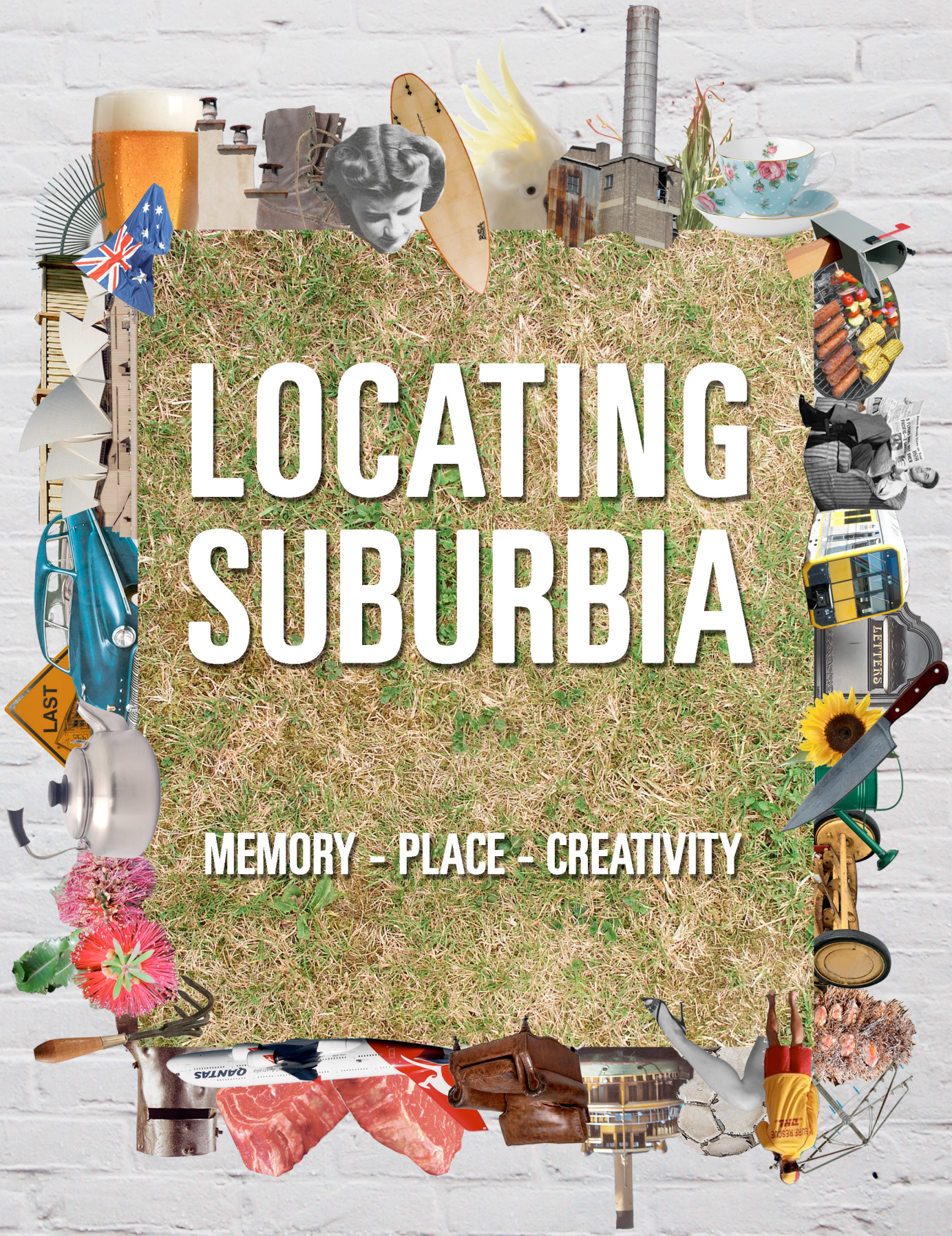


LOCATING SUBURBIA

MEMORY - PLACE - CREATIVITY

EDITED BY

PAULA HAMILTON & PAUL ASHTON

Locating Suburbia
Memory, Place, Creativity

Edited by

Paula Hamilton and Paul Ashton

UTSePress

First published by UTSePress 2013
PO Box 123
Broadway NSW 2007
http://www.lib.uts.edu.au/utsepress-publications

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry

Title: Locating Suburbia: memory, place, creativity/ edited by
Paula Hamilton and Paul Ashton.

ISBN: 9781863654326 (ebook)

Subjects: Suburbs–New South Wales–Sydney.
Suburban life–New South Wales–Sydney.

Other Authors/Contributors:
Hamilton, Paula, editor.
Ashton, Paul, 1959- editor.

Dewey Number: 307.74099441

Design and typesetting by Two Tone
Eli Hochberg, Caroline Hunter, Cameron Jones,
Minhky Le and Jumana Shakeer

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Julie-Anne Marshall, manager of the UTS Library's eResearch unit, for supporting this project, and Margaret Malone for her marvellous contributions to bringing this collection to fruition. Thanks, too, to UTS Shopfront and its Program Manager Pauline O'Loughlin who facilitated the production of this ebook as a Shopfront project. We would also like to acknowledge the great assistance provided in various ways—including internal grants and seed funding—to the contributors in this collection by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences' Faculty Research Office. Finally, thanks to Professor Ross Gibson and Professor Peter Read who refereed the manuscript.

Paula Hamilton and Paul Ashton
Editors and Co-Directors
Centre for Creative Practice and Cultural Economy

This eBook was designed by
Eli Hochberg, Caroline Hunter, Cameron Jones,
Minhky Le and Jumana Shakeer

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

THE POLITICS AND PASSIONS OF THE SUBURBAN OASIS

Paula Hamilton and Paul Ashton

> Murder in the suburbs isn't murder technically at all really is it? It's a justifiable reaction to aesthetic deprivation and golf.[1]

Suburbia has been satirised and mocked by the best of them from George Orwell's 1939 caricature in *Coming up for Air* to Dame Edna Everidge from the 1960s and TV's Kath and Kim in twentieth-first century Australia. For many of the generation growing up in the twentieth century, suburbia is, on the one hand, the remembered nightmare from which the human chrysallis escaped to experience adulthood and its pleasures *elsewhere* – the stifling, conformist sameness which nonetheless hid evil deeds like murder. Others hold dear the wistful nostalgic memories about growing up in a domesticated cosy world of backyard games so effectively mobilised by conservative Prime Minister John Howard during the 1990s in relation to Earlwood, a suburb of Sydney.[2]

It is certainly the case that for the older generation who lived through depression and war in the twentieth century, the suburbs represented safety and peace – 'a roof over our heads'; 'a place to call our own'. Like the soldier who came back from Changi POW camp, kissed the ground at Narrabeen, a suburb in Sydney, and said: 'this'll do me'!, the expanding suburbs after the 1950s were the retreat for many men after

time abroad in global conflict; a place to replenish the spirit and build again – individual lives, families, homes, garages, sheds, gardens, lawns. Suburbs have also been long hated,[3] and more recently loved,[4] by writers and intellectuals. They have also been perceived with an uneasy ambiguity, as 'being neither town nor country, but an unwilling combination of both, and either neat and shining, or cheap and nasty, according to the incomes of its inhabitants'.[5] This was the 'half world between city and country in which most Australians lived' that architect Robin Boyd decried in his elitist work on Australia domestic architecture.[6] Recently, however, there has been a strong and growing interest in delineating the complexities of the suburban experience rather than simply denouncing or defending it.

Over the last twenty to thirty years, suburbia has had a make-over. How it is remembered and what place it has had in our lives has also being reconfigured. Many now accept that the nostalgia relates only to a childhood dream of the white Anglo-Saxon part of the population that obscured a great deal more than it revealed. Certainly the historian Andrew May argued in 2009 that 'the reliance of the twin fictions of the novelist's pen and of baby-boomer nostalgia for our predominant images of post-war suburban history precludes the prospect of developing more sophisticated historical narratives'.[7] Even before the impact of the massive post-war migration, the suburbs were more culturally and socially diverse than we have previously understood. Class and religious divisions, if not always race and ethnicity, have a long history within suburban communities.[8] Nowadays, the articulation of that nostalgic memory in public forums is strongly contested, as suburban places are made and remade over time.

In March 2013, for example, Peter Roberts wrote a column for the *Sydney Morning Herald* which had the heading: 'What happened to the suburb I used to know? His particular suburb was Greenacre near Lakemba in Sydney and his article juxtaposed a suburban past and present. He remembers a suburb where he grew up during the late 1950s and early 1960s as a place of peace, sparsely populated, filled with boys sports and games:

> Lakemba? Sure that's where we went to the Sunday matinee at the Odeon every week and watched such pearls as the Three Stooges, Jerry Lewis and Ben-Hur.

Roberts does not mention that Lakemba is now the site of a mosque and one of the biggest Muslim communities in Australia. But most of the *Herald* readers will have this in mind. In his (Anglo-Saxon) memory, there was no violence as there is now, which he blames on the 'enclave of Little Lebanon'. Greenacre and Lakemba now, he says, have been 'turned into a minefield, or a battlefield, or a refuge

of drug dealers, criminals, drive-by shooters and terror'. His elegaic tone is one of sadness and loss:

> That was my home – the place where I once simply couldn't imagine living anywhere else – transformed to the place where I could never imagine living again.

There were several responses to this letter which seemed to strike a Sydney nerve and gave readers a sense of how the media mediates our collective memories. At least two letters accused Roberts of cloaking racism in nostalgia. Omar Sakr replied in the same edition of the *Herald* with an awareness about the public prominence of such views and how they need to be interrogated. Sakr is particularly critical of the assumption that all of the problems are the result of another ethnic group, as though murder and rape were not part of any other suburban culture. This view, he says, absolves one group for taking responsibility for the problems of the community as a whole. For him, growing up in this area probably twenty or thirty years later, the most important element was the camaraderie of his diverse delinquent friends.

One letter, though, was from someone who had lived for eighteen months in Lakemba until recently and also spent time there on a regular basis now. Con Vaitsas, now of Ashbury, claimed that Roberts' vision was 'way out of whack with reality' and very outdated. He argued that Greenacre and Lakemba were no longer predominantly the home of the Lebanese but a mixture of very different nationalities living peacefully side by side: 'my neighbours were Filipinos and Colombians on either side and Africans opposite us', he wrote. So his perception was one of a successful multicultural community.

Such an exchange does little to recognise the complexity of current suburban life but it does juxtapose the memories from different generations and cultures against one another as alternative experiences of belonging to particular suburban localities.

What is Suburbia?

Suburbs are geographically defined areas on a map, spatially located in our memories and also an idea: they colonise our imaginations as both inside and outside the pale. But beyond the government defined boundaries, how are they delineated? Are they anything beyond the city central? Inner city areas such as Surry Hills or Balmain are certainly not brought to mind by this term. Spatially the suburbs are seen as 'out there' away from the inner city which somehow don't meet the criteria for single story occupation on a block of land which we think of as characteristically suburban. But where does the inner city begin and end now? Redfern, Waterloo, Alexandria, Drummoyne,

St Leonard's? 'As a state of mind and a way of living', Humphrey McQueen has observed,

> Suburbia is not confined to certain geographic areas but can thrive where there are no suburbs… It is pointless to lay down a criterion for suburbia that includes duplexes, but excludes a row of terraces. Where it survives outside its natural habitat, suburbia still aspires to the ways of living that are most completely realised by nuclear families on garden blocks with detached houses.[9]

The identity of suburbia, so far as it can be ascribed one, is shifting and insecure; a borderline and liminal space.[10] Dominant stereotypes have listed it as 'on the margins' beyond edges of cultural sophistication and tradition' and the areas that make up 'sprawl'.[11] But in the twenty-first century this static view has to be modified somewhat. And it is evident from this collection that suburban dwellers themselves have redefined being cosmopolitan as house prices in the inner suburbs skyrocket and push people further afield.[12]

The study of suburbs is often viewed as separate from the city or the urban as a whole. But in fact not only are suburbs obviously integral; they are now part of the networked city, reinforcing much older electricity grids, transport and water services with contemporary communications networks, especially the internet and mobile telephony which has facilitated greater interaction between suburbs and across the urban generally. Suburbs are always relational in this sense and though we tend to throw a light on the local or the small concerns within the suburb as case studies, this collection does not argue for their isolation from the wider urban landscape, for we know that local knowledge too, has the power to change lives.

***

This collection was set up as a collaborative project by members of the Research Strength in Creative Practices and Cultural Economy at the University of Technology, Sydney, is in the first instance a testament to that range and complexity of twenty-first century responses to city suburbs, predominantly in Sydney, though with a nod to other suburban contexts on the most-populated eastern seaboard of Australia, such as Melbourne and Brisbane. Secondly, the collection showcases the lively engagement and interdisciplinary nature of the intellectual culture in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Technology, Sydney, from the more traditional scholarly approaches of Humanities scholars to the range of cultural forms which make up Creative Practice in the academy, especially in this

case, Creative Writing and Media Arts.[13] We had many seminars and discussions which took place in 2011 and 2012 about the ideas for the collection. We began by viewing it from the perspective of lived experience, always believing it possible that new technologies can create different spaces for collaborative scholarship within the traditional frame of a book.

And so it proved. We found that the tension between representing how a world was experienced while keeping that detached critical eye on its form and nature could work very well through a range of artistic and scholarly practice that spoke to each other. Karen Till, writing about her own engagement with memory studies as an artist, argues that more traditional scholars have a lot to gain by heeding the work of artists 'who also acknowledge the ways that people experience memory as multi-sensual, spatial ways of understanding their worlds'.[14]

Three distinct themes emerged in relation to the central concept of re-imagining the suburban which people researched and made for this publication. As our title indicates these became remembered suburbs anchored either by our own personal past or those of others, suburbs as places that were made and remade across time and suburbs not only as the subject for various creative representations but also increasingly where creativity as an identified practice or industry takes place.[15]

Some of our essays take as their subject particular suburbs such as Bondi, Manly and Campbelltown. Others range across time and the space of the urban and suburban. Others focus on those inner city in-betweens, subject of urban renewal and consolidation, such as Marrickville, Pyrmont and Balmain. Some utilise the concept of the even more local through a focus on the park, shops, the backyard or the suburban house. And still others explore what took place in the homes of these areas there that came to be identified with suburban life.

Referring to the suburbs of England, Roger Silverstone previously commented in his 1997 book *Visions of Suburbia* that 'An understanding of how suburbia was produced and continues to be both produced and reproduced is an essential precondition for an understanding of the twentieth century, an understanding above all of our emerging character and contradictions of our everyday lives'.[16] Whether his argument for the centrality of suburbia to historical understanding still holds for the twenty-first century remains to be seen given the many different shapes it now takes in our imaginations.

MEMORY

07

HOME

Sue Joseph

HOME

Sue Joseph

If you want to keep a secret, you must also hide it from yourself.[1]

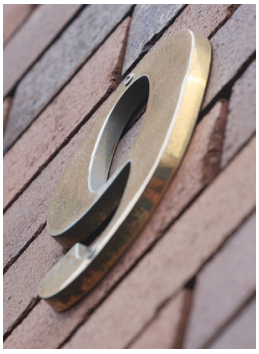
drown (verb) – kill by submersion in liquid

The First Home (0-5 years)

Bondi people, all of them. Even the ones who have left – once Bondi is in the blood, it is impossible to remove. And it gets in the blood by living there; growing up there; breathing the air and smelling the sea and tasting the Bondi brine on your lips.

Bondi people. The whole family, from both sides. Both parents. The mother's family in Birrell Street; the father's, a straight kilometre away, in Glenayr Avenue.

She remembers her first home – a one bedroom flat. At the end of the street, just 100 metres away, is Bondi Road, which sweeps down and around to Bondi Beach.



The block, number 9, is a dark cube of an Art Deco building of ugly, mottled brown and red bricks, built around 1925. Their flat was on the ground floor, on the right if looking straight at it from the road. On entering now there is a screening of hedge at the front and a bank of terracotta-coloured, numbered letterboxes, at waist level – theirs was the first in the row, number 1. A red, yellow and blue jigsaw of pavement in the narrow alley leads to the communal hallway and stairs. The pavers are cracked and eroded and faded, but she remembers them. Hopscotching on them. Lithe, small but strong little girl legs, skipping and jumping. Singing. There is an ochre and clear Art Deco glass panelling above the entrance hall; the foyer is echoey and cold and empty, except for the sweep of the speckled light blue and brown granite stairwell steps, leading upwards.

The constant flow of traffic today creates an incessant, irritating, dirty stream of noise. It ladens the air and touches the skin, everywhere.

This is where she was conceived. In that tiny main bedroom up there, behind that window. This is where her mother was proudly pregnant with her. And from where her father ran from, fast, to the public phone

on Bondi Road, to ring for a taxi when labour began in the middle of the night. They had no phone and no car, so her father ran, fast. This is where her parents brought her home from hospital; this is where the family of three – her mother, father and brother – became a family of four. It was much quieter then. Less cars, noise and smell. Their first family home.

And this is where it all started. Her endemic terror.

She remembers her high chair, with red laminate on the tray; a metal lip of coloured little beads to play with enclosing the tray. She remembers sitting in it, in the tiny, narrow kitchen towards the back of the flat, near the front door. The solid gurgling sound of the old, lemon-coloured, black-lidded electric kettle. The steaming mist. The smell of cooking. And her mother – her mother's dark beauty, always within reach. She remembers being quiet.

Very quiet; just watching.

And she remembers a shapeless fear. An engulfing tension, as she begins to learn wariness.

She remembers each day, sitting in the pram, pushing backwards with all of her tiny might as her mother pushes forwards, across Waverley Park, to collect her brother from preschool. Every morning they deliver him here and that feels good; and every afternoon they return to collect him. Which is not good and she does not want to. They cross Park Parade before turning into the park.

The tension.

The grass is always green and roses cascade from their bushes, dropping petals. People picnic with their children under trees and run

and play ball and there are dogs and laughter and sunshine. They cross Paul Street, heading into Dalley.

The tension.

And cars stream up and down Bondi Road. Backwards and forwards. From the beach. To the beach. It always seems to be summer in Bondi.

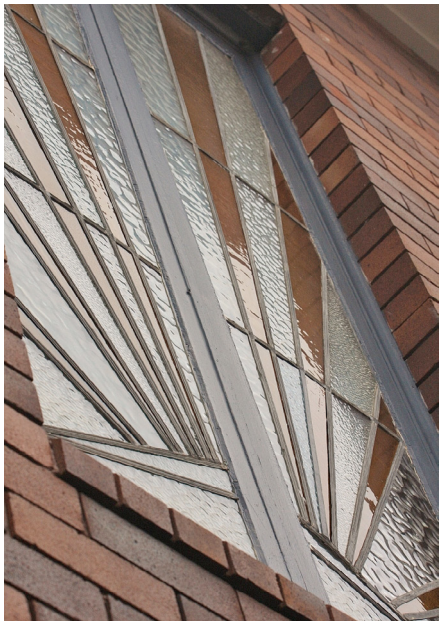
But as they get closer to the preschool, she pushes back on her pram harder and grows smaller. She cannot really remember why. It has no true shape before the *Drowning*, but she knows it is there. She remembers something, all around. Shimmering, dark. Catching it from the corners of her eyes. Sensing it near.

But the *Drowning*. The *Drowning* is vivid. For a long time it had another name: the family legend. A brave story of a brave boy. For years, the truth lingers behind a gossamer shroud in her mind. A secret not there but there. An always knowing but an always not-looking.

And then one day, she remembers.

***

She is only four and he is two years older than her – no, that is not quite accurate. He is 22 months older than her. She and her brother are playing on the foreshore, a beautiful sunny day, with their parents just up there, behind, sitting on the sand with friends. The sky is blue, an heraldic blue, broken up by mountains of those pure white clouds children love so much. The ones they dream of sitting on. The waterline is calm, gentle with no major surf. The whistling sounds of the sea. Bird call down the way. And the breeze, brushing across the surface of the water, salty whisperings across her face.



She and her brother, playing. Sitting in the water. Soft, silky waves, lapping. There are a few shells and a small amount of seaweed. A perfect day for the beach. A perfect beach for the day. The water is a translucent greenish colour. Crystal clear and clean.

She remembers the water getting a bit deeper, as she follows him, as she does what he says. Not so much deeper as darker. The translucent green, where the sand along the bottom is easy to see, is changing. Her

feet are not so easy to see, the sand squelching between her toes. The waves flowing, now nudging her knees. Deeper. More aware of the waves. Then suddenly she cannot feel it, the sand. It is gone; her dream clouds, gone. The gentle breeze and the lapping waves, all gone. She has slipped from sunshine into a shimmering, shadowy, cold darkness.

Down.

He pushes her from the gentle, watery sand slope. It drops away and she is out of her depth. She remembers the final shove, off the sand shelf, as she loses her footing, and tries to grab onto him. Feeling him push her away. Unexpectedly unsafe. Without warning.

The surprise of it.

The not breathing of it.

And then the panic-terror of it.

Immersed in water and sinking. Flailing with her arms; kicking with her tiny feet. Trying to get purchase somehow. Looking up through the water and seeing its shimmering surface, like the other side of a mirror. Moving and mercurial and very far away. And the thickness of the bubbling silence all around; suspended in a watery mould. Buffeted by the current, out then in. It is then she feels something through her hair. Someone. She thinks he is trying to pull her – but there it is.

Another shove.

Down.

Every way she moves, the water moves with her. It is exhausting. There is no air. And she wants to stop moving. Be cradled by this mass. Just give in. Listen to the drone of the quiet. Close her eyes. Open her mouth. And then she feels him again. This time, a definite grab. Her swimming costume strap, jerked upwards. It takes such a long time.

Water everywhere.

And then air.

She feels the breeze. She opens her mouth and breathes. She gasps and coughs and gasps again. The sounds begin to separate. Water flows from her eyes and ears and nose. Off her hair. Down her back

as he hoists her onto his bony shoulders and starts to climb. His bony collar bones dig into the backs of her bony legs.

Bone against bone.

He painstakingly, step by step, climbs back up the sand shelf. He holds her wrists, tightly, so tightly it hurts. She is breathing air again but his head is still underwater. It takes such a long time.

Splashing and shouting and running and huge brown hands grab her and him. Held against their father's chest. His hairy chest, gleaming with sun-shiny sweat and now sprayed with water, as he lunges and grabs and hauls them from the sea. She is crying and their mother is wide-eyed and crying and their friends are making calming sounds and their father is holding her and looking at him.

Their mother takes her and wraps her in a towel in her arms and rocks her.

'You saved your sister, son,' their father says, quietly, a smile in his voice. 'You are a little hero. My little champ.'

Such pride. And the legend is born.

Snot runs down her face and mingles with tears and saltwater as she looks up at these adult people, beaming at her brother.

Looking at her brother. She looks. And he looks. And she feels a stabbing coldness, not on her skin but inside. It is in his eyes.

And then he smiles.

And she hesitates. Then smiles, a little.

She never tells…

…and begins to forget.

The Second Home (5-8 Years)

> Families are not only subject to time constraints but also produce their own sense of time.[2]
>
> Lie (verb) – present false information with the intention of deceiving; convey a false image or impression

By the time we move to our second family home, there are five of us: another brother, five years younger than me. Plus a dog – a corgi pup named Tammy. Our second home has a phone and we now have a car – a two-tone green Valiant station wagon. A 1960s Australian family cliché of a car. But I always get to sit in the back part, in the wagon, alone. So it makes me happy.

This is a North Bondi home, a semi-detached, brown brick home in Reina Street. The bricks are definitely ugly, again. Back then, the semi, number 61, was a duplicate of the other side. Not any more. Cement-render now hides the ugliness of those bricks, though the original red glazed ceramic roof tiles remain. There is no longer any symmetry in these Bondi semis. And there are many semis in this street. Reina Street is just off Murriverie Road, a long thoroughfare that runs from Old South Head Road, touching all the tributary streets that lead to Bondi Beach.

All roads and streets lead to Bondi Beach in my childhood.

This home sits on top of a garage housing our new, station wagon, with a small driveway onto the street. We play on cycles and scooters here, up and down, up and down between the red bottlebrushes. A parent always watching, from near the young fig tree on the pavement. I have a tricycle with a little seat at the back. It is meant for dolls or teddy bears, but I always carry books. Mostly, my favourite book is *Peter Pan*, a hardback version with original illustrations. It is simple why I love *Peter Pan*. The flying. I know if I keep it near, I too will learn how to fly soon. Really soon. If Wendy, John and Michael Darling can learn, there is no reason why I cannot.

Most days, another book joins it. *Winnie the Pooh*, a hardback compilation with both *Winnie the Pooh* and *The House at Pooh corner,* runs a very close second in the favourite stakes. I am not sure whether it is for the tales or because my father bought it for me one day when I had a sore throat. Special attention. But it is often there, on the back seat of my blue and red trike, with *Pan*.

Near the letterbox there is a little step from the driveway up to a path that leads to the front door at the side, and then continues on up to a gate into the yard. There is a nectarine tree at the back of the yard by the fence and an ancient, hovering mulberry tree, which leans over the fence from our neighbour's yard and drops splotches of foamy smashed fruit onto our pathway. My father builds a cement sandpit under the nectarine tree. The plan is to fill it with sand in winter and water in summer. It is exciting.

I share a bedroom with my older brother in this home – two single beds lined up against opposite walls of an average sized bedroom, next to the front door. A big wardrobe at the end of the room. Our parents sleep in a room on the other side of the front door, above the garage, and our little brother is in his cot in a sunroom off their bedroom. A hallway joins the bedrooms to a living room, dining room, onto a kitchen, and out through a laundry to the yard.

I help my dad wash the car in the driveway every Saturday afternoon. The warmth and clearness of the soapy water when we begin is replaced by dirty, suds-less, tepid water by the time we finish. My jobs are the hubcaps and the bumper bars and the two number plates. I guess I am that small.

For some reason, I often stub my toe on Saturdays as well. My big toe, on my right foot. I think it is because I am always in a hurry. Always running and jumping and skipping.

There is an oval at the top of Reina Street, four houses away, with a sandstone outcrop of rock I think is mountainous and climb with deep yearnings for adventure and flying. It always seemed so far away when I was small but it isn't – a mere 46 adult steps now. It belongs to the school there – it used to be Dover Heights Girls High School and now it is the co-ed Rose Bay Secondary College. The school has grown and looms over the oval. It never used to. There used to be steep grass hills, which we slid down on, on pieces of torn cardboard, where the new buildings are now. My brother and I used to walk from the bus stop on New South Head Road after school, through the back streets to the short-cut through the oval, via a cement path running around it, to the top of Reina Street. The strangler fig trees along this pathway are now huge, their roots disturbing the concrete and lifting it unevenly. The passageway to Reina Street is now blocked by a modern, iron black fence; it is impossible now to get in and out of the oval from the top of the street.

Today from this street I can see up and over the Bondi Basin to Bellevue Hill, then on to the cityscape – it is so different to when I was small. Always, the arcing tip of the Harbour Bridge, but now there is Centrepoint Tower and massive high-rises, at this distance like thin, black silhouetted Lego, geometrically patterning the skyline. To the south are the giant apartment blocks of Bondi Junction, like plumper Lego pieces against the sky, and just to the left, the wide Swiss-Grand Hotel on Bondi Beach.

The mulberry tree is now replaced by palm trees. And the young fig on the pavement: huge. The red bottlebrush still line the pavement, carefully manicured throughout the years to maintain their size and shape. They were much smaller when I was.

From this home, my father loves taking us on weekend adventures, usually on Sundays. He piles us into the Valiant, and we drive: to an animal sanctuary, up the coast, down the coast. Just away, and together, because we can.

A favourite is the Royal National Park, just south of Sydney. This was the first national park ever designated in Australia, although I did not know that then. We drive through the bush, winding between towering eucalypts and along craggy cliff faces, until we arrive at a narrow track leading to 'The Opening'. I always wonder how adults know where they are going and how we always arrive at this exact same clearing, as familiar as our own living room. It seems so hidden and innocuous from the road. I believe that it is ours, just waiting for us to arrive and fill. My father gathers rocks to make a pit and we scatter to collect the kindling for the fire. Today, a vague scent of eucalypt,

mingled with catnip, thrusts me back to that place – the sounds, the quiet, the rustling, the muted light through the treetops. The eerie darkness deeper into the bush. The clear cool stream down the bush track where my grandfather taught me to skim pebbles.

I was determined to be the best and practised and practised.

I thought at the time it was idyllic.

My father also loves to take us on a 'Summer Holiday' from this home. It is usually Boxing Day and we head north to Surfer's Paradise. It takes days to get there, and he carefully packs the Valiant's wagon with our bags, making a small nest for me to lie in, away from my brothers. I snuggle down and read for as long as I can. Then I tilt my head just a little and watch out the side window the blue of the Australian summer sky skelter past as we speed northwards, and dream of one day getting on a plane and flying through the skies, away.

Within these memories is a startling hollowness – no trace of my elder brother. I simply cannot remember him. There is a black space, a void, in my recollection. On all these family outings, trips to the beach, dinnertime meals. Today it is explained to me by doctors who know about these things that I cannot remember him being there, in this family, because I dissociated much of the time. I seem to think I was happy, weekly washing the car with my dad, shadowing my mum, caring for my baby brother, going on family weekend adventures.

But, apparently, they say, I wasn't really.

There are two memories I have, nothing to do with my older brother. I remember watching *Romper room* on television one morning and there was a news break and I ran fast out to my mother who was hanging clothes on the Hills hoist to tell her that a man called John F. Kennedy had been shot dead by another man without a name, with a gun. It seemed terribly important to get to her and tell her. She dropped everything and rushed back inside with me and I watched her as she sat forward, looking at the screen with tears pouring down her face. Quietly crying, not saying a thing. A little moan, every now and then. And I really wished I had not told her. Our home now fills with a sadness I do not understand even though I know it is somehow important. My mother, with her vibrant and young dark beauty, weeping. And me, five years old, watching her.

I also remember waking in terror one night in this home, crying and lashing out at the cruel and too-real and heavy sediment of a nightmare coursing through my eight-year-old body. We had been

house hunting, soon to be on the move again, and had found a ‘perfect’ home high on the cliffs of Dover Heights, looking down the hill to Bondi Beach. The home is huge, to accommodate our seemingly ever-growing family.

My little brother is cute and chubby and swaggers on three-year-old legs, giggling and nattering to himself everywhere he goes, like a miniaturised, turn-key old man. In my terror-dream, he swaggers out the door of this new home, swaggers four doors up the pavement to where the cliff edge and raging sea below are kept at bay by an old, broken hurricane fence. He then swaggers through the hole at the base of the fence – a rusted upturned lip of wire – and over the cliff.

I wake, screaming, before he reaches the savage and sea ravaged cliff base.

Now this one is a true family legend.

Our parents are down the hall from the bedrooms, at the dining room table, just beside the kitchen. As we sleep, they have just decided to make the financial commitment to this new Dover Heights home. They each have a small nip of straight Scotch in front of them, and are excited. My mother is pregnant again, with my third brother, and sips her nip, delicately. They are pleased with themselves and each other and this decision.

It is a momentous moment, shattered by my screaming.

They run. My father lingers in the doorway, darkly, silhouetted against the hallway light. My mother’s face turns a paler shade of ash as I swipe the snot from my face with my arm and sob my story into her chest. As I beg them not to buy the scary, eerie house on the high, high cliff. Always to be haunted by my little brother and his childish ‘old-man’ whisperings.
I guess I fall back to sleep, soothed by something, none of which I can remember. Nothing more is said the next morning. The next day. The next night. The next week. Life strolls on.
We do not move to the house on the cliff and continue hunting for another ‘perfect’ home. Looking back on it, this was one of the few times I can remember anyone listening.

Or seeing.

Or understanding.

But there is another incident I do remember, involving my other brother, to do with my mother. It is solidified in my psyche and its shape is huge and monstrous and black and cold, holding fear and loss and grief and pain.

It is untenable.

***

The thing is my mother must not have really trusted him either because she takes him, and leaves me behind with the baby that day.

My little brother is sound asleep and she needs to go to the shop. The corner shop at the end of our street. To get an ingredient for our dinner. She leaves me at home with my sleeping baby brother – I am five years old at the time and 'very responsible' – and takes my older brother with her to the little corner store, 300metres down Reina Street, then to the left for another 50 metres. It is on the other side of Murriverie Road.

She takes him and will be gone for only 15 minutes. This is very normal and very ordinary. I just keep doing what I am doing – curled up and reading. The baby who grows into the chubby little three-year-old brother of my nightmare, sleeps deeply in his nursery sunroom. Not yet walking. Too tiny to natter or swagger, just asleep.

Peace.

Then the phone rings. Our new phone in this new home.
I answer it and my world heaves sideways then upside down, inside my head. In my ears. In the space all around me.

'Quickly. Quickly. Mummy has been hit by a taxi on the big road and she is dead, in the middle of the road… you have to come.'

Today, remembering, I do not know why he said it was a taxi which killed her. I do not know how he had the money or knew what to do

with it, in the red public phone booth outside the little local store in Murriverie Road at the end of our street in North Bondi. I am not quite sure how he even reached the coin slot or handle to speak or the dial to ring our number. Or why our mother did not see him and stop him. Or how, at seven, he knew our phone number. But he did. And he rang.

I remember dropping the phone and flying. Not like Pan. This was earth bound, pain driven flying. Flying out the front door; leaving the baby in the unlocked house. The front door swinging. Running, crying into the neighbours who were not at home.

The panic-terror of it.

Into the next neighbours, who were not home. And neither were the next neighbours. It did not occur to me to run down the street to my dead mother – it seemed such a long way away. Too far to run there alone. And I did not really want to see her, dead in the middle of that big road.

I was crying and shouting and flying and running and finally, Mrs Carr was at her front door. She looked horrified and grabbed something – it must have been her keys – and took me by the hand and threw me into her car and we drove to the bottom of Reina Street and turned left and looked, and kept going to the little corner store, just 50m along Murriverie Road.

And then I saw my mother. She looked very alive. Not dead. Preoccupied and beautiful and busy and intent on carrying her shopping, in a hurry so she could get back to her new baby and me.

He was there, at her side, laughing quietly. And when he looked over at me, I saw a savage enjoyment.

Cruelty.

My mother was shocked at first to see me. And then confused. She listened to Mrs Carr and was more confused. Then a dawning. Horrified. Then, deep, deep embarrassment.

I vaguely remember her looking down at him but I think this must have been the beginning of my shut down, because I can remember no more of that day, or really anything more about him…

…from then onwards.

The Third Home (8-18 Years)

> All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.[3]
>
> Cut (verb) – penetrate or wound with a sharp edged instrument

Over the hill from Bondi, closer to the harbour than the coast, but not too far away – Bondi Beach is still only 10 minutes drive by car – you live the next 10 years of your life in a beautiful old home in a gorgeous, tree-lined street full of children and bikes and laughter and dogs, called Boambillee Avenue. It is a lyrical Aboriginal word that means 'clearwater' and it shimmers through this decade of your life, as the focal point of every day.

You remember the first time you see this home. You are with your parents and brothers – there is a new-born brother now, which takes the family to six, plus a dog and a silver crested cockatoo and a blue-tongued lizard and two turtles. You are eight years old and you are driven down this avenue to number four. There is a beautiful pitched casement and, very much out of character, you say loudly but oh, so politely: 'Can that be my bedroom, please?'

Both parents smile at you, and each other, and carelessly say, of course.

The casement is on a stairwell.

Despite this disappointment, this is the beginning of a grand love for a grand old home.

It is big and rambling with huge rooms and high ceilings. There is an upstairs and a downstairs and

a back verandah and rickety old stairs down to a large backyard with a huge garage and a banana tree and an incinerator. There is a steep, steep driveway at the side of the house and you are on a go-kart, very shortly after you all move in, howling down this driveway, gleeful, when a bolt on one of the wheels splits your wrist in two and you bleed, everywhere, for a long time. There is panic and pressure and bandages and adamant refusal to be stitched. You are not stitched and the scar is still visible, all these years later, and somehow, you have a deep fondness for it. Probably because of the speed you were travelling at when it happened. Always faster than the boys.

Faster than the wind.

Your room is upstairs at first, opposite a gigantic room your older brother shares with your younger brother. There is a creepy attic in the roof off their bedroom, which you convert into a clubhouse when you get brave enough to remove the spiders. You find a hiding place in the floor, where the floorboards can be lifted out and secrets stashed away between the rafters.

The baby's nursery is downstairs, opposite the kitchen, and that fact is important because one day, when he is old enough to move upstairs, the secret shuffling noises and strange scents and activity transforms the former nursery into your very own, beautiful bedroom-birthday-present, away from the boys, opposite the kitchen. Where your mother always is, which makes you feel safe. And you love it. You fill the bookshelves with your books right up to the ceiling of one wall. A few years later you re-paint one wall olive green and the other three red. When you are older – a teenager – you hang posters of peace signs and Stairway to heaven and Bob Marley on these walls. You listen to David Bowie, loudly, and Lou Reed and Neil Young and Iggy Pop.

You go to school and you read and you play and you run fast and play sports. You walk home every day from school, from the bus stop on New South Head Road, via the short-cut alleyways tiering down from street level to the next. There are three of these secret passageways, quietly and surreptitiously cutting straight through to Boambillee, and only the locals know of them: wooden stairwells, festooned with lush rainforest offerings – scents and smells and sounds. Always a little creepy – always feeling like an adventure. Always an accomplishment when you make it home safely, to number 4.

One day the old verandah is knocked down, along with the rickety stairs, and a beautiful new comfy 'addition' becomes the family room and the deck. And the garage is pulled down and in goes a swimming

pool. It is clearly the most exciting day of your young life. Your very own swimming pool. And you spend hours and hours, and days and days, and weeks and weeks of summer, swimming and playing in that pool.

But still, every Saturday morning, you hop on a bus with your older brother and travel to Bondi Beach Swimming Baths, to take part in club races. You swim in the main sea baths, with the old Icebergs Club built into the cliffs and looming sideways above; the sweep of the beach behind. Today, the newly refurbished Bondi Icebergs sits like a post-modern sentinel in all its blue and steel and glass, an iconic declaration to the world; an assertion of Australianness. It is expensive to join; a place to eat and drink and party, and to be seen, if those sorts of things matter to you. The waves lashing the seawall in varying degrees of ferocity, depending on the swell of the day and the mood of the winds. It seems such an insubstantial barrier between you bobbing in the baths and the might of the Pacific Ocean behind, surging and crashing, threatening to swipe you away if given a chance. It seems a little dangerous and so much more fun, because of it. You and your brother swim in the smaller pool to the left of the club building after the races finish, knowing you have a spare 20 minutes before you have to go to the change rooms and then dash for the bus home.

This home, in this avenue, in this place means something immense to your parents, but you are unaware of that, then. Now, with the passage of time and much of your own life lived, do you understand. A young man and a young woman, from two Bondi working-class families, study hard and work hard and become professionals – with an earning capacity that none of their own fathers or mothers can fathom – and meet and marry. Their gift to their own children is the best of educations with opportunity and comfort and books and their own bedrooms and holidays – and a swimming pool.

This home, in this avenue, in this place – your family sell it one day, one day while you live in another home of your own on the other side of the world. You return and drive back to this avenue, this place, to see your old home.

It is gone.

Instead, a new, contemporary home. Your old home, vanished; the bricks and mortar; the number 4 your father carved; your bedroom with the window you climbed out of in the middle of the night despite your parents saying ‘no, you can’t go’ – or rather, because they said no. You knew it wasn’t fair and you just had to go. Wherever. The stair casement; the floorboard which lifted to reveal secret missives between the rafters in the attic clubhouse; the old rambling rooms and high, high ceilings; the kitchen table where you all talked and argued and cried and laughed.

You stand and stare and there are tears on your cheeks. You do not know what you are crying for. This home, in this avenue, in this place: seemingly idyllic back then; filled with fear and recurring panic-terror. Then someone comes out and sees you and you talk and you are invited in through the garage, which is now where your beautiful bedroom used to be, through to the back deck.

And there, although refurbished, is the swimming pool: same shape and size and position. And somehow this makes it all a little bit better. You wonder at space and families and time and life.

And you try not to, but you cannot stop, and you remember.

***

It is just you and him, home that Saturday morning. Your father is at the surgery until midday; your mother has taken the little boys to their sports. For once, you have no sport's fixture yourself that weekend.

Which is a pity given what happens next.

He has been in and out of trouble for a while now. Wagging school to play pool and smoke dope. Stealing money to wag school to play pool and buy and smoke dope. He is always sneaking out at night. But somehow, in a different way to you. Every night, to different types of places and with different types of people. Sometimes he is caught; sometimes not. Once the police bring him home in the middle of the night because they find a flick knife on him. It is illegal to carry a knife like that. Your father takes the flick knife and hides it in his bedside table drawer, for safety.

Your parents do not know what to do so send him away to boarding school.

You are secretly pleased and relieved and happy because while he is out of the home, he cannot get to you. Now, he is not there enough to sustain the terror; it only happens when he comes home on school holidays.

He is 14 and learns to shoot up heroin at this very expensive, exclusive boarding school. You believe he would have eventually done it anyway. It is not the school's fault. It is ironic, yes, but not the school's fault.

Anyway, on this particular Saturday morning while your father is at the surgery and your mother at various sports fields with your younger brothers, he is home with you in Boambillee and looms out of nowhere, as he often does. You cannot really remember how it happens. Perhaps you were curled up in a chair in the back family room, reading. Perhaps you were listening to music in your bedroom, your safe place. Perhaps you were in the kitchen.

It is so strange not to be able to remember.

You can't recall how long it lasts but what you do remember is running. Running hard, away from him. And him following, so close the blood in your veins sucked into your heart and then pumped out again, ice cold. So cold, it is hot. And he corners you, in that back family room. You try to hide silently behind the curtains, not breathing. Not moving. But he finds you and he traps you. And in his hand, he holds that flick knife, the one your father has hidden for safety in his bedside table drawer. He corners you and seems to grow in size in front of your eyes, hulking over you. He leans his forearm into your chest, your still unformed, little girl's chest, and pins you against the windowsill, behind the curtain. He laughs. He keeps his arm against your neck, and slowly looking away, oh so slowly, presses the button on the flick knife.

Click, with a sort of *whoosh.*

The blade snaps out, long and lethal and sleek and sharp. He turns his face back towards you. Eyeball to eyeball, as he removes his arm, replacing it with the knife.

You feel the coldness and the hardness of the metal against the soft flesh of your skin, and the fear and panic-terror in every cell of your body.

And you do not move.

He shifts the blade to the side of your neck. You say nothing. You don't breathe. He stops laughing and at that moment, the years of fear solidify inside you.

In his eyes, you see it.

And you know he is capable. This he is able to do. This he wants to do. You have always known. You have never told but you have always known.

And then, you both hear at the same time the car come down the driveway. The steep, steep driveway that runs down the side of the house and wends itself under the back deck, now that the pool is where the garage used to be. Your father has finished his Saturday morning surgery and is coming home to his wife and children, to begin his weekend. You both hear the classical music he always plays – Mahler – stop as he turns the engine off. You hear the door thud shut behind him, as he gets out of the car. Long gone is the two-tone green coloured station wagon. This is a Mercedes, and your

father looks good in it. Handsome. Deserves it. Has worked hard for it. For all of it.

For his family.

And you see your older brother falter. There is a faint shift in his eyes. Like a gentle shake. A shimmer, really.

He says nothing as he slides the knife from your neck, slowly releasing you. As you hear your father whistling up the backstairs, and patting the dog; talking to the dog. You vaguely hear the click as the flick knife is shut. You disintegrate into one of the comfy chairs in this oh so comfy 'addition' of a family room. Your brother fluidly picks up one of the sailing magazines off the coffee table and sits opposite you, in another comfy chair.

He feigns reading, gently staring at you from the top of the page.

Softly,

effortlessly,

menacing.

Your father walks in and says hello. Asks why you aren't in the pool; it's such a great day; you should get out there and enjoy it. He walks through the house, whistling again, to his bedroom with the bedside table drawer where he thinks he is safely keeping the flick knife, to change his clothes. To put on his weekend clothes.

He is going to wash the car.

You remember to breathe again…

…and still, you never tell.

BROTHER
Rest in Peace
1957-2013

Kay Donovan is a Research Associate with the Centre for Creative Practice and Cultural Economy, undertaking practice-led research in documentary filmmaking and creative writing. She has an MA (Writing) and DCA (Communications – Media Arts and Practice) from the University of Technology, Sydney. She is also a documentary filmmaker (*Tagged* 2006) and the author of *Bush Oranges* (2001).

Paula Hamilton is Professor of History at the University of Technology, Sydney. She has been a practitioner of oral history for 30 years and has worked in a range of projects with community groups, museums, heritage agencies and local councils. She is also the co-director of the Australian Centre for Public History and has published widely in public history, oral history and memory studies. Her most recent publications are *Places of the Heart: Memorials in Australia* (with Paul Ashton and Rose Searby, 2012), *History at the Crossroads: Australians and the Past* (with Paul Ashton, 2010) and *Oral History and Public Memories* (co-edited with Linda Shopes, 2009).

Megan Heyward is a media artist who works at the intersection of narrative and new technologies. Her electronic literature works – *I Am A Singer* and *of day, of night* – have been widely exhibited in Australia and internationally, including USA, Canada, France, Germany and Japan. Both projects have been recognized in significant new media awards, including AIMIA Awards and the Adelaide Festival Awards for Literature. *Of day, of night* was published by US publisher, Eastgate Systems, in late 2005, and is still being exhibited in electronic literature conferences in the USA, such as ELIT 2012 and MLA 2013. More recently Megan has worked with narrative and locative technologies. Her locative documentary, *Traces: stories written upon this town* was exhibited at the Sydney Opera House, Adelaide Festival Media State and the Centre Pompidou, Paris in 2006-7. Megan's locative artwork, *Notes for Walking*, was exhibited in the Sydney Festival, 2013, drawing several thousand visitors to Middle Head National Park, Sydney, during January 2013.

Sue Joseph has been a journalist for more than thirty years, working in Australia and the UK. She began working as an academic, teaching print journalism at the University of Technology, Sydney in 1997. As Senior Lecturer, she now teaches and supervises into both journalism and creative writing schools, particularly creative non-fiction writing, in both undergraduate and postgraduate programs. Her research interests are around sexuality, secrets and confession, framed by the media; HIV and women; ethics; trauma; supervision and ethics and life writing; and Australian creative non-fiction. Her third book *Speaking Secrets* was published in 2012.

Chapter 7: Home

1 George Orwell, *1984*, Complete Works of George Orwell series, 1987, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Boston and New York, p602.

2 John Gillis, 'Making time for family: The invention of family time(s) and the reinvention of family history', *Journal of Family History*, vol 21, no 4, 1996, pp4–21.

3 Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, Penguin, Hammonsworth, UK, 2004, pi.

Photos by Hans Bool
Original drawing by J. Andrew Blackwall