another powerful focus for further exploration.

Maz's difficulty attached to the notion of her own body (alone) as mode of transport, when taken with, for example, Margo's everyday walking and wildflowering practice, suggests both the need and possible ways to heighten awareness of the everyday body moving through the landscape.

I want to highlight the importance of conversation in producing material that can be further explored. I mean by this the ways in which we can, face to face, mutually animate each other.

The productiveness of relatively informal conversation talk was very clear to me and of course especially so when turned into text and made available for reflection. It is a process that has been invaluable in my own learning and I want to explore appropriate ways for women to take this up. It is a process quite different from traditions of journalling, because it involves another from the outset, and I want to look closer at practices that can facilitate individual expressions in a co-operative context.

Shaping a Project

Conversations at the window table at Café

Yannis surrounded by bags and paper.

Cappuccinos and sticky date biscuits. We'd

try to park our cars in the shade. It was

usually about 4.30pm and the sun beating

across Armidale. Inside Yannis the fan

was always on too high.

How do we put ourselves in the picture?

(pers. comm. Mary Hutchison, 1999)

It is in collaboration with community writer and publisher Mary Hutchison that I develop a project focused on voice, body and the materials of place as a way of addressing the question 'How do we put ourselves in the picture of place?'. Mary is engaged in a professional developmental project that intersects interestingly with mine around the use of conversation, text and artworks commenting on place. Mary is specifically concerned with documenting place and placemaking in imaginative ways, and we are both interested in ways to foreground the tangible qualities of location and the invisible landscapes the experience of location engages.

I invite any women in the local rural community to join me in a group exploration, developing artworks about the place we live in, and documenting and making public, in a group exhibition, the experience of the process and its outcomes.

The project is open to any woman in the community no matter what their previous experience. I appeal to women who have an interest in saying something about the place in which they

live, and who are interested in developing existing making skills or want to *start* a creative gesture they have always wanted to make.

A number of workshops will provide the major building blocks for exploration and learning and the rest of the project will unfold from them. Mary and I will work together through the workshops taking different roles at different times. As two other facilitators and workshop presenters join the collaborative process, we will have opportunities to lead events, to be documentors, and sometimes participants ourselves.

The following three chapters deal with three core workshops which respectively take Voice, Materials, and the Body in Place as their focus.