School of Media, Culture and Creative Arts

Familiar Places — (Re)creating "Home": An Exegesis

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This thesis is presented for the degree of
Master of Creative Arts (Communication and Cultural Studies)
of
Curtin University of Technology

July 2009

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: ……………………………………….

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— Abstract —

My thesis — a novel and an accompanying exegesis — addresses the question: what is 'home'? What are the ways in which it has been and can be understood? And in particular, how can it be represented in narrative fiction so as to take into account its many intricate facets? Framed by my understanding of the relationship between mental inscapes and outward landscapes, I propose that 'home' is not so much a geographical space as it is an interpretation of that space, and that, in prose, this interpretation is based on the subjective viewpoint of a narrative focaliser.

This said, in my creative practice I explore experiences of 'home' through two alternate focalisations. I represent 'home' in several ways: as the tension point between nurture and neglect; as a space of transience and fluidity; as an experience of familiarity; and as part of the everyday process of the creation of self. Drawing upon the landscape, culture and community of the places I have lived in — Bunbury, Albany and Perth — and the years I have spent traversing the roads within and between, this is a novel in which the sense of home (or the homelike moment) is constructed out of movement, communication and sociality. This is a novel in which 'home' is not just a place; it is an activity.

Relative to my creative practice, my exegesis details how the construction of my novel was based on a triangulate relationship between personal experience, theoretical readings and the exemplar of fiction. Each chapter examines 'home' from a certain theoretical point of view, and in turn the representational applications of these points of view are studied via a close reading of Thea Astley's *A Descant for Gossips* and in my own work. Finally, it is this understanding — point of view, perception, focalisation — that forms the basis of both my creative and theoretical work.

— Acknowledgements —

In my pursuit of this novel and exegesis I was supported by so many people, for which I am extremely grateful.

I would like to thank Julienne van Loon and Ann McGuire for their professional and committed supervision; for their careful, exact and sensitive feedback; and for their belief in my work.

I would also like to thank the Katharine Susannah Prichard Writers' Centre for an Emerging Writer in Residence fellowship in 2006. Early drafts of the narrative focalised by Ruby Potter could not have been written so productively and so fluidly without this wonderful and unique experience.

Throughout the drafting of *Familiar Places*, I was lucky enough to receive two Varuna Longlines consultations with Peter Bishop, whose encouragement gave me the confidence to keep going.

Thank you also to the various writers' groups I participated in, and thank you especially to Maureen Gibbons and Natasha Lester for their thorough feedback.

Finally, thank you to my parents for providing me with the time and space I required to complete the final drafts of both the novel and exegesis. Thank you to my sisters Pamela (for lighting up my house and being my social break) and Nicole (for reading the various incarnations of my novel and for providing intelligent and critical advice). And thank you to my partner, Michael Watters, not only for reading and commenting on every stage of my work, but also for your patience and emotional support.

Familiar Places — (Re)creating "Home"

An Exegesis

Maria Papas

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Introduction

— Home, Homelike, the Seer and the Seen —

Common Middle Ground

Nobody sees anyone as he is… They see a whole — they see all sorts of things — they see themselves.

— Virginia Woolf: Jacob's Room (28-29)

In an essay called 'Get out of the house, go for a bushwalk', John Bennett argues that one should learn *to feel at home* outside of the house (55 emphasis added). He quotes William Cronon, an environmental historian: 'We need to discover a common middle ground in which all of these things, from city to the wilderness can somehow be encompassed in the word "home". Home, after all, is the place where finally we make our living' (55)[1]. Given such a framework, what then is 'home'? For the student treading the same path to and from school, for the housewife, for the business owner twenty-years in the same town, for the transient: what is the connecting thread? What are the ways in which home has been and can be understood? How can 'home' be re(written) or re(created)? And in particular, how can it be represented in narrative fiction so as to take into account all of these things — 'the city to the wilderness'?

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[1] See Cronon, William. <u>Uncommon ground: toward reinventing nature</u>. New York: WW Norton, 1996.

Throughout the writing of my creative piece, I understood the concept of 'home' to be a highly complicated, multi-faceted and emotive topic. Words I came across — *nostalgia, yearning, belonging, intimacy, oppression, exclusion, relationship, non-place, shared space, depthless and indeterminate* — seemed at once to complement *and* contradict each other. From the phenomenological study of the relationship between body and cosmos to the post-structural, post-modern preference for infinite and unbounded spaces, the definition of 'home' was not one that I could pinpoint easily. Was it a dwelling (Heidegger 1971 145)? A first-world space? (Bachelard 4). Was it a 'place of nurture?' (Tuan 137). Or was it 'oppression' (Rose 55), 'a tool of confinement'? (Bennett 55). To engage with 'home', to write of it, to read about it — these things are discursive. Constructions of home oscillate between dual feelings of belonging and non-belonging, inclusion and exclusion, domestic and economised. As much as 'home' has been represented as private and enclosed, it has also been described as a site broader than dwelling. With this in mind, the principal purpose of my writing, both in my creative piece, *Familiar Places,* and in this exegesis, was not to define but rather to represent (and to explain my representation of) home's complex and intricate facets. In particular, since the impetus for me as a writer was to produce something that would contribute to the wider tapestry of Australian social meaning, and since I wanted to take up the challenge put forward by Drusilla Modjeska in her essay *Timepieces* and write a narrative that increased our understanding of 'how we live in time, how we live now, and where the conditions of our living come from' (211), I wanted to represent 'home' not only in a way that acknowledged the phenomenological, structural and post-structural interpretations of the word, but also in a way that responded to William Cronon's desire for broader meaning.

Accordingly, my idea was to write a narrative in which 'home' was not so much a definable place as it was a construct based on the experiences, relationships and

imaginations of those who interpreted it. The initial inspiration for my fiction was (in part) based on my personal experience. Having grown up in regional Western Australia, and then having moved, at the age of seventeen, to Perth for university, 'home' was both the place I came from and the place I lived in temporarily during each semester. I was always 'going home' — but 'going home' didn't necessarily have a constant meaning. At uni, after classes, I might have said, 'I'm going home', and I would have meant my residential boarding room. On a Friday, 'going home' had connotations of a bus or a train ride back to Bunbury. 'Let's go home,' was Dad picking me up from the station. And 'I have to go home,' was what I finally said (after weeks of consciously avoiding the word 'home' as a way to describe my Sunday journey back to Perth) on the *Australind* platform. That afternoon, on my way 'back home', I sat in my allocated seat, and as clichéd as it was, I looked out of the window into paddocks and farmland, and behind my sunglasses I wept. Not because I missed home. But because I no longer knew where home was.

In researching 'home' for the purpose of representing it, I noticed that certain theoretical studies, especially in the field of human geography, confirmed and reiterated the multiple meanings I extracted from my experience. Perhaps I was drawn to such theories. Nevertheless, my readings strengthened my perception that places *do not* have meanings that are natural and obvious, but ones that are created by people (Cresswell 2004 27); that 'home' is not just a physical structure or geographical location, it is a complex emotional space (Rubenstein 3); and that 'home' is the focus of one's own landscape (Lippard 27). What threaded these ideas together (and what resonated with my personal narrative) was the implicit understanding of the relationship between person and home. 'Home', here, is an *interpretation* of space, one that is based on all the knowledge, experience, and social constructions affecting the perceiving subject's way of

seeing. Reading these theories, I couldn't help but think back to the memory of myself crying on the train, and (with the benefit of new theoretical understandings) what I saw was a girl who had not necessarily replaced one home with another, but one whose meanings of home had become, and would thereafter continue to become, more and more layered and complicated as she gained new experiences and knowledge . . . and I wanted to write . . .

Since my project was a way to 'represent' this rather personal relationship between 'home' and its perceiving subject, the central representational strategy that I drew on to write how I wanted to write — character-based, emotively, and in a way which made the reader see from various perspectives — was the strategy of focalisation. To elucidate, John Berger once reasoned that we never look at just the thing — we look at the relationship between that thing and ourselves (1974 9). In much the same way Vera John-Steiner suggests that if you approach a visual surface with one eye open and then with that eye shut and the other open, the view changes (106). Similarly, in narrative, 'whenever events are presented, they are presented from within a certain 'vision'. A point of view is chosen, a way of seeing, an angle' (Bal 2001 42). Perception is largely dependent on the position, distance and previous knowledge of the perceiver in relation to the perceived (Bal 2001 42). As such, focalisation (as a narrative theory) refers specifically to the relationship between that which is 'seen' and the vision through which it is presented (2001 43). In its simplest understanding, A says that B sees what C is doing (2001 46). There is a triadic relation formed by the narrating agent, the one who sees, and the object seen (Cohan & Shires 95).

If home is indeed a construct of perception, if it is, as Berger would argue, an image or a sight (re)created or reproduced (1974 9), then the 'representation' of home in my fiction did not necessarily need to be about 'dwelling'. Rather this re(creation), based

on the subjective (and affected) viewpoints of a narrative focaliser, would draw on a number of experiences, definitions, memories, and senses of home. Home as a place of belonging, communities as home-places, and other such interpretations would change depending on who was the subject of that gaze, whose perspective or vision was presented, and how the text was focalised. My choice — to employ just one third-person and heterodiegetic narrating agent and (with the exception of the opening and closing scenes) two focalising characters, Ruby Potter and Potts Lucano — was a choice intended not only to position the reader *within* several perceived events, but also to provide him/her with a constant sense of watchful objectivity. If Ruby, for example, went into a room, then the reader went with her. If she walked out into the streets, the reader invariably followed. The reader was privy to Ruby's intimate thoughts and feelings. The reader saw what Ruby saw. But, unlike Ruby, the reader would also be privy, in a similar way, to Potts's focalised narrative. In doing this, my intention was to represent 'home' in a way that took into account personal and community identities as much as it did physical locations, in a way that gave equal voice to at least two perceptions, and in a way that began to explore 'home' as having multiple definitions.

To strengthen this idea, what I drew on, in the writing of *Familiar Places*, was not simply the notion of 'home' but also that of the 'homelike'. Originating from the German '*heimlich',* my interpretation of this word comes largely from Sigmund Freud's essay, 'The Uncanny' (341-347). In his essay, Freud studies the dual meanings of *heimlich*, and after a long list of dictionary definitions and exemplary sentences designed to provide context he argues that the word 'belongs to two sets of ideas, which, without being contradictory, are yet very different' (345). On the one hand, it translates into something domestic, familiar and intimate. 'She did not feel too *heimlich* with him . . . We pictured it so comfortable, so cosy and *heimlich* . . . A sense of agreeable restfulness . . .'

(342-343). But, on the other hand, there is a more negative connotation, an implication of something hidden or concealed. '. . . Like a buried spring or a dried up pond . . . Withdrawn from knowledge . . . That which is obscure, inaccessible . . .' (343-344). Interpreting these meanings, Annaleen Masschelein argues that the difference (not unlike that of focalisation) is one of perspective. 'In the positive sense,' she writes, '*heimlich* takes the inside-perspective of the intimacy of the home. In the negative sense, by contrast, the walls shield the interior and in the eyes of the outsider, the seclusion of the inner circle is associated with secrecy and conspiracy' (3). While in my writing I do represent Masschelein's interpretation, I also extend it. I dispense with walls. I represent homelike moments in spaces and activities that are familiar, domestic and intimate, regardless of whether these spaces are actual homes, and I represent also the negative meaning of *heimlich* from the point-of-view of the insider. I draw a distinction between the outward (and rather homelike) projection of self-identity and the turmoil that is perhaps masked within. Equally sensitive, then, to the experiences of both the insider and the outsider, 'home' — represented in my writing with consideration to perspective and to the broad and complex meanings adopted from the word *heimlich* — is at once a space of familiarity and also a space of things undisclosed or forgotten. Far from being bound simply to dwelling, this representation not only encompasses 'home' as any infinite, unbounded space and any infinite unbounded 'homelike' moment, it also stresses the relationship between 'home' and 'person'.

The writing of my creative piece was not accidental. It was drawn from the understandings found in my personal experience, my theoretical readings and in the exemplar of fiction. This exegesis, as a companion to *Familiar Places*, is structured thematically so as to show how several different interpretations of 'home' are

conceptualised in my creative piece. Each chapter examines 'home' from a certain theoretical point of view, and in turn, the representational applications of these points of view are studied via a close reading of published fiction *and* in my own work. Constant throughout all three chapters is my employment of one of Thea Astley's earliest texts, *A Descant for Gossips*. Although I drew from many fictional texts, Astley's narrative, focalised through the vision of a number of characters, was perhaps the most useful. Not only did it provide a structural example in terms of focalisation, it demonstrated, through alternating perspectives, the subjective and socially constructed viewpoints of the focalising agents, the tensions between belonging and exclusion, the ways in which one might inhabit transient spaces, and the comforts, familiarities and *illusions* one makes of 'home'.

Accordingly, in the first chapter of this exegesis I begin with both Gaston Bachelard's childhood home as a 'fundamental place' (15) and Martin Heidegger's notions of dwelling as '*the basic character* of Being' (1971 160) and as the 'wish to belong to the environment, to feel inside a place, and to be at home' (Bognar 189). I ask: if 'home' is the site of belonging, what is it to not belong? If it is a place of rest and withdrawal, a safe-haven from the world, what is it to not feel rested? To not feel safe? Using the dual meanings of *heimlich* and the narrative focalised through the character Vinny Lalor in Thea Astley's *A Descant for Gossips*, I explore the *other* of experience: the child in the 'home' rather than the young adult remembering the home and the female figure in the 'home' rather than the (often theorised) male experience of 'home'. That is, I approach 'home' via its negative opposite. And in doing so, I explore how 'home' came to be represented in my fiction not as a narrative of belonging or inclusion, but as a narrative often of oppression or exclusion.

In the second chapter I move towards theories of space and I explain how this search for an alternative framework allowed me to let go of traditionally accepted binary positions (inside/outside, open/closed and public/private) and therefore represent 'home' in terms of transience and fluidity. Using, as an example in fiction, the focalised vision of the transient character Helen Striebel in Astley's *A Descant for Gossips*, I explain also how my own representational concerns — to conceptualise the expanding and contracting movements of 'home', to see 'home' as infinite and unbounded, and to locate or identify 'homelike' moments in unlikely spaces (placeless spaces, non-places and shared spaces with no real history or concern for identity) — led me to develop a narrative that recognised the inseparability of home and world.

Finally, in the third chapter I expand on the work of theories of space — and in particular those like Henri Lefebvre who studied the movements of everyday life, routine chores and daily pleasures — and I use this work to explain how 'home' in my creative piece is represented as a function of familiarity. Again I employ the dual meanings of *heimlich,* and I argue that the repetition of daily life, in my fiction, functions both as a way to represent the comfortable predictability of the first meaning of homelike and as a way to mask the unpleasantness of the second meaning. Using the narrative focalised in *A Descant for Gossips* through Robert Moller, a character given to adult longings for his remembered and recreated past, I link questions of self-identity to the small movements, the expected and taken for granted aspects of daily life, and (applied to my work) I then argue that it is precisely these movements that form the homelike spaces and homelike moments that keep narratives of self going.

Chapter One

— Origin, Belonging and the Gendered Domestic —

The childhood home seen from within

> *Nothing is small, nothing is great. Inside us are worlds.*
>
> — Edvard Munch

I begin with Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962) who in 1958 published the polemical *The Poetics of Space*. Approaching the topic of home from a phenomenological point of view, Bachelard argues primarily that the homes we are born into and grow up in are the first world or first universe spaces that subsequently shape our understandings of all other spaces (4). Of all the 'homes' one might eventually experience, it is this home — this early initiation into physical and emotional environment — that Bachelard argues is the most 'fundamental' of places (15). When he writes 'all really inhabited space bears the essence of the *notion* of home', when he says 'the sheltered being . . . experiences the house in reality and in its virtuality, by means of thoughts and dreams', the house he is referring to, the one that 'comes to dwell' in his present experience is the house of his childhood (5). Specifically describing the maternal features of the house, Bachelard comes back time and time again to notions of protection, care, and warmth. 'Before he is cast into the world,' he says, 'man is laid in the cradle of the house . . . Life begins . . . *enclosed*, *protected*, all *warm* in the *bosom* of the house' (7 emphasis added). Circling around the notion of retreat, this childhood home-space, made up of a complexity of smaller spaces — attics, basements, corners and drawers — each with their own effect on

memory and imagination, shelters 'day-dreaming . . . protects the dreamer . . . allows one to dream in peace' (6). For Bachelard, the house he grew up in (and by association, the house he subsequently left) is the house he returns to (not in body, but in mind) whenever he wishes to take leave from his modern condition. Remembered and seen from his vantage point of nostalgia, this first house is not only described as the embodiment of 'home', but also the embodiment of dreams (15). It is always there, always the same. An oneiric wealth of space with nothing less than a living room, bedroom, attic, garret, cellar, stairway, and the picturesque view of rolling hills, it is, for Bachelard, 'the land of Motionless Childhood . . . a fixation of happiness . . . a memory of protection' (5-6).

Writing *Familiar Places*, however, it was precisely this version of home that I consciously tried to avoid. Not least because its foundations are stable, middle-class and rural, and therefore limited in a sense, or because the vertical imagery — the attic through to the cellar as a metaphor for the human mind and body — is hard to apply to the single-storey, verandah-enclosed, weatherboard or brick-and-mortar Australian stereotype[2], but because I didn't want to perpetuate a rose-tinted nostalgia for either the *childhood* home nor for the remembered *mother* who so often remains housed in this home. Bachelard's narrative, perceived from the point of view of one who *leaves*, and others like it: Martin Heidegger's work on 'dwelling' as a place of belonging, as a place that 'spares' and 'preserves', and as a place of peace (1971 145-150); John Ruskin's infamous assertion that wherever a woman was became 'a home, a space endowed with special qualities, a haven of tranquillity and love' (Rose 18); Yi-Fu Tuan's home as a

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[2] See Malouf, David. <u>12 Edmondstone Street</u>. London: Chatto and Windus, 1985, for an example of the extent in which Bachelard's vertical imagery must be modified to suit at least one experience of the Australian home-place.

'place of nurture where our fundamental needs are heeded and cared for without fuss' (137); David Seamon's intimate place of rest, refreshment and repose (1979 81); David Malouf's 'long afternoons' measured by 'a (sewing) needle drawn back and forth through heavy flannel' (39); and even Virginia Woolf's description of her 'most important' memory — an image of the red and black flowers on her mother's dress, and then of herself, 'lying half asleep, half awake, in bed in the nursery at St Ives' — as the 'base that (life) stands upon' (1985 64), all imply, one way or another, that home is tied to person, and in particular, to carer. But what does this mean for the carer? How is 'home' perceived from their point of view?

In *Feminism and Geography: the Limits of Geographical Knowledge,* Gillian Rose argues that few women would actually recognise a home that was 'conflict-free, caring and nurturing' (56). How is it, then, that descriptions of 'home' as 'enclosed', 'protected' and 'warm in the bosom' continue to persist? The question I posed throughout my creative production was: to what extent were such descriptions — seen through the child's eyes, but with the distance of years — a product of fantasy. And to what extent, in fiction, was it the role of the carer (or the mother) of the house to *provide* such a fantasy? So, while the construction of 'home' as a place of belonging and nurture has been widely contested by post-structuralist, neo-Marxist and feminist critiques, and while this was a construction I personally wanted to avoid, I did feel that the childhood home — gendered and domestic — was still a worthwhile starting point for my writing, not only because Bachelard, Heidegger and others laid certain foundations in the study of space, but also because it is precisely this narrow and idealised notion that highlights and makes visible the *other* of experience.

Part of the appeal of employing *A Descant for Gossips* as a structural and creative model for my writing was that it encouraged a reading of 'home' that considered both

the fantasy and the other. As a literary construction, and written on the brink of second-wave feminism, it not only challenges the problematic assumptions regarding 'home' as an emotionally stable and nurturing place, it represents through the eyes of Vinny Lalor, the young female protagonist, 'home as dwelling' and 'home as mother' as a space of *work*. Preceding the writings of those like Betty Friedan and Ann Oakley who, in 1963 and 1974 respectively, concluded that women were passively fed media images of the 'happy housewife', and that in this 'myth of representation' standards existed — neat lines of washing, creative culinary masterpieces, obedient and smiling children — of which the 'housewife was permanently aware, but could not hope to achieve due to other demands on her time' (Friedan 10, Oakley The Sociology of Housework 59), Astley's narrative, affected by the same cultural understandings, is similarly conscious of the female figure in the home and, in particular, of media images and other inventions of the maternal.

Likewise, in my representational practice, by employing one overarching narrator and two alternating focalisers, one male, the other female, each with their own unique background, history and personality, I aimed to represent experiences of 'home' which countered the cultural idealisations. The character Ruby Potter, for example, specifically *rejects* 'home as mother' through the disapproval of her mother's passive role as 'homemaker' in an unfaithful marriage; in the subconscious denial of her own pending motherhood; and most importantly, in her ultimate and final decision to abandon both her son and husband. Consequently, the other focalising character of the narrative, Potts Lucano, grows up in a house *without* a mother. His experience of home — 'motherless' and unoccupied during the working day — is one which *cannot* be defined by cultural idealisations since there is *no* mother to enclose, nurture or protect. But more to the point, since his father is single and working, 'home as a residential

dwelling' is almost always an *empty* place, and 'home as an activity' is one which occurs, more often than not, in spaces like the pool-hall, which often fall outside the traditional boundaries of 'home'. As a result, while a large part of my creative piece remains preoccupied with traditional ideals for 'home', in understanding what it is to belong, to be nurtured and to be cared for, there is an inevitable focus on not belonging, on exclusion and neglect.

Belonging / Not Belonging

In his theory of alienation/disalienation, Henri Lefebvre argues that man is conscious of what he is, only in, by and through what he is not (Vol 2 214). Similarly Madan Sarup links the concept of 'home' to the question of identity (95). Drawing on Heidegger's awareness of 'rootedness' and the loss of 'rootedness' in place[3], he speaks specifically of the migrant experience and quotes Christopher Hampton[4]: 'the person with roots takes them for granted, while the person with no roots is vividly aware of them' (96). While I consider the representation of the migration experience and its relationship to the concept of 'home' as outside the scope of my creative praxis, and while the purpose of my writing was instead to represent the small movements, the taken for granted aspects of everyday life rather than the greater changes often associated with migration, what attracted me to Sarup's work, and to the abovementioned quote, was a sense that one's perceptions of 'home' and 'identity' could be conceived out of negative opposites.

Engaging with the opening scenes of *A Descant for Gossips,* I recognised this same point of perception in the narrative of Vinny Lalor. The novel begins:

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[3] See Heidegger, Martin. Being and Time. New York: Harper and Row, 1962.
[4] See Hampton, Christopher. White Chameleon. London: Faber, 1991.

> Almost as long as Vinny Lalor could remember she had been on the fringe of things. Family and school both found her their least important member. They circled giddily without needing her. She was afraid, as she clung to the spinning edges of her world, that one day she would be flung unwanted and violently into space (5).

> *she saw* in the uneventful years *herself*, when skipping season was at its height, left endlessly turning the rope, while awaiting, wordless and patient, the briefest of turns (7).

Here is a girl who, like the migrant in Hampton's work, is so aware of her lack of 'rootedness', of the things she is not, and of her inability to belong that she imagines herself forever moving through space. Within the narrative this image of Vinny, flung-away and whirling, is juxtaposed against a settled backdrop of natural scenery — fig trees, cassias and giant casuarinas — all conversely with *roots*, all in place. She imagines being in space because she is *without* space.

Unlike *The Poetics of Space, A Descant for Gossips* is focalised, in part, through the child-in-the-home, rather than from the adult who has already *left* home. As a result, the passages I have presented above have none of the nostalgia associated with Bachelard's memory of the childhood home. As a 'first world' space Vinny's experience of home is not the emotionally stable, rural and middle-class experience Bachelard once wrote about. Quite the opposite, it is unstable in its predictable and often lonely stability. The narrative makes small of the already sad and lonely figure in Vinny. She is *clinging* to her *world*, fearful. She is forever turning a rope.

What is interesting is that the novel does not begin in domestic home-space, but out in the street, 'on the fringe of things', where loneliness is at its most noticeable. As

readers, we are with Vinny as she *moves* through the town, through all the places of rural belonging — the pool hall, the streets, the two publican bars. She is neither here nor there, but within an environment that, as an in-between space, draws attention to her excluded position. To be more precise, if 'home', as the traditional critiques suggest, is synonymous with 'belonging' then, for Vinny, 'home' can neither be located in the residential space nor in the public space. Vinny's home-life and school-life share an important commonality: she views herself as an outsider. She is friendless, taunted, left out by the older and more sexually aware girls. Similarly, within her family, she is a child amongst adults. Her sister and brother both have jobs to go to and experiences to talk about, while she, 'dismissed in careless hullo', is the 'reject' who goes 'truculently to an earlier bed' (114). The notion of 'home', for Vinny, is hardly a place of belonging or a retreat for solitude. In fact, it is this very solitude that makes her so conscious of her difference and exclusion.

Applying both Lefebvre's and Sarup's theoretical framework and the example of this theory as employed through the focalisation of Vinny in Astley's text, I too aimed to represent a perspective of home that understood continuity through the vision of discontinuity, and belonging through not-belonging. That is, for each of the characters in my novel, 'what one was' and 'what one had' were as important propositions as 'what one was not' and 'what one did not'. Potts, for example, sees himself without a family *precisely* because there's a family he loves and adores as a point of comparison 'across the road'. He knows himself (freckles, redheadedness and a wiry frame) through the opposites (large, hairy and dark) presented by his dad. He bases a whole journey to Albany and back on the very things he does *no*t know — his mother, the circumstances of her death, his forgotten memories. Ruby too has moments of alienation. Having newly discovered that she is pregnant, for example, she sees mothers and their babies

'everywhere' because, for a finite period, she is still not a mother herself. At the same time, however, she sees a little girl, walking as if in a daze and being taken care of, because, in pregnancy, while Ruby cannot yet identify with being a mother, she also can no longer identify with being a girl (72, 73). That is, Ruby sees herself through what she is not. And what she is not frightens her.

Outsider: other and otherness

When Lefebvre talks about alienation he makes an important distinction between 'other' and 'otherness'. To paraphrase — the former, he argues, is something (possibly) friendly and accessible. It offers itself to us, up to a point, and when it looks at us, we do not feel uneasy. In contrast 'otherness' is distance: an inaccessibility which threatens, frightens and drags us away. To pass from 'other' to 'otherness' is to discover something unknown or something distant in what is near. What we knew, and what we were familiar with, moves away and plunges us into the depths of uncertainty (Vol 2 215). Similarly *heimlich (*or 'homelike') begins as façade. That which is like a home appears as if one thing on the surface but is really something else beneath. To the person perceiving from the outside-in only the outer layer is visible. Any difference, any unhomely stirring, is shrouded in secrecy — we perceive the other, but not the otherness. For example, in Astley's text, when Vinny views both houses and shops within her neighbourhood, she sees a *flatness* that points to *no* emotion behind the façades, but makes everything appear *strangely* two-dimensional (5). She doesn't see the goings-on inside, and in particular, the 'adultery and drunkenness' that we, as readers, experience through shifts in focalisation. (14). What she does notice, however, since her own father abandoned his family, and since her mother was left with the dual and often conflicting responsibilities of provider and nurturer, is the nuclear norm. Central to her concern is an understanding through

overheard conversation, magazine images and personal experience of what a home *should be* like. For Vinny, the myth becomes the norm, and her family, the other. When, in the textual space, Vinny *imagines* everyone else's home as in the 'magazines' — overflowing with bright rooms, adult conversation and 'momentous works of gelatines and ices, sandwiches and open glazed tarts', she is in fact purchasing (whether it be passively or not) 'the happy housewife', the cohesive 'family'. It is not surprising, then, that Vinny only ever sees her mother *within* the home-space. Although, as readers, we are conscious Mrs Lalor has a paying job, we do not know what it is. Neither the narrator nor any of the focalising characters take us to her everyday life in a paid working environment. Rather, her role, as far as we are concerned, is reflective of a greater socio-ideology: she is principal carer. At the same time, however, she is represented in terms of her failed attempts at this role. Through Vinny she is seen *red-faced* and *dirty* at the kitchen stove (53), *loverlike* over the ironing (115), feverishly joggling needle and cotton in her *arthritic fingers* (183), *eyes hallowed* from lack of sleep (207). Her 'burdened' body is not the body pictured in the magazines, but rather it is abandoned and ravished, sexualised and subsequently 'caged' within the everyday space of shame, responsibility and domesticity. While other mothers participate in the community, while they accompany their girls to the school formal and madden them 'by plucking at a hem or twitching rebellious belts and sashes' (186), Vinny's mother stays at home. Without a husband she is unlike the maternal norm, set apart and without common identity, because she is unable to even call herself a 'housewife' let alone be one. For Vinny, then, the implications of her father 'walking out' are far reaching. To a certain extent she romanticises and even desires whatever private abuses the 'other families' endure. She views façades without passing into otherness and concludes that a father at home (and,

by association, a mother that is successful in the cultural ideal of mothering) would give her a sense of community or likeness.

In a similar way, in *Familiar Places,* Potts, focalising from the point-of-view of the child in the home and as an outsider to the appearances of Louise Sweet's family life, also sees a cultural norm. Walking home from the pool-hall one evening, after a tense moment with his dad, he notices the lights on at Louise's house, and although he can't hear the television, he imagines for himself '. . . Mum, Dad and Louise, on chairs and beanbags, having hot chocolates' all of them, *together*, 'watching' (17). Even with certain knowledge — his first image of Louise lying stretched across the road wanting to 'get run over', the persistent sneaking out through her bedroom window to meet up with a string of different men, her promiscuous reputation and her acknowledgement that Potts was 'lucky to have the father he had' (30) — all Potts sees is 'a mum in the garden, and a dad who (comes) home at five-thirty on the dot' (68). Ostensibly, there are things that Louise does not share, and while there are questions as to the stability of *her* homelife, these questions, within the narrative, do remain unanswered. Since the narrator of *Familiar Places* can only give, through focalisation, what Potts sees, hears or experiences, and since Louise, as a character, seems quite unlikely to share 'home-truths', then the elements that remain hidden to Potts also remain hidden to the reader. As such, Potts's longing for the home that he *believes* others (in particular, Louise) to have is so strong that while he is on the road, stuck behind a string of cars, he thinks of his dad . . . 'of vomit crusted on a bathroom door'; of Louise . . . 'her breath mainly but also the way she liked to smoke'; and also of his mum . . . 'or rather not his mum, but the emptiness in him without her' (42). These thoughts, put together, represent for Potts the home he has (vomit crusted on a bathroom door); the home he'd like to have (Louise and the seeming perfectness of her family); and the element of home that is

missing (a mother). Potts's conclusions, then, are similar to those drawn by Vinny: he views façade without passing into otherness.

The shock of recognition

Throughout my writing praxis I understood the character's journey as a process of discovery that required the inevitable passing from other to otherness. In this respect, I found certain links between Lefebvre's work on alienation/disalienation and Freud's conceptualisations of *heimlich/unheimlich*. More specifically, the etymology of the word *heimlich* is such that its meanings — from familiar and intimate, to strange, hidden and concealed — continue to shift until *heimlich* becomes aligned with its opposite: *unheimlich* or 'uncanny' (which for Sigmund Freud, as with Ernst Jentsch, is that which incites a feeling of fear, discomfort, anxiety or even repulsion (Freud 339, 340, 345; Jentsch 3, 4, 6)). Like the passage from other to otherness, *heimlich* becomes *unheimlich* through discovery. What ought to have remained secret and hidden comes to light (Freud 345). There is a shock of recognition. What was once homelike is now unhomely. But more than that, 'something is frightening, not because it is unfamiliar or new, but because what used to be familiar has somehow become strange' (Masschelein 3).

For the girl in fiction, and especially for the girl who takes her identity from the way others perceive her, the process of discovery, the other to otherness, and the 'knowing' that shifts one meaning of *heimlich* to another is one which often coincides with new and sexual awareness. From Vinny's point of view, for example, since her mother, rejected, is not the mother of her imagination, 'home', like her body and her mother's body — 'poor', 'unwanted' and 'cheap' — is situated on the locus of rejection *and* shame. What follows, for Vinny, is hardly an 'emotionally saturated longing' for 'home as mother' as Roberta Rubenstein suggests of traditional theoretical critiques (14),

but rather a complete denial of the maternal and, by association, the sexual self. In Vinny's eyes the reproductive body, and everything new she learns about it, is met with embarrassment or indignity. Menstruation, for example, is remembered as an awkward conversation in which what her mother described as the most 'natural' thing was in fact, to Vinny, an object of disaster, proof that she too could bear children. 'I hate it,' she says. 'I'd rather not be normal. I wish I were a boy' (224). The burgeoning female body, as the object of the male gaze, also holds for her a sense of shame. Seeing her adversary, Pearl Warburton, through the hidden veil of a lantana, 'stark naked', all 'breasts and thighs' and poised out on a diving rock in front of her brother's (and two of his friends') *guzzling*, desiring eyes, not only puzzles and scares her, it sends her running back through the town and towards her home 'like a mad thing' (118). Pregnancy, too, frightens her:

> She still remembered . . . all the rows and then her father leaving and her mother suddenly taken by ambulance one night, sweating the pain in rivers, in tides, in oceans, and then no baby, but her mother back home again, thinner than ever under the warped timbers of the house, just at the time when the seed pods were splitting open on the cassias (74).

There is a certain 'shabbiness' that Vinny associates with both motherhood and 'home' (74), a threat of domesticity and economic dependence. What Vinny desires is the '*burdenless*' body: 'girls, young men, and elderly *seedless* women' (73). No longer a girl and not yet a woman, she cannot separate her maturing self from the ideologies that oblige the simultaneous *exposure* and *enclosure* of the female form. With each shift in knowledge — menstruation, sexual attention, pregnancy, abandonment — the borders between home and world, private and public coalesce, and her experience of home becomes recognisably complex. Consider the final chapters where she comes to believe,

despite never having been sexually active, that she, like her mother once was before she was abandoned, is pregnant. Unable to cope with the constant taunting, the loss of her 'boyfriend', and the harrowing and persistent thought that she may be carrying his baby, she turns to 'home', to that 'safe' place, that place of 'retreat'.

> Home took her in with a union of safety and non-safety to the steady things, the reliable bladebone stew, the dried apricots soaked overnight and stewed ragged in too much sugar, the sweetened white sauce in the brown jug. All the things that had given the security to home for years and had gone unnoticed, now blazed their unalterable ordinariness across the fear-filled blank of her sky. She felt despairingly she could no longer touch or taste or enjoy these things in ever the same way again (229, 230).

Here, home is rendered strange. It is, as Astley describes elsewhere in the text, 'more normal than normal, more real than real' (119). The things that are most familiar and most recognisable have been disrupted by something quite unfamiliar. New knowledge, sexual knowledge, the knowledge that she may be pregnant — these things *change* the way she perceives her 'home'. She eats with her family as she always does. She tells herself she is the *same* . . . the *same* . . . (221). Yet, invariably, she stares at the 'stared-at' bedroom walls, and she feels as if these 'shabby walls' will never again 'hold her in the . . . *same innocent* way' (252). Dried apricots, familiar stew, white sauce served in a brown jug — these things are of no solace. In fact, they are a source of oppression. The very repetition that would normally be comforting, cages her. For it is no longer the *same*. It is different. *She* is different. Pushed from other to otherness, into a point of knowing, familiar is made strange. *Heimlich, unheimlich.*

Using Vinny as an example of the 'girl' in fiction and, in particular, the 'girl' whose perception of home changes with each shift into new and often sexual

knowledge, I began to explore the possibilities of a changing or moving perception (in my own work) through the character, Ruby. What I wanted was to be true to Lefebvre's premise of 'dialectical movement' and to the 'never-ending passing from otherness to other' (Vol 2 215). So, while in *A Descant for Gossips* Vinny's changing awareness is structured such that she almost *always* appears frightened and shocked by discovery; Ruby, in comparison, undulates waves of alienation/disalienation. Several times throughout the narrative — sexual awareness, pregnancy, marriage, living in Albany, childbirth, relationship breakdown — she is represented as being alienated or distressed by new experience, but after a while, as Lefebvre suggests of the process of knowing, she 'bring(s) it closer' to herself (Vol 2 215). It becomes familiar. And in familiarity, she is *disalienated . . .* until the next alienation.

With every wave of knowledge, Ruby's perception of home changes. As a girl she views 'home' as a place of inward reality and outward appearance. Her home-life is that of wealth — 'peppermint-lined houses, swimming pools, tennis courts and two-storey fairytales' — but it is also her father's infidelity and her mother's reluctance to leave him. Consequently she sees 'mother' as bored and frustrated, and 'home' as an unrealised dream — 'mum and dad and two perfect blonde girls' (13-14). As a young woman, and as a resident of a university boarding college, her perception coincides with a renewed sense of community, youth and hope, which represents, for her, the possibility of a 'home' other than 'mother' and other than that of 'feathered birds confined to cages' (13). In a way, university provides a form of escape from 'home as mother'. So, like Vinny, when Ruby falls pregnant, this knowledge is met with trepidation, fear and avoidance. 'She does not tell anyone . . . She locks herself in her room. She draws the curtains and ignores Marion's knocks at the door' (72). Even, in Albany, in the months before her expected due date, she throws herself into renovation,

work, painting, anything that wipes away not only her history, but also her pregnancy (115-118). Her passage, then, from 'girl' to 'mother' is not an easy one. She goes from being able to escape 'mother' to *being* 'mother' in one narrative space, and her experience of 'home' changes accordingly. 'White walls. Firelight. A couch. A coffee table. Every step she takes. Every step of Jack's . . . reflected deep into their lounge-room floor' — these images quickly become 'littered with tissues, washcloths, bibs, towels and nappies' (114,145), and she, now *a mother,* is 'eyes of black circles' (146), a 'broken body' (139), 'something familiar gone strange' (140). So it continues. In waves of ups and downs. The process of discovery. Familiar. Strange. *Heimlich. Unheimlich.* The shock of recognition.

Returning to Bachelard

In *The Poetics of Space,* Bachelard draws on binary positions to study something as simple as a door: 'and then, onto what, toward what, do doors open? Do they open for the world of men, or for the world of solitude?' (224). Implicit in this statement is the idea that people, or more specifically, men, go to work, live their everyday journeys and *come back* home. From first-world space to transience, home provides solitude and privacy. Work is outside. Poetry is inside. Home, for Bachelard, is a positive experience. Home, according to other theorists, is also a place of drudgery and neglect (Rose 55). It is the gendered domestic. It is exclusion, the site of oppression. By approaching 'home' in terms of its negative opposite my aim was to represent not only the 'other' but also the process by which this 'other', alienated and different, oscillates towards disalienation and back again. My questions — if home was the site of belonging, then what was it to not belong? What was 'home' in the eyes of the outsider? And what was it in terms of gendered expectations? — led me towards an exploration of theoretical and fictional

literature that I felt weakened the notion of Bachelard's 'first-universe' space as a fundamental place of belonging, as a place made 'magical' by mother, and as a place where one could locate his/her identity. As a result, the experiences of 'home' represented in my novel, *Familiar Places*, not only shift with each shift of the subjective gaze, but also with each change of experience. Even so, both Bachelard and the thread of thought presented throughout this chapter share the same limitation: in order to define 'home' we search for distinction between the 'in' and 'out'. We look at convention. At secrets. At the private and public dispositions. At other. And while this enables an understanding of 'home' via perception, it still creates a narrative, however focalised, that is ultimately singular, bounded and dependent on the existence of a binary position.

Chapter Two

— Inhabiting Transient Spaces —

Movements of home

As I know my way around my house, so I know my way around all the familiar places of my 'habitat'.

— Edward Casey: The Fate of Place (233)

In this chapter, I wish to explore how theories of space have enabled me to represent the expanding and contracting movements of 'home'. My purpose, in developing a different perspective to the more traditional notion of the childhood home and its inevitable links with 'home as mother', 'home as a field of desired return', and 'home as a place of confinement', was to let go of the usual associations with stasis, permanence and often nostalgia, and instead redefine 'home' as a site of transience and fluidity. I found myself drawn to the work of Henri Lefebvre, Edward Relph, Marc Augé, Michel de Certeau, and then ultimately to Doreen Massey's argument that 'place identity' (and, by association, 'home identity') was created not out of the security of comforting and bounded enclosures, but rather by ongoing and interweaving social relations and by the effects produced by these relationships (1994 169).

My desire to develop an alternative perspective for the concept of 'home' came from a certain dissatisfaction with Gaston Bachelard's attempts to establish a relationship between place, belonging and identity. While the 'childhood home' in his *Poetics of Space* was remembered lovingly and was seen as comforting, bounded and enclosed in the stillness of memory, this 'land of Motionless Childhood, motionless the

way all Immemorial things are' (5), was still nevertheless focalised from the point of view of someone who had moved on. For me, this had problematic implications. Bachelard's childhood home, seen from spatial and temporal distance, was formed out of what Doreen Massey would argue are notions of nostalgia and security (1994 166). It had ceased to exist as an actual location that could move forward with time, and instead took on an imagined and static form. Bachelard remembered it as he had left it, *better than he had left it*. It was warmer. Cooler. More comforting (10). But importantly, once the memory was made it became 'secure' and 'fixed in place' (9). Constructed through daydream, it had all 'the treasure of former days' (6). There was still a room at the end of the garret, still a deep cupboard, still the odour of drying raisins (13). I felt that in his wistfulness for the past, Bachelard was denying his childhood home (and its current occupants) both a present *and* a future. I felt also that this 'first' house, constructed as it was, existed *precisely* because there was another subsequent, more transient location — a Parisian high rise, a 'superimposed box', an urban longing for rural community — to remember and create it from. The limitation, as I saw it, therein lay in his choice to narrate from one particular life-trajectory. Because Bachelard's narrative, written from the point of view of the nostalgic adult, focussed primarily on the *memory* of 'home as mother' or 'home as a place of childhood belonging', there was the inevitable prerequisite that he should 'leave home' in order to write about it elsewhere. It shaped his perspective.

My research explored other points of view, and this, in turn, influenced my creative piece. I wanted to understand the possibilities of representing home as focalised through the mother or the child *in* the home, rather than through the adult who had *left* home. But, while on the one hand, seen from the outside-in and with time as a buffer, home was a place of origin and imagined return, and on the other, seen from the inside-

out, it was the place one wanted to escape, these polar positions, although they began to frame 'home' in terms of a seer and a seen, still left much unaccounted for. What I wanted, then, was to explore, in my own writing, an account of 'home' that came not from one position or the other, but worked to understand the tension between the two.

The framework of the *heimlich,* particularly its positive associations, perhaps provided an appropriate springboard. If home was to be seen in terms of things familiar, then the many complicated movements of everyday life could be justifiably represented as homelike. Routine, disruption to routine, public spaces, travel spaces, and spaces of work and leisure, while not necessarily homes themselves, provided (at least for the characters I wanted to write about) the experience of it. What attracted me to this approach was the unavoidable blurring of boundaries between inside and outside, home and away, here and there. Unfixed and indeterminate, 'home' would take into account a whole host of dynamic and changing social relationships.

Not surprisingly, then, theorists of space intrigued me. I read that place was produced by moving displacements (de Certeau 108). That mobility created fleeting spaces, 'non-places' — freeways, airways, department stores, supermarkets, cable networks — where people could cohabit without actually living together (Augé 78-79; 110). There was the notion of the city, the tireless repetition of the street, its many passages, the interactions of desire, movement and communication (Lefebvre Vol 2 310). But what I found most interesting in terms of 'home' was that, aside from the feminist perspective, the domestic sphere received little attention. Certainly the theorists I mentioned alone focused more on public domains than on the everyday routines, habits and acts of transience that occurred within private spaces. Despite offering various fragments regarding the insistent repetition of daily chores and pleasures, more often than not, it was 'the street rather than the home that (was) seen as the privileged

sphere of everyday life.' (Highmore 2002 12). In a way, however, by neglecting the notion of 'home', these theorists provided me with a means to *extend* it. If home was to be formed out of the conduct of daily living, then it would no longer need to be contained by wall or border. Rather it would be found in the 'movements of life'. In one of my readings Minha-ha Trinh poses the question: 'For . . . where does dwelling stop' (14)?

It was my belief that dwelling *did not* stop. It was infinite, unbounded. An experience of familiarity rather than a location. An activity. Home could exist through space, between places and across the network of habitual and familiar routines. Indeed these insights were implicit to all aspects of my writing. If home was to be seen as transient and fluid, then my interpretation of theory and my analysis of Astley's *A Descant for Gossips* would lead me to produce a creative piece that would be about movement and, in particular, about shared spaces, journeys, and the repetition of everyday life.

Movement and the sense of placelessness

In 1976 Edward Relph wrote about the erosion of place. He suggested that increased mobility, popular culture, tourism and mass movements of people 'with all their fashions and habits' homogenised the world and 'encouraged the spread of placelessness' (90). Spaces, he feared, were becoming more and more indistinguishable from each other. They not only looked alike and felt alike, they offered the same bland possibilities (Relph 90). People had shifted around so much they had lost their connection with the world. They were existential outsiders with no sense of identity or authenticity to any particular place (82). More recently, in *The Lure of the Local*, Lucy Lippard argues that mobility has been more American than stability (40). She reflects on

her own heritage and notes that it was rare for two or three generations to stay in the same place. Reading these theorists, I thought back to my family and found that we also had similar experiences. We had moved from place to place for study or work. We had travelled to cities far away and 'more exotic'. We had swung between country centres and urban spaces, like pendulums, unable to settle at all. But did we feel like we had lost our connections to the world? I, for one, didn't. In fact, I felt like I had *gained* connections. I felt like I knew many localities, each with their own *unique* rather than bland possibilities. Not surprisingly, in the writing of my creative piece I was drawn to the landscape, culture and community of the places I had lived in; Bunbury, Albany and Perth were chosen partly because of theoretical conjecture, but also because of the many years I spent traversing the roads within and between them. Like Lippard, and unlike Relph, I *expected* a certain amount of mobility. I wanted to write about these spaces, not from the vision of characters who saw them as 'indistinguishable', but rather from the perspective of those who perceived their differences as discerning, who found their 'placeless' similarities a source of comfort, and who came to expect rather than deny movement as an aspect of 'home'.

Astley's *A Descant for Gossips* is a good example of a novel which represents the creeping sense of placelessness that Relph talks about. Gungee, the town where the novel is set, is constructed neither as a city nor as completely rural. Rather, like Bunbury and Albany, it occupies, as David Bell and Mark Jayne put it, a strange in-between category (5). Its access to various health, recreational and social services — a high school, a pub, the butter factory and a medical centre among other things — make it far from pastoral. But, unlike the city space, there is a certain reliance on satellite communities and outsiders for support. Small shifts — crossings from regional centre to regional centre, work-related postings, weekend trips to Brisbane, or else to 'little'

places, 'retreats' with names like Tin Can Bay and Snapper Creek (127), are not only required, they are accepted as the norm. As a result, characters such as Helen Streibel and Robert Moller (both posted school-teachers, transferred in and easily transferable out) have moved around so much that their attitude to the town is constructed, as Relph suggests of placelessness, as inauthentic (82).

Helen, in particular, is represented as not 'inside place'. Like those in Relph's suppositions, she does not belong or identify with Gungee, for the condition of 'placelessness' does not allow her to (49). Her home, for example, a hotel room, is essentially 'a traveller's space'. It is not a space she has chosen, but rather one allocated to her through the nature of her work. Here, home-life occurs behind the roar of 'morning drinkers', 'starting-price punters' and 'farmers in for the Saturday beer' (253). Never once called a 'home' within the narrative space, Helen's lodgings are both magnificent and sombre. The 'majestic backdrop of sin', the 'wide dark stairs marching upwards', and the 'ranks of red faces packed with sacred male preserve' draws attention to and makes visible the ways in which she (young, female and recently widowed) occupies this space (254). And yet, while the 'brown linoleum in the hall, the grey air, and *behind* the stairs, on the ground floor, the number of doors *closed* or *half-open*' (254 emphasis added) make her accessible to those who want just enough information to find gossip, these structures also paradoxically deny her any reciprocal access to the hotel's pub community. Rather, they act as a barrier, a division between the public and private spaces. Further, as a domestic space, the hotel has none of the permanence, security and enclosure that is commonly associated with the notion of home. Helen's room, in particular, is 'nothing more than a cavity *veranda'd* and *corridored* at each opening' (33 emphasis added). Once 'an outside', now 'an inside', it is a space temporarily afforded to her, since it is she who has added 'the intelligence of personality with prints tacked on

the wall, a mantel radio, a clock, books and magazines' (33). But it is also a space that is easily transformed — emptied out, polished and made bare — from one occupant to the next. As such, when Helen says, 'I've had no kindness for years. Nothing but hotel rooms and commercial travellers and drunks and publicans and baking roads into steaming schools with undisciplined classes' (110-111), she is not only constructed as paralleling Gungee's sameness with other towns, she is marking its reluctance to allow her to become, as Relph puts it, an 'existential insider' (55).

Not surprisingly, the very places Helen is most at ease, the places where she 'drops her persona', as J. Douglas Porteous would say (108), and finds the level of comfort and privacy consistently attributed to the notion of 'home' are quite often moving or public spaces. In a train carriage that is 'practically empty', for example, she sits 'as she *always* (does) . . . by the last window' (120). She catches the ghostly glimpse of her own face, and in a solitary vision that validates Edward Relph's negative evaluation of *placelessness*, town after tiny Australian town stamps 'skinny farmers and dumpy housewives' across the dusty glass (121). However, contrary to the belief that this sameness ought to make her feel disconnected, Helen is reassured. In the mode of travel, these things are familiar. They are what she knows. Far from being disconnected, she is 'happy at heart beyond belief' (121).

Reading this scene*,* I spent long hours thinking about Helen on that train. Relph's notion of placelessness, while it focussed on the relationship between near and elsewhere, neglected to consider the moving space in any positive light. Place, for him, was still a bounded concept. It had history, community. Roads, railways and airports, by contrast, while blamed for the spread of placelessness, could never satisfy the criteria for place (90). Regardless of their nature, these were spaces unable to offer any feeling of either belonging *or* alienation.

And yet, there she was, Helen, on a train, happy.

Inhabiting shared spaces, non-places

Like Relph, theorist Marc Augé examines what he terms 'spaces of circulation, consumption and communication' (110). But rather than see these spaces as destructive to the notion of place, he argues that they are, in their own right, peculiar kinds of places: 'non-places' (78-79). Marked by transience and mobility, these are the kinds of spaces that can be crossed and recrossed and made new with every indirect interaction. Unlike the conventional anthropological place, which Augé argues is 'invested with meaning' (52), these spaces of movement, these shared spaces, are without relation, history or concern for identity (Auge 77, 78). Or else, they are, in the post-structural, post-modern viewpoint, of multiple and infinite histories, none immediately obvious, all a part some other ongoing life (Massey 2005 119).

The hotel in *A Descant for Gossips,* because of its dual function as a traveller's space *and* a home space, is not a true non-place. It doesn't put the 'individual in contact only with another image of himself' (Auge 79). Nor is it formed out of solitary contractuality (Auge 94). What it lacks, and what other non-places provide, is the chance to disappear, to become anonymous. Unlike the hotel, for example, the moving car provides a 'private spatio-temporal vacuum' (Pearce 165). Despite the fact that the road it traverses is a road for many, the car, travelling 'not across space-as-surface, but . . . across (many) trajectories,' (Massey 2005 119) incites the illusion of aloneness. The train platform, Brisbane, the 'loneliness of the tramline . . . packed with people and movement and pulsating life' (62), the night-time and veiling street (34) — these spaces, with their *continual* shifting of crowds, people and stories, are at once visible spaces *and* spaces of anonymity.

This suggests then, that the sense of 'home' can be, as Doreen Massey argues, constructed out of movement, communication and social relations (1994 170-171). Spaces that are supposedly without history or community can, in fact, be homelike: a source of comfort. In the narrative space, Helen, on a train, is certain acknowledgement of interconnectivity. Her movements not only resonate with, they are formed through, 'a whole range of (her) crossings, real and imagined' (McElroy 94). She is 'not just travelling through or across space', she is 'helping to alter space, to participate in its continuing production' (Massey 2005 118). At either end of her journey there are places, people, each with their own ongoing social trajectories. Gungee is no longer the Gungee she has left behind, (a fact highlighted by the placing of this storyline — Helen travelling to meet Moller for what is ultimately a sexual liaison — next to, and in concurrent temporality, with the scenes of Vinny, at the swimming hole, spying on the burlesque interactions between her brother and a semi-naked Pearl Warburton). The narrative therefore not only recognises each character's forward moving existence, it *insists* that place, home-place and that which is homelike, exist in multiple movements of both time and space. Far from being bland then, Helen's possibilities, in the mode of travel, are endless. Precisely because the non-place is supposedly void of meaningful history, Helen, on a train, or for that matter the car, the road, the art gallery, is able to use the shifting space to her advantage. She is able to negate her own past — her husband's death, the community's cliquey groups, her everyday boredom — and recreate for herself new narratives. Other narratives. Narratives which cannot be bound by traditional meaning, but rather require, as Tim Cresswell suggests, 'new mobile ways of thinking' (2004 46).

It is not surprising, then, that the dual anonymity and comfort of these familiar and in-between spaces — where the 'road and trees (become) a kind of rhythm, and

they (speak) little, and the minutes (slip) away as quickly as the miles' (127) — enable Helen and Moller to pursue their romance. Intimacies not shared in either one of their 'homes', for fear of what gossips may say, are hidden out in the open. 'We look back,' Helen thinks, 'and there we are feeding the swans in the park, or travelling between this town and that, all night, standing in the corridor outside the lavatories because all the seats are taken, and talking, joking most of the way' (175). The difficulty in this, however, is that these spaces also write the vocabulary for their relationship. It is as Augé argues: 'certain places exist only through the words that evoke them' (95). They create an image, a myth. They perpetuate the cliché. And the cliché here is that of the illicit affair. Helen is conscious of her reputation; and Moller, despite his wife's illness, paraplegia and institutionalisation, is still a married man. In choosing to shift their domestic intimacies into moving and transient spaces, they are, on the one hand, forming new areas of privacy, but on the other, entering their relationship into an already-defined (and public rather than private) space. On a train platform beneath 'canned food advertisements', the 'arrogance of their loving' is reduced to 'the flat sordidity of torn posters and scribbled-on walls' (121). In the woman's waiting room, 'childish pornographies (invite Helen) to gross behaviour' (124). And later, when the relationship is exposed, notices such as, 'MR MOLLER LOVES MRS. STRIEBEL' and other 'more direct terms' (141, 142) are chalked at first *inside* lavatory walls, and then 'two feet high across the bitumen road strip . . . crudely to the point' (145).

What this illustrates, perhaps, is a reluctance to accept the possibility that 'home' can, in fact, be infinite and unbounded. A relationship conducted in the seedy public spaces of out-of-town hotels and train platforms is a relationship that is not contained by the traditional circumspection of 'home'. Helen and Moller's fondness of between spaces, non-places and places that are identified not by closed-in walls but by criss-

crossing trajectories may be figurative of a post-modern shift into multiplicity, but for members of the Gungee community, especially the community that exposes and rejects Helen for her romance with Moller, this fondness is not one that is easily accepted. Mysterious, different and elusive in a way that cannot be captured by any fixed point in time, the spaces Helen traverses are the kinds of spaces which are often said to cause fear and disorientation (Massey 1994 171). To accept Helen is not only to accept her role as 'other woman', it is to accept her inhabitation of these spaces as part of the inevitable, yet for some, fearful, conflation between home and world. In a way, the community has little choice but to remove Helen from their locality. To remove her, to gossip about her, to stand her up and highlight all that is different about her, is to establish an identity for themselves that is positioned against the other. Moreover, it is to remind themselves of their own security and to validate the perception that 'home' ought to be bounded, private and enclosed.

One of the outcomes I wanted to achieve in my creative praxis was to write a novel in which the idea of 'home' was represented as an 'activity' rather than a 'place'. Following Massey's line of enquiry, I not only wanted to explore the possibility that 'home' could be constructed out of the movements of daily life, I wanted to reiterate that shared or public spaces — at once visible, veiling and, for some, frightening — could in fact be private, comforting and homelike. More so, I wanted to explore the inhabitation of these spaces and the implications of homelike activity within them.

Like Helen and Moller, Potts and Louise in *Familiar Places* develop their romance in spaces, more often than not, outside of the home. The beach, the car, the nightclub — each of these locations provide, if momentarily, enough privacy for sexual and emotional intimacies. For Potts, in particular, these are the spaces where he can access a

sense of common or equal ground with Louise. While interactions at home — cooking dinner for her, sitting at a meal and blurting out declarations of love — leave him looking and feeling desperate for the fantasy of family, in public his desires for the idealised home seem to go unnoticed. Wyalup Beach, for example — a non-place, a shared space, a space of numerous and untold histories — absorbs whatever concerns he has for his personal home-life, and instead leaves him only with the desire to add the narrative of romance to all the other narratives hidden beneath the 'myriad of soil and rock types' (57). His car also, like the car Helen and Moller drive, and like the car theorised by Lynne Pearce, provides him with a private vacuum. In it, all there is, is Louise.

> It didn't matter that his dad thought he was an idiot. It didn't matter that the car was actually falling apart. Potts didn't care, because Louise, bored with the street crowd, caught his eye, lifted her skirt and traced her fingers slowly along her thigh (91).

Likewise, in the alternate narrative, Ruby exhibits a similar feeling of comfort and accessibility towards city spaces or spaces that emulate a city-like experience. In Albany, after failing to find a sense of belonging at home or in the community, Ruby participates in a whaling protest:

> Outside the gates of the station, she relishes the crowd. It is a city-sized crowd. It is the kind of crowd that pushes and moves and jostles against each other. She imagines herself in the middle of Perth, this same rally marching all the way to Parliament House. In the wave of demonstration she is separated from Marion, and then reunited again. She is like a current, like a part of the ocean (205-206).

What is common about these spaces, as with the spaces represented in *A Descant for Gossips*, is their impermanence. The homelike experience, for Ruby as for Potts, is one which occurs not just *in* space but as a result of social relations *with* space. The protest crowd, like the beach, is a space of flux and change. It is arguably unsafe and uncontrolled, but at the same time, Ruby finds it comforting. Her interactions with it are similar to Potts's interactions with the beach. Not only is she is absorbed by it, it enables her to let go of her own underlying emotional narrative. In shouting, 'a whale is a whale' (205) while carrying a baby, she is protesting not just for humane concerns, but also for the right to release her grief. Consequently, by expressing herself in a way that is traditionally reserved for 'closed doors', she is taking the impermanent space, and she is using it, intentionally or otherwise, like Helen in *A Descant for Gossips*, and also like Potts and Louise, to conflate home and world. However, in doing so, she too is vilified. She is photographed, shown in the news and ignored. It is as if her behaviour, uncontained, uncontrolled and unaccepted (since it occurs in a public space), is highlighted and viewed by others — 'what a fucked up place for a baby?' (206) — as disconcerting and frightening.

Banalities of everyday life

In *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder and Women*, Elizabeth Wilson explores the fear of the non-place in the work of early twentieth century writers such as Franz Kafka, Robert Musil, Virginia Woolf and Dorothy Richardson. Looking particularly at the representation of the city space, Wilson argues that while many male writers of this period drew a 'threatening picture of the modern metropolis . . . woman writers responded with joy and affirmation' (157). Referring specifically to Wilson's study, Doreen Massey, in *Space, Place and Gender* suggests that the more masculine

interpretations of the city — as a place of disorder, complexity and chaos — are born from a particular view, and that this view (which sees place and personal identity as singular, fixed, static, bounded and enclosed) is contestable (1994 171). The 'identity of place', she believes, is far more open and dynamic than these representations allow. Like cultural identity, it is continuously produced and reproduced (1994 171). Formed by social relations, and by the effects of these relations, place identity is, in her understanding, inevitably unfixed and indeterminate, precisely because the 'social relations out of which they are constructed are themselves, by their very nature, dynamic and changing' (1994 169). In contrast to the reading of home in terms of apparent security, she insists that the identity of place is not only wider than the area being referred to as place, it is, in part, constructed out of positive interrelations with an elsewhere (1994 169). The fear of boundaries dissolving is therefore, in her view, an effect of one's reluctance to recognise interconnectivity (170).

Since, during the writing process, I was conscious of the expanding and contracting movements of 'home', the notion of repetition formed a large part of my praxis. In repetition, familiarity not only drew on and acknowledged the kind of interconnectivity Massey spoke about, it accepted that 'home' existed in all aspects of ordinary life. To consider 'home' and 'journey' as the 'daily movements — physical, cultural and linguistic — of subjects and their everyday lives' (McElroy 94), was to enable, at least for me, a way into writing that moved beyond the notion of seclusion, and therefore also beyond the fears such an idea produced. An interest in Henri Lefebvre, at this point, led me to, of all things, window shopping. 'Queen things . . . Fairy things. . . Capital . . . Factories . . . Alienation . . .' (Vol 2 312). Like Massey, Lefebvre recognised that everyday life was a reflection of all the different aspects of sociality. Something as simple as a woman buying sugar, he said, not only mirrored

individual and social desire, it was completely entwined in the fabric of economic and global analysis (Vol 1 57). If that was the case, I was back to the question I started from: 'for . . . where does dwelling stop'? (Trinh 14). Seemingly banal and trivial events — walking to the mailbox, travelling to work, returning and going to the supermarket were not only our most travelled journeys and inhabited spaces, they formed our landscape (Highmore 2002 2). They evidenced the inseparability of home and world. 'Home' expanded through commodity.

Familiar Places

After reading Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life*, I found it difficult to look at a packet of sugar in the same way again. Each shopping trip, for me, became a collection of depraved glances into other peoples' trolleys. At one point, and I remember this specifically, I crossed paths with an elderly woman buying a small selection of what appeared to be specific recipe items: a carton of milk, butter, a six-pack of eggs, and of course, a bag of sugar. What was peculiar to me was that her shopping was not in the base of her trolley, but in the more accessible toddler-seat; and then I noticed she had a hunched back. In that moment my ordinary trajectory from home to non-place, and then later back to home, intersected with the ordinary trajectory of this old lady. I wondered about the sugar. What was it for? Who was it for? Did she have a family? Grandchildren? Great-grandchildren? I wondered about her back. Her limbs. The logistics of her bending to reach for something at the bottom of that trolley. But I also wondered about other lives. Far away lives. Lives of people I had, until now, never considered. A worker in a cane field. The mechanical roar of those operating a refinery plant. A truck driver on the road. Figuratively, I took that old lady home with me. I wrote about her. In my creative piece the character Ruby has a similar interaction. For

Ruby, it incited, in line with Lefebvre, desire. She was purchasing a fantasy. For me, the sugar represented many things more. I understood that Ruby, at the protest, intersected with many lives — other protestors, workers behind fences, people who would lose their jobs, who would read the newspapers, who would see a picture of an angry woman, baby in hand, and those who would comment. And yet, in the shopping centre, buying sugar, she was given the opportunity to intersect once more. I saw from Massey's point of view: home, the sense of home, that which was homelike, drew on all aspects of everyday life. 'Home's' meaning was not a product of its own internal history but of a complicated network of pathways and social trajectories. Consequently, when I finally returned to my house from my own shopping trip I did not close the door on that old lady. Outside infiltrated inside. 'Home' was reproduced. It was neither *just* the place I returned to at the end of the day nor was it the place I occupied domestically. Rather, it was interlinked with all the other spaces I participated in, none mutually exclusive, all impacting on daily life.

When it came to writing my creative piece, 'home' was never in my mind a place of stasis. The 'home' I wanted to explore was one that could be found in the 'non-place'. I used the boarding college, the city space, the open road, the beach and most importantly the pool-hall, to represent a kind of home that could exist in the movements of life. I was very aware (and keen to employ in my own work) the tensions illustrated in Astley's text between the recognition of home as open, mobile and fluid, and home as a place of stable and meaningful history. In my own work these tensions were represented in a number of ways. The beach and the protest space, as I have already mentioned, were at once publicly available, shared, and uncontrolled spaces. However, this did not necessarily mean that they were, as Augé suggests of non-places, without history, relation or community. In fact, in my representation these were *precisely*

the kinds of spaces that formed, and would continue to form, both the histories of the characters *and* the histories of those who interacted with these characters. To give specific examples: Ruby at the protest, photographed, and then viewed on a museum wall, forms not only her own history, but also Potts's. In turn, Potts, viewing this picture, alters his trajectory back 'home' and to his dad, and in doing so, the museum — a space open and given to the constant tread of public history — contributes, in quite an unlikely way, to Potts's personal narrative. The pool hall, too, is constructed out of that same point of tension. Despite the fact that it is technically a non-place, it is also undeniably a place of history. For Potts, the pool-hall accounts as much for his past as the traditionally defined 'anthropological place'. History — in the sanding down of painted walls, in the relics of beach concrete, in other peoples' homes, and in printed, photographed museum spaces — was not at all something I privileged just for the home space. Far from being without a past, the non-places I wrote about in *Familiar Places* were rich with *multiple* pasts. But more importantly, they were rich with multiple *presents*. The pool hall functioned as a meeting place, as a place where several trajectories interacted and formed again and again. Like Massey's interpretations of place, like 'home', like the hotel, like the supermarket, it was continuously produced and reproduced. Precisely because it was transient and changing, it allowed me to represent 'home' not as a dwelling, but as a fluid collection of social relations, forward moving and expanding. More to the point, it served to acknowledge that 'home', as bell hooks once wrote, was no longer just one place. It was locations (148).

Chapter Three

— The Homelike Moment —

Routine Chores and Pleasures: the Maintenance of Personal Narrative

There is no place that is not haunted by spirits hidden in the silence. Haunted places are the only ones people can

live in.

— Michel de Certeau: The Practice of Everyday Life (108)

Writing *Familiar Places,* I conceived my novel as the kind of character-based narrative in which relatively little happened. The representation of 'self' and also of 'place as home' hinged not on exciting and tense plot structures, but on small movements — unnoticed, unquestioned and taken-for-granted patterns of everyday life. A sense of continuity (and an associated disruption of continuity) was critical to my representation of home. The *familiarity* of home, regardless of its nature — good, bad or otherwise, desired or hated — came to inform my sense of the project. It did not matter whether this familiarity was a positive or negative experience. What was important was that it was there, everyday, a *version* of the same thing, never *exactly* the same, but sufficiently recognisable that it suggested the strength and comfort of habitual banalities. I came to conceptualise 'home' in many ways, but at its core I saw it in terms of 'continual repetition, daily chores and routine pleasures' (Lefebvre Vol 1 40). As my novel developed, two very specific statements seemed particularly relevant. The first was Marc Augé's suggestions that the house is 'invested with meaning' and that this meaning is 'endorsed and

confirmed by every new circuit and every ritual reiteration' (52). The second was Yi-Fu

Tuan's assertion in *Space and Place: the Perspective of Experience* that:

> Abstract knowledge *about* a place can be acquired in short order if one is
>
> diligent. The visual quality of an environment is quickly tallied if one has the
>
> artist's eye. But the 'feel' of a place takes longer to acquire. It is made up of
>
> experiences, mostly fleeting and undramatic, repeated day after day and over
>
> the span of years. (183).

So important were these ideas to my work that I drew on both for the final

chapter focalised by Ruby as a way to represent the fundamental links between home,

self and the repetition of daily life. In both Augé's and Tuan's thoughts there is a certain

implication that 'home' is an experienced and lived space, one which can be defined, as

Mary Douglas argues, 'as an organisation of space over time' (294). That is: 'home

acquires its meaning through practice; and as such it forms part of the everyday process

of the creation of self' (Petridou 88). To give precise examples of how this is presented

in my work, Ruby, for instance, comes to stay in Albany, not because she loves it, but

because she becomes *used* to it. Jack relies on his daily movements and his routine habits

regardless of the consequences to his health. And Potts, after a coming-of-age journey

south and back, returns to Bunbury, because Bunbury, the pool hall, his dad, and their

emotionally distant and sometimes aggressive relationship are the elements that provide

consistency.

The 'feel' of a place then, made up of experiences, fleeting or otherwise, is

bound, as Anthony Giddens would suggest, to self-identity, which, understood in terms

on an ongoing biography, 'is not to be found in behaviour, nor . . . in the reactions of

others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going' (54). It follows that if

home is formed out of the process of everyday life, and if everyday life — its chores,

pleasures and embodied acts of movement — provides us with a sense of continuity, then 'home' may indeed be maintained by the narratives we tell ourselves. Home, in this way, is constructed via a mental inscape. It relates to the imagination. It cannot exist without either an observer or the distinctive activities — the 'psychological manoeuvres' that can 'propel' people into 'wishful thinking, fantasising, all kinds of storytelling' (Modjeska 75) — and the imaginings that frame that observer's point of view (Hubbarb, Kitchin and Valentine 5).

My understanding of these concepts meant that when it came to researching my novel I consciously searched for such 'activities' both in theory and in the analysis of Astley's *A Descant for Gossips*, and, in turn, this research came to inform my novelistic practice. What this chapter expands on, then, is the outcome of this research: 'home' as an imagined construct is represented in my work as being formed out of the physical banalities and distractions of everyday life. Repetitive and habitual movement, the body-in-space and other routine (but not necessarily daily) breaks from the more ordinary acts of living — reading the newspapers, redecorating, listening to music — not only provide portals into other spaces and timeframes, they also function as a way to recover and maintain (even if 'home' is oppressive, boring or undesirable) a sense of something predictable and known.

The repetition of Daily Life: Routines and Body Movements

Throughout the writing of the novel, I drew on the resonances of the word *heimlich* to help me present an idea of home that encompassed not just physical and domestic dwelling, but also relationships, public spaces, routines and everyday habits. Using what Freud describes as *heimlich's* various 'shades of meaning' (345), I specifically sought to represent 'home' in terms of the maintenance of personal narrative. It was my

understanding, from my research, that there is a certain familiarity that arises out of the repetition of daily life. There is an ease — a habitual and automatic ease — which results, for a time at least, in the kind of consistency that is often associated with the more positive meanings of the homelike. For phenomenologist David Seamon, this habitual familiarity is linked completely to the way the body moves and to the narrative of self. Everyday life, he argues, consists of path-movements, and these movements often occur pre-consciously (1980 152). Walking the same route to and from work, turning the wrong way because the wrong way is the right way in another circumstance, doing the dishes so as to keep busy — these are the kinds of habitual and *heimlich* movements which arise directly from the body (1980 154). In the ease of routine the body moves automatically. The 'hands know what to do' (1980 156). But more importantly the mind is freed from the proximity of the current environment. One can focus. One can tell stories. Or else, as Seamon explains, 'one can direct their . . . attention to wider, more significant life dimensions' (1980 156). However, at the same time, it is precisely this ease which provides a mask for any unpleasantness held beneath the surface. If a routine is performed to keep a certain narrative going, then while it creates the illusion of stability and permanence, it also functions, like the more negative understanding of *heimlich*, as a way to avoid, deny or repress other knowledge. To give a specific example of how this functions in fiction, Robert Moller in *A Descant for Gossips* sees himself, from the outset of the novel, as 'happy to be unhappy' (13). Reading 'The Wanderer' by Christopher Brennan, Moller finds himself identifying with the poet's search for (and ultimate disbelief in the existence of) a dream home. As he reads, Moller's 'present was pain with the past. It was all one thing — the wasting of café conversations in the student days and the weekly visits of squeezed-out talk with Lilian now. There was the group waving violently on the church steps . . . and here were the

empty rooms at night top-heavy with silence' (12). Moller, like the narrator of Brennan's poem, longs, as Roberta Rubenstein might suggest, not simply for 'home' (imagined or otherwise), but for 'the self that once inhabited that home' (4). The home he wanted, the home he dreamt of, once housed both him and a still-healthy Lilian. By contrast, he is now alone; Lilian is presented to the reader as bedridden, bored and 'too miserable to be interested in much' (24); and their house — a house *'invested with meaning'* — is consistently seen through Moller's eyes as empty, silent or lonely (12, 22, 44). He keeps it, he reasons, 'largely as a place for his books, somewhere to play a record and cook a quiet meal, or just to lie around in the months of June and November, *unhappy* in the debris of unmarked examination papers' (emphasis added 22). For Moller, then, his house is a palimpsest; it is layered with histories, with other ostensibly erased but still haunting narratives, and it is a reminder of a dream that can neither be recaptured nor erased. The predictability of what Henri Lefebvre describes as the 'regular return of hours, days, weeks, months, seasons and years' (Vol 2 47), the knowledge that there is school to go to, and home to return to, and dinners to make, and that in June and November there will *in fact* be examination papers to mark, is a knowledge far more preferable than the 'frightening weariness' of the weekly visits to Lilian in hospital and, in particular, to 'the tossed bed, the magazines, the sweet smells of ether and the oranges and the flowers' (24). In a way, if *heimlich* is both familiarity and the masking of something unpleasant within, then the unhappiness Moller experiences is, in fact, homelike. It provides for him a surface-narrative to cling to. This contentedness to be unhappy in the uncomplicated and ordinary passing of his day is a way to mask the greater unhappiness of his wife's deterioration. For Moller, routine, boring as it is, helps him to 'feel at home'. But 'to feel at home' is not necessarily a positive, restful

experience. Rather it is to link his subjectivity to an absence and to favour one version of 'home' and one narrative over another.

Earlier in the exegesis I spoke of the process of moving from 'other' to 'otherness'. This movement, like the shifting definitions of the word *heimlich,* is one which relies on the discovery of something hidden or distant in what is near. Lefebvre suggests that it is to be taken from what is known and familiar and to be plunged into the depths of uncertainty (Vol 2 215). Routine, for a character such as Moller, functions as a way to avoid such depths. For Moller, there is *no* movement between other and otherness. Routine keeps what is *heimlich* familiar, and what is potentially *unheimlich* distant.

Often, characters in my novel are constructed in relation to this idea of the *heimlich*. Ruby, for example, bored, lonely, and without university studies or paid employment, immerses herself in the occupation of home renovation. In renovating and redecorating her home, she is reinventing not only her material world, but also her emotional world. For a while, day to day, she has a worth, a way to fill her hours and to block (from her mind) knowledge she is unwilling to accept (116). Her pregnancy and the imminent responsibility of motherhood — in the face of carpentry to paint or walls to sand down or kitchens to make new — simply do not have to exist. So long as there is another routine, something predictable and *heimlich* to cling to, these things, *unheimlich* as they are, can stay lurking and unacknowledged beneath the surface.

It is the same for Potts. Although, unlike Ruby, he loathes his regular work-related routine — polishing the video screens and pinball glass, counting out the float, cleaning tables, benches and chairs — it does provide him with a way to deny or repress less desirable circumstances. When he is faced with the vision of his dad lying sick and grey-faced in hospital, it is precisely the pool-hall routine that he returns to. Leaving the

hospital car-park, he finds himself driving, as if automatically (since the 'hands know what to do'), not to the place he intends to go, but to his dad's pool hall. He counts the float. He vacuums. He empties out the ashtrays. Why? Because it seems like the right thing to do (153). Because these actions provide for him a sense of comfort, a façade to hold on to.

Writing these scenes, I employed not so much the concept of 'home' as I did 'familiarity'. Drawing on Freud's use of the word 'familiar' to specifically define at least one version of *heimlich,* I understood that the two — 'familiarity' and 'home' — were indeed related (343, 346). As a result, to relate the familiarity of the homelike moment to personal identity, I represented routine in terms of body movements. In creating Potts's and Ruby's characters, I imagined them *performing* their routine tasks (not in the dramatic sense of the word, but in terms of physical movement: 'to do', 'to act upon', 'to complete'), and in imagining these performances I was able to represent that part of their personalities that chose safer, more familiar narratives over the ones less known. Home, for these characters, was more about consistency than it was about dwelling or intimacy. Despite having relatively banal or unpleasant experiences, these characters, in maintaining their regular and expected patterns of day to day life, not only found comfort in predictability, they created a certain spatial distance from their more *unheimlich* moments. What I saw and, for me, what linked these two characters together was that they were not only providing for themselves an illusion of stability, they were denying the more frightening narratives of their lives. They were avoiding the shifting meanings of *heimlich*.

Routine Pleasures and the 'Illusion of Escape'

In writing the novel, I understood that part of my purpose was to explore, in fiction, the relationship between home-spaces and spaces-of-imagination. To see routine in terms of the ways in which the self maintains and accesses a sense of homelike predictability was also to see it negate or deny undesirable histories. As a result, as focussed as I was on giving the characters I wrote about routine chores or work-related activities (no matter how ordinary or meaningless) to keep them busy and occupied, I saw the importance of constructing them in relation to routine pleasures as well. Reading theoretically, I noticed in the writings of Tuan, Lefebvre and others a similar theme: 'home' was not 'wholly divorced from work' (183), nor was it separate from other circuits of non-working life. In his *Critique of Everyday Life,* Lefebvre specifically insists that the 'everyday' is a 'totality' of the relationships between 'work, leisure, family and private life' (Vol 1 42). For Lefebvre, home is not to be found only in the routine of work-related movements, but also in the anticipated breaks from such movements. Spaces and activities of leisure provide ways into other places. They relieve boredom. They provide a distraction. It stood to reason, then, that part of my creative work would draw on leisure as a way to link self with other homelike possibilities.

Of leisure, Lefebvre writes:

> We cannot step beyond the everyday. The marvellous can only continue to exist in fiction and illusions that people share. There is no escape. And yet we wish to have the illusion of escape as near to hand as possible. An illusion, not entirely illusionary but constituting a world both apparent and real… They *are* that critique in so far as they are *other* than everyday life, and yet they are *in everyday life*, they are *alienation* (Lefebvre Vol 1 40).

Leisure, for Lefebvre, offers an interesting contradiction: it can be identified both in the non-everyday and in the everyday (Vol 1 40). It is a part of routine, for we accept and look forward to it. But, it is also a disruption to routine. It breaks the monotony of the day, week, month or year. It provides what he terms 'the illusion of escape'. It distracts. In leisure one does not have to think about work, chores, bills, task-lists — these things momentarily do not exist. Rather, what is made available is an alternative space, a familiar and in-routine-but-out-of-routine space that enables, if for a moment, an obscured, but nevertheless homelike, version of reality.

Cafés, funfairs, radio, television — for Lefebvre, these are precisely the kinds of spaces that constitute a "world" 'both apparent and real' (Vol 1 40). In my research, other theorised examples I came across included: the map, for the map not only incites daydream, it accesses other places, different ways of life and different worlds (Lippard 77; Brooks 30); movies, since the cinema screen is set up to trigger the 'ifs' of one's imagination (Fellini 170-171); and shop windows, where 'mannequins perform mute solicitations of the passer-by's gaze (Highmore 2005 46). In Astley's *A Descant for Gossips,* the 'illusion of escape', the 'distraction' or 'sharp break' from reality, as Lefebvre puts it (40), can be identified in many spaces, but most of all it presents itself in the 'soundscape' of music.

For *Familiar Places*, this had a number of implications. *A Descant for Gossips* was an instructive example of the use of music in a narrative to create an atmosphere for both home and person. I read and reread sections of Astley's narrative. I focused on Moller, in particular, because of all the characters he was most likely to, as novelist Drusilla Modjeska once suggested of nostalgia, 'coax life into more controllable possibilities' (75). I made notes. I wrote for my own inspiration: *Music in the shop. Music to dance to. A mix-tape.*

Why?

Because my research had taught me that music not only creates an environment for domestic living, it forms a sensory place, one which is closely linked to emotional narrative (Tacchi 25; Pink 72). According to Jo Tacchi, music, and in particular radio, can be seen to fill 'empty' space and 'empty' time (25). It affords a frame, a way into (and out of) social interaction (25). It is a 'textured soundscape', interwoven into the larger fabric of everyday life, and often hardly thought about at all (28). Working on both a conscious and unconscious level, music, then, can be used in a variety of ways to afford that which is homelike. It functions both as a form of silence (high-volumes block out distraction), and as a way to *avoid* silence (radio covers sound or, more precisely, the absence of sound) (30). It can provide a background of unfocused noise. But, it can also specifically foreground a particular mood or desire (35).

For several characters in Astley's text, music provides a way into a more agreeable reality. Vinny Lalor, for example, in her longing to enclose herself in the sameness of other families, tunes in to a popular radio show, so as to negate what she feels to be an isolating and inadequate social life (25). Vinny's mother, attempting to be more refined, chooses classical music (25). And Alec Talbot, a minor character, divides a line between himself and the 'hicks'. How? Symphonies. Movements. Esoteric chamber music (30). But it is in Robert Moller's focalisation of the narrative that music works both to distract from routine boredoms and to create a space which is homelike. For Moller, music fills the void left by his wife's absence. It creates an 'alternative textured soundscape' (Tacchi 30), a way to hide his loneliness. In its simplest representation music is the background for his home. It provides, like the leisure spaces Lefebvre talks about, a break, something to look forward to, a way to unwind. But, it is also metaphoric. If music is leisure, and leisure is a distraction from routine, then when

Moller says he wants Helen with him to share the silence (22), he is not only filling the gaps in his social life, he is making a distraction out of her too. To have Helen, in his home, listening to Beethoven and playacting the everyday ordinariness of domestic intimacy — rummaging through the cupboards, slicing bread and making coffee — is to help him forget (or perhaps replace), even just for the duration of a record, the absence of Lilian (43-44). To have her (and Vinny Lalor) accompany him on a road trip to Brisbane, with Vinny singing 'current popular songs loudly' most of the way, is to imbue 'each familiar section road, each familiar action' of his weekly trip to visit his wife with new 'connotation' (59). What is normally the 'endless pattern and perplexity of never-ending oceans' (46), the same thing over and over again, the same complicated thing, is now, for the time-being, not complicated at all. All there is, is the vacuum of the car, Vinny excited, and Helen, there, beside him, like the lyrics he is singing, providing the 'illusion of escape'. In essence, even Helen, a person, constitutes a 'world both apparent and real'. However, at the same time, in requiring this 'illusion', Moller is effectively acquiescing to a certain stasis. His underlying narrative of unhappiness still exists — work, and marking, and the weekly trips to the hospital, and the loss of that part of himself that saw home as family and family as Lilian. And although, for a moment, in the house listening to records or singing in the car, he is taking a break, Helen is not of the narrative he chooses to 'keep'. When later, she tells him she is being transferred to Camooweal (a remote town more than fifteen-hundred kilometres from their familiar locales), he responds with the brief and perhaps insincere suggestion that they both move to Brisbane for work outside of teaching. Then, he reneges: 'I must — Helen, please understand this if you can — I must consider Lilian' (196). For really, to make changes with Helen is to accept Lilian's deterioration. And in turn, to accept Lilian, as she is — frail, incapacitated, and riddled with terminal illness — is to alter his narrative.

So he keeps it going — like his empty house and the music he plays at the end of the day — because, like 'The Wanderer', his unhappiness houses the kind of hope he is unwilling to give up.

Throughout the drafting of *Familiar Places,* I saw routine chores and in-routine-but-out-of-routine pleasures as having similar functions. The finest distinction, as I perceived it, seemed only to lie in one's choice to maintain predictability or to escape it. The purpose of the latter was not necessarily to preserve a narrative but to overlay it. While the unpleasantness of routine chores served to block out or deny undesirable knowledge, routine pleasures functioned instead to create a more agreeable reality, a different reality, an alternative space.

For Potts, in my novel, perhaps the 'illusion of escape' is best exemplified through his perceptions of Louise's parents' house. What Potts sees and experiences within this space is a kind of homeliness, a maternal and ordinary homeliness that he lacks in his own house. To have dinner with Louise's family is not only to participate in someone else's daily routine, it is to substitute an alternative reality — a mum in the garden, a dad who comes home at five-thirty on the dot, and the smell of roast for dinner — for his own latchkey upbringing. Cooking too provides him with an element of escape. To cook a bolognaise or a stew for the regular pattern of alfoil-tray dinners that he and his dad will eat on the working side of a shop counter, or to make a cheesecake or baked fish or oily potatoes specifically for Louise, who he knows first as a childhood friend and then as an adult lover, is to fill his house, empty as it is, with something homely. It is not seen by Potts as chore-like. Rather it is a desirable break from the ordinary expectations of his everyday life. It is a way to access his imagination, to create yet another reality — Louise this time, eating with him and filling the almost

silences — the crickets outside, the hum of the fridge and the sound of the ocean (69-71; 92).

However, in my fiction, this is not to say that the more negative reality ceases to exist in the minds, memories and thoughts of the characters. For Ruby, one of the most important breaks from routine — a fishing trip in which she, Jack and Potter drive to Salmon Holes for what is ostensibly their first and only family outing together — comes at a time when Jack and Ruby's marriage is on the verge of collapse. On the night preceding the trip, they are described as 'a family with cracks. They are broken, tense. They sleep with their backs turned away from each other. Or they do not sleep, but pretend' (182). And yet, by the next morning, they are willing to access that part of leisure that will, for a time at least, allow them to overlay their more obvious problems with seemingly meaningless pleasures such as fishing, collecting shells and building sandcastles. Nevertheless, writing this scene, it was my intention to represent a sense of the underlying tensions within the marriage; for it was my understanding that the leisure space, regardless of what it was, could not ultimately negate other concealed and *heimlich* realities. Narrated through a third-person agent who, although omniscient, is limited to Ruby's internally focalised thoughts, feelings and perspectives, this scene presents the reader with several crucial insights. Firstly, through the narrator, the reader 'watches' Ruby and gains a sense that her outer body language, her experiences and the activities in which she occupies herself — building an overly detailed and textured castle and showing her son how to fold paper boats — reverberate her previous architectural desires and maternal fears. Secondly, through Ruby's focalised perceptions of Jack — reeling in, reeling out, oblivious to Ruby and Potter's playing — the reader senses a feeling of distance within the relationship. Thirdly, through Ruby's thoughts, the narrator is able to relay to the reader a memory: 'the image of herself as a little girl . . .

folding boats out of fragile sketchbook paper' (184). And finally, through speech, the reader learns her underlying sadness. When she says, in a voice loud enough for Jack to hear, that Potter will one day build all the houses she didn't, the reader understands a certain melancholy that, despite the leisure space, she cannot escape. Likewise the scenes on Christmas Eve — shopping, buying sugar, making biscuits and setting out a border of paper bags filled with candles and sand — function to override her narrative of unfulfilled dreams, loneliness and marital dependence. What appears at first sight as the desire to attract a sense of community and to finally adapt to both her separation with Jack and to her life in Albany is, in actual fact, a way to create, for the in-routine-but-out-of-routine holiday season, another narrative, a narrative in which there is a happy ending: 'firelight, white walls, the image of herself and Jack barefoot and upside-down on polished boards' (224).

Small movements

Writing *Familiar Places* was not so much an exercise in exploring home as it was about sensing and representing, in my own prose, the homelike moment. Since the 'home' I saw was unbounded and infinitely linked to other spaces and trajectories, including (but not limited to) the space of everyday life, the German word *heimlich* was perhaps a more appropriate springboard for my writing than the notion of 'home'. Thinking in terms of *heimlich* enabled a link between place and person. *Heimlich* considered familiarity. And familiarity — the small movements, the predictable and taken for granted repetitions of daily life — these were the things that formed my characters. In what I desired to be a character-based novel which drew on the relationship between home and imagination, *heimlich* — in terms of comfort *or* denial — provided for me a way into my writing. Throughout the drafting and redrafting or my work, I understood that 'home' was an

entity to be experienced. As I have mentioned previously in the chapter, it couldn't exist without either an observer or the activities and imaginings — the repetition, routine chores and expected pleasures — that framed both the observer's point of view and the focaliser/narrator relationship. For the focalising characters in my novel, 'home' (as experienced) not only maintained self-identity, it formed those homelike spaces and homelike moments that kept narratives of self going.

Conclusion

— Discourse —

Perception

One can lie on the ground and look up at the almost infinite number of stars in the night sky, but in order to tell stories about those stars they need to be seen as constellations, the invisible lines which connect them need to be assumed.

— John Berger: Stories (172)

In music, a descant denotes: a melody or a counterpoint accompanying a simple theme and usually written above it; the art of singing or composing in parts; an instrumental prelude consisting of variations on a subject. Outside of music, it is a discourse at length, and with variety.[5]

I like to think of my thesis in the same way. Home. Approached from many angles. Many perspectives. Not as shelter, but as 'the city to the wilderness'. Not as a place, but as an activity. An interpretation. My research, viewed from a variety of theoretical standpoints — phenomenological, Marxist, feminist and post-structuralist — was intended to aid a creative production which represented the rather personal relationship between 'home' and its perceiving subject. My 'simple theme' (drawing on the word 'descant') was, of course, 'home'. But, it was also regional Western Australia, the way it is imagined and experienced, its social networks and relationships, and

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[5] Living Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language. 1972 The English-Language Institute of America, Inc

everyday life. In addition, this 'simple theme' of 'home' was one which best worked in conjunction with another less obvious concern; contrapuntal and set off from the narrative, the structuring device for my novel was 'perception'. Like the musical descant I composed my novel in parts. I allowed several characters to see, construe and voice the complexities surrounding one's interpretations of 'home'. I alternated narratives. I provided variations of a theme and of an experience.

My intention from the outset was not to define, but rather to represent, and yet I am here now, at the end of my project, wondering what 'home' really means. For Bachelard it is a metaphor for the body. For Freud it is the subconscious. Lefebvre links it with commodity. Massey with social networks and relationships. And Tuan with the narrative of self. Home is a process. It is practice. It is familiarity — good, bad or otherwise. It is constructed out of movement, unbounded and infinitely linked to all sorts of spaces and trajectories, including (but not limited to) the space of everyday life.

I tell myself my research is complete and I go for a walk — through my neighbourhood, through all the 'familiar places of my habitat' — and I am thinking not of home, but of language. Of shifting language and shifting definitions. In my mind there is a reading: Terrence Hawkes in 'Some Twentieth Century Views' argues that '*meaning* is not a stable or fixed quality, but one which words or groups of words acquire in use' (58). 'Home' is perhaps a perfect example of a word so complex and ambiguous that it evades any sense of fixed definition. More so, here is a word which continues to attract countless applications. 'Words do not *mean*', Hawkes says, 'we *mean* by words' (58). But what *do* we mean when we use the word 'home'?

Walking along a suburban street, I people watch (because this is what I like to do whenever I need inspiration). My neighbourhood is a neighbourhood that's changing. It used to be an area of market gardens and simple houses on large blocks.

Now it's subdivisions. Townhouses. Strata title. Not that I mind. It's this that links me to so many stories. Besides, it's how I afforded a 'home' of my own. Out walking I see the elderly Italian ladies that have lived here since the 1960s. They're walking too, in a group of four. Two of them are wearing tracksuit pants. One is in the black dress we've long come to stereotype as widow-wear. And the last has her cardigan draped across her shoulders, sleeves unfilled, in a way that reminds me of my aunty. Down the road I see a Maori bloke flattening newly cleared land with a bobcat. I see the four Sudanese kids who live nearby. They're playing in their front yard, up and down the driveway, chasing each other and rolling about in fits of laughter. From inside their house I can smell, even early in the afternoon, a spicy casserole smell. Chicken perhaps. Onions definitely. Tomatoes. A car zooms by. In the reflection of someone else's window I catch a glimpse of myself, student, mother, writer, and I think specifically about my question again. But this time I change the emphasis: what do *we* mean when we use the word 'home'?

It is not a question of definition; it is a question of perception.

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