Introduction

The research on which this thesis depends was inspired by the pleasures of reading, writing and talking about history and a desire to create a narrative that challenges and reflects on the ‘way women do history’. It began with thinking about how I ‘do history’ myself, with thinking about my childhood, my schooling and my studies as sites of learning and, later, as I worked as a tutor for Indigenous students studying history at university. I thought also of my long involvement with living history and historical reenactment. This I had regarded as fringe history, non-academic and not particularly rigorous; it was merely play. As I began to examine the development of historical consciousness, history theory debates and performance of history, I realised there was an opportunity to interrogate all my assumptions about the practice of history and in particular the possibility of a gendered exploration of practice.

Central to many of my questions was the learning I undertook as an undergraduate and, later, postgraduate in the History Department at the University of New England. I had become an avid consumer of historiography and of debates about methodology. I was particularly interested in the contribution to the body of historical knowledge offered by women’s history, oral history and life histories. At the same time, I experienced a degree of an uncomfortable un/knowing that I would later identify as my attempts to weave the threads of empiricism and postmodernism into a cohesive fabric of understanding.

The weave became knotted and warped. I would wonder if I was weaving the wrong fabric on the wrong frame and, like Penelope in Homer’s Odyssey (Lowenstam, 2000), un-weaving as much as I wove. I turned, literally, to felting and in doing so focussed my mind on the tiny loose fibres of the wool that lock and interlock together. I performed felting at the Abbey Medieval Tournament in Queensland, learning and refining the skill, experimenting and chatting with the enthusiastic public audience. I realised that I needed to be rhythmic and gentle with the defiant wool fibres, take
chances with design and allow the felting process to occur naturally. I would take the same chance on my research, allow myself to be absorbed into the fold of “emergent learning” (Somerville, 2007b) and I would write as a form of enquiry (Richardson, 1994).

Thus, rather than using a structure of weave, I would felt. I would bring together all my questions and wonderings about history, and my place in it, in a doctorate. And I would seek out the women I studied with while doing my postgraduate studies in the 1990s. I would immerse myself and these women in talk about passion for history and see what narratives emerged. It felt risky and abstract and I barely seemed to have the words to tell the women what I hoped to do. Yet, there was no resistance from these women, they seemed to understand and welcome the opportunity to respond to the invitation, “Tell me about your passion for History”.

The data that would emerge was to be my raw material / wool, with which I felted together, moistened and matted the fibres. From the friction of the interlocking process, the questions and assumptions evolved into a thesis. As the personal and the political (the debates over the philosophy of history theory and method) interlocked, I drew together a notion of women “as” historians in a broad and interdisciplinary thinking space. This space begins to be shaped by our learning as children, but more significantly by our learning experiences as students working for higher degrees at university, mostly in the form of Masters of Letters (M.Litt.). The storylines that emerged pointed towards a thesis that would look at the legacies of our learning, the diverse and thoughtful ways in which the women and I “do history”.

This thesis incorporates History Theory, Feminist Theory and theories of learning in the higher education setting. It looks at the intersections of women as students, subjects, writers and performers of history. As it developed, the ontogeny of historical consciousness, the significance of materiality, place and pilgrimage, and the historicised self emerged as an imprint embedded in a story of self-reflection. The business of inhabiting the historicised self emerged as an important narrative among the women; it is in part a serious endeavour pointing to a learned academic rigour, but it is also shaped by the personal and by gender.
The historian, Ludmilla Jordanova, has written of perfumes evoked by and inspiring historians.

We can best speak of these in terms of the emotional responses historians experience when working on their sources and especially those upon which they rely most heavily. These responses are complex and certainly cannot be summed up in a few words, and yet they infuse everything historians do. Such persistent historical perfumes, which elicit quite individual responses, are not to be understood as good or bad. They should not be romanticised, but they must rather be acknowledged, discussed and where possible, evaluated as inherent in the practices of history. (2000:34)

These perfumes were to be infused throughout the stories of the women who participated in my research, as well as in my own stories. Like the fibres of felt, they provided the connective narrative of our passions for history. They emerged in stories of family history, of the historic matrilineal lines of the construction of our selves, in stories of meaningful places, the pilgrimages we have undertaken and will undertake in the future, in the familial rituals we re-enact, the objects we keep and the histories we write.

Such perfumes are important for their variety and for the way they give an all-persuasive sensual and dynamic character to historical scholarship. As Jordanova suggests, analysis must not be romanticised and in order to ensure that her insight clarifies rather than clouds investigations, I have sought to deconstruct as precisely as possible the stories and practices the women presented. Underpinning the frailties and troublesome aspects of the thesis question were the inherent problems of the philosophy of history: the source of ongoing debate about legitimacy and professionalisation amongst history theorists. As a means of exploring these fragrant but troubled sites of thinking, I turned to feminist poststructuralism.

In this Introduction, I list the early questions that inspired my research and a series of chapter outlines. I also offer a clarification of the terms I have used throughout the thesis. In keeping with the idea that the contextualised and historicised self is an important part of any historical research, I include also a brief over-view of my own
background and the activities that have shaped my own perspectives on education and understanding of the past.

As this thesis has been designed largely as a personal narrative, I have not, as is usually the case, included a literature review within the Introduction. References to the literature have instead been dispersed throughout the chapters, as an accompanying historiographical narrative as well as a reflection on my personal learning journey.

In Chapter 1, I will discuss the ways in which I employed feminist poststructuralism as a means of exploring my data. My M.Litt. research had involved a historiographical study of Indigenous women’s life histories. I was a non-Indigenous outsider making comment on the significance of these sources for students of Australian History in higher education. Feminist poststructuralism offers the idea that it can be productive to research a group of which the researcher is a part. I invited a group of fellow women students to join me in a collaborative exploration of our love of history. In this chapter, I outline the bricolage like processes of this research, including searching for the women, data collection and analysis, as a preliminary to the story of my current research.

I will also demonstrate in Chapter 1 the process involved in Postmodern Emergence as defined by my initial Ph.D. supervisor Margaret Somerville (2007b:225). This method encourages researchers to look for the ruptures, the silences and the in-between spaces of the dominant narratives. In History, the traditional narrative is often regarded as a masculine one. I aimed to feast on an alternative discourse, one that reflected the multiplicity of women historians and women’s history.

Chapter 2 tells the story of a learning journey through the debates of history theory over the emergence of postmodernism. From the outset, this journey was marked by furious argument amongst disciplinary commentators, questions of legitimacy and the protection of disciplinary boundaries. As the traveller, I was burdened with doubts about my own legitimacy as one who wanted to slip between the boundaries, carrying my empiricist learning while welcoming the opportunities offered by postmodernism.
As a means of participating in the debate, but with a feminist voice, I then explored how women’s history has offered different and new questions of historical sources. A sense of resolution came when I attended the 20th International Congress of Historical Sciences Conference (CISH), in Sydney in 2005, where I found that historians can and do incorporate ideas and skills from multiple theoretical groundings. In turn, this chapter has allowed me to make use of methods of analysis from a range of interdisciplinary positions. It has erased for me, to a large degree, the ferocity of the arguments that froze and impeded my ability to have confidence in my developing thesis. The chapter, therefore, acted as a permission giving process, releasing me from the notion that I needed to utilise a singular empiricist framework in the exploration that would follow in later chapters. Instead my research would reflect a multi-modal approach.

Chapter 3 examines the idea of Historical Consciousness, its development and implications for “doing history”. I have drawn largely from the work of Jorn Rüsen, “The Ontogeny of Historical Consciousness” (2005), as well as of other academics who have undertaken practical applications of Rüsen’s theories. Rüsen developed a Disciplinary Matrix (Lee, 2002:3) which charts the various stages of historical consciousness, and which also, significantly for my research, shows the journey from the intellectual approach that underpins daily historical practice (lebenspraxis) to the type of thinking about History that we are taught to undertake in higher education.

To offer an alternative and feminist perspective, I also look at Katriina Honkanen’s dissertation, which engages with the idea of “Historicising as a Feminist Practice” (2004). Honkanen offers a forthright approach and argues for a “strategic forgetting” of the structures of masculine history. Informed by the constructivist thinking of Judith Butler, Honkanen proposes a radical rethinking and rewriting of history from a feminist perspective.

This chapter then looks at the childhood and school experiences described in my own and the other women’s stories. I explore the ways in which these periods were marked by episodes of historical learning that orientate the self within and outside the past. These markers are also the “hooks” that captured our attention, led to a love of and fascination with the past. I will also look briefly at historical scholarship and at the
teachers who, as one participant put it, “knew how to push our buttons” within the school environment.

Chapter 4 focuses on our learning experiences at the University of New England. The majority of the women within the research group had enrolled in both undergraduate and postgraduate studies at the University. This offered me the opportunity to examine the ways in which the History Department taught history theory, how it was perceived and to what degree the women and I have used this theory. In turn, the chapter explores the current scholarship surrounding the teaching of history at universities, and identifies a need for more research on the development of historical consciousness within the postgraduate learning experience.

This chapter also looks at the intrusions of daily life on the mature-age woman student. It supports Catherine Waldby’s notion of “the fiction of the disembodied scholar” (1995:17) and then considers the scholar’s physical self within the physicality of the university space.

The thesis then shifts so as to focus on the embedded narratives of the stories the women of my research told. It is Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 in which one can begin to discern the legacies of our learning, our developed sense of historical consciousness and the historicised self. Chapter 5 looks at materiality and at the idea of being keepers of history. All participants agreed that we were custodians of “special” objects which told various stories of our family histories. The deconstruction of the embedded narrative embedded in the “special” objects led to an interdisciplinary examination of materiality and of the thinking that underpinned the role of “keepers of history”.

The emergent themes of materiality included the agency of objects, the significance of touch and, the responsibilities and sense of urgency involved in being a keeper of such objects. As the stories of the objects evolved, it became clear that the historicised self / keeper / storyteller were rewarding but challenging roles. In addition, it was evident that the women’s stories and subsequent discussions would shift from the micro to the macro levels. Thus, the historical narrative might begin with a personal domestic object, but as the conversations developed a meta-narrative would emerge as
the speakers situated the objects and their embedded meanings within a wider historical framework. I regarded this shift as reflective of the legacy of our learning at university, of the wide body of knowledge in which the women would contextualise the personal.

Chapter 6 examines the many ways in which the women of this research wrote or performed history in the public sphere. This was not necessarily an embrace of the public/private binary but refers more to the issues surrounding the notion of Public History. This chapter raises the ongoing issues of legitimacy and professionalisation of community history organizations. The shifts are not necessarily new, as Chapter 5 demonstrates, but they do raise telling questions about the important historical work that is often done on the fringes and the almost inevitable drift towards professionalisation. This drift can stifle histories as well as bring them to a new wider audience.

Chapter 7 explores the ideas of place and pilgrimage as contested sites of historical thinking and being. The historical narratives embedded in locales build upon perceptions of historicised self and be/longing. In this chapter, I examine some of the diverse literature that seeks to explain the identity-building mechanisms evident in stories of place. In turn, I look at the stories of returning to place, and of pilgrimages to sites of personal historical significance as individuals seek a reconnection to the people who have inhabited these places. The pilgrimage stories told by the women of my research were largely affirmative, agentic and meaning-making acts. Just as they locate and dislocate the traditional historical narratives, these stories also attempt to erase or at least ease the distance between the speaker and past generations. They are stories that seek an embodied knowing of the past.

In Chapter 8, I have argued that it is fruitful to consider feminist and matrilineal historicisms as ways of thinking about the self-reflective woman historian. I refer to historicising the methods and focus of women researching, writing and performing history. The women of my research have explored many of the facets of history production at university and it was evident that they/we mediate, navigate and orientate our way in a variety of fashions through the philosophies that underpin history making.
This chapter looks at the idea of a historic sisterhood, exploring the way generations of women have contributed to the bodies of knowledge we access today. These women include historians, mothers and grandmothers, and women in the community. Matrilineal historicism is reflective of a developed sense of a cumulative historical consciousness and of the historicised woman self.

This chapter also highlights the way in which many women historians make connections between the international and the intimate. It argues that the in-between space, the national history, has often been the preferred domain of male historians. In contrast, I will show how women historians have produced rich histories by means of exploring very personal and proximate experience in direct relationship with networks redefining beyond national boundaries.

In my conclusion, I end with discussions of the way in which my research has informed and shaped my understanding of feminist practice in history, historical consciousness and the contextualised / historicised self. In relation to the conclusions of my argument, which are in themselves provisional and open-ended, I will briefly look at the current debates in Australian history. In the last weeks of thesis writing, I attended the regional Australian Historical Association, not to present a paper but simply to listen, to articulate again my thoughts on the way women “do history”, to hear of the topics that incite their passion and to note the methodologies they employ.

This research does not seek to create a homogenous account of the way women do history. It is a snap-shot of experience, of a particular group of women. They/we are all well educated and privileged to a large degree. The research does however propose possibilities for re-thinking methodology and history theory in the higher education setting; outlining the scope for an inter-disciplinary and gendered approach.

**Clarifying my Terminology**

This research looks at the historical interests and expressions of women. Men and masculinities are not absent from this story, indeed history and higher education were long the domain of men, the foundations of philosophy and history were constructed largely by men and the lives of men appear regularly as subjects of the research by the
women I interviewed. Among my participants and my colleagues, there was consistent support for the idea that women historians, both amateur and professional, often approach history with a different lens, even as their training may be squarely situated in a masculine pedagogy, but this difference is not a clear and precise one. Conditions for women, as Jill Julius Matthews has argued, vary in relation to differing periods of time and of place (1984:5).

Natalie Zemon Davis’ discussion of women historians in the fourteenth to nineteenth centuries clearly demonstrates this variability. She wrote that the few women historians, though they usually came from the elite classes, were unlikely to have good access to historical resources, the means of travelling or education (and even when they did certain areas remained out of bounds). Nor did they necessarily have the “connection” to the public sphere that would inspire writing or provide an audience (Zemon Davis, 1980:154-55). In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the would-be woman historian operates in a very different world. It is, however, still a world where masculine hegemony dominates Western society on many levels. The woman historian of today still navigates the mechanisms of patriarchy but, as this thesis will demonstrate, there is a thriving trade in women’s historical practices.

The multiplicity of these practices is important and this thesis offers a feminist and interdisciplinary epistemological comment that can be utilised when thinking about and constructing history theory and methodological offerings for students in the higher education setting.

Construction of Woman

As Joan Wallach Scott has taught us, the term “gender”, and in turn, “male” and “female”, are laden with historic inferences (1988:28). Thus, embarking on this feminist research, I was aware of the frailties and tensions associated with imposing my own political interpretations on broad questions of historical practice, scholarship and consciousness.

Matthews has argued that there are four categories of woman, the biological, psychological, the systemic and the social. The fourth category, she suggests, is tantamount to:
The social level of the meaning of women, the history of we the women. This is the level, which is constructed by and encompasses all the others. Women as social beings are biological entities and self aware identities who live within the strategies of prescription and punishment of the gender order (Matthews, 1984:16)

This analysis was particularly useful as I thought about the women in my study, their differing views on feminism, their historical undertakings, the subjects of their research and, most importantly their conscious and historicised agency.

Equally, Judith Butler’s (2004) assertion that we can “undo gender” has proved helpful in my thinking. Her more recent ideas, outlined in a public address in Sydney, about repetition, regulation, performativity amid normative perceptions, forced me to think about my own embedded ideas and assumptions about women both as subjects of the past and as historians (Butler, 2005b).

I use several terms that include a slash, for example, be/longing, re/turn, and dis/ease. These terms refer to the idea of individuals occupying the territory of the slash, the in-between spaces. As I will explain further in Chapter 2, I am resistant to the use of binaries as autonomous categories. I regard the occupation of the slash as a productive and challenging position from which to write.

Clarifying the Author

When I speak of “the women of my research” or “my participants”, I am referring to a group of fifteen women who studied postgraduate History at the University of New England in the early 1990s as I have explained in Chapter 4. I am one of these women and as I explain below, I regard myself as both the researcher and the researched.

My academic practice has focused on tutoring within the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS). For more than a decade, I have tutored undergraduate and postgraduate students in an array of History courses at the University of New England. My interest in historiography, social justice and scholarship has been shaped by this work. It was also the inspiration for my Master of Letters thesis (Nye, 1996).
My historical practice has been largely embedded in Living History and Historical Re-enactment and my participation has focused especially on re-enactment of Viking cultures. This choice of period and people is linked to the fact that this is the focus of the re-enactment group within my locality. With an interest in costuming I have since worked on other periods and geographic locations, including Ancient Rome and the English Civil Wars. Plans for future projects are underway and include the English and Australian suffragist and temperance movements. More significantly however, I have become interested in the Living History movement in Australia, its practices and dominant discourses, particularly in relation to gender and the accession and interpretation of historical resources.

My other historical pursuits are wide and diverse. They include family and local history, collecting and the history of plants and gardens. Central to virtually all of my activities is an interest in the lives and agency of women. The feminist thread throughout this thesis reflects my long interest in feminism. I would situate myself as a feminist influenced originally by radical and socialist feminisms, but also as avid consumer of all facets of contemporary feminist thinking.
In this chapter, I will outline the interdisciplinary nature of my research methodology. As Denzin and Lincoln (2000:3) suggest, the bricolage, as a research methodology, is an interactive approach and is informed by diversity. My research is marked by this diversity in terms of both subject and methodology. Initially, I sought to maintain a feminist poststructural approach, which in itself encourages and reflects an interdisciplinary basis. This was a deliberate rejection of the empiricism of my university learning, yet I would discover that such a rejection was neither possible nor desirable. Instead, I would find a comfortable position from which to work, one that remained open to a variety of theoretical positions. As a result, this thesis has grown from seemingly opposing theoretical positions. I believe that this has expanded my thinking and writing in a productive way and challenged my assumptions about the story of women’s passion for history.

My feminist background has informed my research throughout. I have been interested in women’s stories and explanations in regard to their love of history. I have wanted to combine questions of gender with questions of learning in higher education, and this has led to stories of the legacy of our learning and of the practices and performativity of the woman historian. To achieve this, I have chosen to explore these issues with women with whom I had studied external postgraduate history in the 1990s.

**Feminist Poststructuralism**

Feminist poststructuralism offers researchers the opportunity to problematise the fixivity of knowledge, gender and language (Somerville, 2004; Weedon, 1993). It argues that there are no single truths and promotes the idea of multiplicity of experience. Feminist poststructuralism problematises the text, the expert researcher,
the subject and the body, and it seeks to identify women’s agency. I will demonstrate
the way that has affected the processes and chronology of my research by using the
following five categories: seeking participants; collecting data; interviewing and
collaborative storying; the process of analysing; and the writing process.

Seeking Participants

Women only?
My research focused only on women’s stories and this in itself raised two concerns.
The first was, why exclude men? Certainly the male students would have offered
interesting and worthwhile stories. Yet I wanted to see what would emerge when I
examined the experiences of women in a seemingly masculinist profession; the
processes, opposition and adaptation they undertook. The second concern was that I
risked creating a single female narrative. Having asserted the multiplicity of self and
subjectivity and possessing an aversion to grand narratives and essentialism, was I
about to contradict myself? It has been necessary throughout to keep a careful balance
between similarities among women, as distinct from men, and the diversity of
women’s experience.

The Search

I began searching for my participants in my old notebooks and in hand-outs from my
M.Litt. period. Hand-outs included lists of names, topics and order or time of
presentation at residential schools. I “Googled” the women’s names as a way of
starting while I awaited responses from other sources.

“Googling” was more fruitful than I imagined it would be. Immediately I found
women who had held book launches or had joined family or community history
groups. Sometimes it evoked a sense of unexpected sadness and disruption. I came
across an obituary; one of the women had died soon after our residential schools and
to my knowledge did not manage to pass her M.Litt. This was unexpected and I was
surprised at my sense of grief and loss for a woman I had known only briefly, yet had
re-assigned in my own mind as a research participant, successful graduand and likely
community historian.
The second source of contact details came from within the School of History. Professor Alan Atkinson still held in his cabinet, paper-work dating from our residential schools. He kindly shared these with me, providing more names, as well as the topics the students researched. The Head of School also granted me permission to look at files from the period. I was led to a storage room containing filing cabinets. Within these cabinets were the records of all postgraduate students from an extensive period of time. I was looking for a small group studying in the early 1990s but I spent considerable time working through the files of my period. At such an early stage in my research I was unaccustomed to the trust placed in me as a researcher. I was acutely aware of the private nature of the files, private especially in the sense that they showed who had completed and who had been unsuccessful. My discomfort was accompanied by a sense of privilege. This was part of the process of thinking my way into the professional dimension of research.

I was able to assemble a list of fifty names and I then turned to the university Alumni office for assistance. They agreed to post my letter of introduction to any students whose addresses remained on their file. This would prove to be quite successful and I received fifteen responses. As each of the women contacted me it became clear that their university experience had been a positive one. In my letter introducing myself I had outlined what I hoped to achieve and how they might contribute. This included sending recollections by post or email, attending a reunion, and participating in a University of New England mailing group.

It was at this stage that the feminist poststructuralist focus on learning from absences first came to the fore. Clearly all the women who contacted me had all successfully submitted their M.Litt. thesis. No-one who had not completed their thesis or who had failed responded to my request. I understood their reluctance and I felt that I would probably have felt the same in these circumstances, but I realised that without them my research would not tell a complete story. I needed therefore to re-envision the scope of my project. Informed by Elizabeth Atkinson (2001) and Elizabeth St Pierre (1997a), I understood that the research would necessarily shift in various ways in response to the data that was returned. I would have to let go of a sense that I was in
total control of the direction of the thesis. It would take on a life of its own and as a researcher I needed to be responsive and reflective of the shifts that would occur.

Another anomaly emerged later in my research as I attempted to use a University electronic mailing list. My plan was that once each of us had subscribed, I would post some general questions and that conversations would ensue. The women did not respond enthusiastically and only a few contributed. While they were happy to send me long emails directly, and while they later, enjoyed connecting with each other at the reunion, the mailing list remained unpopular. Perhaps, in 2003, this was a time when mailing lists were still new to both the Internet and as a research tool. Certainly none of the women appeared to be familiar with such mailing lists. I expect that I had not created a comfortable email environment and I had failed to spot and attend to their apprehension. I quickly realised, however, that I was receiving rich data from other sources and I decided I should focus on these. I still regard mailing lists as a potentially excellent resource for researchers. In other research, relating to historical re-enactment, I have found “Yahoo group lists” to be an extremely rich resource. In hindsight I would argue that success depends partly on participants’ familiarity and confidence with the technology.

Collecting Data

Having established methods with which the women felt comfortable in contributing, I invited them to converse with me and each other on the question, “Can you tell me about your passion for history?” The affirming nature of the question appealed to the women and their willingness to respond was overwhelming. They immersed themselves in the task and I encouraged them to erase any restrictions that defined or limited the idea of historical practice. I was aware that my own historical thinking transcended all aspects of my own life and suspected that theirs would too. This was indeed the case and the women demonstrated an appreciation of the opportunity to share their stories with myself and other participants. It was also clearly evident that they thought highly of the lecturers who had taught them at the University of New England and appreciated the skills they had acquired during their studies. Presumably
former students who had failed or dropped out would not have been quite so appreciative, but this was something my evidence would not tell me.

**The Reunion**

In November 2003, I held a reunion using the rooms our residential school had been held in. Only four of my group were able to attend, but they were enthusiastic in their contribution to the day, and while the number was small the exercise was justified in the richness of the evidence they offered. One woman lived locally and others travelled from Brisbane and Sydney, requiring up to eight hours driving or on the train. Several other participants sent stories and other contributions to be shared at the reunion. My colleague, Phoenix de Carteret, a sociologist, a graduate of the University of New England and a proponent of collective biography, also joined us. Phoenix assisted in the technical aspects of the day as well as contributing her own stories.

The reunion was loosely shaped around the following topics:

- **Introductions**
- **Reconnecting with Lecturers and Supervisors.**
- **Keepers of History (Storying an object)**
- **Remembering our studies.**
- **The Legacies of our learning and what we are doing now.**
- **Dinner at a local restaurant**

This plan was open to change and offered only a guide. I had hoped that the conversations would take on a life of their own, spurred by enthusiasm for talking history. This was indeed the case and my only concern was that the prolific discussion that took place over meal times could not be recorded as well.

In reading the transcripts, please note that Helena and Helen are different participants.
Reconnecting with Lecturers

I had invited lecturers to attend a morning tea at our reunion. While I received acceptances from some lecturers, none were able to attend. I did not discover until the following week that their non-attendance was due to the fact they were at the airport as Dr John Ferry made an urgent flight to Sydney for medical treatment that same morning. Like everyone who worked with or studied under John, this news weighed heavily upon myself and upon the women when I later informed them. John was much admired by our group. He had been my supervisor for my M.Litt. so news of his illness and subsequent passing was a terrible jolt just as I/we were seeking to remember and celebrate our time as students at the History department. Perhaps it helped to give us all a stronger sense of our deep involvement in university life.

The absence of lecturers at this point in the data collection process was unfortunate also in the sense that I had hoped to evoke memories and connections with the learning experience. The lecturers, their personalities and approach to History represented significant markers in the women’s development of both their historical consciousness as well as guiding their future interests and professional/non-professional paths. I was able to talk, at length, with several current and past lecturers in the duration of my research, and their input proved invaluable. The opportunity however, to observe the interaction, between them and my participants, was lost.

Keepers of History: show and tell

I was interested in the objects that families treasure and pass on to younger generations. Was it possible that through these objects family identity and stories were nurtured? What were the embedded narratives and could we ask gendered questions of the objects, the narrative, the keepers and the receivers? I asked the women to bring along an example of a treasured family history object to the reunion, or if they could not come to send a story. This was a particularly popular activity and having raised the idea of precious objects from the point of first contact, the women had considerable time to think about what objects they deemed significant. Indeed, they remarked that the more they thought about them the harder it was selecting one to bring to the reunion. Without any intervention on my part the embedded narratives emerged at the reunion as well as evoking other stories. Accounts sent by women who
could not attend proved as thought-provoking as the objects we saw and handled on the day.

Figure 1: Bronwyn and her grandmother’s Autograph book.

**Remembering Our Learning**

This section focused on our experiences at university. While I was interested largely in our postgraduate learning, I was conscious that our undergraduate years, and even earlier times in our lives, had provided the grounding and inspiration to continue
learning at a tertiary level. I encouraged the women to shape the discourse and talk about any aspect of their time at university that stood out for them although the conversation did tend to focus on the postgraduate experience as the culmination of higher education learning.

**The Legacy of Our Learning**

This section of the reunion was designed to focus on the diversity of historical practice. The women spoke at length on what they had done since their graduation. I limited directives from myself in an effort to allow free conversations to flow, unhindered by categories or partly irrelevant labels. The women did not in fact require such encouragement and their eagerness to share and to listen to others was evident. Equally evident was their appreciation and understanding of my desire to identify the diversity of historical practice and to make connections with the knowledge we gained at university.

**Explaining my Feminism**

As in everyday life, my enthusiasm for feminism was evident in both my letters to the participants and discussion at the workshop. The women were quick to establish that they did not share my feeling for what they regarded as a label. Rather they spoke in terms of: “I am not a feminist but …”, and “my mother was way ahead of her time, she was very strong”, and offered stories of women struggling and resisting what I would call patriarchy. These stories reflected considered thought and were extensive in detail. It was clear that I needed to re-evaluate my approach and my desire to use the term “feminism”. Their stories reflected feminist attitudes yet the naming of feminism was problematic for them. This suggested a gap between practice and theory of a kind learnt at the university, which was to be central to the whole discussion, though in other ways the women were eager to bridge that gap.

I had no desire to change the women’s views and impose my own. I was however intent on being honest about the fact that my feminism would underpin my research and that I would ask gendered questions of our experiences. Thus we found an appropriate and comfortable site from which to discuss such issues. The idea of a matrilineal connection, or generational nurturing, by women was especially welcomed.
by the participants. Indeed they provided many examples in their own lives to support my assertions.

**Collaborative Storying and Interviewing**

**Researched / Researcher**

By researching the stories of the women with whom I shared experiences at university, I had chosen to work with a group of people of which I was a part. This approach is in part, reflective of auto-ethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) and collective biography (de Carteret, 2005: Haug 1987). I was seeking a type of collaborative analysis to inform my thesis.

I was impressed by Laurel Richardson (2005) who has promoted the self as a subject of research. She extended her approach to the point that her experiences, alone, became the focus of her work as seen in her recent research on class. (Richardson, 2005:485). Similarly, Ann Curthoys has argued that autobiography and intellectual work are unavoidably entwined (1988:150).

I had been concerned about the notions of the researched/ researcher and the expert / subject dichotomies. I was conscious of Clifford Geertz’s notion of the “burden of authorship”, plus the political and ethical questions he raised (1988:138). Several of the women in my group held postgraduate degrees other than the M.Litt., and some were working on their own PhDs during my research. All were informed on issues regarding the philosophy of history. I remained, therefore, open to the participants’ comments and suggestions and constantly re-evaluated my position, the questions I asked and my analysis.

Lorina Barker (2006) articulates some of these research problems as she discusses the difficulties she experienced as an Indigenous researcher researching her own community, Weilmoringle in western New South Wales. Barker argued that the insider / outsider dichotomy raised several issues relating to her academic expectations and responsibilities and those as a member of the community (2006:2). Barker discussed the layers of intellectual and embodied distancing of the research
process and explains how she employed a “Hangin’ out and yamin’” approach to her interviews (2006:3). This was a similar approach to the “deep hanging out” employed by early childhood researcher, Kerith Power (1999:para 3). This was reflective of my own approach. I sought to re-create the informal and comfortable environments of residential schools, where women came together over tea and coffee, in breaks or lunch, and shared their enthusiasm for their study.

The Analysis Process

Erasing Binaries

One of the first steps I took was to examine the use of binaries. Elizabeth Atkinson’s work on binaries provided considerable insight. Atkinson explains that people have multiple identities. She says in describing her own work that it

Demonstrates a move towards a position where not knowing who I am, rather than being an admission of failure, might constitute a new recognition of multiplicities of self within and between the social, sexual and academic roles I inhabit, a position where multiple identities may speak more clearly in multiple contexts. (E. Atkinson, 2001:307)

When I began the research I too struggled with who I was. Was I an inadequate student who lacked rigour in examining the past? Was I a feminist poststructuralist trying to work within an empiricist framework? Was I a tutor for Indigenous students or was I a student? Was I a “real” feminist, with one foot in radical feminism and one in an emergent liberal feminism? I was a mother of a two-year-old and two teenagers, should I therefore be at home? The binaries and labels I had encased myself in were debilitating and unhelpful. In turn I needed to ask what labels and binaries should I avoid as I analysed the stories of my participants. The process of working through these problems was productive. As Patti Lather suggests by describing such processes the scholar should aim to “unsettle readers into a sort of stammering knowing … a knowing not so sure of itself” (1997:288). Once I understood that my multiplicity of roles would position me in the slash of the binaries, the grey areas, the both and the none, my lack of resolution become something to value and a site from which to be

The rhizome metaphor has been employed by a number of researchers. Deleuze and Guattari suggested that “every rhizome contains lines of sedimentarity according to which it is stratified, territorialised, organised, attributed etc, as well as lines of de-territorialisation down which it constantly flees” (1987:9). Similarly, St Pierre further explains the unpredictable nature of research and the need for the researcher to respond to ways in which a rhizome can break away, exist on its own and lead the researcher toward another site of thinking (1997a:405).

Nomadic Inquiry
In each chapter I have sought out a wide range of perspectives emanating from diverse theoretical backgrounds. This was a deliberate inter-disciplinary and nomadic form of research. As St Pierre suggests, “the nomad is one who de-territorialises space and refuses to settle into grids or categories and thus escapes either side of humanistic boundaries” (1997b:283). I wanted to be this intellectual nomad, to inform myself of the contradictory and the consistent ways for thinking about the themes that had emerged from my data. St Pierre states:

By questioning meta-narratives that legitimise the science of humanism, they [nomads] provide here interrogative rather than stable texts in which they attempt to keep the concept of qualitative research in education open, in play, restless, available to innovations we haven’t yet been able to imagine.
(1997b:283)

Agency
It was important to me to identify agency in the women both as subjects of history and as historical practitioners. This is not an unproblematic concept, because as individuals and as women, we are of course shaped and restrained by society and its history. Further, the masculinist nature of history has been embedded in history writing and teaching. Yet amid this, I sought to identify the moments that did seem to reflect a personal and political agency, of deliberate assertion against habit and convention and against the pressure of a dominant masculine hegemony.
As subjects of history, for example, women’s agency is evident in the work of Australian historian, Penny Russell (1994). Russell troubles the idea of women of the Australian colonial gentry by examining the “tensions” between ideal and practice which demonstrates the “contested” nature of men’s leadership (Russell, 1994:2). Agency of women historians has been demonstrated by historiographical work by Bonnie G Smith (1998), Natalie Zemon Davis (1980) and Mary Spongberg (2002). Again we see the troubling of taken for granted assumptions of the absence of women as historians in the past. All three of these authors show how women worked with determination, from the outside or from the fringes of professional history of their times. From the outset of this research project, I was, likewise, determined to find stories of agency, affirmation and celebration of women as historians.

**Journaling**

Prompted by the work of my supervisor Margaret Somerville and aware that I am both participant and researcher, I began writing a journal, documenting my learning journey. Somerville encouraged her students to use the journal at all stages of the research process and has demonstrated in her own research how seemingly trivial emotional responses to people, place, interviews, landscape and conversation can assist in our growing understanding of our topic. As Valerie Clifford has suggested, journaling can be a “vehicle for reflective practice and critical awareness” (1999:1).

One of the first and most important issues to first emerge from my journals was the difficulties I encountered as a student in History. Without knowing or understanding the terms, I can, in hindsight, see that I had leanings towards poststructuralism while doing my M.Litt. which I had completed shortly before I embarked on the PhD. Therefore, one of the first chapters I now needed to write was an exploration of the empiricist and postmodern divide.

I outlined in it, the two sides, and then explored women’s history as a separate area. Eventually I came to a resolution by realising that historians of today appear to borrow from both empiricism and postmodernism. This became clear to me when I attended the 20th International Congress of Historical Sciences (CISH) in July 2005 in Sydney. In her presentation Nancy Partner’s (2005) presentation, *Narrative Power*
and Narrative Coercion, she articulated, with particular clarity, the problems I was struggling with. Partner demonstrates that historians have held on to some aspects of postmodernism and rejected others. I began to realise, through my reading, journaling and note-taking at conferences, that the battle was not as divisive as I imagined, and that while some historians wrote in vitriolic terms of the emergence of postmodernism, there was a wider consensus. It was not necessary to wave banners and flags of allegiance; rather it was evident that there was room for broad historical scholarship.

The Writing Process

Writing the Self
My own experiences are strongly evident in this thesis. Not only as a subject of the research, but also in that this thesis is presented as my own learning journey. This was a conscious decision based on the recognition that researchers are laden with their personal, social, political and historic baggage. It recognises that I am not a finished expert on women’s history, historiography or of the philosophy of History theory. Rather these are the things I am immersed in as learner and as researcher.

Writing the self is an increasingly popular method of qualitative research. As Ann Oakley suggests, the “pretence of neutrality” of the researcher is actually counter-productive (1992:53). If a researcher does not recognise her/his personal investment in strategic decision-making, there is a considerable risk that the research will tell only part of the story. In his research on Adult Motivation and Higher Education, Linden West suggests, “Writing the self of the researcher into research and acknowledging its influence in shaping the text, stands conventional research wisdom about objectivity on its head.” (1996:12) Further, he states, “I realised how much I was using my own biography as a basis for making sense of theirs and vice versa” (West, 1996:211). Similarly, cultural historian, Mark Neumann has argued that this approach “gazes inward for a story of self but ultimately retrieves a vantage point for interpreting culture” (1996:173) and more poignantly, from my notes from a conference presentation, historian Penny Russell said, “The shade of my own imagination is in everything I write“ (2005).
Empiricist history methods have always encouraged students of history to examine the authors of prescribed texts. In my own undergraduate and postgraduate experience in History, this was a major focus, situating the author in time, class and personal agenda. Yet this always seemed to be an othering process, the contemplation of the distant author. We were not however encouraged to ask ourselves these questions with regard to our own writing. Thus in discovering the poststructuralist notion of putting the self into the research, I was astounded at not only the types of questions I needed to ask myself but the answers that came in return. At these times my research focus would shift. These shifts, while perhaps not easy to deal with, always led to a more productive insightful work.

Asking difficult questions of myself, was at times, a disconcerting process. Equally, accepting that tension, feeling uncomfortable and needing clear resolution led to productive research. The process demands of the researcher a commitment to looking for absences and silences, deconstructing one’s own as well of other’s language and agendas. Critics of poststructuralism have suggested that too much deconstruction can reflect an overworked reductionism and that meaning can be lost. Equally, some radical feminists have argued that postmodernism and poststructuralism have damaged feminism, that they have led to a “depoliticised” state and a “moral nihilism” (Waters, 1997:296) and that a postmodern feminist is a “contradiction in terms” (D. Thompson, 1997:325). These criticisms are not without foundation, yet the ideas that underpin the poststructuralist approach offer the opportunity for diverse research practices. It helped me to re-examine taken-for-granted philosophies as I sought in-between stories about learning and one’s passion for history.

Feminist poststructuralism places considerable focus on language and the deconstruction of many assumptions about the meaning we draw from text. This provided considerable insight as I explored the various ways I could approach my data. The potential for rigorous historical analysis through the tools of deconstruction is significant. As Weedon states, “Language and the range of subject positions which it offers always exist in historically specific discourses” (Weedon, 1993:35) and in turn, analysing these as embedded in institutions and practice, offers different and useful perspectives. I found this approach particularly useful as I sought to identify
the way in which particular discourses were present (under a guise or visibly so) or absent. This thesis has been a conscious learning process, and many of the embedded narratives I had used, whether consciously or unconsciously, needed to be deconstructed as well. From this perspective, I had wondered about the way normative thinking has evolved into a common sense or taken-for-granted status. Troubling the shape and nature of particular discourses has been, at times difficult, but always rewarding as new ways of thinking about them emerged.

**Re-emergence of Empiricism**

A brief comment from my supervisor on an early chapter draft, “You seem to be talking about the development of historical consciousness”, led to a dramatic shift in my methodology and analysis. Certainly this was what I was looking at, yet I had not explored academic writing on Historical Consciousness as a specific topic. A scan of Google led me to realise that this was indeed a well-researched area. Yet with the multitude of sources and with limited time, I needed to fast-track my exploration. As a member of the H-History and Theory email list (sponsored by the *Journal of History and Theory*), I posted a request for “must read” texts on historical consciousness. The response was swift and I was directed to Peter Seixas (2004), John Lukacs (1968), Peter Lee (2004) and “naturally” Jorn Rüsen (2004). The “naturally” comment would soon make sense, because Rüsen has laid solid groundwork which continues to inform scholars of historical consciousness. My own research was to develop considerably under the influence of Rüsen’s work.

Rüsen’s writing is largely empirical and I was initially resistant to the apparent rigidity of this approach. I was to discover, however, that a reliance of his work was not going to entirely constrain me. Indeed Rüsen discusses at length; the contribution of postmodernism to the discipline of History (2005:137-41). This was another instance of the usefulness of interdisciplinary approaches to my work.

**Interdisciplinary Exploration**

Throughout this thesis I have sought to access academic resources from outside history. The rich data that emerged from the research seemed important to my general thesis of interdisciplinary-ness, yet I found myself initially ill-equipped to embark on detailed analysis. I had only vague ideas about material culture, anthropological
notions of place and pilgrimage and some knowledge of Public History, and I would need to explore these academic fields. I found myself immersed in sociology, philosophy, anthropology, art theory, immigration studies, geography, material hermeneutics, literary criticism and thing theory. The value of an interdisciplinary approach became more obvious. Yet I was also reminded of the need to be discerning, given time restraints and the risk of being diverting from my original aims. Thus I was aware that my research would not provide definitive explanations of all of these fields of study, rather, they would offer accompanying and informative discourses to my thinking.

**Embodied Researcher / Participant**

Throughout the researching and writing of this thesis I have been conscious of the idea of the body as significant to the process. Alison Bartlett’s (2006) work on breastfeeding, teaching and academy introduced me to the work of Cixous (1976), Waldby (1995) and Gallop (1988). Like Bartlett, I was also breastfeeding when I began my doctoral research. It was encompassing process, ever-present and overwhelmingly female. My intellect had told me it had nothing to do with work; it was a body thing, a female thing, disassociated, just as my body was, with university study. Yet through the work of Bartlett and others I began to find the links. As I explored the ways in which my body imposed or was imposed on by the higher education framework and my own thinking, it became evident that it was worthwhile to ask similar questions of my participants. Initially the women were surprised by this inclusion, yet also came to appreciate its significance.

**Emergent Methodology**

My methodology has been largely shaped by Margaret Somerville, through her guidance as my initial supervisor and through her work on emergent methodologies (2007b). Somerville introduced me and her other doctoral students to the terminology of feminist poststructuralism, led regular workshops on writing and performativity and encouraged us to travel to Sydney to hear feminist philosopher and poststructuralist, Judith Butler’s public address; *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005b).
Somerville states that postmodern emergence “emphasises irrationality, the messy, the embodied, open ended-ness, and unfolding as a stance (for) research” (2007b:225). Somerville has further developed Laurel Richardson’s concepts of “experimental representation [and] writing-as-a-method-of-enquiry” (2007b:226). For my own work this approach proved vital in developing the early research framework. It encouraged me to explore a range of disciplinary thinking, to “wonder” (Somerville, 2007b:228) about theoretical possibilities and impossibilities and, to then, write freely. The writing that I did under this premise initially sounded naïve and was full of emotion, yet I and my writing were to undergo a transformation, underpinned by that naivety and emotion but matured by reading, talking, listening and experience.

The analysis process in this thesis has come largely from the emergent methodology. As I read through the transcripts and discussions, I employed Somerville’s nitty-gritty method. Somerville has not articulated this method in publication and it is therefore necessary that I explain it. It focuses on a systematic analysis/deconstruction of each line of the transcripts. In the margins, I list the themes to which the words allude. Some of these themes were concepts I had considered prior to the data collection, as well as those that arose during my attendance at history conferences, but most emerged from the women themselves. Each line of the transcript was numbered and a secondary list of categories was then formed indicating the frequency to which themes arose. From this point, the chapters began to take shape. Using an interdisciplinary approach I examined each major theme. Looking to a range of publications on each of the areas, Chapter 2 had been a permission-giving chapter, which allowed me to comfortably seek out a variety empiricist or postmodern research from within or outside the discipline of history. I utilised research that squarely sat within psychology, geography, education and philosophy and then looked at research that crossed over these boundaries. The work on historical consciousness and education was a particularly useful position from which to work. These new studies on historical scholarship and the connections to teaching were very informative and reflect a growing area of study that I hope to continue to be a part of in the future.
My thematic and philosophical analysis had, from the outset, also been influenced by three books; the first was *Voices of Women Historians: the Personal, the Political, the Professional*, edited by Eileen Boris and Nupur Chaudhuri (1999). This collection of autobiographical accounts by women historians in the United States of America highlights the connections between feminist activism and historical scholarship. This book generated an inspiring dialogue. The second book was *Encounters: Philosophy of History after Postmodernism* by Ewa Domanska (1998). This book offers a collection of discussions between Domanska and a series of esteemed male historians alongside her own story and a postscript by Lynn Hunt. The appeal of this book was the intersections of personal and theoretical engagement. Domanska’s exploration of the role of postmodernism was thought provoking. As Hunt suggests “She clearly wants to place postmodernism in a historical framework, appreciate its value, declare its termination, and figure out the emerging new directions of historical thought” (1998:271). The third book was Diane Bell’s *Generations: Grandmothers, Mothers and Daughters* (1987). This book tells the story of rituals and objects that are handed down through generations of women. From a series of anthropological interviews with a large number of Australian women, Bell articulates impact of the cumulative knowledge and practices on women’s lives.

Each of these books’ themes resonated with my desire to undertake this research. I was interested in what underpinned women’s understanding and their agency within their historical practice and scholarship.

**Conclusion**

Central to my thesis has been women’s learning experiences and historical practices that result from these experiences. Having studied at postgraduate level at university, I wondered if I could indeed draw together a connected story on the subject that did not suffer from the problems of a grand narrative, and which would reflect the benefits of an interdisciplinary nature of both learning and practice. What has emerged is a series of storylines that reflect a developing historical consciousness, responses to empirical learning and its relation to historical practice and the significance of material objects, family history, place and pilgrimage and working in the public sphere. Underpinning my analysis of these aspects has been a continued
feminist focus and one that led to an exploration of the concepts of feminist and matrilineal historicism.

In this thesis, feminist and matrilineal historicism reflects an in-between story of identity and subjectivity and is marked by the constructions of the historicised woman self. The women of my research are laden with the cumulative knowledge from life, study and working in both family and community histories. The women I worked with were conscious of their historicising of themselves, their family history and material culture. They (we) participated in a generational nurturing that would encourage and preserve a self of historic identity. For each of the women the story was different, reflecting her own personal multiplicity, yet there were threads of connectiveness underpinned by the rigour of our learning, by both intellect and embodiment.

Seeking these stories required the utilisation of an interdisciplinary approach, one that embraced the openness and potential for transformative learning which is to be found in feminist poststructuralism. In turn, I was encouraged by the feminist poststructuralist use of problematising and troubling ways of thinking. I regard autobiographical and emergent methodologies as productive sites for learning. Thus this thesis does not sit firmly in feminist poststructuralism. Rather it has been a tool for exploration and a vehicle for responding to the emergent themes. As a result the learning journey of this thesis traversed the interdisciplinary and draws, unapologetically, on a bricolage of standpoints.
Chapter 2

Exploring Debates in History Theory

History ... will go with anybody – Marxists, Whigs, racists, feminists, phenomologists, structuralists, empiricists, Eltonians, Foucauldians, Poshists – anybody. (Jenkins, 1997:64)

This chapter will reflect my learning journey through recent debates over History Theory. The journey was prompted by a desire to understand the positions students of Australian history occupy when studying, writing and performing history. Any analysis of the teaching and learning of history would have to be marked by the political and personal positions that historians occupy. I would discover, as Jenkins (1997:64) suggests, History is diverse and can be fruitfully analysed and understood in many ways.

In this chapter, I report on my journey through History theory from three perspectives. Firstly, the heated arguments put forward by traditional empiricists in regard to postmodernism are analysed. Then an exploration of women’s history follows. Thirdly, I detail the multiple methods of history that were presented at the 20th International Congress of Historical Sciences Conference in Sydney in 2005. It was there I began to understand that the single divisive lines drawn by some history theorists did not ultimately shape the whole arena. Rather, I discovered a considerable diversity in approaches to History.

Discovering Theory

As mentioned in the previous chapter, I was troubled by a sense of theoretical otherness towards the end of my M.Litt. studies and would later learn more of postmodernism as I began my doctoral studies. I found that I was not alone. Lisa
Duggan, feminist historian and gender studies academic, has spoken of her experiences in a History department in the 1980s in the U.S.A. where she had an inkling of other theories being used in the “English department” (1998:9). I had also heard hints of theories that belonged elsewhere. As I discovered what these theories were and the often, vitriolic debate that was associated with them, I worried, that as I drifted toward an interest in feminist poststructuralism, I was treading in dangerous waters, risking academic credibility.

Yet as I read on, I found that the concerns of those who attacked the emergence of postmodernism in history were very much focused on preservation of a tradition they treasured. The attacks could be perceived as part of a desire to preserve privilege and established hierarchies and a rejection of exploration of new possibilities in the study of history. There was a strong desire among some commentators to cement the empirical methods as the only path to good history.

One of the first books I read in this project was Hamerow’s Reflections on History and Historians which told me of a crisis, a gloomy future born of limited employment opportunities for history graduates, “the decline in the importance which society assigns to historical scholarship” (1987:9). More disturbingly, “the conquest of the distant frontiers of historical knowledge has also coincided with an increasing awareness of the meaninglessness of history” (Hamerow, 1987:12). The pessimism and sense of abandoned hope weighed heavily in the text. Hamerow also referred to “social scientists” and those who cross disciplinary boundaries as “an oddity”. While this seemed problematic, it did provide me with a standpoint from which my learning journey could begin. This journey into the debates of history would reflect the colour, language, urgency and excitement of the debates and I was engrossed, aghast and captivated.

What began to emerge was the story of impending doom for the traditional scholarship and scholars. The monopoly on historical knowledge was apparently slipping, slipping into the hands of amateurs, public historians and social scientists. Hamerow (1987:33) himself saw this as rescuing it, bringing to an end “the narrowness and pedantry of academic life, from the heavy handedness of formal scholarship, from the conventionality of an organised profession”. In turn, he invited
the reader to think again about the impossibilities of what we understand as Historical knowledge and its capacity to be revealed. “The past remains obscured by countless details as well as crucial omissions, by ambiguities, mysteries and imponderables and riddles” (Hamerow, 1987:37).

One needed to ask: What is it that needs protecting? What is empiricist or positivist history? I picked up George Igger’s (1997) book Historiography in the Twentieth Century: from Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge. I knew Igger to be highly regarded as an authority on history theory. From here the famous names begin to pile up: Carr, Collingwood, Elton, White, Natalie Zemon Davis, and I attempted to develop a picture of historical method writing since the early twentieth century. My historiographical account was by no means exhaustive. The sources were endless and the interpretations diverse. Thus, this chapter reflects an account of my learning journey, rather than a definitive account of modern historiography.

Traditional historians of the twentieth century largely focus on chronology, causality, facts and objectivity. However, this is not to say that all historians found agreement. Louis Halphen wrote in 1947 that historians must:

 Forget their own time and environment, even themselves, and give up their prejudices, beliefs and ways of thinking, so that they could reach the past and guide us all straight to the sources of the past. (Halphen 1947 quoted in Peltonen, 2006:4)

In the years following, the writings of E. H. Carr, R.G. Collingwood, G.R. Elton and Bloch would offer some directional changes. The “famous duel” between Carr and Elton is often regarded as pivotal to a student’s understanding of history (Peltonen, 2006:5). Carr sought a more democratised history and one that asked students to look at the historians as well as the evidence. Elton’s beliefs represented the established thinking of the time, which encouraged systematic and rigorous examination of the facts, which, in turn, would provide the insight historians sought. As Peltonen suggested in his historiographical account of shifts in history theory, “an experienced historian instinctively knows the right questions to ask of his sources” (2006:5). Keith Jenkins surmised: “as far as Elton is concerned, if history could speak for “itself” and
disclose the essence of its being, then it would to all intents and purposes speak Eltonian” (1995:65-66). In discussions with people who had been taught by or heard Elton speak at conferences, I was reminded that it was important to keep in context the teaching methodologies of the time, one in which professors were not to be questioned or challenged. Rather, they should be listened to and scathing criticism given to new postgraduates in their seminar presentations was regarded as helpful. Scholarship was vertical and hierarchical in that Professors spoke down to students from the heights of expertise to the crude and unformed student of history.

Equally, it is significant to note the opportunity for discussion with others remained quite localised during the 1970s but in current times, with the advent of the Internet, students and researchers partake in a multitude of online engagements that traverse the world. In Carr and Elton’s time, we find references to British, Continental and American schools of thought. The physical distance meant limited contact between the three, and one imagines prime conditions for “us and them” attitudes to be cemented. The demographics of universities were also changing at this time. Students were no longer from the privileged classes, but arriving from a diverse social background and accompanied by their associated cultural capital. To understand the furore of the Carr-Elton debate, one must imagine a changing of teaching pedagogy, as well as a changing world.

Amid this changing world were emerging new ideas and perspectives from which one could ask questions of the past. The impact of the Annales School, founded in 1916, for example, had begun to spread and unsettle many traditionalist views. The Annales historians sought to disregard compartmentalism and labels, to seek a “total history” unencumbered by previous reductionism (Tosh, 1987:90).

In the 1930s, Collingwood had begun to talk about research as imaginative thinking or re-enactment of the past (Dray, 1995:32). He also argued that historians of the time merely applied a random “scissors and paste” approach that lacked the benefits of a problem-based approach (A. Clark, 2003:108). Collingwood was a proponent for change and progress in historical method. Unlike many historiographers, he did not seek to supplant by derision, recognising generational change “as not replacement of the bad with the good but the good with the better” (Collingwood, 1976:327).
Despite these developments, as Tosh claimed, there remained a belief that “commonsense” and a general knowledge of history were the necessary tools required by historians (1987:vii). It is not hard to imagine the Eltonian perspective as a long lasting and embedded way of thinking. The notion of commonsense is a constructed perspective and marked by those who hold power to name it as such. What is regarded as commonsense by one individual or group will not necessarily be shared by another. This became the focus of many criticisms of empiricist research. This hegemonic construct, however embedded, was increasingly at risk with new waves of thinking emerging with each generation. Thus, we saw the emergence and influence of oppositional ways of thinking such as Marxist and Feminist research, designed specifically to undo “commonsense” and expose traditional presentations of history as privileged white male constructs.

The 1960s was a period of significant change, and on the fringes of university History departments we can see there was a shift towards social history. Among some of the most significant developments, was the emergence of History from Below, the history of ordinary people and their lives. This was developed by both Marxists and historians of the Annales School in the 1960s (Docker & Curthoys, 2006:126). E. P. Thompson’s (1965) publication The Making of the English Working Class, offered a political alternative to the traditional focus on the privileged and the elite constructions of history. Thompson described his work as reflective of “socialist humanism” and argued that people “make their own history” (Tosh, 1987:144-5). The publication also represents a radical departure from the typical voice used by historians. Joan Wallach Scott wrote of Thompson:

Thompson did not present himself as an analyst outside the historically situated discourse; instead he spoke from within it as an advocate. Positioning himself as the carrier of historical memory. (1988:71)

As Scott noted, despite the significance of Thompson’s work, feminist commentators continued to observe the awkward and marginal presence of women (1988:72). This trend would continue, in another important development during this period, the “History Workshop”. Established by Raphael Samuel in 1967, the History Workshop
had a significant impact on historical knowledge and methodologies. With socialist thinking underpinning their approach, the History Workshop took History outside the academic department and to the working class. As Spongberg noted, however, while this proved groundbreaking in terms of class, this approach remained focused on the male experience (2002:178).

The development of socialist or left wing histories did, however, assist and inspire women seeking to develop women’s history as a definitive subject of history. It was during this period that feminist historians such as Gerder Lerner, Natalie Zemon Davis in the United States of America, Anna Davin in Britain and Ann Curthoys in Australia had begun challenging traditional male histories by asking new questions about women and their place in history (Docker & Curthoys, 2006:167-9). In 1975, Miriam Dixson began the first year long women’s history course in Australia at the University of New England. She published her seminal book, *The Real Matilda: Women and Identity in Australia – 1788 to the Present*, in the following year. The growing focus on historical constructions of class provided an opportunity for many women historians to make another sector of society more visible.

During the 1970s, Oral history began to gain attention. Paul Thompson’s *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* was published in 1978. Like E.P. Thompson, Raphael Samuel and many of the early feminist historians, Paul Thompson’s political background was in socialism and his aim was to bring to light the histories of those previously ignored (Thomson, 2007b:52). Despite the concerted criticisms of positivist or traditional historians, leading oral historian Alistair Thomson argued that the ongoing development and popularity of oral history has had a transformative effect on a wide range of aspects of history. These include political and legal practices, the relationship between memory and history as well as exploring interdisciplinary approaches (Thomson, 2007b:50).

All these developments of the 1960s and 70s, Marxist histories, History from Below, Feminism and Oral History, had a major impact on traditional history and opened the path for interdisciplinary approaches and postmodernism to emerge as a radical and transformative climate of thought. One of the first groundbreaking publications was Michel Foucault’s *Archaeology of Knowledge* first available in 1969 and translated to
English in 1972. Foucault’s work asked new questions of both power and knowledge. He identified the structures of discourse rather than traditional concepts such as chronology, as providing insights into the stories of History (E. A. Clark, 2004:114). As Clark notes, Foucault’s analysis was welcomed by literary scholars but within many History departments the response was less than enthusiastic (2004:114).

The “Linguistic turn”
The linguistic turn generally refers to the major philosophical developments between the 1980s and 1990s. More specifically, sociologists, Denzin and Lincoln identify the period between 1970 and 1986 as being representative of “blurred genres”. The following period, between 1986 and 1990, is identified as a “the crisis of representation” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:3). It was a time of radical re-thinking of language and knowledge and, significantly, its impact was felt across all Arts and Education based disciplines.

For historians, the linguistic turn was largely focused on language (its structure and meanings), narrative and textuality, influenced by the writings of Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and Hayden White (Igger, 1997:120). Many regarded this as the beginning of postmodernism. Academics from all disciplines were encouraged to deconstruct and re-examine language, power, artefacts, texts, and “taken-for-granted” assumptions. In the process, history, as an entity, came under severe scrutiny. Terms such as myth and fiction re-entered the arena, along with a new name “post-structuralism”, and historians responded in various ways.

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese claimed post-structuralism was “a bastard child of history that resembled anthropological ‘thick description’ and of a literary theory in search of its own possible significance” (1989:211). Rather than recognising these ideas as part of another generation of thought, historians such as Fox-Genovese sought to discredit and exclude them from real history. Many agreed that postmodernism lacked rigour, was representative of a fad and in turn would be unlikely to survive as a dominant approach. Indeed, some criticisms seem to go so far as to argue that all “postmodernists” would deny the existence of any events in history all together.
Postmodernism, like most theoretical positions asks questions; as to how the past is examined, who examines it, what is the nature of the discourse, what are the absences, and what power and privilege positions have shaped that discourse? To argue that postmodernists believe “events” did not exist seems to reflect a refusal to actually engage with the postmodern discourse at any level.

In many history departments, teachers of history continued to promote traditional empiricist thinking with fringe or alternative histories offered as sites of interest rather than the basis for historical thinking. This was the theoretical climate when I, and my research participants, entered higher education. We saw the diversity suggested by Tosh and Gardiner, yet the grounding that historians such as Halphen laid, seemed to weigh heavily. These new areas of research seemed to exist on the fringe of real history, and my impression was that amid all these we were expected to focus on the old standards: objectivity, chronology, causality and facts. Indeed, despite the fascinating developments between the 1920s and 1970s, a basic strand of history appeared to have survived. For the critics, it remained limited in its encouragement of critical thinking. Keith Jenkins wrote:

Protected by a continued adherence to common-sense empiricism and realist notions of representation and truth, most historians … have been resistant to that postmodernism which has effected so many of their colleagues in adjacent discourses. Their residual disinterest in and/or hostility to philosophy has enabled them to cling to an ostensible “a” or anti-theoretical position. (1997:1)

Hayden White (1998) made a similar claim in an interview with Ewa Domanska suggesting:

The discipline of history is systematically anti-theoretical. Historians think of themselves as being empirical and they are, but they are not philosophically empirical. They are empirical in a common sense way – in an ordinary everyday way. That is why Marxism in the United States was always regarded as something that was not really genuinely historical because it had theory. And Marxism, of course, was always criticizing bourgeois historians because they had no theory. (Domanska, 1998:15)
Jenkin’s and White’s suggestion that historians unknowingly position themselves in an “anti-theoretical” stance is provocative, yet makes sense. If academics do not deconstruct their own thinking and, in particular, consider the exclusionary boundaries they establish, there is a risk of producing limited histories. Certainly, this restrictiveness risks undermining the most basic of premises that underpins any exploration and creation of knowledge; that we consider all the things that can impact on the resources we use and the texts we produce. Clearly critics of postmodernism would not agree. They might argue that they are protecting a well defined and long standing discipline, essential to the basis of Western civilisation. Indeed, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese sees the criticisms of empiricism by postmodernists as part of a power grab: “For those most intent upon discrediting ‘traditional’ history are no less intent upon claiming its mantle for themselves” (1999:40).

What is at the heart of this debate? The accusations seemed increasingly vitriolic, personal and as a journey man/woman through this debate, I wonder if the debate shifts us from being lovers of history to competitive mud-slingers. As Elizabeth Clark asks, “What are these obituaries about? Why are these historians crying murder?” (E. A. Clark, 2004:1).

I am reminded that History is a powerful tool, worth fighting for. Those who write it can shape a nation’s thinking, those who teach it can ensure or erase a political standpoint, and those who absorb it become the carriers of political thought. The power and privilege of the historian is not disregarded within the debate by either side of the divide. As Daniel Heinsius stated in 1613, “If History had no professorship, if all the universities closed, she will always have a hospitable reception in palaces and in the innermost chambers of Kings and Princes” (cited in Southgate, 2000:59). Similarly, Samuel Butler claimed in 1901: “It has been said that though God cannot alter the past, historians can” (cited in Southgate, 2000:51).

The role of the historian is without doubt a powerful one, so when postmodernists began reviewing the way history could be ‘done’, resistance was inevitable. I am reminded of the way in which Elton wrote of the emergence of historians who employed “scientific, ordered, systematic study” in the nineteenth century and who...
were “superior” and “better scholars” than those before them (1976:14). I have been unable to find specific reference to how the established historians of that earlier period had responded to the new modern history Elton described, however one would imagine that they might not have welcomed such analysis. I read, with interest, however, that in Elton’s analysis he paid tribute to “that elderly trinity”, such as Frederick Maitland and Lewis Namier, whose knowledge and ability “surpasses many even of the good moderns”, but he says it is the different “attitude and purpose” towards history that arises from adopting a scientific approach that leads to a better scholarship (1976:15). I wonder if he might have considered the same applied with later emergent approaches, including the likes of Collingwood and later, postmodernism. Or perhaps he regarded his own time and approach as singularly superior throughout all time.

Postmodernist approaches, like the modernist, were to arrive on the scene regardless of the type of welcome they would receive and, in turn, would alter and add to the perceptions of History. Among some of the most vocal critics of postmodernism are Elton, Marwick and Igger. Elton named postmodernist historians as “Prophets of uncertainty, relativism and individual self love, to the point where history is said to have no independent reality at all” (1991:54). This resistance comes in many forms. Arthur Marwick claimed “Postmodernist ideas about language and the ‘subject’ make for exciting novels but they are a menace to serious historical study” and that they “stifle genuine curiosity about the past” (1995:29). George Igger warns his readers of the fraudulent writers. He conceded the road to truth was problematic, but retained the conviction that there was indeed a single truth; “the historian is always on the lookout for the forgery and falsification and thus operates with a notion of truth, however complex and incomplete the road to it might be” (Igger, 1997:140). I am troubled by Igger’s notion of falsification, of the process of exclusion, and single truth, yet it is a common thread for many theorists. Munslow suggested,

Instead of beginning with the past we should start with its representation, because it is only by doing this that we challenge the belief that there is a discoverable and accurately representable truthfulness in the reality of the past. (1997:2)
As I read Arthur Marwick, I am reminded of the type of language and emotion used in theoretical debate, such as in *Knowledge and Language: History, the Humanities, the Sciences*. He uses the word “fundamental” three times in his abstract. The article is peppered with phrases of exclusion and admonishment.

> Only practising scientists and practising historians know the effort and dedication needed to undertake research and carry it through to successful publication …, but the Foucauldians simply do not understand the drive to find out. (Marwick, 2002:3)

He claims feminists, queer, multiculturalists and ecological critiques “are wrong (are) deeply flawed (and are) prone to shoddy research” (Marwick, 2002:4).

Marwick suggests Historians should be likened to scientists and attacks the interdisciplinary, the postmodern, the Marxist and of course the ‘dubious’ cultural theorists (2002:5). Clearly, in Marwick’s perception of history, good history is produced in one way and the interlopers are treading in waters where they do not belong, producing work that can never meet Historical standards. I read on awaiting a softening, awaiting acknowledgement of a changing world of academia which history cannot ignore. Yet, the preservation of traditional historical methods as an enclosed body of thought is imperative.

I re-read some of the criticisms and find that Fox-Genovese claimed that postmodernism “aims not to drain politics from history but to replace one politics with another” (Fox-Genovese, 1999:41). Her point is valid and I have to imagine how it might feel to see a discipline facing the barrage of philosophical and political change. Most certainly postmodernism is political, although whether it is intended to entirely replace empiricism is debatable. From my reading, it seems to offer an alternative position rather than a replacement.

Marwick’s criticisms of feminist historians evoked a personal and emotional response. I felt compelled to ask, with what authority did Marwick speak and why did he use such language? And I recall my M.Litt. supervisor, Dr John Ferry, questioning me about the strength of attack compared to the effort of understanding and
exploration. He advised that it is easy to be oppositional and to name theoretical positions with a simplistic dismissive voice. Where, I wondered, was his evidence in dismissing feminist history in a mere sentence and claiming its downfall is that it fails “to counter check from several angles” (Marwick, 2002:12). This suggested that feminists, queer theorists and others are so singly focused that they do not take into account the great bulk of historical knowledge. Surely, it is their examination of the very nature of this knowledge that had prompted them to begin to ask gendered or sexualised questions of the historical representation.

Amateur Historians

Postmodernists are not the only historians in the sights of critics. Amateur historians have raised the ire of many. Attending history conferences, such as the Australian Historical Association and the International Oral History Conference, it was evident to me in post-presentation discussions that the work of those outside the profession, such as journalists and writers of historical fiction, raised many concerns about rigour and research practices. There are many other people working in the heritage field who work in an amateur capacity. Hamerow suggests:

The dramatic increase in public interest in heritage and history should not be ignored by the professional historian. Nor should the amateur historians be dismissed. The question is whether professional Historians will be able to satisfy it (the demand) or whether it will be left increasingly to gifted amateurs who compensate by vigour of their prose and vividness of their imagination for the technical shortcomings from which their work occasionally suffers. (Hamerow, 1987:34)

I wonder about the nature of professionalism and the development of hierarchies. In this thesis, I explore the storylines that intersect the constructed hierarchy that creates terms such as “professional” and “amateur”. Certainly, one can understand the desire to create a professional body that ensures high quality services and that maintains a strong sense of self. But I wonder about the benchmarks and the criteria, who makes the judgements and on what basis? Who is excluded and what impact might the exclusion process have on those outside the group? I suspect that Hamerow is correct
in describing amateurs as vigorous and imaginative, and without doubt amateur
groups and individuals thrive. I will explore some of these questions in Chapter 6
when I examine the many ways my participants enacted their passion for history in
the public sphere.

**Generational Debates**

I was resistant to wholehearted dismissal of methods, be it empiricist or postmodern,
and found solace in Hamerow’s comments.

> For about two thousand years history has continued to be written in a
haphazard hit and miss fashion, intermingling scholarship with theological
speculation, philosophical reflection, moral uplift and national pride … the
lack of systematic methodology and autonomous purpose, however, was in no
way incompatible with the creation of important works of historical learning.

(1987:39)

My concern lay with the *knowing* that “we now have got it right”. Is Hamerow no less
influenced by his times and culture than Thucydides or Einhard? Nancy Partner
suggested, “Historians tend to get nervous rapidly at any threat, however subtle, to the
‘out-thereness’ of the ultimate term of reference, because their world is no longer
there at all” (1986:95). Similarly, Keith Jenkins talked about the fear of history being
relegated to myth. But what if, as both authors suggest, this is not a looming
catastrophe? What if these battles are no more than recent representations of the
Carr/Elton debates? What if the modernist and postmodernist divide is merely
reflective of generational changes and that with each generation new questions are
raised and new knowledge created?

Certainly, some historians have argued that the questions raised by postmodernists are
hardly new. Fitzhugh and Leckie suggest that

> Many of the positions associated with postmodernism – in particular, critiques
of historians’ objectivity, acceptance of cultural relativism, and scepticism with
regard to the bases of moral and political agency – are not unique to postmodern
thought, and were widespread among professional historians by the end of the progressive era. (2001:61)

Equally Howard Brasted has written:

For the questions Thucydides posed of the fledging discipline of history so long ago have been levelled again in concerted fashion by science in the 20th century and postmodernism over the last 30 years. (Brasted, 2005:6)

Similarly, John Docker and Ann Curthoys explored at length the writings of Herodotus and the connections that could be made with postmodern approaches to genre, story telling, value in conflicting and multiple sources (2006:194).

I would agree to a large degree that some of the questions are not new, but the context from which the historian voice emerges, is. Contemporary events and subsequent philosophical dilemmas have shaped our awareness. Thus, we are now asking different questions informed by the development of 20th century feminism and by the broad influence of Marxism. We ask gendered and class based questions and we ask different questions about race given our new understanding of power constructs. The new questions arise from the deconstruction of hegemony and privilege. One would expect that new questions will continue to arise as we discover new considerations of present human life, which we can, in turn, ask of the past. I will argue that this process is often about the transformative nature of knowledge.

**The Present and the Past**

There is considerable agreement amongst historians that understanding the present is vital to knowing the past and vice versa. As Becker stated

> The present doesn’t exist for us, or it is at best no more than an infinitesimal point in time, gone before we can note it as the present. Nevertheless, we must have a present; and so we create one by robbing the past, by holding on to the most recent events and pretending that they all belong to our immediate perceptions. (1932:226)
Similarly, Lowenthal claimed:

Memory, I have suggested, innately and immediately distinguishable from the present experience. The distinction between the historical past and the present is not innate but acquired, and often uncertain or absent. (1999:231)

At this stage in my reading I began to feel concerned that I had not found resolution. Comments by Joan Sangster (1998:95) that “inherent idealism of some poststructural theory” simply identifying privilege by including other voices does not undo the hierarchy. It reminded me that I was also looking for transformative knowledge and therefore needed to look further. Having traversed some of the debates over the empiricist and postmodern divide, I will now examine women’s history as a site for transformative knowledge making.

**Women’s History**

The lure, or sense of connection, toward women’s history, has driven many of my choices in historical study, both undergraduate and postgraduate. Much of the focus of this thesis is centred on women and their experiences. As I interrogated women’s perceptions and production of historical thinking and writing, it seemed a natural shift to examine “women’s history” amid the wider realm of historical practice. It became clear to me that there was no single approach to women’s history, as women historians vary considerably in their theoretical grounding and preference, as devoted empiricists, Marxists or poststructuralists. The common thread, however, was a focus on women’s experience and the need to challenge preconceived views of power, agency and representations of women. It was productive to examine not only the diversity within women’s history, but to also look at the types of questions women historians were asking of their sources.

My feminist idealism led me to wonder if, just as patriarchy evolves, self-perpetuates and embeds itself across the spectrum of history, a connective woman thread might similarly foster a historic sisterhood, transcending both women’s academic writing and the wider community via oral sources, through objects and through...
intergenerational nurturing and teaching. I looked for an imagined space for women’s historical voice, reflecting the written, the spoken, the known and the held. I have discovered that there was as much diversity in the perception of ‘woman’ as in any category within history.

I was reminded of the fragmentary nature of research, and of the need to re-question my own motives, idealism and assumptions. Amid this uncertainty, I have re-focused on what women’s history as a genre offers women and how women have historicised themselves, as well as what women’s history has brought to the broader historical knowledge. I was buoyed by the work of Ewa Domanska, who argued that rather than seeing women’s history as a crisis in history writing, we can regard it as a “crisis in traditional views of history. In fact there has been a tremendous increase in historical interest and a concentration of aspects of history that were previously ignored” (1998:108).

The logical place to begin was with women historians of the past, how they are/were interpreted and remembered. These women wrote and spoke in a field dominated and constructed by men. Some did not even regard themselves as historians and certainly not all women historians have seen themselves as feminists. Accompanying this thought was a nagging concern derived from observations of contemporary radical women who spoke loudly or differently and from outside the celebrated norm. How will they be remembered and documented? And if their stories are marked by their otherness, how might the stories of earlier different women be marked?

**Beginnings of Women’s History**

Sandie Holguin (1999:381) provides a time line glimpse of women historians. She suggested there have been four phases: the first being a period where “historians [were] seeking equality in political, social and legal spheres”. She cited Christine de Pizan from the 15th century and the Grimke sisters of the 19th century. Secondly there were the existentialists, such as Simone de Beauvoir, who traced the origins of patriarchy. Gerder Lerner described this as the “oppression model”. The 1970s saw a new phase that described the grand narrative. Finally, the most recent period, is one in which women have drawn from anthropology, post structuralism and psychoanalysis. Holgiun also noted that this final period challenged periodisation.
My initial reading of these categories worried me. Reduction to a few categories could not reflect the multiplicity, although it did serve as a starting point. Indeed I was intrigued by the idea that feminist histories erased periodisation. The example Holguin selected was Joan Kelly-Gadol, who wrote the “path breaking” text *Did Women Have a Renaissance?* Published in 1974, Kelly-Gadol showed that the European Renaissance was a Renaissance for men, not women for whom it was a period that consolidated and created restrictive life roles. Mary Spongberg confirmed the way in which periodisation could be perceived as a phallocentric construct and she suggested that women historians needed to reassess the idea of simply adding women to the pre-written narrative (2002:186-7). Similarly, Bonnie G. Smith noted that in the early years of the emergence of women’s history there was expectation that this would lead to changes in periodisation and that “the cast of historical characters” as well as “traditional interpretations” would undergo change (B. G. Smith, 1998:1). Such was the enthusiasm and optimism for the potential of women’s history.

In later chapters, I will expand on the idea that women have written and spoken about time in different ways to men. Kristeva’s view (1986:191) was that women tended to follow a more linear sense of time, which raised more questions about what this means for the type of history written by men, how the historians historicised themselves, the agency of the women historian, as well as the agency of her history. What are these histories going to “do” amid the wider sphere of history? Clearly Kelly-Gadol’s work had the potential to undo longstanding beliefs about the long accepted categories in history.

**Emergence of Women’s History**

The beginnings of women working as historians and women as subjects of history are difficult to define. In a professional sense, for example, Elton (1967) referred to both students and teachers of history as men throughout his text, *The Practice of History*. This was published in the 1960s, many years after women had begun entering universities. This is reflective of the invisibility of practicing women historians, as well as a slow and, perhaps reluctant, recognition of women entering tertiary studies in the 1950s and 60s. Elton’s preference to refer to tertiary students as men is not
necessarily deliberately misogynist, rather it reflects the traditional and well accepted view that only men studied and practiced history. It will become evident in feminist historiographical studies, as discussed below, that this was not in fact the case.

The presentation of women as a subject of history has equally been problematic. Feminist historian, Olwen Hufton (1990:82), studied the representations of women in male doctrines of the ancient historians. There she found images of women as unworthy, the unclean and the “defective being” of the Greek traditions and representations of the irrational. She reminded her readers that the Greek word for uterus and hysteria was virtually the same. Finally, she asked how women lived with such a burden (Hufton, 1990:85). In Hugh Lloyd-Jones’ analysis of the satric poem on women by the 7th century BC poet, Semonides of Amorgos, he discussed ten known types of women. In his analysis nine of them were “disagreeable” and unsuitable as wives. Each was discussed in relation to an animal, with the only agreeable woman being one who was likened to a bee (1975:12).

Deborah Gera compared this poem with the “Tractus De Mulierbus” a Greek text that described fourteen women who excelled primarily on the battlefield in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. (1997:3). In the Tractus De Mulierbus women’s best qualities were those that were considered “manly”, yet in Semonides’ (who she suggests is a misogynist) poem, the ideal womanly qualities, as seen in the bee woman, we see the opposite (Gera, 1997:51). The bee woman’s qualities are deeply subservient. As a novice reader in the field of Ancient History, I found Gera’s book to be particularly thorough and well informed by her feminist thinking. In contrast, reading Lloyd-Jones, I felt he almost celebrated Semonides’s misogyny and the joke on the qualities of women. The inclusion of a series of modern sculptures depicting each animal and their characteristics seemed to compound this.

For later periods, such as the Renaissance and Enlightenment, I turned to feminist historians, Zemon Davis and Farge who suggested, “Woman was not revealed but invented, defined by means of a learned gaze that inevitably robbed her of her substance” (1993:1). They suggested
Taking women seriously involves reconstructing their actions within the context of the relations that men and women have instituted between themselves. It involves viewing relations between the sexes as a social construct whose history can and should be an object of study. (1993:2)

Mary Spongberg provided an extensive analysis of famous women as subjects of masculine history. She argued that Boadicea, “was frequently invoked to show the dangers of female rule, as much for her insubordination to masculine authority as to her resistance to Roman rule” (2002:36). Similarly, Spongberg wrote that representations of women in authority in the sixteenth century were interfering and represented “as the source of social ills”. She cited Catherine de Medici in France and Mary Tudor in England as such examples (Spongberg, 2002:36). By the late eighteenth century women were still regarded as bringing men and nations “to the brink of disaster” as seen in the life and death of Maria Antoinette. Spongberg suggested, “the idea that gender disorder led to political disorder became common place of counter-revolutionary and revolutionary discourse” (2002:54).

While women have not been entirely absent from history writing, it is important to examine the ways in which they have been represented. What has been significant is the othering, judging and blaming that has so often occurred. In Australian history, Anne Summers suggested in her 1975 book, *Damned Whores and God’s Police*, a historical dichotomy in the representation of women. She said that “a particularly rigid dualistic notion of women’s function was embodied in two stereotypes … that women are either good or evil” (1975:67).

**Women as Historians**

Research on women historians shows that prolific and skilled production of history did not ensure recognition, nor did the sort of social history many women were producing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries count as real history. It should be surprising that in the 1960s Elton saw fit to only refer to male historians, yet an examination of the historiography of women historians in research by historians such as Kathryn Kish Sklar (1975), Natalie Zemon Davis (1980), Bonnie G Smith (1984), Joan Wallach Scott (1988) and Mary Spongberg (2002) it is evident that women historians did exist, but perhaps were merely tolerated and not taken seriously.
In her extensive research on “The Contribution of Women to Modern Historiography in Great Britain, France and the United States, 1750 – 1940”, Bonnie G Smith suggests the historiography of women historians is largely ‘uncharted’ (1984:709). Yet it was evident in the work of Smith, Sklar and Zemon Davis, that women historians were asking poignant questions of the subject of women and producing diverse histories. Natalie Zemon Davis wrote of women historians in the period 1400 to 1820:

All of them were conscious of the relation of their sex to their work; and all of them somehow took up woman as a subject – whether in their self-presentation to their readers in words or pictures or in writing tracts on the education of females or in including and commenting on women in the historical record. (1980:174)

Zemon Davis outlined the criteria from which she identified women as historians as having access to historical materials, access to the genre of history and having a sense of connection with public life (1980:156-7). Of the three historians examined by Zemon Davis, Christine de Pisan, Catharine Macauley and Madame de Stael, she suggests all of them wrote their histories with:

A note of passion, almost tinged with prophecy, as they plead for peace or impartiality or liberty. Male historians could also speak for their values with ador, but the women seem to regard themselves as special truth-tellers, even when they worry that their facts might not be believed. (Zemon Davis, 1980:174)

Bonnie G Smith (1984) provides an extensive analysis and documentation, asserting the often prolific production of women historians. For example, Louise Keralio Robert wrote a four volume biography of Elizabeth I and later a fourteen volume anthology of women’s writings in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (1984:711). At the same time, several anthologies of “great” women in history were also being produced by women authors (B. G. Smith, 1984:714). Despite the prolific and often skilled productions, women historians did not seem to gain recognition.

Kathryn Kish Sklar identified three periods from which she would classify the women as historians. The first period, women born prior to 1800, was defined as historians who “wrote history within the context of a specific community to which they were committed,” while the second referred to those born between 1800 and 1850. This group she suggested worked within the Victorian literary genre, one that embraced both analysis and fiction. The third group, born after 1850, she identified as having worked within what we would regard as the realm of professional historians (Sklar, 1975:172). Sklar’s research identified the ways in which the category of gender shifted throughout her selected periods (1975:176). She demonstrated the way in which women began to create support networks in the later period. Despite the fact that women were doing the work of professional historians, they remained outside the profession itself. In response, the women began to recognise their “collective circumstance.” This recognition, and their exclusion from the American Historical Association annual convention in 1929, led to the formation of the Lakeville History Conference. In 1934, this group would be renamed the Berkshire History Conference (Sklar, 1975:181-2). This conference continues today and is recognised for its contribution to the scholarship of women’s history.

The work of historiographers, Smith, Sklar and Zemon Davis is particularly important in that they undid the perception that women were not writing history until the late nineteenth century. There had been the perception that it was only at this time we saw the “first wave of women’s history” and as Linda Gordon argued historians should begin the story of women historians with women such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Alice Clark (1986:20). Gordon suggested that even these women were largely forgotten. In the last thirty years, feminist researchers have begun to address the way in which women historians of this period are perceived.

Political allegiances appear to have strongly influenced how readers of women’s history perceive the contributions of women historians. Linda Gordon (1986:22) suggested that writers such as Mary Beard “wrote and embodied women’s capability, not their fragility.” Gordon contrasted Beard with Simone de Beauvoir’s appeal to
feminists through her confrontation of masculine domination. Dale Spender suggested that Beard’s contributions to women’s history was considerably inadequate and remained “largely neglected, rarely quoted and relegated at times to the status of her husband’s collaborator” (1992:690). Like Gordon, Spender attributed some of this to Beard’s political stance that women’s collective power is and has been underestimated and that women’s complicity had a part to play in the silencing of women (1992:690).

Barbara Caine noted the way Mary Wollstonecraft was regarded as a “shadowy and disreputable presence” in the nineteenth century (1997:262). This relegation of women to the shadows or to invisibility is a common problem and is not limited to women historians, despite new revelations that continue to emerge from recent histories. Dale Spender devoted an entire book to addressing the invisibility of women activists between the time of the suffragettes, the “first wave” of feminism and the “second wave” in the 1970s. This period is a time that has been regarded as “when there was no women’s movement.” One of the activists interviewed, Mary Stott, exclaimed “there was always a women’s movement!” This statement provided Spender with her title for her book (Spender, 1983).

I regard the historiography of women historians to be far from complete. There is much more to be researched and analysed. This will be particularly evident as the boundaries between genres and categories of history blur as seen in Sklar’s analysis of women writing’s and the changing ways in which women supported each other, first through readership and later through concerted and supportive networking.

One of the more significant publications to emerge in recent years was Mary Spongberg’s (2002) Writing Women’s History Since The Renaissance. Spongberg followed on from Bonnie G Smith’s work and provided an extensive analysis of women historians and their work. She suggested, “Women’s engagement with historical writing cannot be understood except in relation to the emergence of feminist consciousness” (Spongberg, 2002:8). In this context, Spongberg presented women’s history as possessing the potential for feminist activism “as it involved the insertion of women’s subjectivity into an ostensibly masculinist discourse” (2002:8). This potential for feminist agency within women’s history, late in my exploratory literary
journey, provided me with a new-found affirmation and encouragement. The stories of women historians and the focus on women as subjects and agents in history, all against a backdrop of masculinist historical traditions, offered extensive opportunities for re-envisioning historiography, as well as feminism.

**Women’s History performs for Itself: as Subjects of History**

Women’s history, like other genres of history, performs for itself. It often seeks to address absences, undo dichotomies and acts as a mode of resistance to patriarchy. It has its own agenda, a diverse agenda perhaps, but an agenda none-the-less. These sentiments are echoed by Lowder-Newton:

> Like social historians, finally feminist historians operated out of an experience of and a commitment to social change. Thus they were alert to the ways in which hegemonic ideologies and oppressive social relations might operate unevenly across an entire culture. (1989:154)

Similarly, Hufton wrote,

> If I can generate some appreciation of that struggle, of such rewards as were to be had, and of what women cared about in times past, I shall, in my own esteem at least, have written women’s history. (1990:85)

Judith Lowder Newton suggested that on the basis of historical marginalisation women’s view of history needs some re-definition.

> As these once invisible persons, relations, institutions, ideologies, and culture become visible, become part of “history” their relation to the already visible, the larger economic and political structures usually assigned to men began to be explored. (1989:154)

To undo staid stories of passiveness and lack of agency in histories of male power and privilege, many women writers have sought to document the underlying or adjacent storylines. This can be seen in the histories of the women’s movement, in its three recognised phases, (and its in-between stages), from the suffragettes to the emergence
of radical feminism in the 1970s and the current more liberal feminist climate of the new century. These histories laid the ground work for even more storylines, which do not necessarily sit within a resistance or oppositional genre, but rather addressed the lives of women, both ordinary and extraordinary, with the rise of feminism as an ideological, as well as physical backdrop.

In doing so, old dichotomies are slowly rewritten or erased. The multiplicity of women’s lives in the past was allowed to emerge. As Gordon suggested;

> Our collective goal ought to be to advance a theoretical framework to our scholarship that transcends the victim/heroine, domination/resistance dualism and incorporates the varied experiences of women. (1986:25)

There is more to this story than absences, it is reflective of different ways of storying, telling and perceiving. These categories contain a multiplicity within themselves. Bonnie G Smith intrigued me with her return to the “mirror of history” and her suggestion that the mirror “traditionally works better if the observer is male” (B. G. Smith, 1998:3). Indeed, she explored the notion that scholarly work / research was almost always devised from the male perspective. She cited various women researchers who had identified the way in which gendered representations were evident in music, philosophy and scientific research. For example, in the way animal species have been named and plant functions were described. In turn she asked if Historic discourse was also equally embedded in the masculine (B. G. Smith, 1998:4).

**Criticisms of Women’s History**

The development of women’s history as a genre of History, from the 1970s, was therefore greeted with a mixture of silence, dismissiveness and direct attack in some quarters. In the 1970s, as women’s history began to emerge as a historical field of study, reaction and resistance was, it seemed, inevitable. Arlette Farge suggested:

> While many reactions were aroused both within feminism and without, passionate and not so passionate, the university institution as a whole greeted it with as official silence which in itself constituted part of its history. (1992:10)
Indeed Farge suggests the emergence of working class history in universities, in the same period, was never questioned in this way (1992:14). The silence, however, could not be sustained, just as the growth of interest could not be dissipated. Joan Wallach Scott suggested that male academics then sought to discredit women’s history as not real history. Indeed, she suggested it was named as an

Ideology (that is knowledge distorted by considerations of interest) is described as, by its very nature, infecting and so disqualifies intellectual work. The label “ideological” attaches to dissenting views of the notion of unacceptability and gives prevailing views the status of unassailable law or ‘truth’. (1991:52)

As I read Scott’s article, I wondered how might a sustained argument discredit women’s history? Scott provided some illuminating examples. For instance, Norman Hampton dismissed a history of women in France in the nineteenth century as “uterine history”. Scott succinctly suggested that Hampton might have resisted the notion that his work might be categorised as “phallic history” (1991:52). It became evident in Scott’s writing that the resistance to feminist ideology emerged as an influential standpoint in academia, seemingly representing a body of anti-feminist thinking. How much this was to do with misogyny or protection of a masculine professional privilege remains debatable. I found this uncomfortable reading and I am unsure how fruitful deconstructing these criticisms would be. I acknowledge that there are male academics that still regard women’s history as unnecessary and flawed. In contrast, I found my exploration of the historiography of women’s history rewarding and that it pointed to many yet to be explored facets of history. These will be reported in more detail in Chapter 8 of this thesis.

**Herstory: a singular History?**

In contrast to the name-calling of Hampton and the sweeping statements of others, there has been considerable productive criticisms of women’s history. Indeed, one of the most innovative and exciting developments, “herstory”, has come under scrutiny in recent years. First cited in Robin Morgan’s (1970) iconic book *Sisterhood is Powerful*, Herstory offered an alternative history to the masculine traditions of History. As Joan Wallach Scott suggested, it was used in various ways: “Some historians gather evidence about women to demonstrate their essential likeness as
historical subjects to men” (1988:18). Scott has argued that while others have used herstory to “challenge received interpretations of progress and regress … [thus] a new narrative, different periodisation, and different causes” emerged under the herstory banner (1988:19).

Critics of herstory came early from within the women’s movement itself. Audrey Lorde was among the first to note the problematic nature of what some believed could become a singular story. She said that herstory “threatens to become a colourless narrative” (cited in Elam, 1997:68). Increasingly, this criticism pointed towards feminism in general, that it was / is a middle-class ‘white’ movement that ignores or has missed the opportunity to look at women of all class and ethnic backgrounds and that it represented a new sort of privilege, silencing women from other sectors of society.

Joan Wallach Scott also wrote of her concern that herstory, “sometimes conflates two separate operations: the valuation of women’s experience and the positive assessment of everything women said or did” (1988:20). Secondly, she wrote of her concern of the implications of a perceived separatism that could potentially emerge (1988:21). It would seem, in the context of historiography, the emergence of herstory was an important and popular stepping stone for women’s history. The questions and concerns that have been raised as a result can only add to the discourse that surrounds the notion of women as writers and as subjects of history.

In questioning the position of women as subjects of wider history, Hufton suggested it was worthwhile to ask “How many mythological images of women in the past are the creations of historians” (1990:83). To gain a better understanding of women’s lives in the seventeenth century, she suggested that the economic factors and the rule of the church must be considered. By linking economic growth and employment, Hufton discovered a bleak picture. She surmised, “A history of poverty is invariably largely a history of women” (1990:84). She cited the church, its history and how its social rules limited and shaped the possibilities in women’s lives. Yet, she reminded her readers “When the French revolution demolished the church the women reconstructed it” (1990:84). The power and agency of women in history seemed to fluctuate and needed more analysis as conflicting stories continued to emerge. Among the elite,
women were often “pawns”. Their marriages were linked to political arrangements (1990:85). Hufton concluded almost in bitter tones, that the picture of the contented productive woman in the home in the seventeenth century was a farcical image. Rather she said:

I see women perpetually in the meanest jobs and dependant on the upturns of the economy to permit them even a limited entrée into more skilled work: at the next downturn they return to whence they came. (Hufton, 1990:85 emphasis is original)

Hufton’s article provided a brief insight into the skewering of standard views of women’s agency. I regard such reminders of the sweeping generalising that can reduce women’s experience in the past and, indeed, establish absence as fact. She wrote,

I discern, over time, limited revisionism in how women were talked about or treated in law. When I see seventeenth and eighteenth-century women demanding religious or economic equality, I find myself resentful of a definition of first-wave feminism which locates the struggle in the late nineteenth century. (Hufton, 1990:85)

Hufton’s resentment, like Dale Spender’s, was well placed and we see can see similar concerns in histories produced in Passions of the First Wave Feminists (2001), by Susan Magarey.

In a conscious re-appraisal of the histories written by Australian women historians, including Germaine Greer, Anne Summers, Marilyn Lake and Pat Grimshaw, Magarey claimed,

How astonishingly wrong we have all been! The women engaged in the Woman Movement – what today is most often called First Wave Feminism – were as various as we are, their politics complex and wide ranging, usually far more adventurous than current representations of them could even begin to suggest. (2001:2)
The retelling of the standard texts on which my own learning was grounded is refreshing and reflective of the need for historians and consumers of historical texts to remain open to change and re-appraisal. And this is no small task. The radical feminist writings and books such as Anne Summer’s (1975) *Damned Whores and God’s Police* had a life changing impact on me as a young adult. As Curthoys (1988:30) noted, the book largely focused on non-Indigenous women; however, Summer’s interrogation of embedded historical stereotypes proved invaluable to the growing genre of women’s history in Australia. This book remains one of the markers in the development of my own feminist historical consciousness.

Addressing absences has been a political statement throughout women’s history. It is, however, not a simple process. In my research, I have been intent on a celebratory approach, looking for storylines that go beyond the dichotomy of the forgotten and the remembered. I also wanted to explore and even historicise the undoing, the writing, the rewriting and embodied nature of “doing” history. It was more than making space for women in the past and more than discovering women “behind” male leaders. I wondered about the purposefulness, both embodied and ideological, and the links with a sense of the matrilineal and of historic sisterhood. Indeed amid this imagined storyline, I suspect there was a sense of the problematic, of the lack of resolution and of challenge. From a poststructuralist perspective, emergent and troublesome sites of speaking and writing can be enormously productive.

I was reminded of the French feminist notion of being positioned outside the symbolic order, beyond the phallocentric language site. Might women’s history writing in fact be reflective of the other and outside the patriarchal discourse that was so embedded in academia? Thus finding a site/s that was entirely comfortable from which to write, is not necessarily always the best position to aim for. When I write from a problematic site, troubled by the embeddedness of patriarchy, by the risks of essentialism and dichotomies and the risks associated with class and race hegemonies, the possibilities for fruitful feminist research is more likely to emerge.

So what might women’s history and women’s storying look like? It must be a site that reflects multiplicity, reflecting resistance tensions and emitting women’s expressions.
Feminism and Postmodernism

Himmelfarb suggested that postmodernism “has been seized most enthusiastically” by feminists (1999:83) as a means of political radicalisation and/or moving away from women’s history as it had been constructed in the recent past. She argued that women could write history as feminists and with a feminist voice and values. As Lowder Newton examined the development of feminist histories, she identified the significance of multiplicity, the tensions and oppression. She questioned the crediting the new shifts in history to postmodernism, suggesting that women’s history intersected and overlapped with the new historicism but had emerged concurrently rather than from postmodernism (Lowder-Newton, 1989:155).

Feminist and Matrilineal Historicism

Maria Tamboukou’s research on feminist genealogies provided more evidence that there are researchers, not only acknowledging a gendered discourse, but using it as a methodological approach (2003:6). Tamboukou uses Foucault’s notion of genealogy and technologies of the self as a means of exploring “forgotten women’s diaries, letters, auto/biographies and memoirs”. She seeks to interrogate women educators living in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries by deconstructing the processes and practices employed in knowledge construction as well as the external circumstances that shaped the writing (Tamboukou, 2003:6). Similarly, I have sought to ask of my data, questions of the constructions of the historicised self, gender relations, historical knowledge and agency.

In this thesis, I have developed the notion of feminist and matrilineal historicism. This refers to, historicising the way women consciously create, receive, preserve and foster and hand on, especially across generations, historical knowledge. The women who participated in my research provided a snap shot of inter-generational practice as developed in Chapter 8. I have identified a number of ways in which women enact matrilineal historicism through materiality, performing and through embodied practises such as writing, storytelling, researching and collecting. The women participants were active agents in this process and possessed an understanding of their
historicised self. It is with this in mind that have explored the world of history theory, examining where matrilineal historicism sat, particularly given the participants’ professional training as historians of the empiricist stock. I will explore this concept in more detail in later chapters. Within this exploration of women’s histories I discovered links, with alternative storylines on women’s history.

**The Future for Women’s History**

The future of women’s history holds great promise and many challenges. Shifts in feminism and the wider perception of it do not always run together. Indeed, as liberal feminism grows, as the diversification of “what is woman” expands, new opportunities for exploration are provided. At the same time, radical feminism is increasingly relegated to the outdated and irrelevant. This shift is of concern as many of the foundations of radical feminism provided the inspiration and methods to clearly identify patriarchy and its mechanisms. As Robyn Rowland and Renate Klein suggested:

> Where socialist, liberal, and more recently postmodernist feminists have convenient existing theoretical structures to manipulate and re-manipulate, stretching them like a skin across the drum of women’s experiences, radical feminism creates an original political and social theory of women’s oppression, and strategies for ending that oppression which come from women’s lived experiences. (1997:9)

They argued that the women-centredness, and the way in which theory was embedded in practice, must be recognised as the strengths of radical feminism; the things that has brought about change. Diane Elam provides another perspective and argued:

> Feminism have their histories, no feminism exists in pure present, standing on foundations entirely of its own making. In different ways, at different moments, debts have been incurred by feminists, debts whose very inescapability marks the limitations of a merely progressive understanding of feminism. (1997:73)

It is important to recognise the way in which theoretical positions evolve, change and borrow from other positions. Ideally, there should be more recognition of the
historical significance of the radical feminist view. The intergenerational (and inter-disciplinary) teaching and learning within feminism has been and remains imperative. In my reading, I find the outward and whole-hearted dismissal of postmodernism by radical feminists unfortunate. Equally, I find the liberal feminist position that dismisses radical feminism as simply biological or essentialist to be of concern. The lessons of each generation of feminism must be regarded as invaluable to considered research and analysis.

Perhaps more importantly, we must analyse feminist historical practice and performance amid an embedded patriarchy. Evelyn M Hammonds (2004) explored Scott’s discussion of the current status of women’s history and the idea that success has brought power. This power is something women need to understand and “cope” with, for it is fraught with all the mechanisms that power relies upon, exclusion and hierarchy. Hammond asks:

Is the nostalgia for a lost sense of a knowable collective feminist history project produced in part by the equal inability to imagine how different strategic, unstable, political, and professional collectivities of feminist historians might act as outsiders within the guild and the academy? (2004:35)

Scott’s article was optimistic and addresses an array of troublesome and delightful issues. As a reader, it gave me affirmation of the subversive nature of women’s history, and the assurance that interdisciplinary research remains the hallmark of feminist scholarship and that we can move beyond the melancholic and celebrate women’s agency and desire (2004:24-26).

**Unnecessarily re-inventing the Wheel: Threads of Postmodernism**

Might aspects of postmodernism already be firmly implanted in the thinking of historians? Another concern may be in the naming and understanding of the terminology. In my reading of critics of postmodernism and poststructuralism, I am continually asking where did these authors find such *fundamental* definitions of postmodernism? I regard the assertions that “postmodernists believe …” and that
poststructuralism is interchangeable with postmodernism to be problematic. The great diversity of thinking and approaches within this realm cannot be so simplistically defined. Such boxing of ideas goes against the grain of my understanding of the postmodern approach and poststructuralism within that.

Beyond this blanket naming, I suspect there is more to the story and that many historians have adopted various aspects and techniques of both postmodernism and poststructuralism, often, without acknowledging their influence. Despite remaining unnamed, ideas and language are being drawn from both wide reading and a climate of thought. I pondered on this as I read Greg Dening: “The best theatre in historical writing is that in which the Death of the Author is an exchange for the Birth of the Reader” (1996:xv). In referring to Barthes’ notion of the death of the author, Dening recognised that it prompted much angst, yet it seems that many academics have not taken the view that we should abandon writing.

While attending the 20th International Congress of Historical Sciences Conference (CISH) in Sydney in 2005, I was troubled about my sense of interdisciplinary outsidership and even more by the poststructural nature of my research. However at the conference, I found acceptance and affirmation. Postmodernism was not necessarily a forbidden discussion point, instead it was often referred to and even more frequently used and not explicitly referred to. My preoccupation with critics, such as Marwick and Igger, was perhaps misplaced. I had expected a strong empiricist focus and an even stronger anti-postmodern atmosphere. Instead, I found historians using ideas, tools and techniques that could be identified as having originated from postmodernism.

As if to erase any lingering doubts at the conference, Nancy Partner presented a paper called, Narrative Power and Narrative Coercion in a sessions titled “Between Social sciences and Literature: the Changing place of History”. Partner suggested that we are now in the later phases of a post-postmodern period and argued:

> It is not a return to modernism, positivism, or any pre-postmodern assumptions that has informed the writing of history. We are, as theory-informed historians, taking stock, pausing and evaluating the aftermath of postmodern excesses –
what changes seems permanent, what conceptual instruments became indispensable, what looks like ephemeral fashion. (2005:1)

Partner’s informative analysis demonstrated how the influence of the linguistic turn must not be underestimated. She claimed postmodernism “was no fad,” rather, it forced historians to closely examine and deconstruct both language and their personal position (Partner, 2005:2). She suggested that deconstruction, the original “bad child” of postmodernism and the “heavy artillery of the culture wars”, was not necessarily new, and was widely adopted by both those in and outside the academic field (Partner, 2005:3). Amid Partner’s “stocktaking” was the real survivor of postmodernism: the idea of the narrative. She said:

The fact that narrative is understood as reaching from the deepest interiority of the self outward to the boundaries of the sovereign nation, is what gives this deceptively formal and dispassionate area of literary theory such carrying power … Storyness is argument. (2005:6)

It has become evident to me that narrative has been embraced and utilised by many historians. This is supported by Rüsen suggestion of the distinctive nature of historical storytelling and the move away from scientific approaches seeking truths, “narrativity has gradually become the most convincing answer to the question of history” (2005:3). Readers of history can access many types of narrative including: multiple, national, feminist, masculine, community and the personal. Of these narratives we can then analyse and deconstruct the structure, the politics, the origin and language of the narrative. In turn, historians can then analyse what the narrative does; its purpose, potential and its agency. Perhaps the questions that we ask of a narrative are shaped by our personal position and theoretical allegiance, but the focus on the narrative, its language and structure, has emerged from the postmodern arena.

Listening to Partner’s presentation at CISH was most enlightening for me as I struggled with notions of postmodern legitimacy. It was one of the first times I had become aware of an in-between approach to the theoretical divide, a position that did not focus on polarity or champion one position while denigrating another. I would discover more like Partner at CISH and through further reading.
At the CISH conference terms such as the other, the embodied, textuality and other alternative ways for understanding the past were common place. In the audience discussion after Ora Limor’s (2005) presentation Images of Mary came a statement, “it is always the way you USE the other rather than what you thought about them.” I wondered if this was reflective of my own othering of the voice of empiricism. I was to box it, categorise it as rigid and wanting of human voice. I wanted it to be privileged and blind to the fringe. Instead, I found threads of the old and the rigid intertwined with the new and the diverse. This was the historical discourse of CISH and I began to see my own closed thinking, my resistance and rigidity. For all my postmodernist thinking, I had allowed myself to become stale and oppositional, indeed a speaker of the dooms day battle that was unlikely to evolve.

Absence proved to be a common theme amongst speakers; be it absence of the body and or gender. There were regular references to Euro-centric and American-centric language and themes. Similarly, construction and deconstruction were widely used and accepted. An entire session was dedicated to bodies and despite the groans of those who had “had enough” of embodiment, the session was eye opening. Eileen Boris, acting as convenor, began a session with the statement that bodies in history have been “Indicative of representation, they feel, fail, have violence brought upon them, are conveyors of nationhood and citizenship, and represent both equality and difference. Above all they represent multiplicity” (Boris, 2005).

This multiplicity was evident in Australian historian, Marian Quartly’s (2005) conference presentation of the male body in her analysis of the images of the Australian soldier during World War I. Quartly suggested that men were presented in a homoerotic way, feminised, young and vulnerable. I think I was expecting a Russel Ward version of the Australian legend, the masculine larrikin, hardened, resourceful, anti-establishment and resilient. Instead, it was a story of a “sexually charged” beautiful passive figure, who was going to face the brutalised and racialised image of the enemy. This was very clearly a different history from what I had expected to hear.

Similarly, I was intrigued by Penny Russell’s (2005) presentation entitled Affecting Women: On Weeping in the Archives. Russell spoke of the immersion of the self in
the text and the archive space. Her focus represented a radical and feminist departure from traditional ways of thinking about archives and the im/possibilities of their collections. As a member of the audience, I was unsettled and emotional by the end of the presentation, aware of Russell’s very different approach, but I was in need of reflective time to articulate and situate the way in which as the listener was drawn into the experience of weeping in the archives.

Deconstruction was also in strong evidence at the conference and shown to be a useful tool employed by many presenters. In feminist historian, Joanna de Groot’s, presentation: *What Goes Around Comes Around: Veiling, Women’s Bodies and ‘Orientalisms’ Past and Present* (2005), I was struck by the extensive and intuitive deconstruction of the dichotomy: veiled/unveiled. In a similar vein, Martha Vicinus, an American Women’s historian, presented an extensive exploration of representations of lesbian identities drawing from queer theory, psycho-analysis and traditional histories (2005). Vicinus offered her listeners a range of gaps in historical knowledge in women’s history and her level an engagement with the audience not seen in most presentations.

Ewa Domanska’s presentation of *Things As Others* had a profound effect on my understanding of materiality and, in turn, would have a considerable influence on my research (2005). Domanska’s interdisciplinary approach, taking in traditional histories and historiography, sociology, feminism, ethics, psycho-analysis and “techno-science studies” provided a fascinating insight into the possibilities for re-examining the past. This will be further evident in Chapter 5 where I discuss materiality and historical practice.

A vast range of methodologies were evident in the CISH 2005 conference program. The enthusiasm with which the speakers presented their sessions and with which the audience responded, added to the sense of community of historians. I was buoyed by the diversity of representation of both the subjects of history and the approaches utilised. The conference also brought these diverse voices together, sometimes challenging, informative, argumentative, pompous, open and supportive. The post presentation discussions revealed the sense of a shared passion and the possibilities of exchange of ideas and new learning.
The historic voice, its representation and interpretation is expressed in an increasing number of ways. Not necessarily born of the postmodern climate, rather, able to be perceived differently by using tools promoted in postmodernism. This is applicable, I would argue, to the many emergent theoretical positions identified in historiography. Of the shifts within feminism Barbara Caine argued,

Clearly the expanding framework of feminism to encompass difference and diversify is one of the biggest challenges we face, but one cannot but ask whether, if it sits so easily within contemporary political, scholarly, and disciplinary frameworks, feminism can remain an oppositional discourse – and conclude that the concept needs to be under challenge, if it were to have any radical potential. (1995:13)

In a similar way, Keith Jenkins writes,

And so if I want to remain faithful to the ‘posts’ – to post-structuralism, post-colonialism, post feminism, post-modernism – then I cannot in good faith remain a structuralist, a colonialist, a feminist, a modernist … I have to break with these; commit an act of infidelity. I have to be loyal to the new. Not loyal in the sense of refusing to ever move again. (2003:64)

Both Caine and Jenkins raised issues that I also had concerns about. How do we deal with these shifts and indeed how do they reverberate around our writing and thinking? The blurring of theoretical positions can be challenging, fruitful and productive. In acknowledging that inter and trans-disciplinary approaches are currently being employed in many areas of history, I was then able to rethink my own approach. This is a sometimes troubling and complex approach as it encompasses the multiplicity of the researcher. To address the passions of women historians, and explain the thinking surrounding my research, I accept the productiveness of a multi-theoretical position.

Geertz reminds us of the nature of researching life, both past and present. We will not succeed in establishing ordered methodology when the subjects of our research are
personal, political, disorderly and reflective of multiplicity. He extends the Weberian notion:

That man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun. I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not as an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. (1983:5)

Conclusion
This chapter has meandered through the arguments over methodology, exploring empiricism, postmodernism and women’s history. It has become evident that while many historians continue to situate themselves and their work in traditional modes and seek to maintain disciplinary boundaries, others have sought to incorporate different methodological and theoretical perspectives into their work.

The exploratory process for this chapter allowed for a more extensive interrogation of the historical practice and scholarship. It shed the shackles of my concerns about limiting approaches to history and in turn offered an insight into the writing of women’s history as well the incorporation of postmodern perspectives in contemporary history writing.

In the next chapter, I will take a closer look at this understanding, at the development of historical consciousness. My exploration of historical consciousness will be informed by the discussion in this chapter, primarily by adopting a multi-modal approach. By not restricting myself to any single position I hope to gain a richer understanding of historical consciousness.
I will now examine notions of historical consciousness, as a means of gaining further understanding of my participants’ passion for history, having discussed the range of debates surrounding empiricism, postmodernism and feminist histories, and the possibilities for drawing from each in the previous chapter. Historical consciousness is understood here to be a combination of intellectual negotiation of ideas about the past and present and positioning of the self as an interpreter of the historical narrative. The work of Jom Riisen (2005) provided me with a useful methodological tool to achieve this endeavour. He provides a series of structures and competencies that orientate analysis for the ontogenetic development. The knowledge gained from the exploration of historical consciousness in this chapter will inform the following chapters on higher education, materiality, working in the public sphere and on feminist and matrilineal historicism.

This chapter will look at the experiences shared by my participants and my own childhood experiences as part of a preliminary examination of the early stages of historical consciousness. The focus, of this thesis however, will be on my participants and my own experiences as members of a specific group: as trained historians who are situated in the advanced stages of Riisen’s ontogeny. Thus this childhood exploration will act as a starting point to the main thrust of the research. It will discuss the remembered markers and signifiers of childhood that reflect the birth of historical understanding. I will undertake further in-depth research on children’s historical consciousness as a post-doctoral research project.

There have been several research projects investigating the definitions and development of historical consciousness. John Lukacs’ (1968) book *Historical Consciousness: Remembered Past*, stands as one of the early studies of the theoretical
basis for historical consciousness. In recent years, considerable interest in the field has led to a marked increase in research, including significant projects by Rosenzweig and Thelen (1998), Kolbl and Straub (2001), Peter Lee (2002), Ashton and Hamilton (2003), Katriina Honkanen (2004) and Peter Seixas (2004).

One of the most influential writers is German philosopher, Jorn Rüsen. His exploration and subsequent framing of historical consciousness has had far reaching consequences for this field of inquiry (Rüsen, 2005). His initial work in the 1970s and his continued research, has been used as a methodological tool by several researchers. These include Gerald Mazabow, who explored historical consciousness within South African schools (2003) and Kolbl and Straub’s study of eleven to seventeen year old children in Germany (2001). Similarly, Peter Lee and Rosalyn Ashby undertook an intuitive exploration of Rüsen’s theories and demonstrated an accessible and practical application for studying children aged between seven and fourteen in schools (2000). Peter Seixas’s edited book, draws together a series of theorists, including Rüsen, and provides a solid theoretical basis for further research (2004).

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, an eclectic approach to methodology can lead to diverse histories and analysis. With this in mind, I have sought out a variety of additional perspectives, including Katriina Honkanen’s (2004) research, which constitutes a radical departure from the mostly empiricist research of the above mentioned authors. By examining Historicity as a feminist practice and by using Judith Butler’s theories of performativity and materialisation, Honkanen problematises historical theory, arguing that historical narrative is born of patriarchy and that a gendered examination requires an erasure of traditional discourse (Honkanen, 2004:8). In a different framework, lies Rosenzweig and Thelen’s (1998) broad exploration of American perceptions of history, and in Australia, Ashton and Smith’s (2003) adaptation of Rosenzweig and Thelen’s methodology. Both studies provide an insight into the mainstream population’s participation and understanding of history.

As Kolbl and Straub note, there is considerable room for more exploration of historical consciousness and its definitions. They cite, in particular, the absence of any longitudinal research (Kolbl & Straub, 2001:7). My research helps to address this
void, as I story the development of my participants. The data gathered is by no means exhaustive, representing as it does an ontogenetic and interdisciplinary snap-shot of a relatively small group of individuals.

**Defining Historical Consciousness**

To a large degree, there is a shared understanding of the basis for historical consciousness. Most would agree with Rüsen when he suggests that it “functions as a specific orientational mode in actual situations of life in the present: it functions to aid us in comprehending past actuality in order to grasp present actuality” (2005:24). Rüsen’s research alludes to the importance of empirical evidence as the core of the historian’s work, but he is by no means stranded in empirical thinking. He consistently demonstrates the constructiveness of the narrative, of the speaker/researcher and of the audience/reader’s response (Rüsen, 2005:10). Further, he argues that the contradictions between modern and postmodern are worthy of investigation. He states, “this contradiction can at least be relativised, and even changed into a strategy for augmentation” (Rüsen, 2005:135). His idea of an ontogeny of historical consciousness clearly states that individuals can be positioned in more than one of his categories currently, representing an openness for multiple interpretations. It is from this position that I see the possibilities for applying a multi-faceted approach to the notion of historical consciousness.

Rüsen developed a series of complex categorisation techniques. These include three basic categories of historical consciousness, three competence categories, four classifications for positioning individuals, a disciplinary matrix and a “schema of Historical thinking”. Each of these has proved useful to my own understanding of approaches to and understanding historical thinking, as discussed below.

**Historical Culture, Narration and Orientation**

Rüsen’s introductory concepts include: historical culture, narration and orientation. Historical culture is used as a measure for defining “the totality of discourses in which society understands itself and its future by interpreting the past” (Carr, 2006:230). Historical culture looks beyond academia, as it is reflective of the constructed human condition that replaces the now lost natural and basic instincts (Rüsen, 2005:1). Thus
in the unpredictable way of the world, humans construct a historical cultural understanding as a means of providing some sense of certainty.

The second concept, narratives, Rüsen argues, are the woven “fabric” of historical thinking and orientation (2005:10). He says:

> Narratives create the field where history lives in cultural life in the minds of people, telling them who they are and what the temporal change of themselves and their world is about. (Rüsen, 2005:2)

Narratives are thus instrumental in the construction of identity of both the speaker and the listener (Rüsen, 2005:11).

His third concept, “Orientation”, is of particular interest to me. It is the orientation of the self within all aspects of the arena of history. It is “the interweaving of one’s own identity into the concrete warp and woof of historical knowledge” (Rüsen, 2005:27). This is a constantly shifting and negotiated site. As individuals act as either teacher and/or learner they are rethinking and reorientating perceptions of historical knowledge in relation to themselves. It is a site of mediation and evaluation and most importantly, for my research, it is the site for the negotiation of the historicised self.

Within these three concepts, Rüsen is particularly interested in the links between historical and moral consciousness. Although my research will not specifically explore the field of moral consciousness, I regard this notion as a potentially useful tool for examining agency of historians and the privileging of particular speakers and knowledge. My position is affirmed by Rüsen’s statement, “History clothes values in temporal experience” (2005:24).

**Competencies**

Rüsen’s three ‘competencies’ introduce a second layer of analysis. These competencies refer to the skill, which the individual utilises as mechanisms for understanding the past.
1. “Competence of experience” refers to the “capacity of learning how to look at the past and grasp its specific temporal quality, differentiating it from the present” (Rüsen, 2004:69).

2. “Competence of interpretation” provides the “translation of experience of past actuality into an understanding of the present and expectations regarding the future” (Rüsen, 2004:69).

3. “Competence of orientation”, refers to the “guiding action by means of notions of temporal change, articulating human identity with historical knowledge and interweaving one’s own identity into the concrete warp and woof of historical knowledge” (Rüsen, 2004:70).

Rüsen provided a description of four typologies of historical competencies to measure and situate each one.

**Rüsen’s Four Types of Historical Consciousness**

Early in his career Rüsen set out four categories, which provide an insight into the development of historical consciousness, namely Traditional, Exemplary, Critical and Genetic. He has continued to develop these so as to provide a strong methodological tool, as well as a means for self-analysis for teachers of history and historiographers. These categories can be regarded as stages in a progressive journey, although individuals may also adhere to more than one at a time or they may remain in the first. He describes the process as an ontogeny, a journey from birth to death, which one might equate with a life-long learning experience. He makes the clear connection with moral consciousness and with what he calls “lebenspraxis” (Rüsen, 2004:71), which is the defining moral thought that guides our daily lives and is informed by a comprehensive understanding of the past, its temporality and its implications for the future.

### 1. Traditional Historical Consciousness

Traditional historical consciousness is informed by a fixed and stable tradition and it adheres to pre-given narratives (Lee, 2002:4). Rüsen suggests that it might include “an obliging link to an ancient treaty” (2004:71). Indeed it is the confirmation of a
singular and absolute past and culture. This form is often found in popular history and political rhetoric (Carr, 2006:232). We see it in the expression of the thousands of Australians who attend Gallipoli each year as described by Joy Damousi. She states, “most have no family connection with the battle,” yet are inspired by a growing spirituality fed by the Internet and affirmed by politicians (Damousi, 2004:31). She cites historian Bruce Scates, who sees the journey as a spiritual pilgrimage and one bound by notions of national identity and cultural meaning. Rüsen suggests that identity within the traditional category can be regarded as “affirming” and reflective of the “pre-given cultural patterns of self understanding” (2005:12).

2. Exemplary Historical Consciousness
Exemplary historical consciousness refers to the idea that the past can provide lessons for the present, including moral ones. It is centred around the idea of “timeless rules” (Rüsen, 2004:73), and a belief that an individual or an institution can adhere to an imprint from the past, an imprint that provides validity and morality and is characterised by “prudence” (Rüsen, 2004:74). While change is clearly evident in time, there is a series of rules to which society can adhere. As Seixas suggests, exemplary historical consciousness:

Can draw on particular events and people from the past as a source of cultural universals, which apply across temporal change, as in the celebratory history of heroes to inspire strong character in the present. (2004:22)

Rüsen says that they “concretise abstract rules and principles, telling stories which demonstrate the validity of rules and principles in single cases” (2005:13). Rüsen argues that identity if formed within the exemplary category by “generalising the experiences of time to rules of contact” (2005:12). He further argues that identity is regarded within the critical category as without a pattern or framework (Rüsen, 2005:12). This typology may include a tendency towards essentialism and suggest a lack of acknowledgment of agency of individuals to philosophise about themselves and the past. Yet, it is also, perhaps, the grounding for religion, political protest or resistance groups.
3. Critical Historical Consciousness

Critical historical consciousness is a means of confronting and challenging positions that have been regarded as the norm. It draws attention to deviations, and shows how “timeless rules” are fallible and relative (Rüsen, 2004:76). This position provides counter-stories and “a critique of moral values displaying them as having immoral origins or consequences” (Lee, 2002:5). It “un-entangles” the dominant hegemonies of historical thinking (Rüsen, 2004:75). The most common theoretical positions in this category are, therefore, political ones; including feminist and class histories. According to Rüsen, these histories focus on throwing light on a different or ‘othered’ experience (2004:76). Carr claims that we can see the distinction in critical historical consciousness, in between pre-modern to modern historical thinking in Europe at the turn of the nineteenth century, where the “past itself, and with its sacred writings, are robbed of their properly religious sense” (2006:233).

There is potential within this category to identify the emergent alternative transformative moral and political traditions. I would suggest that postcolonial and queer histories would also have their origins in this category.

4. Genetic Historical Consciousness

The genetic category reflects the movement from the earlier stages. It is a site of maturity and of application of historical theorising. It is marked by an understanding of the self, change and temporality. As Lee suggests, “Permanence and continuity are themselves temporalised, … moral values are not static but are pluralised through the acceptance of ‘otherness’ and change with time” (2002:5). Rüsen suggests that at this point one is no longer at risk of “losing oneself in the temporal movement of human subjectivity” (1987:93). Thus, one can contextualise narratives of the self, community or nationhood, relatively unencumbered by rhetoric or popular discourse. Personal and group identity within the genetic category is regarded as being in a state of mediation. It then becomes very much a process rather than structured or pre-given (Rüsen, 2005:12).

Seixas claims that this last mode of thinking “acknowledges the ongoing legacy of the past, at the same time that it comprehends radically changed present circumstances.”
and mores” (2004:22). These typologies are not independent entities, as Carr suggests that the genetic narrative is an integration of the traditional, exemplary and critical narratives (2006:232). Rüsen offers these categories as “methodological and heuristic tools”, by which we “can reconstruct complex relations among the elements in order to pinpoint and define structural specificity or empirical manifestations of historical consciousness and their relationship to moral values” (2004:78). At the same time, Seixas notes that Rüsen is concerned about the risks of using “overly linear and one-dimensional models of progress” (2004:23).

This fourfold typology may present some problems. At times, during my reading of Rüsen (2005:16), I have become concerned with the leanings towards essentialist language, offering a ‘rational order’ when my own learning reflected a more chaotic pathway. At the same time, I felt that Rüsen addressed many historiographical questions that had plagued me. Equally, his exploration of orientation asked poignant questions amid a popular discourse among historians that heralded history as objective and truthful, above reproach. And indeed Rüsen does not shy away from the debates of history theory, the emergence of postmodernism or the furore that followed.

**Rüsen’s Disciplinary Matrix**

Rüsen has developed a disciplinary matrix, which offers an intellectual pathway of historical consciousness and the shifts in paradigms as shown in Figure 2. He has further developed this into a “Schema for Historical Thinking” as shown in Figure 3. I will first discuss the original Disciplinary Matrix and in particular its divisive characteristics, which separate an individual understanding and analysis of history amid daily life (below the dividing line) and academic engagement and perspectives on history (above the dividing line) (Lee, 2002:5). It is important to be reminded of the intrinsic and constant reference point: the present. Rüsen argues that

> Historical thinking takes place in the realm of memory and is committed to its mental procedures, by which the recalling and representation of the past is dedicated to the cultural orientation of human life in the present. (2005:133)
He regards this process as a “complex mediation” connecting the past, present and the future (Rüsen, 2005:133). He suggests that history students should use the objective and subjective as “mental furniture” (Lee, 2002:4). The objective is, Lee says, representative of the lessons learnt at university, while the subjective is the practice of daily experience or lebenspraxis (2002:4).

It is thought that most people follow a cyclical path below the line, experiencing daily life and guided by a common ethic. It is only when an individual engages with the theories and methodologies of history in a structured manner that one enters a more authentic historical space. Rüsen’s dichotomy, above and below the line, is useful as well as problematic, as discussed below.

Figure 2: Jorn Rüsen’s Disciplinary Matrix (Lee, 2002:3)
Above and below Rüsen’s Line

Rüsen’s dividing line is a useful tool, but it also troubling. It is argued that above the line represents a more advanced “level of theoretical reflection” (Rüsen, 2005:133). Just as historians have rejected F.W. Hegel’s notion that it is only with the existence of the state, that historical consciousness came about, creating a dichotomy of civilised and uncivilised societies, there are problems in so creating an academic and non-academic dichotomy, (Hegel cited in Kolbl & Straub, 2001:2). This seems to suggest that there might there be a risk of certain histories being excluded, devalued or regarded as without academic rigour.

Similarly, Lee raises concerns in relation to children’s education in history. He suggests that we need to be careful in dismissing the below the line as naïve and simply common sense and equally in deeming the above the line as sophisticated (2002:7). He states “There are obvious dangers in the idea of a single correct narrative” (Lee, 2002:9). Thus, while I imagine this matrix to be very useful, I would regard it as a potential mechanism for exclusion of some historical views and privileging others. Both Peter Seixas (2005) and Peter Lee (2002) have demonstrated the ways in which Rüsen’s matrix and ontogeny of historical consciousness can be practically incorporated into studies on teaching children history. The construction of Rüsen’s “Schema of Historical Thinking” as presented below in Figure 3 provides further clarification and the opportunity to visualise this framework.
Rüsen suggests that we can follow a progressive journey; from the inherent need for orientation (interests), to concepts of significance (History), to empirical methods, to creating a narrative, and finally to the creation or affirmation of identity. This learning journey encompasses both modernist and postmodernist thinking or, as Rüsen suggests, it creates an opportunity for their ‘synthesis’ (2005:135). In addition, the schema outlines another layer of development, the semantic, cognitive, aesthetic, rhetoric and political. While I have focused more on his disciplinary matrix in this thesis, this more detailed version is indicative of Rüsen’s continued desire to provide
enabling and useful analytical tools for researchers focusing on historical consciousness.

With regard to my own research the disciplinary matrix, and Rüsen’s analysis are of considerable value in the questions surrounding self-orientation. One of my initial thesis questions was; How do the women of my research regard and “think themselves into” a historical narrative? I wanted to write about the “historicised self”; the self awareness of the woman historian, as speaker, creator, preserver and (sometime) subject within a historical narrative.

**Locating the Self**

Rüsen discusses at length, the significance of the location of the self. His analysis offers a valuable perspective from which one can then consider the historicised self. He says:

> The location of the self, in terms of territorial reality as well as in terms of the mental situation of the self within the cosmos of things and beings, has a temporal dimension. It is only through the dimension of time that the location of the self becomes fixed as the cultural habitat of groups and individuals. In situating themselves, subjects draw borderlines to others and their otherness within the locality and temporality of a common world, in which they meet and differentiate from each other in order to be subjects themselves. Such boundaries are normatively determined and always value-laden. (Rüsen, 2002:1-2)

Historians can benefit by applying this notion to their own practice. In historicising the self, one can identify the borderlines we construct, rethink the societal groups in which we belong and the values we promote. A historicised deconstruction allows one to step outside our practice and imagine ourselves, as contributors to, as Foucault (1977) named, the genealogies of history.
Identity

Constructions of identity are intertwined in the development of historical consciousness and, in turn, shed further light on the historicised self and notions of place and belonging. The notion of identity is, however, a much-disputed field of academic inquiry. It is described by Maggie MacLure as a “kind of restless movement in the unstable spaces in between boundaries” (1996:274). By way of comparison, Rüsen suggests that identity can be regarded as less fluid, and he claims that historical narratives “form identity by affirming given – or more precisely, pre-given - cultural patterns of self understanding” (Rüsen, 1987:90). However, he also suggests that in the most advanced stages of historical consciousness one enters a phase where identity is mediated rather than affirmed by historical narrative (Rüsen, 1987:91). Further, he more recently suggested, that:

Identity is located at the threshold between origin and future, a passage that cannot be left alone to the natural chain of events but has to be intellectually comprehended and achieved. (Rüsen, 2002:1)

The contested and multiple nature of the idea of identity is a useful site from which to explore the developing historical consciousness. It is also useful to observe the mediation of identity that is reflected in the movement within Rüsen’s matrix. The shifts perhaps reflect mediations, both fluid and troublesome, in the construction of the known self.

My participants were immersed in the transformative site of learning that led to our further progression through Rüsen’s matrix while at university. It was here we were made aware of the debates within empiricist history as well as being offered, if fleetingly, insights into alternate perspectives of history. More significantly, postgraduate study offers students the opportunity to undertake research in areas of personal interest. This freedom to explore subject areas in depth required us to make methodological and theoretical decisions about our work. We were guided and indeed, instructed, by our supervisors to follow certain paths, but these could not erase our own emergent thinking. The questions that we struggled with would also shape the direction of our research. The multiplicity of our personal and political selves, our constructed identities and relationship to the understood past shaped our
undertakings. It was in these processes that our historical consciousness expanded and developed.

As useful as Rüsen’s work is, I am still troubled by his tendency to lean towards a seemingly universal position on theory. Ankersmit also raised this point and suggested where Rüsen described his theories as historical anthropology. Ankersmit suggests “transhistorical anthropology might have been more suitable” (1998:90). My concern is that Rüsen appears to assume that the exploration of historical consciousness is seemingly above gender analysis. Certainly, he addresses women’s history as a subject, yet his general analysis appears to be deemed a gender free zone. My own research experience and readings suggest that any area of research can have gender analysis applied to it. I will now return briefly to the thoughts of feminist researchers, to provide an accompanying dialogue alongside Rüsen’s work.

Feminist Interpretations of Historical Consciousness

Feminist perceptions of historical consciousness have largely been associated with the issue of historical exclusion. Teresa de Lauretis argues, like Honkanen and de Beauvoir, that the category, woman, is othered to the extent that women stand outside or are excluded from social and historical discourse (de Lauretis, 1990:116). Thus imagining feminist historical consciousness requires a rethinking and repositioning of the category of woman. How then might a more inclusive and gendered version of historical consciousness be constructed? Elizabeth Grosz suggests that this broadening would not be achievable “without major upheavals and transformations” (1992:368). Certainly, we see this transformation in voice in the writings of Joan Scott (1988), Bonnie G Smith (1998) and others, with re-evaluations of power, voice, hierarchy, inclusiveness and a strong development of interdisciplinary writing.

For some feminist researchers it is the notion of time that is at the centre of difference. Masculine perceptions of time have dominated historical thinking, in that they are marked by political chronologies and masculine periodicity. Women, such as Julia Kristeva (1981), Mary O’Brien (1989) and Frieda Johles Forman (1989), argue that women’s perceptions of time are more spatially constructed and draw from notions of
the maternal and embodied. More pointedly, feminist re-considerations of history trouble the traditional masculine constructions of time and in turn offer different historical narratives. I will discuss these interpretations in further detail in Chapter 8.

Katriina Honkanen offers a radical and feminist re-evaluation of historicism and encourages women to imagine a “space of non-historicity” (2004:2). She argues that the very language of history is embedded in masculine empiricism and that it problematises the act of historicising. Honkanen is concerned that women have “a fatalistic tendency” towards history’s narratives and an exaggerated belief that we cannot change the power imbalance of history and “that present inequalities are connected to ‘history’ and ‘old fashioned’ beliefs, that will go away with time.” She argues that with a strategic forgetting of the patriarchal analysis and gaze, we can “explicate the actualities and complexities of oppression” (Honkanen, 2004:66). Thus the potential for a transformed or new narrative is possible.

This notion of strategic forgetting is born of Honkanen’s use of Judith Butler’s theories of performativity and materialization. Within Rüsen’s methodological structure, Honkanen’s approach would lead us to regard the above-the-line space as phallogocentric language in its most embedded state. Within this space is the binding empirical and scientific framework (Honkanen, 2004:180). Equally, Honkanen cites the footnote system as representative of the fundamental “reality prop” (2004:180). Footnotes are linguistic and political markers of historicism and of empiricism. She suggests that “the way history is used in feminist theory disregards the meanings historians’ footnote system is based on” (2004:180). To “strategically forget” one needs to rethink the rules of the footnote, the embedded phallocentric discourse, and the rigidity of the boundaries.

Claire Colebrook asks similar questions to Honkanen, referring to both Foucault and Iriagary’s works. She argues that history is grounded in rules of normativity:

This is not to suggest that feminist projects of history should be abandoned. On the contrary, any attempt to see ‘historicity’ or ‘historical specificity’ as a simple and exterior given which lies outside the space of logocentrism is to repeat, unwittingly, a discourse of the self-knowing and the self-recuperating
subject which feminism has so consistently, and justifiably, challenged.
(Colebrook, 1996:305)

Colebrook, like Cixous and Cohen (1976), cite the outsider-ship of women’s voices in traditional masculine discourse. The privileging of these discourses does not erase women’s narratives. Rather, it is the process of acknowledging outsider-ship that provides an opportunity and freedom to construct specifically female stories. This thinking adds considerable weight to the idea that women’s engagement with the past can be sited outside the phallocentric discourse and the constructed masculinist hierarchies.

As Molly Mullin argues, analysis of women’s historical consciousness is marked by a “continual contest and negotiation” (1991:32). Mullin argues in her research on Irish women’s history that embedded masculine traditions and their associated ideological meanings have dominated historical representations of women. Mullin demonstrates this in her study of the use of twelfth century “Sheela-na-gig” images as feminist iconology in contemporary times (1991:34). Traditionally, these images and carvings had been regarded as ‘repulsive’ and useful, therefore, for warding off evil. Mullin offers a re-interpretation and re-evaluation of the images and their continued use by feminist activists and artists (1991:37). More recently, historians Joanne McMahon and Jack Roberts have undertaken an extensive study of these images, further questioning the traditional masculinist notion that they were representative of lust and evil and suggesting they were instead celebrating fertility and a female goddess (1997). This type of strategic feminist re-evaluation is an important reflection of a re-negotiated historical consciousness.

I was enthused but challenged by these ideas of a feminist historical consciousness and their application to the experiences of my research participants. It was evident throughout my research given that we had a strong grounding in this traditional masculine discipline. This grounding was well regarded and remembered among us. We are products of, and informed by, the empiricist thinking to such a degree that I am not able to discount its contribution to the manner in which we perceive and perform histories. It was evident, however, that a narrative does emerge that is
strongly women-centred. It drew not from the close confines of a rigid discipline, but from multifaceted personal and intellectual endeavours of the participants.

**Agency**

One of the more significant issues to merge from my research process has been the idea of agency. As Seixas suggests “Historical agency is a way of recasting the question of historical causation that makes the question of deliberative human action both central and problematic” (2005:144). The problem of agency lies in the way in which it is often used by empiricist theorists, with the assumption, that the presence of agency, ensures the objectivity of the historian (Deeds Ennarth, 2001:37).

Objectivity is a value judgement and I would argue that we are all encumbered by our personal and political lives, that mean we are never outside the realm of the stories or histories we produce. We do, I believe, have agency however. It is laden with all of the same baggage, but it is named as such. It is the conscious and historicised self, acting with intention, flawed or otherwise. From this standpoint, both empiricist and postmodern theories have much to offer in the analysis of historical consciousness. Neither are perfect positions, which leads me to attempt to take a third position; drawing and learning from both, yet acknowledging their fraught condition and the many tensions.

**Alternate Ways for measuring Historical Consciousness**

Some researchers have sought to look at the question of historical consciousness from the perspective of the “common man”. Becker (1932) named him: “the everyman”. Between 1990 and 1992 a group of American historians, led by Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, carried out a nationwide survey to explore perceptions of history of the American public (1998). In 1999, a team from the University of Technology in Sydney, led by Paula Hamilton and Paul Ashton, embarked on a similar study of the Australian public (2003). Both studies specifically targeted people outside the academy, and were motivated by concerns about, on the one hand, a perceived history literacy crisis, and on the other, the growth in the popularity of the heritage industry as described in the work of David Lowenthal (1999).
Both studies sought to examine the relationship between the academic historian and the general public. Their subjects were individuals who, we might assume, do not necessarily move beyond a historical consciousness guided by their *lehenspraxis* and do not usually think about the past and their position beyond the traditional category of Rüsen’s typology. Yet, the Australian study clearly stated that investigations were seeking to discover information about historical engagement, and about the reliability and trustworthiness vested in people and institutions that ‘taught’ history, the type of connections people felt they had with the past and with historical practice (McCarthy, 2003:33-34). The method and results of these studies illuminate the grey areas of movement above Rüsen’s dividing line. These outcomes suggest to me that we should question whether popular discourse and the heritage industry always stay below the line. This evidence demonstrates that this discourse enters more advanced stages of historical consciousness, such as the genetic category.

Indeed, in both studies it was the positioning and role of popular discourse that intrigued the researcher. The Australian study team suggest that:

> Huge growth in public interest in family/local/historical novels – perhaps the heritage industry has been more to do with contemporary challenges to cultural identities, social authority, institutional shifts within a context of globalisation and rapid technical change. (Ashton & Hamilton, 2003:6)

Yet, there remains a sense that these studies might have gone further in their scope and analysis. As Alan Atkinson says, the Australian study seems to “bypass the way in which people, wherever they live, participate as a matter of personal identity, citizenship and livelihood, within the continuum of the past and present” (2003:166).

Indeed, the main aim for Rosenzweig and Thelen was “not what Americans did not know but what they did know and think” (Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998:3 emphasis is original). Both the American and Australian studies arrived at similar results and both have significant links with my own findings. In later chapters, I demonstrate how objects, places, the self and family members are the pre-dominant features of people’s history making (Ashton & Hamilton, 2003:18). Within my research I have referred to these under the headings: “materiality”, “pilgrimage to place” and “the historicised
I have also suggested a new collective term for the female generational nurturing, un-named in other studies, as “feminist and matrilineal historicism”.

**Mapping an Ontogeny of Learning: Childhood and School**

Reading this diverse group of research endeavours, several questions arose for me. How might these two national studies or Honkanen’s re-evaluations inform my own research? How might these studies be linked or collide with Rüsen’s matrix? Just as Peter Lee and Gerald Mazabow sought to map school children’s historical sensitivities via Rüsen’s tool, this thesis makes similar connections to allow such a discourse to emerge.

Peter Lee (2002:39) asks of his research, “What cultural tools are available to (school) students in relating to the past?” Similarly, as a means for contributing, to the body of knowledge of historical scholarship and knowledge, I have mapped my participants’ and my own stories of childhood and school, I sought to find the markers of learning, the signs of mediation between the self, the stories told by teachers and parents, the imagined past and the impulse of curiosity. Equally, however, I was conscious of the dangers of simplification and assumptions. Kolbl and Straub fruitfully suggest that we should be cautious in assuming that historical consciousness is only a formal competence. They argue that children’s understanding is often under-rated. Rather, children are constantly surrounded with social and cultural influences “that promote or impede the historical sense” (Kolbl & Straub, 2001:24).

Peter Lee identifies the dilemma of transforming and developing historical understanding of children within schools; a process he describes as “counter-intuitive” (2004:134). Children learn from their daily lives that life is invariably simplistic. Lee uses the example of truth and lies. He suggests that children come to understand that an event or circumstance can have only one authentic truth. He demonstrates this in a series of conversations about conflicting stories of two major events; World War Two and the fall of the Roman Empire, (2004:134-6). The children’s responses were clearly sited in Rüsen’s traditional narrative category, as aspects of a fixed and pre-given story. Increasing evidence provided to the children
that there was more than one story of the end of the Roman Empire prompted some of them to deduct that one of the stories must be a lie. Lee concludes that in everyday life a collusion of an understanding of simple truth and falsity is well established in dealings between children and their carers, yet “an idea that works perfectly well in everyday life is likely to become very misleading when applies to history” (Lee, 2004:134).

Lee’s assertions reminded me of some of my previous analysis of the learning that occurs within Living History and Historical re-enactment, of past times. All my own children have been involved in such activities since a young age. At the age of five my daughter knew the great importance of the word “authentic”. Her understanding of historical authenticity was vague but she knew it was imperative, and that its rules shaped everything we did ‘when we went to the forest’. She accepted that her favourite toys and clothes were not to be taken to the forest and watched with delight as her clothes were slowly created, painstakingly patterned and hand stitched. She forwent her favourite colours and learnt of plants that made the ‘right’ coloured dyes. By the age of seven, we would have conversations identifying different peoples, their clothes, food, and tent styles.

Emily: Why can’t I be a Norman?
Adele: Because we are Vikings. But I can make you a Norman costume if you would like one.
Emily: Dana is a Norman and so is her Dad. She says Normans are better.

Such perceptions of “a Norman” and “a Viking” can be positioned within both Lee’s analysis of children’s early perceptions of history. There is one clear version of “a Norman” and another of “a Viking”, static representations from a set time. Perhaps for simplicity’s sake, we re-enactor parents have allowed this traditional perception to be fostered. As they get older, we need to be more conscious of the need to teach children that history and its representations are contested sites. Otherwise, the risk of misleading the children is considerable.

This type of early learning is not, however, without value. As suggested in the research findings by Peter Lee and Rosalyn Ashby’s study of children between the
ages seven and fourteen, the framework in which a child is taught must be relevant to and re-accessible (2000:217). Thus, in re-enactment learning, my daughter and other children can be seen to be within a framework that is constantly reaffirmed by an embodied and physical presence.

Participants in my research used early memories in the telling of the chronology of their historical understanding. Many of these narratives began in the home. As Lee reminds us, children learn of the existence of the past initially from the home environment, prior to school history lessons (2004:134). The early childhood recollections of Helen for instance include the following:

*Back in the 1950s when as a young child skimming through a scrapbook belonging to my older sister, my imagination was fired by the story of Belshazzar, grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, the famous king of Babylon, and the ‘mysterious handwriting on the wall’, I was hooked.*

Such stories matched my own personal chronology. In most lives, books and later film and television are among the first sources of historical narrative. These stories position a child in both traditional and naive exemplary categories. They include historic literary heroes put on historic pedestals that have little factual historical grounding. Yet, these are markers in the progression of historical consciousness and remain important. Firstly, they lay the foundations for a child’s understanding that the past exists and that she/he can come to know the past. Secondly, and with regard to my research, more importantly, these are often the sewing of the seeds of a passion for history. Despite the inaccuracies, the limitations and the static nature of its characters, these early narratives are stepping-stones on a learning journey. This journey would become a lifelong passion for my participants and one that would be continually shaped and reshaped.

In recalling my own early childhood experiences, I realised that my sisters and I were immersed at an early age in a diverse range of historical experiences, both embodied and intellectual. My mother taught us about family history and she offered stories of place, pilgrimage, immigration, social class, hardship and cultural signifiers, such as
food and music. Our heritage was a mix of Italian, British and Chinese, and the matrilineal lines featured strongly in her stories.

Equally, the women I interviewed reported similar discourses of family history. At times, they ran simultaneous to school learning. As one woman said, “My interest dates from my late school days and my mother telling me about our first ancestors in Australia.” As we shall read in later chapters, this early and largely matrilineal based thread of history is repeated by the participants themselves, once they in turn became parents. Indeed, they often represented the earliest seeds of large research undertakings by the women, emerging as subjects of a university thesis or published and unpublished historical works.

Learning about one’s family background is perhaps one of the first lessons in self-orientation. This means gaining an understanding of ancestors and their influence on our lives today and the realisation that we as individuals are part of an ongoing family story. Perhaps it is not by accident that these stories are most often told by mothers and grandmothers. Women often ground their histories in the personal, the local and the domestic spheres. The idea and practice of matrilineal historicism will be explored in greater depth in Chapter 8, however, it is important here to place it within the ontogeny of historical consciousness. Perhaps a child’s learning of matrilineal historicism is secure in Rüsen’s below-the-line space, but Rüsen’s three competencies are of particular relevance here. The mother or grandmother introduces the child to the tools that enable an understanding of the differentiated past and the orientation of the self. The child comes to understand the continuity as well as temporality of family, its rituals, notions of identity, its places of significance and the means for engagement with these characteristics.

Mothers are by no means the only source of historical learning outside the school environment. Fathers and grandfathers, I would suggest work in a partnership. Certainly, this was the case with my own family. Both my parents immersed their three children in the world of antique collecting and historical societies. A lasting personal memory of the late 1960s was a historical society visit to an early settler’s house at Wiseman’s Creek, near O’Connell, New South Wales, (see figures 4 and 5 below). It was accessible only by a long walk through paddocks and across a river
(women and children were carried across). The house had been abandoned, yet none of the neglect could hide the enormity of this two-story house and its rambling additions from my young eyes. According to my father, it was abandoned after the death of the residents and left “as is”, furniture still in place, the tablecloth still on the table and birth certificates in the drawers. Today, my father recalls the interest of the historical society members and how well preserved the house contents remained. I recall the mysteries of books and movies materialising in this ghostly house in a wild isolated paddock, wondering at our luck (privilege) that I/we were allowed to actually visit it.

Figure 4: House at Wiseman’s Creek, O’Connell New South Wales 1967, Photographer R.J. Nye
A schoolteacher in a one-teacher school in rural NSW, my father had a strong appreciation of the importance of history for children.

One of my best days teaching was when I took the whole school on a day long excursion, including a picnic. We visited every house or ruins of houses in O'Connell that had been built prior to 1850. Some of the buildings were due to be demolished by graziers but they held off until after the excursion.

I am thoughtful of the embodied and intellectual immersion in history that we, three daughters, had begun at such a young age and that both parents actively sought to expose us to a diverse range of historical discourses and materiality. Again I am reminded of Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth’s “anathemic subjectivity” (2001:48) - the interweaving of ideas emerging from multiple sites as being descriptive of my own chronological survey of my historical consciousness.
Learning in School

The shift from a mere fascination to questioning the past often begins in the school classroom, where teachers propose to children historical dilemmas or inconsistencies in history and ask children to take on a new role. It is a time when children begin to engage in critical thinking. Rather than being observers and listeners, students in high schools are introduced to the notion that they can develop their own opinions and that the past is not only a contested site but one on which the children themselves can make valued comments. As one of the women participating in my research noted:

Well I do remember, Miss Dorothy McCorkell, known to the students as ‘Dot, my fabulous History teacher... With hindsight ‘Dot’ knew exactly how and when to press my button.

In this story the crucial trigger was a high school teacher and the response that the individual was able to evoke within her child mind. The pressing of buttons alludes to an early understanding of the complexities of the past, beyond a traditional or exemplary consciousness, to questions evoked and the growth of a fascination. This can be linked to Rüsen’s idea that everyone has an innate desire to understand history. It is a desire that can propel an individual on an analytical path or above the line.

Not all school memories were positive. Some of my participants complained of being forced to rote learn histories that seemed distant and boring. One said, “To say the least, history bored me at school, where it was simply lists of dates, battles and Kings”, and another, “I’d found History extremely boring and irrelevant, with no Australian content and far too much about centuries of English and European fighting”. In these quotes, we can hear the desire for more than facts. It may be the desire to move beyond the traditional or exemplary positions and perhaps, even more, desire to attain Rüsen’s competencies, to experience, to interpret and to orient oneself on a path towards meaningful understanding. The figures and dates of European history were alien to these children. Without a point of reference to the self, and an overarching storyline, and even a sense of connection to place, these lessons did little to incite progression in historical consciousness.
Debates over History as a School Subject

There is considerable ongoing debate both in Australia and overseas, regarding the ideological direction and content of History as a subject in schools. As Hobshawn noted historians are “the primary producers of the raw material that is turned into propaganda and mythology” (1997 cited in Laville, 2004:165). Such concerns were seen in the recent Australian History Summit in August 2006 and its aftermath in the media. Much of the furore seemed to call for a return to what would appear to be exemplary styles of history. Paul Kelly suggested in the keynote presentation:

The logic of the summit is that Australian History must be saved from its patchwork, fragmentary and demoralising disrepair with the restoration of the strong narrative themes that encompass the Australian story. (2006:20)

Further, the Summit called for a return to a “clear chronological sequence” approach within the schools, and there was a push for the erasure of any interdisciplinary connection. New South Wales Premier Bob Carr, had already enforced History as a ‘stand alone’ subject in NSW schools and he argued this position at the Summit (P. Kelly, 2006:20). This call for a return to national narratives was peppered with clarifying comments that the participants did not seek a single narrative or a “names and dates” style of history. Yet, the discourse of the Summit appeared to lean heavily towards this approach and certainly the diversity of inter-disciplinary or postmodern approaches was rejected.

Rosenzweig noted in his research on American perceptions of history that,

One of the deepest ironies to emerge … is that some of those who are alarmed by the supposed lack of historical knowledge have prescribed a revival of the most traditional forms of history teaching, particularly a focus on memorising a canon of historical facts. (Rosenzweig, 2000:277)

History theorist, Elizabeth Deeds Ernarth, argues that there are political implications in the intrusion of politics into the structure and design of history and that the desire to return to mainstream histories and reject postmodern approaches reflects a “fear of
dissolution of identity politics, just as former marginals reach the point of participating in it” (2001:35). As Carl Becker suggested in 1932, historians and students of history should in fact delight and find relief in the supplanting of the old ways of history. “The history that lies in unread books does no work in the world” (Becker, 1932:233-234).

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have sought to explore the development of historical consciousness from diverse perspectives. Such exploration can lead to multiple questions about the innate, as well as the accompanying learned, desire, to understand and relate to the past. Historical consciousness entwines the past, present and future in a complex manner. It depends on the mediation and location of the self in relation to temporality and, in turn, Rüsen gives voice to the im/possibilities of telling history. In practical terms Rüsen’s ontogeny of historical consciousness and disciplinary matrix are particularly useful for examining the development of school children. This has been evident in the work by Lee and Ashby (2000), and Kolbl and Straub (2001). There is room for continued research relating to undergraduate and postgraduate tertiary students, as well as non-formal explorations of history.

I have also offered feminist perspectives on historical consciousness, which argue for a re-thinking of masculine constructs that define the categories of history. This is a vital and ongoing development in feminist histories. As I discuss later in this thesis, they evidently underpin many of the feminist histories currently being produced in Australia, in individual researchers such as Penny Russell (1994) and Katie Holmes (1995a) and collectively in feminist journals such as *Hecate, Lilith: A Feminist History Journal* and *Australian Feminist Studies*.

The two positions, Rüsen’s ontogeny and feminist histories are not necessarily in opposition; rather, one can inform as well as trouble the other. In addition, I have looked to the studies of mainstream historical consciousness by Rosenzweig and Thelen (1998), and Ashton and Hamilton (2003). These studies provide considerable information on the ways people broadly engage in historical practise.
There is much for teachers and practitioners of history to gain in utilising and expanding the current body of knowledge relating to historical consciousness. There are some areas that would benefit from more research, for example in the notion of agency, but equally the work that has been done, can be regarded as useful analytical tools.

In the following chapter, I will explore the learning that occurs in higher education. This period represents the opportunity to move above Rüsen’s line, into the analytical phases that accompany intense learning and creative production at university. I will demonstrate how higher education can feed a passion for history and create opportunities for women to embark on personal, but highly structured endeavours, and I will show that this period is one of enlightenment. It also provides the tools to move on to another period, of agentic engagement in historical practice as independent adults.
Chapter 4

Women in Higher Education

This chapter will follow the learning journey of my participants and myself as external students at the University of New England. During our undergraduate and postgraduate studies our political and personal understandings of historical discourse, as well as our ontogenetic development of historical consciousness underwent a transformation. The chapter will firstly discuss History as an academic discipline and the way in which women navigate its traditionally masculine foundations. It will briefly look at publications on the history of our university department and consider some of the experiences of women academics at the University of New England and other Australian universities. The focus however, will be to look at our experiences as students and the teaching practices and materials that guided us. These will cumulatively provide an insight into the importance of learning spaces, methodological perspectives, embodied learning and the fragmented lives of mature age women students. Underpinning this exploration are feminist questions, seeking to identify how our learning is shaped by gender.

This chapter does not offer a definitive account of all external mature age women at university; rather, the story represents a snap shot of the experiences of successful postgraduate students. It will become evident that the academic landscape is a changing one and during the period this study focuses on, history departments were feeling the impact of many changes. Among these were the increasing visibility of women’s history and the modernising of university departments, where domineering and authoritative head professors were relinquishing their power to a more democratic and interdisciplinary system. These experiences remain pertinent to history education debates today by offering an insight into the personal evaluations of or by students, by identifying the markers of change and by rethinking the aspects of our mediation and
orientation skills that remain, and continue to inform us, with us more than a decade later.

The Discipline of History

There is a growing academic interest in the learning experiences within the history discipline in higher education. While there is a considerable body of research on the teaching and learning of the undergraduate history student, there is little on the postgraduate experience. This research will, in part, address some of these absences. At the forefront in this field are researchers such as Alan Booth (2004), Peter Stearns (2000b), Peter Seixas (2004), David Pace (1993) and Sam Wineburg (1997).

Some of the useful questions raised in current research and in this chapter include: What are the characteristics of the discipline of history within higher education? What are the theoretical groundings that shape the teaching of History? Building on these, this chapter will then ask: What are the legacies of learning within this discipline on historical endeavours in later life? Alan Booth suggests academic disciplines possess a “disciplinary culture” that is marked by a particular discourse, rituals and symbols (2004:247). Booth links these with:

socialisation, professional behaviour, personal status and career progression
[and] in this sense an academic discipline is a site of power, as well as a field of knowledge, privileging some voices and excluding, restraining or marginalizing others. (Booth, 2004:247-248)

He suggests that this is one of the reasons postmodernism has such an effect on the disciplines. Increasingly teachers of history are being reminded that the classroom and its mechanisms for evaluations in school or at university are never neutral sites.

Each ‘teaches’ students about the certainty (or uncertainty) of historical knowledge: each conveys messages about the student’s agency in the face of historical knowledge; each guides students towards a particular conception of
what counts in framing historical argument – even whether argument has a place in knowing history. (Stearns, Seixas, & Wineburg, 2000a:3)

A reader of academic writing on the discipline of History becomes aware of a sense of protectiveness over the independence of the study of history and a resistance to the intervention of other disciplines. Within the period I and my participants, studied at the University of New England, this protectiveness was not evident to the student, yet, in retrospect, the signs were evident. The resistance to interdisciplinary methodological interaction raised its head only fleetingly to the student. I recall my supervisor once alluding to things “that belonged downstairs in cultural studies”. This exchange was brief and there was no further explanation other than advice on how to continue on the desired path. Thus, our learning largely occurred within an empiricist framework. Booth’s rituals, symbols and discourse were embedded, and to a large degree, comfortable and familiar. During this research, my participants also indicated they regarded these as a source of tension, thus providing an opportunity to explore our chosen topics accompanied by rigour and order.

Booth claims that amid the “hierarchic model of scholarship, teaching has been relegated to the status of secondary activity, under-represented in the discipline’s structures of communication, recognition and reward” (Booth, 2004:259). In turn he says there has been “little incentive to explore pedagogic issues”. This chapter will in part look at the ways in which the University of New England History department encouraged students to explore methodology and both primary and secondary resources; to consider the type of scholarship that was encouraged. Our time as students was marked by a radical change in the way tertiary history departments approached teaching.

The centuries of historical practice at universities left a legacy of history as a noble pursuit. Honour remained a feature of the scholarly community, a collegial respect and traces of old hierarchies lingered. Becker stated that historians are among the “honourable” sector of society (Becker, 1932:231). Similarly Kitsen-Clark, in 1973, reminds his readers that it is indeed honourable to teach history just as it is to write it (cited in Booth, 2003:1).
As Penny Russell has suggested, the period of the “seductive authority of older narratives” and “God Professors” had begun to decline in the late 1970s and early 1980s where single authoritative texts and individuals could no longer claim rights to the podium (1997.ix). Postmodernism and political and social change, as I have discussed in Chapter 2, created much dissention. Of the ensuing debate, Goodman suggested “in turning away from the social sciences, professional history closed ranks against speculative outsiders and stressed its careful empiricism, its embeddedness in the particularities of the past” (1995:50-51). For some, this protectiveness and alignment with empirical methodologies had its risks. Sarah Mann suggested such risks included “the alienating effect” of being disciplined into docility” (2001:14). Further, she suggested there is a danger of mere replication of ideas rather than innovative and imaginative research.

**Women amid a masculine Discourse and Profession**

Methodological repetition and academic docility are not the only source of unease within the discipline. From a feminist perspective, the masculine discourse, that dominated university history for centuries, continues to represent a potential stumbling block for students. Throughout my reading of historiographical and education based resources, masculine discourse emerged as a thread of concern. Terms such as “honour” and “noble pursuits” seem to be absent from women’s discourses. The profession did have a long tradition of being open only to men. As previously mentioned, until the twentieth century, women historians largely worked outside the profession. This is not to say women historians have not been productive in the field. As Bonnie G Smith argues, women historians made significant contributions to the field, however, “they departed from the conventional subject matter and methodology” (1998:710).

How then did women find a place in the academy? Women’s early experiences have been marked by institutionalised discrimination and the limiting expectations of society. Jessie Webb was Australia’s first female academic in History (Janson, 1995:91). She first began working at the University of Melbourne in 1905 but did not hold a lecturing position until 1909 and did not receive a permanent posting until 1921 (Janson, 1995:93). Webb endured a heavy teaching workload, was paid less than half the wage of her male colleagues and was passed over for promotions in
favour of less qualified men (Janson, 1995:103). Susan Janson found that measures of recognition of past academics have been often limited to the number of publications and stature. Jessie Webb did not meet these requirements, but was remembered by those who have sought out her story by her huge teaching load and dedication to her students.

This is not an unfamiliar story and throughout the following decades women struggled to find a place in History departments throughout the country. This is evident in the writing of Jo Woolmington (1988) at the University of New England in the 1970s and 80s, in Susan Davies’ (1995) account of Kathleen Fitzpatrick at the University of Melbourne, 1940s to 1960s and Margaret Kiddle (Magarey, 2005:45) at the University of Melbourne during the 1950s and 60s. At the Australian Historical Association’s 2006 conference I again heard of the struggles for a place in university history departments as Pat Grimshaw recalled her career developments in the 1970s and 80s. As I will discuss later in this chapter, Miriam Dixson’s experiences at the University of New England were equally marked by battles for acknowledgement of women’s perspectives on history, especially when the ideas that underpinned her work did not match the accepted tenets of the period.

Honkanen reminds her readers that many feminist historians refer to mainstream history as “male-stream” history, arguing that these histories are “composed of narratives about nationalism, colonialism, imperialism, economy and sexism” (2004:73). Women historians did not slip easily into this culture nor were they particularly welcome. Yet, even in contemporary times, the language has shifted slightly but still appears to reflect a male gaze. When the discipline appeared under threat from “managerialism”, it was the discipline’s “autonomy, integrity and collegiality” that seemed most threatened (Booth, 2003:2). These terms are reminiscent of a professional honour, although the culture and the language has most certainly changed in recent time as gender issues become more apparent on a wider scale across universities.
Women’s Experiences in Higher Education

There is a large body of research examining the experiences of women as academics and as students in higher education. I was drawn to the many qualitative projects that highlighted the multiplicity of women’s experience in higher education. In my search for feminist information on this, I was led to the notion of the “Chilly Climate”. In the early eighties, a report by Roberta Hall and Bernice Sandler submitted to the Association of American Colleges, outlined the different ways in which women were treated when compared to men in university classrooms (1982). The term “Chilly Climate” has since been utilised by feminist researchers to extend this to: student perceptions, practices for hiring and evaluating staff, the balance between academic and personal responsibilities, wage differences and discrepancies in peer review systems (Freyd, 2003). The term has reflected the “aggregated impact of a host of micro inequities and forms of systematic discrimination that disadvantaged women in academic environments” (Crombie, Pyke, Siverthorn, Jones, & Piccinin, 2003:1).

These studies continue to be important considerations for exploring the experiences of women in higher education and the most recent studies demonstrate that bias towards males is still embedded in universities. Freyd (2003:para 4) argues that there is a common view that while discrimination occurs, it is often done unconsciously, or it is “out there, not here” or that it has a negligible impact on people.

While I found “chilly climate” studies informative, my participants’ stories did not necessarily make the same connections. I was, however, seeking different stories, those of agency and reflective of a celebration of learning so I looked to the writings based on mature aged women in higher education. There were few undertakings that look specifically at women studying history, some studies focusing on literacy, sociology and women’s studies fields and there were many that looked at the general experience of higher education. These largely qualitative studies, to name a few, included Janet Parr (2000), Magda Gere Lewis (1993), Mons Montelius (2000) and Rosalind Edwards (1993). These studies provided extensive ideas for the exploration of women’s experiences as mature age students and alerted me to the diversity of research questions on adult learning. Adult educator Linden West (1996) has focused
his research on the idea of personal fragmentation. West’s work resonated with several stories of the women in my research as we navigated our multiple selves.

The aims of my research largely focused on gendered questions about the type of historical knowledge we gained at university and how the legacy of our learning was reflected in our practice as historians. The thread of a history of women’s inequity in educational institutions was evident however I was still seeking a different story; one of agency. I was sure there was another storyline, a parallel discourse – of the in-between of women’s experience that would demonstrate a developing historical consciousness as well as agentic thought and action. To a large degree, the body of knowledge I accessed during the research process did not address these issues.

Students of the University of New England

By the time my participants and I enrolled in higher education, we would have been immersed in or guided by a sense of lebenspraxis, according to Rüsen (2004:71). With a sense of the past and of ourselves in that past, we had not yet entered the ‘above the line’ realm of methodology and theoretical debates. There had been hints of the diversity of historical understanding at school, however, we were largely still situated between Rüsen’s traditional and exemplary categories. In this chapter, I will chart the shift in understanding that occurred during our years at university.

The women participating in my research were all enrolled in a Master of Letters between the years 1990 and 1995. From the outset, I have to say, the recollections were overwhelmingly positive. Each of us left the department happily laden with an affirming understanding and appreciation of history and set about our individual paths.

As I sought to analyse their memories, I was reminded that we were individuals within a large institution; an imposing physical space incorporating many individual teachers, as well as an overwhelming administrative body. It is therefore useful to look at what was happening at the university in the years that we attended and to ask: Does the institutional history story inform the development of our learning? Thus I
sought out articles and books, which examined the history of the university and more specifically the History Department, as it was then known. The University of New England is a regional university in rural New South Wales, Australia. It has a significant proportion of external students. In Don Beer’s publication *A History of History*, the period 1980 – 1997 was described as “The not so good times” (1998:30). Indeed, it was a tumultuous time that saw great change in higher education in general and reductions in the university’s commitment to History as a discipline.

While reading the many Histories of the university, I realised that to a large degree we as students were oblivious to the debates: political and administrative. I also found that many of the resources where of a masculinist discourse and I was consistently prompted to ask: “What might the gendered version of this account be?” There were some hints of women’s lives amid the institutional histories. For example, the struggle history lecturer, Miriam Dixson, experienced to get her Women’s History course accepted in the 1970s (Jordan, 2004:103). Having spent a year studying history at the Australian National University, I had taken the availability of women’s studies courses for granted. I did not realise the significance of the existence of one women’s history course at the University of New England. All too soon, I would realise that this was the only women’s history course at this university and it would be only briefly available.

As part of my research, I sought out Miriam Dixson to ask her about her experiences as an academic at the university. It was in this telephone interview that the chilly climate research resonated. I had heard about a particular departmental meeting in the mid 1970s that saw Dixson and the department’s dominating head of school, Russel Ward, go head to head over the inclusion of a women’s history course. It was Ward who ended up storming out of the room after Dixson questioned his capacity to chair the meeting, given his “active interventionist” approach (2007). Dixson described Ward as “a remnant from another culture, like an ancient emperor” who was unused to his authority being questioned and, yet, she needed the “approval of the fathers” to get the final go ahead to introduce her course (2007). Dixson stated she had enthusiastic student support, as well as the support of the Board of Studies.
The department, and Ward in particular, were to be the last bastion of opposition. After Ward left the room, it was argued by one colleague that while he was unconcerned about student pressure, he was concerned that if the Board of Studies had agreed to the course then there was a risk that the department might look old fashioned if it refused. Ward never chaired another department meeting and this meeting is still referred to in hushed tones by those who recall it. For whatever reasons, the course was approved and the actual battle reflected the painful side of change. It reflects the bravery of women such as Miriam Dixson, as well as the raw pain of Ward, who had so much invested in his status and his narrative of Australian history.

Don Beer argued that Ward had come under increasing strain at this time. The “modernising process he had begun” would become a system which ultimately undermined his own power (1998:27). Ward had come to the university as somewhat a celebrity, as a “self professed radical” (Jordan, 2004:102). He ruled the department unflinchingly and was known to “terrorise staff” if they did not meet deadlines (Jordan, 2004:102). Authors such as Beer and Jordan present a particular story of Ward, one of a dedicated, extraordinarily hard working, iconic Professor who could also “abuse the swivel-eyed, splay-footed, knock-kneed bastards in the university’s administration in the most endearing and amusing manner” (Beer, 1998:20). He lived, it seems, the irreverent larrikin of the Australian Legend. As a feminist and a keen reader of Australian historiography, I struggle to share this view.

As I absorbed the writings about the University of New England by various authors, I came to realise there are many layers to the life and times of the History department. Both Beer and Jordan outlined a series of innovations in the years preceding the arrival of myself, and the women involved in my research, as well as during our undergraduate and postgraduate years as students.

Reunion at the Marnie Yeates Room

I chose the Marnie Yeates Room as one of my major data collecting sites. This reunion was held in the same room we used during the History residential schools. The selection of this familiar place was part of my desire to return to the mind-set of external studies to evoke the enthusiasm of past residential schools. The day was
filled with stories, treasured objects and laughter. Our talk resumed over dinner and lasted late into the evening over dinner. There seemed no end to the stories that could emerge from a request “Tell me about your passion for History”.

Within the first moments of arriving at our reunion, we were reminded of our commitment to history keeping and of the historicised self. One of the women had brought her diary, which followed her residential schools. The eccentricities revealed and shared brought about an immediate connection and comfortable sense of place and people.

Adele: This is Bronwyn
Bronwyn: I know Rosemary!
Rosemary: You do? (laughs)
Bronwyn: You did ... Hunter valley... Soldier
Rosemary: Soldier Settlement
Bronwyn: Yes!
Helena: And I remember your face too!
Rosemary: There you go I remember (laughing)
Helena: I met you at dinner
Rosemary: You’re incredible

(all laughing)

Helena: Actually I kept a diary every night and I mentioned all the people I met and what we talked about ... (showing the diary) .. so there you are ... next to Peter and John .... He was adamant on the decline of standards, anyway I won’t say more!
Rosemary: Oh isn’t that amazing! Its history in the making!

I was struck by the immediate sense of the historicised self and recognition of one’s agency within history and history making. It was also a source of amusement to us that we often recalled various people by their thesis topic:

_The terribly mundane history of the health department._
_The untold history of the Tresillian services._
_The intriguing history of Sarah Bernhart in Australia._
The remembering of topics and the things that intrigued us, is reflective not only of our personal theoretical applications but the context and meaning which we apply to those memories.

It was clear, from the first introductions that we were in for a day of excited storying and I was reminded of Greg Dening’s description of talk:

> Talk is tattoo. Talk is body paint and house columns. Talk is never just a stream of consciousness either. It is shaped and dramatised – in a dance, a song, a story, a joke. Talk might seem to be blown away by the wind on the lips, but it never is. It is always archived in some way in the continuities of living. Talk joins past, present and future. (2000 para 11)

We bounced off each other’s memories, laughed, evoked the emotion of the stories of mothers and grandmothers and of course of our learning, at as one woman described: “Dear old UNE”. The university was much more than buildings and a rural landscape, indeed it was individual lecturers who were recalled with considerable endearment. Professor Alan Atkinson’s teaching and encouragement marked virtually every participant’s journey. Norma Townsend’s unyielding teaching style was also remembered.

*Helena:* Norma Townsend, she was my first supervisor, and everyone was so hostile when they got their assignments back. She was a bit rough on them

*Adele:* She always set high standards

*Helena:* She did indeed! She didn’t give my thesis as good a mark as I thought I deserved! (much laughter)

As with our childhood memories, the recollection of individual teachers / lecturers was indicative of the markers of our developing historical consciousness. Those who provoked considered thought, challenged our boundaries or evoked protest were well remembered.
Recollections of the Undergraduate Years

At the reunion, we also remembered our undergraduate History studies when we were introduced to the idea that historians were individuals whose writings were reflective of their time and place. And that we should question, argue and wonder about notions of validity. We went from one course to the next, amazed and thrilled by the depth with which we could examine the past. These courses were some of the early dalliances into a formalised journey above Rüsén’s line. They were also the fuel for the desire to continue on to postgraduate studies.

In thinking about our undergraduate years, I do not rely entirely on the transcripts but also on the contents of a box: a collection of course handbooks and the memories of lecturers. The handbooks have been stored in old boxes in a deep cupboard. They were covered in dust and mixed with my notes and essays. As a primary source, these handbooks, notes and essays represented a diverse collection of institutional publications, hastily written lecture notes, essay plans covered in the scribbling of myself as well as my then two year old son, the final essays complete with marker’s comments. In addition, there was another layer of personal notes, domestic, unfinished letters, reminders to pay bills and the like. The sort that one jots down in quiet moments in lectures or disturbed moments of essay writing – yet reflective of the busy life of mother, student, citizen and reflective of the fragmentation described by Linden West (1996).

Pay the car, vet and rent... Insurance due!

Convict Oath ... Hand to hand, on earth, in hell, sick or well, on sea or land, on the square, ever

Dear Mary, Uni is going okay, major essay to do. I started part time job at Grace Bros ... Markets are great, having lots of fun selling herbs but making more friends than money. Our neighbouring stall-holders give us cups of tea and tell us amazing stories of how they escaped from Czechoslovakia

Buy this book! Wendy Lowenstein, Weevils in the Flour
Biographies: Nixon (boring and chronological) Palmer (enthusiastic and good read) Threkeld (radical for his time!)

Ring new babysitter

Thus, in-spite or simply along side the domestic and the personal, we external students spent many nights pouring over texts, constructing essays and preparing for exams. Where one began and another ended is open to conjecture.

Outlining Australian History Courses
Booth further suggests that studying history required an “imaginative engagement” from the student and that amid the need for an “inherently creative” approach, one also needed to be grounded in both critical and sceptical research methods (2003:6). Further, he says the “personal connection to past events … a supportive yet intellectually challenging learning environment conducive to self expression” as essential characteristics (Booth, 2003:7). This was evident in a number of courses. The personal connection was also evident in the type of things remembered about courses. The undergraduate courses discussed in this chapter are primarily from the University of New England. I also include the first year Australian history courses (1A and 1B 1987) at the Australian National University, which I completed while spending a year living in Canberra. This course provides interesting comparison with its UNE equivalent

Many of us began our undergraduate degrees with Australian History 155. A year long course that introduced us to the expectations of the school.

History is a discipline, a literate and literary discipline, which requires a high degree of precision in argument and in the presentation of that argument both in expression and in documentation. (UNE History, 1985:23)

We were also introduced to the essay writing mantra: “What were the social reasons? The economic reasons? The political reasons? The Ideological Reasons?” (UNE History, 1985:23). Advised to avoid answering essays in a chronological or narrative
form, we followed this path throughout our undergraduate studies. The resources were largely primary sources, court documents and newspapers. It should also be noted that women were not represented in any way in this course.

One of the two prescribed texts was *Settlers and Convicts*, by Alexander Harris first published in 1847, highlighting the academic perceptions of the colony of this period. At the forefront of the design of the course was clearly the idea that students must be discerning in their reading; to place authors and sources in context with their time and to extract opinions and ideas carefully. The handbook stated:

> You are asked to consider the book, analysing critically, rather than praising or condemning, and using as far as possible the primary source material supplied to you during the year. (UNE History, 1985:6)

The second major resource was *The Australian Legend* by the afore-mentioned, Russel Ward, a past Head of Department at our university (1958). This inclusion was reflective of the teaching methods of the time, promoting an esteemed colleague’s work and demonstrating to students that significant texts emanate from within our own department. Proximity to writers of such esteem were thought to encourage students to ask questions of the author as well as understanding that the cited authors do not necessarily come from far flung universities. Yet this text was problematic in many ways. The statistics were regarded as questionable and it did not address women or Indigenous peoples to any great extent. It was a masculine story of mateship and the colonial frontier. In 1987, the Australian National University’s first year Australian History course was already asking the more probing questions of this text. By 1996, while tutoring in this course, I noted the University of New England had also shifted in its approach to this book. Still listed as a prescribed text and studied in the first week of the unit, the questions now probed the statistics, asked if he was “starry eyed”, noted the absence of women and challenged the notion of “legend” (UNE History, 1996:35).

By the mid 1990s, a new group of researchers of Indigenous history had emerged on the Australian scene. Of particular note were Henry Reynolds’ books. Although his first book *The Other Side of the Frontier* was published in 1981, it was not until the
1990s that coordinators of Australian History at the University of New England began to list his publications as essential reading. Other historians of this new generation included Peter Read (1984), Ann Curthoys (1978), Anne McGrath (1987) and others, their work reflecting a dramatic shift in studies in Australian Indigenous history. At the same time, the historical narrative had begun moving beyond the universities and into the nation’s courts where the concept of Native Title was being established.

It is also worthwhile noting that while the Australian National University course focused on the failings of Russel Ward in 1987, they were equally promoting their own academics; among them, the very popular Manning Clark. Clark’s (1986) grand narrative in his revised *A Short History of Australia* reflected a new way of telling the nation’s story, conversational and accessible. Similarly, the Australian National University History department promoted the work of Geoffrey Serle (1963), W. F. Mandle (1978), John Ritchie (1975) and Geoffrey Blainey (1975a) (ANU History, 1987:6). The course was also markedly different to the University of New England’s, first year course in that women’s history was delegated an entire week of study. Recommended readings included Jan Carter (1983), Miriam Dixson (1976), Kay Daniels and Mary Murnane (1980) and Anne Summers (1975).

**Second and Third Year Courses**

During the late 1980s and early 90s, the University of New England was offering a wide range of courses. As we moved on to second and third year courses, we were coming to better understand the procedures and requirements of undergraduate study. We were also becoming aware of the opportunities for specialised study. Particular courses and lecturers stood out in our memories.

Dr Carl Bridge introduced us to new perspectives in Australian History in his course *Australia Since 1914*. He spoke of the radical and innovative views of politicking and the protests against the Vietnam War. He invited his students to re-evaluate our recent past and challenge standard interpretations of Australia’s political past. His approach and topic was unlike any previously offered to us. Booth’s (2003:7) discussion of the way in which courses can highlight the intersections of the personal past with history resonated in Bridge’s lectures. I also recall feeling that Bridge’s teaching seemed to be at the cutting edge of historical interpretation of this period.
Dr Jo Woolmington’s course *Aboriginal History Since European Settlement* would prove for me a life-changing experience. Having grown up in rural New South Wales, I had no idea of what had been happening to the Indigenous children and families around me. I completed her course angry, humbled and determined that my studies would continue in this vein until I had grasped the alternate narratives of this history that had been amazingly invisible to my middle class and privileged life.

It was Jo Woolmington who gave me, and perhaps other undergraduates, the first insight into the possibilities of postgraduate research. Jo would often embark on long, enthusiastic and entertaining narratives interspersed by “Ooh now there is a thesis for somebody!” Initially, I did not understand her point. Later, however, her imaginative, original and intuitive thinking would captivate me. In conversations today, I now intersperse my own suggestions to students, aware that this sort of spontaneous sharing of both knowledge and unanswered questions is thought provoking and emancipatory. It immediately positions the student as a potential researcher and affirms the democratisation and accessibility of history. Researching and undertaking a Masters or Doctorial thesis is not something confined to a particular privileged group, it is (or at least should be) accessible to all.

Professor Geoff Quaife’s, *The Americas and European Expansion 1500 – 1700*, was a course that introduced us to the processes of colonisation around the world, bringing new understanding to what had occurred here in Australia. His ideas and teaching preempted the theories of post-colonialism, now so popular. While alluding to the exemplary notion of timeless rules of domination and exploitation, Quaife also demonstrated the temporalised nature of power and resistance. Quaife noted in the course handbook that the main requirements of the course were to develop the following techniques: “Comprehend, criticize, create and communicate,” with a particular emphasis on “criticize” (1990:3). He also instructed students to avoid all secondary quotes unless “you want to discuss or analyse the opinion expressed” (1990:3). The reasons behind this instruction would become more evident to the student as the course progressed. The listed resources were varied from the balanced and well informed to poor analysis. I recall feeling unsettled by one text, it seemed
out of context and was informed by Quaife that the research was in fact of poor quality, but that it was included to demonstrate the diversity in historical analysis.

Learning about Methodology

History theory, historiography and methodology courses have not had a long history and their introduction was not always welcomed. In 1967, Geoffrey Elton lamented the shifts in the teaching of history that encouraged students to examine historiography. He wrote:

But when, as too often, it becomes the only a confrontation of conflicting views, it is not a good way to teach history because it directs the attention away from what happened to what is later said about it. All those booklets and pamphlets, which treat historical problems by collecting extracts from historians writing about them give off clear light only when a match is put to them. (1976:192)

Elton was, it seems, certain of the existence of an actuality and, in turn, a single interpretation. He did not regard historiography to have any educational value, which in contemporary times, might be regarded as remarkable and intellectually limiting. As Tosh advised

Traditionally history undergraduates were offered no formal instruction in the nature of their chosen discipline; its time honoured place in out literary culture and its non-technical presentation suggested that commonsense combined with a sound general education would provide the student with what little orientation he or she required. (1987:vii)

At the University of New England during the 1980s and 90s, students wishing to undertake postgraduate studies, were required to enrol in a methodology course: *Approaches to History*. This course was run by Alan Atkinson accompanied by other lecturers and introduced me to a subject area that to this day underpins my research, my enthusiasm and understanding of history. In retrospect, one can identify a deliberate intention to invite students into Rüsen’s genetic category for understanding the past and, more importantly, the positioning of historians.
When I asked the women about their recollections of this course, a participant stated bluntly “Methodology is boring until you understand it,” another said: “I believe in oral history more than written.” They were also suspicious of the language I used for example, such as using ‘story’ as a verb and of “embodied learning experiences”. One said: “I am a plain language girl”. David Goodman laments the problem of students “fleeing theory” and, like myself, found enrolling in a methods course, liberating (1995:50). I recall thinking, that I would have liked to have studied this in my first undergraduate year and that my progression and understanding throughout my degree would have been very different. I was not alone in this thinking, as Una stated:

Aboriginal History, especially Aboriginal women’s history, which I likened to the Druids with their strictness for passing on accuracy, strength and ritual in preserving tribal and ancient history. And Bias! Oral history versus written history? We have got to observe the observer. This was one of the best lessons I had at university.

Keith Jenkins also advocated an early undergraduate theory based course. He suggested students would benefit from going beyond the traditional theory subjects and from the inclusion of “textualist, post-structuralist and post-modern” approaches.

I would argue history students now need to know if they are to understand anything of the general intellectual milieu within which they actually live, and which has serious implications for any consideration on the “nature of history” that they must undertake. (Jenkins, 1996:75)

In 2007, the Australian Historical Association released a report by Carly Millar and Mark Peel on honours courses in Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Fiji (Millar & Peel, 2007). Both the University of Western Australia and the University of Newcastle advocated a more concerted and early introduction of history theory. Other respondents to the survey agreed, but cited difficulties with the need for justifying courses with small student numbers. Some universities have actually dropped the compulsory theory component of their honours degrees in the hope more students would be attracted to less theoretical work, this has not, however, resulted in higher enrolments (Millar & Peel, 2007:10). It is evident that perceptions of history theory
and historiography have changed dramatically since the 1960s. An acknowledgement of their importance has not necessarily translated into practice within universities. The perception that students do not want to do theory is troubling, but for many students this may be true.

As a strong advocate of an early introduction of theory, I also advocate a multifaceted approach. I am reminded of concerns articulated by Sarah Mann; that the confines of a distinct discipline can have an “alienating effect” on students and that there is a risk of students being “disciplined into docility” (Mann, 2001:14). History theory courses, from my observations, have tended to offer the theoretical standpoints in a hierarchical manner. Areas considered to be characterised as fringe or not ‘proper’ history are being presented to students, but often only as a means for showing why students should return to the disciplinary fold. I recall a conversation with a history lecturer early in my doctoral research. I had asked: To what degree is postmodernism offered to students? The lecturer replied: “Postmodernism is studied early in the course and we show why it is not helpful and then return to traditional methods”. The report by Millar and Peel indicates that this view is changing and several universities are expanding the focus of their theory courses. One such example is the inclusion of “History and Hypertext” at the University of Sydney (Millar & Peel, 2007:11). I regard this as particularly innovative. I also adhere to Sam Wineburg’s concept of epistemological knowledge, which he describes as being “at the core of disciplinary knowledge [where students of history are able to] follow disputes about clashing interpretations, unsubstantiated claims and spurious interpretations” (1997:260).

Returning to the discussions by my participants, I am reminded that the theory course we undertook in the in late 1980s and early 1990s did not evoke great excitement or debate. I realised, I would need to explore the data from another angle to gauge how the women had embraced or not embraced methodology. I was not disappointed though, it was clear the theories of history were most important to the women. They tended to demonstrate their positions in their actions, rather than using self-labels or by making declarations of allegiances. In both an unspoken and spoken sense, the women were mediating positions, translating other’s positions and finding a comfortable space through self-orientation.
Enrolling in a Postgraduate Degree

Education researcher, Maggie MacLure, has argued that researching the points of entry and exits in research on teacher training offers insights into the “double nature” of transition (1996:276). Her focus is also useful for my purposes, looking at the processes of becoming historians and its legacies. In recalling the decision to enrol at the University of New England, the women’s stories were varied. For some the undergraduate enrolment came as an unexpected opportunity, sometimes prompted by friends or a newspaper advertisement. Continuing on to a postgraduate degree, however, was fuelled by a passion, an addiction to history or a suggestion from lecturers. For me, it was sheer addiction, accompanied, or even fed by, an inability to stop. This reflected Rüsen’s idea that we possess an innate desire to question and retell the past (2005:1). According to Rüsen, most of this activity will occur below the line in daily life and be guided by an ethic or lebenspraxis. Most will not be conscious of the process and will not apply methodological analysis, historicise their selves, nor perceive the theoretical battleground that foreshadows dedicated historical research.

Enrolling in a degree in History clearly took the women above the line. As a structured empiricist degree, it not only demonstrated the variety within the theoretical battleground, but challenged the women students to think about their own voice. The women often referred to a great appreciation of lecturer’s “guidance” and I suspect that this is in some ways an appreciation of the bridge to Rüsen’s above the line status. The women were able to see their daily life and understand their sense of lebenspraxis with new tools and skills and then embark on a personal and agentic research process. As one woman stated:

*I met Sandy Yarwood, he was writing about the Australian whaler. Many conversations of history gave me a good vibe about what was happening at UNE in history, so I enrolled in a Masters to indulge my love of a challenge.*

The identification of a “good vibe” and a vibrant learning community was indicative of the enthusiasm and dedication to a very particular type of history; one that I would identify as above the line and most certainly positioned with Rüsen’s Genetic category.
The opportunity and access available within the university community was also commented on, in another way, by school teachers of history. Anna Clark found in her analysis of the *Australians and the Past* survey, that teachers regarded there to be a “gap between themselves and academic historians. Universities were frequently seen to have more access to resources, and a greater expectation of original research and scholarship” (2003:198). Once we were accepted into the degree, we were immersed in a new type of study, familiar in some ways and completely alien in others. One of the consistent threads throughout our time at UNE was the importance of residential schools and the intense learning we enjoyed.

**The Skills of a Historian**

From the outset of studying at university, students of history are required to undertake a considerable amount of reading. In recent times, the types of sources offered to students has widened beyond the textbook and the records of the archives, incorporating art, music, the landscape, film, spoken narratives, photographs and objects. At the time of our study, however, we were largely restricted to books and articles. Many of the skills we acquired to disseminate the sources are of equal use in analysing the more recent inclusions. Published works and archival documents continue to be at the centre of most students’ study.

How do historians read a text? What are the particular skills and nuances that mark the historian’s reading in contrast to other people? These are some of the questions raised in Gaea Leinhart and Kathleen McCarthy Young’s research (1996). They found that historians “routinely engage in the self-conscious, directed reading and re-reading of historical documents, moving iteratively between documents and their own historical theories about an issue” (1996:441). Again the links with Rüsen’s ideas are clear of cognitive and rhetorical strategies for mediation and orientation (2005:133).

There is a constant negotiation and translation process occurring as the historian absorbs the thrust of the text and simultaneously analyses the representations and underlying agendas within the text. Leinhart and McCarthy Young suggest that historians then regard texts in three ways; either as an example, as a puzzle piece or a discovery. Other researchers in the field, such as Wineburg, affirm such analysis and state that the texts are treated as “artefacts” (1996:445).
In my own research, the women participants’ stories reflected similar views, and these processes were used equally with a wide range of historical sources. All sources, including their own memories, were subject to a rigorous analysis that incorporated their own philosophy, the bodies of knowledge gained at university and or that which has developed since. At every stage of these processes the orientation of self was a guiding prompt or signifier. To what degree did this process become embedded while at university? The history student’s experience, both undergraduate and postgraduate, was evidently marked by a progressive understanding of its importance. At first, students were heavily guided, and later, encouraged to work independently. The skills were easily transferred in later periods to analysis of the vast number of types of sources they would use. The women would move into the field of public, family, community histories and story telling, as I discuss in later chapters.

Place and Space at University /Learning in Different Spaces
I spoke with Professor Geof Quaife, a past head of School, early in my research. He told me of the early struggles of women entering external studies in the 1960s and 70s; of the dramatic downward shifts in staffing rates, and the changes in popularity of subjects. But what struck me was a comment he made on the enthusiasm at residential schools. He said the students enjoyed the totality of the residential experience to such a degree that “You could work 24 hours a day” (2001). This, I felt, reflected my memories of residential schools, of the desire for immersion, for intense engagement with the subject and with lecturers and fellow students. This pointed to the intensity of and passions for studying History. It also demonstrated the importance of learning and developing one’s historical consciousness in both formal and informal settings.

Our group remembered undergraduate formal lectures with considerable fondness. They were feasts laid before us and we were limited only by our ability to listen to every word and take notes quickly. One woman noted how helpful her shorthand skills were in capturing every word. We wanted to hear every word, absorb ideas, suggestions and put forward our own interpretations. Equally, one could be overtaken with fear of speaking aloud, yet there was always a balance created by a common ground – the desire to learn.
At the reunion, there was consistent talk about the impact of non-official gatherings – be it meals at the college or the Bistro, morning teas at Mary White College or snatched moments in the corridor. All the women confirmed that these moments were imperative to their sense of being a student, to having the opportunity to ask “silly” questions about the course or sharing logistical problems relating to external study.

Rosemary:  
*The camaraderie, shared interest in a love that can’t find expression at home or your work place. You’re not having those conversations. To be able to come up here and have someone who knows exactly what you are talking about and also knows your battling and juggling time and hours and jobs and families and all the rest of it.*

Helena:  
*I enjoyed residential schools particularly and not just because of the history study, but for the conversations with like (and unlike) minded students around meal times and even coming up on the train from Sydney.*

The train conversation was one that brought immediate memories for the women and for myself, having travelled from the south coast to Armidale twice a year for residential schools. The train was always filled with externals and the conversations began at central station and ceased only as we parted to register at the accommodation colleges.

I recall one fellow traveller, another undergraduate History student, who opened my eyes to the idea of lifelong learning. Having retired from a life’s work in the theatre, an elderly lady, heavily made up and colourfully dressed in bohemian attire, chatted throughout the daylong train trip. She told me of her life and study experiences. Finding herself bored in her eighth decade, she loved her undergraduate studies, so keen that she had already completed her essay not due for another month. I had yet to begin my reading, having been kept busy by two young boys, part time work and the often exhausting, life of a sole parent. Our very different lives shared a single passion, studying history, and we talked until the train pulled into a cold Armidale railway station.
I did not get a sense of the privilege of the university space that Bruce McLeod spoke of in his research. He describes the space as being “inscribed in literary theory (and suggests that) place and theory reinforce one another,” (1994:88). He cites Adrienne Rich’s notion of ‘the politics of location’ (1987) from the perspective of the counter-hegemonic cultural practice and raised the questions: To what degree were we aware of our privilege? How well did we in fact fit in? The point that keeps re-emerging for me here, is that the university space seemed to act as an enclave from the outside world.

Embodied Learning

I was also interested in embodied experiences in higher education and found the work of feminist scholars such as Jane Gallop (1988) and Allison Bartlett (2006) particularly useful. I also found resonance in Catharine Waldby’s notion of the “fiction of the disembodied scholar” (1995:193). These authors explored the body, its presence, its pleasures, its awkwardness or intrusiveness in the teaching and learning environment. I prompted my research participants with an undergraduate experience of my own. I spoke of struggling to attend a residential school, eight and a half months pregnant and doing an examination only a few months later.

*The Milky Exams: Having driven an hour to Dubbo to a small church with the Minister coordinating our exams. I was ready to be the student, pouring my knowledge and passion onto the pages. I was alarmed to realise that my body believed the excess of milk should be mixed with my words of wisdom. I quickly wiped it off the paper – good students do not leak onto exam pages ... would I ever get this good student thing right?*

The body is not meant to intrude on intellectual pursuits. In retrospect and informed by Alison Bartlett’s and others research, I understand that the body is ever-present. It is a signifier of our well being, or ill health, and always marking our ontogenetic learning journey. While the women enjoyed my story, they seemed momentarily unsettled. Indeed one woman responded with

*I’m blank! Fancy being wordless!*
They did, however, launch into some remarkable stories of touch, perhaps unrelated specifically to university learning, but demonstrating the voice of historians. The women analysed and wondered over the significance or touching objects as a way of connecting to the past be it monuments, heavy door carvings, drawers, silver spoons, World War One fighter plane coverings or army handkerchiefs in the war museum. This thread of talk will be discussed in the following chapter on materiality.

Later the women did begin by talking of the body in place, at university, of the library, the town and the open rural spaces that surround the university.

*I think the environment here is important to me, the fact that it is peaceful, tranquil and there are many trees and I would walk around in the morning.*

The library was designated with one of those “special” labels. It was a place of retreat and a source of everything. As external students, physical access to the library was regarded as a great treat. Many happy hours were filled with wandering and browsing the 900’s shelves, the home for many History books.

*I can remember ... just the pleasure. Of being able to get what you wanted, so you could spend all your time getting as much as you possibly could, in the afternoon and evenings. But I would also sneak off to town, being particularly naughty and shopping.*

It was interesting that during our M.Litt. schools, the podium in the Marnie Yeats Room remained a strong memory for all of us. Each of us were expected to give a presentation outlining the current status of our research. It was a source of terror, a place to shine and share and, at times, a soapbox. Each of the women recalled the moment of truth, standing behind the podium. When I was listening to my tapes, I became aware of both the embodied and the intellectual story of the podium in the first of two residential schools. Or of a particular desk which we used to speak from in the second school. Perhaps this an attempt to make the school more relaxed? This shift, I was to discover, merely exposed my shaking hands and legs – normally hidden by the height of a podium – but at a chair and desk, visible for all to see, were my trembling limbs. And the women agreed:
And you sat there in abject fear (laughter) that you would sound as if you hadn’t progressed from the last time you were here.

In keeping with the work of Elizabeth Atkinson, the muddying of the fear/thrill binary gives light to the multiplicity of the moment. Thus we find the imagined binaries of the learning process is representative of “plural articulation and difference rather than opposed to each other” (E. Atkinson, 2001:310). As the discussion continued, such ideas were affirmed, and amid the trepidation was exaltation and confirmation.

Bronwyn: I remember my presentation because I was so excited about sharing it.
Rosemary: And I found that you had such a willing audience, because they were all doing something themselves. They were all nervous that they weren’t up to scratch. People were genuinely interested in the passion that you had, so that spurred you on.

This shared understanding and support amongst the students was very evident in the women’s discussion. I also wondered about the sites of division. Despite the connection and close relationship between lecturers and students on a one to one basis, at other times, there was a distance in that room, as we readied ourselves to give our presentation. It was a distance between the lecturers who represented the knowledge, positions of power and judgement, and we, the students, who were about to expose our vulnerable selves, to perform our research. This vast chasm dissipated after the presentation and the relief was palpable. The authoritative and formal lecturers suddenly reverted to friendly and supportive faces once again. But for a brief time, despite the lecturers making every effort to create a comfortable space, the distance between lecturer and student could not be more evident.

In that room, there was a feeling that you wanted to capture every word of both the lecturers and fellow speakers. I recall taking extensive notes, on each of the student presentations and looking for any ideas and hints on how to best go forward with my thesis. We were aware that all too soon, we would return to our homes, far from the
support of the university, its students and lecturers. Certainly, the isolation of external study was an obvious point of discussion during our reunion. Apart from busy lives, the physical distance was compounded by the absence of like-minded people. In recent years, I have heard women talking about selecting courses that do not have residential schools – to minimise intrusion and costs on their busy lives. When I mentioned this to the women participants, there was an uproar of protest. The residential experience was vital.

*It was getting a sense of what university is ACTUALLY like.*

**Fragmented Lives: Home Life and being Mothers**

Linden West’s (1996) research on the fragmentation of the mature age student resonated with the stories of my participants. The schools were an intellectual life-blood. My sole parenthood, my feminism and studies set me aside from the norm in my small coastal village – coming to Armidale was as different as night and day. In a study by Abbey and O’Reilly in 1998, the authors described the multiplicity of women, mothers and grandmother’s experiences.

Mothers are never only mothers …[Everyday] subjectivity shifts synchronically and diachronically. In any given day, a mother will move from one identity to another. At any given moment several selves will be complementary and conflicted. (1998 cited in Gouthro & Grace, 2000:9)

One is prompted to ask: To what degree did the women put this story forward as part of their larger story? I felt a sense that this was an accompanying storyline rather than a focus. Indeed, it was a storyline that reflected their determination and their agency. Similarly:

*Bronwyn:* I had a very busy time, working full time and my kids were early teenagers.

*Una:* I had all the grandchildren, all over NSW and I had to be there for them. Looking after children all day and working on my M.Litt. at night.
Rosemary: That’s why it was so good to come here and get away from that. And just say this is your moment – get to it!

Looking back at the transcripts, the idea that it was “our moment” intrigued me. It was the thing we did for ourselves and it was an act that reflected choice and agency. It was indeed a time of immersion for our passions, intense learning, talking and listening and snatched moments over texts, amid busy lives. It was our time to play and to reflect our agency in the space above Rüsén’s line.

The conversation shifted to an engrossing story of Alan Atkinson’s directing one of the women to seek sources for her thesis on horse drawn buses in Brisbane beyond her local archives. This was a defining moment that gave her the opportunity to access data upon which she could test her analytical skills and begin to draw together a thesis in her own voice.

He was quite amazing really. He said to me “Because your history has never been looked at before, find out what happened in Sydney, in Melbourne, in Adelaide and in London”. If I hadn’t had the advice that I was given here, I wouldn’t know where to start. It really snowballed. I have been researching this for about twelve years now and I guess I will for the rest of my life.

This moment was a clear signifier for this participant. She did not choose to tell us of the fascinating data she would later find, rather, she selected the specific moment that allowed her access to the data. It is the openings that marks the learning experience: a thoughtful comment by a lecturer, embodied access to the library, finding voice at a presentation or engaging in debate with fellow students. Each of these can be seen as different to speaking of the production of the women’s own work. They represent doors opening and what comes after, as almost taken for granted: the period of expression and creativity. Perhaps the ‘after’ is what occurred above Rüsén’s line and these signifiers were the opportune ladders that allowed your entry.

Doing an M.Litt. was not always an easy task. Many of the women spoke of struggling with expectations, their own and their supervisors, with accessing data for their research and getting through the completion stages. Not unfamiliar problems for
any postgraduate student. I remain concerned that I was not able to contact the women who started to study with us, but did not submit. Although a few receiving my introductory letter fitted this category, they did not respond. Did they think their story was unimportant? Was it perhaps a time they preferred to leave in the past? I am unable to answer these questions and feel that this will be one of the absences in my research.

I recall a presentation at one residential that left me wondering about whether I should be doing a thesis at all. A woman had given a presentation that, to me, appeared to be a solid and articulate presentation. In the feedback she was given a resounding – “What is the point of this research?” – I recall feeling alarmed at the clear indication that her study was considered to be unworthy. It was family history and according to one of the lecturers it was devoid of serious historical worth. I cannot speak for this woman, as she did not respond to my letter of invitation. For myself, I cringed into my chair and thought: “If HERS wasn’t good enough then what would they think of mine!” I also thought about this moment much later and linked it with my own uncertainties about worthiness, inclusion and exclusion, not just within our university but amid History as a whole, amid the debates over history theory.

**Academic Rigour**

Much of the debate in history theory alludes to the presence and sometimes absence of academic rigour, a key marker in any research process, be it empiricist or postmodern. I asked the women about it.

> Well I’ve not used it from a Historical perspective but oh dear I have used it in my teaching, And I would never have been able to do that as well if I hadn’t been put through the rigours of rewriting chapter two. (much laughter)

Each of us jumped in amid great laughter

*Rosemary:*  What are you saying here?
*Beryl:*  What is your argument?
*Adele:*  Is there a point?
*Rosemary:*  Is this valid?
Clearly, we learned our lessons within our degrees but there was nothing like rewriting a chapter to solidify an understanding of expectations. Indeed, this challenge is indicative of the complexity of the mediation and orientation of a developing historical consciousness.

The women’s stories reflected the immersion of Jordanova’s (2000:34) perfumes. They were strong and full of determined vitality. As will be seen in the following chapters, the women have gone on to write histories of local parishes, of churches and schools. They established family history groups, set up historical travel consultancies, and worked in archives. There was clear evidence of the historicised self, questioning of one’s approach, one’s place and role within the work and a sense of generational nurturing. The work they have continued to do was very much grounded in their learning in the History department and, I would suggest, in their ability to navigate Rüsen’s cyclical matrix (Rüsen, 2005). It was as if a passion was nurtured and fed by our studies and layers of understanding and rigour that shaped our paths. It was evident that the women were committed to identifying absences, restoring and salvaging history at risk. Quite a few relayed stories of working in various types of archives.

Phoenix: That’s the thing with history really, the archives and keeping things, it requires a lot of methodical work.

Helena: Well it requires putting things in envelopes and writing labels.

Phoenix: There’s not necessarily the money to go around.

Helena: No no!

Phoenix: And if it wasn’t done a lot of valuable stuff would be lost.

Helena: Fascinating stuff but you haven’t got time to read it.

This sense of obligation was a continual thread in all of my data. There was an obligation to not only organise and preserve existing data but to bring forth new and unknown histories. Returning to those years at the University of New England has been an affirmative one. The women and I demonstrated the great value we placed on serious historical study. It was a life changing period, provoked self-evaluation as well as prudent evaluation of text and materiality. It sits firmly as a happy and
rewarding space in the women’s and my life. And I feel that during our reunion we evoked, called upon and drenched ourselves in Jordanova’s historic perfume,

*It’s a slice of your life than we can share and that we have come back to rekindle.*

*Yes the atmosphere and sharing history
History is where my real passion lies.*

**Historicising our Learning: History and Distance**

Historical and gender analysis of our childhood and young adulthood dominated the discussion at the reunion and, to a degree, the posted stories. Why men and women behaved in particular ways, the implications for children, the building of communities, objects we treasured, of social prejudices and of social standing. This historicised perspective of our own and our community’s past prompted me to ask questions of historical distance. In my reading of historical consciousness, I became concerned that the topics offered by the women might fall into some sort of shallow category. Much of the readings alluded to things ahistorical, to nostalgia or to heritage areas, which have often been deemed to be outside the proper historical realm. I was aware of an un-named layer of analysis that the women offered was something else again. It was something that reflected a discerning voice that had its roots in our learning at university. Increasingly, I was drawn to the idea of historical distance - not so much the empiricist view that distance could be equated with objectivity, thus reflecting a truth. Rather, it was proximity that interested me, the very thing that many historians would argue led to a simplistic or singular story. How might proximity actually lead to a different and valid analysis? In Salber Phillips’ chapter on historical distance and micro-history, he suggests:

It is ironic, nonetheless, that the history of historical thought has long resisted attempts to historicise its own foundations, preferring instead to follow implicit, but strongly held prescriptions about what constitutes proper forms of historical investigation or understanding. (2004:87)
Salber Phillips goes on to argue that historical distance is indeed a construction. He asks whether it relies on “a passage of time”, “engagement and disengagement” or might the historical narrative bring a “vivid and palpable” connection. Indeed he goes on to ask, “are impersonal social forces a central feature to analysis?” (2004:91-2). He suggests that these questions can be applied to more than historical texts and suggests that contemporary museums with their participatory approach are examples of the question of historical distance, ideology and representation. In turn he suggests that there are four types of historical distance; formal, affective, ideological and cognitive (2004:97).

These categories and questions shed further light on my considerations. Might proximity, embodied and material, be reflective of the “palpable” history that Salber Phillips refers to. The generational nurturing of historical stories embedded in materiality, in the personal stories and in the historicised self, lead us to another layer of history, where objectivity based distance is actually complemented and enriched. Salber Phillips notes:

> It certainly does not follow that there exists a universally privileged distance location. On the contrary, it is essential to recognise that there is no fixed stance, either detachment or proximity, that is best suited for all contexts, purposes or genres. (2004:95)

It is within this framework that the following chapters explore women as keepers of history, the importance of place and pilgrimage and working in the public sphere.

**The Future of History in Universities in Australia**

As previously mentioned, the Australian Historical Association released a report in 2007 outlining the results of a survey of university history departments in four South Pacific countries (Millar & Peel, 2007). The prospects for postgraduate history study initially appeared to be grim. Millar and Peel write that all departments were currently suffering from a decline in both student and staff numbers as well as a decrease in funding (2007:18). The report suggested that the introduction of the “Bologna Process”, a model favoured in Europe and similar to that used in the United States, will see a restructuring of university courses across Australia and the first university
to adopt the model will be the University of Melbourne (2007:17). Already the impact of this announcement is being felt as student protests are distributed in History related email lists, outlining major cuts to History courses (Yahoo Group Australian and New Zealand Living History, 2007).

Millar and Peel’s report indicates that the changes in history departments in Australia include a small but growing shift towards interdisciplinary research. What has begun as a “small trickle” of students undertaking interdisciplinary honours courses seems set to become a trend (Millar & Peel, 2007:11). This is not necessarily welcomed by those in some History departments who reported to Millar and Peel of their concerns that there will be an ongoing effect on “historical training and the depth of their knowledge of the discipline” (2007:12). The protection of disciplinary boundaries remains an imperative for many historians. Some universities, however, have already begun developing interdisciplinary courses at the honours level and are reporting very positive results. The impact of such changes in Australian and New Zealand universities is yet to be fully analysed. I was, however, buoyed by the strong focus on History Theory by the University of Waikato (Millar & Peel, 2007:10) as well as the way in which some institutions such as the University of Ballarat and Curtin University of Technology, have introduced successful interdisciplinary postgraduate courses (Millar & Peel, 2007:13).

As I argue in this thesis, these are important developments in the field of history in higher education. As long as the Federal funding and university structures allow these to continue, I believe students will respond positively. Like many of the respondents of Millar and Peel’s survey, I do think we are heading for treacherous waters. There should be room for single focused historical study, alongside an offering of multi-faceted histories in the higher education arena. The essential factor must be a strong understanding of history theory and methodology to inform students in their choices.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, it has become evident that learning at university can be a transformative experience. As I traced our experiences from enrolment to undergraduate and postgraduate studies, it was evident that each of us embraced the opportunities to further our historical knowledge. This chapter has also provided an
insight into the changing focus of courses, reflecting the generational shifts of the philosophy of lecturers and authors as well as the institutional hierarchy under which they work. As students, we were not always aware of the political and personal nature of these changes and the focus of many of our memories often centred on individual lecturers who helped and inspired us and the privilege, of simply being able to study. As we looked back at our experiences, I sought to lead the women to unexpected sites of analysis. We were able to re-think the idea of the embodied student amid a disembodied institution. We talked about notions of the university landscape alongside the intellectual frameworks and then explored the negotiations we undertook, balancing the fragmentary nature of mature age student lives. This chapter has demonstrated the complex nature of teaching and learning history in higher education. It was evident that by revisiting student experience a decade after the completion of our courses, we can engage in different discussions about historical scholarship, feminist perspectives and history in the higher education arena.

In the next chapter, I will examine the notion of materiality and the role of being keepers of history. I will argue that these areas offer great potential as subjects or vehicles for studying history. Although these were not a focus of our own learning in the higher education experience, I will demonstrate their importance amid historical practice to the women of my research. Materiality and the personal historical narratives embedded in objects have enormous potential for extending historical scholarship.
Chapter 5

Materiality and Keepers of History

Figure 6: Autograph book c 1890

"And when she came and gave me this I just nearly fell over. I mean it was just the most special thing that was given to me"
What is it that makes family heirlooms, souvenirs and collections so “special”? In this chapter I will explore the historicism embedded in objects and the idea of women as keepers of history. I report on the responses made by the women in my study group to my request to write about or bring particular objects that they have kept as part of their family history. Each provided a number of “special” objects and spoke at length of the stories inscribed in each. These stories provide an insight into their historical practice and consciousness. They spoke of the significance of touching objects and of preserving and passing them on to future generations. It became evident that informed by their learning experiences at university, the women told stories of objects and place that were laden with meta-narratives which served to enrich the micro-narrative or personal perspective. These included philosophical, economic, social, cultural and political backgrounds, which then added to the body of knowledge surrounding the object or place. This affirming and supportive endorsement of the object and its meaning for the individual was indicative of the discourse of the workshop. With immediate connections and understanding of the personal alongside and supported by a vast body of historical knowledge, the group exchanged and enriched each other’s stories.

This is not to say people who have not studied history at university cannot make such analogies, but the extensive nature of the shared body of knowledge was most certainly reflected in our workshops. Thus given the nature of the female discourse, their interests and desire to share and affirm each other’s stories meant that the context in which we heard and revealed of our objects was expansive.

**Narratives embedded in Objects**

In this chapter, as well as dealing with historicised objects, I will explore the signifiers of the development of historical consciousness and legacies of our learning at university. I will discuss what narratives are seen as embedded in the objects the women showed, how are they constructed and what do they do for the speaker /keeper and for the audience? A useful standpoint to do so can be found in the discipline of material culture. From within this discipline I will discuss notions of agency of objects, touch, the role of the keeper, the historicised self and the idea of generational nurturing.
I am mindful of Honkanen’s exploration of whether the meaning and historicity lies within an object or is it based on context and related discourse (2004:74). Equally, of her discussion of the relationship between materiality and the discursivity (2004:76).

Analysing these narratives can be problematic especially if the researcher has preconceived ideas about a particular aspect or seeks to quantify the objects. When a researcher recognises their accompanying learner status and is willing to re-evaluate their assumptions, however, a more fruitful analysis is made possible. When Barbara Babcock wrote of her research in women’s production of folkloric objects, she referred to a pivotal turning point in her understanding of what it was that was embedded in the storyteller pottery created by Helen Cordero, a Cochiti potter.

I spent a lot of time in 1978 trying to ascertain how many Storytellers she had made, if not in her lifetime, at least in the past month or year. Helen replied several times that she just didn’t know, and finally in exasperation remarked “Its like breads, we don’t count” And after a while I stopped counting too and began to understand what it means to liken breads to potteries. (Babcock, 1987:392)

It becomes clear in this statement that the investment in many objects cannot be quantified, rather what matters, is the purposeful narrative embedded within the object.

Similarly Susan Stewart offers further useful analysis of objects, which she describes as a “souvenir”. She states: “The souvenir is, by definition always incomplete. The object does not replace the experience and equally it does not exist without the associated narrative (Stewart, 2003:136). Stewart points to the importance of deconstructing and contextual orientation one needs to undertake during analysis of material objects. I found within my own research, quantity and even quality of objects were not paramount, what did seem important, was the meaning we derive and pass on and the sense of cultural and social obligation that motivates us.
Literary Background to Material Culture

Material culture was first subject to scholarly discussion in 1875 by A. Lane-Fox Pitt-Rivers, who claimed it could be regarded as the “outward signs and symbols of particular ideas of the mind” (cited in Schlereth, 1985:21). Researchers have since demonstrated that by exploring material culture we can provide insights unavailable in other forms. As Auslander says, a reliance purely on literal sources might be regarded as “impoverished” (2005:para. 2). She fruitfully explains that through a study of the embodied relationship between object and individual or community, we can further understand objects as “modes of communication, or memory cues, or expressions of the psyche, or an extension of the body as well as sites of aesthetic investment” (Auslander, 2005:para. 4).

Materials and objects have continued to fascinate researchers as a “humankind’s oldest legacy of cultural expression” (Schlereth, 1985:23). In the last few decades material culture has developed well beyond anthropological and archaeological disciplines. Indeed the recent notions of “thing theory” are being embraced from many academic sectors. This interesting development, alongside the expanding notions of embodiment and place as a means of learning, teaching and knowing, provide the basis for this chapter, in which I aim to story the women’s passion for history through materiality, and to explore the processes behind being keepers of historical objects. I am conscious that this will offer more of the in-between storylines, which may be dismissed as unimportant in the grand scheme of macro history, yet illuminate intricacies of connections and disconnection to the past.

Don Ihde connects natural sciences with hermeneutics: “A material hermeneutics is a hermeneutics which ‘gives things voice where there had been silence, and brings to sight that which was invisible’” (2003 cited in Domanska, 2005:4). Many objects are held, used and preserved without any historic analysis. I wonder, however, if many of the objects discussed in this chapter had been rendered silent. Through a process of selection by the women, however, each object emerged laden with voices of the original and current keepers. By looking to Irigaray and Honkenan’s ideas of the potential for women’s history to exist outside a patriarchal history, through such
objects, we may find there is ongoing and generational histories being told and retold, all within a matrilineal domain and outside “the language” of the masculine (Irigaray 1997 cited in Honkanen, 2004:97).

In this chapter, I will remain informed by the proposition that outside the formal histories, alluded to by feminist theorists such as Butler, Irigaray, Honkanen and Braidotti, is a female style of ‘doing’ history. One might suggest this history can be boxed into a binary formal / informal, but this is far too simple to be particularly useful. Women historians cross the formal / informal divide constantly. But there is potential for situating certain material histories as female, as constructed, and as ongoing through generations, remaining largely unrecognised as historical practice requiring self-orientation, translation and mediation. These histories are often oral, centre on the material, but inscribed with personal discourse. One of the ways in which we can analyse this discourse further is by thinking in terms of agency, of the individuals, but also of the objects themselves.

**The Agency of Objects**

One of the more recent developments in the study of material culture is the idea that objects have agency. As Auslander suggests they are “communicative, performative, emotive, (have) expressive capacities, they act, (and) have effects on the world,” (2005:para. 6). This agentic notion is recognised by a number of academics from a variety of theoretical positions. Of particular note are History theorist, Ewa Domanska (2005), anthropologist, Alfred Gell (1998), anthropologist, Diane Bell (1987) and feminist philosopher Judith Butler (2003). Each offer readers a particular perspective, yet I would argue that once again an interdisciplinary approach could provide an informative bricolage of understanding on the deliberately assigned as well as the unintended meanings we give objects.

Much of the research into agency is intrinsically linked with the construction of the self and one’s orientation with a peopled past. Domanska claims;
Things (relics of the past, keepsakes) can be used to help us determine who we are: the thing becomes the other of human being; the thing participates in creating human identity, legitimates it and becomes its guarantor; it also marks changes in human identity. At the collective level things help build and strengthen interpersonal relations as they serve to connect people. (2005:2)

We, as researchers, are thus confronted with the need to interpret the embedded agency. Domanska provides an insight into the methodological possibilities for such study evident within the Journal for Material Culture. This journal she suggests, “Reject(s) constructivism, narrativism, and textualism … (and points) to the agency of things, accentuating the fact that things not only exist, but also act and have performative potential,” (Domanska, 2005:3).

The idea of a performative potential is a useful standpoint given that the interaction between the self, the object and the perceived past, is a constantly negotiated site. As Bell suggests an object has a “timelessness: their transmission transcends lifespan; they have a life force and logic of their own” (1987:261). Thus the historicised keeper / self translates and passes on the embedded narrative.

Alfred Gell makes a cautious dual distinction of primary and secondary agents. He suggests that the primary agent is the person who “distribute(s) their agency in the causal milieu, and the thus render their (the object’s) agency effective” and the object as secondary (1998:20). He is reluctant, however, to create a hierarchy within this binary. The agency of the object is “always relational and context dependant” rather than agents merely in a “manner of speaking” (Gell, 1998:22).

I feel somewhat troubled by Gell’s use of a binary, which he follows up with another, of agents / patients going on to create a fourfold typology; Indexes (material entities), artist (creators), recipients and prototypes (Gell, 1998:26-27). This sort of breakdown is obviously useful within his field of anthropological study of art. However for my purposes, I am drawn more to notions of performativity and self.

Judith Butler offers another perspective on the purpose of materiality by suggesting that it can be seen as;
A return to the notion of matter, not as a site or surface, but as a process of materialization that stabilises over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixivity, and surface we call matter. (Butler, 1993:9)

The constructiveness and the role of materiality can therefore also be regarded as part of the historicising process of that gives individuals certainty and signifiers by which we navigate our constructed self, orientating our selves and objects to give meaning.

**Touching the Past**

Before looking at the idea of keepers in detail, I will explore the one of the most basic aspects of objects and our most developed sense, that of touch. The terms, “fingertip acquaintance and fingertip knowledge”, coined by Brooke Hindle, alert us to potential for accessing the past through objects (1983:458). At my research workshop, I was surprised that talk led quickly to the idea of touch, which occurred without any directives from me. This fundamental accession to the past and to the narratives inscribed in objects reflects the embodied and personal nature of a love of history.

Talk at the workshop, began with a story of a visit to the Chester Cathedral in England. There was a “tap on the shoulder” – “Madam, you know, you can read the notice, you are not allowed to touch these things, will you come with me please”. We, her listeners, collectively shuddered. It was agreed that touching was “being naughty”, yet we also understood her need to touch, to test the authenticity of a carving guarded by chains, mesmerised by the timelessness and the privilege of seeing such aged treasures. Just as she must have done we jumped at “the tap on the shoulder” and imagined the walk up the stairs tentatively following the Cathedral guardian, aware of the gravity of broken rules.

This cathedral is over a thousand years old. It has seen a thousand years of worship, intrigue, and artistry. And now our speaker relays her nervousness as she is led up the stairs to face her come-uppance. The church guardian was however a man of some humour and appreciation of passions for history. For the journey up the many stairs
led her and the guardian into the very chapel of Anselm, Abbot of Bec and later Archbishop of Canterbury. Such was the reward for being naughty and passionate on this day. Her story resonated with the other women, they too had more stories of touching and so they began to flow.

This desire mixed with reverence might be linked with notions of hierarchy and privilege. The women were evidently aware of the precious nature of the historical objects, equally, they were aware of the restrictions and controls placed on common people in accessing or touching the objects. Yet possessing an informed and educated knowledge of history they were driven by a desire to authenticate the reality of the object and the meaning they derive from it, through touch.

Constance Classen and David Howes argue that prior to the nineteenth century, touching objects in museums was not generally forbidden. In the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, curators believed touch was regarded as an “essential and expected means of acquiring knowledge,” (2006:201). It was thought that all of the senses were imperative to gaining a true understanding of the objects and their history and that through touch, one might gain an “interior truth”, unavailable by sight alone (2006:202). Concern about preservation largely erased these ideas, as museums implemented strict rules of access and installed impenetrable glass cases to protect precious items. In recent years an increasing number of “open air” and Living History museums have been established. Their ‘hands on’ approach seeks to encourage a broad sensory engagement.

I tell the group a story of the roof section of a fighter plane, which now sits in a local museum, but had spent many years guarding a French gardener’s tomatoes. The plane had been shot down over France in World War II and the local museum had eventually retrieved it for a display on a local pilot who lost his life in the crash. As I touched the worn and weather-beaten section I wondered about the pilot reaching to open the roof. I wonder how many times airmen’s hands had slid that piece of Perspex over their head before heading off to fight, or about the times they slid it open back safe at the airstrip? Then I imagine the crash, the breaking up and the desolation of war. But this piece of Perspex then went on to a take up a gentler role as a protector of plants, years of planting and replanting beneath this unexpected war
souvenir. By what quirk of history did it come, now, to a country town in New South Wales, to take on new meaning?

We are mesmerised by the unveiling of stories of touch as each one inspires another as another woman waits to tell her story. We are transported to Rome, in St Peters Cathedral to a tall door, intricately carved and solid.

_I must have looked a bit strange shoving this door – these strange desires, it is only when you think about it afterwards, at the time it seemed perfectly normal – why do you need to push it._

To push the door is to push it just as so many have done centuries before, just I had touched the Perspex cabin cover. The survival of objects connects us to previous users and hints at the emotions evoked by each toucher.

Another woman stated _and public things are not really for you to touch, your being almost naughty._ Another spoke of a crypt in Scotland where the effigies are so worn by the touch of inquisitive hands they are not recognisable. And another spoke, of two statues in Scone, New South Wales, a mare and her foal. The foal drew the children’s touch and now bares the scars of such interest.

Talk turned to sites where guardians provide surveillance with such vigilance as to prevent passionate and inquisitive hands to touch. Saumarez House, a colonial house, just a few kilometres from the Armidale township. It is a grand place that once was the home of the town’s elite. It is now a public museum of untouchable histories. The contents and fixtures of the house are out of bounds. Fortunately our storyteller is a maverick who was able to tell of quietly opening a drawer, exposing the contents to peering eyes. “It was almost like they had just walked out, just left things,” she observed. The listeners to this story murmured quietly, aware of the sin but more aware of the treasured glimpse of untouched history. It was confirmation that there were indeed times when passion and fascination must overcome caution, for the rewards were unique glimpses and memories. These stories represented glimpses and memories that this group of women could well appreciate.
In this reverential moment, Rosemary suddenly declares, “I wouldn’t want my drawers immortalised”. The group fell into laughter and connectedness. As we gathered ourselves, talk returned to the educative importance of touch, particularly for children. Una spoke of the War Memorial in the nation’s capital, Canberra, and the fact that curators and educators encourage children to touch objects, to gain a sense of the real. For example, a World War II collection is strategically placed in a large trunk.

Una: It was filled with memorabilia, peaked caps with gold braid and plenty of badges and uniforms. As each group of children arrive at the trunk, they are told they can pick out one object. The most commonly chosen object was, in fact, a khaki handkerchief.

Rosemary: What they pick up and crush it?

Una: It was already crumpled.

Rosemary: Mmm.

Una: It wasn’t beautifully ironed or anything, it was crumpled so it was just pulled out of the trunk.

Rose: It looked so life like?

Una: Exactly, the curator said ‘we had terrific fun just trying to make sense of that. We realised that war was so far out of the children’s experience, they could only see it on television or read about it. But to be able to touch something that had been in somebody’s pocket, it was so realistic, so much like their Dad’s pocket’.

Here we are reminded of the potential historical proximity of the personal object. The handkerchief is a mundane item of daily life, yet it is also accessible and knowable. It does not require the child to construct an elaborate contextual setting, simply a father’s pocket reflecting the continuity and timelessness of history. Yet the marker of war interrupts this imagery. The colour is significant, as it goes with a uniform; which takes the father figure beyond Australia’s borders to a scene peppered with the machinery and weaponry of war that is also displayed throughout the museum. There is therefore the potential for the touching of simple and familiar items, transforming
the museum into a wider, more international scene that is in fact peopled by men and women of our families.

Una explained how she too had taken up this idea when sharing her stories in local schools. Her father had given her his World War I diary, letters and medals. They are treasured items and their historical value highly regarded by Una. They are treated not only as sources of personal memories, but as artefacts. Una preserves and re-tells their background whenever the opportunity arises. She regards herself as a custodian and actively encourages children to listen to the stories and hold the medals.

The stories of touching objects revealed the basic desire to know and interpret history through the body. The emergent tactile knowledge accompanies and informs intellectual knowledge. I turn now, to the role of the keeper of historical objects, a role that privileges the embedded narratives of objects and the practice of preservation.

**Keepers of Objects**

In the research workshops, the women discussed not only the objects they kept as part of their family history and their embedded stories. But also examined what it meant to be a keeper, the problems that arose and the sense of personal fulfilment gained. Marcel Mauss wrote extensively of exchange practises in the early 20th century and is often cited as a starting point for materiality. He encouraged students of sociology to examine their own practices and lamented the development and reduction of exchange practises of previous cultures with the coming of modern economic trade. Mauss concluded that gift giving transactions were intrinsically linked with morality (Pritchard in Mauss, 1954:ix). While this provides interesting ideas for analysis of exchange or passing on of objects, it did not serve my own purposes as I hoped. Instead feminist historians such as Diane Bell and Susan Stewart, provided me with connective and illuminative ideas.
Diane Bell alludes to the potential for political and subversive qualities of the passing on of objects between women family members. She suggests women were able to act outside the framework of patriarchy, undetected by the privileged male gaze.

The genealogies of particular categories of objects reveal that their transmission is a rule-governed activity that subverts the history of estates and allows continuity of identity from one generation of women to the next. (Bell, 1987:261-262)

This perspective has provided interesting possibilities for feminist research and certainly Bell’s work acted as a sound starting point for such exploration.

In Alan Atkinson’s research on farm and village life in colonial Camden, he found evidence of women writing wills, which favoured unmarried sisters or female friends. In a period when laws favoured and maintained patriarchal inheritance, these women needed to include specific instructions. Atkinson states “In New South Wales before the Act of 1879, they could do this only by making clear provision against the claims of husbands” (1992:149).

Technologies and Tools
Many of the things passed from one generation of women to another are domestic or useful tools. Domanska argues that this need not devalue the item or its meanings: “Technologies are not thought to estrange people from themselves and their world anymore, but to mediate their existence and experiences” (2005:4). Later in my discussion of participation in living history in Chapter 6, the reading of archaeological tools, their re-creation and use can provide us with considerable understanding of the past. In this chapter, however, I remain focused on the objects the women chose as representing their keepers of history status. Predominant among them were tools relating to sewing and cooking. The passing on of tools is particularly important due to the shared use within families over time. The handling of the tool, its usefulness or lack of, becomes a shared experience that can transcend generations. From the stories shared in this research we also came to understand that sometimes we kept tools and used them differently, such as for display purposes.
In/scripting Survival
I am particularly interested in the idea that women embark on generational nurturing and that beliefs, narratives and objects are passed on to future generations with intent. Here is a discussion between mother and daughter in Bell’s research:

Do you know why Mum gave me that machine? It was because if you ever go bankrupt, the two things they cannot take are your bed and your sewing machine. It was because you need your bed to sleep on and you can earn a living on the machine. I gave you that machine when you were married, but I didn’t really think about the why of it until you asked. (Bell, 1987:72)

Two things struck me in this conversation. First, that the sewing machine is significant to women, both as a tool as well as a source of economic survival. Secondly, that the mother had partaken in a ritual, momentarily forgetting that it was indeed a historical tradition. I found this story and others like it moving. The historicised self is sometimes lost but the traditional generational nurturing continues, as lessons from women of one generation to another, that sit outside the phallocentric world - a not oft-spoken tradition, specifically female, a quiet passing on, without fanfare, hierarchy or privilege. A few quiet words spoken and/or written accompany an object, reflecting generational caution and care.

Jean spoke of her Cornish sewing basket, a much-treasured gift from her grandmother during hard times. It will be returned to a niece in England. She described the sewing basket as “about to take another long journey, a well travelled septuagenarian”. The human like characteristics the object acquired is reflective of the inscribed stories it bares. It is not and never was a mere sewing tool. When Jean’s grandmother gave her the sewing box it was to inspire her to do embroidery. Jean stated; “she succeeded” in this quest despite her other sewing skills remaining non-existent. In turn the niece who will receive it is already known to be an excellent needleworker. Thus the box is an accompanying reminder of the passing on of a love for embroidery. It represents the passing on and the instructive desire to see, the skills of embroidery embellished and retained. A skill, an instruction, a teaching and stories of the past are all held within this object. Yet its history also remains, in part, secret. The cultural and historical links with Cornwall life remain a mystery and inspire Jean to continue to
research its unusual style. The story of this box and the passing on process is inscribed with the personal story of grandmother, aunt and niece.

Responsibility
Much of Jorn Rüsen’s work on historical consciousness leads to an analysis of moral values and reasoning. In his presentation of the story of an ancient treaty in Scotland between MacLean and MacLonich clans he questions the treaty’s influence in a modern time. How would current MacLean family members respond to an ancient promise, engraved in stone at the family estate?

They [the choices we make] express this social relationship as an obligation for us, addressing us at the core of our subjectivity, calling upon our sense of responsibility and conscience, self, and our value orientation. For such a mediation between values and action orientated activity, historical consciousness is a necessary pre-requisite. (Rüsen, 2005:23-24)

The women participants too made these choices in their preservation of histories, their research and storytelling. These responsibilities were not lightly regarded. Rather they weighed heavily on the women’s minds and were a consistent topic of conversation. Their consideration was shaped and even born of their sense of historical consciousness, just as Rüsen suggests. The women consistently mediated, interpreted and questioned their orientation of self. Indeed the moral values and reasoning highlighted not so much the self in the present and personal sense, as in a historicised manner. The historicised self is burdened with responsibility and obligation. These women felt it keenly. They are keepers of history, of family history as well as of their research subjects for the future. As Rüsen suggests:

This implied reference to the future is contained in historical interpretation of the present, because such interpretation must enable us to act – that is, it must facilitate the direction of our intentions within a temporal matrix. History clothes values in temporal experience. (Rüsen, 2005:24-5)
Rüsen’s term, “temporal orientation”, provides insight into a number of discussions and conference presentations I have listened to in recent years (2005:25). Women’s concerns for the way in which the history of local communities, families, organizations or institutions is recorded and preserved were often at the forefront. At the core of the discussion was the temporal orientation of self, what they could offer to the history’s audience in the future, what errors might create false histories and what could be left unrecorded and thus lost. The sense of personal moral responsibility amid the continuity of time, could weigh heavily, as indicated in the following discussion.

Bronwyn:  And now I look at all the information she has left for me.

Una  There you are, there’s the female historical descent link! That’s safer with you than with any of the...

Bronwyn  I’m proud to have it.

Rosemary  So who do you actually distribute to while you are alive, is very important isn’t it. Because you know basically things can get lost.

Nostalgia

When analysing the keeper’s role the question arises: To what degree does nostalgia play a part? And if so, does nostalgia sit within the realm of serious history or does it sit within psycho-analytical thinking? I would argue that nostalgia is a constant in many people’s lives and it is represented and used in a number of ways. Nostalgia for childhood or from shared family memories serves as a personal connection to the past. How people express nostalgia and in what historical context it is performed will indicate where it sits, amid the binary of serious and trivial histories.

The term “nostalgia” was first used to describe home-sickness by Johannes Hofer in 1688, (Probyn cited in McDermott, 2002:390). Initially it was meant to describe a medical condition, the term has undergone a number of transitions. Today it implies an absence or loss and/or a “(painful) longing to return home” (McDermott, 2002:390). Gayle Greene argues, “Nostalgia is a powerful impulse that is by no
means gender specific. Everyone has a longing for home, which is what the word
means; nostal, the return home” (1991:295). Thus we see connections between the
construction of self and a sense of home or belonging. Greene goes on to argue:

Memory is our means of connecting past and present and constructing a self and
versions of experience that we can live with. To doubt it, is to doubt ourselves,
to lose it, is to lose ourselves. (1991:293)

How do we examine the desire or longing for such markers that provide us with a
personal history? Susan Stewart offers three perspectives on the idea of longing.
The first is “yearning desire”, which she suggests can be understood as “a deferment
of experience in the direction of origin and thus eschaton, the point where narrative
begins/ends, both engendering and transcending the relation between materiality and
meaning” (2003:x). In other words, it is a desire, for the connection between one’s
beginnings, and the pivotal point where meaning comes to the fore. The second she
links with pregnancy or the maternal, and with the “unconscious inscription upon the
developing consciousness of the child and the eruption of the mark that before, had no
name” (Stewart, 2003:xi) This has been linked with Kristeva’s notion of “elsewhere”
and “the powerful sublimination and indwelling of the symbolic within instinctual
“Belonging”, which she describes as “The capacity of the narrative to generate
significant objects, and hence to generate and engender a significant other” (2003:xi).
Stewart’s tri-fold analysis provides an intimate examination of the personal
connections between self and materiality. Thus in examining nostalgia, we can see it
can be interpreted as more than a superficial desire for familiarity and place. On the
other hand, Lowenthal alludes to its frailties, suggesting that it has been blamed for
alienation from the present. As sociologists have suggested, it can be representative of
a desire to escape the present and to use the past as a “buffer” from the ills of the
world today (Lowenthal, 1999:12-3).

These mixed views of nostalgia remind us of the diversity of the analysis surrounding
materiality and its connection with the individual. I would argue that rather than
focusing on notions of lack, illness or absence, these are merely processes that feed
the desire for nostalgia, but more significantly is the translation and mediation that
occurs during a nostalgic metaphorical journey. Each individual derives a constructed historical meaning and nostalgia is dependant on a sense of the historicised self, the ability to make meaningful translation and mediation of the symbolic.

In the research workshop during a discussion about a diary from a grandmother, it became evident that much of her direct story and personal reflections were absent. Yet the speaker and the rest of the group embarked on a fascinating discussion about the need to look beyond obvious absences, to become aware of the subtle evidence.

“Just because we don’t understand it, I don’t scrap it”

“No!!”

“I’m exactly the same!”

Susan Stewart argues that the significance of material objects or the souvenir can be seen as a kind of “failed magic” and that without the story of its origin, a context in which we can place the it, the object becomes bereft of meaning (2003:151). One might equate this with the lost or sold objects discussed by my participants - the sadness evoked by finding family photograph albums in antique shops and the desire to somehow return the albums to the original family. The absence of the embodied ownership transforms the albums into lost objects, without a narrative and in turn without meaning. The sadness is enhanced by the knowledge of a family that is without the albums. Thus the presence of the object, in this case, only highlights the absence elsewhere.

From this perspective we might examine again the photographs of grandmothers with this idea that the photograph might be seen as the desired embrace that we can no longer access or share. They may also be seeking the advice and guidance we once listened for yet can no longer hear. They are out of context, in their survival and continued preservation, paced on table, or mantle-pieces and caught via a glance, perhaps unplanned. Thus in daily lives the passing and spotting of the photograph is an unplanned moment that will transport us as we momentarily reminded of the guidance or the sense of a grandmother’s arms around us. A momentary slippage in time, where we are children again and the reassurance of the grandmother is once
again with us. Once again, Stewart evokes notions of the desire, maternal and sense of belonging as she argues:

> The souvenir may be seen as emblematic of the nostalgia that all narrative reveals – the longing for its place of origin. Particularly important here are the functions of the narrative of self: that story’s lost point of identity with the mother and its perpetual desire for reunion and incorporation, for the repetition that is not a repetition. (Stewart, 2003:xii)

With each of these planned or unplanned moments, we reinvigorate the memory and the meaning. In turn we also reinvigorate the story of the object. And the agency of the object, its potential to transform the moment for the observer and keeper is also reinvigorated. But what is the span of the object. The temporal nature of attachment and meaning-making is paramount. For the moment it is in another’s hands or in an antique shop, its potential is transformed into another realm, to be accessed by the next observer or keeper. New meanings will be derived, that will not be associated with the familial connection, but with perhaps the shop, the local community or its historical context.

**Photographs as Objects**

In their study of the American public’s historical perceptions, Rosenzweig and Thelen found photographs to be at the most common ways of accessing and discussing the past (1998:19). They also found that it was women who were more likely to be the ones who took, kept and storied the photographs (1998:29). The equivalent Australian study, also found photographs to be at the centre of familial historical practices (Ashton & Hamilton, 2003:11). Rosalind Coward explores the significance of photographs and their preservation by women:

Guardians of the unwritten history of family, women collect and keep photographs. Tied with ribbons, higgledy-piggledy in old chocolate boxes, or kept tied in orderly albums, photos are used as precious evidence of the existence of yourself and other people. Photo collections are used as tangible proof of our genealogies. (1987:49)
Further, Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart argue that photographs are three-dimensional objects that “exist in time and space and thus social and cultural experience” (2004:1). The photograph includes the tactile, the image and the embedded stories. Beyond these three crucial characteristics are further considerations including the ownership and the placing or arrangement of the object.

Photographs are at risk of being regarded as mere images. Edwards and Hart suggest “Photographs thus become detached from their physical properties and consequently from the function context of materiality that is glossed merely as neutral support for images” (2004:2). Contrary to their thinking, I would argue that it is possible to explore the materiality as well cultural and personal markers that site the photograph as something intrinsic to the histories of family and community. This was most evident in my reunion where the women brought photographs to share and each one was marked by a story with both a physical and social base.

Bronwyn, for example brought a photograph that was always accompanied by silver spoons. Placing them for us at the workshop, the photographs sat with the spoons, just as they did at her home. Bronwyn spoke of a pile of silver spoons, battered and well used. She pondered on the fact that she always places them with some photographs of her grandparents. “I mean the spoons are of no intrinsic value, I mean it (the mustard spoon) is a pretty awful thing really.” The connections to her family are further revealed that while she does not use many of the spoons, there is one that she continues to regularly use, a serving spoon that belonged to her grandmother. “You can see it has served many a meal”. I found this an interesting distinction. That most spoons were placed with photographs, all were regarded as having little value, one was even “ugly and weird”, yet they are symbolic of her family’s past. Despite Bronwyn’s statement that they lack beauty or value the spoons are placed on show, a personal, yet at the same time, a public declaration. Secondly, the serving spoon is in continued use, in that Bronwyn re-enacts her grandmother’s daily life, as a reminder and a connection, an embodied re-enactment.

The stories of all the objects were intertwined and inseparable. They represented the memory and story of her grandmother, and this story could not be told or presented as an image without all the components. This multiplicity reflected Bronwyn’s
considered thought (link to historical consciousness) about the construction of her memories. This affirms Edwards and Hunt position that, “photographs have inextricably linked meanings as images and meanings as objects; an indissoluble, yet ambiguous, melding of image and form, both of which are direct producers of meaning” (2004:2).

Una’s photograph of a sea chest told a different story. The chest was too large too bring to the workshop, but its presence was felt considerably, in her many stories, in her publications and finally in the photograph. Where Bronwyn’s story and performance of her photographs and spoons make the link between the physical object, embodiment and the discourse, Una’s photograph was presented as the final performance of the story of the chest. This story was different to Bronwyn’s, is very much centred on ownership and guardianship. Indeed the focal point of her discourse is that she is one of a series of owners and her research has focused on the lives of the owners as keepers of the chest. This continuity is important to Una and her showing of the photograph seemed to be her final triumphant performance.

In my office, I am surrounded by the women and men of my family’s past, and present. Their presence is tangible as I spend hours thinking around the matrilineal connections between generations of family. As Diane Bell wrote:

> In recalling the stories of transmission of objects a search for self was manifest. In looking at photographs of a female forebear there was a collapsing of images. The objects have a timelessness; their transmission transcends lifespan; they have a force and logic of their own. (1987:261)

My photographs are not unproblematic. One photograph (see figure 7), of Christina, sits just off set from my computer screen. She leans elegantly on a carved chair. And I wonder what she would think of my musings on our connection given that they are frail and in many ways broken. She was my maternal grandmother’s mother, who was compelled to give up her daughters to foster care and played only an intermittent and distant role in my grandmother’s life. Her husband had left England and a wealthy and privileged life to come to Australia. She had lived in the Presbyterian community of Murwillumbah in northern New South Wales. Their lives changed dramatically
when they came to the Sydney suburb of Surry Hills. Life in Surry Hills during this period was marked by poverty and hardship. In turn, in 1905, three of the five children were fostered out within the church community. So why then do I keep her photograph close? I suspect the answer lies in notions of grief, hers over the loss or absence of her daughters and the hardship that must have plagued her life and my grandmother’s grief of an absent mother.

Figure 7: Christina circa 1900
I wonder if my positioning of Christina’s photograph is reflective of a desire to return her to our family’s story. To recreate her place in the matrilineal generations, an absence that is marked by a return. The links remain precarious and imagined, without historical basis or facts. Yet I am plagued by a desire to bridge the distance between mother and daughter in the future telling of the family history. I place Christina’s photograph on my wall, because of the absences, the grief and the regret, and my desire to reunite mother and daughter in the only way possible nearly a century after they were parted; in the stories I tell my children.

**Women’s Writing in the Home**

Diaries and autograph books provide a welcome insight into the individual and their time. Katie Holme’s research on women’s diaries makes some insightful connections on the voice and life inscribed in diaries (1995a). She picks up from Carolyn Heilbrun’s (1990 cited in Holmes, 1995b:para 2) use of weaving metaphor. Heilbrun explored the story of Homer’s *Odyssey*, with Penelope waiting for her husband, Odysseus to return from the wars. Remarkably, Penelope’s weaving and un-weaving became her voice and reflected her agency, as she declared that she would not accept a new suitor until her weaving was complete. She undid each day’s progress during the following night. Unable to speak out loud of her conviction she articulated her desire through the incomplete shroud (Heilbrun 1990 cited in Holmes, 1995b:para 2). This notion of how women were able or not able to speak out loud of their feelings and beliefs is taken up by Holmes. She suggests that diaries and other writings of women, ordinary women, provide a powerful historic resource into an otherwise inaccessible history.

Diaries, autograph and “confession” books were among the significant objects during the workshop. These provided intimate insights into private lives as well as broader historical conditions of life.

*This book is owned by my grandmother and contains 40 entries by her and her family and friends, living around Tumut in 1878 and 1880s. The book is a great insight into her early life and times, well before I knew her because I was an adolescent when she died.*
This book (see figure 15 in Chapter 8) was filled with answers to questions ranging from “Where would you like to live? What is your favourite flower? What is your idea of misery? What is your chief aversion? Your particular weakness?” And so on. Helena used this book as a source for her master of letters research on culture development in rural New South Wales. She had researched similar books and provided the Mitchell Library with a copy of her own. We saw a number of actions demonstrating Helena’s view of history. Her own personal connections were clear. Her grandmother “was a very special person in our family”. Equally she is aware of its historical value to others and the importance of preservation and archiving such documents. Further, she used this book as a primary source for a study on culture in 19th century Australia. This threefold purpose is reflective of Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth’s (2001:48) notion of anthemic subjectivity, of the interdisciplinary nature (and the multiple stories inscribed on an object) of the women’s view of historical objects, the personal, the literary source, the role of the keeper and preserver.

Absences and Loss

Much of the discussion at the workshop alluded to the responsibility of passing on objects, laden with history, to family members, the concern being, that the new keepers might not share their appreciation of the object. Indeed, one had made a list of relatives who were to become keepers of her particularly valuable items, constantly making changes as she tries to decide who would be the best person. As her relatives went on with their daily lives, this woman was assessing their actions and values. Their position on the list reflected her assessment of their ability and commitment to family history. Her role as guardian and custodian of items was always a serious and life encompassing matter.

One of the women, Rosemary, had arrived as a young child in Australia at the time of the “ten pound” immigration scheme. Although her family immigrated under their own initiative rather than participate in a scheme her father insisted on paying full fare, so little money was left for baggage.
Almost nothing was brought from England by my parents and my mother wasn’t there when her parents died so nothing was passed on, everyone forgot us. My husband’s family also came from England and they brought nothing either so we are like a little family unit bereft of things.

Figure 8: Rosemary and a painting of her cottage at Barrington Tops, New South Wales.

Rosemary was without a material past. This absence, and the shock of the Australian landscape, weighed heavily on Rosemary. She spend many years coming to terms with her loss, as did her mother who refused to take on Australian citizenship until all of her family, still in England, had passed on. I will discuss Rosemary’s acts of
identity-building pilgrimage in the Chapter 7. Her decisions, however, relating to objects, is noteworthy. Rosemary began again. She started to rebuild the family heritage with contemporary items.

One, a painting (see figure 8), she brought to our workshop. The painting depicted an isolated bush house on a property she and her husband purchased. Two thousand acres of wild and unexplored land, the property became the family retreat. Without water or electricity, her family were enthused by the hardship and the painting is to be passed on to her daughter who, she surmises, will appreciate its meaningful nature.

The fact that it actually changed my attitude towards Australia is what makes it memorable for me, having said that, I am going to see my daughter [living in the Faroe Islands], in April, I think I’ll take the picture and give it to her right now!”

Keeping historical objects can be a fraught process, personal lives impinge, artefacts are valuable and the responsibility can weigh heavily. The following extract tells the story of a male keeper who, when he was diagnosed with a serious illness, rang Una:

He sounded a bit restrained on the phone
The 1815 Journal
He said “It would be safe with you”
He said “I am the wrong person to look after this.”
He insisted on sending this precious journal by mail
It got here, wrapped in pink paper
With an inscription, just a like a jolly birthday present

When I got back from the residential school
I had a letter.

He had committed suicide
Only hours after he posted that thing to me

(Sigh)
I consulted my lecturers and his family

It’s in the Mitchell Library

They tell me many people have consulted the journal

In this narrative the journal changed from being a precious item wrapped in a “jolly” fashion, to a “thing” inserted in a time schedule for suicide. The shift in Una’s story unsettled and saddened her listeners. Her own grief was evident to her audience, and yet the historical significance of this journal was un-blighted. It was clear that the responsibility of being a keeper was not always an easy or comfortable load. The narratives embedded in this journal are multi-layered. This story is now burdened with the sad death of one of its keepers.

Emergence of the Meta-narrative

Reflective of the women’s learning at university were the meta-narratives that would emerge from personal stories of the material. A conversation began with a description of a child’s image of visiting servicemen amid starched linen table clothes, a mother’s rule of law and the rituals for using butter dishes, jam spoons and syrup, (which should be handed under the table and placed on the floor when not in use). The conversation of early twentieth century etiquette later shifted to one of the impact of having servicemen come into the homes of ordinary people. These men, directed from ‘the hospitality centre’ were taken into homes for rest and entertainment. The women spoke of English, American and other servicemen entering the private domestic sphere and the ironies of the immediacy of and distance from war. The opportunity and potential for historical analysis was one that the women enjoyed. Indeed there were few, if any, topics of conversation that did not end up being accompanied by extensive further analysis.

Similarly, discussion of life during the depression began with talk of paper bags and string, billy-cans of milk and shopping. This led to analysis of the dire employment conditions for those who had work, as well as the practice of beggars in Junee.
During the depression these blokes would come to the door wanting a hand out, taking it [the donations] to a bloke at the end of the street, who had a sack to put them in, so they could go piteously empty-handed to the next house. These were blokes who were previously proud in their own businesses and profession. It was pitiful.

It was also evident that the “Protestant - Catholic” divide played a significant role in a number of the women’s lives. The accounts began with simple domestic materiality, yet the othering process that occurred remained strong in the women’s memory. The mere contents of one’s school lunch could deem a child as “other”. And we would hear of all sorts of material and social practices that relegated an individual to her side of the divide. It was interesting that the impact of this process remained like a wound or perhaps a scar.

_Catholic Dogs_

*Jump like frogs*

_And eat no meat on Fri-day (in a rhyming sing-song voice)_

_Heard that?*

_I had that shouted at me on my street._

A listener could hear and identify the continued personal pain of exclusion, yet it was again, accompanied by a historical narrative, dating the practice and analysing its purpose and effects. Thus the discussion at the workshop jumped between personal and considered historical analysis, so much so that the two became entwined and sometimes indistinguishable from the other.

Such conversations were reflective of the women’s desire both to tell their personal stories and to place these within a broader historical framework. The skills they had learnt from their own tertiary research allowed them to step into their own past as well as step outside it, moving above Rüsen’s (2005) dividing line, seeking to mediate their own experiences as evidence with a wider body of academic knowledge.
Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the diverse positions from which we can examine materiality and the role of keepers of history. By deconstructing the idea of “special” being attributed to objects, it was evident that there are layers of narratives embedded in objects. These narratives largely relate to the passing on of knowledge that ensures connectivity and a sense of belonging to previous generations. They are also inscribed to ensure the survival of cultural and economic practices.

We have seen the importance of the tactile and agentic characteristics of material objects. There is a clear connection to the construction of the historicised self and the embodied attempts to erase historical distance. From the perspectives of Stewart’s research the process can be interpreted as dependant on the impossibilities of connection, and it is the imagined that we seek to bring to home and hearth. The women in the workshop talked of a shared understanding that is seemingly passed down through generations, an embrace from the past. At the same time the women accompanied their personal stories of materiality with the meta-narratives of their tertiary learning: thus demonstrating the incorporation of empirical learning with the embodied and personal interpretations.

While this chapter had focused largely on the domestic spheres, I will continue with the theme of agentic keepers of history within the public domain in Chapter 6, continuing to explore the historicised self and the ongoing impact of a developed historical consciousness. As public historian David Glassberg argued of a gendered analysis of public history: “It seems that in the US, men narrate history as a succession of events whereas women curate history as a web of objects and places” (1996:22). My own research affirms Glassberg’s view but will further interrogate the complexities of the woman historian’s practices in the public domain.
Chapter 6

Historians in the Public Sphere

In this chapter, I will examine the ways in which the participants of my research did historical work in the public sphere. In recent decades, public history has emerged as a vital and popular genre of history and I will provide a brief background to its, sometimes troubled, development. I have identified particular themes that will tell more of the story of women as public historians. These themes include: the historicised self, privilege, the purpose of History, authenticity, the accessibility of history, interaction with other historians, responsibility to community, academic rigour and the challenges faced by women working in a masculine domain. It was evident that public history work can be inspired by, and contribute to, the political arena as it engages in political activism or addresses identified absences in community narratives. It is also an arena that can encompass tourism and historical re-enactment, both seemingly outside the rigour of the academic sphere, but upon closer inspection, found to be underpinned by serious historical considerations. The ways in which the women of my research group worked in the public sphere was notably diverse. The legacy of our learning at university and our critical thinking about historical theory and consciousness was evident in both this diversity and in the manner in which we approached the various undertakings.

It became evident in this research that public history is an area that continues to attract broad interest in Australian communities. Participants in the field are often drawn from diverse backgrounds, some from tertiary institutions while others come from the wider sectors of communities. The construction of local heritage narratives is integral to the constructions of identity. It became evident in the women’s stories that the process is marked by a passionate belief in the connection between historical scholarship and a sense of belonging.
Public history in the United States had its origins in the desire to raise historical consciousness in the public setting (Davison, 1991:6). In Britain, the equivalent movement was regarded as “People’s History” and was derived from the idea of bringing history to more specifically, the working class (Davison, 1991:9). It has been argued by Davison that Australian public history has drawn more from the British model, citing the potential for political analysis as well as the self reflection it encourages of its practitioners (1991:14). In the first three decades after the term public history first came under scrutiny, there has been a continued debate over its aims, practice and meaning. Notably in the last decade, however, less has been written on the theoretical debates and efforts are seemingly more concentrated on the practice itself.

Many debates had focused on the differences between academic history and public history, arguing that the primary difference lay in the make-up of the audience. The audience of public history is presumed to be those who do not necessarily read academic histories or attend museums, commemorations and performances.

The exploration by Arnita Jones (1999) of public history in the United States, was focused on professionalisation. Jones detailed the “uneasy alliance” that developed in the 1970s, where academic historians and people working in museums, archives and historical societies came together under the National Committee for the Promotion of History (Jones, 1999:22). This gathering was born of great concern that graduates of history were unable to find adequate employment. Subsequent negotiations shaped the way public history was introduced into history departments at universities and was spurred on by a growing public fascination with heritage.

The divide between academic and public history did not evaporate and continued to be felt by those in the field. In 1992, Ann Curthoys and Paula Hamilton wrote in “What makes History Public” that public historians are a “heterogeneous group” working from diverse positions that differ from academic historians in their “funding sources, and different conditions of production and distribution” (1992:11). They
suggested the problems that remained concerned “definition, visibility and recognition” and identified that public history continued to be regarded as “academic history’s other” (1992:10). They argued that this othering was not deserved and that important histories were emerging from the field:

In the end, for us a commitment to the idea of public history is a commitment to a concern with audience and an awareness of the complex relationship between audience, historical practice and institutional context. (Anne Curthoys & Hamilton, 1992:13)

In 1996, in the United States, David Glassberg sought to analyse the scholarship of public history and memory. He suggested that what is ‘new’ about the scholarship can be seen in the approach of public historians, rather than impressing a singular approach. He said, “the new studies primarily seek to understand the interrelationships between different versions of history in public” (Glassberg, 1996:9).

This diversity of approaches brings about a new accessibility and deconstructs the hierarchy of scholarship previously linked with tertiary institutions and Glassberg also makes a direct link with Carl Becker’s (1932) “everyman” (1996:10).

For some, diversity has its limits. In 1999, Theodore Karamanski, an American Public Historian, produced a scathing article of the impact of postmodernism on Public History. He claimed that now that Public History was “accepted” as a real, “if minor, field of study”, it was forced to contend with the unethical influence of postmodernism. He claimed postmodernism was dangerous and disrespectful. “The dead are real. Their lives are not a mere text to be broken apart and re-assembled at the whim of an investigator” (Karamanski, 1999:132). He further argued that:

Ethical service is at the heart of our definition of history as a profession … The question is whether the larger university-based community of historians will throw off the thrall of postmodernism and join us in building greater historical consciousness. (Karamanski, 1999:133)

I am reminded of the irony of the democratisation of history that brought Public History into the realm of accepted histories. Similarly, at an Australian Historical
Association Conference, associated with the International Congress of Historical Sciences 2005, within a single session I heard about the fraught beginnings of the Australian Oral History Association. It started with the story of the associations’ formation over a linoleum kitchen table in Perth (Hamilton, 2005). We heard of the joy of the accessibility of doing history and the recognition of the body’s grass-roots beginnings. The presenter’s story then took a turn and began to focus on the need for qualifications and the standards that should/could be instilled in the association. It was argued there was a need to develop a system of categories and restrictions, which could be applied to its membership. It was stated that the association now had the need for an evaluation procedure to prevent “bad” and damaging practices from occurring. Should an individual fail to meet the criteria, it was suggested by a member in the audience, there should not be an option to re-apply. I found it ironic, that within a forty-year period, groups can shift from the grass roots under-dog to a potentially exclusionist bureaucratic body. While I concede the need for “good” history, I lamented the absence of the joyous embrace of Becker’s “everyman” as a historian (1932) and his contemporary “everywoman”.

I doubt that the Australian Oral History Association took up the audience member’s call, nor do I believe all Public Historians share Karamanski’s views. However, such remarks helped to pinpoint the generational shifts and privileging of positions that can occur within the realm of History Theory, as I discussed in Chapter 2. Bodies such as the Australian Historical Association and the Australian Oral History Association play an important role as an alternative source of legitimacy to that provided by the academy. Amid the inevitable professionalisation process, we see a consensual series of negotiations occurring, navigating shifts in thinking and responding to community needs.

There are many positive projects underway in the field of Public History. A recent collaborative consultation package submitted to the US National Park Service offers an insight into the possibilities for women’s public history to be reinterpreted and more easily recognised by cultural resource workers (Derousie, Evans, Cowley, Eyring, & Sharp, 2005). The report offers an explanation of the changing scholarship in women’s history and of the many ways categories of women and gender that can now be examined on sites within the National parks. It provides workers with
methodological tools to undertake practical evaluations of both sites and remaining materials. This type of report is a valuable contribution to Public History, in particular, in asking gendered questions of places thought to be only inhabited by men (Kijas, 2003). More significantly, in terms of current feminist history debates, is the attention given to women’s work in the public arena and citizenship (Derousie, Evans, Cowley, Eyring, & Sharp, 2005:4).

Australian National Parks have undertaken similar consultative investigations. Historian, Bronwyn Hanna, submitted an extensive report to the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service entitled *Re-gendering the Landscape in New South Wales* (2003). This report offers feminist interpretations of the managing and preserving of the historic landscape. Hanna pays considerable attention to defining three forms of feminism; liberal, radical/socialist and postmodern feminism (2003:19). She argues that in doing so, workers within the field can become aware of the different kinds of questions that can emerge from different feminist standpoints (2003:72).

Johanna Kijas offers another example of a consultancy directed at women and public heritage (2003). *Women and Landscape: NSW Western Parks Project* is an important contribution to the current national discourse on the Australian character. Kijas suggests “Women in their diversity remain marginalised and often excluded across the mainstream historical discourse that informs the historical interpretation and popular conceptions of outback parks” (2003:iii). Research by women, such as Hanna and Kijas in Australia and Dirousie et al in the United States, are important examples of women’s historical exploration in the field of Public History. They each problematise the dominant masculine narratives of the past, yet do not dwell there. Instead, they go on to demonstrate the richness and diversity of embedded women’s narratives, showing how to access them by offering a philosophical and practical template for historians, workers and public visitors to the national parks of their region.
My Participants and Public History

The women within my research did not fit neatly into the categories of the debates raised by Karamanski or the discussions about membership to bodies such as the Australian Oral History Association. We were amateur enthusiasts who undertook History studies via an empiricist approach at university and benefited from additional scholarship derived from what were then regarded as fringe histories. In our immersion in an intellectual discipline we too are caught up in the professionalisation processes and arguments over rigour and audience. It became evident throughout the data collection process that each of us has worked within the field of Public History. I was prompted to ask, how do we feel about the types of history we are producing and what questions of historical conscious and academic rigour inform our activities? And how do we evoke our historicised selves in the process?

Diversity of Activities

The women of the research groups worked in a wide range of areas. Membership to historical societies and family history groups were common to several of the women. Some had moved into administrative and leadership roles of such groups, thus acting as facilitators and mentors to others. One of the women was an active storyteller in local schools and with the children living in her street. Community histories were an important part of several of the women’s activities, including the production of histories of localities, schools and the parish. Another woman and I had been involved with Living History and Historical reenactment. Others have been further developing their M.Litt. topics. While three of us had undertaken doctoral studies, others were expanding their research independent of any institutions. Two women had incorporated their interest in history with their work in travel consultancies and finally another woman works at the Female Factory Historic site in Melbourne.

In keeping with the categorisation we were taught during our time at university and, as we saw in Juliet Gardiner’s (1989) *What is History Today*, the types of history the women immersed themselves in was predominantly Social History. However, there was strong evidence of crossing over into other categories including: Institutional, Women’s, Environmental, Oral, Urban, Cultural, Ancient, and Military History. In
our exchanges throughout the research process, Postmodernism was not widely discussed. There was strong evidence, however, that like the presenters at the International Congress of Historical Sciences the women had embraced certain facets of postmodern thinking, without a deliberate acknowledgment or awareness of this position. More pointedly, the multidisciplinary approach was cited by several of the women, including myself, as reflective of their theoretical position. One woman suggested, that by taking this position she could incorporate all of her interests and bring together a poignant and accessible history.

**Historical Consciousness**

The women’s work in the public sphere was once again reflected in the Genetic category of Rüsen’s ontogeny of historical consciousness (2005:12). The women are very much aware of the temporal nature of resources, of themselves and of their writing. They understood their work to be a constant process of complex mediation and evaluation, and we saw them drawing from their knowledge gained at university as well as their more recent experiences. Their ongoing consideration of the historicised self was readily evident, and even as we sat together sharing stories we were renegotiating and questioning our positions. In the field of Public History, the knowledge and the skills of the “above-the-line” (Lee, 2002) status are re/turned to the site of “below the line”; the *lebenspraxis* As we saw in the work of Hanna (2003) and Derousie et al (2005), the imagined and constructed daily life of history was re-examined and retold.

Some of the women in my study were obviously conscious of their role as teachers of history and therefore as facilitators of their audience’s developing historical consciousness. Una regularly attended primary schools to tell stories of the past. Her motivations reflected her deliberate thinking of the importance of history. She seeks to impress upon the children their own relationship to the past and to assist in the movement from a sense of the past that is static to one in which they and the people around them are understood as part of an on-going continuum. We see shades of Una assisting children in moving from Rüsen’s traditional category (2005:12) to a more developed understanding, where they are aware that history is organic and immediate, rather than a distant story with which they have no connection. She said:
That’s what is appealing to me here, I’m trying to go through my memory and work out how many stories that related to kids at this age, I can remember from either reading or experience so that they can relate to them and think, okay this is not just an old lady, she was once young. Or that old bloke, getting along with a stick, he was once a boy like me. That’s what I want to get through to them.

In my own fourteen years of experience as a tutor in undergraduate and postgraduate History through the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS), I have also sought to engage my students in some of the complex questions surrounding historical consciousness. Given the history of colonisation of Australia’s Indigenous peoples, studying history at university can be a fraught process for some students. I have encouraged the students to value their own and their family’s historicised experiences. Many of my students had close connections with the practice of child removal, the removal of communities from their traditional lands and efforts for re-invigorating the public face of community and culture. It was often difficult for some students to reconcile their own personal knowledge of the past with that found in history texts. Tutoring has been a site for negotiation and mediation as well as a strong emphasis on the value of interdisciplinary approaches within higher education. In turn, I have encouraged a close examination of the way the students view themselves, their own voices and other Indigenous voices in Australian history.

**Commitment to Public History: Rigour and Audience**

The public historian’s work is often linked with a sense of obligation to community and place. As a contributor to the H-Public History List recently wrote “I became a public historian when I began actively to look for ways to be of service” (2007:30th May). Being “of service” to the community is inherently linked with producing rigorous and accurate histories, to giving voice to those who have not been recognised and ensuring the survival of histories at risk.

The participants in my research all shared accounts of the work they have undertaken in their own communities. The knowledge and skills gained at university, coupled
with an advanced sense of historical consciousness, meant that the women felt a strong sense of obligation to academic rigour. As one women stated: “I wanted it to stand up to scrutiny as good history”. This was evident in Cheryl’s community history publications and her concern that the concept of audience must be considered. She stated, “It is important to me to write for the local audience, which makes for quite a challenge given the different expectations of academic writing”. Cheryl sought to employ all the skills and rigour of research, while ensuring her writing was accessible and enjoyable to her audience.

At times the women’s discussion of their own and other’s activities in public focused history showed little tolerance for “poor” standards in history. The small country town of Junee was mentioned several times through family history connections as well as in relation to a particular historic house, the Monte Cristo. This house, built in 1884, is now open to the public and the current owners publicise it as “Australia’s most haunted house”, with the catch-cry “Be prepared to be scared” for their ghost tours (R. Ryan, 2007). This, along with factual errors in their promoted historical account, drew strong criticism from one of the women in my group. She knew a great deal of Junee and the Monte Cristo’s history and, picking out the errors, she concluded, “it’s a load of old rubbish”.

These discussions raised the question of the forces that underpin commitment by public historians to their subject choices. Alan Atkinson suggested that it was the personal connections historians often evoke when doing community histories. He challenged Lowenthal’s (1999) idea of the distance between the past and the individual.

An exploration of regional and local heritage, as I define it, is a means for stressing aspects of heritage, common to everyone, in which the past is by no means a foreign country and in which we are by no means mere observers. (A. Atkinson, 2003:165)

Certainly, this close and embodied connection was evident in the women’s stories about local and community histories they had been involved in. When Helena had been asked to write the history of her local Parish and later of the Theresian Club for
Women in Sydney, while she played down her contribution, her words suggest that she was a skilled historian; her community needed her. She said:

*My Parish was just about to celebrate its first hundred years. So they grabbed me! Finally! Someone who knew about history. And then another group wanted the history of their club written. So I was at it again.*

Helena’s sense of intellectual and embodied allegiance to community and her commitment to telling history is reflected in the ease in which she states: “I was at it again”.

Another of the women in my research group, Cheryl, discussed her research and subsequent book, *Snake Island and the Cattlemen of the Sea* (2000), about her local community and stated “My motives for writing tend to have more to do with returning stories to the community.” Her research was well received, as she explained:

*One of the local Bass Strait fishermen, who left school very young, keeps a copy of *Snake Island* on his boat and makes all the young deck hands read it while they are out to sea. Some of these boys would never have completed a book in English at school! Stories like this inspire me to want to write more.*

Here, it is evident that Cheryl’s research has played an important role in reminding members within the local community and industry of their connections with the past. In particular, the young fishermen, with limited access of historical learning have the opportunity, not only to learn about their industry’s past but also to historicise themselves within that history. As Alan Atkinson suggested:

> It is also a question of how inhabitants conceptualise place and distance (rationalising afterwards, perhaps), of how their sense of the past informs the way in which they negotiate place and distance in their daily lives. (2003:165)

The notion of place, which I will discuss in the next chapter, is central to many historians’ thinking and writing.
Precious Histories

The idea that history and its objects are precious was regularly raised in the women’s stories. They would comment on the fact that during their work in the public sphere, much trust was placed in them when they were given valuable items to use in their research. Always conscious of their role as temporary or permanent keepers of such items, the sense of obligation to get things “right” was only heightened.

Both Una and Helena talked about objects coming into their care via their public history work and the subsequent impact on their research. They discussed how and where these should be kept, including how several had donated papers to libraries. Helen noted precious and original photographs sent to her from descendants of the women who arrived in Australia on the convict ship, the *Woodbridge*. In turn, she commented that she hoped her research would not only be of use to the wider body of knowledge about women convicts, but also continue to be added to. I was reminded of the way in which the women viewed their own role as historians – as part of a much wider historical picture. With that role came responsibilities.

Attending a presentation on the history of the Coalition of Activist Lesbians (COAL) (Lavender & Draper, 2004) at “Australian and International Feminisms: Where We’ve been and Where We’re Going. Celebrating 30 Years of HECATE”, I was struck by the discussions about preserving the history of feminist and lesbian activism. There was little dispute over the recognition of the urgent need for concerted and organised collation of materials, yet there was also a degree of caution. The tensions were evident. There was the concern that others might write the history incorrectly, that the materials were being stored in a variety of attics and garages around the country and the concern over the ambiguity of the historical importance of the activism alongside personal pasts. As one woman noted: “I am not an archive!”.

I see these concerns again in a recent work on the state of feminist archives by Alison Bartlett, Maryanne Dever and Margaret Henderson (2007). They note that the historical archives of Australian feminism are held in a variety of places, both private and public, “dispersed and fragmented” (Bartlett, Dever, & Henderson, 2007:para 5).
They argue that collections of music, oral histories, documents, material culture, photographs and cartoons are of vital importance and suggest:

Advances in technology in recent years offer new possibilities for presenting this history for the public and scholarly interpretation, new possibilities to tell stories of the movement: its struggles, contests and creativity, its wit and passions and dreams. (Bartlett, Dever, & Henderson, 2007:para 25)

These discussions are important and it is welcoming to see the commitment of feminist activists and historians to preserving the vast and precious women’s histories. The evident questioning of the orientation of the self as activists, keepers of histories and as historians will help to ensure the diverse nature of archival material is preserved.

Feminist scholarship is another aspect that is worthy of consideration in this context. As I will discuss further in Chapter 8, Ann Curthoys, Jill Matthews and Marilyn Lake have provided a sample of the historicisation of the work of feminist scholars (1991). Feminist scholarship is often located on the intersections of the academic institution, the personal and the community experience. I have begun collecting material for the story of the cottage in which I currently work. Margaret Somerville established the Fiery Cottage at the University of New England in the late 1980s (de Carteret et al., 2004). It has been a site for the women in the Armidale community and across the New England region, as well as from the university. This intersection, between the community and the university is unusual in its collaborative and non-hierarchical nature. Women doctoral students use the offices and the lounge room has served as a place where academic and non-academic women can give seminars, practice conference presentations as well as simply a place to discuss feminist issues. It is primarily as a place that is outside the masculine “competitive academic culture” (de Carteret et al., 2004:6) and where Margaret Somerville has lecturered about and practiced her “Postmodern Emergence” teaching methodologies (2007b). The cottage is a place for transformation, where learning and writing happen alongside acknowledging the body (the well and the unwell), the cottage garden, soup and bread gatherings and all “encircled by eclectic blends of weeds, alongside majestic pines and Eucalypts” (de Carteret et al., 2004:6). The cottage is a feminist retreat.
seemingly always under threat by the university administration, but somehow, continuing as a site for transformative learning.

It is evident how easily women’s history and in particular feminist histories can be lost. They are often at the fringe of official and institutional bodies, sometimes noisily so, but often quietly and without fanfare. As Penny Russell suggests, women’s history is often located in “small talk” (2007). It is also located in activism, transformative scholarship, in every day life and is an interpretation of women’s lebenspraxis.

Women’s Agency in History: as Subject and Method

Women historians and historiographers often seek evidence of women’s agency in historical narratives. In this research, I have thought about agency in terms of subject of narratives as well as the agency of women as historians. I have looked for evidence that demonstrates the deliberate immersion in particular aspects of history as well as taking leadership roles in public history.

Having completed many years of university study, the women of my research reflected an agency and confidence born of their considerable body of knowledge. Taking an active leadership role within historical organizations, these women were able to put into practice their developed views of the direction of public history, as well as acting as mentors and facilitators for other researchers. This was particularly evident with Perry’s work. She has held several positions within the New South Wales History Council, including President in 2005, where she played a major role in the CISH conference. Perry described her work as very satisfying in that she has been able to contribute to a peak body in history, where she has taken on administrative roles, coordinating events and chairing meetings. On the other hand, she suggested there was another side to this work too.

*It is nothing compared with the personal achievement of finishing a PhD for example and contributing to something, that is much more concrete, to the body of history.*
The directive role should not however be underestimated. Work such as Perry’s is vital to the development of perceptions of public history for both the wider New South Wales audience as well as amateur and professional historians. This is evident in the Council’s establishment and promotion of Historyweek, which is a coordinated program including over two hundred events across the state. The explicit aim is to foster connections between community and professional historians.

During Historyweek, community groups, local councils, libraries, archives, museums, universities, cultural institutions, professional and amateur historians across NSW open their doors to present the latest in today’s historical research - fascinating stories, artifacts and experiences about both our past and ourselves today. (New South Wales History Council, 2007)

Perry also has a long history of been involved in leadership roles within the Society of Australian Genealogists and the Australian Catholic Historical Society. Again, her leadership, accompanied by many hours of often mundane administrative and archival work, is reflective of her agency and confidence in her philosophy and knowledge of history.

Similarly, Bronwyn has taken up leadership roles within the Queensland Association of Local and Family History Societies, now known as History Queensland Inc. The group coordinates a large number of individual historical societies and family history groups. Bronwyn regularly writes for the newsletter and coordinates community days promoting both family and local history. In bringing together this wide and diverse group of amateurs and professional historians, the parent body can make submissions to the state government to enhance and protect various archives, provide information about academic courses relating to the field and give on-going support to groups via fairs, excursions, meetings and the internet.

Agency and leadership roles through teaching and promoting of history were also demonstrated in Una’s storytelling. She stated, “You can think History belongs to adults, but you sew the seeds in kids”. Sewing the seeds means more than hearing the stories. It is encouraging children to orient themselves as storytellers and as listeners.
When neighbourhood children arrived at her house asking for more stories she teased them, encouraging them to re-tell the stories themselves:

_Una_: What sort of story? You are all busy on your roller blades, you don’t need a story.

_Boy_: No, tell them the story about the sheep’s head!

_Una_: Why?

_Boy_: Because it’s a good one.

_Una_: Well, if you remember it well enough mate you tell them.

In this setting we can see how Una encouraged the children to imagine themselves in the role of the speaker of stories from history. This agentic and deliberate process reflects Una’s desire to take the lead and be constructive within her community, to assist the children in their developing historical consciousness as well as see themselves as storytellers and in turn, historians.

**Public History as Activism**

Ludmilla Jordanova suggested that Public history has radical potential, and that with its access to a wide audience, it is often used for political and activist purposes, (2000:141). This was evident in the Cheryl’s environmental work. Having published her book on Snake Island and the cattlemen who worked in the region, her work took on a more political and environmental focus. This has led to it being used both as historical evidence of the changing environment and an account of employment in the area. Her current PhD research is an environmental history of Corner Inlet, a maritime national park. This research covers the long history of industrial use and impact on this fragile land and seascape, its legislative history, as well as incorporating the story of the original inhabitants.

Another participant, Bronwyn, has also incorporated her interest in history with environmental and urban issues. She has published many local and community histories, with more forthcoming. The trend towards an environmental focus came from a long standing interest and as well as employment opportunities that arose. Being a trained teacher, Bronwyn, like Cheryl, has been able to actively participate in helping her audience make connections between place, history and the self.
Loss

Many of the activities the women undertake are motivated by the desire to preserve history and by an awareness of what has already been lost to the community. This was also evident in Chapter 5 where I demonstrated the significance of loss in relation to materiality. I am reminded of Graeme Davison’s comments that community histories are born out of a state of mourning and nostalgia:

To the sceptical social scientist the sense of community inspired, or supported, by local history may seem to be at odds with the realities of an increasingly mobile, anonymous society. Community, it seems is always in the process of disappearing. (2000:219)

The concern for history resources at-risk was evident in the way in which the women worked in back rooms of archives, silently sorting and categorising. The discussions portrayed Davison’s sense of urgency as the historical narratives of stories, documents and materials were perpetually under threat as they lay undiscovered or worse of being lost or destroyed as modernity competes with the past. This was also evident in Una’s storytelling to children where she saw their lives focused on contemporary games and a lack of access to notions of history. Once again, it is possible to identify the women historicising themselves as agents of history and historiography. It is also evident that the women cross boundaries or the slash; between traditional historical practices as collators, preservers and story-tellers with the role of fostering new interest in history. As modernity encompasses daily life in community, the women seek new ways to indulge their own interests, and seek to ignite the passions of others.

Historical Tourism

Two of the women in my research group had incorporated their passion for history with tourism consultancies. Perry’s “Australia – Ireland” consultancy, linked with the Society of Australian Genealogists, is for travellers interested in tracing their Irish family history as well as making an embodied connection with the land of Ireland itself. She wrote of her aims on the web page:
To help Australians reconnect with the Irish past of their ancestors the Society of Australian Genealogists has, since 1984, run tours to Ireland. Assistance is offered in tracing Irish families through local records but the main focus is on the diversity and drama of the Irish landscape, the remarkable history of the Irish people and the chance to experience the unique charm of the ‘Emerald Isle’ with its ‘forty shades of green.’ (McIntyre & Reid, 2007)

Similarly, Cathi incorporated her interest in Ancient Rome into a travel business focused on Italy. Her consultancy was not directly attached to genealogy as Perry’s, instead, she and her business partners focused on visiting important historical sites and providing guides with backgrounds in history.

This incorporation of travel and history reflected a desire to extend one’s own understanding and appreciation of Italy and Ireland, as well as facilitate the same exploration by others. Notions of place and pilgrimage were regular points of discussion among all of the women in my research. In the following chapter, I will discuss the significance of these in further detail.

Interacting with Others and Women in a Masculine Domain

Social interactions, in the process of researching or performing histories, proved to be an issue for several women. These were both positive and negative. Helen found considerable enjoyment in the connections she was making in her research on the descendants and fellow researchers of the Woodbridge convict ship. Equally, Una discussed at length the people she met in her research trips to Europe, many of whom, have become life-long friends. Yet, she also told stories of being a female researcher in a masculine domain, of not being taken seriously and having to speak in a forthright manner to re-iterate her position as knowledgeable and worthy.

Not only was I a woman, but an Australian woman taking an interest in British military history! It was very awkward. They were dismissive. I wrote to correct some information in the Australian Dictionary of Biography. Now the awkward and dismissive attitude, well it improved later, as they got to know me and got to realise I had done a bit of research.
At various times she found men wanting to protect, flatter and dismiss her. In another setting, the archives of a Church, she was greeted with “Such a beautiful young lady!” (she was in her seventies at the time). She told us: “I thought, uh huh, that’s a typical thing and he doesn’t know enough about the topic anyway.”

**Understanding our Historicised Selves**

Throughout the data collection process, the critical analysis of the self, evident in women’s stories, attracted my attention. At all times, the decisions made and directions undertaken were underpinned by strong commitment to what they regarded as good history. The personal role and the impact of their work regularly underwent deconstruction. When recalling our other colleagues from the residential schools, our talk turned to the very different histories produced. The conversation concluded:

*Helena:* Thank heavens we are not all the same.

*Bronwyn:* Well that’s the beauty of history isn’t it?

There was a shared perception that each of us offered distinctive qualities and equally that the women seemed confident in their particular area of interest and methodology.

The women’s commitment to the mundane work of cataloguing and other administrative tasks within archives, Historical Societies and Family History groups reflected their understanding of the importance of proper preservation. This work ensures the accessibility of resources to all types of researchers.

*I do volunteer work with the Historical Society and with an archive group. But I don’t do anything very intellectual, I put things in chronological order for the files. Not particularly creative but very necessary. And sometimes I think I am going in circles, but it is very necessary work, it is at St Mary’s archives, There are boxes and boxes, they have got rooms and rooms of boxes. Anyway, I do my bit.*

The emphasis on the importance of such work and the obligation the women felt to participate in it, reflects a considered historicised self in the wider domain of history. The work that they do today will be used and appreciated for many years to come.
The women know that this is important and necessary and that they are a part of a community of historians whose diversity cannot just be seen in the type of histories they are interested in but also span over generations, decades and even centuries.

**Embodied Public History: Living History and Historical Reenactment**

Participation in Living History and historical reenactment was once positioned on the fringes of public and academic history. In contemporary times, there is an increasing acceptance of what the embodied accession and ‘hand on’ experience can offer students of history and the wider public audience. As historian and reenactor, Stephen Gapps, has argued, reenactments have been performed in the forms of pageants, civic parades and commemorations in Australia since the late nineteenth century. He says they “resurrect[ed] events as part of a negotiation of the event’s status in the present” (Gapps, 2003:29).

Currently, living history and reenactment in Australia involves recreating embodied historical representation at public performances, commemorative events and historical celebrations, in interactive history lessons for school children, supporting museums and events open only to members. There is a concerted aim to recreate authentic histories within the constraints of contemporary times. The results are always less than accurate, as Jordanova claimed about Living history it “offers limited historical insights given that they are highly selective and have been purged of most risks” (2000:6).

During my own involvement in amateur re-enactment, I have accepted its and my shortcomings and frailties in the accuracy of historical performance. I have also observed the changing nature of this endeavour in Australia. In the last decade, two bodies, the Australian Living History Federation (ALHF) and the Queensland Living History Federation (QLHF) were formed largely due to changes to public liability insurance requirements. At times, I see parallels with the professionalisation and bureaucratisation processes that other bodies such as the Australian Oral History Association have undergone. Some reenactors have sought to establish boundaries for acceptable representation, method and performance leading to a necessary negotiation
and discussion. Like the Oral History Association, the potential for exclusion from the body for a less than adequate performance is a source of division.

Part of the causes of division lies directly with the participants’ differing levels of historical consciousness, motivations for participation and the ways in which participants access historical resources. There are many reenactors who remain clearly within Rüsen’s ‘below the line’ status, who do not extend their thinking beyond a sense of play and for whom only minor historical mediation or orientation occurs. Others, however, engage in extensive research, experimental archaeology and self-reflection.

Amateur reenactment is obviously problematic in many ways, and issues of representation of gender is just one of many issues that arise. Marian Quartly’s (2005) presentation at the 20th International Congress of Historical Sciences Conference on the homoeroticism of the images of Australian men during the First World War would not necessarily sit well with some of the masculine representations some reenactors of this period seek to promote. Equally, there is the problem of women re-enacting roles that were unlikely to have been fulfilled by women in historical times. Gapps argues that this divisive argument, the right to participate and authenticity came to the fore in Australian reenactment debate in the 1990s (2003:313). Gapp’s conclusion gives recognition of the ‘unease’ in the intersections of performance and categories of history (2003:316). The tensions of gendered performance have largely concluded in the reenactment movement. I regard these discussions as having been productive and transformative sites for thinking as we argued over the many contestable aspects and impossibilities about ‘doing’ Living History. Such debates reiterate the necessary negotiations between the present and the past.

Pioneer villages, Open-Air and Living History Museums have provided this ‘hands on’ accession to history for more than a century and were first recorded in Sweden in the late nineteenth century as part of an Indigenous fold revival movement (Chappell, 1999:335). The concept spread throughout Europe, with other examples in both Tilsit, East Prussia and at Helsingfors in Finland between 1913 and 1914 (Anon, 1914:171-72). In Britain, open-air museums were first established in the 1950s and 60s.
(Samuel, 1994:301). In the United States of America, the earliest living history museum was established in the 1930s, but in the 1960s it became evident that they were becoming so numerous that a broad collective, known as the Association for Living history, Farm and Agricultural Museums, was established (Boardman, 1998). They later found appeal in Australia in the 1970s, although, as Gapps notes, these had little in common with the nineteenth century Scandinavian versions (2003:245). Like Gapps, I recalled my childhood visits to these pioneer villages; Old Sydney Town, Timber Town and Sovereign Hill and upon reflection wonder at the pseudo construction of the national and cultural narratives they promoted. As Chappell suggested, in the most kitsch examples of open-air museums visitors sometimes leave more embarrassed than enlightened (1999:338). There is little doubt, however, that these villages were very popular with the Australian public in the 1970s and 1980s. It should also be noted that while the historical anomalies received considerable attention, there are many high quality Living History museums that offer remarkable insights and embodied immersion into representations of the past (Katz, 2006).

Both I and another participant in my research have been involved in historical structural recreations. Our involvement, while not in actual Open-Air museums as such, shares some characteristics. Cathi spoke of her plans for various reconstructions on their farm in the central west of New South Wales.

*I have plans drawn up to build a Roman temple as well as a Celtic sacred circle. I’m also trying to talk my husband into building a Roman “Guard Priapus” at our farm gate.*

My own reconstruction interests lie in the building of a Viking longhouse and village surrounds as shown in figures 9 and 10 below, every two years for a “Dark Age” event attended by reenactors from around Australia, New Zealand and more recently, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands.
Figure 9: Village buildings, Armidale Pine Forest 2000

Figure 10: Longhouse at Armidale Pine Forest 2000
The longhouse is accompanied by various other structures in an attempt to create a village environment and opportunities for experimental archaeology. Yet, the constraints of contemporary life immediately impinge on this work. The Longhouse and village must be temporary constructions as they are situated in a New South Wales State Forest and therefore restricted by their legislation. We are consequently limited in what we can achieve and many of the anomalies found in open air museums cited by Chappell (1999) are constantly evident. Every effort is, however, made to ensure the village is as authentic as possible. As part of the building team, I can attest to the sense of greater immersion and challenge in historical representation. While we attempt to use authentic materials, tools and design, we are constrained by cost and availability. Further, and in some ways ironically, the pitch of a traditional Longhouse is deemed unsafe by the NSW and local council building laws requiring us to create a lower roof height (Gapps & Nye, 2006).

During and after the building process, the reenactment group to which I belong, the New England Medieval Arts society, have held interactive demonstrations for local school children. The immediacy of such accession to history is particularly beneficial, especially when accompanied by classroom studies that encourage children to progress through the stages of historical orientation. Peter Lee and Rosalyn Ashby’s research on the development of children’s historical consciousness argued that by the early teens, adolescents have developed an understanding of the falsities of history making and “will hardly be satisfied with a diet of cultural icons masquerading as a common past” (2000:216). The opportunity to participate in living history, and participating in thatching or applying daub, for example, offer an alternative way of thinking and an embodied snapshot to further shape their growing understanding of life in the past.

Conclusion
This chapter has offered an outline of some of the facets of Public History and the various ways in which the women of my research participate in this sphere. I have shown that the knowledge and skills the women gained at university and their developed sense of historical consciousness can in some ways be a burden, not necessarily an unwelcome one, that after takes the form of an obligation. As demonstrated, the women approach their various roles in the public domain with some
caution. We have been aware that public history; community and performative; can be inherently problematic. There is a requirement of the individual for negotiation and orientation around ideas of rigour and obligation. It has also been evident that Public History has been subject to the ontogenetic processes of legitimation as it navigated a path towards recognition within mainstream histories.

For children and adolescents the diversity of public histories can be regarded as an opportunity for enriched and embodied access to history. As the quality of Living History and reenactment in Australia continues to be enhanced, for example, the opportunities for school children as well as the wider community to immerse themselves in practical activities can, to a degree, erase historical distance. For participants in these activities, the opportunity arises to undertake practical experiments and research can add to the body of academic knowledge of the past.

Equally, for communities, the developments and growth in public history have given voice to stories that may have been dismissed or overlooked in other historical frameworks. While many undertake community and local histories as independent individuals, others work within the growing number of historical associations such as the New South Wales History Council, historical societies and heritage groups. Consistently, it has been evident that such undertakings are underpinned by the orientation and development of historical knowledge that culminates in community identity.

In the next chapter, I will examine the ways in which women view place and pilgrimage as major concepts that shape our understanding of history. By examining the multiple layers of place we can ask further questions of identity, belonging, the role of objects and the idea of re/turning to home. Further, while it will demonstrate the problematic nature of conflicting memories and representations of place, the chapter will show how place and pilgrimage are of primary concern to historians.
Chapter 7

Place and Pilgrimage

We have seen in previous chapters how materiality, ritual and working in the community, have a strong connection to place. In this chapter, I will further examine the idea of place and pilgrimage in the women’s stories, incorporating ideas of historical consciousness, the historicised self and approaches to history. I will also look at the learning, which occurred during our university studies. These aspects will be demonstrated through discussion of the details that are markers of place, of the way attachment to place can be disrupted, of the naming of places, of home and of the “body in place” (Somerville, 2004). Pilgrimage will be thought of in terms of the re/turn, keeping in mind considerations of the impossibilities of pilgrimage to place.

As I began thinking about my understanding of place, I realised that there were a wide range of disciplines underpinned by equally diverse theories that attended to the idea of place. My own thinking had grown from feminist poststructuralist research such as that of Margaret Somerville (1999). She has demonstrated how oral stories of place are interwoven, leading to a “hybrid place, the in-between, represented by the marginal, the not-owned, the publicly accessible spaces where anybody can tell their stories” (Somerville, 1999:4). Place comes into being, Somerville suggested, through evocative stories and through the constructions of the speaker’s performance.

Her research has produced several collaborative publications focusing on Indigenous communities in New South Wales. It was her book on the Ingelba community, 80 kilometres south of Armidale that first introduced me to her work. Here, she told of five Indigenous matriarchs who lived at Ingelba in the nineteenth century via the stories of their descendants (Somerville, 1990). This powerful book had a profound effect on me, particularly as an Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme tutor. I regularly offered it to my students as a valuable and alternative history source and as
an important way of understanding community, place and kinship in Indigenous communities.

Speaking to Margaret, years later, when she began supervising me, I was surprised to hear that she did not regard herself as a historian. To me, her work was valuable to any local historian. It gave voice to an almost silent but integral sector of the community and above all redefined what this place, Ingelba, meant in historical, social and personal terms.

In analysing my data, I wondered what other approaches researchers were using to examine and deconstruct place. I would discover that amid disciplines such as anthropology, geography, history and sociology, studies of place abounded. As in my study of general History Theory in Chapter 2, I traversed this diversity only to wonder about the dominance of masculine discourses, and in turn I sought out approaches, which included gendered questions.

**A Glance at the Historiography of Place**

This search for a historiography of academic research on place led me to deconstructive narratives of space, place, locale, locality and nationalism. The diversity of this growing area of academe is seemingly boundless as researchers from all fields begin to think about the way place can shape our thinking and actions. Several researchers have argued that place has been viewed as a limited concept. Escobar suggests that space has, until recently, been “enshrined as the absolute, unlimited and universal while banning place to the realm of the particular, the limited, the local and the bound” (2001:143).

Likewise, Heidegger, Tim Cresswell suggests, developed a rather static, “romantic and nostalgic” notion of *dasien*, referring to dwelling, (Heidegger 1977 cited in Cresswell, 2004:21). The rootedness and immobility of Heidegger’s *dasien* has been challenged and developed by others such as Samuel Relph, who looked beyond the physicality of place to the meanings and narratives attached to place (1976 cited in Cresswell, 2004:22). Similarly, Tuan wrote that the speech associated with place is
often neglected, that “geographers and landscape historians tend to see place almost exclusively as the result of material transformation of nature” (Tuan, 1991:684).

Belonging and Inter/national Identities
Much has been made of the postcolonial condition of nations such as Australia, the United States and Canada. Questions of belonging have abounded, many of these questions were inspired by the work of Anthropologist, Walker Connor (1993) and Historian, Benedict Anderson (1991).

Walker Connor has written extensively on place and the idea of ethno-nationalism and has argued that this sense of belonging is based on a “non-rational” belief, that the historical facts do not necessarily support the sentiment of a homogenous population (1993:382). While this work is focused on nations that have seemingly maintained an ethnic homogeneity, his ideas have been utilised by researchers such as Australian historian Loretta Baldassar to demonstrate and deconstruct the emotions of migrant families and their descendants when they return to their country of origin, to visit “home” (2001:2). In thinking about his own background, Connor offered evidence of the ambiguities of the image of nations built on colonised and immigrant populations and their connections to ‘home’. He argued that familial metaphors are employed, to name a few: motherland, fatherland, land of our fathers, the cradle of the nation and the homeland. He suggested this “emotion-laden phantasma” creates a “spiritual bond,” (Connor, 1993:385). He also demonstrated the ambiguity of nation building in colonised societies and offered his own school experiences as an example. His school class, he wrote, was made up of diverse ethnic backgrounds, mostly second and third generations of immigrant families. They were told, “we shared a common ancestry”, and were taught to memorise the words of America’s “founding fathers” as part of a nationalism building exercise (Connor, 1993:387).

The same fervour for nationalism can be seen in the current work of Australian commentator and historian John Hirst. He argues that while this may now be “unfashionable”, he persists and writes of a national character that can be drawn from adversity and hardship (Hirst, 2007a:1). He describes Australian founding fathers as the Australian diggers, the soldiers, the larrikins, which are the same terms used by Russell Ward (1958). But Hirst argues that immigrants have embraced the Australian
character and the sense of home as well. Indeed he demonstrates how “Australia is an easy society to fit into” (2007a:97). Hirst does not utilise the caution nor cite the ambiguity that Connor noted, instead he appears to dust off the old criticisms and charges forward with a singular Australian character, one that everybody can fit into if they choose to.

Benedict Anderson (1991), like Connor, found a wide audience for his book *Imagined Communities*. This work provides a similar perspective to Connor. He regarded nationalism to be like a “cultural artefact (that it is) capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self consciousness” and it needs to be examined from a historical perspective (Anderson, 1991:4). He has suggested that the grounding for an intellectual imagined community comes from a shared sense of belonging and comradeship and was originally derived from notions of religion and kinship. He suggested nations have “finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations” (Anderson, 1991:7). The members of communities need not share the same political power or ideological connections and they will not know each other, yet they will share an understanding of belonging (Anderson, 1991:6). This intellectual imagined community, Anderson argues, has come about largely through “print-capitalism”, the emergence of accessible printed texts in daily life” (1991:36). We might assume that this textual revolution has encouraged people to think collectively, but has this been at a cost of independent thought? Indeed, Anderson notes the dangerous side of a manufactured national comradeship, one that can lead to wars and death on a massive scale (1991:7).

**Who’s Place?**

In an interview in 2005, Anderson was asked about the absence of women in his and others’ work on nationalism. He replied, “I have heard and read of women’s role in nationalism, but as yet I haven’t found a way of writing about it” (Khazaleh, 2005:para 18). As I scoured the anthropological readings on place, the masculinist focus became more evident and I began to seek out feminist interpretations of place.

Susan Hanson has argued that the discipline of Geography has long been based on research which asks no questions about gender, race or class (1992:570). Similarly,
Feminist Geographer Gillian Rose asserts that much of the analysis of place is masculinist. She argued that the focus on the idea of home, by researchers such as Tuan, is defined by biology, nurturing and the domestic, a notion that remains at odds with the feminist notion of domesticity as subservience (Rose, 1993:53).

Dolores Hayden’s (1995) ground-breaking research on place grew from the founding of “The Power of Place” in 1984, a corporation which aimed to “situate women’s history and ethnic history in downtown, in public places, through experimental, collaborative projects by historians, designers and artists” (1995:xii). Her multi-disciplinary approach invited other scholars of place to re-think the idea of place and in particular the urban landscape. Hayden has suggested that to examine place, one needs “to be grounded in both the aesthetics of experiencing places with all five senses and the politics of experiencing places as contested territory” (1995:18). The stories that emerged from Hayden and her colleagues’ research are diverse and intimate and the undercurrent of political and cultural histories led to a profound picture of place.

**Place Pedagogy**

I sought out Margaret Somerville’s most recent research on *Place Pedagogies in Rural and Urban Australia* (2007) and *A Place Pedagogy for Global Contemporaneity* (Under Review). This work is partly informed, among others, by the multidisciplinary approach suggested by David Gruenewald (2003) and Adam Carter (2006). Somerville argues, “Place is a productive framework because it creates a space between grounded physical reality and the metaphysical space of representation” (2007a:para 2). To examine the connections between the real and the representations of place, Somerville incorporates the stories that emerge from art, photography, maps, scientific and agricultural writing, alongside, the notion of body in place. She states: “Methodologically, the body as a meta-category can be used to identify absences in dominant storylines (decolonisation) and to write new stories of place (re-inhabitation)” (Somerville, 2007a:para 5). From this perspective I have been prompted to ask how the body in place figures within my participants’ stories? Later in this chapter, I will present evidence that each of the participants had developed their own ways of understanding and negotiating the postcolonial context in rural and urban places they have lived.
Pilgrimage

As a colonised nation, many Australians are descendants of immigrants. The women who were a part of my research all made reference to their family history and, in particular, to the places that give meaning to this history. The idea of returning to these places, both in Europe and in Australia, represented a desire to embrace, as well as examine, the constructed identities in which we clothe ourselves. This is an area of increasing interest amongst historians and we can regard “immigration history” as a growth area in the discipline.

There has been a general shift away from the traditional national image “Australian larrikin” of Ward’s (1958) *The Australian Legend*, although as I have argued, it is occasionally revived by nationalist historians such as John Hirst (2007a). Generally, however, the multiplicity of immigration history and the continued growth of Indigenous History that examines a return of the “Stolen Generations” and of Indigenous agency in Australian history, have led to a fruitful re-examination and problematising of concepts of home, belonging and return.

I was keen to deconstruct the idea of pilgrimage, to ask what were the motivations and what narratives emerged from the journeys. Australian historian Loretta Baldassar (2001:18) explored some of these ideas in her book, *Visits Home: Migration Experiences Between Italy and Australia*. This book had particular resonance for me, given my own, similar family history. Baldassar begins by discussing anthropologist Walker Connor’s notion of “belonging beyond reason” (1993:2). Baldassar sought to explain the concepts that underpin the return to homeland, she explained:

> The anthropological notions of pilgrimage and *communitas* – the communal sense of belonging which characterises the liminal stage in the rites of passage – [which] are other concepts that help make sense of the return visit. (2001:2 emphasis is original)
Baldassar also argued that the idea of belonging and pilgrimage is an ambiguous one, in that it can be appropriated by members of families in a metaphoric sense. She wrote:

> Even if they never actually manage to ‘go back’ the lives of the migrants and their children are steeped in the myth of return … I am referring to the myth in the anthropological sense – as a key metaphor which orients the lives and desires of those who foster it. (2001:4)

Baldassar also offers the notion of *Campanilismo* which refers to a sense of “local identity” (2001:110). Baldassar suggest this includes both positive and negative connotations and can be used as a “conceptual tool to understand collective and individual attachment to and identification with place” (2001:110). These constructed mechanisms embedded in daily life that shape and foster a collective belonging raise fruitful questions about belonging and home.

I was reminded of comments made at 20th International Congress of Historical Sciences, during a session called “Talking Communities”. Heather Goodall spoke of her collaborative book, *Isabel Flick: The Many Lives of an Extraordinary Aboriginal Woman* (2004), and of her more recent research in the Vietnamese community in South Sydney (2005). Goodall had discussed the importance of place in the stories, of the way sequence and memory unfold and of how women’s fishing traditions of Vietnam were re-established in Australia. She was followed by Jill Cassidy’s (2005) presentation on “Tasmania and Migration”. Cassidy spoke of constructing an exhibition of items brought forward by migrants of the 1940s. Evocative stories emerged from photographs and stories of simple items, such as suitcases. Most of them are now held by the second generation of these migrant families. The audience discussion that followed was emotionally charged and included talk of returning to the countries of parents’ origin and, of what inspired tracing and preserving family heritage.

The construction of returning to or connections to homelands is not, however, unproblematic. Dalia Kandiyoti (2003) has argued that much of the writing surrounding the transnational experience has been centred on an accepted continuum
of identity. She has suggested that this needs to be problematised and that the assumption that transnational identities and multiple belongings can be far from smooth constructions, given the patriarchy of some communities and nations (Kandiyoti, 2003:para.4). This research focused on an “in-between generation” and the experiences of displacement and discontinuity of identity (Kandiyoti, 2003:para.5). Her exploration is underpinned by gendered questions of diasporic communities and argues for an interdisciplinary approach for researchers in migration studies (2003:para.6). Kandiyoti’s focus on the multiplicity of experience led to the suggestion that some of the problems that have arisen in this research area are derived from the constant return to the idea of a nation-state, marked by its various geographic, political and cultural borders (2003:para.12). This problematising of methodological approach and philosophy is a useful standpoint and as I re-read my data and the many resources, it became evident how easy it is to slip into a comfortable and simplistic version of analysis of migration and its legacies.

In the next section of this chapter, I will look more closely at the stories the women in this study told in terms of place and pilgrimage. I will deconstruct their language looking for further indications of a developed historical consciousness, a commitment to “good” history as they offered their stories, as well as their own analysis of the ideas of place and pilgrimage.

**Stories of Place**

An exploration of place within my data has revealed that the idea of place is a contested and organic construction. The women’s stories of place reflect their negotiation, self-reflection and mediation. There was no single way of telling a story of place, rather the story emerged from layers drawn from the meta-narrative, the perspective of a childhood, social, cultural and economic context and the historicised and retrospective critical self. Equally diverse were the types of place discussed, each peppered with evocative detail.

The women spoke of women’s domestic lives, from isolated rural properties to the city, where they might be alone in other ways for instance, while menfolk fought in
distant wars. They spoke of professional lives, institutions, class, culture, music and language. The stories were never regarded as too personal or tedious, each recollection evoking an enthusiastic and considered response. Each seemingly bounced between Rüsen’s (2005) framework of above and below the line as a site of analysis. At times they were seemingly reflective of considerations drawn from practical life and at times immersed in theory, questions of methods and analysis of forms of representations (Lee, 2002:3).

Stories of World War II featured prominently. There was an account of working as a radio officer in the Women’s Royal Naval Service (WRANS) at Potts Point. Una offered an ambiguous account of the frivolity of two years of absolute joy, a break from my strict upbringing; and night clubbing in Romano’s and Princes to the sober recollections of observing the HMAS Hobart arriving in Sydney Harbour with dead and wounded Australian soldiers aboard. Helena, who also remembered these times and places, related how invitations were exchanged between defence and civil organizations to attend social events.

*My sister’s office were having a ‘crazy night’ and they had written to the Air Force Association, asking for six airmen. I met my fate [future husband] but it was a comic thing.*

The harbour, its foreshores, the signals offices, civil buildings and the night clubs were all places tainted with the sobriety and fears of war-time, yet they were juxtaposed by the air of frantic socialising at a time when women, in particular, were thrust from their strict upbringing. Listening to these stories, I was struck by the ambiguity of the frenetic social changes the women experienced, yet it was clear this was an anomaly of place and time. The temporal nature was immediately evident as Una mentioned a marriage proposal. It was inappropriate, he was a Scottish Catholic and she an Australian Protestant and her family stepped in to stop it. As swiftly as we were drawn into the story of wartime life on the foreshores of Sydney, we were taken back to the established social rules, of the Catholic and Protestant divide in rural communities and of mothers struggling to feed families during war-time. The joyous narrative of Potts Point, of bodies dancing, joking and singing was cut short, as life moved on for these women.
Another story showed a different version of place and war. It was seen through a diary of Bronwyn’s grandmother, alone on an isolated dairy farm and listening to the radio for news of Australian troops. She recorded each time the bombs hit Darwin where one of her sons was stationed. In this place story, it was the embodied and geographical isolation that dominated. The frustration of the sense of a futile elsewhere-ness seemed to shroud this story. Ironically, the story concluded with the voice of her sons, who told Bronwyn their experiences overseas during the war, *opened their eyes to the world*. One would imagine their experiences also included seeing the horrors of war, but like Una and Helena, there was another side to war; the unveiling of a dramatic and exciting international world. But for her grandmother the war was lived through the radio far from any such things.

War also entered the domestic arena in the form of servicemen requiring R&R in private homes, away from Sydney in the quiet of the Katoomba, in the Blue Mountains. The narrative in this story focused on the way children should behave when visitors came and of the considerable work the mother of the house endured in her unseen contribution to the war effort. This home was a site of maintaining the ways of the ordinary as a place of respite to the life of an active serviceman. One can only guess at how the servicemen perceived his retreat to the home in Katoomba, one of many listed at the defence hospitality centre.

These different perspectives of war are all framed by a sense of place. The detail of the farm, the radio and its batteries, or the Katoomba dining room, its table and the lace table cloth; all added layers of meaning to the story and built upon the place or location as a defining characteristic of the story.

Yet another perspective was to be found in Rosemary’s recollections of living in England during the bombing raids. She said: *Everyday I would wake as a small child, look out the window and expect to see the house next door no longer there and a burnt block in its place.* This particular story and the way in which she told it would have a profound impact on my thinking about telling stories of place. Transcribing in my office weeks later, I was reminded of the power of the voice to shift the present to another place. Caught up in the story, I found transcribing could be much more than a
mundane exercise in listening and typing. Instead of extracting data for my thesis I find myself sitting next to her, looking out of the window too, sharing a child’s fear, transported by a few lines and distracted from my task.

Each of these wartime recollections seemed to emerge from the “body in place” (Somerville, 2004:52). They demonstrated the evocative story of the body immersed in a number of different wartime experiences and each, in their different perspective and reflecting the multiplicity of experiences of the home front.

Building Place through Detail

The inscribed story of places is often constructed through small meaning-making details. For example in Hayden’s discussion of an African homestead, and of Biddy Mason’s home amid the urban landscape of Los Angeles, she directs the reader’s focus from the now empty asphalt site to the small details that construct the sense of place. A series of installations were constructed. One is framed by a window frame and curtains and filled with intimate objects, a photograph, fabric, a vase, a medicine bottle and a fan (Hayden, 1995:181). The observer is looking in the window of the now demolished house and the inside vision evokes a sense of immediacy via objects. As discussed in Chapter 5, the stories inscribed in objects offer a historical and personal narrative. In creating installations of place, meaningful objects are brought together and arranged to encourage the observer to see the collective story of the home.

During the discussions at the reunion when talking about a community or home, my participants told the story via a series of details. Each detail had been inscribed with a story of its own and collectively the audience were able to feel a sense of place. These small details that evoke a sense of place and create a relationship with place were evident in Rosemary’s description of the land she bought many years ago but had since sold. This personal narrative of this land is both transformative and embodied.

*We bought the most magical place, 2000 acres in the Barrington Tops, in the mountains. Now in this little hut was no electricity, no water, I used to take two buckets down to the creek and collect my water. We had a bath under a plum*
Rosemary’s story provides the unique and fine details that defined her sense of being in place. The above quote is only a small section of her lengthy descriptions of individual trees, of collecting water and wood, of cooking. Rosemary then told a story about bringing her mother to stay in the house. As listeners, the proximity and the unique atmosphere were accessible and almost tangible. We could sense her visiting mother’s quiet alarm as she asked: “Is that where I will have a bath?”

This story evokes Elizabeth Grosz’s (1995:33) notions of the “inscribed” and “lived body” and of the re-configuration of the mind/body binary. The discourse of Rosemary’s property and the time she spent there would become, as discussed later in this chapter, a reference point for an embodied knowing, her identity and her sense of belonging to the Australian landscape.

**Disrupting History of Place**

The women of my research were clearly concerned about preserving community histories. They were agentic historians and collectors who respected and understood that certain things belong in certain places. Rosemary told of the purchase of an old church and its precarious journey on a truck through the perilous roads to her property:

> We bought a little deconsecrated church. We moved it in on a truck, it was very difficult, we had to cross little stony creeks and take it through a cutting. But we put it on a hill.

As Rosemary spoke, I was silently wondering about the implications of such a move for the small community from which the church came. But she too must have had similar thoughts and concluded the story with:

> The local historical society contacted me about its history the other day. I was really pleased about that.
Her relief was evident in that the church’s connection to its original community was not entirely erased and the move had been recorded by the local historical society. There was a general sense of agreement among her listeners that this was indeed important.

**Naming a Ridge**

To give a particular place a name, an official name, is reflective of privilege. Tuan has suggested that “naming is power – the concrete power to call something into being, to render the invisible, visible; to impart a certain character to things” (1991:288). One of the women recalled this privilege:

> I used to love to walk and we’d pack a bag, it would take all day to one point. It was a magnificent view and you really did feel that you were looking at half of Australia and that it was yours. We named the point Pete’s Ridge and the people that bought it kept the name, so I think that’s important, we actually named a ridge!

Giving this ridge point a name meant leaving a legacy of their ownership of the land. In doing so however, they named the ridge point after the previous owner, which alludes to the ambiguity of the temporal/permanent inscription of the custodian. Just as Una’s research focused on the lives of the owners of her military sea chest, we see here another example of the historicised self. It is an acknowledgement of being a caretaker, rather than owner. We can see how rather than owning a place, it is shared by many over time, and this naming process was recognition of those who had gone before. The present owners and future owners are all connected and their stories can remain embedded in the landscape.

**Narratives of Place and Materiality inform each other**

Tuan also challenged the idea that place has often been defined by geographers only in terms of large and significant sites “usually not individual houses, and certainly not that old rocking chair by the fireplace” (1974 cited in Cresswell, 2004:20). I was reminded of the way in which the women talked about the meaning they derived from the material object in place. Una’s chest as a mobile site that settles in with its new
owner, its new home and the way in which the owner’s narrative becomes embedded in the chest, fits with Tuan’s notion of the ordinary and micro. It can also be seen in the space in front of the fire at Rosemary’s hut in the bush. Again the associated narrative builds a sense of place, belonging and of a lived experience.

**The University as Place**

Tim Cresswell has suggested that a university can be regarded as “the product of hundreds of years of practice in education in particular ways” (2004:36). A hierarchy based on power knowledge and experience is well established and is translated into both the intellectual and physical environment. He has suggested that it is not a “finished” site: rather we can see new developments in approaches to teaching which unsettle the long standing traditions (Cresswell, 2004:37).

I looked back to my data to see how this might be interpreted in the stories of our time at the University of New England. I would suggest that the women were familiar, if not comfortable, with much of the traditional ways of the university’s institutional and hierarchical sense of place. What seemed more important to them than the university as a place in its own right, was the opportunity which coming here gave them, to engage with other students and lecturers. But how much of this exchange was reflective of simply being happy to be at the university and take away knowledge and skills? In many ways the allegiance to the university and acquiring and maintaining the identity as a University of New England graduate was strong. Many of the women belonged to the Alumni. They were also willing to travel hundreds of kilometres, at their own cost, to attend my workshop. The invitation to return to the university site was a welcome one. Equally, the chance to review the room in which our residential was held was also greeted with approval. However, we were all external students, so much of our engagement with the university had been by post. Our regular trips to Armidale for residentials were brief, yet intense, real engagement with the university as place.

The meaning we derived and the sense of identity we constructed, first as students and later as visitors, were a site of constant negotiation. As students, this identity was seemingly shaped by the institutional structures of Cresswell’s “hundreds of years of practice” (2004:36). Yet at the same time, this long tradition was troubled by the
overt enthusiasm described by Professor Geoff Quaife (2001); we would push the allocated boundaries to gain more access to our lecturers and by being “naughty” as described in Chapter 4. Equally, it was troubled by our status as distance education students. In the pilgrimage / return to the university, we affirmed memories of place and our sense of belonging to this place.

**Stories of Place in Rural Towns**

As mentioned in previous chapters, during the workshop, the women would often pick up on the story of an object and discuss its wider implications in Australian History. The same occurred when country towns were mentioned. These meta-narratives accompanied the personal story of their embodied experiences. In turn, the images evoked reflected thoughtful historicised constructions of how people inhabit and negotiate the physical characteristics of place and the remnants of these stories today.

**Charters Towers**

The story began with a mention of Charters Towers in Queensland. The following enthusiastic discussion scanned the history of this unique town.

Una: *It’s called “The World”.*

Rosemary: *Yes there is the world theatre.*

Bronwyn: *No the town was called “The World”, it was huge and there were more people living there than in Brisbane in the 1870s.*

Rosemary: *And there was a Stock Exchange. I had spoken to a man who grew up there he said “I used to take the gold into the stock exchange with my father.” He could describe exactly where the Assay office was. I had to ring him and say, “I have been to your home!” We had a wonderful day there. They are getting lots of public grants to develop their history there. Mining has had a big influence on our past.*
The discussion continued shifting between the impact of mining on rural towns, the way in which communities were preserving their past and the way in which communities could flourish and then decline. Listening to this discussion, I was struck by the women’s broad knowledge, their historicising of rural and urban development and considerations about the current preservation practices of historical bodies in those communities. We heard similar stories and analysis of Silverton in New South Wales. Also of Mudgeeraba, once a small isolated hinterland community in Queensland, now a popular and expensive suburb of the Gold Coast, Snake Island in South Gippsland Victoria, was mentioned along with the historic townships of Bathurst, Junee, and Harden in New South Wales, to name just a few. As seen below, the accompanying narrative for each of these towns would switch from the highly personal to an account of the town’s historical and cultural development.

**Silverton, Embodied Perceptions**

As mentioned in Chapter 5, one of the women, unable to attend the reunion in person, sent some stories about a sewing basket given to her by her grandmother. Jean had found a similar basket in a museum in Silverton, a New South Wales town located close to the South Australian border. The ensuing discussion shifted from the basket to the town and I was reminded of Somerville’s notion of body in place (2007). Jean had written:

> There is not much left of Silverton, once a town of three thousand. Picture Silverton as red dust, only one road in and what is left of the other streets are just dirt tracks. But the museum was spotless. It was pristine.

The women spoke of the way in which the townspeople survived in such conditions, but the conversation was interrupted with an urgent interjection from Una:

> A warning here, if it starts to rain in Silverton, you have to get out fast! If a thunderstorm starts you have to leave right away, you won’t be able to get to Broken Hill [because the road would become impassable]. I was there in the Fifties, we used to go there for picnics.
Una’s interjection and the other women’s contributions summoned the idea of body in place in a historical and embodied context. It was apparent, that to understand Silverton, one needed to understand the vulnerable body in these adverse conditions. The imagery evoked was one of a colonised environment, a community of people that struggled to sustain itself, with the absence of a permanent water supply and the history of the boom and bust of the mining industry, so that Silverton remains a precarious place and ultimately may be a place one needs to escape from. In the midst of this, we were reminded, is a pristine museum, its collections cared for by town folk who, indeed, have remained, and who endeavour to preserve the history of the town and its inhabitants.

**Una’s Stories of Place: Hints of Henry Lawson**

Una spoke of her embodied experiences living on an isolated farm in western New South Wales with her husband’s parents. Her stories were of her physical battles with unruly animals, of dealing with rat plagues and caring for her two year-old who got trench mouth amid the harsh conditions. She also spoke of the relationships that shaped her experience. In particular of a father-in-law, who did not trust her, bullied her and only ever referred to his wife as “The Cook”. *He used to ridicule everything the Cook did, and she couldn’t drive.*

The sense of place that emerged from Una’s story was of harsh isolation, hard work and a cruel patriarch. Una situated her mother-in-law’s body at the centre of many of these anecdotes, to tell the story of coping and survival. The story of “The Cook’s” survival of the brutality and loneliness was a long constructed anecdote. Una’s mother-in-law devised a series of strategies that would allow her escape the farm and go to town. These were largely centred on her supposed ill-health, involving lying-down rituals on the veranda with a ‘bad head’, trips to the intuitive and cooperative doctor and the willingness of the mailman, who provided the ride to town.

It was in this story that we as listeners caught a glimpse of the life of some women in isolated rural areas. For weeks after the workshop, “The Cook” stayed in my mind, with questions of feminist interpretations of her determined agency, in finding a way to escape the farm and finding relief in the company of other people. These experiences of the 1940s and ‘50s were the source of many of Una’s stories and self-
published works, and were often reminiscent of the style of Australian poet, Henry Lawson’s, The Drover’s Wife (1892).

**Pilgrimage and Re/turning to Place**

Before the reunion, I had deliberately offered to the potential participants, the idea of pilgrimage as a topic of discussion. I was interested in this idea from a personal perspective, derived from my own family history, but also because I hoped to find stories of the re/turn to place. As the women historicised their writing, their personal treasures and their historian selves, I wondered how they would historicise pilgrimages to personally significant places.

Loretta Baldassar (2001:1) introduces her book with an account of visiting her Nona’s (grandmother’s) village in Italy. Her first recognition of the place was in hearing a familiar dialect that she had only heard in Perth, Australia. This was the experience my mother had when she travelled to the Aeolian island, Lipari. The dialect was instantly recognisable to my mother as that of her grandmother, Noni, heard in Sydney. While this is an understandable linguistic phenomenon, the emotional effect can be mysteriously profound. Years after Noni had passed away, her voice seemingly echoed in the community of her origin. Even as one arrives at the destination, the familiarity can be immediately obvious. I am reminded of Hayden’s belief that an understanding of place can be perceived and evoked through all five senses (1995:18).

It was a sense of smell that Bronwyn spoke of when she recalled the silos on her grandparent’s farm and the immediacy of her memory.

> I can smell the silo! I can hear him saying, “Don’t climb over there or you will fall in!” And you know I was only little, sitting in the chook house too, I’ve got those memories.

Psychologist Piet Vroon has argued that smell, can be a trigger for evoking past memories (1997:21). In this instance, Bronwyn does not need a trigger from her
environment as a means for recall, rather it is a lived bodily experience she deliberately maintains in the narrative of her personal history.

**Britain / Home**

For several of the women participating in my research, Britain was the focus of their desire for pilgrimage. Two of the women had migrated as children from England while the others were British variably as second, third and fourth generation descendants. Deborah Gare provides an interesting perspective of the significance and the irony behind “Britishness” in Australian history writing, when she argues that historians have shown how Australians were indoctrinated with a sense of Britain as “Home” while maintaining the idea that the British military, at least during World War I, was overwhelmingly incompetent (Gare, 2000:1150). Yet, like Walker Connor (1993:387), all my participants had grown up with Britain as the iconic homeland and with an idea of allegiance to the Empire. The stories in the workshop reflected a more complex story, one informed by the indoctrination of our school days, by the allied wartime relationship, but even more so, informed by historical analysis, by our learning at university and by historicising the complex shaping of our identities.

**Somebody else’s House/ and mine too**

A sense of belonging to a house is often complex and multi-layered. The passing of time and new owners, do not erase the sense of connection individuals feel. Images and stories of one’s childhood home can stand suspended in time and we can revive images of domestic life and of nurturing family members. The remnants of gardens can evoke memories planting particular trees, of labouring in hard earth or horticultural fashions of the time. Each of these memories can add to the layers of our stories of place and their historical context.

A rather humorous story emerged in our group discussions, about giving in to the desire to enter a house in England that one of the women’s mother had grown up in.

*We were primed with a bit of wine by this stage, so we just found the house and all sort of stood there as if we quite belonged in this house. The owner opened the door and saw this whole gaggle of people all standing there and we blurted out our story. He couldn’t do anything else but say, ‘come in’.*
Now amongst this group was Mum’s sister, Elsie, and she had strong memories of this house. She literally took over. She said, ‘Oh this is the kitchen and this is where we rang for the maid, and down here is the cellar’.

We all sent him a letter, we felt terrible afterwards when we sobered up. But he had shaken hands with us and had his photo taken on the front veranda. And when my grandmother died, he actually went to the funeral, such a nice gesture, he’d read in the paper that she died and turned up because he now felt part of that.

A return to the family house had prompted a multitude of stories of place, the past and the present. Revisiting the home, Elsie transformed from visitor to matriarch and storyteller and the present owner became merely the current caretaker, of a place laden with a family’s past. His willing immersion in this past reflects the way in which storytelling and the very obvious physical confirmation of that past can transform or dislodge the present.

Embedded Narrative: Stairs / Looking to Sons at War

The story of three stairs provided an evocative journey of remembrance, of a mother looking out to sea and looking towards her sons, across the oceans, fighting in the war. The story began with a return to the isolated house site in the mountains of the Gold Coast hinterland in Queensland.

There’s no farmhouse now, but strangely enough the big Sassafras trees are still there and there were three stairs leaning against the tree. And I said to my brother, ‘You probably don’t realise the significance of those stairs.’ My grandmother once told me that she used to sit on the front stairs of the house and look out and she could just see the ocean, and Uncle Bert was in Darwin, Tim was in Canada and Dad was in ...

A mother’s yearning and worry over her soldier sons was palpable and drawn from the remains of wooden stairs discovered more than fifty years later.
Ideas of beauty

For Rosemary however the importance of England was far more personal and immediate. Her self-reflection on her immigrant experiences and its legacies was something she spend considerable time analysing. She said:

I’ve been socialised to think about the idea that Britain is gentle and that we came from Yorkshire, the dales, the sheep, it’s all Herriot country. It’s taken me a heck of a time to get used to the fact that Australia in the middle of a drought can be beautiful.

In the end I said, “No I’ve just got to go to England”. So I went for a month, hired a car and wandered around England. I realised why I needed to go. I needed to clear myself of the green and the beauty. To actually look at Australia with fresh eyes and say, “Yes, this is fantastic”, you know, the grandeur, the fact we are here and how we have survived in this country.

Tilley’s research on landscape comes to mind as I sought to deconstruct Rosemary’s stories. He says,

Landscapes are on the move peopled by diasporas, migrants of identity, people making homes in new places, landscapes are structures of feeling, palimpsests of past and present, outcomes of social practice, products of colonial and post-colonial identities and the western gaze, they are places of terror, exile, slavery and of the contemplative sublime. (Tilley, 2006:7-8)

The complexity of Rosemary’s dilemma went beyond the concept of beauty or imagery, but it was the metaphor to which she subscribed, to explain her sense of belonging in the English landscape, with all it embedded family narratives and sense of personal renewal (survival) in Australia’s harsh landscape.

The Im/possibilities of Pilgrimage

Just as Walker Connor spoke of “belonging beyond reason” and Benedict Anderson of the “imagined community”, I felt compelled to ask how fantasy impinges upon or shapes our construction of place. Tony Taylor has suggested the idea of “Fantasy as a challenge to knowing beyond the limits of reality” (2003:1). Similarly, Judith Butler
has written; “Fantasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings elsewhere home” (Butler, 2003:208).

Is it possible to interchange “History” with “fantasy”? Certainly from a postmodern perspective the two are interchangeable and the idea of “bringing the elsewhere home” offers enormous scope for exploring the way we ‘do’ history. I would like, however to briefly, look at the impossibilities. Teresa de Laurentis offers comment on the notion of elsewhere:

the elsewhere of discourse here and now, the blind spots, or the space-off, of its representations … spaces in the margins of hegemonic discourses, social spaces carved in the interstices of institutions and in the chinks and cracks of power knowledge apparati. (1987 cited in Salvaggio, 1988:273)

There are many tensions and historical anomalies embedded in the idea of pilgrimage. Reconstructing place and its meaning through re-enactment can make no promises of authentic experience. In some cases the subsequent re-telling and doing, can evoke dismay. This seems particularly evident in war experiences. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Joy Damousi has explored the pilgrimage made by thousands of Australians who attend Gallipoli each year:

In rewriting this as a generic tale, it would be beholden on the historian to suggest what is missing in this commemorative moment: the imperialist and colonial aspirations of the British Empire which evaporate from an effort to universalise the story. It is the role of the historian to consider how these pilgrimages have become normalised and ritualised to the extent that the historical and political dimensions of war often remain un-interrogated. (Damousi, 2004:32-33)

Tilley also argues there is a risk of romanticising place through nostalgic imaginings. He says that when identity is constructed through a particular place, change challenges the continuity of this identity. He argues,
In the face of perceived threats to the identity of place and landscape ideas about uniqueness and singularity of both have become in many cases re-entrenched with people wishing to find a refuge, to defend a notion of bounded place with which they can identify. This almost inevitably results in nostalgic imaginings of how these landscapes and places should appear and conservation and heritage projects whose overriding aims are to preserve such a romanticised identity, a search for the purity of ethnic groups and continuity in the face of change. (Tilley, 2006:13-14)

Dalia Kandiyoti raises further problems identified in immigration studies arguing that the rosy pictures that sometimes surround pilgrimage can be fallacies. In her research on women immigrants, Kandiyoti argued that the fluidity of transnational connections can be inflated (2003:para 2). She suggests that in reality the impact of the multiplicity of individuals, particularly women and their experience does not lead to a smooth connection. Rather she argues, an in-between generation emerges and that sometimes this group does not fit comfortably in the old country or the new (2003:para 5).

It is evident that though nationalism building, nostalgia and homogenising the immigrant experience can create conflicting stories of place. This troubling of the notion of place, however, is a productive path. Somerville points to Paul Carter’s notion of the “contact zone” (1992) - a characteristic of place as providing a space of the intersection of different stories, “an in-between space of transformative potential, where differences are preserved and meaning can be suspended” (Somerville, 2003:255). It is from this position that I question my own family history and the pilgrimages made by my family and the pilgrimage I hope to make in the future.

**Noni’s Lipari: Imagined Lipari**

Prior to gathering the women of my research together, I had thought a great deal about place within family history. During the reunion, I told my own story in order to get conversations started.
It was the story of an Aeolian Island, Lipari, just north of Sicily, and of my great grandmother, Natala, known by our family as Noni. Unlike my other great grandmother, Christina (mentioned in Chapter 5), Noni’s influence was and continues to be ever-present over our extended family today. Noni migrated to Australia with her husband, Andrea, at the turn of the century with a young son, my grandfather. Three more sons were born soon after. But in 1921 Andrea died leaving Noni to raise these four boys.

Figure 11: 1905: Andrea and Natala with three of their children. Author’s grandfather, the eldest, is on the right.
Included below are two images of Lipari, one taken in 1900 (see figure 12), the time when my great grandmother prepared to leave the island and the second one of the many paintings my mother has produced, (see figure 13). Her paintings of different scenes of the island and its foreshores and the stories told in our family history have rendered particular scenes as iconic and embedded in a narrative of dis/connection for subsequent generations. Until we go there ourselves these are the places that we think of.

Figure 12: 1900 Marina Corta with Lipari Castle in the background, Lipari (2006 reproduction postcard)
Many members of our family make the pilgrimage to Lipari. Indeed my mother now makes the trip annually. I am yet to travel to Lipari, and from my own view the narratives that surround it are largely focused on knowing Noni, imagining her early life, walking the streets she walked, visiting her home and connecting with relatives still living there. Equally important, and more currently accessible to me, are the places connected with Noni (see figure 14) once she migrated to Sydney at the turn of the century. Her homes in Woolloomooloo, Birkenhead and Drummoyne, were each linked to the family’s connection with the fishing industry in Sydney Harbour.
For me her story has reflected a loving, if formidable, ever-present matriarch. Visits to her home provided an extraordinary experience. It is only in recent years that I have looked at Noni beyond the immediate family and hear stories of her work within the Italian community in Sydney. Noni sponsored several family members during the 1950s, acted as translator for Italian people in hospitals and during World War II helped in family businesses when the men were interned in camps. This side of Noni is one I hope to learn more about. Until now my construction of her has grown purely
from the perspective of a great-granddaughter. Noni died when I was 16 years old and we had frequently visited her during school holidays in her Drummoyne home, as described in my poem that follows.

**Visiting Noni**

Relying on childhood memories
I am
My sisters and I,
Running down the path
The door is unlocked
Mum calls out
Walking into the darkened hall
Religious imagery, crosses
Photos of beloved line the walls
Busts and figurines observe my entrance
The smells are familiar and welcoming
Garlic, olive oil, eggplant and veal

Past the bedroom
Don’t go in
Why?
A glimpse of huge wooden cupboards
Lace seemingly draped everywhere
A huge heavy bed
Surely none could climb so high
I dare not go in
I long to peak
But this is no place to misbehave

Further down the hall
We move slowly I don’t know why
I want to see the next room
Where Noni will be sitting
waiting
Darkened room
Curtains drawn
Shadows fall over figurines
Family of the past see me through ornate frames
I see them
I know him
Great grandfather, died so long ago
But we know his face
And their wedding photo
Embedded in my knowing
Knowing Noni
The mother, grandmother great grandmother
Lounge chairs, dark and patterned
I am lost and sinking back
Into the realm of the chair
Of the exotic, the bohemian
Lace abounds

I sit
Listen to Noni
As a child would
But lost in the fantasy and history of the room

Out to the kitchen
Centre of activity and production
Biscuits, strange and sweet
This ritual is kind and familiar

The stairs to the garden
Steep rickety, risky
Mum hovers and worries
But we rush
Wondrous and dangerous

To the huge ponds
Edged by enormous rocks
Withholding the fish
Hidden by fat floating leaves
A flash of gold
Of red
Don’t touch
We wonder if they would bite us
Untouchable and dangerous
Obedient children, we won’t touch

Leaving, as arriving
The alcove of the veranda
The bright coloured tiles
Through the over-flowing garden
The fragrance of jasmine
Winding path
And up on to the road
A different world
Of cars and 1970s city life
Behind me the house of the past

On the veranda Noni waves, one hand on the walking frame
And Uncle Vince, smiling, waving
The memories of Noni during the 1970s remain vivid and enveloped in emotion, but they are the recollections of a child. The adult/child now wants to know more of her life in Lipari. I have, at times, constructed her identity as being derived only from and reflective of an othered culture, an older culture and lineage, of her parents, Anna Mollica and Guiseppe Fazio. Yet I am aware that her life was also shaped by her immigrant experience in Australia. Thus I have, as Kandiyoti (2003) might suggest, over-simplified this construction. I have a sense that I need to further explore “my Lipari” and, like Rosemary’s England, I need to visit and explore the island myself.

**Rosemary’s England**

Many of Rosemary’s stories are about place, leaving England, returning to England and the places in Australia she has made her home. What is it about identity and place that veils her thoughts? One might suggest loss. Even when the loss is the frightening state of Yorkshire in the midst of World War Two, it is a sense of loss that lasts almost a life time. It is not until Rosemary decides deliberately to create her own heritage in Australia that the threads of connectiveness come into play. It is a process that includes revisiting England and returning to Australia with different eyes.

On her return to Australia it was no longer regarded as barren and harsh. She discovered beauty and a sense of place and identity amid the unforgiving landscape of the rugged Barrington Mountain range. And it is from the Australian folk-lore of Henry Lawson that she drew her measure. Australian heritage had become her heritage and from this time on, her life took on new meaning and strength. Indeed, it was at this time she embarked on university study of History.

This powerful connectiveness of place, heritage and identity envelopes Rosemary’s many stories. In turn my analysis process is fraught with tight-chested, near-tears moments and I am overwhelmed by her willingness to share these with me – a glimpse of the privilege of a researcher.

**Re/turning to a Past in Surry Hills**

In thinking about my desire to make the pilgrimage to Lipari, I realise there is another pilgrimage I wish to make. That is to Surry Hills, where my maternal great-grandmother spent her adult life, bereft of three of her children. My physical journey
to Surry Hills is unproblematic. It is a familiar suburb, but it is Christina’s life in that place that intrigues me. The irreversible hook that caught me was the discovery of the hundreds of photographs in the Sydney Council Archives dating from 1900 to 1930. These photographs, were taken by an unknown public works photographer at a time when the suburb was undergoing radical change. It was also the time when Christina and her husband made the decision to give three of their children into foster care. As I have no family stories of place relating to Surry Hills, my pilgrimage is largely intellectual. I have an address and I have access to many libraries and resources. Thus my reconstruction is imagined and negotiated, metaphorical, flawed yet rigorous. It is my in-between space where I am looking for an illusive yet suspended narrative, the story of women living in Surry Hills between 1900 and 1937, the period Christina lived and died in this place.

I will not provide an extensive summary of this research. Indeed it is unfinished, and will be further explored after the completion of this thesis. The history books and photographs often paint a dismal picture of Surry Hills at this time. Max Kelly (1977) produced a “photographic documentary” using the photographs of the public works photographer. This book and Christopher Keating’s (1991) book *Surry Hills: The City’s Backyard* offer a fascinating, if troubling, story of the community and the people living there. Yet amid the many problems of entrenched poverty, racism and dis/ease, both texts allude to the sense that Surry Hills was a landscape of change and vitality. It was often the first place of abode for migrants and also the site of developing industry. Surry Hills and its surrounds seemed to offer much food for thought to the social historian. It was, however, the mention of the sounds of women’s work over the night landscape: “late night hum of the sewing machine” (Keating, 1991:38), that caught my attention and further inspired me to re-imagine the history of women’s lives in Surry Hills, using the feminist and interdisciplinary approaches that have a central place in this thesis.

**Conclusion**

Discussing the importance of place and pilgrimage at the workshop and in letters to the women in my research group inspired much enthusiasm. Each of us regarded certain places, towns, small communities, houses and even broad landscapes as having shaped our identity and personal histories. In turn, we contextualised these
stories of place, as shaped by as well as shaping, our wider understanding of the Australian cultural and historical discourse. It was evident that ideas of locating ourselves in the physical landscape can contribute to wider narratives about learning and teaching History.

This chapter has demonstrated some of the ways in which historians can access the narratives ascribed to the concept of place. Place, belonging and returning are terms now embraced and deconstructed by academics from a wide range of disciplines. I have argued that it is productive to adopt an interdisciplinary approach to studies of place and pilgrimage. In particular I have argued that Somerville’s place pedagogy offers the researcher different tools to think about the implications of body in place. Baldassar has offered a practical excursion through her own places of family history and examines “the myth of return”. Kandiyoti, like Honkanen, has sought to problematise traditional masculine historical narratives. In turn, I have argued that from my transcripts, the women of my research group explored their own stories of place and pilgrimage from a personal, contextual, and historical perspective. Laden with the knowledge we acquired at university, we have layered the meta-narratives upon the personal and familial narratives to mediate notions of identity and be/longing in place.

In the next chapter, I will examine the notions of feminist and matrilineal historicism; the thinking that surrounds women as part of generations of women, writing, preserving and performing histories. I will ask whether there is a means for examining the agentic and historicised self. Rather than alluding to an essentialist women’s way of doing history, the chapter will aim to present the multiplicities of the historicised woman self alongside the legacy of the learning acquired while studying history at university.
Chapter 8

Feminist and Matrilineal Historicism: Contextualising the Historicised Self

Bronwyn: It’s like a daily memory and I always put it there like that.

In this chapter, I will discuss notions of Feminist and Matrilineal historicism, of a historic and intellectual sisterhood and the idea of the historicised self. I include transcripts of the workshop and autobiographic writing of women historians alongside my exploration of these concepts. As evident in Bronwyn’s statement above, repetitions, cycles and rituals can be deeply embedded in women’s ways of knowing, performing and telling histories.

Feminist and Matrilineal historicism refers to the historicising of the way in which women perform their histories, contextualise themselves and the stories they tell. It is the way in which the women know and take responsibility for the legacy of their historical performance. Feminist and Matrilineal historicism reflects an agency and awareness that shapes the manner in which women “do” history within in the academic and public spheres and in regard to materiality and to concepts of place. It is reflective of knowing one’s place or places in history; acknowledging that, just as their knowledge is a culmination of the histories constructed by the generations before, the preservation and the additions women make to the body of knowledge will shape the subjectivity and identity of those generations to come. The women participating in this research have constructed their historical knowledge of lebenspraxis, from tertiary study and from the generational nurturing that has been bestowed upon them by mothers, grandmothers and great grandmothers. Feminist and Matrilineal historicism reflects an agentic and self-reflective culmination of knowledges and the scholarship and practice of a historic sisterhood.
As means of exploring this discourse, I have sought out feminist research that alludes to women’s method for historicism. This has been evident in some women researchers’ work, particularly since the late 1970s, where we see women refining and deconstructing the notion of women’s time and women’s writing, proclaiming these as very different to the masculine constructions. The subsequent publications by women, such as Julia Kristeva (1981), Helene Cixous (1976), Alice Jardine (1982), and Elaine Showalter, (1984) provide a radical assessment of women’s voice in history and literature.

Aided by the thinking that has emerged from these writings, I will reflect on the female historicised self as reflective of the legacies of their learning in higher education. These skills, knowledge and critical thinking assist in the movement above Rüsen’s line of lebenspraxis, leading this group of women to a more intricate and informed historical understanding of themselves and their role in the telling of history. The connection between the global and the intimate history emerged as a consistent thread amid feminist historicism in this chapter. Many women historians have pointed to the importance of this relationship, and at times, seemingly by-passed a national narrative. In a personal interview in May 2007, Miriam Dixson discussed the introduction of Australia’s first year-long women’s history course. She said: “I tried to paint our own experience against the international Western experience.” This was in contrast to Geoffrey Blainey’s (1975b) *Tyranny of Distance*, which evoked a sense of Australian outsider-ship, it seems that many women historians, as well as feminist activists, have been seeking to make the connections between the global and the intimate as a means for deconstructing women’s experience and as a source of transformative knowledge.

These assertions beg the question: Is it exclusively a female story? Are men and a masculine discourse entirely absent? It is impossible to erase the embedded patriarchy of traditional knowledges that have informed our learning. Men have played significant roles within the women’s stories and the women also have willingly participated in the traditional and patriarchal structures of academia. In the process of thinking and reading around this issue, I came across the debates that occurred during and after “The Mary Daly Event” in Sydney in 1981 (Genovese, 1996:137). Australian feminists argued over the validity and worth of a separatist feminist
position. Soon after, the debate was further discussed at a Women’s Studies conference in Wollongong with Dale Spender, newly arrived back from the United States of America, as keynote speaker (Sheridan, 1993:103). The im/possibilities of a “unified sisterhood” (Sheridan, 1993:103) were at the centre of these debates and remind me that these questions remain as valid today as they were in 1981.

Katriina Honkanen’s recent call for a “strategic forgetting” of masculinist histories is not entirely possible and perhaps, not even desirable. Instead one might view a feminist and matrilineal method as a parallel or accompanying discourse. It is certainly one that contrasts with traditional masculinist histories, which Miriam Dixson described as “stag stories” (Kissane, 1999). Yet, it is not a “feminist wail” as described by John Hirst in his appraisal of the inclusion of feminist histories (1995). His statement evokes for me the abhorrent scientific analysis of female hysterics, of the past. I find a more comfortable position from which to think and write, in Ann Curthoys’ work on the interdisciplinary nature of feminist historical work (1998:80).

**Literary Background**

Amid the scholarship that emerged after the resurgence of feminism in the 1970s, many women writers sought to explore an exclusively female experience. The 1980s was a time when the results of asking different questions of literacy and history began to appear in scholarly journals. To a large degree, these writings, remained on the fringe of the history discipline and it would be some time before their influence could be seen in the wider domain of mainstream history. Again, looking back to CISH 2005, I found that the work of Kristeva, Irigaray and Cixous was evident in many of the women’s history presentations. They were not presented as dominant discourses, rather accompanying historic feminist ideas from which researchers could build upon as well as challenge.

For the purpose of this chapter, I have revisited the discussion and literary background surrounding women’s time, women’s writing and language. I do not want to embed myself in the 1980s feminism, but rather to see it as an evocative time of knowledge-making. I describe feminist thinking as a cumulative process which
reflects the many layers of experience of generations of women. Secondly, I have
looked at research surrounding storytelling. Thirdly, I have focused on the notion of
the (historicised) self.

**Women’s Time**

Fieda Johles Forman has argued that while women have been absent from much of
the more elaborate analysis of time, there is reason to believe that this is changing.
She suggests:

> Time is on our side: the intellectual and spiritual conditions exist now, not only
> for women’s history, but for feminist historiography: for women making history
> and for feminists recording it. We have cause for exhilaration when we reflect
> on the enormous creativity of feminist historians whose work encompasses the
> reclamation of our foremothers’ lives, the recording of our history making, and
> the redefinition of History from a revolutionary perspective, that of feminism.
> (1989:8)

Traditional masculine historical time periods, Mary O’Brien has argued, have been
presented to students of history as unduly specific and tidy. She suggests that she
learnt of these clear-cut definitive periods during her schooling. As she and her fellow
female students were encountering their bodily changes and menstrual periods, they
were told these female periods were bound to be irregular. She wrote, “As we never
have been offered information about alternative modes of time consciousness, the
contradictions of linear and cyclical modes were puzzling and irregularity seemed
slightly pathological” (O’Brien, 1989:11). She challenged the masculine desire for
clear periodicity. Of Hegel’s (1967) system of time, she wrote;

> He conceives (!) a history mothered by negativity and fathered by
> transcendence – body by mind, nature by history, intuition by reason.
> Periodicity was historicised in the positing of a creative antithesis – dialectical
> process – in which man’s self-conscious was eventually to be subsumed in his
> spirituality, and reborn as universal reason. (O’Brien, 1989:12)
O’Brien suggests the need for a “regenerative time consciousness” on which women might draw:

An ancient base for a new knowledge of the world in the concrete, non-objectified female experience of the unity of continuity in the practical act of birth, the experience of species persistence as accomplishment rather than fate, of life rather than death, of practicality rather than ideology, of wisdom rather than power. (1989:17)

For Kristeva, the term “women’s time” is more distinctively spatial than chronological. She agrees that the female subjectivity of “women’s time” is marked by a sense of repetition and eternity, of cycles and biological rhythms. These culminate in an experience that is reflective of an “extrasubjective time, cosmic time, occasion vertiginous visions and unnameable jouissance” (Kristeva, 1981:16). The idea of a rhythmic cycle and unnameable sense of pleasure is a fruitful one for thinking about women’s historical agency, writing and other performances. Certainly, the women in my research expressed similar thoughts. Helena described how it seemed an appropriate time to begin her studies in the late 1980s.

I raised a family of seven children and by 1986 I was a widow with no great family obligations. As a mother I had realised my maternal obligations were primary and I had no quarrel with that. My mother had been a strong feminine model, assured of her place and importance in the world.

In the practical application of notions of “women’s time”, Kristeva sees a change in historiography, born out of a sense that writing women’s history is intrinsically linked with political and subjective representations. She has argued that the suffragists of the first feminist movement sought to fill the gaps of patriarchal history with the inclusion of women’s stories (Kristeva, 1981:18). The second movement in the 1970s, sought a very different history, one that had arisen from an “exacerbated distrust of the entire political dimension” (Kristeva, 1981:19). This is not dissimilar to Honkanen’s notion of strategic forgetting of masculine history. It is a concerted decision to construct, not add to, written history. Kristeva suggests that the historical writing produced by women after these reassessments reflects a mixing of the two ideas of insertion into
history and a refusal of patriarchal limitations (1981:20). Similarly, Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth optimistically suggests:

What is most exciting is that women’s self awareness has inspired a search for new premises that can uncover new modes of liveable time and that may avoid mere re-inscription of paralysing old modes. (1989:45)

In the late 1980s, the exploration of women’s space, time and writing continued with enthusiasm and confidence. During this period, Julia Kristeva argued that a new generation of feminists was emerging which would have to confront the task of reconciling maternal time (motherhood) with linear time (political and historical) time (cited in Moi, 1986:187). She suggested that an intermingling of these times could lead to the opportunity for “free play” in the deconstruction of identity (cited in Moi, 1986:188).

Gynesis, Gynocriticism and L’écriture: 1980s Transnational Debates.

During the 1980s, a sometimes tense, but transformative and productive, transnational intellectual relationship between French and American feminists had began to evolve (Showalter, 1984:37). The feminist scholarship of this period played an important role in my own developing understanding of feminism and assisted me in my desire to explore the category of woman within, a challenging intellectual sisterhood. I will now provide a brief description of gynesis, gynocriticism and L’écriture.

Gynesis

When Alice Jardine (1982) introduced the term gynesis, she invited women to think about a women’s space for writing, one that was outside the masculine. She was influenced by the work of Lacan and Deleuze, but frustrated by the way in which their idea of woman limited possibilities for further exploration (Willis, 1988:34). Equally, she questioned the reliance by women, such as Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva, on these and other male writers, and in the case of Cixous, a focus on male subjects (1982:58-59). In turn, she sought to problematise the fixivity of women’s identity by
examining the mechanisms of “heterogenous scenes” (Willis, 1988:30) and “the linguistic inscriptions of masculine/feminine” (Stanford Friedman, 1996:14).

Gynesis itself shares in a post-modern theoretical journey, a voyage of re-exploration, where the itinerary itself re-charts and reconstitutes the territory, relocates speaker and addressee … Gynesis exposes binary oppositions as misconstructions by disclosing an embedded third term. (Willis, 1988:29-30)

Alice Jardine’s work raised many new questions at this time, as well as crossing transnational borders when a division between American and French feminists seemed to develop. It was her challenge of the borders and limitations that shrouded analysis of the category “woman” that prompted debate and thinking of fruitful intellectual slippages. Susan Sheridan confirmed this in 1993, when she noted that as Jardine’s notion of gynesis reached Australian shores, it and other international discourses were embraced and challenged by Australian feminists leading to a fruitful expansion of thinking and discussion (1993:105).

**L’écriture**

French feminist, Helen Cixous (1976) introduced feminists to the notion of L’écriture where it acts as a means for naming the inscription of the feminine of women’s writing. She wrote:

> It is impossible to define a feminist practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded – which doesn’t mean that it doesn’t exist. But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallocentric system, it does and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophico-theoretical dominations. It will be conceived of only by subjects who are breakers of automatisms, by peripheral figures that no authority can subjugate. (1976:883)

Cixous then formulated her ideas of “I’écriture féminine” and writing the body also contributed to the growing number of accounts of women’s knowledge. Cixous argued that despite the dominance of phallocentric language, it was possible for women to revert to a writing that reflected engagement with the m/other and self in
language (Klages, 2001:5). Writing the body is a concept that has continued to be
developed by many feminist academics, including Jane Gallop (1988), Minh-ha Trinh
(1989), Catherine Waldby (1995), Margaret Somerville (1999), Bronwyn Davies
(2000), and Alison Bartlett (2006), to name a few that have influenced my own
thinking. The body has become a discursive terrain; a site which women (in
particular), have chosen to use as a starting point for research and one that inhibits
and challenges the binary: mind/body.

Like Allison Bartlett, I began this research while still breastfeeding and I shared her
enthusiasm for the possibilities of thinking about writing the body. Discovering
Cixous at this time evoked a multiplicity of feminist imagining. While reading
Bartlett, Cixous, and Waldby’s assertion of the “fiction of the disembodied scholar”, I
was particularly conscious of the intertwining of my body, my research and my child.
I recalled too the degree to which giving birth and raising young children intersected
with my studies for nearly two decades, balancing maternal and intellectual desires.

**Gynocriticism**

American feminist and literary critic, Elaine Showalter, developed the notion of
Gynocriticism in the early 1980s. She created the term as both a response to Cixous’s
L’Ecriture and as a desire to provide a means for further engagement in feminist
“critical discourse” (Showalter, 1985:248). She wrote:

> Gynocritics is roughly speaking, historical in orientation: it looks at women’s
> writing as it has actually occurred and tries to define its specific characteristics
> of language, genre, and literary influence, within a cultural network that
> includes variables of race, class and nationality. (Showalter, 1984:36)

In 1984, Elaine Showalter argued that feminist criticism stood as a gender marked and
transformative theoretical position. She argued largely from a literary and historical
position that feminist criticism:

> Has not only re-read the canon, but has also opened up for critical exploitation
> the vast, almost inexhaustible raw materials of women’s texts. We do not derive
> our charter from a single authority or a body of sacred theoretical texts. There is
no Mother of Feminist Criticism, no fundamental work against which one can measure other feminists. (Showalter, 1984:29)

Over twenty years after Showalter argued that feminist criticism stood outside of and provided an alternative analysis to modernism, I and others argue for a similar position in post-postmodern times. There is a feminist perspective that continues to evolve concurrent to, yet informed by, the dominant masculinist discourse. Showalter suggested, “It is a double-voiced discourse that is influenced by both the muted and the dominant cultures, that operate at the juncture of two traditions, and that has both a Mother and a Father Time.” (Showalter, 1984:32). I would argue, like Showalter, that this women’s position is one that encompasses academic thinking as well as the personal, embedded in women’s daily lives.

In 1996 Susan Stanford Friedman, an English and Women’s Studies academic argued that Gynocriticism continued to be useful as a practice for studies in locational feminist geographies of identity. She wrote:

For Gynocriticism, the existence of patriarchy, however changing and historically inflected, serves as the founding justification for treating women writers of different times, and places as part of a common tradition. (1996:14)

Stanford Friedman argued that both gynocriticism and gynesis might be the means, through self conscious, fluid and self reflective exploration, for “ensuring the survival of feminist criticism as a powerful and distinctive set of voices” (1996:32).

The seeking of a re-conception of feminist historical narrative is a task undertaken by women academics from a number of disciplines, within History itself, literary criticism and psychoanalysis. The interdisciplinary-ness of such endeavours is further evident in the work of sociologist Judy Long in the 1990s. She formulated a “women centred methodology for telling women’s lives” as a result of her work in women’s history (Long, 1999:117). She writes:

As I got deeper into the mystery of subjectivity I became interested in the spectacle of women enacting the subject of an autobiographical narrative, the
problematics of self-presentation, and the calculus of publication. I came to appreciate multiple narratives (and multiple audiences). (Long, 1999:i)

Long offers a methodological framework that focuses on the rethinking and problematising of the subject, the narrator, the reader and the text. Her particular interest in the narrator “forges the essential link between her own subjectivity and that of the subject through a conscious practice of empathy” (Long, 1999:121). Long combines this sense of empathy with the links she makes between daily life and continuity that underpin her women’s stories. In turn, Long argued that feminist methodologies “challenge the convention of the disembodied scientist,” and traditional academic practices (1999:126). She also notes the risks involved in working outside the traditional framework and placing the self or the personal at the centre of the story; for a “narratorial self-avowal” (1999:132). Long says this can “seem wrong” and reflect a “messiness”, but in turn can offer accounts and insights into women’s lives that might not otherwise emerge (1999:127-8).

This feminist mediation and re-orientation of self in the concept of women’s time and in history writing is reflective of the development in Rüsen’s ontogeny of historical consciousness (2005). It involves a re-evaluation of self, of agency and of voice, a navigating and reorientating amid the structures of the discipline. These structures themselves are not concrete. They too are continually being re-orientated as the discipline responds to new thinking and social changes, including feminism. Thus in the current climate of post-postmodernism, there are an array of innovative new assertions coming out of Poststructuralism, Postcolonialism, Queer Theory and Critical Theory. These ways of thinking unsettle and challenge past thinking as evidenced in my analysis.

**Women’s Studies/ Gender Studies**

I am troubled by what has been happening to this specifically women’s space/time/writing genre, where the discipline of Women’s Studies has been extended to become Gender Studies and Masculinities is now included as a subject area. I am concerned that the women’s scholarship that had begun to emerge has now been relegated as irrelevant (Bulbeck, 2006:36). That once again feminist scholarship must be marked and framed by its relationship to patriarchy, a subcategory in Gender
Studies. These concerns echo those of radical feminists such as Sheila Jeffreys who has argued that there is a risk that feminism, amid the postmodern shift, might become “depoliticised” and “sanitised” (1997a:359). Similarly, Somer Brodibb has argued that the feminist standpoint has been appropriated, diluted and in turn has lost the original focus; the patriarchal mechanisms that oppress women (1997:310). In response to these types of arguments, Linda Nicholson supported Gayatri Spivak’s notion that for feminism to remain “viable” in the postmodern shift toward the term gender, one needed to adopt a “strategic essentialism” (Spivak 1989 cited in Nicholson, 1998:295). She suggested of the male/female, “We can see it as an encompassing a complex web of distinctions evidencing threads of overlap within a field of discontinuities” (1998:297). I am reminded, however, that despite the concern over status of the category of women, be it within Women’s or Gender Studies, we may indeed be faced by a further erasure of feminist questions in academia. As Ann Curthoys noted at the turn of the millennium, even gender “is declining as a focus analysis and theoretical innovation” (2000:32).

Feminist or gendered histories have continued to offer students of higher education thought provoking challenges. Ann Curthoys and John Docker provide an overview of the changing use and meanings of the term gender, concluding that a “pluralising” perspective has become dominant (2003:177). At times, I reluctantly absorb the new analysis. Rosi Braidotti writes of the trend toward neo-liberalism and individualism and argues that feminist activism had been “replaced by a less confrontational policy of gender mainstreaming [and that we now see a] historical amnesia that expresses the rejection of a sense of common connection to other women” (2005:171). It is this seemingly absent sense of sisterhood or connection that causes me concern today. As Chilla Bulbeck has argued, “a number of young women are grateful to older feminists … however this gratitude comes with a distancing” (2006:37). I regard the process of listening to the cumulative knowledge of women activists, writers and historians as intrinsic to political and transformative thinking.
Re/membering and contextualising a Historic Sisterhood

Women’s labour historian, Eileen Boris, notes the opportunity History offers to not only “recover memory”, but to also “connect generations of activists” (1999:194). Since the 1980s, Boris has been instrumental in facilitating a number of Women’s History conferences and organizations, generating both a support network and site for activism. She argues that from such groups comes the opportunity to “shape feminist scholarship,” as well as change the conversations about women’s experience within the academic arena (Boris, 1999:196, 202). It was Boris and Chaudhuri’s book Voices of Women Historians that provided me with further inspiration as well as an affirmation for this thesis. In a collection of women historians’ stories, ranging in age, experience and historical philosophy. They wrote, “These personal narratives spill outside the grooves of academe to represent the bildungsroman [reflective life story] of a feminist as historian and the historian as feminist” (Eileen Boris & Napur Chaudhuri, 1999:xiii). This collection provided me with a sense of the historicised self and the notion of women ‘AS’ historians; the story of the feminist scholarship that underpins the ‘doing’ of history. It also evokes a sense of historic sisterhood that demonstrates feminist scholarship as transformative and political.

Re-examining the way History had been produced and imagining the self and the mother amid the patriarchal time of history is evident in the recollections of American historian Renate Bridenthal:

The same awakened feminist rage energized my historical work. Like so many others at the time. I suddenly wondered where have the women been in history? Where have they been in German History, in my field of specialisation? I had written a Master’s Thesis on a nineteenth-century male utopian socialist and a PhD dissertation on a nineteenth-century male German historian. Now my mother’s stories came to the forefront of my mind. Where was she in German History? … I saw myself in the flow of time. (1999:80 emphasis is original)

Participating in and contributing to a women’s history was “exhilarating” and Bridenthal began to articulate a new way of history as a metaphor; “becoming”
For Bridenthal “becoming” meant making women’s history visible, networking, convincing male historians to consider “integrating women’s history into their work,” but more importantly celebrating a new women’s scholarship (1999:83).

For Jan Carter, the inspiration to write *Nothing to Spare* came from rethinking her grandmother’s stories.

> In my childhood their stories seemed unremarkable, almost commonplace. But on returning to Australia, after ten years in London, my grandmother’s memories seemed to offer reminders of some of the social changes that had taken place during this century. (1983:ix)

The female figures who have nurtured and shaped our lives remained seemingly absent from traditional histories. The desire to find a contextual and historical narrative in which to position these women, and in turn ourselves, has been a common thread among many feminist historians.

Radical feminist, political scientist and historian, Sheila Jeffrey, has been an advocate for acknowledging the women of previous generations. In her exploration of feminism between 1880 and 1930, Jeffrey wrote:

> I was so excited to find out that the ideas and tactics of our foresisters were so similar to those we had reinvented in the 1970s … I was rediscovering my foresisters’ work with admiration and respect. (1997b:ix-x)

The notion of foresisters is not one that has been outwardly and obviously embraced by many feminist authors in recent years. There is, however, an under-current, a thread in a wide weave of history writing and performing that does allude to a historic sisterhood. At times, I wonder if there is a sense of mild embarrassment, as being feminist is seemingly less fashionable and a brands of liberal and DIY (Bail, 1996) feminism take to the fore. Like Jeffrey, however, I regard the sisterhood of activists, writers, generations of mothers and grandmothers as central to feminism. It is the culmination and historicisation of these knowledges that allow women to be as we are and the possibilities for a feminist political space in the world. As Jeffrey wrote,
“Feminism is about making trouble after all; challenging masculine ideologies and male behaviour. It was in 1880 and it is today” (1997b:xv).

Where Sheila Jeffreys called them foresisters, Katie Holmes spoke of “founding mothers (and) younger sisters” (2006:1-2). Diane Bell named these women “Sheroes” (1991:45). These are the women who “have shaped the spaces we now occupy” wrote Bell (1991:46). Further she explained:

At each generation level we find women who have flown in the face of the tempest, shouted into the wind, and their voices, having been heard by those present, were blown away with the passing of the storm. Their fate is to be recalled in oral tributes and hearth histories. Fragments. If only all those lives were available. If only I could tap into those experiences, refashion them for the now, and be buoyed up by the knowledge that this was not virgin territory, my sheroes had already pioneered these spaces and their wisdom could guide, inform, empower, and nurture their heirs. (1991:46)

Bell’s desire to access the knowledge and stories of her sheroes reflects an understanding of the silencing processes of phallocentric mechanisms of history. Neither Holmes, Jeffreys, nor Bell dwell so much on the masculine erasure, looking instead to the great value and the opportunity for learning that arises when one does gain access to these stories. We see similar assertions in edited anthology or compilation texts such as those by Kay Daniels and Mary Murnane (1980), Margaret Bettison and Anne Summers (1980), Debra Adelaide (1988) and Dale Spender (1992), to name just a few. This is not to say that feminist historians ignore the masculine constructs that have oppressed women, far from it. Sheila Jeffreys, for example, has written extensively and with great clarity, demonstrating how these mechanisms operate and thrive. There are, however, many “moments” in research and writing devoted entirely to the voices of women of previous and present generations, with the explicit purpose of being inspired by, of learning from and challenging the actions and writings of these “sheroes”. Evelynn Hammond has suggested that feminist historians in the United States of America must come to terms with what has been achieved, the consequences, and how women move forward with these
achievements and subsequent power and has argued that at the centre of this negotiation must be “collective cross generational” conversations (2004:37).

These celebrated women of past generations are not from a particular class, race or background. The commonality is the agency that led to a legacy / survival of literate or oral histories. Holmes cites the strengths of feminist histories as being “inclusive, subversive, critical and alternative” (2006:11). Similarly, Kay Daniels and Mary Murnane wrote that the diversity of records can only lead to an “enrichment” of knowledge (1980:xi).

In the following transcript, the women sought to explain a sense of connection between one of the participants in my research and her grandmother. It reflects a process of orientation and mediation between the un/knowable nurturing between generations and contextualising the preservation of the diary.

Una: I wonder what she thought of this book? If your Nan was hovering and listening, she would be very proud.

Rosemary: I don’t believe in a sixth sense or anything like that, but she left me this, I think she’s trying to tell me something.

Una: I believe so, just because you don’t understand it, don’t scrap it.

Bronwyn: No!

Una: Just accept what happens.

Bronwyn: I’ve been puzzling over what happened to me, when I was little, til I was five. I have such a strong feeling about the farm [where her grandmother lived]. I knew so much about it. My brother doesn’t have the same, he’s younger and I am sure now, when I look at all the information she has left for me, I think I was with her on the farm for long lengths of time. [when her mother was ill in hospital].

Una: There you are. That’s the female historical descent. The link! That’s safer with you.

Bronwyn: I’m very proud to have it.
Rosemary:  *Who you distribute things to, while you are alive is very important. Because things can be lost.*

The primary issues for Bronwyn was the unclear feeling of connectiveness she felt to her grandmother and the farm she lived on and her role of custodian of the precious book. Much of her story is without definitive structure. Bronwyn’s mother was ill for a great deal of Bronwyn’s childhood and died when she was fifteen of “Bex poisoning”. As Bronwyn pieces together her memories and her collections of spoons, photographs and diary, she suspects that she may have spent a great deal of time living with her grandmother. The spoons and photographs are ritualistically positioned at her home, the same way her grandmother had positioned them in her daily life.

The ensuing discussion among the women moved between the material objects to the problem of fuzzy memories. They discussed the troubling dis/connection of early childhood memories which evoke a bar or standard that the women were not keen to over-work or read too much into. Yet at the same time, her possession of these objects suggests an agentic and thoughtful decision by Bronwyn’s grandmother to pass the items on to her. Thus, we heard talk of the issues involved in being the receiver of material objects and their embedded narrative, then, of being the custodian, and finally of bestowing the items on to younger family members. This cycle is reflective of the ‘order of things’ (Bell, 1987).

Helena shares a nickname Leo with her grandmother. Naming processes were raised several times throughout the research, sometimes indicative of connectiveness and others of disconnection. She had brought along a nineteenth century “Confessions Book”, (see figure 15 below) similar to an autograph book, but rather than providing space for ditties, rhymes, drawings or personal messages, this book asked a series of questions of the person contributing. For Helena, however, her story of names preceded her presentation of the book of which she remained “keeper”.

*This book belonged to my grandmother, she’s got Leo Hute, I discovered she was christened Eleanor, and I got Leo, the Lee and then Le. But I got sick of it in my old age and returned to Helena.*
It seemed important that Helena made this introductory statement before demonstrating the book’s general value to 19th century social history. As if to indicate a sense of sameness between grandmother and granddaughter.

Figure 15: Helena and her Confessions book

She was a very special person in our family, she died when I was an adolescent. I think of the book as a survey of my grandmother’s place in time and I wrote an article for the Sydney Morning Herald and also used it as the source for my M.Litt. thesis.
The interrogation of women’s knowledge and its transmission is evident in Diane Bell’s *Generations: Grandmothers, Mothers and Daughters* (1987), where she explored women’s stories and the way in which objects, beliefs and traditions are handed down between generations of women. Bell claimed:

> My own Anthropological training led me to explore the operation of an alternative generation principle, to map the content of the familial relations as lived experience. Finding ways of bringing these insights to bear on an understanding of Australian social structure and culture, however, entails crossing both disciplinary and psychological boundaries. (1987:258)

Bell’s exploration of the “order of things” (1987:9); of how things are done and the transmission of these practices; provided much inspiration for my own research. To examine women’s interactions, writing, activism, the material heritage, and their legacies seems to offer new insights into the diversity of cultural and feminist history. Accompanying the influence of Bell’s work on my own, was Margaret Somerville’s (1990) feminist exploration of place and transmission of women’s knowledge.

**Women’s Knowledge Building and Place Narratives**

Throughout Margaret Somerville’s *Ingelba and the Five Black Matriarchs* (1990) the transmission of knowledge between generations remained an important focal point not only for Somerville as a researcher, but also for the Aboriginal women informing and collaborating in her research. She suggested that knowledge was “transmitted in the form of advice, skills and stories, or indirectly, via objects and sites.” These included traditional Aboriginal lore and skills “passed along these kin lines”, and in particular midwifery skills, (Somerville, 1990:143-44). While the telling of stories was a seemingly daily occurrence, certain events such as the “Woolbrook Cemetery Event”, where sixty relatives gathered to tend and clean the graves, had the hallmarks of an important ritual. The stories of the five matriarchs of the past emerged as a “self-conscious social reconstruction”, and as one of the “modern matriarchs” commented:
It seems funny you know, it takes you a long time to sit down and think, you’d have ter [sic] think for a long time, cause it’s a long way back like in those days. (Somerville, 1990:13)

Telling the stories of the matriarchs required thinking and being “in place”, and the process was marked by long held rituals and traditions. From a non-indigenous gaze, the process may not be visible, yet Somerville and her collaborators’ work at Ingelba, and at Coonabarabran (1994) demonstrated a listening to and learning from female ancestors.

In a similar way, Helena’s Confessions book became a multiple point of discussion during the workshop. The very personal matrilineal connections were evident, but it was equally a historical literary source; of place, social attitudes and humour. The book asked numerous questions and Helena read them out with the corresponding answers to the delight of our group.

*Where would you like to live?*
*What is your idea of Misery?*
*What is your chief aversion?*
*Who is your favourite character in real life?*
*What qualities do you admire in a man / woman?*
*Who is your favourite musician?*

Helena’s audience keenly listened to every question and answer. Historical analysis was offered at many levels. Each question was orientated within cultural history and the answers deconstructed in relation to the social, gendered and geographic location of the writer. Helena’s performance as the speaker and storyteller in this instance reflected her multiple self. We heard her intimate self, as granddaughter but equally we heard her professional self as a teacher, historian and journalist. Accessing the life of a much-loved grandmother through a material object was the initial aim of this presentation by Helena. It was evident, however that one could not learn about her grandmother without evoking a historical context. So we were offered a glimpse of a
woman and her friends’ political, social and private lives in the nineteenth century in Tumut, a small rural town in New South Wales.

Helena: What is your favourite occupation?
Listening to grand music
Where do you get grand music in Tumut?

Una: In the Masonic Hall

Rosemary: And in Church

The ensuing conversation explored the possibilities of “grand music” in the period and locale. This included travelling professional and amateur musicians, sources of music within the home such as gramophones, pianos, accordions and violins as well as the ethnic origin of the style of music. Each opinion offered was accompanied by extensive historical analysis thus reflecting the women’s desire to understand as well as situate the contents of this historical text. At yet another level the women then accompanied this narrative with examples from their own family history.

The life of women was a constant thread in the discussions. As each representation of women’s roles arose, they were quick to note and analyse it. I regarded this process as indicative of matrilineal historicism. It revealed a desire to access the lives of grandmothers and a sense of historic sisterhood. It was a desire to gain an understanding of the daily activities and expectations they faced as well as seeing women’s lives from a meta-historical perspective. Much laughter came from husband’s, sometimes cheeky, answers relating to their wives

What is your idea of misery?
Holding my ponies, waiting for my wife.

What is your chief aversion?
My wife’s trains (length of fabric of her dress)

What is your particular weakness?
Stealing a march of my wife

Much exclamation followed the question: “What is your favourite subject or source of study” and the answer “Women’s Rights”. In 1878! exclaimed Helena. The following
responses again confirmed the significance of the locale and the political implications of the text, as we imagined a forthright feminist inclusion in a place and time where we may not have expected it.

**Analysing Women’s Narratives**

Since the early 1980s, a changing world produced new analytical discourses. As we have seen in Chapter 7, the debate and thinking that surrounds place is indicative of a range of new ways to think and write. The structures for re-evaluating place and women’s space as “other” have spilled over academic boundaries. Ruth Salvaggio has argued:

> It is through this Other space, I believe, that women are breaking with both traditional and postmodern concepts of space. This is the space where women theorists are refusing to join in familial bonds with Aristotle and his descendants and where they are fast dissolving a theoretical empire long dependant on temporal and spatial delimiters for its solidity. (1988:262)

These feminist explorations of place trouble traditional masculine or normative storylines. Increasingly this focus is becoming more evident in Australian history, for example in Russell’s study of women of the colonial gentry, Joy Damousi’s study of mourning and bereavement in wartime or Katie Holmes study of women’s diaries in the 1920s and 1930s. Each of these studies provide the reader with new insights on women’s lives from a particular perspective yet, as a reader, I found the accompanying historical discourse of women in place of particular interest. Concurrently I had been thinking about the “collected and inherited identity” of community referred to by John Ryan (2006:2) in a publication on the history of the New England district in New South Wales. In turn I wondered who have been the collectors and the inheritors of stories of place? Many Australian histories have depended on masculinist interpretations of this role and subject, yet increasingly we see publications by women historians providing rich histories derived from very different starting points but in turn offering new thoughts and questions on place.

As previously mentioned, Susan Stanford Friedman has shown how Identity Studies has brought a new understanding to the self and subjectivity. She has argued that
since the 1970s academia has seen an influx of new thinking that explores difference and sameness, culminating in a place based analysis (1996:16). She proposed that:

The new geographies figure identity as an historically embedded site, a positionality, a location, a standpoint, a terrain, an intersection, a crossroads of multiple situated knowledges. (Stanford Friedman, 1996:15)

In problematising the fixivity of constructions of identity in the past, she argues “The relational discourse of positionality stresses the constantly shifting nature of identity as it is construed through different points of reference and material conditions of history” (Stanford Friedman, 1996:19). She questions gynesis and gynocriticism for its use of the binary man/woman, yet she argues that the patriarchy and historical conditions that led to these concepts still exists. Thus she asks,

If feminist critics abandon the “privileging” of women and gender transformation in favour of a diffused progressivism, then who can be trusted to resist the historic forces producing gender backsliding and backlash? (1996:30)

Like Standford Friedman, I argue that it is important to ensure concepts such as gynesis, gynocriticism and women’s time are not dismissed. Standford Freidman’s “locational feminist criticism” offers a useful position from which to think and work. It is not necessarily, in my view, the utopian standpoint, but rather another significant shift in methodological approach. A nomadic and interdisciplinary map that traverses time and academic allegiances and leads to transformative and emergent understandings of knowledge and agency. This has become increasingly evident to me in the ‘snapshot’ of experience that I explore in this thesis.

Storytelling
I will briefly look at the notion of storytelling. As we have seen in previous chapters, storytelling has been a common thread in written histories, in the stories passed on within families and in those told in the public sphere to children and in historical performances. In traditional Australian History we often think of the nationalist male storytellers such as Henry Lawson and Banjo Patterson and in more recent times, Manning Clark. Studies of Irish folklore have also shown that it is has been men who
have dominated the scene (Brennan Harvey, 1989:111). In families too, it is often thought the fathers and grandfathers that are the main storytellers.

There have been a number of useful but unsystematic scholarly comments on storytelling within the family. In the University of Technology, Sydney study, “Australians and the Past”, described in Chapter 3, many respondents cited their mothers or grandmothers as the keepers of the family History. Yet in Peter Read’s analysis of the data, he has claimed he could not see a clear gender division, although he did find that women seemed to be “better transmitters” of family stories (2003:133). In Thelen and Rosenweig’s American study, however, women were distinctly more likely to be the storytellers of family history (1998:30).

There have also been empirical psychological studies relating to storytelling. I examined two which aimed to assess intergenerational stories (Martin, Hagestad, & Diedrick, 1988) as well a study asking how stories told by men and by women differ (Fiese, Hooker, Kotary, Schwagler, & Rimmer, 1995). These studies while useful in some ways, they made unduly strong use of dichotomies. I found this to be limiting and I was left wanting more analysis than percentages and dualities could provide me with. The study by Martin, Hagestad and Diedrick’s asked “which parts of life stories remain “family treasures” over what period of time to create current family reality?” (1988:534). The research team found that more stories of the maternal line were told than the paternal (1988:536). The selected participants were the same-sex parents of students of a Family Development class at Pennsylvania University (1988:535).

This study did provide data useful for my purposes, on two points: Firstly the temporality of the stories; in that very few stories extended beyond grandparents. Peter Read made similar findings in the “Australians and the Past’ research and suggested that unless there was a concerted telling and retelling, stories do not tend to survive the death of the original teller (2003:139). Secondly, the stories were categorised by the researchers as personal (micro) and historical (macro) (Martin, Hagestad, & Diedrick, 1988:535). They found that more micro stories were told than macro (1988:539). This dichotomy was further explained in stories of heroes (generally masculine subjects) contrasting with stories within the family (generally
female subjects)(1988:540). Thus we can see a traditional gender divide emerging from this research.

I would argue that the quantitative methodology used in these studies, limited the types of questions asked and in turn shaped the outcome. Instead I found it is more useful to look back to my participants, their educational background and towards the historicised self as I demonstrate in this chapter. The findings of Martin, Hegestad and Diedrick contrasted with the stories of the women in my group, where the personal and the broader historical stories were inter-twined and the relationship between the two was consistently used to support and add to each other. As discussed in previous chapters, this historicising of the macro and the micro as well as the inter-relationship, was reflective of a developed historical consciousness and a desire to use a broader and more informed historical perspective.

In a more recent psychological study, researchers sought to ask gendered questions of the family stories shared by parents with young children (Fiese, Hooker, Kotary, Schwagler, & Rimmer, 1995). Again, a dichotomy was employed as the main focus: analysing stories of “affiliation”, meaning personal stories of rejection, loss, love, warmth and nurturance, on the one hand and stories of “achievement” referring to failure, success, accomplishment and heroes on the other (Fiese, Hooker, Kotary, Schwagler, & Rimmer, 1995:770). Women were found to tell more stories of affiliation while men told more of achievement. Participants were chosen through advertisements in newspapers and at child health care services (Fiese, Hooker, Kotary, Schwagler, & Rimmer, 1995:765).

Storytelling in my research group was diverse. There was clear evidence that the women enjoyed and privileged stories of affiliation. Yet they told stories that were obviously informed by their learning at university, by their assessment of the historicised self and as speakers of diverse histories. Like Rosenzweig and Thelen (1998:30), I found the women’s stories often located within family history and were clearly cited in generational acts, picking up the task when, mothers or grandmothers passed on. Equally as Rosenzweig and Thelen found (1998:31), the women were often the ones who actively sustained family history, not only through story telling, but by a variety of other means including holding reunions and diary writing. My
participants’ story departed from the findings of the American study when we examine the women’s perceptions of history. Where Rosenzweig and Thelen found that their storytellers did not privilege or intellectualise their own learning in relation to their historical activities, the women in my group were constantly making intellectual connections and contextualising the stories. The historicised self, informed by tertiary learning was a constant companion for these women.

Global, National and Local Histories

I have been interested in the historicising process and the agentic historicised self that can accompany these stories informed by the feminine. I have sought out research that appeared to apply, in a practical sense, these complex notions of women’s subjectivity, history and sense of time. In the 1970s and 1980s Australia academics such as Miriam Dixson, Beverly Kingston, Jill Roe, Ann Curthoys, and Diane Bell were producing and teaching feminist historical narratives that would revise and usurp traditional masculine narratives. The work these and other women were producing reflected a desire for a feminist and historic sisterhood that was unseen in the traditional masculine competitive scholarship that prevailed in universities. Miriam Dixson has suggested it was often a solitary process in the frequently hostile environment of academia, but support systems were developing. Dixson claimed the 1980s as a time of great change, in particular with the formation of the Women’s Historical Association as a sub-branch of the Australian Historical Association. Dixson was also at this time working with and drawing support from Australian feminist historian Jill Ker-Conway who was located in Canada.

In a very practical sense it is evident that a feminist sisterhood aimed at fostering scholarship. Marilyn Lake has argued that:

Feminist scholarship is an international enterprise, and feminism has a transnational history. Australian feminist Historians have participated in international exchanges and networks to a much greater extent than our male academic colleagues, who still dominate, and act as custodians of national history at home. (2007:182)
Feminist Historians can be seen to be making connections of both the international perspectives and the intimate or the personal histories. The middle ground and nationalism has often been the domain of masculine history, as seen in the work of John Hirst (2007a). In debates over school curriculum and undergraduate studies, it has often been regarded as the most important story, as the story of Australia. I argue however that the feminist histories are important for troubling and challenging of the hierarchy of privileged knowledge. Ann Curthoys has similarly suggested that “the national history, while still necessary, is not enough” and it is through Indigenous, Feminist and Environmental Histories, as well as incorporating a comparative transnational perspective, that can offer more illuminative perspectives (2003:29).

In 1983, Jan Carter sought to demonstrate the importance of listening to grandmothers and great-grandmothers. She also wrote that it was a timeless act of learning that also crossed geographical boundaries that “speaks to a wide audience”.

They remind us that recalling the past is not only an act of nostalgia, but a force to be reckoned with when assessing the contemporary difficulties faced by their descendants. (J. Carter, 1983:7)

In Carter’s writing, one can see the way in which feminist history can construct bridges across the boundaries of the global and the intimate, as well as the distant past and the present. Feminist histories occupy the slash of the binaries of historic narratives.

The relationship between the global and the intimate aspects of history was also evident in Una’s research and custodianship of her military campaign chest. She felt that she was an integral member of an international community of scholars. It is largely a group of men and the histories often associated with the chest are typically masculine. Her membership to this group is not, however, one that binds her to a particular framework; she is independent and agentic and her opinions respected. While her knowledge of the associated military campaigns and colonialism is evident, Una also brings different questions to the story of Edward Lockyer and the military chest. She is interested in the story his family relationships and more significantly, the
story of the keepers of the chest and the subsequent additional layers of history
embedded in it. Membership to this group of researchers offers Una the opportunity to
travel at leisure and to challenge accepted narratives as she choses. Una does not,
however, present herself as an expert or authority in the field, instead, as she does
when she tells historical narratives to school children, she presents simply as a willing
contributor to a wider body of knowledge. Una’s knowledge is accessible and
egalitarian.

I had been in touch with two English historians and stayed with them and they
had come out here in 2001 for what they called the “Lockyer tour”. When they
came to NSW, they came to Armidale. It was a stepping up point to go around
every part of NSW and Brisbane that they could associate with Lockyer. And we
did that with Michael driving. Thank goodness he did, Michael died less than a
year after that. Marvellous people, but what a wonderful association! And we
went to all the old places – that surprised them, old sandstone convict roads,
they couldn’t believe it. I am still in touch with a lot of them, but far less letter
writing since the death of the Pastor and of my Dutch correspondent.

This story reflected a number of issues important to Una. It is not a nationalist history
but one that spans the globe, both in its historic and contemporary contexts and then
returns to the local and the material contexts. She had described at length the ways in
which she first made contact with historians or descendants of Edward Lockyer, some
by accident and others by design. These meetings and ongoing contact, without doubt,
shaped Una’s life. Indeed, to a large degree, the Lockyer chest she cared for and the
subsequent travel and research constituted her sense of self: as researcher, companion,
collaborator and custodian. She declared, I have been free to do this since 1986. Thus
for twenty-one years Una’s devotion to the chest, and its embedded narratives, has
given her purpose and sense of contributing to the international body of historical
knowledge.
In looking at the historicised self, I gathered from a range of areas including phenomenology, hermeneutics and feminism and then returned to Jorn Rüsen (2005). This exploration has grown from a recognition that the women in my research possessed a strong sense of the historicised self with characteristics which offered interesting variation on the conclusion of the studies I have mentioned. Regardless of audience, each story told, research project undertaken, participation in public history or in generational act, the women challenged their position and incorporated their self into a wider historical context. The women did not seem to act outside these considerations. They are embedded narratives. These narratives, I suggest, have emerged from the critical thinking processes developed and fine-tuned while studying History at university. Primarily, the self does not act outside a historical context, it is clothed in it, feeds upon it; it is nourished by historical context.

French philosopher, Paul Ricoeur provided a useful understanding of the character of identity as built through “innovation”, an agentic process and “sedimentation”, which is a pattern of thinking that is “settled and habitual” (1992:121-22). This binary is useful for me, not least for providing an evocative slash which one might occupy, but also in that it can encompass both the historicised agentic self and the nurturing generational self. These processes build upon the notion of an organic yet historicised identity, affirming the importance of "troubling" the world, while finding collectively understood meanings.

This is helpful in understanding the way in which the women of my research expressed a confidence in their historicised self, while at the same time, seeking external affirmation from the body of traditional knowledges, where repeatedness reflects rigorous and uniform standards, as well as from the cumulative weight of generational knowing. Thus the sediment, the hard earth, can be seen in empiricist learning as well as the survival of family history and its traditions.
Historicising the Self / otherwise

Feminist analysis of the self as ‘other’ offers a productive position from which to work. The masculinist self, as Seyla Benhabib says, is as an autonomous self, one that is seemingly disengaged from circumstances. In turn, Benhabib suggests that from the construction of the binary public (male) and private (female) spheres, women become subjects / owned by men. This isolation and power of the male self leads to the idea of women as the “generalised other” (Benhabib, 1992:157-58).

Similarly, Wittig wrote that the feminine is marked by compulsory heterosexuality, while the masculine, is unmarked, and not in need of a category, (because masculine is normative and universal) (Wittig 1981 cited in Butler, 2005a:258). Has the same occurred in traditional histories? The masculine tradition is regarded as autonomous, normal and general, while outsider and women’s histories must be signified and marked as other, the fringe or the alternative to the real. In turn, one is prompted to ask: What effect has this had on the processes of history?

It is useful to think about the shifts in histories, with the emergence of new ways of viewing the past, seeking legitimacy in the autonomous realm of “real” history. How might this translate to the women of my research group, who were taught within the traditional framework and carry its intellectual legacy, yet still produce different by “othered” female histories?

According to Judith Butler, gender identity can be understood as a verb, and understood through repetition of acts and gender signifiers (2005a:263). If gender identity is thus so closely linked with performativity, I have wondered about the historicised performance of the women of my research, particularly within the generational performance that seeks to connect family and or community over time.

Creating / Understanding / Existing in Order

The historian undergoes a series of mediations and orientations in an effort to reflect on the writing and performance of the self. The individual needs to situate oneself in the tides of history, recognising the discontinuity, as well as the order of things. The individual is agentic and has the power to influence the shape of the history he or she writes or performs. Rüsen has argued that “History is a narrative construction of the
human mind”, and rather than it being a reflection of social culture, it is a part of that culture (2005:5). The self is embedded in the story of history, its construction and its meanings, and in the legacy of the story. One can never stand outside of history. Thus by occupying a site of critical and genetic narration the historian is in a position to have a transformative effect on history (Rüsen, 2005:15). It is from this point of view that we can identify and understand the moral and ethical dilemmas raised by Rüsen (2005:23).

The ethical dilemmas present themselves in the earliest stages of “doing” any history. The self is already laden with the personal and political aspects of one’s experience. Yet the self is not an autonomous entity, it is organic and equally laden with the moral thinking of previous generations. In turn the actions of the self will affect the historical meanings derived by future generations. We have seen this expressed in the anxious moments of undertaking research in higher education, and in the material preservation or discarding process and we see it in the interpretation of place and pilgrimage. The historicised self is a troubled, but enthusiastic self, even more so when one has an understanding of the mechanics and orientation of history making.

As we examine the notion of women making and performing history, it is important to acknowledge both the framework of the historicised self as shaped by both critical and genetic narratives and the im/possibilities raised by notions such as women’s time, gynesia, gynocritics and l’écriture.

**Unending Passion**

Researching, thinking about and immersing the self in history were evidently life-long pursuits for the participants of my research. These had become defining characteristics of the women’s identity. Described as “an addiction” by one woman, “a perpetual open door” by another, and “something I will always do” by another.

*It is in History that my real passion lies. I hope that I can retire before senility sets in to complete further research. I enjoy the discipline. But I admit that one gets addicted to the feeling of achievement.*
This is reflective of not only the personal passion for history but also an acknowledgement of the open-endedness of History, that there is always more to be researched, more documents to be collated, archives to be sorted and more to be written. Helena, who researches the female convict ship the Woodbridge, remarked on the life long nature of this process. Similarly, Australian historian, Babette Smith, also researching a women’s convict ship remarked “My file stays open on the women of the Princess Royal and I welcome contact with anyone with further information about them” (1992:177).

Conclusion
In this chapter, I have endeavoured to navigate a path through notions of women as historians. This began by exploring the 1980s feminist notions which argue for a shared yet multiplistic female experience. In turn, I have asked questions of the potential for identifying a historic sisterhood in historical literature, materiality and oral traditions. Central to this feminist gaze of the way women “do” history is the historicised self, an ever present companion in each endeavour and performance.

The women historians I have mentioned and the participants in my research have demonstrated a very particular sense of historicised self. It is reflective of their ability and desire to mediate knowledge and self within the confines (or extremes) of the History discipline. It is always self-reflective and open to new learning. It is also often embedded in a familial context, and in turn we see an embodied commitment to generations of women within their families. It is ritualised and nourishing. It exposes loss and grief, yet has the ability to re-invigorate lost narratives. It is a lifelong desire and commitment. It is an embodied female passion for the past and it seeks to serve not only the self, but future generations, as well as acknowledge generations past. It can be seemingly frivolous, yet also seeks to ensure a woman’s familial and community survival. It makes connections between the intimate and the global conversations about women and history. As Saul Bellow’s suggests “Everyone needs his memories, to keep the wolf of insignificance from the door” (1977:190). I argue feminist and matrilineal historicism do not seek individual significance, rather, they embrace a productive and collective way of questioning and understanding the past. As Denise Riley proposes,
The question of the politics of identity could be rephrased as a question of rhetoric. Not so much of whether there was a particular moment any truthful underlying rendition of ‘women’ or not, but of what the proliferations of addresses, descriptions and attributions were doing. (1992:122)

The effects of the analysis of women and in this case women’s many histories and historical explorations and redefinitions, are of particular interest. This expanding body of knowledge and debate have been not only empowering but self-perpetuating. In asking how are women doing history, this thesis is a reflection of a wider movement in feminist research that seeks to trouble taken for granted assumptions. At every turn of a page or tapping on the keyboard, the feminist question and history grows. With each generation of women writers the questions reform, fold upon themselves and emerge again.

In the conclusion of this thesis, I will draw together the issues that have marked the learning journey. These have included the female inscriptions of our education and our historical practices. I will briefly look at the current climate of Australian history, the surges in feminist scholarship as well as the history wars and nationalist revivals. I will discuss the significance of the contextualised and historicised self as integral to the exploration of the voice and passion of women historians.
Conclusion

Within this dissertation, I have offered a feminist and interdisciplinary interpretation of the History Theory debates, the notion of historical consciousness, scholarship of history, materiality, place and pilgrimage, public history and the historicised self. Each chapter has argued that by employing both a feminist and multi-modal approach, students of history in higher education can access and produce rich and diverse histories. In deconstructing the processes of “doing history”, I have found that the women involved in my research, including myself, have utilised the political and masculinist grounding of empiricist history scholarship while at the same time incorporating a specifically personal and female grounding, thereby following a dual path for accessing and performing/writing history.

The female inscriptions on our historical practice and scholarship have been a consistent thread woven throughout this research. It has been important to me to identify and explore these inscriptions. Like Showalter, who developed a means for critical analysis of women’s writing in gynocriticism (1984:para 10), I have sought a cumulative female voice for historicism.

This research has focused on a small group of women, drawn from a specific sector of society. It has been evident that “doing history” is a passion for the women. It is something they will always participate in; it is an encompassing and embedded practice. As one woman stated, it is an addiction.

*It is in History that my real passion lies. I hope that I can retire [from other work] before senility sets in to complete further research. I enjoy the discipline. But I admit that one gets addicted to the feeling of achievement.*

This idea of achievement is defined by a developed historical consciousness, shaped by the practice of daily life, lebenspraxis, and developed by the learning within higher
education and by a sense of a worthy and rigorous contribution to the body of historical knowledge.

The women participants have been, and continue to be, active in a broad range of historical activities, both in the domestic and public spheres. Their work in the preservation and storying of material objects, for example, has indicated thoughtful analysis underpinned by their roles as daughters, mothers and/or grandmothers, yet also marked by considerations about transnational and meta-narratives. The narratives show that a sense of belonging to place and the desire to return to particular place can also be embedded in the women’s analysis. The complex relationship between personal lived experience and the wider theoretical implications of history and its meta-narratives should not be understated. The women’s stories have shown how, after studying history at university, these two things are intertwined, and that they shape, nurture and complicate each other.

This research represents a snap-shot of experience that in turn offers comment on the possibilities for a broadening of teaching practices in history in tertiary education. In particular, I advocate the inclusion of the concepts of place, materiality and feminist perspectives in methodology and theory courses. Such inclusions would be beneficial to all students, male and female, and can sit comfortably and productively alongside the empirical grounding usually offered in these courses.

This multi-modal approach offers different insights into history and can help students identify the often unnamed personal connections that resonate with their historical knowledge. As Liz Bondi suggests, it is a common trait of feminist research to “address multiple audiences from multiple positions” (2003:65). I adhere to this idea and have incorporated theories and positions from a number of academic sites in this thesis. Knowledge need not be bound by disciplines, or by the idea that a voice on the other side of a discipline boundary is unworthy of consideration.

I appreciate the practical usefulness of disciplinary divisions and the way in which new sub-disciplines must develop and professionalise until they reach a point of recognition and legitimacy. In many ways, this progression is dependant on the creation of boundaries, criteria, regulations and standards. This very process,
however, can silence or devalue certain players in the historical narrative. In a cyclical fashion, it becomes almost inevitable that the silenced will forge their progression towards recognition.

In this thesis, I have given considerable attention to the significance of thinking about the role and impact of history theory on students and their learning. It has been evident that empirical theories have shaped the learning of the women in my research group, once again, including myself. It underpins our thinking, research and writing. This process has been accompanied by the influence of our developing historical consciousness and our daily life. In recent decades history theory and practice have been influenced by the surge of interdisciplinary practices in universities. In turn, this thesis has mapped some of the results of this development as evident in conference presentations and publications. Theoretical considerations are inescapable and vital to all historians, and as Jordanova states

> History is eclectic, hence the range of its debts, and the complexity of its relations with other disciplines. Sometimes these are to be understood in terms of the use of theories; indeed ‘theory’ can be a useful concept for clarifying relations between disciplines, yet this should not be taken to imply that historical practice ‘theory’ is something special, set apart. In the business of doing history, ‘theory’ is a constant presence, whether acknowledged or not. (Jordanova, 2000:87)

**Feminist Practice in History**

Despite the women participants’ initial reluctance to name their historical practice or themselves as feminist, it was evident that feminist and, in particular, matrilineal notions did in fact underpin much of their work. The more we discussed the meaning behind the idea of being keepers of history, the meaning of place and pilgrimage and of women’s generational nurturing, the more evident this became. From this point it was possible to consider and compare their experiences as students, mothers and workers with the experiences of the women historians who have taught us, and of those whose academic writings have informed us. I have therefore looked not only at the student’s learning period but also at the emergent professional and the long established experiences of women historians. I have sought to extend this analysis
beyond the contemporary Australian experience to the international and to the experiences of women historians in the past.

Feminist historians have been exploring different ways of researching and writing history for many years now. There has been a shift in thinking from merely providing women’s stories as an additive, to fill the spaces in the discourse to a more deliberately separatist approach, one that argues for a different space that can be filled with women’s multiple historical or temporal experiences, and that is its own space – outside of a masculine hegemonic narrative. Katriina Honkanen has proposed that by using a feminist perspective to look at history, it is possible to employ a “Virtual non-historicity – a strategic forgetting of history” (2004:180). She has argued that this is primarily about sceptical problematising of history, its discourses, meta-narratives and the absences (2005:292).

Few women historians have failed to acknowledge the dominant masculine narrative of traditional history. The way in which each woman historian responds to this and the type of history they produce varies between the two theoretical positions of additive history or strategic forgetting. Yet it seems that women have all experienced a moment (or several) of what Renate Bridenthal called “the click”.

The very first “Click” came from my first husband, whom I had met in college and who joined me in graduate school, suddenly announced that I couldn’t be a historian after all, because I was a woman, I couldn’t possibly understand diplomacy and war. I think it was the first time in our marriage that I was rendered absolutely speechless with astonishment. (Bridenthal, 1999:79)

Upon discovering a sense of being outsider, women historians have pursued history writing rather than retreated. The result has been a prolific outpouring of publications. Amid my own reading, over the years, women such as Gerder Lerner, Joan Wallach Scott, Eileen Boris in the United States, Bonnie G. Smith and Hilda Smith in the United Kingdom and from Australia, Miriam Dixson, Anne Summers, Ann Curthoys, Jill Matthews, Marilyn Lake, Heather Goodall, Penny Russell and Diane Bell, have created a picture of the many ways in which women’s history can be told. Immersion in their work brought a sense of feminist affirmation that absorbed the political and
the transformative nature of the previously untold and unacknowledged stories of women’s experience emerging from the text. It has also reiterated the importance of listening to the diverse and cumulative body of knowledge built by women historians. The historic intellectual sisterhood I had imagined early in the research process did emerge. It affirms my continued desire to encourage those interested in women’s experience in Australian history to seek out the writing of past and current women historians for not only the generational and feminist underpinnings but also its multiplicity.

Shifting Boundaries / Legitimacy in Australian History

The women participating in my research were all passionate about Australian history. Each of us in some way contributed to community histories, family history groups, historical societies and/or history teaching and in turn held strong views on inclusion and exclusion of various aspects of contemporary state on Australian history. We all demonstrated concerns about academic rigour and the risks of trivialisation of local heritage. We were also concerned with the way in which children were taught about or accessed the country’s past. Each of us kept an eye on the current state of collective national views and its relationship to a transnational historical discourse. Amid this contemplation, our attentions were regularly turned to the specific representation of women, migrants and Indigenous peoples. In thinking about the women’s stories, I have looked towards the conversations held by historians and commentators in the public arena and the current debates and shifts in thinking.

The field of history is never static. New generational shifts continue to shape the discipline as new questions and knowledges are formed. These shifting boundaries are usually productive as well as problematic. Legitimacy and worthiness are subjective categories, yet the debates over inclusion in and exclusion from the “profession” are ongoing. It is disappointing to see that alongside the growth and expansion of history, there are still calls for feminist history to be erased as an “already attended to thus now irrelevant” category. We see this clearly in the writing of John Hirst (2007a), in his new book on Australian mateship, where he revisits Russel Ward’s (1958) *The Australian Legend*. In the book itself and in the attendant publicity, essays and interviews, Hirst has seemingly little new to say other than to attend to the two criticisms of Ward’s book: the lack of attention to race and to women. In one
interview with the ABC Radio National (Colvin, 2007:para 5), he argues that “to my delight [we have moved past the need for feminist historical analysis now because] women are now called mate, fathers call their daughters mate.” Equally, in terms of ethnicity, Australia has been successful in bringing in migrants and “we’ve managed to take that egalitarianism and widen it, so it [mateship] now includes an Italian greengrocer and of course Chinese” (Colvin, 2007:para 7).

Given that Hirst is a prominent historian, public commentator and favoured by the current Australian government, it is disheartening to see the masculinist histories presented as indicative of mainstream history. He sees mateship, with its fundamentally masculinist connotations as central to the Australian story and to Australian national identity, as a type of relationship which underpins the Australian community. Thus he argues that the Australian characteristic of mateship evident at Gallipoli and Kokoda can be seen in Australian rescue efforts after the bombing in Bali, and in Prime Minister John Howard’s extension of the hand of “mateship” to Australian Muslims after 11th September 2001 (Hirst, 2007b:29). There is a continuing and robust masculine tradition in the production of Australian history, which is nationalist, depends on war imagery, and the iconic historical image of the Australian soldier, “the digger”. The self-satisfied ethnocentrism of Hirst’s analysis is evident as he describes a published guide to the laconic Australian culture and notes, “This seems to me a good guide to give to someone coming from China or Japan. What a shock it must be to them” (2007b:28). Hirst cannot however, be dismissed by students and teachers of Australian history. His influence is considerable in the media, the political arena and the academy.

What does this mean for feminist histories? Hirst’s assertions can be viewed alongside the conflict that has become known as “The History Wars”, born of Keith Windschuttle’s (2002) attacks on the credibility of authors of Indigenous histories. In addition, the Federal government’s History Summit of August 2006 created further concern that a nationalist and chronology-based style of history, was to be introduced into Australian schools, a system the opposition Federal Minister for Education, Jenni Macklin argued, “must not be captured by partisan politics.” Macklin warned “young people and teachers will be discouraged if history is used as a political football” (Peatling, 2006:para 7). It is against this backdrop that I have written this dissertation.
In this dissertation I remind myself of the diverse histories that are being produced by other historians which sit outside the masculine and nationalist genre, and of the importance of feminist historicism. Katie Holmes has written of the need to continue to bring feminist interpretations to the current discourse:

I have a sense – no maybe a fear – that criticising the History Wars for ignoring women might be seen to be picky, that what is at stake in the History Wars is far too important to raise the issue of women’s absence. I can hear a voice commanding: “Shut up and sit down. Stop being difficult.” But Joan Scott has given me permission – nay, commissioned me – to be a critical gadfly, so it is my duty to be irritating. (2006:7)

Competing for a feminist space in history has been an ongoing battle. Miriam Dixson engaged in and disrupted the nationalist debates of the 1970s by analysing women’s contributions to the Australian identity. In the United States, Gerder Lerner wrote in 1989 of the “crisis in history”, and the need for mainstream history to endure the intrusion of feminist perspectives, as they were “no passing fad” (1989:465). It is evident that these discussions continue to be relevant.

I am therefore reminded and heartened by the very different histories that women in Australia continue to produce. Penny Russell, for example, has argued that historians think about empathy, connection and matrilineal inheritances (2004:1). Marilyn Lake, like Dixson, continues to write feminist political histories (1999). Mary Spongberg makes important contributions to the historiography of women historians (2002). I am also reminded of the Australian women’s academic journals that still flourish, contributing to the body of women’s historical knowledge, such as *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal, Australian Feminist Studies and Hecate: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Women’s Liberation*. The arguments in this dissertation are interwoven with such work.

In terms of teaching practices, I am encouraged by the work of Margaret Somerville and recognise her contribution to feminist perspectives on place and learning in higher education. This dissertation has been nourished by her sense of direction. Thus,
despite the seemingly overt return to masculine and nationalist focus in Australian history, feminists are continuing to be the “gadfly” of academe and the diversity of their work is reassuring.

**Historical Consciousness**

The concept of historical consciousness emerged at an early stage as a significant part of this research. It was a field of scholarship that I had been initially unfamiliar with, but in keeping with the emergent methodology outlined by Margaret Somerville, I welcomed the way in which it became a part of this research and shaped the weave of the general story of the voice of women historians. The value of such incorporation for scholars looking at learning and teaching practices in history has been evident, particularly when it is examined as an ontogeny as Rüsen (2004) has outlined. His notion of *lebenspraxis* and his disciplinary matrix offer insightful ways to examine this ontogeny. Rüsen’s exploration of the historicised and located self provide opportunities for re-evaluating identity amid the historical narrative. He has asserted that as we progress through his typology, notions of identity become more complex and mediated (Rüsen, 1987:91). In this thesis, I have regarded the complex journey Rüsen outlines as a particularly useful way to think about the way in which we imagine and story the past.

Thinking about historical consciousness and its relationship to learning represents a relatively new field of research. As Peter Seixas recently argued, “Historical consciousness highlights conundrums on the interface between history education and the study of collective memory across cultures and time” (2007:para 10). Seixas cites Hans-Georg Gadamer, who wrote:

> Historical consciousness is a specific cultural development located in the modern era … [its achievement is] the full awareness of the historicity of everything present and the relatively of all opinions. (1987 Seixas, 2007:para 7)

The potential for undertaking research in this field can offer teachers of history different ways of thinking about the construction of both collective memory and the historicised self. Such questions are being put before forums such as the International Society for Scholarship of Teaching and Learning History (SoTL) established in
2006. Peter Seixas is now asking about the connections between the historical consciousness of those “beyond the ranks of historians” and the study of history education. This, he suggests, can be a means of deconstructing the relationship between collective memory, the rejection of traditional national narratives, and the construction of new narratives. Collective memory and its varieties, he argues, can be “conceptualised into a typology or hierarchy that could provide guidance for contemporary history education and its normative demands” (2007:para 5). The work of Seixas and members of SoTL represents a significant new development in research on history education. In this thesis, I have incorporated it in my arguments about the complexity of historicising communities, locations and objects and in relation to the historicised self.

**The Contextualised/Historicised Self**

The historicised self has remained central to much of the discussion in this thesis. It is a key step in the ontogeny of historical consciousness and of historical practice. It was evident throughout my conversations with the women participating in this research that they undertook and appreciated the value of, self reflection as part of “doing history”. As we explored our current historical practices, the notion of being keepers of history raised many theoretical issues. We were keepers of material objects and their embedded narratives, of documents and of oral histories. In doing so we added to historical knowledge and have become more aware of the cumulative knowledge of women before us and of the importance of remembering and acknowledging their contributions to the discourse.

Orientating the self with the un/known past and questioning one’s motivations in historical endeavours brings a clarity as well as an intimacy to the writer’s voice. For students and readers of history, contextualising oneself is a vital process. It is, however, a sometimes difficult one. It brings together the larger and monolithic questions of history and the micro questions of self, family and belonging.

From a feminist perspective, this process also relies on the rethinking of a dominant masculine hegemony. It requires one to think about the possibilities of Honkanen’s “strategic forgetting” (2004:66) and of Linda Nicholson’s “strategic essentialism” (1998:297), on the one hand, thereby erasing celebrated masculine discourses, while
on the other negotiating the potential risks of seeking a women-only historical experience or narrative. This is not an impossible task; rather it is one that requires a re-evaluation of feminist and historical motivation. For example, Penny Russell’s research into the life of Lady Jane Franklin, the wife of governor and Arctic explorer, Sir John Franklin, offers a clear example of a different story to the traditional, nationalist and heroic narratives. Russell has described her approach as embracing “multiple ways in which Lady Franklin entered an otherwise masculine story” (2005: notes taken by author).

Having been inspired by the work of Ewa Domanska (1998) and of Eileen Boris and Napur Chaudhuri (1999), I would suggest that there is space for a published compilation of the views of Australian women historians to their work. This might include further exploration of the idea of a contextualised and historicised self. It would involve a shift from the approach I have taken in this thesis, of a small snapshot of women students, to a broader examination. The women historians in such a study could be a broad group including those working in academia, in public history and its supporting organisations and those working in an entirely private capacity.

I would also suggest there is a need for an Australian companion to the American book, *Her Past Around Us: Interpreting Sites for Women’s History* (Kaufman & Corbett, 2003). This edited collection of public history stories examines women’s historical inscriptions in gardens, household museums, sculpture and urban spaces. The collected essays explore material objects and landscapes offering insightful analysis. A similar collection based on the Australian rural and urban landscapes and utilising some of my assertions in this dissertation on materiality, place and pilgrimage and feminist and matrilineal historicism, could act as a significant contribution to the wider discourse on Australian women’s history.

**Australian Historical Association Conference October 2007**

In the closing weeks of my candidature, I attended the Australian Historical Association regional conference at the University of New England. It was a timely re-immersion in the broader storying of history in academia. As I had done in past conferences, I found myself listening for the personal voice of the presenters, identifying their motivations and passion for exploring the past. I listened too, for the
theory that underpinned their research and for the way in which feminist perspectives were being utilised.

The conference represented a diverse collection of views and proved more than satisfied my hunger for contemplation and analysis. It was evident that a number of historians working within the traditional empirical mode, yet only a few seemed solely encompassed by a singular framework. Many presenters acknowledged the benefits of interdisciplinary approaches to their subjects.

Notably, speakers such as Heather Goodall (2007), invited her audience to re-imagine the transnational, national and local discourses alongside the traditional narrative assigned to disputes over the embargo of Dutch ships at post World War Two Australian ports. Angela Woollacott (2007) and Lisa Featherstone (2007) gave separate presentations that offered similar feminist questions and analysis of representations of masculinities in nineteenth-century Australia. Josephine May (2007) spoke of representations of women in silent films made in small Australian communities in the 1920s. She demonstrated the complexity of the female body as both desired and feared as well as offering an insight into the ways in which filmmakers produced films in and for small communities in this period. An intriguing aspect of this presentation was the analysis based on the relationship between cultural representations of women, local communities and audience.

It was also evident at this conference that the multiple layers of historical narrative can be derived from the examination of material objects. Alistair Thomson (2007a) discussed the ways in which family photographs were useful to historians. He demonstrated that when contextualised photographs can be seen as multi-authored, project multiple meanings, sometimes obvious and at other times censored or concealed. Thompson also discussed the manner for keeping and assemblage of photographs, similar to my discussions in Chapter 5.

The discussions following the presentations largely reflected the supportive nature of the historical community. I heard little, if any, of the practise of the past where the audience regarded discussion time as an opportunity to harshly challenge the speaker’s narrative, and on only two occasions did I hear questions from the audience.
that were merely self-promotion exercises. Despite one presenter’s assertions that interdisciplinary-ness was harmful to academic research, it seemed that few people shared this view. The multiplicity of historical research occurring throughout Australia was both reassuring and inspiring. It was evident that many historians are utilising interdisciplinary and postmodern approaches to inform and expand historical discourse in Australia. Similarly, the feminist interpretations of Australian history were also evident at the conference. Many women historians, as well as two male historians, reiterated the benefits of asking feminist questions of our past. These benefits were clearly evident in the depth and breadth of many presentations.

In conclusion, I have presented this dissertation as reflective of a learning journey, one that seeks to weave or felt the data into a bricolage fabric. I have asked its readers to accompany me as I traversed some of the debates of the empiricist, postmodern and feminist histories alongside the discourse of discussions on material objects and notions of place and dis/location. I have been informed by diverse readings and by my experiences at various History conferences. The exploration of one’s learning journey has required considerable insertion of the personal. The value of this approach has been evident in the way in which I have made connections between the personal, political, sociological and cultural aspects of history. This has led to discussion of the historicised self, a concept I regard as being integral to historical scholarship, and historical consciousness.
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