

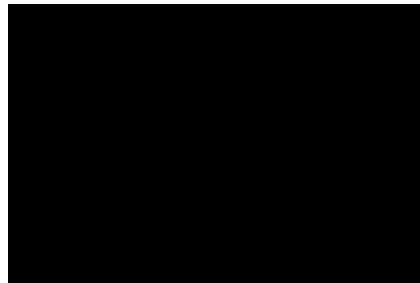
***Dead Cars in Westall: A narrative exploration  
of multicultural migrancy, postcolonial  
sexuality and commodity culture in  
cosmopolitan Melbourne.***

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts, Department of Communication, Culture and Languages, Victoria University, December 2003.

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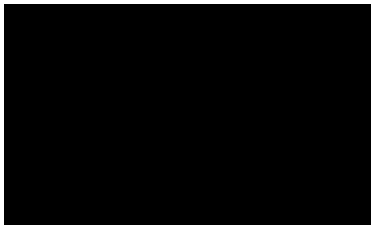
## Abstract

*Dead Cars in Westall* is a collection of interlocking narratives, examining the everyday practices of multicultural migrancy, postcolonial sexuality and commodity culture in the cosmopolitan global/local nexus of Melbourne. These narratives are supported by postmodern and poststructuralist theoretical underpinnings pertaining to gender, sexuality, class, race/ethnicity and popular culture. Utilizing a bricolage of qualitative methodology, the stories are autoethnographic and automobilitic and describe mobile subject positions, which traverse time and space. The 'dead car way' of resistance, influenced by Chela Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed* and explicated throughout the text, produces a third space of cultural possibility, that of the 'liminal' or the space in-between, whereby the subject is constantly in flux.

# DECLARATION

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university and, to the best of this candidate’s knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signed:

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of the candidate.

Rose Kizinska

December 2003

## Acknowledgement and Thanks

To my supervisor Susan Hawthorne for her amazing patience, constructive criticism and illuminating suggestions.

For my mother who has shown me how camp 'suburban' can be and for freeing me to write what I like, on the proviso that there aren't too many swear words in my stories. My grandmother for her stories, strength and enjoyment of life and years of allowing me to sit in on and listen to kitchen table, instant coffee-ridden family women's secret sessions.

My sisters who are my final links to 'Springy Chickdom'.

My nieces for showing me humour, untainted wisdom and a hope for the next generation.

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# Introduction

## (Let Me Open the Car Door For You.)

This thesis comprises two parts: a collection of interlocking narratives, entitled *Dead Cars in Westall (Dead Cars)*, forming the majority of the thesis and an accompanying commentary towards the narrative collection, containing a manual on methodology, techniques used in writing the narratives and a critical examination of the theoretical underpinnings and themes pertaining to the narratives. A theoretical background introduction to the text/s in its entirety therefore shapes the exegesis, in the form of a preface and a ficto-theoretical conclusion. In this sense, the exegesis surrounds the body of the narratives and acts as an exoskeletal shell or as auto-(car) panelling of the narrative collection.

The narratives contained within the theoretical auto-frame, incorporate and describe several metaphorical and some literal drivers (and many passengers) within this ‘dead car’ theoretical shell, who (en)force its mobility and inscribe its pathways. The front and rear ends of this vehicle (the exegetical preface and conclusion) can also be visualized as the ‘bonnet’, containing the engine and other mechanical parts intrinsic to its movement and operation, and the conclusion as its ‘boot’, as a place where things are usually stored for emergencies or placed there when necessary, before embarking on a trip or removed from after a hard day’s shopping. A rear end repository that also proves invaluable to the commonplace use of cars and a metaphorical summary of loose ends that are not completely tied up and hence, allowance is made for other possibilities and further interpretations. The ‘boot’ and ‘bonnet’ also clothe the naked, raw creative text, making it suitably and discursively dressed for academic presentation.

Another structuring device used in the *Dead Cars in Westall* collection is its division into three parts: 1. *Key In Ignition - N(o)ew Beginnings* 2. *Release Handbrake - Border Crossings* 3. *Accelerate - Infinite Trajectories*. These sections enable a crisscrossing movement intra-time and intra-space and simulate the act of travel and movement through the steps involved in driving a car. Each part contains five narratives and one short piece, the final narrative *Alphabet Bumper Stickers*, acts as a

semi-conclusion to all of the narratives, with truisms that reflect themes and diatribes explored in the fiction.

The metaphor of a 'dead car' expresses a paradoxical state. It highlights mobility and immobility, stasis and motion, instability and promise, fetish and desire. This paradox speaks to the discourse of in-betweenness as a site of emergence about new experiences and new identities. The collection of intimately blended narratives elucidates this both through form and content, from conceptualisation, to research to writing.

*Dead Cars* consists of sixteen distinct, self-contained but inter-connected narratives: Different stories joined together by a commonality explicated by the condition/s embodied in *Dead Cars in Westall*. Narratives are the lives and the relationships shaped by knowledges and stories. Communities of persons negotiate and engage in narratives to give meaning to their experiences and to certain practices of self and of relationship, that make up ways of life associated with these knowledges. The narratives in *Dead Cars* engage with each other by over-lapping primarily via the trope of travel, as a thematic structure. Travel is mobilised as a critical point of departure to inflect the displacement of home, location and identity. Travel navigates *Dead Cars'* motif of theoretical movement and translates spaces into places. Space in this sense is viewed as a temporal practice and as the formation of historical identities.

The narrative collection begins in Westall, a south-eastern suburb in Melbourne, replete with its more than ninety (ethnic) multicultures, formerly the site of The Enterprise Migrant Hostel and renowned for its car factories and industrial wastelands. Located in-between Springvale and Clayton, Westall stands as a liminal space, which speaks about the modernity of Melbourne through the incommensurability of cultural difference (from ghettos to suburbs to states, from local bodies to national citizenships to global signposts). The narratives move through seemingly disparate sites, geographically as well as temporally. The dead car travels through pre-and post-war Poland and Germany, parts of contemporary Asia and the United States, post-war and contemporary suburban Melbourne, cyberspace and other electronic forms of communication and virtual journeys (such as the CB radio),



simulating the fractured experiences of migration, difference, homelessness and the search for home.

Exposing the urban myths of Australiana and multiculturalism, *Dead Cars* queers the puberty blues of southeastern Melbourne, from petty crimes to needle piercing rituals, televisual fantasies and lesbian desires. Utilising distinct and separate fonts, it foreplays suburban sex, technologizes (back)street culture, kisses, spits and performs on the images that it confronts. This is a collection that plays with the ambivalence of living in the margins of multiple cultures, spaces and times.

This collection articulates the cultural circuit connected by Westall, as a tactical site of production, consumption, distribution, representation and regulation. Implicit in this is a technological interface traversed by local television, cable, radio, the internet, music, magazines, newspapers, cinema and zines, to highlight the interactive devices of flashback, talkback (therapy), self-parody, fantasy, post-realism and of course, the postmodern clichés of hybridity and pastiche.

*Dead Cars in Westall* aims to explore the complex and interweaving threads of diasporian identity and postcolonial identification in contemporary cosmopolitan Australia. It unravels the difference of representation, class, ethnicity and sexuality from the perspective of a post-punk NESB Generation X lesbian. The stories are also in part, an attempt to redress the largely undocumented outer-suburban young homeless nesbian experience.

Both the collection of narratives and the accompanying exegesis are concerned with exploring the same theoretical paradigms. My theoretical readings include but are certainly not limited to, works from theorists and philosophers such as: Michel Foucault, Michel de Certeau, Pierre Bordieu, Homi Bhabha, Judith Butler, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Rey Chow, Gayatri Spivak and Chela Sandoval.

Theoretically influenced significantly by Michel de Certeau's theory of 'the practice of everyday life', queer theory, theories on class, postcolonial (and postcolonial feminism/s) and diaspora studies, *Dead Cars* intends to produce liminality (the space between self-definition and externally imposed definition) as a third space of cultural

possibility. The most striking feature of postcolonial literature is the erasure of the boundary separating the fictional from the non-fictional. I envisage that the collection of interlocking narratives therefore affect a type of post-realism, one that encapsulates fantasy, (skewed) memory, desire and disavowal. The creative textual form that this hybridization necessitates is one that includes the stylistics of the essay, fiction, memoirs, internal dialogue and poetry.

I have also critically read and evaluated creative works of fiction from writers as diverse as Kathleen Fallon, Annamarie Jagose, Grace Paley, Finola Moorhead, Christos Tsiolkas, Kathy Acker (R.I.P), Joyce Carol Oates, Marion M. Campbell, Dorothy Allison, Alice Walker and Sally Morgan, to identify gaps, to compare and contrast (both style and content) and to research how best to contextualize my creative written work, in order to inflect the very specific but highly mobile sense of space, time and place, in accordance with my subject position/s.

Thus far, I have been unable to locate a creative text that specifically deals with the intersections of ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality within the local context of suburban Melbourne. Tsiolkas' *Loaded* comes marginally close, however this novel is geographically located in the inner-city suburbs of Melbourne and deals more specifically with the non-English speaking background (NESB) gay male perspective and experience, rather than that of sub-urban NESB lesbian (herein referred to as 'the nesbian'). Moorhead's *Remember the Tarantella* features a lesbian taxi-driver traversing all Melbourne suburbs (one character is even born in my 'native' Springvale) however although the intersections of women's sexuality and class are explored, race and ethnicity appear more so as a given and are not sufficiently problematized. Donna Jackson's *Car Maintenance, Explosives and Love*, a monologue in which class is mediated in a lesbian relationship through the discourse of car lust and maintenance (the relationship ultimately explodes due to the difference in vehicle choice by the middle class partner), further elucidates the trope of 'lesbians and cars' as does the road journey ruminations in Susan Hawthorne's *The Falling Woman*.

Fallon's novel *Working Hot* shares some of my concerns also, particularly with reference to the novel's locale - working-class, queer (namely lesbian), suburban

Australia. This novel's groundbreaking prose, innovations in textual style, the resounding heat and raucous invocation of sex and women's sexuality and the rhythms of language and words used to inscribe the lesbian body (as a corporeal entity) have also inspired.

Ana Kokkinos' debut feature film *Only the Brave* is a vital 'text' in the creation of my own literary work. The setting is a suburb in Melbourne's working-class west, amid the industrial smoke stacks and train yards. The narrative explores the nihilism, struggles and dreams of two young women of Greek background, one of whom is discovering her lesbian sexuality within the stifling surrounds while her best friend is incestuously victimized by her father. The film ends with the main character resolving to leave her home in search of a future and a past. She wishes to locate her missing mother and to pursue a taste of the possibilities of writing.

The *Dead Cars* narrative collection also stands alone. The experiences described may resonate with the reader and elicit feelings and further develop understanding. As a metaphorical dead car it has the potential to move, when thought through, alongside, above and beyond. De Certeau argues for reading itself as a surreptitious act of transgression: "... readers are travellers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write..." (1988: 174). I prefer to keep the stories somewhat open and accessible to further interpretation and dialogic engagement and the key here is, against all of my academic training, to refrain from a tendency to over-theorize.

Writing (text) in any media form has the power to set agendas, frame debates and to inflect desire, memory and fantasy: The challenge, then, is *to develop a (writing practice) by which subjectivities may be lived and analyzed as part of a transformative, emancipatory praxis* (Shohat and Stam, 1994: 356). Broadly speaking, this is the objective with which I pursue the writing and research of this thesis, as a continually self-and 'other'-reflexive textual journey.

## Methodology

**(Please Read the Driving Instruction Manual First. Fasten Your Seatbelt.)**

Shulamit Reinharz considers that the image of the 'quest' in feminist research is similar to the traditional (male) image of the quest for truth, to reveal the process of discovery, where "initial discoveries energize the scholar to continue on her quest". A "feminist researcher-traveller" however realizes that she has "a self and a body" and therefore abandons "the voice of disembodied objectivity..." (1992: 211). In order to embark on such a quest then, I was required to take with me a myriad of diverse resources and materials such as newspapers, stories, conversations, pamphlets and political flyers, photographs, literature and other secondary readings, songs, film, television shows, memories, desires and dreams. At times, I wandered out of my metaphorical dead car frame and took up the activity of walking so as to observe spaces and render meaning from them.

Immy Holloway sees qualitative research as "a form of social inquiry that focuses on the way people *interpret* and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live" (1997:3). To enable such an inquiry I utilized whatever tools were necessary and along the way discovered what else I needed in order to continue. This particular *Dead Car* journey proceeded along a long and winding road, hit a few potholes, sometimes had me singing with joy as I cruised steadily, laughing at the odd turns I'd taken and weeping when the *Dead Car* would momentarily fail to reactivate. The developmental form of the text was generative in that it was produced through a bricolage of narrative inquiry, autobiography, discourse analysis, ethnography and other subjective study approaches which in turn drew on methodologies such as feminist sociology, postcolonial and diaspora writing techniques, visual methods, personal experience methods, memory work and other forms of qualitative inquiry. Hence, the task of my research and the development of my text concentrates on investigating what 'bits and pieces' should be brought into use; how the 'bits' integrate; what they should be used for, and how they can be used; and, crucially, whether they enable or constrain future developments. After all, one can only plan for a trip up to a certain point. There is always the unexpected and the unplanned occurrence. Bricolage requires knowledge of the technology, the embedded scripts,

change processes and also situated knowledge. In the context of qualitative research, the bricolage metaphor depicts the interdisciplinary nature of the process *and* product of the research. In the realm of writing (as praxis), we draw on our creative energies and respond to situational exigencies with spontaneous acts of mindful and creative expression. As Ardra Cole and Gary Knowles observe, “it makes sense then to seek ways to understand art practices that are also non-linear, multimodal, and multidimensional” (2000: 63 in Stewart, 2003).

To begin considering the methods by which this work has been theorized, created and elucidated a brief survey of the several themes involved with the research needs to be considered. This thesis examines the relationship between postmodernism, postcolonial and diaspora theory, postcolonial feminism and queer theory. In particular, it considers how the collection of inter-locking narratives, *Dead Cars*, relates to these theories. These various theories and perspectives will be discussed at greater length in the next section entitled: *And Then The Road Map. Are We There Yet?* (p.27) They are worth mentioning here as they have had an impact on the type of methodologies used. This preface will also reflect on the theoretical literature relevant to the use of pastiche, fantasy, post-realism, tropes and parody in fiction, especially in *Dead Cars*.

De Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* elucidates the transition of ‘space’ to ‘place’ through movement – walking and observation as a means through which (sub)urban dwellers create their own stories. “The story does not express a practice. It does not limit itself to telling about a movement. It *makes* it” (1988: 81). (Sometimes dead cars necessitate that the driver becomes a walker again, as was most evident to me when my car blew up last year and left me in a state of ‘pre-licence-like, non-vehicle’ travel.) He also posits ‘la perruque’ as another tactic used by the working class through which we create new objects, new meanings and ultimately, place. It is also a subversion of ‘ordinary language’ and culture as a means of creating something of our own.

Postcolonial and diasporian theory offer the concept of ‘routes’ (Gilroy: 1993) as a way of forging new narratives and ‘hybridity’ (Bhabha: 1990) as anti-essentialist and thus, as capable of examining new forms of ‘identity’ and hitherto unexamined subject

positions. The postcolonial has been described as “all culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day . . . What [postcolonial] literatures have in common . . . is that they emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre. It is this which makes them distinctively postcolonial” (Ashcroft et. al, 1989: 2). In turn, postcolonial feminism is a constructive critique of some strands of Western feminism/s and their inability to articulate the ‘double colonisation’ experienced by women living in postcolonial nations and/or as part of a diaspora. The combination of liminality, opposition, and agency is also essential to a postcolonial feminist theory of identity.

Queer theory is useful too as a disruption to preconceived notions of community, politics and identity. My text is a disruption to the homogenizing tendencies of mainstream heteronormativity and to the mainstreaming of the ‘queer’ community itself. Queer theory also problematizes the normative consolidations of sex, sexuality and gender, which in turn, allows for ambiguity and contradiction. Donna Haraway, Elspeth Probyn and Judith Butler are all queer feminist scholars, each concerned to articulate an understanding of the subject-in-process (whether cyborg, performative or nomad) who is formed “through experience” (Probyn, 1993: 3) and not prior to it. The concept of “performativity” (Butler, 1997) as a set of repetitively enacted social constructs, which can serve to examine the artificiality of race, cultural identity, ethnicity, gender and sexuality is also accommodating to my notion of an identity of self that is not fixed but constantly in motion and consistently created and recreated by the society it inhabits and is inscribed by. I have found all of the above writers and perspectives most informative in developing a framework for a queer-post-colonial-post-structuralist-feminist epistemology and methodology, as they cathect with my various identifications and subject-positions - how I have been viewed by others, how I have been constructed and how I view myself as queer, nesbian, wog, working class and woman. These epistemologies provide a framework to make sense of the everyday, situated experiences of being and indeed of “becoming” subjects (Sandoval, 1995: 415). Undoubtedly, such epistemological perspectives have enormous impact on which methodologies I use to conduct research on those same gendered/ethnicized mobile and socially discursive subjectivities. I therefore utilized “alternative”

qualitative methodologies: the multi-method research that includes observation, archival analysis, oral history (conversation), personal experience, field trips, narrative inquiry, photographs and interpretation – all methods which come under the broad rubric of ethnography (Reinharz, 1992: 46-51). The fact that the texts I engage with are seemingly disparate is not unintentional. I believe that the eclectic nature of the body of my research is true to the conditions of living in the margins and within the centre of margin and negotiating back and forth between. “Working right at the limits of several categories and approaches means that one is neither inside or outside. One has to push...to the borderlines, where one never stops walking on the edges, incurring constantly the risk of falling off one side or the other side of the limit while undoing, redoing, modifying this limit” (Trinh T, 1992: 218). To articulate these borderlines is to attend to the contradictions played out in transitions between sites, rather than situating them exclusively within a single domain. Ethnography then is the preferred method of inquiry for this project.

Ethnography has been described as the study of people in their natural settings; a descriptive account of social life and culture in a defined social system, based on qualitative methods. For some, the term ethnography is loosely applied to any qualitative research project whose purpose is ‘rich description’. A more precise definition, rooted in ethnography's disciplinary home of anthropology, is a qualitative research process and product whose aim is cultural interpretation. The ethnographer goes beyond reporting events and details of experience and works to explain how these represent the webs of meaning in which we live (Graue, 2003).

Contemporary ethnography could be seen as a mesh of approaches ranging from descriptive accounts of cultural groups to activist-oriented critical ethnographies whose aim is “empowerment” through the study of domination and potential sources of resistance. The incorporation of theoretical frameworks such as feminist, postcolonial and queer theories to the traditional anthropological notions of culture have broadened the terrain addressed by ethnography and have opened new questions and methodological concerns. Reinharz posits three main goals of feminist ethnography: “1. To document the lives and activities of women. 2. To understand the experience of women from their own point of view. 3. To conceptualize women’s

behaviour as an expression of social contexts” (1992: 51). These goals have been considered throughout my research primarily focusing on the nesbian self.

My journey and traversing through particular places/spaces (i.e. queer, nesb, working class, sub-urban) is a reflection of my own interests and investments. The spaces I choose to explore are familiar ones I have traversed or immersed myself in. My own sense of self has been negotiated in relation to these social, cultural and political spaces. Reinharz suggests that “analysis of the author’s background or experience augments more conventional research methods ... [whereby] the typical separation of the process of research from the product of research is eradicated” (213). My childhood experiences of growing up in the culturally diverse Melbourne suburb of Springvale during the implementation of the social policy of multiculturalism in the late 1970s and early 1980s have been used as a broad research base. Memories of going to Poland at nine years of age, where most of my extended family still live helped to form my diasporic notions of ‘host’ and ‘home’ and my various other geographical travels to various other parts of the world have informed my creative text. My adolescent experience of leaving the family home at the age of fourteen to escape violence provided me with ‘embodied knowledge’ including the ability to describe feelings associated with the trauma of homelessness. Living across Melbourne throughout the politics of welfare, through participation and activism within the second wave feminist movement and the post-AIDS global queering project also proved to be a fruitful source of information as was research into these politics of regulation and liberation. My grandparents’ photographs from concentration camps and labour camps, where they were imprisoned, Polish displaced persons’ camps, migrant camps in Victoria and of their post-war migration experiences were used to image memory and enabled me to visualize scenes when writing creatively of times and places other than where and when I am currently living. I have also had countless discussions with my mother, grandmother (and grandfather when he was still alive) and many of their friends, pertaining to their experiences of migration and settlement.

Concurrent with ethnographic methodology, I made several field trips to the southeastern suburbs of Melbourne (mainly within The City of Greater Dandenong as this area is now called) throughout the writing process, to study locations that I



described in my narratives through observation and photography. To return to this source of past pain, no matter how much I attempted to convince myself that it was all in the name of impartial study, affected me in ways that I initially did not envisage. There was no sense of fear, panic or dread as there would have been several years prior, but a profound sadness, a mourning of a past that clearly should have been better. When I opened the door to the public rest room in Springvale for instance, a place that my school friends and I spent a substantial amount of time in during our adolescence, shame overwhelmed me and I could not face this site for very long. Likewise, when I pulled into my mother's driveway, I was unexpectedly flooded with tears. The house had become further dilapidated and I sat there wondering how she could possibly remain living there, after all of the violence, fear and hatred that was contained within. I have been to my mother's house on a number of occasions after I left home. When I have entered the house, I consistently endure the bizarre sensation of the ceiling and walls suffocating me, moving ever closer and squeezing me in. This time, I viewed it from the 'outside' at an apparently 'safe' distance and yet the emotional impact was no less severe.

Further field research in the form of various trips within Victoria, namely to Bonegilla, Mildura and Castlemaine, was undertaken to the areas which formerly accommodated and/or employed (for the purposes of repaying their passage fare) post-war migrants, to inform the fiction as framing devices – sets and props for some of the narratives situated in these times and spaces. These trips also assisted with accurate representation of detail for some scenes in *Dead Cars*. My mother arrived in Australia in 1950, from her birthplace in a Polish displaced person's camp in Paderbon, when she was five years old. Her most vivid recollection of Mildura was the scent of oranges in the air. I was more so struck by the dry heat and the fact that the only trace of this part of my family history is a small shed on an otherwise barren piece of land where the migration camp barracks previously stood. No plaques, no monuments, no heroic testaments to those who'd made the journey, no other traces.

I gathered informal oral accounts of the experiences of young NESB gays and lesbians in the suburbs, some of whom had migrated to Australia and some who were Australian born. I was particularly interested in their processes of 'coming out', 'staying in' or 'running away' as the case may be. These conversations lent

themselves to evoking the diversity and similarity within, in-between, amongst and across ethnic groups and engendered a contemporaneity of the issues faced, in order to reflect an accurate representation across time within the fiction. On several occasions while visiting Springvale, I would haphazardly meet other queers in noodle shops and clothing stores, who used code phrases such as ‘Have you been to Three Faces lately?’ to ascertain if their suspicions about my sexuality were correct and our conversations would proceed from there. I was also a co-founding member of ‘Internesbian’ – a social support group for nesbians in Victoria and so made contact with young lesbians of diverse cultural backgrounds in this manner.

“Many ethnographers have eliminated the distinction between the researcher and the researched and have studied their own experience” (Reinharz: 70). Susan Krieger’s *The Mirror Dance* (1983), an ethnography of a lesbian commune, combines the methodology of fiction with social science. It is both self-revelatory and emotional but deeply analytical and uses the ‘self’ to expose the falseness of so-called truths and absolutes. Krieger deliberately writes in novelistic style and attempts to instead present her observations ‘exclusively’ through the speaking voices of the various women characters in the community. She advocates the use of fictional methods in order to admit that research writers often do what novelists do, to present conflicting evidence and to avoid describing the social world through the lens of ‘currently fashionable sociological theories’. Krieger’s work is helpful in that it helps us to see how research texts ‘persuade’ via fictional or narrative devices. The use of fiction as research is an acceptance of multiplicity and uncertainty. Stories make permeable the boundaries of one’s own and other’s life experiences and enable the appraisal of these experiences. Through telling and listening to stories, individuals are able to “put the personal and particular into perspective” and to fashion “alternative notions of truth and representation.” As people, we interpret and secure, challenge and reinterpret our experiences through telling stories (Graue, 1999). ‘Self’ and ‘others’ in relation to the ‘self’ are examined equally within the narratives of *Dead Cars in Westall*.

Anthropologist Deborah Reed-Danahay posits that autoethnography stands at the intersection of three genres of writing which are becoming increasingly visible: 1. “native anthropology,” in which people who were formerly the subjects of ethnography become the authors of studies of their own group; 2. “ethnic

autobiography,” personal narratives written by members of ethnic minority groups; and 3. “autobiographical ethnography,” in which anthropologists interject personal experience into ethnographic writing (1997: 2). Taking into account the various ethnographic methodologies I used and the subject-matter of my narratives, (the ‘self’ and ‘others’) autoethnography and indeed auto(car-mobilic)ethnography (a concept I will expand upon later in this discussion) best describes the process and the dimensions of the journey I embarked on. *Dead Cars* is an autoethnographic text in that the stories are explanations of myself as a participant/observer in various culture(s) and subgroup(s), most of which I have been an inherent part or they are a part of my history and genealogy. As such, I have examined my own situations in the context of the larger social, environmental, cultural, socioeconomic, and various other forces that have shaped me. Utilizing a range of writing (poetry, prose and academic discourse) and research strategies I have thus created an ‘autoethnographic bricolage’: a complex, dense, reflexive, collage-like creation that represents my images, understandings, and interpretations of the world or phenomenon under analysis. This “bricolage will...connect the parts to the whole, stressing the meaningful relationships that operate in the situations and social worlds studied” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994: 3).

Gloria Anzaldua has described her own text as a “kind of crazy dance”; it is, she says, a text with a mind of its own, “putting together the pieces of its own puzzle with minimal direction from my will” (Anzaldua, 1987: 46). Hers is a prose full of variety and seeming contradictions; it is a writing that could be said to represent the cultural “crossroads” which is her experience/sensibility. With agency and opposition, Anzaldua’s hybrid mestiza identity is forged in interstitial or in-between space, which she calls the ‘Borderlands’. My writing is also a development of an alternate (in Anzaldua’s words, a mixed or mestiza) understanding, a mosaic, woven, with numerous overlays; a montage, a beaded work, a crazy dance, (a dead car re-enlivened, a liminal car-park space) drawing on the various ways of thinking, speaking and understanding that might be said to be a part of my own cultural position/s and sensibilities. In Anzaldua’s terms then, I have also written a “forbidden” text.

‘Contact zones’ are social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power. The most famous

interpretation of autoethnography comes from Mary Louise Pratt. In her essay entitled 'Arts of the Contact Zone', Pratt defines autoethnographic texts as "representations that the so-defined others construct *in response to* or in dialogue with those texts" (1991: 585). She introduced the term "autoethnography" as an oppositional term: "If ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others, autoethnographic texts are those the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations"(1992: 7). This process is a way of tracing knowledges at odds with all dominant discourses, rather than knowledges we see at first glance. Although Pratt denies that autoethnographic texts are "authentic" her attribution of this genre to marginalized subjects is characteristic of writing on autoethnography.

Autoethnography is a genre of writing and research that connects the personal to the cultural, placing the self within a social context (Reed-Danahay, 1997). These texts are usually written in the first person and feature dialogue, emotion, and self-consciousness as relational and institutional stories affected by history, social structure, and culture (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). Authors use their own experiences in a culture/s reflexively to look more deeply at self-other interactions. Autoethnography may have liberated some researchers from the constraints of the dominant realist representations of empirical ethnography because how researchers are expected to write influences what they can write about. It is a technique of self-representation that is not a fixed form but is in constant flux. Or, as I conceptualize it, as both *self (in)flux* - the self in a state of flux as a continuous succession of changes and as *self 'influx'* - the flowing of self into place. This flowing and constant movement can readily be achieved through the use of auto(car-mobilic) ethnography. The dead car negotiates between the local and global, the now and then, in a back and forth, side to side motion.

Michael Fischer describes "contemporary autobiography" as an exploration of the fragmented and dispersed identities of late-twentieth-century pluralist society. In this context, what he terms "ethnic autobiography" is an "art of memory" that serves as protection against the homogenizing tendencies of modern industrial culture. Moreover, autobiography has become a powerful tool of cultural criticism, paralleling postmodern theories of textuality and knowledge. Fischer describes the "writing

tactics” of autoethnography thus: “Contemporary ethnic autobiographies partake of the mood of metadiscourse, of drawing attention to their linguistic and fictive nature, of using the narrator as an inscribed figure within the text whose manipulation calls attention to authority structures” (Fischer, 1986: 194-233). Identity is no longer a transcendental or essential self that is revealed, but a “staging of subjectivity” – a representation of the self as a ‘performance’. In the politicization of the personal, identities are frequently played out among several cultural discourses, be they ethnic, national, sexual, racial, and/or class based. The subject ‘in history’ is rendered destabilized and incoherent, a site of discursive pressures and articulations. The fragmented and hybrid identities shaped in *Dead Cars* destabilize the very notion of ‘ethnicity’ itself. One’s body and one’s historical moment may be the joint site of experience and identity, and yet they do not necessarily add up to ethnicity as an anthropological category. Autoethnography is a vehicle and a strategy for challenging imposed forms of identity and exploring the discursive possibilities of inauthentic subjectivities.

Autoethnography can also be a form of what James Clifford calls “self-fashioning”, in which the ethnographer comes to represent herself as a fiction, inscribing a doubleness within the ethnographic text: “Though it (ethnography) portrays other selves as culturally constituted, it also fashions an identity authorized to represent, to interpret, even to believe - but always with some irony - the truths of discrepant worlds” (1988: 94). Once ethnography is reframed as a self-representation in which any and all subjects are able to enter discourse in textual form, the distinctions between textual authority and reality begin to break down.

But Clifford concedes that even though the “discipline of fieldwork-based anthropology, in constituting its authority, constructs and reconstructs coherent cultural others and interpreting selves... if this ethnographic self-fashioning presupposes lies of omission and of rhetoric, it also makes possible the telling of powerful truths.” How then is one to address the issues surrounding validity in present-day discussions of the so-called legitimation crisis? French literary theorist Hélène Cixous’ interpretation of Archimedes’ thoughts on truth is one starting place: “Archimedes is someone who never believed in the truth of something; that

something was the truth, no. To believe in the Truth as tension, as *movement*, yes” (Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997: 5, my emphasis). Again, the mobile is invoked.

The notion of autoethnography’s purportedly narcissistic tendencies has been challenged by scholars sympathetic to the idea that “autobiographical reflection is not a symptom of but a solution to contemporary psychosocial problems” (Casey, 1995: 217). Similarly, William Pinar has argued that, “Understanding of self is not narcissism; it is a precondition and concomitant condition to the understanding of others” (1988: 150). Is a life in fact represented most ‘truthfully’ in its very interconnectedness, in all its messy entanglement with the lives and doings of others? To be born at all is to assume a place in the social, political and cultural realms. If I was to attempt to write a ‘purely factual’ (assuming such a thing exists) autobiography, I may start by reading from my birth certificate which states that I was born female, in Springvale, in 1968, the third child of Polish immigrant parents, a ‘tool setter’ father and a ‘homemaker’ mother. Aside from the distinct lack of any aesthetic value (i.e. it sounds boring, dull and lifeless, like a bad hair day) this statement still alludes to geographical spaces, with their attendant histories, communities and socio-economic status. The discourses surrounding sex and gender are also invoked, (it is notable that many birth certificates cite mother’s occupation as ‘homemaker’ or they only show father’s occupation and mother is there only as the mother, even though I know that my own mother in particular has always worked ‘outside of the home’ as well as in it), as is socio-economic class positioning and migration/ immigration with its legal, regulatory and borderzone ramifications. Biological family position and relationships are also cited. To write of the experience of self is to write of social experience as the self does not emerge or exist in a vacuum. I therefore use autoethnography to confront dominant forms of representation and power in an attempt to reclaim marginalized representational spaces (Tierny, 1998).

On commenting about women’s oral history projects, Reinharz points to the dilemma that “the personalized form of the story may detract from our ability to develop a socio-political understanding of events and forces” (1992: 137). She proposes that we need to elaborate those forces then, to articulate them in an engaging way. I hope to achieve this through my combination of theory and fiction and by realizing that

autoethnography makes no grand scientific or totalizing claims but is uncertain, tentative and speculative. Although a common feature of autoethnography is the first-person voice that is intently and unambiguously subjective, this is only one of three levels (as 'speaker') on which the writer can inscribe themselves, the other levels are as 'seer', and 'seen'. The discursive possibilities of these three voices is another form of identity, that of the hybrid and border. These three forms of voice may also assist in a stronger elucidation of socio-political events and forces.

Trinh T. Minh-ha has written about the 'Inappropriate Other' as the subject whose intervention "is necessarily that of both a deceptive insider and a deceptive outsider" (1991: 74). She implies that such a figure actually lurks within every "I," and if one of the goals of a postcolonial ethnography is to become aware of how subjectivity is implicated in the production of meaning, the Inappropriate Other is the figure to be developed. By exploring autoethnography as an intercultural, cross-cultural method, I hope to suggest how the Inappropriate Other also functions as a time traveller who journeys in memory and history. Re/membering is an interpretive connection of past and present. Trinh challenges traditional ideas about memory as a process of storage and subsequent retrieval. Instead memory is seen as a dynamic process, in which the present constantly transforms our impression of the past and vice versa. In this way the very division of time into discrete past and present components is called into question and emerges in *Dead Cars* as a fragmented, nonlinear trajectory.

auto- from Gk. *auto-*, "self, one's own," combining form of *autos* "self." The opposite prefix would be *allo-*. As a shortened form of *automobile* it dates from 1899.

automobile - 1895, from Fr. *automobile* (adj.), 1861, from Fr. *auto-* "self" + *mobile* "moving."

autonomy - 1623, from Gk. *autonomia*, from *autonomos* "independent," from *auto-* "self" (comb. form) + *nomos* "custom, law." *Autonomous* is recorded from 1800.

([www.etymonline.com/a8etym.htm](http://www.etymonline.com/a8etym.htm))

The automobile (car) and more specifically the term 'auto(car-mobilic)ethnography' evokes the sense of truly mobile subject-positions and the journeying self and other,

in transition. In my introduction, I stated that the metaphor of a 'dead car' highlights, amongst other paradoxes, 'instability and promise.' I wish to further expand on this point here via a reinscription of Sandoval's 'cyborg consciousness as differential consciousness' (1995) into the 'dead car way'. Not only does the figure of the dead car invoke an industrial wasteland(scape) – the setting for many of these stories but it can also be seen as a 'vehicle' for the reconfiguration of this 'scape'. A dead car can be revived if one learns the 'mechanics' – the internal workings of the machine (to be inside and out simultaneously). A new engine can be added (the rev/revolutionary possibility). Parts from the same make and model (placed into historical context) can be used or alternatively, completely new parts, which are nevertheless compatible with the old parts, from other cars (the hybrid) can be fused. Even when completely wrecked and damaged beyond comprehension, the dead car can be recycled into something completely new, used for a different purpose other than its 'origins' dictated. Bric(ar)olage can be employed – using whatever works to reinstate mobility. In these ways, the dead car is never finally 'dead' and always stands as a vehicle for the possibility of action.

Chela Sandoval's exploration between the cyborg and other forms of cultural resistance is useful here. Sandoval situates cyborg consciousness as a contemporary form of 'oppositional consciousness,' a practice and subjectivity which has existed amidst the colonized and working classes for centuries. "My argument has been that colonized peoples ... have already developed cyborg skills required for survival under techno-human conditions." She describes cyborg consciousness as "flexible, mobile, diasporic, schizophrenic and nomadic." In her attempt to cross disciplines and theoretical domains in the academy she further aligns the cyborg with other oppositional consciousness such as mestiza, feminist criticism, postcolonial discourse theory, postmodernism and queer theory (1995: 401-422). This cyborg-machine dynamic is implicit within my metaphor of the dead car auto(mobile).

The dead car industrial wasteland contains oppressed subjects within it who experience feelings of nihilism and despair but it is not explicitly the 'death drive' as described by Sigmund Freud (1975). Sandoval criticizes Freud for not recognizing this drive as a survival technique of the colonized and the oppressed and for not seeing these survival techniques as a legitimate science. As she states the "methodology of



the oppressed is formulated and taught out of the shock of displacement, trauma, violence and resistance” (Sandoval, 2000: 76.7). So too is the dead car way of mobility. Both are ‘site[s] of active possibility’ (189)-and resistance.

## Techniques and Tactics

**(Bring This Mechanics' Log and Service History With You.)**

A collection of short stories is formed by a motif, usually a thematic repetition of an image or detail that represents the dominant idea of the story. In the 60s, the short story lent itself to the rhetoric of student protest and was found in a bewildering variety of mixed media forms in the underground press that publicized this lifestyle throughout the world. Prior to zines in their contemporary form, which includes on-line e-zines, other sub-cultures and political movements also had their own underground press in the form of magazines and broadsheets. Zines are a continuation then of the products and methods of former defiant, transgressive movements. Conversely, the birth of the contemporary 'zine' movement has been dated as beginning around 1977, when 'youth culture' invented its own means of dissemination. Punk 'do-it-yourself' ethics had much to do with this global and well-documented movement that centered around the punk music scene. Mainly, these were A4 photocopies, filled with type written copy about personal obsessions, pen-line drawings and instamatic snaps of young punks stage diving and publicity shots of bands.

The beauty of zines, as confrontations with dominant mainstream culture (presented as 'non-professional' cut and paste aesthetic) is that the writer has absolute expression of any point of view they wish to communicate. As personal, intimate communication vehicles, zines celebrate diversity and as in the case of Queerzines, they allow for parody, humour and a critique of the mainstream gay and lesbian scene. The noteworthy queerzines (*Outpunk* and *The Burning Times* for example) are often street smart and/or transgressive and allow for a more diverse range of opinions, lifestyles and marginalities to be expressed than is currently available in the often banal mainstream gay press. The zine format has been adopted to some extent in Christos Tsiolkas' and Sasha Soldatow's *Jump Cuts* which is primarily a (long) autobiographical conversation between two gay men. It is also a style that features throughout *Dead Cars*, in keeping with a hybrid sensibility. This is also part of the justification for my use of images as well as text, within the narratives. To elaborate, different fonts are used to connote speech acts and to link narratives through product

names and the various practices of everyday life. Smoking is one example to which this technique applies as in *My Mama Said That Little Girls Who Play With Fire Always Wet Their Beds* (p.101), with the Winfield and Malboro cigarette packet logos serving as text also. Headings for most of the narratives are pictorial, evoking either banner ads or links on a webpage and each heading elucidates or implies something intrinsic to the text (see for example *Coke is Shiii...* (p.82) heading opposite.) These illustrations and differing fonts act as navigating devices. Text augmented with images – pictures and the symbolic arrangement of lexias and their colours intersect paths and work as a meaningful composite. In this instance, text may maintain its status alongside visual information and in a new symbiotic relation to it. As a form of hyperfiction (although not here in html format) and to extend the metaphor of travel, interaction within and throughout the narratives occurs mainly through anchor words, themes and concepts. Also pictures are included as a meta-textual device as a fictional world is created within the narratives, which is to be not only looked through but also looked at, where in, “the visual layout provides the syntax for the hypertext structure” (Rosenberg, 1996: 112).



**@<<We(e)<Stall<~~~~~** (p.48) This heading which announces the

title of the first narrative in the collection is situated above a digital photo of the inside of the public toilet in Springvale. A visual pun is here created, featuring a ‘cyber-rose’ as a play on my current first name (which was my second name which became my first name again, twice – see *The Polish Stop* (p.106) for a further elucidation of this ‘naming’ process) and a juxtaposition of the sweet fragrant flower and the symbol of passion and love, with the ‘wee stall’ (pissing cubicle). The word ‘Westall’ is also the name of the suburb from which this dead car journeying ostensibly begins. The division of ‘Westall’ into the two words ‘We Stall’ also connotes the feelings of stagnation of living in this particular industrial wasteland and ‘we stall’ here in Westall as I invite the reader to stop here with me, (here we are @ (at) Westall) to slow down, to situate ourselves here as the narrative further locates the suburb of Westall through the narrative of Australia’s postcoloniality. It does so by decentering



draws attention to its own cultural site and lineage. *Trilogy of TV* (p.121) for example, uses television as a site/sight for mediating a tri-generational mother/daughter narrative that in turn produces a spatial trajectory, from the southeastern suburbs of Melbourne to the old borders of the Eastern bloc. The title is also a parody of the title of a 1975 made-for-TV camp horror film called *Trilogy of Terror*. In addition, this narrative is theoretically informed by the work of Caren Kaplan and James Clifford on transnational feminist location, Patricia Mellencamp, Margaret Morse, Teresa De Lauretis and Alice Jardin on TV as gendered technology, Michel de Certeau and Mackenzie Wark in their discussions on TV as 'vector', as a space of possibility and impossibility. The TV is therefore a delivery route, the means through which information is delivered (Warke, 1994). A project that takes place within this postmodern milieu therefore necessitates a mixing of styles, ranging from the literary, poetic to street slang, song bits and commercial product jingles. This collection of fiction therefore combines a literary amalgamation of discourses.

Style, whether it is hair or clothes is also referential and refers to economics and sites of production, to gender and sexual vernaculars, historical periods and international sites. Hair therefore, in all of these manifestations, is an often-used signifier within the narratives, particularly in *The "L" Word: No Freedom. On Not Thinking Outside the Box You Live In* (p.115) and *The Polish Stop* where the freshly shaved head of my lesbian self is juxtaposed with that of a concentration camp survivor. *I.D. Bracelets* (p.73) has, as its main character, Jenny with her shaved head and 'butch' characteristics. She uses bricolage manifested in how she decorates and marks her body. Bricolage in this sense is a subculture's appropriation of commodities, which are then re-combined and re-articulated to disrupt and re-organize meanings not originally intended by the producers (Hebdidge, 1979:106). The main way in which resistance occurs within subcultures is through the 'politics of style' (120).

The narrative *I.D. Bracelets* further considers the subject matter of masculinist and suburban discourses as predominantly a 'boys and their cars' sub-culture (McRobbie: 1991). This story is about how Jenny the punk dyke came out in this particular milieu with her queer girl punk sensibility. Gangs abound in this landscape. Some of those I recall from my youth include the Patterson Road Punks, The Bowies, Dingley Sharps, Oakleigh Wogs, Techno Heads, the hip hop scene in Dandenong, bogues, metal

heads, disco wogs, Dandy Skins, dirt bikes riders around the Westall train tracks and the petrol heads at the Dandy drags on Friday nights. In most of these gang and sub-cultural circumstances 'girls just watch'. The men in the group defined women's role within many sub-cultures. As Angela McRobbie states, "a girl's membership of the group was dependant on the boy she was with – it was always tentative, easily resulting in her expulsion from the group, depending on the state of her relationship with the boys" (McRobbie, 1976: 211).

In the midst of this marginalisation and within these hegemonic subcultures of gender and sexuality, Jenny 'comes out' with her pink triangles on her closely cropped hair. The master punk statement is therefore appropriated elsewhere, in a multi-ethnic, working-class suburb in South Eastern Melbourne for someone else's identity. Safety pins on British punks may suggest a revolt against the middle class but in the context of Jenny, it is a statement against the hegemonic working class family, i.e. she never marries the local boy either.

Within these suburbs there is the space for many subcultures that are as diverse as they are contradictory. Youth subcultures revolt against their working parent class but they are however, often hegemonic with regard to gender and sexuality. Jenny therefore is the subversion – a subculture of her own (Gelder, 1997). This narrative also connects to *What Did 'P' Stand For?* (p.59) via the symbol of the pink triangle, used in Nazi Germany (the historical context evoked in this story) to differentiate between and separate gay and straight 'prisoners' (Plant, 1986) and the re-appropriation of this symbol in modern and postmodern times as a symbol of queer pride. The reference to Jenny wearing zip-laden pants in *I.D. Bracelets* also links with the story *Zipped* (p.127) which uses the metaphor of a zip as enforced silence and unzipping as partially breaking that silence; another 'coming out' both about violence in adult relationships and child abuse.

The point of view of the narratives is mainly first and third person (multiple points of view) to allow for a non-linear narrative that in turn, makes for a navigation of text – movement and multi layering and some elements of postmodern pastiche in a reconstituted parodic form. Sandoval's understanding of postmodern pastiche as a "site of active possibility" (2000: 189) infuses it with a re-politicization. A re-ignition

of parody (and not just dead pastiche) is possible within the 'methodology of the oppressed'. Fear and trauma for Helena in *Taniec Sily: A Dance of Strength* (p.62) show how, "The extremities of life lived in the regions of social subjugation, war, and postmodernism unlock the shackles of perception, and provide the methods by which postmodern being can fill with resistance" (189). While Sharon is robotized through (revolutionary) homogirl-'love' in *I.D. Bracelets* as she is impassioned by Jenny's advances and by the possibilities of a 'new' kind of loving and living.

Although Frederic Jameson characterizes postmodern parody as "blank parody" without any political bite (1984: 65), Linda Hutcheon sees much to value in postmodern literature's stance of parodic self-reflexivity, seeing an implicit political critique and historical awareness in such parodic works. According to Hutcheon, one of the main features that distinguishes postmodernism from modernism is the fact that it "takes the form of self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement" (1989: 1). One way of creating this double or contradictory stance on any statement is through the use of parody: citing a convention only to make fun of it. This element of humour is present within many of the *Dead Car* narratives. As Hutcheon explains, "Parody-often called ironic quotation, pastiche, appropriation, or intertextuality-is usually considered central to postmodernism, both by its detractors and its defenders" (93). Unlike Jameson, who considers such postmodern parody as a symptom of the age, one way in which we have lost our connection to the past and to effective political critique, Hutcheon argues that "through a double process of installing and ironizing, parody signals how present representations come from past ones and what ideological consequences derive from both continuity and difference" (93). Hutcheon insists, instead, that such an ironic stance on representation, genre, and ideology serves to *politicize* representation; illustrating the ways that interpretation is ultimately ideological. Parody 'de-doxifies', to use a favourite term of Hutcheon's; it unsettles all doxa, all accepted beliefs and ideologies. Rather than see this ironic stance as "some infinite regress into textuality" (95), Hutcheon values the resistance in such postmodern works to totalizing solutions to society's contradictions; she values postmodernism's willingness to question all ideological positions, all claims to ultimate truth.

It is often very difficult to determine just exactly what signals parody, leading Hutcheon to offer this working definition: “repetition with critical distance which allows ironic signalling of difference at the very heart of similarity.... [This] allows an artist to speak *to* a discourse from *within* it, but without being totally recuperated by it” (96).

*‘It’s like radiate, on your wedding day’* – (Alanis Morissette, *Ironie*) – My heterosexual, suburban-dwelling older sister’s favourite vacuum-cleaning song. For reasons outlined above, ‘irony’ figures heavily throughout my narratives. Defined as a device in which the intended meaning of the words used is the direct opposite of their usual sense, (is irony therefore oppositional or complimentary?) or as a representation of one concept in terms of another, that may be thought to be *analogous* with it - (indeed, the paradox of irony itself), irony is one of the most important figures of speech as it involves creativity and reflexivity. There is self-reference in irony. Irony arises when one tries, by the interaction of terms upon one another, to produce a development which uses all of the terms so that conflicting personalities, positions and traits simultaneously affect one another hence the dialectic or duality of role: to conceal and yet clarify at once. Thus figurative language (irony especially) is prominent within the creative writing technique I have employed throughout my fiction, as a means of problematizing the notion of ‘normal’ language and to signal a distance from the authenticity of images, and from the authenticity of the self.

Sketch writing, which is what the *Dead Car* narratives encapsulate, is more about space whereas tale writing, (i.e. linear narrative in the form of a novel) is more about time. Therefore, utilizing the genre of the short story more readily lends itself to a transition from space to place. Sketches frequently describe people or a single person and have elements of description and direct quotes, soliloquies or accounts of a person’s habitual ways of doing things or stories and anecdotes about events which often reflect a person’s character. Tales, on the other hand, contain elements of a sequence or time to a description. Characters are placed within the sequence and the sequence depicts an event or series of events that constitute a beginning, middle and end. The sketch is therefore horizontal and equates with space. The auto(car-mobilic) ethnographical text of *Dead Cars in Westall* then navigates this space and in turn (and by taking unexpected turns) produces liminality as a third space of cultural possibility.



## Literature Review

### (And Then the Road Map. Are We There Yet?)

Speaking for oneself is an inherently complex process. There is the risk of reproducing (uncritically) the stereotypes that one seeks to destroy and also of falling into the trap of essentializing the 'otherness' of the 'other'. One can also lapse into competing for the 'oppressed' status on the one hand and apologist self-punishment on the other. Constant vigilance against these tendencies is necessary, as is critical reflection when writing from the margins or writing in resistance. Indeed, these are difficult tasks for any writer.

The following is a discussion of the various interconnected perspectives and theories that remained in my thoughts while I undertook this journey and which informed and explained the views and situations that the *Dead Car* narratives speak of. The theories have provided me with a pathway, a cartography of intersected roads that intermesh drivers' and passengers' subject-position/s within the dead car/s. Some of these perspectives I have known of for some time, others I discovered at various crossroads in my travels. They have stopped me from running too many red lights or from lingering at the red and amber lights for too long. Broadly, this road map of themes engages with queer-post-colonial-post-structuralist-feminist epistemology. I used this map selectively and in no way is it an exhaustive chart of these perspectives. One insight is not necessarily privileged over another here as they all combine in various ways to elucidate the process and position of becoming and being a liminal third site and a mobile subject.

*In learning to reflect reality in broken mirrors, [she] comes to treasure a partial, plural view of the world because it reveals all representations of the world are incomplete...meaning is a shaky edifice we build out of the scraps, dogmas, childhood injuries, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved: perhaps it is because our sense of what is the case is constructed from such inadequate materials that we defend it so fiercely, even to the death.*

- Salman Rushdie (1991: 12)

Texts are not merely positioned in the world as a way of exhibiting their author's perspective. They do however constitute different positions that define distinct ways of being inside - or relegated to the outside of social identities and formations. Living 'in-between' is the position that migrants and their children (whether or not these children were born in the 'home' or 'host' country) are deemed to occupy. It is a shared looking back across time and space and an emotional connection to another country where they do not live. It is a sense of identity influenced by the past migration history and one, which is also shared within a community of people of similar backgrounds: A feeling of neither belonging here nor there. Postcolonial literature terms this sense as being a 'diaspora identity'. The foundations for the critical practice of postcolonialism were laid by scholar-immigrants to the West, such as Edward Said for instance, who called into question the underlying assumptions that form the foundation of 'Orientalist' thinking. A rejection of 'Orientalism' entails a rejection of biological generalizations, cultural constructions, and racial and religious prejudices and an erasure of the line between 'the West' and 'the Other.' Said argued for the use of "narrative" rather than "vision" in interpreting the geographical landscape known as 'the Orient', meaning that a historian and a scholar would turn not to a panoramic view of half of the globe, but rather to a focused and complex type of history that allows space for the dynamic variety of human experience (1978). He also wrote extensively on the condition of 'the exile', stating that, "While it is an actual condition, exile is also for my purposes a metaphorical condition. By that I mean that my diagnosis of the intellectual in exile derives from the social and political history of dislocation and migration ... but is not limited to it" (1994: 52).

While the sentiment of loss is recognized in this displaced position, what is even more enticing to consider is the possibility of forging new models of identity from this in-betweenness. The diasporic "scatterings of peoples, whether as a result of war, oppression, poverty, enslavement or the search for better economic and social opportunities, [results in] the inevitable opening of their culture to new influences and pressures" (Gilroy, 1997: 304). Paul Gilroy suggests that diaspora "...opens up a historical and experiential rift between the place of residence and that of belonging" (329). From this position of 'insecurity' and unrootedness, new knowledges and ways of seeing can be constructed out of the myriad of combinations of the 'scraps' which Salman Rushdie so aptly describes. In this way, new narratives are forged via

trajectories or “routes”, rather than “roots” (Gilroy: 1993) which fix and assuredly pin people into space (as opposed to place): a distinction I will further elaborate on in my discussion of de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life*.

The complex relationship of people to ‘place’ has come under increasing scholarly scrutiny in recent years as acute global conditions of exile, displacement and inflamed borders, struggles by indigenous peoples and cultural minorities for ancestral homelands, land rights and retention of sacred places, have also brought the questions into sharper political focus. More attention is now being paid to the ethnography of place, of how people actually live in, perceive and invest with meaning places they call home (i.e. the everyday practices). “Glocalization” denotes new kinds of relationships between local and global realms which are made possible by information technologies. These emergent relationships subvert traditional, mediating power structures like the economy, the nation-state, and the disciplines that compose the professions and the “knowledge industry.” The concept of glocalization is highly conflicted and contested, since it is used both in theories of corporate marketing to describe the process of modifying products for local audiences (in essence, the global appealing to the local) and well as in critical postmodern theory to describe the global representations of the local (the local appealing to the global).

In contrast to “glocalization,” the more common term “globalization” suggests a radical disassociation, between the “global” (multinational corporations, international terrorism, the entertainment industry, CNN, the Web) and “the local” (the sense of place, neighbourhood, town, locale, ethnicity, and other, traditional sources of identity). The term “glocalization,” on the other hand, denotes a more dynamic and two-way relationship between these two realms, especially as they are brought into contact on the Web and in other media.

Wayne Gabardi writes, [Glocalization is marked by the] “development of diverse, overlapping fields of global-local linkages ... [creating] a condition of globalized panlocality ... what anthropologist Arjun Appadurai calls deterritorialized, global spatial ‘scapes’ - A virtual space in a networked environment where identities are expressed. A “scape”, [be it an ethnoscape, technoscape, finanscape, mediascape, or ideoscape.... (Appadurai: 1996)] presents an alternative to the physical landscape (and

hierarchies of town/state/region/nation) from which we traditionally construct identities” (Gabardi, 2001: 33-34). This condition of glocalization represents a shift from a more territorialized learning process bound up with the nation-state society to one more fluid and translocal – whereby ‘routes’ are taken rather than the assumed ‘security’ of ‘roots’. Culture has become a much more mobile, human software employed to mix elements from diverse contexts. With cultural forms and practices more separate from geographic, institutional, and prescriptive embeddedness, we are witnessing what Jan Nederveen Pieterse refers to as “postmodern hybridization” (1992).

Routes cannot presume an even, continuous passage through time. It is always a changed, a reclaimed but hybrid identity, which is created or called forth by the diasporian attempts to constitute and represent identity. Hybridity is an important concept in postcolonial theory, referring to the integration or ‘mingling’ of cultural signs or practices from the colonizing and colonized cultures. It is also a useful concept for helping to break down the false sense that colonized and colonizing cultures alike are monolithic or have essential, unchanging features. But at the same time, the usage of this concept cannot overshadow nor forget the ways in which racism still operates in the present, even though it may offer some form of resistance. Homi Bhabha states that - *The great, though unsettling advantage of this position [of in-betweenness and hybridity] is that it makes you increasingly aware of the construction of culture and the invention of tradition* (Bhabha, 1990: 10). Postcolonial literature is often (but not inevitably) self-consciously a literature of otherness and resistance, and is written out of a specific local experience. Literary products of postcoloniality frequently modify or even abandon the generic boundaries inherited from the literatures of colonizing cultures. The literary device of Magic Realism, for example, with its mixing of the fantastic and the realist, has been adopted as one of the textual strategies for negotiating the colonial past. My story *Poles Apart* (p.88) for instance, uses the American tale ‘The Wizard of Oz’ and the Eastern European mythology of the ‘Baba Jaga’ to describe in-betweenness, the diasporic condition and the politics of (no) return. Magic Realist texts can be conceived of as writing that “works both within and against the aesthetics of realism” (Chamberlain in Baker, 1993: 1) and as a discursive practice that resists colonialism and colonial ideologies. Robert Wilson claims that Magic Realism creates a “space in which the spatial effects of

canonical realism and those of axiomatic fantasy are interwoven ... in magic realism, space is hybrid (opposite and conflicting properties are co-present)” (Baker: 2).

Attending to differences may be paramount but so is thinking between and across these differences. One of the major criticisms levelled against postcolonial theory is that it has a generalising tendency, in that settler and settled communities are collapsed together and that differences (of ethnicity within Western and/or non-Western cultures, sexuality, class, mobility etc.) both within and between nations are often elided. Anti-essentialism and hybridity do not completely allay the anxiety concerning who speaks, about what, for whom and to what end. Further to this, as beings in culture, colonized peoples are both constructed and changing, so that while they may be ‘other’ from the colonizers, they are also different from one another and from their own pasts. (See for example, *The “L” Word* ... for a fictional account of class and other differences not being attended to within a section of the late 80s university-based ‘nesbian’ movement itself. My article, ‘A Love Letter From NADIA (Non-Anglo Dykes in Australia)’ in *Multicultural Queer: Australian Narratives* (Kizinska, 1999: 159-168) further elucidates this quandary.) Hence, there is always the danger of essentializing or totalizing the ‘other’ and indeed, the ‘other’ of the ‘other’.

Like most words, the term “multiculturalism” therefore, needs to be understood from both an historical and a conceptual perspective. It is an “ideology promoted by a policy community. It is also government policies, programs and legislation implemented to realize that ideology and it embodies a constituency that supports the ideology and policy community” (Lopez, 2000: 446). Mark Lopez in his analytical account of the origins of multiculturalism in Australia between 1945-1975, offers a four-fold typology of multiculturalism as principle versions of ideology that were evident in Australia by 1975. These are: cultural pluralism, welfare multiculturalism, ethnic structural pluralism and ethnic rights multiculturalism (447-448). An amalgamation of these versions still informs Australia’s contemporary stance. Sara Ahmed turns to the manipulation of the rhetoric of multiculturalism within Australia, exploring how the government appropriates difference in order to elide it, and in so doing reaffirms the power and values of the hegemony. In Australia, Ahmed argues, multiculturalism is reduced to the concept of accepting ‘cultural diversity’. This then allows the ruling elite to “reinven[t] “the nation” over the bodies of strangers” since

this form of multiculturalism actually “excludes any differences that challenge the supposedly universal values upon which that culture is predicated” (2000: 95). Or, to put it more strongly, “the official discourse of multiculturalism implies that differences *can* be reconciled through the very legislative framework which has historically defined Western values as neutral and universal” (110 Ahmed's emphasis). Thus multiculturalism also elides differences in-between ‘cultures’ (those of class, gender, sexuality etc.) by homogenizing peoples into groups/categories based upon how they speak, the primary language they use and especially by the food they consume. Terms like ‘melting pot’, ‘smorgasbord’ and ‘national flavour’ may all add a ‘touch of spice’ but they in no way reach far enough into an understanding or major negotiation of ‘cultural difference.’ Hence we are left with “(m)ulticultural bellies, full of tacos, falafel and chow mein [that] are sometimes accompanied by monocultural mind” (Shohat and Stam, 1994: 21).

Rob Cover in his discussion of the text *Multicultural Queer: Australian Narratives*, proposes that if we think about the term ‘culture’ in the cultural theory mode of Raymond Williams, as a “description for a complete way of life of a group including attitudes, beliefs, rituals ideologies, behaviours, political procedures and everyday activities” (Williams, 1976 in Cover, 2002: 2), it allows us to see “how different groups in a national society have different ways of living, which may be at odds with the dominant *authorised* national culture” and in turn, this may account for a concept of ‘non-heterosexuality’ as a culture “which is embraced to varying degrees by different people and which is always in flux and changing over time” (2). He critiques the multicultural paradigm currently operating in Australia on several levels and suggests that the structure of the ‘nationalistic nation’ not only contains difference and is a concept founded on racism and colonisation but that it is also a “heteronormative construct in which the dominant culture continues to legitimate heterosexuality and *either* exclude non-heterosexuality spoken as mainstream ‘lesbian/gay’ or exoticise elements of non-heterosexuality through various multicultural devices – both insulting and unjust” (3). Likewise, Jacqui Alexander writes that “no nationalism could survive without heterosexuality - criminal, perverse, temporarily imprisoned, incestuous or as abusive as it might be, nationalism needs it”; according to Alexander, heteropatriarchy is constitutive of state nationalisms, whereas same-sex desire, especially between women, “is downright hostile to it” (1997: 83).

Despite reservations and debates, research in postcolonial studies is growing because postcolonial critique allows for a wide-ranging investigation into power relations in various contexts. The formation of empire, the impact of colonization on postcolonial history, economy, science, and culture, the cultural productions of colonized societies, feminism and postcolonialism, agency for marginalized people, and the state of the post-colony in contemporary economic and cultural contexts are some broad topics in the field. Several postcolonial feminist writers however, see postcolonial theory as privileging men without focussing much attention on the multiple experiences of women. Rey Chow and Gayatri Spivak both critique the gendered theorizations of diaspora which obscure the places of women; Gayatri Gopinath and Martin F. Manalansan IV both challenge the heteronormativity of diasporic discourses, or what Gopinath refers to as the “hegemonic nationalist and diasporic logic” (1997: 472). For Gopinath, diaspora can “be seen as part of the nation itself,” and this destabilized border “allows the nation to be rewritten into the diaspora” (Gopinath 1995: 317). Postcolonial feminism is a significant field where questions of race, class, sexuality, religion and gender intersect and reveal a complex discourse that throws light on the multitudinous dimensions that women contend with in their everyday lives

Feminist work is and always has been a constitutive part of the field of postcolonialism. As practices, they both share the mutual goal of challenging forms of oppression. However, postcolonial feminist critics have also discussed the limitations of the extent to which Western feminist discourses are able to address the ‘double colonisation’ of marginalized women living in once colonised societies and in Western locations alike. These debates also force one to think of issues such as the articulation of women’s voices, female agency and the relationship between feminist critics and their subject matter. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s conception of the ‘subaltern’ theorizes the process by which non-Western women are ‘spoken for’ in First World writing, which renders them the mute, passive (and implicitly grateful) recipients of Western ideas, and which often ignores strategies evolved by Third World women themselves to contest against their own oppression (1990). Third World women speaking from both within and without Western culture destabilise the notion of a seamlessly unified global feminism, yet it may make possible the evolution of a specific and localized movement which seeks to establish overlapping areas of

purpose that span cultural boundaries: what Chandra Talpade Mohanty terms an 'imagined community' of women.

Mohanty's influential essay 'Under Western Eyes' (1991) argues that much Western feminist writing about Third World women "discursively colonize[s] the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world, thereby producing/re-presenting a composite, singular "third world woman"- an image which appears arbitrarily constructed, but nevertheless carries with it the authorizing signature of Western humanist discourse" (53). For Mohanty, the local, national and global economic forces are interconnected; she explains that "as global capitalism develops and wage labour becomes the hegemonic form of organizing production and reproduction, class relations within and across national borders have become more complex and less transparent" (5). Thus, Third World women are not only those living in Third World countries, but also indigenous, migrant and immigrant workers living in the United States and countries of Western Europe (and Australia, although she does not specify this); these women occupy a specific material position within the international division of labour and via the process of globalization, with its attendant migrations and dispersions. Mohanty argues that Third World women, like Western women, are produced as subjects in historically and culturally specific ways by the societies in which they live and act as agents. Moreover they have both voice and agency.

In *Scattered Hegemonies...*, Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan further articulate that the "problematic of nationalism ... places women in a symbolic relation to nation, leaving aside all those spaces in which women see nationalism as either outside or antithetical to their lives" (1994: 22). Nationalist discourses, subtended by gendered, class-based and heteronormative regulatory mechanisms, are also predicated on gender-sex exclusion - erasing sexual minorities and marginalized gendered subjects. As Gayatri Gopinath observes "some recent attempts to consider the imbrication of discourses of nationalism and women's sexuality still presume the heterosexuality of the female subject." She adds that, "By failing to examine the existence and workings of alternative sexualities within dominant nationalisms, such analyses leave intact hegemonic constructions of the nation as essentially heterosexual" (1997: 469).



The work of postcolonial, diasporic and queer theorists such as Gayatri Gopinath, Kobena Mercer and Martin F. Manalansan IV and others have indeed begun to interrogate the heterosexualized borders and deviating margins of nation-states. Gopinath suggests that “a queer diasporic logic displaces heteronormativity from the realm of natural law and instead launches its critique of hegemonic constructions of both nation and diaspora from the vantage point of an ‘impossible’ subject” (485). Diasporic feminist and queer scholars have also contributed to critical examinations of the gendered/sexed constructions of transnationalism and transnationalist discourses of community and identity

Queer theorizations of diaspora, such as those of Gopinath and Manalansan, also offer performative models for theorizing the critical imbrications and identity disjunctures - of class, gender, sexuality, location and forms of movement - which diasporic subjects embody and live. These queer models allow for nuanced critical analyses of class-based, gender-based, and sexuality-based theorizations of diasporic moments as lived, embodied and performed in diaspora. It is within this realm of inquiry and within these contemporary junctures that I envisage *Dead Cars in Westall* has evolved.

This thesis embarks on a queer(y)ing journey or queer project, in that it attempts to use, as Sedgwick describes it, “the leverage of queer to do a new kind of justice to the fractal intricacies of language, skin, migration, state” (Sedgwick, 1993: 9). The leverage of queer is that it has no indisputable definition thus it allows for ambiguity and even contradiction. As Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner have noted, queer commentary results in “unsettlement rather than systemization” (1995: 348). Ambiguity admits of interpretation in two or more possible senses. In so-called logical and critical texts, ambiguity is usually something that is avoided but many creative works capitalize on it quite effectively. When one is interpreting several inter-connected subject-positions at once, queer theory allows for this fluidity. According to many theorists, the unknown potential of queer may well be its most enabling aspect: the “resistance to the regimes of the normal” that Warner has identified as its hallmark (1993).

Queer has gone beyond mere postulations concerning only sex and sexuality. So far, queer theory has proven to disrupt preconceived notions of community, politics and

identity and has problematized normative consolidations of sex, sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity and the nation. On the advantages of treating sexuality and gender as distinct but inextricable from one another, Bidy Martin argues that this will not simplify gender but instead, *multiply its permutations... with sexual aims, objects and practices* (1994: 108). As a theoretical model, queer did not evolve in nebulous isolation. It has been informed by the post-structuralist theorization of identity as contingent and transient that, not coincidentally, impacted upon feminist and postcolonial theory and practice.

Just as cultural identity and ethnicity are 'performative', in the sense that they are repetitively enacted social constructs, not pure and wholistic phenomenon, so too is gender and sexuality. Butler calls for a rethinking of "subversive possibilities for sexuality and identity" by exposing how gender and sexuality are constructed within power relations "where power is partially understood in terms of heterosexual and phallic cultural conventions" (1990: 30). Indeed, Butler's explication of the 'performative' (33) as an effect of reiterative acts, contests the 'truth' of gender itself. In the narrative *Zipped* I provide a textual and pictorial illustration of the performative in action - a transgendered ventriloquist doll speaks on behalf of and alongside 'her' nesbian keeper/controller, woman with the hand inside the doll's back. The performative is also an explication of a subject in continual flux.

Sandoval links first-world theorizing (the groundwork of which, one could argue, has been laid in postmodernism/poststructuralism as well as academic postcolonialism) and the concrete freedom struggles of marginalized groups of people, be they working class, queer, Third World women, etc. to articulate the "differential mode of oppositional social movements" (2000: 61). She identifies five different "technologies", or techniques used by marginalized groups of people, composed of both "inner" technologies of psychic resistance, and "outer" technologies of social praxis. These are: 1. "sign-reading", a kind of observant deciphering of cultural figuration. 2. deconstruction. 3. "meta-ideologizing", or appropriating hegemonic ideological forms in order to rework and re-use them in a revolutionary fashion. 4. "democratics", or using the three aforementioned techniques not just for survival, but also for active change. 5. "differential movement", which Sandoval describes as "a polyform upon which the previous technologies depend for their own operation" (64-

81). The benefit of this movement is that it allows what Anzaldúa calls a “weaving between and among” oppositional ideologies as conceived in this new topographical space, where another mode of oppositional consciousness is found (1987). It is also useful in configuring “the dead car way” as was explicated in the previous section on ‘Methodology’ (p.17-19). Sandoval labels the tactics used by the ‘movimientos’ (differential movements) as: equal rights, revolutionary, supremacist and separatist. She suggests that U.S. Third World Feminism then is “differential consciousness,” as it possesses the faculty of mapping the circumstances one finds herself in, and acting accordingly out of the four forms of tactic, it “functioned like the clutch of an automobile, that mechanism that permits the driver to select, engage, and disengage gears in a system for the transmission of power” (57).

Differential consciousness is thus “a force which rhizomatically and parasitically inhabits each of these five vectors, linking them in movement, while the pull of each of the vectors creates ongoing tension and re-formation” (1995: 418). Fundamentally, differential consciousness exists in a constantly dynamic state of flux and development, continually re-aligning and re-organizing itself with changing in which this subject is always in process of “becoming”, rather than a fixed self.

Further, Sandoval argues that rather than so-called “cyborg politics” being a product of the technological and transnational age, “colonized peoples of the U.S. have already developed the cyborg skills required for survival under techno-human conditions” (408). In its organization of disparate elements, either technological or theoretical, Donna Haraway's (1985) metaphor of the cyborg is also a productive “object to think with” about how to align hegemonic Western feminist theory (as critiqued by Mohanty) with forms of oppositional consciousness and practice which, according to Sandoval, characterize the political standpoint of U.S. Third World Feminism, as well as that of other marginalized groups. This theme in Haraway's work is often overlooked in favour of the cyborg's implications for technoscience; however, Sandoval finds the trope of the cyborg a fruitful one for talking about a “methodology of the oppressed” (2000). The cyborg trope is also useful in considering questions about what privileges the machine threatens and what assumptions it erodes. In what ways the machine (i.e. the ‘auto’ dead car too) operates as a figure for a whole range of liminal zones, or spaces that exceed classic

philosophical distinctions between, for example, life and death, mind and body, original and copy, human and animal.

Another helpful strategy is that proposed by Spivak, who posits the use of ‘strategic essentialism’ (1990), as a strategy which has the potential to expose that there is no such thing as the essential. Spivak’s ‘strategic essentialism’ as a writing strategy proposes that ‘race’ as an essential category, for example, when seized upon and reappropriated, has the ability to expose the constructedness of such a category. By celebrating and operating with a ‘wog sensibility’ throughout *Dead Cars*, I hope to expose the construction of ‘wog’ as both the same and the other.

Rey Chow's second book, *Writing Diaspora* (1993) also centres on questions of an “intellectualization” of a “diasporic consciousness,” but with the specific intent of showing the complexities and pitfalls of understanding both China and diaspora as fields of study (22). In doing so, Chow works towards intervening in the contradictions and complicities between scholarship, pedagogy, and the social and political situation between China and the West.

Citing Michel de Certeau, Chow upholds the idea of a “tactic” over the traditional use of “strategies.” She maintains that a strategy belongs “to those who are committed to the building, growth, and fornication of a ‘field,’” and conversely, a tactic is “a calculated action determined by an absence of a proper locus” (16). Strategic attitudes lead to the re-inscription of old ideologies while professing newfound “solidarities” formulated according to a rhetoric of political change and difference.

De Certeau’s work on the ‘practice of everyday life’ also offers several pivotal concepts I have drawn upon in the writing of *Dead Cars*, especially by suggesting other tactics of resistance as “the place of the tactic belongs to the other” (1984: xix) and by describing the movement from space into place. A city (suburb or space), no matter how efficiently planned out or how beautiful, is rendered worthless without people. It cannot exist because it takes people to make a city. It is people who will take the empty shells of buildings and make them function. It is people who take space and turn it into places. It is people who anchor the city in time, even if only for a fleeting moment. If we examine de Certeau’s three requirements for the ideal or “concept” city, we find that it leaves us with a city without life or presence. “Rational

organization must repress all the physical, mental and political pollutions that would compromise it” - we imagine that this must be brought by the inhabitants of the city, not by the urban structure itself. “The substitution of a nowhen, or of a synchronic system, for the indeterminable and stubborn resistances offered by traditions.” It is the people who must establish and break the traditions of the city; it is not for the city to make its own history. *The creation of a universal and anonymous subject which is the city itself* (1984: 94-95). The city is to bring nothing but the basis of stimuli to the population and it is the people who are responsible for making it come alive and giving it meaning. Moreover, it is people who order city space, making it real for themselves. In effect, the city provides pen, ink and paper and it is the people, namely the pedestrians, who provide the story.

Fred Dewey’s article in *Architecture of Fear* posits that in Los Angeles, “What is new is the impossibility that members from separate existences might link, mix, meet, and challenge each other as people have throughout history. In a mutation derived from the old American South, made easier because of the automobile, segregation in Los Angeles, beginning with innovations in physical territorialization, has advanced into the structure of the mind itself” (1997: 262). Ironically, as the car allows for mobility and freedom and seems a necessary evil especially within the sprawling suburbs, its introduction has had the effect of expanding ‘interiorization’, a concept Richard Rogers (1998) writes about in his exploration of the nexus of ‘the suburb and car’, a state of being in which the more cars that appear in the street, the fewer people talk to one another. During my three-month stay in 2001, predominantly in the white, middle-class suburb of Carrollton in Dallas, Texas, I experienced this effect to an overwhelming degree. Most residents in this area own a four-wheel drive, ‘a truck’ as they refer to them and there are very few footpaths, a condition which discourages walking. Indeed, walking can almost be seen to be a transgressive act given that I was pulled over and questioned by police twice when walking to 7/11 in the evening to purchase cigarettes.

According to de Certeau, it is specifically the walking people then who bring the city to life. They do not have that god-like “all-seeing power” and are therefore trapped within the ‘city’s grasp.’ They are at ground level and looking down, and ironically it is these people who write the ‘[sub]urban text’ without being able to read it. More

importantly, it is the mass movement of people who write the text. With thousands of individuals each writing their own story and giving their own interpretation, the city is pieced together something like a patchwork quilt of individual viewpoints and opinions. The created order is “everywhere punched and torn open by ellipses, drifts, and leaks of meaning: it is a sieve-order” (1984: 107). It takes a single city to provide the stimulus, but it requires a multitude of people - all unaware of their role in the creation of the city - to provide the meaning.

The space once defined, only remains thus defined for as long as the individual defining the space remains there. The definitions are fleeting; one replaced by the next as a second pedestrian assumes the position of the first. De Certeau defines the verb “to walk” as an action of “lack[ing] a place”: This should serve to illustrate just how the stories defining space disperse and disintegrate as the pedestrian moves out of a place, for the definition of city space is similar to walking itself. It holds to no single space, and it is in no way anchored. The stories and legends allow people to move freely within city space, but without them there can be no space to move within at all, for space ceases to exist. Thus it can be seen that as the subject moves through city (suburban) space, so she defines it: there is no city space without her. She creates the space to move through as she moves through it. The city is subject to the views and stories that the mass population projects upon it. The city is there to be manipulated, molded and used, and yet it emerges the same at the end, for no image projected upon it can ever remain since the pedestrians are not static and nor is the space in which they move. Indeed, one could venture so far as to postulate that the space is not even real, but simply make-believe.

The city is also something like an ecosystem, with its arterial network of moving vehicles and people. People within the city interact on numerous levels in a hierarchical mesh of city/suburban life. This webwork, in turn, could be viewed as a metaphor for hypertext. This site as hypertext is a metaphor of the city.

Hypertext allows us access to explore the multi-dimensionality of each and any human existence or experience as it challenges the static nature of identity. It becomes a complex site which supports multiple, (sometimes contradictory) readings and inter-textuality. Within the webwork, there are roads and highways, streets and networks of

subway systems. Trains, cars and other vehicles run through the web, and wherever you are, you can always choose a different way to go. My narrative pertaining to experiences of cyberculture, *Silver Petals* (p.137), attests to this mobility of culture/s, its explicit entanglement with prescribed norms and its capacity for forming 'real' corporeal relationships: the good, the bad and the ugly of netting and being caught in the net.

Christine Boyer in her book *Cybercities* (1996) has a number of goals: to bring the city back into discussions of modern life, to explore "the analogy between the computer matrix and the space of the city", the withdrawal from the "excesses of reality into the cybernetic representations of the virtual world of computers." (Martin: 1988: 10) Part of this is due to "the dematerialization of physical space and chronological time." While she recognizes the trend of decentralization, she does not think this is necessarily a beneficial experience. She asks why our contemporary era is so fearful of centering devices, evident from the fact that we refer frequently to the invisible, the disappearing, the de-industrialized, the disfigured, and the decentered city. Postmodern cultural critics have deconstructed the city in many ways because they think the notion of a unified place is an artifice. Boyer believes this has happened at the cost of community. She believes that community is important but declines the challenge of defining it.

Like Foucault, de Certeau is concerned with linking place, practice and power. Foucault analyzes changes in society; exposing the interacting factors of power, control, thought and the various ways in which people have reacted to these (1970). He shows "the arbitrariness of institutions and ... which space of freedom we can still enjoy and how many changes can still be made" (1988: 10). By illuminating more new spaces and ways to escape from technologies of control, de Certeau's writing diverges from Foucault. De Certeau proposes "the practices of everyday life" which can open up new spaces and help one's self to become free of the oppressive structures of modern society. Technology and the mutable city space combine in such a way as to impact on our displacements. John Rajchman outlines how "among the vectors that have transmogrified urban space, those of transport and transmission have performed a key role: in some sense it is the auto and the airplane that killed off or complexified the rational grids and the radial city of nineteenth-century industrialism. Such

processes supply the starting point for the analyses of urbanist philosopher Paul Virilio, who, like Eisenman, thinks that to understand the complexities of the city we must depart from a “static urbanism” and view the city instead in terms of movement, rhythm, speed, in a word the “timespaces,” that the various modes of transportation and transmission make possible” (1998: 28).

In the first section of his book de Certeau focuses on tactics one can use to escape. The tactics which he terms, “tricks” and “games” allow one to use ordinary language and culture to subvert the dominant system and create new spaces. These “tactics” are an escape that is offered by the “science of the ordinary” and allow the [every woman] and “every man” to leave the theoretical landscape for that of common place discourse. The people that de Certeau believes have been able to subvert the established order he terms, “rural believers”. These people (the group that de Certeau describes closely resembles the urban slum residents of Rio de Janeiro that Levi-Strauss writes about) have been able to see stories and myths of defeat as conquest and thus re-employ the system against itself. This idea is symbolic of de Certeau's view that one can use existing repressive systems to escape. As examples of groups that have used these tactics de Certeau cites the songs of the ‘underclass’ in Brazil that create heroic myths from a history of repression, the myths Levi-Strauss says the rural Brazilians use, and the practice of “la perruque”.

La perruque is a French word that describes workers using scrap materials and factory machines to create objects on their own time for themselves. Cars are modified and ‘hotted up’, for Friday night ‘Dandy drags’ with parts taken by workers, usually passed onto their sons, from any of the car factories in Westall. Just as local young people in *The Centre Piece: Stalled Vehicle Crossings* (p.97) use Patra orange juice bottles as bongs for smoking marijuana and many others utilize actual ‘dead cars’ (or car wrecks) as hangouts to shelter in or to conduct dates in, as occurs in my first narrative piece, *We(e) Stall* and *I.D. Bracelets*. These dead cars are driven at high speed through the landscapes, through the portals, clefts and ruptures of the suburban working-class queer girls’ imaginations.

De Certeau marvels at la perruque as a way in which workers are using the tools that oppress them to create new objects; which he sees as, a type of space. De Certeau



concludes the tactic of *la perruque* is spreading to other sectors of society such as culture and language, which can also account for the slang and ‘creolization’ of ‘Australian English’ by migrants and their children. The consumer receives information without creating it. But de Certeau optimistically sees chances for an escape. He believes that oppression breeds insurrection: The child will write and draw ever more in her school text book, and the worker will steal from the assembly line, the ‘checkout chick’ will perfect the art of shop-lifting and tag-swapping and bongs will be made from all manner of bottles and brand names of beverages (24-42).

The second major tactic of escape that de Certeau outlines is walking. Walking he believes allows voyeurism, observation, and fragments and disrupts the city’s immobile order. Walking opens up new spaces, creates legends, stories and joins street numbers with buildings and meanings. In one sense, I am posited as a voyeur within these texts, not having had the opportunity to obtain my driver’s licence until not all that long ago. I was thus afforded the possibility (only now in hindsight do I see this to be an advantage) to observe my surroundings and to make of them, to create their pathways, throughout various stages of growth in my life: as a child, adolescent and adult. Most importantly, walking as movement allows the voyeur to create his/her own space and own meaning from the regimentation of cities and suburbs.

In contrast, the train (which I will substitute with the car here, for my purposes) incarcerates its inhabitants in a fixed and confined space in and outside of it. The rider in the car is fixed in a defined space, as is the scenery outside; there is no interaction between the two. In this way, cars act as an abstract prison, a navigational incarceration, like a submarine; distancing oneself from one’s surroundings. Unlike the train however, the driver of the car has some semblance of control over the ‘machine’, if they are driving it rather than being at the mercy of another driver, even though they are at the mercy of other drivers on the road. Hence, the furthering of the paradox of the ‘dead car’. In contrast, walking in the city/suburb allows one to interact with the world. It also allows one to create stories, which de Certeau defines as being about movement between spaces. When the movement occurs within a (moving) car however, the story is less one’s own as senses are deprived, within the confines of artificial, enclosed space. Indeed, the sensory details absorbed through ‘scanning’

(while walking) surpass the largely visual stimuli processed by the motorist in a tightly enclosed climate controlled vehicle. (Snart and Swinford, 2001: 2) The motorist is trapped in a linear sensory dynamic, while pedestrian movement is intrinsically recursive (7). Also, “the pedestrian, ... is engaged in an entirely different, non-linear process of navigation. The driver must deal with tasks sequentially” (1). When one walks one has shifting boundaries and a blurring of space, creating a meta-story of one’s self (de Certeau, 1984: 91-110). “When places are actively sensed, the physical landscape becomes wedded to the landscape of the mind, to the roving imagination, and where the mind may lead is anybody’s guess” (Feld and Basso, 1996: 55)’.

De Certeau sees modern society as also being a scriptural empire; this means a place where text is taken as truth (like the myth of heteronormativity for example). These texts have always been engraved in bodies by ways of torture; (sometimes they still are) and now the torturing of bodies is also ‘complemented’ by books; skin has its collorary with paper. Thus society ingrains its laws and customs now on books as well as on bodies. And de Certeau claims that to make people believe is to make them act; following in this logic then, it is clear that modern society’s texts, books and magazines potentially create docile bodies out of the populace. However, de Certeau sees in this scriptural empire, cracks in the wall (131-154). This feeling of unknowing and uncontrolled space unravels the world I intend to create in *Dead Cars*, a world that is already here and not there. Cracks are also opened up by the cacophony of disparate voices within my text.

Another common presupposition is that consumption too plays a role in creating the docile bodies of modern society. In the last three centuries the source of beliefs has changed from the scripture to the political as a source of one’s beliefs of “real events” and convictions but despite this change in the source of beliefs the way in which people believe is the same; they act as consumers. The ideas of the enlightenment period have continued today in the belief that bringing culture to the masses will change the masses. The key point here is that the masses don't change - culture changes the masses. In contrast, de Certeau believes this to be a myth, and posits instead, that in fact masses change culture and it is when society merely acts as a consumer of culture and not as one that internalizes and makes it ones own, that we are oppressed. This production of culture for the masses also creates a hierarchy

between the producers of culture and the consumers. De Certeau seeks to break down this hierarchy by having people interact with culture, produce their own and thus create new spaces, destroying the confines of regimented and dictated cultures. This destruction of boundaries and creation of new space, new meaning and skewing of language is key to escaping from domination and oppression. Without making culture “speak oneself” one becomes a consumer blindly taking in text and believing (xii-xiv).

*Coke is Shiii* for instance, examines the local experiences and local cultural consumption practices surrounding Coca-Cola (and beer) in the sense of these products being a generic global beverage. As a form of cultural capital (buying status), the practice of the mother feeding her child Coke, for example, highlights the inequality produced by a global, multi-national conglomeration. The practice of adolescent teenagers drinking beer and Coke (given in exchange for sex with an older adult) signals an entering into the cultural realm of ‘the adult’ and of cultural privilege. By crossing this line in the aforementioned manner, not only is the adult/adolescent line crossed but the sexual (man/boy sex) and legal (under aged drinking, age of consent) line is traversed as well. Pierre Bordieu’s (1986) notions of ‘economic capital’ (a person’s material belongings), cultural capital (education, taste) and social capital (useful relationship-network) examine how the lack of one sort of capital can be compensated by another. By introducing the term cultural capital, Bordieu postulates that individuals can be successful in modern society despite a lack of economic power. He moves beyond traditional ideas of social class to explain how individuals from the same background can have different destinations as adults. Bourdieu also analyses how various consumer goods, ways of presenting food and eating meals, home furnishings and interior decoration are used by socio-economic classes to mark themselves off, to differentiate their distinctive way of living. Consumption can be seen as a set of social and cultural practices that serve as a way of *establishing* differences between social groups, not merely as a way of *expressing* differences. Lifestyle is an outcome of both economic and cultural capitals. Due to the fact that cultural capital resources are socio-culturally determined, cultural capital can exist entirely independently of economic capital.

Sarah Thornton on 'subcultural capital' (1995) argues that, similar to Bourdieu's concept of taste, the taste required for the acquisition of subcultural capital must be learned in an unconscious manner, in order that it appear natural. Thornton calls this type of acquisition 'embodied understanding.' Furthermore, she argues that taste as subcultural capital is articulated largely through the binary opposition between the concepts of 'underground' versus 'mainstream'. 'Mainstream' is a term used to reflect the taste choices embraced by the masses whereas 'underground' refers to the taste of that which is unprocessed by dominant cultural influences and which is also often a reflection of a direct opposition to the values and ideals deemed important by the mainstream of society.

Thornton deconstructs notions of subcultures as "resistance" by a clever application of Pierre Bourdieu's ideas of "taste cultures" and "distinction" which is mapped onto raves, clubs, and the "underground". Here she, perhaps unsurprisingly, finds strongly enforced hierarchies of knowledge, power and social capital in subcultures supposedly professing egalitarian ideals and "alternative" politics to a loosely defined "mainstream".

By limiting her scope to the straight, predominantly white, club and rave subcultures, she acknowledges the sizeable differences between the politics of these subcultures and the politics and "resistance" of other subaltern club cultures (lesbian and gay club cultures and Black and Asian club cultures especially). Thornton contends that there is no such thing as the "mainstream" outside of the imaginations and poorly hidden gender, class, race and age prejudices of subcultural members asserting their difference through well-worn binary oppositions. She extends this argument by taking the idea of "asserting one's difference" in these predominantly white and male subcultures not to the conclusion of "resistance" (as was done by the Birmingham School writers in the 1970s), but to one of complicity in a time where difference is often the ultimate capitalist consumer luxury and a powerful status symbol.

Ultimately, de Certeau outlines in pixels and dots, the ways in which society oppresses us with in fixed spaces: trains, cities, language, culture. But he then, in bold, with underline and caps lock, shows us the cracks in his depiction - cracks which allow some light to filter through the typeset. These cracks are the tactics of everyday life that we can use to create hope, space and meaning. The tactics de Certeau illuminates manifest themselves not just in the myths of Brazil, and the handy crafts of French workers; but also in the wanderings of a suburban queer teenager and the working-class consumer of popular culture and its artefacts.

**And now for a final word from our sponsors before we proceed on our journey:**









## **1. Key in Ignition: Ne(o)w Beginnings**



## @<<~We(e)<~Stall~<~~~~~



*Memory is a flirt: A big old-fashioned strip tease, never fully revealing or concealing.*

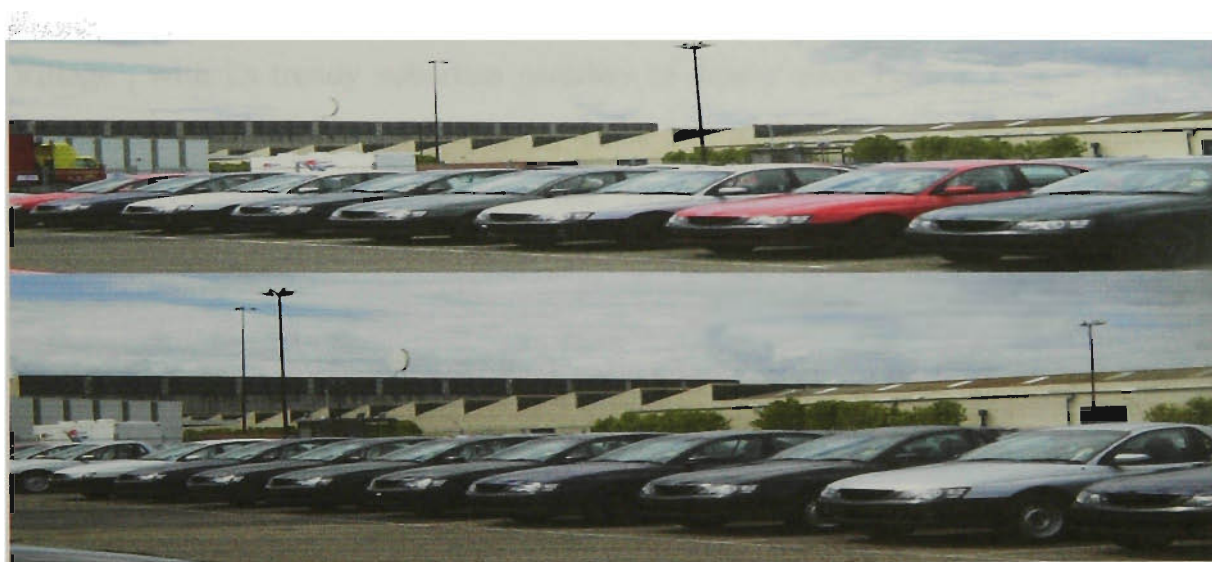
Seldom the West, often the inner-urban, the outback, and the bush; that is what you would think contemporary Australia was made of. That's all you ever get to read about. If I hear another benign blokey bush-ballad bullshit thing, I think I'm gonna puke. More South East of the West but at best, just as West, is the suburb of Westall, Melways reference 79 G6, approximately 21.4 km away from the Melbourne CBD, around 50 minutes by train, shorter by car, traffic conditions permitting. It is merely around the corner from my mother's house in Springvale, where I lived until my escape in early adolescence. So close it seems but in my head, a world away that is nevertheless sometimes stuck on a blinking **Don't Walk** light. An in-between place in the middle of the road, a jut off the Princes Highway; a blot on the landscape, a sight guaranteed to give you sore eyes, a thorn in my arse, the only place from which to dream. Please allow me to air out my car boot here a little, let me toss out those crushed cans, the fast food wrappers, empty cigarette packets and disused toilet paper rolls, somewhat dusty now but always there just in case. I'll park here a while and clean it all out, if you don't mind.

The road is clear of traffic but the car make names and insignia loom large and choking-smokey. Toyota, Nissan, Ford, Holden ... The streets are almost empty of moving vehicles, aside from the train tracks on which car parts, like contorted limbs, just keep on rolling in. The same tracks incidentally, upon which David lay his confused, drug-infused head, one drizzly day. By the time we stumbled on over there,



in our own grog enhanced manner, the track was clear of blood but we still vowed, out of fear more than respect for the dead, never to make that particular area our drinking and cavorting patch. Further on, between the two railway stations, Westall and Springvale, in scraps of land by the tracks, lay dozens of shells of clapped-out Cortinas and the like, the likes of which any self-respecting Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle probably wouldn't wear. But we as teenagers drank from cheap casks and smoked whatever came our way in these steel shelters and thought it sophistication at its peak.

The only other cars you'll see around here are the ones lined up on the gravel, in rows of ten or more; brightly coloured, shiny gleam, hot and fresh off the assembly rack.



And the ones who were lucky enough to get their licence at eighteen are driving around in old 70s Datsun 120Ys or 120Bs - that seem to only come in rusty orange or mustard and puce. They then forget their hotted up Torana dreams. I choose however not to give the place an entirely adverse rap. It's had more than its fair share of that. The current affairs shows and newspapers mention only drugs (heroin mainly), pork roll induced food poisoning, cock-fighting, stand over gangs and even a pet dog eating incident once. Westall is just a place, in many ways, like any other: a home to many who have fled their distant homes; a place to live and breathe in and while you're doing so, all the hype and bad press leave no impression. You walk the streets and go about the business of life moderately unscathed. The place itself per se did not



make me run. Perhaps looking back into my own backyard once too often has kept me away.

Where did 'The Enterprise Migrant Hostel' disappear to? I could've sworn it was somewhere along this road. So many times I rode my bike there as a child and wondered why skin was segregated into hues and placed behind high walls. Such a physically large institution too, surely I can't have missed it on my way here today. Perhaps it was that 'gated community' looking place I noticed up the road, the type that is springing up all over the suburbs and in the middle of fields of nowhere. This one is touted in vivid colour on those glossy billboards at the entrance, promoting a luxury lifestyle in Westall, fully fenced off to keep the riff-raff out and the golf club members in. Seems it has gone the way of 'The Pen' in Coburg, now 'Pentridge Village', with its trendy suburban paradise of dream brick homes. Ex-cons all over Victoria must be laughing at that one. I know I do each time I drive past it. Makes me feel slightly queasy at the same time too. They paid with a crime to get in there and now apartments start at \$265,000.

Aha, a diary page stuck under the back seat. I don't recall leaving it here, this trace of how I envisaged the ideal story of my life. It reads: *A mermaid with wings, with x-ray spec eyes. One arm ends in a claw, the other a drill but they can change back into her slender long hands at will. With all of these attachments, she can really help. She can make a difference.*

*She lies by the side of the creek and stretches her wings out to dry, never mind that one snags onto a half-submerged shopping trolley. Her eyes searching further than any mortal eye can see. She sees beyond the top of the hill through the gum trees and darting swallows and screeching rosellas. The plum-filled gardens, the potholed tar that skinned many a bike-riding bare toe, the mangled railway yards, to the grass that was never greener on the other side. Above the make-shift, home-made, backyard swings, the garage that housed a whole runaway family, attached to the house without milk, from where the old Koori woman with a bent head and permanent black eye would seek her out for nourishment. To somewhere in-between the lamb lady's house, who let her lambs loose to graze in the front yard, so that all the school children who passed by could feel as if they were somewhere else.*

*She sees behind the man with a sea of greyhounds that lie all over him, next to the house of her childhood friend who never smiles. But they both climb their fences and chat over the border, only to have their hands slapped by the evil man next door, for the earthly sin of catching a glimpse of his concrete lawn. She remembers the beach ball thrown from a Cessna airplane, with a 3XY radio station prize-winning ticket attached, that she could never reach as it fell in the neighbour's pear tree because she was young and small. The turtle squeezing itself under the paling fence, arriving at her feet, to get a better feel of the sun. The boy who said they could share the turtle. That it was free to live with whomever it chose. It chose the boy more and so he gave her a bluetongue lizard instead.*

*She sees her early 70s AV Jennings-built, three-bedroom brick-veneer home where many years ago, she packed their goods and chattels, drilled into the floorboards holes that reached the centre of the earth. The flames darted through stronger than any gas stove could. She cut out a row of paper dolls from the wall with her claw. They held hands and danced around joyously, in a swirl. Then she flapped her wings so hard that the walls collapsed and the roof eventually caved in, just in time for her and the dolls to make their ascent to one hundred thousand feet above.*



Could you imagine a *Dead Cars in Brighton or South Yarra* perhaps? One day they're gonna build a theme park out there with a little fenced-off dirt yard, containing a couple of rusting Valiants, Monaros and Escorts. And they'll pay some working-class kids (minimal youth wages) to writhe in-between the metal. Maybe they'll even put daddy's little finger on show in a jar, the one he had chopped off by the (in 'broken' English) 'machina bbbrrrrr' car factory machine. Yes, the old man worked at the local car factory. Last I heard he was carting sewerage around ('driving a shit truck for his penance', as my sisters and I, with righteous vengeance like to say). Maybe his finger is still permanently stuck to someone's 70-something Toyota, flicking the ball bearings around or lining the break pads perhaps. Pinkie fingers on key chains will be sold at the Westall Dead Car Wasteland souvenir shop.



And then everyone will want to get back to the ‘real urban route’s look’ and rotting cars, with their skeletal metallics, will become a feature in Toorak’s front-yards. Fuck the box hedges and indeed the English roses! Ahhh, I should try and stop thinking like this, all this negativity. Let’s switch the radio on ... ‘Little red corvette...Baby you’re much too fast...’

My grandfather, on the other hand, was more of a railway man. He worked out at Flinders Street Station for twenty-five years, slowly progressing from ticket person to paper-and-pen pushing clerk, as he somehow qualified himself with the final year of high school, while in a Displaced Persons’ Camp. He had the same Volkswagen beetle for most of that time too and it remained almost as pristine as the day he bought it. His gold rail pass took him to work and back every day but much to my grandmother’s chagrin, it never took either of them anywhere else. My grandmother was always too afraid to drive and she regrets her fear to this day.



My mother failed her licence five times. My older sister worked for the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria. It was

her longest held job. My younger sister tried, to no avail, to teach me how to drive. Some of us automatically have that auto-gelling mind, some of us don’t. I traversed my sub-urban space on dirtbikes, pushbikes, trains, buses and on foot. I had my own Torana wet dream too. When I finally purchased my \$500 Torana, I was well into my twenties and still without a driver’s licence, so it sat





in the driveway and I sat in the driver's seat at night sometimes, with the radio on and I sat there and just kept on dreaming. The black vinyl upholstery was immaculate but the engine soon chugged its last rev.

OK, I admit I came from a family of should-have-beens. Many artistically talented, creative people on my mother's side but all of us stuck somewhere on a closed road in survival mode, too busy barely surviving. All of us, lacking the confidence, too afraid to try to even consider the status of could-have-beens, never venturing anywhere close to the street of has-beens. If you don't attempt something there can be no failure. I resolved that when I grew up, I'd try and break this curse of the static and be an 'am'. But what I 'am' now is anyone guess. 'Arrested Development' someone called it - maybe I'm still 'becoming'.

There are so many photos of family members with the most important family member, the family car. Sitting on it, standing beside it, patting and rubbing it for good luck, like on a divine Buddha's belly. The suburban automobile is the key to freedom and mobility. Unfortunately, when I fled from the suburb, I wasn't at all old enough to have a car and instead, wore only my ragged Dunlop runners, pyjamas and a will to survive. Can the cliché of arriving with only one suitcase extend to include an empty car boot, or with no car at all? Departure, waiting, arrival – where to go to now? At midnight, a young woman in mid-winter, at least quite adept at pulling off free phone calls from public phone boxes by then. No car herself but a car full of louts coming around the corner, hiding behind trees and fences, louts jumping in and out of yards in pursuit. The imminent threat of more violence when violence is what she fled. Funny about that, it all happened on Anzac Day too. I apologise for inundating you now – still trying to clean out the car boot here. It really does need a good airing. Endless money pits they are - damned cars! Once you have one you can't do without. It's like you instantly lose the use of your legs or something.

A car hit me when I was five years old. We were visiting our cousins' house and I walked with the middle one to the local milk bar. She left me across the road. It was dark and she was taking too long. Five minutes to a five year old in the dark is an eternity. The tree silhouettes and silence spooked me. I had to cross. Hearing Hector the Road Safety Cat from the ad, singing in my head, 'Look to the right, look to the

left, look to the right again. Then if straight across the road. Don't run.' friends who were also visiting my down on their way home. It's occur. They drove me back to my doctor. The reasons for my mother's apparent to me recently and in some time, they may be revealed to you too. But for now, OK, I'm getting back on track, I'm thinking cars here – vehicles, automobiles, sedans, coupes, vans... When I eventually came to that night, my only concern was that I was deemed too young to enjoy any of the Bazooka bubble-gum purchased from the milk bar.



the road is clear of traffic, walk Hector, I did walk and the family cousins that evening knocked me uncanny how these coincidences cousins' place and I never saw a medico-phobia have only become

Several years later, when I was thirteen, I saw a boy from my school get hit by a train. I was with my best friend at the time, waiting to cross the tracks. When the police asked for a detailed description of the incident the following day, they heeded my friend's words, more than mine. I told of feelings, motivations, suspicions (I thought he deliberately ran through the booms and into the oncoming train. That's how it looked to me - and why wasn't that plausible? Surely I wasn't the only miserable one in the place.) I was unable to deliver the eyewitness view without using my 'imagination', without a full dose injection of 'm(e)y(e)self' and 'I'. As far as I was concerned the body fell right in front of my feet but my friend managed to narrow the distance down to around two and a half metres away. In shock, my eyes had narrowed the distance considerably more. I was still coming to grips too with the fact that we saw his mother further along the road, walking towards the school to meet him. We smiled and said hello to her knowing that her dead son was not much further away. We agreed it was the cops' job to tell her. We smoked and drank more heavily than usual for months after that but the image of the falling limp boy still waited behind our eyelids to catch us in bed at night when we lay down our weary heads.

Perhaps, for these reasons, I eagerly awaited the millennium, when I was sure that cars and trains and buses would all be nothing but a dead relic remnant of the past. I was waiting for my flying jetpack. Even though I almost lost my life on a Polish Lot flight, in which the door wouldn't close properly and was being stuffed with pillows and blankets. I could've been blown to crumbs all over Poland before I even got there.

Granted, I thought I was a real Polka girl before I arrived and I was going there to become a real Polka girl. Even despite this, I wanted a jetpack more than I ever wanted a Torana. This is, I believe, partly why I suffer now from post-millennium blues. My licence was accorded to me the second time around. The first time, I nearly blew the clutch with an uphill hand brake start gone terribly wrong. I drive a car now, which incidentally, has a glove box filled with bubble gum. I get parking tickets, have had a few accidents, one run in with a pedestrian alighting a tram, a car blow-up and several plain old, old vehicle breakdowns. All this auto-drama would have been avoided if I were jet-packing it around the world instead. Finally however, at least I have my first brand new car and it's my favourite red. Could there be a jetpack somewhere in this little Ford KA2 boot? I'll keep on searching.

I knew a boy named Ben who used to sleep his early teenage years away in a dead car. It kept him safe and warm, he said, when he eventually started speaking again. His dad worked in a truck yard and lived in a shipping freight container he had transported there. Ben moved into the container and put two posters on his wall.



He rigged up twenty speakers in his room, hooked them up to a gramophone that he fixed. The only word he could write was fuck and he sat in his room most days, listening to the radio and often called me on the telephone to ask me the time and to tell me when his radio signal had faded out. And time means nothing to him. Numbers are squiggly lines and money is indistinguishable. I would tell him of the passing of the day, according to the position of the sun or by what meal I had just consumed. Thankfully, he usually called around 1pm. He promised me the small 50s delivery van corroding away in the truck yard, 'up and running', he said. But time went on, we both moved on and time means nothing to him.

And while I'm remembering, I have to say that those car parts on the tracks over here take me back to a lasting impression I had of Auschwitz. The cyborg-like-mechanically-enhanced humanoids, superior they would seem, though their metal limbs and glasses are stacked in piles up to the ceiling, crutches criss-crossing up to

the roof and those are all that remain of thousands of human beings. I was always fascinated by the replacement of missing human parts, the ‘passing’, the need to ‘pass’, if you will. Transgenderism however does not fascinate me. This desire to just ‘be’ seems far more normal than human extermination, in any case. Then there’s all the hyperviolence on TV, on every channel and when you press the remote, rarely do you see two men or two women kissing and when they do, it’s an international scandal. And I know this all connects somehow... somewhere, in some way. I must apologise again, I am morose I think, as a consequence of being exposed to all this far too early in life and without the means with which to retaliate then. So many shards and fragments and (the) ‘I’ is/am just a speck...



At the age of thirty, after the thousandth wearisome scrap with a long-time lover, in the middle of a chilled night, I drove a set of ‘anger plates’ that had been clanking away in my boot, beckoning me for several months, all the way to Westall. I found a secluded spot by the railway yard and smashed them all against a life-denouncing graffiti full wall, one-by-one. As each plate cracked, shattered, smashed and crashed and echoed into the dawn, I cackled like a crazy madwoman who at least now still couldn’t get even but finally got mad. Certainly, there are not enough plates in this world to represent each and every person, system, institution or ‘ism’ that infuriates me. But maybe, that’s not the point. I did it. I was demonstratively angry and the world is still spinning and I’m still in it. Disaster did not befall me then, so I’ll keep on spinning out my bundles of cable instead, to try to make sense of it all. I will empty all of the overfilling suburban car boots too and scatter their remnants, near and far. I think I’m done with this boot for now, no plates in here at any rate. Can never get the darn thing completely clean though. Hop in; we’ll drive on, shall we? Now with a somewhat lighter trunk, a little more room, I aspire to navigate my way to a place where time and space intermesh via a trip of mixed metaphors and apparent hyperbole. It can’t all be that bad now. Have car ... will travel ... from anywhere to anywhen...



## What Did the P Stand For?

With each new question, the meticulously groomed silver-haired man pours himself another Wyborowa vodka, “Ah, why take me? Why? What did I do? Why all this fighting still? Will it ever end? Still no peace, no peace. My head is pounding ... When will it stop? When?”

Stefan was in the forest wearing his scout's uniform. His brownie camera was ever at the ready, taking shots of birds and the fine knots in trees. "Achtung," the voice rang out from the approaching camouflage truck. "Hand over that camera," the voice became a man in a different uniform to Stefan's, whose hand grabbed him and threw him into the back of the truck that took him to hell.

“Mother’s name? Father’s name?” His pants around ankles, every inch inspected. Measuring, prodding, poking, wearing gloves all the while of course, lest the condition of inferiority be contagious. “Hmmm, sufficiently Aryan-looking, blue eyes, yes, yes but a filthy Polak all the same. Spying, you Untermenschen, I know that’s what you were doing. Dirty rat, spying you were, or looking for some other young boy to play with perhaps. I know your despicable kind. Rancid vermin, you make me sick, ppppptttttttt,” he ranted, as the spit ran down Stefan’s cheek. “Slave boy, that’s all you’re worth, for the use of the supreme Aryan nation. This land is our Lebensraum. We’ll put a stop to your incorrigibility. Wear this at all times. The patch on your chest marks out your stinking type. This is your new uniform.”

The voices grieved within Stefan's head, "Wojtek and Mariska. Oh, my friends, my beloved friends," as he threw the final clods of dirt on top of the pit, where the shadowy-frames of his friends and several others lay. At first, he toiled on German farms when he was barely big enough to hold a spade and now, in this camp, Treblinka, he knew that each pile of soil he shovelled into the grave of his fellow sufferers, brought him closer to his own grave. He knew that to bear witness to this, at such close proximity, meant that his own eyes and mouth would soon be closed too, with a single shove into the pit-pile. So he dug and he shovelled and kept his mouth

shut until his eyes remained dry and his stomach was hollowed. He heard only bird-song in his waking dreams.

In a fate that can be equated to a death of the former self, the fate of the exiled, Stefan is displaced and re-placed into yet another camp in Paderbon, at the war's end. Here he meets Halina. Any mislaid guilt is shallowly submerged, memories half-purged and true selves hidden. Apocalyptic fears spawn children through momentary passion (or the conviction that this, to make life, is the only right thing to do, under the circumstances).

For some time after his re-settlement in Australia, Stefan tolerates two more camps. First, he and his family are taken to Bonegilla and then, to another migrant camp in Mildura. While his family remains behind and picks oranges and grapes, for extra income, Stefan stays in Castlemaine to log forests, to repay their passage to 'freedom'. Unfortunately, he is not paid enough to make the train fare back to Mildura on most weekends.

Nervously, with his new Kodak camera poised, he walks through the bush near Sailor's Falls on Saturdays and marvels at the Candlebark trees, while inhaling the smell of the Peppermint Eucalypts all around him. Stefan tentatively photographs the wonders that surround him until he sees some Yellow Robins and Grey Fantails, tiny enough to fit into the jar he has with him. As he sees the delicate bird's wings flutter through the glass, a claustrophobic nausea engulfs him and he immediately opens the jar again.

In his new country, another generation is born. Stefan would tell his grandchildren to never forget the 'occupation', to never let anyone tell them that it wasn't true. They would be an extension of his own eyes and mouth now; they would bear witness too. The first time he told them this, he showed them horrifying photos and propaganda pamphlets he found when rifling through a Nazi officer's drawer as the camp 'administrators' were fleeing. "This is real," he said, "it happened and I pray it never happens again: Never again. Please promise me you'll shield your minds from extremes. Avoid extremes of any kind, on any side." And then, he went quietly back into his room again.

Upon arrival, Stefan went headlong into a de-eastern-Europeanizing trajectory – he perfected his English to a ‘tea’, so to speak. As a bona fide ‘New Australian’, he worshipped the Collingwood Football Club and shunned all offers to participate in any Polish ‘cultural’ activities that were being organized in his new place. “What did I leave behind that was so great? Hunger? Cruelty? Stench? My mother country that couldn’t save me? Ah, my mother, my mother, the poor deluded woman who put me in dresses and tried to turn me into my sister, who died by choking at the age of three. I had four other brothers. Why do this to me? What should I miss? I hate such homeland myth hypocrisy, all those oh-so-pious ones at church every Sunday, who treat others with such contempt,” he thought, as he poured himself another drink. He said he was made to wear the ‘P’ patch in the camp, designating him as Polish, for long enough but what colour the patch was, we will never know. What was stored in the survival closet remains solidly there. Only birds can be made free.

Everyday Stefan would retreat into the locked room of the first diminutive house he built, in the backyard of the bigger second house, to be alone. In this room he left behind the scent of his aromatic pipe tobacco, empty vodka bottles, countless self-portraits in pencil and ink and no last will and testimony. For someone who was always so thorough and organized in life, this came as a shock to his family. The repetition of Stefan’s face on paper mirrored his life-long search for himself, for the pieces that had been stolen from him. Or perhaps what was missing is really what’s there.

I ask her, “Tell me about your life Babcia?” I try not to steal her memories and I learn of the dance.

## Taniec Siły: (A Dance of Strength)

“I can’t look Mama, I can’t. I’m scared.”

“Don’t fear child. She is calling us. Look, in the lake. Her hand is gesturing. Come, maybe she has something to say. Hold my hand. Oh, she’s beautiful. Look. We must go to her.”

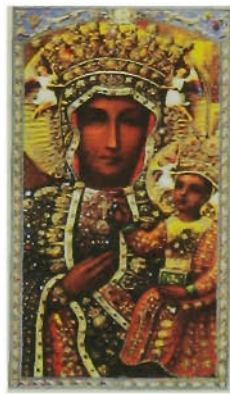
Halina kept her hands over her eyes when they made their way towards the lake. As they walked home together, she had been showing her mother some new dance steps she picked up at school from her friends. Up ahead, her mother noticed an iridescent glow emerge from the lake. The glow was a silhouette of a veiled woman.

“Listen Halina. Did you hear her? Did you hear what she said? A catastrophe was the word she used: something awful, a man-made hell on this earth. Soon it will come, she said. Oh, why did she choose us to tell? Pray to her Halina. Pray that this terrible thing won’t happen. Promise me that you will always have faith.”

“Yes Mama.”

They toss their heads back and their golden, black or chestnut manes and tresses slap soaking wet on their backs. They laugh, tease and lovingly mock as they sit in the sun on rocks by the river. “Hey Elena, you are getting quite a figurka! They must be feeding you well in Rosja!” “Ah! You Polki! You’re just jealous!” The river separates two countries from each other but it hardly manages this momentous task.

Halina is the one who has come to the river with four of her six sisters. She is the one whose dreams are concealed behind dark and knowing but silent eyes. Tonight she will dance because this is what she needs to do. The absence of parental permission will not deter her. She will be transported as if with wings, through the woods while the house sleeps. No, it has nothing to do with the boys being there. It is the ecstasy in movement: The rhythm draws her closer. *She knows all of the new dances, the Cha-cha-cha, the Samba and the old ones too, the Krakowiak and Polonez. Soon, war will attempt to seize her music.*



On the way home from the river, she meets her mother in the fields. Together they carry baskets filled with the daily toil. Halina's mother doesn't look like a woman who has given birth to twelve children. How should such a woman look? She dare not convey the impression that giving life is strenuous and painful. Such magical powers can only be gifts bestowed upon the virtuous.

Besides, just the other day, a woman squatting in the fields, digging up potatoes, delivered her own child, placed him in her apron and she's not complaining. They pass by the minute village hall and Halina smiles knowingly to herself, "I'll see you tonight with my dancing shoes on." Babies could not be further from her mind at this time.

Just one more paddock to tread through and they will be home. A man in a swastiked uniform, and a machine gun in his arms, stands across the path. With a brutal grin he takes aim. All that stands for protection in the emptiness is a buckled shack. The two women run to it, slam the door and huddle together in the corner. Bang, bang, bang - they hear the shots, see the holes emerge through the walls, hear the thud of heavy boots move away and they have survived. He didn't mean to kill, only to terrorize. Only?

The children are all called into their home. It shivers and weeps with the frightened family who sit sullenly by candlelight: Thirteen figures, flickering shadows. The older daughters' husbands are still at work and their father hasn't returned either. A knock at the door breaks the tears, "You, you and you come with us." Fearful fury pervades the shadows. Now is the time to say what has been left unspoken. Resistance is impossible before the barrel of a gun. "We love you mama." Halina, her mother and younger brother are pushed into the night. "Please leave my Mama alone. We have done nothing." Halina yells, to no avail.

Inside an abandoned warehouse friends and neighbours pray together or alone. Halina and Janek, with their tear-stained dreams, kneel on boxes by the window. In those few hours they age by decades. Their mother is seated on hessian sacks and the blood is seeping to the floor. Janek is very young and scared. He doesn't understand and thinks that his mother has been injured. Halina understands. That painful indignity will

always travel with her because she knows the shame her mother is experiencing draws from forces that drum into women's consciousness that she is 'unclean' and 'abnormal'. Argumentative voices permeate her thoughts with, "If only Eve hadn't tempted Adam, we wouldn't be so cursed."

Their father arrives and convinces the soldiers, in German, (Russian comes in handy for him later) that his is a poor family, without connections, without any political ties, whose only interest at present is survival. They are released. *Did their prayers have a hand in it or was it the dance? They may step on your toes now and then but you are too wrapped up in the spinning and whirling. You won't let anything stop you. You know the steps so well that you stumble rarely and only momentarily.*

Trust, that elusive and enigmatic quality, is even more hard-pressed for an appearance in times such as these, when clear boundaries are drawn and the 'other' enemy detectors are activated. Just how long it would be before Halina's family was threatened again was unknown. Alternatives are not exactly raising their clever heads out all over the place. They can only take the barest necessities with them as they flee to who-knows-where. The first few nights are spent in the woods. The metal washing tub is filled with water and warmed on the open fire. *Wash, wash, wash your sisters as you dream, dream, dream of the dance.*

Her mother had taken to baptising all of the Catholic babies, who were born within her vicinity, during this war. The babies were baptised as soon as they were born as no chances could be taken now, no time to waste. A labour room was no place for a priest either. She saw it as a duty to her beloved Mary, who had been so kind as to warn her of the impending catastrophe. In this way, in case of any misfortune, the babies would be assured a swift passage to heaven. Her own babies eventually ended up in various parts of the world, away from her.

Under the duress of guards and guns, Halina works in a munitions factory. She must become a part of the machinery and reserve her anger and distress for her lice-ridden bed in that ugly, cramped box of a dormitory; away from her beloved family, forests, fields and the river: the river that ultimately let her down. Its unifying force was no match for those hell-bent on a hellish domination. Any utterance in the factory meant

the end of life. Halina had seen it happen to the few who challenged authority, the young women who refused to shut their mouths without question, the young women who were pulled out the door and who didn't return to this earth. The silence here hangs thick and heavy. It is a deafening scream. Play the robotslave – all else is futile. *Keep the dance in the back of your mind. The music is blotted out now by the tap, tap of metal on metal and metal on skin.*

They hear the rumours around the barracks, "Tomorrow's roll-call will be the last. Don't walk with them. Wherever you are, do not return. Stay away, if you can." Halina works outside of the factory as well. She is a young woman slaving for a Nazi family. As she smashes the ice covering the lake outside, with bare hands, to bring water in to do their laundry, the Nazi family watch from their window, in front of the fireplace. As she cooks gourmet meals every day and bakes their cakes, she is left to salivate over leftovers. Halina heeds the rumours and runs to the woods when the family isn't watching. Many others are also hiding. They stay there for two nights. Halina craves the open fields now, where she and her siblings once lay, sipping from poppy bulbs and dreaming in colours of splendour.

Amongst an eerie silence and with absolutely nowhere else to go, they return to the camp and are caught in crossfire. All that she can do is jump into the ditch with the others – dead and alive. "Don't look. Don't look," she tells herself. "Don't look at that face, the blood." Halina does not faint, for by now she has seen unspeakable horror, at every turn. Instead, when the gunfire ceases, she runs to the toilet block and locks herself in. "It's okay, you can come out now. It's okay. Dobre. Good. We are American soldiers. Dobre. A-m-e-r-i-c-a-n." A black man opens the door and Halina is crouched behind the trough, with the shock of difference.

The war has finally ended and Halina is whisked away, without much say, to the country that had waged it. She is placed in a displaced persons' camp. She knows where her home is. Displaced as if she is some piece of lounge room furniture that has been put out onto the veranda because it no longer matches the interior. Furniture has no conscious memory or roots. Halina meets her husband in the camp and still, there is no time or place for the dance. It was never his so it won't be hers either. *The dance*

*assumes a new pace. It is duller, slower and now but then, it urges and insists. It is multi-faceted, sometimes contradictory to the point where you may stomp on your own toes, stumble and fall. No one is there to pick you up. You learnt that a long time ago.*

She will tell her daughters and their daughters her truth about birth, life and death. Halina demanded a baby, when Stefan, her husband (before he was her husband), set about leaving her. “Fine then. Go.” she said, “But make a baby with me first, before you leave. That’s all I want from you.” Her first-born child was only two years old when something like pneumonia invaded his body. The local hospital was still in the genocidal wartime mode of bodily experimentation, for the ‘cleansing’ of the human race, on souls deemed not as worthy as theirs. For this reason, the babies’ lungs were flushed with water and various other cruelties were committed. For this reason, Halina’s first born is always with her, only in dreams.

After several attempts to flee, which are always thwarted by those who have more money to pass under the table, Halina, her husband and two children are now given a choice: Canada, America or Australia. They choose the place that is the most distant. Halina senses the intimidation as they disembark from the Fairsea, onto Port Melbourne dock. But these people know nothing of what she has been through. They tell her to put it all aside and go back to your own country if you don’t like it. “And don’t you ever forget that we are doing you a favour. If you want your family to eat, you work hard. You work to pay back your fare.” No room here to find your peace, to contemplate and rest. Learn the language however you can, while you tend to your husband, four children, battery hen farm job (that, incidentally, puts you off eating chicken for life) and your new two room self-built home. Do not expect any attempt to be made to understand you. The past and present tug at each other and Halina is caught in the middle. ‘Populate or perish’ but ‘assimilate or die.’ *Fortunately, she can still waltz with a partner or lead in the tango, when necessity dictates.*



After her family and friends leave, Halina is exhausted from making small talk and repressing her grief. She is now entirely alone, not dressed in black but maroon instead. A delicious delirium however, slowly creeps in, with episodes from her past. It's a beautiful spring afternoon and she is back at the river. Girls are splashing each other, chatting and plaiting hair. Halina warmly smiles to herself when she recollects how they all knelt down, with upturned eyes, to praise the sun's rays breaking through dusky pink clouds, which they all swore was the Virgin Mary herself. Now that the man who refused to fully share her dance with her has gone, Halina has entered another phase of herself. *She is rediscovering her voice, her strength, her steps, her power: The dance. She is herself: alive and dancing with her present past and future.*

## Living on the Ceilings I: 2m x 1m with 3 =

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*Time and space shift from one canvas to another, frame by frame. Now, if you run your plastic, electronic rodent along and around the page, click on an icon that takes your fancy, you too can move in mysterious ways.*

The sisters were down below. The top bunk was hers. She instantly recognised the potential in that spot. She was queen of all that she surveyed above. That spot could have been a slice of the Sistine Chapel. If freedom and more than mere imagination allowed it to be so. Zinnia was the centre of a big feuding family with three on either side of her. In the room where she was designated a place in between two, Zinnia proceeded to make herself, thus:

Um, if Lily says I can only put up one picture, one object, one item on the wall, then what shall I choose? Please, please, no more Abba! Even though I don't mind Anna and Frida that much, I don't think I can bear to look at the beaming Bjorns and Bennys all over this room any more. Not throughout another sleepless night anyway. 1, 2, 3, 4 ... No, I really can't bear to count the beaming Bjorns to sleep again ... O.K. It will have to be Blondie's Debbie Harry poster then. The one where she's wearing the black T-Shirt with 'Andy Warhol is BAD' scrawled across it. Who's Andy Warhol anyway? As long as he is BAD for something good, then that's fine by me.

Lily was the oldest sister. She frequently dreamt of living in a clinker brick home. She snacked on Clinkers whenever she could afford to do so: Those smoothly choc-coated ovals with a centre like honey comb, but harder inside and yet more brittle. Prone to crumbling sooner than melting in your mouth. Still harder and more unyielding. The flavours are various, tangy, more biting-bitter than sickly-sweet. They were adapted, had evolved to take the bile, biting and the spit. Lily was this confectionary personified.

She was a semblance of order in chaos. The way her wardrobe was synchronized, colour and season coded. The way she ensured that there was to be no spillage of useless articles into the room. Her motto always was, "If you haven't worn it for over six months, you don't really need it then, do you?" And she would proceed to check the teary-eyed, nostalgic sisters' cupboards to rid them of all traces of the worn-out and the old.

The freedom and tenacity with which she speaks of and with her own body only served to consolidate all of this. To her, a body, is a body, is a body... A container of smells, textures, noises, processes, exit and entry points, that just are. Shelley was Zinnia's best beloved friend and although they frequently bathed together, there was seldom any crossing of the naked bodily comfort zones. Lily, on the other hand, quite happily spent her time and energy before a big night out, shaving and sculpting the bewildered Shelley's underarm and leg hairs in the shower for her. There is no doubt that the area designated as 'the bikini line' would have become that standardised perfect triangle too, if Shelley had enabled Lily to access it, that is.

One time, Lily had a growth removed from above her buttocks. No one else but her and the doctor were privy to viewing the object that came out. The first time she described this growth to anyone, it was as a plug, with the length and width of a pinkie finger or apple core. The second time, it became a cylinder as long as an iris stalk. The third time, it could have been a shower hose. The butt plug growth thing grew and grew each time she spoke of it. It is now so long and firm that it could easily wrap itself around and embrace the world five times over.

So, now I have Debbie Harry to watch over me. Lily has made no objections yet. Surely, she wouldn't mind then if I create a little glow-in-the-dark star scape above my own head? And it really would be an ideal place to hang those freshly glued together Revell, cross-national model aeroplanes. They can battle it out with the pterodactyl too. Cordoned off by some tasselled fringing, strings of colourful glass beads, perhaps a fabric sash of red and gold all around. Mmmm, almost palatial-like I'd have to say!

Meanwhile, Lily's clothes began to pile up on the floor in a heaving fetid mess. Neither Zinnia nor Violet had the authority or audacity to remove or even move them. Violet being the youngest, still had her trainer wheels on and so took her cues from either sister, depending on whose style at any point in time she admired more. Ultimately, she wished she had been adopted and daily dialled a place, an orphanage by all accounts, she called 'Sunny Brook.' At that time, they seemed to have all of the answers for her.

Lily even stopped pretending to feed the fictitious children in the cupboard with Vegemite sandwiches and Milo milk. Even while knowing how this game used to cause such a frenzy of hysterically confused laughter in her sisters. When she fed 'all her little children', Lily's sisters ran around the room screaming and cackling in half-belief, "Stop it, stop it. It's not true. It's not true." Then they would part their fingers that were over their eyes to peek into the cupboard, just to make sure.

Two weeks had passed and every single piece that Lily had worn during that time was now cascading from the wall in a torrent of entwined crotch-facing-up knickers, soiled denims and grimy pink shiny jump suits. A mountain of rancid cloth. It was her final defiance when words could do no more.

Zinnia was the first to run. An inane dispute over the use of a power cord left her bruised and furious. She couldn't persuade Violet to go with her. Violet clung onto her mother's arm as she told Zinnia, yet again, not to provoke him. Lily, who wasn't there that night, had already been in and out of home for the past three years. However, when the house erupted again a few months later, Lily joined Zinnia and confirmed that she was out of home for good. She convinced Violet too that she would be safer away from there. The Kwiatowski sisters found another place together. Lily could have had a room all of her own or perhaps the studious Zinnia should have had it. But no. There was no question about that. One move away was monumental enough. So they rented the spare room to a friend and all three lived in one again. At times, they dined on half-cooked sausages, lovingly prepared by the twelve year old Violet, trays of donuts and jelly cakes from Lily's work and roast chicken dinners that always took Zinnia three and a half hours to bake. In this pokey flat, Zinnia left her space open - ready. Ready to assist, entertain, to try and be at peace with, to open up

and survive in tandem with her sisters. Debbie Harry was gone. Stars, planets, planes and prehistoric birds were out of the equation. Violet needed a surrogate mother or someone to cry to nightly at the loss of her own. Zinnia could no longer justify canopying herself into the space of two by one.

During those many restless nights, when the cicadas screeched so incessantly that cotton balls in ears masked nothing, Zinnia concentrated on every crack and fragment of peeling paint above her, to the point of inventing stories about how the indentations in the ceiling came to pass. She read the cracks and heard about the family who had previously occupied the flat. Two small girls lived in the room. One girl was the favourite as she embodied everything a little girl should be. She had no identifiable edge and did as she was told. The other, whose body once inhabited the space now taken by Zinnia, was known as the spirited, troublesome one, who didn't want to keep still, who had so much to say but was silenced. Who knew all of the tricks of the yoyo, created elaborate worlds out of a blob of Play Doh, spontaneously performed cartwheels wherever she was. Who tried to tempt her 'good' sister into performing amazing acrobatic feats, trampolining on the bed with her. She never understood why anyone wouldn't enjoy being flipped over someone else's trustworthy shoulders with a high-flying, leg-catapulting somersault, to land standing flat on both feet, on the bedroom floor. She also needed a partner to parrot her favourite commercials on TV with her, putting in words 'other' than English at every opportunity, to laugh at the arbitrariness of it all.

She wanted them to mark their territory together but the 'good' sister would have no part of this. Bedtime was a part of her self-regimented but other-imposed routine. To sleep, to only live her other life in a dream. The 'bad' sister chose to live her dreams in this life as best she could - there was no other way for her to exist. If she dreamt of escape, she knew she could always count on the angel to take her through the ceiling and away.

She stole money from her father's wallet once, to support the angel in pulling them both through that ceiling. She thought about planting a wisteria vine under her mattress. They grew quickly and in nearly no time at all, their persistent mauve fingers would have poked up and produced a network of crevices that would

eventually join. In the end, she bought a clear glitter-speckled rubber ball from a twenty-cent slot machine. She'd spent a whole dollar before the object of her desire came hurtling out of the hole. She threw the silent ball repeatedly at the ceiling, hoping to make a small opening for her and the angel to take flight through. The paint began to peel slowly back. Slowly away. She was making progress in her enterprise. On the seventh night, the veiny spider-like crack began to take shape and to form. It was the beginning of a getaway hole. Slowly but surely, an imagined way out was becoming a potential reality. Until they all had to move to elsewhere. Zinnia, for once, left the ceiling as it was.

Again I will stay here under a two by one sky. But this time, it will be clear. What would Uncle Edmund say if he knew that I so vehemently contemplated and obsessed about my space?

Zinnia's Uncle Edmund was a political prisoner who was imprisoned at Buchenwald concentration camp, during the second world war. One of the many forms of torture he did endure, was being forced to spend nights with two others, naked and freezing, in a concrete box of a room no larger than two metres by one. Edmund is an architect now. To ensure the free-flow of human movement, he builds bridges around Gdansk, connecting the city with other cities.

Another man goes to Auschwitz on a tour in the late seventies. As far as we know, he is an average tourist. He surveys the gruesome surroundings with his wife by his side. He comes to a set of huge emaciated skeletal portraits. Photographs measuring two metres by one each, of hordes of near-death faces. He pauses in front of one of these testimonials to human cruelty, reaches for his eyes, throws his head forward and moans. "Stanek," cries his wife, "Stanek. It is you."

On the last day of school, Lily leaves work early and waits at the train station for her two sisters. She has with her a new pair of boots, jeans, socks and a winter top for each of them. She wants to make sure that her sisters can begin again, wherever they will be, without feeling the cold too much. It won't be long now before they will separately move on.



## ID Bracelets

In the rust-dusty dead car wasteland, alongside the rail yard and behind the paper mill, the one that seemed to spontaneously combust at least twice every summer, she sat in the twisted metal hulk of a greying-white Torana of '74. The springs hung out of the massive holes in the burgundy vinyl seats but they had spread themselves out nicely enough into a ring, leaving just enough unadulterated, unsprung vinyl for her to sit on.

Sharon was waiting for her much anticipated date to come. She found a dollar note in between the upholstery and although this was to be a cheap date in the monetary sense, it was to be a momentous one.

And then she arrived, behind Ruby, the shiny red-eyed crow. Ruby always preceded her arrival. Ruby went everywhere with her. She said it was so she could be her lookout, ready to pluck out the eyes of any man who threatened to impede her dalliances. Jenny was fearless and resplendent. A shaved head, bearing three raised bright pink triangle clumps of hair, outlined in black. She shuffled over the dark grey gravelled puddles in her black moccasins that never seemed to get soggy or misshapen in the wet. The many safety pins in her ears always failed to infect.

Jenny was 'one of those' but she didn't perfect her 'thoseness' through a stint in Winlaton, like many of 'those' others had. Mandy, for instance, had been in and out of Winny so many times that it was fast becoming more her first home than her second. The first time she went in, she explained to all who would listen, that it was because *mi dad wouldn't lay off mi*. Then, she was still in primary school. Now, she only had to contemplate a shoplifting spree from Woolies and she'd be back inside Winlaton again.

Mandy had been out for three weeks so far and during that time, she'd taken a liking to Sharon. She'd seen her around at Rocky's and Darwin's, played pool with her a few times. Mandy even had a couple of her girls out on guard for her, just to make sure nothing nasty happened. Sharon was pretty much a long blue-eyed, horse-faced

girl but her hair was long too and thick and white-blond, so this made her much in demand amongst boys and girls alike. Out the back of Rocky's one night, as they enjoyed a joint together, Mandy gave Sharon a chunky silver ID bracelet that she had had engraved for her. "I really like ya Shaz. You're really pretty and an ace chick," she said, blushing all the while. Sharon was a tad frightened of Mandy's reputed toughness so she accepted it without question. To be honest, Sharon was a bit of an opportunist too. "Well, if she wants me to have it, why not? Jewellery's fine, 'specially if it's for free. Doesn't mean I'm gonna have ta do anything with her." And that was true too, for Mandy was a good stone butch, one who protected and admired from afar. Sadly, a kind word was good enough for her and kept her passion for Sharon flowing.

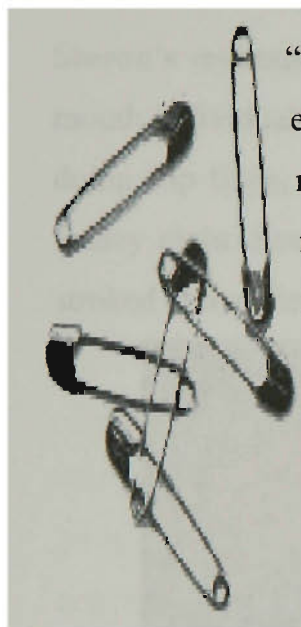
As Jenny approached the beat-up Torana now, Sharon was spinning the bracelet around on her wrist and trying to decide whether or not to show it to Jenny. "Nah", she thought to herself, "I'll see how we go this time first and then I'll know if it'll be worth makin' her jealous." Jenny was the most brazen out of all of the 'one of those'. She strutted around with pride in her cut-up zip-laden pants, in the most hostile of conditions. Rare were the times when she would even bother to utter, "What the fuck are you lookin' at?" Instead, she would just smile, content in the knowledge of how sublime she could make a woman feel.

"Hey Sharon darlin', what ya been up to?" Jenny asked, as she climbed in to the Torana on the driver's side that was missing a door. "Oh, not much. Been waiting for ya forever though." With that, Jenny took Sharon's horsey-head in her hands and planted a slow and gentle kiss on her mouth. "Wow ... nice," thought Sharon, when their lips finally disengaged. "Sharon, I know it's not much of a place here for us to meet but I promise ya, soon, I'll take ya somewhere real nice. At least we can be together alone here, without anyone perving at us," she said, as she twirled Sharon's curling-wanded, hot-rolled curl around her fingers.

"Gazza wants to take me to the Dandy drags on Friday night. His car is shit hot now since his dad flogged him some parts from his work over at the Ford factory. Seen it on his front lawn. I wouldn't mind going with him. It'll be ace fun, don't ya reckon?"



Jenny didn't want Sharon going out with anyone else really, not in that 'date' sort of capacity and especially not with that deadhead Gazza. She knew he just wanted to get into Sharon's pants and there was no way, in her mind, that that was ever going to happen. She hadn't even been given the opportunity to explore that region of Sharon yet herself and it had been two long months since they started to meet privately.



"Sharon, I'm really startin to like you um... like ya more and more, each time I see ya. Ya make me crack up a lot and ya kinda' get my... mi heart racing." Sharon felt the bracelet weighing heavier now on her wrist and as she reached into her pocket to retrieve her PJ 20s, she casually manoeuvred the bracelet in there, at the same time. Ruby atop the car bonnet noticed this through the windscreen and let out a huge *caw*.

"Er, wanna' smoke Jen?"

"Oh yeah, ta hon," she lit up her cigarette with Sharon's, in a kind of hands-free mouth to mouth fire stick ritual. "Sharon, I don't wanna tell ya what to do or who ta hang out with. I'm not ya Mum. But this Gazza, he's one of the Dingley Sharps, isn't he? That's gotta be bad news."

Sharon fixated on Jenny's punk-head and blurted, "Well, some people probably think the same about you," and then she quickly corrected herself, "but I know ya and you're a sweetheart."

"Yeah, thanks Shaz. So are you," she whispered into Sharon's ear, sending goose bumps up her spine. "But I'm not in a gang either. It's just me, Jenny, and mi own little ways and if people don't like it, well, I'm not about ta smash their heads in for it. I got betta things to do with mi life."

"Could be worse ya know Jen. What if Gazza was one of them Oakleigh Wogs or a Dandy Skin even? Shit, I just wanna' have some fun for a change, speedin' up and down the road, y'know, a bit of excitement in mi life? Shit Jen, for once I wanna' sit in a car that moves!"

Jenny took Sharon's hand in hers. Her formerly silvered wrist was now bare and Ruby was keeping a sharp red eye on it. "Sharon, how about if I promise ya that you'll have the time of your life with me on Friday night? Will ya come out with mi, out to ... it'll be a surprise." She kissed Sharon's fingers one-by-one.

Sharon's resistance was considerably weakened. As Jenny placed each finger in her mouth individually and sucked on them softly, up to their tips, Sharon's stomach was doing flip flops, and 'no' was in no way at the tip of her tongue. "Ah, yeah, yeah. Friday night. Sounds cool." Familiar tongues found each other again and spoke and stroked above the decaying Torana gearstick.



"Shit, it's gettin' late Jenny. Mum's gonna be pissed off if I'm not home to feed mi brother and sister. She's doin' overtime tonight so they gotta be fed, clean and in bed before she gets home."

"No worries darlin'. I'll walk ya home." Jenny reached for Sharon's hand, along the road, in the looming evening. Sharon pulled it away from her. When they reached Sharon's house, she allowed Jenny a quick, dry peck on her cheek before she opened the front door, shouting, "Friday night then, hey?" behind her.

"I'll be here, around seven, okay?" Jenny replied. As she sauntered the three blocks away to her home, she thought to herself, "Sometimes I really hate this place. Little boys with their little toys. I just wanna' be with mi girl, show her I love her, whenever I feel like it. Damn, just to let her know that it's okay to love mi back. That I'll look after her. Fuck it's hard. But no way, I ain't changin' for nothin'."

Sharon spent the next few nights before Friday's surprise, tossing-hot in her floral flannies. She held on tightly to Jenny's Bonds singlet and pressed its scent against her face. "God I want her. I want her so bad. What am I so scared of? Why do I always end up seemin' like such an asshole to her? I ... shit, I want her real bad." She avoided her usual pinball parlour haunts everyday after school in case she bumped into Mandy or one of the other girls who hung around with her. She just didn't want to deal with the situation at all. Instead, she went straight home and robotedly went through the homework and chore-motions. Inside, her whole body buzzed and churned.

Friday finally eventuated and so did the reappearance of Jenny. Sharon placed a few dollars ready in her jeans' pocket for train fare and the like and as she ran out onto the nature strip, Jenny stood holding open the front passenger door of her chrome purple HQ Holden Ute, for Sharon. As far as Sharon knew, Jenny didn't earn all that much from her maintenance job at a women's refuge (she didn't even know where it was either) but she did know that it wasn't polite to inquire about people's personal fiscal matters. "Well my darlin', I can take ya anywhere ya lovely heart desires. No need to stop at any piss-soaked stations, every five minutes. No need to worry 'bout the skins and their red Dockers and evil eyes all over the train seats. Just you and me and the open roads. Ruby's even doing her own thing tonight!" she chuckled.

"Jesus Jen, why didn't ya tell me you were busy with such a cool car? I never even knew ya could drive or fix cars or nuthin. I mean, I know you're good at lotsa' things but not that sorta' stuff. It's grouse Jen, just, wow, shits all over Gazza's piece a shit."

"Well Shaz, I wanted ya to like me for mi, y'know, without all the other hot trimmings and accessories that I come with. And since ya kept seeing mi and not really expecting all that much, I just thought that maybe ya mighta' really had a real thing for me."

"Hhhmmm," Sharon thought, "Well, come to think of it, I've always had a real thing in the pants for ya." And then she hugged Jenny and said, "Oh, you're great Jen. Just the best."

As they pulled out of Springvale Road and onto Princes Hwy, Kim Brown, ex-student from Sharon's school, drove past them in her orange Datsun 120Y, the mark of a straight girl who left school early and went straight into Safeway on a full-time basis. A girl who would marry her first serious local boyfriend of three years, Darren, and have approximately three children and eventually move up in the world to Narre Warren or Scoresby or somewhere not too far out, where the houses are huge but so close together. Somewhere where all the couples are around the same age, so that they can have affairs with each other and eventually divorce and swap around and start all over again. Kim nearly ran a red light and cranked her head off trying to get a good look at Sharon and Jenny in the ute, as Jenny put her Blundstone to the pedal. They both laughed heartily. Jenny had her arm around Sharon and in between gear changes, she mostly drove with one hand.

A crackling and scratching emerged from somewhere on the dashboard, "Breaka, breaka, JenX, do ya copy, ya big ol' dyke!"

"You can get that Sharon, go on. Just say *breaka, breaka, I copy*."

Sharon reached for the CB radio, pressed the button on the side and began, "Hi, uh, yeah, um, breaka, it's me, um, Sharon."

"Oh, Jen's girl, right? Been dyin ta see ya."

"Wanna meet a coupla' mi mates? They live in the houso flats, up Brunny Street, y'know, in Fitzroy," Jenny asked Sharon.

"Ah, yeah, I s'pose. Wherever the hell that is."

Jenny smiled, "Here hon', give us that CB. Hey True Kitty, JenX here. See ya in about half an hour then, hey? I mean, over."

There on the beige corduroy couch sat Jo Jo who'd moved down from Moe. She was sick and tired of being called a 'poofster sheila' all the time. She was going to write a book one day and give it all back to them, "without mentioning names," she

cautiously added. In her lap sat her girlfriend, True Kitty - Kate, a landscape gardener by training, who was looking for a job in the city, one that was a bit more cognate with her skills than the gardening section at Moe's Kmart. They all chatted and checked Sharon out thoroughly and after Jo Jo gave Jenny the 'yeah, she's cute' wink, they headed down Brunswick Street for a cappuccino. Jenny took hold of Sharon's hand in the street and Sharon held on like she would never let go.

It was one of those humid post-rain summer nights; too pleasant to not share together, alone. Jenny started the ute up again and with Sharon, bade her friends goodbye. They followed the Yarra until it seemed that no one else was interested in heading that way. The road was empty and the view made even the seemingly hardened Sharon thaw. "Here, here, let's stop here. I wanna see the river. Maybe watch the sun go down."

Jenny spread a blanket out on the grass and set down two glasses and a bottle of pink champagne on it. She also laid out some handpicked, hand-made chocolates, with sugared violets and mandarin slices on top of them.

"Whew, it's gorgeous Jen. Sure beats Springy Creek and all the stinkin' old tyres and shopping trolleys floatin' around in it!" A whole chorus of crows cawed and Sharon wondered if any of them were related to Ruby.

They lay together on the blanket and at last, Jenny lingered in the place that Sharon had for so long denied her. Sharon wanted a taste too. She wanted to instantaneously grow more hands so that she could feel Jenny's body everywhere, all at once. "Slow down hon', slow down," Jenny whispered, "There'll be other times. I won't give ya up easily ya know, if ya want me that is."

"Aw, I want ya. I want ya for sure. Only you Jen."

Jenny took out one of the many safety pins in her ear and clipped it into Sharon's earlobe and painlessly made a fresh hole. "Shit, Gazza's gonna spew when he sees this. He'll give mi hell. I think he likes mi Jen."

"Fuck him," said Jenny, "Fuck 'em all."

“No thanks. Eeeewwww, no way!” they immediately responded, in unison. Their response ended in clasped lips and the sun then made its way down. Sharon made sure she kept her eyes open during the embrace.

Sharon dangled the ID bracelet in the river as Jenny packed everything up in the ute. She contemplated letting it go but returned it to her jacket pocket instead, “Well, still, a girl can never have enough jewellery, hey,” she mused.



## **2. Release Handbrake: Border Crossings**





Just out of curiosity, she picked up an empty *Coke* can off the sand and before tossing it into her recycling bag, placed the lip over her ear, like a shell. To her amazement, a monotone voice began to resonate from it, amongst the usual sea-echo and an empty-bubble hissing sssshhhiii...

*All they can hear are three snorting grunts from behind the closed door. Sharon and Jodie are still pretty lucid. They've only had a couple of beers and a bottle of \$1.99 Brandavino between them, after all. Big girls of the world can hold their grog you know. But not right then. It's hard to hold the gagging down. The grunts are incomprehensible and disturbing.*

*Lawrie told them to wait in the grotty lounge room of the dirty old man's dirty old house. Their bottoms don't dare touch the stained brown and yellow chequered couch. Standing there, VB stubby each in hand. Dirty old man takes Lawrie into his bedroom then, "Make yaselves at home girls...shouldn't be too long." They still won't sit on the couch. Their working-class-wog-girl best friend's motto of: 'You don't have to be dirty just 'cos you're poor', running through their drunken rushing heads. Jodie imagined that edict in action now as she recalled the starched bright white damask*



*doona covers on, how many beds was it again? All seven of them at Ala's house, on that one rare occasion when she visited her, while Ala's parents were at work. "So many beds," she thought, "that's right, they're Catholic or something like that. Lucky my Mum's on the pill." So many beds and doonas. Jodie had never seen a doona before until that day. Ala never knew what the word for one was in English. She only knew that her grandma made them all out of sacks of duck down from the Dandenong Market. They used the doonas they had in their baby cots as pillows now. Jodie described to Ala how at her house, she sandwiched herself between a couple of sheets and a scratchy blanket, all pulled tight under her mattress, making it difficult to roll around and move. Ala dubbed this bedding arrangement the Anglo-sandwich bed.*

*They lay down together on top of the soft doona that day. Ala and Jodie giggled and bounced until they worked up a big thirst. No ~~Coke~~ in Ala's fridge though – just a family-size glass jug of morello cherry syrup. Jodie took an instant liking to the taste of the red stain on Ala's cherry lips. Jodie had to get those images out of her mind now. Her and Sharon were still waiting for Lawrie. Oddly enough, they didn't fear for themselves. Their flesh was not in demand here, it seemed.*

*They are geared up for a night on their town. It's the two-buck-chuck pre-Stoli and speed days, before they move up in the world. That makes for some very mean alcohol, a few rides up and down the hill in a Safeway shopping trolley and maybe later, a \$2.50 'underage' disco, if they make it there. They light up a PJ and zone out on their smoke rings, bursting against the dusty beer bottle lampshade. They take the obligatory swig of beer in between drags and ensure that they don't make eye contact with each other. To comprehend where they are right now would not be cool.*

*"One day I'm gonna kill him. I swear." Lawrie eventually emerges, fixing his flannelette shirt into his jeans, tears streaming. An oily limp \$10 bill in his faded black Levi's back pocket, a packet of PJs in the front, two VB beer bottles in one hand, a ~~Coke~~ in the other.*

“I don’t know if I liked that story at all,” she said to herself, as she shook the can and searched for some dials, like the *Coke* can radios usually have. “Hmmm, no dials, just an empty can that talks, how odd,” she mused, as she placed it over her ear once more, hoping to hear something pleasant. It began again, with a woman’s lilting, grieving voice.

*As I toast you with gin and bitter lemon, ever the reliable depressant, the one that lets you cry it all out; as I toast you on your thirtieth birthday and wonder why you feel the need to commiserate the loss of your youth so soon; as we drink together and agree that the days and years go by so suddenly nowadays; do you know what all this reminds me of, my love?*

*The old **Coca-Cola** slogan of our time - The Real Thing - and that’s why I thought you liked *Coke*. Ah, the irony of it all! Like every single one of those bottles and cans, with ‘*Coke*’ printed in Mandarin and Cantonese on them, that you insisted on carting all the way from China on the train, in the taxi, on the ferry, in the car, on the plane... from home to home... from girl to girl... away from me.*

*But I have to admit something to you darling I never really did like *Coke* myself. Is this a ‘Sign of Good Taste’? Somehow, it felt like a snare down my throat. And that may be because a man came wheeling his wife in a wheelchair to my mum’s house one day. I was about eight years old. They needed to know where Olinda Avenue was and of course I knew, because that was near the milk bar that I took my first packet of Wrigley’s chewing gum from. I needed to madly chew on something, other than on my own gum.*

*They offered me 50 cents for my kindness and troubles, once I had gotten them there. I hesitated and politely declined several times, as I had learnt to do. A bit more cajoling and praise was bantered about, so I accepted the cash, for a job well done. I assumed this was the end of our transaction, according to my limited past experiences of monetary exchange.*

*I scrambled into the milk bar excitedly and bought two things that were always wanted, too damned hard to steal and impossible to buy. And then they called me a thief and a beggar because I had no spare change left to spare. I spent it all. I spared them no expense.*

*I stood there melting in 38 degrees. I only wanted to taste a bit of 'Ice-cold Sunshine'. I just wanted to 'Have a **Cake** and a Smile' but instead, I stood dripping sticky in my own spearmint Choc Wedge and showered fizzy under my small classic **Cake** bottle - just that once.*

"Well, I guess that one was a bit more bearable," she said. "I wonder if it has anymore to say?" She shook the can several times but still nothing. She tried again. Turned it upside down and over again. Then ... ssshhiiii... it hissed and buzzed once more. A fluey nasal voice started up this time.

*Baby wanna Big Gulp **Cake** for brekky? Mum's got food shoppin ta do today, some more Heinz tins for ya and lotsa runnin' round to do too. I'll get ya bottle filled up at 7/11 on the way to the bus stop, hey. Gotta catch up wif Melissa and Kelly and Cheryl and their kids, down at Broady Square. C'mon, ya gonna 'ave someone to play wiv there too. Might even go ta Macca's for lunch and get ya a Happy Meal. What toy 'ave they got happenin' there now? I seen it on the tele ad but I can't remember. Barbie or sumthen or was that the other week? You'd like a little Barbie, hey luv'?*

*Gotta find out if Steve's gonna gimme some of his sickies this fortnight. Scummy prick that ya dad is. His prolly givin all his doe to his new tart, that what's-her-bloody-ugly-scrubber-name and her two stinken brats. Gotta go down to the bloody department too bout mi dental and then Cenalink and tell them bastards that they jibbed mi last pay and that I haven't got mi new Healthcare card yet.*

*Gotta see if I can nick them shiny black shoes from Kmart for ya. I reckon they'll go real good on ya. Spewin' that tightars bitch down at the Salvo's wouldn't gimme them*

*other red ones for two bucks. It's all I had on mi that day, the cow. Shoulda just run off wiv em and then we'd just neva go back there. Shoulda whacked off a pair from some other shop and just left ya old ones there. Ne'ermind, we'll give it a go today, maybe, hey Bub?*

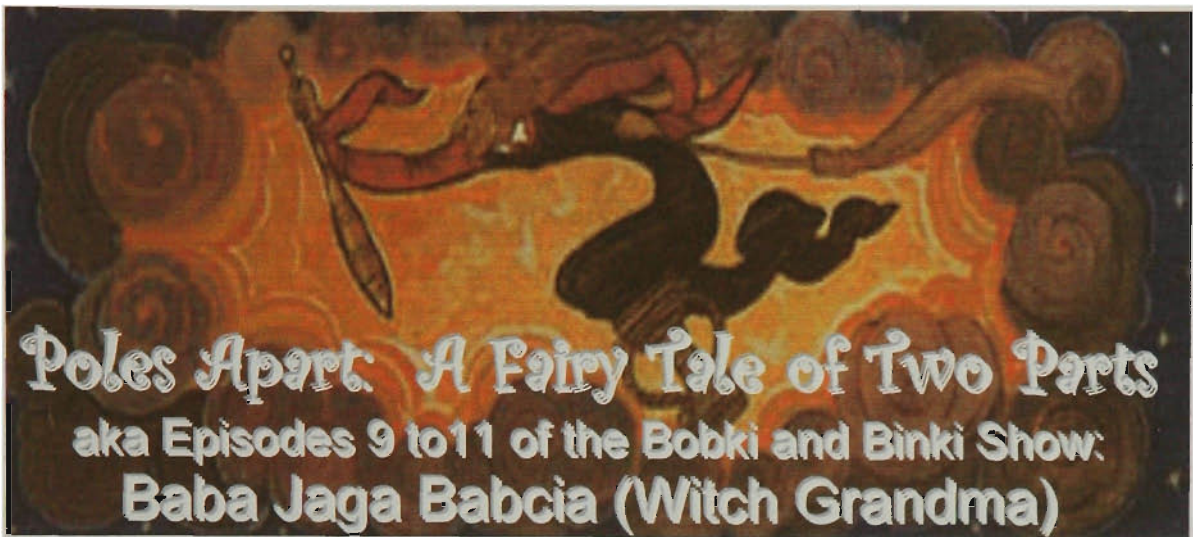
*And then, remember, I seen that wog bird, Lina or Pina or sumthen, after goin' to the Salvos? She used ta be in mi class in year 8, y'know. Thick as dog shit, she was. She's like my age and still livin' at home wiv mummy and daddy. I seen her down at Midas that day, at Broady, buyin' these 250 buck shoes – just a coupla gold straps they were really. Pretty pox lookin', I reckon. I wouldn't wear em if ya paid me. Too woggy lookin'. S'pose she's got nuthen else to do wiv her money. Bet ya she's not gonna have a baby in a hurry anyway. Bet ya she wouldn't know how.*

*Hop in the pusher darl'. There's ya bottle. Nearly eleven - it's gettin' a bit late. It's OK but, you'll have a nice big drink a **Coke** soon. Shit, gotta tell Houso ta fix this lock too. Bloody slackers. Y'know 'n here I am tryin' ta bring up mi kid, nice and safe, on mi own. I luv ya Courtnee, y'know I'd do anythin' for ya luv. You're Mum's little girl, aren't ya, hey?*

She shook the can again, even more vigorously now and the monotone voice returned, in a new frenzied manner.

*Yes, she was a dirty, greedy girl for wanting a **Coke** in the steam of the summer heat and yes, he was a dirty greedy boy for f/sucking off some old man for money, beers, cigs and **Coke**, and yes they are dirty greedy little toddlers for sucking on the teats of **Coke**-filled bottles ...Sshhhiii... but the greediest of all was he who stood behind the milk-bar, steaming up his **Coke** bottle glasses, ice cold **Coke** bottle, firmly wedged in anus. And that's just it – It's The Real Thing – You Can't Beat the Feeling - What You Want Is a **Coke** - Be Really Refreshed – Drink **Coca-Cola** - **Coke** Adds Life – Things Go Better With **Coke** - You Know You Want It. Enjoy! Enjoy! Always! Enjoy! **Coke** is... **Coke** is Ssshhhiii...*

The monotone voice began to bubble, spurt and furiously fizzle now. She quickly peeled the *Cake* can away from her ear, “Oh, no, no, no, no, no. That’s all been a bit *too* real for me. It’s not my life. I know I don’t want it. No, not at all.” She threw the can into her recycling bag, sniggering, “Well, that’s the end of your sssshhhiiIT. I’m gonna crush you right down. I *can* beat the real thing.” And she did.



Once upon a time there were two little sisters who lived in the land of Oz. The younger one was called Bobki and the older one Binki. They lived in the land of Oz but they didn't speak the language very often. They were first taught their mother-tongue by their mother and by her mother too. Their mother took them to their mother-land of their tongue, when they were nine and eleven, respectively. They were to meet with their family on the other side.

On their first night there, not too far from where the plane touched down, they stayed in a wooden cottage, in what they could only have described as a village. The house had colourful carvings of roosters and flowers covering the walls and a few kaleidoscopic tapestries hung, to keep the heat in. They only knew of these kinds of places through stories they'd heard or documentaries they watched on television. Places where the streets are made of dirt and a few scattered stones, where chickens and the odd cow roam. Their relatives were so honoured to receive them all the way from Oz, that they sunk a new well in the backyard that night, so that thirst could be quenched and faces washed. Water bubbled up instantly and in abundance, to the amazement of the girls who were accustomed to turning on taps.

The neighbours a few blocks away had the only bathtub with warm running water in the place so they traipsed across the fields of bowing poppies and cornflowers so blue-bright, that they were almost visible in the evening. Bobki and Binki had come from the hot land of Oz and even though they landed in their mother-country in

spring, for them, it was still rather cold. One of the relatives (all cousins several times removed but who uncannily looked to be identical twins of their cousins in Oz) gave Bobki a scratchy woollen cardigan to wear on her way to the bath. The cardigan had huge orange glass buttons on it and all Bobki could think about was how to avoid touching them. This was one of her secret and strange phobias that only very close family members knew about.

The following morning, Bobki sat on the rickety steps of the cottage and watched her new-world-for-now go by, complete with chickens, geese, cows and a few clip-clopping horses pulling shabby carts. An old man approached her: A crinkled up stranger wearing a fisherman's cap, a face full of wrinkles and a mouth without teeth. He reached into his pocket and as Bobki was on the verge of a scream for help, he gave her a little box and said, *Give this to your mother so she can cook you up some soup.* Bobki was a well-mannered girl and even though fear stuck in her throat, she let out a polite thankyou and ran inside. **Mama, mum. This old man wants to poison me.** Her Mama was busy handing out stockings and sanitary pads to all the women there who wanted them and who had for some time, been without. Bobki showed the box to Binki and together, they deciphered the label to mean that it contained a chicken stock cube – Category One, no less – premium quality, for its time. The old man stranger didn't think of Bobki as a stranger at all. Sitting on the cottage steps on the village path, she was just a regular kid. She was a girl at her home watching and waiting for her place to be revealed.





They should've known something wasn't quite right when this as yet unknown grandma of theirs threw the lamb's wool slippers they gave her, the ones they had searched for all over Melbourne, the type that they'd never afford for themselves, under the bed, with a barely audible, bloody rubbish under her breath.

For some reason though, they told their Mama that they didn't want to go with her to see the heavily bejewelled Madonna, didn't want to trudge around the country in a tourist bus for two weeks, to visit the likes of underground salt mines, with salt crystal chandeliers or palaces guarded by fire breathing dragons. They were content to stay with grandma. Maybe get to know her on their own terms. Perhaps bond a little. Maybe even find some other kids on the block to play with. This may have been the crux of their decision, to find some company of their own age. By this stage, Bobki and Binki were in fact tiring of each other, delirious and exhausted from the constant movement, literally fighting like cats and dogs, with scratches all up and down their arms to prove it. Also, in consultation with their mother, they agreed that this woman was their Babcia, just like their grandma in Oz. This, they consoled themselves, meant that she would never do them any harm. Their Babcia in Oz was still young and glamorous, still in a 40s kind of way. This Babcia was more the Ma Kettle version, with squinting eyes that had needed glasses many, many years ago. But they were eager to give her the benefit of the doubt.

Babcia in Oz was kind and loving and merely giggled at their indiscretions and



naughtiness and never, ever raised her voice. Her own mama had twelve children altogether and was constantly yelling, to the point of her own fatigue. Surely, this old woman would be nice to little children of her own flesh and blood? Mama picked up her gigantic make-up

case and made her way to the taxi downstairs. She gave the girls five Oz dollars in Polish zloty, just in case they found something they liked and she dutifully kissed them both goodbye on the cheek. Her mother was a survivor of war-time labour camps and so she etched this in her daughter's head: Always kiss the ones that



you love goodbye for you never know if and when you will see your beloveds again.

Bobki and Binki so desperately wanted the smoked eels and cabbage rolls they saw on the menu, stuck on the front of the Castle restaurant, at the peak of five hundred stairs. They peaked in the door and the whole room stopped and turned, with that, *why aren't they at school?* look on their faces. They were frightfully hungry but still didn't have the guts to enter this adult domain. Only the equivalent of some paltry poultry stuffing had been fed to them twice in the past week. To be exact, once a bowl of cold noodles and cold milk, the other time cold milk with bits of stale dry bread floating in it. The rest of the time, they ate nothing. For Bobki and Binki were already nicely rounded thankyou, from all the delicious food that their Babcia in Oz cooked for them. Now they drooled at the thought of just one of her dumplings, a potato pancake or two. Baba Jaga Babcia glared at them as she sat, mopping up her lard and jam with fresh bread and telling them that they were way too fat. What had really possessed them to stay with Baba Jaga in the first place? Had one of the geese from the village, under one of Baba Jaga's spells, lured them there? Everyone knows that geese under her spell are renowned for stealing children for Baba Jaga to eat.

My good Babcia  
curtains open in  
there peer down



warned me of the likes of you. Were your  
the night of the full moon? Did the man up  
on you and turn you into a bitter loon?

Baba Jaga was indeed a Guardian Spirit of the Fountain of the Water of Life. The light would mysteriously turn off whenever the girls sat on the toilet and there was never any paper in the holder. They had become accustomed to using newspaper pilfered from neighbours' mailboxes. One day Baba Jaga stood in the corridor and as Bobki passed by her on the way back from the toilet, she taunted her and laughed, Ha, ha, ha, ha. Well, you didn't look hard enough for it, did you stupid girl, gloating with a fresh roll of paper on each hand. By then, it was well and truly enough for them. Guardian Spirit indeed!

Baba Jaga wouldn't wear glasses, ankle and knee braces or false teeth because that would mean she was admitting defect. Why, that would mean that she couldn't work on the farm anymore; the farm that she no longer had anyway. Anyone with any defects like that should be put down like a lame dog, she said. Empty people. What good are they? Vacant shells. What good are they? Just a bunch of ragged bones and rotting meat, taking up space, wasting money, honest dolary, when they should be working hard on the land. Seemed as though she should've lived in the chapel they saw with their mother last week, the one made of the skulls and crossbones of the victims of a cholera plague, where the nun opened the trap door in the floor, to show them the pile of 3,000 more. Maybe that was her real home and she just flew to the city apartment block at her leisure because there were so many more children there.

Just tell her to get fucked, Binki whispered. She won't understand what you say.

OK then. Fuck off, fuck off you fucken ugly old bag.

Grinding away at something indistinguishable with her mortar and pestle (a true Baba Jaga's mode of transportation, no less), Ah, *that* word. I remember this one I learnt when I went to stay with your tata in Oz. I kept telling my son that daughters were worthless. You think you're so smart, still going to school when you should be tilling the soil on the farm, you good for nothing, you rude, lazy, useless, you should-have-been-smothered-at-birth-girls. How about *shuddup yoo busteds*? I remember that one too. Heh, heh, heh. Baba Jaga screeched, as she glided towards her kitchen and turned the oven on. Even though they knew they were clever enough, they weren't about to take their chances on her spatula either. For if she invited them to sit on the end of it and the spatula deemed them without wit, it was into the oven for them.



Quick, said Binki to Bobki, *Let's Run*.

They made it to the bottom of the stairs of the apartment block in ten seconds flat. So, now where do we go? Chink, chink, the milk-lady's bottles rattled together in their basket as she walked over to deliver and to inquire as to who they were. *Hmmm, so*

*the old lady in number 503 is your Babcia, I see. Well you poor girls, I don't envy you. That lady is quite cruel and mad, I know that ... some even say she is ... a... a real Baba Jaga ... Ummm, well, I better go and finish up my milk run then, bye.*

Bobki and Binki in unison thought, **Thanks a lot lady. Tell us something we didn't know. Can't you even give us a bottle of milk cos' we have nowhere to go?** They went to the basement of the building to check for the Baba Jaga's obligatory house-huge chicken legs. They could expect to see two or three or four. It's what keeps their houses in perpetual motion, endlessly spinning, dashing from here to there. She must have known that they were going under there as her house has windows for eyes and a doorway mouth. No chicken legs were to be found and yet, they heard her loudly cackling. They never had the opportunity to investigate the bottom of the skeleton chapel for bird's feet though.

**God, I'm so hungry. There's gotta be a shop somewhere around here.** Bobki and Binki walked for what seemed like hours and in circles too. The Romany woman with the two-coloured eyes disappeared into the alleyway when the girls begged her to have their fortune read so they could see what else was coming their way. Perhaps she sensed the evil with which they were being tainted. Finally they came to a sparse looking supermarket without any advertisements, no colour and barely a thing on the ceiling-high shelves. In their weird looking home-tailor-made red-edged denim flared overalls, they were bound to attract suspicion. Were they rich delinquents who didn't have to go to school? Decadent Westerners perhaps, whose Mama shopped at Venture and the Dandenong Market for their clothes? A stout woman in a white, what looked like a butcher's uniform, wearing a net on her head too, followed their every move, without a single word. Little did she know that they had enough money to buy up everything in the shop. But there was very little there so they settled on a pillow-sized bag of boiled lollies that took both of them to drag up the aisle to the cash register.

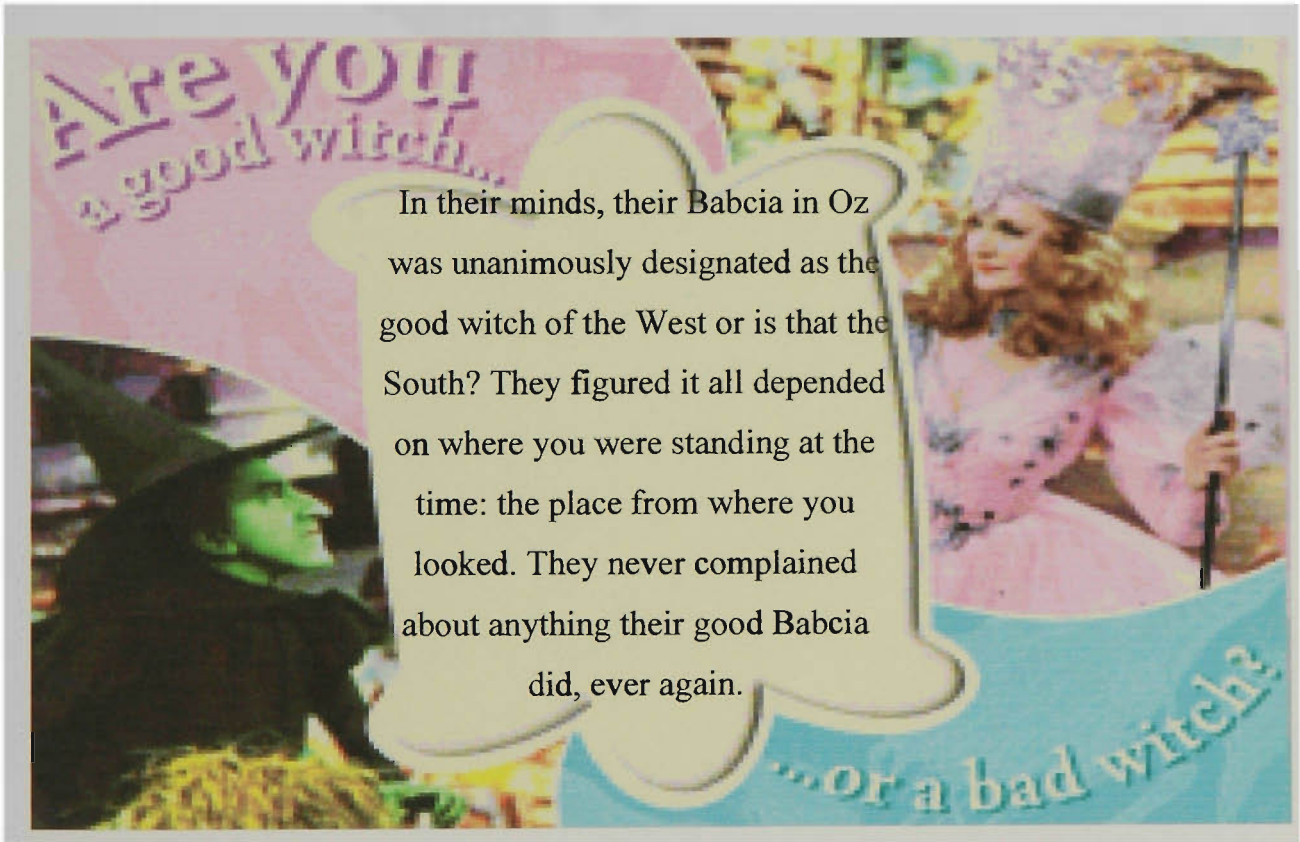
After filling their faces with as much sweetness as they could bear, they walked on to the park with the shiny silver old warplane as monument, high up on a pedestal. Bobki and Binki sat in the plane and contemplated their next move. They wished they could find their Mama or someone or anyone. The plane then started up and took off

into the sky. It flew them over the tiny vegie plots and the tall apartment buildings. Look Binki, that's where we found all those huge pink snails they export to France. I'd settle for a few of those right now, let me tell you! Red banners streamed across the sky with slogans that didn't mean all that much to them. Perhaps they had something to do with the murmurings of uncles and aunts, about waiting in queues since 4am, to get the morsel of meat in your pierogi, that you were fortunate enough to be having for dinner, while the reds emptied their seas of caviar. Or talk of how the reds took all the crystal out of the country to line the Moscow Olympic pool. At least the colours matched up.

Well, whatever, this was surely better than walking on tired feet. The girls decided to try and follow Baba Jaga's path to check out the skeleton chapel but this was to no avail. As she flew with her mortar and pestle she must have swept away her tracks with a broom. Who, who, who can we find? We're so hungry, thirsty, cold and tired and we need someone who will be kind. Bobki then recalled that their cousin Edyta, who they met a few weeks ago and who looked exactly like her favourite cousin in Oz, couldn't have lived very far away. She remembered a tram stop right out the front of the building block. It stuck out because the apartments were new and aside from those few things, there was stark-all else. But what number was on the front of the tram? As if by some miracle, the speedometer on the plane hit 242 and steadily remained there, even while it started to descend back into the park to land, as it was doing right then.

Edyta waited at the other end of the tram tracks like she had anticipated their arrival. She had hot potato pancakes stacked up on plates for them, plenty of soft toilet paper bought on the illegal market and best of all, three tickets to the circus for the following night. They talked on into the night about Baba Jaga as Edyta knew her well. She had lived with her for a time until she could take peeing and studying in the dark no more. Although the sleeve of Bobki's new lime green jacket was sodden with elephant pee at the circus, neither she nor her sister could've been happier, besides that, here, they could use the washing machine. Bobki and Binki slept in Edyta's toddler son's cot, for the remainder of the week, where they were warm and fed and very content.

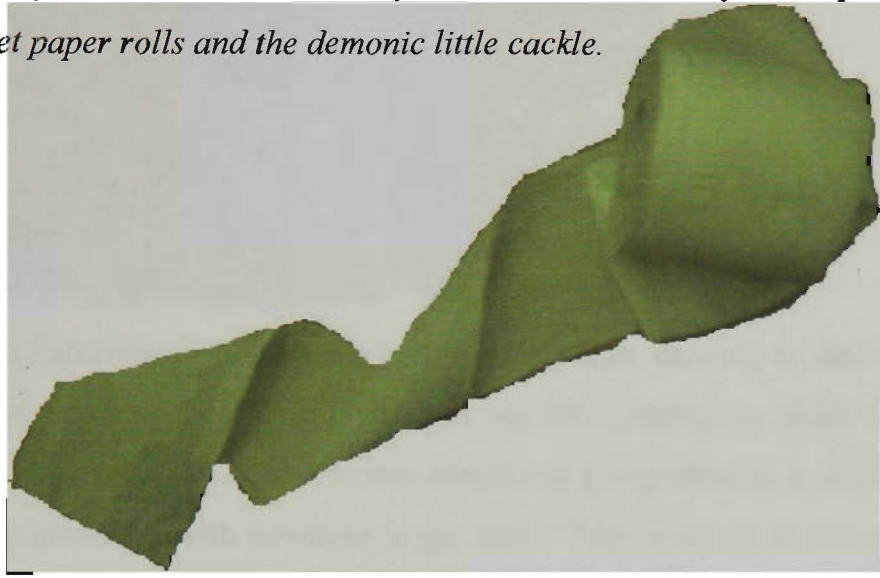
Edyta escorted them back to Baba Jaga’s when it was time to leave. Their Mama would be returning from her trip so they could leave straight away with her and be safe. So, I hope I’ll be seeing you again before you go back to Oz? They assured her she would and hugged her and heartily thanked her. I hope it’s OK, I won’t be coming upstairs with you ... er... I’m not feeling very well but your Mama will be back really soon. I love you and please take care. Bobki had a jar of fireflies she caught in the circus sky in her jacket pocket, just in case there was no light. Besides, *together* for the next hour or so, packing away their belongings, Bobki and Binki would survive the wicked witch of the East or is that the West? (They could never be sure of those directional matters.) Their time with Baba Jaga had ensured that the scratches on their arms had healed and no new fresh ones were made.



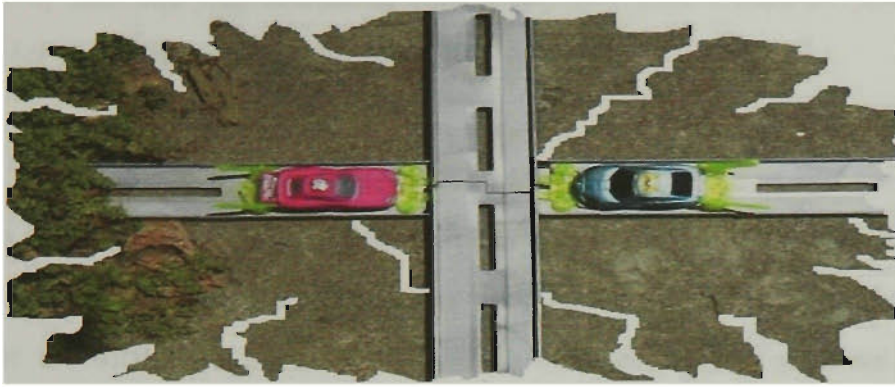
They wore the green and purple and white striped ponchos, made from itchy carpet wool from the factory where Babcia worked, with pride. They ate her homemade jam, from homegrown plums, with relish, every day in their school lunches. They stood up in her maroon canvas shopping jeep as she pushed them around the market and they stopped bobbing down to hide from everyone or trying to escape when Babcia wasn’t looking. They even let her put daisy chains and crown-like plaits in their hair, as they sat together in Babcia’s backyard and watched every Sunday in the sun pass by.



*Last they heard, Baba Jaga only had one leg and then, not long after that, they heard she was dead. Now, when they are safely tucked away in their beds in Oz, Bobki and Binki pull the covers tight over their ears, so they can't hear the walk of a stump, the rustle of pilfered toilet paper rolls and the demonic little cackle.*



## ***The Centre Piece: Stalled Vehicle Crossings***



They were sucking on Patra orange juice bottle bongs, flying high, dancing around the creaky fibro house and watching the movie ‘Starstruck’ on TV. Singing the ‘Body and Soul’ songs ear-explodingly loud. They were star-struck and going around in circles: Star-struck and going nowhere, with nowhere to go, fast. They were all at Shane’s house the night before his dad threw him out. He was not too cute anymore. You may know Shane as the guy who sits in the wheelchair all day, playing the gut-twisting bagpipes under the clocks, on the steps of Flinders Street station in the city. You may not know however, that he can walk perfectly.

When Zinnia laments not having her driver’s licence yet, she thinks of all the stalled cars she has known not intimately enough but loved all the same. All the stalled young people too, who had dreams and ambitions that surpassed their means. She recalls the cars in which revelations were made, the movement in stasis, girl revolutions, cars that provided a reprieve from the daily ennui.

Paola hides under the dashboard of her father’s long purple Valiant. “Just drive Toto. Hurry. Just drive.”

“What you problem?” her father asks.

“Nothing, nothing. Bloody Jesus Toto, just drive, faster.”

“Ah, Paola, I take my time. Not drive silly. What for? I in no hurry.”

“Yeah, well Toto, I sure as hell am. Especially in this big woggy thing.” Paola’s father slows down even more then and Paola, by this stage, melts into a puddle on the Valiant floor. They were exiting Dandenong after all, which for girls from Springy was the big glitzy light-filled city. She had just been strutting her stuff at the new under 18s disco, saw a boy of interest there who wore white socks under pants, which

in that era was a disco wog thing. She failed to notice however his pierced left ear, a dead-giveaway that she was entranced with a gay boy who would not have paid any heed to her let alone the car she was travelling home in.

At thirteen years of age, Emily was short in stature but huge in the risks she took. She'd place three phone books underneath her in the driver's seat, so she could see over the dashboard of the cars she borrowed, now and then. That girl would do anything for the thrill of a burnout, the daring of a well-executed donut. It cost her two years back in juvy each time but she swore it was worth it. The adrenalin hit was way better than the rohs she was popping and expense-wise, the activities were about on a par.

On some Sundays, Zinnia's Uncle Eddie would say, "Wanna' go see Star Trek at the drive-ins?" And so they'd go in his chocolate brown Datsun Stanza. Eddie wasn't much of an automobile enthusiast himself so he chose a car purely based on his favourite edible flavour. The only other sentence he uttered to Zinnia would be, "Wanna choc top?" So they'd sit in silence, watch the movie and then drive home. The sweet economy of words they displayed: uncle and niece connected through sci fi worlds, showing on an outdoor cinema screen, in a chocolate mobile, eating chocolate coated ice-cream.

On her 18<sup>th</sup> Birthday, Zinnia had just completed her first year of university. This was going to be the first birthday party she ever had and before she could down her fourth 'Malibu surfboard', the house was full of bikers and karatekas, most of whom she didn't know. All of her friends from high school were there too (except for Emily who was locked up again) and they all discovered a red MG convertible parked on the road, just outside the front gate. It didn't belong to anyone at the party. They piled into the car, smoked a joint and reminisced about the dead cars they hung out in back home and how this one was such a step up. Even better than a Torana. Pity no one had the keys or that Emily wasn't there.

That year, Zinnia also discovered that she was a working-class girl. It was clearly defined for her in relation to the others she attended uni with. Before this, she had been homeless but before that, her home of origin had been made of brick. (Although



the huff and the puff of the wolf inside threatened it more than anything.) What did this class category mean then? It meant that when a girl who formerly attended Mandeville Hall asked her what high school she came from, the girl never spoke to her again. It meant that she wasn't driving a Volvo to uni but walking or if she was lucky and managed a part-time job, was catching the public bus instead. It meant wondering what Shakespeare had to do with her reality and being yelled at by a red-faced, grey-haired academic when she asked him this. Being working class meant never feeling worthy of a higher education and never feeling welcome in that higher learning place. Being out-of-place and then visiting friends in her home-burb Springvale who expressed amusement at how posh her accent became even though she didn't notice the difference. So she had learnt his master's voice after all but the master never spoke to her and she spent some lonely years at uni, with the thought of leaving always in the back of her mind but the resolve of staying at the forefront. They may have had money but she had the brains.

The two Springvale friends at the party who had made it to university, Danni and Zinnia, began bantering around the big words they had already learnt. Paola, who failed year twelve and was figuring out what to do next said, "So what's this episteme, ha? Sounds like a steamy piss to me." Danni was doing arts/law. She had a photographic memory and would show Zinnia at school how she'd glance at a page in the dictionary for a few seconds and remember it all. Danni wasn't going to proceed with her degree though. She'd had too many pieces of fruit and insults thrown at her, as she walked through the Law Faculty, carrying her books in a plastic Safeway bag. She never saw the use for a leather satchel like the other students had.

"Man, I'd love to roll Madonna for those long Chanel boots," Paola continued, "Even though she reckons she had it tough, living on popcorn and stuff, she's still like all those other wog girls at school with money, remember, who still lived with their parents and didn't need a thing. I reckon I'd roll them too, spoilt rotten bellas."

"Hey, you know what Paola?" Zinnia said, "You may as well roll me while you're at it because sometimes I wish I was just like them: a car for finishing HSC, maybe even one like this. A fat deposit for a house when I finish my degree. Perhaps an around-the-world trip to expand my suburban horizons. I'd grow my hair long and wear a

dress everyday if that's all it took. God, what am I on about? All I want is for my mum to start talking to me again."

Paola looked away in avoidance of the issue of Zinnia's mother, who hadn't spoken to Zinnia for three years, since she threatened her mother's de-facto, if he ever laid a hand on any of them again. Here, there was too much pain. "How many of us have a real choice about leaving our homes anyway? I bet even our parents wouldn't have gotten on the boats unless they really had to. Otherwise, they wouldn't talk so much about the old country and act like they'd never left."

The red MG didn't go anywhere but the young people in it were moving, sharing, growing and dreaming together and nothing or no one could possibly have removed them from the vehicle. They were crossing borders in a stalled car that one-day maybe some of them, or at least just one of them, would find the key to.

The joint had been passed back to Zinnia more times now than she could recall. Thoughts of love, longing and loss swirled around her mind like a washing machine on the maxi cycle, spinning out truths of a mother who ignored her and a lover she only dared to dream of. She struggled out of the car eventually and stepped over Karen who lay on the nature strip, beside the MG in a pool of blue curacao vomit, denouncing her violent, incestuous brother to anyone who'd listen. "Why is my obsession such a secret? Why have I kept it so long? Fuck it. What do I have to lose?" Zinnia thought. She went back into the house and over to the beautiful object of her desire. In a burst of confidence mostly fuelled by mixed substances and the private recital of the "I'm eighteen - It's my birthday" mantra, Zinnia confessed her longing for her. While kissing her solidly on the lips, the beautiful object said, "How about Simon joining in? Won't that be fun?" Zinnia's heart was instantly broken, all chambers and arteries snapped in two. She wished that the events were merely being viewed on a drive-in screen: that she could unhook those speakers from the car window, hang them back on their poles and not hear anymore of this stinging in her ears. She never anticipated this, let alone such a willingly given kiss. If she hadn't been so smashed, she'd have driven far away from that place right then and never returned.



## Mama Said That Little Girls Who Play With Fire Always Wet Their Beds.

There are 101 places to buy cheap cigarettes all over the metropolitan area. Everyone chooses the one place closest to them, the shortest walk or drive more than likely. The five-cent difference is not that much of a difference to them. Feel Free To Enjoy the Air Here. Your Smoking Pleasure Is All Ours. Adults Have the Right To Choose Their Poisons. I go to *this* place. Adorned by smoker's rights paraphernalia, nicotine products loom larger than life. It takes me ten minutes or so to get there by foot. Driving there would not do it justice. A small amount of exercise always excuses your mouth at the end of a lit cigarette, at the end of a walk, long or short. It is the ultimate reward. *This* place is a market discount smoke stand, plastered with its odes to a decent smoke.

My grandma took up smoking I was told, when the Red Cross parachuted cartons of **Marlboro** cigarettes and Twinkies down to them as part of the war relief effort. A little something to take the stress off all that awfulness. A little something to help them emulate the glamour of an *Amerikanka* 40s movie star. A bittersweet little something falling down from the starry sky, along with the fire and bombs.

Some forty years later my grandmother developed cancer. She'd only given up smoking a few years prior. I always ponder the link. I once made the faux pas of asking a devout vegetarian, Amnesty International devotee, hypocritically politically correct woman, touting for members on the street, if she thought I could perhaps sue the Red Cross on my Grandma's behalf. An outraged, serious No one sues the Red Cross: They are good people, evacuated her face. No grin lined my face either, well maybe just a little sneer.

One day I buy a **Coke** can look-a-like lighter from the market cigarette stall owner and this **Coke** is how our special relationship begins. Perhaps it is all in the amount of time it took me to actually buy this lighter, the number of times I went into his shop before I bought it. Or maybe his assumption resides in the fact that I didn't end up purchasing the lighter until they had all been sold out and a fresh new shipment arrived. Just for me, he claimed. I'm a sucker for that kind of stuff! I like my goods new, fresh and clean. Just for me. From then on, the shopkeeper homed in on my supposed fetish for lighters. He shows me everything that's current in the lighter line.

I caress each new shape, edition and style for at least ten minutes. This amount of time seems to be mandatory, with his monologue in the background about re-fillable, I fix the flame, precision made in Japan, look, look, very nice, very cheap, you want? I make special price for you. I'm in a smoke stand trance and it's not as if I'm inhaling some of that cheap and nasty but reliable butane gas either. In this place, that word **Winfield** is tattooed across my eyes. It must have been a **Winfield** cigarette that I first ever lit and puffed on. I don't recall much about it now except for how it led on to me spending many of my 'formative years', as they say, in the local public toilet. *Meet you in the dunnies after school* was a favourite catchcry of ours.

Under the filthy sink, nestled in amongst the rusty, leaking pipes, our collective emergency packet would rest. It wouldn't do to have more than two sharing in this hiding spot. A collective of two best friends only. We trusted only each other in this. From one Saturday to the next the cigarettes would last us. No one ever stole any of them. No one would ever dare. After a short fast bike ride, with me sitting on the handlebars with tightly clamped eyes, we reach this rest room detached from the toilets. It is fully sealable with doors that can be locked from the inside. It was definitely purpose built. No baby change tables, no mirrors, no hand dryers even. Just bench-filled walls and a sink at the end. Built with our purposes in mind.



Stop carving that shit into your arms. Come over here and I'll pierce that ear again for you.

I always conduct all piercings. Armed with a single sewing needle and a flavoured ice tube. The ice is optional. BYO. I charge nothing for this service.

Truth, Dare, Kiss or Promise? Pick.

I will always pick Dare 'cos I am always bored. Dare me to do something really bad. Something that I will not ever be able to confess. That I would not even dare say the words for out loud or even whisper in church. Is that it? No big sin.....there you go.

This was our place of beginnings and endings. Our back and forth. Our migratory patterns were mapped here. This was the juncture, the axis of shifts and ex/changes. The place that had seen and the place where it was all played out. From wise cracking smart arse to blubbering heart-ached fool. From roof climbing, mud cake-making tomboy to good head giving girlfriend and then back again. From in other words, **restricted wog girl** to loose skippy moll. From hidden cigarettes to dirty needles, sharps containers and forty-five bucks to score. From Italian run pinball parlour gambling houses around the corner to Vietnamese beef noodle soup. Little did



I know that little Johnny was anonymously getting his dick sucked in the boys' toilets next door while I'm puffing on a stale Winnie and ignoring the boy who's fondling me. They say there is nothing much here for a girl.

I draw the lighter on offer today slowly back and forth, towards and away, studying this afternoon's treasures with an appreciative eye. This time it's a silver woman's hand with long red nails. Pull the thumb back, and you have a forefinger on fire. Back and forth. Slowly back and forth just like Mandy always used to do with her prosthetic for aesthetics' sake, detachable eyeball. With the not-so-empty hollow cavern inside. Barely All There they called her. That's capital B, capital A, capital T. Batty for short. I called her *All and More*. She is all that *AM* is for me. *AM* would always pull her eye out, in the park, just for my eyes to see. In the park with the huge fibreglass happy face swing by the creek. The one just past the toxic paint factory smoking away, still poised to take off with my mum.

I was never entirely convinced that *AM* couldn't see out of the socket. A little bump of skin sat smack, bang in the middle of it. It was a moist little bump, a clitoris in place of a sphere, as eyeballs are meant to be. She used to turn the eye back in on herself and describe what she could see. The person she saw through that glass eye. Moving it back and forth. This is me. I can see that. *AM* was so proud. We would sit on the swing together smoking, flying high. Her hand clasping one eye. Swinging back and forth. It was never our sordid secret. It was an added attraction for me. Cavern like a cunt with one main large fold. I always thought she was so lucky. She was blessed by two.

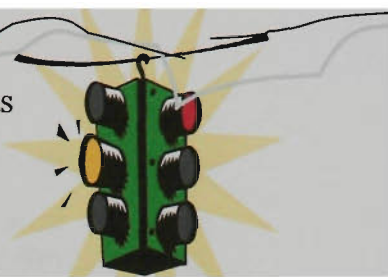
*AM* always stood her ground in a fight. She was a fighter. All fights were fair. She fought furiously with her oldest brother Dazza and that's how the eye she was born with was lost. There were about seven of them you know. All big time crime doers, or so it was widely known. Dazza did the whole Smith family. He was not content with just one. Only a mother and her two daughters would do for a time. We would see the youngest Smith daughter wheeling Dazza's baby in a decrepit pram past the high school. Everyday. Back and forth. Waiting for lunchtime to come.

The Smith family father was a bespectacled respectable Sunday school teacher\ bank clerk. A suit that never spoke much. But the trap door receptacle beneath the marital bed spoke loudly. Look in.... See.... Lift the lid when you need some spare change or some equipment for a dirty, sleazy game. The trap door beneath the Smith's marital bed was laden with a stash of wads of cash. Hundreds of hundred dollar bills way beyond a poor girl's imaginings. The hole in the floor provided us with countless cigarettes, dozens of bottles of cheap alcohol, heads of dope and half decent take away food. The rest was purely incidental - whips, masks, chains, hoods, handcuffs, knee high rubber boots, wooden paddles, three pronged dildos... Oops! Look! There goes a school girl's school uniform....

I place the lighter back in the hand of the cigarette stall owner and say, "Thank you, but no." It's like this weekly ritual that must occur for both of us in order for us to feel normal, whole. A place in the world for us. A place where I can go back and forth. Somewhere that we belong. Me as viewer and observer. Him as peep show spruiker but with far more sensuality. I always leave and rarely purchase but he always shows me *MORE*.



At the western end of my grandma's suburban street in Dandenong, that is where Poland ends. Where there's the great unknown. For a time, that was the end of my world as I knew it. And at that time, as a young child, time seemed to be endless, unchanging and slow. Beyond that point is the



vast unknowable beyond. Almost every household on her street comprised families who emigrated after surviving the Second World War. All of these families had come from Poland, except for the last house on the corner, with the rowdy little Chihuahua in their front yard, who bit my grandma's ankle, requiring her to have three stitches. That dog couldn't possibly have belonged to a Polish family, for at the time, sometime in the 70s, Pomeranians were more in vogue for us. My family was way out of Oz-Polish fashion I guess. We had a Boxer /Labrador cross.

Across the road from the Chihuahua house, directly behind the footy oval, was a perpetually freshly purple painted weatherboard, with an angry man inside, whose head would pop up over the fence and growl at us if we were making too much noise or being as children are. We saw only *this* head from the house that had an aura of intrigue about it. Several years later, in the hub of the night, an ambulance removed a large object from there, after the fire engine had widened the front door. The angry-man-head said goodbye to his giant wife on that night and he remained ever angrier, ever more.

During the day, as they collected water from the tap in the football oval, they smiled at the squawking cockatoos in the gum trees. One of the cockies landed on the Hills Hoist in my grandma's backyard and remained a permanent fixture. He even taught himself a few choice Polish phrases that he had heard around the street. 'Babcia, wipe



my bottom' and 'shut up Lizzy' were among his favourites. The water in the creek was undrinkable and the creek was rugged and unforgiving, taking a few of my mother's school friends with it, as it roared at the end of the court. The family dog at that time was a Blue Heeler/Kelpie cross, who



swam in the creek with the kids and managed to retrieve everything from there, except for the kids who drowned.

In the 50s, a few Bunurong people still lived in huts by the creek, at the eastern end of my grandma's street. They showed the kids, who'd first learnt to walk on ocean liners, how to throw boomerangs and cook food in the ground under hot coals. Nobody really kicked up a fuss when they noticed that they'd moved on. Nobody has any idea where they went. Everybody had their own life to wade through. The street just continued to meet by the creek and bake potatoes and lament those they had left behind elsewhere and rejoice at the clean, fresh air. Sometimes they gathered in my grandparent's 'barak', a two room abode that they lived in, and danced and sang the night away, to the strains of piano accordions, banjos and harmonicas that made it here intact. (Forgive me, for I forget some words in English and I think in Poleng instead. The LOTE is a real pesky mongrel of an insect. You can't stop it. It crawls into your head and it just keeps coming back at you.) At night, they listened to the sound of flapping flying fox fruit bats catapulting themselves into fig trees, still crunching away at local apples in their mouths.



I hated that sorrel soup; the slimy green sour weeds. Most of all, I hated that it was usually served with cut-up boiled eggs floating around in it. Even though mine, as a rule, was always devoid of the eggs, somehow the memory of them would besmear the soup that I knew (well, was told anyway) was good for me but would make me gag. I refused to eat it, said I was going far away somewhere, where they had Vegemite sandwiches and meat pies and normal food. My grandma packed my clothes into a garbage bag and walked me to the gate. 'If you want to go, then go. I can't stop you,' she waved as I kept looking back to see if she'd follow. I never went beyond the end of my grandma's street where Poland ends.

When my grandmother's sister stayed with her, during her first trip away from Poland and after several years away from her sister, the Polish Stop street was where Australia began and ended for her. She only speaks Polish and fears 'the other' with a



fear bordering on contempt, as she is accustomed to a more culturally homogenous place. She bought potato flour from the market on a forty-degree heat day and although we assumed she needed it for cooking Polish food, she proceeded to cake it on under her arms. My grandmother bought her some ‘gentle’ hypoallergenic roll-on deodorant the next day. My mother saw her singeing the hairs on her legs atop the gas hotplate one day and discretely slipped her some wax-strips and an impromptu demonstration. My great-aunt fed the cockies on the football oval every morning and seldom communicated with any other humans while she stayed. As I walked along the beach with her once, she asked me why my ‘Japanesish-type friend who I lived with’ looked like a boy. When in Sydney, at my uncle’s house, like a child, my great-aunt ran away too but it wasn’t over soup. Perhaps it was all the difference.

As the car would approach Lonsdale Street, I knew that we were just around the corner from where Poland Dandy Hams and Bacon suited pig would tip his top making the fountain water across the road from it. my grandma once worked, swimming pool, and great best toys were given away Cocky benefited from a jumper, when she lost all of her chest feathers, in her twilight years) – This place was further away but it signalled to me that we were entering my grandma’s suburb and that it wouldn’t be all that long before the relative safety of a Poland was reached.



began and ended. The neon monocled and pinstriped hat, on the top of the shops, change colours, in the park The carpet factory where with the tennis courts and family picnics at which the to all (I do recall that even home-made carpet wool

Gilligan’s Island was right in the centre of the street. An old camper bus sat in the backyard with a little picket fence around it. We would play there on most Sundays and remain marooned on the most exciting places that our minds would allow. The Gilligan’s were the only Anglo family in the street but as they had eight children, they must have been Catholic, so that was deemed to be okay. Unlike our new over-the-fence neighbours at the time, who, shock, horror, ‘believed in the queen as their pope’ said Mum, when I ran inside to ask her what an Anglican was and if it was all right to talk to one. Somehow, though, as good children do, we all got along in the end.

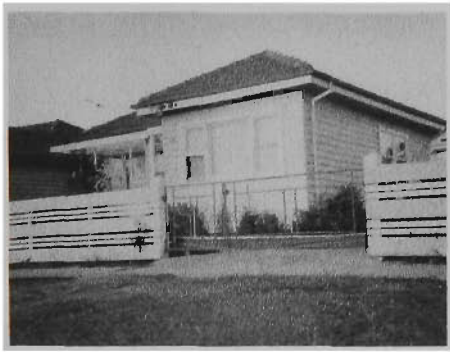


Mrs. Hikisz from two doors down at the Polish Stop had just received her war crimes compensation cheque in the late 80s, from the German government. It went towards her Pokies and Southern Comfort habits. She urged my grandmother to apply for it too, for my grandma was now a widower and could've used some extra money. Most of the street was each at least five thousand dollars better off. "It will never replace my child. Money cannot compensate," she said, referring to her first-born, who was 'experimented' on as a two year old and subsequently died as a result. "It will never stop the sights behind my eyes and the screams inside my head."

For most of my adult life, I have been acutely unaware of why I know this place so intimately, why I have so many memories of it, why I can still smell my grandfather's aromatic tobacco and my grandmother's Ardath cigarette smoke and why it bothered me so much when she eventually renovated her 50s style kitchen and rid herself of the watermelon and grey tables and chairs that I loved. I recall being feverish with chickenpox and pink-stained with calamine lotion, laying on my grandparent's couch, my older sister at the opposite end, equally afflicted. I know I lost a tooth there too and was given a dollar note for it from the tooth fairy. I remember lying in bed sulking while my grandfather tried to cheer me up with moving flick cartoons that he'd drawn. All of these pivotal moments come in flashes of vision and bytes of scent and sounds.

I assumed these moments occurred on any of the many Sundays we spent at my grandparent's house or that because there are five children in my family, the sick contagious ones were sent off to grandma's for the duration of their illness. My assumptions were proved incorrect when last year my mother casually commented on the time my sister and I 'lived' at my grandparent's house. So, for the first five years of our lives, before we started school, the Polish Stop was home. Although my mother insists we only stayed there as she had to work every day and I probably won't question her further on this and we haven't mentioned it since, I fear we lived there, my sister and I, because we were born girls, two girls after the first-born son and therefore worthless in our father's misogynistic eyes. I came to know pretty quickly that we weren't wanted. I came to know this with fists and foul words. I came to know that little girls weren't worth dirt (nor worthy of eating the good ham in the

fridge, using the telephone, listening to the stereo or watching television either) – all things arbitrarily designated ‘for the boys only’. And while I fear this was the reason we lived at the Polish Stop, I also know that the proportional stability and nurturing of my grandmother’s house in those determining years may have ultimately saved us, my sister and I and gave us a taste of safety and a foundational calm to look back to and compare.



When my niece visits her great grandma now, she knows none of this. The house she sees is this new one my grandfather built in front of the barak, which was torn down not all that long ago, being asbestos-laden. The doors on the rest of the street are open for my niece, just like they were for my siblings and

I. She is fed and spoiled and fussed over by the few who remain there now; those who haven’t opted for a small ‘low-maintenance’ unit; those who weren’t ripped off for their land on which now sit at least ten such aforementioned units.

My grandmother’s next-door neighbours, the two bee-keeping men, would pass me honeycomb over the fence. I had an intense fear of bees, surmising that one sting could kill me, as I hadn’t been stung yet. I would grab the sweet, dripping chunks and run to the opposite side of the yard. Such admiration I had for these netted faces as they faced the buzzing throng every day. They built their house together and lived there since arriving. As they occasionally attended church, nothing seemed unusual and it was assumed everything was above board between them.

One of the bee-keeping men died last year (the other one, not long after). It was then revealed that the first man had been financially supporting a secret daughter that no one else had ever met. She inherited everything the two men owned – bees included. Although the house was mowed down to fit in several units, the bees went with her. I don’t know how or where. All I know is that she still visits people in the street, now that she’s been discovered and hands out jars of honey to all.

I graduated from uni in 1990 and I was the first and only one. After all the pomp and ceremony was over, I shaved my hair, number one all over. Previously, it was waist long 'pretty' photo of me, albeit I walked past my grandma's enter her house through the back gate, and as I waved to her, she giggled and wagged her finger at me saying, "Oooohhhh, your mama's gonna kill you!" My mama was there that day and despite all of her 'Why? Why? Whys,' I live to tell another tale. My grandma reassured her that it was the fashion again, a part of the cycle that comes and goes. "Why, didn't Twiggy have the same hairstyle in the 60s?" I stayed over at my grandma's that night and I sat at the kitchen table in one of her dressing gowns in the morning, eating the warm porridge she'd made for me. Her neighbours visited and stared, but perhaps I had been sick, sitting there with my chemo-head. They were too polite to ask and the pentagram I had shaved into talked as normal, "Remember, this is Teresa's middle child? I bet she's grown since you last saw her." And her friends spoke in hushed reverent tones, assuming that I was nearing my deathbed.



Tadek, a few doors away, was forced to have his head shaved in the camp. He had a tattooed wrist too. Every moment he could find alone, he spent scraping the numbers to modify them. He had cracked the number code to the gas chambers. Tadek scraped away at the tattoo for days, letting the ink bleed into new numbers and he lived. His youngest daughter was born with jet black hair and his wife's remaining fear of any hint of stereotyped Jewish features meant that the girl was a bleached bottle blonde, with frequent touch-ups made for years, to the roots of her baby-hair.



At the extreme western end of my grandma's street, currently known as 'Heritage Hill', I stood holding these in the late 90s, not so long ago:



Behind the Dandenong Town Hall, where my grandparents and their children were 'naturalised' and made anew, where they took their oath to a distant queen and far-from-home country, the infamous One Nation was attempting to stage a mass meeting. Meanwhile, a mass rally was going on out the front of the building. Pauline ended up with an egg-coated head. And this time, the cameras didn't swing my way.

Young queers from my home-burb, Springvale, upon seeing my placards, flocked to me for information and as a point of referral. 'Where can we meet others in the area? How do we organise, network, find a sympathetic local ear, a community mag...' All the whos, hows, whats and wheres were overwhelming. I didn't know. I hadn't lived there for over fifteen years. At my time of baby-dykedom there, the local library books let me know that it was just a phase many teenagers go through. It too shall pass. Phew, I was ever so relieved. When I was a teen, we met in the public toilet and played in parks. The young people were thus disgusted that I was not a real 'Springy Chick' and hinted at my gutlessness for leaving. I could not be their local queer saviour after all. The assumed commonality was dead and gone. I felt momentarily guilty as if I had abandoned someone. But these someones I didn't even know. I had severed the roots and taken other routes. Yet, I was left with a feeling of some kind of debt I owe.

Once I was told I was not really Polish either, by a scoffing dyke from Poland who had lived here for five years. I was so looking forward to meeting her too as all the Polish girls I knew from my youth had eventually married all the Polish boys from then. She turned her nose up and said, “Ha, she’s no Polka. She’s Skippy, like bush kangaroo,” even after I’d spoken my most perfect polished Polish with her. Did proof require some sort of a bio-medical test? I knew the Polish anthem better than I did the Aussie one. I danced all of the dances and sang all of the songs (on stage no less). I went to Polish language school every Saturday and even had to join the Polish-Australian Girl Guides. All of these activities were concealed then, even from my ‘best friend’. I didn’t want to deal with the double whammy of daggy wog or woggy dag. But who was I then? Where does this Polish begin? Where does it all end? Who is this impostor? ‘Romper, stomper, bomper, do... tell me, tell me, tell me true... I, Miss. Helena of Romper Room, through my magic mirror, little wog girl, I’ll never see you.’ They made me. I became a Rose by an(y) ‘other’ name, while they casually swapped names around, busily mistranslated and wrote it down. The ‘I’ was transangloformed. Not for any reason of making a fortune nor for concern of my future fame but for the sheer privilege of attending primary school. I became utter(ly) pronounceable then. Thus, the others wouldn’t laugh at my mother-given name. I would be spared at least this pain. But they would call me Rose and I’d split in two. They would call me and I wouldn’t know who. Is this ‘I’ me or is it us, them or you? Yes, multiculturalism of the seventies and beyond let me be but not myself.

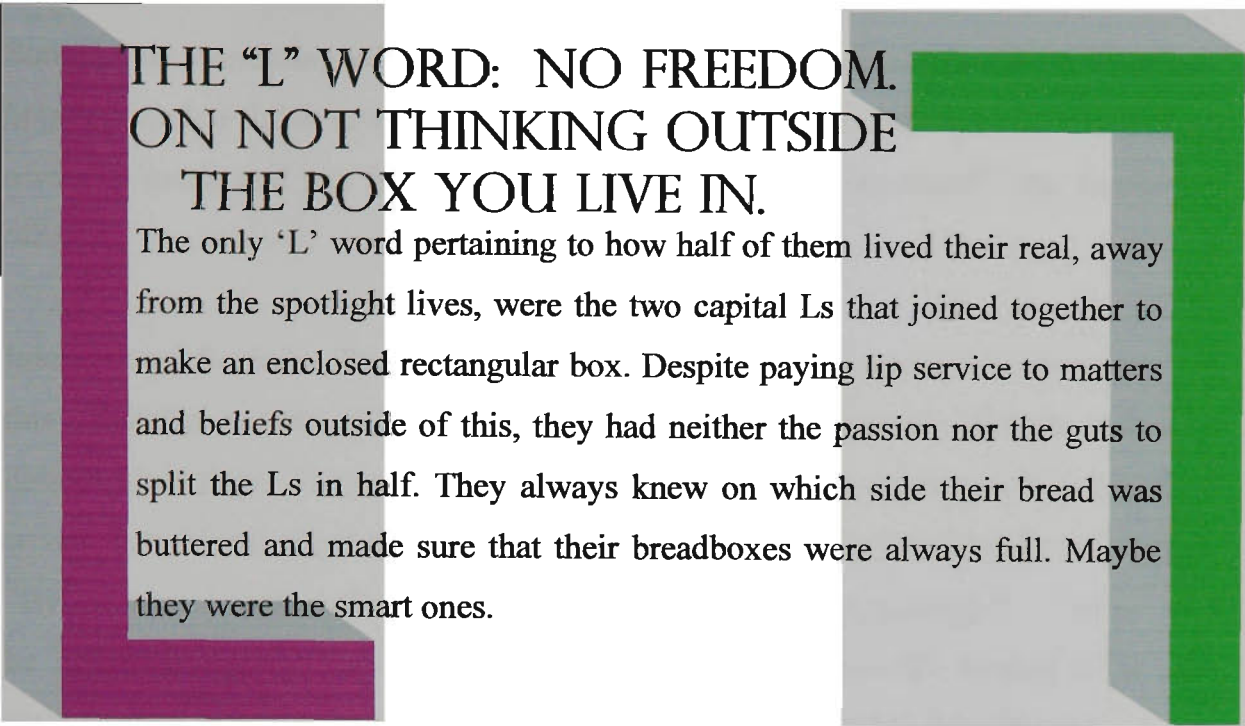
Am I at home now or is this my host? I left my birthplace as a very young woman because I ran for my life. I left just as my mother and her mother had. We each left for different reasons. Did I make it beyond where the Polish stop? Will I ever? I belong to the snatches I chose to take with me and those snatches belong to me. I’ve been busy erasing the hum of the rest of the grating track that was laid down in my head. And if I do owe the place something, ‘words are all I have to give,’ (thank you Barry Gibb), so there it is.





### **3. Accelerate: Infinite Trajectories**





## THE “L” WORD: NO FREEDOM ON NOT THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX YOU LIVE IN.

The only ‘L’ word pertaining to how half of them lived their real, away from the spotlight lives, were the two capital Ls that joined together to make an enclosed rectangular box. Despite paying lip service to matters and beliefs outside of this, they had neither the passion nor the guts to split the Ls in half. They always knew on which side their bread was buttered and made sure that their breadboxes were always full. Maybe they were the smart ones.

*What were we singin’ in the 80s?* We were struggling on during a time of pastel colours and shades that were muting and im/paling our minds. ‘Born again virgin’, that’s what Rosaria’s sister called her, when she found out. It’s a straight person’s term for an emerging or newly out lesbian and it surely defined her experiences then, within the 80s university feminist scene, surrounding the discourse of ‘virgins’ and ‘phalluses’. They would flatly deny that they ever slept with a male and you could have known for a fact that this wasn’t true. In fact, you might have even been in the same room with them at the time of such coupling. That’s just how it was. You’d be eaten alive. Better to keep on denying.

At this collective meeting once, all of a sudden and completely out of context, the matriarchal NESB lesbian guru of the time, Ms. Alethea, suddenly stood up in hysteria and announced that the only man she ever had sex with, in her entire life, was a black man, a bone fide refugee no less and so as far as she was concerned, that was acceptable. Is a man who is black therefore a feminized man? Is an oppressed man hence castrated? In their half-nods to this striking confession, the other women at the meeting all mentally calculated how long it had been since they last slept with a man and what his ethnicity was. If indeed this was to be the measure of a decent nesbian, then they surely had all failed.

Songul was wondering when this meeting would be over so she could go home and help her mother finish sewing the leather jackets, in time for the exploitative company owner to come and pay her fifty cents a piece. “What about class?” she tentatively offered.

International Socialist Trudy said, “Working men have so much to contend with in this capitalist society. They work so hard all week and the system robs and dehumanizes them. They are bound to be frustrated. This is the reason they beat their wives. Yes, it’s all about class – capitalism breeds patriarchy,” she lisped, then added, “By the way, I can’t make it to next week’s working group meeting. I ... um ... will be ... I’m going to a huge I.S. demo in Perth.” (Euphemism for staying at the nice little country retreat her parents bought her, for her much needed sabbaticals.)

And the meetings continued.

“Well, I’m oppressed too. I don’t have a modem.”

“You think that’s bad? I don’t even have a computer.”

“Penetration is so male-centric.”

“Your hand writing is like a boy’s – not ovular, but so square and angular.”

“When are you going to come out?”

“You’re still sleeping with a boy.”

“Real lesbians don’t need toys.”

“I am triply oppressed.”

“You listen to boy’s music.”

“It’s not culturally appropriate. You have to stay in.”

“You have such patriarchal sex.”

“I am really working class. Both my parent’s work.”

“Why don’t you want to sleep with *her*? You’re not a real lesbian.”

“You fuck like a boy.”

And still, the collective never decided on a name for its latest project. There were codes of behaviour and rules to contend with first. Lackeys to be made and power mongers to position themselves and to delegate. Someone had to set the moral foundation. To put it flippantly, they were engaged in an experiment in alternate worlds in which, unfortunately, authenticity and uniformity seemed to be the sole

aims. The experiment ultimately failed when the outer world was merely replicated in a more insidious form.

Rosaria quietly sat in the corner, hoping that the *de rigueur* question of that period, ‘What do *you* think?’ used to prove inclusion, didn’t come her way right then. This is because she was thinking: Spare me, you so-called sisters. Spare me all of this comparison of oppressions. Let me compare thee to... I dare not tell you now, for shame, that I stole lunches from other kids’ bags because I was hungry and besides, they had donuts. I dare not have pride in the fact that I went to a co-ed state high school and still managed to come out of there a dyke and that while I stood in the school oval and looked out in the distance, at this very institution of higher learning that I am attending now, teachers would walk by and sneer, “Dream on, you won’t be going there. You’ll be lucky to get a job at Woolies.”

I dare not interrupt your coming out stories of single-sex school same-sex sex games and your happy ‘first period’ yearly celebrations. I started bleeding right when Brooke Shields did on ‘Blue Lagoon’, when the movie first aired on TV. It could’ve been so glamorous, yes, but I was only ten and my misogynist father used it as another reason to degrade me. I find it hard to celebrate this. Such futility – I’m merely sitting here peeling my own sour grapes.

Am I just a daggy scarf and bad perm hairdo away from being just like you? Or is there more to it than that? I couldn’t play the stereotypical good wog girl and stay at home and wait for my glory-box and stash of white goods. I couldn’t stay at home at all. Sometimes, in the grand scheme of things, you don’t have a choice about whom you sleep with either. Sometimes, it’s a matter of necessity. Sometimes, you make the wrong choice. This ‘lying spoons’ business is not for me. I may be a homo but homogenous I can’t be.



I was taught all about the notion of 'relative deprivation' too, from a high school history teacher, now a prominent right-wing liberal minister, who derisively directed other student's 'poverty related', 'socialistic' questions to me. 'Relative Deprivation,' I swallowed it whole for a while until I felt so hungry that raw popping corn tasted great to me. I knew there were others hungrier than me but when you are hungry, hunger and misery are hunger and misery. Damn it, now I'm all confused. I'm getting into this comparing stuff too, this hierarchy of oppression. I need a drink. My head hurts. Please, sisters, please spare me your shit today.

Post graduating, Alethea invited Songul and Rosaria (on the proviso that she wear something decent and acceptable) to the fake engagement party she had. She was betrothed to a nice Greek gay boy ('a real man's man' as her family continued to ironically refer to him), to appease her parents. Alethea who erred on the butch side of the dyke equation (even though they didn't use that unsound word then) was ungainly clomping around in the highest of heels, in a flouncy floral frock. At the time, she was secretly sleeping with Songul, amongst others, and on that night, Songul cried her eyes out in the church hall toilet. Rosaria showed up, mainly to support Songul, sporting the hairstyle that Alethea warned her would offend her parents, when she said, "You're not coming with that hair are you? You can't." Rosaria explained that she cut it off and sold it for fifty bucks, as she really needed the money.



So, out of this forged union, Alethea was thus set up with white goods and appliances for life. Even all the fifty-dollar notes being pinned to her dress would have been enough. Rosaria herself lucked out big time in the financial department. Her parents gave her nothing but an inferiority complex, recurrent depression, a genetic heart defect and an everlasting gob-stopper bout of PTSD.

Songul and Rosaria shackled up together at one stage, after finishing uni. They fell in and out of love with each other on most Fridays. Perhaps it wasn't love so much as a mutual admiration for each other's clubbing gear and tasteful designer perfume. One Friday they decided to head on out to Sydney. They decided to fully enjoy a hedonistic life. They hadn't been to Mardi Gras before and although it was towards the end of the festivities, meaning they missed the parade, they bought tickets to the Boot Scooting Ball, after becoming experts in the dances after two lessons. The discovery of k.d. lang may have prompted this sudden interest too. They pressed their tasselled shirts, snorted some speed, starched their faded jeans and they looked the part, as much as two wog girls could. The ball was a dud. That's what they consoled themselves with. Not much dancing, flirting or even talking went on there. After a couple more days of trying to make it really dykey in Sydney, they went back to Melbourne in the way that they came, by train.

As they boarded the train, finally a conversation was had with some seemingly like-minded women, who were getting onto the same carriage. "So, what did you get up to in Sydney?" Rosaria asked them.

"We're co-organisers of the Gay and Lesbian Holocaust Commemoration Committee. We were up here for the commemoration ceremony. It was so moving. Such repugnant crimes were perpetrated. Amazing how they got away with it. How could it ever have happened? So sad," they replied.

"Yeah, bet it was," responded Songul, thinking inaudibly to her self, "Such an apolitical little weekend we two had. Oh well..."

Two hours into the train trip and a group of soccer fan boys began trudging up and down the passageway. They were becoming progressively more intoxicated with each passing of Songul and Rosaria. Initially, they were full of smutty innuendos but when they realized that Songul and Rosaria were queer, rapidly the dynamics were even more abusive. The women were physically and very loudly verbally trying to defend themselves. They were obviously outnumbered and in danger and were making it obvious to everyone else on the train too. Faces looked forward and took no notice.

Songul and Rosaria then locked themselves in the toilet for reasons of safety and to share a nervous smoke. Soccer boys were kicking the door, yelling, “Hey, there’s two dirty dykes in there together. They’re licking each other out. C’mon, let’s get ‘em. Smash their faces in.” No one said a word. No one deterred them. Rosaria and Songul were aghast that this was happening in such a confined space, with so many other people around and with not one of them helping. In desperation, Rosaria pulled the emergency cord and the train came to a sudden halt. Now someone would have to attend to the situation because presumably, it was their job to do so.

Soccer boys were eventually locked up in the train’s lock up for the remainder of the night and before heading off into another carriage, Songul and Rosaria went back to their original seats to collect their bags. Still, no one said a word. Gay Holocaust Commemoration girls sat staring at the wall in front of them and dared not turn around, discreetly removing their various badges and ribbons, hoping to blend in with the other silent ignorant passengers.

## Trilogy of TV

Three small children in their Sunday best hand-me-downs, stand by the pale blue bubble of a Volkswagen. One remains in Grandmother's lounge room, turning the dial and twisting the rabbit ears for a better reception of her siblings. They never cross the road to Shepley Oval when the footy's on; it's not their thing. Only when the game has finished, they collect coins dropped in the grass by the careless crowd, in the fervor of Dandy home team triumphs. She runs outside, "I saw youse, I saw youse, and you gotta try and stop pickin' ya nose. The camera was right on ya!" Sometimes it swings at half time and catches a glimpse of the kids who sit on the Holden bonnet, every Sunday, waiting for their image to be watched from inside.

I wake up in my mother's house and I am very young. I know this because I was not in my mother's house for that long. When I get to that mission-brown edged off-white dining room, I find glass all over the swirly pewter carpet. There is a bullet lying right in the centre of one of those yellow swirls as if it were some kind of target. A bullseye on the floor. There is also a bullet hole in the dining room window, the trajectory of which just narrowly misses my prized ten-year old gold fish.

Two weeks previous, my old man brought home a huge colour Blaupunkt TV. The first colour TV I had ever laid eyes on. This would have had to be the biggest TV in technological existence at this time. I did not think to ask why it was wrapped in dark grey blankets. I thought it was to stop it from getting too cold. Actually, I didn't care. It was new. It was big. It had colour and it was there. It was the first of several blanketed appliances to make it into our home in this manner. I can tell you all of this now because I swear we don't have any of them any more. Not even the radio-alarm clock. But that's another story.

The TV was uncovered that night with far more gentleness and concern than I had ever seen him handle any human being before. This was a valuable possession. This TV had intrinsic value. He plugged it in and switched it on. It was a supreme family event. Such a togetherness feel. The like of which was probably never to be repeated.



Flick the dial to **0**. The sparkling green pastures of Italy are a fluorescent spectacle, especially without the mechanical capacity for correct contrast and tone.

Tuning in, tuning in. Turning knobs, switching dials. Still too bright. The desert sands of Saudi Arabia a perfectly shimmering luminous gold. It was late but we can have no regard for dull old time. The TV is timeless. Months pass you by in a minute. The world is coming at you at an astonishing pace. The world is in your home. Your home is in the world.

Go on. Put it on that new channel. 0/28. The first official transmission of SBS begins. That is Special Broadcasting Service for those of you not in the know. Special. We who began life not speaking the tongue are suddenly made special at the flick of a switch. We are instantly filled with a recognition of our own importance, just like that. No longer like babbling freaks on the fringe. We can see that even in full feature length. It's right there on the screen. We belong.

They are showing a feature length Polish film. Mother is so transfixed by hearing her own language come out of a TV set, that we slip out of the house at around 11.30 at night. We ride our bikes to The Enterprise Migrant Hostel nearby. Sang and Michelle stand arm in arm by the hostel gate. Michelle's semi-shrouded young protruding belly belies the myth of a purely white Australia and keeps the gossiping gums fluttering about a new generation of mixed-up mixed gang babies.

We play chasey and ballgames with some Timorese kids there whom we have never met before. In the daylight hours, we probably will not admit to have known them. In the face of more suitable company they become anonymous, faceless. This is, after all, the final frontier.

Take a look at the mug shot of the new imported Mafia, Eastern European in origin. Arrested for the procurement of stolen goods. Two columns in the morning papers make for much angst. I arrive at school in a dis-connected daze. The police have been



and seized everything that electrically shreds, slices, dices, chops, grates and mixes, heats my room, tells the time, plays music, curls, styles and dries my hair, sheds some light and grills the bacon. The glorious technicolour box now scrapes the roof of the divvy van. Worst of all, they take the pull-the-string talking Bugs Bunny too, promised to an overseas cousin. But to tell you the honest truth, it wasn't really the worst thing for us. We sobbed and pleaded because Bugs was not to be ours and so we were secretly delighted that no one would ever have him - not friend, family nor foe. You can't expect a kid to be that selfless now, can you?

No one else was home. Just us three girls and Mum. The dog barks and the officer draws his gun out of the holster and aims in my pet's direction. Doesn't it bloody well understand English? Tell it to shut up little girl. All guilty by association. "Don't you dare," I scream. "Don't you dare you, you pig." Funny how it was the first insult that came into my head.

I arrive at school and nothing is as it was before. Your dad's a thief. My dad says he's a stupid filthy wog crim who's gonna rot in jail. I am being judged by the convict nation. I have been that judge before too.

Dearest Tatus,

With that TV you brought many things into our lives of the imagined and the real. You brought it all home but the colour was far too bright. A brighter picture we gained of a myriad of shades of colours beyond the black and white divide. Of keeping up with the Smiths and Joneses. Of not being the Smiths and Joneses. Of having the status of the Smiths and Joneses when confronted by our others. The reality of greed, of crime and punishment. Of our suffering for your mistakes. Of the shit that spouts from parents' mouths and of how all children will see this as their truth. Of blind prejudice and ignorance, also on our behalf. Of difference and the same. Of an imagined homeland that transgressed our

current realities. Of a brutal reality we wish to transgress. You brought it all back home.

I answer the telephone the following day. Tell that dirty cheating Polish Jew that I'm gonna kill him.

"Okay." I say. "But he's not a Jew, sorry. He believes in no higher power but his own." I hang up, talking as if I had just ordered take-away or something. I am hoping it was the shock of it all but I still can't say for sure.

Different crime, different place on a different channel now, some eight years later. A crime with a bit more respectability attached this time; one committed by the same father, wearing a dirty white collar. Videotape viewing from a monster-sized VCR. Controlled via remote, connected by a thick and taut cord, barely spanning a quarter of the length of the room. The channel's been changed to **2** ABC. Tape it for posterity, if Beta lasts that long.

This place is new in our neighbourhood. A no through road, in a stark and dry, suburban display home village: A baby crying and toddler crawling cul-de-sac, in the lounge room of a bargain house with Berber wool carpets and a lounge suite to match, popcorn all-round. Press the volume button, on the remote control, too big to be held in one hand. It's criminal - we're young, we've just started a family and we could lose our home. Colour is pastel-muted and washed out, instead of a funky, twisted, psychedelic 70s dazzle. Auntie, suitably permed and shoulder-padded, and uncle with regulation length tails in his hair, are small on the small screen, sitting and sinking into the big taupe studio couch. They watch themselves as we watch them too and squirm in our seats to the sins of our father.

Auntie turns and says to me, we never thought he'd do it to family... This time the visuals validate it. From newsprint to TV screen to videotape, always more tangible, always more real. A consumer dispute investigated, documented from

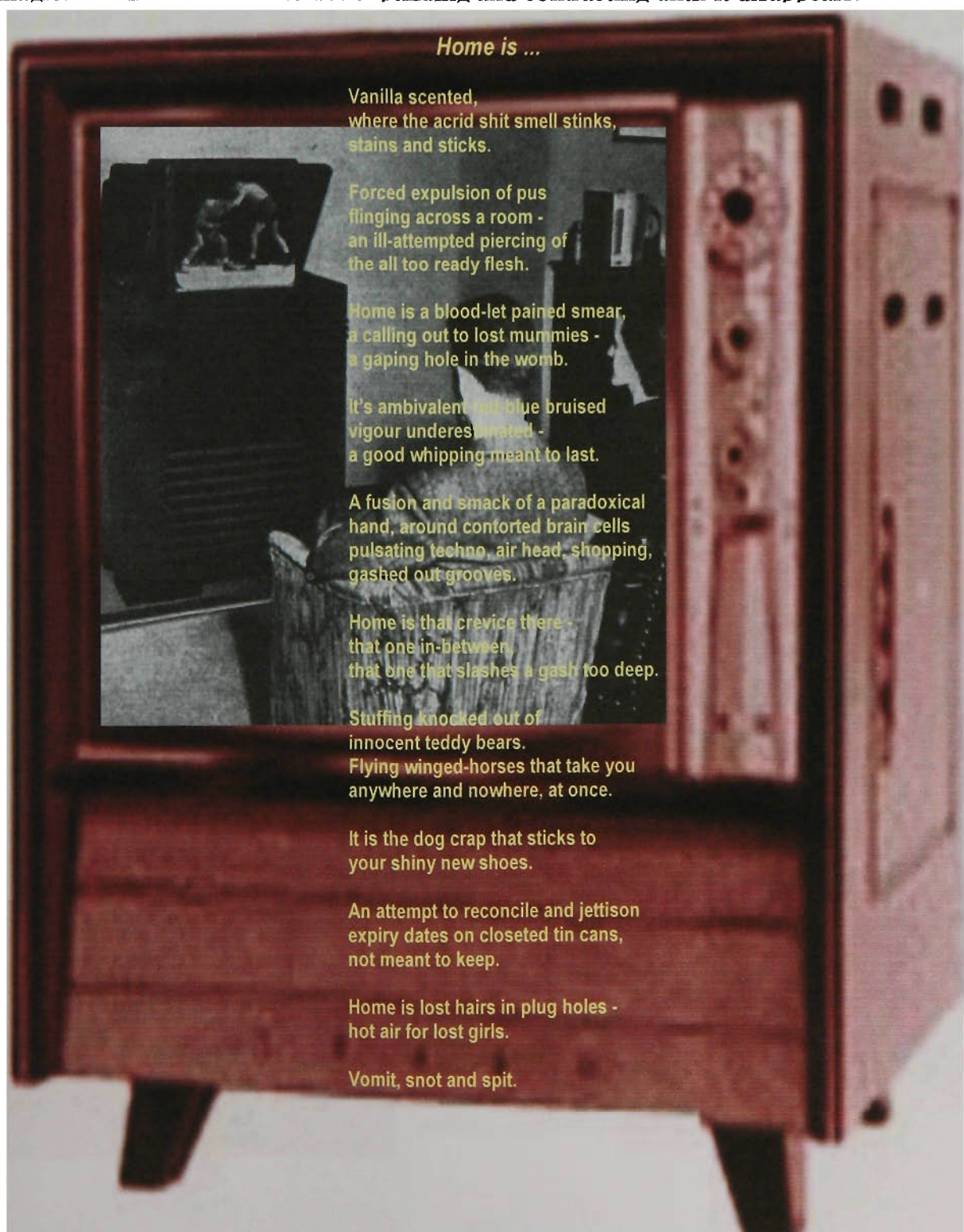
fragments of light to a family fragmenting. And Mum still keeps on asking why don't they ever put something 'nice' on TV?

We engage our mother in idle chatter, at least interesting enough to keep her eyes off the screen and her head turned elsewhere. This time, my sister sits on a loud plastic stool inside the box, vigorously shooting aliens on a *Space Invaders* machine, with a *Winnie the Pooh* blue dangling from her lips and a lemon, lime and bitters, for the more sophisticated bogue, shaking about and splashing all over the table top game. Having clocked up 45 racks: A champion at *Rockys* and every other pinny parlour in the area, only ever beaten by Julie, aka 'Rag', she seems oblivious to Frankie Doyle butch-swaggering around in her denim overalls, camping it up and mouthing off for the camera. My sister becomes an extra, an added touch of after-school loutish authenticity to the usually sterile scenes of *Prisoner*. It was strictly forbidden for little sisters to frequent the same pinball parlour as their elders, so while I was around the corner at *Darwin's*, playing *Galaga* and a few rounds of pool, she was within touching distance of my strutting idol. And this was another thing my mother never knew.

The interviewer's polite bald, pancake made-up head nods as he smiles and feigns interest at the appropriately rehearsed moments. Morning television chat is not his calling. "It's my mother's first time on television and mine too. But we just want to say thank you for the fantastic opportunity we were both given. My mother never thought she'd have the chance to go home once more."

Remote control pointed at the ceiling. A quick, early morning, pre-work cable channel surf. Smooth picture, flat screen, grandmother and mother are in surround sound. A banner ad of global stocks and share prices scrolls beneath them in an endless stream of figures and places. You haven't seen your brother for fifty years? "Er, that's right, yes. During the Occupation, you know, the Second World War, I was taken to a labour camp in Germany and I lost contact with him and, and... sorry I'm a bit nervous..."

“Oh, It’s Okay Mum. Just imagine, my girls will be so excited when they see us!” she says, as she leans over to the interviewer and nervously picks the fluff off his jacket. “I’ve been using these herbal tablets for my arthritis and when my son saw that there was a competition on the label, for a big amount of travel money, well, I’ve never won anything before... maybe just twenty dollars on Tattsлото sometimes... I was so shocked but so happy when I won. I haven’t seen my family for a very long time. I never dreamed that I would ever be reunited with my brother. Look, here is a picture of my brother and I together, just around the corner from his house, at the McDonalds ... in Kiev...” A family no longer free-to-air but freer all the same. Test pattern magic. Black screen. White dot expanding and contracting until it disappears.



*Home is ...*

Vanilla scented,  
where the acrid shit smell stinks,  
stains and sticks.

Forced expulsion of pus  
flinging across a room -  
an ill-attempted piercing of  
the all too ready flesh.

Home is a blood-let pained smear,  
a calling out to lost mummies -  
a gaping hole in the womb.

It's ambivalent red-blue bruised  
vigour underestimated -  
a good whipping meant to last.

A fusion and smack of a paradoxical  
hand, around contorted brain cells  
pulsating techno, air head, shopping,  
gashed out grooves.

Home is that crevice there -  
that one in-between,  
that one that slashes a gash too deep.

Stuffing knocked out of  
innocent teddy bears.  
Flying winged-horses that take you  
anywhere and nowhere, at once.

It is the dog crap that sticks to  
your shiny new shoes.

An attempt to reconcile and jettison  
expiry dates on closeted tin cans,  
not meant to keep.

Home is lost hairs in plug holes -  
hot air for lost girls.

Vomit, snot and spit.

# ZIPPERED

Her lover takes her striped flannelette pyjamas out of the dryer. She puts her arms in the sleeves and her lover does up every single button for her.

She is looking at a photograph of herself at seven. In it, her eyes are abstracted, there but not here. She is swaddled by a mauve chequered pinafore safely tied up by her grandmother, to protect the only school dress she owns. Her collar ends are perpetually turned up from continuous nervous rolling. Only one button is visible, just below her neck, much too close for her liking to her crooked grimacing mouth. It glares at her like a blank white screen or a tiny mirror with two small thread holes, through which she will see the past and the presence of this past, in a seemingly harmless inanimate thing.

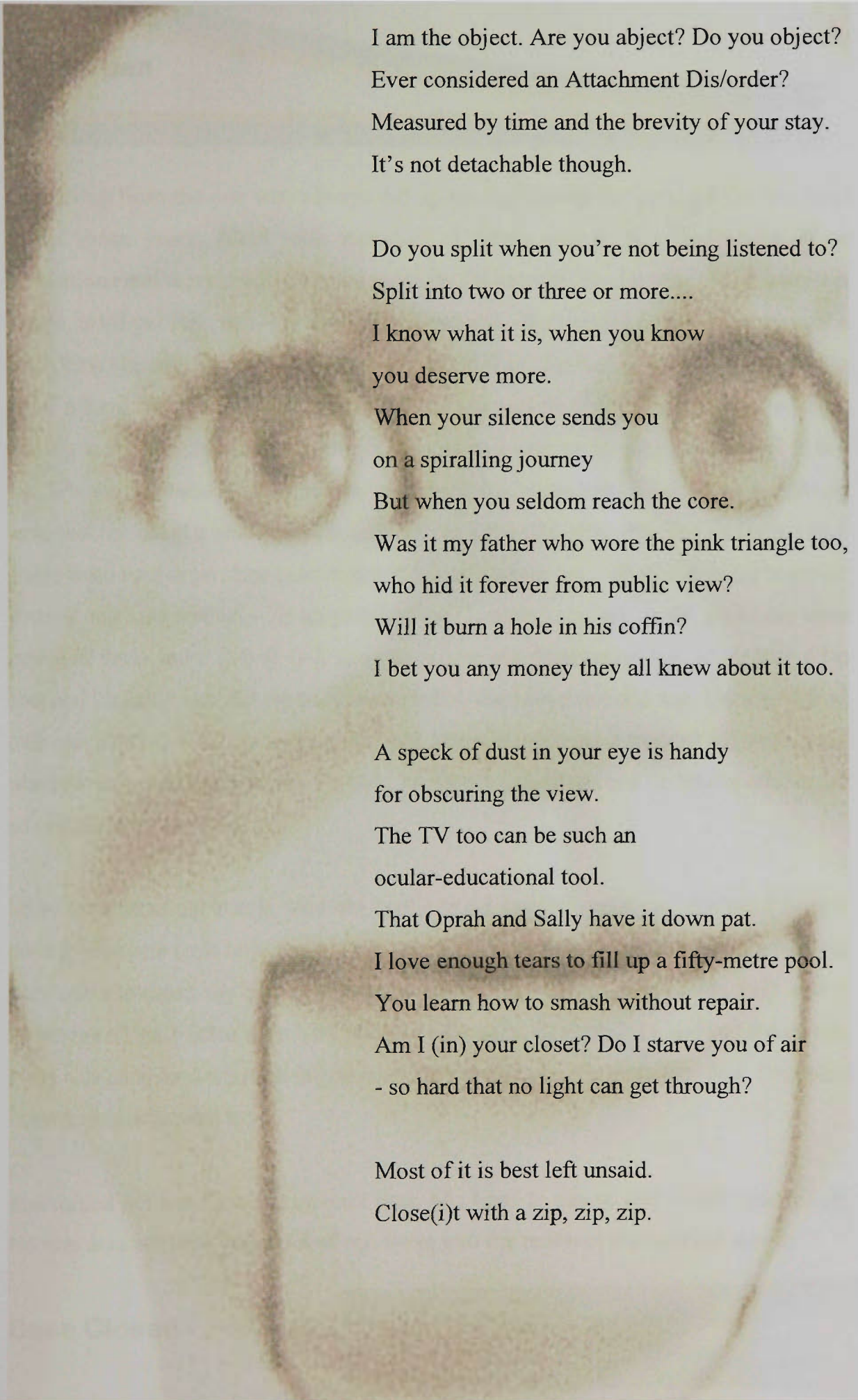
She makes her way to the dinner table. It was one of those times when her mother wanted all five of them to try and get along better with each other. Buttons – around her plate, on her eating utensils. She runs, crying, wanting to hide her ashamed face under her covers: buttons piled up in her bed. When she grows up, she vows, she's only going to wear clothes that zip up. She's going to learn to zip up her mouth about why this is so. Its absence (and any other absences) marks it as present.



## A Ventriloquist Doll She Named Zip

She who never wanted to be he in the first place.  
More power over and through the puppet.  
Look while I play with the snappy jawed doll.  
Felt-tongued tastes, fibreglass fancies,  
wires enmeshed,  
jaw jacking, strings pulling, back-hole-slot-  
poking, eyeball yanking -





I am the object. Are you abject? Do you object?  
Ever considered an Attachment Dis/order?  
Measured by time and the brevity of your stay.  
It's not detachable though.

Do you split when you're not being listened to?  
Split into two or three or more....  
I know what it is, when you know  
you deserve more.  
When your silence sends you  
on a spiralling journey  
But when you seldom reach the core.  
Was it my father who wore the pink triangle too,  
who hid it forever from public view?  
Will it burn a hole in his coffin?  
I bet you any money they all knew about it too.

A speck of dust in your eye is handy  
for obscuring the view.  
The TV too can be such an  
ocular-educational tool.  
That Oprah and Sally have it down pat.  
I love enough tears to fill up a fifty-metre pool.  
You learn how to smash without repair.  
Am I (in) your closet? Do I starve you of air  
- so hard that no light can get through?

Most of it is best left unsaid.  
Close(i)t with a zip, zip, zip.

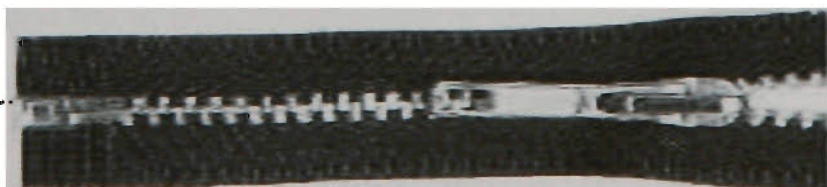
## Case Open

On parting from the one who always did up the buttons on her pyjamas for her, after all of those years, filled with stretches of bitter silence, a torrential tirade of accusations and tears finally flooded through. Oh ya mere slip of a thing. Ya let me slip in though, didn't ya? Nah, no silk or satin slip ever on you – But I slipped in and you, the slip of a butch thing I flipped. Ha, betcha didn't know ya could squirt like that - just slipped outta ya little slit of a thing. Ya said ya didn't want to give up any control. Christ, it was like the man not wanting to spill his precious seed. On ya front, on ya knees, on ya back – Ya started to beg me, ' Please oh please.' But we two, we were flippin the (a)gend(a)er identities, ya thought we were switchin 'em at a whim – Top, bottom, bottom, top – side, side, side. You started out such a tight fisted hard virgin stone butch tease, didn't ya? Answer me... what have ya got to say for yourself now? Go on then – zip up ya lip(s) then ... again... zip 'em up like mine have been zipped all these years. []--[]--[]--[] You said no one would believe me cos' you're such a big shot and I'm just a turd. But my body knows better, she knows well and true. I let you walk all over me, didn't I? Well, I'm walking now and talking too and not a moment too soon. Take whatever ya greedy heart desires. I'm takin' my slice of dignity now and I'm bowing out. I'm just so ecstatic to be rid of you.

Now I think better out than in. Methinks I got a bit too baw(ore)dy for you. Too many flippins' done spoiled your broth hey? Are you listening? Hey, remember my friend who had a therapist once who she called 'dry cunt' on account of her powdery cobweb mouth? You don't want to be like her do you? Since when have you ever been stuck for words? Ha, and you always said I was only good for a witty one-(nighter)liner. Ten years down the track now. Well, I've poked holes (in that argument) too...

She turned her head and in response said, All I have to say to you is don't you forget. No one else will love you either if you delve into the realm of the best left unsaid.

**Case Closed** – Zzziiippppp...





## Living on the Ceilings II: Blooming Flowers.



Stifled by the stodgy outer suburbs, Zinnia looked for the cheapest form of inner city living her meagre budget would allow. The half house that she lived in was mostly identical to the one next door. But the house next door was crumbling and dilapidated. It seemed uninhabitable. Given the smell of putrefaction about the place and because the windows were always jammed open with a thick film of mould and because half used Jif bottles on the window ledges never became emptier than half, Zinnia thought that the occupant might have died. She left a note under the neighbour's door once to see if she would attain any response. The following day there was a box of moderately priced chocolates on Zinnia's doorstep with a note attached - 'Welcome girls to Eastbourne St. I look forward to seeing you one day. Thankyou for your concern. Kind regards, Ruby, your neighbour from 45.'

Ruby stepped out of her collapsing front door looking like royalty. With a high collared, large ornate diamond-and emerald-encrusted broached shirt on, a perfect snow dome bun on her head and always those polished black shoes. She was never at her home during the day and returned when it got dark. Never had any lights on and lived without power, electricity nor gas. She arose at six every morning, arrived at her friend's house up the road by seven and returned home about then in the p. m. She had been taking care of this friend for many years, most of her life it seemed and didn't see the need therefore for anything in her own house, as she spent most of her time at Ethel's. Except for the nights. Was Ethel her secret life long love? Zinnia wondered. Perhaps she was still in a not-so-distant time warp, where secrecy and silence were fundamental to the love life of girls. So she would not stay the night out of good public morality and decency, even though there was now no one around her who would have given it a second thought. There was no one more in her life. No friends or living relatives. No husbands, ex- or otherwise, nor any children of her

own. Just Ethel. Daily, she blurred the boundaries between the notion of her own house and a home.

Across the road from Zinnia, the hugest pair of Bonds Blue Ringers fluttered on the balcony to dry. The same pair of underpants every night. They were evidently his one and only. Waving in the wind every night like an ode, a flag denouncing old-age poverty. Perhaps the flag should be a stained white, with just that thin blue double ring around it. That blue ring of hope. That fresh blue ring of confidence you get by using toothpaste by Maclean's. That blue ring of the octopus sting. Poor old bonds blue ringers unite! He walked by once when Zinnia was weeding the garden and straight faced, the only words he ever uttered were, "I have seen it. That bamboo will be the death of you."

When those old bed-sitter flats were being converted into condos, the underpants man was gone one day, just like that. Zinnia knew this because the flag no longer flapped in the breeze. In his and the other tenant's memory and honour she took it upon herself, late one night, to piss in every newly installed glistening bath tub. It was as if she was in a doll's house because they hadn't yet replaced the facade that they had so viciously torn off. Still, up went the luxury confinement blocks, condominium style.

That woman - I just can't believe her. Everywhere I go, no matter where, she's always there. Doesn't matter if I've travelled for an hour. I always see her. She walks past this house five times a day on average and spies intently through me and through the house walls, I'm sure.

The woman was a giraffe. Custom built to peer over the fence without even a minor stretch of the neck. She wore huge thick brown-rimmed glasses, all the better to see all with. Zinnia thought she might have been into that Neighbourhood Watch thing, until she started to appear before Zinnia's eyes in every other unrelated neighbourhood as well. She was reaching that point beyond curiosity and into a state of near paranoia, when she decided that she just had to ask. The next time the woman passed Zinnia's house she inquired, "Do I know you from somewhere?" It sounded like a very poor pick up line but that was furthestmost from Zinnia's mind. "I used to



He visits Zinnia's workplace one day wearing a Stetson hat. "Where did you rack that one from?" she asks. She knows how much they are worth. One hundred and twenty five dollars, last time she heard. Her grandfather always wore one. Tony's hat was from the same shop too. The best, the oldest and the only hat shop in the city. Tony saved up for his. His hard-earned cash from his first legitimate job, in the eyes of the law, throwing senseless pizza bases into an oven, until the small hours of the morning, on most days of the week. Before he leaves, he takes off his hat, passes it to Zinnia and says, "Please look after my hat will you." She shows him where it will be stored and assures him that she will do her utmost. Her utmost to ensure that it stays in the special place that she has designated for it. He rarely visits now but when he does, he asks to see his hat and he is content. He knows that in knowing the whereabouts of his most treasured possession, having a home for his hat, he will keep on returning for it. He will keep on.

If it wasn't for the fact that my feet and hands would eventually burst, on this plane is where I'd live the rest of my life, radio ear plugs in ears, miles high above it all. But it's still in and up here too. The aisle crawling, slobbery tongued drawling, self-opinionated, drunken louts. The stares, the whispers, the glares and elbow nudging, "Is it a boy or a girl? Are they lesbians those two? Those Asians are taking over, aren't they?" Fucking boring and boring holes into my head, boring hollow, senseless shouts.

She advises against going to the park downstairs because it is full of nothing but rubbish and dirt. "And the squirrels there may even be rabid, with diseases," she says. Her balcony is enclosed like a cage but the lizards and skinks can still get in. Zinnia promptly removes them from the wall when she spots one and secretly places it outside again.

Zinnia's past lover's mother lives in Singapore where houses only have room enough to go up and rarely across. She has one daughter in Australia and the other one in Hong Kong. She lives alone. Whenever she called on the phone, she was in the process of knocking down a wall or two or changing the covering on the floor.

Searching for that ‘just nice’ pair of sunglasses or boiling another pot of circulation soup. A new light fitting would take her up to three months to choose.

Her mother told of how she paced the rooms back and forth but how the view never changes. She sat in the balcony cage and clandestinely smoked Rothmans’ Consulate cigarettes, in the orange hue of her newly installed, retro art nouveau light. She watched the old man enact his life on the balcony across from hers. He tended to his forest of Bonsai trees and read books from his overflowing shelves. The titles of which she’ll never know. She has never spoken to him.

Although there is a Daimaru, all-inclusive shopping mall around the corner from her house, she shops two suburbs away, lest the neighbours, she thinks, have something to say about the woman who lives alone. She took Zinnia to the market with her and showed her where to buy the best cuts of meat, steamed pork buns, thick dried mushrooms and the freshest fish and vegetables. Zinnia remained transfixed by the kaleidoscope of flowers that didn’t even rate a mention. When she saw the doctor that day, for more herbs, she told Zinnia to wait for her in the car, with a bag full of rambutans for company, “But don’t eat too many, you’ll be sick. Just a few. And don’t go anywhere. Sit. Wait for me. I won’t be long. Just stay here,” she instructed. It had been an incredibly long time since Zinnia’s own mother had spoken to her like this.

She told them both how she used to delight in drawing when she was a child but now considers herself far too old for such foolish pursuits. About how she always wanted to play a wind instrument too. Before Zinnia and her former partner left Singapore to return to Australia, they gave her a harmonica, some paper and pencils. She blew into the harmonica twice while they were still there and only sent them one minute drawing, of the correct breathing technique to be used before and for a beneficial sleep.

In Hong Kong there is no time to stop. The pavement moves and slides with teams of busy people all headed in the same direction, heading towards and beyond July ‘97, which may or may not be home. It is a high-tech, super-tech, high flying highway; a frenetic cacophony of illuminating electricity that rarely stops to catch its own breath.

In Hong Kong, Zinnia had difficulty in finding a public toilet that is large enough to comfortably accommodate her.

She seemed to endlessly spin in Chungking Mansions, through the zig-zagging corridors, the simultaneous opening and shutting of a hundred doors. The hands from dark corners that beckon with a thousand promises of bargains too good for the incessant shopper in her to pass: watches, digits, clocks and hands at all angles, like in a Wong Kar-Wai film, the countless hands counting when time is up. The weighty plight of 'illegal' immigrants and petty criminals that live in the building pressed down hard upon Zinnia's head.

My family goes beyond borders. It weaves and heaves and weaves and breathes and weaves itself by my own choice. My family it chops and changes, fleeting and ever-shifting, it rearranges. Distance is the perfect antidote I've found for love and hate alike. Time is too lengthy and though you may run, time and time again, or some time ago, any casual careless remark or drifting scent can take you back there to a painful 'once upon a time', that was prolonged by ties and bonds to a longed-for 'when'. 'When' this is over, I'll love you, 'when' this is done, I will stop. The time of 'when' is a long and hard wait away. It may never come or you may never get there. Waiting for 'when' is looking for home in all the wrong places.

Lily and Violet live within five kilometres of each other now. They have similar furniture and vertical blinds. Lily re-coordinates and re-decorates her house at regular intervals and takes off on holidays, with her family, at least twice a year. Violet has returned from an extensive and extended overseas back-packing trip. No one believed that she'd do it or make it alone. Everyone assumed how much she needed them and couldn't do without. She has proved them all absolutely wrong. She has finally passed through the place where her distant relatives are and where her parents came from. Violet hasn't mentioned the 'Sunny Brook' orphanage since.

When friends visit Lily's home, she straightens place mats, fluffs up and re-organises cushions, removes their coffee cups even before they have finished drinking from them and always returns the couch back to the exact angle she likes it on. Her daughters wear freshly laundered clothes and change outfits at their leisure throughout the day. They are ballerinas, rabbits, bossy school teachers, dancers in high heels, magical fairies, omnipotent witches, construction workers in the sand pit, princesses, robots, check out chicks and sometimes even soap opera stars. Lily's kitchen has just been remodelled, right down to the choice of the handles. Right down to the very last touch. It was the last untouched room in the house. She is now ready again to move on.

### ***Home Again, Home Again ...***

Zinnia and her new lover, who travelled across the world only to be with her, share a queen size bed. The kind of bed especially made for size queens. In the mornings, their two fuzzy dogs burrow under the doona between them. They also share a tiny fossil of a laptop computer, to keep in touch with their worlds and their families for now: All within two metres by two.



In one of her more pessimistic moments, Silver says that if you play with it too much, the masturbation monster will come outta' your hole, grab your hand, and pull it right up and outta' your mouth. And then you'll have to walk around like that somehow, inside-out forever.

They say that absence or distance 'makes the heart grow fonder', or to phrase it in its cyber-context, 'abstinence makes the hand go wander'. Lying there, microphone strategically placed, *Do you want to hear my breathing or my pulsating wetness below?*

Earphones crackle, *Whatever you want baby... I like 'em both, just as much. Hummm...hang on, just puttin it down there...can you hear it?*

*Hmmm, well, I can hear some kinda' squelching noise and if that's it, well you're plenty wet grrrl. That's for sure.*

*Are you top or bottom for now?*

*Can we flip? ... I wanna do you...*

*Oh, but I wanna' do you so bad...*

*OK, be my top baby. Knock, knock* (then, a simulated door slam sound in Messenger)...*shit...are you still there hon'? Damn... you booted again? Oh, I can't stop this time...I can't stop this...I'm on the edge. But I really want you to hear me. Damn, dang...whatever you wanna' say... same difference... hmmmmm... baby... I want you here, I want you here, I want you here, ...your nic is no longer highlighted...shit...are you still there hon'? damn...you booted again? Oh, I can't stop this. I can't stop this time... I'm on the edge. ...hmmmmm...baby...I want you here, I want you here, I want you... to... at least...hear...aaaaaaarrrrrrrrgggghhhhh.*

Too late. Line dropped.

R e b o o t i n g.

No cameras please and perhaps this is a blessing. We are wired: wires spanning across the globe. Some wires connect our voices and our machines, our hearing and our

sight, others make the buzz and whir that generates and pulsates us to a similar rhythm and beat. Our orifices are wired: an electric connection. Lying spread-eagled, too afraid to jolt too hard, in case a wire loosens and the connection is lost. What a sight to behold!

R o b o t i n g .

Caution: It wasn't always this 'good'.

Year 1993: Logged onto Lambda Moo – text based virtual reality house of many rooms for the queerly inclined. No invitation to membership yet so logged on as 'Yellow Guest', colour randomly chosen by the machine. Lurking by two lairs in particular. Conscientiously contributing to conversation like a good fembot should. No answer. Prattling on with witty repartee until too much time without reply lapses.

Question: *Why won't anybody speak to me?*

Answer: *Because you are 'yellow'.*

Quizzing: *Ha?*

Continuation: *We don't like your kind around here.*

Only Plausible Response: *Well, fuck you then. You're all a bunch of wankers anyway.*

Them quizzing: *What does that word mean?*

Answer: *It means all you do is constantly play with yourself, you wankers.*

In denial: *Oh, no, no, no – we don't do that.*

The power of the vernacular, the metaphoric impact is lost in translation, amongst the insular. Expand your territories, your prejudices but not your minds.

Wank, wank, wank.

Netiquette schmetiquette.

Inside-Out.

It gets better.

Year 2000: Logged onto Gay.com chat room. Friday night. Conversation proceeds in this manner:

(Obligatory boring first chat question) *So, where are you?*

*At Trade Bar in the city.*

*I must be getting old. Never knew they had 'puters in clubs nowadays lol ☺ Why aren't you dancing or something?*

*Well, I live with my parents near Meadow Heights. Don't have a 'puter at home. Snuck out tonight. You know, strict wog parents, won't let me out.*

*Aha but there are 'real' girls at the club right? Why aren't you talking to them?*

*Oh, I don't think anyone here will speak to me.*

Inside-Out.

**Nothing much has changed.**

Year 2003: Logged onto Yahoo homepage. Reading the news. Checking out messages pertaining to the US invasion of Iraq. More than one response read in this vein, *Kill 'em all. Men, women and children. They all deserve whatever they get. Just blow the whole country up. Fucking terrorists.*

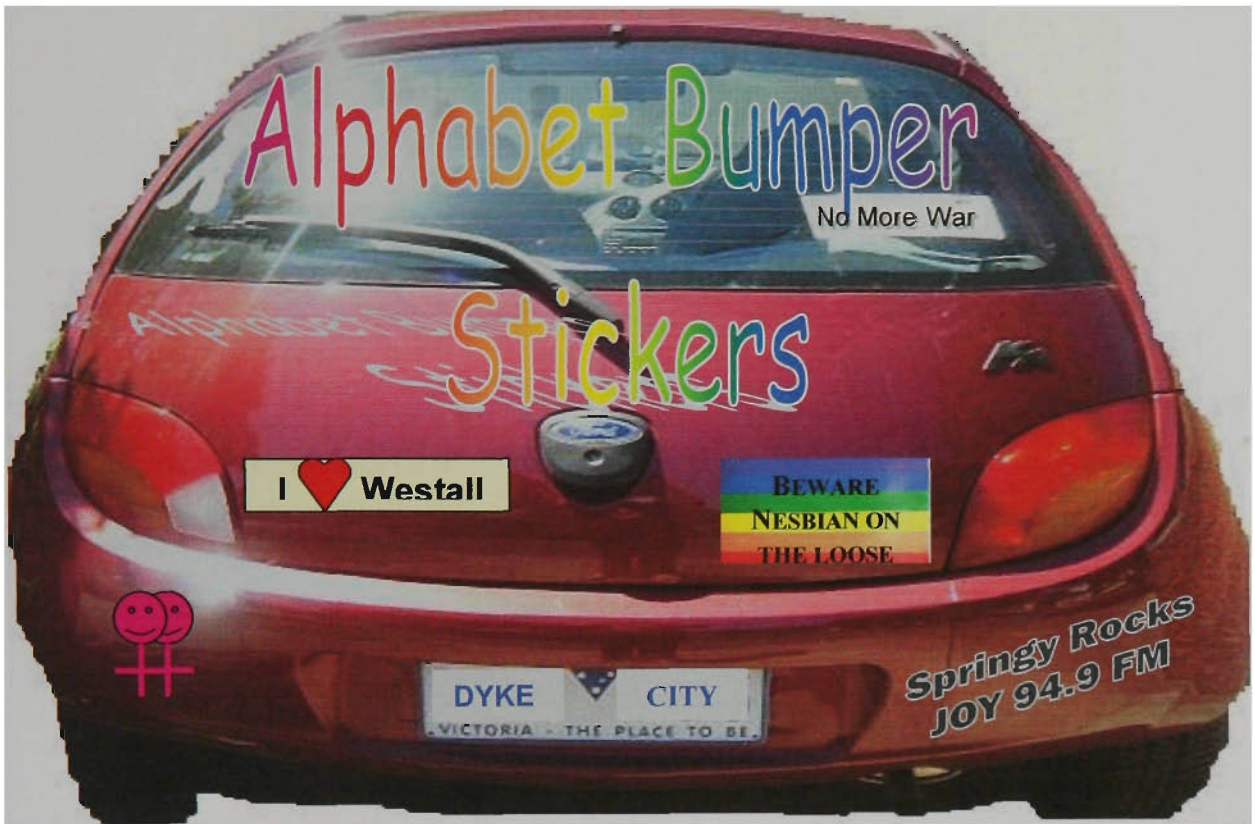
**It's got to get better.**

When she's feeling more optimistic Silver says that if you rub it hard enough and for long enough, a genie will appear. This genie, she will grant you three wishes.

Wishes that were granted:

1. Spent 32nd birthday in a hotel room in Tokyo, getting geographically closer to the woman on the other end of the wire.
2. Spent 32nd birthday (time-zone change) in the U.S. getting physically closer to the woman at the other end of the wire.

Wish number 3 not yet granted.



**A**cceptance is in the hue of your hair.  
 Ambivalence is wading in a choppy sea.  
 Assimilate or drown.

**B**ehaviour is dictated by comfort zones.  
 Blanks are not always waiting to be filled.  
 Bodies contain.

**C**olour perversion is in the slant of an eye.  
 Culture is only fixed by race dopers.  
 Carefree won't be found in a box of tampons.

**D**isplacement is in the lash of your tongue.  
 Diversity is not measured by the repertoire of your pal(ate)ette.  
 Detention is at the centre of host bound boat trips.  
 Disa(vow)al is wedded to inertia.

**E**xcessiveness is never enough.  
 Equality is every girl's wet dream.  
 Eonism is only the beginning of gender's end.



**F**ascism is the emperor's new clothes.  
Fetish is hardly foreign.  
Food fests assuage the guilty taste buds.  
Fluidity won't stain your clothes.  
Fleeting delusions that this is your home are shattered by  
Fragmentary hallucinations of street and TV reality.  
'F' words are aplenty and justifiably used frequently.

**G**eisha chick is not white chic.  
Girls do it better together.  
Gayness is next to godliness.  
Govern one's self and not the Other.

**H**ost is the body that sticks to your tongue.  
Hirsuteness is only to be waxed lyrically.  
Hocking boxes is fleshtrade for unevenly distributed cash.  
Hypochondriacal complaints are bodies disinterred from home.

**'I** didn't know' is a very old convenience store.  
Integrity is in/visible.  
Icons are necrophiliac fodder.

**J**ealousy is the envy of the Other.  
Jimmy Grant is a rather ironic immigrant.

**K**itsch is the domain of the poor plastic fruit.  
Kleptomania is key to colonization.  
Keeping up appearances solidifies shit.

**L**anguage is the marker of the rule.  
Libido unleashed is how the West was won.  
Liberation is standing up to pee.

**M**arginality is centrally maintained.  
Multiculturalism does not end in your bowels.  
Mimetic gestures are mediocre reproductions.  
Myopia sees through the eye of a gun.  
Monism is the denial of the Self as Other.  
Morality is the worship of Elvis.  
Moderation is the domain of the rich.  
Maladjustment is an iron corset.

**N**ot all dykes are white.  
Nihilism has no real extremes.  
Normal is overrated.

**O**ral is the folklore of the silenced.  
Obesity to the West - starvation to the  
Other-sides.  
Order deserves a huge dis'.

**P**astiche is not political until parodic.  
Poverty is in abundance.  
Polka is too often reduced to a dot.

**Q**ueer is the Race for colours beyond the Rainbow.  
Quotas are there to quell colour.  
Queues are best jumped cash in hand and pack on back.

**R**epression is the paradigm of the dominant.  
Race was systemically designed for riot.  
Rainbow stickers obscure whiteness.  
Remember - you are welcome here.

**S**anity is a dry sanitary napkin.  
Slurring speeches bespeak the pathology of the system.  
Strangers seem stranger as you cling to the centre.  
Sorry is well overdue.

**T**oilets are cross-legged borderless scenes.  
Tomboi chicks are tasty tricks.  
Terrorism is truncated by a barrage of fridge magnets.  
Taboo is inked into the skin.  
Tainted is love in a closet.

**U**ltimate pleasures are always paid for.  
Uniform(ity) of yours needs to be ironed out properly.  
Utopia should be somewhere way over the rainbow.

**V**ernacular is the slang that pierces your ears.  
Victory is a blind winning as opposed to a winning blind.

**W**asps colonize every corner.  
Wogs rule but some skips are cool.  
Words hide and illuminate.

**X** is a tightly-pursed butt hole.  
X is a cross-wired nerve ending.  
Xenophobia is no stranger to hate.

**Y**our neighbour is not a threat.  
Yellow is only perilous for cowards.  
Yawning is a legitimate response to most things.

**Z**en has become Hollywood's lovechild.  
Z in your name causes panic.



## CONCLUSION

**(We're here, somewhen.)**

*The "last moment" is only the ultimate point in which the desire to say takes refuge, exacerbates and destroys itself (de Certeau: 194) - on writing and death.*

This was/is the hom(e)ography of Zinnia and others. I cleaned the car boot out as best I could but in my travels, I accumulated more. I remembered what I forgot to tell you before.

*Every story is a travel story - a spatial practice (de Certeau: 115).* So many kilometres we've written and read together. Time for a service, lube and oil change...

Zinnia is a 'composite' flower - made up of various others and her(self). She is 'I' and



yet she is not. She is auto but more so, an auto(eye)mobile - the mobilized self - the migratory - shifting and changing - the moving eye - the roving 'I' (tattooed by an eye with wings on her

chest even), to keep an eye out on her damaged heart, with the extra valve, threatening to pump out more blood than is necessary, to drown her in her(self). They can't say when this might happen or if it will happen for sure. But they did tell her to quit smoking, which she did for a while but not anymore.



Zinnia was prescribed and described by medical discourse (thanks Michel Foucault) - well, in one big, fat, ugly jerk's 'professional' opinion as - 'a rather unhappy plump girl, with technicolour hair' (hmmm - hair we go again - she's sick - a psycho - the hair proves it). Does any of this he said have anything to do with her passing out episodes, the reason she went to see this neuro(tic)logist in the first place? Passing out perhaps from not 'passing' - not being able to 'pass' for (quite) Anglo and straight (enough).

Where is she now? Where did she get to? Is she the beast in your closet? (Yahp, 1996: 61) The one who fought the good fight, fought long and hard and lost in love and won. Mad as a cut snake, never grew up, grew up too fast, out of her depth, out of her mind, out of sight... The queen of cliché and not-so-incidentally then, really a really bad driver. (Driving and writing being so intimately connected). “In modern Athens, the vehicles of mass transportations are called *metaphorai*. To go to work or come home, one takes a “metaphor”- a bus or a train. Stories could also take this noble name: everyday, they traverse and organize places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories” (de Certeau: 115). One takes a dead car and ends up somewhere here.

She’s positioned as ‘scribe’ within her biological family - births, deaths, marriages, divorce, parties, anything - she’s provided documentation for them all. She’s ‘the writer’ they say. As the ‘righter’, she can help write wrongs. She can put the words together, surround feelings and thoughts and facts in ‘posh’ phrases, ‘tasty’ text, to make them consumable for any central discourse that (other)wise works to negate the marginalized. Her dreaded daddy was a real estate agent once (wait for it - irony factor increases ten fold here) and she was rendered home-less at fourteen, thanks to him. She got her first big break at seven, writing advertising copy for the agency, describing spaces she’d never seen and suturing up daddy’s ‘broken’ English. He broke her up bad too. And she knew that despite what the school ‘welfare officer’ said at the time (that daddy’s ethnicity made him the brute that he is) she’d met enough others in her predicament to know that brutishness speaks many languages, repaired English being one of them.

*Nothing fixes a thing so intensely  
in the memory as the wish to forget it.  
- Michel de Montaigne.*

Eventually, she perruqued out and flipped her wig. She’d had enough of being auto(door)matic. Her memory-filled head started to crack and overflow. Her first and only ambulance ride saved her life then and drove her to a story to be continued. She’d popped enough pills to sleep for eternity. She just wanted to sleep, to lay down her head full of hurt, to forget. She didn’t want to be Zinnia anymore. The following

year she ended up working for the Ambulance Services (irony factor again) but that didn't last long either. A head stuffed to the brim to blame for that.

She is after all, the family memory bank. Burdened with the longest memory and an attention to acute, gory detail. Want to know what you were wearing when we ran for our lives? Just ask Zinnia and she'll tell you. But she'll tell you *her* memories and yours may be different, of the same event. Don't fill your head with her/s. Only take her/s in small doses. "Memory is a sense of the other" (de Certeau: 87).

*One need not be a chamber to be haunted;*

*One need not be a house;*

*The brain has corridors surpassing*

*Material place.*

*- Emily Dickinson*

She la perruqued everything in sight, wigged it, bricolaged it too, like a manic brickie's labourer, she'd laid the words down, not too evenly though, with the cement slopped all over them. She couldn't contain the (t)ex(t)cess. She was in awe of her new found access. Shopped till she dropped that girl did. Trashed and treasured at the Coburg drive-in market site on Sundays and in her negative frame of mind, hoped that the pink Dodge Phoenix atop the ticket booth didn't decide to take off for a drive and then realize that it was a dead car, in need of re-imaging first.

La perruque being French for 'a wig' - yes, she's growing her hair long again - for her(self) this time. She's growing hair as thick as a glitzy tranny wig, giving her face a hiding place, shielding her eyes from other I's for a moment. Ah yes, she's bold enough though (or silly enough - depending on how you look at her) to tell you too that perruque (phonetically speaking) sounds like the Polish child's word for a fart - a 'prook' (onomatopoeic perhaps?) She's probably still wasting her time and prooking around in space/s: An 'other' self-flatulater. And all the while, Laurie Anderson sings in the background, *because when I do my job, **that** is what I think about...*

After all *that*, I think I might turn on my car radio again.... *sex drive... it sees no gender or colour so lets get together and collide with each other... sex drive... Aw, you know how it feels, get outta' my car and get under my wheels...* Then again, on

second thoughts... I'll switch it off. She's so autoerotic that Zinnia - she's been playing with her(self) again - she's been playing with you too. Playing with words. Conducting a sexte(x)t. Driving you crazy in her auto, I bet. She likes to show and tell, if you haven't already guessed. Playing is something she does best but there's no money in it. I keep telling her so. She over-indulges herself in the carnivalesque (thanks for that potentially subversive concept Mikhail Bakhtin). Likes to look a lot and laugh. Zinnia devours all the fun things in (cult)ure, sucks in all that she was previously denied in her autocratically controlled life. Recently, she enjoyed watching the Japanese anime *Revolutionary Girl Utena*. She counts it among one of her favourites. The androgynous Utena wins a sword duel and for this she becomes the fiancé of the Princess Rose Bride. Initially, she accepts her prize with great reluctance. Even though she always wanted to be a prince she didn't figure partnering up with a princess into the equation. As she grows to know the Rose Bride and empathizes with her ill treatment at the hands of the boys, she decides to escape to another place with her. When her car dies while the boys are in pursuit, Utena lies beneath the princess and morphs into a labia-like pink vehicle in a uterine diagram-like shape. Zinnia would gladly trade in all of her dead car/s for a thriving, organic automobile like this any day! The car is alive, alive, oh, alive, alive, oh, what a feeling... Zinnia wonders if 'woman as cyborg' theorist Donna Haraway has seen this manga yet. She thinks it would make sense if she did.



*When someone asked him about the meaning of a sonata, it is said, Beethoven merely played it over (de Certeau: 80). If you feel I've left anything out, feel free to read me over again.*

Thanks for the *memo(mamma)ries* oh *m(other)bo(a)red* of mine.

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N.B. My grandfather took most of these photos of my mother and her family. They were not labelled in any way so I consulted with my mother on dates and other details, if I didn't know them. Otherwise, where not specified, the photographer is not known but the photos are either from my collection or my mother's and grandmother's.

If websites cited above also have a date, this refers to the date of access, as these sites have either since been modified or are no longer available on-line. The undated sites are 'static'.

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