

Department of Media, Culture and Creative Arts

**Metalepsis in Digital Poetry: Representing Australian Suburbia
through the Convergence of the Verse Novel and Electronic
Literature and *Chamberlain Street***

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Doctor of Philosophy

of Curtin University

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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Signature:

Date: 17th of August 2016

Preface

Parts of this thesis have been accepted for publication in the peer reviewed book *Where Do We Go Now? 2014 Curtin Humanities Conference Proceedings* scheduled for release by Black Swan Press.

The follow poems from the creative production, *Chamberlain Street*, have been previously published:

- “Sixty Years” was published in the *Australian Poetry Journal* 5:1, 2015
- “Mr Harwood” was published in *WRIT Poetry Review Issue 2, 2015*

Abstract

This thesis consists of an exegesis and a creative production that both address the research question: How might metalepsis be utilised in the convergence of the verse novel and electronic literature to explore tensions that occur in representations of Australian suburbia?

The exegesis answers this question by considering the role of metalepsis through a textual analysis of verse novels and works of electronic literature as part of a larger discussion on representations of suburbia. While there is a lot of existing research into metalepsis in digital texts, metalepsis in poetry, and in particular in the verse novel, is a little discussed area. Likewise, while many Australian researchers have explored theories on suburbia in relation to print media, few have discussed how these representations could be transformed in digital texts, possibly because there are not many existing works of electronic literature which represent the suburbs. The exegesis has, therefore, combined an in-depth analysis into the representations of suburbia with an examination into metalepsis in the verse novel and works of electronic literature. This analysis is used to propose the creation of a new hybrid genre, the digital verse novel.

The creative work, "Chamberlain Street", addresses this same question through practise-led research, utilising the convergence of the verse novel and electronic literature to create a longer work of digital poetry focused on the events in a suburban street. The creative work represents the tensions in

suburbia through the techniques used to create metalepsis, such as the narrative voice in verse novels and the interactive interface in digital texts.

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Finally, I would like to thank my thesis committee Chairperson, Dr Robert Briggs as well as Curtin University for providing me with opportunity, facilities and general encouragement.

Part One: Creative Production

Chamberlain Street

Accessing the Digital Work

Chamberlain Street is a work of digital poetry and is accessible online. While a print manuscript of the poems has been included as a reference, it should not be considered a substitute for viewing and interacting with the digital work.

Chamberlain Street is compatible with every web browser and mobile device, however, it is optimised for desktop and laptop computers. Some features will not work to the same standard on mobile and tablet devices.

Chamberlain Street is best played in Google Chrome version 43, Internet Explorer version 10, FireFox version 16, Safari version 9 or any later releases compatible with CSS 3 and HTML 5. As a result of a known bug, some features are not compatible with Microsoft Edge.

The recommended screen resolution is 1366 x 786.

Access Chamberlain Street:

www.chamberlainstreet.com

Username: chamberlainstreet

Password: phdcurtinuniversity2016



Figure 1: A screenshot of the front page, taken from the digital work, *Chamberlain Street*, by Karen Lowry, 2016.



Figure 2: "The Accident files" is the first page the reader/player encounters. Here they can investigate the scene of the crime before moving on to

question subjects. Taken from the digital work, *Chamberlain Street*, by Karen Lowry, 2016.



Figure 3: A screenshot of the main interface, taken from the digital work, *Chamberlain Street*, by Karen Lowry, 2016.



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Figure 5: "The Hedge" literary game. Readers use the arrow keys to move the car and avoid the words of the poem as they drive down the street. Taken from the digital work, *Chamberlain Street*, by Karen Lowry, 2016.

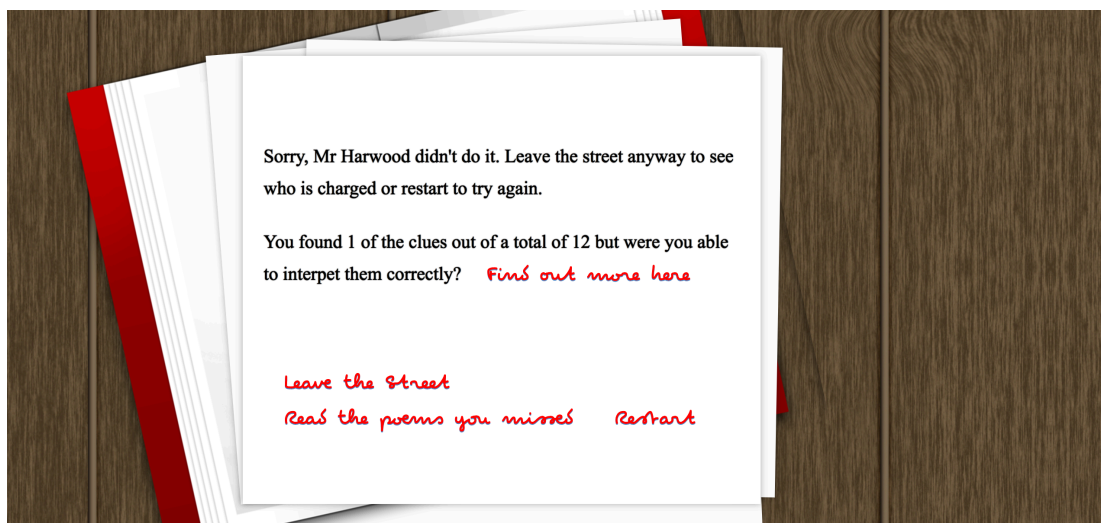


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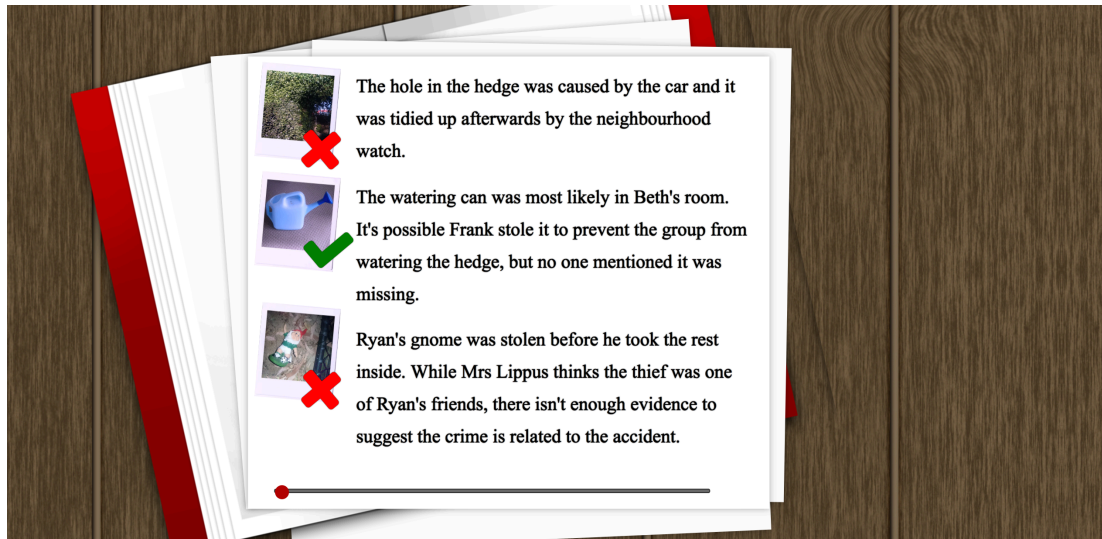


Figure 7: A screenshot showing the user how many clues they correctly investigated. Taken from the digital work, *Chamberlain Street*, by Karen Lowry, 2016.

Part Two: Exegesis

Metalepsis in Digital Poetry: Representing Australian Suburbia through the Convergence of the Verse Novel and Electronic Literature

Introduction

Suburbia in Digital Poetry and the Verse Novel

While there are now many examples of digital poetry, albeit of varied quality, Australian digital poetic work has tended towards shorter forms in the virtual space, such as works like *Sydney's Siberia* by Jason Nelson, rather than the extended format of the verse novel. Equally, while some examples of these digital works focus on representing place,¹ there are few examples of Australian suburbia in electronic literature or digital poetry. However, even the few examples that exist focus mostly on representing the collective suburban experience using visual metaphors in the interface and interactive tools afforded by the computer.² The poetry in these texts often uses an absent narrator to reflect global experience instead of the more personal, subjective experience represented by the narrator in many verse novels.³

¹ Such as *Terminal* by Benjamin Laird which he explains “plays on and with the multiple meanings of the word “terminal”. It is an end point but rarely acts like one: in computing it is an interface for entering data, in illness a death, and in transport an end of a journey although more often a transition point” (2012, pp 59). Another notable example that deals with place but not specifically the suburbs is *Pigeon Poetry* by Red Room Company which gave readers the chance to bet on pigeons which had poems tied to them and were then raced across New South Wales.

² Some notable examples of suburban digital poems include the zoom in function and desolate images in Nelson’s *Sydney’s Siberia*, and the maps used in both *The Disappearing* app by Red Room Company (which maps poetry to place) and *Melbourne Poetry Map*.

³ While this is not always the case, poems like *Sydney’s Siberia* uses an absent narrator, devoid of pronouns and any reference to life. Likewise, *Terminal* is devoid of the personal pronoun, focus on the transitions in code to represent transitional spaces.

Such verse novels often represent the collective only by suggesting that the personal narrative is part of a greater whole.⁴

In analysing representations of suburbia in these texts, this thesis also argues that suburbia is a state of mind as much as a geographical location. Considering, then, that our cultural perceptions can influence the physical space of the suburb, one must further acknowledge the difficulties authors face in representing both the collective experience of suburbia as well as the personal experience of living in the physical space. While there is a lot of existing research into how suburbia is represented in print texts including poetry and, to an extent, the verse novel, there is little research into how representations of suburbia might be transformed in digital texts. Therefore, this exegesis considers how the convergence of techniques used in both the verse novel and electronic literature might contribute to shifting from representations of suburbia in print texts that are fixed and pre-defined by the author, to representations that are fluid and dynamic based on the reader's interactions. By first analysing the role of the narrator in print examples of the verse novel such as Dorothy Porter's *The Monkey's Mask*, Virginia Wolff's *Lemonade* trilogy and Stephen Herrick's *The Simple Gift*, this exegesis will investigate how the narrative voice in poetry can be used in a digital text to represent the subjective experience of living in the suburbs.

When investigating the role suburbia could play in electronic literature and digital poetry, one must first acknowledge that many existing examples use

⁴ Red Room Company's *The Disappearing* app is one of few examples of electronic literature utilising this technique as they represent the individual voice through poems mapped onto places. However, there is no clear cohesive narrative in the poems, with the map instead functioning as a metaphor that ties the sequence together.

the interface and interactive elements as a frame of reference so that readers know how to engage with the text. One could propose, instead, that by utilising representations of suburbia, this interface could function as a frame of reference for the collective experience or 'front' that one first encounters before any consideration has been given to how subjective the ideas that have shaped our understanding of this suburban space really are.⁵ By using visual metaphors that are symbolic of everyday items found in the suburbs, this 'front' becomes user friendly and accessible. The interface could be complex enough for readers to disengage from the text as writing and immerse themselves in the narrative world while being easy enough to understand and navigate that it does not risk obscuring it. By representing the suburb on a platform that readers can interact with, the text becomes a self-reflexive representation of the readers cultural perceptions of the suburb.

The History of Digital Poetry

In considering a convergence of the verse novel and digital poetry, one must first acknowledge that digital poetry has developed from earlier examples of electronic literature (such as hypertext and interactive fiction) as a result of the increased capabilities of the computer and web-based platforms. For example, N. Katherine Hayles explains that:

With the movement to the Web, the nature of electronic literature changed as well. Whereas early works tended to be blocks of texts (traditionally called 'lexias') with limited graphics, animation, colors, and sound, later works make much fuller use of the multimodal

⁵ In a similar fashion to the 'map' used in *The Disappearing* app.

capabilities of the Web; while the hypertext link is considered the distinguishing feature of the earlier works, later works use a wide variety of navigation schemes and interface metaphors that tend to deemphasize the link as such (2008, pp. 6-7).

Meanwhile, Ensslin describes the more contentious genre of literary games saying that they “replace—either fully or partially—the kind of graphical elements we know from standard videogames (player-characters, enemies, obstacles, and cursors) with linguistic material” (Literary Gaming 49). She explains that, while this genre has a lot in common with games, it should still be considered a subgenre of electronic literature as the focus is on representing the literary text more than following pre-defined rules. However, the genre also uses more of Jesper Juul’s six features of games than other subgenres of electronic literature, demonstrating the potential modern web browsers have for transforming and redefining texts in the digital sphere.

When considering digital poetry as a subgenre of electronic literature, Emerson explains that:

While we have to acknowledge digital poetry as part of our current cultural moment, this acknowledgement is doomed to vagueness as long as we cannot say what digital poems are let alone adequately describe their behaviour (as cited in Nelson, 2011, para. 6).

However, this vagueness that Emerson references also makes the genre malleable and Christopher Funkhouser’s explanation of it “containing incomprehensible material” (2012, p. 25) is worth discussing separately to definitions of electronic literature. Many poets consciously make the text

incomprehensible in order to destabilise readers' expectations.⁶ In these instances, a lack of context and understanding of poetry can sometimes be preferable. However, while some poets focus on defamiliarising the text and web-browser platform, others rely on these pre-existing assumptions of poetry. It is, therefore, important to consider how readers interpret the text based on these pre-existing assumptions and what role the setting has on how they fill in the blanks in the fictional world. While a reader's assumptions about genre will influence how they interact with the text, most readers will fall back on the setting and representations of the fictional world to fill in gaps in this knowledge. This theory will be discussed in more detail below using Ryan's principle of minimal departure as well as Tyan Sylvester's theory of apophenia.

Metalepsis and the Convergence of Suburban Representations in Digital Poetry and the Verse Novel

This exegesis then discusses the possibility of a convergence between digital poetry and the verse novel. However, before considering how this convergence might contribute to representations of suburbia, one must first examine the role of metalepsis in both defining the existing representations in these genres, as well as how it might contribute to creating a text that is both electronic literature and verse novel. This exegesis, therefore, considers theoretical work on metalepsis by theorists such as Marie-Laure Ryan, Astrid Ensslin and Gerard Genette while also analysing examples of digital poetry

⁶ For example, *Nio* by Jim Andrews focuses on combining and mixing different sounds to destabilise our expectations of performance poetry, making the user mix and master the poem instead of being just the listener. *[theHouse]* by Mary Flanagan, likewise, focuses on how the shape of objects can change the text, focusing on how the user interacts with the objects to destabilise the linear reading of more traditional poetry.

such as Jason Nelson's *Sydney's Siberia* and Jim Andrews' *Arteroids*. While the visual interface in a digital work focuses on breaking down the barrier between the storyworld and the reader's real world to create a more immersive experience, it can also be considered another narrative level of the digital work. Furthermore, in print media it is usually the text and the physical object (cover design, publishers blurb) which creates and defines the fictional world for the reader. However, in a digital text the visual interface defines the parameters of this world long before the reader engages with any of the text or the computer hardware. In acknowledging this, one can address the layers of metalepsis in both the verse novel, an area where little discussion has been undertaken in academia, as well as digital poetry. In converging these layers and forms of ontology and rhetoric, one could create a text that neither represents the verse novel in its metaleptical make-up, nor the current topology of digital poetic texts. This could result in a text that more creatively engages with existing theory on Australian suburbia by focusing on both the personal individual narratives using the verse novel as well as representing the suburb as a place that we project and displace "a vast array of our fears, desires, insecurities, obsessions and yearnings" (Healy, 1994, p. xiii) onto. However, as much as these ideas shape the physical space of the suburb, they also shape our interactions with the digital texts that represent it. Like the suburbs, these texts also function as cultural sites onto which we project and displace our own experiences. This exegesis, therefore, investigates the possibility of a new genre of electronic literature, the digital verse novel, and addresses how this might negotiate some of the existing problems in representing suburbia in print texts.

In order to define this new genre and clarify its importance in the field, this exegesis also considers the role of metalepsis in both the verse novel and digital poetry. In defining metalepsis in digital poetry, however, one must also address metalepsis within the larger category of electronic literature. In doing so, it becomes important to position digital poetry within the debate between ludology (games) and narratology (narrative), focusing on established theoretical work by ludologists such as Espen Aarseth, Jesper Juul and Makku Eskelinen as well as narratologists and electronic literature experts such as George Landow, N. Katherine Hayles, Marie-Laure Ryan and Nick Monfort. These are crucial areas of study as, without being fully informed on the history of the electronic literature and how this has influenced the techniques used by authors, one cannot fully address how these techniques might create metaleptical transgressions. By discussing this existing theoretical work and many of the conflicting definitions of electronic literature and games, this exegesis also considers the role of narrative and builds on research first conducted in relation to print genres, such as Barthes and Kristeva's research into intertextuality. While many verse novels are readerly texts and have fixed meaning and outcomes (Barthes, 1975, p. 5) many examples of electronic literature and digital poetry are writerly texts and are "other than final or authorised" (Keep, McLaughlin, & Parman, n.d., para. 1). The writerly text, therefore, destabilises expectations and creates an ontological metaleptical transgression. This exegesis also discusses Derrida's theory on the destabilisation of the text which also results in the destabilisation of the author. This is seen in some examples of digital poetry

where authors choose to defamiliarise the interface and existing genre expectations.

In defining the role place plays in these print and virtual texts, one must also discuss the visual interface and the extended visual metaphors employed by authors which are usually intended to mimic familiar, everyday items. Finally, this exegesis positions these elements within the frame work of suburbia and the physical space of the suburb by discussing both historical and existing ideologies that inform suburbia. It then analyses how they are represented in each genre and, lastly, how these representations might be more comprehensive and fluid in the digital verse novel, using my creative production, *Chamberlain Street*, as an example.

The Problematic Definition of the Verse Novel

The role of Poetry and Fiction in the Verse Novel

In considering a hybrid genre of the verse novel and electronic literature, one must first address the problematic definition of the verse novel and how the problems raised by other theorists influence its use of place and suburban representations. Specifically, as the verse novel's narrative is crucial to its convergence with electronic literature and digital poetry, one must focus on how narrative techniques problematise this definition. Patrick Murphy, for example, investigates why existing definitions of the verse novel might be problematic in his article "The Verse Novel: A Modern American Genre" when he explains that "critics rely too frequently on analysing modern poems by means of historic genre definitions" (1989, p. 1). While these historical genre definitions might aptly describe poems written in past centuries that does not necessarily mean they bear any resemblance to those written now (Murphy, 1989, p. 1) especially when one considers the verse novel's hybridity with contemporary fiction genres.⁷ Although traditional forms of poetry have become increasingly rare in publishing, the novel has dominated as a popular mode of writing. Therefore, when Murphy suggests that the verse novel is "a genre that cannot be described by means of historical genre definitions" (1989, p. 1), one must also consider the commercialisation of the novel and why the techniques that have made this form so popular have had such an

⁷ Which is not to say that fiction and the verse novel are being conflated, but that some fiction techniques are being used as the defining characteristics of this new poetry genre alongside existing poetic ones.

influence on the development of a genre of poetry more suitable for contemporary audiences. That is not to say that there is money in poetry, even in its hybrid form, the verse novel, but rather, if any money is to be found it would surely be in a cross over with popular fiction. For example, when explaining the hybrid nature of the verse novel, Catherine Addison says “in attempting to account for this contemporary fashion, we might interpret it commercially as an attempt by poets and publishers to capture for poetry the ‘audience of prose readers” (2012, p. 89). Likewise, Dino Felluga suggests that its emergence could be a response to the recent marginalisation of other forms of poetry:

Poetry [the verse novel] could attempt to play to that market as best it could by exploring those characteristics that made the novel such a popular success (narrative sequentiality, realistic description, historical referentiality, believable characters, dramatic situations, fully realized dialogism and, above all, the domestic marriage plot) (2002, p. 171).

Furthermore, a study by the Australian book industry found that the average prose fiction writer earns only \$12,900 per annum (pa) while poets earned even less, with the top selling poets earning a measly \$5,100pa (Zwar, Thosby and Longden, 2015, para. 1-13). It can hardly be surprising, then, that some poets might choose to capitalise on the success of fiction by embracing the hybrid form of the verse novel.

While some poets are choosing to use elements from novels to create the hybrid verse novel, it is important to distinguish this genre from other forms of poetry before further establishing this connection to prose fiction. As Joy

Alexander explains, one must distinguish “between a novel told in verse and a series of poems linked in a narrative sequence” (2005, p. 270). Vikki Van Sickle summarises the difference quite succinctly when she explains that the term verse novel is “used to describe a novel written in a series of free verse poems” (“Emerging Genre of the Verse Novel” 2006, para. 1). Murphy, on the other hand, distinguishes the genre with little comparison to other forms of poetry explaining that, as a form of poetic fiction it “may very well present a story that is narrated from multiple points of view by means of changing narrators, or is essentially non-narrated, letting the characters advance the ‘narrated event’ through their own speech and actions” (1989, p. 58). While Murphy’s definition is not as prescriptive on poetic techniques (such as rhyme and metre) as Van Sickle’s, one must acknowledge that it was written at the beginning of the boom for the verse novel in 1989 with many of the examples that changed and defined this genre coming afterwards.⁸ While Murphy’s concept of “multiple points of view” may have been applicable to the genre’s definition in 1989, it is not essential to its definition now. Although his definition is not as accurate today as it was two decades ago, it is still an important point of discussion as it represents a disparity between the use of the term ‘verse novel’ and ‘narrative poem’. For example, Murphy analyses Eliot’s long poem, *The Waste Land*, as an example in his paper, explaining that each separate story in the narrative is suggested by a shift in the dialect of the poem and not from a page break (1989, p. 58). While this does, in fact, describe the structure of Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, it applies more to narrative

⁸ *The Golden Gate* by Vikram Seth being one of few examples to the contrary, however, despite being published in 1989, it wasn’t widely popular until the 1990s (Addison, 2012, p. 1)

poetry than it does to the contemporary verse novel which usually begins each new section or poem on a new page. Alexander's explanation of the verse novel's structure might, therefore, be a more appropriate definition for the verse novel as she explains that "often each section [poem] is less than a page in length and only rarely more than two or three pages" (2012, p. 270)". However, Murphy elaborates on how his definition applies to Eliot's *The Waste Land*, saying that "these lines present a series of miniature narratives, events occurring in time in a variety of voices" (1989, p. 62). Although this comment more closely aligns Murphy with Alexander's definition, one can still observe several issues with his initial analysis. The first is that his example, *The Waste Land*, is hardly novel length by anyone's standards which is a crucial element of the novel adopted into poetry's hybrid form. First published in 1922 in literary magazines in the US and the UK, the narrative poem, *The Waste Land* is only 434 lines. Secondly, one could suggest, to the contrary, that there are many modern examples of the verse novel that use only one or two identifiable narrators in a similar fashion to many modern prose novels (*The Monkey's Mask* by Dorothy Porter, *An Autobiography of Red* by Anne Carson) as opposed to Murphy's "multiple points of view" qualifier.

Although Murphy's definition is somewhat outdated, multiple narrators are still used in some examples of the verse novel, mostly as a device that can work to solve problems that occur when representing different spaces in print. This is as opposed to the interactive elements afforded to digital poetry which are commonly used to represent different settings and spaces in place of multiple narrators or a strong narratorial voice. Stephen Herrick's *The Simple Gift*, for example, demonstrates some of the benefits to its application

in the verse novel. Herrick's narrative is fragmented to show small glimpses of different characters, some only getting one poem over the course of the novel. The text uses three main narrators from different backgrounds to explore the suburban fringes, focusing on what Brendan Gleeson calls "the 'non-places' of suburbia where the drug dependent, the angry and the homeless are forced to range, out of mind, if not out of sight" (2004, p. 24). This term "non-places" is also examined by Marc Auge in his book *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity* where he defines them as places "formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure)" (2008, p. 94). Auge further explains that:

a person entering the space of non-place is relieved of his usual determinants. He becomes no more than what he does or experiences in the role of passenger, customer, or driver. . . . The space of non-place creates neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude, and similitude. There is no room for history unless it has been transformed into an element of spectacle, usually in allusive texts (2008, p. 103).

This is demonstrated in Herrick's *A Simple Gift* as Billy leaves his father's abusive home in the suburbs, a place he doesn't feel he belongs and describes as "rundown and beat" (Herrick, 2000, p. 4). Billy runs away to a "non-place", an abandoned train yard, where he meets a homeless man called Old Bill and a rich girl called Caitlin. From there the narrative is shared between the three characters. Each chapter is a first-person account from either Billy, Old Bill or Caitlin and explores their issues with belonging in the suburbs. Billy for example, struggles to find his identity in the non-place he's run away to as he becomes "relieved of his usual determinants" (Auge, 2008,

p. 103) from the suburb. Meanwhile, Caitlin is looking for a way to escape her family's expectations of her and shed the historical identity inscribed into her parent's money while Old Bill has lost himself and can't find a way to move forward. In this non-place the characters are stripped of the suburban identities that plague them. However, as the narrative progresses they realise that, as they are stripped of all identity, they are instead trapped in an in-between space of existing that has no inscribed historical identity (Auge, 2008, p. 103). As none of the characters are able to inscribe themselves into this place, the train station becomes a transitional passageway to the next place, to them entering back into the suburbs and occupying a role that fits them. The first person narration shared by these multiple narrators makes the non-space they occupy more intimate and performative for the reader. More importantly, the reader is able to explore how different suburban spaces can lead to issues with belonging.

These same issues with belonging and suburban space are a central theme in Virginia Wolff's verse novel trilogy, *Make Lemonade*, *True Believer* and *This Full House*, which were also written for young adults. Unlike *The Simple Gift*, Wolff discusses issues of belonging and identity in existing spaces of historical identity. The three main settings in *Make Lemonade*; LaVaughn's apartment, her high school and Jolly's apartment, are all suburban entities in a low-income neighbourhood. While LaVaughn visits Jolly's apartment to babysit, her high school is by far the most culturally significant setting to the narrative. Dealing with teen pregnancy as a central issue, this verse novel looks at issues that arise when trying to belong in a space that has already been historically inscribed with a different purpose. However, unlike Herrick's

The Simple Gift, Wolff's novel uses only the one narrator to explore these issues, focusing on the first person point of view of 15-year-old LaVaughn. The small chapters and conversational, simple verse read like diary entries and make the character's narration more authentic or as Sullivan explains, "it is hard to imagine the powerful, real voices of these characters coming through as well in prose" ("Fiction or Poetry?" 2003, para. 5). However, the exploration of other characters through LaVaughn's narrative gives the reader insight into the ordinary lives of other people. By focusing the narrative through the eyes of a teenager still trying to find her own identity and, more importantly, by viewing the rest of suburbia through the transitional lens of a high school, the spaces the other characters occupy are represented and critiqued as possible future destinations. If Wolff had used multiple narrators these lower-income households would not appear as transitional as they are to a high school student and the core theme of growing up and finding a sense of belonging and balance would not be as imperative as it is to the narrative now.

What this clearly establishes is that, although some contemporary verse novels do adopt the fragmented voices that Murphy attributes to the genre in his definition, there are also many contemporary examples that don't use multiple narrators. That being said, while it is important to consider the similarities between contemporary verse novels and Murphy's longer narrative poems, one should not fall into the trap of making the assumption that both genres are the same. Although the contemporary verse novel has developed from some of the earlier narrative poems cited in Murphy's paper, these paradigms alone do not wholly account for the verse novel as it

presents today. While the verse novel genre has clearly progressed since Murphy's paper, one cannot discount the importance of earlier narrative poems, such as the long narrative poems of the Victorians, referred to by Felluga in his discussion of the verse novel, as well as modernist long verse experiments like *The Waste Land*. These earlier narrative poems were usually balanced heavily in favour of poetic techniques as opposed to the modern verse novel where, while varying between authors, this line is much harder to define. For example, in analysing *The Waste Land* more closely in regards to its poetic techniques, one can ascertain that it is a poem full of anxiety and disillusionment, focusing on the barrenness of both human sexuality and the natural world following the devastation of World War One. Described by many critics as a modernist, Eliot

comes to write poetry after a great tradition of poetry has been all but tapped out. Despite this bleakness, however, the poem does present a rebirth of sorts, and the rebirth, while signifying the recovery of European society after the war, also symbolizes the renewal of poetic tradition in modernism, accomplished in part by the mixing of high and low culture and the improvisational quality of the poem as a whole (Lewis, 2010, para. 7).

While Eliot's poem is not considered a verse novel, as a modernist interpretation of the epic⁹ (Lewis, 2010, para. 27) it is still part of the larger

⁹ According to Michael Meyer, the epic is a long narrative poem whose themes centre around heroism and nationhood (Meyer, 2005, p. 1). While many people think of Homer's *The Odyssey* as an epic due to the form being much less popular in modern times. When Reviewing Franco Moretti's book *Modern Epic*, Majorie Perloff suggests that "the modern epic must be such a system because, unlike its earlier counterpart, it cannot construct an encyclopaedia: encyclopaedias already exist" (Perloff, 1996/7, para. 14).

branch of narrative poetry that the verse novel is descendant from. This is further clarified in Ezra Pound's description of the epic as "a poem including history" (Lewis, 2010, para. 27) of which Eliot's *The Waste Land* clearly qualifies. Eliot himself compares *The Waste Land* to lyric poetry which he defines as "the voice of the poet talking to himself, or to nobody" (Lewis, 2010, para 27). While the exact genre is much disputed, few compare Eliot to the verse novel genre, describing it instead as a long poem (Clarvoe, 1993, p. 2; Lewis, 2010, para. 27; Vanhoozer, 2011, p. 99) largely because of its focus on the poetic to the detriment of balancing this with fiction techniques.

While these long narrative poems may still draw on suburban space and critique¹⁰ and the length has clearly been inspired by that of the contemporary novel, they fall short of adopting the novel's true length.

Ultimately, this is what, predominately, sets the two genres apart. As a result of this revelation, one must consider the question: how much of the prose novel is actually adapted and conceptualised into the modern verse novel? It is here that Murphy's discussion holds most relevance as, although his examples do not fit the contemporary definition of the verse novel, they still consider prose techniques, just on a smaller scale. As part of his discussion, Murphy specifically asks the question "What does it mean to assert that poems have been novelised?" (1989, p. 63). He quotes Bakhtin in response who explains that "this does not mean that poems stop being poems or that one discrete, utterly separate genre or prosody replaces another" (Bakhtin

¹⁰ Eliot's *The Wasteland*, for example, comments on the humdrum life of London commuters and the ghosts of dead soldiers from World War One saying "A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many, / I had not thought death had undone so many" (Eliot).

cited in Murphy, 1989, p. 63). Both Murphy and Bakhtin suggest that the prose instead gives the poetry in a verse novel a revitalisation (1989, p. 63). This is seen in a lesser extent in works like Eliot's which focuses on subverting existing poetic techniques. Eliot deviates from traditional rhyme and metre and uses techniques such as enjambment to leave every line unfinished, creating a feeling of despair and lack of closure.¹¹ While Eliot has focused on defamiliarising existing poetic techniques, the verse novel destabilises both poetry and fiction genres, it is neither one nor the other. The use of prose fiction has, as Murphy puts it, freed poetry "from the restraints of traditional, historic genre requirements no longer appropriate for the production of long poems" (1989, p. 63). While some of Murphy's examples are outdated, they still abide by this definition and have set the groundwork for more contemporary verse novels to further push against these established boundaries.

While Murphy is vague on exactly what techniques are adapted from prose to the verse novel Addison provides a more specific explanation, saying:

The typical verse novel is not characterized by the disjointed or metaleptic fragmentations of postmodern novelistic technique, even when representing the disjunctions of modern urban life; its story is easily accessible, its discourse commonly resembling the explanatory and confiding style of the popular novel rather than the resistant techniques of many art novels of the twentieth century (Addison, 2012, p. 88).

¹¹ For example, "Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not / Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither" (Eliot)

Although agreeing that the verse novel adopts simple, accessible prose and not postmodern fragmentations, Kerry Mallan and Roderick McGillis disagree with Addison's comparison to the popular novel, suggesting that the modern verse novel could be more thematically linked to the young adult (YA) novel, which can be seen in the number of YA verse novels being written.¹² They contend that, like YA fiction, the verse novel is more accessible to the reader as it seduces "them with many short chapters and lots of white space on every page" ("Textual aporias", 2003, para. 2). Sullivan also agrees with this approach saying that "the substantial white space on the pages of these books certainly appeals to reluctant readers" ("Fiction or Poetry?", 2003, para. 2).

One can see, thematically, how many examples of the verse novel adopt the style of YA novels as, while some of the very first verse novels of the 1980s (such as Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate*) had constrained metre and rhyme, many of the more recent examples, particularly those of Dorothy Porter's (e.g. *The Monkey's Mask*, *Wild Surmise* and *Akhenaten*), use free verse with a much more conversational syntax and narrating persona. It is important to note here, that while some of Murphy's analysis uses these early examples of the verse novel, there has been a dynamic shift away from constrained metre which has led some theorists to consider verse novels such as Wolff's *Making Lemonade* (published in 1993) to be the one of the first examples of this modern genre (Apol & Certo, 2011, p. 285). Furthermore, while this use of conversational dialect can be considered a prose fiction technique, there is

¹² For example: Wolff's *Making Lemonade*, Herrick's *A Simple Gift*, *Identical* by Ellen Hopkins, *Stop Pretending: What Happened When My Big Sister Went Crazy* by Sonya Sones and *Out of the Dust* by Karen Hesse, just to name a few.

a distinct history of the conversational tone in poetry, outside of that of the verse novel, as well. For example, many consider *The Conversation Poems* by Samuel Taylor Coleridge to be one of the first examples of poetry to establish a precedent of addressing someone very close to the poet (Baldick, 2008, p. 70), a technique suited to the metre in poetry. However, the accuracy of this previous statement is debatable as metaphysical poet, John Donne, is sometimes deemed conversational in the direct address of his poems (Brown-Fuller, n.d., p. 8; Landa, 2015, para. 1; Targoff, 2008, p. 28). In fact, Jose Angel Garcia Landa credits Donne with “widening of the scope of the Elizabethan tradition” (Landa, 2015, para. 1). He further explains that that Donne “implements already existing modes in every aspect: new metrical schemes (although he will return to the sonnet in his last works), a rich and original imagery, a colloquial, conversational tone” (Landa, 2015, para. 1).

While this demonstrates a distinct history for this conversational style in poetry that is somewhat separate to the verse novel’s claim to prose fiction, until recently it was still commonplace to use some form of rhyme and metre in most conversational poems. On the other hand, very few verse novels use rhyme and metre, choosing to focus on poetic techniques such as metaphor instead. While this could suggest a stronger correlation to the tone in novels than previous poetry examples, it could also be, in part, a development of these earlier forms. For example, in Porter’s 1994 verse novel *The Monkey’s Mask* there are no constraints in the rhyme in metre (Lea, 2016, para. 7; McCredden, 1995, p. 7; Mortimer, 1994, para. 2; Royal, 2012, p. 2). In the poem “My sweetheart” the narrator, Jill, weaves internal and external

conversation while talking to her girlfriend, Diana, saying “My shout’ // in my hurry / my wallet spills its guts / all over the floor” (Porter, 2009, p. 75). Not only do the lines have no rhyme or consistent metre, but there is neither any consistency in the length of the stanzas.

While the verse novel has developed from both prose fiction and poetry, the contemporary verse novel aligns more closely to YA fiction, and occasionally the popular novel, than other literary genres. For example, Mallan and McGillis suggest that the short lines found in many examples of the verse novel have been adopted from the YA novel because they give readers “the opportunity to pause, reflect, and anticipate or, they may read quickly since the narrative segments are usually brief” (“Textual aporias”, 2003, para. 2). However, this also results in less space for the narrative to develop within the poems. Drawing the same conclusion, Mallan and McGillis also point out that “these books call upon the reader to feel because what she or he reads is short, or relatively short, lyric verses that are as much reflective as they are plot driven” (“Textual aporias”, 2003, para. 2).

The short amount of space in a verse novel means, regardless of the audience, the characters usually have to take active positions within the text (“Textual aporias”, 2003, para. 2). For example, the repeated ‘I’ in the poem “My Daughter” from Porter’s verse novel, *Akhenaten*, signifies the narrator’s urgency and presence; “I stroke her arm / I sit up Meketaten / my daughter” (1998, p. 99). The instances of the ‘I’ increase as the narrator deals with the loss of his daughter “I’m not the crocodile god / I’m of the sun // I don’t feed in dirty water / I love her” (1998, p. 99). Here “crocodile god” refers to Amun who was worshipped before Akhenaten’s reign and was later surpassed by

Aten who was “of the sun” (1998, p. 99). Carol Lipson explains in “Comparative Rhetoric, Egyptology, and the Case of Akhenaten” that this occurred “during a period when Amun was the chief god of the Egyptian empire. The new king soon began building a temple to a sun god that his father had also valued, named Aten” (2013, p. 272).¹³ Akhenaten, initially called Amenhotep IV, then changed his name “from one featuring the god Amun to one featuring the god Aten. He was now to be known as Akhenaten, not Amenhotep IV” (Lipson, 2013, p. 272). By saying, “I’m of the sun” (Porter, 1998, p. 99), Akhenaten is positioning himself as a god, as the creator of all life. The close repetition of the first person ‘I’ emphasises this as every statement he makes is about his actions and not the other character in the poem, his daughter. He says “I stroke her arm” (Porter, 1998, p. 99) and “I don’t feed in dirty water” (Porter, 1998, p. 99). The poem is about the most private experience his daughter will ever have, death, and yet we don’t hear anything about her. This quick repetition, therefore, not only signifies his belief that he should control whether his daughter lives or dies, but it also creates urgency which drives the plot forward in a very short amount of time; the longest line in the poem is only six words. When Akhenaten says “My daughter / quiet, shy girl / goes to sleep / in her Daddy’s arms.” (Porter, 1998, p. 100) and then “I was quick” (Porter, 1998, p. 100), he is returning only to the ‘I’ to re-establish his control of the situation and justifying his supposed part in her death.

The urgency with which Akhenaten mourns his daughter’s death has readers sympathising with his pain. However, he mourns during a time and with a

¹³ see the poem “Aten’s scent” (Porter, 1998, p. 51)

belief system that few people can imagine existing within. Porter “gives us a fine sense of the domestic tedium of the court and the impatient weaknesses of Akhenaten, living down the scorn of his hard-nosed mother, hounded by the need for an heir” (Sarangi & Mishra, 2006, p. 76). While the historical framework employed by Porter distances the reader from the shock of Akhenaten’s sexual practises (marrying his cousin and sleeping with his daughters to produce an heir), there is the acknowledgement that they are acceptable as they occurred in a different time and culture with different values from our own. However, the domestic relationship with his mother and the pressure for grandchildren is still applicable in many relationships today. This relationship contextualises many of the tensions Akhenaten faces in the narrative, making the world seem more authentic. These quotidian representations become even more crucial to the narrative when one considers the urgency created as a result of Porter’s use of short lines. Although they make the verse novel more interesting and push the plot forwards, it leaves less time for Porter to develop the narrative in each poem and establish authenticity. By foregrounding Akhenaten’s relationship with his mother using poetic techniques such as metaphor and simile, Porter establishes a precedent for each poem and chapter that the reader can relate to.

This use of short lines is not specific to Herrick and Porter’s verse novels. In fact, the technique is discussed at length by Mallan and McGillis as part of their discussion comparing the verse novel to young adult literature. They quote Sharon Creech who suggests the verse novel doesn’t actually contain any verse. Mallan and McGillis explain that, in her verse novel, *Love That*

Dog, Creech suggests that verse novelists “do not write poetry so much as they write a story in lines. They create ‘verse’ out of simple prose statements” (Mallan & McGillis, 2003, para. 2). However, unlike Mallan and McGillis’s summary, Creech uses a ‘verse’ example:

...any words
can be a
poem
You’ve just
got to
make
short
lines (Creech, 2008, p. 17).

While this could be interpreted as being intentionally ironic given it is written from the perspective of a young boy named Jack, it is still true that some verse novels use more prose fiction conventions than they use verse. That is not to say that poetic techniques are void in the verse novel, as even those most heavily weighted towards prose fiction still tend to adopt some kind of poetic meter that emphasizes the natural cadences in speech¹⁴ as well imagery created with metaphor and simile. However, like many of the definitions discussed already, Creech’s cannot be applied unilaterally to all verse novels. For example, in the poem “XXX. Distances” from Anne Carson’s *Autobiography of Red*, the narrator says “*Oh let’s see the*

¹⁴ Verse novels like *The Monkey’s Mask* by Dorothy Porter, *A Simple Gift* and *By the river* by Steven Herrick and *Making Lemonade* by Virginia Wolff all focus on natural speech patterns and the use of strong metaphors and similes to help drive their plot forwards and add depth to the narrative and characters.

*cappuccino is good here/I'll have a cappuccino please lots of cinnamon and-
he pushed up his spectacles/a plate of olives"* (1999, p. 94). Two important things to note is that, first of all, Carson has used italics to indicate direct conversation instead of the traditional quotation marks used in prose fiction—a stylistic choice that can be better appropriated into poetry than the more rigid grammatical conventions of the prose novel. Secondly, despite Creech's suggestion that verse novels use a lot of short lines to turn prose into verse, most of the lines in this poem span the page with Carson only alternating between long lines and short lines in each poem to give the impression that the short lines are after thoughts of the main narration. The novel itself reimagines the ancient Greek myth of Geryoneis by repositioning the main character, Geryon, into a contemporary suburban environment. Instead of being a multi-headed monster, Carson's reimagining is more symbolic as she represents him instead as a young boy who is abused by his older brother. Carson uses the myth of Geryoneis as a metaphor for self-discovery and belonging in a culture where expectation is inexplicably tied to the physical space of the suburbs we grow up in.

With her use of longer prose-style lines, Carson's verse novel clearly blurs the boundary between verse and prose. This sets it apart from earlier verse novels like Vikram Seth's, *Golden Gate*, which places more emphasis on the poetry. Unlike Carson's *An Autobiography of Red*, Seth's verse novel is made up of 590 sonnets in iambic tetrameter. Seth uses the rhyme scheme ababccddeffegg which was made popular as a result of Alexander Pushkin's long poem *Eugene Onegin* (Scherr, 2006, p. 267). This rhyme scheme later became known as part of a literary device called the onegin stanza (Scherr,

2006, p. 267). Like with Seth's stanzas in *Golden Gate*, the onegin stanza uses iambic tetrameter (Scherr, 2006, p. 272). Seth has also used these onegin sonnets to write his biography saying "The author, Vikram Seth, directed / by Anne Freegood, his editor / To draft a vita, has selected..." (Seth, 1991, p. i). The contents page and acknowledgements, likewise, read as an onegin-inspired poem with the acknowledgements starting with "My debts are manifold and various: / First, Stanford University / Where, with my progressively precarious..." (Seth, 1991, p. v). These three poems bring the total number of sonnets to 593. However, despite this obvious connection to poetry, the original cover of the 1986 version of *The Golden Gate* claims "a Novel by Vikram Seth". On my 1991 reprint, however, (note: bought in 2013) three of the five quotes allude to the text being a work of poetry first and foremost with the first one (a quote from Gore Vidal) going as far as to say "The great California novel has been written, in verse" (Seth, 1991). Despite this, the publishers have still chosen a cover quote that suggests the text is prose fiction, having instead quoted *Newsweek* who says "An utterly original, utterly delightful novel" (Seth, 1991). The first quote referenced on the back also alludes to the text's status as prose fiction comparing it, not to other poetry, but the "great California novel". The problematic placing of this genre is emphasised in that two of the quotes on the back also define the text only through its status as poetry.¹⁵

¹⁵ "A thing of anomalous beauty---Seth writes poetry as it has not been written for a century" from *Washington Post Book World* (Seth, 1991) and "A marvelous work...bold and splendid...Locate this book and allow yourself to become caught up, like a kite, in the lifting effects of Seth's Sonnets" by Judith Freeman for *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* (Seth, 1991)

As is evident in all these examples, there is no single way to interpret the conventions or hybridity of the verse novel genre, instead, it is more of a sliding scale with verse on one end and the prose novel on the other. It is at the author's discretion as to where on the scale they position their text. In other words, how many of the conventions available in each genre are used by the author depends on the thematic and stylistic approach they've chosen to take with the text in question, hence is the problematic nature of defining the verse novel. That being said, we can still identify some core structural techniques that are common to each text analysed so far. While the narrative techniques vary from text to text, the structure of the verse novel remains mostly stable. For example, *The Monkey's Mask* by Dorothy Porter has 265 pages, *Akhenaten* has 172 pages, *The Golden Gate* by Vikram Seth has 305 pages and *Autobiography of Red* by Anne Carson has 149 pages. Although these might seem to vary, they are all much longer than the standard collection of poetry. Kelly Pilgrim-Byrne's collection, *Domestic Archaeology* is only 76 pages long, Geoff Page's collection, *Improving the News*, is quite long for a single collection of poetry, spanning 91 pages and Cath Kenneally's collection, *thirty days notice*, is only 75 pages. More so, however, we are seeing the chapbook surpassing these complete collections which are shorter still. Scott-Patrick Mitchell's, *the tricking post* is 28 pages and *q finger* by Janet Jackson is only 32 pages. The volume of pages in the verse novel, therefore, stands out compared to other genres of poetry. Even though Carson's *Autobiography of Red* and Porter's *Akhenaten*, both 149 and 172 pages respectively, are short compared to their counterparts which are twice the length, they both still tower over the page length of non-narrative based

poetry. Secondly, whereas in a standard volume of non-narrative based poetry each poem stands alone, in a verse novel each poem has a place in the overall plot structure of the text and contributes accordingly. In other words, in a verse novel, some poems might not make sense taken out of context of the collection or, at the very least, you will lose some of the meaning by losing its connection and place in the rest of the narrative. This verse novel structure is crucial to defining the genre and creating a cohesive plot.

The Role of the Plot in the Verse Novel

The use of plot in the verse novel, while more common in prose fiction, not only organises and drives the narrative but it also prevents it from becoming a random sequence of poems, something that separates it from many other forms of poetry. When considering the role plot has in developing narrative in the verse novel more closely, one can examine Paul Cobley's definition of the terms, 'story', 'narrative' and 'plot':

Put very simply, 'story' consists of all the events which are to be depicted. 'Plot' is the chain of causation which dictates that these events are somehow linked and that they are therefore to be depicted in relation to each other. 'Narrative' is the showing or the telling of these events and the mode selected for that to take place. (2013, p. 5).

When considering the techniques that could contribute to creating a plot and 'chain of causation' between poems, one cannot doubt the importance of the fictional world and the resulting representations of place. As the allusion by

Felluga, which was touched on earlier, suggested, many prose novels replicate common tensions in relationships. These quotidian representations are utilised in the suburban environment in many instances to create conflict, such as the widely popular 'domestic marriage plot'. While not a suburban representation in itself, this concept of the domestic is still commonly associated with suburban life; as theorists such as Fiona Allon point out the suburb comes "with its emphasis on domestic life" (1994, p. 47). As the verse novel draws on these conventions, Felluga's theory and the suburban tensions already discussed are just as applicable to verse genres as they are to the contemporary novel with poets such as Steven Herrick being most notable for their suburban plots. However, domestic romance plots and quotidian representations are, of course, by no means recently contrived but are crucial to the emergence of the novel form, peaking in the 19th century (Psomiades, 2010, p. 53).¹⁶ Equally significant is Porter's use of the well established conventions of the detective or mystery genre in her verse novel, *The Monkey's Mask*. Porter uses these conventions to engage readers in an exploration of the divides and tensions underpinning suburban life.

While the setting these plots occur in varies greatly, one cannot doubt its importance in creating an authentic fictional world for the reader to immerse themselves in. For example, the epic *Gilgamesh* uses the ancient city of Uruk as a metaphor for the way hunter-gathers tamed the land (P. Davies, 2012, p. 23). Although set in a real place, the story is clearly fictionalised as Gilgamesh journeys beyond the edge of the earth. However, this world is still

¹⁶ While earlier forms of poetry, such as the epic, focus on representing nobility and masses of people, the novel, and later examples of poetry, represents the individual. For example, epics usually only use the individual to represent the greater whole of all citizens as is the case in *Gilgamesh*.

real for the reader as they can draw on their knowledge of the city and the rural areas surrounding it to fill in the blanks. Marie-Laure Ryan describes this notion of filling in the blanks more aptly in her book *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory* as the principle of minimal departure (Ryan, 1991, pp. 48-50). Building on John Searle's speech-act theory (Searle, 1985, pp. 221-232), Ryan explains that this principle occurs when details of a fictional world are not specified and, as a result, the reader needs to fill in the blanks using information from their own actual world (Juul, 2011, p. 123; Ryan, 1980, p. 406). She explains that "whenever we interpret a message concerning an alternate world, we reconstrue this world as being the closest possible to the reality we know" (Ryan, 1980, para. 1).

Suburban Representations in the Verse Novel

Coming back, then, to more contemporary examples of both prose and verse, one must acknowledge that drawing on a setting that is familiar to the reader is hardly a recent phenomenon. The shift we have, therefore, seen in many contemporary Australian texts is an emphasis specifically on the suburban space. It should come as no surprise that Australian readers are more familiar with the suburban environment than living in the CBDs or small country towns. In fact, the online newspaper *Crikey* cites that nearly "90% of residents of Australia's capital cities live more than 5km from the CBD" (A. Davies, 2012, para. 8) while the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) merely states that "nearly 90% of Australian's live in urban areas (cities or towns of more than 1,000 people)" (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013a, para. 61). However, when profiling the average Australian according to 2011 census data, the ABS states that "she is married, and lives with her husband and two

children (a boy and a girl aged nine and six) in a separate house with three bedrooms and two cars in a suburb in one of Australia's capital cities" (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013a, para. 78). The most important point to make here is that the ABS have stated that she lives in the suburbs. This again is further supported with population growth charts showing in Perth, for example, that the largest population growth was in the outer suburbs with the ABS citing Baldivis, Ellenbrook, Piara Waters, Yanchep and Byford (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015, para. 11). Further, the ABS explains that, as the average Australian pays a mortgage of \$1800 a month, it is more than likely that they can't afford to be closer to the CBD (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013a, para. 73).

While it is, therefore, clear that most Australians are living in the outer suburbs, it should be to no surprise that the suburbs are a popular topic in literature as they hold relevance to contemporary life. Not only are many readers residing in suburban areas, but likewise, many Australian writers will have also grown up in the suburbs. This makes it equally possible that some writers are focusing their work on the suburbs because that is what they know. It is with this in mind, that one must consider how poets explore these tensions that plague so much of Australian literature and our suburban identity, Australian professor Terry Flew explains this further in his paper "Right to the City, Desire for the Suburb?" that:

Australian suburban development has therefore been characterised by a recurring tension between the desire of large sections of the population to own their own home (the fabled quarter-acre block) in the suburbs, and the condemnation of suburban life from an

assortment of intellectuals, political radicals and cultural critics. This was the point succinctly made by the economist and urban planner Hugh Stretton in his 1970 book *Ideas for Australian Cities*, where he observed that ‘Most Australians choose to live in suburbs, in reach of city centres and also of beaches or countryside. Many writers condemn this choice, and with especial anger or gloom they condemn the suburbs’ (Stretton 7). (Flew, 2011, para. 6)

Although many poets approach writing about the suburbs with different agendas, condemnation of the cultural tensions that surround the suburbs is a common theme in many verse novels. *The Monkey’s Mask* by Dorothy Porter, for example, uses the main narrator’s first person narrative to emphasise the tension between the ‘Australian dream’ of owning a separate house on a large block¹⁷ and the high cost of living associated with properties of this size.¹⁸ This is emphasised in the poem “selling up” where the main character, Jill, explains the process of selling her house in the Blue Mountains, using the ‘for sale’ flag as a metaphor as the character feels it is yelling “Bankruptcy!’ / it flaps to the street / ‘Marital Bust-Up!’ it flaps like a failure” (Porter, 2009, p. 250). This narration exhibits her failure at semi-rural living outside of the suburbs, a theme followed through the plot of the verse novel as it both begins and ends with Jill’s abandonment of semi-rural life and her failure at ‘fighting the system’. Jill goes on to explain the circular trap of people trying to escape the suburbs and urban cities at the end of the

¹⁷ The ABS state that 74% of Australians live in a separate free-standing house (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013, para. 57)

¹⁸ In 2012, only 67% of people in metropolitan areas own their own home (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). However, *Perth Now*, reported that the WA topped the nations mortgage default list in 2015 (AAP, 2015, para. 1).

verse novel by saying “really / it’s a pirate flag // ‘New Loot!’ / it flashes // I’m heading / for the high sea // I’m off / to Sydney” (Porter, 2009, p. 250). While Jill may be abandoning the ship that is her semi-rural home in the Blue Mountains, the “high sea” she refers to is a metaphor for the rougher, more dangerous urban Sydney as well as the surrounding suburbs. While this exhibits the tensions between homeownership and the high cost of living, it represents this collective indirectly, using Jill’s personal narrative as a metaphor for the larger collective experience of living in the suburbs.

Although defining the verse novel is still problematic, it is only problematic because the verse novel is still in relative infancy. Instead of approaching it with a set of predefined rules that it must adhere to, we need to think of the conventions as negotiable instead of fixed. Any one feature can range from being predominantly ‘verse’ such as the metre in *The Golden Gate*, or ‘prose’ such as the longer lines in *Autobiography of Red*, some of which span the entire page. It is only by allowing for author aesthetic that we can truly understand and analyse what defines a verse novel. The one aspect that many verse novels share, however, is the importance of place in defining the setting and driving the plot forward. The combination of both poetic and prose techniques in verse novels can, therefore, replicate the tensions, spaces and relationships common in Australian suburbia. This also suggests some interesting possibilities for these representations should one consider a cross-over with electronic literature and games.

Electronic Literature and Games

Defining Electronic Literature and the Importance of Ludology

When considering a convergence of the verse novel and electronic literature, one must also consider existing definitions of electronic literature and the importance of ludology in developing the genre. In doing so, one must address the disparity between electronic literature and games as this is quite a contentious issue in the literary world with many scholars disagreeing on the parameters of their fictional worlds and what drives the plot forwards.

While many initial studies saw scholars siding with either ludological or narrative conventions as being singular in forming these fictional worlds and plot devices (Juul 2001; Juul 1999; Eskelinen 2001), more recent studies do acknowledge the coexistence of both in digital text with most scholars simply disagreeing with which one is more predominant (Juul 2005; Ryan 2006).

Marie-Laure Ryan sums up the controversy quite well when she asks the question, “is the concept of narrative applicable to computer games, or does the status of an artefact as game preclude its status as narrative?” (2006, p. 181). While there is no simple answer to this question, Jesper Juul, like many other scholars (Aarseth, 1997, pp. 1-5; Eskelinen, 2004, pp. 1-2; Frasca, 1999, para. 1-15; Ryan, 2006, p. 15; Simons, 2007, para. 1-4) begins by contextualising this debate within the two main schools of study to which Ryan’s question refers. Juul explains the terms used in this debate, somewhat more precisely than Ryan, saying “the early years of video game studies were often conceived as a discussion between *narratology* (games as stories) versus *ludology* (games as something unique)” (2006, p. 15).

In order to consider the debate between narratology and ludology and, more importantly, the role ludology has in the development of electronic literature, one must first consider the parameters of each argument. Andrew Mactavish expands on the conventions used by each of these areas of study quite well, clarifying that

To date, the most common debates have been between ludological approaches, which define digital games as primarily rule-based objects and activities, and a collection of other approaches rooted in the study of narrative, theatre and film. While most ludological commentators grant that digital games can include story, performance, and filmic convention, they often argue that these elements are secondary to a game's gameness (2013, p. 350).

While few scholars today consider ludology and narratology to be completely separate schools of study, it is important to note that, despite the quantity of recent work by theorists such as Mactavish and Ryan, the study of ludology (as with the emergence of electronic literature and games) is still a relatively recent phenomenon. Because of such, studies can become outdated very quickly and the parameters between the two are much less clear. As Astrid Ensslin illustrates:

We have progressed from a first wave of digital literature and videogame criticism that provided definitions and important theoretical insight (e.g. Bolter 1991; Moulthorp 1991; Delany and Landow 1991; Landow 1992, 1997; Salen and Zimmerman 2004; Juul 2005; Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al 2008) to a second wave of systematic,

analytical scholarship that looks in detail at specific phenomena within both sectors and applies principles of literary and ludological criticism to individual genres and artifacts (2014, p. 3).

Although these initial studies into definitions from the first wave of criticism are crucial and will be discussed here, it is important to note that these definitions are constantly being altered and adapted as the principles are applied to more contemporary works of electronic literature. As a result, one could propose that it is more accurate to address this argument using Ensslin's proposed literary/ludic spectrum instead of treating the literary and ludic as being incompatible as is the case in some first wave definitions (Eskelinen, 2001, para. 1; 2004; Juul, 2001, para. 16). When discussing this concept Ensslin clarifies why she believes a spectrum might be more appropriate, stating that "literary elements are more closely associated with deep attention, and ludic elements (the game elements such as rules, gameplay, avatars) with hyper attention" (2014, p. 43). This spectrum suggests a more accurate way of considering the role ludology plays in the development of electronic literature as Ensslin herself proposes that these "two types of attention" (2014, p. 43) are better suited to a spectrum because they "aren't exactly binary opposites but a matter of degree of attention" (2014, p. 43). Juul also supports this in his 2005 book, possibly inadvertently, when he says that "theory has tried to stake something of a middle ground where the unique qualities of games are not denied, but the function of fiction or story in a game can still be discussed" (2011, p. 16). Juul then expands on this by positioning contemporary research in relation to this 'middle ground', explaining that "from the other end of the spectrum, Geoff King and Tanya

Krzywinska (2002a) have discussed the relationship between games and cinema” (p. 16). The keyword here is “spectrum” indicating that Juul’s “middle ground” uses the same spectrum concept that Ensslin applies to degrees of attention in digital literature.

Defining the role of Narrative in Games

However, even with this acknowledgement that the use of narrative in games is more of a spectrum,¹⁹ the definition of games and the use of narrative and fiction in creating the plot and fictional world is still problematic and, therefore, the role of ludology in electronic literature also comes into question. There are, no doubt, many games that do not use narrative or storytelling, such as chess, checkers and other puzzle-based games, as well as many critics who maintain separation of game and narrative. However, even games like chess and checkers can be traced back to narrative origins. Chess, for example, dates back at least 1500 years (Anonymous, 2003, para. 1) and was “descendent of the Indian game Chaturanga, meaning ‘four sides’—because Indian armies were made up of four parts” (Anonymous, 2003, para. 1). This acknowledgement of the narrative history of games has still not prevented some academics, such as Aarseth, from criticising suggestions such as Ryan’s claim that “the greater our urge to tell stories about games, the stronger the suggestion that we *experienced the game narratively*” (2006, p. 193). While all games involve some level of narrative, Aareseth responds somewhat negatively to Ryan’s claim. As Juul explains,

¹⁹ Instead of siding with those arguing for narrative in games or those arguing that games exclude narrative, Juul instead suggests recent theory occupies a grey area in between (2011, pp. 16-17).

Aareseth “has criticised this for being an unproductive ideology of *narrativism*” (Aarseth, 2004, pp. 45-69; Juul, 2011, p. 16).

While the argument that games do not use narrative is somewhat outdated, Juul is correct when he explains in a later chapter that the very definition of narrative is problematic and, as a result, how you interpret narrative in games (and, by extension, other digital texts such as electronic literature) depends “exclusively on which meaning of ‘narrative’ we are using and what aspects of games we are focusing on” (2011, p. 157). When expanding on this last point, Juul outlines six possible meanings of narrative:

1. Narrative as the presentation of a number of events. This is the original and literal meaning of the word: *storytelling* (Bordwell 1985; Chatman 1978).
2. Narrative as a fixed and predetermined sequence of events (Brooks [1984] 1992).
3. Narrative as a specific type of sequence of events (Prince 1987).
4. Narrative as a specific type of theme—humans or anthropomorphic entities (Grodal 1997).
5. Narrative as any kind of setting or fictional world (Jenkins 2003).
6. Narrative as the way we make sense of the world (Schank and Adelson 1977). (2011, pp. 156-157).

These definitions in themselves are complex with Roger Schank making the leap to “storytelling and understanding are functionally the same thing” (1995, p. 24) which is the foundation for Juul’s sixth definition. As a result, it is easy for arguments to emerge between people using different definitions of

narrative. Eskelinen, for example, claims that games are not narrative because narratives need narrators (2001, p. 3) which focuses on the fourth definition. Ryan clearly points out that Bordwell, who Juul has referenced for the first narrative definition, would dispute this claim by Eskelinen as “for Bordwell, narration occurs when signs are arranged in such a way as to inspire the mental construction of a story, and it does not necessarily imply a narratorial speech act” (Ryan, 2006, p. 185). Ryan also quotes Juul who says in an earlier 2001 article that games can’t be narratives because “games almost never perform basic narrative operations like flashback and flash forward. Games are almost always chronological” (Juul as cited in Juul, 2001, para. 27; Ryan, 2006, p. 185) which clearly disputes the second definition on the list Juul developed in 2005. This also disputes more recent studies into how cutscenes contribute to developing the narrative arc. Theorists such as Rune Klevjer argue that cut-scenes are “typically found in story-based games” (2010, p. 191) while Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, likewise, state in *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals* that “cutscenes create narrative scenarios that can enrich the design-making process for players” (2003, p. 410).

It is important to note here that even these recent studies that do reference narrative are not regressing back to using narratology instead of the ludological arguments developed by the likes of Aarseth, Juul, Salen, Zimmerman and Eskelinen. Rather, this acknowledges that, in some instances, narrative can be considered a core structure in games and, as a result, game studies cannot exist in a vacuum where this is not acknowledged. Although in a previous 2001 article, Juul argues that “you

cannot have interactivity and narrative at the same time” (2001, p. 8), he later says that

Recent video games provide more elaborate worlds than previous games and, often, more coherent worlds. In combination with the improvements in computer graphics and storage, this results in an increased emphasis on game *fiction* (2011, p. 162).

That isn't to say that Juul has rescinded his previous argument because, when discussing how narrative fits in with the development of game rules, he also states that

Conversely, contemporary games give the player more freedom in his or her use of the game: The player no longer has three lives, but can continue or even save the game; developers publish semi-official cheat codes for their games; players can set up the games the way they want. These are two movements in opposite directions: one is aimed at creating more coherent worlds on their own terms; the other is aimed at paying more heed to the real-world player by providing difficulty settings, retries and/or cheat codes. (2011, p. 162).

Juul suggests that, as a result, video games project “incomplete and sometimes incoherent worlds” (2011, p. 162). So, although he is no longer considering narrative and interactivity to be binary opposites, these two arguments still say relatively the same thing; that the role of narrative in contemporary games is still problematic and ambiguous.

That being said, if games are not always defined by their narratives, the question then becomes: what does define them and how does this impact

definitions of electronic literature? Firstly, one must consider that, “in games, the dominant temporal relation is the one between user time and event time and not the narrative one between story time and discourse time” (Eskelinen, 2004, para. 5). In addressing this distinction, one can define storytime as a “sequence of events and the length of time that passes in the narrative while discourse time is the length of time taken up by the telling (Eskelinen, 2001, para. 30). While discourse time is not the dominant mode of time for many games, it does dictate the temporal relationship in narrative-based texts like the verse novel as well as some forms of electronic literature. Juul factors in these temporal relations when he develops a new definition of games that builds on many of the previous ones. He develops six essential game features which are:

1. *Rules*: games are rule-based.
2. *Variable, quantifiable outcome*: Games have variable, quantifiable outcomes.
3. *Valorisation of outcome*: The different potential outcomes of the game are assigned different values, some positive and some negative.
4. *Player effort*: The player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome. (Games are challenging.)
5. *Player attached to outcome*: The Player is emotionally attached to the outcome of the game in the sense that a player will be a winner and 'happy' in case of a positive outcome, but a loser and 'unhappy' in case of a negative outcome.
6. *Negotiable outcomes*: The same game [set of rules] can be played with or without real-life consequences. (2011, p. 36).

If we address these six features, it is of note that narrative is not one of them; Juul does not consider it essential. Although, as Ryan notes, we tell stories to talk about games we have played (how you 'won' at chess), we do not always need to be told a story in order to play them. This is not the case, however, for electronic literature.

Defining Electronic Literature and the role of Narrative and Games

Unlike games, electronic literature focuses primarily on the narrative with other functions serving only to enhance it in ways not possible outside of the digital sphere. For example, the Electronic Literature Organisation defines electronic literature as “work with an important literary aspect that takes advantage of the capabilities and contexts provided by the stand-alone or networked computer” (Electronic Literature Organization, 2007, para. 1). N. Katherine Hayles also defines it as “excluding print literature that has been digitalised, [it] is by contrast ‘digital born’, a first-generation digital object created on a computer and (usually) meant to be read on a computer” (2008, p. 3) with Ensslin also defining electronic literature as “digital-born” (2014, p. 3). The emphasis here is that not all literary texts that appear on a computer are works of electronic literature, a point Simanowski concurs with, stating that “the most popular misconception is that all text appearing in digital media is digital literature” (2011, p. 27). Ensslin also supports this, saying that electronic literature excludes “e-books or any other paper-under-glass forms of digital writing that can be printed without losing their specific aesthetic appeal” (2014, p. 3). For example, *Arteroids* by Jim Andrews emulates the 1979 video game, *Asteroids*, where all the graphic material has been replaced by the words of a poem. The player shoots words instead of

asteroids to create a self-reflexive experience where they are destroying words that represent different forms of poetry. It is an assault and the focus is on survival. This meaning would not come across in a print context as there is no capacity in print for the poetry to be destroyed as it is on the computer. Jim Andrews expands on this when describing his work on his website saying "I'm trying to synthesize and transform image, sound, and text, not simply juxtapose them" (Andrews, 2001, para. 32).

Arteroids is only one of many examples where a work of digital poetry could not be replicated in print form. To establish this as a trend, one can also consider the earlier example of Shelly Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* which, while it could not exist in print as it does on the computer, does not use as many game elements as *Arteroids* does. Published in 1995, *Patchwork Girl* is part of an early wave of electronic literature called hypertext which fragments the story by having it branch off in many different directions (Bell, 2010, pp. 1-9; Bolter, 1993, p. 114; Ensslin, 2007, p. 11; Landow, 2006, pp. 2-3; Ryan, 2006, pp. 146-147). The reader uses links to decide which narratives to read and which to exclude in what Wardrip-Fruin calls "branch or perform on request" (2013, p. 163). The use of hypertext in Jackson's, *The Patchwork Girl*, creates a collage of different narrative segments which are put together to create the larger narrative in the same way that Frankenstein was made whole from many different smaller segments. This represents, as Christopher Funkhouser explains, "how a digital poem can have multiple personalities, and that different viewers see and attend to dissimilar attributes emanating from within the same work" (2012, p. 3).

When considering how hypertext influences narrative, one must first define it and, in doing so, it is best to begin with Dirk Van Hulle who describes it as using disorientation as an aesthetic quality (2013, p. 148). He explains that the “fabric of the text can be explored in more innovative ways than on paper” (2013, p. 148), suggesting hypertext has a more disorienting plot than many print texts, which are more commonly read linearly (though that is not always the case). Jay David Bolter, who co-created Storyspace (a program for creating, editing and displaying hypertext fiction), provides one of the clearest definitions of hypertext, explaining that “hypertext is a new electronic technology for reading and writing. Like a conventional printed text, a hypertext is composed of verbal elements: each element may be a phrase, a sentence, a paragraph or more” (1993, p. 114). George Landow also contributed vastly to the area as he was the first academic to write a book that brought together literary theory and computer technology specifically to discuss hypertext. In it Landow coins the term “lexias” (2006, pp. 2-3)²⁰ to describe what Bolter later refers to as “verbal elements” (1993, p. 114). Bolter explains that “in a printed text the lexias are laid out in one fixed order...in a hypertext, lexias are connected by electronic links and may be read in a variety of orders” (1993, p. 114), creating a variety of different plots within the narrative. This was demonstrated in the earlier example, *Patchwork Girl*, where the reader clicks on links to explore different lexias. The text itself is

²⁰ Landow says that “Electronic links connect lexias ‘external’ to a work—say commentary on it by another author or parallel or contrasting texts—as well as within it and thereby create text that is experienced as non-linear, or, more appropriately, as multilinear or multisequential”(2006, pp. 2-3)

split into five segments that each branches in a different direction: "a Graveyard", "a Journal", "a Quilt", "a Story", and "& broken accents".²¹

Electronic Literature, Roland Barthes and Jaques Derrida

While this establishes a definition of hypertext in relation to how the affordances of the "stand alone or networked computer" (Electronic Literature Organization, 2007, para. 1) influences narrative and plot, one must further consider its relationship to print and the application of pre-existing narrative theory, specifically that of Roland Barthes. Ryan addresses this when she defines hypertext in her book, *Avatars of Story*, expanding on Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva's notion of intertextuality. Ryan's definition of hypertext aligns itself closely with Barthes and Kristeva's theory of intertextuality as she defines it as "the practise of integrating a variety of foreign discourses within a text through such mechanisms as quotation, commentary, parody, allusion, imitation, ironic transformation, rewrites and decontextualizing/recontextualising operations" (2006, p. 7). This correlates to Kristeva's theory as she builds on the work of Barthes who established that the text isn't an original work of the author but is instead a product of all previous texts that came before it (1977, p. 146). Kristeva argues that the text "is constructed of a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (1985, p. 37). In his original application of this theory, Barthes argues that the death of the author is the birth of the reader and emphasises the way readers bring meaning to the text (Barthes, 1977, p. 153). Using print examples such as *If on a winter's night a traveller* by Italo

²¹ Jackson also uses images of the graveyard in her text to constantly invite the reader to resurrect Mary Shelley's monster.

Calvino (as was inevitable given there were no digital examples), Barthes claims that writing will always be “a new tissue of past citations” (1981, p. 39) that are redistributed within it. What this makes clear is that Ryan, Kristeva and Barthes have all focused on how the author rearranges the words and ideas from previous texts into their own. While the reader as a co-author has existed in print texts before the advent of electronic literature, computers afford writers new methods with which readers can rearrange the author’s new iterations of these texts. This makes the reader a co-author of the digital text, or as Simanowski explains, in hypertext “you no longer get your text/music ready-made from the author/composer, but you arrange it yourself according to options provided by the other” (2001, para. 20). This difference is best emphasised using Barthes theory of “readerly” versus “writerly” texts, an embodiment first applied to hypertext by Landow. Barthes explains that

the writerly text is a perpetual present, upon which no consequent language (which would inevitably make it past) can be superimposed; the writerly text is ourselves writing, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages (1975, p. 5).

Christopher Keep et al also explain that writerly texts “force the reader to produce a meaning or meanings which are inevitably other than final or ‘authorized’” (Keep et al., n.d., para. 1). In other words, the reader takes a more active role in the construction of meaning. This is unlike the role of the reader in readerly texts which, according to Barthes, are defined by their

fixed meaning (1975, p. 5). In readerly texts, the meaning is pre-determined and the reader's only role is to receive and interpret the information (Barthes, 1975, p. 5). When Landow applies Barthes theory to electronic literature, he explains that it could be considered a "writerly" text as it gives control of the narrative back to the reader in ways that the "readerly" text does not. Barthes description of it as it being "ourselves writing" (1975, p. 5) demonstrates how the writerly text destabilises the expectations of the reader and breaks down the barrier between artefact and reality. This distinction from the writerly text, despite being first applied to print texts, is just as applicable to electronic literature.

While Landow discusses Barthes' theory in relation, specifically, to hypertext, it is also applicable to more contemporary iterations of electronic literature. Although hypertext is one of the founding forms of contemporary electronic literature (Hayles, 2008, pp. 6-7; Wardrip-Fruin, 2013, p. 163), the genre has expanded exponentially alongside the capabilities of the computer which needs to be taken into consideration. When discussing this transition, Hayles explains that older examples of electronic literature:

tended to be blocks of text (traditionally called "lexia") with limited graphics, animation, colors, and sound, later works make much fuller use of the multimodal capabilities of the Web; while the hypertext link is considered the distinguishing feature of the earlier works, later works use a wide variety of navigation schemes and interface metaphors that tend to deemphasise the link as much (2008, pp. 6-7).

This is demonstrated very clearly in *The Electronic Literature Collection* which is a digital journal of electronic literature published by the Electronic Literature Organisation in 2006 and again in 2011 and 2016. Works in the collection vary from hypertext such as *The Jew's Daughter* by Judd Morrissey and *Frequently Asked Questions about Hypertext* by Richard Holeton to literary games such as *Stud Poetry* by Mark Niemi. One of the works in Volume One is *Nio* by Jim Andrews which questions whether poetry is limited to the experience provided by words and stanzas. *Nio* is a “writerly” text as Andrews is not the author, the reader is; they are the composer. This destabilisation of the text also destabilises the role of the author, a concept which was first suggested by theorists following a post-structuralist approach to textual analysis such as Jacques Derrida's. In his 1966 lecture “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Science”, Derrida suggested that it is sometimes necessary for the reader to replace the author as the primary subject of inquiry (Derrida, 1970, p. 2), a process he referred to as decentering the author (Derrida, 1970, p. 2). In *Nio*, for example, the reader's job is to mix the audio attached to each letter which is animated in a mock-studio environment. This text uses sound, colour and graphics in ways that the earlier examples of hypertext hadn't. However, as Hayles points out, this is an example of a text that “cannot be accessed until it is performed by properly executed code” (2008, p. 5). Although this has always been a feature of electronic texts, the code in contemporary examples is much more complicated and inaccessible than earlier forms.

Electronic Literature, Hypertext and its roots in Interactive Fiction

During this development from hypertext to contemporary electronic literature, it is important to note the foundations of the genre, which has its roots in interactive fiction. Considered by some to be an early form of video games (Monfort, 2013, pp. 273-277), interactive fiction came before hypertext with its popularity peaking around 1979-1986 (Monfort, 2013, pp. 273-276). Nick Monfort defines interactive fiction saying

The basis of the form is textual input and textual output. The interactor types a command to one of the characters, called the player character, such as "ask Galatea about her awakening," "enter the doorway," or "reboot the server." The program, in turn, describes whether or not the player character is able to perform this action and, if it is possible, narrates what happens in the simulated world as a result (2013, p. 267).

For example, in *All Roads* by Jon Ingold the player character is a teleporting assassin, in *80 Days* by Meg Jayanthe (winner of the 2015 XYZZY Awards) you circumnavigate the globe. Although popularity has been declining since the early 90s, interactive fiction is still a niche genre today with the Interactive Fiction Database compiling games and annual awards such as the XYZZY Awards and the Interactive Fiction Awards. One of the most popular contemporary examples is *Depression Quest* (2013 best narrative by Boston FIG, category winner MassDigi, honourable mention Mozilla GameOn, IndieCad Collection 2013) where the player character suffers from depression in a contemporary suburban environment and must navigate through work, relationships and family as someone with a mental illness. Many earlier examples of interactive fiction (*Zork*, *Hitchhikers Guide to the*

Galaxy, Deadline) were published through Infocom, which was acquired by Activism in 1986 and then shut down in 1989.²² However, Activism have released *Lost Treasures of Infocom* for iOS in 2012 which has in-app purchases available for 27 of the Infocom titles.

While hypertext and more contemporary forms of electronic literature developed from interactive fiction, video games preceded these forms and developed parallel to them.²³ Because of this, it is important to clarify that many examples of interactive fiction are considered works of electronic literature and not video games, a view held in consensus among most scholars (Ensslin, 2014, pp. 3-4; Hayles, 2008, p. 8; Monfort, 2013, p. 267; Montfort, 2005, p. 310; Ryan, 2006, p. 97). For example, when explaining the complexities of defining interactive fiction as a work of electronic literature and not a game, Hayles explains that “many games have narrative components, while many works of electronic literature have game elements” (2008, p. 8). Eskelinen also weighs in on the debate suggesting that in games the user interprets to configure but in electronic literature and interactive fiction specifically, the user configures in order to interpret (2001, para. 7). Furthermore, Monfort observes that while Juul says that “many computer games contain narrative elements” (Juul, 2001, para. 45; Monfort, 2004, p. 310), he suggests that “reversing this formulation works better for IF [interactive fiction]. It is a potential narrative that may contain game elements” (Monfort, 2004, p. 310). This can be applied, not just to interactive fiction, but

²²This period saw the development of programs such as TADS (1988) Inform (1993) and later Twine (2009) and ADRIFT (2013) which makes the form more accessible to create and self-publish.

²³ When explaining that electronic literature has “stronger game elements” (Hayles, 2008, p. 8) Hayles clarifies that “there is a general difference in emphasis between the two forms” (2008, p. 8).

to most genres of electronic literature. One exception, and an area of more contention than other sub-genres, are literary games.

Literary Games and Digital Poetry

In her book, *Literary Gaming*, Ensslin explains that poetry-based literary games “replace—either fully or partially—the kind of graphical elements we know from standard videogames (player-characters, enemies, obstacles, and cursors) with linguistic material” (2014, p. 49). However, Ensslin agrees that these ‘games’ are still literature based and hence still considered electronic literature (2014, p. 49). Looking again at *Arteroids* by Jim Andrews, the graphic material has been replaced by text, however, there are still rules the player needs to follow. Despite this, one must still acknowledge that the author has made a decision to replace this graphical material with text in order to emphasise the meaning readers might derive from their interactions. In other words, it may appear on a surface level to be a game, but the focus is still on interacting with the text and the rules of the game to guide these interactions. This is exemplified especially in the two modes Andrews has in *Arteroids* where you can play in a structured setting and progress through levels or you can just have fun destroying words in an act that is symbolic of destroying poetry itself, with minimal rules being imposed.

While *Arteroids* can be considered a literary game, it is also an example of digital poetry which is another subgenre of electronic literature. A lot of it was developed recently out of technological advances following the genres of hypertext and interactive fiction. However, that is not to say that poetry was not used as a narrative medium earlier, just that it wasn’t as common. For

instance, hypertext poetry was popular in the late 1990s but aged much more rapidly than poetry in print²⁴ (Paloff, 2011, para. 1). Interactive poetry, which uses elements from games, came later with one of the most notable examples being the 2004 project *JABBER: The Jabberwocky Engine*. The engine connects randomly floating letters which users can then incorporate into their own jabberwocky-like poems. Some of the more recent forms include kinetic poetry such as *Text Rain* by Camille Utterback where the letters of the poem fall and the reader uses their body to catch them and make words, code poetry such as those published through the Source Code Poetry Awards (See “The American C” by Done Lean for the 2015 winner of the best compilable poem), video poetry which ranges from videos generated entirely from software to videos absent any digital effects like performance-based poetry and, finally, sound poetry which foregrounds the phonetics in speech instead of semantics.

As a result of the variety of forms that come under the umbrella of digital poetry, it can be contentious to define, especially when the only aspect that is certain is its status as a work of electronic literature. Therefore, when defining digital poetry, Funkhouser suggests it is a moving organism (Funkhouser, 2012, p. 3), however, this is not to say that Ensslin’s proposition of a linear spectrum (2014, pp. 44-45) is wrong. That being said, although Ensslin has positioned digital poetry on the spectrum of literary/ludic works, this does not help us define all of the examples that are contained within that position. In addressing this, Ensslin quite aptly splits up many of the subgenres of digital

²⁴ Benjamin Paloff explains that the “poem in hypertext, a digital medium initially trumpeted for its novelty and malleability, appears to age so much more rapidly than its cousins in print” (Paloff, 2011, para. 1)

poetry to allow for the variation of literary and ludic qualities²⁵ which Funkhouser does not do. He does, however, agree with Ensslin who argues that most forms of digital poetry require deep attention (2014, p. 124) when he explains that “digital poetry presents difficulties, and exists on the fringes of literary arts precisely because of the demands it imposes on audiences” (Funkhouser, 2012, p. 24). One can, therefore, position the specific subgenre of poetry games on the spectrum separate to other examples of digital poetry as it “challenge[s] players’ hyper attention by confronting them with textual material that requires deep attention for in-depth understanding and intertextual referencing” (Ensslin 2014, p. 123). Ensslin also later states that this

particular combination of deep-attention close reading and hyper-attentive gaming afforded or, indeed, required by poetry games creates a phenomenological paradox—a receptive and interactive clash that game designers deliberately build into their designs to make players reflect on their own expectations and habits of gameplay (2014, p. 124).

In other words, digital poetry can be quite an abstract medium to navigate through as a reader. Funkhouser agrees with this sentiment when discussing digital poetry more generally stating that many readers encounter “incomprehensible material” (2012, p. 25). For example, *Map of a Future War* by Angela Ferraiolo is described by Funkhouser as “visually demanding” (2012, p. 131). Written at the time of the global financial crisis, it shows the

²⁵ For example, hypertext appears earlier on the spectrum than poetry games which appears just after interactive fiction and drama (Ensslin, 2014, p. 45)

influence capitalism has on the breakdown of the workplace and the home. Each screen is a collage of different symbols and texts. Nuclear symbols represent the destructive nature of capitalism when contrasted with the MasterCard logo, numbers, stocks and text that focuses on the commercial workplace. Funkhouser is, therefore, right to point out that “the frequent overlap of contrasting colours, text and icons make the work challenging to absorb seamlessly” (2012, p. 134). This work is seemingly incomprehensible on the surface despite not being a literary game. This is important to note as the sub-genre of digital poetry covers a wide range of digital-born poetry texts and not just poetry games, a point discussed by Lori Emerson who explains:

While we have to acknowledge digital poetry as part of our current cultural moment, this acknowledgment is doomed to vagueness as long as we cannot say what digital poems are let alone adequately describe their behaviour. (Emerson as cited in Nelson, 2011, para. 6)

Likewise, Jason Nelson also includes this ambiguity in his definition as he describes digital poetry as “more of a continually changing process” (Nelson, 2011, para. 3), a sentiment Stephanie Strickland also makes in her own paper saying that “writing native to the electronic environment is under continual construction (poiesis) by its creators and receivers” (Strickland, 2006, para. 1). What these definitions have in common is the “transitory/transitional condition and ‘instability’ of the craft” (Funkhouser 2012, p. 14); the role of the reader and the creator cannot be clearly defined. There is, therefore, a potential flexibility in defining the genre which is pragmatically summed up by Nelson, who comments:

when I describe my work for the purpose of submitting to exhibition calls or to be published in journals or applying for grants, I fluctuate to emphasise the aspect of the work that most neatly fits the submission call's description. (Nelson, 2011, para. 9)

While this complicates the definition of digital poetry for authors, it also complicates the genre for readers. This is because, while reading digital poetry can be informed by genre, sometimes a lack of these contexts can be preferable depending on the imagined audience. In the event that the author is producing the work for an audience with pre-existing assumptions formulated from print poetry, it is important that the author leaves enough cues in the text for the reader to know what paradigm to draw from to fill in the blanks. *Arteroids* is a good example of a text where predefined perceptions of poetry are not advantageous as Andrews focuses on destabilising poetry in contexts by having the reader destroy words we commonly associate with them. While *Arteroids* is not informed by print contexts, it does draw on preconceptions formed from the 1980's videogame, *Asteroids*, in both its interface design and the gameplay. Therefore, one can conclude that, in many examples of existing digital poetry, it is not the reader's pre-existing knowledge of poetry or fiction that develops their comprehension of the text but their understanding and ability to relate to the fictional world and engage with it in a manner appropriate to the goals and outcomes of the text. This is true even when using narrative poetry which one can potentially align with subgenres such as hypertext and interactive fiction because, in many cases, the fictional world is defined more by the narrative voice than it is the interface and interactive elements. As no fictional world

can be truly complete and inclusive, the reader must be able to draw on their own experiences to fill in any gaps in narrative. Tyan Sylvester discusses this in more detail than Ryan when he applies the theory of apophenia to games, explaining that it can be defined as “the human tendency to see imaginary patterns in complex data” (2013a, p. 92). Sylvester applies this theory to games specifically, however it can also be applied to a broader category of digital works including digital poetry. He describes how game-players can perceive meaning from events that are not intended by the game designer, specifically focusing on facial expressions and other human tendencies that we have trouble replicating on a computer (Sylvester, 2013b). By way of example, Sylvester uses the computer game *Sims 3*, citing that many players perceive betrayal, hopelessness and other complex emotions on their characters faces that were not written into the game, simply because they’ve taken cues from the events occurring and applied their own experiences to them (Sylvester, 2013b, para. 18-20).

This theory, although applied specifically to games in the context of Sylvester’s article, can also be applied to electronic literature and digital poetry to give the reader direction in their play with interactive elements. The fictional world is undeniably important in many of these digital texts as it forms the foundation for all future interactions. More importantly, after observing patterns in the poet’s imagined world, the reader can then project their own experiences and interpretations onto the concrete space of the computer. This concrete space consists of the physical elements that allow the reader to interact with the game such as the mouse and the keyboard, as well as the software and operating system that sets parameters for the

functions available in the text. The way the reader uses the concrete space to interact with the text and what aspects of the text they choose to interact with, is informed by their own experience.

Digital poetry and Suburban Representations

One can observe similarities in the reciprocal relationships between the game and the computer and the way our own ideologies and prejudices influences the physical space of the suburbs. Both the suburb and the computer function as a physical space for us to project and displace “a vast array of our fears, desires, insecurities, obsessions and yearnings” (Healy, 1994, p. xiii). Not only is the physical space of the suburb informed and transformed by these projections and displacements, but it can also reform these sometimes outdated ideologies. As Healy explains,

it is much more interesting to consider how images and ways of speaking and thinking about suburbia have circulated so as to produce actual suburbs in which people live, to consider how discourses of suburbia have both formed, and been formed by, the literal space of the suburb (Healy, 1994, p. xiv).

Applying this to the game/computer relationship one finds that, although the hardware limits the landscape of the game, the game can influence the way we engage with the hardware and can even change it so that the keyboard controls are more suited to gameplay. More importantly our interactions with any fictional or imagined world is as much defined by our insecurities and desires as the physical space of the suburb is. In other words, when we project our own pattern and meaning onto a text, we draw on these existing

paradigms. As we interpolate our own suburban world into the fictional, the fears and desires we let shape our real world environment, also influence how we interact with the game's concrete space as well as how we choose to shape and reshape the world the author has created.²⁶

This fictional world is crucial to the reader-player's understanding of the text as, at its very essence, digital poetry is accumulative, intertextual and constantly moving, for both the creator and the reader. While Emerson tries to define digital poetry as "poems reflecting thinking that is based on either Euclidean or non-Euclidean principles of mathematics" (Emerson as cited in Nelson, 2011, para. 6), this defines the genre based on the process of creation and not the product produced. However, many scholars continue to define digital poetry as a mathematical equation (Funkhouser, 2012, p. 20; Glazier, 2002, p. 169; Nelson, 2011, para. 6) with Nelson, likewise, stating that "Digital Literature requires an intimate engagement with numbers, equations and geometry" (Nelson, 2011, para. 6). Thanks to modern software this isn't always the case. At least, I would argue, with authors being able to use programs that automate a lot of the code and mathematics involved in browser-based digital poems, the use of mathematics as a defining point becomes contentious. Instead, I choose to consider the digital poem as fluid and shifting, much like our suburbs. It is both mathematics and code, as well as poetry and text. It is a product of all the texts that came before it, of all the websites, JavaScript and CSS. It is forever shifting states between the digital,

²⁶ These fears and desires are defined more aptly by Chris Healy who uses the term 'suburbia' to describe the abstract ideas we approach the suburb with, saying more specifically that suburbia defines our thoughts and beliefs but not the physical space, which he uses the term suburb to describe, referring to the concrete spaces like houses, roads, schools and parks (1994, p. xiii).

the mathematic and the literary. It is both the author and the reader that define these states and because of that, the definition will always be fluid and changing according to both the reader's input and the writer's creation. The influence the social and spatial location of reading – such as the suburb – has on the reader cannot be discounted as an important part of defining space in some digital texts.

Metalepsis

Defining Ontological and Rhetorical Metalepsis

What has been established in this exegesis so far is that there are a lot of different layers that go into creating the digital verse novel. Some of those already discussed include the verse novel, hypertext and interactive fiction, digital poetry, plot, the fictional world and the concrete space of the computer. While it can be hard to conceptualise their co-existence in a text in most circumstances, one could instead approach them as individual metaleptical schemes. If we consider each scheme another layer of the text, Harold Bloom's definition of metalepsis as a literary device adds context and understanding to this reciprocal relationship: "...a scheme, frequently allusive, that refers the reader back to any previous figurative scheme" (2003, p. 74). However, when defining these schemes within the context of narrative, a concept that underpins the digital verse novel, it is easiest to begin with Ryan who suggests we imagine the story as a stack (2006, p. 204). Normally, when a new narrative or narrative world is introduced, it doesn't interact with the narrative or world that came before it, it is a separate level on the narrative stack (2006, p. 204). In this hierarchy, the audience is at the top of the stack and the most nested fictional world at the bottom (Meister, 2003, para. 2; Pier, 2005, p. 303; 2014a; Ryan, 2006, p. 205). Metalepsis occurs when these worlds or narratives interact in situations where they normally wouldn't²⁷ (Bell, 2014, p. 22; Pier, 2014a; Ryan, 2006, p.

²⁷ Ryan says that "metalepsis the operation by which narrative challenges the structure of the stack" (2006, p. 206)

206). For example, if you're watching a movie where a parent is reading his or her child *Goldilocks* and Goldilocks then walks into the room, the original narrative of a parent reading a bedtime story isn't contained anymore, you can't separate it from the second layer, which is the fictional story of Goldilocks.

This is not only an example of metalepsis, but more specifically, it is a form of ontological metalepsis, which Ryan clarifies is when a passage opens up between levels "that results in their mutual contamination" (2006, p. 207). Alice Bell explains it more simply when she explains that "the Reader is asked to imagine that characters, readers, narrators can interact" (2013, p. 23). The word, ontology, as used in ontological metalepsis, actually has its roots back in the early 18th century and is derived from the Greek word *ont*, meaning 'being' (Baldick, 2001, p. 1242). It has been used in a broad context to question existence and reality (Baldick, 2001, p. 1242). Ontology deals with the concept of being or, as Dale Jaquette explains:

What exists? This is what we really want to know: whether and in what sense spatiotemporal physical entities, numbers and sets, propositions and universals, persons and minds and God, among other things, are real. (2014, p. 1).

This questioning of existence and reality is crucial to understanding ontological metalepsis and is a concept Bell refers back when she labels it an 'unnatural narratology' (2012, p. 166). Bell explains that she drew this conclusion because ontological metalepsis involves "disorienting transgressions of boundaries that are physically or logically impossible, and

hence properly unnatural” (2012, p. 167). John Pier’s definition, likewise, draws more connections with the previous definitions of ontology as he says “metalepsis calls the distinction between levels into question which has repercussions for a number of other distinctions current in narrative theory” (2005, p. 303). In other words, the complete breakdown of boundaries makes us question everything about the narrative world we are in and what that means theoretically as we analyse the story and derive meaning from it. This makes Sylvester’s application of the theory of apophenia, as discussed previously, all the more important because, when we begin to doubt the composition and framework of the text’s fictional world, we can only regain stability by drawing on aspects of our own.

The other main type of metalepsis to be discussed in this exegesis is rhetorical metalepsis and, unlike ontological metalepsis, it doesn’t actually result in the mutual contamination of levels of being. Instead, as Ryan explains, the author can speak about his or her characters, but still presents them as part of his or her imagination (2006, p. 207). In this instance, the fictional world is informed by the real world but not mistaken for it, as can be the case with many Role-Playing Games where the boundary between real and fictional is blurred. Instead, with this form of metalepsis, the layers remain stable and the fictional characters remain in their positions, or, as Bell explains, the narrator “draws attention to his role in the fiction making process while not moving across any ontological boundaries” (2014, p. 23). Bell further elaborates saying “rhetorical metalepses are merely metaphoric ones in which no actual boundary crossing takes place” (2012, p. 167). While

the reader informs their understanding of the textual world from their own experiences, the text remains fictitious and both worlds remain stable.

That being said, although this paper focuses on these two types of metalepsis, Monika Fludernik considers four types explaining that they are

(1) authorial metalepsis (as in Virgil “has Dido die”), which serves to foreground the inventedness of the story; (2) ontological metalepsis (type 1) in which the narrator (or a character) jumps to a lower diegetic level; (3) ontological metalepsis (type 2) in which a fictional character jumps to a higher narrative level; and (4) rhetorical metalepsis (2003, p. 389).

Authorial metalepsis, initially called “author’s metalepsis” (Gerard Genette, 1980, p. 234) by Gerard Genette and Pierre Fontanier,²⁸ occurs when “communication between narrator and reader takes place” (Bell, 2013, p. 23). However, when discussing the types of metalepsis in her book *Analyzing Digital Fiction*, Bell says “rhetorical and/or authorial metalepsis” (2013, p. 23) using ‘and/or’ to suggest the similarities between these two types. This demonstrates that there are many varied interpretations of Gerard Genette’s original theory with Ryan identifying two core types of metalepsis instead of Fludernik’s four types. Ryan asserts that these are Genette’s “author’s metalepsis” which she labelled as rhetoric and McHale’s later proposal of an ontological metalepsis. Pier recognises that this theory of Ryan’s “is now widely acknowledged” (Pier, 2014b, para. 12). However, there is still a lot of support for Fludernik’s expansion with Karin Kukkonen and Sonja Klimek

²⁸ Genette references Fontanier in footnote who also calls it “author’s metalepsis” (Fontanier, 1967, p. 116)

using her definition in their book *Metalepsis and Popular Culture*. In support of Ryan's theory, Bell and Jan Alber state that "from our perspective, authorial and rhetorical metalepsis are merely metaphoric ones in which no actual boundary crossing takes place" (2012, p. 167). This paper uses Ryan's theory of metalepsis from this point onwards and considers authorial metalepsis to be part of the larger category of rhetorical metalepsis.

Metalepsis and Diegetic Levels

When she expands on these two types of metalepsis in *Avatars of Story*, Ryan explains that the narrative will be either descending in that the narrative will move to a lower layer than the one the reader is currently experiencing (and deeper into the story), or it will be ascending, moving up to a higher level (towards the world of the reader). Brian Patrick expands on this by quoting Genette:

the narrator is bound always and only to narrate events occurring at a subordinate diegetic level. All other modes of involvement in these events—as participant, witness, victim, or unseen demiurge—are unavailable to the narrator and to characters at the narrator's level. Narrative situations that violate this principle are cases of metalepsis (Genette, qtd. in Patrick, 2008, pp. 1-2).

Genette's use of the word 'digesis' refers to the interior view of the narrative world. By referring to diegetic levels he is referring to the different layers within the storytelling. With this in mind, descending metalepsis will move from an extradiegetic layer, which is a "narrative act external to any digesis"

(Coste & Pier, 2011, para. 2)²⁹ and towards the intradiegetic “which means the level of narrating the story (which is usually the real world as represented in the narrative, but not the actual world of the reader/viewer)” (Ensslin, 2011, p. 7).³⁰ Both ontological and rhetorical metalepsis can have extradiegetic and interdiegetic movements with Ensslin referring to Sonja Klimek’s explanation that metalepsis “can happen between all levels of diegesis” (p. 8; Kukkonen & Klimek, p. 25). That is, it can occur whether the metaleptical transgression is rhetorical with no complete transfer taking place (Ensslin, 2011, p. 6) or ontological with a complete change of both levels occurring.

What is most crucial here, however, is the practical use of metalepsis in fictional texts and how this might change when considering the ludological applications of electronic literature. Genette describes the kind of text metalepsis produces quite aptly with the definition that established a theory of metalepsis, explaining that it is,

any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by the diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.) or the inverse [which] produces an effect of strangeness that is either comical or fantastic. (Gerard Genette, 1980, pp. 234-235).

Furthermore, Genette explains that to achieve this, the author needs to create “a shifting but sacred frontier between two worlds [within the text], the world in which one tells, the world of which one tells” (1980, p. 236). While

²⁹ Lucie Guillemette and Cynthia Levesque from Universite du Quebec a Trois-Rivieres explain in their article “Narratology” that the extradiegetic is the main plot (Guillemette & Levesque, 2006, para. 15). Ensslin defines it as the storyworld itself “(i.e. the fictional world which accommodates the setting, characters and events of the main story)” (Ensslin, 2011, p. 7)

³⁰ Guillemette and Levesque, likewise, refer to the intradiegetic as the “event-story” (2006, para. 16) or “narrative act” (2006, para. 6).

this application is very apt for rhetoric metalepsis, some examples of electronic literature and many examples of games do not have an intradiegetic level or storyworld with the play instead occurring in the reader's world. Furthermore, the intradiegetic levels are not always predetermined by the author but are sometimes created and rewritten by the player during play, especially in the case of games. This results not in "a shifting but sacred frontier" between levels within the narrative, but in a complete breakdown of the barrier between the fictional and the real. This half-real existence in some games and electronic literature texts is a form of ontological metalepsis.

Juul pens the term "half-real", titling his 2005 textbook with it, and continues to define its role in videogames explaining:

In the title, *Half-Real* refers to the fact that video games are two different things at the same time: video games are *real* in that they consist of real rules with which players actually interact [extradiegesis], and in that winning or losing a game is a real event. However, when winning a game by slaying a dragon, the dragon is not a real dragon but a fictional one [intradiegesis]. To play a video game is therefore to interact with real rules while imagining a fictional world, and a video game is a set of rules as well as a fictional world. (Juul, 2011, p. 1).

This oscillation between the real rules and the fictional game is what breaks down the ontological barrier for players. As Juul further explains "we can also treat the fictional world as a fixed set of signs that the game presents, and we can treat the fictional world as something that the game cues the player into imagining and that the players then imagine in their own ways" (Juul, 2011, p.

2). However, the author/creator can direct the way the reader imagines the world by embedding cues into their work. For example, if the author/creator uses suburban representations in their digital work, the reader will fill in the blanks from their own experiences with suburban identity in order to understand the narrative and the rules of the game. Juul uses *The Legend of Zelda* as an example because of the arrow that hovers above the heads of other characters that the player can interact with (Juul, 2011, pp. 1-2). These arrows represent the quotidian experience of human interaction and social engagement. Our understanding of this paradigm, in the real world, informs how we play and engage with the game.

Metalepsis in Poetry and How it Differs From Metonymy

Applying these same principles to create metalepsis in poetry is somewhat different as, although there are no rules, there is an existing paradigm that dictates the conventions of the poem and how one should read and analyse it. That being said, despite these conventions dictating the 'rules' of the poem, they in no way constitute a real world element and are instead an extension of the fictional, narratorial elements of the text. As a result, these conventions are considered another nested level of the text and do not extend to the top layer of the reader's real world like the rules do in video games. This, by extension, means that rhetorical metalepsis is much more common as the poet simply alludes to the breakdown of barriers between these layers of the text using metaphor and simile. In narrative-based poems, this breakdown can be alluded to through the narrating persona and, in some cases, the use of multiple narrating personas from different layers can cause

a complete breakdown between ontological boundaries and intradiegetic levels.

While the narrating persona is one poetic technique that can achieve metalepsis in poetry texts, metaphor and metonymy are arguably just as important with allusion being a mutual convention across both poetry and all forms of metalepsis. In fact, metalepsis is commonly considered a type of metonymy (Gerard Genette, 1980, pp. 232-234; Pier, 2014a, p. 192; 2014b, para. 7-10); a poetic device derived from the Greek *metōnymi* which means, broadly speaking, to substitute or share (Baldick, 2001, p. 1114). Pier also explains that metalepsis is a type of metonymy saying “narrative metalepsis as a concept results from the convergence of rhetoric (placing it alongside metaphor and metonymy as tropes or transformation, substitution and succession)” (2014a, p. 191). Ruurd Nauta, however, suggests two different strains of metalepsis; “one concerned with allusion (following Quintilian) the other with narrative (metalepsis as metonymy of the preceding and the following)” (Nauta as cited in Pier, 2014b, para. 10). The former relates to rhetoric metalepsis where the breakdown of the boundary is alluded to but never actually occurs, and the later can be considered mostly ontological as objects/characters from one world are substituted in another causing the complete breakdown of these boundaries.

While there are clearly similarities between metalepsis and metonymy, there are still subtle differences. When it comes to defining metonymy, Michelle Boisseau et al explains in *Writing Poems* that “in metonymy we substitute *one thing for something associated with it*” (2008, p. 140). They use the example “to keep life from spilling” (2008, p. 140), which is a line from Robert

Frost's poem "Out, out" (2008, p. 140). Frost substitutes blood for life to emphasise that the boy's life is at risk as a result of the blood loss he is trying to curb (Boisseau et al., 2008, p. 140). That being said, defining metalepsis is more complicated than what exists in current frameworks for metonymy. When expanding on this, Madhavi Menon explains that "many definitions of metalepsis deem it a second-degree metonymy" (2004, p. 75). However, Menon also argues:

Unlike metonymy, in which the word that starts the associative chain is considered unproblematic and nontropological, metalepsis, as Quintilian and these dictionary definition insist, links two tropes; in other words...it links two terms that have already had their meaning 'turned' from their pristine state (2004, p. 75).

One must, therefore, acknowledge that "the rhetorical classification of metalepsis has never been fully resolved (figure or trope?)" (Pier, 2005, p. 303). This is something also noted by Genette who will only say that "metalepsis shares with metaphor and metonymy the principle of a transfer of sense" (Gérard Genette, 2004, pp. 7-16; Pier, 2014a, p. 339). Dumarsais, on the other hand, goes as far as to explain that metalepsis is "a form of metonymy by which one explains what follows in order to denote what precedes; or what precedes in order to denote what follows" (Dumarais as cited in Dahlberg, 2010, p. 110). This clearly establishes some ambiguity when considering the differences and likeness of metalepsis and metonymy with Fontanier too says that "metalepsis and metonymy are seen as indistinct" (Fontainer as cited in Dahlberg, 2010, p. 104) and Bernard Marie Dupriez simply stating that "metalepsis resembles metonymy" (1991, p. 275).

One can further consider the differences between metonymy and metalepsis using Australian poet Steve Smart's collection, *Imaginary Love Poems*, as an example. Smart uses metonymy in lines such as "world turns to rainbows and fire" (2010, p. 2) to emphasize the coexistence of happiness and pain.

However, these images only give the reader a small glimpse into the two different worlds of the narrator and don't completely fulfil the definition of ontological metalepsis as outlined previously in this chapter. The metalepsis in Smart's poem is not achieved through figurative speech and imagery, but through the narrating persona and the point of view Smart writes with.

Ultimately metalepsis owes a great deal to the reader's interpretation of whether the worlds penetrate each other, or, in fact, the reader's own. The narrating persona and modulation of point of view is the strongest tool in the poet's belt for influencing how the reader reacts to certain elements in the text. For example, in his collection, Smart refers to the reader in the second person which also makes him or her the addressee embodied in the poem. In his first poem "Imagined First Meeting" (2010, p. 1) Smart writes "You say you don't like my poetry" (2010, p. 1) and continues in "If you only had a name I could call" to state that "you don't really exist do you?" (2010, p. 2). This brings the reader into the world of poem using an ascending metalepsis as it moves from the lower diegetic layer of Smart's narrating persona (and the fictional world it creates) to higher diegetic layer which is the real world of the reader. However, this is still an example of ascending metalepsis as the reader does not work to move down into the world of the poem, but rather, the second person pronoun works to bring the world of the poem up to the reader. In other words, the narrator moves up the stack to the reader's world

by directly addressing them in second person. Smart is explicitly stating that a conversation has taken place between the reader and the writer or, as Genette puts it, between “the world in which one tells, the world of which one tells” (1980, p. 236).

When considering how Smart’s usage of the second person narrator can be metaleptic, one can draw on David Ben-Merre’s article “I’m so vain, I bet I think this song is about myself: Carly Simon, Pop Music and the Problematic ‘I’ of Lyric Poetry”. Ben-Merre explains that the speaker uses the lines “You’re so vain/You probably think this song is about you,” to not only accuse her lover, but also to suggest that the listener should be the one to take on this role (2011, p. 70). This, therefore, makes the song metaleptic as “the act of addressing a ‘you’ transgresses the supposed boundary between the real and fictional world, fusing the role of character and audience” (2011, p. 70) in the same way the listener becomes the person who doesn’t like Smart’s poetry. This latter example isn’t just metaleptic but also self-reflexive as it draws attention back to the poem as a construction, a construction that Smart has proposed was shaped as a result of the reader’s influence in the very narrative it constructs. However, it is important to note exactly what this “you” means for the reader, a topic discussed by Ensslin and Bell. In their article “I know what it was. You know what it was: Second Person Narration in Hypertext Fiction”, with some help from the the critics they are quoting, they compare the “you” as it is used in narrative to the “you” used in video games, explaining that:

Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin define the textual "you" in terms of player choice and responsibility, with the player being considered as a

singular entity rather than collective audience: "you are the person for whom the story is being told" (xiv), and the "you" fills the role(s) enabled by any chosen game's avatar selection or customization mechanism (which is particularly true for offline and online role-playing games). (Bell & Ensslin, 2011, p. 313)

While Smart's poetry is one example of how poets can use the narrating persona to influence metalepsis, it very clearly fits in the "you are the person for whom the story is being told" (Harrigan and Wardrip-Fruin as cited in Bell & Ensslin, 2011, p. 313) category of Harrigan and Wardrip-Fruin's definition. Despite this, it still works because, as Bloom explains, "influence as a metalepsis for reading [narratorial intrusion] tends to be either a projection and distancing of the future and so an introjection of the past....or else more often a distancing and projection of the past and an introjection of the future" (2003, p. 74). Smart's uses the second person narrating persona to create a future projection between the speaker and the reader before bringing himself back to the present in the final lines "that's how I imagine / our first meeting would be" (2010, p. 1) to create a rhetorical metalepsis. This is also demonstrated with the narrating persona in Dorothy Porter's verse novel *The Monkey's Mask* where the main narrator, Jill, is interrupted by a projection of the past while investigating the disappearance of college student, Mickey. This past projection comes in the form of a manuscript of "Mickey's Poems" that was written before she disappeared. Both of these narratives occur alongside each other such as in the poem "Your heart of ferns" (Porter, 2009, p. 109) where Jill starts by reading Mickey's poem: "*where I'll burn you up / where I'll melt your lips on mine / where I'll melt your ashes into my skin /*

holy man, your heart of ferns is not safe with me / you'll smell me coming with my box of matches" (Porter, 2009, p. 109) before pausing to comment on it herself in the last line of the poem, saying "I quite like this one." (Porter, 2009, p. 109). However, Mickey's past projection functions as more than an insight into a crime as they illustrate a different sense of place from that of the main narrator. While Jill has moved from the semi-rural Blue Mountains and into urban Sydney, Mickey is writing from within a university setting and the rich inner suburbs of her parents. These projections give us insight into Mickey's life, an insight we wouldn't have in the present because of her death. It is only through the understanding Jill gains of Mickey's setting that she is able to solve the crime and work out how she died.

What this establishes is that, while many people mistakenly consider metalepsis in poetry to be replacing one figure of speech with another, it is, in fact, a more complex web where the role of the speaker and the reader become much less clear and the boundaries of the poem and its setting become much harder to define. However, metalepsis having its roots in metonymy demonstrates that poetry has foundations in metalepsis. This is a sentiment Bloom agrees with, explaining that "the interpretation of a poem is always an interpretation of that poem's interpretation of other poems" (Bloom, 2003, p. 75). In other words, poems not only blur the boundaries between the worlds they create for the reader, but also between the worlds of all the poems that preceded it. This is especially true of the verse novel as every proceeding poem relies on the reader's comprehension of the narrative in the poem previously with metonymy being a common device used by the narrating persona to refer to previous metaphors and create intrusions of

past experience and place. That is, each poem in a verse novel series can be viewed as its own intradiegetic level, the relationship between them creating extradiegetic metalepsis. Using *The Monkey's Mask* as an example again, it is only because of the previous events and settings which Jill narrates that the reader makes sense of Mickey's poems and can contextualise them and position them within the narrative stack.

Metalepsis and the Extradiegetic in Electronic Literature and Digital Poetry

In using these forms of metalepsis, there is potential for the narrating persona[s] in the verse novel, in its digital form, to shift away from "you are the person for whom the story is being told" (Harrigan, 2007, p. xiv) and towards being the "'you' [that] fills the role(s) enabled by any chosen game's avatar selection or customization mechanism (which is particularly true for offline and online role-playing games)" (Bell & Ensslin, 2011, p. 313). In order to demonstrate this, however, it is important to also consider the role of metalepsis in electronic literature. This exegesis, therefore, also looks at the role of metalepsis in games as neither games nor electronic literature can be discussed in a vacuum. Games as examples of metalepsis are a well explored area of research because, by its very definition, a game involves the player being an active participant in the fictional world; the barrier between the real world layer and the fictional layers need to be questioned for a game to be effective. This correlates to metalepsis as "the literal meaning of metalepsis is 'a jump across'" (Kukkonen, qtd. in Ensslin, 2011, p. 4). While previous examples of metalepsis in poetry were mostly examples of ascending metalepsis, most games are examples of descending metalepsis,

that is, “the narrator joins the world of his or her characters, or when a player delves into a game world using an avatar” (Ensslin, 2011, p. 6).

One important point to make is that most of the theory already discussed about metalepsis focuses on narrative voice and other narrative techniques. However, narrative isn't one of Juul's six essential features for defining video games and, as a result, metalepsis in both games and electronic literature cannot be presumed based on this narrative component. Ensslin has allowed for this lack of narrative voice in electronic literature with her theory of metalepsis, suggesting that there is a need to add an extratextual diegetic level in some forms of electronic literature and most literary games (Ensslin, 2011, p. 4). This level would be used in cases where the text has no narratorial authority present to create an extradiegetic narrative world. In these instances, the layers of the story are nested in the extratextual world instead of the extradiegetic world. As a result, the world of the reader becomes intertwined with the world of the game instead of having the sequence of events take place in the fictional or imagined world of the narrator. This confusion in and of itself represents the highly metaleptical nature of games. The lack of narrative and loss of the standard extradiegetic world means the player becomes present within the game or text itself. As a result, the reader questions whether the text is fiction or non-fiction as the player's world is interpolated into the game.

This having been addressed, it is important to note that this theory can be applied to all forms of electronic literature including digital poetry. Although Bell and Ensslin discuss their theory of the extratextual in reference to literary games, it can be applied to most other forms of electronic literature with Bell

using it to analyse the digital story *10:01*. She describes how the narrative takes place “across the fiction-to-actual boundary” (2014, p. 35) clarifying that there are “no instances in *10:01* in which any fictional entities move to other ontological domains within the fictional world” (2014, p. 35). Bell further suggests that the work uses only an omniscient narrator (2014, p. 31), with the reader unable to access or change any of the information because the characters “belong to a different ontological domain to the reader” (Bell, 2014, p. 31). Instead, *10:01* uses hyperlinks to link to websites in the actual world to suggest that the world of the narrative and the world of the reader are the same.

These hyperlinks, termed metaleptic links (Bell, 2014, p. 33) by Bell, are an important aspect of metalepsis in electronic literature. Bell explains that the metalepsis occurs when the fictional text is edited into an external link that redirects the reader to a website in the actual world instead of another passage of the story. Bell’s example, from *10:01*, is the text “Mall of America” which not only introduces the setting but also links to the mall’s website as it exists in the real world. These hyperlinks mimic the links in hypertext which link to another passage of the story. However, in this work of electronic literature they are much more significant because the reader “is taken from the fictional world to a source of information that originates in the actual world” (Bell, 2014, p. 33). Like a traditional hyperlink in hypertext fiction, the metaleptic link is supposed to be used by the reader to help them understand the fictional world. In doing so, the reader is “asked to imagine that the characters in *10:01* belong to the same ontological domain” (Bell, 2014, p. 34) as themselves. Bell further explains that these links “suggest that the

fictional world and actual world are not so separate after all” (2014, p. 34).

These links are an example of ascending metalepsis because the story moves up to the world of the reader. However, Bell points out that the cursor used to action these links is a descending form of metalepsis as it serves as an extension of the user’s arm. This, therefore, signifies them reaching into the story, down the stack.

Having both ascending and descending metalepsis occurring in the same work of electronic literature can, at first glance, seem problematic. However, Ensslin demystifies the concept by introducing the term convergent metalepsis. Like Bell’s example in *10:01*, in convergent metalepsis “the movement is both ascending (bring the narrative to the reader) and descending (the reader having to descend to the plane of narrative and diegetic decisions and commands)” (2011, pp. 13-14). There is, therefore, a difference between how convergent metalepsis presents in electronic literature compared to games, saying that electronic literature is author driven as opposed to games which are user driven (Ensslin, 2011, p. 14). For example, both the web based and the print versions of *10:01* are set in a suburban environment; based in a movie theatre that is inside The Mall of America in Bloomington, Minnesota. Both document the 10 minutes leading up to the start of the movie and both end with an explosion. However, many of the similarities stop here because, while the print version starts at 00:00:00:00 and ends at 00:09:54:27, the digital version contains two different forms of navigation; a visual timeline at the bottom, and a visual representation of the physical seat positions of the different characters in the centre of the screen. While the print version is read from beginning to end in

chronological order, the web-based version of the story can be started from any point in the timeline and can be read in whatever order the reader chooses.

Although the differences between the print and web versions of this text function to give control of the text back to the reader, these navigational structures do not make the text user-driven like games. This is “because users respond to the textual tools and structures created by an author, rather than creating their own narratives independently” (Ensslin 2011, p. 14). It is this quote that also explains how, in some instances, it is possible to have an extratextual and an extradiegetic metalepsis exist at the same time. The “textual tools” the user responds to are what creates the extradiegetic world. However, by being able to respond and interact with these textual tools the status of the text as fiction is questioned. While the text creates its own fictional world, the elements that allow the reader to engage with it suggest that the events they are interacting with are actually occurring in the reader’s world where the real suburban shopping centre, Mall of America exists. Although there is no clear narrator in *10:01*, it is not a far leap to consider the metaleptic links and cursor being used in a text that does have an established first person narrator. In this case, both the intertextual and extradiegetic are occurring in the same text, with the reader fluctuating between them depending on whether they are interacting with the text or reading it. Both, however, still draw on the reader’s suburban environment. In the extradiegetic level, a rhetoric metalepsis takes place using narrative-based techniques to allude to the real suburban world (such as naming the fictional shopping complex after a real one). The navigational qualities of the

text that create the extratextual world form an ontological metalepsis. The hyperlinks that link out real websites such as the words “Mall of America” linking to the mall in the real world, break down the barrier between the fictional suburban world alluded to in the text itself and the real suburban world of the reader. Both of these states co-exist in the text with the reader fluctuating between them.

While *10:01* is a good example of metalepsis in fiction-based electronic literature, it is also important to focus on how writers have adapted poetry for the web as this exegesis focuses specifically on developing the verse novel which, although using narrative components, is still a work of poetry. This concept of a digitally interactive verse novel fits best in the sub-genre of electronic literature, digital poetry. Like *10:01* and other fictional examples of electronic literature, a lot of digital poetry will have a convergent metalepsis. For example, Jason Nelson’s infinite click and read poem, *Sydney’s Siberia* uses *mise en abyme*, containing an infinite poem within a poem. The poem itself opens with text over an image that reads:

“between 1875 and 1877 twelve men and women created the folly history society. their [sic] goal was to photograph strangers, build histories of important and far reaching deeds and then memorialize them as grand pillars, window adorning guardians civic’s future”
(Nelson, 2010).

The reader can then click on any part of the image to zoom in so that the tiles that make up the image are revealed. This process is repeated, infinitely zooming, until you’ve selected a new tile to make up the next passage of the

poem and start again. This act of zooming in to more detail signifies the act of reading a poem, making the text's self-reflexivity metaleptic in itself as the text is aware of it being fiction. Embedded in this click and zoom action is Bell's theory of the metaleptic cursor, making this a descending metalepsis. However, the text itself is ascending as it mimics a crime scene and draws the reader in as a detective following a map. Both of these forms of metalepsis function to help the reader explore the town of Newcastle as being an undesired part of Sydney instead of its own independent city. The click and zoom function on the map of images brings the reader into the setting and gives them control of where they go. The metaleptic cursor is an extension of the user's arm and allows them to navigate through the images as if they are on a walking tour of the city. However, Nelson shows only the back alleys of Newcastle using pictures of road signs and rubbish. With each click the reader is able to decide which of these landmarks to visit next, focusing on the overlooked aspects of the urban and suburban environment. Nelson's decision not to include any life forms in the images or the text makes the tour a lonely one and gives the impression that Newcastle lives in Sydney's shadow, that it exists in a place of exile. While the infinite zooming of these images is descending as the reader makes a conscious decision to enter into the suburban environment, the text itself is ascending as it positions the reader as a detective and directly addresses them. The co-existence of both forms of metalepsis results in the text that both welcomes the reader into the suburb to investigate its urban fringes, as well as a text that is alienating when the reader approaches it.

The Visual Interface

The Visual Interface as Part of a Metaleptical Machine

When it comes to designing interfaces for electronic literature, it is important to first establish a definition for exactly what an interface is. Emerson considers this in her book *Reading Writing Interfaces*, asserting that “while interface is a productively open-ended, cross-disciplinary term, generally speaking in computing it refers simply to the point of interaction between any combination of hardware/software components” (2014, p. x). However, in order to look at how the interface influences how users interact with electronic literature, it is also important to consider the role human agency has in the development of these interfaces. Lev Manovich explores this using his concept of the human-computer interface:

The term *human-computer interface* describes the ways in which the user interacts with a computer. HCI includes physical input and output devices such as monitor, keyboard, and mouse. It also consists of metaphors used to conceptualise the organisation of computer data. For instance, the Macintosh interface produced by Apple in 1984 uses the metaphor of files and folders arranged on a desktop. Finally, HCI also includes ways of manipulating data, that is, a grammar of meaningful actions that the user can perform on it. Examples of actions provided by modern HCI are copy, rename, and delete a file; list the contents of a directory; start and stop a program; set the computer’s date and time. (2001, 69).

Manovich, therefore, establishes the way metaphors are used to organise the computer interface in a way that promotes human agency and interaction.

Emerson also elaborates on the different ways both humans and computers interact with these interfaces by paraphrasing Florian Cramer. Cramer establishes eight different kinds of interface which are:

hardware-to-hardware interfaces (such as sockets and drives),
hardware controllers for software functions (such as joy sticks),
software-to-hardware interfaces (such as the operating system), and—
especially for this book—human-to-hardware interfaces (such as
keyboards, screen and mice) and human-to-software interfaces (such
as the graphical user interface) (Cramer, p. 119; Emerson, 2014, p. x).

While some of Emerson and Cramer's interfaces focus on computer interactions between hardware and software, the latter two examples focus on human agency, a point Jason Farman further elaborates on, possibly inadvertently, when he defines interfaces. Farman explains:

while the author facilitates this interactivity in designing and
developing the interface, the audience helps create the narrative they
experience and actually brings the story's discourse into being.
Interfaces offer a selection economy, where the choices afforded to
the users by the interface determine those behaviors available to
audiences and constrain other behaviors through omission or design.
(2014, p. 56).

While this chapter focuses on developing and designing the graphical interface,³¹ a subtype of the human-to-software interface, it is important to first consider the fact that Emerson and Cramer's eight types of interfaces could, collectively, represent a hierarchy of levels on the computer which correlates with Ryan's suggestion of "metaleptical machines" (Ryan, 2006, p. 217). While there is the hardware-to-hardware level at the bottom of the stack which Ryan refers to as "the real machine, made up of physical hardware" (2006, pp. 216-217), the next level up is the software-to-hardware level which interacts with these hardware functions. The human-to-hardware and human-to-software levels are the ones readers generally encounter and, while Ryan explains that "the stratified architecture of the computer is not in itself metaleptic" (2006, p. 217) these user interactions create "opportunities for metaleptic operations of a technological nature (viruses, programs that operate on themselves) as well as for manipulations that lead to ludic and artistic effects" (Ryan, 2006, p. 218). One could suggest that this feedback loop recursively interacts with the rest of the levels of the computer so that the reader does not need to engage with code or binary in order to utilise the capabilities built into the hardware, making it an example of metalepsis. This feedback loop blurs the boundaries between the interface the reader encounters and data the computer receives and interprets. While to some professionals these levels might appear clear and distinct, this is, in fact, an example of quasimetalepsis to the average user, which Ryan defines as

³¹ Bernard J. Jansen defines the graphical interface as "a specification for the look and feel of the computer system...GUI usually have common characteristic such as windows, icons, menus, and push-buttons (WIMP). Collectively, WIMP are pictures that bring forth a certain action or an action space. The user issues commands via the GUI to computer applications" (1998, para. 8)

“playing with levels that remains compatible with a rational explanation”
(2006, p. 218).

As a result of this quasimetalepsis, the graphical interface can take on a more user-friendly aesthetic which exists in direct contrast to the process many authors undergo to create the work in the first place. In further analysing the audience’s role in the design of these interfaces, it is prudent to consider Anna Ursyn’s explanation for the purpose of a visual interface in her chapter “Aesthetic Expectations of Information Visualization” where she explains:

the linkage structure of the World Wide Web would be valuable to understand but is extremely difficult [for audiences and users] to visualize. Consider also that despite billions of bytes of video data sharing Internet sites such as YouTube and Hulu, that understanding and exploring within its content is still near impossible. (2012, p. 14).

This clearly coordinates with Ryan’s metaleptic machines as it acknowledges that there is an impossibility in the average user being able to engage in all the different ways information is stored in a computer in order for websites and digital texts to function. Ursyn expands on the importance of the visual interface in handling this data this when she says that it can be managed through visualisation in an interface that limits what information the reader can interact with (2012, p. 14). She explains that this “information visualisation is usually defined as the presentation of pictures showing easy-to-recognise objects, which are connected through some well-defined relations, to amplify cognition” (2012, p. 14). This visualisation and resulting

simplification of large quantities of data results in Emerson's "invisible interfaces" (2014, p. 43), an apt term for Ryan's metaleptic machines.

Emerson suggests that these interfaces are invisible as the user/audience is often ignorant to this backend of information.

Creating a Visual Interface using Cultural Representations

When it comes to creating these visual elements one must reconsider how the use of metaphor, proposed earlier by Manovich, can simplify a design and make it more user-friendly. When addressing this, Ursyn quotes Robert Kosara who explains that "a minimal set of requirements for any visualization comprises an image based on data that is readable and recognizable" (Kosara as cited in Ursyn, 2012, p. 14). Ursyn gives an example of this when she argues that "everyday environments (such as computers, communication media, TV, multimedia, online protocols, and games) serve as a container for a story" (2012, p. 24). When applying this to electronic literature, these everyday environments, and even objects, can serve as extended visual metaphors throughout the many different types of pages and links contained within a digital work.

While these graphical interfaces rely so heavily on cultural representations because they are recognisable, Manovich also explains that it is, in part, because there has been a need to balance standardisation with originality (2001, 91). Old forms of media, which—in some cases—have become iconic cultural symbols of Australian suburban life, use conventions familiar to most audiences. While originality can make a digital work more appealing and

unique, it needs to be balanced with standardisation and easily recognisable images that the user knows how to navigate through. As Manovich explains:

Modern general-purpose HCI [human-computer interfaces], be it the Mac OS, Windows, or UNIX, allow their users to perform complex and detailed actions on computer data: acquire information about an object, copy it, move it to another location, change the way data is displayed, etc. In contrast, a conventional book or a film positions the user inside an imaginary universe whose structure is fixed by the author. Cultural interfaces attempt to mediate between these two fundamentally different and ultimately incompatible approaches. (2001, 90).

In this context, Manovich's term 'cultural interface' refers to "the ways in which computers present and allow us to interact with cultural data" (2001, 70) and one can see a correlation between Manovich's theory of standardisation and Ursyn's suggestion of using visual metaphors to represent data in more recognisable ways (Kosara as cited in Ursyn, 2012, p. 14). For example, Manovich poses the question: "Why do cultural interfaces—Web pages, CD-ROM titles, computer games—look the way they do?" (Manovich, 2001, 71), having clarified earlier that "computer media is simply a set of characters and numbers stored in a computer, there are numerous ways in which it could be presented to a user" (2001, p. 70). One could, therefore, argue that "the language of cultural interfaces is largely

made up from elements of other, already familiar cultural forms” (Manovich, 2001, p. 71).³²

While Manovich refers more broadly to new media theory his analysis, Ursyn focuses specifically on website design and considers more of the technical aspects involved in creating graphical interfaces. Like Ursyn, this chapter focuses on developing web-based interfaces, in part, because JavaScript, HTML and CSS (among other web-based coding languages), are the most accessible and easiest to learn and troubleshoot for many authors. Authors can also utilise the web browser to create a graphical interface that accesses the capabilities built into the computer’s operating system. These capabilities include access to hardware such as the keyboard and the mouse which is why, in her paraphrasing, Emerson has grouped the human-to-hardware interface with the human-to-software. She explains that the boundary between these latter two kinds of interface are much less clear. This is possibly because, unlike the other levels of the computer, the human-to-hardware and human-to-software levels are directly influenced by the reader of a digital text. Nonetheless, when defining the web-based user interface, which is the primary focus of this chapter, one can align it more with the human-to-software category as it provides a graphical interface to help users access the capabilities of an existing software program.

The Web-Based Graphical User Interface

When discussing web-based interfaces specifically, one should first address Jakob Nielsen and Marie Tahir’s research which resulted in them developing

³² This theory is often referred to as remediation, the blending of old media, such as broadcast TV and print, into the interfaces of new media forms (Bolter, 2000, p. 62-72).

113 guidelines for homepage usability. They explain the importance of the homepage in web design, asking one to “imagine how disorienting it would be to walk into a store and not be able to tell immediately what services or goods were available there” (Nielsen, 2001, para. 17). This is just as important to consider in electronic literature as the user needs to understand the goals of the work and how to interact with it to achieve those goals. This importance is supported by Chun-Cheng Hsu who focuses his paper on categorising website homepages based on different interpretations of these guidelines. He paraphrases Thomas Powell et al who categorise website design into two groups “text-based and GUI [graphical user interface] (or metaphor-based)” (Hsu, 2011, p. 1316). Hsu explains further:

a text-based (or library like [referring to Jeffery Veen who used the library as a metaphor for text-based websites and the gallery as a metaphor for GUI's]) webpage is usually functional and used to provide information. The style and aesthetics are usually less important, for example, search engines (e.g. Google.com, Yahoo!). In contrast, a metaphor-based or gallery-like design is form-based which makes use of colors, creativity and mood (Hsu, 2011, p. 1316).

As this chapter focuses on the graphical interface over the text-based interface, one must acknowledge that screen size poses more restrictions on a designer who is using visual elements over one who is merely using text.

Hsu expands on the restrictions of web-based design in his paper, saying:

in comparison with its paper-based counterpart, [web-based design] has to be adapted to the fixed-sized monitor. Therefore, when a web

designer uses visual elements, he or she has to think in different ways to a traditional designer. For example, hyperlinks and animations all add to the complexity of web-based design. (2011, p. 1315).

With contemporary screens coming in many different sizes such as desktop/laptop, tablet and mobile, the job of the web designer to constrain their visual elements to the screen becomes increasingly difficult despite CSS introducing media queries in their latest release, CSS 3. Media queries allow web designers to specify exceptions in their visual code for different screen sizes. While a website's sidebar might be present on a desktop PC, media queries allow web designers to specify its absence on the smaller tablet and mobile screens to allow for ease of access to information for readers and an uncluttered design that doesn't involve zooming in and out to access different features.

When considering how screen size restricts the design of web-based digital works, one must address the different styles of web-based interfaces and it is of note that a study by Hsu et al included only one category for text-based design. They argued that websites "fall into six categories: text-first type, frames-and-color-blocks type, rational layout type, emotional-and-curved type, image-centered type and cartoon-like type" (Hsu, 2011, p. 1316). While Hsu's analysis purports that the text-based type is a poor choice for any designer, this study is based on the design of a website and not electronic literature and digital poetry. For example, *The Jew's Daughter* by Judd Morrissey uses a text-based web design despite the multimodal possibilities available to those using a web-based platform. Emerson suggests a comparison with the digital text *YHCHI* by Marc Voge and Young-Hae Chang, saying that an

interactive narrative is not true freedom for the reader but the allusion of freedom through a set of predetermined choices (2014, p. 43). As a result, text-based digital works “choose to accentuate the absence of freedom in their work” (Emerson, 2014, p. 43).

Web-Based Visual Interface in Electronic Literature

While one can still consider the role of metalepsis in these texts, many, such as Morrissey's, qualify as author-driven and not user-driven as is the case in most games, a distinction made earlier by Ensslin and Bell. However, while research into web design isn't entirely accurate when applied to electronic literature and digital poetry, a website is still an example of an author-driven text which is a parallel not associated with games. Furthermore, it is important to note that all of these studies have so far focused on web design for the homepage as this is the first screen the reader/user engages with on a website. A web-based digital work can be comprised of many screens so the variation and use of these categories will depend on the purpose of page in question. For example, a web-based work which uses a branching narrative to split the story or poems into sections might have many 'homepages', one to front each section of the text. Furthermore, as Farman explains “narratives that branch in many directions depend on audience choices, such narratives need not necessarily have a specific beginning or a necessary end” (2014, p. 57). While research into website design focuses on conveying a particular message on the homepage, there might be no fixed start or end point in a digital work. Furthermore, if the artist/web designer's purpose is to defamiliarise the web browser, then many of Hsu's criteria might not apply. However, not all purposes align with defamiliarisation and

some digital artists might opt to use these criteria to develop clarity and purpose or even to establish an aesthetic that is familiar to the reader. They might then use these criteria to defamiliarise or put into question other aspects of the text such as genre, structure or cultural ideologies whose existence needs to be questioned and analysed.

Contributing to this defamiliarisation is the drive to constantly improve and update the functions that make web interfaces interactive. This builds obsolescence into digital works as, despite popular rhetoric suggesting that content shared on the internet could outlive us, many digital works have a short life span. As Jed Rasula explains; “our future pixels will not be monumental” (2009, p. 3). Funkhouser concurs with this sentiment when he outlines some of the common complaints people have when engaging with web interfaces used in electronic literature. He says they they often:

involve disconnection—broken links, missing information, software incompatibility or corruption, and the inconvenience of (and insecurities involved with) downloading or upgrading applications (2012, p. 213).

Many of these issues, therefore, stem from problems with accessibility to content. When browsers are updated and website domains are not renewed, outward-bound links are broken. As the interactive elements used in electronic literature are reliant on these built in functions, when enough features are rendered obsolete, the barrier between the storyworld and the real world is no longer brought into question and the work, at best, becomes a static block of text (flash works for example, are not visible at all except for an

error message). That being said, browser-based works are, overall, more accessible as computers and laptops now come preinstalled with their operating system's own web browser (Internet Explorer for Windows, Safari for Apple's iOS). There are also other free web browsers available for download such as Chrome which is made by Google and Firefox made by the Mozilla Corporation, with many people preferencing one over the rest. For some people, which web browser they use has become as personal as setting their desktop background. Not only are these browsers more accessible to readers, but the code is more accessible and easier to learn for authors with guides and *W3Schools* containing tutorials, references and examples for most languages used in web design such as JavaScript, CSS, HTML, SQL, PHP and JQuery. Therefore, by focusing on a graphical interface designed for a web browser, the process of creation is accessible for the author, the interface is user-friendly and the work is available on most computers.

However, one must also acknowledge that, when using a graphical web-based interface, there is more risk of built in obsolescence than there is in a purely text-based one. While many older examples of digital poetry used Adobe Flash as a platform (*Map of a Future War* by Angela Ferraiolo, *Seedsigns for Philadelpho* by mIEKAL aND, *Touch* by Serge Bouchardon) the latest release of web browsers no longer supports Adobe Flash and these works, as a result, are rendered obsolete. Many other examples of digital poetry, such as those by Jason Nelson and Jim Andrews, are web browser-based works that instead utilise languages such as JavaScript, CSS and HTML. This accidently builds obsolescence into the browser as these

languages are constantly changed and updated. The growing problem of obsolete texts leads one to reflect on the fickle nature and potentially short life span of web browser based works as both a problem that impacts accessibility as well as intentionally self-reflexive.

Metalepsis and Web-Based Visual Interfaces in Electronic Literature and Digital Poetry

While many other recent examples of digital poetry are also utilising the world wide web as a platform, a lot of earlier examples of electronic literature were made on StorySpace. Created by Jay David Bolter and Michael Joyce, StorySpace was a popular tool for creating, editing and reading hypertext fiction during the early years of the web when hypertext links were less fluid and pages had to be coded by hand in HTML. As a result, Lori Emerson explains that, although StorySpace was less limited than earlier renditions of web-based platforms in the 80s and 90s, it was also more inaccessible (2014, p. 34). However, with the multimodality now available on web platforms, Emerson purports that many of the practitioners of electronic literature and digital poetry (referencing Jason Nelson and Judd Morrissey as examples) use the web browser in order to “create interfaces that frustrate us as readers, because they seek to defamiliarize the interfaces we no longer notice” (2014, p. 34). Therefore, while Emerson considers most of the electronic literature genre when she suggests that some authors choose to defamiliarise web browsers as part of their work because ordinary use creates “invisible interfaces” (Emerson, 2014, p. 46), one could suggest, to the contrary, that it applies more specifically to digital poetry. The “immersive quality” (Bell, 2016, p. 21) that results from Bell’s interactional metalepsis

becomes more crucial when considering the volume of “incomprehensible material” (Funkhouser, 2012, p. 25) in digital poetry. Expanding on this further, one could argue that “the internet and web have become familiar and even boring and sometimes disagreeable spaces” (Voge and Chang as cited in Emerson, 2014, p. 43). While this makes it important to consider web design strategies in defining the interface in a digital work, it also makes it crucial to consider that many of these strategies are subverted in digital poetry. That being said, not all works of digital poetry use this defamiliarisation of the web browser as a central tool. Works such as *Paths of Memory and Painting* by Judy Mallow, in fact, rely on this familiarisation in order to create ekphrastic poems that replicate the process involved in painting a landscape. Mallow uses hypertext links and multiple lexias to transition the reader between ekphrastic poems that represent the different stages of drafting and painting. In this instance the text has a descending metalepsis as the reader has to use Bell’s “metaleptic cursor” (Bell, 2014, p. 31) to action the hyperlinks and transition between the stages of the portrait. This is also an example of metalepsis as Mallow has included Bell’s metaleptic hyperlinks in her topology (Bell, 2016, pp. 1-28).

While digital poetry presents difficulties (Funkhouser, p. 24) in its complexity and understanding, this no doubt coincides with the complexity in representing information on visual interfaces. Bell suggests that, unlike the argument for metalepsis in print defamiliarising a text (Bell, 2016, pp. 1-22),

in digital fiction it can create an “immersive effect” (Bell, 2016, p. 1). Building on Aaraseth’s definition of ergodic literature,³³ Bell explains:

while ergodic digital fiction is defined by its reliance on interactivity, it has also evolved from primarily utilizing ‘anti-narrative’ devices such as fragmentation, multilinearity, and lack of closure in the text-based Storyspace hypertext fiction of the 1980s and 1990s, to twenty-first-century multimodal devices in which interactivity is combined with narrativity (Bell, 2016, p. 22).

While many digital poetry interfaces focus on defamiliarising the web browser and using ‘anti-narrative’ devices, Bell’s analysis is still important to consider as not all works of digital poetry focus on defamiliarisation. As Funkhouser explains, digital poetry is “already a complex expressive form—a compound of written/visual/audio/mental expression with code, software and the network, fluidly enabling media and intertextual potential” (2012, p. 11). While some poets utilise metalepsis in a fashion more akin to print applications in order to fragment these elements and defamiliarise the poem and web browser platform,³⁴ there is still the potential to align the use of metalepsis in digital poetry texts more closely to that of Bell’s by focusing on the narrative in genres like the verse novel. While Bell is referring to fiction genres when she explains that “defining them in terms of their ability to defamiliarise

³³ A term developed from Aaraseth’s ‘ergodic literature, which he coined in his book *Cybertext*. Aaraseth explains that “in ergodic literature, nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text. If ergodic literature is to make sense as a concept, there must also be nonergodic literature, where the effort to traverse the text is trivial, with no extraneous responsibilities placed on the reader except (for example) eye movement and the periodic or arbitrary turning of pages” (1997, p. 1)

³⁴ That is to say, many print applications also focus on defamiliarising the text, a technique adopted into some electronic literature and digital poetry such as *Arteroids* by Jim Andrews.

(Richardson) and/or their relative 'conventionality' (Nielsen) across media is more problematic" (Bell, 2016, p. 2), her argument that "interactional metalepsis is a device that is inherently built into ergodic digital fiction and thus that ergodic digital fiction is necessarily unnatural" (Bell, 2016, p. 1) can, likewise, be applied to digital poetry. Bell defines interactional metalepsis as:

a form of metalepsis which takes place across the actual to storyworld boundary and that exploits the interactive nature of digital technology via the hardware through which the reader accesses the text, such as the mouse, keyboard, or other navigational devices, and/or via media-specific interactive modes of expression such as hyperlinks or avatars (Bell, 2016, p. 1).

Taking note of Bell's use of the word 'media-specific', metalepsis in texts can be considered media-, and even genre-specific, which, therefore, affects the kinds of interfaces produced. For example, the extended visual metaphors suggested by Ursyn could unite the visual interface with the textual metaphors in the poems, further implying that the narrative in the poems exists in a world the reader can interact with. This technique is utilised in many digital poetry texts such as web-based work *Map of a Future War* by Angela Ferraiolo. Ferraiolo uses symbols of capitalism such as stock numbers and bank symbols that overlap with colours, text and other icons. The interface is busy and too challenging to take in all at once; users have to mouse over elements to bring them to the foreground. This creates an ascending metalepsis as Bell's metaleptic cursor represents an extension of the user's arm. This complex interface also mirrors the content of the text which talks about the confusion following a breakdown of the economic

system and the impact it has in people's personal lives and relationships. The lack of any instruction at the beginning of the work mimics the lack of guidance during an economic crisis and represents the potential the metaleptic container has in blurring the boundary between text and interface and, as a result, between reality and fiction. This economic crisis is clearly demonstrated in the text:

woman at her
desk muttering
under her breath
bastards the
bastards when
I go to speak to
her she starts
to whistle (Ferraiolo, 2008).

This text is presented on an interface which is cluttered with bank symbols that represent the crisis as well as other overlapping text passages which tell a story of collective experience, of the many other people who have lost jobs or had their personal lives impacted. The interface Ferraiolo has designed reinforces the content and metaphors in the text. This creates an ontological metalepsis and brings into question the reality of this collective experience as the reader also questions the text's status as fiction and its broader existence in author-driven texts.

These visual interfaces are also used in electronic literature to navigate "large data sets" (Ursyn, 2012, p. 14) of poetry or prose fiction. However, the

way the interfaces navigate these data sets has ontological implications. For example, the web-based interface in *Screen* by Noah Wardrip Fruin et al is a room made up of words that describes a relationship that is on the brink of collapse. The words fly at the reader with the speed increasing as time passes until the walls of the room collapse and the relationship is over. This interface controls the rate and quantity of text the reader has access to. When the words start flying towards them it becomes clear they are not supposed to read the walls of the room, but rather, their access to the text is mediated through animation. However, the voice of the narrator is questioned by readers as a result of this control and the limitations placed on their interactions. Readers are left to question what really caused this relationship to breakdown and whether or not the narrator's account is reliable; why has the narrator chosen to mediate and filter the text despite the interactive possibilities of the web-based platform?

Some of these examples use only simple interfaces to create the illusion of freedom, forming only rhetorical metalepses. This results in a text that never fully brings into question the narrative's status as fiction. However, most contemporary web browsers have more multimodal capabilities than many early platforms used in the genre. This has resulted in texts that use more complex design criteria, or, as Claire Bishop explains "the developments in the new media art involve digital, participatory, multisensory, creative activities" (Bishop as cited in Ursyn, 2012, p. 19). Ursyn paraphrases Gillian Crampton Smith who explains that, as result of these more complex interfaces, "designers of digital technology products no longer regard their job as designing a physical object—beautiful or utilitarian—but as designing our

interactions with it” (Ursyn, 2012, p. 20). While designing graphical interfaces for web-based platforms has clearly become more complex, both the browser and process of creation has become more accessible for readers and authors alike. With the languages used to code a website being the most accessible, the web-interface becomes the code equivalent of building a house in the suburbs. By using visual elements inscribed with suburban identity in the design, the aesthetic becomes realistic and seemingly achievable by those without programming skills despite the process of creation being more difficult. As a result of this DIY aesthetic, readers are also able to navigate the large collection of poems in more familiar ways, such as through a smartphone device or using a map as a visual representation. As Talan Memmott explains, “there are no guidelines for creative and cultural practice through applied technology and it is, therefore, up to practitioners to develop their own (anti)methods. Each creative application is a new event marked by individual theories of media applications” (Memmott as cited in Rasula, 2009, p. 12).

Using Suburbia as a Container for the Story

Defining Australian Suburbia

Before one further considers how suburban ideologies are represented in texts and the implications this has on aesthetic and design, one must first establish what these ideologies are. The analysis of suburbia in this exegesis so far, has established that texts represent suburbia in many different ways. Some of the common threads of these ideologies are summarised by Graeme Davison, who explains in his article “The Suburban Idea and Its Enemies”, that his purpose is to identify “the main ideological strands of the suburban idea as it first appeared in England—Evangelicalism, Romanticism, Sanitarianism, and Class Prejudice—and examines [sic] how they were reproduced, with occasional variations, in the colonial city” (Davison, 2013, para. 1). While this doesn’t account for how suburbia has changed since its first emergence in England, the historical pedigree is still important to consider. Eric Jaffe examines these ‘ideological strands’ quite closely, citing Davison when he explains that they are:

Evangelicalism. The purity of home was a central construct in the Evangelical revival. So while cities were viewed as places of corruption, while retreating into the countryside was seen as a moral refuge.

Sanitarianism. In keeping with Evangelical tastes, cleanliness was seen as godliness. Cities, meanwhile, were rotten places with garbage, manure, and in many cases soot everywhere—breeding

grounds of disease and misconduct. The suburbs were seen as a hygienic alternative: 'literally clean-aired,' Davison writes.

Romanticism. This aesthetic movement promoted feeling over reason, nature over artifice, solitude over sociality, nostalgia over ambition. As a result, detached residences and private gardens were considered far more beautiful and desirable than the cramped shared quarters of the city.

Class Segregation. As cities and towns became manufacturing centers filled with industrial workers, suburban areas were seen as exclusive retreats for the moneyed classes. 'When the well-to-do fled to the suburbs, they sought to place a protective cordon between themselves and a class on whose labor they relied but increasingly sought to avoid,' writes Davison. (Jaffe, 2013, para. 5).

However, as this analysis focuses on the emergence of suburbia in England, one must consider how the changes in migration have resulted in issues of racial and ethnic diversity. This is especially the case in the composition and tensions exhibited in many Australian suburbs. For example, Fiona Allon explains the shift towards an ethnically complex suburbia, focusing on Sydney in her analysis:

Increasing cultural heterogeneity within the everyday urban fabric is, I would argue, the most important socio-cultural force affecting cities and suburbs today. As a consequence, the suburbs of the 21st century are 'suburbs of difference': they are multiethnic, multiracial, multiple (Sandercock, 2003). (Allon, 2006, para. 19).

While Davison's initial identification of these ideological strands needs to be reviewed to be applicable to contemporary suburbia, his argument that these ideologies are "based on the logic of avoidance" (1994, p. 63) still holds relevance. This is a point Jaffe concurs with, explaining that they result in:

behaviors of avoidance ('the determination to escape the vice, disease, ugliness, and violence of the city') and attraction ('the desire to embrace the virtue, health, beauty, and seclusion of the countryside') that combined to form suburban culture (Jaffe, 2013, para. 5).

That being said, while Davison's theory focuses on England and holds some relevance to Australian suburbia, the more deeply embedded structures of class distinguish it and prevent it from being conflated with ours. Healy's research, on the other hand, focuses specifically on Australian suburbia. Although there are differences between Davison and Healy that need to be considered, one can still see a correlation between Davison's ideologies of avoidance and attraction and Healy's claim that, in shaping the suburb, we project and displace "a vast array of our fears, desires, insecurities, obsessions and yearnings" (Healy, 1994, p. xiii). However, while Healy applies this theory specifically to the physical space of the suburb, these ideologies can also shape our perceptions and readings of the texts that represent it. In the case of electronic literature, it can also influence the shape and navigation of the text as is the case with *The Disappearing* app by Red Room Company where users' preconceptions of the urban and suburban space will influence the sites they choose to visit on the map.

This acknowledges that our own ideas and narratives about suburbia are inexplicably tied to the physical space. It is, therefore, important to consider how one might define and establish the boundaries between the two terms used to talk about the suburbia and the suburb, or if a boundary can be established at all. Healy explains this quite succinctly in his introduction to *Beasts of Suburbia: Reinterpreting Cultures in Australian Suburbs* where he explains that the “suburb’ refers to actual places, while ‘suburbia’ refers to a state of mind” (1994, p. xiv). When considering how these two terms interact one can again draw attention to Healy who describes how the physical space of the suburb is inscribed with the cultural significance underpinning the term ‘suburbia’. He explains that the collection for which his introduction was written was born out of a desire to think about suburbia as a cultural site (1994, p. xiii), a lived place (Healy, 1994, p. xiv) where cultural systems “involve us being positioned, and positioning ourselves” (Healy, 1994, p. xiv). With this in mind, one can consider these cultural sites to be defined by the “actual concrete ‘places’” (Healy, 1994, p. xiv) of the suburb such as “bodies, homes, gardens, streets, schools, shopping centres, nations” (Healy, p. xiv). However, they are also defined by our preconceptions of suburbia which are “abstract ‘places’ of identification and connection: individuals, families, recreation, residents, consumers, citizens” (Healy, 1994, p. xiv). These abstract places are defined by Davison’s suburban ideologies, and this, in turn, influences the way the suburb is shaped to fit them; even if that is to make room for these ideological constructs or out of fear and avoidance of them. Healy is, therefore, quite right in stating that “suburbia has been a way of talking about other things” (1994, p. xvii) with Andrew McCann, likewise,

stating that “suburbia, not to mention the realm of heightened experience with which it is often juxtaposed, cannot be easily, separated out from various narratives of wish-fulfillment which fixate on 'cultural, geographical or sexual alterity” (McCann, 1998, p. viii).

As this exegesis addresses Australian suburbia specifically, one must consider the way these ideologies manifest in Australian suburbs. When considering historical identity, Ashton explains:

While dominant cultural, social and economic discourses of the 1880s and 1890s focused on the ‘city and the bush’, the 1900s, 1910s and 1920s witnessed the rise of a contest between the city and the suburbs. In the struggle over cultural dominance and finite resources, proponents of suburbia cast the city as corrupt and retrogressive; a mere engine; a product of ‘old world’ influences deleterious to the national imperial character and the establishment of a new social order. Fusing civilisation and nature – the best of the city and the country – the respectable suburb was to be the fount for the new race (Ashton, 2008, p. 37).

However, one cannot discount the importance of racial identity in the formation of this ‘new race’ as the period Ashton references, the 1900-1920s, is an indicatively white race (Jupp, 1995, 207). While that changed as a result of post-war European migration (Jupp, 1995, 209) and the end of the White Australia policy (officially known as the restrictive immigration policy under the Commonwealth Immigration Restriction Act of 1901) (Jupp, 1995, 207), racial tensions are still high in the Australian suburbs. This is exemplified by

poet, Judith Wright in her 1991 book *Born of the Conquerors: Selected Essays*:

Those two strands—the love of the land we have invaded and the guilt of the invasion—have become part of me. It is a haunted country. We owe it repentance and such amends as we can make, and one last chance of making those amends is to keep as much of it as we can, in the closest state to its original beauty (Wright, 30).

One cannot, therefore, discount the influence early racial political policy has had in developing Australian suburbia, nor Wright's suggestion that it exists almost in a binary with the idealised white suburb. Ashton himself also touches on this issue of race in his paper, albeit he focuses on the period from the 1900s to the 1920s and not contemporary suburbia. He explains that "suburbia also gave expression to religious division, sectarianism and 'wowsersism' as well as the pervasive White Australia policy" (Ashton, 2008, 37).

While race is an important consideration, Ashton has also drawn our attention to another suburban ideology by suggesting a fusing of suburb and nature (Ashton, 2008, p. 37). While many councils now plant native flora on their verges, there are still remnants of previous juxtapositions where the bush has been previously considered uncivilised next to the sophistication of the suburbs. In fact, the very planting of native flora in the suburbs occurs in a domesticated setting, suggesting this dichotomy might still exist.

Furthermore, although Ashton clarifies that in early Australian suburbia, the suburbs were defined as civilised in juxtaposition to the bush (2008, p. 37), in

more contemporary times, one also cannot discount the influence of juxtaposition with the city and other urban areas. Ashton explains that “suburbs allowed the recipients of the benefits of capitalism to insulate themselves from sites of industry and commerce and to quarantine themselves from ‘inferior’ classes” (Ashton, 2008, p. 36). One could argue that, as a result of this separation, the suburbs became “integral to the rise of domestic industries and services – tiles, timber, plaster, plumbing, electricity, sewerage – tying wage and salary earners into ‘pay-off-as-rent’” (Ashton, 2008, p. 37). While domestic ideologies and the domestic housewife in particular are arguably ideologies most prominent in the 1950s and 60s, Jenny Stedman claims that “there are still remnants of these broad generalisations like the heterosexual, nuclear family and the ideology that the domestic life is the women’s role and domain, even today” (Stedman, 2014, para. 6). One can, therefore, ascertain three main ideologies shaping Australian suburbs; juxtaposition with the Australian bush, distinction between classes and finally, domesticity and gender roles.

Juxtaposition of the Bush and the Suburbs

Of these ideologies, one of the most defining dichotomies has been the juxtaposition of the bush and the suburbs. This has presented, in contemporary times, as avoidance of our unsophisticated past and, as a result, taming of the bush through domesticity of native flora. However, there is also a romanticism of the bush dating back to colonial times and seen predominately in bush poetry which supports Davison’s questioning of the suburbs as becoming “too spacious, too clean, too safe, too conventionally virtuous, too sanctimonious” (Davison as cited in Jaffe, 2013, para. 7). When

considering contemporary representations of the bush, Ian Hoskins explains that the suburb is defined by its juxtaposition with “‘unshaped’ space” (1994, p. 14) and marks the border between civilisation and “the emptiness and ‘otherness’ of the ‘the bush’” (Hoskins, 1994, p. 14). Using the suburb of Daceyville in Sydney, New South Wales as an example, Hoskins explains that “though public spaces had been consciously planted with native species, the private gardens in Daceyville were full of exotic blooms, distinguishing them from ‘the bush’ with its wildflowers: ‘You wouldn’t just put them in your garden—they were a bush plant’” (1994, p. 14). Hoskins applies this theory specifically to Daceyville in Sydney as it was built on the edge of the city where the bush marked the regional perimeter. However, this theory can be applied to many suburbs in Australian cities even, to a lesser extent, the inner suburbs and other areas not directly surrounded by bush in contemporary times. While Daceyville was initially built on the fringes of Sydney, it is now surrounded by other central suburbs such as Kensington and Kingsford, wedged in-between Sydney CBD and the Sydney airport. Although no longer bordered by bush, Hoskins establishes that this ideology of fear surrounding the uncivilised bush is still prominent in the suburb today (Hoskins, 1994, pp. 1-17) as the initial design of the suburb has remained mostly unchanged (Hoskins, 1994, pp. 1-17).

In exemplifying this last argument, one can observe trends in the central suburbs of Perth where non-native trees and other flora have been planted on the streetscapes, dating back to periods where many of these suburbs bordered the bush. For example, the streets of Applecross are lined with Jacaranda trees which are native to more tropical and subtropical regions

such as South America and Cuba (City of Stirling, p. 3). Likewise, many of the amenities in Como and Bentley such as Como Secondary College, Collier Golf Course and Curtin University, are scattered with Maritime Pine trees (anonymous, n.d., para. 5) which have “aesthetic, historic and representative cultural heritage significance” (City of South Perth, 1997) as they are preserved remnants of the Collier Pine Plantation (City of South Perth, 1997). Native to southwest Europe and northwest Africa, these trees do not have their origins in Australia but were imported and planted in the 1920s to fill a shortage after world war one (City of South Perth, 1997). Their inscribed cultural significance is irrevocably tied to their intended civilising purpose; to build houses and other suburban entities such as schools and business. This, as well as their foreign status, exemplifies the suburbs as ‘not bush’ and instead links them to more civilised realms than Australia.

This juxtaposition of the bush and the suburb is represented in many Australian literary texts, especially poetry, such as Les Murray’s poem “Sydney and the Bush”. Murray begins by chronicling the colonisation of Sydney and how “When Sydney and the bush first met /there was no open ground” (Murray, n.d.). He details the cities expansion with the lines “The convicts bled and warders bred / the Bush went back and back” (Murray, n.d.). Of significance here is how Murray capitalises the first letter of the bush using the same conventions for nouns and city names like Sydney. While lines like “there was no common ground” suggests a dichotomy between the outer-suburbs and the bush, Murray’s capitalisation of the ‘bush’ as if it were a noun creates a rhetoric metalepsis. Murray is suggesting a similarity

between Sydney and the bush, opening up a window between the two with lines such as:

When Sydney ordered lavish books
and warmed her feet with coal
the Bush came skylarking to town
and gave poor folk a soul (Murray, n.d.).

However, Murray explains that, despite this similarity, man started dominating and destroying nature. This is exemplified with the line; “Then the bushman sank and factories rose” (Murray, n.d.). Murray further suggests that this does not make the city and the bush dissimilar with the lines “the Bush in quarter-acre blocks / helped families hold their own” (Murray, n.d.), insinuating this dichotomy is born out of greed.

In contemporary times, Murray explains that “When Sydney and the Bush meet now / there is antipathy / and fashionable suburbs float / at night, far out to sea” (Murray, n.d.) using the words “fashionable suburbs” to suggest possible motive. The haunting final lines “When Sydney and the Bush meet now / there is no common ground” (Murray, n.d.) further exemplifies this dominant ideology which indicates that the unshaped space of the bush is considered ‘other’ to the city. Murray’s poem, therefore, questions the juxtaposition of Sydney with the wild, unkempt bush, suggesting that representations are not always so polarising. In fact, one could argue that Murray romanticises the bush, potentially suggesting another ideology to fear entirely. Dating back to colonial times, those who inhabited the bush were represented as noble, pioneering Australians while the city and suburbs were

implied to be inauthentic and weak.³⁵ This is further exemplified in a lot of Australian poetry written during colonisation which uses themes like ‘the outback’, ‘the convict’ and ‘the drover’ to “distinguish Australia’s urban environment from any other city in the world” (Keane, 2009, p. 17). While there is still a strong following for bush poetry in Australia, fewer writers experience and live in the bush than in colonial times. This has shifted the quintessential Australian experience to those of urban and suburban environments with the bush being used as ‘other’ to exemplify our separation from this unsophisticated, convict and colonial past.

Suburbia and the bush are, therefore, commonly held in juxtaposition to each other, whether that be to romanticise or create separation from the bush. However, both romanticised depictions of the bush and representations of it as something to be feared were grounded in ideologies born from the same need to develop a uniquely Australian voice. In colonial times this was the result of both isolation from our British counterpart as well as isolation from ourselves in a land so vast that many passed away in the deserts trying to travel between towns.³⁶ However, even in contemporary times with most Australians having access to air travel, trains, cars and internet that can connect us to anyone or any news story around the globe, we still battle isolation (State Library of Western Australia, 2000) and this theme is evident

³⁵ For example, the now famous argument between Lawson and Banjo Patterson that occurred through back and forth bulletin poems. Patterson accused Lawson of representing the bush negatively in his poem “Borderland”, titling his response “In Defence of the Bush” and ending with the lines “or the bush will never suit you, and you’ll never suit the bush” (Patterson, n.d., para. 10). A later poem by Lawson in response, “City Bushman”, includes the lines “And the city seems to suit you, while you rave about the bush” (Lawson, n.d. para. 12).

³⁶ The most famous example is Victorian explorers Robert Burke and William Wills whose embarked on “the best equipped expedition in Australia’s History” (National Museum of Australia, n.d. para. 7) with Charles Grey and John King (National Museum of Australia, n.d. para. 9). Only King survived.

in many contemporary Australian works. For example, Jason Nelson's work of digital poetry, *Sydney's Siberia*, uses an infinite click and zoom interface of text juxtaposed with images of trash and graffiti to signify Newcastle's isolation from its larger counterpart, Sydney. As discussed previously, *Sydney's Siberia* is an example of convergent metalepsis as the click and zoom interface is descending and uses Bell's metaleptic cursor to reach down into the text. However, the absent narrator and images, both of which are devoid of life, are ascending as they emphasise the town's isolation and neglect to position the reader as an outsider. Nelson focuses on representing the collective experience of living in Newcastle rather than individual stories. While the reader represents the individual, they are an outsider, a tourist, catching glimpses of the suburban whole. The metaleptical functions of the text invites the reader into the town, however, the limitations on the author-driven narrative position the reader as an outsider as they do not fully break down the ontological boundaries.

This theme of rural and regional isolation is evident in many other country towns as the ABS states that 68% of people in Australia live in major cities (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008, para. 3) with only 32% of people living in smaller regional towns (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008, para. 3). However, this isolation is not just applicable to regional areas as John Kinsella exemplifies in his poem, "Alienation", which details living in Perth. While many Australian towns, even capital cities, are isolated from each other (Perth is 2695.5km from Adelaide, the next closest capital city) Australia is, likewise, isolated from the rest of the world. Keane explains that this is reflected in a lot of Australian poetry as "at the heart of the concern is

often a sense of alienation; from others, from nature and from the world” (Keane, 2009, p. 2). This alienation people feel in Perth, despite the modern technologies available—or maybe even because of them, is detailed in Kinsella’s poem. He writes, “I come to this. A cousin’s / mother-in-law asks me / to tune her short-wave radio / into the BBC world service, / almost. Just off-frequency, / you can hear them speak” (Kinsella, n.d.). Kinsella uses the off-frequency voices on the radio as a metaphor for Perth being off-frequency with the rest of the world. This is an example of rhetorical metalepsis as Kinsella uses the off-frequency radio to open a window through which the reader can view and consider Perth’s place in the rest of the world. He then further exemplifies this isolation as a negative connotation with the lines “A group of sufferers meet / in the hills of Suburban Perth” (Kinsella, n.d.). In his poem, Kinsella, therefore, creates a rhetorical metalepsis by using these images in the individual narrative as a metaphor for the collective experience, suggesting to the reader that this being the case for one family, makes it the case for all. Likewise, in Porter’s *The Monkey’s Mask*, main narrator Jill speaks of this isolation, saying “I came for the quiet” (Porter, 2009, p. 5) but she is moving to Sydney because “I need a new job” (Porter, 2009, p. 5). Acknowledging the shortcomings of both regional and urban/suburban areas, Jill says:

but thick mists

thick neighbours

and involuntary celibacy

are as inductive to hard drinking
as diesel fumes, high rent
and corrupt cops (Porter, 2009, p. 5).

Unlike in Murray's poem "Sydney and the Bush" and even, to some extent, Kinsella's "Alienation", the narrative in Porter's verse novel results in a voice that makes the suburban representations and theme of isolation a distinctly individual experience.

Representations of Class

While this demonstrates that Australian suburbia can be represented through both its isolation and the polarising representations of the bush as well as romanticised ones, one must also consider the influence of class and gender. For example, in Perth, the more central suburbs of Como and Applecross do not use many native trees on their streetscapes. However, many of the outer suburbs such as Gosnells and Armadale have a higher instance of native trees with the eucalypts blending into the bush in the surrounding Darling Scarp. One could also argue that the British-inspired landscaping in the inner city areas are a result of the closer allegiance to Britain at their time of conception with Applecross being established before federation in 1896 and Como only shortly after in 1905. However, with *Your Investment Property Magazine* stating that the average house price in Applecross in 2016 is \$1.48 million (Your Investment Property Magazine, 2016a, para. 1) and \$930, 000 in Como (Your Investment Property Magazine, 2016b, para. 1), one must acknowledge that these differences in landscape design might contribute

greatly to our understanding of class and how this influences the design of the suburbs. While not focusing on trees specifically, Craig Powell's poem "Outer Suburb" does still describe the topography of lower and lower-middle class living with lines like "The houses are / pastel in fibro" (Powell, n.d.), "The people walk with a harsh bewildered rhythm" (Powell, n.d.) and "The dust crawls, with the monotony of a toothache" (Powell, n.d.). Likewise, J.R. Carpenter's *Entre Ville* is a work of electronic literature that explores the back alley ways of Montreal. While Carpenter clearly does not discuss Australian suburbia, as most Australian examples of electronic literature address our relationship with technology and the virtual space as opposed to the physical space we exist in (for example, *Error_In_Time()* by Nancy Mauro-Flude, *Alice's Room* by Jeffery Shaw and May Gideon and *The World Generator/The Engine of Desire* by Bill Seaman and May Gideon), using examples from internationally renowned authors will have to suffice.³⁷ In a statement about her work, Carpenter explains that "poetry is not hard to find between the long lines of peeling paint fences plastered with notices, spray painted with bright abstractions and draped with trailing vines" (Carpenter, 2006, para. 2). *Entre Ville* itself is layered with framed poetic text, video taken using the more personal and subjective handheld camera as well as sounds from the streets which are superimposed onto maps of the neighbourhood. Like Nelson's *Sydney's Siberia*, *Entre Ville* takes the reader on a walking tour

³⁷ The earlier example, *The Disappearing* app by Red Room Company and the *Melbourne Poetry Map* are not works by an individual author but curated works akin to a poetry journal or magazine featuring multiple authors. The collation of these individual voices is an excellent metaphor for the collective suburb, especially considering the works do not represent a collective narrative, direction or intent in the writing, only in the interface design, in the shape of the suburb. However, *The Disappearing* is an app available on Google Play and iTunes and is not a web browser game which is the focus of this exegesis.

of the city, focusing instead on the back alleyways. Exhibiting a descending metalepsis, the reader reaches into the text using Bell's metaleptic cursor to engage with different layers of the text. The reader's engagement with this text runs parallel to the physical space of the suburb and mimics the subjective experience of interpreting these suburban ideologies. For example, the text addresses the proximity of the neighbours and represents the underbelly of life in Montreal not seen by tourists or, as Carpenter explains, "where cooking smells, noisy neighbors and laundry lines crisscross the alleyway one sentence at a time" (Carpenter, 2006).

Domesticity and the Housewife

While class has clear implications on how one might consider the suburbs, one cannot discuss suburban representations without acknowledging the significance of gender in the domestic ideology of the housewife. Most prominent in the 50s and 60s, this ideology was challenged by Gwen Harwood who "started a guerrilla war on incompetent literary editors by sending out her poems under male pseudonyms. As she had suspected, poems by 'Walter Lehmann' and 'Francis Geyer' were more readily accepted than those from Mrs Harwood of Hobart" (Sheridan, p. 140). With Harwood publishing her first poem in *Meanjin* in 1944, and her first collection, *Poems*, in 1963, she began her career in the post-war era where "women were supposed to be grateful for their modern suburban homes and proud of their enhanced domestic roles, but not ask for anything more" (Sheridan, p. 144). This attitude extended to the workplace and other public roles where Sheridan claims that Harwood's interpretation of this ideology was that "in the world's eyes, 'housewife' and 'poet' were incompatible terms" (Sheridan, p.

145). However, in living in this post-war society, the notion of suburbia was shifting under Harwood's feet as:

anxieties about the everyday experience of life in Australian cities, its social and political effects and cultural possibilities, they are also anxieties about the 'everyday' itself as an experiential category referring to the mundane cycle of work, consumerism and domesticity in which most of us are, in varying degrees, implicated (McCann, 1998, p. vii).

In representing these notions of suburbia, Harwood wrote satirical poems about domesticity and raising children. In "Suburban Sonnet: Boxing Day" Harwood mocks "the false comforts from women's magazines" (Sheridan, p. 146), defining the narrator in the opening lines as a "woman with a broom" (2003, p. 157). When the narrator sees a headline in an open magazine; "How to keep you husband's love" (Harwood, 2003, p. 157) Harwood explains that "The simple fact is, she's too tired to move" (2003, p. 157). This article is used by Harwood as a form of rhetoric metalepsis to suggest that items of inscribed cultural significance can exemplify issues with domestic representation in the suburbs. These banalities are also represented in the digital installation and performative work, *Banalities for the Perfect House*, which was created by Rainer Linz and Ruark Lewis. What Linz and Lewis' work represents, most importantly, is that the domestic ideology represented in Harwood's poems is not an outdated 1950's and 60's notion of suburbia; the domestication and gendering of the suburban continues. Linz and Lewis explain how they represent these domestic banalities saying that the "performance space is arranged with wooden frames, boards and barricades

resembling, in abstract form, a housing construction site. Each surface is rendered with text creating an immersive environment that can literally be read, and heard as speech” (Linz, 2005, para. 3). This housing construction site uses “everyday sources including newspapers, cookery books, and snippets of overheard conversation” (Linz, 2005, para. 4) that are found in the contemporary suburban home such as the magazine used in Harwood’s poem “Suburban Sonnet: Boxing Day”. These texts are inscribed onto everyday items that also hold cultural significance, from the walls of the of the house itself to cards, pages that are both bound and loose—they all become performative scripts. The house itself is a physical manifestation of the ideas we have about suburbia (the cultural texts) and how they shape the physical space of the suburb (the housing structure) and influence how we read and understand it (the performance of the work as we walk through the space). This text is also an example of ontological metalepsis as Linz et al question how these cultural texts and ideas about suburbia influence the physical space of the suburb. The barrier between fiction and reality is transgressed and the people who walk through the house are no differently implicated into their suburban roles than they would be in real life. The only difference is that the self-reflexive nature of the text makes the participants question their roles as they descend into the text, moving from room to room. The absence of any one narrator in the work also emphasises collective suburban experience, focusing on the way we define and change the physical space of the suburb as a whole. Even the individual experience of walking through the text presupposes existing gender roles that are inscribed into the cookbooks and newspapers projected onto the surfaces of the house. The text’s purpose

is not to emphasise the individual but to question the collective identities individuals are expected to fill.

Another example of domestic representations which focus on the individual can be seen in Harwood's poem "In the Park" where the female narrator "sits in the park. Her clothes are out of date. / Two children whine and bicker" (2003, p. 65). The line "her clothes are out of date" (Harwood, 2003, p. 65) represents her poor socio-economic position and Harwood insinuates that this is a result of the two children who "whine and bicker" (Harwood, 2003, p. 65). However, Harwood also establishes in the poem that child rearing is traditionally a female domain. The narrator says that "someone she loved once passed by—too late" (Harwood, 2003, p. 65) and after "rehearsing / the children's names" (Harwood, 2003, p. 65) he leaves with a "departing smile" (Harwood, 2003, p. 65) because men are not tied to domestic duties. When the narrator says that "they have eaten me alive" (Harwood, 2003, p. 65) she leaves the reader with an image of desperation and hopelessness as she has been eaten by society's expectations. While Harwood was most prolific in the 50s and 60s, one can compare her to contemporary female Australian poets who represent similar themes. For example, many of Jackson's poems question this ideology. However, poems such as "The man I want" simultaneously reinforces it with lines such as "the man I want likes conversation / better than TV" (Jackson, 2013, pp. 80-81).

Representing Australian Suburbia in Digital Poetry

What all these examples indicate is that, given the mix of ideologies, there is no one way to represent suburban identity in texts. Moreover, there is a

myriad of techniques that can be employed by authors depending on the desired purpose with interactional metalepsis being one of the new common techniques used across the genres. While Harwood used the voice of her narrator to represent images that are inscribed with cultural significance and suburban identity, Linz and Lewis used the computer to create an ontological metalepsis and cast the text into a physical space. As a result, many of these texts break down the barrier between the ideologies represented in the cultural text and the physical space of the suburb that many of us live in and embody in ourselves. While poetry in its print form varies between representing individual experience through the voice of a narrator and using metaphor and some forms of metalepsis to represent the collective, the verse novel has a distinct narrative voice which represents the individual. Electronic literature, on the other hand, has a tendency to focus on the global aspects of the suburb, such as the work by Linz and Lewis, which addresses how the physical space of the suburb is a cultural product. Even texts like Carpenter's *Entre Ville*, which is an example of digital poetry, doesn't fully blur this boundary between the individual and the collective suburb with its focus on alleyways behind neighbourhood houses. One could propose, then, a digital text that utilises the capabilities of the computer to represent the collective suburb, such as Ursyn's suggestion of creating a container for a story from everyday objects (2012, p. 24). Ursyn's examples are everyday objects that most Australians associate with suburban living such as "computers, communication media, TV, multimedia, online protocols, and games" (2012, p. 24). While this is utilised in Carpenter's *Entre Ville* as she frames the story using a map and notebook, there are not enough existing examples of digital

poetry which represents the suburbs to infer this to be a prevalent convention. *Entre Ville* is, however, an example of a text that tries to balance objective description of the collective suburb with the subjective experience of living in the suburbs as it is represented in the poetry itself. While the first poem is mostly an objective description of the street, starting with the lines: “Altars of clutter, / hanging gardens of sound - / the back balconies buckle / under the weight of / high summer / Saint-Urbain Street heat” (Carpenter, 2006), the second poem includes a more intimate narrative. This is depicted in the lines “‘Fuck you!’ she hollers / as she hands the laundry / to her silent husband” (Carpenter, 2006). The narrator even goes as far as to say “I envy them their garden” (Carpenter, 2006), but it is not until the final lines that she truly positions herself in the text by saying “Undies, / bed sheets and bras, / dance on the line - / a delicate curtain / to separate / her balcony / from mine” (Carpenter, 2006). Focusing on suburban Montreal, one must question how the interface would change for a text based on Australian suburbia and culturally inscribed places.

In answering this question, one needs to first consider how the interface in *Entre Ville* reflects the culturally inscribed places of Montreal. When creating *Entre Ville*, Carpenter explains that it “is a text of walking, and a walk through texts. There are many authors of our neighbourhood”, suggesting some potential for verse novels, like Herrick’s, that have multiple narrators. The verses themselves scroll the page like walking through alleyways, which creates a rhetorical metalepsis and opens a window to the suburbs, allowing the reader to imagine this act of walking. However, as it is hard to stop and start the animation, the reader has little control over the walking and are

instead being led by the author. Furthermore, the poetry collection is quite small, with Carpenter explaining that, in its first iteration as a print publication, it was "photocopied and stapled" (n.d., para. 39) and "recycles images cut from some children's textbooks" (Carpenter, n.d., para. 39). One should, instead, consider how the narrative voice can be developed in a longer collection like the verse novel to bridge the gap between the interface and the text. While *Entre Ville* is more akin to a walking tour, it is the interface that informs us on how to read the poems and interact with the text. One could suppose that a longer narrative sequence of poems could, likewise, function to inform the reader on how to interact with the interface. This convergent metalepsis could blur the boundary between the physical and virtual space, forcing the reader to question whether the representations of suburbia in the text are any more fictional than the definitions of suburbia in the suburbs themselves. If Porter's *The Monkey's Mask* was used as part of a digital text, for example, the narrator's position as a private investigator out of place in Sydney's rich inner suburbs would inform the reader of the goals of the text and dictate their interactions with the interface as much as the interface would influence their reading of the text. The relationship could become reciprocal where neither the cultural ideologies of suburbia represented in the text, nor the physical space represented with the interface, would become the dominant representation of suburbia and the suburb.

As has been seen in previous chapters, this sense of place could become visible in all layers of the text; from the extended metaphors used in the verse novel to create a narrative and plot across multiple poems, to the visual metaphors in the interface and those that underpin the narrator's identity as

they jump across ontological boundaries. Representation of place could create cohesion in the text and making it all the more crucial when considering the fluid, multimodal nature of texts in the digital sphere.

Conclusion

Utilising the Convergence of Electronic Literature and Digital Poetry to Represent Suburbia

While most of the texts analysed in this exegesis represent suburbia in some way, most verse novels have represented the suburbs and utilised metalepsis through the narrative voice.³⁸ On the other hand, most digital-born texts have focused on the interactive elements of the interface.³⁹ When discussing this in application to my digital verse novel, *Chamberlain Street*, my intention was to create a work that utilises metalepsis to make the user question and critique some of the common ideologies surrounding Australian suburbia. One can, therefore, assess how the elements of each genre discussed so far can function as different levels of the text, each contributing to representing this sense of place. These elements can then converge using both ontological, rhetorical and interactional metalepsis to further break down the barriers between both genres and the collective versus individual voices of the suburb. As a lot of digital works have focused on representing the collective suburb⁴⁰ and a lot of verse novels represent the individual,⁴¹ the transgression of these genres could allow both the collective and individual to be represented in a digital text. This poetical text could, therefore, represent

³⁸ Such as Jill's first person account of urban Sydney versus the rich suburbs of Mickey's parents in *The Monkey's Mask* or LaVaughn's first person narrative in Wolff's *Making Lemonade*.

³⁹ *Arteroids* by Jim Andrews, for example, focuses on the metaphor behind users 'destroying' the words of poetry in a game inspired by the interactive elements of the 1980's videogame, *Asteroids* to derive meaning.

⁴⁰ For example, *Sydney's Siberia* by Jason Nelson focuses on representing Newcastle in comparison to Sydney. *The Disappearing App* by Red Room Company, likewise, focuses on representing what place means in Australia and how we react collectively to cultural icons.

⁴¹ See note 39.

the poetic and subjective individual experiences of the suburb depicted in some poems and verse novels (such as Porter's *The Monkey's Mask* and Herrick's *A Simple Gift*). The collective experience and cultural ideologies that shape the physical space of the suburb can also be represented through the design of the interface and interactive elements (such Ursyn's suggestion of using visual metaphors as a container for the story). While many existing examples of digital poetry rely on the interface to provide the reader with cues on how to engage and interpret the text,⁴² the narrative in the verse novel can create a reciprocal relationship that can, likewise, inform the reader on how to engage with the interface. For example, if a verse novel like Porter's *The Monkey's Mask* was developed into a digital work, the reader would suppose the purpose is to investigate a crime as the narrative follows Jill, who is investigating Mickey's disappearance.

My digital work, *Chamberlain Street*, will utilise this reciprocal relationship to question the ideologies many suburban spaces are approached with. It will, therefore, be an example of electronic literature that utilises the techniques and capacities of the print-born verse novel. However, unlike in print, it also utilises the capacities of the web-browser platform as the visual interface and interactive elements represent the collective experience more directly than the metaphors in poetry. For example, the use of a map to navigate between houses suggests collective experience and a 'sameness' to the suburb while the poetry focuses on exploring individual voices and the characters

⁴² Again, *Arteroids* by Jim Andrews emulates the 1980's videogame, *Asteroids*, from which readers can interpolate their interactions. Likewise, Carpenter's *Entre Ville* uses cultural icons scattered like a scrapbook to prompt users into clicking and exploring different sections, hence becoming a metaphor for eclectic experience of walking around the suburb.

contained within. Likewise, the use of a mobile phone as the sidebar symbolises a connection to both the suburb and the ideologies being explored. These digital properties could, therefore, make the personal experience of the poetry more immersive and engaging. While the visual design represents the collective suburb and the user's connection to it, it also represents the user's ability to make conscious choices on how to navigate these connections. Their reading will, therefore, be different to every other person who reads the same text, as it will always be fluid and changing. Although some of the metaleptical transgressions that bring these genres together can be predicted by the author, such as appropriating the extended visual metaphors of the interface into the images in the poems (the hedge motif is one such example), some transgressions are wholly dependent on reader interaction, such as navigating the controls in a game, choosing to play an animation sequence or deciding which branch of narrative to read. Because the readers have a choice over which elements of the interface they engage with, the interactivity of the genre is as subjective as the outcome. *Chamberlain Street* could, therefore, exist on the low end of Ensslin's spectrum for some readers, existing as nothing more than a branching hypertext narrative, while for others it might be considered a complex web of narrative sequence and literary games more closely aligned to early examples of interactive fiction and literary games than digital poetry.

With most Australians living, or having lived at some point, in the suburbs of our capital cities (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013a), using representations of suburbia for the extended visual metaphors that converge these layers would seem appropriate and could provide the necessary

'standardisation' that Manovich believes should be balanced with a text's originality in order for it feel familiar and be recognisable and readable (2001, 91). As a result, using suburban metaphors in a digital work could make the interface recognisable and familiar to the reader, it could provide them with a framework they can relate to and feel comfortable engaging with. However, it might not be the only purpose behind an author's decision to include these suburban representations in their works. Firstly, many Australian writers will, likewise, have some familiarity with the suburbs that could drive and govern their use of these representations as a guiding framework in their texts. However, with the physical shape of the suburb so clearly influenced by our own cultural ideologies, perceptions, fears and desires (Healy 1994), many writers have chosen to use their texts as public comment and criticism on the role that suburbia plays in supporting the dominant formation of capitalism. While these cultural texts are an important aspect of our society, they are missing one crucial element and that is a way for the reader to reinterpret and engage with these ideologies and cultural systems.

One of the advantages of the digital verse novel is that it could provide a framework which guides the reader towards their own representation of suburban experience. Each decision the reader makes influences their cultural representation of the suburb and challenges them to think critically about their own ideas of suburbia. The unique reading each reader/player conducts through their own choices results in a text that challenges their own beliefs. Instead of one personal narrative, *Chamberlain Street* could include the narratives of many as filtered through the primary narrative voice. This use of one narrator is intended to make the reader question their own

individual suburban narrative as they also question the narrator's representation of the other characters. The reader challenges these pre-existing representations through their interactions with the text and the main interface. In *Chamberlain Street*, each character the main narrator introduces represents a different cultural ideology, thus giving the reader the opportunity to guide their own way through the text. By attempting to solve a mystery, the reader makes choices which challenge their presumptions about suburbia. While *Chamberlain Street* uses a mystery plot, the path the reader takes is based on which of these cultural influences most aptly fits with their individual experience. However, the use of a single narrator also prompts them to question how these ideologies might impact the physical space and how they are represented in cultural texts. As a result, *Chamberlain Street* could mark the beginning of a new subgenre of electronic literature which utilises both the verse novel and digital poetry to better represent suburban experience. This digital verse novel provides a framework for representing both the ideas that surround suburbia as well as a digital manifestation of the physical space of the suburb. The interactivity afforded to the web browser interface allows the reader to critically engage with the text and question its ideological representations. This engagement is further exemplified in the way readers are able to physically engage with the text using the computer's hardware. Furthermore, the longer length of the verse novel combined with the shorter lines that drive the plot forwards also means that each combination of poems not only makes sense within the story arc, but could also reflect the ideologies underpinning the reader's choices. By utilising metalepsis in the convergence of the verse novel and digital poetry, *Chamberlain Street*

explores some of the tensions that occur in existing representations of Suburbia.

Chamberlain Street and the Visual Interface

When considering the visual interface in *Chamberlain Street*, I employed Ursyn's theory of visual metaphors (2012, p. 14). Ursyn explains that "the linkage structure of the World Wide Web would be valuable to understand but is extremely difficult to visualize" (2012, p. 14). This is because there is so much data (Ursyn considers the multitude of videos loaded to YouTube as an example⁴³) that exploring and understanding it all becomes near-impossible (2012, p. 14). Ursyn's theory of using visual metaphors to represent larger sets of data (the search bar on Google and YouTube, for example) also correlates to Ryan's 'metaleptic machines' as the visual interface not only becomes a metaphor, but also allows the user to engage with the text without understanding the backend of information a computer requires to function. To consider the computer as a metaleptic machine is to acknowledge that, for the average user unskilled in computer programming languages, there is little separation of interface, hardware or code. While each relies on the level below it in order to function, the average user only needs to interact with the visual interface, which is recognisable and easy to read. Ryan suggests that "the stratified architecture of the computer is not in itself metaleptic" (2006, p. 217), calling it instead a quasimetalepsis as, while to some professionals

⁴³ A study by Cheng et al in 2008 suggests 65, 000 new videos are uploaded to YouTube each day (2008, para. 61)

(such as computer programmers) these levels might appear distinct, to the average user they do not.

Managing this data through clearly readable and recognisable visual metaphors becomes all the more prudent as it allows users to navigate the large number of poems contained within a full-length verse novel. For example, *Chamberlain Street* uses visual metaphors associated with the suburb as nearly “90% of residents of Australia’s capital cities live more than 5km from the CBD” (A. Davies, 2012, para. 8). This suggests that these symbols would be easily recognisable and readable. In *Chamberlain Street*, the main navigation for the different houses of poems is a map that represents the collective image of suburbia in an easy, recognisable way. The handwritten fonts and simple drawings suggest the narrator has been taking notes and this, along with the zoom that occurs when hovering over houses, indicates the possibility of exploration. This map, therefore, provides a simple visual metaphor that is familiar to readers. It represents a succinct visualisation of the larger data sets of poems in each house. Likewise, the interface uses Bell’s ‘metaleptic cursor’ (Bell, 2014, p. 31) and, in line with the user needing to investigate the crime, exhibits a descending metalepsis as the reader has to action hyperlinks embedded in the images of the houses in order to explore characters and find clues. When a clue is found within the poem, the user must ‘action’ the clue by clicking the link text under the polaroid and, thereby, adding it to the smartphone and the map. This descending metalepsis puts the onus on the user to conduct a thorough investigation, leaving how interactive the work becomes up to them. The use of the polaroid image in the clues, again, represents something easily

identifiable; a quick snapshot, developed instantly. It represents urgency and impulsiveness. While a detective is considered systematic, recording the finding of a clue in someone else's house could require a degree of spontaneity if one is not acting on behalf of police and is conducting an unofficial investigation, as is the narrator. The map also becomes a visual representation of the user's involvement in the game and a visual representation of suspects as the clues discovered are added to the visual representation of each house. The addition of the clues to the smartphone and the onus on the user to write notes and 'decode' their purpose and relation to the game, also brings into question the role of privacy and gossip in the suburbs. At the conclusion of the game, the user not only gets told how many clues they have found, but also if their understanding of the clue's purpose in the game was correct. The interface at the conclusion includes images of each clue with a green tick or a red cross, another easily identifiable symbol for the user's progress and success. However, this also questions the role of privacy as it presupposes access to the initial apps on the smartphone.

The use of a smartphone in the visual design also symbolises the user's connection to this suburb while also functioning as a sidebar. Although the smartphone still exhibits Bell's metaleptic cursor and, therefore, becomes an example of descending metalepsis, the phone also becomes symbolic of the effort put into the game and establishing connections and suspects. For example, the clues and suspects discovered in the game can be added to the smartphone using links. The phone, therefore, becomes an easily recognisable symbol of the goals the user needs to achieve, those being the

need to discover and analyse clues as well exploring and naming possible suspects with the intent of narrowing it down to only one name. Furthermore, most users will be familiar with concept of a smartphone and will understand how to read it and use it with little prompting or understanding of the rules.⁴⁴

The use of familiar objects, like the smartphone, also relates to Manovich's 'cultural interface' and his suggestion that there is a need to balance standardisation with originality (2001, 91). While there are certainly original aspects of this work, such as the use of a full length verse novel, Manovich suggests a need to balance this with standardisation, especially in the interface, to make it easily identifiable. This correlates with Ursyn and Kosara's use of visual metaphors to make the interface recognisable (Kosara as cited in Ursyn, 2012, p. 14) and can, therefore, simplify the design and make it more user-friendly. Ursyn's examples of familiar visual metaphors are "everyday environments (such as computers, communication media, TV, multimedia, online protocols, and games)" (2012, p. 24) and these are the same items I've used as the container for my story. The digital work takes place on a desk, with the map and phone sitting on top of a book and a stack of papers, a sight recognisable for many, as I doubt few have an impeccable-looking desk, either in the office or at home, all the time. This visual metaphor serves as a container for the story as it is replicated throughout the many different types of pages and links contained within *Chamberlain Street*, providing an easily recognisable interface to guide the user through the large sets of poems. This also relates back to Manovich who explains that "the

⁴⁴ According to a 2014 study by Dr. Justine Humphry for the University of Sydney, 77% of the young adults and adults in the 95 homeless families surveyed had a smart phone (Humphry, 2014, 3).

language of cultural interfaces is largely made up from elements of other, already familiar cultural forms” (Manovich, 2001, p. 71).

This theory of cultural interfaces and the use of previous cultural forms is also the reason behind my decision to use a web browser over other forms of interface. As discussed earlier in the chapter “The Visual Interface”, the web browser is the most accessible for the user as every computer comes with one preinstalled (Windows has Internet Explorer, Apple has Safari). It, therefore, makes the work accessible for the user. It also makes it accessible for the author. Web language likes JavaScript, HTML and CSS are easy to learn and troubleshoot with websites like W3Schools providing basic guides and libraries.

The most visually interesting aspects of the visual interface in *Chamberlain Street* are the mini games which have a win or lose outcome. Each of the two games begins as a poem, meeting the standard diadactic conventions one would expect; left aligned, split into stanzas, short lines. The games are an example of descending metalepsis in that the user must use the arrow keys or the mouse to play and thereby reach into the game. The user moves into the game from a “narrative act external to any digesis” (Coste & Pier, 2011, para. 2), in this case the extradiegetic is both the real world and the conventions of the poem. The metalepsis then occurs by transgressing down to the intradiegetic or “the level of narrating the story (which is usually the real world as represented in the narrative, but not the actual world of the reader/viewer)” (Ensslin, 2011, p. 7). The mini games do not represent an ontological metalepsis with the user’s real world or a real life situation, but instead positions the user to question the ontology of the poem. That is not to

say that they should question whether the poem is fictional or represents fictional things, but rather, they should question the poem's status as 'poem' and what conventions it is comprised of. This use of metalepsis positions the user, not in a real life situation, but as part of the poem, as an affector and controller of the outcome of the poem and, therefore, of the game as well.

***Chamberlain Street* and the Metaleptical Use of Sound**

The use of sound in *Charberlain Street*, like the visual interface, is also metaleptic as it mimics normal suburban sounds (the hum of traffic, birds, a cat bell). The soundtrack brings the external sounds of the suburb inside during a time when many are spending a lot of time indoors instead of outside.⁴⁵ The metaleptical transgression between the sound and the real world of the user is a rare example of ascending metalepsis in *Chamberlain Street* as the reader does not have to put in effort to reach down into the fictional world of the game. Rather, the sound is an example of ascending metalepsis as it brings the interdiegetic game world into the extradiegetic world and the world of the user.

While the sound is an example of ascending metalepsis, the use of sound could also be ontological or rhetorical, depending on the interactions of the user. The sound mimics normal suburban sounds and, in most situations, would be rhetorical as it can open a window to the suburb within the game, while not confusing the user enough as to think the game and their suburb are the same. That being said, one must also acknowledge that there is a

⁴⁵ One can suppose this as the Australian Bureau of Statistics state that "Australian adults spend on average four hours per day doing sedentary leisure activities such as watching television compared with only half an hour of physical activity" (2013b, para. 1).

chance the sound could become ontological if the user begins to question whether the sound is, in fact, coming from the computer or if it is coming from outdoors in their surrounding suburb. In doing so, the interdiegetic and the extradiegetic become indistinguishable. As a result, the user not only questions the ontology of sound, but also that of the fictional world and the suburban ideologies underpinning it. Can they clearly separate the ideologies in the game from those they approach the physical space of their own suburb with? This answer to this question underpins whether the representations are ontological or rhetorical and, in working towards an ontology, are in part dependent on the metalepsis of sound.

Navigating *Chamberlain Street*: The Slider

Earlier conceptions of *Chamberlain Street*, including the one sent to the examiners, used buttons instead of a slider. The buttons used the font 'Pecita', a handwritten font that suggested a rhetorical metalepsis by working with the visual interface to recreate a desk, scattered with papers and handwritten notes. While the reader at no point considers the visual interface or buttons to be an actual desk or notes, it opens up a window to such a reality and creates an "invisible interface" (Emerson, 2014, p. 43). As a result of this 'visual interface', the user does not have to scroll the pages or interact with the browser in order to play the game. This allows a rhetorical metalepsis as a window is opened to the suburban world of the narrator where she stores her notes and works on the investigation at her desk. An interface that requires the user to interact with the browser would also break the "fictional dream" (Gardner, 1991, 97), a consideration not made for many

websites but a necessary one when using the browser for the purposes of a narrative. When describing the 'fictional dream', Gardner says:

...according to this notion, the writer sets up a dramatized action in which we are given the signals that make us 'see' the setting, characters and events; that is, he does not tell us about them in abstract terms, like an essayist, but gives us images that appeal to our senses... (1991, p.97).

The fictional dream is important as it invests the reader in the narrative and its outcome. However, breaking this fictional dream can also break the reader's investment. Gardner's chapter, "Common Errors", focuses on print fiction and not poetry, or digital poetry for that matter, however, the application of this theory still holds relevance. One can consider how being made aware of the web browser could break the reader's attention and interactions with the narrative. While some texts utilise the web browser to link to real websites and suggest that the narrative belongs to the same ontological domain as the reader,⁴⁶ I wanted to keep the narrative contained in the existing visual interface. In doing so, the ontology of *Chamberlain Street* is only brought into question as a result of the user's interactions with the fictional suburb and not through external inputs such as websites.

Emerson also explains that a lot of electronic literature seeks to defamiliarise the web browser because ordinary use creates 'invisible interfaces' (2014, p. 46). Using the visual interface to comment on the the web browser's ordinary

⁴⁶ *10:01*, for example, links out to the website for the real Mall of America, the setting of the fictional story, to create an ontological metalepsis where the user questions whether or not the narrative belongs to the same ontological domain as themselves (2014, p. 35).

use, to defamiliarise it, would detract attention from the purpose of *Chamberlain Street*, and that is to prompt the reader to question existing suburban ideologies by creating a metaleptical transgression between the fictional suburban and their own. The navigation was, therefore, crucial in making the interface invisible, so that users could look past it and focus on the investigation, the metaleptical use of sound and the metaleptic cursor that reaches into the map. The pages are all contained without the user needing to use the web browser's built in scroll and I also did not want the user to utilise the back and forwards buttons built into the browser. I wanted the suburb to be completely contained. Coming back to Gardner, breaking this narrative and the narrative's connection to the user's own world, which is built into the interface, would interrupt the fictional dream (1991, p.97); "we are snapped out of the dream, forced to think of the writer or the writing" (Gardner, 1991, p.97). In the case of web design, by defamiliarising the browser and drawing attention to it as created, one is also drawing attention to the content; forcing the reader to think of the writing and the writer. In creating *Chamberlain Street*, my purpose was for the user to question the role the ideologies represented have in their own suburbs and household. However, by drawing attention to *Chamberlain Street* as written, the whole work loses purpose for the user, which is to follow the narrator on an investigative journey and help her work out the culprit. Drawing attention to the work as created also breaks the ontological implications of other features such as sound, which clearly isn't coming from outside, and the map and ideologies represented in each house, which were obviously written and

created. The navigation used to transition to each page, therefore, had high importance; it needed to be clean and easy to use.

My original use of buttons to navigate between poems and pages did not replicate the papers on a desk which both the interface and the page transitions suggested. Only being able to go one page at a time backwards or forwards (with many poems consisting of several pages), was not only inconvenient for the user, but also suggested reading a book and not a loose leaf stack of pages, which was breaking the fictional dream, drawing attention to the interface and, therefore, the work as having been created and written. Upon suggestion of one of the examiners, I switched to using a slider, which allows the user to easily preview each page before settling on one—they no longer have to read every page inside each house to get to the end. This not only better replicates the metaphor of shuffling through loose leaf pages, but is also more symbolic of the transitory and fluid nature of digital poetry, or what Funkhouser refers to as the volume of “incomprehensible material” (2012, p. 25) many poems are made up of. For example, users don’t have to read the poems contained within a house from start to finish as the slider makes it easier to jump around. The user can, therefore, control of plot of the narrative⁴⁷ (the order of the poems) unlike the reader in most verse novels.⁴⁸ This fragmented plot is a consideration common with hypertext, with theorists like Hulle explaining that the “fabric of the text can be explored in more

⁴⁷ Remember Colbey’s definition of story, narrative and plot: “Put very simply, ‘story’ consists of all the events which are to be depicted. ‘Plot’ is the chain of causation which dictates that these events are somehow linked and that they are, therefore, to be depicted in relation to each other. ‘Narrative’ is the showing or the telling of these events and the mode selected for that to take place.” (2013, p. 5).

⁴⁸ For example, the plot in *The Monkey’s Mask* by Porter is predetermined and the reader has no influence over the order of events or the chain of causation.

innovative ways [in hypertext] than on paper” (2013, p. 148). While a lot of print verse novels are read linearly,⁴⁹ the plot in hypertext is fragmented. My buttons enforced a linear reading of the text which not only aligned it closer to print, but also suggested I wasn’t utilising “the capabilities and contexts provided by the stand-alone or networked computer” (Electronic Literature Organization, 2007, para. 1). This underpins the Electronic Literature Organization’s definition of electronic literature and I could not create a work of digital poetry without this consideration in my navigation system.

⁴⁹ *Making Lemonade* by Wolff or *By the River* by Herrick, for example, both have linear plots.

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Appendix

Collected Poems

The scene of the accident

The Accident

You left a hole

in the hedge

like a cavity;

some people

had tried to save it

with a

root canal

but others

had wanted

the whole thing extracted.

You were extracted.

You were the infection

that was scraped out,

cut from the rest of the hedge

like pus or bacteria.

They needed to take
all the branches
around you
as well,
scrape out everything
you touched
because they
couldn't afford to
inject antibiotics
into the tooth
before they sealed it
back up,
if they sealed it back up.

They took all the branches
you snapped and fractured;
some dead and
some with new shoots on them,
left only the trunk
and roots behind

until it was a tooth
that could be broken,
chipped,
until it needed to be

extracted.

The Insurance Company

My insurance company

told me on the phone

to wait with

the vehicle

but the airbags had deployed

and its breathing was impaired.

I rode in the ambulance with you

instead

because you could be saved

but my car was dead.

Your mother stayed behind

to wait for the tow truck

but my insurance company

had told the driver

to only talk to me.

If she'd been there when

you'd crashed
they might have been
more lenient
but—thankfully,
she did not see
the way
you had washed up
on the bitumen.

You were not smooth
like stone or sand;
you were rough glass,
broken and left behind
after the umbrellas
were packed up
and towels shaken out.

You were crushed
drink bottles
and discarded
burger containers;

you did not belong
where we had found you,

and while
the RAC mechanics
will wash the hedge
off my car
like they're washing
sand off themselves
at the beach,

the hospital will not
be able
to clean all the sand
off you.

It will stick to
your scalp
like dandruff
or head lice.

This street is a parasite
and my car was infested,
it will always be with you
now,
you can't escape it.

The Ambulance Officer

If your accident was a song

the crash would be

the cadence

in the intro;

tempo and volume getting faster,

brakes getting louder,

then a pause

before sirens and whispers.

If your accident was a song

the ambulance officer's

clipboard

would have been the score

and while I sat in

a fold-up chair

backstage

we would have collaborated

on the rest of the melody;

I wrote down the notes,

helped him

fill out the forms.

In hospital,

the nurse's notes

made up the steady

drum beat

of medication and

blood pressure checks;

doctors only came in

for the bridge

when your bass line got

too fast.

My voice was the chorus.

I was the one

who helped you with

your IV

when you needed to pee,

who brought pyjamas

from home

so you wouldn't need
their backless robes.

They were there
to support you
but I was the lead.

It was me they gave
your medication to
when you were discharged,
me who wheeled you out to
the car;

clack of the wheelchair
in the outro
and flashbacks
to the crash from
when I took you home.

Detectives

You told them you saw
a shadow on the road
and tried to avoid it,
veered off into the hedge
like a bowling ball
rolling down
the gutter.

They scribbled something
down
in moleskin notebooks
while you explained
that you didn't want
to strike out
because you knew
if you hit someone,
they would not
stand back up

and the game

would be over.

Now these men have

the nerve

to call themselves

the referees

just because

they're the detectives

in charge of

your case.

They might have

the scorecard

but they're not even trying

to tally the game;

there's still

a whole street

of suspects

that they haven't questioned.

I keep making appeals
but the calls aren't going
my way;
they're listening to you
because you're the captain
but I'm on this team too,

I'll show them;

I'll conduct my own investigation.

The House with the Hedge

The Hedge

The hedge outside
grew a little bit
each year,
all it took
was some pruning,

once every six months
if they wanted
to keep on top of it,
once a year
if they just wanted to keep
it neat; tidy up stray leaves
with the hedge clippers,
cut off unruly branches.

There was no need
for the hedge
to look rebellious,
but branches crept
towards the house
and they kept
the windows shut,
the curtains drawn,

even though the hedge
was too high
for passers by to see them,
out of fear
I guess,
for the hedge
was slowly chasing them.

What they didn't know,
was that on the other side,
the hedge crept over footpaths,
snuck out near bus stops,
crawled over
the neighbour's bed of marigolds
out the front
and snaked through the
chain metal fence
they had erected out the back.

What they didn't know,
was that the hedge scared everyone,
that as it inched
further and further
towards our houses,
the rest of the world
tiptoed

further and
further away.

Christmas Lights

No one knew

if the old couple

put

Christmas lights up

each year

or not.

You couldn't see

the house from the street,

and they never invited

anyone in.

They did hang lights

on their hedge one year,

twisted them around

the branches that had

wandered off,

lit up sections

of homeless leaves

that trailed

from stray limbs

like bottles of whisky.

I like to think they're

still in there
somewhere,
that buried in
the forks
and u-turns
are those same Christmas lights
blinking like broken indicators,
slightly out of sync
with the rest
of the street
but still signalling
to traffic
that they intend
to turn off
 somewhere,
that at some point
they intend
 to leave.

Getting to Know the Neighbours

The neighbours warned you

not to go over there.

They shook their heads

and mumbled

under their breaths,

their whispers like gas leaks.

They told you

not to introduce

yourself

but you didn't listen.

Instead

they watched you walk

over to that house

with the cupcakes

I'd baked for your mother;

bitter from too much

baking powder,

overdressed with

cream cheese and

glace cherries.

You didn't care

that the icing was fresh
and stuck to the glad wrap
like sweat to my clothes
or that I would be held back
at our neighbours'
front doors
during dinner parties
to be questioned,
banned from backyard BBQs
during their investigations.

They warned you
not to go over there
but you didn't listen.

You dodged
stray branches
of the hedge
like you were dancing;
sidestepped leaves
that had wandered
down concrete footpaths.

You stepped
instead
on rotting lemons
which stuck

like gum

to the bottom of your shoes.

That's when you saw it.

You almost missed it

through the tinted windows

but there it was

on the kitchen table;

his naked body

and a pair of legs,

the skin slack like pants.

You dropped the plate

and it got their attention.

The hedge

had trapped you in.

Jewels

You said he came out wearing a towel

like he was walking out of a sauna.

It fit around his hips

like a mini skirt,

his thighs thick as sausages.

I was washing the dishes

and you had pulled up

a stool from

the breakfast buffet.

“He looked like he was

gonna start

yellin’ at me”

you explained,

“I thought he was gonna

wave his arms around

like he was full of hot air

but he stood tall as that statue—

David, yeah?

Stiff as stone”

I had washed all the cutlery

and was trying to

neatly stack
the bowls
which was hard
because
we'd broken
at least one
from each set
so they were all different sizes,

"That's when I dropped
the plate"
you explained,
drawing circles in
the water on
the bench,
"he bent down
helped me pick up
the pieces,
his legs were a bit
spread open
but that isn't even
the good part!"

I imagined my cupcakes
soaked

in his garden
like dirty dishwater
while I picked up
the tea towel
I'd made
in second grade.

"We tossed 'em
in one of those
green rubbish bins"
you said
"man there were
so many
dead leaves,
I could legit hear
them crunch
when I walked
like I was eating chips.

I was gonna leave"
you explained,
not bothering to help me
"but I turned around first
because, like,
should I say thanks

or whatever?—
and he was
just standing there.”

You described the way
he let go of his towel
as if he was unveiling
something,
I imaged him holding it out
like a white flag,

like a peace offering.

Cutting the Hedge

I cut it while the suburb slept,
while the houses
were wrapped up tight
with their shutters drawn
for warmth and comfort
and the renters' house
on the end
was left to shiver,
as bare and naked
as the day
the contractors
had finished
building it,
back when tradies
put down tools
like they were
salad forks.

I cut the hedge
one limb at a time,
let the leaves accumulate
at my feet
like toe nail clippings

in the bathtub or
the lounge room carpet,
a carpet that matched my
comrades
who took my post
on the nights I couldn't make it.

I knew that
when the owners woke
the next day
they would not notice
that anything was missing.

They would not see
the Papaw Chapstick
that had fallen out of
my trackpant pocket,
mixed in amongst
the dead
on the sidewalk
that I had left behind.

I knew my comrades
would notice,
see the casualties of war.

I went back most nights
and took a little bit more,
started spraying it down
with the weed killer

I told you
I'd been using
on the garden.

In the mornings
you used to
wonder why
the cracks in our paving
were full of pigweed
like loose stitches.

I never found
my Chapstick.

Missing

There were missing signs
taped up to every light post
in our street,
new signs were put up
overnight
to replace the ones that had
faded in the sun
like old photographs,
the ones our neighbours
had torn down,
left to melt into the pavement
until they were clear as cellophane,
fragile as rice paper.
They stuck like graffiti
when it rained.

You went out in the mornings
and drew moustaches on them,
gave the leaves
top hats and canes
in black marker.
You drew attention to our house
like we'd won

the Christmas lights competition.

You didn't know then
that I'd done it.

This morning the sign
out the front of our house
was duct taped in place;
HEDGE MISSING,
the poster said
REWARD FOR INFORMATION.

I didn't think
the owners
cared that much
so I wondered why
they were putting up posters,
I didn't need to wonder
for long
in the end;
my Chapstick showed up
in the mail
with a photo.

The missing signs

down the
entire street
had been replaced
with photos of me,
trimmings at my feet
like strands of hair.

I went outside and
held the picture up,
trying to work out
which neighbour
took it
from the angle.

The Poster Fallout

You visited them again
after that picture went up.

You'd wanted me to go as well
but I told you I didn't think
they cared.

You told me later
that the old woman
had opened the door
without her top on.

She held a towel to her chest
but you could still see
her wrinkly skin.

It looked more like
someone had done a poor job
folding a fitted sheet
than it did part of a person.

“The boy who dropped the cupcakes”

she said as you averted your eyes,

“sorry you caught

the end of the show”.

You held up a poster

and explained that it was me.

The old woman laughed

and pointed to a pair of

hedge clippers

which were leaning against

a stack of plastic

outdoor chairs.

“Oh we don’t care about any of

that nonsense”,

she said

“we’ve been meaning

to cut it ourselves

for years

but, well,

we always run out of time”.

“I’m sorry, anyway”

you said,

“she could’ve asked

permission.”

The old man

yelled something

unintelligible

from inside

and the old woman

turned abruptly;

“have to go, love”

she said

over her shoulder.

Her rolls of back fat,

which were

hung like

roman blinds,

disappeared as she

closed the door.

Household Chores

They used
the gold star system
for chores
around the house

except instead of getting paid
at the end of the week
the husband got sexual favours;
a blow job if he did the dishes,
a fuck if he finished the washing.

They locked themselves in on weekends
and she paid him
for all the work
he'd done,
sometimes in gold coins
and sometimes in cents,
“sometimes”, she told you,
“he got them at once”.

Other times he collected coins
like an easter egg hunt;
in each room of the house—

the backyard
near the shed,
“it took the whole weekend”
she said
“for him to find his wages”.

Communal Lemons

There's a basket
in the hedge
that's always full
of lemons,
it sits on dead branches
like the ones gathered
into vases,
decorating lounge rooms.

In the evenings
people like to
wander out of
their houses,
pull their front doors
closed
as if they're dragging
something behind them.

They stop
by the hedge
and take
lemons to use
in salads
or marinades,
hands cupped
to hold them
like they're
going to scoop
water
out of a lake.

I don't use lemons
but I still
walk out
to the hedge each day,
run my fingers around
the basket
as if it were

the rim of a glass.

Nothing grew

in your place

so people left lemons

in the hedge

the way others left me

casserole dinners,

only, I'm not a widow

and you're not dead,

you're coming back to me.

Frank and Genie

Frank

He lives with
his third wife
wearing odd socks
and dirty clothes,
has a compost bin
in his backyard
that looks like a
rainwater tank
but smells like dung.

I used to watch him
leave the house
on weekends
in ragged
T-shirts and
brown hemp pants.
He didn't wash his hair
but I think that's because
he couldn't afford to.

You made jokes about
the grease stains on his shirts,
looked down on him

like he was a door
to door salesman,
a bible preacher,
probably because of
the meetings
and his crazy ideas.

You treated him like
a Jehovah's Witness,
his house was
The Watchtower
and you didn't want
to read about
"The Man Who Changed
the World"
or "Armageddon"
so you closed our blinds
and locked the doors,
thinking he wouldn't sneak in
like ants
through the gaps in the silicone
you'd piped around
the kitchen benches.

You didn't see me visit him

on weekends
or notice the copies of
his magazine
stacked by the front door
like an ant hill.
You overlooked
the ones I'd brought in
with the mail,
the ants that had
trailed upstairs
to the bedroom,
crawling under the
popped-out spline
in the downstairs flyscreen
like a one-way tunnel,
single file.

Frank and Genie's House

The front of their house

was cosmetic.

They had used

foundation on the

weatherboard facade

to hide

the urine-yellow paint

picked out

when the house

was first built

in the 70s.

The front porch

had also needed

many face lifts;

they dragged it

back out of its

muddy foundations

almost annually.

There was a gardener
who pruned the roses
and a new brick driveway
put in last year.

Frank replaced the chipped
limestone blocks
in summer and hand-watered
when it wasn't his sprinkler days.

The inside had exposed beams
and plastic sheeting.

Furniture had been
pushed into corners
and knickknacks
gathered dust on rugs.

The only rooms that were finished
belonged to

Frank's two boys—
both early twenties.

Genie also had a daughter
and her room was nearly done
but the shower was open plan
so she had to wait
until the boys went out,
which rarely happened.

The house looked nice
from the street
though
and to Frank
that's all that mattered.

The Plot

We gathered in his lounge room.

You thought I was out riding

so I had to wheel my bike

around the back of his house,

leaned it against the cane chairs

on his verandah

where you wouldn't see it

from the street.

The paint was peeling off them

in patches

like bad sunburn

and it left marks

I had to wash off later.

During meetings

Frank liked to tell

me and Mrs Lippus

about when him and Genie

first moved in,
back when they tore down
the white wooden
picket fence
because people walking home
from the train station
late at night
would break off the tips
like they were tearing off
someone's phone number
from a poster.

He says he still remembers
when they
planted the hedge,
watched it grow out of control
like a toddler
eating crayons
and drawing on the walls.

“We were busy renovatin”

he explained,

“we still like to touch up

the front of the house

even though we ain’t

half way through the insides,

only done my kids’ rooms—

all these years

we’ve never seen ‘em

out there with the clippers.

Least we try.

It’s a goddamned scandal.”

Frank was right,

of course,

their house had camouflaged

well into

the rest of

the street.

“We have to do something,”

he explained,

“It's overgrown!

Genie and I

can't even use

the footpath

out the front of

our house.”

Frank, Genie and I

all nodded

like bobbleheads

when Mrs Lippus suggested

trimming it ourselves.

“We'll take shifts”

Frank said,

making notes on

a Synergy bill

“take a week each

so it doesn't grow back".

"But how am I supposed to

hide this?" I replied.

"How often will each of us

need to sneak out?"

"Sneak out?" Mrs Lippus said

grabbing onto her pearl necklace

as she laughed,

"we're all adults here,

we don't need permission."

"There's four of us"

Frank said,

"So at least

once a month."

I could manage that.

Genie

Genie sat in on our meetings

smoking cigarettes

and filing down her

yellow-crusted nails,

legs crossed like a crucifix.

She looked as old

as the orange peels

I had thrown out last week;

cheap spray-on tan

and aging skin.

From the way she talked

it felt as if

she had accumulated

life events

like piles of rubbish,

hoarding them

around their house

in broken frames,

buried under

last week's dinner.

Genie said

she couldn't remember

her oldest daughter's wedding,

first born grandchild.

She couldn't find those things

in the spare room,

boxed up

in the hallway.

She knew

they were in there

somewhere,

probably near the bottom

of one of those piles,

poured over the discards

of her first divorce

like stale milk.

It stank up the meetings
until Mrs Lippus and I
stopped going,
until she banned me from attending;
I told her she should
pay her dues
and get the rubbish removed,
that she needed
to clean up
her own house
before worrying about
someone else's.

Theft

When they took it

Frank wasn't even sleeping.

He was in the front room

enjoying

one too many

glasses of wine

with his iPhone

plugged into

the portable speaker,

turned up as loud as it would go

which was not as loud

as he would have liked,

but it would do.

When they opened the back door

he was probably laughing,

he spent most of that night

laughing,

we could hear him from
the other side
of the street like
we were living next to
a stadium or
a madhouse.

When they crept down the hall
the dog was probably
passed out at his feet,
exhausted from
hours of barking,
from listening to him
stumble back
from the bathroom;
sound of scuff marks on the door
and the books he knocked over.

When they quietly slid
his son's keys

off the bench

he was probably quite

busy shouting,

his eyes slightly

cross-eyed and his

body swaying like

he was at sea.

We could hear him slurring

his words

like he was having a stroke.

He stood framed in

an open window

as if he was giving a speech,

shouted at the street

about how marijuana

cures cancer

so he's

not breaking the law,

he's just being preemptive.

When they started the car
and the motor crept
out of his drive way,
he was probably
flicking through songs
like he was using
an old jukebox
in his favourite pub,
back when a \$5 note bought
two pints of beer.

Later, I watched him
walk to the bottle shop
while one of his sons
called the police.

He stumbled out
onto the road
like he was falling off a tightrope,
came home with a brown bag
half-empty already

and sunk into the couch

like quicksand.

I couldn't help but wonder

if he had listened to his son

arguing with the

insurance company

in his bedroom,

not knowing

that the car had

already been found

around the corner,

crashed into a stop sign

with the full tank empty.

We only knew

because the police

had asked us

if we saw anything,

shook their heads

when his house beat
itself into tachycardia,
went over and told him
to turn the music down
instead of pumping it into
all the other houses
on our street.

Angry

Frank was angry

the first time

he saw me

watering the hedge.

He came outside

yelling

with one arm raised

like one of those

lucky cats.

You told me

to stop getting involved

when you finally

found out,

said the owners

didn't care,

but I did.

I liked Ryan
even if I had to
tolerate Amy
to see him,
but Ryan watered the hedge
and Frank
hated that.

When I started helping,
Frank also hated me.

“It’s a fucking disgrace”
he yelled,
walking across the road
to yank
the watering can
out of my hands,
“look at the ugly fucking thing.”

The watering can was heavy
and it tipped forwards,

watering Frank's feet.

"It's next to my fucking house

you fucking bitch"

he yelled,

lifting his feet up

one at a time

to shake the water out.

It didn't work.

The water had already

soaked through

his canvas shoes

and Frank's anger

started to grow.

Beth

Beth didn't like me

at first

because of how much time

I'd spent with

her step-dad.

They were opposites

in every way;

while her step-dad was

plastic cutlery

she was

stainless steel,

he was

microwave dinners

and she was

steamed vegetables

from the garden.

When they fought,
Beth's mother
always took
her step-dad's side
and Beth was more like
the bit of wasabi
that rubs off on
your sushi
in the box
than she was a daughter—

but Beth did what
her parents wouldn't—
she thought for herself
and she hated
living with them.

They were like
a trashy
women's magazine
while she was

an academic article.

They were responsible

for cutting the hedge

and she was one of the people

who watered it.

The Rental House

The Renters

The renters thought they were invisible,
it's the only explanation.

Yesterday the man came out
and checked the mail
in nothing
but Superman branded underpants.

They looked a size too
small
and the fat around his stomach
spilled over them
like a sleeping bag
that had been carelessly
stuffed back in.

The renters hadn't introduced themselves
to anyone,
not that it mattered,
new people moved into that house

every six months or so

and everyone else

had stopped bothering

to get to know them.

It was like the street's own

private whore house;

always the same

drab curtains in the windows,

the same dead flowers

facing

towards the street.

Anyone caught going in there

was frowned upon and gossiped about

over cold tea

and petite sandwiches.

Mrs Lippus

liked to bring out food

on a vintage weavewood

serving tray,
about 12 inches in diameter,
just small enough
to give her an excuse
to duck back into
the kitchen
at regular intervals.

Her canapes compensated
for meaningful conversation
with each of us taking
another bite of
devilled eggs
to hold our tongue.

Normally Mrs Lippus
did all the talking
but today I complained
about the renters.

“They’re like
telemarketers

or door-to-door salesmen”

I explained,

“always asking

to borrow a coffee maker,

lawn mower.

It seems like a good investment

when they offer to

edge your gardens

but I still haven’t gotten

my bamboo steamer back—

it’s a scam.

They’ll move and we’ll never

see our stuff again”.

I explained that they

never seemed

to be home

when I knocked

and Mrs Lippus

concurred

saying

she'd been chasing

the cheese grater

they said

they'd bring right back.

I didn't want

to risk calling them

in case I had to

pay by the minute

for a conversation

with fake breasts

and sweatpants

instead of

lingerie.

"I guess I'll add

'bamboo steamer'

to next week's shopping list"

I said,

“I’m sick of waiting for them

to respond to

the note I left

on their front door.”

Mrs Lippus refilled

the serving tray

and added

a dash of whisky

to my tea.

Inspection

The real-estate agent

parked her car in the driveway.

If she was looking,

she would have seen

two faces

peeking through the drawn blinds,

two sets of bulging cartoon eyes,

but instead

she was busy patting down her hair,

pulling her handbag out

from the back seat

with her thumb and forefinger

like she was holding

smelly socks.

She peeled the magnetic lid

off her iPad

as if it were a facemask,

a second skin,
took pictures of the yard,
wore a pencil skirt so tight
it cut off
the circulation in her legs,
her swollen feet
stuffed into stiletto heels.

She knocked on the door
even though she had a key,
started taking pictures
of the cracks in the walls,
the dirty stove.

There was a Chinese lucky cat
in the kitchen window,
I wondered if it appeared
accidentally
in one of the photos.

I turned my attention

to the young woman
in the house
across the street,
she sat in her sun room
by the big bay window,
sipping a cup of tea,
wondered how long
these tenants would last,
her blonde hair just straightened
and her nightgown
hitched up
just above the knee.

Nightmare

The old woman

introduced herself

as Grandma Wú

and handed me

two red bean buns.

She pulled them

out of her

Tupperware container

one by one

and when she placed

the lid

back on top,

one side collapsed

under her hands

like an accordion.

I held the buns

in my palms

like weights,
unsure of what I was supposed
to do with them
and while I stood out the front
of my house,
mid rep,
Grandma Wú told me
about her nightmares.

She explained that
every rental house
is haunted
with its own real estate agent
and that the ghost that lived
in her house
had been following the family around
because they were behind
on rent.

Grandma Wú was scared

because

she had the nightmare

almost every night.

She wanted to keep

talking about it

but my hands had gotten hot

so I cut her off

and accepted her apology.

Inside I put the buns

on the lip of the couch,

my hands red as stop signs,

the woman's story

burnt into me,

as red as the real estate agent's

hair.

The Chinese Family

The Chinese family had only lived there
for six months.

Some of the people in our street
wondered if they were bad tenants,
even though the Grandma Wú
was the only person we'd seen
in many years
who'd pruned the garden.

I was mowing the lawn
the day her son
hired the trailer,
saw him pull up
with it attached
to the back of their
Mitsubishi Lancer.

The car had
a rusted tin roof

which spread like

skin cancer.

The man fumbled

with one of the latches

while his wife ushered

three young kids inside

in a tongue

no one eavesdropping

could understand.

Grandma Wú

stood in

the garden,

flicking through

something on her phone

like she was browsing

Tinder profiles

or skimming

magazine pages.

When her son
swung the gates open
she jolted upright
and I wondered
if someone else
had swiped right too.

I watched as the man
dusted the rust
off his palms
as if he'd been baking
with flour.

His three kids
ran past him
with boxes
and he spun on the spot
like a roulette wheel.

Meanwhile, Grandma Wú
had moved from the garden

and was sitting
on the trailer,
her feet were
stretched out
over the ramp
as if it was an ottoman.

“FUCK the lot of you”

the husband said
and the neighbours spat their tea out
and his wife asked in broken English
what he meant.

What the owners thought of the hedge

The hedge made it harder

for the owners

to rent the house out.

They knew it would

impact

the sale.

It looked messy

and the owners

muttered about

trash and hoarding

and told people

that there was probably

a car graveyard

or something

hidden behind it.

They talked

loudly

about firing

the real estate agent

when she priced the house

\$35, 000 under

their projection.

They treated the street

like a backyard BBQ;

the road was their

outdoor table.

We were all invited

to listen to them complain,

sit out on our front porches.

For some people on our street

hating the hedge

was the owner's only

redeeming quality.

For Sale

Ads stacked like apartments in Paris

20 to a page

and they all look the same,

have the same shutters,

balcony,

spiral staircase.

It's like there's a guide for these things;

each architect uses the same designs,

the same language,

phrases,

camera angles.

This ad makes our street

look like any other

in this town

but there is history

in these houses,

just as

there are stories in Paris;

in each building,

monument,

cobblestone

path.

There is more to see here

than the Eiffel Tower,

Arc de Triomphe,

ensuite spa bath,

but people still

pass through

like tourists.

They get stopped by

the real estate agent

as if they were

drug traffickers,

detained at the

front door

while she checked

their papers;

no one left

without

a card

and a brochure.

We walked through ourselves

to compare it

to the other houses

on our street.

I commented on how

the real estate agent's heels

clicked like a dog's toenails

when she walked

only

she wasn't as obedient.

You laughed when

she didn't stay

long enough

for us to see

the kitchen.

We both agreed

that the tours were short

so we left Paris disappointed

having only seen

the Notre Dame Cathedral

and parts of the Louvre.

The real estate agent

did not show us

the cafes

tucked into corners,

where the fireplace

used to sit

or how the bedroom wall

could be knocked down

to make a larger lounge.

Double Chin

The owners did not want
the lease renewed.

They did not want to pay

for plumbers

or electricians

or replace the hot water

system tucked into

the side of the house

like a tumour

or an abscess.

They did not want to

fix the cracks in

the walls

or replace the stained

carpets;

rash in the living room

like meningococcal.

The owners did not want
the maintenance fees,
they did not want
to watch the house
get old and age
like their parents had
so they put it up
for sale,
started looking
for someone else
to take care of it
so that they wouldn't have to.

The owners did not want
to keep the house,
but they did not want
to pay commission
on it either
so they fired

the bossy
real estate agent
and let potential buyers
wander in and out
while they stood
by the door
handing out flyers.

They put off doing
anything
that wouldn't help
the sale,
let the problems
spread like an infection
into every wire,
pipe
and faucet.

The owners came around
at night

with paint cans,
had cheap furniture delivered
during the day.
They gave the house a face lift
but underneath it still had
high cholesterol
and emphysema,
things you couldn't see
in the photos
on the flyer.

Years later,
the new owners
will tell us
they've bought
a house in a
retirement village
and we will offer
to help pack
their belongings

into boxes like

a game of Tetris;

he'll be giving you

old power tools

from the shed

while I sort through

appliances

in the kitchen

and it will be only then,

years from now,

that they'll find

that same flyer

buried under grandkid's

drawings on their fridge.

They will comment

on how they wish

the camera had

caught their good side

as well as it did

for the house;

hid their double chins

and sandbag arms,

but it never did.

Mr and Mrs Lippus

Sixty Years

After ten years

my parents' marriage

broke apart

like a KitKat bar,

wafer biscuit,

leaving behind

the crumbs of

their old house;

lampshades and video cassettes.

They twisted in

opposite directions

like an Oreo cookie,

it's debatable who got

the cream--

my father got us kids.

My sister

had been with
the same man
since I was born,
they broke apart when
I was 24,
she slid off him
the way arms drop off people
in scary movies;
with a short delay
and then all at once,
cut cleanly off.

Then there's that
one couple
that keep
piecing themselves
back together
like a mosaic portrait;
each broken saucer,
chipped Royal Doulton

tea cup,

they took turns

gluing the pieces on

with white cement;

dropped vase

from a child's

sticky fingers,

broken dinner plates--

low pay cheque week,

each asset broken

and divided,

shared between them

like handfuls of chips.

There are people

who have tried

to pry

those pieces up,

leaving little craters

behind like

bullet holes

to show

where they've been hit;

that's the kind of marriage

I want;

I don't want to look back

in sixty years

at a perfect print,

I want to see the messy

brush strokes

chipped paint

and peeling canvas.

I want to know

I've lived.

The Potatoes

Leaning on the fence,
elbows propping up his head
like the pine legs
on a glass table,
Mr Lippus tells me about
their old house;
how the paint
peeled off the walls
like loose skin
and the broken latch
hung off
the door of the shed
like a pendulum.

“I had 5 or 6
44 gallon drums
of seed potatoes
in there”

he says,

“each the size of

my fist.

I cut the drums

in half,

folded the metal lip

over itself

so that it wouldn't shred

my hands like cabbage

when I reached inside.”

I try to imagine

the flaky skin

of each potato,

rough and dried out

in his palm.

He holds his hand out over

the Colorbond fence.

I push up against its ribs

but I still can't see it,

left instead

with lines of dust

down my shirt

like prison stripes.

I imagine potatoes,

hard as wood,

untreated pine

with knots and bumps.

Mr Lippus smiles

and his face cracks,

matches the bark

on the tree next to him.

"I was working when it happened"

he says,

"drove old steam trains

through the

New Zealand mountains.

Some climbs were so steep

the carriages felt like

dominoes

that might just

topple back down,

me crushed in between them.”

“I had to leave the boys at home”

he says,

“and Denise never watched them,

visited the neighbours

like they were running

a day spa.”

“I guess they got bored

because I came back one day

to find

they'd painted

each potato,

lined them up
on the lawn
like pieces of a
cubby house
that still needed to be
nailed together.”

Mr Lippus keeps talking
while I imagine
the empty drums
drained in the shed
with coffee powder dirt.
“My boys had dropped
seed potatoes
on the lawn
like hand grenades”
he says,
“blew up my whole
veggie garden
while I’d been away.

They painted
corpse potatoes,
white like ghosts,
left them on the lawn
so they looked like hail,
pale as a dead man.”

“I threw them out in the end,”

he says

lifting his arms off

the fence between us,

“drove them down

to the tip

in a ute

that threw me up

in the air

with each bump

like I was riding

a pogo stick.

There was no point keeping them;

they weren't gonna grow

in the garden."

Flowers

There was a girl
who picked flowers
out of Mrs Lippus's yard,
pushed her tiny hands
through the gaps in the
chain metal fence
like she was threading
a needle,

each flower another
brightly coloured
fabric,

the bouquet
woven together into
a patchwork quilt.

The chain metal fence
hung like a jumper

off knitting-needle pipes,
pipes that tinged in the rain
like a
tuning fork,
middle C,
middle of the street.

Girl played piano
with no teacher present,
no parents.

She walked past
with a small white
paper bag
full of clouds
and coke bottles;
picking flowers,
sewing quilts
and throwing the whole garden
out of tune.

Tattletale

"My sister picks

your flowers,"

he told

Mrs Lippus,

who was holding

a small spade

shaped like the hull

of a boat.

The cream-coloured handle

fit in her hand

more comfortably

than her husband,

gardening gloves

as thick as her

calloused skin.

She told the girl

not to pick her flowers

while resting her hand
on the chain metal fence
that divided them.

The roses
grew out of it
like they were arms
reaching out of
prison bars,
or the cheap,
galvanised fences
at detention centres
for refugees.

The girl was like
a pick-pocket;
stealing the watches
off their wrists,
the diamond rings,
bright red rubies
and emerald greens.

The boy fancied himself

a sheriff,

hid the prison stripes

his mother gave him

underneath

his costume—

plastic badge.

He got the girl

into trouble

but she picked the flowers

anyway

and their mother put them

in water

on her bedside table

and the old lady

yelled at the boy

when he walked past,

stick in his hand

like a cricket bat,

hitting the poles

in the fence

so that they tinged

like a

xylophone.

I watched the girl

rip ribbons off

her dresses

to tie the bouquets

together

but I was more interested

in the boy.

He was busy tying himself

in knots,

twisting himself around

Mrs Lippus's fences

like many of her

flowers

but also,

I had noticed,

like many of her

weeds.

Boy steps out onto the road

The boy was scared of

the old woman.

He started crossing the street

when he got to her house,

stepped out onto the road

like he was side-stepping

a flanker in

a rugby match.

He avoided her house

like it had a red cross

on the door

and it was 1616,

he avoided her house

and imagined cauldrons

and pointy hats,

smelt dead frogs and

rotting corpses

like she'd lit incense—

eau de witch.

He imagined children in cages

rattling the bars with

chicken bones

like they were playing

musical instruments;

the notes getting lower

with their hopes

of escape.

He imagined children

in large iron pots,

brown water and

floating carrots

instead of rubber ducks,

a film of spices and oil

instead of bubble bath mixture.

Sometimes he imagined

the house was on fire,

other times he thought

he could hear

the witch's footsteps,

squeak of the floorboards

like a rusty hinge.

He wondered if his parents

would notice if she took him,

he ran past faster

just in case

they didn't.

Why people didn't get along with Mrs Lippus

Mrs Lippus was the one

who told me about

the miscarriage.

When she walked down

the back steps,

her hips jiggled

side to side

like a washing machine,

she was big,

held a spatula up in one hand

like a traffic sign.

Mr Lippus was

taking in the washing.

He shook his head

while she talked to me,

put the wooden pegs

back in the basket

and threw the dry clothes
onto his shoulder.

“Has anyone even asked
them what happened?”

he said,

taking the spatula out of

Mrs Lippus’s hands.

He walked inside

pretending to play

the violin on his clothes,

spatula bow.

Rumours

Mrs Lippus was the one
who started the rumours.

She swallowed people whole
like a frog swallowed flies,
long thin tongue could reach
right down our street.

Some of our neighbours
choose to swim
below her,
goldfish in small tanks
marked by their property lines,
Mrs Lippus tapping on their
doors and windows.

Other people flew above her,
sparrows and pigeons
who lived in two storey houses,

flying to the tops of their bird cages

to escape her.

There are snakes that eat frogs

in the next suburb over.

That's where my mother-in-law lives.

I hate her,

but she visits us often.

Ryan and Amy

Hospital Visit

I didn't know them
that well when it happened.

It was six months back
and no one had seen
the young woman
for over 24 hours.

Mrs Lippus told me
about what happened
while standing on top
of a stack of pavers
to peer over the fence.

She explained that Mr Lippus
had seen the man come home
at about four in the morning,
saw his car pull in
while staggering to the fridge
for another beer

(water he had told her
the next morning,
but she knew better).

Mrs Lippus had
told the rest of the neighbours
over tea.

Soon all of us
were watching
from our lounge rooms
and sneaking peeks
through our blinds
like puppies
waiting for our owners
to come home.

We sat out on our painted decks
with iced tea.

We were watching
at 6am

when the man came out
with an overflowing garbage bag
of clothes,
saw the pink elephant
mobile
crushed next to
the yellow knitted booties.

We were watching
when he left again
at 7am,
at lunch time
when people
started crowding
around the house,
the same people
who helped the couple
move in
with the trailer
and the ute,

people mowing lawns,
sweeping leaves,
bent over so that we
could see the seam in
the back of their jeans,
black rash on their t-shirts
when they stood back up
from where their bellies
had dragged in the dirt.

We were still watching
when the young man's car
pulled up later
that afternoon
while one of the fathers
was pruning the roses.

We were watching when
the young woman
got out,

pushing down
on the dashboard
to steady herself
like it was a bicycle pump
that would collapse beneath her.

We were still watching
when the young man ran over
and grabbed her arm,
when she staggered
like she thought
she would be heavier,
leaning backwards
so that her normal s arch
was a stiff letter c.

Her body was light
and he caught her,
but it should have been
heavy,

it should have been
like taking all the shopping
inside
in one load,
it should have been
like carrying the furniture
when they moved house,
but it was like
saying yes
to a plastic bag
when you only have one item,
like folding up
the cardboard boxes
instead of packing
things inside them.

If you looked closely
you could see
that, unlike the young woman,
the man still had something

to carry.

He carried her,

carried all the weight she'd lost,

the sadness.

She was wearing a hospital band

on her wrist

“and TED socks,” Mrs Lippus said,

because she noticed things like that.

Possible Thieves

The man was worried

more of his

his garden gnomes

would be nicked.

He was busy putting them

in the shed

when his friends arrived—

a gnome under each arm

like dumbbells or naughty kids.

The rusty Excel

swerved into the driveway,

knocking over a gnome near

the letter box

whose paint-chipped clothes

looked patched up,

only,

no one in that house

knew how to sew.

A young man jumped
out of the car,
pulling his pants back up
with one hand
and slamming the door
with the other.

He grabbed the gnome
and held it
to his groin,
mimed humping it
while three other boys
stepped out of the car
with a bit more grace.

One of them
pushed the young man
in the back

and he stumbled forwards,

dropping the gnome.

“Hear you always finish early”

the boy joked

as the gnome’s head

rolled off

into the lawn.

The young man

shrugged his shoulders

and walked inside

without an invitation.

Across the street,

Mrs Lippus had been

bickering on the phone,

she held it out

towards the window

like she was pointing a gun.

The police arrived
a little while later
and asked
the young couple's friends
about the robberies.

The friends asked
if they could shoot
the policemen's guns
and called them
stiffs
for doing up
all their buttons.

Billy

One of Ryan's friends

walked in

on one of our meetings.

He saw Genie's daughter

and called her

jailbait,

ignored me

and raided the liquor cabinet.

He called us 'greenies'

and compared saving the hedge

to rescuing whales.

I walked Genie's daughter home

and Billy followed us

out into the street

muttering something about

threesomes.

"I'd fuck an animal

over you”

I said,

and Billy threw

the bottle of absinthe

at my face,

and missed.

Amy

Amy had just straightened her hair
and was sitting by the bay window
in her night gown
as she was still too sore
for pants.

She was wearing

Jamberry nail wraps,

Tea Rose lipstick

and a maxi pad.

Her feet rested on

the window sill

while she watched

the Chinese family move,

red bean buns rotting

in the back of her fridge.

She hated them.

She hated having to pretend
that she understood their
broken English,
how they always smelled like
Szechuan pepper,
fennel seeds
and citrus peels.

She hated
the SpongeBob backpack
the youngest child wore
to school
or how they had a garage sale
and she had to watch
someone else buy a cot
for 20 dollars
and the baby clothes
that didn't sell
get thrown out.

She hated them.

She called them chinks

and panfaces

to her husband

who pretended she was joking

but knew she wasn't.

She said she thought they had

a one child policy

and how was it fair

that they could have two

when it was against the law

and she didn't have any.

Was there an authority

she could report it to?

"It's legal in Australia"

the husband said,

"that could be why they moved."

Plant Parenthood

Ryan said

he'd developed

a strange relationship

with three pots

of basil,

said he'd secretly been

racing them off

against each other

since he brought

them home.

I told him I was a

tomato woman

myself,

mostly because

the fruit hung

like Christmas baubles

and I liked having
mini Christmas trees
lined up in my backyard.

Amy looked up from
the sun lounge
and rolled her eyes.

When she'd left
to refill her glass of wine,

Ryan said
she didn't just hate
gardening,
she didn't like
the hedge.

Why Amy didn't like me

When I started

spending time

with Ryan,

it was sudden,

like winning the lottery

and going from

having no money

to being rich.

I didn't know Ryan

that well

at all,

and then I did.

I was fickle,

I wanted to try out

friendships

like cheese tastings

in Margaret River,
like trying on different
pairs of jeans
until I found the one
that fit.

I wanted to belong somewhere,
to come home with
a perfectly sculpted bum
and have you notice
for once,
have you care,
have you pay attention
to me
the way that Ryan did.

The Pensioner

Watering Can

It started with a man

hunched over in faded

blue jeans,

faded like the colour of

his eyes,

hunched over

like the handle

on an

umbrella.

He wore

a red plaid shirt

with the sleeves rolled

up,

even in summer.

It started with a man

who left his feet

behind him

when he walked,
who rolled his
pant legs up
and had a
shuffling gate
which creaked
when it moved.

It started with a man
who crossed the street
each day
to water their gardens,
brown scrub like
fire kindling,
who occasionally
got down on his knees
to pull out weeds,
who did it without
being asked,
without thanks,

who tipped
his watering can up
each afternoon
like he was pouring tea.

It started with a man
you used to wave at
when you rode to work.
He always waved back
but you were never looking.

You were like
a checkout assistant
who would ask
about his day
while scanning the milk
and counting the minutes left
on your shift.

That's how you look
at me sometimes,

like you're just passing

the time.

After our

last fight

you slept on

the sofa bed

in the spare room

which folded out

into three parts

like a letter.

We'd both made mistakes

but I was the only one

trying to fix them

and it was tiresome.

I wanted to make up for

the holes I'd cut in our

relationship

but without both of us

working together

all we were left with

was dead shrub.

Then I noticed

that Ryan

had started helping

the pensioner

water the hedge.

More importantly,

I noticed

that Amy wasn't with him.

The next time

They went out

I asked

if I could

bring some

fertilizer over,

suggested
serving it
on saucers or bread plates
so that we could
have our own
tea party
in the afternoons.

I kept them company,
we kept each other
company

and our guest list
slowly expanded
to every garden
on our street.

The Watering Club

The Pensioner

didn't want meetings

like the neighbourhood watch

but that's all Ryan and I

really knew about him;

he rarely said anything,

just watered the hedge

each day,

bent over with his

watering can

like he was doing yoga,

downward facing dog.

We joined him,

stretched and flexed

in front of the neighbours

on our yoga mat footpaths.

We enjoyed our workouts

but it wasn't long until
we wanted more
than he did—
vegan meetings
and meditation retreats.

That's when we
started meeting
at Ryan's house.

The pensioner
didn't join us
but Mr Lippus did
occasionally
and so did Genie's daughter,
Beth.

We planned our
yoga workouts
in advance,
each pose

before we tried them.

We felt

the pensioner was more

ad hoc,

he always watered

his own garden first

and he didn't hold the poses

long enough

or move fluidly

between them—

he watered the hedge

like it was an after thought,

like sucking on lemon

after shooting tequila.

Mr Harwood

Mr Harwood

If he was a clock maker,
his clocks would be beautiful.

They would be
the kind of clocks
shown in art galleries
and museums
behind several feet
of red velvet rope
that allowed you close enough
to see
the small hand-cast
golden cogs,
while being far enough away
to ensure you couldn't
touch any of them
and upset
the delicate fabric of time.

If he was a clock maker
people would marvel
at the tiny brush strokes
he hand-painted onto his clock faces,
the intricate mechanics,
the bells and whistles.

If he was a clock maker,
his clocks would be considered
pieces of art,
rare delicacies
like caviar or goat's milk cheese.

Because if he was a clock maker,
his clocks would be beautiful
and everyone
would want one
but they would not use them
for anything
other than

being ornamental,
because even though his clocks
would all tell the same time,
the second hand would skip
and they would always be
a few minutes behind,
no matter how many times
you tried to reset them.

Luckily for us
he wasn't a clock maker,
just a man who left the house
each morning
impeccably dressed
and always late.

Harwood's Masks

I wanted to talk

to Mr Harwood

but he never had the time.

It was only when I asked about

his strange collection

of tribal masks

that he let me inside.

I could see two hanging

behind him

like uni degrees

when he answered the door.

He said he got

his first one

back in 1998;

a large black mask

with a nose like

a horse.

I learnt that
most of them
came from
Papua New Guinea
and once floated
in front of
people's faces
like dead skin
peeling off
a snake,
a mask that
stayed in shape
like the people of
Pompeii.

When I asked about
the burglaries,
Mr Harwood
brushed me off.

He said he hadn't
seen anything
and started talking
instead
about how
his masks
had long noses
like fishing hooks
to catch spirits.

It made me wish
that I had a mask.

I only seem
to catch empty bottles,
and old tires.

Sometimes I even lose my bait.

MASKS STOLEN

Mr Harwood came home one day
and parked his Daihatsu Charade
under the carport—
water dripped
from cracks in
the concrete roof
and he pulled the tan collar
of his rain coat
over his head
for the quick dash to
the front door.

It wasn't until
he was pulling his keys
from the front pocket of his
briefcase
that he realised
he didn't need them.

The flyscreen was twisted
into an hour glass shape
and the stained-glass
panels on his front door
had been broken—
his roses had been picked
and beheaded.

He could see an empty hook
framed in the shattered glass
like abstract art
and as he stepped over the pieces,
scrutinising the reflection in
his shoes,
he looked up again
only briefly
to confirm that
his two prized masks
were gone.

The wall was topless
with two nipple hooks laid bare
in the middle.

He averted his eyes
and stared down
at the still fully dressed
hall table,
scattered with unopened bills
and advertising material.

“Has anything else been taken?”

the police asked on the phone,

“I don’t know; I haven’t checked”

He answered honestly.

“Aren’t my masks bad enough?”

The Park

Playground

Many of the children
in this neighbourhood
have swing sets in their backyards,
cubby houses
and the occasional slide.

This playground
is for the poorer children,
the social children.

Every house
down this street
has a big backyard
with plenty of space
but still they build parks
every couple of blocks,
wedged between houses,
fences with stains from
the bore water tanks.

This is the children's
coffee house,
their meeting point,
but at dusk

it gets cloaked
in night,
unspoken by
passing cars,
to the smell of lamb chops
and fish and chips
for dinner,
listening instead
to bedtime stories
and lullabies,
to Mum and Dad
arguing down the hall.

As teenagers
we hang out in playgrounds,
inexplicably drawn to them,
as adults we don't even
see them,
we've forgotten how
we used to pour our
water bottles
out
over the sand
to make
meat pies,

how we huddled
in the hull of the boat
during a storm
until Mum told us
it was time to go
and we reemerged
into the sun light,
how the ground was lava
and we were pirates.

Now we're mothers
and teachers,
nurses and doctors,
we chauffeur and
we clean
and we're tired.

There is no time left
to be pirates.

Chamberlain Street

Woman Running

Her shoulders rise with each

breath in

like someone has

lifted them up

for her,

like the air is full of

helium.

Her posture straightens

and her breasts

sit higher.

She isn't someone

you'd go out with,

she might just float away.

When she breathes out

her shoulders slump over.

She loses air like

a balloon

still tied

to the mailbox

even though the party

is over.

She looks deflated,

staring at her feet,

wondering

why she still hasn't lost

the fat around her stomach.

I watch her cross the road

while she exhales,

it's dusk and

the stripes on her top

glow like a

high visibility jacket.

Our Street

I wonder

what the people

driving down our street

think of us.

Do the passengers peer through

our windows

trying to polaroid our lives—

shaking the meaning

out of every scene?

Do they drive past at night,

having to resist the urge

to sweep in

and pull back the curtains

like they're playing with doll houses—

wanting to reach in

and walk the small children

up the staircase

and into bed?

Do the houses go past them

so quickly,

they see nothing

but the same rose garden beds,

the same front paths?

Or do they see the differences;

the plastic flamingo

and the garden gnomes—

the picket fences,

sandstone walls?

I wonder if they

dissect our lives,

picking out our flaws like

they're weeding the suburb.

I'm worried they're sidetracked,

looking back and forth

between the road and the hedge

like a spectator at

a tennis match,

like someone that might cause

an accident—

like someone that could have hurt you.

Our House

Short Circuit

Sometimes,
your mother
comes over
and cleans our dishes,
pushes her manicured nails
into the cloud fluff foam.

She complains that we
let them build up
during the week,
about how we stack them
on the bench
like old newspapers
so that,
when she changes
the water,
it's muddy from the
dirt tracks

we've left behind;

week old chilli con carne

and expired milk.

Sometimes she mows the lawns

in stiletto heels,

leaves golf-tee holes

while you tap at

the bottom of the weedkiller

like you're trying to get out

the last drops of tomato sauce.

Most of the time

though,

she just

sits out on the swing,

standing up occasionally

to admire the teddy bear trees

and insult Mrs Lippus.

Candlelight

I don't like leaving the light on
in our bathroom
because the window is broken
and people can see in from the street.

Your mother won't pay to fix it
because we won't tell her how
we broke it;

my bare bum pushed up
against the red-bevelled glass,
your forearms
crossed like an X
above my head.

I don't want the neighbours
to watch us
so we use
a flickering candle now

instead of a light,

it's much more romantic;

let them

watch instead

our silhouettes,

they come and go

in the bathroom mirror

like an old slide changer.

Another Theft

The front door
was still locked
as was the back
but the
rose garden
by the
bathroom window
was scattered
with a fresh layer
of glass
which looked like
hail.

My laptop was missing,
your Xbox One,
DVDs had been
pulled off shelves

and the hall table
was lying on its side
like a
dead horse.

Your mother
reconsidered
fixing the window,
our house had been
broken into.

Another Fight

You got angsty

without Forza 6

and Fallout 4.

I hadn't paid

our insurance

premiums

and we couldn't

afford

to replace anything

on our own.

You turned the TV off

while I was watching it

via the app on your phone

and slammed the doors

like you were

throwing down

a book

after

the main character

had died.

At least the sex

was great—

it was sparse

but it was hungry,

like I could hear

your stomach

rumbling.

You starved yourself

and then ate me up

without swallowing,

without breathing

between mouthfuls.

It almost made it worth it,

but for me,

it's not enough.

Arguments

Sometimes I pick fights
with you,
get told I'm misinterpreting
what you're saying
but I did not imagine that inflection
in your voice.

There is a mirror between us
and your words reflect.

You think I put the mirror there,
that I'm not listening,
but I know you.

You build up walls of glass
to keep me out,
hoping I'll break them down
but I don't want cuts on my hands
so I leave them up.

Now you say
it's my fault
you've slammed the door again,
set up immigration offices
around yourself
and rejected
my partnership visa.
One day I'll stop applying.

I pick fights with you
on the cold days;
on the days you turn the heater off
and our relationship shivers
without blankets.

I pick fights because you can't
hate me
without loving me as well
but some days you seem indifferent

and you say it's because I need
medication
but these pills are like a glass of water
on a hot day,
like giving food to the poor,
the starving.

I am not devoid of patience
and understanding,
I fill myself up
like a car at a petrol station,
adding a little bit
each day
so the tank never drops below
half way.

You like to run it down to
empty.

Seasonal

You break me apart

like a wishbone.

We take a piece each

but you get the bigger half,

sometimes I think that's

all you wish for.

You push it aside

with your fork,

held in your hand

like a garden rake.

I'm like dead autumn leaves;

I'm seasonal.

Public Transport

Before you got your license
or brought that road bike from
the secondhand store,
you had to leave for work at six in the morning,
caught the local bus if you were on time.

If you were running late—
which was most mornings—
you walked to the train station,
past houses
that were set back from the road
with big front yards
and tin metal fences.

Sometimes,
if you missed the train,
you would run a bit further,
catch the bus you used
as a last resort.

You ran past the local shops
and the car park,
fenced off
and full of cranes.

You didn't stop
to look at the progress
or the apartment block next door
whose car park was being used
as a dumping ground for all
the building site rubbish.

On occasions rarer still,
I would drive you into work.
You'd spend the car trip
buckling your shoes,
and buttoning your top
while I watched the cars
pull out of our
neighbours' houses

and locked the windows

so you wouldn't hear

the fucks and cunts

Frank stepped outside

to spit my way.

30 minutes before the accident

I hit you and punched you,

scratched at your skin

and watched red marks

run down your chest

like stretch marks,

I wanted to hurt you.

You left the room

but I followed behind you,

had my thumb tucked into

my closed fist

and you pointed it out

before I hit you again.

It felt like sinking into

a couch

at the end of

a long day,
your skin soft,
your body malleable
like dough.

I hit you
and you grabbed the keys
—my keys!—

So I stood in the door
and you pushed me aside.

I fell into the hall table
your father had made by hand,
heard something snap in
one of the drawers
and screamed
even though I wasn't hurt.

You walked out the door
and I followed behind you
but you left

without me.

I walked out onto

the street

and I waited,

waited to see if

this time

you would come home,

waited to see if you'd

fight for me.

Nothing

I fly like a bird,
higher and higher
until the oxygen thins
and I can't breathe,
but I fall gracefully—
wings spread open,
I glide back down.

We fly in the same formations
even when we are not talking.

It happens so naturally
we don't even question it,
flying alone would seem as
unnatural as stopping.

So this is what I do to myself.

I remember each phone call;
the late ones where you spoke

a little softer

like you were trying

not to scare away

a bird you'd

just found injured.

That was me,

falling from the sky

and you left the formation

to check I was okay,

poor injured bird.

Each text message,

last minute

dinner date,

all those birds in the sky

and I saw

only you.

Now it hurts to say

your name out loud

but we still fly together

because that

is what

we're used to.

Leaving the Street

Clouds

There used to be a slide
down by the foreshore
that was made up of lots of little
plastic pipes,
it made my bum vibrate
when I rolled down.

We all lined up
to have a turn;
a conveyer belt of children
travelling down
into dirt and sticks,
bent like elbows and
lanky knees,

that's what the sky looks like today,
clouds stretched out like
that plastic slide,

rolling the sunset further

into the distance,

rolling it further away.

S297—Grievous Bodily Harm

I can see Frank
sitting in the backseat
on the left,
staring at a storm grate
that's been used as
a partition.

One of the officers
had pushed him
into the car like
she was dribbling
a basketball.

She had left
her front door
open,
and I could see
dials and

touchscreen panels
where,
in a normal Ford Falcon,
there would be
a stereo system
and a mounted
mobile phone,
GPS.

As she gets back
in the car,
a male officer
picks up a radio
shaped like
an old parking meter
and confirms Frank's arrest—
S297—Grievous Bodily Harm.

Frank notices me
watching him,

he grins
and rattles the handcuffs
at the window,
I don't know what
he'll tell police;
whether he was just trying
to talk to me,
or was hoping this would
end it.
I do know
that I could smell
the tequila
on him
from across the street—

when they came
to arrest him,
Frank handed the bottle
to Genie
like he was just asking her

to hold it

while he searched

his pockets

for his keys.

Genie stands out the front

by the rose bushes

taking swigs

while the officers

drive Frank away.