LOCATING SUBURBIA

MEMORY – PLACE – CREATIVITY

EDITED BY
PAULA HAMILTON & PAUL ASHTON

Locating Suburbia
Memory, Place, Creativity

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Paula Hamilton and Paul Ashton

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INTRODUCTION

THE POLITICS AND PASSIONS OF THE SUBURBAN OASIS

Paula Hamilton and Paul Ashton

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What is Suburbia?

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

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

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

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

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

***

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

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

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

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

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

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

MEMORY

02 REMEMBERING THE SUBURBAN SENSORY LANDSCAPE IN BALMAIN

Paula Hamilton

REMEMBERING THE SUBURBAN SENSORY LANDSCAPE IN BALMAIN

Paula Hamilton

There's something about walking around the streets of a suburb where the layers of architectural bastardry hit you in the eye. Amongst the pleasing restored sandstone, the replanted native bush and coloured geraniums is always the cheapjack that according to my sense of the aesthetic means red brick flats with thin walls and cheap thin aluminium window fittings or the occasional tiny wooden or dirty fibro cottage that's boarded up, falling apart.

Balmain coal works 1950

But my sense of vision dominates here: what I don't hear and smell is the long gone and largely forgotten memory of my area, Balmain, as an inner city industrial slum; Balmain as a sensory landscape of dissonant pitches and olfactory assaults for those who had recently come to live there in the 1960s. I also don't feel the coal dust on my skin and see it turn the weekly washing in the backyard grey. I don't smell the powerful waft of soap chemicals when the wind blows and I don't witness my poor neighbour on the back verandah potty, all of which form part of the sensuous memories of that time.[1] No. Despite the occasional infelicities, Balmain in the second decade of the new millennium is largely beautified, sanitised, gentrified or for the purposes of this chapter, sensorially disciplined.

One of the community projects with which I have been involved is 'Transforming the Local' in this now highly desirable peninsular close to the centre of Sydney. It charts the experience of gentrification of a former industrial working-class suburb, a phenomenon documented by urban historians in many cities of the world. Much of the research on gentrification tells the story of change through rising income levels and external visual measures such as house renovation and types of shops. Very little of it examines the process from the point of view of the people who lived through it, either as long-time residents of an area or the newly arrived middle class. Through this oral history project I had the opportunity to ask interviewees about what they remembered in terms of sensory experiences. With these

questions I was seeking to create a more intimate scale, but also a more dynamic sense of how people grouped together to change a suburban landscape more to their liking, and in this sense to have greater control over the visual, auditory and olfactory realms. As well, I wanted to compare the differences between the expression of sensorial dissonance in a new environment by the gentrifiers, with the landscape of those who had lived in Balmain all their lives to see how these changes and differences were understood through the sensual dimension of the everyday.

Paradoxically, work on the senses has also shown the limits of our apprehending of past experience, particularly through oral histories. While there is no longer an assumption that human thought and experience is only structured through words, senses and the embodied experience are sometimes outside language, not just something one sees and hears but something one lives. Joy Parr refers to the writer Michael Polyani who noted succinctly in his book *The Tacit Dimension* some years ago that 'we know more than we can tell', that is, that we all have embodied and situated knowledge 'which is implied, understood referentially.' These are often things we have learned over a long period that we do habitually, ritually, without consciously thinking about it.[2] Nevertheless, oral histories do involve the reduction of the three dimensional embodied experience into two-dimensional interviews and then are frequently transformed again into writing.

Oral histories are, by their nature, articulating experience in speech, language and gesture (if technical means have a visual dimension). Since oral histories are essentially about agency, or individuals as a central character in their life stories, it is important to make a distinction between the interviewee as a 'consumer of the senses' and a 'producer'. As Peg Rawes noted, we all create our own landscape of the senses as we move through environments.[3] We are engaged in the active construction of our experience. But if we heard, saw, smelled, touched or tasted in the past and this is articulated as a recollection, then we are discussing a context which cannot be reproduced in the present. How people heard or smelled in the past is not the same as we hear or smell and today. It is critically important, therefore to 'historicize' the senses. While recreating and reimagining the past in many forms, such as museum exhibits, has become fashionable, we cannot recreate the conditions of consumption and reception at the time. Some sensory experiences become even jarringly historical. Few can imagine today for example, the smell and taste of the first cigarette of the day as 'pure joy'. But for two of the senses, the capacity for technical reproduction since the nineteenth century for vision and twentieth century for sound has meant that we can retain them as sources of intangible heritage, frozen in time, kept in film and sound archives.

Nonetheless, the result of my memory work is a rich portrait of a place and landscape that over a thirty-year period from the late 1950s underwent major cultural and economic change. Balmain was transformed from a suburb where people lived in rented houses and worked nearby to one where not only the kind of labour and relationship to the workplace shifted radically, but home ownership and renovation markedly increased and the use of public space was reconfigured, increasing the separation between public and private. Monica Degen points to the significance of the senses in the reconfiguration of contemporary public space and life in her study of Barcelona and London,[4] and I have identified this process in Sydney. Many of these changes to the landscape of the suburb were state led through local councils but they were also both initiated and contested by these recent residents acting in informal groups or formal associations.

The Working Landscape

There are several ways to consider the role of senses in suburbia utilising the memories of people who lived there through oral history interviews. All of those who have written as advocates for one or other of the senses refer to the hegemony of the visual sense in relation to the understanding of experience. Recent scholars have argued that ‘to a large extent state and municipal planning is dominated by the reduction of human experience to that which can only be made visually legible through maps and models’,[5] and that to be aware of the other senses is to see the world in a fundamentally different way, especially, ‘to highlight the symbolic and transformative role of the senses in relation to change’. This has forced a rethinking about the nature of social experience, interpersonal as well as relationships to community, and even ideas about how we live and move through space. These episodes do more than restore the sensory dimension to experience of the past. They remind us how we move through the world utilizing senses in different frames, at different times. As Constance Classen asserted: ‘We not only think *about* our senses we think *through* them.’[6] So, too, do various scholars remind us that the relationship between sound and all the other senses is complex because they are always associated with emotions.[7]

We associate the modern city with a cacophony of sound, much of it defined as noise, that we screen out because it assaults our ears, eyes and nose. By contrast, we imagine the suburbs as ‘sleepy’ and muted, if not silent. Mid-twentieth-century inner-city suburbs had a very different resonance. Smell and sound are deeply implicated in industrialization and Balmain, a harbor peninsular, attracted heavy industry which relied on water such as dockyards, or drew on imported ingredients from overseas for chemicals or soap factories. Many of the people interviewed did not work in these industries but were moving

there to live in the 1960s to take advantage of affordable housing to build families. Many of them were growing up during the war and had taken advantage of the expanding education system during the 1950s to gain higher qualifications.

One of the initial observations from the interviews was how people oriented themselves through geographies of smell. They were able to tell which way the wind was blowing, for instance, by particular smells:

> I can remember if the wind blew from the west, you'd smell Monsanto chemicals, a very strong smell. The one I loved the most was the one from CSR across at Pyrmont [Colonial Sugar Refinery], that sugary, honey smell, I think it was more like treacle. It was in the southerly from memory [Interviewer: 'I didn't like it']. And in other winds you could smell the soapflakes from Palmolive, Lever & kitchen – Pears and sand soap, it was a clean smell.[8]

The sociologist George Simmel described smell as a 'dissociative sense' for there is 'something radical and non-negotiable about its emotional judgements.' This interviewer also commented on the smell with a different opinion. In another interview, Mrs Mortimer remembered that 'we had this very sickly sweet smell that would often waft up from Colgates on one side of the peninsula or Unilever on the other side. So that was a very distinct smell at that point.' Moreover, the smells expressed a very localized sense of place, because in other parts of Balmain where there were three power stations you could, as yet another interviewee said, 'smell coal dust from the coal loader, if the wind was blowing from the south west.'[9]

Balmain was also an intensely localised place. When I moved there in the early 1990s, I was always asked exactly which street I lived in by residents because they knew its geography intimately. The old women next door's world was the immediate neighbourhood, a few streets. When Phillip Bray was interviewed, he also remembered this intense localism:

> When we moved to Hanover Street, we had a lady living next door and she was known as Auntie. She was Auntie to that particular microcosm. Auntie, who was well into her 80s at that stage when we moved there, swept the footpath outside her place every morning because that was the proper thing to do… Her brother, who was known as Uncle, lived in the house behind. So she was in Hanover Street, he was in, I think it's Murdoch Street, the one behind, and she had lived her entire life in those two houses. She was born in the one behind and she lived in the one at the front. And one day we were talking

> to her and she was quite bemoaning the fact that her daughter had moved away and she didn't see as much of her now, and we said: 'Oh, where's she gone to?' And she said: 'The Grove.' And it took a couple of moments to realise that the daughter had moved all the way to Birchgrove and – [laughs].[10]

Moreover, the rhythms of largely men's work also marked out time in everyone's lives who lived in the area. One of the islands off the Peninsular, Cockatoo Island, was used for ship building. Joan Chapman remembered that you would know when work was finishing because 'there was this strange haunting whistle.' The men then caught the ferry a short distance from the island back to Balmain. Soon, 'hundreds of them would come streaming up the street from the wharf' and there would be 'an endless row of boys selling [afternoon edition] papers and yelling in competition.'[11] These were the short-lived but repeated sounds of the every day. They speak of the masculine world of work intruding but also operating alongside the changing domestic suburban landscape, where Joan had moved not long previously. Fran Tonkiss spoke of the senses, particularly sound as 'capturing a larger urban tension between collective and subjective life' that would seem to be evident here.[12]

The story above also speaks of movement across landscape and our understanding of the city as a 'sensorium' – a place where the senses are infused with each other and are strongly influenced by modes and styles of movement. Even in the 1960s, because of its settlement on a peninsular with narrow streets, Balmain was a place where the everyday noises of cars did not dominate. (There was still the odd horse and cart, though no-one spoke of these more gentle habituated sounds.) Many walked everywhere as well as from home to work and back. Just a few years later another interviewee remembered doors slamming and cars revving up as the auditory signal of work's end. These evocatively reimagined soundscapes remind us of the diverse pitches, volumes and tones in daily routines and help us orient the physical landscape in time.

Moreover, some sounds of the modern were completely unwelcome. The question of 'noise' as unwanted sound became an increasing matter of great concern to residents in some parts of Balmain, who wanted a quieter suburban life. The transformation of Balmain into a peaceful clean, gentrified suburb was not a process that happened suddenly since its heavy industry utilising the waterfront and proximity to the city centre guaranteed that industrial activity would continue for some time. Indeed, for the emerging middle class who moved there from the 1960s one of the biggest issues was the building of container wharves in Johnston's Bay and White Bay from the late 1960s which

utilised more than 1.5 km of the Balmain waterfront and destroyed many old houses and wharf industries despite community protest. Diana Bryant married a doctor and moved into Balmain, living not far from the cargo wharves. To her, 'industry was peripheral because none of my friends worked there'. Yet she has a vivid memory of the advent of containerization in the late 1960s and the 'clanging metal noise when they used to drop the containers on the ships… people who lived around that part of Balmain were definitely affected by that noise'.[13] It is probable that there were different kinds of sound associated with loading and unloading cargo under the previous system such as the railroad shunting system and the sound of cranes and men shouting but people who had lived there for some time were acclimatized to those as part of their daily soundscape. What Bryant remembers here is the discordant, the new sound intruding into her claimed suburban domain.

Solicitor Jocelyn Morris had an even more violent response to the containers but she had only limited capacity for action. Initially the drilling and blasting to gouge out the rock was difficult for nearby residents but the siren sounding to indicate an imminent explosion sent people scurrying inside to protect themselves from the showering debris. For Jocely, who was a young mother living in Llewellyn street, one of the adjacent streets at the time, the noise and fear for her child induced her to write a letter to the company threatening legal action, which afterwards reduced working hours on the site. After it was complete, the sound of the gantry crane dropping containers on top of each other and the accompanying 'grinding, grating noises' became the bane of her life. She remembers that 'the dropping of the containers was the worst thing because it would startle you. I would stand there in the kitchen. I felt like screaming.'[14]

How Balmain was seen as a landscape in the 1960s and 1970s also varied considerably. Photographs from the time, like many historical images, present a bare landscape, more stark in colour, with buildings of factories and houses dominating the picture. Many of the newer residents refer to its bareness because there were no trees and little colour or scent from flowers. The Balmain Association set up in 1965 by an eclectic group of residents led by architects to support historical preservation mounted a tree planting campaign in 1969. This was supported by the Council until 1974 when there was a change of government.[15] Since many of the workers also kept racing hounds in backyard kennels there were few grown in the tiny backyard areas. Gradually this changed with gentrifiers planting trees shrubs and flowers.[16] One resident remembered:

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> There was hardly any trees, but – all the new people moving into Balmain started growing trees and it made a very big difference to the area. I remember my first summer here walking back down from the shops how hot it was walking along Curtis Road and there were no trees there then. And, of course, there were very few birds.[17]

Living Together: Peas in the Pub

There are various registers of listening and sound in interviews. It was only when Rose Pickard, teacher, and her husband Errol, an architect, bought their first house in Grove Street Balmain in 1964, that they realised what it really meant to live in a largely industrial slum. Theirs was a tiny terrace in a tightly built row. She could hear the council worker two doors up who sometimes had a bath in the afternoons after his job as a garbage collector finished. Rose says he 'was a very vocal bather' and they could hear him singing and talking. He would also call out to his mum asking: 'What've we got for tea tonight?' This clash of class cultures, the enforced eavesdropping, reminds us of the significance of different understandings of spatial comfort. Rose remembers hearing him respond:

> Why cant I have a bit of steak? A man goes around the world, land, sea and air and can't get a bit of steak for his tea?

Each evening the same man would come out to the front of his house in the street and scrape the steak and chop bones off his plate for his dogs. At first Rose and Errol and the several couples who were moving in with the artists, writers and bohemians, romanticised the initial experience of a clash in class cultures: 'So this is how the real people live', they said, 'like in a French movie'.[18] But the romance soon wore off when they saw that the chop bones attracted rats as well as many other cats and dogs that milled around the rubbish left out, or when they constantly encountered the globules of phlegm on the footpath outside the many hotels.

Life on the streets, more seamlessly public than Rose had previously experienced, was particularly evident in relation to these hotels on virtually every corner which were an extension of the domestic. On the one hand, some husbands took their dinner across there from home to have a pint with mates. On the other, the wives of working men had traditions of their own that blurred the distinction between home and public spaces. Most afternoons, Rose Pickard's neighbour took the vegetables to be prepared for the evening meal and would sit in the Ladies lounge of the William Wallace hotel with two of her friends and 'shell the peas in the pub' while having a drink – shandies, gin – and chatting. Occasionally they also did the beans but it was

mainly the tactile tedium of stripping peas from their shells into the pot. Many other working-class women had this ritual but for Rose's mother, who was horrified that she had moved to Balmain, these women were 'common' because they drank. Rose remembers that her neighbour would often come back in the early evening 'merry'.

Not all the incoming middle-class residents were consumed by disgust or sorrow for the poverty they witnessed. Robert Irving, for example, remembers the Pacific hotel in Stephen street where he and a group of people drank which was 'frequented by wharfies and open for long hours' 'was called the 'Opera House' for a while because it was well known that the wharfie drinkers sang. There was a good deal of community singing going on. So along with other memories, there was also one of the community literally being in harmony on occasions.[19]

Allan Garrick, who grew up in Balmain, had a different memory of this hotel, working nightshift for Unilever. His oral remembering felt to the interviewer like he was seeing it in his mind's eye as he spoke:

> The Pacific Hotel was an early opener and you would feel like a beer. Even though it was 7 o'clock in the morning you didn't want to go home and go to bed…you would walk into the Pacific Hotel on a Saturday morning and the place, the bar would be full, not empty, full! Full of people, cigarette smoke was like a fog. Every person would be smoking and you could hardly see from one of the bar to the other, all studying the racing form… they were all hanging on to their two page racing spread, studying the racing. A very grim scene and tough looking characters there. You wouldn't take them on. You wouldn't say anything indiscreet. These were pretty tough people and you would mind your Ps and Qs.[20]

Allan Garrick's filmic-like memory using sight and smell is nevertheless curiously silent. It may be that it was quiet, or that the sound has been lost in the fifty odd years since he had this experience. It is also characterised by how his younger self perceived the environment with some trepidation.

Kurt Danziger has discussed the historical context of psychology's engagement with the senses and noted that 'the experience of remembering itself involves not only a recall of the past, but a sense of the past in the present.' He argued for a blurring of the lines between memory and perception but crucially emphasized the way in which sensory memory is shaped by our personal past: 'The way we take up any part of our sensory experience, the way we actually experience it, the meaning we give to it, is always affected by the rest of our

experience, some of it current as background perception, some of it past as something retained from previous encounters with the world.'[21]

From the Other Side

Several of the interviewees who had lived in the Balmain peninsular all their lives refered to transported coal, coal dust on the washing and coal loaders. While some of these references were in relation to the energy used for the Power stations, one of the enduring memories of the area was the coal mine on the Birchgrove side of the peninsular. Given that the Balmain colliery only produced coal from two shafts that went under the harbour and came out at Cremorne until 1931, and natural gas until 1945, it is an oddly sustained memory. It may be because the coal mine loomed large as an industry which created widespread fear. It was the deepest coal mine in Australia and there were several accidents over the period in which men were killed in very difficult working conditions. The mine was never profitable, the property was sold in 1955 and the shafts filled in and sealed two years later.[22] In the 1980s it was bought and made into a waterside apartments complex. Mae Bourke could only have been a very small child when the coal mine closed but she retains a memory full of class resentment:

> That wasn't noisy, it was filthy dirty, big shale hills here and that mine was a mile deep. Told the people down there it was a quarry and told them half of them are sitting on million dollar homes on a mile down shaft. And it goes up to Tarban Creek and it goes to Mosman. When it played out this end, there was no more coal, the Mosman people – well, we know what they're like – they wouldn't have that end open, so they shut the mine, and then during the war they opened it for your butane gas, with the big things on top of the cars. And one dill lit a cigarette and boom, everything, just about blew us all up.

There is no record of an accident involving a cigarette but it may be that this memory metaphorically speaks of the danger of the mine to the people living there at the time which was passed down in families.

Many of the interviewees in the Balmain project, both long term residents and more recent ones, told variations on particular stories that related to both the Unilever and Colgate-Palmolive factories, though they were primarily related to the latter. This was firstly because these factories provided a host of sensory experiences since they manufactured goods related to smell.
The US firm Colgate Palmolive set up a factory in 1923 on the waterside site of an old meatworks in Broadstairs Street Balmain (later renamed Colgate Avenue). At its peak in the 1960s, it employed

1250 local workers. Peter Waterman came to work down at the 'Olive,' as it was known, being first employed there as an office boy:

> Well, when I walked down there was a multitude of aromas coming from this place. You know there was tallow which wasn't very nice and there was perfume, you could smell sweet perfumes and after about a week or so, when I used to walk down the street… I couldn't smell it anymore. It just became part of the area– if you worked in a place the smell was absorbed but you couldn't smell it.[23]

Colgate organised the deliveries of animal fat or tallow used in the soap by barge straight to the company's own wharf which was cheap and economical. Waterman remembered that: 'When it stood too long in the heat and started to melt then it smelled the worst.' It is a commonplace that people speak the habituation to particular smells and sound over time at their workplace, though there is a great deal of research yet to be done on the meaning of labour and work through the senses.

Secondly, the salience of the repeated stories spoke to the amusing incongruities between industrial and domestic landscapes. The most dominant story related to the occasional boiling over of the huge vats full of soap. Mae Bourke, who worked on the machine wrapping Palmolive soap with another young woman, could not remember the smell or the noise, but did refer to the accidents with the huge kettles of liquid soap: and it boiled over and right down the street, you know, and I remember they were running a publicity thing for Java and I had all these Javan villagers there. We had to rescue them; don't worry about the soap and that, you know [Laughs].' Several interviewees also remembered the clean up and the liquid soap hitting the water and immediately liquefying in chunks that had to be picked up by boats.

So while newer residents remembered the crust of soap which formed on their cars when the wind blew in a particular direction – Colgate Palmolive introduced a range of soap powders from the 1960s – or how it bubbled up in gutters when it rained as a form of pollution, the older residents told it as an amusing story.

There were also gendered memories of workers at Colgate. Mae Bourke remembered the uniform as quite desirable in the 1950s when it was a better alternative to the everyday clothes worn by women: so many tried to smuggle one out for friends. But wives or children at the time remember the smell of their husband or father's work in their uniforms, overalls or jackets, which brought the unknown outside world into the intimacy of the domestic environment. These were not comforting but dissonant experiences of transporting senses 'out of place'.

Only one of the interviewees refered to the dangerous nature of the various industries of Balmain and Cockatoo Island where he worked as a boilermaker. With no occupational health and safety, men were often injured but their health was also damaged by the filthy conditions. Merv Houghton describes how his wife Mary forbade him from working any longer at Ward's stoves:

> Oh, I was there quite some time and Mary says to me, 'You'll have to give it away', because I'd have a bath there before I left and by the time I get up to the pub to have a drink before going home, I'd be black again. It'd be sweating out of your pores, all the black stuff, and you'd get it all over your shirt and everything, you know. So I think I was there for about, oh, about six years… And she said: 'You have to give it away.' She said, 'It's no good.' She said: 'If you're swallowing all that stuff, you'd be getting it on your lungs and everything.'[24]

Merv Houghton's memory gives a strong sense of the embodied nature of the sensory in this workplace. He does not speak of the smell so much as its all consuming touch on his skin and in his lungs.

Nor was it only industrial contexts that workers identified pleasant and unpleasant smells. Neil Bevan as a young man in 1950s Balmain used to help deliver ice with a horse and cart because many of the homes did not have refrigerators. Bevan remembers that he didn't like to deliver into some homes because of the smell of the meat left on top of the ice chest and its greasiness to the touch. As a young man, this made him feel 'queasy'. His memory seems to underline the clash between outside work as a delivery man coming into contact with the intimacy of the domestic space in a slum environment.[25]

There is still a great deal to be understood conceptually in terms of the relationship between memory and the senses and why some sensual experiences are remembered and others lost. Nevertheless these examples provide a very different understanding of the process of gentrification, one that was experienced from a variety of viewpoints. On the one hand, they reveal the complexity of the Balmain 'community' and the layered histories and multiple meanings of place, despite the unity implied by the idea of the 'local'. On the other, they give some insight into the scale of the local and the way this is redefined across time and space in relation to extensive social change and different forms of mobility. They are also a testament to the powerful role of the middle class in the remaking of suburban place which centrally involved the disciplining of the sensorial environment.

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

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