

**The Gay Gang Murders:
Illegitimate Victims, Disposable Bodies**

Kristen Lisa Davis

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**To Gilles, Ross, John, Kritchikorn, Victim M,
Victim B and the others ...**

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Abstract

This thesis undertakes a discourse analysis of the mainstream and gay media, legal and popular narratives pertaining to a set of gay bashings, murders and disappearances of gay men from the Bondi-Tamarama region in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, during the 1980s and early 1990s. With the exception of one murder, these events – dubbed the ‘gay gang murders’ – were not properly investigated until more than a decade had passed when a detective noted a number of similarities between the cases. A task force named ‘Operation Taradale’ was established to examine links between the suspicious deaths – originally dismissed as suicides, accidents or one-off attacks – and Sydney gay hate gangs which existed at the time. Following this investigation a Coronial Inquest was staged and numerous findings and recommendations proposed.

A number of key institutions, namely, the law, the judiciary and the media, failed to respond appropriately to these crimes at the time they were committed. This suggested to me that the victims were not held in very high regard by wider social bodies nor were their losses publicly acknowledged. Yet, by the turn of the 21st Century, this situation had shifted dramatically with the New South Wales Police Service and the New South Wales State Coroner’s Court investigating these crimes and mainstream and gay media sites providing regular and serious coverage. As a case study of a series of gay hate- crimes, which charts three decades of social and institutional changes, this thesis operates as an example of how gay victims of violent crimes are discursively constructed and institutionally recognized within Australian culture. The shifts in institutional responses and public consciousness towards the victims of the ‘gay gang murders’ can also be applied, on a more general level and in varying degrees, to other Australian victims of anti-gay violence. Thus, by bringing this particular set of events to prominence, I exemplify wider social trends involving the status and position of gay men in Australian culture from the 1980s to the current day, 2009. This analysis demonstrates how discursive knowledges – the law and the media – and cultural understandings of sexuality and masculinity produce different ways to read and make sense of these crimes.

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Introduction – The Bondi ‘Gay Gang Murders’: Fragments

Introduction to case studies

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, a series of gay men were bashed or murdered, and a number of others disappeared entirely while walking on the panoramic Bondi-Tamarama walkway in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia. The murders, which came to be known as the ‘gay gang murders’, took place in the location of Marks Park, a gay beat¹ adjacent to the walkway. With the exception of one murder, these events were not properly investigated until more than a decade had passed when an investigating detective noted a number of similarities between the cases. A task-force, dubbed Operation Taradale, was set up to examine links between the suspicious deaths – originally dismissed as suicides, accidents or one-off attacks – and gay-hate gangs which existed at the time. Following this investigation a Coronial Inquest was staged and numerous findings and recommendations delivered. Later in this chapter I will provide a detailed case study which introduces the ‘gay gang murder’ victims, namely, Gilles Mattaini, Ross Warren, John Russell and Kritchikorn Rattanajurathaporn, and the suspected circumstances of their deaths and disappearances.

Throughout this thesis the broad cultural phenomenon that I am dealing with is anti-gay or homophobic violence, specifically homicides involving gay men or those perceived to be so. Rather than produce a sweeping overview of the relationship between Australian gays and homophobic violence, I will bring one particular series of events – that of the ‘gay gang murders’ – to prominence. In doing so, I will exemplify wider social trends via a discursive analysis of the legal, media and popular narratives circulating around these murders. This analysis centres on the particular, that is, the cultural and social meanings generated in and around the ‘gay gang murders’. This restricts the focus to one location, namely, the Bondi / Tamarama region in New South Wales, Australia, and to a particular time frame, the late 1980s, early 1990s and the turn of the 21st century. However, as a case study, it can also operate as an example of

¹ The Australian slang term ‘beat’ is used to refer to spaces where men gather to seek out or arrange casual sexual encounters with other men, regardless of the sexual identity of participants (Dalton, 2008:100).

how gay homicide victims are discursively constructed and institutionally recognized within contemporary Australian culture. Thus, the shifts in institutional responses and in 'public consciousness' towards the victims of the 'gay gang murders' can also be applied on a more general level, and in varying degrees, to other Australian victims of anti-gay violence.

In focusing on the homophobic violence that has taken place at Marks Park, I am situating (a crisis of) masculinity² as the bedrock on which these crimes are founded. I am looking, then, at the confrontation between heteronormativity and non-heteronormative sexualities that has been played out in these murders. My analysis will show how discursive knowledges – the law, the media – and cultural understandings of sexuality and masculinity produce different ways to read and make sense of these crimes. This discursive analysis will, in turn, examine how contemporary Australian society understands and regulates non-heteronormative sexualities and practices such as beat sex. Whilst I am tracing such discourses, and their movements, through a range of texts that they circulate in, or are generated by, I do not want to suggest that these discourses are *only* textual. Instead, these discursive knowledges have impacted in very tangible ways on 'real life' people. In other words, although the primary focus of my research is on the multiple ways of thinking about and making sense of these crimes, such discourses have produced material effects in, on and through people's bodies, lives and deaths.

After introducing the 'gay gang murders' cases, I provide a Ficto-Critical contextualization of the Bondi cliffs as a crime-site. This helps to 'set the scene' by examining the uncanny and liminal nature of the crimes and crime-scene, a haunting quality which piqued my attention from the very first news report I ever read about these cases. Following this, I examine the methodological approaches I adopt throughout this PhD. I begin by describing the various qualitative research methodologies I used to construct an archive of media, legal and police documents pertaining to the crimes, including archival

² I am not using the term 'crisis of masculinity' to indicate that men are the victims of feminism. I also want to avoid the notion of 'masculinity' as a permanent, monolithic structure which should not be tampered with. Rather, what I want to suggest is that there are changes in our ideologies of masculinity which have nothing to do with victimhood or permanency but rather changes produced by postmodern interventions, ranging from not only feminism, but also shifts in how we understand sexuality, parenting, family structures, work, and so on.

research, visits to the State Coroner's Court and Coronial Inquest, visits to the crime scene, and interviews. I expand on my methodological approach by outlining how I draw heavily from the fields of Auto-Ethnography, Ficto-Criticism and Cultural Studies and how there are indeed significant overlaps between these categories. In this defence of the mixed methodological approach, I alert the reader to the performative nature and process of Ficto-Critical writing with its emphasis on self-reflexivity, inter-textuality and genre-blurring, amongst other identifiable features. I also outline the value of a Cultural Studies approach which allows me to explore and critique the cultural meanings, narratives and ideologies generated by and circulated around the 'gay gang murders'. Throughout this thesis I differentiate between the more traditional analytical material and the Auto-Ethnographic writing by the use of different fonts. I use the font 'Arial' for the traditional theoretical analysis and the 'American Typewriter' font for the more Auto-Ethnographic sections.

After examining the methodological approaches, I introduce the reader to specific social institutions, in particular the institutions of the law and the media, and the ways in which they generate and mobilize various discursive readings and understandings of the crimes in question. I look here at how a variety of discourses, which appear across a range of texts and at numerous institutional sites, operate to construct particular cultural meanings around these events. This introductory chapter concludes with a chapter outline which provides a brief précis of the chapters which follow.

Setting the scene.

December 2001.

On the panoramic Bondi-Tamarama walkway, winding its way along one of Australia's most mythologized coastlines, the police rescue squad throw a weighted mannequin from the fifteen metre cliff-face. Sun-bleached tourists and Bondi locals, power-walkers and joggers alike, survey the scene with interest as the dramatic re-enactment unfolds. Six times – face first, back first, face first again – the 55

kg dummy is tossed off the clifftop down onto the rocks below. A small crowd gathers on the walkway whilst police photographers and media crews capture this surreal event. This is the scene I watch on the evening news. Silhouetted against a brilliant blue sky, a weighted dummy hurtles off the clip-top, tumbling through the air before landing on the rocks below.

Face first.

Back first.

Face first again.

The next morning, and in the days that follow, a wide range of national newspapers, both mainstream and gay, pick up on the story. The re-enactment turns out to be part of a fresh investigation, Operation Taradale, into the deaths and disappearances of gay men in the Eastern suburbs, specifically the Bondi/Tamarama region, during the 1980s and early 1990s.

A newspaper photographer catches an image of the flying body, graphically suspending it in mid air³. It is this uncanny image, rendered in a grainy black-and-white, that I cut out and pin on the noticeboard above my computer desk. In the photograph, the dummy hangs off the clifftop in a vertical position, facing downwards, as if held in place by invisible wires. The mannequin's bleached out gym shoes top the image, its face dangles at the bottom of the shot, the shadows of the rocky cliff cut against the body horizontally.

I grab a coffee (flat white, no sugar) before surveying this photographic image some more. It strikes me as both

³ This image that I refer to came from an article written by Charles Miranda entitled 'Dummy's new role' in *The Daily Telegraph* [Sydney], 10 December 2001, p. 11.

uncanny and liminal. Tracing the word back to Sigmund Freud's essay of 1919, 'Das Unheimliche' ('The Uncanny'), the term 'uncanny' 'is the name for everything that ought to have remained ... hidden and secret and has become visible' (1985:335-76). Thus, it refers to 'a feeling of something not simply weird or mysterious but more specifically, as something strangely familiar' (Royle, 2003:vii). As I will demonstrate throughout this thesis, the 'gay gang murders' embody the feeling and experience that Royle describes whereby 'uncanniness entails a sense of uncertainty and suspense, however momentary and unstable' (2003:vii). Uncanniness is also frequently associated with an experience of the threshold, margins, borders, frontiers, and liminality (Royle, 2003:vii). Explored extensively by anthropologist Victor Turner (1982) in the context of 'rites of passage' in small scale African cultures, the term liminality is used to describe a stage of being between phases. Derived from *limen* (the Latin word for threshold), the idea of the threshold or border is central to the concept of liminality, a space of in/between-ness and indeterminacy.

As I reflect on these associations, I scribble down the key words - 'thresholds', 'borders', 'hybridity', 'in/between-ness' - then ask myself, what exactly is it that's being crossed, or not crossed, in this cliff-top tableaux. Is it something contemporary? Historical? Geographical? Spatial? Disciplinary?

I sense there's more at stake here than just the movement of the flying mannequin doubling as an example of media spectacle. Instead, there's a whole range of transitions taking place, shifts from one liminal social space to another. I start to pen a tentative list:

Body to dummy.
'Real life' to re-enactment.
Shore to sea.
Land to water.
Life to death.
Past to present.
Private to public.
Unsolved to ...?

This is only a hesitant beginning but at least I know what it is I'm trading in: liminal spaces, liminal bodies. This heavily mythologized locale – the Bondi-Tamarama walkway – is imbued with an intensely public and legitimate face – yet the crimes transposed across it bring an Otherworldly illegitimacy to the scene. They make its familiarity and everydayness strange, uncanny, ghostly even.

The concept of liminality can be applied both to the 'object' of my analysis, the 'gay gang murders', and also to the structure of the project itself. By crossing the boundaries of various disciplines – Cultural Studies, queer theory, sexual geography, criminology, critical legal scholarship and 'new writing' – the very form of this PhD – Ficto-Criticism – can be situated as a liminal form, refusing to fit into dominant systems of categorisation – 'critical' or 'creative', 'fiction' or 'theory'. As Helen Flavell elaborates, the hybrid nature of 'Ficto-Criticism as "writing-between" is a contentious space where a mixture of elements are combined without clear rules of organisation, hierarchy, or set characteristics to aid identification' (2004:3).

I return to the photocopied image above my desk – the mannequin hurtling through the air⁴. I want to rewind this image, to replace the copy with the original. The mannequin for the man. I want to take this scene back in time, to find out where it came from, to discover what really happened out there on that cliff-top, but such desires are, of course, impossible. This is not a novel written by the American detective fiction writer Sara Paretsky, nor an episode of the U.S. police drama *Cold Case*, but nevertheless it's starting to haunt.

The dummy, once used in the Australian thriller *Lantana*⁵, now stars as the Sydney barman, John Allen Russell, 31, whose body was found at the bottom of the Bondi cliffs in November 1989. Dressed in clothes similar to those Russell was wearing at the time of his death, the dummy also symbolically stands-in for other gay men who have disappeared, or been found murdered, at the same site. Their photos eventually appear in media accounts too. Mugshots of Gilles Mattaini, Ross Warren, and Kritchikorn Rattanajurathaporn, are later positioned in news reports on the 'gay gang murders' beside John Russell, and eventually each other, resembling a relationship of sorts, not unlike a family tree. These men, now with the status of 'gay hate victims', bring a ghostly presence to this locale, their liminal bodies, lingering at the threshold of past and present, self and other, life and death. Some of these men, like Ross Warren, are 'missing, presumed dead' but not yet officially declared so. Others, like John Russell, are deemed 'dead' but not 'murdered' despite numerous signs to the contrary. For others, like Gilles Mattaini, their status as 'missing' has not even yet made it to public attention. These men are neither 'here' nor

⁴See Miranda, 2001:11.

⁵ In Miranda's article on the cliff-top re-enactment (2001:11) he states that the dummy used in the police re-enactment had previously been used in the Australian hit movie *Lantana*.

'there', their status both socially and structurally ambiguous. Like the mannequin, suspended both spatially and temporally, they remain in mid-air, in fl/fright.

The geographical location also adds another layer to this liminal, hybrid space. Not only does the Bondi-Tamarama walkway traverse the sea – the Pacific Ocean – and the land – the Bondi cliffs, parkland and foreshore – but this popular, internationally renowned tourist site now doubles as a crime scene. More than a decade after the men's disappearances and deaths, the words POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS waver uneasily in the Bondi breeze. Plastic tape signals a site marked by violence and loss. Beautiful Bondi wrestles for discursive space with the Bondi Badlands⁶.

Rewind to 23 November 1989.

Sydney resident, Neville Smith is walking along the rock ledge at the base of the Bondi-Tamarama cliffs when he sees a male body lying face down in a pool of blood. Smith checks to see if the man is still alive. The result is negative. Smith alerts the Police and Crime Scene Unit who attend the scene. Russell's body is conveyed by government contractors to the nearest hospital, St Vincent's⁷, where life is pronounced extinct. A certificate is issued then the body is transported to the central Sydney morgue in the inner-city suburb of Glebe.

As one would expect all institutional reports are written in a clinical language. Results of life are deemed

⁶ In Chapter Two, 'Postcards from the Bondi Badlands', I will examine cultural mythologies pertaining to Bondi, specifically notions concerning its construction as 'Beautiful Bondi' and also as a Badlands.

⁷ St Vincent's Public Hospital is a few suburbs away from Bondi, located in the Sydney inner-city suburb of Darlinghurst.

'negative'. Life is pronounced 'extinct'. Certificates are issued. Bodies transported. This is the language of officialdom, of bureaucracy, of government departments. Page after page of police reports and inquest transcripts are written in this tone. You can almost switch off to it. Take it in. Put it down. *Almost*.

But not all police reports produce this response. The lists of property and clothing found on the deceased, or at the scene of somebody's disappearance, elicit a different, somewhat haunting, response from me when I cast my eyes over them. In these official documents, catalogues of ordinary objects function as a synecdoche for the person, a stand-in for the Real. For these are the emblems of trauma, indexical of loss, representational of that old familiar sadness: the lost object of Desire. These itemized lists of property and clothing become iconic, embodying a mystery of their own, a haunting quality which insists on their own substantive reality even as it suggests the extraordinary complete lack of the person who owned and used them.

Fast-forward to July 1990.

After a 35 minute inquest held in July 1990 the State Coroner, unable to determine whether John Russell had fallen or been thrown from the cliff top, returned an open finding leaving the case effectively 'unsolved' (Callaghan, 2007a:49). Deeming the death as 'accidental' meant, barring initial inquiries, that Russell's death was never pursued as a possible homicide at the time.

Four months before Russell's death, in July 1989, Wollongong television presenter, Ross Bradley Warren, 25, disappeared from the same location. When Warren failed to

make a pre-arranged social occasion and to turn up for work, concerned friends, Craig Ellis and Paul Saucis, feared the worst and began their own search. Aware of Warren's favourite haunts, they headed to Tamarama where they located his locked vehicle in Kenneth Street, adjacent to Marks Park. A day later, the car keys were discovered on a rock pocket below the cliff ledge. Within a week – despite no body nor a plausible explanation for his disappearance – detectives concluded that Warren had probably fallen into the ocean (*Illawarra Mercury*, 28 July 1989, p. 5).

The third case the new investigation covered was the assault and attempted murder of 'Rick'⁸ at Marks Park on 21st December 1989. Described as 'the man that got away'⁹, 'Rick' became a significant witness as he had been bashed by a large group of youths, taunted for being a 'poofter', and threatened with death close to where Russell's body had been located a month before. After viewing police mug shots of 'persons of interest', 'Rick' was able to identify some of his attackers, members of the 'Bondi Boys' gang.

During the course of the investigation, detectives also re-examined the murder of Thai national, Bondi resident, Kritchikorn Rattanjurathaporn, 34, whose bloodied, battered body was discovered below Marks Park in July 1990. In this case it was revealed that the perpetrators, three teenage boys, had headed to Marks Park with the

⁸ In various media and legal sources, this witness, whose name is suppressed, is either not deliberately identified (see State Coroner's Findings and Recommendations, March 2005: 4, 12-13; Kamper, 2002:4; Tsavdaridis, 2002:9; Lamont, 2003:6; Masters, 2003:24-25) or referred to as 'Rick' (see Callaghan, 2007a and 2003) or as 'Victim M' (Lamont, 2003:13). Both titles 'Rick' and 'Victim M' are pseudonyms. Despite orders for suppression of his name, the witnesses' real name is used throughout Fenn's book *The Beat* (2006) and also once in *The Daily Telegraph* [Sydney] newspaper ('Gay hate gang faces justice', 1 April 2003, p. 9).

⁹ In Callaghan's (2007a:151-172) book, for example, there is a chapter devoted to 'Rick' titled 'The man who got away'. Callaghan also describes 'Rick' as 'the man who got away' in his feature article (2003:23).

express intention of 'poofter bashing'. The youths found Rattanajurathaporn and his companion, Jeffrey Sullivan, sitting on the lookout wall at Mackenzie's Point admiring the view. The victims were threatened before being set upon by the trio with fists, feet, and assorted weapons including a claw hammer and baton. Sullivan was left in a semi-conscious state by the lookout, whilst Rattanajurathaporn was pursued along the clifftop walkway where he was either pushed, or fell, over the edge of the cliff to his death. The post-mortem examination found that he had died from the combined effects of the assault and drowning, with extensive lacerations, bruising to the body and skull, spinal fractures and brain damage (R v. SM & DM, NSWCCA 11/11/93, cited in Tomsen, 2002:38¹⁰). All three youths were charged with murder and sentenced to fourteen years imprisonment.

One suspicious disappearance, an 'accidental' death, a gay bashing, and a gay hate related murder. These cases may not have been linked if not for the persistent requests¹¹ from Ross Warren's mother to have the investigation into her son's disappearance brought to a conclusion so that a death certificate could be issued in his name. As the police at the time of his disappearance had not produced a Brief of Evidence, the matter needed re-investigation. More than a decade had passed, and investigators, headed by Detective Stephen Page, started to notice common threads between Warren's suspected death and a number of other incidents. All the offences had taken place in the Marks Park vicinity, a well-known beat, and during the same time frame, 1989-1990. The victims were all gay men,

¹⁰ Tomsen is quoting here from the 1993 legal proceedings of the New South Wales Court of Criminal Appeal (NSWCCA) involving two of Rattanajurathaporn's killers, David McAuliffe (DM) and Sean McAuliffe (SM).

¹¹ In a two-year period, between 1998 and 2000, Ross Warren's mother, Kay Warren, had written six letters to the New South Wales Police Service.

or at least men perceived to be gay. What also unsettled investigators was that the men were reported to have been in 'good spirits' at the time of their deaths and disappearances. Russell had just received a considerable inheritance and was looking forward to a relocation and the chance to build his 'dream home'. Warren was also in an optimistic frame of mind having arranged an interview with Sydney TV station, Channel 10, an opportunity he wanted to make the most of. Finally, in December 2001, the New South Wales police publicly voiced what Russell's and Warren's friends and family members had long suspected: firstly, the men were victims of foul play, and secondly, the perpetrators had targeted them because of their homosexuality.

The dramatic reenactment with the dummy against the iconic Bondi cliffs, and the publicity that ensued, generated exactly what the police were seeking - further witnesses. After seeing the media coverage, a number of individuals came forward to provide testimonies of being 'gay-bashed' at Marks Park in the late 1980s by gangs of youths. Many of these men reported that their assailants had threatened to throw them off the cliffs. Unfortunately, the publicity also produced another 'missing person' and most probably another casualty. French national, Gilles Jacques Mattaini, 27, was last seen walking along the Bondi-Tamarama walkway in September 1985. Mattaini was known to enjoy long walks along the coastal path whilst listening to his Walkman. At the time of Mattaini's disappearance, when friends searched his apartment, they found no sign of his Walkman, spray jacket or keys. The fact that these particular items were missing suggested that Mattaini had never returned from his cliffside stroll. As Mattaini was estranged from his family, owing to his homosexuality, they had not reported his absence to authorities. When

informed of his disappearance, Mattaini's mother said she thought her son may have committed suicide. Friends in Sydney believed that a missing person's report had been filed in the mid 1980s but no record of this could be located. As a result, prior to 2002, no official investigation into Mattaini's whereabouts had ever been undertaken.

Research methodology: Constructing an archive

In my PhD I used a range of qualitative research methodologies to construct an archive of media, legal and police documents relating to the 'gay gang murders' and, more widely, to anti-gay violence in the Australian context. My archival research drew on a number of different sources including media reports, legal documents and interviews. The media analysis I undertook in this thesis drew on reports of Sydney-based gay hate crimes, including the Bondi cliffs cases, from Australian, predominantly New South Wales based, mainstream and gay press from 1988-2007, and two true-crime books published specifically on the 'gay gang murders' in 2006 and 2007, namely, I.J. Fenn's *The Beat: A True Account of the Bondi Gay Murders* (2006) and Greg Callaghan's *Bondi Badlands* (2007a). I chose this period of time because the majority of the 'gay gang murders' occurred between 1989-1990¹², the fresh investigation Operation Taradale was publicized in 2001 and 2002, the Coronial Inquest was held between 2003-2005, and the books on the case published between 2006-2007. I accessed the newspaper and media articles at the National Library of Australia archives located in Canberra, A.C.T, and from the on-line archives of the gay media *Sydney Star Observer*¹³ and Australia's largest on-line newspaper database, Newstext¹⁴.

¹² Gilles Mattaini's disappearance in 1985 was outside of this time frame. At the Coronial Inquest the Deputy State Coroner was unable to make a finding that Mattaini met his death at the hands of another person or persons stating, 'I can however bring in a finding of death for Mr Mattaini, but where and how he died remains unknown although there is a strong possibility that he died in similar circumstances to the other men' (State Coroner's Findings and Recommendations, March 2005, p. 14).

¹³ See <http://www.starobserver.com.au>, accessed 10 February 2009.

¹⁴ See <http://www.nexstext.com.au>, accessed 10 February 2009

My archival research also involved a number of visits to the New South Wales State Coroner's Court in Glebe, Sydney. My first visit to the State Coroner's Court on 9th March 2005 was to attend the State Coroner's Findings and Recommendations into the Operation Taradale inquiry. Unlike the earlier hearings which were well attended by family and friends of the deceased, witnesses, journalists, and spectators, when the Deputy State Coroner, Jacqueline M. Milledge, presented her closing remarks and findings, the courtroom was relatively empty. There were a few friends of the victims and a number of journalists from both the mainstream and gay media in the press gallery, yet there were no family members, witnesses or interested on-lookers as there had been throughout the inquest. Following the Deputy State Coroner presenting her Findings and Recommendations, I decided I needed to access the entire Brief of Evidence which had provided the background material to the Inquest. I approached (former) Detective Sergeant Stephen Page¹⁵ outside the Coroner's Court for these resources, and he suggested I access both his Brief of Evidence and the transcripts of the Coronial Inquest. I subsequently requested permission from the State Coroner's Court to view these documents and was eventually granted access.

My second visit to the New South Wales State Coroner's Court in November 2005 involved accessing numerous documents relating to the 'gay gang murders'. This archive included Detective Stephen Page's Brief of Evidence which was tendered to the State Coroner's Court and transcripts of the Coronial Inquest itself which included crime scene photographs pertaining to John Russell's death and multiple statements tendered to the inquest from 'gay bashing' victims, witnesses, police officers, forensic pathologists, and 'persons of interest' implicated in the crimes. Owing to the extensive volume of the Brief of Evidence, and the lengthy Coronial Inquest transcripts, I attended the State Coroner's Court on a daily basis over a three-week period. During this time I read the entire archives and took extensive notes which I have relied on heavily in the course of writing this PhD.

¹⁵ By the time of the final hearing of the Coronial Inquest in March 2005, Stephen Page had left the New South Wales Police Service hence my reference to him here as Mr. Page.

My PhD research also involved undertaking semi-structured interviews with people who either had a general knowledge of the cases in question and / or an awareness of the broader issues concerning Sydney-based anti-gay violence. These interviews took place in Sydney during November 2004. Prior to conducting, recording and transcribing these interviews, I obtained ethics approval from the Australian National University Human Research Ethics Committee to do so. In total, I conducted seven interviews with a range of individuals including government, police and community gay and lesbian liaison officers, gay press journalists and editors, and legal practitioners involved in research and advocacy relating to 'gay hate crimes' from a criminal justice perspective.

Firstly, I interviewed Jackie Braw, the Policy Officer for Gay and Lesbian Liaison with the New South Wales Attorney General's Department. As she is in a liaison and research role, Ms Braw is involved in facilitating communication and coordinating programs with a number of government agencies and community groups with the aim of preventing anti-gay violence and reducing the impact of such violence on the gay and lesbian community. Whilst Ms. Braw has an excellent knowledge of programs targeting homophobic violence, her information on the 'gay gang murders' themselves came solely from media sources. Secondly, I interviewed Brad Gray, the Project Coordinator of the New South Wales Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project (AVP)¹⁶. Mr. Gray is involved in a number of educational and community projects to target homophobia, both in schools and the wider community. He is involved in coordinating practical support for gay and lesbian victims of homophobic violence through preventive educational campaigns and the operation of a Report Line which monitors rates and sites of homophobic violence and provides information and referral services for victims. Whilst Gray was able to provide helpful background material on Sydney gay hate violence, like Braw, he did not have any specialist knowledge pertaining to the Bondi cliffs murders.

I also interviewed two staff members from the major Sydney gay newspaper, the *Sydney Star Observer*, who, in their role as journalists and editors, had

¹⁶ The Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project (AVP) is a project funded and operated by the AIDS Council of New South Wales (ACON), a health promotion organization based in the New South Wales gay and lesbian community.

covered a number of stories on Australian gay hate crimes. Marcus O'Donnell, the Editor in Chief of the *Sydney Star Observer*, had worked in the gay media as a journalist and editor for over twelve years. In that time he had seen significant changes in the way that gay hate crimes were responded to and reported, particularly in relation to such crimes attracting more sympathetic and less sensational media coverage. Likewise, Stacy Farrar, the News Editor of the *Sydney Star Observer*, was well versed in issues relating to homophobic violence having attended the Coronial Inquest into the 'gay gang murders' in her capacity as a journalist. In the interview Ms. Farrar reflected on the somber mood at the Coronial Inquest and the commitment of the Deputy State Coroner, Jacqueline M. Milledge, and Detective Stephen Page, in their efforts to generate further information and stronger 'evidence' on these cases.

Following interviews with media representatives, I interviewed two legal practitioners with a strong interest in, and knowledge of, Australian anti-gay violence. David Buchanan, a Sydney Barrister and Senior Counsel, spoke of his involvement in advocacy and lobby groups in relation to the so-called Homosexual Advance Defence¹⁷. Buchanan spoke of his participation in the Sexuality Hate Crimes Monitoring Committee, an Australian legal body set up at the request of the Attorney General to monitor gay hate crimes from a criminal justice perspective. I interviewed another member of the Sexuality Hate Crimes Monitoring Committee, Lloyd Babb, the Director of the Criminal Law Review Division of the Attorney General's Department for New South Wales. Mr. Babb elaborated on the work of the Sexuality Hate Crimes Monitoring Committee as a useful data collection centre as well as the committee's involvement in 'gay friendly' judicial and legal profession education. Lastly, I interviewed the Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officer for the Surry Hills Police Station¹⁸, Senior Constable Paul Morgan. Senior Constable Morgan's main role as a Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officer (GLLO) is to monitor gay hate crime in the local Surry Hills area, to provide victims with appropriate services and support, and to be pro-active in the reduction of hate crime by strategies such as a more visible police presence in districts with a high concentration of gay businesses and

¹⁷ The 'Homosexual Advance Defence' is used to describe cases in which an accused person alleges that he or she acted either in self defence or under provocation in response to a homosexual advance made by another person (Attorney General's Department, New South Wales, 1998:10).

¹⁸ Surry Hills is an inner-city suburb of Sydney with a large gay population.

community venues.

Although in writing up this thesis I rarely quote from the interviews I undertook, I found that they provided me with significant general background and valuable context in relation to the broader issues concerning Sydney-based homophobic violence and how it is dealt with by official bodies and community organizations. Despite a strong grasp of, and involvement in, the issues of anti-gay violence in New South Wales, most of the people I interviewed had limited, primarily anecdotal, knowledge of the 'gay gang murders' cases. Hence, whilst I found the interviews useful in terms of providing me with broader contextualizing material, they were not as helpful in terms of constructing an archive of material specific to the actual Bondi cliffs cases themselves.

Since beginning my thesis I visited the crime-scene locations – Marks Park and the Bondi-Tamarama walkway – on an almost annual basis. As I was in Sydney every November for work purposes I made a point of always visiting the crime scene when I was there. These visits happened to coincide with Sculpture by the Sea¹⁹, an annual public art event which involves exhibiting sculptures all along the two kilometre Bondi-Tamarama coastal walk and in Marks Park itself. During my annual 'pilgrimage' to the crime-scene I would often take photographs of the walkway and Marks Park, including sometimes photographing sculptures which were installed in these locations. My last visit to the crime-scene was in January 2008. This journey was specifically for the purpose of visiting the crime-scene, photographing it, taking further notes of my impressions, and identifying the locations where the victims in the 'gay gang murders' were believed to have met their respective deaths. In Chapter Three, 'Meditations on the scene of the crime', I reflect extensively on this particular visit.

¹⁹ See <http://www.sculpturebythesea.com>, accessed 10 February 2009.

Research Methodology: Auto-Ethnography, Ficto-Criticism and Cultural Studies

The methodological approach I am adopting throughout this PhD draws heavily on Auto-Ethnography, Ficto-Criticism and Cultural Studies. In exploring these cases, and the wider social issues they related to, I found a variety of stylistic formats and modes were the most appropriate way for me to proceed. By utilizing a mixed mode of traditional criticism and Ficto-Critical / Auto-Ethnographic reflection, I have been able to critically reflect on general media and legal trends in an analytical mode and simultaneously to engage the tools of Auto-Ethnography to put myself into the picture. Whilst such an approach has authority analytically, it also blends a more personal and poignant meditation into the overall picture.

I simply couldn't approach this case from a purely analytical perspective as I wanted to bring out the highly individualized and personalised nature of the cases, and highlight that these events have had very real ramifications for real-life people. In some small way I wanted to bring the victims and their loved ones into this thesis even if it was only via my own meditative reflections. I decided against interviewing the family and friends of the victims because I was, primarily, examining the representational fabric of the cases and to conduct actual interviews would have lent the study a vastly different emphasis. Conducting interviews would have produced victim / survivor narratives which are often granted a 'truth' value above and beyond any other discursive representations of the case. Whilst I did not want the personal and anecdotal to take over the analysis, I did want to indicate my own personal interest in, and involvement with, the cases. However, I do not intend that my Ficto-Critical / Auto-Ethnographic reflections be reified as any kind of 'truth'.

Sharing some similarities to ethnography, with its focus on the study of experience, an Auto-Ethnography is an autobiographical 'genre of writing and research that displays multiple levels of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural' (Bochner and Ellis, 2000:739). It is a form of writing that 'make[s] the researcher's own experience a topic of investigation in its own right' (Bochner

and Ellis, 2000:733). In this genre, authors draw on their own lived experiences, and by connecting the personal to the cultural, place the self and others within a social context (Reed-Danahay, 1997). This means that as well as describing and critically analyzing one's own personal experience, an Auto-Ethnography also provides a form of cultural accounting.

Auto-Ethnographic texts, which are frequently written in the first person voice, appear in a variety of forms – 'short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose' (Bochner and Ellis, 2000:739). As Carolyn Ellis elaborates, Auto-Ethnography employs many of the conventions of literary writing:

Research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical to the cultural, social, and political. Autoethnographic forms feature concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness, and introspection portrayed in dialogue, scenes, characterization, and plot (2004:xix)

Throughout this PhD I have utilized Auto-Ethnographic conventions by deliberately writing myself into the work as a major voice and character thus challenging dominant perspectives on silent authorship where the researchers' voice is noticeably absent in the presentation of findings (eg. Charmaz and Mitchell, 1997; Holt, 2003). This has meant that my voice – as author and researcher – can be heard, as opposed to being omitted from, or written out of, the text. In other words, by writing myself into this analysis, I am also highlighting my active participation and personal involvement in the research process itself. Indeed it was memories of my own lived experience as an 'out' dyke teenager which led to my interest in gay-hate crimes and my motivation for doing a thesis in this area. As a gay teenager I experienced and witnessed numerous acts of homophobic violence on a semi-regular basis. In the course of my teenage years I, along with my friends, partners and house-mates, were threatened, spat at, chased, punched, kicked and had various objects, including bottles and beer-crates, thrown at us, accompanied with the standard taunts of 'dirty dyke' and 'bloody lezzo'. On most occasions, our assailants were large groups of young men, including our neighbours, gang members, uniformed police officers and plain-clothed detectives.

During the course of this PhD I toyed with the idea of writing up my own personal history of homophobic violence – as I have just done here – and integrating it into the thesis in an Auto-Ethnographic mode. However, I had thought this would be somewhat self-indulgent, as it would turn the focus away from the victims of the ‘gay gang murders’ and the almost unimaginable circumstances surrounding their disappearances and deaths and onto me. Perhaps it was a case of survivor-guilt. I had walked away from gangs of homophobes with the occasional bruise and, in one case, slight concussion. The men at the Bondi cliffs had lost their lives. It wasn’t until I was writing up the final draft of this PhD that I included my own personal history of violence. I anticipated unfavourable comments from my supervisor, Dr. Rosanne Kennedy, and panel member, Dr. Peter Jackson. I was most surprised when they responded favourably, describing the ‘personal history’ as a ‘compelling’ and ‘very interesting’ section which provided valuable information concerning my motivation for writing this thesis as well as offering up a clear justification for writing in a Ficto-Critical and Auto-Ethnographic mode (Kennedy, R, personal correspondence, 2009; Jackson, P, personal correspondence, 2009).

Along with Auto-Ethnography, the other two dominant modes I utilize in this thesis are Ficto-Criticism and Cultural Studies. As I will demonstrate in this introduction, there are significant overlaps between these two categories with Cultural Studies being posited as one of the ‘homes’ of Ficto-Criticism (Brewster & Schlunke, 2005:393). In *The Space Between: Australian Women Writing Ficto-Criticism* (1998), Amanda Nettelbeck defines Ficto-Criticism as:

hybridized writing that moves between the poles of fiction (‘invention’/‘speculation’) and criticism (‘deduction’/‘explication’), of subjectivity (‘interiority’) and objectivity (‘exteriority’). It is writing that brings the ‘creative’ and the ‘critical’ together – not simply in the sense of placing them side by side, but in the sense of mutating both, of bringing a spotlight to bear upon the known forms in order to make them ‘say’ something else (1998:3-4).

In Ficto-Criticism the ‘creative’ and the ‘critical’ are brought into a resonant relationship with each other which creates a certain symbiosis, tension and resistance between the two (Flavell, 2004; Brewster, 1996; Nettelbeck, 1998).

Alerting us to the performative nature of Ficto-Criticism, Anna Gibbs argues that it:

... does not illustrate an already existing argument, does not simply formulate philosophy (or anything else) in fictional terms. It is not translation or transposition: it says something which can't be said in any other way: because it is not reducible to propositional content. It is, in essence, performative, a meta-discourse in which the strategies of the telling are part of the point of the tale (1997).

Whilst, as a performative mode, Ficto-Criticism may be highly attuned to stylistic and textual strategies, it still manages to engage with, and produce, complex theoretical and philosophical analyses. In Chapter Six, 'Trace Evidence: the ordinary objects (not) left behind', for example, I integrate a series of Ficto-Critical reflections on the mundane traces left in the wake of the men's disappearances with psychoanalytic theory to render such found objects both meaningful and meaningless. Thus my Ficto-Critical musings, combined with psychoanalysis and 'thing theory', mutate together in order to read the trace objects left behind in a new light. Likewise in Chapter Three, 'Meditations on the scene of the crime', I bring together Cultural Studies theory on the meaningless(ness) of crime scenes with my personal Ficto-Critical reflections on visiting the location and analyzing the crime scene photographs so as to demonstrate how the very scene of the crime can be turned into, and read, as a legible and intelligible site.

Some identifiable narrative traits that a Ficto-Critical text exhibits are an emphasis on hybrid writing, self-reflexivity, inter-textuality, the b(l)ending of narrative boundaries, the mixing and multiplicity of genres and perspectives, and the fragmentary form 'as a verbal form of montage' (Gibbs, 2005). Thus, Ficto-Criticism shifts not merely from point to point, or position to position, but also more significantly in/between these very positions and their fault-lines. I am aware that when I list some of Ficto-Criticism's recognizable characteristics – for example, 'self reflexivity', 'genre bending', 'performative', 'hybridity' – that a collection of terms such as these can be viewed as 'buzz-words' which have

little meaning or value in and of themselves. Like the term 'postmodernism', for example, Ficto-Criticism is a doubtful, contested, contradictory and inchoate category. However, its tentative and blurred status need not render it meaningless. For, as Anne Brewster and Katrina Schlunke, put it so eloquently:

As always when we begin to define or declare what Ficto-Criticism is or is not, Ficto-Criticism loses its purpose, which is first and foremost a space of possibility. There is even a touch of romance here – give me your awkward political phrases, your strange troubles with practice as theory, give me your passions about place in a global imagining, hand me your in-between beingness: all that is cast out from the lingering categories and I will give you a home here (2005:394).

Whilst fictocritical writing is regularly touted, particularly in a celebratory mode, as a subversive strategy that mixes and disturbs genres, it is worth noting the fluidity and instability of these genres themselves. As Scott Brook suggests:

One of the ironic effects of thinking about fc [Ficto-Criticism] as a transgressive, hybrid form of writing might be to shore up the differences between its constitutive parts. Instead of thinking of genres as essentially different – that is, as different in type for being based on historically discrete discourses, and therefore capable of monstrous coupling in the 'space between' – perhaps we should think of genres as already monstrous (2002:113).

Genres, as Brook points out, are always historically variable, contagious and operating within a particular milieu. Yet, making the constructedness of the category 'genre' conspicuous does not necessarily mean that 'genres' – which as Brook points out 'are never as stable as they seem' (2002:113) – cannot, in the guises we read and relate to them over, be broken, bent, fought over, or even monstered. For already monstrous genres can themselves be monstered more perhaps even to the point of obliteration.

As for Ficto-Criticism's status as a genre, I am in agreement with Nettelbeck that it is 'not so much a discrete literary genre as a writing practice – a strategy for writing – that stands outside of textbook definitions' (1998:4). Gibbs echoes this point, claiming, 'Ficto-Criticism was never a genre that was One ... [it] is not so much a genre as an accident, even a hit and run – or perhaps precisely a hit and run guerrilla action, tactical rather than strategic' (1997).

As Gibbs has observed, Ficto-Criticism's 'self-conscious mixing of registers and (already mixed) genres matches (or mimics) both a multidisciplinary approach – which may encounter areas of incommensurability in the overlaps between disciplines – and the 'methodological impurity'²⁰ of Cultural Studies (2005). For as Angela McRobbie claims, Cultural Studies itself is not a rigidly defined discipline but rather 'a shifting terrain, a site of dispute and contestation' (2005:2).

Ficto-Critical writing shares common characteristics and strategies with work located in the interdisciplinary field of Cultural Studies with its emphasis upon the forms, practices and experiences of contemporary cultural life. As Brewster and Schlunke suggest, there is a need to 'think of the fictocritical as one possible outcome of a Cultural Studies and / or creative writing trajectory concerned with a display of its own motivating questions that is also an account of them [as well as for Cultural Studies] to come to terms with the Ficto-Critical as a scholarly genre that understands one of its homes to be Cultural Studies' (2005:393). Ficto-Criticism, as Brewster and Schlunke argue, challenges the very nature of strict theoretical writing by revealing the textual performance of scholarly work and attempting to display, perhaps even model, its thinking within the writing process (2005:393).

The process of writing this PhD, and more widely, Cultural Studies, is most valuable in its ability to expand the parameters of more traditional ways of seeing. A Cultural Studies approach allows me 'the requisite room to bring different theories together, to cause discursive clashes, to untangle one theoretical knot with the aid of another from a different discourse, to leap theoretical hurdles in the same way' (Morrissey, 2003:4). In other words, I use theory instrumentally rejecting the concept that things, people, narratives, discourses can ever be considered as autonomous units. In this way, I can utilize what Kathleen Daly and Lisa Maher describe as an 'intellectual double shift' (1998:1), demonstrating how only through working across disciplinary boundaries can one adequately detail the power of representation to produce

²⁰ Gibbs attributes this description to Australian Cultural Studies theorists John Frow and Meaghan Morris, specifically, their 1993 introduction to *Australian Cultural Studies: A Reader*, John Frow and Meaghan Morris (eds) (Sydney, New South Wales: Allen and Unwin).

real, cultural and personal effects. Cultural Studies, then, allows me to analyze each discourse through the lens of another, seeing them as they are not self-consciously intended to be seen.

This methodological approach follows on from what Foucault (1974) famously described as a 'rummage' or 'tool-box' 'which others can rummage through to find a tool which they can use however they wish to in their own area' (1994:523-4). In following the 'tool-box' approach, I am drawing on theoretical material from Cultural Studies, queer theory, sexual geography, criminology, critical legal scholarship as well as from Australian media and legal texts pertaining to the crimes.

As much of this thesis is concerned with the institutions and discourses of 'the law' and 'the media', I could have adopted a strictly legal or media studies approach, as opposed to a Cultural Studies one. However, I am not so much interested in *how* specific Australian legal and media processes and regulations relate to the operations of 'the law' and 'the media', but rather how they generate and circulate particular cultural meanings and narratives. As Vincent Leitch has pointed out, institutional and ideological analyses are pivotal to the field of Cultural Studies (1997:1). By using such an approach, I am able 'to analyze and assess the social roots, the institutional relays, and the ideological ramifications' (Leitch, 1997:2) of the 'gay gang murders', and how and what they came to mean in contemporary Australian society. Such an approach will interrogate both the material means and methods used by institutions, such as the law, media and criminal justice system, which circulate within specific cultural texts, and critique the beliefs and representations embodied in and produced by these cultural artifacts and practices (Leitch, 1997:1).

As opposed to more traditional thesis models, this Ficto-Critical PhD highlights the performative nature and process of writing, in particular the specific choices and textual strategies that I made about how I wrote and what I wrote. In identifying my work as Ficto-Criticism, I am not suggesting that the 'ficto' can be easily or unequivocally distinguished from the 'criticism'. At times, it may be easy to differentiate between two such categories yet at other times there is a slippage between these nominal poles. In the process of writing this PhD, so-

called 'creative' and 'theoretical' writings were brought together and juxtaposed so that they not only resonated with each other but also actively produced and made evident the tensions in and between the various texts. This PhD has deliberately steered clear of omniscient modes of narration, over-arching arguments and Grand Narratives in favour of multiple and partial points-of-view, fragmentary forms, and a close focus on a singular, local case study. Using strategies common to both Ficto-Criticism and Cultural Studies, this thesis can also be described as an example of 'new writing', that is, as a work 'of critical innovation, political intervention and creative textuality which draws upon diverse styles and genres of writing as well as disciplinary, discourses and audience expectations' (Schlunke, K, personal correspondence, 2007).

The title of this chapter, 'Introduction – The Bondi 'Gay Gang Murders': Fragments' is a play on Roland Barthes' title, *The Lover's Discourse: Fragments* (1978), in which Barthes privileges the fragmented image over a systematically built-up argument, thus he foregrounds 'the borrowed and reconstituted nature of ideas rather than lays claims to authorial originality; he offers the text as a performance of 'thinking through' rather than as the residue of critical thought' (Nettelbeck, 1998:4-5). I am not offering a singular nor definitive account of the 'gay gang murders', nor as I.J. Fenn (2006) claims, 'A *True*²¹ Account of the Bondi Gay Murders'. Instead, as the title of this chapter suggests, I am working with my subject material on a range of different levels and in different pieces. It is an amalgam of theoretical meditations, fictional narratives, poetry, and quotations. It consists of eight chapters with varying degrees of dislocations and congruence between them.

What attracted me to producing a Cultural Studies based-thesis in a Ficto-Critical form? To begin with, I was excited – and continue to be – by the possibilities that Ficto-Criticism offers. Brewster and Schlunke, among others, have explored some of these – those moments of in-between beingnesses, the way Ficto-Criticism wants 'to wear its weird politics of pleasure and passion on its sleeve in a way that is naturally theoretical and practical and personal' (2005:391); to produce writing that 'wants to turn and touch its listeners and readers and wants to feel their touch back' (2005:394).

²¹ Emphasis added.

Touch me gently.
Slap me around.
Just touch me. Damn it.
Touch me.

It was these desires and more.

Under a university-issue desk littered with documents, both paper and electronic, I found myself working with and upon genres that were both already monstered and yet always monstering ... legal jargon, media headlines, tourist brochures, confessional transcripts, philosophical meditations ... these were the voices, the discourses of 'intensity, performance and shifting temporalities' (Brewster & Schlunke, 2005:394); the unreliable I's and the 'not I's', competing for an audience in this 80,000+ word project. Sometimes their form was almost un/recognizable. Other times, their key concepts lost in translation. Yet persistently, quietly, and oh so patiently, these monstered genres, these (un)buried archives, demanded to be seen, heard, touched, acted up/on, monstered some more.

(A Polaroid comes to life in the palm of my hand:
ink-saturated, fresh colours, heightened tones emerge.
I blow the image dry then place it under a light bulb to
watch the colours washing out, seeping through, becoming
something other to what they were.
Skin turns a ghostly shade of pale as flesh drifts away
from, hangs loose, off bone.

I copy the same image, this time under the harsh light of the Xerox machine.

The black and white tones make the bones prominent.

I pin it on my noticeboard, up above my computer: white teeth pulsate from the darkness of the photocopied page. They're trying to tell me something but I don't know what it is.)

I put my ear to the ground.

I listen.

I look.

There was something else.

It haunted, both from the margins and, unexpectedly, the centre.

It had a name but I couldn't put my finger on it.

It played with me:

Taunted.

Teased.

Beckoned.

Begged.

Finally, after 50,000 words, eight drafts, countless flat whites no sugar, chocolate muffins (fat-free), Bitburger premium (no impurities), a variety of (il)licit medications and too many deleted files being dragged down the screen to the TRASH icon, I realized what it was loitering in the darkness: 'the something that can't be said in any other way' (Gibbs, 1997).

The lingering words, doubtful pauses and throwaway phrases were playing with me. This was 'writing as flirtation, seduction; expressive but staged, not necessarily seeking/invoking a real(ist) intimacy' (Brewster &

Schlunke, 2005:394). It was a game. Only when I started to p/lay back – pay back, lay back – did things begin to shift. The ‘fiction’ and the ‘criticism’, the ‘percepts’ and the ‘concepts’, started chasing ‘each other around successively masking and unmasking’ (Muecke, 2002:125); doing and outdoing each other, until as Stephen Muecke called out from the sideline, both arms waving frantically up in the air: ficto/criticism – ‘Concept/percept, who cares?’ (2002:127).

Who cares indeed.

You’ll find them loitering throughout this work.
The something’s-that-can’t-be-said-in-any-other-way.
The ‘deformed’ literature (Muecke, 2002:125) some of us call ‘Ficto-Criticism’.
Trace your fingers through these pages and you might feel these deformities, these monstrosities, these ‘methodologically impure’ contagions too.
You might decide to take your bright red BIC pen and put a slash right through them. Or a big bold black line

—
You may draw a net across them as if to envelope them within a grid.
Or perhaps meander a series of question marks all around them.

??

Go ahead.

There’s plenty of room.

There’s no shortage of paper.

From these Xeroxed sheets of A4 paper, they might speak to you:

These traces – mugshots – locks of hair – footprints (not) on the dancefloor – shadows at the cliff face.

They might look you in the eye.

Stare you down.

Stare you.

Tear you.

If you're lucky, their gaze may even hit the side of your face.

You might swear for a moment you actually felt something there, brushing softly against your cheek, something tactile – someone blowing into your ear, a finger grazing your skin, a kiss of sorts.

Like the ordinary objects (not) left behind at the scene of the crime, the uncanny *things* that both provide 'evidence' and yet as mere objects symbolize nothing, a something-that-can't-be-said-in-any-other-way is weaving its presence into our conversation, into this dialogue, onto this screen:

Catch it if you can.

Feel its touch back.

Try to 'get it'.

Institutions

When I read in detail the descriptions of these crimes and the official (non)responses they received, in both media reports and legal and police documents, what strikes me is how a number of key institutions, namely, the

law, the judiciary and the media, failed to respond appropriately to these events at the time. Their inability to read and to treat these crimes as crimes deserving of investigation and attention suggests to me that the victims were not held in very high regard by wider social bodies and institutions, nor were their losses, for the most part, publicly acknowledged. In analyzing the discourses and institutions which, predominantly, positioned the victims as ungrievable, I will be drawing on Judith Butler's work *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004) where she examines the means by which some lives become worthy of public mourning while others are viewed as undeserving of public grief, and indeed even incomprehensible as lives. One of my motivations in writing this thesis was to draw attention to Gilles, Ross, John and Kritchikorn's lives (and deaths) and in the process to position them as lives worth remembering and publicly grieving over.

A number of institutions have determined the way in which these crimes have been situated within different social and cultural discourses. I am defining institution here as 'those enduring regulatory and organizing structures of any society which constrain and control individuals and individuality' (O'Sullivan et al, 1983:116). As productive agencies, social institutions provide a structure of roles, relationships and functions for those who inhabit them. The New South Wales Police Service, for example, was the institution responsible for investigating these incidents and for responding to them as serious crimes. In Kritchikorn Rattanjurathaporn's death, the only Bondi cliffs case to have resulted in a conviction, the New South Wales Law Court was the State apparatus in charge of 'punishing' the offenders. More recently, between 2003-2005, another legal body, the New South Wales State Coroner's Court, has been responsible for conducting an inquest into three of these suspected deaths. Locally based gay and mainstream media institutions have also imbued these events with specific meanings. Sometimes these meanings have been generated by the overall tone of the coverage, whether, for example, the victims are treated in a 'hostile' or 'sympathetic' manner. The degree to which these events were actually considered 'newsworthy' in the first place – as demonstrated by the amount of coverage they received, use of accompanying visuals and where the stories were placed in the newspaper – is also significant.

During Operation Taradale the material unearthed by Detective Page and his team was painstakingly gathered and meticulously presented. The Deputy State Coroner, Jacqueline M. Milledge, described it as a 'thorough' and 'impeccable' investigation which used 'extremely sophisticated police techniques and methodology' (State Coroner's Findings and Recommendations, March 2005, p.8). The Brief of Evidence tendered to the New South Wales Coroner's Court in April 2003 included statements from scores of witnesses, police officers, 'gay bashing' victims and alleged perpetrators. The Brief's volume was in itself impressive – at the start of the inquest it comprised six lever-arched folders of statements, 276 annexures, and Detective Page's original statement which was 258 pages long. Furthermore, although the joint inquest focused on the suspected murders of Warren, Russell and Mattaini, it also covered a number of other 'gay hate' related assaults and murders in the Eastern Suburbs during the late 1980s and early 1990s, including that of Rattanajurathaporn.

In the State Coroner's Findings and Recommendations, presented in March 2005, Milledge examined a number of contentious issues. She addressed the 'beat' location of the crimes and debates over its existence and usage, the 'gay hate' climate that existed at the time of the suspected murders, and the fragile relationship between the New South Wales Police Service and its gay and lesbian clients. In a scathing critique of the earlier police operations, Milledge described the investigation into Warren's death as a 'grossly inadequate and shameful investigation' which did not even warrant the term 'investigation', whilst the inquiry into Russell's death was deemed inadequate and 'lack lustre' (State Coroner's Findings and Recommendations, March 2005, p. 6).

During the re-investigation a number of individuals had been identified as 'persons of interest' in relation to the Taradale cases and asked to provide evidence at the Coronial Inquest. These suspects included the men convicted of Rattanajurathaporn's murder, members of the Alexandria Eight involved in the murder of Sydney gay man, Richard Johnson, in 1990, and other individuals identified by the victims of gay bashings and other sources. As well as damning earlier police investigations, Milledge was highly critical of the alleged perpetrators who all flatly denied any involvement in violent attacks on gay men. According to Milledge, their 'evidence' was 'completely at odds with the police

intelligence gathered during the course of the investigation' (State Coroner's Findings and Recommendations, March 2005, p. 9). The unreliability of the statements offered by these 'persons of interest' was contrasted with the 'chilling', 'honest and forthright' accounts from the victims of gay bashing (State Coroner's Findings and Recommendations, March 2005, p. 12). Milledge proposed numerous recommendations including reviews of procedures and practices relating to 'suspicious' missing person cases, the reintroduction of the GLLO (Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officer) training programme, and the development and implementation of the 'Beat Usage Reduction and Safety Improvement Project' (State Coroner's Findings and Recommendations, March 2005, p. 14-15).

Whilst I have identified key institutions – legal, media, criminal justice – in which the Bondi cliffs cases have been played out, I do not want to suggest that these institutions are self enclosed systems which operate in a vacuum. Instead, it is important 'to recognize the essential interconnectedness and fusion of [these] institutions' (O'Sullivan et al, 1983:117). The symbiotic relationship between the institutions of the law and media, for example, has been noted by various researchers. Media theorists, Richard Ericson, Patricia Baranek and Janet Chan (1989) have argued that the production of news does not occur in isolation from the events, institutions and people who act as sources of and conduits for it. Criminologist Mark Fishman (1981), who analyzed the way in which the New York media manufactured a seven week 'crime wave' against the elderly, has pointed out that there exists a circularity in the reporting of crime so that crime news actually recreates itself. Australian researchers, Peter Grabosky and Paul Wilson, also acknowledge the close relationship between police sources and media journalists whereby 'the selection of crime news is based on what police make available to journalists, and what the police make available is, in large part, based on what the press reports' (1989:3).

The way in which seemingly discrete institutions inter-relate with each other can be seen clearly by the responses generated to the gay deaths at the Bondi cliffs. The initial police response to these events – which ranged from total neglect to sheer incompetence – translated to the limited amount of media attention at the time. Mattaini's disappearance in 1985, for example, received

no coverage at all until August 2002. Russell's death in 1989 generated a handful of brief reports in local newspapers including an article in the gay publication, the *Sydney Star Observer* ('Mystery death of gay man near Bondi beat', 12 January 1990, p. 3). Warren's disappearance received blitz coverage in the mainstream media for approximately a fortnight. This publicity can be attributed to Warren's celebrity status as a TV presenter. In contrast, the official attention that these cases received at the turn of the 21st century, demonstrated by the resources provided to detectives and the State Coroner, led to an increased amount of media coverage. From 2001, when the cases were re-opened, they attracted considerable attention on the radio and television news and in the mainstream and gay print media, both in Australia and internationally. The cliff-top re-enactment in December 2001, for example, received coverage in a range of national newspapers (for example, *Sydney Morning Herald*²², *The Daily Telegraph*²³, *Illawarra Mercury*²⁴, *Townsville Bulletin*²⁵) often accompanied by photographs of the victims and the police rescue-squad. Likewise, when police linked the men's disappearances to 'gay hate gangs', the story received front-page press and double page spreads (for example, Kamper, 2002:1; Kamper, 2003:13; Callaghan, 2003:20-23). During the Coronial Inquest and later its Findings and Recommendations, the Bondi cliffs murders received the most attention to date with major Australian daily newspapers (for example, *Sydney Morning Herald*²⁶, the *Canberra Times*²⁷, *The Australian*²⁸ and *The Daily Telegraph*²⁹) reporting on proceedings on a regular, sometimes daily basis, and also producing feature stories on the case. More recently, as I noted earlier, the murders have been the subject of two true-crime books, namely, *Bondi Badlands* (2007a) and *The Beat: A True Account of the Bondi Gay Murders* (2006), which I will analyze in later chapters.

The symbiotic relationship between media, legal and judicial institutions is also

²² 'Strands of hair may hold vital clue to men's deaths', 10 December 2001, p. 3.

²³ Miranda, Charles, 'Dummy's new role', 10 December 2001, p. 11.

²⁴ Woolage, Danielle, 'Police reopen case of missing WIN presenter', 10 December 2001, p. 2

²⁵ 'Police re-enact 1989 death at cliff face', 10 December 2001, p. 10

²⁶ Eg. Lamont, Leonie, 'Mother's letters spur inquiry', 1 April 2003, p. 6; Lamont, Leonie, 'Police flaws not because victim was gay: detective', 3 April 2003; Lamont, Leonie, 'Hate crimes', 10 April 2003, p. 13

²⁷ Eg. 'Football star involved with gay bashing gang, inquest told', 1 April 2003, p. 4.

²⁸ Eg. Callaghan, Greg, 'Police blasted over gay-hate killings', 10 March 2005, p. 7; Milligan, Louise, 'Tapes link gay-hate murders', 1 April 2003, p. 9.

²⁹ Eg. Kamper, Angela, 'Gay hate gang faces justice', 1 April 2003, p. 1 and 4.

evident in relation to the Coronial Inquest. The detectives involved in Operation Taradale collected and prepared the Brief of Evidence which was tendered to the State Coroner's Court. During the course of this investigation police appealed to the public for more information. Media publicity unearthed yet more victims of gay bashing and also another suspected death, Mattaini, which in turn led to further investigations by both the New South Wales Police Service and State Coroner. The State Coroner herself described the Coronial Inquest as 'very much a 'work in motion', acknowledging the ongoing nature of Detective Page's investigation throughout the hearing with statements being taken from 'witnesses as they became known during the course of the inquest' (State Coroner's Findings and Recommendations, 2005, p. 9). In turn, the Coroner's findings, which relied heavily on the fresh evidence, were distributed to the media and police at the end of inquest proceedings. From these findings, fourteen recommendations were directed specifically to the Minister of Police and Police Commissioner. The close relationship between these institutions has meant that dominant media representations of the case have, in many instances, echoed police briefs, trial transcripts and inquest findings.

Discourses

The legal and media institutions involved in this case produce and mobilize various discourses that influence our understandings of the crimes and the meanings we attach to them. In linguistics, the term 'discourse' simply refers to passages of connected writing or speech (Hall, 1997:44). In post-structuralism, particularly in the influential work of Michel Foucault, the concept has been developed so that it represents both a general theoretical notion and refers to numbers of specific discourses which 'are produced at several different sites and circulated through several different processes or practices' (Hall, 1997:3). By 'discourse' Foucault was referring to:

a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment. ... Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But ... since all social practices entail meaning, and meanings shape and influence what we do – our conduct – all practices have a

discursive aspect (Hall, 1992:291).

In my research on the 'gay gang murders', a variety of discourses conspire to produce multiple, often contradictory, readings of the crimes, the victims, the perpetrators and the crime site. These discourses appear across a range of media and legal texts and at several different institutional sites. Institutionalized discourses, such as the legal and criminal justice system, are prominent in my analysis as are media discourses, like the mainstream and gay print media. General ideological understandings of (homo)sexuality and masculinity, which are mobilized throughout these various discourses, also function to construct particular meanings around these events.

Like the discourses which circulate in and around these crimes, the cultural meanings of the 'gay gang murders' are also the product of specific social, historical and institutional formations. In Australia during the past two decades there have been dramatic shifts in how media, legal, criminal justice and other social forces have responded to anti-gay violence. When these crimes took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s, 'fag bashing' was frequently viewed as a social rite or a form of sport, not worthy of official investigations or resources. (See, for example, State Coroner's Findings and Recommendations, 9 March 2005, p. 13 and Graycar, 2002). More recently, such readings have been contested, particularly by discourses produced and generated by the media, the law and the New South Wales Police Service. These attitudinal shifts have contributed to 'poofter bashing' being more widely regarded as a serious crime not only by members of the GLBT³⁰ community but also more significantly by those outside of it.

Throughout this thesis I mark a trajectory of the discursive shifts that have occurred in relation to the Bondi cliffs murders. I observe that in the mid 1980s through to the early 1990s, the men were situated as disposable and illegitimate victims, not worthy of official resources or attention. By the turn of the 21st century, however, the men's deaths have been the subject of a police investigation, Coronial Inquest, and extensive and sympathetic media coverage. In other words, these men's lives – which were once dismissed and ignored –

³⁰ GLBT is an abbreviation for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Trans-gender.

are now being publicly recognized and mourned. This demonstrates a wider discursive shift involving Australian gay men, or those presumed to be, from a space of non-citizenship at the time of the 'gay gang murders' to the site they currently occupy, whereby they have moved further along the continuum, edging closer to full citizenship. This discursive shift emerged as a result of a number of diverse, sometimes converging, cultural forces and institutional changes, namely, gay community initiatives, research projects and partnerships with key institutions; major reforms and development in the New South Wales Police Service; increased cultural and legal recognition for Sydney's gay and lesbian population; the mainstreaming of gay identities in popular culture; the Pink Dollar; the popularity of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras; the unprecedented and unexpected media production of an 'anti-gay crime wave' in the early 1990s; and media and community responses to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. I will be examining and contextualizing these discursive shifts in Chapter One, 'Context/History'.

Chapter Outline

This chapter, 'Introduction – The Bondi 'Gay Gang Murders': Fragments' has introduced the reader to the set of crimes under investigation throughout this PhD. It has described and provided a justification and defence of the key methodological approaches employed in this work, namely, archival research, Auto-Ethnography, Ficto-Criticism and Cultural Studies. It has outlined how this analysis will explore discursive knowledges and institutional regimes which have determined the ways in which these crimes have been situated within diverse, sometimes contradictory, social and cultural discourses and contexts.

In Chapter One, 'Context/History', I situate the Bondi cliffs murders in relation to the broader social and cultural shifts that have occurred in Australia since the late 1980s. In doing so, I outline the social, historical and cultural context in which the crimes took place and the responses they received in media, legal and public discourses and institutions, both at the time and up until the current day. This chapter charts specific trends in both broader Australian society and especially within the institution of the New South Wales Police Service.

In Chapter Two, 'Postcards from the Bondi Badlands', I analyse the abject underside indicated by the crime scene and crimes which I believe is implicit in the social and cultural context described in the first chapter. In this chapter, I concentrate on the crime site, Bondi, situating it as a badlands. I am not arguing that Bondi is a badlands only because the 'gay gang murders' took place there, but also because the Bondi cliffs crime site has a richly nuanced and contradictory history, at times involving violence, spanning over at least a century. I explore the tensions within Bondi through my consideration of myths of the beach, myths of Australian national identity pertaining specifically to Bondi, the dominant heteronormativity of the site, and its suppressed queer Other indicated in the way Marks Park operates as a beat.

In Chapter Three, 'Meditations on the scene of the crime', I continue my analysis of the scene of the crime with a Ficto-Critical meditation on the John Russell crime scene photographs I viewed at the Coroner's Court, and my visit to the Bondi / Tamarama walkway where I retraced the steps of both victims and perpetrators. I chose to examine the crime scene photographs of John Russell, largely, because they were the only ones I had been granted access to. Essentially the point of crime scene photographs is to provide a dramatic counterpoint to the general legal discursive analysis of the crime, thus forcing the viewer to see the Real. I found the only way I could write about these images was in a personal way because as crime scene photographs they bring home the individualised, personalised, graphic nature of this particular crime into the more detached legal and media discourses surrounding the crimes themselves.

I wanted to write Ficto-Critically about these photographs to emphasize their loaded and dramatic nature – as the crime scene image distils so many varied and complex meanings. This reaction is not unusual in discourses regarding photography, although, of late, as we have moved into a digital era, photography has become much more contentious. There is, however, still a very strong tendency to believe what we see. Susan Sontag, for example, wrote in *On Photography*: 'Photography furnishes evidence. Something we hear about but doubt seems proven once we're shown a photograph of it' (1977:5). Roland

Barthes agreed in *Camera Lucida* stating that, 'Photography never lies: or rather, it can lie as to the meaning of the thing, being by nature *tendentious*, never as to its existence' (1980:87). I wanted to bring home the visceral impact the crime scene photographs had on me and that I felt needed to be explored further.

Having viewed the photographs of the crime scene I felt I needed to literally place myself at this location so as to further draw out the complex social history of Bondi that I had explored in the previous chapter. In Chapter Two I analysed Bondi from a more theoretical perspective whilst in Chapter Three I meditated on what that analysis meant for an individual, namely, me.

In Chapter Four, 'The Gay Hate Gang: the all-Australian 'Bondi Boys'', I turned my attention to analysing the discursive constructions of the perpetrators of these crimes – the gay hate gangs, and, specifically the 'Bondi Boys'. In this analysis I found their representations contradictory, meaning that on the one hand they are represented as deviant criminal gang members, while on the other, they are, in part, covertly presented as members of the mainstream Australian community. Perhaps the most interesting discovery I made about the 'gay hate gang', which goes some way to indicate their quasi-acceptance within heteronormative culture, is that they were presumed to be white thanks to the persistent imaging of Anglo-member, Sean Cushman, but they were not; their own sexuality was never remarked upon, and nor was their class background; and finally, they were all assumed to be male which once again they were not.

In Chapter Five, 'The Victims', I consider constructions of the victims in media and legal discourses and in the true-crime genre. Once again, I found complex portrayals rather than simplistic ones. For instance, the crimes, at the time in which they occurred, were either ignored or sensationalised, and in the latter case, the men's presumed homosexuality was always presented as the titillating focal point of the story. At the turn of the century the coverage shifted to present a more sympathetic and humanized portrayal of the men but this time the crimes themselves were not only sensationalized but spectacularized as exceptional and isolated acts of 'gay hate' violence as opposed to my understanding of them as limit cases and extreme examples of entrenched

everyday homophobia. So, in the case of the victims – as opposed to that of the perpetrators – their sexuality is never in any doubt and is emphasized throughout. Despite more humanized portrayals, they always remain the Other.

In Chapter Six, 'Trace Evidence: The ordinary objects (not) left behind', I return to my meditative mode, where I consider in part how objects are used as synecdoches for the bodies of the men who were lost. In some cases the objects must stand in entirely for the missing person, while in others, the objects provide traces of the violence in which the men died. I use this chapter especially to consider meaning considering these objects as both meaningful and meaningless, showing how we use things to anchor ourselves in our own realities, while at the same time remaining aware that those things can be used in different ways by different people. These things perform a double function, giving us a glimpse of the horror of the men's deaths even as they stubbornly assert their own mundanity.

In the Conclusion, I examine the degree to which the State Coroner's Recommendations, specifically those regarding the gay community and policing strategies, have been implemented. I also briefly canvas current trends in relation to homophobic attacks in Sydney. This involves an in-depth analysis of a 2007 gay bashing in Sydney and the poor response the victims received from the local Surry Hills police station. The extensive publicity generated around this case led to an internal review of the Surry Hills police command which involved high ranking officers being replaced by new staff. I finish the conclusion with meditative reflections on the haunting and liminal nature of the 'gay gang murders' and of the victims.

Chapter One: Context / History

Introduction

In this chapter I situate the 'gay gang murders' in relation to some of the broader cultural, social and attitudinal shifts that have taken place in Australia from the late 1980s through to the current day, namely, 2009. In doing so, I examine how changes in public meanings circulating around non-heteronormative sexualities and practices have impacted on the ways in which the 'gay gang murder' victims have been discursively constructed by media and legal institutions as well as the extent and manner to which police and legal institutions have responded to these crimes.

Throughout this thesis I observe that there have been dramatic shifts in the ways in which the Bondi cliffs victims have been represented in public discourses and addressed by legal and media discourses and institutions. I argue that three of the men in question – Gilles Mattaini, Ross Warren and John Russell – have moved from occupying a site as 'non bodies' – not worthy of serious or sympathetic media coverage or a professional police investigation – to being conceptualised as 'bodies that matter', bodies whose deaths and disappearances have become the subject of an intense, albeit belated, police investigation and Coronial Inquest; bodies worthy of extensive mainstream and gay community media attention³¹. To some extent, such a shift exemplifies wider social trends for Australian gay men, particularly those based in Sydney where the majority of my research is located. Yet, although there have been, and continue to be, positive changes in terms of cultural, social and legal recognition for Australian gay men, their status as victims of crime remains fraught as the following examples demonstrate.

³¹ Whilst Kritchikorn Rattanajurathaporn's murder is mentioned in the State Coroner's Findings and Recommendations, his case differs from that of the other three victims in that it was quickly pursued as a homicide with the offenders eventually being brought to justice and charged with his death. Hence, in terms of media coverage and police investigations, Rattanajurathaporn was conceptualised as a 'body that mattered' from a very early stage.

Complaints regarding the New South Wales police being either slow to respond to Sydney-based gay hate crimes, or in some cases ignoring them altogether, still appear on a regular basis in the gay and mainstream media (for example, Higbee, 2008 and Fox, 2008). Recent research on New South Wales-based homophobic violence also demonstrates a mixed, somewhat contradictory, response from gays and lesbians in relation to seeking police assistance and/or reporting homophobic crimes to authorities. In a 2003 report on homophobic violence, for example, 80% of respondents said they would report abuse to police (Attorney General's Department of New South Wales Report, 2003), yet in a 2007 report concerning safety and hostility at and around gay and lesbian public events, less than one percent of the incidents of homophobic hostility were actually reported to police (Tomsen & Markwell, 2007). Similarly, the total number of hostile incidents reported by respondents at public events such as the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras vastly outweighs the acts of violence and harassments monitored and recorded by community groups, the media and police agencies (Tomsen & Markwell, 2007:36).

The central aim of this chapter is to sketch the social, historical, and cultural context in which the Bondi cliffs crimes occurred, and also the varied responses they received in media, legal and judicial discourses and institutions. There are a number of cultural forces and institutions which have impacted on these responses, namely, gay community initiatives, research projects and partnerships with key institutions; major reforms and development in the New South Wales Police Service; increased cultural and legal recognition for Sydney's gay and lesbian population including the mainstreaming of gay identities in popular culture; the so-called Pink Dollar; the popularity of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras; the unprecedented and unexpected media production of an 'anti-gay crime wave' in the early 1990s; and media and community responses to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

These specific forces and developments are important to look at when examining the shifts in the ways the 'gay gang murder' victims were treated because they show us what it meant and still means to be gay in Sydney during the relevant period of this thesis, namely from the late 1980s until the turn of the century. Gay community initiatives, research projects and alliances with key

government departments increased public awareness in regards to the dominance of homophobic violence in Australia and meant that major institutions started to tackle the issue in a serious way. Reforms within the New South Wales Police Service impacted directly on Sydney police-gay relations as police became more attentive to the needs and demands of the gay community. Other phenomena, such as the rise of the Pink Dollar, the increased popularity of Mardi Gras, and the 'explosion' of gay themes and characters in popular culture, contributed to a mainstreaming of gay culture which in turn led to further acceptance of gay people. The media-produced 'anti gay crime wave' in the early 1990s drew further attention to the issue of New South Wales-based homophobic violence which meant that Australians beyond the gay ghetto were at last becoming aware of the regularity and extent of such violence. The mainstream media and community responses to the HIV/AIDS epidemic also shifted dramatically during this period, moving from a state of ignorance and hostility to a more considered and informed approach. All of these cultural forces and events impacted on how the 'gay gang murder' victims were represented and responded to by legal and media institutions.

Gay community initiatives, research projects and institutional responses

During the early 1990s, a range of community initiatives were undertaken which mobilized members of Sydney's gay and lesbian population and increased public awareness. Many of these events received extensive coverage in the 1990-1991 'anti-gay crime wave' produced by the mainstream media which I will examine later in this chapter. In March 1990, more than six hundred gays and lesbians marched through Sydney's streets to publicize rising levels of homophobic violence ('Stop the Bashers!' *Sydney Star Observer*, 9 March 1990, p. 1). Three months later, the Whistle Project ('Blow The Whistle On Bashers') was launched. In this community-based project, people in the Darlinghurst and Inner West areas of inner-city Sydney were encouraged to carry whistles and to blow them for assistance or to intervene in a crime ('Blow The Whistle on Bashers', *Sydney Star Observer*, 13 July 1990, p. 7). Using a title reminiscent of the feminist venture, 'Reclaim the Night', the second anti-violence rally 'Take Back the Streets' was staged in January 1991. This was

followed by the dramatic 'One in Seven' paint incident in which various important city buildings were splashed in red paint as a symbol of the blood shed by gay men and lesbians in homophobic assaults ('Landmark hit in paint demo', *Daily Telegraph* [Sydney], 9 April 1991, p. 3)

Other community initiatives during this period included a three-day educational intervention at an inner-Sydney high school; the introduction of a self-help group for gay bashing victims; rallies against violence, and specifically against the use of the popular Homosexual Advance Defence by alleged perpetrators of homosexual violence. One of the most poignant community initiatives carried out in the 1990s was the publicity surrounding the 1997 conversion of the site of a vicious anti-lesbian rape at Floods Lane, Darlinghurst, into a well lit, landscaped area renamed Mary's Place, in honour of the victim, Mary. Members of the Gay and Lesbian Anti Violence Project (AVP) and the South Sydney Council joined together in this venture by, firstly, re-landscaping the lane, and then staging a public rally during which they erected a memorial plaque at the crime site.

Whilst not as visible as some of the actions previously surveyed, such as the paint incident and the launch of Mary's Place, community-based research projects proved to be equally productive. In the following section I will canvas a number of the most significant reports on hate related violence towards gay men and lesbians produced in New South Wales during the past two decades. Arguably, one of the most influential and highly publicized reports on homophobic violence in New South Wales was the legendary Streetwatch report launched in April 1990³². The Liberal Government Police Minister, Ted Pickering, launched the Streetwatch Report in the new Pride club to a press gallery of television, radio and newspaper journalists from the straight and gay media. Prioritized in the evening news bulletins, the launch proved to be an event which 'fascinated the media, focussed their attention on homophobic violence, gave it credibility as a serious issue and created a phase of intense media interest and coverage' (Thompson, 1993:6).

³² During this period, a number of similar research projects were carried out in other Australian States, for example, Baird et al (1994); GLAD (1994); Mason (1993).

The Streetwatch project had been initiated by the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby (GLRL) because of an 'apparent contradiction between the lack of reports to the police of violent assaults and the Lobby's impression of a serious and growing problem of street violence against lesbians and gay men' ('Extra police to combat anti-gay violence', *Sydney Star Observer*, 20 April 1990, p. 4). Studying 67 attacks, the report showed that 90% of the assaults in Sydney were carried out by young men aged between 16 and 25, and in groups of up to 15 offenders. The majority of attacks took place in the vicinity of gay areas or venues, such as Oxford Street, Darlinghurst, and King Street, Newtown. In about half of the attacks witnesses were present, but in only half of those did the witnesses offer any assistance. Seventy nine percent of the victims believed that the assaults were related to them being gay, as evidenced by the verbal taunts that accompanied the attacks. Less than half of the victims reported the assaults to the police, stating low clear-up rates and expectations of poor police service as the reason (Streetwatch Final Report, June 1994, p. 7).

As a result of recommendations contained in the earlier 1990 Streetwatch report, increased community activism and intense media publicity, major institutions – such as the New South Wales State Government and the New South Wales Police Service – began to address the issue of homophobic violence. Representatives of the Sydney gay and lesbian community met with senior bureaucrats in the Department of Health, Department of School Education, Department of Housing, Department of Community Services, the Attorney-General's Department, and the New South Wales Police Service, to produce a range of practical strategies aimed at reducing violence. Following this meeting, the New South Wales Health Department produced a \$55,000 grant to the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby to establish the Anti Violence Project, a community based project dedicated to eliminating violence against lesbians and gays. The New South Wales Department of School Education also responded by introducing materials on homophobia for year 7-10 students, and offering a Personal Development course for years 11 and 12, which included 'homosexuality' as one of the options (see, for example, Kallen, 1996:219).

From the early 1990s gay-specific issues, such as anti-discrimination

legislation, gay marriage, and gay families, also started to be debated in the Australian courts, State and Federal Parliament, and mainstream media. Official anxieties about homophobic violence created the backdrop for New South Wales' anti-vilification legislation being passed in 1993. The major political lobby group for gays and lesbians in New South Wales, the coalitionist Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby, played a key role in the State Parliament passing this legislation which has made it illegal to incite hatred or contempt against gays, lesbians and people living with HIV/AIDS. Hailed as a victory for the State's gay and lesbian community, the legislation was important symbolically because, as Willett argued, 'the most enduring threat to lesbians and gay men is that of harassment and violence, and any statement by the parliament – however little it might mean in practice – was at least sending a message to society' (2000:243).

In 1995 the New South Wales Police released 'Out of the Blue' which was a report on a survey of 297 lesbians and gay men at a Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Fair Day. The results were disturbing. Gay men and lesbians were between four and six times more likely to be assaulted in a 12 month period than other Sydney men and women. The majority of respondents in this study felt that homophobia was the motive behind the attack (New South Wales Police Service and Price Waterhouse Urwick, 1995).

In 1999 the Crime Prevention Division (CPD) of the Attorney-General's Department of New South Wales (AGD) appointed its own Gay and Lesbian Policy Officer, a role which continues to this day. Since the role was established, the officer has worked closely in partnership with a range of key New South Wales government agencies, local government and lesbian and gay organizations such as the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby and the Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project to oversee research and policy pertaining to homophobic violence.

One of the most significant projects the Attorney General's Department Gay and Lesbian Policy Officer has been involved in was a large-scale research project on homophobic violence conducted in partnership with over 20 New South Wales Government agencies, local government and lesbian and gay community

organizations. The 2003 report entitled "You shouldn't have to hide to be safe': A Report on Homophobic Hostilities and Violence Against Gay Men and Lesbians in New South Wales' involved a postal and internet survey on homophobic abuse and violence to which six hundred people responded as well as a number of focus groups. More than half (56%) of the respondents reported having experienced one or more forms of homophobic abuse, harassment or violence in the past 12 months with eight-five percent having had at some time experienced such abuse, harassment or violence (Attorney General's Department Report, December 2003, p. i). The three most common types of abuse experienced both in the past 12 months and ever were verbal abuse, harassment such as spitting, offensive gestures, being followed etc, and a threatened or attempted physical attack or assault (Attorney General's Department Report, December 2003, p. 57). The percentage of this survey's respondents who had experienced some form of homophobic abuse in the past year (56%) was almost exactly the same as was found in the 'Out of the Blue' survey in 1994/1995.

What was strikingly different, however, from earlier reports was that nearly 80% of respondents said that they would be prepared to report homophobic abuse or violence to the police. The focus groups suggested that most respondents would prefer to deal with a Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officer (GLLO), although there are a limited number of GLLOs and they are not always available. The fact that 80% of the survey respondents said they would feel confident about reporting abuse to police if they thought it was warranted suggests that over the past decades there has been a significant improvement in the likelihood of gay men and lesbians seeking police assistance (Attorney General's Department Report, December 2003, p. iii, 58). However, as there is evidence to show that homophobic crimes are still under reported, it is worth noting that such intentions do not always translate in practice to actual reports.

What was also different about this report from earlier surveys was that it targeted subgroups within the lesbian and gay population, including indigenous gay men, indigenous lesbians, lesbian and gay parents, young gay men and lesbians, mature gay men and lesbians, gay men and lesbians of Middle-Eastern background, gay men of Asian background and non-university

educated gay men in Western Sydney (Attorney General's Department Report, December 2003, p. 3). The complex forms of hate related abuse and violence experienced by gay men and lesbians of indigenous and culturally diverse backgrounds, in part based on homophobia but also racially motivated, suggests that future research needs to be more specifically targeted to sub-groups and specific programs within the broader gay and lesbian community (Attorney General's Department Report, December 2003, p. 62)

Major reforms and development within the New South Wales Police Service

Although there were some legal prohibitions against anti-gay discrimination, police harassment of gays and lesbians was widespread throughout the 1970s and 1980s. It occurred in a variety of forms including gay bashings, deliberate entrapment and the selective surveillance of gay and lesbian venues and beats (Kallen, 1996:211). However, dramatic upheavals and radical reforms within the New South Wales Police Service in the 1980s not only influenced public perceptions of policing in the state of New South Wales, but also impacted directly, and often positively, on Sydney police-gay relations. Two 'events' in particular are worth noting. Firstly, the advent of community policing, and secondly, the issue of police corruption. Introduced by Police Commissioner, John Avery, during the 1980s, community policing was aimed at sections of the Australian community, particularly minorities such as gays and lesbians, who had traditionally regarded police as the natural enemy. The community policing programme involved officers getting to know and gain the trust of the particular community they served, rather than remaining distanced and alienated from it (Goddard, 1990:26). Community consultancy committees made up of local residents and police were established, for example, the Neighborhood Watch project and the Safety House initiative, with the aim of bringing the public closer to the police (Stephenson, 2004:9). This more conciliatory-style of policing has meant that the New South Wales Police Service has, for the most part, become more responsive to the needs and demands of Sydney's gay and lesbian population.

From 1990 onwards, the Police Service started to tackle the issue of homophobic violence, both at the organizational or strategic level and the operational or patrol level. During this period, a full-time Gay and Lesbian Liaison Unit was established in Sydney, and a full-time Police-Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officer (GLLO) appointed. At the beginning of the 1990s the Police Service initiated changes in education and training strategies; consulted directly with local gay and lesbian residents; and produced recruitment campaigns specifically targeting gays and lesbians. During this period their commitment to Sydney's queer population was also demonstrated by a number of symbolic and highly visible initiatives including assigning additional police to the Darlinghurst area; positioning a mobile police van at Taylors Square; establishing a community hotline; launching a poster urging victims of violence to report assaults to police and providing an increased presence at community events, such as Mardi Gras Fair Day, World AIDS Day and the annual Leather Pride Fair (Tomsen, 2001:232; Thompson, 1993:8; 'Extra police to combat anti-gay violence', *Sydney Star Observer*, 20 April 1990, p. 4). In the early 1990s, consultants from the New South Wales Police Service worked closely with the mainstream media in an attempt to change homophobic portrayals, particularly those which blamed gay and lesbian crime victims: 'An extensive amount of assistance was provided to facilitate coverage of issues by TV current affairs programs, radio, newspaper, popular magazines (such as *Penthouse*, *Rolling Stone*, *GH*) and TV serial programs such as *GP* and *Country Practice*' (Thompson, 1993:6).

As well as implementing practical strategies, during the early 1990s, senior members of the New South Wales Police Service and State Government gave credibility to homophobia as a public issue by speaking out in a number of fora. As I mentioned earlier, Police Minister, Ted Pickering, had launched the Streetwatch report. The Commissioner of the New South Wales Police Service, Tony Lauer, also spoke out against homophobic violence in a number of public sites, including the popular press. In a tabloid newspaper, for example, under the headline 'Bashers be warned', Lauer urged Sydney's gay-bashing victims to report attacks and warned would-be assailants that the Police Service would take 'strong action' against such crimes ('Bashers be warned', *The Daily Telegraph Mirror* [Sydney], 24 April 1991, p. 12).

Members of the New South Wales judiciary gave out strong warnings to potential gay-bashers, in the lengthy sentences handed out to Richard Johnson's and Kritchikorn Rattanaaturathaporn's killers, and in public statements issued to the press. In the case of Johnson's murder, five of the perpetrators were convicted of manslaughter and three of murder, with two of the perpetrators being handed out maximum sentences of eighteen years jail time (Callaghan, 2007a:112). Likewise, Rattanaaturathaporn's killers were given sentences of fourteen years imprisonment. These lengthy sentences, and the harsh warnings which accompanied them, came in the midst of what was, at that time, an atypical response to violent crimes involving gay victims, namely, both of these cases received thorough and professional police investigations which resulted in convictions, and both attracted unprecedented and sympathetic media coverage.

In the mainstream media, former magistrate and State Coroner, Kevin Waller, produced a long and considered analysis of the sentencing of the teenagers involved in Rattanaaturathaporn's and Johnson's deaths, and examined a range of measures to reduce such violence ('Ugly stains of homophobia continues to pollute Sydney', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 September 1992, p. 13). The sentencing judges at both Rattanaaturathaporn's and Johnson's trials railed against homophobic violence in their closing remarks. In handing down the sentences to Rattanaaturathaporn's assailants, Justice Wood said that he could not neglect the need for deterrence: 'The message must go out to all young men that gang attacks on defenceless victims will attract heavy sentences of imprisonment' (Curtin, 1992:7). At the Johnson trial, both the Crown Prosecutor, Mark Tedeschi, and the presiding judge, Justice Badgery-Parker, agreed that general deterrence was the most significant factor involved in sentencing (Curtin, 1991b:8) and that the sentences should demonstrate that the community would not tolerate this kind of violence (Bye, 1991:5).

Police attitudes to gays and lesbians also started to change. At a meeting of gay community representatives and New South Wales police in 1990, a senior police officer publicly, though I would argue somewhat prematurely, declared, 'The Darlo Days are over', in reference to the notorious (now closed)

Darlinghurst police station's record of homophobia and gay bashings (Goddard, 1990:25; Willett, 2000:246). During the same year, the police-gay consultant, Sue Thompson, felt confident enough to comment, 'Ten years ago most police were homophobic. Now they're the minority' (quoted in Goddard, 1990:28). At the turn of the century, Stephen Tomsen noted the shift from a more repressive old-style model of policing to a softer, more conciliatory style, asserting that the 'New South Wales police have become markedly more responsive to the demands and needs of articulate, politically organized inner-city homosexuals' (2001:232). Detective Stephen Page also noticed a dramatic change of attitudes in gay-police relations, commenting, '...I know with the first Mardi Gras the police marched into it swinging batons and I think these days march in the Mardi Gras twirling batons'³³. Page was referring to the stark contrast between the first Mardi Gras rally in 1978 where Sydney gays and lesbians, who had ventured out as part of International Gay Solidarity Week, were set upon, violently assaulted and arrested by police, to the current situation whereby a contingent of New South Wales Police, including some 'out' members, march proudly alongside gays and lesbians in the annual Parade.

As official homophobia has sometimes been linked in public discourses to a culture of police corruption, it is worth pointing out that these gay-friendly reforms have taken place amidst increased mainstream publicity on police corruption. Throughout the 1990s, repeated allegations of corruption and incompetence in the senior levels of the New South Wales Police Service generated internal investigations, and a highly publicized Parliamentary Inquiry, the Wood Royal Commission. More recently, former police officers and detectives have spoken out in public inquiries, current affairs programmes, and the popular press, for example, Deborah Locke's account of whistleblowing, *Watching The Detectives* (2003), and Tim Priest and Richard Basham's expose, touted as the 'untold truth about the New South Wales Police Service', *To Protect and to Serve* (2003).

Although there have been significant changes in police culture and specifically in its attitudes to marginalized groups such as gays and lesbians – as

³³ <http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/content/2005/s1366917.htm>, accessed 11 April 2008.

demonstrated by the symbolic presence of police in the Mardi Gras parade – problems in police-gay relations still persist. Australian gay historian, Graham Willett, has observed that while station-based gay and lesbian liaison officers are now more inclined to respond to reports of homophobic violence and complaints against police in a serious and professional manner, and appear to be making a change in Sydney's police culture, complaints of beat arrests, entrapments and police bashings still surface on an alarmingly regular basis (2000:246).

The much-lauded GLLO program itself has also not been without critics as there have been lengthy periods where these positions have either been vacant or when the personnel assigned to the roles have been unavailable. Gay community publications, for example, have given voice to concerns about the unavailability of GLLO's in relation to recent homophobic attacks in news articles and Internet comments posted by readers (for example, Dennett, 2008 and O'Neill & Moran, 2008). The Sydney Lord Mayor, Clover Moore, has also been critical. In a recent case of a particularly brutal attack on two gay men, Craig Gee and Shane Brennen, in Darlinghurst, Moore contacted the New South Wales Police Minister David Campbell directly to query the lack of available GLLO's on the night in question (*see O'Neill & Moran, 2008*). Prior to this, in March 2005, the Deputy State Coroner Jacqueline Milledge, in her 'Findings and Recommendations' on the Bondi cliffs cases, also highlighted what she described as the breakdown of the GLLO programme and called for its reintroduction. One of Milledge's recommendations was that the Minister of Police and Police Commissioner 'reintroduce the Gay Liaison Officer 'in service training programme' (State Coroner's Findings and Recommendations, 9 March 2005, p. 15). Understandably, the perceived failure of the GLLO program continues to attract intense criticism from members of the Sydney gay community, particularly within gay media discourses.

Mainstream media attention: the production of an 'anti-gay crime wave'

During the 1970s and 1980s the Australian mainstream media tended to either report gay and lesbian issues, including what we now term as 'gay hate crimes',

in an antagonistic or sensationalist way, or to ignore them altogether. The 1990s signaled the start of more sympathetic and serious coverage by the 'straight' press on gay issues. The murder of gay man, Richard Johnson, functioned as the catalyst for the mainstream Sydney media 'at last becoming aware of the regularity and brutality of homophobic assaults, and ... finally treating them as 'serious' news issues' (Goddard, 1991:16). Lured to a toilet block in Alexandria Park, Johnson was bashed to death by a group of eight young men, six of whom were aged between sixteen and eighteen years. Most of them were students at the nearby Cleveland Street High School which had already earned the tag 'Poofter Basher High'³⁴ (Goddard, 1990:18). Like so many other gay murders, Johnson's death was particularly brutal³⁵. The court prosecutor, Mark Tedeschi, QC, said Johnson was subjected to 'one of the most severe beatings that one could possibly imagine without the use of any weapons, just with fists and feet' (McIntosh, 1991:23).

A variety of different factors, including the age of the perpetrators, their publicly declared motivation ('to bash a fag'), and the particularly vicious nature of the murder, meant that the Johnson murder, 'neither a freakish or isolated incident', caused an uproar in Sydney's mainstream press, and effectively 'ended a conspiracy of silence about gay murders' (Goddard, 1991:19). In 1990, there were at least five 'gay hate' murders in Sydney alone, including that of Kritchikorn Rattanajaturathaporn, and numerous reports of anti-gay assaults. Only days before Johnson bled to death, the local gay press had warned readers that the rate of gay bashings was increasing. Underneath the headline 'BASHED: Gay assault rate soars', a large scale photograph displayed the battered face of another gay Sydney-sider who had been bashed unconscious (*Sydney Star Observer*, 12 January 1990, p. 1). The following edition of the *Sydney Star Observer*, released two days after Johnson's death, reported yet

³⁴ In May 1990 Cleveland High School was in the news again when one of their teachers, Wayne Tonks, was found bound and gagged in his North Shore flat. Tonks had apparently told friends that he had been subjected to anti-homosexual taunts by some of his students. However, later it emerged that although two schoolboys killed him, neither of them were associated with Cleveland High School.

³⁵ As previous research (Bell & Vila, 1996; Comstock, 1991) suggests, violent attacks against gay men are 'notable for their exceptional brutality and the frenzied form of attacks, with victims tormented and wounded repeatedly' (Tomsen, 2002:25).

another spate of beatings, under the headline 'Sydney's gay bash goes on' (26 January 1990, p. 1). While the gay press regularly featured reports of gay bashings and murders, the mainstream media had rarely reported such events. Only the more 'lurid' or 'sensational' cases, or those involving public figures, had received media attention. Johnson's murder, however, was covered by a range of mainstream newspapers, including the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Daily Telegraph-Mirror* [Sydney]³⁶.

Throughout 1990 and 1991, the issue of anti-gay violence received an exceptional amount of publicity in gay and mainstream media sites. Frequently, the attention coincided with members of the Alexandria 8³⁷, being charged or sentenced. As committal proceedings against the schoolboys began, an 'anti gay crime wave' was produced in the media³⁸. Homophobic violence was said to be 'sweeping' through 'Sydney's gay heartland' which was 'in the grip of an unprecedented wave of violent murders and bashings' (Gosman & Jones, 1991:22-23). Metaphorized in military terms, Sydney's gay community was described as being 'under siege' (Macey, 1991:2). April 1991, p. 2) and 'mobilizing against further mayhem' (Gosman & Jones, 1991:22-223). Reminiscent of media reports pertaining to the fate of military personnel, *The Sun-Herald* produced photographs of gay victims with their status declared in bold print: 'KILLED', 'MISSING', 'KILLED', 'MISSING' (Gosman & Jones, 1991:22) whilst *The Eastern Herald* listed what was essentially a body count of 'the fatal victims of hatred' (Long, 1991:6). The combat theme was also evident in the rousing headlines, 'The Gays Are Fighting Back' (Long, 1991:6) and 'Gays Fight Back' (Glover, 1991:7).

³⁶ In 1990 *The Daily Mirror* merged with its morning sister paper *The Daily Telegraph* to form *The Daily Telegraph-Mirror*. In 1996 it reverted to being *The Daily Telegraph*. In my archival research I have located and referenced articles from both *The Daily Telegraph* and its earlier form, *The Daily Telegraph-Mirror*.

³⁷ Investigating police dubbed Johnson's killers the 'Alexandria 8', in reference to the crime scene location, Alexandria Park, and the number of perpetrators.

³⁸ I am drawing here on criminologist Mark Fishman's influential essay 'Crime Waves as Ideology' (1978), where he recounts the production of a crime wave against the elderly in New York in 1976. Reviewing the NYPD crime statistics for the period of the seven week 'crime wave', Fishman discovered that homicides against the elderly were actually down 19% from the previous year. Fishman argued that the media manufactured 'crime waves' by reporting violence in such a way that exaggerated its dominance.

The perpetrators were demonized as 'gutless' 'hoodlums' (Macey, 1991:2); a 'menace haunting the gay scene' (Lenarduzzi, 1991:18) and 'teenage gangs, straight from the nightmare world of *A Clockwork Orange*' (Gosman & Jones, 1991:22-23). Poofter bashing was characterized as a deadly sport with Martyn Goddard describing it as 'mindless and lethal hatred' (1990:16). The weekend before Johnson's killers were sentenced, the *Sydney Morning Herald* compared Sydney's gay bashings and murders to that of Pol Pot's infamous regime, as evidenced by the title, 'In the Gay Killing Fields' (6 April 1991, p. 39).

A 'gay bash', an 'anti-gay crime wave', 'gay killing fields' or a 'deadly sport' - regardless of the terminology, Sydney's homophobic violence was, at last, receiving widespread mainstream media attention. On the 8th April 1991, the intended day of the Johnson sentence hearing, a gay activist group called 'One in Seven' splashed red paint over prominent city buildings, including Parliament House, the Education Department, St Mary's and St Andrew's cathedrals, News Ltd. and Fairfax Buildings. The 'One in Seven' group issued a media release which said:

The time for silence, for meek acceptance, for discussion, for pleading, has passed. Today we've painted the town red: the colour of the blood that's being spilt on the streets, the colour of our anger at the shit that's heaped on us by a society that says violence against gay men and lesbians is OK (*Outrage*, May 1991, p. 8).

Unlike many other public demonstrations, this piece of activism and the arrest of one of the protestors, Dr. Mark Bloch, received extensive attention in the straight and gay press. The publicity was fuelled by another tragedy. Timed to co-incide with the sentencing of Johnson's killers, the 'One in Seven' paint action also co-incided with the murder of yet another Sydney gay man, Maurice McCarty³⁹. As Goddard observed, 'for the press, even Maurice McCarty's death had flawless timing. It provided proof, in the most dramatic way, of what the gay community had been saying all along: that our blood is flowing, and nobody seems to care' (1991:21). News reports concerning Johnson's murder, and then McCarty's murder, led to a 'snowballing' effect in which there was extensive mainstream publicity on anti-gay violence in Sydney.

³⁹ Gay man, Maurice McCarty died after suffering massive head injuries following a violent attack in his Newtown home.

During this period, local newspapers, radio and television shows, for example, the *7.30 Report* and *Hinch*, picked up on the issue of Sydney-based homophobic violence. Reports were produced on the Johnson hearing; the paint incident, Dykes on Bikes street patrols; Maurice McCarty's murder; the release of an anti gay bashing video produced by South Sydney high school students; the formation of a special Homicide Squad; and interviews with potential and past victims, gay inner city dwellers and workers. As Goddard put it, 'straight journalists now had the basis for a major, ongoing story which would run without a break for more than a fortnight' (1991:20), producing the most extensive and sympathetic coverage on the issue that Sydney had ever seen. Coming in the wake of Johnson's murder, Kritchikorn Rattanjaturathaporn's death was also widely reported⁴⁰. The considerable and unexpected media attention on Rattanjaturathaporn's murder echoed the intense publicity fuelled in the wake of Johnson's death. I will address the responses to Rattanjaturathaporn's death in a later chapter.

Increased public recognition

Throughout the 1990s and into the turn-of-the-century, as the issue of anti-gay violence was receiving unprecedented and largely sympathetic coverage in the mainstream media, gays and lesbians were becoming increasingly visible throughout wider Australian society. In international and Australian-made television soaps, sitcoms, dramas and reality TV shows, gay and lesbian characters, and in some cases, so-called 'gay themes', have proliferated wildly. TV stars Roseanne and Mariel Hemingway kissed on air on *Roseanne* in 1994,

⁴⁰ The day after Rattanjaturathaporn's body was located, for example, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Daily Mirror* [Sydney] and *The Daily Telegraph* [Sydney] all ran stories on the cliff-top killing. Throughout July and August 1990, appeals to the gay community were printed in mainstream and gay newspapers. Regular updates on the progress of the case, for example, when the youths were charged, court appearances and trial proceedings, were also covered in all newspapers.

a kiss for which advertisers threatened to abandon the show⁴¹. Three years later, in 1997, talk-show host Ellen DeGeneres came out on a much-watched episode of *Ellen*⁴², an outing which graced the front cover of *TIME* magazine⁴³. In the same year, the cartoon character Homer Simpson was forced to confront his fear of gay men on an episode of the *Simpsons* titled 'Homer's Phobia'⁴⁴. Meanwhile comedy shows such as *Will and Grace* (1998-2006) featured two gay characters, namely, Will and Jack, and the stereotypical fag-hag, Karen. *Bad Girls* (1999-2006), the British remake of the Australian classic *Prisoner: Cell Block H* (1979-1986), featured a number of lesbians characters, whilst at the end of the fourth season of *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), there is a not-so-platonic declaration of love between witches Willow and Tara.

Post 1990's-produced dramas and soap-operas have also been open to 'pink programming' as evidenced by the gay character Matt Fielding in the popular American soap *Melrose Place* (1992-1999); the character Jack in *Dawson's Creek* (1998-2003) who demonstrated every week the myriad of difficulties school age men have when they come out and David in *Six Feet Under* (2001-2005) who revealed the problems of being gay and finding a relationship whilst working as a funeral director. During the same era, the FOX TV series *Beverly Hills, 90210* (1990-2000) featured a white, gay character, Jimmy, who had full-blown AIDS. Despite breaking some stereotypes of gay men, this particular characterization received criticism for perpetuating the stereotype of an AIDS-infected white gay men who threatened to infect the rest of society whilst the rest of the non-gay characters in the show got to lead sexually active lives.

Closer-to-home, in the Australian-produced drama, *The Secret Life of Us* (2001-2005), the female character, Alex, indulged in a lesbian kiss, and her friend, Gabrielle, admitted to an off-screen lesbian affair when she was much younger. On the same show, Ritchie finally had sex with his good friend Simon and this

⁴¹ The Rosanne and Mariel Hemingway kiss featured on a *Rosanne* episode entitled 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell', Season 6, Episode 18, original air date 1 March 1994.

⁴² Ellen's kissing scene with Laura Dern featured on 'The Puppy Episode Part 1' of *Ellen*, Season 4, Episode 22, aired in the United States 30 April 1997.

⁴³ 14 April 1997.

⁴⁴ 'Homer Phobia' appeared in Season 8 and was originally aired 16 February 1987.

immediately precipitated him to make the classic choice and to 'come out'. Australian reality TV shows have also regularly featured gay contestants (including prime time kisses) and characters, for example, *Big Brother* (2001-present), *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (2003-2007), and *The Block* (2003-2004), whose gay participants, Gav and Waz, not 'merely [came] out of the closet but renovated it' (Smiedt, 2004:28). Not only were there a host of shows which included gay characters but also by the turn of the century Australian viewers were able to watch TV shows devoted entirely to gay and lesbian lives, such as the hard-core British and American gay drama *Queer As Folk* (2000-2005) and the Hollywood glossy *The L Word* (2004-2009).

Whilst numerous criticisms could be raised about the representation of gays and lesbians in some of the shows I have just listed, what is important in terms of documenting changes in public discourses and attitudes towards gay men in Australia is that the mainstream media is not only acknowledging gay life but, in many cases, actively embracing it. Such visibility can be particularly useful in educating people's perceptions of social groups, such as gays, to viewers who receive most of their social information about these groups from the media. The sheer quantity, and diversity of such media representations, also operates to seriously challenge heterosexuality's idea of itself as being given, natural and universal.

Since the late 1980s, gay news was no longer only accessible from community-based publications, but was beginning to appear in a range of mainstream media sites. During this period, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, for example, has consistently reported on gay and lesbian news stories, issues and reviews of community cultural events (Scahill, 2001:189-190). The increased cultural recognition of Australia's queer population/s has also been strengthened by a number of high-profile figures publicly 'coming out' via the mainstream media. This 'out' list currently includes, for example, television personality, Julie McCrossin; Uniting Church minister, Reverend Dorothy McRae-McMahon; rugby league player, Ian Roberts; retired High Court Judge Michael Kirby; the recently deceased lawyer and public identity, John Marsden; former Democrat senator, Brian Grieg; Greens senator, Bob Brown; and celebrity lesbian doctor, Kerryn Phelps, who married her partner, Jackie Stricker, in a much publicized

ceremony in New York in 1998.

The Pink Dollar

As well as receiving recognition from legal and media institutions in the early 1990s, gay consumers were being courted as a desirable and affluent market group. A wide range of mainstream corporations started to target the so-called 'gay niche market' hoping to cash in on the Pink Economy which 'constructs queers as model consumer-citizens ... economic angels, blessing the economy with miracles of unlimited spending' (Bell and Binnie, 2000:97). In 1992, Toyota became the first major national company to produce advertisements specifically targeting gay customers (Willett, 2000:216). Telstra began a concerted gay and lesbian marketing program in 1995 which involved using 'out' rugby league star Ian Roberts and drag star Miss Candee as official spokespeople and sponsoring community services and institutions, for example, the New South Wales Gay & Lesbian Counselling Service, and the Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras. Incidentally, Telstra still prides itself on being 'the only corporation in Australia, and possibly the world, which has had both a high profile footballer and a drag queen on the payroll as official ambassadors' (Gibbs, 1999). In the early 1990s, other companies, such as Smirnoff, Da Vinci Uomo, HQ and Jim Beam, also targeted the Australian 'gay market' with advertisements and sponsorships. By 2009 major national and international companies, such as Air New Zealand, Virgin Blue, Ikea and Pump, support Mardi Gras as either sponsors or major business partners.

There are numerous and valid criticisms of the simplistic, assimilationist and essentialist nature of the Pink Economy. Ewan Evans, for example, argues that the Pink Dollar creates a monolithic and exclusionary gay lifestyle which 'represents only a minoritised upper-middle class gay male ... at the exclusion of representations of other queer identities' (2004:17,33). Approaching the subject from an economic perspective, Lee Badgett (2001) renders the Pink Economy a 'misleading' economic myth which fails to take into account a range of critical issues, such as workplace discrimination and the denial of health care benefits to gay partners and children. David Bell and Jon Binnie draw attention

to the homophobic nature of the discourse, noting the 'tendency either to demonize and pathologize gay men as shallow, passive consumers – as both victims of and exploiters of capitalism – or conversely to celebrate the creative, radical and innovative nature of gay consumer culture' (2000:100). Whilst not undermining the validity of these criticisms, 'the visibility that has resulted through positioning [gay and lesbian] identities as a market cannot be underestimated' (Evans, 2004:53). The unprecedented proliferation of gay-targeted advertisements meant that gays and lesbians were, at least, appearing in a larger number of public, and more complex, representations within mainstream Australian society.

The Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras

Community based celebrations, particularly the annual Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, also enhanced the gay community's visibility within wider Australian culture, if not internationally. Public interest in the annual Mardi Gras parade, for example, increased dramatically as evidenced by the audience figures alone: 'from 5000 watching in 1981, to a claimed audience of 230,000 in 1991, to an implausible (if not actually physically impossible) 500,000 in 1993' (Willett, 2000:203) and an estimated crowd of 450,000 in 2005 (Farrar, 2005 cited in Tomsen & Markwell, 2007). The size of the crowd has been paralleled by the intense media interest in the event. In 1994 television crews from the United States, Britain, and New Zealand covered the parade, along with print journalists from four magazines in the United Kingdom, ten in the United States, and several from Europe (O'Shea, 1994:3).

When the State-funded Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) screened edited highlights of the 1994 parade in prime-time television they produced their best ever ratings for a Sunday night program, with an estimated 45% of Sydney viewers tuning in (Carbery, 1995:194). This was done amidst major controversy which included complaints from ABC viewers and church leaders, and a petition from Members of Parliament. In justifying the decision to broadcast segments of the parade, the managing director, David Hill, said that whilst he was aware that a large section of the Australian community was offended by the ABC's decision

to broadcast it, 'the Mardi Gras is now a major Australian and indeed world festival and the parade is the centerpiece of it' ('Hill defiant over Mardi Gras timeslot, Lenore Taylor and Gabrielle Chan, *The Age*, Melbourne, 8 March 1994, p. 1). In 1997 Channel Ten also covered the full event becoming the first commercial broadcaster ever to do so⁴⁵.

Since the mid 1990s, the ABC and most of the commercial TV stations have featured 'highlights' of the parade, as have many of the mainstream newspapers. Throughout the late 1990s, and in the early part of this century, the Mardi Gras has continued to grow so much so that it has now become Australia's largest annual public event (Tomsen, 2001:234) with the largest impact of any sporting or cultural event in Australia (Tomsen & Markwell, 2007:6) and considerable economic impact. In the early 1990s, for example, it was estimated that the large numbers of interstate and international travelers attending Mardi Gras generated \$38 million for the New South Wales economy⁴⁶. Likewise, an evaluation of the 1998 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras estimated the event injected \$99 million into Sydney's economy and had a net effect of over \$41 million nationally (Marsh & Levy, 1998). This significant economic contribution has functioned as a legitimating factor for the Sydney gay and lesbian community giving it increased political clout.

The Mardi Gras has increased both in terms of spectator and domestic/international tourist numbers and also in terms of the quality and scope of events offered during the month-long festival. Close to the turn of the century the organization included a large full time staff and its own travel organization. Early in 2002 the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras went into receivership wherein a host of community organizations stepped in to fund a new organization dubbed New Mardi Gras. Since then New Mardi Gras has been responsible for organizing the parade, the Post-Parade, Fair Day and at least 100 different arts events. This public interest is echoed in the Messages of Support sent to, and published in, the annual Mardi Gras Guides, by politicians from the Labour, Greens, Democrat and Liberal parties, as well as other public

⁴⁵ <http://www.mardigras.org.au/internal.cfm?sub=History>, accessed 11 April 2008

⁴⁶ <http://www.mardigras.org.au/internal.cfm?sub=History>, accessed 21 April 2008

figures and identities, such as local councilors and mayors.

The theme of violence against lesbians and gays was at the forefront of the 30th anniversary annual Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras political agenda in March 2008. This was symbolized by the 'gay hate crime' victims, Craig Gee and Shane Brennen, leading the parade. An estimated 300,000 people lined the route and nearly 10,000 performers participated. Although the large crowds, and the ensuing mainstream media publicity, indicate a high level of interest in the Mardi Gras and more generally in lesbian and gay culture, such public interest does not necessarily equate with the acceptance of gay people and so-called gay 'lifestyles'. For even though large-scale public events, such as Mardi Gras, may have significant social and economic benefits, there is also simultaneously an undercurrent of hostility during and after such events which is related to entrenched societal homophobia. A recent report produced by academics Stephen Tomsen and Kevin Markwell titled 'When the Glitter Settles: Safety and Hostility at and around Gay and Lesbian Public Events' (2007) confirmed that nearly half of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people have witnessed some form of hostility, abuse or violent attacks at major GLBT festivals with a majority of respondents describing the experience as relating to homophobia. This study revealed that a majority of these incidents occurred at the Mardi Gras Parade and traveling home from it. Many respondents said they deliberately altered their behaviour or adopted strategies to reduce the likelihood of attracting unwanted attention, for example, changing appearances and acting 'straight'.

Public, media and community responses to the HIV/AIDS epidemic

From the early 1980s to the current day there have been dramatic and noticeable shifts in how the HIV/AIDS epidemic has been responded to by the Australian public, mainstream media and gay community. To begin with, despite its myriad complex material realities, AIDS was never merely just a health or medical issue. In 'AIDS, Homophobia And Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic Of Signification' Paula Treichler describes AIDS as 'an epidemic of meanings or signification' (1987:264) as well as 'an epidemic of a transmissible lethal

disease' (1987:264). Likewise, British cultural critic, Simon Watney, argues that AIDS was a 'crisis of representation itself, a crisis over the entire framing of knowledge about the human body and its capacities for sexual pleasure' (1987:9). Watney insists that AIDS 'does not exist apart from the practices that conceptualize it, represent it, and respond to it' (1987:3). Australian gay academic, Dennis Altman, has also alerted us to the politicised nature of the disease with his assertion that AIDS was 'a most political of diseases' – a threat to the lives of gay men and the political rights and acceptance they had gained in the previous decade (1993:55-72).

In the first half of the 1980s, Australian medical, social and political responses to the HIV/AIDS crisis were dominated by the hypothetical conflation of AIDS with homosexuality. Such responses were characterized by a widespread fear of the disease and hostility, including outright violence, towards segments of society thought to be particularly at risk, especially gay and bisexual men ('Upsurge in gay bashing by gangs', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 October 1986, p. 3). Efforts to contain the disease frequently displayed little concern for those affected by it. In a number of instances gay men were turned away from health care institutions; denied service and medical insurance by dentists, doctors and private providers, and refused jobs and housing opportunities. In May 1983, for example, 'promiscuous homosexuals' were told not to donate blood to the Sydney Red Cross Blood Transfusion Service; an act which stigmatized gay men by directly linking the gay community with AIDS and promiscuity and also by implying that all gays had 'bad blood' (Sendziuk, 2001:75).

Discriminatory attacks against the gay community frequently arose from sensational media coverage which focussed on the fears produced in the community at large and the disease's connection to gay sexual practices. In the midst of the election campaign in November 1984, for example, the Queensland National Party Health Minister, Brian Austin, announced that four babies had died in Queensland as a result of transfusions of blood donated by an infected gay man (Edwards, 1997:44; Willett, 2000:166; Sendziuk, 2003:57). This event led to 'moral panic' style media coverage with the full-page headline of the *Midweek Truth* [Melbourne], for example, declaring 'Die, you deviate', and the disturbing sub-heading: 'Baby victim's father tells AIDS donor, 'The only

honourable thing to do is commit suicide” (8 December 1984). As Willett notes, the majority of mainstream Australian media coverage on HIV/AIDS during this period was ‘at its best hysterical ... [and] at its worst (as in the *Truth*’s screaming headline ‘Die, you deviate’) bordering on incitement to homophobic violence’ (2000:166). Such violence was enacted after the announcement of the babies’ deaths and the ensuing sensationalist media coverage, when a gang of men roamed Sydney’s Oxford Street assaulting gay men and kicking in the doors of gay bars (Sendziuk, 2003:58; ‘Ministers Act On AIDS Scare’, *Age*, 19 November 1984).

Owing to widespread ignorance and fear about the nature of the disease, there was a lot of hostility directed towards gay people, much of it being reported in the mainstream news media. Sydney Telecom engineers, for example, refused to implement repairs at the Pitt Street mail exchange because they believed it was staffed by a large number of gay telephone operators ‘who probably had AIDS’ (New South Wales Anti-Discrimination Board, ‘Accommodation Discrimination’, *Campaign*, 100, April 1984, p. 6). Another example of discrimination involved the plumbers who refused to fix pipes in restaurants where homosexual men may have dined or cooked because of a fear of ‘catching AIDS’ (Ross, 1993). There were also a number of highly publicized proposals to stop the spread of AIDS which included banning gays from travelling between the United States and Australia; banning a planned gay rights march in Sydney; the closure of gay gyms, discos, backroom bars and saunas, and banning gay people from working in schools, libraries, the food industry, public transport and money handling (Willett, 2000:169; Nile, 1983).

Several dominant archetypes appeared in Australian and international media accounts during this period. The first dominant prototype was that of gay men with HIV/AIDS being routinely cast as ‘guilty’ parties, deserving of their condition and being punished for their ‘deviant’ sexuality with illness and death (Lupton, 1999:38). Such coverage also frequently invoked ‘guilty’ victims in contrast to the so-called ‘innocent victims’, those people with medically acquired HIV/AIDS and often represented by either infants and young children or white, married, middle-class and heterosexual women who had been unknowingly infected by their male partners (Juhasz, 1990; Lupton, 1994; Sacks, 1996). Another

dominant archetype in media coverage was that of the 'AIDS carrier', the individual who was deliberately and maliciously spreading HIV/AIDS to other people (Lupton, 1999:38, 39). This archetype, as Watney noted, gained its power from 'a cluster of similar stories, well known from popular fiction and film, about vampires, mysterious killer-diseases, dangerous strangers, illicit sex' (1992:153). The third dominant representation in mainstream media coverage was the AIDS victim archetype which represented people with HIV/AIDS as being alone, ravaged and disfigured by the disease and resigned to an 'inevitable' death (Crimp, 1992:118).

Whilst these once dominant representations can occasionally still be found in some mainstream news coverage on HIV/AIDS, it is now very rare. Dramatic shifts in the quantity and the nature of representations of HIV/AIDS took place in the mid 1980s as the gay image with which the disease had been strongly associated with was diffused. An increasing number of women, children and heterosexual men were now infected with and dying from HIV/AIDS. The early 1980s emphasis on gay men as the primary people at risk from HIV infection waned as media reports started to focus on the threat posed by HIV/AIDS to heterosexuals (Lupton, 1999:40). After 1985 the Australian mainstream media coverage on HIV/AIDS was, for the most part, noticeably less sensationalist than the earlier coverage and tended to humanize the victims as opposed to the earlier demonizations. The archetype of the AIDS victim, for example, began to be a much more sympathetic portrayal as it came to encompass a range of sub-types including that of people with HIV/AIDS, gay and heterosexual, who had suffered discrimination, people who feared they had contracted HIV/AIDS from discarded syringes, and elite sportsmen who had contracted the syndrome. Unlike the earlier years of discriminatory media coverage, there was little evidence of greater scorn and shame being directed at gay men as opposed to other people living with HIV/AIDS. It is also worth pointing out that for many Australians the news media were the first sources of knowledge about the condition and treatment of HIV/AIDS and continues to be so ('Australia's Response to AIDS Epidemic: A Model for Others', *The Age*, 21 July 1987).

In 1987 the Australian government funded and launched its first national education strategy, the now infamous 'Grim Reaper' media campaign. Paul Sendziuk describes the advertisement as follows:

It portrayed the medieval icon of Death, the Grim Reaper: a macabre scythe-carrying, skull-headed creature swathed in a black hood, bowling in a fog-filled, graveyard-like bowling alley. Instead of knocking over ten-pins, the creature struck down a set of stereotypical characters who represented the diversity of 'ordinary' Australians. One by one, a man in shirt and tie, a footballer, a little girl, a housewife and her baby (flung from her mother's arms) were knocked over in an attempt to illustrate that everyone was at risk of contracting the 'AIDS virus' (as it was called). The camera panned out towards the end of the commercial to reveal an entire graveyard full of Grim Reapers bowling people over and then celebrating, symbolising the way in which the virus and death would proliferate and spread through a community that did not heed the Grim Reaper's warning' (2003:137-138).

The aim of the campaign was to promote safer sex knowledge to heterosexuals by conveying a message to the 'general public' that 'everybody (including the privileged but defenceless mother and child) is at risk from this death' (Tulloch, 1989:105). According to both Deborah Lupton and John Tulloch (1996, 1997), the 'Grim Reaper' campaign is understood to have constituted a heterosexualization and a simultaneous de-gaying of AIDS representations in the Australian media by universalising the at-risk populations. However, whilst it may indeed have done this, there were many problematic aspects to the campaign. Using the 'horror movie' image of the Grim Reaper the advertisement created extensive fear in the community. It failed to provide explicit information about safe sex practices that people needed to know to consider and reduce their level of risk. It is also important to recognize the impact this advertisement had on people living with HIV/AIDS who were confronted with the dominant myth that it invoked, namely, the 'AIDS equals death' narrative with AIDS-related deaths being depicted as exceptionally swift and brutal (Sendziuk, 2003:157,158).

Whilst the aim of the 'Grim Reaper' campaign was to inform Australians that HIV/AIDS did not discriminate between age, sex, gender or sexuality, it did not entirely dispel the popular myth that AIDS was a 'gay disease'. Such mythologies were already heavily ingrained in the minds of many Australians because of their longevity and because they upheld existing prejudices against

gay people (Sendziuk, 2003:154). Despite the intended message of the 'Grim Reaper' advertisement, gay men actually became the target of homophobic violence and denigration during and after this campaign (Page, 2005).

There are some positive shifts however. At the same time that public anxieties about HIV/AIDS were being played out in a variety of discriminatory practices, Australia's approaches to the disease became recognized as one of the most effective and successful in the world. By the end of the 1980s, Australia's approach to AIDS prevention was being touted as a model for other countries to adopt ('Australia's Response to AIDS Epidemic: A Model for Others', *Age*, 21 July 1987). During the late 1980s and well into the 1990s, the groups in Australian society most affected by HIV/AIDS have had significant success in obtaining health care and access to education and prevention along with social support in the form of government funded publicity and legal sanctions outlawing discrimination on the grounds of actual or assumed HIV infection (Edwards, 1997:41). This is somewhat surprising given that HIV/AIDS impacts primarily on groups that have traditionally been seen as marginal, for example, gay and bisexual men, injecting drug users and sex workers. Yet in the Australian context these groups have been significantly empowered in and by the institutional responses to HIV/AIDS.

The successes that have been achieved can be attributed to a variety of factors, in particular, the close working relationship between AIDS community based organizations and the federal government which has taken the lead in HIV/AIDS policy development and implementation. Thus representatives of affected communities worked closely with, and were consulted by, various government agencies and health authorities in key campaigns against AIDS including in the areas of lobbying and policy-making. Instead of closing down gay saunas and bath-houses, as had happened in the United States, for example, these venues were used as sites to disseminate safe-sex messages. The second important feature was the targeting strategy whereby representatives of the various subcultures developed and then promoted peer-education campaigns that met the specific needs of their community.

Media coverage throughout the 1990s and into the present day reported on these successful interventions in the fight against HIV/AIDS. The earlier, heavily pessimistic archetypes that were so dominant in the early 1980s were replaced by more optimistic representations including stories which reported 'new hope' concerning medical and scientific breakthroughs in treating HIV/AIDS. Such stories challenged and dispensed with the earlier AIDS victim archetype whereby having HIV/AIDS was a death sentence. New archetypes emerged, namely, those of the 'AIDS survivor' who was shown as successfully winning the war against anguish and illness, either with the help of conventional bio-medicine or more alternative therapies and the representation of PLWA, that is, People *Living* With AIDS rather than dying from it. Once again, in this type of coverage little differentiation was drawn between people who were gay or straight nor was there a significant focus on the means by which people had contracted HIV/AIDS.

Conclusion

Increased cultural visibility in the mainstream media and popular culture, legal recognition, and other gay-friendly institutional responses, for example, improvements in Sydney gay-police relationships, suggest that the Sydney gay and lesbian community has made significant gains over the past two decades. Cultural shifts such as the ones I have examined in this chapter have contributed to the unprecedented level and serious nature of mainstream publicity on Sydney's 'gay hate crimes' which occurred in the early 1990s and has continued to this day. This explains the dramatic shifts that the 'gay gang murder' victims have received in terms of their crimes initially being ignored or downplayed through to the current situation where the men have been publicly acknowledged as victims of violent crime whose deaths deserve both media attention and a thorough police investigation.

In the following chapter, 'Postcards from the Bondi Badlands', I will introduce the reader to the physically 'real' and mythological site where the murders took place, Marks Park and the Bondi-Tamarama walkway in Bondi, New South Wales. I will also examine the beat status of the 'gay gang murder' site and

interrogate how this contributed to the crimes not being taken seriously or adequately investigated by police, legal and media institutions at the times that they occurred.

Chapter Two – Postcards from the Bondi Badlands

Introduction

This chapter provides the reader with a cultural history of the crime-scene, Marks Park, and its heavily mythologized surrounding locale, Bondi. It begins with a brief introduction to the ghosts who occupy and haunt this geographical and mythological landscape. This is followed by an examination of the cultural layerings, mythological accretions and social forces that have produced Bondi and continue to shape it. Drawing on the 'badlands' work of theorist Ross Gibson (2002a), and following the lead of journalist and true-crime author Greg Callaghan (2003, 2007a), I also situate Bondi as a badlands – a sinister and dangerous, intensely mythologized landscape. In Callaghan's book, magazine articles and media interviews, Callaghan explicitly positions Bondi as a badlands site, highlighted by his choice and usage of the term 'Bondi Badlands' for the titles of his magazine article (2003) and book (2007a). Throughout his journalistic writings, Callaghan uses the term 'Bondi badlands' in a descriptive way to refer to the 'gay hate' violence that occurred in the Bondi region during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Like Callaghan, I make use of the term 'Bondi badlands' as a short-hand descriptor of the Marks Park violence but also extend my usage of the term to critically examine the under-currents evident in popular readings of Bondi. Thus, in my framing of Bondi as a badlands site, I am able to draw out some of the cultural ambivalences held towards this treasured Australian icon. These tensions indirectly contributed to the homophobic violence that occurred at Bondi being ignored and down-played by mainstream media and legal institutions. They also played a significant role in the victims' lives being rendered ungrievable.

After making a case for Bondi being a badlands, I undertake a brief analysis of myths pertaining to the Australian beach, as well as specifically to Bondi beach. I argue that Bondi operates as a metonym for Australian beach culture and also for Australian national identity. Following this analysis of myths of the beach and of Bondi, I produce a historical time-line of cultural events that have taken place in and around Bondi, specifically events which destabilize popular renderings of Bondi. This fragmentary snap-shot like collection of events draws out further

tensions in the way that Bondi is produced and in doing so makes evident its abject underbelly. This examination reveals more individuals who have come to an untimely end in the Bondi region, and thus evokes more ghosts, which adds to the landscape's haunted quality.

In the next part of this chapter I examine the way Bondi rests on an abject underside which is constituted by a symbolic and literal expulsion of queer bodies from the domain of heteronormativity. I argue that the 'gay gang murder' victims signify the abject through the violence performed on their bodies and also because they challenge heteronormative assumptions about the Australian cultural icon, Bondi. I examine the way that each dominant image of the picture-postcard Bondi has its suppressed queer Other which is crucial for the survival of the cultural icon itself. Using Judith Butler's work on ungrievable lives (2004) and 'bodies that matter' (1993), I look at how the physical location of the murders has helped to produce the victims as non-grievable subjects and cast them out into a zone of uninhabitability.

The following section explores the way in which the Bondi beat, as a recognizably queer space, was contested by another marginalized sub-culture, groups of poofier-bashers, who transformed the site into a 'hunting ground' and 'killing field'. With beats constituted as no-go zones for the 'general public' and authorities, such violence often flourished because of police neglect, the isolated location and the reluctance of the victims to report such crimes. In conclusion I claim that the very site of the murders – a beat and more specifically a *Bondi* beat – contributed to these crimes being relegated to unimportance with the victims' lives not considered publicly grievable.

Ghosts I

'It's about living with ghosts', that's my standard reply when asked to describe my dissertation topic. 'Ghosts'. There you go, I can sum it all up in one word.

In my defence of Ficto-Criticism in the introductory chapter, I signalled points, positions, genres (to be disturbed, disrupted, broken) and flagged the numerous possibilities and pleasures of ficto-critical writing. I alluded to the uncanny and liminal nature of the crime scene, the cases, and the writing itself. I threw in the word 'haunting' and the phrase 'ghostly presence', but it was lip-service, just the entrée: there was more to be said.

A shadowy form, a faint trace. Isn't that what a ghost is?

According to Jacques Derrida in the *Specters of Marx* (1994), the spectre or ghost is the figure of what is there by not being there: a figure that is not present, nor real, nor even there, but that never-the-less enters and disturbs whatever is present, tangible and there. Thus the ghost is the spirit of someone who's died, who's passed, who's no longer with us, but there's a resistance too – a refusal to be altogether absent, a refusal to be completely gone.

Both (t)here and not (t)here.

'Real' and 'not real'.

A watered down version.

A possibility.

A trace.

Greg Callaghan said that by the time he'd finished writing *Bondi Badlands*, he knew the victims 'well enough to know their ghosts are not yet rested' (Callaghan, 2007b). He's a journalist. A true-crime writer. A 'murderous muse' (Callaghan, 2007b). This means he can get away with it – he can write in clichés, talk about 'ghosts that are not yet rested'.

Sculptor Lachlan Warner also evoked the presence of ghosts in his installation of twelve Buddha figures in a grove at Marks Park at the seventh public art exhibition staged along the Bondi-Tamarama coastline, *Sculpture By The Sea*. Entitled 'puja for purification safe passage', the work was advertised, in the Buddhist and gay press, as a tribute to those who have been the victims of violence at the site. Sculpted in Warner's trademark Easter-egg foil⁴⁷, and reinforced with resin to withstand the weather conditions, this work became a site for a Puja (ceremony) for the suffering caused in Mark's Park (Warner, 2003:30). In a public ceremony, led by the Venerable Bhante Tejadhammo, Buddhist purification rites were performed at the site on the morning that *Sculpture By The Sea* officially opened.

Similar to Warner's other works⁴⁸, in their 'display of disposability' (Smith, 2002: 9), this installation

⁴⁷ In the exhibition catalogue Warner lists Darrell Lea Easter foil as one of the materials he used. His work is also supported by Darrell Lea (Warner, 2003:30).

⁴⁸ Warner's installation at Marks Park shares similar themes to that of his earlier award winning installation, 'Vitrine of lightweight (Sunyata) disposable (Anicca) Buddhas, in a range of festive colours, postures and mudras', which was awarded the 2001 Blake Prize for Religious Art. By using Easter egg wrappers to cover Buddha figures, Warner is drawing links between Buddhism and Christianity, particularly the increasing commercialism of both. As Clark suggests the decorative Buddha's imply 'a kind of flashy, glitzy image of the packaging of religion' (2001:7). Warner himself has described this earlier work as both a critique and a celebration of the commodification of spiritual iconography: 'It's about consumerism, it's also a celebration of the aesthetic of Thai and Tibetan Buddhism that's very loud and lavish and wonderful like that' (quoted in Carmody, 2001:1).

suggests a sense of fragility, specifically the fragility of life. As Gregory Smith said in relation to Warner's earlier work, by 'showing these hollow, disposable ephemera in this way, Warner is foregrounding a Buddhist teaching on the impermanence of all things' (2002:17). When the alfoil Buddhas appeared in a Sydney gallery one critic commented that it was 'as if giant chocolate Buddhas have recently vacated their metallic cocoons, leaving their discarded shells behind'⁴⁹. A similar sense of absence, combined with a sense of the transitory nature of life, is also evoked in the installation 'puja for purification safe passage' which links the disappearing chocolate Buddhas to the men who vanished from Marks Park.

'Ghosts that are not yet rested'. Disappearing chocolate Buddhas. Both artists draw attention to the homophobic violence that has bloodied the coastal walkway and surrounds, as well as its residual after-affects. My task is a similar one. I need not only to evoke restless ghosts but also to *theorise* 'ghosts' within specific inter-disciplinary fields; to contextualise them; to discursively situate them. I need to interrogate how people who are no longer physically (t)here can both haunt and stain the present, the here, the now, this moment.

Initially, I thought I was dealing only with four restless spirits – those of Gilles, Ross, John and Kritchikorn. For these are the most obvious ghosts to inform this research: they are the objects under examination, they are relentless in their pursuit, they will not let (it) go. However, as this thesis has progressed, I have discovered that there are a multiplicity of ghosts who also inhabit and haunt this geographical locale, this discursive

⁴⁹ <http://sydney.citysearch.com.au/profile?id=11719>, accessed 9 March 2003.

terrain. Such ghosts 'belong', or rather are attached to, other people who have also come to an untimely end in this area. For, as this chapter will demonstrate, the violence at Marks Park is not a new phenomenon. Rather, Bondi has a long history of violent disturbances and bloodshed.

Mythological Accretions: the Bondi Badlands

In order to make sense of Bondi, to make it *mean*, I need to examine its cultural layerings and mythological accretions. In my attempt to get close to the dead, to spend my waking hours with ghosts, I have to meditate on the site itself, Bondi. In this chapter I will examine the multiple layerings of Bondi: its relationship with the past; the contradictory, sometimes conflicting, cultural histories and social forces that have not only built it but continue to shape it. The central task of this chapter is to get inside these imaginings and dreamings, and in doing so, to read Bondi as 'an ever-assembling mosaic of cultural artefacts, relics and stories that people have left on and in the ground' (Gibson, 2002a:177-178).

Stains on the bed-sheets. (Ink? Wine? Blood?).

Discolorations on the landscape.

Marks on the canvas.

This set of events, the gay-hate crimes, can not be read in isolation from other histories of Bondi. Hence, the focus of this chapter, 'Postcards from the Bondi Badlands', is to lay the foundations for the rest of this thesis by interrogating the historical layerings, past events and popular imaginings which have produced, and continue to produce, Bondi as an uncanny and haunted 'vast historical crime scene' (Gibson, 2006). This meditation on Bondi's multiple and contradictory mythological accretions is, primarily, composed of four sections. The first part situates Bondi as a badlands – a meeting place of sinister and violent acts and imaginings. The second part is a brief analysis of mythologies pertaining to the Australian beach and also, specifically, to Bondi. The third section involves the production of a timeline of historical 'backfill', a fragmentary snap-shot like sequence of Bondi events and imaginings. The final section

explores the way in which the location of the crime site, as a Bondi beat, contributed to the men's suspicious disappearances and violent deaths not being adequately investigated or even acknowledged by the appropriate authorities and in turn being rendered publicly ungrievable.

Through tracing Bondi's mosaic of 'cultural artefacts, relics and stories' and by drawing primarily on Ross Gibson's work, *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland* (2002a), I have followed Greg Callaghan's lead in framing Bondi as a badlands. Hence, I too position it as an ominous place, a troubling and unsettling space where past events are overlaid on current narratives. Traditionally the term 'badlands' was used by nineteenth-century European explorers attempting to cross the hard and unrelenting desert plains of South Dakota in the American West with the French describing the territory 'as *mauvaises terres a traverser* (badlands to cross)' (cited in Weaver, 2003:195). Gibson emphasizes the importance of these colonial roots when he notes that badlands are used to refer to 'a tract of country that would not succumb to colonial ambition' (2002a:14). Contemporary usages in popular discourses conjure up Charley Starkweather and his girlfriend Carol Fugate who became known as the 'badlands killers' after a bloody trail of murders they committed in the Great Plains of Nebraska and Wyoming in the United States during 1958. With their victims' bodies located in gas stations, storm cellars and farm houses across U.S. states, these crimes 'became myths almost before they were acknowledged as events' (Marcus, 1989:263). As Greil Marcus attests, the crimes, which signalled 'a moral panic and an inflation of the moral currency' (1989:265), can be read as 'mythical assaults' on the geographical and cultural landscape of late 1950s America.

In framing Bondi as a badlands, it is crucial to recognize the mythical nature of badlands. As Saffron Newey (2006) points out, badlands are 'a site for imagination ... a psychological phenomenon; a projection, a phantom and frameless imaginary'. Ross Gibson also defines badlands in a similar way:

badlands are made by imaginations that are prompted by narratives. A badlands is a narrative thing set in a natural location. A place you can actually visit, it is also laid out eerily by your mind before you get there. It is a disturbing place that you feel compelled to revisit despite all your wishes for comfort or complacency (2002a:14-15).

Gibson argues that part of the way the badlands myth operates is the fact 'that a special 'quarantine-zone' exists within a general location [which] tends to guarantee that everywhere else outside the cordon can be defined (with reference to the no-go zone) as well-regulated, social and secure' (2002a:173). Such myths imply that the violence 'can be assigned to a no-go area, to a place which is comprehensible as elsewhere-but-still-in-Australia' (2002a:173).

Positioned in Australia's largest city, Sydney, Bondi is a densely populated and popular coastal suburb. It is certainly not isolated, uninhabited, nor a 'quarantine zone'. Yet the badlands trail can be mapped onto this mythic site, and in doing so, make explicit the tensions between the safe, public face of Bondi and its more dangerous sinister Other. Recent publicity on the 'gay gang murders' makes explicit some of these tensions. In Greg Callaghan's book *Bondi Badlands* (2007a) and his earlier feature article 'Bondi Badlands' (*The Weekend Australian Magazine*, 4-5 October 2003), for example, the story of the gay hate gangs and their victims is presented as a standard badlands narrative. According to Callaghan, local residents aptly dubbed their neighbourhood the Bondi badlands because of the screams that echoed well into the early hours of the morning and the blood stains they frequently found splattered along the concrete walkway (2007a:5). In media accounts of the Bondi badlands the blood stains that locals reported seeing on the walkway are used to symbolize the violence that took place in the area. In the large boldly printed headline that graces Callaghan's feature article, for example, one of the letter A's in the word 'Badlands' is, initially, conspicuously missing. In its place is a reddish smudge, and four droplets of blood falling down the page like teardrops. These drops of blood effectively displace the letter 'A' so that it comes to rest upside down on the bottom of the page, not unlike a body coming to rest at the bottom of a cliff.

By framing Bondi as a badlands in this article, Callaghan demonstrates yet again the cultural ambivalence held towards this cherished Australian icon,

Bondi. As he puts it, Bondi is simultaneously both a 'spectacular setting' *and* the site of a series of 'hellish deaths (Callaghan, 2003:20). In Callaghan's badlands narrative, the popular cliff top walk is described as a 'playground for killers' (Callaghan, 2007a:5) and a 'shadowy ... favoured killing field' for a 'gang of teenage thugs' (Callaghan, 2003:20). The iconic Bondi cliffs are described as 'bloodied', and the coastline deemed 'Hate's fatal shore' (Callaghan, 2003:1, 20). In such coverage, juxtapositions between the beautiful, safe, daytime Bondi and the *unbeautiful*, out of control night-time Bondi are explicitly spelt out. In a description which exemplifies this polarization, Callaghan writes that:

The pathway skirting the cliffs between Bondi and Tamarama beaches in Sydney's upmarket eastern suburbs seems too spectacular a setting to have the stench of murder hanging over it. By day, it's crowded with suntanned locals, smartly dressed tourists and visiting Hollywood stars, but it was here in the late 1980s that a handful of young men were bashed and dragged screaming to their deaths after nightfall (2003:20).

Such renderings of space – playing off the public, day-time site with its 'darker side' or 'Gothic underbelly' (Hunt cited in Brown, 1995:141) – imply that when the sun sets, the picnicking families, fitness enthusiasts and day-trippers disappear without a trace. Callaghan attributes this dramatic shift to the setting of sun: 'As twilight descends on the headland ... it takes on an entirely different mood altogether, one that is all shadows and theatre' (2007a:3). In other words, as night falls, so too does the site's heteronormative and legitimate public persona. Out of the darkness, according to such mainstream media discourses, the hunting ground arises, complete with men jingling car keys hoping to gratify a sexual urge, followed by gangs of gay bashers intent on tracking their prey in their own bizarre blood sport. In this picture, the beat-goers and gay-bashers are clearly demarcated from the locals, tourists, and power-walkers as if they belong to mutually exclusive groups. Thus, Bondi, as a counter-site or heterotopia, juxtaposes in one single geographic location 'several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible' (Foucault, 1967:5). The gangs of poofier-bashers, as much as the beat-users, operate as physical and symbolic sites which embody the very incompatibility of the Marks Park site itself.

Given that Bondi is a cultural icon haunted by an unacknowledged queer and violent background, I argue that the beat's physical location at Bondi was as important, in determining (the lack of) police interest in the 'gay gang murders', as the fact that the murders took place at an 'illegitimate' relatively unpoliced site. Undoubtedly, the beat status of the crime site contributed to it being considered an illicit no-go zone. However, this sense of illegitimacy was heightened because evidence of Bondi-related violence is usually erased or downplayed from dominant cultural narratives which position Bondi firmly as a tourist Mecca and national treasure. The site, in this case, was of enormous consequence in determining the representation, both of the murders and of the men themselves, in mainstream media and legal discourses. As a beat, and a *Bondi* beat at that, the very crime scene worked against the murders and suspected murders of these men being taken seriously by either law enforcement agencies or the mainstream media. Thus the Marks Park beat, and the adjoining walkway, operated as a badlands site, a cultural framing which has been created by multiple and repeated occurrences over lengthy periods of time.

The Australian beach

As the traditional Australian bush myth has become less relevant to contemporary Australia, the beach has occupied a much more significant place in Australian mythology (Fiske et al, 1987:54). In one of many works entitled 'On The Beach'⁵⁰, Frances Bonner, Susan McKay and Alan McKee argue, that the beach operates as a privileged site from which to explore a sense of national identity (2001:269). They describe the central role of the beach in the Opening

⁵⁰ Helen Grace noted in her article 'The Persistence of Culture: Recovering On the Beach', that the title of the 2001 Australian annual Cultural Studies Association conference 'On the Beach', and the *Continuum* edition following this conference (edited by McKee et al) 'comes unashamedly from the world of popular entertainment, inviting us to revisit Neville Shute's 1957 novel and Stanley Kramer's 1959 film. The Shute/Kramer novel/film [has been] freshly appropriated in the mood of early 1980s appropriationism in the Sydney-based magazine *On the beach* (1983-1986) and in Andrew Milner's early 1990s Jamesonian reading' (2001:289).

Ceremony of the 2000 Olympic games as a site where Australia's national identity is played out:

The voice-over tells us about Australian national identity as Webster lays down her beach towel and prepares to dream about the sea: for the most salient characteristic of our 'wide brown land' for this modern identity is that we are 'linked inextricably to the sea'. As Nicki lies down on the sandy floor of the arena, we are told how to interpret what follows. She 'represents young Australia', says the voice-over – this young, white, Australian woman – and her representativeness comes in her fantasies, as she 'dreams, as we all do, of wide blue skies, the sand and the sea (2001:269).

The beach functions here as both a symbol of Australia, which is being performed to a large international audience, and also of Australian-ness, whereby participating in the 'Australian way of life'⁵¹ involves dreaming of the sand and the sea. As Leone Huntsman points out in *Sand in Our Souls*, in tourism promotions and advertisements the beach is endlessly invoked as an image of the Australian way of life (2001:140). In yet another article entitled 'On The Beach', Meaghan Morris comments on the 'massive, obsessive inscription' of the beach in Australian popular culture: 'tourism, fashion, softdrink and sanitary napkin commercials aside, a vast anthology could be compiled of beach scenes from literature, cinema, photography, painting, theater, television drama and documentary, newspapers and magazines' (1992b:102). Indeed, the beach has had such an influential role in shaping Australian culture and national identity, that the beach *per se* can be said to function as a metonym for Australia (Gibson, 2001:279). Bondi is, arguably, the metonym par excellence.

⁵¹ In the post World War Two period, Australia's immigration publicity campaigns were influential in constructing and shaping both a quintessential Australian identity and a 'typical Australian way of life' which would be attractive to British migrants (Cosic, 2005,14-15). The concept proved so popular that by 1950 a columnist could complain that she was 'sick and tired of hearing people bleating about 'The Australian Way of Life' (White, 1981:158). During the 1950s the concept of the 'Australian way of life' was central to any discussion of Australian culture and national identity (White, 1981:158). Arguably, this is still the case, given the 'un-Australian' debate that continues to flare up on a monotonously regular basis. For a cultural studies analysis of the Un-Australia phenomena see *Continuum* (Vol 21, No. 4, December 2007).

Dominant representations of the Australian beach are, however, careful to suppress its more sinister aspects in favour of a more sanitized image. As Huntsman points out, the beach is a site 'where the overwhelming presence of the natural can stimulate the awakening and expression of primitive violent and libidinal urges' (2001:150). She argues that the beach's 'unstructured space, the absence of physical boundaries and limits, has as its counterpart the ignoring or the rejection of moral constraints' (2001:151-152). In an analysis of how the figure of the 'lost child' has haunted the Australian imagination, Peter Pierce also examines the beach as a crime scene for some of Australia's most notorious crimes. Pierce argues that in the post-Beaumont world, 'even the typical site of innocent Australian hedonism and recreation – the beach, not the bush – invited predators' (1999:179).

Myths of Bondi

Bondi itself is not free of predators – the 'gay hate gangs' that inhabited the coastal walkway in the 1980s and 1990s are the prime example of this – nor is it entirely 'safe'. Instead, Bondi's popular, sanitized image, is weakened considerably by ambivalent under-currents. 'Bondi the beautiful', a central theme in Bondi discourses, has as its flip-side, the Un/beautiful, epitomized in both the sewage and violence that has 'polluted' the site. Likewise, many of Bondi's pleasures are tainted by a number of legendary natural dangers, for example, freak waves and sharks. Later in this chapter, when I examine some of Bondi's mythological accretions, I will explore this underbelly in more depth. At this stage, however, I want to briefly showcase Bondi's popular image as a site of national significance and a global tourist destination.

As far back as 1907, Bondi was promoted as having 'the chance of being to Sydney what Coney Island is to New York, and Blackpool to the Midlands' (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 January 1907, as quoted in Huntsman, 2001:75). Almost a century later, Bondi is said to have lived up to the challenge. Hailed as one of Australia's, indeed the world's, most famous beaches, Bondi has become synonymous with Australian beach culture. Bondi, like the Australian beach culture it represents, functions as an emblem of national identity, signifying the

combination of 'everything that is Australian' (Game, 1990:108). Anne Game describes a poster made by Percy Trompf (1929) for the Australia National Travel Association which characterizes this production of Bondi. The advertisement depicts a group of two young women and a man standing on a verandah looking out at Bondi beach. As Game states, it is 'an image of Bondi with Australia written across the bottom. Bondi stands for Australia. The image is, in a sense, paradigmatic of the Bondi photo/image, signifying the combination of 'everything that is Australian' (1990:108).

The collapse between 'Bondi' and 'everything that is Australian' is frequently invoked in popular culture, particularly in contemporary tourism promotions. According to the website [Travelmate.com.au](http://www.travelmate.com.au), for example, the name Bondi is 'as Australian as koalas, kangaroos, meat pies and Holden cars – a name that conjures up images of sand, cascading waves and bronzed surfers'⁵². Bondi's local city council, Waverley Municipal Council, echo these sentiments with their claim that 'Bondi symbolizes many aspects of the Australian lifestyle – sun, surf and sand, not to mention the bikinis, beach inspectors, lifesaving, surf carnivals, Bondi Icebergs, foodshops, and the City to Surf run' (*Waverley 125*, 1984, p. 6). The Lonely Planet guide, *East Coast Australia* (2006), also paints a similar picture:

On Bondi beach you can spot just about every Australian beach cliché: bronzed Aussie lifesavers pulling pale British tourists from the surf, topless beach bunnies baking themselves senseless under the blazing sun, men in singlets sipping Victoria Bitter beer and children nursing rapidly disintegrating icecreams. For decades Bondi's great arc of sand has played a crucial part in Sydney's self image and the Australian national psyche; the beach is a sandy synonym for the laid-back, sun-loving Aussie way of life and a picture perfect encapsulation of the country's naturally beautiful coastline (Lanigan, 2006:123).

Rolling surf, golden sand and glistening blue water – such images are repeatedly evoked in tourism promotions, whilst in newspaper articles one discovers fond personal reminiscences of Bondi: dripping Gelato's at Pompei's,

⁵²

http://www.travelmate.com.au/Places/Places.asp?TownName=Bondi+Beach_%5C_NSW, accessed 7 January 2008

cold beer at the iconic Iceberg's, testing out new surfboards and flippers on Christmas Day in the Bondi surf (see, for example, Smee, 2006:20-21). Nostalgic descriptions like these construct Bondi as a site of heightened sensual experiences where, such discourses proclaim, Bondi's qualities and features are inevitably the 'best', the 'greatest', the most 'famous', most 'iconic', 'panoramic', 'spectacular', and so on.

These descriptions, however can only tell us so much about the site. Although they work to 'set the scene', they limit us to a sketchy outline, to catchy clichés and broad sweeps on the canvas. They speak to me of those rough, hurriedly drawn, images associated with crime-scenes: a chalked figure on the road that displays the contours of a body but not the human who once inhabited those contours.

I began my introduction to Bondi with a series of beach clichés because they encapsulate the public face of Bondi that has been so successfully marketed domestically and internationally. Like the chalk figure on the tarmac, these clichés provide a broad outline for the reader to (dis)orient herself, a handrail to touch. These tentative beginnings, these yellow and red flags flying on either side, signal points of interest, as well as points of safety and danger. They operate like an establishing shot, directing your gaze to the perimeter of the flags where you see a dune buggy with an upside down number plate parked beside a lookout tower. You lay your towel down on the sand and stake your place on the beach. Someone rubs pink zinc onto your nose. Someone else throws you a straw-hat. You smell coconut oil and sea-air. You bury yourself in the sand but you don't fall asleep, nor do you dream of blue skies, sand or sea.

Historical Backfill: Bondi's Timeline

Historical Backfill. This was a term Ross Gibson conjured up when asked to describe what he was doing form-wise in *Seven Versions of an Australian Badlands* (2002a). As Gibson⁵³ defines it, backfill is:

What we have to enact when conventional historical techniques fail us ... work performed after one has done some divination, after one has attempted to intuit feasible and defensible but admittedly inconclusive accounts connecting the fragments ... [they conjure] "maybe" propositions that are not history but are historically informed and might be sometimes more important than history because of the way they make manifest an urge to account for the disconnected fragments (2006).

Such work, as Gibson comments, is historically engaged yet also speculative. It tests and conjectures as opposed to being conclusively convincing. Such a method can be usefully applied to my historical timeline of Bondi. In this timeline I provide a layering of cultural events that have taken place in and around Bondi, specifically those occurrences which undermine popular readings. Although presented chronologically, this timeline is *not* a complete or irrefutable history of Bondi, nor does it set out to be one. Instead, it consists of a fragmentary series of isolated events that tease out tensions in the way/s that Bondi is currently imagined and discursively produced. In doing so, it makes evident some of the cracks, fault-lines and tear-away undercurrents of Bondi's underbelly.

Rewind to 1842.

Bondi is described as 'a place of peculiar loneliness, with solemn roar of breakers and shining sandy beach unmarked by human foot' (quoted in *Waverley* 125, 1984, p. 6).

⁵³ www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/index.shtml, accessed 10 April 2007

1884, Boxing Day.

Bondi's small population is swelled by a large group of 'drunken rowdies' and 'larrikins'. After tossing back drinks in the Cliff House Hotel, the crowd relocates to the Bondi Dance Hall, opposite the pub. A verbal argument – over a woman – breaks out, and develops quickly into a physical fight. Punches are thrown. Names are yelled. The gum-saplings on the wall are torn down and used as weapons. Female patrons pull at each other's hair, rip at each other's clothing. Two on-duty constables try to quell the fighting. The crowd turns on the police, chases them out of the hall and into the scrub, where they are cornered and badly beaten. Later the officers turn up at the local police station; their white pants blood-stained and their heads encased in bandages. Eventually police reinforcements arrive and several of the rioters are arrested⁵⁴.

1889.

Despite fierce public opposition, the first ocean outfall, the Northern Bondi Sewer Outfall, starts operation. Raw sewage is discharged from the headland north of Bondi beach and pumped directly into the ocean.

1889.

Bondi is characterized as 'a wasteland of scrub, sand hills and lagoons'⁵⁵.

1889-1894.

In the five years following the completion of Bondi's outfall, numerous complaints about pollution are received.

⁵⁴ Riot in Bondi, Available at: <http://www.waverley.nsw.gov.au/Library/about/historical/riot.htm>, accessed 3 October 2004

⁵⁵ www.waverley.nsw.gov.au/library, accessed 3 October 2004

Engineers claim the pollution can't possibly come from the outfall because the southerly current would carry it in the opposite direction.

1906.

Australia's first formal surf life saving club, Bondi Bathers Surf Lifesaving Club, is established.

1907, October.

Following suggested by-laws making it obligatory for bathers to wear costumes that would dramatically limit bodily exposure, surf bathers stage demonstrations at Sydney beaches in an attempt to parody the skirt proposal (White, 2007:27). At Bondi 250 male bathers march along the beach wearing skirts of various descriptions to satirize the proposed regulations (White, 2007:29).

1920s.

Local real estate agents, keen to promote the suburb, launch the campaign 'Bondi the Beautiful'. The majority of residents attracted by this drive are new immigrants and working class.

1928, April.

Bondi lifesaver, Max Steele, is mauled by a shark. He manages to escape but his leg requires amputation.

1929, January.

Fourteen year old, Colin Stewart, is killed by a shark in waist-deep water off Bondi beach.

1929, February.

A month later, thirty-nine year old, John Gibson, is fatally wounded in a shark attack.

1930s.

A lookout tower is erected at Bondi beach.

1938, Black Sunday.

Three freak waves dissolve a sandbank, before sweeping across the length of Bondi beach in a matter of seconds. The undertow drags hundreds of people out into the deep channels. Eighty lifeguards use the recently developed life-saving reels to try to rescue as many people as they can. Most of the bathers are rescued unharmed. Sixty are suffering from immersion. Thirty five are retrieved unconscious. Five people drown.

1946.

At a time when local councils had banned the bikini, a crowd of several hundred beach-goers follow bikini-wearing Pauline Morgan down the length of Bondi beach. In the enthusiasm, Pauline is pushed to the ground and almost trampled. When she arrives at the dressing pavilion, a beach inspector orders her to change (*Daily Telegraph*, 20 October 1946, cited in Booth, 1997).

1971, April.

A strike by 10, 000 Water Board workers leads to the dumping of raw sewage in the ocean along Bondi's coastline.

1970s-1980s.

The term 'Bondi cigar' is used to refer to human faeces found floating in the tide. The Public Works Department and the Water Board (now Sydney Water) blame the pollution on beachgoers and passing craft (Beder, 1989:71).

1985, September.

Gilles Mattaini sets off for an afternoon stroll along the Bondi-Tamarama walkway. He is never seen again.

1986, October.

Former policeman, Simon John "Cyril" Edwards' body is discovered in the water off Mackenzies Bay, down from Marks Park. Edwards' hand and feet are tied up. He has been shot once in the head. His wife claims that on the evening Edwards disappeared he went to meet two detectives to 'fix' criminal charges relating to a marijuana plantation on his property. Warning his wife that the meeting could be dangerous, he claimed to be in the possession of documents implicating high ranking police officers in criminal activities (Curtin, 1990:5). Investigating officers treat the death as suicide.

1989, Good Friday.

Almost a quarter of a million people attend a concert on Bondi Beach as a protest against the pollution off Sydney's beaches. This leads to an independent review of the Water Board's plan and the New South Wales Government committing itself to a program of reforms to clean up Sydney's waterways (Beder, 1992:34).

1989, July.

Ross Warren vanishes from the Marks Park location.

1989, July.

The dismembered body of a young man, Clayton Beackon, is washed up at Dover Heights. Craig Ellis, Ross Warren's friend, is driven to the Glebe Morgue to determine if the body is Ross's. It isn't. Some months later, an anonymous caller phones Crime Stoppers and tells them that Clayton drowned near Marks Park.

1989, November.

John Russell's body is found at the bottom of the Bondi cliffs.

1990.

The New South Wales State Coroner, Derrick Hand, returns an open finding on "Cyril" Edward's death. He rules that Edwards has died from the effects of the bullet wound but is unable to determine who fired the gun (Hand & Fife-Yeomans, 2004:142).

1990, July.

Kritchikorn Rattanajurathaporn's body is discovered directly below Marks Park.

1990, December.

Tourists report seeing a body floating off the rocks at Mackenzies Point. A subsequent land and water search reveals nothing.

1995, Christmas Day.

The tourist-friendly façade of Bondi's Christmas Day beach party is shattered when revellers start to pelt police with rocks and over-turn cars and buses. Commentators describe these events as 'full-scale violence' (Martin, 1996:6), a 'riot' and a 'rampage' (Cass, 2000:28; Murphy & Watson, 1997:48). The New South Wales Police Minister, Paul Whelan, calls Bondi a 'hell hole' (quoted in Martin, 1996:6). These events are singled out as evidence that the 'quintessential image of Australia has lost its innocence' (Murphy & Watson, 1997:48).

1996, September.

English tourist, Brian Hagland, and his partner, Connie Casey, are strolling along Bondi beach after leaving a work party. They pass Sean Cushman and Aaron Martin who allegedly makes a lewd comment about Ms Casey. A violent scuffle breaks out. Martin punches Hagland, then pushes him in front of a moving bus, continuing to kick him in the face as Hagland loses consciousness. Hagland's death creates a mini 'moral panic' and is used as yet another example of Bondi's loss of innocence.

1996, November.

Natalia Bond is found dead at the cliffs below Ben Buckler Point, Bondi. It is not clear whether Natalia has suicided or been murdered.

1997, June.

Frenchman, Roni Levi, is shot and killed on Bondi beach by New South Wales Police. In an agitated state, Levi strides down the beach, waving around a kitchen knife as he edges along the shore. He's told: *drop the knife*. Levi either ignores or doesn't hear. Again, he's instructed: *drop the knife*. Six police officers surround him. Levi hangs onto the knife. Two officers aim their guns directly at Levi. They fire twice. He crumples to the sand. What is particularly striking about this incident is not only the resonance of the setting, but that it took place in front of hundreds of early morning beach and café goers, many of whom believed that the shooting was unprovoked and unnecessary. Subsequent investigations find that one of the officers who shot Levi was high on cocaine at the time.

Unbeknown to the police, a freelance photographer, Jean Pierre Bratanoff-Firgoff, had been trailing the activity and managed to take a photograph, 'freezing in time the

scene split seconds before Roni Levi was shot' (Hand & Fife-Yeomans, 2004:185). Within a day of Levi's death this harrowing image was published nationally and internationally. In many ways, Bratanoff-Firgoff's haunting image, and the tragic event it depicts, encapsulates the cultural ambivalence held towards Bondi. Journalist Darren Goodsir's description of Levi's death makes explicit this tension between Bondi as a site of recreation and hedonism and a site of violence: 'It was 7:30 a.m. The sun now completely coated the sand in a bright pale shade. The waves pounded in, roaring in smallish-size sets. An ever-congested beachfront of spectators gazed out in awkward wonder, and then in horror. Even at this sickening moment, Bondi Beach was magnificent and inspiring' (2001:54).

1997.

The Deputy State Coroner, John Abernathy, records an 'open finding' into the death of Natalia Bond. He suggests that the key to the mystery of what happened to Natalia in the hours before her death may rest with the 'selective memory' of her boyfriend (New South Wales State Coroner's Court inquest transcript). During the inquest, claims by Natalie's boyfriend of her suicidal tendencies are unsubstantiated by other witnesses.

1999, September.

Invoking the public outcry over Brian Hagland's murder, the local member of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly, Mr Debnam (Vaucluse) invites the Minister for Police and the Commissioner of Police to come to Bondi to discuss local policing in the area (New South Wales Hansard Articles: LA: 16/09/1999:#36, p. 1).

2001.

Operation Taradale is set up to examine links between the suspicious disappearances and murders of gay men in the Eastern suburbs of Sydney, particularly in the Bondi-Tamarama vicinity.

2001, November.

Five years later, with his request still outstanding, Debnam again appeals for further resources at Bondi including a stronger police presence, video surveillance and better lighting (Legislative Assembly, Private Members' Statements, 9 November 2001, p.4). Debnam quotes a series of violent incidents that had taken place in the Bondi area since Hagland's death including brutal bashings and stabbings. In calling for extra resources, the beach *itself* is invoked as if it is also a victim of crime. A resident who contacts Debnam after one of his sons was assaulted and another held up and robbed writes, 'Part of the problem is the inadequate street lighting in many areas near the beach ... This is an open invitation for muggers ... *Bondi Beach deserves more ...*' (italics my emphasis, quoted in Legislative Assembly, 9 November 2001, p. 4). Debnam also invokes the beach's unique character and status: 'Bondi Beach is not just a famous area around the world, it is famous all across Sydney. Bondi Beach attracts a large number of visitors every day and every week of the year, but it also attracts criminals and many thugs. *Bondi beach is not just another suburb*' (italics my emphasis; quoted in Legislative Assembly, 9 November 2001, p. 4).

2001, December.

The police rescue squad throw a weighted dummy off the Bondi cliff-face to simulate the death of John Russell and generate publicity regarding Operation Taradale.

2003.

The New South Wales Coronial Inquest into the 'gay gang murders' begins with unprecedented media attention. 'Persons of interest' appear before the New South Wales State Coroner, Jacqueline M. Milledge.

2004, October.

British backpacker, Melody O'Gara, vanishes from Marks Park. A witness tells police that he saw O'Gara on the coastal walk, sitting alone in a 'precarious' position on a cliff ledge at Mackenzie's Point (*The Daily Telegraph*, 10 November 2004, p. 7). The following day, a security guard at Marks Park finds O'Gara's handbag, which contains a number of personal items (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 November 2004). In mid November 2004, Inspector Mark Smith, from the Kings Cross Police Station, reports that it was 'more than likely' that O'Gara had taken her own life. Family members and friends flatly dismiss such suggestions.

2005.

Sydney Water announces that it will continue pumping raw sewage from the city's more affluent suburbs into the ocean near Bondi until at least 2010. This decision is said to be a victory for residents of the upmarket Dover Heights who opposed plans to have sewage piped fifty metres underground beneath their houses. As councillor Sally Betts reports, the local residents 'would rather have clean poo [in Bondi's water] than damage their houses' with a pipeline (*The Sun-Herald*, 14 August 2005, p. 21).

2005, March.

The State Coroner delivers her findings and recommendations on the 'gay gang murders' with a scathing critique on the police officers involved in the earlier (non)investigations.

2005, April.

Nearby beaches, Bronte and Tamarama, are closed for three hours following a shark attack on a surfer. Tamarama local, Simon Letch, manages to ram the nose of his surfboard into the shark's mouth, push it away, and escape.

2006, December.

Owing to a 'moral panic' over the uses of beach photography, celebrated Australian photographer, Rex Dupain, is questioned by police for half an hour while taking pictures for his new book *The Colour of Bondi* at Bondi beach (cited in Cvorov, 2007). Dupain's camera is confiscated⁵⁶.

2007, December.

Earning the dubious honour of being the first person in seventy years to be attacked by a shark off Bondi beach, Scott Wright saves his own life by punching the shark on the nose. Wright swims to safety while the shark avoids capture by evading the entire length of the metal shark net that stretches along Bondi beach.

⁵⁶ This follows public debates over the legality (or otherwise) of beach photography, regarding the control over representations of the Australian 'way of life' at the beach, as well as the ownership of the public display of bodies articulated through pleasure, health and leisure (Cvorov, 2007; Gibson, 2001; McGregor, 1995).

2009, January.

Following sightings of hammerhead sharks at Bronte and Tamarama beaches, the shark alarm is raised and swimmers evacuated from the ocean.

2009, February.

A surfer at Bondi beach is severely mauled in a shark attack. The Bondi local is paddling out for a surf when the shark suddenly appears and locks its jaws on his left arm, partially severing his hand. The man swims to shore and manages to survive the attack.

Ghosts II

Fatal shark attacks, freak waves, riots, assaults, murders, vanishings, hints of official cover-ups, and free-floating sewage. These fragments undermine the popular 'sun, surf, sand' image of Bondi that is celebrated nationally and internationally. Such mythological accretions destabilize dominant representations of Bondi and make evident its abject under-side. I have produced such a timeline in order to situate the 'gay gang murders' within a continuum of disturbances at Bondi and to show that such violence is not an isolated or exceptional occurrence but rather yet another example of Bondi's illegitimate and dangerous under-belly. The ghostly fragments (of narratives) left by people on and in the land and sea exemplify the dark and conflicting social forces at work in the production of Bondi. Such histories are usually repressed or erased from mainstream representations. By foregrounding such historical layerings and popular imaginings, I am showing that the 'gay gang murders', which took place in one of the most mythicized sites in Australia, has also as its

backdrop or over-lay, a lengthy history as a crime scene and badlands.

Melody O’Gara, Roni Levi, Natalia Bond, “Cyril” Edwards, John Gibson, Colin Stewart, Clayton Beackon, the Black Sunday victims – these are just a few of the people who have come to an untimely end in the Bondi-Tamarama region. Whilst the narratives pertaining to these individuals are peripheral to this thesis, their ghosts – like those of Gilles, John, Ross and Kritchikorn – inhabit this geographical terrain and, as such, contribute to its multiple mythological layerings. These uncanny apparitions, which hover over the region’s present and past, contribute to the landscape’s haunted nature. Like other spectral beings, their non-presence is strangely evident, visible, traceable. Just as in the Derridean sense, the spectre inhabits and haunts all concepts, these ghosts insinuate themselves thoroughly within the Bondi crime scene, the haunted landscape and the throwaway phrases and loitering words that bounce off the pages of this PhD.

Un/Grievable Lives

The ‘legitimate’ uses of Bondi, and more specifically, Marks Park – as a tourism / picnic site, wedding backdrop, scenic lookout, exhibition venue and a site of historical interest – sit neatly within dominant discourses of mainstream tourism, leisure, sport, politics, and landscape, particularly those which position Bondi as a national icon. Yet, just as a singular, definitive ‘meaning’ of Bondi cannot be found, there are a number of slippages in relation to how the site is used and perceived to be used. Like every cultural icon, Bondi rests on an abject underside. I am using the term ‘abject’ here in the broadest possible sense, as Julia Kristeva does in *Powers of Horror* (1982), when she suggests that abjection operates not just at the corporeal and psychological level but also at the socio-

spatial where it is extended to people and places. Dominant cultural images, such as those produced around Bondi, come into being and are maintained over time by an operation of power that both expels non-normativity and also suppresses representations of its own operation.

In the case of the 'gay gang murders', the ideals of Australian heteronormative culture are constituted by a literally violent expulsion of queer bodies from the domain of (hetero)normativity. Like the legendary Bondi sewage that flows from the city's more affluent suburbs into the ocean near Bondi, the treatment handed out to four of the victims in this case, Gilles Mattaini, Ross Warren, John Russell and Kritchikorn Rattanajurathaporn, exemplify this abject underbelly. Not only do they represent the abject through the violence enacted on their bodies, but also because they challenge heteronormative assumptions about Australian cultural icons and sites in general.

The sanitized 'tourist-friendly' and 'family-friendly' images of Bondi, which function as an icon for Australian national identity, are built upon a structure of homophobic violence. Historically, this operation of raw violence has taken place with the complicity of institutions such as the law, police service and the mainstream news media. Each dominant image of Bondi has its suppressed, but constitutive, queer opposite which is essential to the survival of the cultural icon itself. The 'postcard perfect' legitimate, safe, public face of Bondi has an illegitimate, dangerous and queered Other, exemplified both in Marks Park's role as a beat and also in the 'gay gang murders' themselves.

The physical site of the Marks Park crime-scene can work to both underpin and delimit representation. For the refusal to acknowledge queer space at Bondi has had vitally important ramifications for reading and making sense of the 'gay gang murders'. The crime scene as a gay beat located at Bondi has directly impacted on the ways the victims were represented in mainstream media and legal discourses. I argue that, due partially to the physical location of the murders, the men were produced as non-grievable subjects for which any public mourning was implicitly prohibited. Despite recent shifts in later representations of the victims, which have allowed some measure of 'grievability', current

popular imaginings of Bondi continue to erase gay presence and usage, thus continuing to delegitimize a gay heritage.

The site of the 'gay gang murders' at the Marks Park beat is crucial in helping to explain the lack of public mourning over the deaths and disappearance of 'gay' men from this location. As Judith Butler contends in *Precarious Life: the Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004), some lives become worthy of public grief while others are seen as undeserving of public mourning, and indeed even incomprehensible as lives. Likewise, in her earlier work *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993), Butler suggests that certain subjects are privileged over other abjected 'non bodies'. Butler mobilizes the notion of the 'ungrievable life' to encapsulate the absence of any public grieving for the loss of lives to the continuing AIDS crisis, referring initially to the United States in the 1980s and 1990s, to the ongoing AIDS deaths in Africa, and also to the unnameable and non-narratable deaths produced by the United States military in, for example, Afghanistan (2008:5-7).

In the case of the 'gay gang murders', not only are we dealing with the actual physical absence of the men's bodies and evidence of their deaths, but also with the way in which they were excluded from the sociopolitical status of 'subject' at this time. Butler refers to this sort of exclusion as the 'domain of the abject', describing the abject as:

... those who are not yet "subjects" but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject. The abject designates here previously those "unlivable" and "uninhabitable" zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the "unlivable" is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject (1993:3).

Turning her attention to the production of these 'lives not worth living', the 'domain of abjected bodies', Butler interrogates the physical and discursive conditions which render certain bodies legible, liveable, and grievable:

How does that materialization of the norm in bodily formation produce a domain of abjected bodies, a field of deformation, which in failing to qualify as the fully human, fortifies those regulatory norms? What challenge does that excluded and abjected realm produce to a symbolic hegemony that might force a radical rearticulation of what qualifies as bodies that matter, ways of living that count as “life”, lives worth protecting, lives worth saving, lives worth grieving? (1993:15)

My research into these men’s lives (and deaths) suggests that I am recasting these men as ‘subjects’ in the same way that they have also been partly rehabilitated by the New South Wales Police Service, New South Wales Coroner’s office, and unprecedented media attention. In doing so, the domains of the ‘livable’, that were previously occupied by the men’s killers and those who chose not to get involved in what happened in the Marks Park crimes, is transferred to the murder victims, albeit many years too late. Thus, a fundamental slippage has occurred wherein I am no longer certain of what constitutes the ‘constitutive outside’ delineating gay from straight, outlaw from subject. However, at the times of their respective disappearances and deaths – the late 1980s and early 1990s – the men’s lives were not recognized as valuable human lives and therefore could not ‘be mourned because they are always already lost, or rather, never ‘were” (Butler, 2004:33). Instead, the victims were symbolically cast out into a zone of uninhabitability with their deaths largely unrecognised and unaccounted for. Deemed unworthy of official resources, police inaction and mainstream media neglect and sensationalism were the predominant responses to these cases. I will be examining the responses of the mainstream and gay media in later chapters, namely, ‘The Victims’ and ‘The Gay Hate Gang: the all-Australian ‘Bondi Boys”.

Institutional responses by law enforcement agencies at the time ranged from disinterest and neglect to outright homophobia. Although it was a known trouble spot, Marks Park was, for the most part, ignored by authorities, which only increased the risks of violence for beat-goers. Sydney gay man, Gary Burns, recounts how in late 1988 he had been chased from Marks Park by five young men shouting ‘faggot we’re going to get you’, managing to escape only by hiding under a car in nearby Kenneth Street (Mills, 2002). Burns claims that when he reported this incident to the Bondi Police Station, a sergeant dismissed his complaint by saying, ‘We’re not interested in gay domestics (Mills, 2002).

This disinterest in activities at beats was common at the time. In the case of Bondi and Marks Park, it would have been compounded for two reasons. Firstly, the beat's location at Bondi itself and, secondly, the uneasy historical relationship between police and beat-users (Willett, 2000:22,132,150).

Bondi's Gay History

As well as the 'legitimate' uses listed earlier, the Bondi-Tamarama walkway and Marks Park continue to operate as sites of public cruising, 'temporary and invisible networks of queer space' (Rushbrook, 2002:4). In the wake of the Coronial Inquest on the 'gay gang murders', Marks Park is still considered to be one of Sydney's busiest beats, with one beat-goer, Scott, claiming that he sometimes sees up to 50 men there at one time (*Sydney Star Observer*, 17 March 2005) whilst I.J. Fenn reports Marks Park as hosting up to a hundred gay males seeking casual sex (2006:58). If one searches, for example, the 'Address4SEX Worldwide Cruising Directory', out of a possible 3443 global locations, three Bondi sites are specifically listed, namely, Bondi Beach, Tamarama, and Marks Park⁵⁷.

While not part of a commercialised gay zone, Bondi, North Bondi and Tamarama are all significant sites on the Gay Map of Sydney⁵⁸. Claimed as 'gay beaches', or at the least 'gay friendly', the bodies on these beaches are as much – if not more – part of the beachscape as the surf, sand and Bondi cliffs. If the Australian beach is seen as a site of leisure, escape, and hedonism; the 'gay beach' – with its 'body beautiful' ethos and sexually charged atmosphere – is doubly so. In the gay travel narratives, North Bondi and Tamarama figure not just as places to relax at or escape to, but in the same vein as mainstream depictions, as sites where the Beautiful People can be found.

⁵⁷ <http://address4sex.com/cruising.shtml>, accessed 7 December 2007.

⁵⁸ Although Sydney has recently emerged as the 'gay capital of the South Pacific', due in part to the growth and popularity of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras (Markwell, 2002:81), Sydney's prime beach, Bondi, is hardly in the same league as, for example, the famous 'gay paradise', South Beach in Miami, Florida. Nor is the cosmopolitan foreshore promenade, Campbell Parade, a commodified gay zone, in the way that Oxford Street, Darlinghurst, and King Street, Newtown, clearly are. While rainbow flags and Mardi Gras posters may be few and far between in Bondi's sidewalk cafés and small businesses, this is not to deny Bondi a 'gay history', or to ignore the recognisably 'queer spaces' that exist within this environment.

However, despite much evident gay usage of the area, Bondi's gay past and present is erased from mainstream mythologies. The Spanish-style pavilion located on Bondi beach, for example, is listed as 'a structure of significant historic character' which was built in 1928 as part of a beach improvement scheme⁵⁹. Classified by the National Trust in 1977, the pavilion currently operates as a community and cultural centre and the venue for art exhibitions, films, plays, and other events (*Waverley 125*, 1984, p. 8). In promotions for the Bondi-Bronte clifftop walk, the Bondi Pavilion is listed as the starting point.

In *City of the Plain*, a history of Sydney's gay subculture, Garry Wotherspoon describes the role of the Bondi Pavilion as a major beat during the interwar years, and also for the duration of World War Two (1991:66-67, 94-95). Like other Sydney beats of the time, for example, the old Turkish Baths and Giles' Hot Sea Baths, it was a popular meeting place for gay men because of its all male clientele, the privacy of the cubicle/shower, and the fact that there was a legitimate reason for being naked (Wotherspoon, 1991:66). Mainstream tourism publicity's refusal to acknowledge the pavilion's former role as a gay beat, effectively erases queer history to produce a heteronormative history of the area.

This erasure persists in other dominant acknowledged uses of this area. The Waverley Council, for example, who are responsible for the maintenance and beautification of the coastal walk hire out sites along it for private functions. For those interested in a wedding by the beach, Marks Park is advertised as the most popular wedding park in the area, offering spectacular ocean views and privacy. Bronte Park is also listed as another possible wedding site in the Waverley area. Both sites are listed as photo locations for wedding photography with the council charging a minimum of \$50 for such uses. Despite the increasing popularity of same-sex marriages in Australia, I have not yet seen evidence that this site has been used for anything but legally binding heterosexual unions.

⁵⁹ www.waverley.nsw.gov.au/library, accessed 20 January 2008

Queer spaces as hunting grounds

Queer spaces, such as the Bondi beats, are contested by other marginalized sub-cultures, gangs of gay-bashers, who transform such sites into both a hunting ground and a crime scene. Beats function as hunting grounds in two ways. Firstly, as they are the domains of men looking for anonymous sex with other men, beat-goers can be considered benign hunters in these quests. The second way, as Wayne Myslik argues, is that once 'the reputation spreads in the media that an area is a gay neighbourhood or queer space, the violence increases. Queer spaces become hunting grounds' (1996:162). As one beat-goer put it, gay bashers 'know of and hunt in the same territories as the fags they want to bash and kill' (cited in Leap, 1999:166). Beat-goers, then, become hunted animals, the object of pursuit or attack. The detective in charge of the Bondi cliffs murders investigation, Detective Page, likened the phenomenon of poofster bashing to sport, or more specifically 'a blood sport' (cited in Callaghan, 2003) and a 'team sport' which rendered the perpetrators 'cowards' who would only 'act as a group'⁶⁰. One of the 'persons of interest' in the Bondi cliff killings also used the sport analogy declaring that poofster bashing was, 'Something to do mate ... It's not fun ... It's a sport in Redfern ... Oh it's a fuckin hobby mate. What are you doin' tonight boys? Oh just going fag bashin'" (State Coroner's Findings & Recommendations, 9 March 2005, p. 13)

There is no doubt that the beat status of Marks Park contributed to its operation as a hunting ground for poofster-bashers. In the murder of Kritchikorn Rattanajurathaporn, police interviews with perpetrators suggested that the young men involved were all aware of the beat status of the park, and the way that it attracted men to the area (Tomsen, 2002:49). The assailants travelled from inner city suburbs to Bondi, and then walked to Marks Park, a long and strenuous walk from Bondi itself, with the express purpose of 'faggot bashing' (Tomsen, 2002:40), choosing Bondi because 'we know poofs would be there for sure' and 'that's where all the faggots hang out' (cited in Tomsen, 2002:39).

⁶⁰ <http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/content/2005/s1369269.htm>, accessed 7 October 2005

Detective Page has contended that the gang of teenagers involved in Rattanjurathaporn's murder, as well as other incidents, deliberately chose the cliffside location as 'their favoured killing field' (cited in Callaghan, 2003). As a popular beat, such a site would have offered a ready availability of potential victims. The perpetrators would also have been attracted by the relative seclusion of the site and its inaccessibility (Tomsen, 2002:26). Like many other beats, Marks Park is poorly lit, isolated and – after hours at least – relatively untrafficked, barring beat-goers. The compromised situation of the victims, who may have been seeking or engaged in casual sexual activity with other men, would have been another drawing card for the perpetrators.

Community homophobia and indifference has also, unwittingly, aided the perpetrators of anti-gay violence. In the eyes of the wider community, and in their own opinion, gay bashers viewed beat users as 'fair game' or legitimate targets, owing to their marginalized status, and their presence at a beat site. As Tomsen (2002:41) has noted, many gay hate perpetrators have been surprised that their crimes were treated seriously by law enforcement authorities and in some cases believed their activities constituted a form of community service. Dr Adam Graycar, former Director of the Australian Institute of Criminology, concurs explaining that 'Some of the perpetrators ... do not believe they have done anything wrong, and in fact expect society to applaud them for what they have done' (2002). Given the dearth of police response, until fairly recently, to queer bashers at beats, they might even be forgiven for such opinions, as historically police have allowed such gangs to operate in a quasi-police capacity in 'regulating' beat usage. The fact that the perpetrators believed they were doing society a favour only worked to make the victims even more *ungrievable* as they were often portrayed as little more than detritus.

In its role as a beat, Marks Park, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, incorporated a sex-death nexus. At this time, beats in general were produced by police and mainstream media discourses and, I would argue, by gay popular culture and sociological discourses, as sites that inexorably connected sex with death. Police discourse was vital in producing this situation through their construction of beats as no-go zones, territories outside the law, due to their usage for illegal public sexual activities conducted by an already marginalized

group. This meant that, in both police and gay discourses, beats became known as high-risk places where sexual gratification could very well be interrupted with violence, in the form of bashings and, occasionally, murder. Due to these particular constructions, Marks Park was understood in police discourses as a site where law enforcement officers had no place.

Engaging in sexual activities in a no-go zone such as Marks Park meant that the participants were particularly vulnerable to violence. Police neglect, and the reluctance of victims to report beat-related crimes, meant that gay-bashers could appeal 'to the geographic circumstances to implicate the victims themselves' (Berlant & Warner, 2000:315). With authorities refusing to adequately monitor the site, the violence is made to appear like a natural hazard, 'voluntarily courted by queers' (Berlant & Warner, 2000:315). This attitude that queers deserve their vicious treatment at beats is played out throughout the initial police investigations into the 'gay gang murders'. During the Coronial Inquest, these investigations came under attack, as did the officers in charge, and the police institution itself, particularly in terms of its general response to gay hate crimes. At the turn of the century, the Deputy State Coroner, police counsel and journalists described the original investigations into the Warren and Russell cases as 'seriously flawed' (Lamont, 2003d:13); an 'aborted jumble' (Masters, 2003:4); 'sloppy', 'grossly unprofessional', 'tragically muddled', 'non-investigations' (Callaghan, 2003).

The law enforcement authorities that had turned a blind eye to violence at Marks Park were criticized on a number of fronts. Police in charge of these cases were criticized for being 'slow to respond' to the attacks ('Football star involved with gay bashing gang, inquest told', *Canberra Times*, 1 April, 2003, p.4), for ignoring crucial evidence, and for 'fobbing off' complaints by gay victims (Lamont, 2003b). In what was described as a 'damning day' for police, the inquest heard that basic police procedures, such as taking crime scene photographs and canvassing the area, were never carried out (Farrar, 2003). It was also revealed that officers had lost paperwork relating to Warren's disappearance including the crucial Brief of Evidence, the entire transcript of Russell's 1990 inquest, vital hair samples found in Russell's hand, and the original missing person's report into Mattaini's disappearance. In her closing

remarks, the State Coroner, Jacqueline M. Milledge, described the investigation into Warren's death as 'a grossly inadequate and shameful investigation. Indeed to characterise it as an 'investigation' is to give it a label it does not deserve' (State Coroner's Findings and Recommendations, March 2005, p. 6). Such official responses to the 'gay gang murders' contributed to the notion that gay victims of crime, like members of other marginalized groups, were being positioned as illegitimate victims and 'disposable bodies'⁶¹. Highly critical of the earlier police investigations, Milledge declared that, 'Given the disgraceful investigation into Mr. Warren's suspected death and the completely 'lack lustre' investigation into Mr. Russell's demise, it would not be unreasonable for the gay community to believe that as a group they do not warrant proper police attention' (State Coroner's Findings and Recommendations, March 2005, p. 11). The reason for the disturbing inadequacy of the police investigation may well have stemmed from the physical location of the beat itself for the Marks Park crime-scene jars with the popular postcard 'sun, surf, sand' image of Bondi.

As Butler (2004) has argued, one of the characteristics of the publicly 'grieved life' is that the circumstances of the death should not be uncomfortably confronting for the general population. The beat location of the crimes studied here immediately disqualifies the murders as 'grievable' in that the site itself confronted mainstream society with both public sex and visible homosexuality. These victims, then, could not possess the ideal features of the regularly mourned 'innocent victim'. Rather they were tainted by association with mainstream media and police discursive constructions of beats as illegal, risky, and tawdry. Men who used beats were considered as 'guilty' as those who bashed and killed them. Due to the victims' very presence at the (counter)site of a beat, their lives were deemed ungrievable, and the crimes against them,

⁶¹ AIDS activists and cultural theorists have frequently invoked the notion of gay bodies as 'disposable bodies'. The New York based AIDS activist group Gran Fury, for example, produced a number of texts along this theme. One poster asks: 'When a government turns its back on its people, is it civil war?' with a subtext sustaining the disposable bodies metaphor, 'The US Government considers the 47,524 dead from AIDS expendable. Aren't the "right" people dying? Is this medical apartheid?' (Crimp & Rolston, 1990:109). Simon Watney also argued that 'until gay men are provided with the same health facilities as other citizens in this present emergency, it will be difficult not to conclude that we are regarded in our entirety as a disposable population' (1987:135).

unimportant, at least to police, and via their symbiotic relationship, to the mainstream media as well.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the ways in which the very *site* of a murder can have a dramatic impact on whether or not the victim's life is considered publicly grievable. In the late 1980's and early 1990's, the suspicious deaths and disappearances under investigation here were relegated to unimportance due to their occurrence at a beat site geographically positioned at Bondi. For the police institutions and mainstream media discourses of the time to acknowledge the existence of such crimes would also have meant making explicit the underbelly of the (inter)national tourist Mecca, Bondi, as well as making evident the existence of beats and the popularity of male-to-male sexual practices. Grievable lives are only granted to those who appear to foreground 'the relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility' (Butler, 2004:22). If we disavow some lives, discount them as 'ungrievable', we automatically assert, as Butler tells us, that we are 'as much constituted by those [we] grieve for' (2004:46) as by those *we don't*.

In the original societal refusal to mourn the loss of the lives of Gilles, Ross, John and Kritchikorn, we denied any ethical responsibility we had to them as fellow citizens. Their deaths showed how the location of these savage bashings somehow managed to translate their very lives as unimportant and their hold on their communities as members entitled to safety and concern as negligible. In doing this, we have allowed the site to dictate that these men were not human, indeed *could not be human*, because they made plain that which Australian society in the late 1980's and early 1990's preferred to keep hidden: a world beyond the comforting 'straight' one of the daylight parks, where public sex was ordinary and homosexuality everyday. Police and mainstream media discourses at this time, constituted our social world as determinedly heterosexist on the very bodies of gay men who died at beats. They insistently disavowed their responsibility, as public watchdogs, to care for all members of the community, preferring instead to state through their actions and inactions that only certain

people rated the rank of 'citizen', and that men who were thrown from the cliffs at beats were certainly not amongst them.

In the following chapter, 'Meditations on the scene of the crime', I continue my analysis of the beat location crime-scene. Having examined the cultural layerings and mythological accretions that have produced Bondi, particularly those social forces that have rendered it a badlands, I turn my attention more specifically to the Marks Park site. I do this by providing an autoethnographic meditation on viewing the John Russell crime scene photographs at the State Coroner's office as well as a meditation on my visit to Marks Park where I literally retrace the steps of both perpetrators and victims.

Chapter Three – Meditations on the scene of the crime

Introduction

In the previous chapter, 'Postcards from the Bondi Badlands', I provided a cultural history of the crime-scene, Marks Park, and its heavily mythologized surrounds, namely, Bondi beach and district. In framing Bondi as a badlands, I presented a time-line of events which occurred in the area that undermine and destabilize popular constructions of Bondi as a national icon and tourist Mecca. I also examined the beat status of the Marks Park crime scene and how this impacted on the way in which the men's murders were treated by media sources and police authorities. I concluded the chapter by arguing that the very site of the murders – a Bondi-located beat – had contributed to the victims' lives being rendered ungrievable. The focus of this chapter is also, once again, on the crime scene. However, in 'Meditations on the scene of the crime', I place myself – as a writer and researcher – within the discursive and geographical frame of the crime scene location so as to extend the analysis I provided in the previous chapter. Form-wise, this chapter is comprised of two meditative reflections. The first is a meditation on the John Russell crime scene photographs which I examined at the New South Wales Coroner's Court in November 2005. The second is a meditation on my last visit to Bondi, in January 2008, where I physically re-traced the steps of both victims and perpetrators along the Bondi-Tamarama walkway to Marks Park.

The approach I am adopting throughout this chapter can loosely be defined as Ficto-Critical but is, more strictly speaking, an example of Auto-Ethnography because it explicitly describes and critically analyses my own personal experiences of looking at the Russell crime scene photographs and visiting the Marks Park and Bondi-Tamarama walkway. Like other examples of Auto-Ethnography, this chapter is a highly personalized (self)narrative where I have drawn heavily on my own lived experience in order to produce a more complex and nuanced reading of the crime scene location and its relation to broader issues concerning the 'gay gang murders'.

In undertaking a physical and literal journey through the crime scene locations, I am not only making explicit my own role in the process as a researcher and writer, but am also asking the reader to emotionally experience these events as I narrate them. For one of the objectives of Auto-Ethnography, as an evocative and personalized discursive practice, is to 'affect' and deliberately 'move' both the author and their audience (Berry, 2006). As Bochner and Ellis assert, Auto-Ethnographic texts frequently challenge those who come into contact with their affecting messages: 'The good stories, the really good ones, grab us by the collar and demand that we listen and that we feel ... Readers can't just sit back and be spectators. They are thrust into scenes that invite them to feel, care, and desire' (2006:119). That was, indeed, the aim of presenting this chapter in an Auto-Ethnographic form – to reflect upon, and to convey to the reader, some of the emotions I experienced during my analysis of the crime scene, both at the Coroner's Court and also at the geographical location itself.

Box 3 of 3. Exhibits and Miscellaneous Documents. Envelope dated '23/11/89'.

Traditionally, crime scene photographs have an evidence-based imperative in the functions they offer: to contribute an understanding of how a crime transpired, to define the geography of the crime scene for future reference and to furnish proof on behalf of the prosecution that a crime actually occurred (Hargreaves, 1970: 211). Whilst functioning as a record and archive of a crime, these photographs also have an aesthetic dimension as a number of artists and critics have pointed out (for example, Gibson, 2002b and 2000; Wollen 1997:25; Young, 2005:99). In *Evidence*, which examines New York murder scene photographs taken between 1914-1918, Luc Sante declares the enduring after-effect of these images which 'like the voiceprint of a scream ... extend death, not as a permanent condition in the way tombstones do, but as a stage, an active moment of inactivity' (1992:60). In his work on the photographic archive at the New South Wales Justice and Police Museum, Ross Gibson found himself transfixed by the way crime scene images from 1950's Sydney 'flare *during* the viewing; they flare like a struck match, and then glare almost hurtfully for a time before dimming down to a kind of testimonial radiance' (2002b:147).

Pulses of intensity. The voiceprints of a scream.
Transfixing flares.

As both writers point out, such descriptions are not only metaphorical. Gibson, for example, refers to the way in which some viewers really do 'feel something scorching ... The flare ignites on the surface of the image but as you look, it radiates in your nervous and vascular systems' (2002b:147). Sante, likewise, attests to the power of the images declaring that 'the pictures wouldn't leave me alone. They recurred unexpectedly in my mind, like songs. I would close my eyes at night and see them imprinted on my eyelids' (2005:unpaginated). Peter Wollen also describes the emotional charge of crime scene images:

There is the mesmerising anxiety produced by contact with the abject and the uncanny, the awareness of a scene, haunted by degradation and terror, which is insistently fascinating, which suspends time and freezes the spectator into immobility yet, in the final analysis, remains safely removed from reality (1997:24).

Such images encapsulate a moment in time, suspending it in a perpetual past whereby whatever crime has taken place is now over, dispensed with, long gone. As Alison Young states, what we are left with 'is a sense of 'having been', of departure and the departed, of vacancy – all that remains is an image of the *aftermath* of the crime' (2005:99). Whilst the event itself is long gone, the image of the aftermath has its functions. Crime scene photographs preserve and document potentially significant trace evidence and provide a permanent visual record of the crime scene. In criminal trials and media sources they are widely used to establish comprehension of the importance of place to the commission of the crime.

Photographs of the crime scene location, taken after the crime in question, are also used in media accounts to orient readers to the nature of the crime scene. In an article on the 'gay gang murders', for example, a whole page is devoted to a colour photograph of Detective Page standing at the cliff edge close to where a number of the victims met their deaths. With his shadow falling across the rocks at his feet, one's gaze is directed beyond Page into the crashing surf down below

(Callaghan, 2003:21). Two similar images of Page appear in *Bondi Badlands* (2007a:120). One of these images, taken at the spot where Rattanajurathaporn is believed to have slipped or been pushed to his death, depicts a grimly faced Page standing on a cliff top ledge and looking down at the sea. Once again, the readers' attention is directed beyond Page's body and down towards the waves pounding against the rocks. Photographing Page at the crime scene location, as opposed to a more 'innocent' site such as his 'Operations Room' at the Paddington Police Station, serves two purposes. Firstly, it shows Page actively working on the investigation – which suggests a certain dedication to the cases – and, secondly, it conveys a sense of the circumstances of the crimes themselves. Indeed, I found it hard to look at these photographs of Page standing on the cliff top without imagining, in some detail, how the ambushes and murders occurred. With a knowledge of the crimes that have transpired at this location, the seemingly 'innocent' rock formations, cliff ledges and crashing waves take on a threatening, even menacing, appearance.

I experience a similar sense of the ominous when I peruse the contents of the large manila envelope dated '23/11/89', photographs of John Russell's crime scene. Like other crime scene images, these photographs document the aftermath and a feeling of 'having been' (too late). In looking at these images I experience similar emotions to those I felt when I originally saw the newsprint image of the mannequin, Russell's stand-in, hurtling through the air. Once again, I want to press the REWIND button, to play around with time, to breathe life into John Russell, to resurrect him. Instead, at the New South Wales Coroner's Court, in Box 3 of 3 labelled 'Exhibits and Miscellaneous Documents', in the biro-scrawled envelope '23/11/89', I am faced with one of the most uncanny examples of abjection, images of Russell's dead body. As Julia Kristeva has argued, corpses are the most abject of any object because they confuse the boundaries between one's living self and the corpse one will become, forcing recognition of the end

into the heart of our here, our now, our aliveness (1982:3-4).

I feel a momentary sense of intrusion, a fear that I am little more than a voyeuristic spectator, encroaching on the Russell family's private grief. After all, I am aware that these images were not meant nor intended for public consumption. I am secretly (guiltily?) grateful that I am viewing these images in complete safety, more than sixteen years after the event depicted. I am also completely alone. There is no-one to witness or monitor my responses to these shots. The windowless, dungeon-like, room I have been placed in at the Coroner's Court resembles a storage room more than an office space. No pretty pictures gracing the walls. No fresh flowers. No potted plants. Instead, I find office chairs with broken handles and missing castor wheels, a fan that no longer works, and an antiquated computer. But, despite these broken appliances, there is something to savour about my time in the institutional bowels, namely, the solitude I am granted and the opportunity to be alone with, to reflect, and occasionally shed tears over, the archives I have been granted access to.

I turn now to the contents of the envelope '23/11/89', the Russell crime scene. In these images, space is organized along conventional cinematic structures, with a range of establishing or long shots, mid-shots, close-ups and extreme close-ups. The establishing shots depict the geographical area the body was located in. One image focuses solely on the Bondi-Tamarama coastline, directing the viewer's gaze straight out to sea. Another pictures the cliff-face as a ghostly presence looming over a rocky ledge. In another image apartment blocks which overlook the walkway function as a crown for the cliff-top. Yet another

shot looks ominously down, from the walkway to the vegetation adorned cliff-ledge, right down to the rocks and boulders jutting out in the waves. Then the camera circles in from the parameters and a body becomes visible. The redness of Russell's sweatshirt and his faded blue jeans form a contrast to the earthy brown tones of the cliff-ledge on which he is stretched out, stomach-down.

Further shots hone in on the body itself. Russell lies, *as if sleeping*, across the rock shelf, blood clearly visible across and beneath his torso. Not just a drop or two, but an extensive amount: a pool. A side view reveals loose coins scattered near Russell's body, landing on moss and cased in blood. Then the photographer zooms in even closer, positioning himself directly above Russell's torso and looking straight down onto his bloodied and battered face. I can make out what looks like an image of a horse on his sweatshirt but the shirt has been pulled up in such a way it is hard to see more. Underneath the bottom of the shirt I can see extensive bruising on his stomach. His eyes are closed in this shot which strikes me as unusual. In most of the crime scene images I have seen before, the victims have had their eyes open. Perhaps a police officer, or maybe the photographer, closed Russell's eyes out of respect. It's hard to know. Another close-up reveals a line of blood dribbling down from his ear to the corner of the lip but then again the arc could be trickling in the opposite direction, from the lip to the ear.

Extreme close-ups are then taken of Russell's hand and wrist, eerily reaching out from the cliff, his fingers resting on a rock. Another shot moves in even closer to capture the abrasions and cuts on his fingers. If you look carefully you can see a clump of hair in his hand, plastered between the thumb and index finger. Lastly

there's a series of close-ups which appear, initially, to feature an assortment of rocks. It's when I look closer I realize why these images were taken. The textured nature of the surfaces of the rocks show that they have been discoloured by blood. The rocks are no longer just markers of the landscape. Instead, they are transformed into pieces of evidence, proof of a struggle.

The images I have just described are simultaneously both the scene and the seen of John Russell's death. These representations of the crime, or rather its aftermath, are all we will ever truly know. As Alison Young argues in *Imagining Crime*, in re/representing crime an alert imagination constructs and legislates the event of crime:

As an event, crime is thus always already textual ... Crime is mediated as text; the text can therefore be read as crime. The text provides the scene of the crime. Crime's images are thus the seen of the crime (1996:16).

After my initial sense of trespass, I have two key responses to these images. If, as forensic investigators insist, every crime scene has a voice and 'speaks in a secret code that can be broken by the alert searcher' (Williams, 2005:21); how could this have ever been deemed an accident? I go over and over these images: the cliff tableau, the close-ups of injuries, the positioning of the body across the rocks. I arrange the shots in different sequences, from long-mid-close to close-mid-long, and re-arrange them again randomly as if they have been thrown into the air and fallen down like a pack of cards. I contrast the blueness of the sky and sea, and the faded blue of the denim, with the vibrancy of Russell's red sweatshirt and the thick, congealed nature of the blood,

staining the flesh and rocks. Whichever way I reshuffle these images, either literally or mentally, they speak of murder. Admittedly, an accidental fall may have produced a few cuts and bruises, but the angle of the twisted body, the shirt pushed up at the back, the strands of hair in the hand, the sheer quantity of bruised flesh and the volume of blood: it just doesn't add up.

Others who have viewed these shots have had a similar response. Detective Page, for example, was adamant that the crime scene photographs exhibited all the characteristics of murder, not 'misadventure' (Callaghan, 2007a:89-90). The forensic pathologist, Dr Allan Cala, also agreed. His first response to Detective Page, after viewing these images was: 'This guy didn't fall face down' (Greg Callaghan, 2003:22). In Cala's official report, which was tendered to the Coronial Inquest, he stated that the position of the body was not consistent with an accidental fall or deliberate jump, elaborating by way of summary: 'The possibility exists that this man has met with foul play and might have been forcibly thrown off the cliff' (Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 2005).

My second response concerned the incongruity of the murder scene with its Bondi backdrop. At first glance it looks like any other 'Beautiful Bondi' summer day. All the clichés a travel writer can summon up are there – the sun is shining, the sea and sky both an intense blue shade. Yet in these crime scene photos, Russell's bloodied body, sprawled face down into the rocks, interrupts and destroys such a postcard-perfect setting. The imaginary grid of Beautiful Bondi is once again overlaid with another, the one local residents dubbed the Bondi Badlands.

Walking the walk – Bondi, January 2008

It is this incongruity that also strikes me when I re/visit the crime scene in January 2008. I'm nearing completion of my PhD, re-structuring, re-writing, ruthlessly editing, trying desperately to wield all the unruly fragments into one cohesive document, when I realize I need to do it one more time. I have to go back to Bondi and walk the walk, again ... In criminal trials the scene of the crime is an important focus. In a number of cases, jurors are actually taken to the scene so that they can visualise for themselves the events that took place there, and thus presumably more effectively judge the competing narratives of the crime told to them by prosecution and defence counsel. Over the course of his three-year investigation, Detective Page made numerous visits to the Bondi-Tamarama cliff tops. These trips included 'walk throughs' with gay-bashing assault victims and also witnesses such as Craig Ellis, Ross Warren's friend, who directed Page to the location where he had found Ross's car keys and the site where Ross's car was parked (Coronial Inquest Video, accessed at New South Wales State Coroner's Office). Some of Page's visits, recorded by broadcast and print media, were employed as a means of generating publicity about the cases, whilst others were used to develop strategies for further investigation. Since I began researching and 'writing up' this PhD, I, too, have visited the Bondi-Tamarama area on an almost annual basis, documenting these trips with photographs and notes. Theoretically, that should be enough – such documents should jog my memory. But in writing up these meditations on the crime scene, I have a strong desire to do it one (last) time: to spend another day with the dead.

I arrange for my partner (in crime) to come on this visit and start organizing the trip. She hunts through our filing cabinet and locates a map of Bondi, 'Seaside Sydney at its best!'⁶². On the front cover, toned bodies in bikinis and board-shorts, stand smiling, their fingers resting on the dazzling orange and yellow boogie boards. Inside the map, I find images of girls in bikinis, surfers, yachts, parachutists, kites, cafés with seaside backdrops, people waving brightly coloured towels on the sand and more girls in bikinis.

Such takes on Bondi are not unexpected. In fact, they're exactly what I anticipated and yet they still strike me as incongruous. Having spent the past few years researching the 'gay gang murders' and displacing Bondi's status as a national icon and heritage listed location with its underbelly of violence, I am not naïve. I expected this underbelly to be completely erased from all dominant representations. I know that in popular culture, the bikini clad girls, the beaming beach-goers and the delicately poised surfers will drown out the presence of Bondi's ghosts and yet such images continue to provoke an uneasiness in me that refuses to subside.

18 January 2008, Friday

Driving out of Canberra on the Monaro highway, we pass the road sign: "Sydney 311". The weather in the ACT is cloudy, grey, bleak. It rains intermittently. I hope it'll be better in Sydney. All the way along Remembrance Driveway, we see multiple VC rest areas commemorating Australians who were awarded the Victoria Cross. These stops have always come across to me as particularly uninspiring – there's a tree or two, a small plaque, a meagre picnic table and a

⁶² 'Bondi and the Eastern Beaches Map: Seaside Sydney at its best', Waverley Council.

pit toilet. As Stuart Stark has asked, '... in an age of motorways, cruise control and service centres (equipped with fast food, fuel, and, importantly, sewerage), who stops to relieve themselves at a roadside pit toilet? When they do stop, do they solemnly remember the bravery of these men, as the spaces invite?' (2007:614). The irony that such semi-sacred and nationalistic sites are appropriated by homosexually-active men as beat conveniences does not go un-noticed (Stark, 2007:624). It also seems appropriate that on the journey to one beat, Marks Park, we by/pass many, many others.

Almost three hours later and we've made it to the inner suburbs of Sydney. There's the usual narrow lanes, heavy traffic, and smell of aeroplane fuel, but we're also right in the thick of 'hunting ground' country. To our right is Moore Park, a known beat and historical haunt of the Sydney 'gay hate gangs'. Before too long we're passing yet another beat, Centennial Park, and also another gay-bashing site.

I'm reminded of the sworn statement from Matthew Davis, one of the three men charged with the murder of Kritchikorn Rattanajurathaporn, where he nonchalantly confessed to having been involved in about 'a dozen bashings of gay men', mostly at Moore Park and Centennial Park (cited in Callaghan, 2007a:81).

Likewise, in phone-taps of the Alexandria 8, the perpetrators boasted about regularly beating up gay men at both Centennial and Moore Park, including, in one instance, the same victim:

French: We went to Centennial, eh? You were there when we got the guy with the wig? ... There was Trindall, me, Sharkey, Brad. We were just gunna walk by him and Sharkey goes, 'I know that poofter, man. I've seen him before. I've belted him before'. They'd belted him at Moore Park when they was up at the Cross before and took his wig ... I can remember when we used to go out to Centennial Park every day.

Howard: I never done any at Bondi. I did Centennial and that and Moore Park.

(cited in Fenn, 2006:130).

In an incident recording a suspected 'gay hate assault' at Centennial Park, 'Robert of Darlinghurst' reported coming to the aid of a young man who he saw being attacked by a group of youths near the Centennial Park beat (Fenn, 2006:104-105; Callaghan, 2007a:138). Minutes later, Robert was also set upon by the same gang armed with iron water pipes. Despite repeatedly returning to the park to identify his assailants, the court ultimately dismissed Robert's case claiming that his identification of the attackers was unreliable owing to the short-term memory loss he had suffered during the assault (Fenn, 2006:104-105; Callaghan, 2007a:138). Years after this particular attack rusted steel pipes recovered from the sea at the bottom of the Bondi cliffs proved to be very similar to the ones used at Centennial Park. These corroded pipes were located close to where John Russell's body was found and where Ross Warren and Gilles Mattaini are believed to have gone missing. Whilst the presence of distinctive iron bars at two crime scene locations was not, in itself, conclusive evidence, Detective Page believed that it was more than a coincidence. The presence of such a weapon at two Sydney beat locations suggested links between the 'gay hate gangs' at the Bondi-Tamarama cliff top and those that operated in the Centennial Park location.

Moore Park, Centennial Park ... and we haven't even reached our chosen destination, Marks Park. Public places such as these may be ordinary, everyday locations, yet they are also imbued with dark and violent undercurrents. Instead of merely being sites of recreation and leisure, their role as 'hunting grounds' transforms them into 'bruised places where the arbitrary setting of law [has] momentarily slipped and unmanageable forces of living [have] coursed about' (Gibson, 2000:251). Suddenly my map of Sydney is starting to resemble one large crime-scene.

We drive up Oxford Street⁶³, heading in the Bondi direction. I can't help thinking of Ross Warren who took this same route on the night of his disappearance. After having his last drink at the popular gay nightclub, the Midnight Shift, Ross waved goodbye to his friend, Phillip Rossini, at Taylors Square⁶⁴. However, instead of taking a right turn and heading south to Redfern where Ross was staying, Phillip watched Ross drive off in the opposite direction, east towards Bondi.

Oxford Street has changed so much since the late '80s. Ross mightn't recognize it: Over-priced designer shops. Too many straight clubs. Generic fast-food chains. Although there's still a large and visible gay enclave in this area, there's also a number of signs that Oxford Street is losing its appeal to the gay community 'as it becomes gentrified, commoditised and heterosexualised' (Ruting, 2007:1). We

⁶³ Located in Darlinghurst, Oxford Street is known nationally and internationally as the centre-piece and central through-fare of Sydney's gay community. Oxford Street houses many gay venues including night-clubs, cafés, and gay community organizations. In central Sydney, visibly gay territory has formed around Oxford Street which stretches from Hyde Park in the city, through Darlinghurst and Paddington and towards Bondi (Ruting, 2007:1).

⁶⁴ Situated on the border of Surry Hills and Darlinghurst, Taylors Square is a gay precinct, located at the centre of the city's gay community, adjacent to Oxford Street.

both lament the Golden Mile⁶⁵ is nothing like it used to be. It's definitely tarnished.

Next we turn into Bondi Road and drive down to Campbell Parade where we locate our hotel, right in the heart of Bondi. Our room looks straight out at Bondi beach – a spectacular view, even with the incessant rain – but as I remind myself, we're also looking at a crime scene. The brochures say the sand is 'golden' but to me it remains 'bloodied'.

Roni Levi. Brian Hagland. Gilles Mattaini. Ross Warren. John Russell. Kritchikorn Rattanaajurathaporn.

And the others.

They're all there ...

I pick up the Room Service guide to find out what's on offer. At the top of the guide is an image of a pale blue sky with faint traces of clouds. The bottom shows a dark blue sea. Not a wave nor ripples in sight, just flat ocean. There are no people in the image, nor boats, nor kites, nor sand. It's just sea and sky. Zen minimalism. If I hadn't spent the last few years immersing myself in dead bodies at the seaside, I'd probably read it as a calm, tranquil image. Yet I can't help thinking that this would have been the sort of scene, albeit with a blacker sky, that Gilles, Ross, John and Kritchikorn would have faced when they were hurled over the cliff-top.

Night sky.

Blue sea.

Nothingness.

⁶⁵ Australia's 'gay street', Oxford Street, has long been known as the 'Golden Mile'. However, there is evidence that gay residents and businesses are starting to abandon the areas around Oxford Street leading to its gradual 'de-gaying'. For an insightful examination of this trend, see Ruting (2007).

19 January 2008, Saturday

It's still raining. It hasn't stopped. I expected fine weather. Every other time I've been to Bondi it's been blue and sunny, nothing like this. I was all ready to contrast the 'darkness' of the crime scenes with postcard clichés – 'golden sand', 'glistening blue waters', 'sunshine massaging our bodies' – but it's not like that. For the whole of the morning we put off doing the walk because of the rain but I'm starting to get edgy. Finally, we decide to bite the bullet and venture out. The forecast is for non-stop rain so it's hardly going to miraculously ease up.

We cross Campbell Parade and begin the walk. It's weird to think we're re-tracing the steps of the perpetrators and possibly some of the victims. We start off at the historic Bondi Pavilion and head right in the direction of Tamarama and Bronte. We're only at the start of the walkway and haven't left Bondi beach when I realize we may not be far from where Gilles Mattaini disappeared (Callaghan, 2007a, map:1). Mattaini jogged this whole stretch of pathway regularly enough, but which direction he headed towards is still uncertain. We pass the iconic Bondi Baths and Bondi Icebergs, momentarily watching a few brave swimmers doing laps in the pool. Looking back at Bondi beach, I see that it's pretty deserted, apart from a few camera-toting tourists milling around under umbrellas. The sun-bathers are noticeably absent, as is the sun. However, owing to the large swell, there are a number of surfers catching waves.

As the rain beats down we continue on our walk. The pathway is wet and greasy. I have to hang on to the rails to avoid falling. I'm reminded of the police officers investigating Ross Warren's disappearance who described this area in these weather conditions as 'treacherous ... very wet and very slippery' ('Police patrol coast for Warren', *Illawarra*

Mercury, 29 July 1989, p. 5). They might be right about the slippery path but, like the verdicts offered by the Deputy State Coroner, Jacqueline Milledge, and Detective Page, I don't believe for one moment that Ross slipped to his death. There are a few other people braving the elements, mainly tourists and joggers, but not many. I have never seen the walkway so un-populated. Every time I pull my camera out, rain droplets form on the lens, and I have to quickly dry it before taking the shot to protect the camera. A few of the tourists are also pointing their lenses at the beach and coastline but I suspect I'm the only person taking crime scene photographs. This seems somewhat surreal. They're enjoying the vista whilst we're spending our afternoon with ghosts.

Along the walkway there are a number of commemorative chairs with little plaques embedded in them. Dutifully, I read them all, hoping but not expecting to find one dedicated to the Bondi cliff victims. None of them are. We keep walking. It's a strenuous walk, with lots of up-hill sets of stairs. I think of Rattanajurathaporn's murderers, who headed by bus from inner-city Redfern all the way to Bondi, and then took this lengthy and demanding walk with one aim in mind: to roll a poof. They were dedicated. They meant business. I spend a lot of time looking downwards, from the path to the rocks, cliff-ledges and ocean below. It's at the foot of a twelve-metre high cliff on the Bondi side of the headland, that I recognize the rock shelf where John Russell plummeted to his death. I do a double-take. Despite the lack of a body and the volume of blood like in the crime scene images I've studied, the rock platform is still recognizable. An unusually shaped boulder, that featured in the crime scene photos, gives the location away.

We keep walking until we reach the Mackenzies Point lookout. I recognize it immediately. This distinctive rock lookout was where Kritchikorn Rattanjurathaporn and Jeffrey Sullivan were set upon by their assailants. Today it functions as a spot for tourists to take their panoramic shots and for joggers to catch their breath. But it was here that Rattanjurathaporn's and Sullivan's conversation was abruptly interrupted by the arrival of the 'Tamarama Gang' with their assortment of weapons. We have not only re-traced the steps of Rattanjurathaporn's killers, but also his. On the night of his death, Rattanjurathaporn, after finishing his shift in a Thai restaurant in Campbell Parade, had taken this same walk, from the Bondi's café strip to the isolation of Mackenzies Point and Marks Park.

Marks Park may be a secluded and desolate location, part of which contributes to its attraction as a beat. However, what strikes us both is the number of apartment blocks and home units which overlook it. If you walk up the steps from Mackenzies Point to Fletcher Street, you'll find numerous dwellings. Many of them you can see from the walkway itself. The fact that people in these residences renamed Bondi the 'Bondi Badlands' suggests they were only too aware of the violence that went on in the area. Yet 'Rick', who was pursued by the 'gay hate gang' along this very stretch of coastline, said that his cries for help were either ignored or not heard (Callaghan, 2007a:156). The proximity of these residences to the Marks Park reserve and coastal walkway reminds me of our visit to Dachau, Germany, earlier in the year. Taking photos of the perimeter fences, I noticed that the camp was encircled by houses. Houses which would have been of that vintage. Houses which overlooked the camp. Once again, there is the same thought, almost clichéd in its sentiments – "these houses are so close, people must have heard, they must have known ..."

We continue on our walk and round the corner to the spot where Ross Warren disappeared. There are a number of rock pockets in the cliff face, it's hard to know exactly where Warren's keys were discovered. But when we walk up the steps to Marks Park and cut across to the corner of Kenneth Street and Marks Lane, we can make out the spot where his car was located. There is, of course, no brown Nissan Pulsar, sitting there. No MacDonald's wrappers on the front seat. No sign of Ross. All physical signs of Ross, like that of the other victims who vanished, have been dispensed with by the elements. The blood that stained the concrete walkway and the rock ledges in Rattanajurathaporn's and Russell's murder sites can now only be seen in the crime scene photographs which sit in police archives. The shots I take home with me from the Bondi-Tamarama walkway are just like any other tourist shots. To me, as a researcher, they're my personal set of crime-scene images which document the various sites of the men's deaths and disappearances. To any other observer, however, all they show is a rugged coastline, a rocky lookout, stunningly high cliffs, wild surf and Australia's most famous beach. In short, they reveal nothing about any of the crimes that have taken place there.

One could argue that I could exchange my snapshots of the Bondi-Tamarama coastline with the images taken by tourists on the same day. Their Kodak moments for my crime scenes. After all, as I have just made clear, such shots of the crime-scene, taken years after the events, reveal a total absence of crime. They are the un/seen of the crime (scene). Along the walkway and at Marks Park, there is no memorial plaque, no commemorative chair, no public acknowledgement, and I would suspect little or no remembrance of such events having taken place there.

This all lends weight to the argument that the crime scene is, essentially, a site of insignificance and emptiness. Alison Young, for example, describes the scene of the crime as a scene of meaninglessness which is made into a legible and intelligible space via textual re/constructions (1996:86). Alexandra Warwick elaborates on this concept, arguing that:

the meaninglessness of the crime scene is that it represents a break in perceived order, where otherwise contained or repressed elements surface, casting doubt on the clear delineations of social and psychological structure, and collapsing the boundaries between the self and others, the public and private, and the interior and the exterior. (2006:553)

On the surface, then, my images of Bondi are meaningless. They appear to be scenic shots not images of a crime scene. However, with a knowledge of the crimes that have taken place in this geographical locale, the images are made other to themselves. The information I am privy to on the locations of the murders disturbs the tourist veneer of the photographs and the apparent social order they represent. As these repressed elements come to the surface, the banality and everydayness of these images – as scenic shots – is destroyed. Thus, reading these photographs with a knowledge of the location of the crimes gives the images a legibility (as a crime seen) that they wouldn't otherwise have. Once again, Beautiful Bondi is being displaced by the Bondi Badlands.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have meditated on the crime scene, attempting to get under its skin, to listen to its voice(print), and to make it mean. Examining the police photographs taken at John Russell's murder scene plunged me into a territory characterized by the abject and the uncanny with graphic images of John's dead body reminding me of the corpse I too will become. Despite the disturbing and haunting nature of the images, however, I viewed them in a situation of safety and distance. The murder has long since happened. What I am left with is its *aftermath*: the tableaux of the day/s after. In studying these crime scene images I have a strong desire to crack the crime scene's 'secret code', to see something in these images that everyone else has missed, and thus 'solve' the crime. I am aware that this is a naïve and unrealistic, though common, wish; the arm-chair detective breathing new life into a cold case. What I am presented with, however, are incompatibilities, inconsistencies, codes that can't be cracked in spite of this desire for narrative closure. Initially, I am hit by the incongruity of the glorious weather and the stunning landscape with the brutal crime – the dead body – nestled in its midst. It's almost banal to say but it does seem out of place. The more I study the images, the more blood and bruises I see, the more incredulous I am that that this death was quickly positioned as an accident or 'misadventure' as opposed to a possible murder.

The second part of my meditation on the crime scene involved a literal re/visiting of the crime scene, tracing the steps of both perpetrators and victims. During this exercise, a similar sense of incongruity is again evoked. As I rubbed shoulders with tourists intent on getting scenic shots of the panoramic coastline, I was busy identifying and photographing the sites of the victims' deaths and disappearances. Their coastal walk was my crime walk. I was reminded that for the majority of people who visit Bondi and take part in the coastal walk, it is just that – a scenic spot, a tourist venue, a Sunday afternoon jaunt. Unlike other Australian crime sites, for example, Glenelg beach in Adelaide⁶⁶, Wanda beach

⁶⁶ In 1966 the three Beaumont children (Jane, 9, Anna, 7, and Grant, 4) disappeared from Glenelg beach near Adelaide, South Australia. Despite extensive searches of the beach and nearby surround, no traces of the children have ever been found. The case resulted in one of the largest police investigations in Australia and remains one of Australia's most infamous cold cases.

in Sydney⁶⁷, and Port Arthur in Tasmania⁶⁸, Bondi's status as a multiple and vast historical crime scene is rarely publicly acknowledged or widely known. The crimes I talk about throughout this thesis form part of the 'secret life of Bondi'. As I argue in the chapter, 'Postcards from the Bondi Badlands', this neglect stems from the nature of the crime scene – as a beat – and also from the victim group, that is, men involved in sexual practices with other men. The dominant cultural images produced and generated around Bondi expel such expressions of non-normativity in favour of sanitized tourist friendly and family friendly images.

This chapter, and the one preceding it, analysed the Marks Park beat as a heavily mythologized 'badlands' site and crime-scene location. In the following two chapters, I turn my analysis to the inhabitants of this locale, namely, the alleged perpetrators and the victims of the Bondi cliff murders. More specifically, in the chapter that follows, I undertake a critical discourse analysis of the ways in which the perpetrators, as members of 'gay hate gangs', were re/presented in media and legal discourses.

⁶⁷ In what became known as the 'Wanda beach murders', two 15 year old school-girls, Marianne Schmidt and Christine Sharrock, were brutally murdered at Sydney's Wanda beach. A day after they disappeared from the beach their partially buried bodies were discovered in the sand dunes at Wanda beach. Like the Beaumont case, the Wanda beach murders remain one of Australia's most infamous cold cases.

⁶⁸ In 1996, gunman Martin Bryant went on a killing spree at the historic Port Arthur prison colony, a popular tourist site in South East Tasmania, where he killed 35 people and wounded 21.

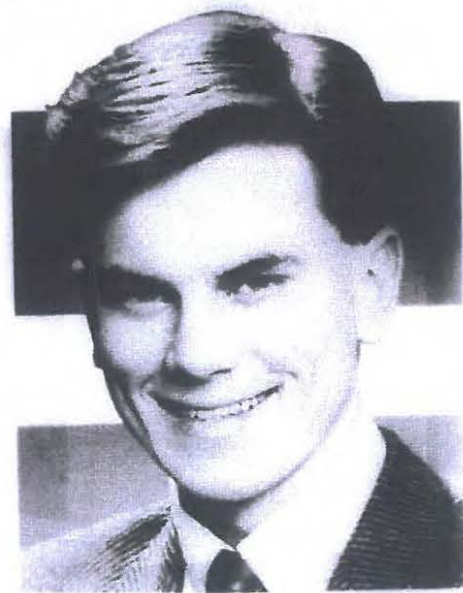
Figure 1: THE VICTIMS



Gilles Mattaini



John Russell



Ross Warren



Kritchikorn Rattanjurathaporn

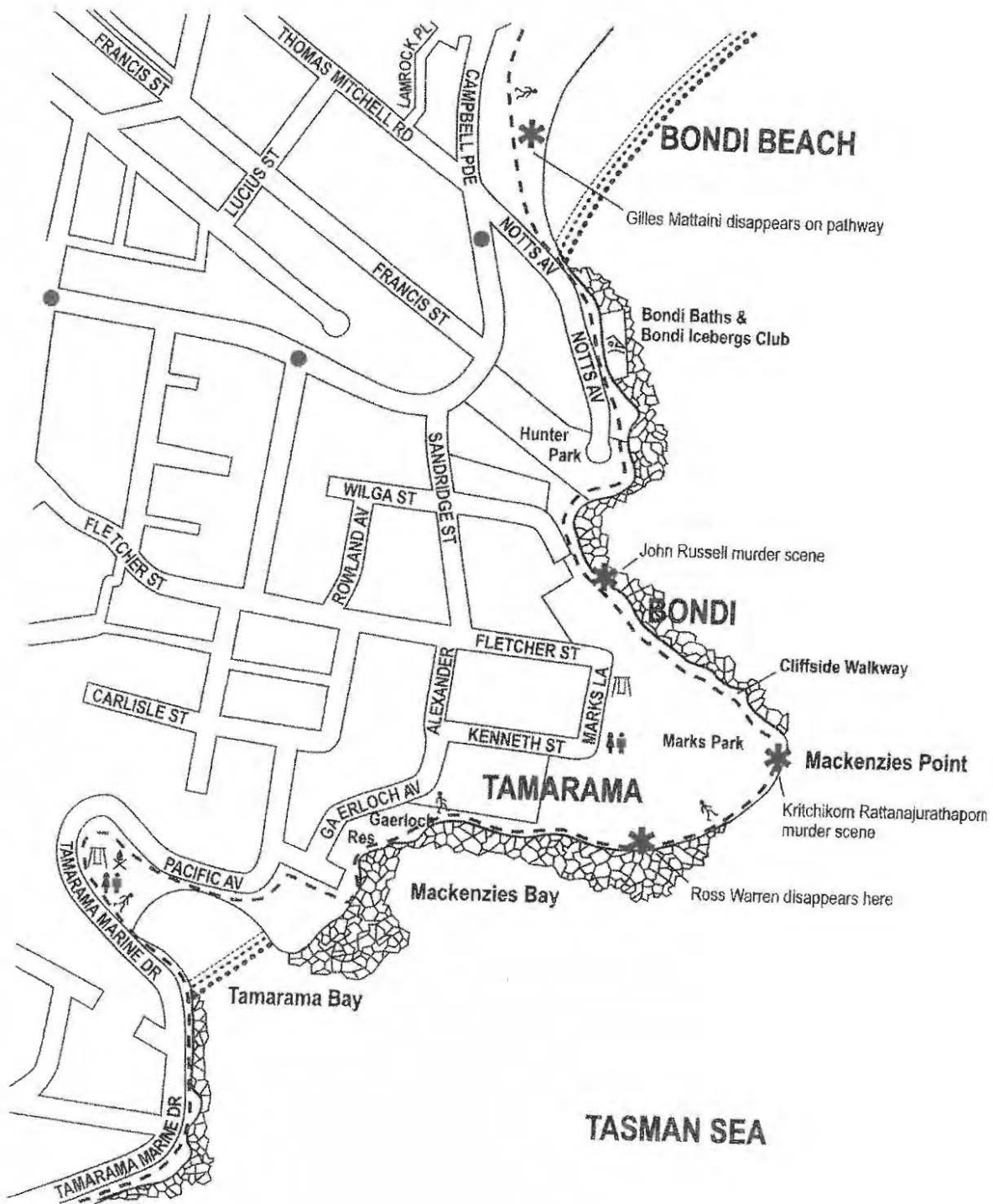


Figure 2: BONDI – TAMARAMA WALKWAY

Map showing murder and disappearance sites

Figure 3: DUMMIES

Mannequin of John Russell wearing his actual freshly laundered clothing standing outside Bondi police station.



In 2001, this dummy, dressed in similar clothes to John Russell, was dropped repeatedly over the cliff where Russell himself was thrown in 1989.

Figure 4: HEADLINES FROM
THE TIME OF THE MEN'S
MURDERS / DISAPPEARANCES

**Murdered
man hurled
down cliff**

**Mystery death of gay
man near Bondi beach**

**Gay TV man's
heartbreak**

BROKEN

AFFAIR

KILLED

WARREN



Figure 5: BONDI – TAMARAMA WALKWAY



Figure 6: BONDI – TAMARAMA WALKWAY

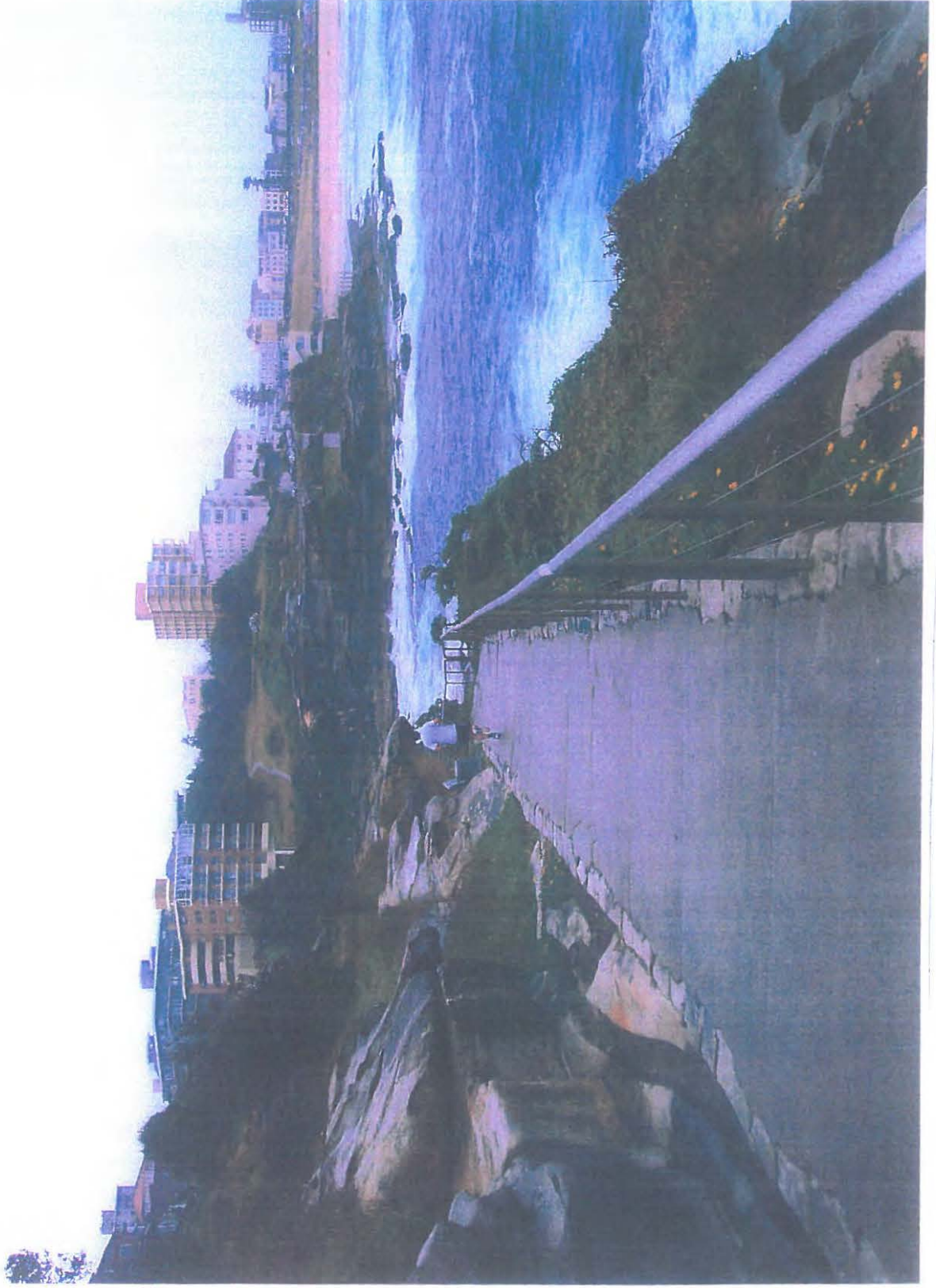


Figure 7: BOND I – TAMARAMA WALKWAY



Figure 8: HOUSES OVERLOOKING THE WALKWAY

Closure

How a determined detective
discovered the brutal truth

Police blasted over gay-hate killings

Woman denies saying
she had role in gay
bashing

Gay hate gang blamed for trio's cliff plunge

Gay hate gang faces
justice

Murder at Marks Park

Figure 9: HEADLINES FROM THE TIME OF THE
CORONIAL INQUEST

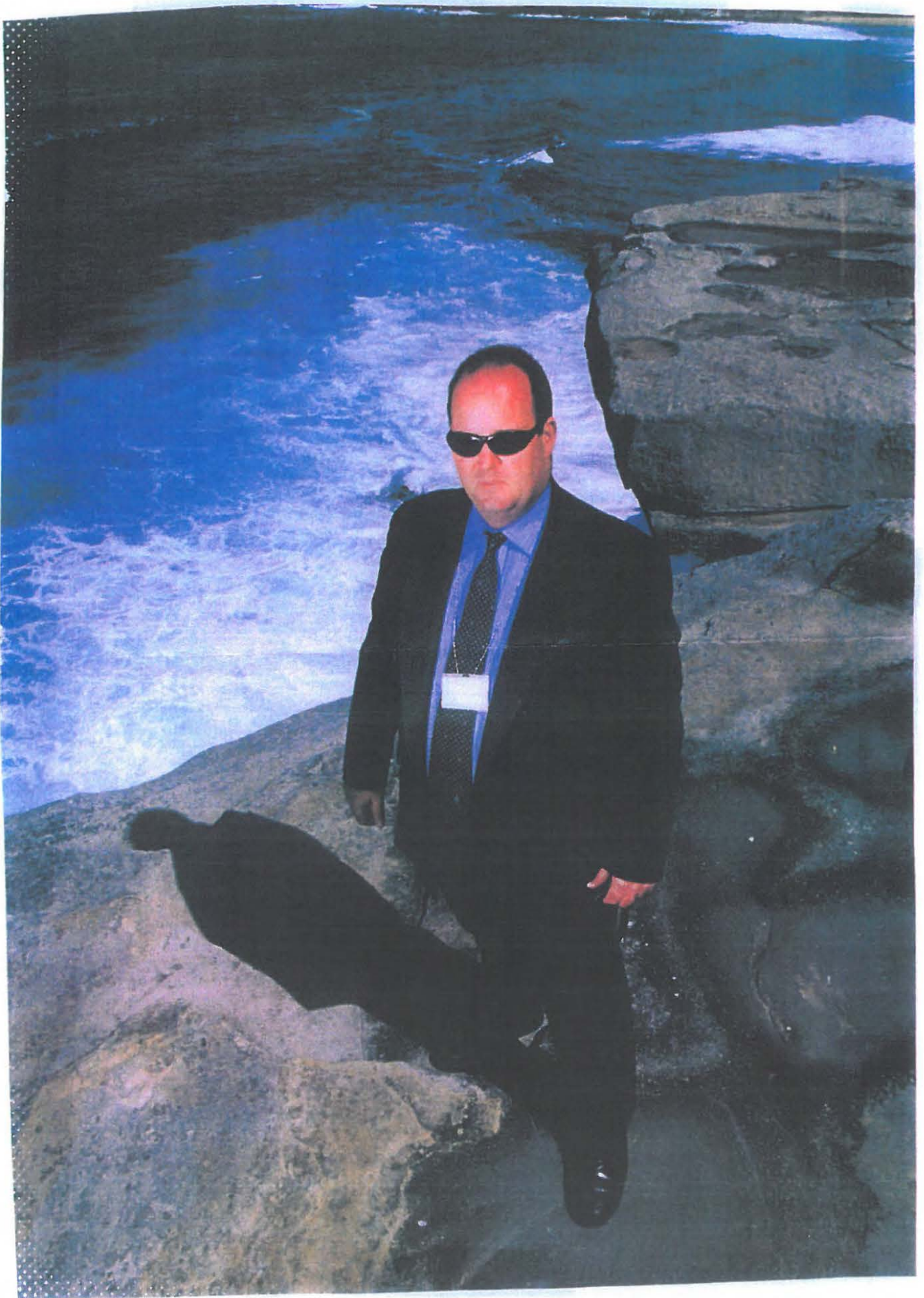


Figure 10: DETECTIVE STEPHEN PAGE AT THE BONDY CLIFFS



Figure 11: SEAN CUSHMAN

By ROBERT
in Lar

MAN preader
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W. flew slignt
which, said
leach para

BONDI BADLANDS

Fourteen years ago, a spate of vicious gay hate crimes bloodied the cliffs of Bondi, but many of the teenage killers – male *and* female – got off scot-free.

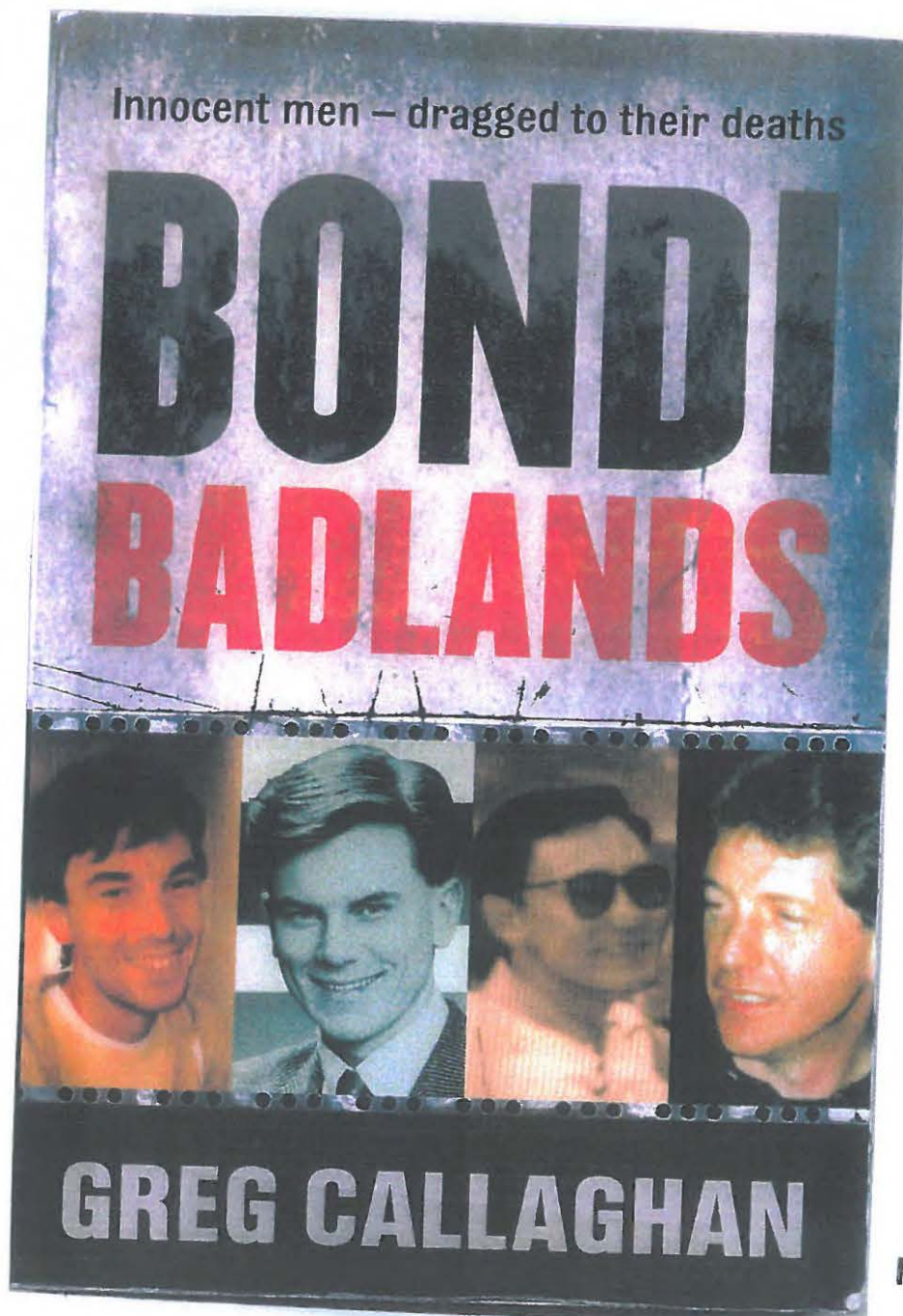


Figure 12

Chapter Four – The Gay Hate Gang: The all-Australian ‘Bondi Boys’

Introduction

In this chapter and the following chapter I will be undertaking a critical discourse analysis which examines the ways in which the perpetrators and the victims of the ‘gay gang murders’ have been constructed in both legal and media discourses. Owing to the symbiotic nature of the relationship between legal and media institutions and the close relationship that exists between police / legal sources and media journalists (see for example, Ericson et al, 1989; Fishman 1981; Grabosky and Wilson, 1989), it is extremely difficult to differentiate the separate discourses generated by these two institutions. Crime news is frequently based on what police sources choose to make available to journalists, and what the police decide to make publicly available is often related to the sort of stories the media is likely to report. Owing to this circularity in crime reporting, I am deliberately not producing a strict ‘legal’ or ‘media’ chapter. Instead I have chosen to explore how both the perpetrators and victims were discursively constructed in, and by, the intersecting legal, judicial and media institutions.

Critical discourse analysis is a contemporary approach to the study of language and discourses in social institutions which draws heavily on poststructuralist discourse theory and critical linguistics and concentrates on how social relationships, identity, power and knowledge are constructed through spoken and written texts in a variety of locations (Luke, 1997, 1995, 1992). Critical discourse analysis is concerned with the study and analysis of written texts and spoken words so as to reveal the discursive sources of dominance, power, and inequality, and how these sources are maintained, generated and reproduced within specific social, political, economic and historical contexts (van Dijk, 1988). Thus the objective of critical discourse analysis is to systematically explore the relationships between discursive practices, texts and events with broader social and cultural formations, relations and processes (Fairclough, 1993).

In this analysis I will be drawing on a range of media and legal documents. The media documents include the two books produced about the murders, I.J. Fenn's *The Beat* (2006) and Greg Callaghan's *Bondi Badlands: The Definitive Story of Sydney's Gay Hate Murders* (2007a). The media coverage is also drawn from Australian mainstream media sources including tabloid newspapers such as *The Daily Telegraph* [Sydney] and *The Daily Telegraph Mirror* [Sydney], broadsheet newspapers including the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Australian*, *The Canberra Times* and *The Illawarra Mercury*, and gay community publications such as the *Sydney Star Observer* and *SX* magazine [Sydney]. The legal documents I refer to include the transcripts of the Coronial Inquest (2003-2005) which include Detective Stephen Page's Brief of Evidence, and the State Coroner's Findings and Recommendations (2005). The broad time period I am looking at ranges from the late 1980s right through to 2008. However, the vast majority of the analysis in this chapter will focus on the books produced in 2006 and 2007 and the mainstream media coverage generated about the 'gay gang murders'. This occurred between December 2001, when *The Daily Telegraph* [Sydney] published a story on the new investigation, through to February 2005 when the State Coroner delivered her Findings and Recommendations after the investigation and inquest had taken place.

In this chapter, I argue that the discursive production of the assailants in the mainstream news media hinges on a contradiction. On the one hand, they are presented as 'gang members' – which in contemporary public discourses links them with notions of crime and deviance – and thus operates to symbolically distance them from the broader Australian community. Yet, on the other, their violence is covertly viewed as an expression of heteronormative values held by some, but by no means all, members of the community. Through their production as gang members the perpetrators are demonized and vilified as an aberrant criminal minority, but this scapegoating process operates only to assuage the public of any social or institutional complicity. In transferring responsibility for these events to a specific, criminalized set of individuals, namely, 'gang members', the other reading of such crimes as 'legitimate' violence through which the social order is (re)produced' (Moran and Skeggs, 2004:27) is repressed.

In many Western societies, including Australia, homophobic violence is not automatically considered to be an aberrant or extraordinary event. Rather, as various critics have made clear, anti-gay violence 'is not associated with exceptional (dysfunctional or pathological) individuals or exceptional settings or disorderly social structures; rather it is ordinary violence performed by ordinary people as part of the routine of day-to-day living' (Moran and Skeggs, 2004:27). Barbara Perry echoes this point in her argument that 'in a generally ... homophobic culture violence motivated by hatred is not deviant behaviour. In fact ... it is an affirmation of the gender [and sexualized] hierarchy that constituted the "legitimate" social order' (2001:35). However, whilst the alleged perpetrators of the 'gay gang murders', the 'Bondi Boys' may have undoubtedly helped to constitute the 'legitimate' social order, as Moran, Skeggs and Perry maintain, there is also, simultaneously, a need to symbolically deny this climate of violence. This is achieved through symbolically, but not literally, punishing individuals like the 'Bondi Boys'. Thus, they have to be represented, not only as ordinary men and women upholding the heteronormative status-quo, but also as exceptional individuals – 'gang members', 'teenage killers', 'thugs' and 'predatory animals' – whose criminality and general Otherness places them apart from dominant discourses relating to law-abiding Australians.

There are a number of factors which demonstrate how the homophobic violence carried out by the 'Bondi Boys' was implicitly socially legitimated. Firstly, these crimes were, for the most part, produced by both police and media discourses as non-narratives. Traditionally, in the production of 'crime news', there are three levels of legitimation – the criminal justice system (in this case, the New South Wales Police Service), the mainstream media and its symbiotic relationship with police authorities, and the general public. In the case of the 'gay gang murders', the New South Wales Police treated these crimes as non-narratives. This was shown by their unwillingness to actively produce and generate a crime narrative out of these events. Suspicious features of these cases – for example, the discovery of Ross Warren's car-keys on a ledge below the Bondi beat, the hair strands located in John Russell's hand, and the unusual positioning of his body which was inconsistent with an accidental fall – were either ignored or minimized by investigating officers. This meant, in turn, that the media could not produce a 'crime story' out of these events which meant

that the general public were also denied one. Indeed, what was produced at the time were stories of straight-forward, even staged, disappearances and accidental deaths, but not narratives involving suspicious deaths or possible homicides at the hands of a 'gay hate gang'. The initial failure to respond effectively to these crimes, and to treat them, in police, media and public discourses as non-narratives, as opposed to newsworthy and significant 'crime stories', demonstrate how the actual crimes themselves, by being relegated to unimportance, were also, to some extent, socially sanctioned.

This sense of the homophobic violence that occurred at the Bondi cliffs both affirming and constituting the 'legitimate' social order at the time can be seen in some of the factors which contributed to these events not being produced as a 'crime story'. These include the fact that the beat location of the crime scene rendered it a 'no go zone' for men engaging in sexual activities with other men, where participants apparently 'voluntarily courted' (Berlant and Warner, 2000:315) any violence they may have encountered there. Tainted by popular constructions of beats as illegal and unsavoury, the victims' very presence at such a site meant that they could not occupy the characteristics of the 'innocent' or 'non-deserving' victim. Instead, owing to dominant discourses circulating at the time which deemed that gay men who used beats were as 'guilty' as those who attacked them, the men's status as victims of crime was also problematized. For police authorities and mainstream media discourses to publicly acknowledge the crimes that took place would have also meant making evident both the Underbelly of the tourist Mecca, Bondi, as well as the existence and popularity of beat sites and male-to-male sexual practices.

The 'gay hate' violence that flourished in the Bondi-Tamarama area during the late 1980s and early 1990s was also, arguably, publicly sanctioned by local residents who were aware of the violence yet failed to do anything to interrupt or stop it. Indeed, local residents had dubbed the Bondi headland as the 'Bondi Badlands' because the Bondi-Tamarama pathway was so frequently stained with blood and because of the piercing screams they regularly heard throughout the night (Callaghan, 2007a:5). During this period residents had reported not venturing out to the clifftop at night because of the violence that went on there (cited in Callaghan, 2007a:9). However, whilst local residents were obviously

aware of the violence taking place in the Marks Park region, there is no evidence to suggest that any of them took any proactive measures to either report the violence to authorities or to intervene and offer support to the victims. In fact, in one instance, a 'gay bashing' victim reported that the residents he appealed to for assistance were unhelpful, hostile and homophobic. According to Victim M's testimony, after breaking free from his principal attackers and running up the stairs to Fletcher Street where he appealed to a resident in a block of units for help, the response was a male voice calling out, "I'm not going to help you. I'm not gonna help no pooffer"⁶⁹ (Coronial Inquest Transcripts; also cited in Callaghan, 2007a:156-157, 161).

Whilst I have just demonstrated some of the ways in which the anti-gay violence the perpetrators participated in was socially sanctioned, the alleged perpetrators were also, simultaneously, produced as being Other to the 'general population' owing to their criminalized status in police, media and legal discourses.

'Gay hate gang' members: Criminalizing the suspects

"Exclusive: Six gay men disappear. Police believe their killers are gang members ... LINKED BY HATE", proclaimed the boldly printed headlines of a New South Wales tabloid newspaper in July 2002 (Kamper, 2002:1). In this and subsequent news articles and books on the Bondi cliffs murders, specifically those dealing with the police investigation and Coronial Inquest, the alleged perpetrators are routinely and regularly constructed as 'gay hate gang members'. Characterizing the suspects as members of a 'gay hate youth gang' criminalizes the alleged perpetrators and in doing so symbolically distances and expels them from the broader, mainstream Australian community, which in turn helps to hide the endemic homophobia of that community. It took more than thirteen years for the majority of the alleged perpetrators to be identified,

⁶⁹ During the reinvestigation of these events when the resident of the unit that Victim M had identified was contacted he claimed that the male voice said to be coming from his unit was not his. He was adamant he would never have used the term 'pooffer' and said that as he had suffered anti-Jewish taunts and been a prisoner of war at Changi, he knew what it was like to be victimized and would have intervened (Fenn, 2006:164-165). This recent statement, which is at odds with the testimony of Victim M, could suggest that, owing to the traumatic nature of the assault, Victim M had mistakenly identified the wrong unit.

investigated by police, appear before the Coroner, and through this process, to be symbolically punished. During Operation Taradale and the Coronial Inquest, both police and media sources positioned the alleged perpetrators as 'gang members', or more specifically, members of 'gay-hate gangs'. Attaching the 'gang' label to the perpetrators locates them within discourses of criminality which functions to further distance them from the wider community.

Cultural anxieties have often revolved around the 'gang' concept, an ambiguous term which carries a diverse range of academic and popular definitions. In its broadest sense, the word 'gang' is used to denote 'any group of young people on the street' (Perrone & White, 2000:2). However, the dominant discourses on gangs which are most prevalent in the Australian media appear to be driven by inflammatory and negative images of threatening youths engaging in violent, illegal and criminal activities. As many criminologists have argued, this representation is largely a media myth, produced periodically against a backdrop of sensationalism and public hysteria, and fuelled by traditional stereotypes on youth violence and anti-social youth group behaviour (White, 2004; Collins et al, 2000; Perrone & White, 2000; Bessant & Watts, 1998). Research shows that young people as a group are no more predisposed to violence than any other age cohort (Bessant & Watts, 1998:8). The number of male and female juveniles in detention in Australia has actually declined significantly since 1981 (Taylor, 2007:vi). Despite such findings, in Australian public discourses there continues to be a widespread perception that Sydney-based 'youth gangs' are a major and growing problem, as the publicity on the so-called Cronulla beach 'race riots'⁷⁰ in December 2005 demonstrates.

In gay and mainstream media constructions the perpetrators are repeatedly represented as both alien and Other to the 'general population'. Characterized as predatory and animalistic, the 'gay-hate gangs' were said to have 'prowled' through Sydney suburbs, 'lurked' on the Bondi-Bronte walkway, and to have

⁷⁰ What became known as the 'Cronulla riots' involved a series of ethnically motivated mob confrontations which originated in and around the beachfront suburb of Cronulla in South Sydney. On December 11, 2005, a large group of approximately 5000 people, of mostly Anglo-Celtic origins, had gathered at Cronulla to 'reclaim the beach' from people of Middle Eastern appearance. In the nights that followed there were incidents of retaliatory violence and vandalism. The violence, which soon spread to other regions in Sydney, resulted in an unprecedented police lock-down of Sydney beaches and surrounding areas, from Wollongong to Newcastle.

'slaughtered' young men with a 'pack mentality' (Kamper, 2002:10; Callaghan, 2003:20). Callaghan invokes the predatory nature of the perpetrators when he writes about Kritchikorn Rattanajurathaporn's assailants sauntering off after attacking him, not bothering to check 'whether their prey was still alive' (2007a:74). In another passage, he describes the victims as being 'lynched and left for dead on the clifftops' (2007a:68, 245) and 'hurled over in wide-eyed terror like helpless animals' (2007a:5).

Descriptions of the suspects as aggressive animals are also repeatedly employed. In *Bondi Badlands*, for example, when gay-hate assault victim 'Rick' came face to face with the alleged perpetrators on the walkway, Callaghan records the following exchange: "What are you?" the ringleader barked"; 'You're a poofter and you don't deserve to live', he snarled, as the group chanted 'gay, gay, gay'; 'You're a poofter, aren't you?' spat another' (2007a:153-154); "Why be a fuckin' poofter?" the ringleader of the Bondi Boys growled at 'Rick' as he kicked and punched him' (2007a:245). Such descriptors – 'barked', 'spat', 'snarled', 'growled' 'prowled', 'lurked', 'slaughtered' and 'pack mentality' – render the alleged perpetrators as dangerous animals. These animalistic metaphors are utilized again when Callaghan describes viewing the Rattanajurathaporn crime scene photographs: 'These butchers had taken mindless pleasure in torturing their victim, prolonging his pain as long as possible – toying with him as a cat does with a mouse in its dying minutes' (2007a:69).

What is perhaps most intriguing about the use of animalistic metaphors in *Bondi Badlands* is that Callaghan employs them for both the perpetrators – the predatory animals – and the victims – the defenceless prey. Unable to deal with either groups of people in a humanistic manner, he transmogrifies the violence into an animalistic orgy or blood-bath. Generally the use of animalistic metaphors serves to distance the subjects in question from the reader. This appears to be the case with Callaghan's constructions of the perpetrators as predatory monsters who are Other to the wider society in which they live. However, in the case of the victims, animalizing them does not serve to Other them. Instead, Callaghan's renderings of the victims as frail, vulnerable and helpless animals evokes sympathy for them. By putting the reader into the

position of the victim – as a helpless and ambushed creature – the victims' plight is highlighted and their (assumed) terror is amplified.

This process of the Othering of the alleged perpetrators can be found in numerous media and legal sources. Like other groups of teenagers congregating in public sites, the Bondi Boys were constructed as a 'polluting presence – a potential threat to public order' (Skelton and Valentine, 1997:7). In I. J. Fenn's book, for example, the suspects are described as a group 'of feral teens lawlessly running around Bondi and the Eastern Suburbs, causing trouble, behaving like tantrum-throwing infants' (2006:270). When Adrian MacDonald Ingleby, a sergeant at Bondi Police Station in the late 1980s, told the Coronial Inquest that the group used to meet up near the Bondi Pavilion every weekend and drift along the beach looking for people to assault, he constructed the group as having an anti-social and disruptive presence. In Ingleby's words, the 'Bondi Boys' 'consumed alcohol, just hung together, probably committed a bit of crime, and caused a fair bit of trouble' (Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 02/04/03). Discursive constructions of the group as a contaminating presence were also exemplified in comments on their graffiti tags which were said to 'litter' Sydney beats (Lamont, 2003:13) and descriptions of the 'gay hate gangs' as 'street scum' (Fenn, 2006:171).

In mainstream media accounts of the 'gay gang murders', journalists' constant references to the perpetrators' youthful ages weakened their social position by evoking a sense of criminality. By displaying a pre-occupation with the youth of the alleged perpetrators, mainstream media narratives evoked the mythic figure of the 'juvenile delinquent'⁷¹. At the trial into Kritchikorn Rattanajaturathaporn's murder, the liminal or 'in-between' age of the suspects was stressed in headlines which beamed out, for example, 'Youth charged with murder' (*The Eastern Herald*, 23 August 1990, p. 2), and 'Teens on murder charge' (*The Daily Telegraph Mirror* [Sydney], 15 January 1991, p. 17). In accounts of this case in mainstream and gay media alike, the perpetrators were characteristically described as 'juveniles' (for example, 'Thai murder: two

⁷¹ The concept of the juvenile delinquent came into being during the 1950s. Lesley Johnson's (1993) discussion of 'troublesome youth' offers a useful analysis between development of a discourse of youth as a problem and the establishment of many levels of institutions and processes for the monitoring, processing and surveillance of young people.

charged', *Sydney Star Observer*, 7 September 1990, p. 5). More than a decade later, it was reported that in the course of the Coronial Inquest and investigation which preceded it, 'the alleged sins of youth' were being revisited (Lamont, 2003:13). Once again, the criminalized and 'at risk adolescent' was called to mind with media accounts and book passages casting the alleged perpetrators as 'teenage killers' (Callaghan, 2003:20), 'teenage thugs' (Callaghan, 2007a:250), 'street-hardened teenage boys' (Callaghan, 2007a:69) and 'tough streetwise kids' (Fenn, 2006:245).

The interchangeability of the terms in media accounts – kids, youths, teens, juveniles, thugs and killers – is not incidental, for as Howard Sercombe points out, terms such as 'youth' and 'juvenile' carry with them a strong sense of criminality (1995:83). In the examples I have just given this sense of criminality is further amplified when the emotive descriptors 'street-hardened', 'tough streetwise', 'killers' and 'thugs' are attached to the term 'teenage', a classification already heavily invested with connotations of criminality and disorder. In legal discourses such emotive terms were also employed. In delivering her 'Findings and Recommendations', the Deputy State Coroner, Jacqueline Milledge, for example, described the perpetrators as 'thugs' when she suggested that further evidence could always come to light as 'relationships between these thugs do not always remain 'solid'' (State Coroner's Recommendations and Findings, 09/03/2005).

The association between 'youth' or 'young people' and 'crime' is well established and has a lengthy history. Owing to the symbiotic relationship between police and journalists, youth subcultures are frequently represented in the media via police sources in the context of criminal activity (Sercombe, 1999:11). In this discursive tradition, young people are routinely represented as 'agents of social disorder' and 'sources of misrule' (Bessant & Watts, 1998:5). Such representations are by no means new, as demonstrated by earlier 'moral panics'⁷² over, for example, 'larrikins' and street-gangs in late eighteenth century Sydney (Bessant & Watts, 1998:6-7); 'bodgies and widgies' in the mid

⁷² In his ground-breaking work, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (1980), Stanley Cohen used the term 'moral panic' to characterise the reactions of the public, media and other institutions, to the seaside fights between Mods and Rockers. Cohen argued that 'moral panics' are frequently and successfully played out in the demonization of youth.

1950s (Stratton, 1992), and punk culture in the early 1980s.

An impression of criminality is also evoked and reinforced by references to the perpetrators' abuse of alcohol and illicit drugs. In Callaghan's book, for example, he refers to Rattanajurathaporn's assailants as 'a group of street-hardened teenage boys' sitting around before their deadly assault 'knocking back beer after beer and passing around a bong' (2007a:69). Fenn also paints a similar picture of the 'Tamarama Gang', placing them initially in the shelters on the grass at Bondi beach 'with cans of VB [beer] on the table, a cone [marijuana] passing between them', then later sitting on a cliff ledge 'smoking the last of their dope' (2006:109) before they set off for Marks Park. The fringe-like status of the alleged perpetrators is made even more explicit when Fenn describes them as 'uneducated, inarticulate, drug-using marginals' (2006:246). Intercepted phone conversations and police interviews with 'persons of interest', including most members of the 'Bondi Boys', only confirm such impressions. 'Person of interest' Kylie, for example, was quite open about the fact that as a teenager during the days she 'used to steal things and sell them' (cited in Fenn, 2006:262) and 'at night we'd be off drinking' (cited in Fenn, 2006:262). Another suspect, Joey Phillips, 'was probably too drunk to remember' (cited in Fenn, 2006:283) all of the incidents he had been questioned about in relation to the Bondi cliffs murders, as was 'person of interest' John, who said he had never got involved in any serious violence because 'I was always too pissed' (cited in Fenn, 2006:201).

Police, legal and media profiles of the three gangs

In undertaking my analysis of the discursive constructions of the 'gay hate gangs', I will briefly reproduce overviews that have been produced and circulated about three of these groups – the 'Tamarama Gang', the 'Alexandria Eight' and the 'Bondi Boys'. I do this as a way of contextualizing and differentiating the separate gangs that were said to exist at the time. In reproducing 'profiles' of these groups, I am drawing extensively on the police profile produced by Detective Stephen Page in his 'Brief of Evidence' and on similar profiles reproduced in mainstream and gay media discourses. It is worth

pointing out, however, that 'membership' of these groups was often transitory, fluid and contested. According to a variety of different sources, including other gang members, police intelligence and witnesses, some members were reportedly attached to more than one gang. Others, whom authorities regarded as members of specific gangs, distanced themselves from the groups in question and refuted their alleged membership. It is also worth noting that the names used to refer to the three groups in question came, primarily, from the official authorities as opposed to the alleged members. In the case of the first two groups – the so-called 'Tamarama Gang' and the 'Alexandria Eight' – the gang titles were initially coined by investigating police officers and then used extensively by police, judicial and media discourses. There is no evidence to suggest that the members of these two groups ever used these titles to describe themselves.

According to police and media discourses, the 'Tamarama Gang' described the three individuals who were convicted and imprisoned for the murder of Kritchikorn Rattanjurathaporn. Known to meet on the Bondi-Tamarama coastal walkway at night, these individuals were aged between 16-17 years at the time of Rattanjurathaporn's death. As with the 'Tamarama Gang', the 'Alexandria Eight' did not use a gang title or graffiti tag that was known to police. Investigating officers dubbed this group the 'Alexandria Eight' in reference to the number of its members who were charged over the 'gay hate' murder of Richard Johnson at Alexandria Park in 1990. According to police and media sources, there were up to fifteen members of this group, aged between 15-18 years, who regularly met in Alexandria Park, Sydney.

The largest of the so-called 'gangs' linked to the Bondi cliffs murders was the self-titled 'Bondi Boys', which consisted of thirty members, aged between 12-18 years who congregated around the Bondi Pavilion on a regular basis (Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 02/04/03). According to Detective Page, the Deputy State Coroner and mainstream and gay media accounts of the murders, the 'Bondi Boys' were said to have adopted a range of alternate gang titles, such as 'PSK' (Park Side Killers) and 'PTK' (People That Kill), and to have used the same two distinctive graffiti tags, particularly in the Bondi region, including on the rock-faces and walls on the Bondi-Tamarama walkway (see, for example, Coronial Inquest

Transcripts; Callaghan, 2007a; Fenn, 2006). There is, however, some debate about what the initials 'PTK' and 'PSK' actually stood for. Journalist, Leonie Lamont, for example, did not automatically assume, as other journalists had (for example, Callaghan, 2003:2), that 'PTK' stood for 'People That Kill'. Instead, Lamont raised the question, 'Did PTK stand for Prime Time Kings – or was it Part Time Killers?' (Lamont, 2003:13).

The alleged perpetrators themselves were also non-committal about the precise meanings of the graffiti tags and gang titles. When interviewed by Detective Page and other investigating officers about their involvement in the Bondi cliffs murders, practically all of the alleged suspects admitted to knowing the various gang titles and recognizing the tags. However, few of them actually owned up to using such titles, and when they did, the more menacing connotations of the title were changed in favour of more innocent associations. At the inquest, for example, the alleged ringleader of the 'Bondi Boys', Sean Cushman, was adamant that 'PTK' stood for Prime Time Kings, insisting that the 'k' had no association with the word 'kill' or 'killers' (Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 10/04/03). Likewise, when interviewed by Operation Taradale, other members of the 'Bondi Boys' claimed that the acronym 'PTK' stood for 'Prime Time Kids' (cited in Fenn, 2006:138). Despite these public and private contestations of the gangs' terms, Victim M, who was dragged to the edge of the Bondi cliffs and threatened with being thrown over the side, appeared to be aware of the meaning of the tag 'PTK', telling *The Daily Telegraph* [Sydney], 'After being bashed by these people and knowing what PTK stood for I thought I was going to die' (Kamper, 2002:4).

As opposed to other characteristics, such as ethnicity or race, the district the so-called members were from – Bondi – was what they became defined and identified by in media and legal constructions. On a first reading the very name 'Bondi Boys' suggests a sense of territoriality, and perhaps ownership, towards the geographic area the group congregated in. In numerous public discourses, the title 'Bondi Boy', as a descriptor, is often used in a semi-affectionate way for men who have grown up in Bondi. Politicians, sports stars, celebrities and public figures who were 'born and bred' there are quick to identify as 'Bondi Boys'. However, the alleged perpetrators refused such identifications, particularly when the word 'gang' was attached to the title 'Bondi Boys'. During

the Coronial Inquest, for example, when Sean Cushman was first asked about the 'Bondi Boys', he was evasive, claiming, 'I've heard that name ... I grew up in Bondi so I am a Bondi Boy' (Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 10/04/03). After being informed that other people had referred to him as a member of the 'Bondi Boys' gang, Cushman insisted, 'I grew up in Bondi so I could call myself a Bondi boy, yes, and I'm proud to do that' (Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 10/04/03). When asked directly if he was the leader of the 'Bondi Boys', Cushman again evaded the question, responding instead, 'Well, we're 'Bondi Boys' because we grew up in Bondi, it's like the Bra Boys, the Maroubra Boys ... it's not a crew or a gang, it's my home and I'm proud of it. It's a world famous beach and I'm very proud of growing up there' (Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 10/04/03). Given the media beat-ups about 'youth gangs' and the Brief of Evidence which implicated the 'Bondi Boys' in acts of homophobic violence, it is hardly surprising that Cushman would want to distance himself from such labels and activities, and instead move the focus onto sentiments of national pride generated in relation to Bondi beach.

The title 'Bondi Boys' also, mistakenly, presents the group as male only. Yet, despite their assumed monolithic masculinity, in both media and police discourses, there is evidence that girls were present during a number of these attacks. When I searched through Page's Brief of Evidence, for example, the mug shots of the 'persons of interest' featured a number of girls who were said to be part of the 'Bondi Boys' group. In taped conversations of the alleged perpetrators, a number of the female suspects openly acknowledged that they had been involved in the gang as teenagers. However, like their male counterparts, they all denied having been involved in, or witnessing, acts of violence against gay men. Whilst the 'Bondi Boys' group did, apparently, contain both male and female members, the title 'Bondi Boys' subsumes and erases the female members of the group.

At the Coronial Inquest, and in various gay and mainstream media discourses, the 'PTK/Bondi Boys' survivor, Victim M, recounted the presence of a number of girls who were witness to his assault, 'I remember seeing the girls ... [they were] watching and laughing and still to this day it runs through my mind that they could sit there and do that' (Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 04/04/03).

Callaghan plays on Victim M's 'bewilderment' that females were involved in the gang by attributing the following thoughts to him:

And what about the two women who laughed while his ribs were being crushed and his head reduced to a pulp? Do they ever think back to the times when they went out with their boyfriends bashing and even killing? Do they have children now? As they're tucking their kids in at night, do they think about what they once did?
(2007a:159)

In this particular passage Callaghan is positioning the two women in a very specific and stereotypical way. By assuming that the women's primary roles would now be that of mothers, specifically doting, caring mothers who would tuck their child into bed every night, Callaghan is evoking and drawing heavily upon traditional discourses of femininity and motherhood. The 'bewilderment' that Callaghan attributes to Victim M appears to come from the supposed incompatibility of women being both female and violent at the same time, as if they are mutually exclusive categories. Such assumptions stem from dominant understandings of women and violence, specifically the idea that whilst physical violence is viewed as one of many possible behaviours for men, for women it is regarded as somewhat unusual (Morrissey, 2003:17). In media and legal constructions on the Bondi cliffs murders, the female members of the 'Bondi Boys' are represented, primarily, as witnesses and on-lookers, accomplices to, yet not, participants in their boyfriend's violent activities. The fact that the female members may not only have actively participated in other gay hate bashings and murders, but that they may also have taken pleasure from such activities, is not considered.

True-crime books: Pathologizing the suspects

In the wake of the publicity surrounding Operation Taradale and the Coronial Inquest two true-crime books have been produced on the 'gay gang murders', namely, *The Beat: A True Account of the Bondi Gay Murders* (2006) and *Bondi Badlands* (2007a). The first book on the murders was I. J. Fenn's book *The*

*Beat*⁷³ published by Australian publisher 'The Five Mile Press'. I have been unable to find out many biographical details about Fenn and his career apart from the fact that *The Beat* is Fenn's first, and only, work of non-fiction. Whilst he was undertaking the research for this book, Fenn relied exclusively on the legal documents in the public domain and chose not to carry out interviews with the victims' families, friends and colleagues or the police and legal authorities involved with these cases. Research for the book drew almost entirely on the Brief of Evidence compiled by Detective Page and the transcripts of the Coronial Inquest, both of which Fenn uses as 'statements of fact'. In a number of places in Fenn's book, the transcripts also operate as a springboard from which he fictionalizes events and personalizes the 'characters'. This means that the legal documents themselves are not subject to any form of social analysis or critique.

As a traditional true-crime novel, Fenn propels the narrative with the pace of a detective thriller. As the publicity blurb so aptly puts it: 'Telephones are tapped, surveillance operations put in place, crime scenes re-enacted to ignite media interest and arrests are made' (Fenn, 2006:back jacket). Not only does the book move at the pace of a detective thriller but it reads more as a fictionalized whodunit than as a work of non-fiction. Fenn uses many novelistic devices to tell his story, veering frequently into what is, essentially, a work of fiction that is very loosely based around the 'gay gang murders'. He attributes thoughts and feelings to the 'characters' in the book – opinions and sensations which he, as an author who has never met or interviewed any of the individuals in question, would have had no way of knowing or accessing. Owing to Fenn's status as a new, somewhat amateurish writer, and the small publishing house that produced the book, I am not surprised that *The Beat* received little critical acclaim in the public domain. I have not been able to locate any reviews of this book in either mainstream or gay media sources with the exception of one brief review (Rhys, 2006) which appeared on the non-refereed on-line arts site, 'Arts Hub Australia'.

In his production of meaning about the Bondi cliffs cases, Fenn is unequivocal

⁷³ The term 'the beat' also refers to a police officer's beat. However, in the case of the Marks Park beat, it appears the site was not policed during this period which in part, arguably, contributed to the violence that occurred there.

in his denouncement of the Marks Park murders as ‘an ugly story about ugly people committing ugly crimes’ (2006:back jacket). The emphasis on the word ‘ugly’ here renders his distaste explicit while his invocation of the discourse of beauty effectively Others both the perpetrators and the crimes they committed. This is characteristic of Fenn’s somewhat simplistic understanding of the murders. He reads them as ‘ugly crimes’ with the perpetrators positioned as ‘ugly people’ and the victims, in contrast, depicted as decent though defenceless individuals who became the unfortunate targets of the perpetrators’ misplaced and misdirected aggressions. Although it is clear that the victims were singled out for attack because of their homosexuality, they are also presented as circumstantial victims – they happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Despite Fenn’s simplistic dismissal of the perpetrators as ‘ugly people’, Fenn actually devotes the majority of his book to discussion about the alleged suspects, whilst the victims are glossed over in a much more surface manner. Fenn’s pathologization of the perpetrators, in which their violent behaviour is attributed to their dysfunctional family backgrounds, is not extended to the victims. Whilst the victims are personalized, the sketches Fenn paints of them are relatively brief. We are provided with basic background information about each of the victims – their names, ages, residential addresses, next of kin, employment circumstances etc – but they are not nearly as fleshed out as ‘characters’ as the suspects are in this book.

Fenn also produces a distinctive class division between the two groups. The alleged perpetrators are uniformly presented as being from lower socio-economic backgrounds and suburbs. Part of the way Fenn achieves this is through the stereotypically working class accents he attaches to the perpetrators, combined with the liberal use of swear words peppered through their conversations. Drawing on one of the scenes where the ‘gang’ are sitting outside and chatting, I will provide a brief example of the language Fenn uses, so as to illustrate my point:

‘Aw, c’mon, man. You was keeping the wind off me. I’ll get cold if youse don’t sit next to me again ...’

‘Hey, I dint know you got smokes, man? Why youse dint say nothin’ ‘bout no cones, man?’

‘Oh, fuck off. You’re a waste of time’
(2006:12)

In contrast to Fenn's production of the alleged perpetrators as lower-working class, uneducated and inarticulate, the victims are presented as reliable upstanding citizens holding down responsible positions in the community, both in their professions and their voluntary activities, for example, John Russell's coaching of junior sports teams. Thus, Fenn sets up a distinct opposition between the young working class perpetrators who, primarily, lived in Sydney's poorer suburbs, and the older, more 'privileged' middle class victims who are the targets of their violence.

In a number of instances throughout *The Beat* Fenn presents the female characters as victims of the male characters' violence and abuse. The father of one of the young male characters, for example, is presented as being physically violent not only to his son, but also to his wife. In another scene in Fenn's 'Fiction?' section, one of the young men, in full view of the rest of the teenagers, sexually penetrates one of the young girls:

And now, he held her against the back wall of the club, her skirt hiked up to her waist, knickers ripped at one hip so they hung like a tossed away rag at her ankles ... Jeans undone, the girl's leg listed to waist level, and he sunk deep into her, so deep that she gasped, cried out some animal noise as he pushed and pushed, grinding her, fucking her while the others watched, knowing it was her first time and that he was hurting her and not giving a shit. (2006:25).

Fenn provides no indication as to how the girl felt about this incident apart from the fact that the sex physically hurt her. Instead, we are presented with this scene wholly from the point of the view of the teenage boy who didn't 'give a shit' about the girl's feelings. I have mentioned the boy's public sexual 'conquest' of the girl, and the father's 'wife-beating', to suggest that the female characters in this book are, to some extent, portrayed as victims of aggressive and uncaring males⁷⁴. In this sense they can be equated with the gay men in that both sets of characters are presented as the victims of the male characters' physical and sexual aggression. Not only were the victims of the 'gay hate

⁷⁴ However, as I have also pointed out, according to police intelligence and media discourses, the 'Bondi Boys' gang was comprised of female and male members.

gangs' physically assaulted, but also at least one threat of sexual assault was recorded. Victim M, for example, reported how two male members of the gang which attacked him also threatened him with sexual assault: 'One of them had a stick, not that they hit me with it at all, but they said this was where they'd use the stick, ram it up my arse...' (cited in Fenn, 2006:161)

Perhaps the most striking feature of *The Beat* is the explicit and unapologetic way in which Fenn not only criminalizes the suspects but also pathologizes them. This pathologization is produced by highlighting both the documented and the suspected dysfunctional family backgrounds of the perpetrators. In many true-crime novels foregrounding the disturbed childhoods and family backgrounds of the suspects operates as 'evidence' of their deep-seated pathology. Frequently such books deflect attention away from existing social and political structures by casting the criminals, who have allegedly come from highly disturbed family backgrounds, as the sole source of social problems.

Fenn begins *The Beat* with a double narrative entitled 'Section One: Fiction?' and dated '1989'. This section is essentially a collection of fictionalized versions of two narratives, namely, Ross Warren's last night out with a friend at Oxford Street, and fictionalized snapshots of the activities of the alleged perpetrators. Although this section is entitled 'Fiction?', it is evident that Fenn is framing it more as 'fact' and as 'the truth'. For example, the question mark following the word 'fiction' raises questions about its status as a work of fiction. It also suggests that it could indeed be like the section which follows it, which is entitled 'Section Two: Fact'. The book's subtitle, 'A *True* Account of the Bondi Gay Murders' (emphasis added), also supports such a premise. Whilst I read the first section as a compelling narrative, albeit a fictional one, I noticed that many of the so-called conversations between the suspects were drawn from the actual Coronial Inquest proceedings including the intercepted conversations between the alleged perpetrators. In many cases Fenn had reproduced the transcripts verbatim. The names of the persons uttering such comments may have been changed but the phrases and terminology used were frequently direct copies of the original transcripts. What is significant about Fenn's verbatim use of these quotes is that he has inserted them into a wholly fictionalized world which he is attempting to pass off as an 'accurate' and 'true account' of the cases in question.

In the 'Fiction?' section, Fenn draws upon a range of novelistic techniques, including the development of characters, to present what reads as a lengthy and detailed account of the disturbing home life of one of the teenage 'gang members'. In this narrative the young male character arrives home to find his mother being sodomized by his father. However, on closer analysis, much to the young man's horror, it appears as if his mother is enjoying the sexual activity. Fenn describes the scene as follows:

On the bed, on all fours, her hair pulled tight over her shoulders, his mother kneeled naked and moaning while his father, his pants around his knees pushed into her from behind. Hard. His hands dragging on her hair to hold her head arched, her throat stretched to restrict her breathing as he forced himself into her ... [His] eyes were riveted on the sight of his mother, tits swinging to the rhythm of his father's thrusting, nipples longer than he'd ever have imagined, long and red and full ... His mother was enjoying her husband in her arse. Jesus, he couldn't believe it (2006:23).

Not only is this scene later represented as the psychological trigger for the young man's violent behaviour towards gay men, but it also paints an unsettling view of how women engage in heterosexual sex. By presenting a consensual act of anal sex as a disturbing activity situated on a continuum of violence, Fenn assumes that heterosexual sex has to run along clichéd, well-worn and prescriptive grooves. Fenn illustrates the young man's disgust with the scene by equating the act of sodomy with homosexuality: 'Unable to take away his gaze as his father arched his back spurting inside his wife like a ... like a fuckin' faggot!' (2006:24). In producing such a scene, Fenn is employing a faulty psychoanalytic logic, namely, that because the young man witnessed his mother, (presumably) a heterosexual woman, consenting to and enjoying anal sex⁷⁵, which he views as a homosexual sexual activity, therefore he has to go out and attack gay men. Yet, as Michel Foucault so clearly illustrated in the *History of Sexuality Volume 1* (1976), sexual identities, as a modern phenomenon, are constructed within and by different discursive fields, and are not characterized by specific sexual practices. Thus, Fenn's anal sex scene – which can also be read as a perverted

⁷⁵ Owing to the husband's later physical and psychological violence towards his wife, the 'consensual' element of the anal sex scene could be read as somewhat ambiguous.

version of the original primal scene⁷⁶ – embodies and offers up a highly problematic explanation of psychological causation and motivation for the perpetrator's actions.

In *The Beat*, after the act of sodomy has been collapsed with a homosexual identity, Fenn depicts the teenager's murderous impulses which have arisen as a result of what he has just witnessed: 'Feeling like he might throw up, turning from the bedroom door, going back downstairs filled with the urge to kill. In the kitchen banging cupboard doors, angry. Venomous' (2006:24). Once the young man's father has become aware that he witnessed the scene, he turns his anger on his son. Firstly, he slaps him with such severity that the slaps 'left an instant imprint of his father's hand' on his face (2006:24), and, secondly, he throws him out of the house and tells him not to return. After abusing his son, the father turns his aggression towards his wife:

He stepped towards her, brought his hand up, slapped her across the face with enough force to snap back her head, hitting it hard against the door jamb.

'Don't ever tell me no when I hit the little cunt', he said, his fingers closing around her throat. 'He might be 17 but he needs fuckin' discipline, eh'. His hand tightening around her neck.

(Fenn, 2006:25).

Following this scene, we are presented with an image of an angry and hurt young man 'walking towards the beach trying not to think about what he'd just seen, trying not to think of what his mother had let that bastard do to her' (2006:24-25). In Fenn's narrative the aggression which the teenager unleashes on gay men at the clifftop is attributed to these two factors, namely, having seen his mother being sodomized by his father 'like a fuckin' faggot' (2006:24) and also more generally by the dysfunctional family in which he lives where he, and his mother, are, apparently, routinely verbally and physically assaulted⁷⁷.

Whilst the conversations between the gang members in the 'Fiction?' section are

⁷⁶ Sigmund Freud observes that sexual intercourse between adults strikes any children who may be watching it as something both uncanny and anxiety-producing. He explains this anxiety by arguing that 'what we are dealing with is a sexual excitation with which their understanding is unable to cope and which they also, no doubt, repudiate because their parents are involved in it, and which is therefore transformed into anxiety' (1985:742).

⁷⁷ I am not framing the anal sex as an example of violence as it appears to have been a consenting sexual act between two adults despite the son reading it in a more disturbing light.

directly lifted from the Coronial Inquest transcripts, I have seen no evidence of any of the alleged perpetrators coming from a household such as the one that Fenn has described in the previous narratives. These appear to me to be imaginative reconstructions presented under the pretext of 'reality' or 'fact'. I believe that Fenn reconstructed such fictional interludes, and integrated them into what is presented as a work of non-fiction, in order to suggest that such family scenes could be not only entirely plausible but were indeed the catalyst for the homophobic violence carried out by the alleged perpetrators. Hence the young man's aggression towards gay men is represented as misplaced anger stemming from his own dysfunctional family background rather than from wider contextual issues such as societal homophobia. However, if we use the first chapter 'Fiction?' as being representative of the whole book, then Fenn could also be suggesting, through his psychological causation line, that the responsibility for homophobic violence does not just go back to the crucible of the family, the parents, but more specifically to the father figure whose violence is endured by both mother and son, and also the parents' sexual activities which are situated outside the narrow sphere the son has come to see as the heterosexual 'norm' (i.e. vaginal/sexual intercourse not anal penetration).

Whilst I. J. Fenn is a new, relatively inexperienced, writer, Greg Callaghan, the author of the other true-crime novel produced around the murders, *Bondi Badlands* (2007a), has co-authored another book *Men: Inside Out* (2003) and, in a career spanning more than twenty years, has written for most of the major newspapers and magazines in Australia. Currently Callaghan is a senior editor for *The Australian* newspaper. Callaghan's book, which was published by the well-known and reputable international publisher 'Allen & Unwin', received extensive publicity and critical acclaim both in gay media sites (for example, *SX News* [Sydney]), Australian broadsheet newspapers (for example, *The Australian*) and in diverse on-line sites, including, for example, a review by Michael Kirby in the 'Mission & Justice' blog archive (Kirby 2007). In the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 'The pick of the literary crop', Bruce Elder wrote a favourable review of *Bondi Badlands* in his list of top books for 2007 (Elder, 2007). In 'The Crime Writers Association of Australia' nominations for the 2007 Ned Kelly awards, it was nominated for 'Best Non-Fiction' (<http://www.nedkellyawards.com/2008.html>, accessed 29 October 2008). The

previous year *The Beat* had also been nominated for the Ned Kelly award for 'Best True Crime' (<http://www.nedkellyawards.com/2007.html>, accessed 29 October 2008). However, as every true-crime novel published in Australia is automatically nominated for these awards, such nominations reveal little about the artistic or literary merits of either book.

Callaghan's book is far more extensively researched than Fenn's work. Unlike Fenn, Callaghan carried out numerous, sometimes extensive and repeated, interviews with relevant parties. Callaghan interviewed close to 40 people including Detective Sergeant Stephen Page; John Russell's father, Ted, and brother, Peter; Ross Warren's close friend, Craig Ellis; and Gilles Mattaini's partner, Jacques Musy. These interviews not only helped to flesh out the men as 'real life people' but provided a deeper, more nuanced, context than the archival research alone would have. Callaghan also made use of Page's Brief of Evidence and the Coronial Inquest transcripts but used them mainly as reference sources rather than as key research materials as Fenn had. However, by using these legal documents primarily as 'statements of fact', Callaghan also failed to provide a social analysis of them.

Whilst Callaghan's book is a more serious examination of the murders and the general 'gay hate' culture surrounding these events, it does lapse into clichéd true-crime mode in a number of instances. Like *The Beat*, *Bondi Badlands* is also written as a fast-paced true-crime thriller. The titles of the chapters, for example, are not unlike the titles one would find in a traditional Agatha Christie-style crime fiction or in many highly sensational true crime novels:

Introduction: A deadly playground.

1. A newsreader vanishes.
2. Death of a barman.
3. A detective calls.
4. Murder on the cliff tops.
5. Body of evidence.
6. Dead men walking.
7. Case of the missing hair.
8. The man who got away.
9. Into thin air.
10. A city's shame.
11. Suspicious mind.
12. End game.

Epilogue: Towards the root of the evil
(Callaghan, 2007a:contents)

Such sensational sounding titles, whilst clearly located in the true-crime genre, detract from the predominantly 'serious' attention Callaghan pays to the murders and his analysis of the broader social context in which they are situated.

The pathologization process is not nearly as explicit in *Bondi Badlands* as it is in *The Beat*. Callaghan does, however, provide a few references to the family backgrounds of the perpetrators which could perhaps be seen as an attempt to offer some explanation for their actions. In describing Rattanajurathaporn's killers, for example, Callaghan notes that the McAuliffe brothers had come from a broken home (2007a:80) and that Matthew Davis's parents had separated, and that he had to live with his father in Redfern (2007a:81). Sean Cushman's 'own story of hardship' (2007a:227) is also highlighted, with references to 'growing up in a broken home [and] his disorganized, undisciplined childhood, hanging out with street kids by the age of 12, and being a constant troublemaker at Dover Heights High (when he deigned to turn up to school)' (2007a:227). Despite such references, Callaghan is keen not to simplistically reduce the perpetrators' violent crimes solely to their family circumstances, asserting, 'certainly, some members of the Bondi Boys and the Alexandria Eight came from disturbed backgrounds, but others from loving, stable families' (2007a:249). He also notes that plenty of young men have survived extreme traumas in their family backgrounds yet they 'haven't proceeded to take out all their bitterness and rage on homosexuals' (2007a:248).

Rather than attributing the violence to individualistic and pathological causes stemming back to the perpetrators' dysfunctional families, as Fenn had done, Callaghan presents the murders as examples of social intolerance, thus using a social justice lens to read and understand the crimes. Callaghan achieves this by situating the violence that occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s as, somewhat ironically, taking place at a time when the mainstream media appeared to be combating homophobic prejudice by providing more sympathetic treatment of homosexuality and gay-related issues (2007a:6). He also notes, for example, the popularity of the annual Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras as a major tourist attraction in Sydney during these years (200a7:6). However, Callaghan counters these essentially positive social trends with other events such as the

onset of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the early 1980s and the widespread hysteria produced in the wake of the screening of the Grim Reaper campaign on nationwide television (2007a:6-7). Hence, Callaghan positions the Bondi cliffs murders as taking place amidst other violence, specifically that related to the persecution and intolerance of homosexuals and other marginalized groups, both nationally and internationally.

Callaghan's social justice stance involves a scathing critique of the earlier investigations and the (lack of) mainstream media attention, raising the pertinent question: 'Was it homophobia – an unstated assumption that gay men's lives aren't as valuable as others – or simple, plain ineptitude?' (2007a:8). But the authorities are not the only ones to appear under his 'social justice' radar. Callaghan also pleads with the reader to examine their own 'deepest prejudices: an acceptance of the persecution of gays and the use of violence to confront one's own demons' (2007a:7). He promotes such self-examination as a necessary step towards tackling homophobia. At the conclusion of the book, Callaghan also emphasizes the importance of the role of educational discourses:

Our only real hope of combating gay hatred, of course, is to start in our schools. Just as kids can be taught hatred and intolerance, so they can be taught respect for those different from themselves, to value people equally, and to see prejudice against gays and lesbians as deeply uncool and unacceptable.
(2007a:251).

Unlike Fenn, Callaghan does not use social class to distinguish between the two groups – victim and perpetrators. Instead, in his more nuanced and complex reading of the crimes, he highlights the varied socio-economic, class, gender and family backgrounds that the perpetrators and victims came from, without simplistically attributing the perpetrators' aggression to their purportedly dysfunctional home lives. Callaghan also challenges the unsavoury stereotypes associated with beat sex by transforming the participants into a heterosexual couple:

But if we were to imagine a man and woman being beaten to death because they were caught making out behind a bush in a public park, we would take a different view. What a ghastly crime, we would think. Two young people enjoying some innocent hanky-panky in public – and getting butchered for it.
(2007a:7)

Thus he makes the point that not only did the men have every right to be at a beat but they also had every right to have sex in a public place (2007:7). Such a stance emphasizes his take on the victims as ‘innocent men’ (2007:subtitle of book), who in no way ‘deserved’ the violence they received at the hands of the ‘gay hate gangs’.

Sean Cushman as the ‘face of hate’

In news reports on the inquest proceedings, which were reported regularly in local and national newspapers over a fortnightly period, eight ‘persons of interest’ allegedly implicated in the Marks Park murders were called to give evidence. Throughout the coverage, only one of these individuals is graphically depicted⁷⁸, the alleged ringleader of the ‘Bondi Boys’, Sean Cushman. Presented as the ‘face’ of the gay hate gang, Cushman’s image is used repeatedly. In a sample of twelve mainstream media reports produced during this period, photographs of Cushman are reproduced on three different occasions in two different sources, including in one instance where the media report relates to another suspect, Merlyn McGrath.

Given that the ‘gay hate gang’ suspects comprised men and women, and individuals from a range of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, why was Cushman’s image – that of a Caucasian male – selected in preference to other possible depictions? A number of the ‘persons of interest’, though not all, had been convicted of similar crimes as juveniles and therefore certain media

⁷⁸A much smaller photographic image of an associate, Darrell Trindall, does appear, although it is repeatedly made clear that Trindall is not considered a ‘person of interest’ or a suspect in the ‘gay gang murders’. Trindall was not, for example, called before the coroner to give evidence as a ‘person of interest’. Contradictorily, however, in initial news reports of the inquest, Trindall was said to be ‘implicated’ and ‘involved’ with the gangs (‘Football star involved with gay bashing gang, inquest told’, *The Daily Telegraph* [Sydney], 1 April 2003, p. 9; *The Canberra Times*, 1 April 2003, p. 4).

restrictions applied in terms of identifying them. However, some of these people had already been 'outed' in initial news reports on the Coronial Inquest. After legal representations were sent to the State Coroner's Office, journalists at the inquest were reminded about these restrictions. Another practical explanation is that at the time of the inquest, April 2003, two of the alleged perpetrators, serving sentences for Rattanjurathaporn's murder, were escorted to and from the Coroners Court by prison officials, which may have meant that they did not use the public front exit onto Parramatta Road as Cushman did. A third explanation for the media focus on Cushman – although curiously this was not emphasized or sensationalized in inquest coverage – could stem from the fact that he had previously appeared before the courts in relation to another fatal assault at Bondi beach. In 1996 Cushman received a good behaviour bond for his accessory role in the assault and subsequent death of British tourist, Brian Hagland, a crime that was highly publicized at the time⁷⁹.

I am not entirely convinced by any of these explanations. Nor can I offer a definitive answer as to why Cushman was chosen as the 'poster boy' for the 'gay hate gang', a stand-in for all the other members. If, as Moran and Skeggs (2004) and Perry (2001) maintain, homophobic violence is 'legitimate and legitimated violence' (Moran & Skeggs, 2004:26-27) for the heteronormative status quo, it could then be argued that Cushman – a white, Australian male – operates as a representative of these 'ordinary people', the archetypal Bondi Boy. This would suggest that his role as a 'cover boy' would serve to further normalise the 'Bondi Boys' and also symbolically legitimate their crimes. With his stereotypical 'blonde hair, blue eyes' Aussie-image, Cushman occupies the Bondi Boy role far more effectively, I suspect, than the female and / or non-Caucasian members of his group would have. It is also possible that Cushman is being cast as an 'anti hero', a larrikin Wild West-type figure doing society's 'dirty work' by cleaning the queers off the world famous beach he is so keen to identify with.

⁷⁹ See commentary on Hagland's death in earlier chapter, 'Postcards from the Bondi Badlands'.

Just like us?

Even though the discursive construction of the alleged perpetrators as 'gang members' clearly functions to distance them from the wider community, there are also a number of ways in which the suspects are simultaneously represented as being 'just like us'⁸⁰. Firstly, in mainstream media and legal discourses, the invisible and unmarked nature of the perpetrators' sexuality highlights the normative nature of heterosexuality, in contrast to the over-determination of the victims' sexuality, which renders it different from, and alien to, (hetero)normative standards. The perpetrators' production as 'not gay', signified by the unmarked nature of their own presumed heterosexuality and constant and repeated declarations to that effect, brings them into line with a dominant heteronormative social order and further legitimizes their actions in reproducing such an order.

In the next section, I will show how dominant heteronormative values and assumptions were produced in discursive constructions of the alleged perpetrators. Firstly, throughout the reporting of this case, the sexuality of the suspects was not identified either in the headlines or within the text of articles. In this way, the invisible, normative and unmarked nature of heterosexuality was made apparent. The second factor concerns the explicit coding of the alleged perpetrators as 'not gay' subjects. Not only was the suspects' sexuality not identified in mainstream media reports, but also at various times, particularly in self-identifications on bugged conversations, they were coded very clearly as being 'not gay'. It was not a case of the alleged perpetrators being presented as heterosexual and therefore 'not gay' but rather their identity seemed to rely on what they were not ('gay') as opposed to what they presumably were ('heterosexual'). Both the failure to identify the suspects' sexuality and their coding as 'not gay' operate as a stark contrast to the over-determination and constant highlighting of their victims' (homo)sexuality, which is rendered alien, abject and Other.

My examination of the print news coverage of the 'gay gang murders' from July

⁸⁰ I am referring here to a dominant, albeit mythical, heteronormative, Anglo-Australian benchmark.

2002, when *The Daily Telegraph* [Sydney] broke the story of the fresh investigation, through to February 2005, when the State Coroner delivered her Findings and Recommendations, showed that the sexuality of the victims, rather than that of the perpetrators, functioned as the focal point of the story. Journalists constantly and ubiquitously referred to the victims' sexuality and their presence at a 'gay beat', whilst ignoring the sexual practices and / or identifications of the alleged perpetrators. A cursory glance at the newspaper headlines alone indicate this trend, for example, 'Mother's letters spur inquiry into gay hate murders'; (Lamont, 2003:6); 'Gay hate gang faces justice' (Kamper, 2003:9); 'Tapes link gay-hate murders' (Milligan, 2003:9); and 'Police blasted over gay hate killings' (Callaghan, 2005:7). Although the qualifiers 'gay' and 'gay hate' in these headlines construct the perpetrator's identity as 'gay haters', such identity marks also emphasize the victim's sexuality – as gays – even when it is reportedly hated. This was not a story about 'straight perpetrators', although naturally they do figure in it, but rather a narrative about gays as victims – bashed, murdered, and hated. In constantly highlighting the victims' sexuality, such media coverage is positioning homosexuality as something different from the (hetero)norm.

In the 'gay gang murders', the perpetrators are identified as 'poofteer bashers' and 'gay haters'. This identity is defined against, and heavily dependent on, its abject Other, that is, the victims who are demarcated as 'gay'. Even on the level of linguistics, the classification of the perpetrators as 'poofteer bashers' inextricably links them to the victims by declarations of what they are not. As Edward Said argued in his ground-breaking text, *Orientalism*, the 'construction of identity ... involves establishing opposites and "others" whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from "us"' (1995:332). Diana Fuss echoes such sentiments with her argument that 'heterosexuality secures its self-identity and shores up its ontological boundaries by protecting itself from what it sees as the continual predatory encroachment of its contaminated other, homosexuality' (1991:2). Thus heterosexuality differentiates, strengthens, and regulates its own identity through continually evoking not only what it is, but also what it is not (Lunny, 2003:315). This Othering process operates to negatively construct subjectivity – the perpetrators know who they are ('poofteer bashers') by declaring what they

are not (*not* gay). Situated in an economy in which dominant (hetero)normative constructions of identity are both dependent on and upheld by an abjected domain of non-identities, the gang's identity as poofteer-bashers is heavily reliant on (the sexuality of) their contaminated Other. In contrast, the perpetrator's sexuality is unseen, unnamed and unmarked. This suggests that the perpetrators are still being represented as part of mainstream 'straight' society, which, in turn, gives their actions a veneer of legitimacy that they otherwise would not have had.

The emphasis on the suspects' 'not gay' status is not the only way that the gang is normalized. Discursive productions of the group as the 'Bondi Boys' – a term which is regularly used in an affectionate way in mainstream Australian culture – serves to further normalize the group within 'everyday' Australian culture. Such constructions, which play into familiar nationalistic stereotypes, function to erase the diverse ethnic and gender backgrounds of the members. The members' varied backgrounds are also erased in the majority of the media coverage on the Bondi cliffs murders. This differs markedly from other mainstream media coverage on Australian youth gangs. In contextualizing the coverage it is worth noting that the story of the 'gay hate gangs' was narrated amidst other media-fuelled 'moral panics' about Sydney gangs, specifically, 'ethnic youth gangs'. During the mid 1990s, for example, there was extensive negative publicity about 'Asian youth gangs' said to be operating in the Cabramatta district, such as the infamous 5T gang. In the late 1990s, there were further moral panics about ethnic gangs in Sydney's south-western suburbs following the stabbing death of a Korean-Australian schoolboy, Edward Lee, in Punchbowl in late 1998, and the drive-by shooting of the Lakemba Police Station for which senior police and state politicians alleged that a 'Lebanese youth gang' was responsible. In the 1995 New South Wales election, the Premier Bob Carr made much of his party's 'law and order', anti-gang strategy. From 2000 onwards, extensive and inflammatory media attention has been given to a series of 'gang rapes' allegedly committed by 'Lebanese Australians', with white 'Australian' women⁸¹ as their targets. When the perpetrators of these 'rape gangs' were sentenced in mid 2002, the media coverage generated by the trial coincided with some of the fresh publicity on the

⁸¹ Numerous New South Wales print, radio and television media sources angled these events so that it was a story about 'Lebanese', 'Arabic' or 'Muslim' gangs targeting so-called 'white', 'Australian' women.

'gay hate gangs'.

What is strikingly different in media reports on the 'gay hate gangs', as opposed to the cases I have just listed, however, is that the ethnic or racial background of the 'gang members' is, firstly, rarely identified, and, secondly, not constructed or emphasized as the focal point of the story. The only explicit reference to race was one sentence in an article which stated that previous offenders in other New South Wales gay hate killings were 'mostly Caucasian' (for example, Lamont, 2003:13). Refusing to 'racialize' the group is highly unusual as throughout twentieth century Australia, particularly in recent public discourses on Sydney youth crime, direct links are frequently produced between 'youth crime gangs' and specific ethnic groups (Collins et al, 2000; Poynting et al, 2001). As White (2004) and Poynting et al (2001) argue, the discourses of gangs in Australia have been racialised, with groups of young people from specific ethnic minorities congregating together in public spaces immediately cast as 'ethnic gangs'.

Given such prevalent stereotyping, the mainstream media's refusal to racialise the 'gay hate gang' members led me to assume that they were all Caucasians. For as many cultural critics (for example, Riggs, 2004; Dyer, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993) have suggested, one of the insidious properties of the domain of whiteness, like that of heterosexuality, is its apparent invisibility and normativity. However, after accessing the Operation Taradale police files, reading the Coronial Inquest transcripts, and seeing police mug shots of the suspects, I discovered that my initial assumptions about a mono-cultural Caucasian gang were wrong. Instead, the sheer diversity of cultural backgrounds the suspects came from surprised me with Aboriginal, Maori, Middle-Eastern and Caucasian youth all represented. One of the few Caucasian 'persons of interest', Merlyn McGrath, for example, told two separate witnesses that she had been involved in the assault and death of Ross Warren with a group of 'eight Lebanese from Kings Cross' (Coronial Inquest transcripts, 2005). However, in later interviews with Stephen Page and intercepted phone conversations McGrath was shown to be an unreliable witness who not only denied her earlier accounts, including the existence of the 'Lebanese men', but also offered numerous conflicting versions of events. Other 'persons of interest' had obtained legal representation from the Aboriginal Legal Service. Sean

Cushman is of Caucasian appearance. One of Cushman's associates, JP, is Maori. 'Mr Smith' identified his group of attackers as being Caucasians, Pacific Islanders and Maoris. Another South Bondi victim, Robert Tate, described the key offenders in his assault as a Caucasian, a Pacific Islander, and 'another young ethnic male' (Coronial Inquest transcripts, 2005).

My interest is not in profiling the perpetrators, or entering into debates about racial stereotyping in the media. Given the tendency, however, for dominant media discourses to racialise youth gangs, I was intrigued as to why the 'race card' was not played or the ethnic gang stereotype evoked in the coverage. Instead, this possible angle was downplayed and excluded from the story with the events being named, narrated and developed around the sexuality of the victims. Thus, the homosexual angle obscured, and took priority over, the possible race angle of media reporting.

By the mainstream media's refusal to represent the diversity of the group, in terms of gender and ethnic backgrounds, the 'gang' is constructed as a unified and homogenous, all Aussie group, the (white, male) 'Bondi Boys'. This is exemplified by the 'anti hero', Cushman, who was selected by the media to represent the group. The assaults and deaths that the group have allegedly committed are also trivialized, being constituted not so much as crimes, but rather as the 'sins' of a misspent and troublesome youth. In a police report produced in January 1990, at the time of 'Rick's' assault, the constable in charge wrote, 'From information received from [Rick's real name here] I am aware that assaults and robberies of homosexuals is a popular pastime with the juvenile and hoodlum element' (cited in Callaghan, 2007a:160). Sounding not unlike a hobby, the phrase 'popular pastime' serves to trivialize the seriousness of the violence. These savage and unprovoked assaults are reduced to little more than 'the sins of youth' and the 'popular pastimes' of local teenagers. Thus the 'Bondi Boys' are represented not as a 'bunch of queers', like their victims, or a 'bunch of foreigners', like many of Sydney's so-called 'ethnic gangs', but instead as part of mainstream Australian culture, a group of high spirited larrikins originating from the most iconic symbol of Australian culture, Bondi beach.

In Fenn's representations of the perpetrators, it is also worth noting that,

predictably, the 'persons of interest' were keen to trivialize and minimize the extent of their alleged crimes. In intercepted conversations and police interviews, for example, Shari, a 'person of interest', said, 'We might have been naughty but we were never that bad ... We were little bloody runabouts, drinkin', fuckin', doin' shit' ... 'God, we might have been drinking and being stupid but we didn't do anything that fucking dramatic' (cited in Fenn, 2006:255, 257). Likewise another 'person of interest', John, admitted, 'We always drank down the beach. We'd smash bottles and fight with each other but we never got involved in anything serious' (cited in Fenn, 2006:201). Whilst another suspect was candid about getting 'stuck into the booze and the cones ... silly things like that. Kid's stuff', she was quick to point out that they hadn't murdered anyone (cited in Fenn, 2006:180). Fenn summarized the responses from the 'persons of interest' as always offering 'the same refrain: we didn't do it, we wouldn't do things like that. They might have been 'naughty', might have stolen, drank themselves silly, behaved like savages, but they never did anything 'bad' (2006:269).

The alleged perpetrators, then, are simultaneously constructed as being both 'like us' and 'not like us'. They are rendered 'like us', by media and legal discourses, in that their presumed heterosexuality is invisible and unmarked in contrast to that of their victims. Although their production as 'gang members' does serve to criminalize and scapegoat them, the heavily gendered, Anglo representation of the 'Bondi Boys' gang – an all-Australian, Caucasian and all male grouping – contradicts this reading. In other words, despite the ways in which the so-called 'gay hate gangs' are publicly and symbolically distanced, the ways in which they are represented as being 'normal' suggest that their 'dirty work' is in fact, to some degree, socially legitimized.

Free-floating confessions and 'mistaken identities'

The 'gay hate gang' term produces an amorphous identity for the perpetrators which, in turn, provides a certain level of anonymity to the other suspects. Where, for example, do 'gay haters' congregate? How can one identify a 'gay hater'? Who would own up, and under what circumstances, to hating gays? The

intercepted conversations and survivors' eye-witness testimonies revealed the suspects' distrust of, and animosity towards, gays. Yet in the Coroner's Court, only one of the suspects openly admits to being homophobic. When asked about his feelings towards gay people in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Matthew Davis⁸² replied, 'I couldn't differentiate between paedophilia and homosexuality ... I hated them with a passion ... but whilst I was inside I made a couple of mates in there ... that were gay, and they were pretty cool blokes' (Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 07/04/03). The other 'persons of interest' – including individuals convicted of other anti-gay murders and whose voices were captured on tape expressing homophobic sentiments – were not so forthright. In fact, they were intensely evasive about their involvement and motivation in violent homophobic crimes.

In the intercepted conversations of the alleged perpetrators, many of whom appeared before the State Coroner as 'persons of interest', there are numerous references concerning going to Sydney beats, including Marks Park, with the express intention of 'poofter bashing'. Yet at the coronial inquiry a number of these 'persons of interest' flatly denied such accusations. DM, for example, insisted that Rattanajurathaporn's murder was not pre-meditated (Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 09/04/2003). His brother, SM, maintained that the attack on Sullivan and murder of Rattanajurathaporn was 'a robbery motivated crime. I found out later that it was a homosexual beat' (Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 09/04/03). Whilst both brothers denied the attack on Rattanajurathaporn was homophobically motivated, they found it hard to explain their access to and use of dangerous weapons, including a baton and claw hammer, in the fatal assault (Tomsen, 2002:39). In a statement tendered to the Coronial Inquest, an informant reported one of the alleged perpetrators telling him that Bondi cliffs was the 'most active beat and the most lucrative because all the yuppies that lived nearby were wealthy. Therefore the yuppie gafs⁸³ that went to the beat were likely to have a lot of money' (Coronial Inquest transcripts, 2005, Exhibit 24, MD's statement).

No doubt aware of media coverage on the 'gay hate gangs', many of the

⁸² Matthew Davis was convicted, along with two others (DM and SM), for the murder of Kritchikorn Rattanajurathaporn.

⁸³ One of the men convicted of a 'gay hate' murder and asked to give evidence at the Coronial Inquest, reported referring to gay men as 'gafs' – 'We called them gafs, as slang for fag backwards' (Coronial Inquest transcripts, 2005, Exhibit 24, MD's Statement).

suspects were keen to distance themselves, not only from the gang aspect, but also from 'hatred' and the identity 'gay hater' as the following three examples illustrate. When questioned by Paul Lakatos⁸⁴ regarding his feelings towards gay men who inhabited beats in 1989 - 1990, one of Rattanjurathaporn's killers, SM, replied, 'I never gave it much thought. I just started an apprenticeship. I was working' (Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 09/04/03). When asked if he had 'very bad feelings' against gay men, SM hedged around, 'Well not hatred, no, I mean I didn't ... I wasn't ... they weren't really ... as young guys I didn't want to know much about that sort of thing but I wasn't ... there was no hatred as such' (Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 09/04/03). When the Coroner asked another of the men involved in Rattanjurathaporn's death why they chose to make him a victim, DM responded with what comes across as a very rehearsed answer, 'I'm just thinking, it sounds bad but he just ... he just happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time' (Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 09/04/03). Attributing the crime to 'a mixture of youth and alcohol', DM was keen to dissociate himself, not only from the murder, but also from a gay-hate identity insisting, 'It just happened to be the way it was that night. But that's not who I was'. When asked who he was, DM replied, 'I was a decent young man, your Worship, even though that might sound crazy considering ... given where I am today and what I did to end up in prison. I was a decent young man for the most part' (Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 09/04/03).

The inability of investigators to positively link thousands of hours of intercepted conversations with the suspects provides another level of anonymity to the 'gay hate gang' members. In a secretly recorded tape tendered to the inquest two muffled voices are heard discussing a number of gay bashings. Patrick Saidi, representing the New South Wales Police Service, alleged one of the voices on the tape belonged to the witness, RM, a member of the 'Alexandria 8'. RM repeatedly denied that the voice on the tape was his, including when there was a reference to 'Mrs. M' as 'Mum'. During cross-examination, when asked whose voice it is, he responded, 'I can't recognize it at all' (Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 09/04/03). RM also denied any involvement in other gay bashings or knowing anybody who regularly went gay bashing (Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 09/04/03). Saidi accused RM of 'lying all morning' and 'having this inquest on',

⁸⁴ Paul Lakatos was the Barrister assisting the Crown.

asserting, 'I'm going to suggest that you have deliberately misled this Coronial Inquest in terms of your participation in the conversation with Mr. H. and that you well and truly know it was you in that conversation' (Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 09/04/03). Whilst Lakatos, Saidi, and police investigators have identified the voice as belonging to RM, without an admission from him, the police have not yet been able to 'prove' that this is the case.

What, then, am I to make of such so-called 'confessions'? I listen to disembodied voices on tape, confessing dreadful crimes, yet I do not have access to the all important body of the confessing subject. In other words, we have a confession on tape, but we do not know for sure whose confession it is. This confession operates here as a free-floating signifier. A confession in search of a confessor! Without the physical presence of the confessor, the interlocutor has a narrative but no protagonist, a crime but no identifiable criminal. Never is a confession rendered more visible as entirely the product of the one who listens (in this case) than in these tapes tendered to the inquest. For the tellers provide vital information but no materiality; they give us a vision of events, without becoming visible themselves.

This situation is echoed in the failure to charge some of the 'persons of interest' with gay-related assaults, despite repeated and convincing eye-witness testimonies. When 'Mr. Brown' identified DM as one of the men who assaulted and robbed him in December 1989 in South Bondi, DM denied the allegation, claiming that it was a case of 'mistaken identity' (Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 09/04/03). 'Mr. Brown' also identified Sean Cushman from photographs in relation to this attack, yet Cushman denied it, asking, 'Well, why wasn't I charged?' (Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 10/04/03). In relation to the assault of Robert Tate at Campbell Parade in November 1989, an offence that he was charged for, Cushman maintained that he had been 'wrongly identified' (Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 10/04/03). When asked why a person called Robert Jewell would claim that 'the 'Bondi Boys' threw a pooffer off the cliff at South Bondi', Cushman said he had no idea (Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 10/04/03). Likewise, when 'Mr. Smith' identified Cushman as one of the two main assailants in the January 1990 attack, claiming that he had said, 'I'm going to throw you over the side', Cushman denied the allegation (Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 10/04/03).

When told that he had been identified in relation to another gay-related assault in Paddington in May 1991, and that the victim's description matched his appearance at the time – 'a tall blond male [with] a cropped flat-top haircut' – Cushman, once again, said it was a case of mistaken identity (Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 10/04/03). As the inquest proceedings demonstrate, despite the eye-witness identifications and without further corroborating evidence, Cushman's claim of 'mistaken identity' can not be easily refuted.

It is hardly surprising, then, that Cushman was keen to shield his identity from the gaze of media cameras at the inquest. As he entered and exited the State Coroner's office Cushman put on dark sunglasses, pulled up the grey hooded sweatshirt that he had been carrying and attempted to cover his face with his hands and arm. At one stage he waved away a photographer from the *Sydney Morning Herald* who was most persistent about capturing his image (Callaghan, 2007a:225). In one of the photographs that did appear in the *Sydney Morning Herald* ('Woman denies saying she had role in gay bashing', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 April 2003), Cushman's face is covered by his hooded sweatshirt and dark glasses whilst his hand is reaching out towards the camera lens as if to get rid of it. In another of the images Cushman's face is partially hidden by his arm which is raised protectively, once again in an attempt to hide his identity (Lamont, 2003, p. 6).

Barring limited publicity at the start of the inquest, and partial images of Cushman during proceedings, the alleged perpetrators remain, largely, unseen and unnamed. Out of the eight 'persons of interest' to appear before the coroner, only four are publicly identified in media reports, namely, Sean Cushman, Matthew Davis, Justin King and Merlyn McGrath. The two brothers involved in Rattanjurathaporn's murder (SM and DM), and two of the so-called 'Alexandria 8' (RM and AF) have had their identities suppressed. When the perpetrators do appear, they are subsumed into the loose, vague and generic 'gay hate gang' category. The mainstream media's mobilization of this amorphous category signals a number of key points. Firstly, the sexuality of the victims – men frequenting a beat – held more currency in news reports as a media frame through which to narrate the crimes. The presumed 'gay-ness' of the victim group became the identifying tag and pivotal frame through which the narrative was

told. Secondly, the 'gay hate gang' category fails to identify or make explicit the perpetrators' own sexuality, thus showing its normative and unmarked nature. Thirdly, the 'gay hate gang' category tells us little about the members of such a group, particularly in terms of other sociological factors such as gender or ethnic and class background. Throughout the media coverage and inquest proceedings, many of the 'persons of interest' are not publicly identified for a variety of reasons. Hence they remain mostly unseen and unnamed. This anonymity also serves to position the perpetrators as just 'everyday', 'ordinary' people. However, as I have demonstrated throughout this chapter, the construction of the perpetrators as 'normal' everyday Aussie's – 'like us' – operates simultaneously alongside their production as 'gang members', a reading which symbolically distances them from mainstream Australian culture. Their representation is thus based on an irresolvable contradiction which seems to allow for symbolic, if not literal, punishment on the one hand, while carefully covering the traces of endemic cultural homophobia on the other.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated how the discursive production of the perpetrators in the mainstream media pivots on a contradiction whereby they are simultaneously represented as being both a part of Australian society yet also alien to it. There are a number of factors which suggest that the perpetrators actions are, to some degree, socially sanctioned within mainstream Australian culture. The media's insistence on focusing on the sexuality of the victims, as opposed to interrogating the sociological backgrounds of the suspects, shifts the focus away from the perpetrators and onto the 'gay' Otherness of the victims. The choice of Sean Cushman – a white, Australian male – as the archetypal representative of the 'Bondi Boys' also serves to further normalize the group, as does the trivialization of their crimes as the 'high jinks' of a 'misspent youth'. However, this normalizing process occurs at the same time that the perpetrators are being symbolically distanced from the wider community because of their demonization as a criminal minority, in particular, as members of 'gay hate youth gangs'.

The following chapter 'The Victims' also undertakes a critical discourse analysis. This time, however, the focus is on constructions of the victims in media, legal and judicial sources. In particular, it analyzes the ways in which the victims were Othered by the perpetrators and also within public discourses. In examining dramatic shifts in representations of the victims, I argue that they have moved from a site of being illegitimate 'non bodies' to currently being positioned as 'bodies that matter', bodies worthy of public recognition and mourning. Whilst such a reading may, on the surface at least, appear wholly positive and unproblematic, there are a number of tensions in the ways the victims are re/presented. Not only do the victims continue to be symbolically Othered, but the crimes against them are frequently represented as spectacular and extraordinary acts of violence rather than as examples of entrenched, everyday homophobia.

Whilst I argue in the following chapter that the media representations of the victims have shifted over time, from the late 1980s to the turn of the 21st century, I have not been able to find a similar trend in relation to representations of the perpetrators. Although both the perpetrators and victims were frequently represented in the same sources (for example, mainstream and gay news media sites and legal and police transcripts from the Coronial Inquest), there only appear to be dramatic changes in the ways that the victims have been discursively re/presented. In other words, the same set of contradictions relating to the perpetrators' constructions, that I have identified in this chapter, are constant over time. Unlike the discursive constructions of the victims, those of the perpetrators do not change significantly.

Chapter Five – The Victims

Introduction

In this chapter I will undertake a critical discourse analysis of constructions of the 'gay gang murder' victims in media, book and legal sources. I will begin by examining how the perpetrators marked their victims as Other in two distinct ways. Firstly, they rendered them as abject bodies, and secondly, they produced them as confessing subjects who had to 'own' up to the 'crime' of homosexuality. I will then analyze the dramatic shifts in how the victims have been configured, from the site they occupied in the popular imaginary in the late 1980s, as illegitimate and disposable 'non bodies', to the site they currently occupy as lives that are, to some degree, publicly recognized and mourned, or to use Judith Butler's words, 'bodies that matter' (1993). The shifts in the mainstream media coverage that I will be examining are from three different time periods, namely, the late 1980s, the early 1990s, and the turn of the century. In the cases of Gilles Mattaini, Ross Warren and John Russell, the media coverage from the late 1980s and early 1990s either failed to cover these crimes or, on the rare occasions it did, was highly sensationalist. Although not very far removed time-wise from the other cases, Kritchikorn Rattanajathuraporn's murder did attract extensive and sympathetic media attention as it can be situated within a 'wave' of unexpected coverage on anti-gay hate crimes which occurred in 1990-1991. More recently, at the turn of the century, when all four cases were publicly linked by the investigation Operation Taradale and the Coronial Inquest which followed, the media coverage and books on the case have been much more sympathetic towards the victim group.

As I will argue throughout this chapter, although it is tempting to posit only one premise here, namely, that the discursive shift of the victims from 'non bodies' to 'bodies that matter' is wholly positive and completely unproblematic, such a claim is too simplistic and does not take into account numerous complexities. The key argument of this chapter is that whilst current discursive constructions of the 'gay' victims may not be as explicitly problematic as earlier renderings, the victims are still symbolically Othered. In many of the mainstream media and legal discourses about the 'gay gang murders', the crimes are represented as

exceptional or spectacular acts of violence rather than as ordinary, everyday violence which reflects endemic and entrenched societal homophobia. Thus the socio-cultural factors which contributed to such violence are, largely, trivialized and ignored.

Victims as Abject Other

Eyewitness testimonies and taped conversations of the suspects reveal the gang members' intense revulsion of homosexuals, or those perceived to be so. The perpetrators' views of their victims conjure up metaphors of waste and abjection. In a secretly recorded tape played to the Coronial Inquest, one of the suspects refers to a victim as a 'dirty fucking maggot [who] should have gone off the cliff that night' (Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 2005). Not only is the victim equated with a grub or larva, but their abject status is emphasized further by the suspects' subsequent comment, 'but he didn't [go off the cliff]... we went down and put out a cigarette butt on his head' (Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 2005).

In another bugged conversation tendered to the inquest, the abject status of the victims is again made evident, this time in explicitly misogynist terms:

Voice 2: I've never been fishing, man.

Voice 4: I have, I used to go fishing at Bondi.

Voice 2: Yeah, fishing for poofers in the sea. Fuckin' use 'em as bait, throw the cunts off the cliff.

(Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 2005).

In this conversation, 'poofers' are characterized both as waste material – fishing bait – and as 'cunts' which demonstrates a popular 'misreading of the signifier 'homosexual' [as] that of 'the feminized'" (Lunny, 2003:314). Such 'symbolic feminization' – and misogyny – is a common characteristic of anti-gay violence, with numerous critics and advocates noting the prevalence of misogynist sentiments in homophobic attacks⁸⁵.

As the following intercepted conversation between 'persons of interest' in the

⁸⁵ For example, Karen Franklin (2004), 'Enacting Masculinity: Antigay Violence and Group Rape as Participatory Theater', in *Sexuality Research & Social Policy*, April 2004, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 25-40).

Coronial Inquest reveals, the 'overt' sexuality of gay people was also employed as a justification for homophobic violence:

AF: I pushed a poof off a cliff at Bondi. I hate poofers.

MB: What, into the water?

AF: Nah, onto the fucking rocks.

Inf: Why do you hate poofs? It's not as if they have sex in front of you.

AF: They do, they do it in the park, at school and in the Cross.

(Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 2005, Statement dated 25/03/91 tendered to Page's Brief of Evidence)

Such attitudes are, of course, not only held by the perpetrators of anti-gay violence. Attributing a hatred or disapproval of gays and lesbians to visible expressions of sexuality stems from the dominant (hetero)normative assumption that homosexuality is appropriate only in the private domain. As numerous social geographers have argued, such ideas stem from a belief that the public sphere is not sexualized, but is in fact asexual, a misconception that refuses to acknowledge that heterosexuality is celebrated in public discourses and sites as the dominant ideology (for example, Bell, 1995; Duncan, 1996; Valentine, 1996). Diane Richardson and Hazel May observe, 'While lesbian and gay relations are expected to be conducted in private spaces, expressions of heterosexuality are everyday occurrences within the public arena' (1999:321). Gail Mason echoes this point, contending, 'We need look no further than the popular and longstanding refrain against those who 'flaunt' their homosexuality to realize that the very suggestion that homosexuality *can* be flaunted is itself the product of the social and political hush that has historically enveloped the subject of same-sex sexuality' (2002:24).

A literal reading of the Bondi cliffs cases and the way in which the victims were cast off the headland and into the sea indicates, then, that they were conceptualized as waste material, on par with the legendary Bondi sewage. Rendered Other by their assailants, the victims are 'expelled' into the ocean, along with bodily refuse that flows out from the sewage outlets, as if they too are nothing more than 'a piece of filth, waste, or dung' (Kristeva, 1982:2). Bestowed with notions of pollution, the (human) 'fag' is positioned as both a receptacle for waste, such as cigarette butts, and as an unwanted object, suitable for disposal. Thus, as (sexually) ambiguous bodies / texts, the victims can also be situated as polluting objects. In *Purity and Danger* (1969) Mary Douglas suggests that bodies

which disrupt the dominant social order are inscribed with notions of (cultural) unruliness and disorder: 'A polluting person ... has developed some wrong conditions or simply crossed over some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone' (1969:4). Trespassing across boundaries, marginalized sexual practices, such as homosexuality, are characterized as unclean and dirty, and thus 'constitute a site of danger and pollution' (Butler, 1990:168). Like other devalorized bodies, such as the Jew and the witch, the homosexual operates as 'an Object of fear and fascination. *Abjection itself*' (Kristeva, 1982:185). Hence, when a group of teenagers throw one, two, three, four, five, six men – maybe more – over the Bondi cliffs, and into the rocks and water below, the victims are rendered abject as the assailants' own words demonstrate – 'dirty fucking maggots', 'poofers [who] don't deserve to live', 'fish bait', 'cunts' (Coronial Inquest Transcripts).

The source of this pollution and danger – the homosexual – threatens the dominant order. For the sexual order to be maintained, 'homosexuality must be expelled from the realms of respectable sexual practices. Naming it as dirty provides the rationale for this to happen' (Mason, 2002:45). The fear of being 'polluted' by 'fags' and 'dirty lesos' is, then, played out in acts of homophobic violence. In an analysis of the dirtiness attached to the lesbian subject, Mason argues that acts of homophobic violence directed at lesbians come from and reproduce established associations between lesbianism, dirt and physical pollution: 'Dirty bodies and dirty sexual acts induce a sense of disgust. This disgust manifests in a fear of contamination, a fear that one may be polluted through close proximity to the source of the dirt' (2002:46).

In the Bondi cliffs case the expulsion of the polluting objects, gay men, extended into the realm of murder. Whilst it is almost certain that Gilles Mattaini and Ross Warren are indeed both dead, currently the 'gay gang murder' case has offered up only two corpses: John Russell's body, which was located in a rock pool at the bottom of the South Bondi cliffs, and Kritchikorn Rattanjurathaporn's body, wedged in rocks underwater at the bottom of Mackenzie's Point. In Meaghan Morris's essay, 'On the Beach: A Bicentennial Poem', she observes that the tag, 'on the beach' 'is an old expression meaning beached: shipwrecked, destitute, bankrupt, abandoned, washed up' (1992b:107). With both bodies, literally,

washed up 'on the beach', the corpses in this cultural narrative signify 'the most sickening of wastes ... the utmost of abjection' (Kristeva, 1982:3-4). For as Nick Mansfield argues:

... the physical reality of the corpse brings together life and death, presence and absence, love and repulsion, happiness and dismay in an endless, chaotic, alternation and confusion ... It is the uncertainty of the life/death dividing line, literally in our faces (2000:84).

With the two corpses in the 'gay gang murder' case symbolizing the most extreme form of abjection, the marginalized sexuality of the victims *in itself* also renders them abject, as does the language used by the perpetrators to describe their victims' sexual orientation. I have already noted the associations between 'lesbians' and 'dirt', as epitomized in the popular insult, 'dirty leso' and 'dirty lesbian' (Mason, 2002:44-47). The terms 'fag' and 'faggot', which were regularly used by the alleged perpetrators to refer to their victims, are also endowed with notions of pollution and waste. According to Aaron Peckham (2005), 'faggot' originally referred to a bundle of sticks used as kindling for fires. From this derived a meaning of any unwanted part of a product (wood, cloth or meat) or an off-cut, which became known as a 'fag-end'. Fag, as a colloquial term for a cigarette, originally carried this meaning. The use of the term faggot or fag as a derogatory term for gay men is rumored to have come from the fact that when homosexual men were burned at the stake for sodomy faggots were used as kindling. An alternative on this reading is that homosexual men themselves were used as kindling.

This process of abjection is not remarkable in itself. One would expect homophobic gangs to use negative and demeaning terms – such as 'fag', 'cunt' and 'maggot' – to describe gay men. What is important here is that the terms the perpetrators used to describe their victims were so familiar to the wider population that they needed no further explanation or elaboration. Hence, at that time and in that location, reading gay men as the abject Other was a familiar subject position extending well beyond the gangs who preyed on the men. However, it is worth pointing out that merely to be aware of and to know the demeaning terms is not necessarily to agree with them. Whilst the physical and verbal violence the perpetrators resorted to operates as the most obvious

example of this abject Othering, the regulatory power of heteronormativity reached far beyond the bruised and battered bodies at the bottom of the Bondi cliffs and into the wider social body. This is evident in the institutional neglect that greeted the victims and which failed to competently investigate or publicize the crimes committed against them.

In *The Production Of Space*, Henri Lefebvre describes a space of waste which 'devours' such abject and devalorized objects and people:

The *mundus*: a sacred or accursed place in the middle of the Italiot township. A pit, originally – a dust hole, a public rubbish dump. Into it were cast trash and filth of every kind, along with those condemned to death, and every newborn baby whose father declined to 'raise' it ... In its ambiguity it encompassed the greatest foulness and the greatest purity, life and death, fertility and destruction, horror and fascination (1991:242).

The metaphor of the *mundus*, a site of waste and ambiguity, can be mapped onto the physical sites from where the men disappeared and where two of the bodies were located – Marks Park, the coastal walkway and the Pacific Ocean. Whilst two bodies were 'beached' at the bottom of the cliffs, no traces of the bodies nor clothing belonging to Mattaini and Warren have ever been located. The absence of Warren's body has been attributed to the strong currents. When a tides expert checked the records for the night of 21 July 1989 when Warren disappeared, he concluded that 'in the stiff currents, Warren's body would have been swept into the churning Pacific within a few hours' (Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 03/04/03). This failure to locate the missing bodies or other tangible evidence such as items of clothing signals the mundus-like nature of the crime site, and serves as further evidence of the ungrievability of these men's lives at the time of their disappearance.

As a metaphor, the mundus can also be used to describe the nature of the police investigation. So effective was the Bondi mundus in erasing any traces of these individuals – and in failing to identify the perpetrators – that much of the 'evidence' which could have led to convictions was also, quite literally, lost. As well as two bodies disappearing into the breakers below, crucial exhibits and files pertaining to the cases were 'lost' in the police stations they had

purportedly originated from. This loss of evidence, combined with the absence of police reports, inadequate investigations, and scarcity of convictions demonstrates 'the institutional inability of the state to recognize particular acts as instances of violence' (Moran & Skeggs, 2004:160).

This failure to acknowledge the violence, to take it seriously and constitute it as a crime, makes evident the way in which the victims were conceptualized as less than human, or in Butler's terms, 'bodies that do not matter'. As Butler has suggested in relation to public responses to the post 9-11 losses of life in Iraq and Afghanistan, and to HIV/AIDS related deaths, certain populations are highly valued and thus grievable, whilst for those devalued Others, public mourning is not allowed. In other words, for those populations which are not considered to be 'like us', there is nothing to grieve over 'because it has never lived, that is, it has never counted as a life at all' (Butler, 2008b:2). In the case of the Bondi cliffs murders, in Australian society during the period in question, with key institutions refusing to read and respond to such crimes as crimes, the perpetrators' violent Othering of their victims was implicitly sanctioned and socially legitimized, which meant that the victims' very lives could be perceived as un-grievable.

The Confession: "What are you?"

In the previous section I have demonstrated a variety of ways in which the victims were rendered as abject Others. In the following section I will show that the victims were also Othered by being produced as confessing subjects. The fact that the assailants adopted the role of the police to interrogate their 'confessing' subjects / victims, indicates a sense of the 'legitimacy' they claimed whilst committing their violent crimes. Whilst arguably the perpetrators could 'play' at being police officers without this 'play' being socially legitimized, I argue that such a role was in fact implicitly sanctioned by official bodies because of the institutional and state neglect, specifically police inaction, in response to the crimes at the time they occurred.

The following excerpt is taken from an intercepted conversation involving a

'person of interest' to the Coronial Inquest. At the time of this statement the narrator⁸⁶ was in custody for another Sydney beat murder.

We got him on the ground and we said, 'what are you?' And first he said he was a copper. We said, 'Show us your badge, c---', and he goes, 'Oh, I haven't got it. It's at home'. I went f---ing whack. 'what are you, c---?' Said, 'An ambulance driver', so I f---ing cracked him again and I said, 'what are you, c---?', and he goes, 'I'm a taxidriver.' I said f-- -bang, bang, bang, 'You lied to me three times c---, what are you?' And he goes, 'I'm a homosexual'. F---. Boot. Oh, heaps bad, mate, stresses me out how they lie to me all the time.

(Intercepted conversation, Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 2005)

In analyzing this narrative I will use Michel Foucault's work on confessions to show how a specific subject – a beatable and disposable homosexual identity – is being discursively produced. The role of the confession in Western society has been comprehensively described by Foucault in *The History of Sexuality Volume 1* where he notes that all confessions take place within a power relationship, wherein the power resides with the interlocutor, not with the one who confesses (1976:60-61). The confessor produces the information that the interlocutor demands and the interpretation of what this material means. Thus, the confession is always in the control of the interlocutor, for it is the interlocutor's text, driven and desired by the one who asks, not the one who reluctantly or eagerly tells:

'What are you?'

Four times the assailant questions his victim:

'What are you?'

'What are you?'

'What are you?'

'What are you?'

The victim responds to the questions with a range of possible occupations:

'I'm a cop. I'm an ambulance driver. I'm a taxi-driver'.

One can assume these are not the answers the assailant is looking for. This question and answer routine is more of a game, albeit a violent, potentially fatal

⁸⁶ As this individual was convicted of manslaughter when he was a 'child' within Section 3(1) of the Children (Criminal Proceedings) Act 1987 (NSW), publication of his name is prohibited.

one. It is not the victim's occupation that is being sought here but rather an identity, specifically a sexual identity, which can then be used as the reason, and indeed the justification, for further violence. Ironically, the line of questioning that the assailant is recounting has overtones of a heavy-handed police interrogation or merciless prosecutor searching for the 'truth' about a victim's identity. It is almost as if the victim is wasting the time of the assailant / interrogator by 'lying' about what he is. The line of questioning in this assault reproduces or echoes the ritualistic confession which in Foucault's words 'unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish ...' (1976:61).

While the victim – the confessing subject – is producing the discourse, or 'the truth of sex' (Foucault, 1976:57), the assailant, in the position of the authority figure, plays the role of priest, doctor, psychiatrist, interrogator. In this reversal, the assailant is in the position of power. In Foucault's words, 'the agency of domination does not reside in the one who speaks (for it is he who is constrained), but in the one who listens and says nothing; not in the one who knows and answers, but in the one who questions and is not supposed to know' (1976:62). During this interrogation the victim is positioned as the guilty party, the 'crime' that he has to 'confess' being that of homosexuality. The confession – 'I'm a homosexual' – is not, however, a spontaneous or freely offered declaration. Produced by violence and threats, 'extracted from the body', the victim 'is forced to confess' (Foucault, 1976:59). It is, of course, a no-win interrogation. If he 'lies' about his homosexuality, the victim is beaten. When he does 'confess' his homosexuality, he is beaten for *being* homosexual. Thus, the narrator's attempt to 'fix' the victim's (homo)sexuality and mark it as deviant serves to reinforce the binary logic of heteronormativity whereby the heterosexual is in opposition to, and privileged over, the homosexual.

The crime story that wasn't

September 1985.

Gilles Mattaini goes for an afternoon jog along the Bondi-Tamarama walkway. He is never seen again.

Play it again.

July 1989.

Ross Warren drives off up Oxford Street in the Bondi direction and, like Mattaini before him, vanishes into thin air.

Play it again.

November 1989.

John Russell is found dead in a pool of blood at the bottom of the Bondi cliffs. Play it again.

July 1990.

Kritchikorn Rattanjaturathaporn's badly beaten body is discovered wedged in rocks below the coastal pathway.

Two people missing from Australia's most iconic coastlines, a suspicious death and a murder, all within striking distance of a known gay beat. This set of events bears all the hallmarks of a 'newsworthy' crime story. As media theorists have observed, news content is produced and filtered mainly through journalists' sense of 'newsworthiness', in other words, what makes a good story. The central elements of newsworthiness, which can be seen in the 'gay gang murder' case, include immediacy, dramatization, personalization, titillation, continuity, and novelty (Ericson et al, 1989 and 1991; Chibnall, 1977; Hall et al, 1978). Yet the events which took place at the Bondi cliffs were not produced as a newsworthy crime story until December 2001, more than a decade later, when the cases were officially connected.

Mattaini's disappearance received no media attention until seventeen years after he had set off on his fateful afternoon jog. His disappearance was finally publicized in August 2002 when police from Operation Taradale appealed to the public for information. As the original report on Mattaini's disappearance was 'wrongly filed', a police investigation never took place, which in turn meant that

the police did not have information to pass on to the media. The absence of coverage on Mattaini's case can, then, be attributed to the 'symbiotic' relationship which exists between the press and the police, specifically, the media's dependence on police sources for leads. Ironically, it was media attention – as opposed to police intelligence from other sources – which led to the re-investigation of Mattaini's case. Following a news report relating to the other Bondi cliffs cases, a friend of Mattaini's came forward to report him missing (Kamper, 2002:1,4).

John Russell's body was discovered in November 1989, yet his death did not receive extensive media coverage until December 2001 when his 'fall' was re-enacted. In the weeks immediately after Russell's death there were a few brief reports in local newspapers including one article which appeared in the gay press, the *Sydney Star Observer*, appealing for information from the gay community ('Mystery death of gay man near Bondi beat', *Sydney Star Observer*, 12 January 1990, p. 3). According to Russell's father, Ted Russell, within a fortnight of John's death, a story on Sydney's gay murders, which included an interview with his other son, Peter, was screened on *A Current Affair* (Callaghan, 2007a:86). In 1991, two years after his death, Russell was listed in a 'body count' of possible Sydney gay-hate murder victims ('Crime unit hunts gay bashers', *The Daily Telegraph* [Sydney], 6 April 1991, p. 13). However this appears to have been the extent of the coverage Russell's death received in the mainstream media until the turn of the century.

The limited coverage on Russell's death is surprising given the popularity of crime stories and the frequency of news reports relating to bodies being recovered from Sydney's coastline⁸⁷. The iconic nature of the crime scene alone has often been used to frame far more 'innocent' events. Consider, for example, an innocuous event such as a sand-modelling competition which was considered newsworthy purely because of its Bondi backdrop⁸⁸. More recently, a number of Australian newspapers covered a cliff top 'accidental death'

⁸⁷ For example, 'Body 18m Under Sea', *The Daily Telegraph* [Sydney], 26 July 2004, p. 1, 4. See also 'Tourist falls off Bondi cliff' (*The Daily Telegraph* [Sydney], 12 April 2004, p. 5) and 'Fatal cliff fall' (*Canberra Times*, 13 April 2004, p. 6).

⁸⁸ 'Death in the sands of Bondi', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 January 1991, p. 2. Whilst the title of this article suggests that this is a report of death, it is in fact an article on a sand-modelling competition.

involving a man who slipped off a rock ledge at Mackenzie's Point. Reports on this incident highlighted the location, with descriptions of the cliff top walk as 'picturesque' ('Fatal cliff fall', *Canberra Times*, 13 April 2004, p. 6); and 'scenic' ('Walkers falls 15m into ocean', *Illawarra Mercury*, 12 April 2004, p. 3). The headlines relating to these incidents – 'Tourist falls off Bondi cliff' (*The Daily Telegraph* [Sydney], 12 April 2004, p. 5) and 'Fatal cliff fall' (*Canberra Times*, 13 April 2004, p. 6) – suggest that it was the location of the fall which contributed to its 'newsworthiness'. Yet despite the iconic status of the crime scene, Russell's death failed to attract extensive mainstream media attention. Given that the police play an active role in determining which stories are passed on to journalists, it is likely that their 'downplaying' of the murder possibility contributed to the mainstream press ignoring this crime. The first inquest would not have rated as a particularly newsworthy item given its brevity (35 minutes), the common finding 'death by misadventure', and the fact that Russell was an 'everyday' victim, not a tourist, public identity or celebrity.

Undertaking searches in Sydney and national newspapers for the two-month period following Russell's death, I discovered the crime story which dominated was that of John Wayne Glover, dubbed the 'Granny Killer' and the 'Monster of Mosman'⁸⁹. On the hierarchy of victims, Glover's targets – all elderly women from Sydney's upmarket North Shore – would have ranked highly. Although elderly women are, generally, mostly invisible in social discourses, the fact that Glover's victims resided in a highly affluent suburb and some of them had close links to Australian public figures, contributed to the extensive coverage these cases received. In *Journalism and Justice*, Peter Grabosky and Paul Wilson observe that 'harm which befalls 'respectable' citizens, children or the elderly will receive more coverage than incidents involving more marginal members of society' (1989:13). In this implicit hierarchy of victims in news reporting, some victims are characterized as 'innocent', while other more marginalized groups, such as sex workers, are depicted as somehow 'deserving' of their fate (for example, Young, 1996). As Noel Sanders argues, some victims are clearly 'privileged' over others:

⁸⁹ Between March 1990 and March 1991 Glover killed six elderly women and assaulted others in the lower North Shore suburbs of Sydney.

Out of many children who disappear without trace in Australia each year, the question would arise as to why the disappearance of Samantha Knight in Sydney in 1987 should have become a major media event. As Grabosky and Wilson pointed out, if a traumatic event involves a Koori, such media attention is unlikely to eventuate. But Samantha Knight, whose image was circulated as an 'artist's impression' throughout New South Wales, was a Young Talent Time Aryan 'latch-key' child, and her image, later reconstructed as a mannequin and exhibited by police, was everywhere (1995:126).

In the so-called 'Granny Killings, the suspect's modus operandi indicated that this was the work of a serial killer which only fuelled the story's popularity. For in the very month that Russell's body was located, Glover murdered three of his six victims, two of them within a twenty-four hour period. It is hardly surprising, then, that this investigation took precedence over other suspicious deaths, including that of Russell, especially considering that, at this stage, the 'gay gang murders' were yet to be linked.

Sensational Reporting: "GAY TV MAN'S HEARTBREAK"

In contrast to the absence of coverage on Mattaini's disappearance, and limited publicity on Russell's death, the disappearance of Ross Warren in late July 1989 received considerable mainstream media attention with Sydney based newspapers providing regular reports, sometimes daily. The Warren case received 'blitz coverage' in the *Illawarra Mercury*, with every movement of those connected to the case and its investigation being reported⁹⁰. This level of coverage differs dramatically from that in the gay press, which failed to cover the story at all.

The extensive mainstream media coverage that the case attracted can be attributed to Warren's status as the WIN Television newsreader and weatherman. Warren's public persona, like that of other television personalities, centered around notions of accessibility and familiarity produced largely through

⁹⁰ In the space of one month, the *Illawarra Mercury* published three front-page cover stories (26 July 1989, 27 July 1989, 31 July 1989); a feature article on 'Missing Persons' which documented the Warren case (2 August 1989); a two-page editorial; numerous 'letters to the editor' (5 August 1989, 18 August 1989); police appeals for information (17 August 1989); and regular updates on the case (for example, 28 July 1989, 29 July 1989).

the direct address mode and entry via the TV monitor into the domestic sphere of the home (Marshall, 1997; Ellis, 1982; Brunsdon and Morley, 1978). This was particularly evident in the days immediately following his disappearance when South Coast fans – described as 'worried', 'distressed' and 'grieving' – flooded the TV station for more information (Treasure, 1989:3). Given the 'phantasmatic relationship' that exists between TV viewers and news personalities, whereby 'people who scarcely know their own neighbors are convinced that they know the newscasters' (Stam, 1983:38-39), it is not altogether unexpected that Warren's disappearance generated such public anxiety and mass media coverage.

Initially the news reports presented Warren as an exemplary character, a wholesome lad, with a strong work ethic. *Mercury* TV writer, Annette Sharp, for example, described Warren as 'the weatherman with the toothy smile, carnations and pastel bow ties' and 'the fresh-faced Queensland boy' (Treasure, 1989:3). Chris Jeremy, who had given Warren his first on-air break, described Warren as 'a very pleasant young man. He always said he was either going to be the Peter Faiman of production or the Brian Henderson of the 1990s. He was capable of doing both' (Treasure, 1989:3). These testimonies were strengthened by glowing character references from WIN TV colleagues who described Warren as 'extremely conscientious' (Treasure, 1989:1) and his failure to turn up for work as 'most uncharacteristic' (Morri, 1989:2).

In the days before Warren's homosexuality was disclosed, there were numerous allusions to a secret in his background. The references to a set of undisclosed nocturnal 'habits', equally vague 'personal reasons' for apparently staging his own disappearance, and criticisms that some important 'information' was being withheld, can all be read as veiled references to his (homo)sexuality. These insinuations were confirmed when it was reported that on the night of his disappearance Warren had gone to a bar in the Oxford Hotel at Taylor Square, and visited other bars in the Oxford Street vicinity ('Police patrol coast for Warren', *Illawarra Mercury*, 29 July 1989, p. 5). Oxford Street is famous both nationally and internationally as Sydney's gay precinct, while the Oxford Hotel is known by many Sydney-siders as a popular gay bar.

These revelations were followed by the most notable use of 'outing'⁹¹ in the Bondi Cliffs coverage which occurred when the tabloid-style *Illawarra Mercury* declared on its front page, 'Gay TV man's heartbreak: BROKEN AFFAIR KILLED WARREN' (31 July 1989, p. 1). While the Australian mainstream media have generally *not* reported the sexual preferences of public figures, the tabloid press have occasionally 'outed' individuals in the interest of selling papers (Scahill, 2001:188). In this report Warren is described as 'a member of the gay community spending time in the gay bars of Sydney's Oxford Street', whilst his previous partnership is specifically designated 'a homosexual relationship' and a 'gay love affair' ('Gay TV man's heartbreak: BROKEN AFFAIR KILLED WARREN', *Illawarra Mercury*, 31 July 1989, p. 1). The continued emphasis on Warren's sexuality positions homosexuality as something that is different to that of the 'general population'. As Simon Watney has pointed out, not only is the very notion of the 'general public' massively heterosexualized, but so too is the news media, a characteristic which is not generally noticed by most heterosexually identified viewers and readers (1987:28-29). Whilst the *Mercury's* production of Warren as a deviant fuelled homophobic responses from readers, it was not without critics. Ann Reynolds, for example, wrote: 'Perhaps editor Peter Cullen should seek a position with the Melbourne *Truth*. I look forward to your headline: Heterosexual Man's Heartbreak May Have Caused His Death' (Cullen, 1989: 22).

The sensational reportage not only emphasized Warren's homosexuality at every opportunity but positioned it as a furtive 'after hours' existence which had been deliberately withheld: 'Every reporter and policemen working on the Warren case knew about the homosexual links ... For about seven days everybody kept the lid on the homosexual components of the case' (Cullen,

⁹¹ 'Outing', as a political strategy, originated in the United States during the late 1980s when activist groups such as ACT-UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) revealed the sexuality of closeted celebrities who were considered to be acting against the interests of the gay/lesbian and HIV/AIDS communities (Scahill, 2001:188). During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the 'outing' tactic was hotly debated within the Sydney gay community. Defenders of the practice argued that 'outing' exposed the hypocrisy of closeted public figures. Others saw the tactic as destructive and counter-productive, with some community groups, for example, the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby (GLRL), opposed to 'outing' public figures unless they were blatantly homophobic (Flynn, 2001:69). I am using the notion of 'outing' here to refer to recent politically motivated outings by gay activists. It is worth pointing out that the mainstream media have also frequently exposed gay men's sexuality in a most sensational manner for many decades. However, such exposés by the mainstream media are different from the politically motivated outings done by the gay community.

1989:14). Framing Warren's homosexuality as akin to a Pandora's Box led to an inference of duplicity as prior to the 'outing' Warren had 'passed' (as straight). Such commentary has shades of the gay 'double life' story, epitomized by Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). This narrative, as Richard Dyer puts it, 'has fixed an image of the gay man as a sparkling agreeable surface marking a hidden depravity, brilliant charm concealing a corrupt and sordid sexuality' (2002:80). Readers of the tabloid-style *Mercury* were particularly active in this narrative construction. Mrs. Thelma Linnett, for example, was 'surprised' to learn that 'the fresh, clean cut young man' was also a homosexual, suspected of leading an 'unnatural lifestyle' which involved 'an indulgence of perverted sexual activity for one's own self-gratification' (Linnett, 1989:10).

Warren's 'outing' led to an impassioned debate on the ethics of disclosing his sexuality. Central to both the criticisms and defences of the 'outing' was the notion that Warren's homosexuality was his 'private life' and therefore not a public concern. According to one reader, disclosing Warren's homosexuality would only operate to 'discredit his professional reputation and embarrass his co-workers and friends' (cited in Cullen, 1989:22). Such homophobic constructions assume 'a structural differentiation of 'personal life' from work, politics, and the public sphere' (Berlant and Warner, 1998), and thus emphasize the private as the legitimate home of sexual citizenship. In doing so, they exemplify the logic of heteronormativity which insists that only heterosexuality has a legitimate place in the public domain (Calhoun, 2000; Bell and Binnie, 2000; Berlant and Warner, 1998). I am using heteronormativity here to refer to 'the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent – that is, organized as a sexuality – but also privileged' (Berlant and Warner, 1998). As Gregory Herek has pointed out, when gay people make public what is relegated to the private, they are perceived as 'flaunting' their sexuality and thus violating the public/private divide (1992).

Significantly, Warren's homosexuality was also considered relevant to the police investigation, not because it raised the possibility that he had been killed by gay bashers, but rather that he – as a gay man with 'a love affair which went wrong'

– had killed himself. Such a stock narrative struck me as reminiscent of early cinematic representations where, however sympathetically they may be portrayed, gay characters are frequently assigned tragic endings – suicide, death, madness, and prison (Russo, 1981). In this instance, the break-up of a 'homosexual relationship' was presented as the catalyst, according to the police, for a 'jilted and deeply depressed' Warren to jump 'into a raging sea off rocks at Bondi Beach' ('Gay TV man's heartbreak: BROKEN AFFAIR KILLED WARREN', *Illawarra Mercury*, 31 July 1989, p. 1).

Police also posited the idea that Warren could have staged his own disappearance. They based this claim on the notion that because Warren was gay, he probably had AIDS. At this time, the collapsing of homosexuality with AIDS was very common as people living with HIV/AIDS were frequently blamed for their illness (Watney, 1987:8). Given such repressive media and official discourses, it was not unexpected, according to the police and the mainstream media, that Warren, as a member of a risk group population, would simply vanish. Not only was Warren held responsible for his disappearance, he was also accused of being selfish in 'choosing' to vanish and thereby causing grief to his family. Peter Cullen voiced these sentiments in his editorial: 'Nobody bothered to contemplate whether parental damage had ever been foremost in Warren's mind as he set out to do whatever he has done. Did the son at any stage think of the parents?' (Cullen, 1989:14). Yet, apparently no-one thought to ascertain if there was any likelihood that Warren would do this, or any evidence that he did. Although Warren's disappearance received plenty of coverage, then, in comparison with the other cases, it was mostly negative and focused upon a fixed understanding of his sexuality, which gave rise to lurid and fantastic stories rather than prompting a proper inquiry.

Un/seen violence

Throughout the 1980s the mainstream media's lack of interest in the Mattaini and Russell cases, and their sensational coverage of Warren, which focused primarily on his sexuality and not on the mystery of his disappearance, echoed the authorities' failure to adequately police Marks Park and to investigate such

crimes. This institutional neglect demonstrates how violence itself is defined and conceptualised differently depending on both the social context and social characteristics of the victim (Richardson and May, 1999). As Diane Richardson and Hazel May claim, 'how we understand and explain violence differently in relation to *who* the victim is rather than the circumstances in which the violence occurs raises the question of the social recognition and worth accorded certain individuals or social groups' (1999:309). Such issues are linked, then, to the degree in which specific individuals and social groups are constituted as human, and regarded as having 'lives worth living'⁹² (Proctor, 1995).

I have argued in a previous chapter that the violence the Marks Park victims encountered in the late 1980s and early 1990s was not generally regarded as violence because it was, for the most part, not investigated by police authorities or paid attention to by the mainstream media. Owing to popular social understandings of violence which are heavily (hetero)sexualised⁹³, the victims' social status as queers and their presence at a beat location rendered them as legitimate targets of, and for, violence. Owing to the lack of police investigations and the scarcity of media coverage on the Marks Park crimes it appears that such violence was considered more comprehensible, and by extension more acceptable, than if it had involved other individuals – who were not considered 'gay' – and also if it had occurred in a different context, i.e. not at a 'gay beat'. It could also be argued that not only was the violence not seen or regarded as violence but that it was literally *unseen* altogether. Not only did it take place in the black of the night, and in a relatively secluded location out of public view, but the institutional blindness to the events as they unfolded, also indicates that the crimes were, literally, out of sight and *unseen*.

Just as violence can be constructed as more or less intelligible depending on the social context and characteristics of the individual/s involved, the category 'victim' is also more pliable and nuanced than it may initially appear. As

⁹² Although the destruction of 'lives not worth living' is most commonly associated with the Nazi Party's Final Solution, as Robert Proctor has pointed out, such ideas did not originate with the Nazi Party but had been canvassed in legal and medical discourses since the end of World War 1, both in Germany and the United States of America (2003:413).

⁹³ As feminist critics (eg. Maynard & Win, 1997; Duncan, 1996; Plummer, 1995; Newburn & Stanko, 1994 and Bell, 1993) have argued, social understandings of violence are also heavily gendered.

Richardson and May (1999) have argued, victim characteristics directly influence understandings of violence, specifically in relation to the public and private binary, and also to notions of culpability and victimisation. Like other stigmatised groups, when they are classified as victims, gay men are unlikely to be constructed as 'innocent' victims' (Richardson and May, 1999:310). This was exemplified in the initial public responses to the AIDS epidemic in the United States where gay men (and/or injecting drug users, sex workers, black Africans, and Haitians) were cast as guilty and 'deserving' victims in opposition to the so-called 'innocent victims' – children, haemophiliacs, people who contracted HIV through blood transfusions, and women who contracted HIV from their male partners. Such social constructions have been critiqued by a number of national and international theorists (for example, Sendziuk, 2003; Sontag, 1991; Crimp, 1988; Treichler, 1988; Watney, 1987; Patton, 1990) who highlighted the way in which these dominant (mis)conceptions actively influenced the public, political, and bio/medical responses to AIDS.

Violent crimes involving gay victims, like other marginalized members of Australian society, are frequently under-reported in media sources. Stephen Tomsen has noted that:

... an ongoing series of brutal attacks on gay men in the Illawarra district of New South Wales in the mid-1980s would probably have invited intense political concern and media interest if another victim group were involved. But this violence went unnoticed even in the minds of most locals. (1997:101).

Similar sentiments were expressed by the TV presenter Derryn Hinch, in a rare programme devoted to Sydney's gay murders, who commented, 'If that had been a string of heterosexual murders there would have been an outcry ages ago' (quoted in Goddard, 1991:22). Tomsen has noted two exceptions to the media silence on gay victims: firstly, cases in which the victim has a higher than usual social status⁹⁴, and secondly, cases in which the circumstances of the crime and the details of the victim's lifestyle provoke media sensationalism⁹⁵.

⁹⁴ For example, the Adelaide law lecturer, Dr George Duncan.

⁹⁵ Tomsen notes here, for example, the killing of the Greek consul by male prostitutes in the early 1980s, and a spate of stabbing murders with gay victims which was dubbed the 'gay blade' case (1997:101). Another Sydney case that I would include in this category is that of the murder of the flamboyant gay millionaire, Ludwig Gertsch.

Yet, even in these cases, as I have shown with regard to the coverage of Warren, this attention is not usually directed at the circumstances of the victim's murder, but continues to emphasize only their sexuality and the supposedly 'unsavoury' location of the murders, namely, a gay beat.

Humanizing the victims: the 1990-1991 'anti-gay crime wave'

The coverage of the first three cases – Mattaini, Warren and Russell – is representative of how the Sydney mainstream media has treated the gay and lesbian community since the 1970s, 'with a mixture of hostility ... benign and titillated amusement and invisibility' (Scahill, 2001:189). In contrast, to the earlier lack of coverage relating to Mattaini and Russell and the sensational coverage on Warren, the murder of Kritchikorn Rattanjaturathaporn in July 1990 received extensive and serious attention in both the mainstream and gay press. The day after Rattanjaturathaporn's body was located, for example, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Daily Mirror* and *The Daily Telegraph* all ran stories on the cliff-top killing. Throughout July and August 1990, appeals to the gay community were printed in mainstream and gay newspapers. Regular updates on the progress of the case, for example, when the youths were charged, court appearances and trial proceedings, were also covered in both sites. There are two reasons for the extensive coverage on this case: firstly, Rattanjaturathaporn's status as a Thai national, and secondly, his case followed that of Richard Johnson's highly publicized 'gay hate' murder. In practically every news report, Rattanjaturathaporn was described as a 'Thai national', or alternately a 'Thai restaurant worker', a 'Thai kitchenhand', or a 'Thai student'. So strong was the association that newspaper headlines often simply referred to the case as the 'Thai Murder' (eg. 'Thai Murder', *Daily Mirror* [Sydney], 24 July 1990, p. 4). The emphasis on the victim's nationality, apart from serving as convenient shorthand, suggests that Australia's diplomatic relations with Thailand involved certain protocols for dealing with crimes involving foreign nationals.

Arguably, though, the major reason for Rattanjaturathaporn's murder attracting extensive media attention was one of timing. As Ericson et al. (1989) have

argued, the production of news does not occur in isolation from the events, institutions, and people who act as sources of and conduits for the production of news. Rattanajaturathaporn's death in July 1990 came in the wake of the highly publicized beat murder of Richard Johnson by the 'Alexandria 8' in January 1990. This case had served to put Sydney 'gay hate crimes' on the public agenda, owing to its particularly vicious nature, the number of offenders involved, and the fact that most of them were high school students at the time.

What was also different about the coverage of Rattanajaturathaporn's death in July 1990, in contrast to the earlier Bondi cliffs cases, was that it was narrated as a murder, and possibly a gay bashing, from the start, with initial police sources suggesting that Rattanajaturathaporn had been assaulted before being thrown over the cliff to his death (Kennedy & Henderson, 1990:7 and 'Hunt for clues in cliff killing', *Daily Mirror* [Sydney], 23 July 1990, p. 2). While some of the circumstances of Rattanajaturathaporn's death, for example, the injuries on his body, and the volume of blood left on the pathway, suggested 'foul play', it is telling to notice that equally suspicious factors in Russell's death and Warren's disappearance had been 'ignored' only a year before⁹⁶.

Before 1990, the Paddington police had effectively turned a blind eye to the homophobic violence occurring at Marks Park. Yet within days of Rattanajaturathaporn's death, police sources suggested it may be connected to a series of gay bashings in the area, and organized plainclothes police to patrol the clifftop pathway at night, in the hope of discovering new leads ('Clifftop Murder', *The Daily Telegraph* [Sydney], 24 July 1990, p. 7). Shortly after the initial media coverage and police patrol of the walkway, *The Eastern Herald* ran an article which 'outed' the clifftop walkway as a popular gay meeting place, and again raised the possibility that Rattanajaturathaporn's murder was a gay-related homicide (Horrigan, 1990:6). Homicide squad detectives also asked police in the eastern suburbs to forward on any reports of night-time attacks on people using the clifftop walkway ('Hunt for clues in cliff killing', *Daily Mirror* [Sydney], 23 July 1990, p. 2). In early August, with few leads in the case, the

⁹⁶ In Russell's case, the positioning of his body and the hair strands found in his hand indicated 'foul play'. In Warren's disappearance, the location of undisturbed car keys on the rocks after three days of heavy seas did not sit well with the police theory that he had slipped from the rocks, and left the keys behind.

police appealed directly to the gay community in mainstream papers and gay publications, and distributed leaflets to hotels and businesses in Oxford Street. In these appeals detectives asked people who may have been assaulted on the night of the murder, or whom had been the victim of previous attacks in the area, to come forward and help identify the perpetrators.

Whilst arguably such appeals were to elicit more information from Eastern Beaches beat users, they can also be viewed as a public relations exercise. As I noted in previous chapters, the New South Wales police have had an uneasy relationship with Sydney's gay and lesbian population which has resulted in a cynical and distrustful attitude towards the police. To publicize an appeal such as this one in both mainstream and gay newspapers signalled an intention not only to solve this specific crime, but also a demonstration of support for the gay community, particularly in the anti-violence area. Following these appeals, parents of school friends of the convicted men, and Jeffrey Sullivan, Rattanajaturathaporn's companion who survived the assault, came forward with critical 'intelligence' which led to the identification and subsequent arrest of the assailants. The convictions can, in part, be attributed to the extensive media attention which canvassed the 'gay bashing' possibility at an early stage, the more rigorous and competent police investigation, and the fact that there was a witness who could give evidence against his attempted murderers.

Not only was the sympathetic, extensive coverage on Rattanajaturathaporn's murder a far cry from the silence and hostility that had greeted the other victims, but it also operates as an example of how the Sydney mainstream media has, largely, responded to anti-gay homicides since 1990. The unprecedented mainstream 'blitz coverage' on Sydney's homophobic violence during 1990-1991, and again at the turn of the century, can be put down to a range of political shifts and events that have taken place in Sydney gay life and wider Australian culture since the late 1980s. These factors, which I examined in the 'Context/History' chapter, include the emergence of the 'gay hate crime' term and model; gay and lesbian community activism and research; significant shifts in institutional responses by the State Government of New South Wales and New South Wales Police Service; the mainstreaming of gay identities within popular culture; and the national and international growth of a 'politics of

victimhood'.

Further humanizing: turn of the century coverage

Since the turn of the century, there has been unprecedented publicity on these cases. Beginning with a dramatic reenactment of John Russell's fall at the crime scene in December 2001, during which a dummy was dropped over a cliff to simulate the circumstances of his death, this round of media attention was fuelled by the reinvestigation, Operation Taradale, and later by the events unfolding at the Coronial Inquest. On the surface at least, this most recent media coverage has been remarkably sensitive towards the victim group. In these public discourses, the victims have been humanized, and their alleged perpetrators, to some extent, strongly vilified and demonized⁹⁷. This was particularly evident in the publicity generated by the Coronial Inquest. Throughout the proceedings, photographs of all four Bondi cliffs victims regularly appeared in the media reports, along with images of Russell's grieving family. In articles on the case, the victim's friends, relatives, and colleagues were asked to comment, and in doing so, drew portraits of the men behind the statistics.

In mainstream media accounts we learnt, for example, that Ross Warren was excited about a job interview he had scored with Channel Ten in Sydney. The night of his disappearance had been spent sharing a pizza with his friend, Craig, before meeting a work colleague for drinks at an Oxford Street wine bar (Callaghan, 2003:22). John Russell, we were told, coached the junior rugby league team, the Rose Bay Rams, and liked to fish. We discovered that he lived in Ocean Street, Bondi, with his younger brother, Peter, and a nine year old nephew who saw him as a father. On the night of his death, John had spent the night at the Bondi Hotel with a childhood friend (Callaghan, 2003:22). Another Bondi resident, Gilles Mattaini, was also described as a shy character. It was reported that he was in a good frame of mind at the time of his disappearance and had been looking forward to the arrival of a close friend from Europe

⁹⁷ Although as I pointed out in the previous chapter, 'The Gay Hate Gangs: the all-Australian 'Bondi Boys'', there are a number of contradictions in the ways that the perpetrators have been discursively produced.

(Lamont, 2003:13). Such descriptions of the victims serve to make them more 'real', to give them not only a public face, but to render them as whole people, not simply unshown and unknown victims.

Both of the books produced on the Bondi cliffs murders also humanize the victims by fleshing them out as people. On the front cover of *Bondi Badlands*, above the book title and colour photographs of the four victims, is a prominently situated heading in black font which reads, 'Innocent men – dragged to their death'. The need to emphasize the 'innocence' of the victims stands as a stark contrast to traditional renderings of gay men, like other marginalized groups, as somehow 'guilty' or 'deserving' victims, particularly if they disappeared from a location such as a gay beat.

As with the media reports, the books portray the victims in a positive and sympathetic light, once again serving to reinforce the notion that not only were they were 'innocent men' but that they were 'good people'. Callaghan is particularly generous in the glowing character references he paints of the victims, including the men's personality traits and their physical appearances. He describes Ross Warren, for example, as 'devilishly handsome' (2007a:17) with a 'well-coiffed head', 'electric smile' (2007a:11) and 'sexy, sky-blue eyes' (2007a:12). Callaghan makes much of Ross's 'larrikin sense of humour' and his ability to engage an audience, citing an instance in which Ross had crawled onto a news desk and cuddled a teddy bear for a promotion (2007a:12-13). The young Ross is presented as an 'amiable, popular teenager' who enjoyed playing practical jokes and was a high achiever at school who 'excelled in English and History' (2007a:14). In the workforce Ross is depicted as a most committed and responsible employee who impressed colleagues 'with his can-do enthusiasm' and was 'known for his unfailing focus and workaholicism' (2007a:14). Callaghan paints a picture of Ross as the news-reader / weatherman extraordinaire, quoting from one of Warren's colleagues at WIN Television, Susie Elelman, who described Ross as having the 'it' factor for a career in television: 'a handsome face, sonorous voice and a lively personality' (cited in Callaghan, 2007a:14).

John Russell is also presented in favourable terms in Callaghan's book. He is reported to have been a wholesome young boy who enjoyed outdoor pursuits

such as abseiling, camping and climbing (2007a:37). A sense of John's gentleness is constructed by references to his love of animals. His father, for example, recalls that when John was fourteen and had just climbed to the top of Ayres Rock, he 'was mesmerized by the sight of two eagles nesting' (2007a:37). Later in the book there is a photograph of John as a teenager cradling his family dog in his arms with the caption beneath it reading: 'John loved animals' (2007a:120). In the workplace, Callaghan describes John as a 'gregarious' and 'popular barman with an easygoing manner and cocky sense of humour' (2007a:39). John is also presented as being highly dedicated and close to his family. In his home life, for example, he is described as being a devoted 'second father' to his brother's son: 'John was the one who made his lunches, washed his clothes and more often than not picked him up from school' (Callaghan, 2007a:40). John is also depicted as being responsible, dutiful and kind: 'John managed the house, bought the groceries, made sure the bills were paid on time, and kept a watchful eye on their ailing grandfather, a diabetic' (Callaghan, 2007a:41).

A similarly flattering portrait of Kritchikorn Rattanajurathaporn is produced in the *Bondi Badlands* where he is described as 'a diminutive scarecrow of a man with big brown eyes and floppy black hair' (Callaghan, 2007a:70). Kritchikorn is reported to have been 'a soft-hearted man' (Callaghan, 2007a:72) who assisted his struggling family in a small village in northern Thailand by regularly sending them money (Callaghan, 2007a:72). His devotion to his family is implied when it is stated that one of his mother's letters, 'lined with neat, curled characters' (Callaghan, 2007a:74), was found strewn on the cliff top where he had been attacked, suggesting that he had carried her letter around with him in a pocket. Like the other victims, Kritchikorn is presented as an amiable and hard worker. Only hours before his murder he 'had been happily washing dishes and joking with the cook in a Bondi restaurant' where he undertook part-time shifts to pay for his university studies (Callaghan, 2007a: 70, 75). Even as he lay dying, a sense of his gentle and defenseless nature is portrayed when Callaghan described him as being 'unable to move, clinging to life like a small bird whose wings had been crushed' (2007a:74).

As with the other three Bondi cliffs victims, Callaghan draws a portrait of Gilles Mattaini as a gentle and likeable character. He is described as an attractive man, 'with fine boned features and long, light brown tousled hair' (Callaghan, 2007a:176) who was 'still boyish in the face at 27 and [had] bright, twinkly eyes' (Callaghan, 2007a:175). Personality-wise Gilles is presented as 'a bit of a daydreamer: a timid, softly spoken young man who devoured books, loved playing cards, enjoyed cooking and loved lounging about on the beach' (2007a:175). In the workplace he is reported to have been a responsible employee who was always extremely punctual and reliable (2007a:180). In his personal habits Gilles is also presented as an exemplary character who drank only socially and was never known to have taken drugs (Callaghan, 2007a:176).

What is significant in relation to the extensive humanizing of the victims is that these men's lives – which had once been dismissed and ignored – were now, finally, being publicly recognized and mourned. It became evident to me that such changes demonstrated wider discursive shifts involving Australian gay men, or those presumed to be, from a space of non-recognition and non-citizenship at the time of the 'gay gang murders' to the site they currently occupy whereby they have moved further along the continuum edging closer, but by no means attaining, full citizenship.

Whilst I do not want to minimize the significant shifts that have occurred in the discursive constructions of the victims from 'non-bodies' to 'bodies that matter', the central focus of this chapter is to highlight certain tensions inherent in these productions. Firstly, I want to problematize the positioning of the victims as 'gay hate victims', predominantly because of the sexual and cultural essentialism it produces. Secondly, I will argue that the preoccupation with, and over-determination of, the sexuality of the victims indicates a cultural unease, despite rhetoric to the contrary. Thirdly, I will argue that framing the Marks Park murders as 'gay hate' violence and as an exceptional set of crimes turns it into a Spectacle which functions to make it alien to the broader community and also obscures the social, political and institutional factors that have contributed to such violence.

Positioning the victims as 'gay hate victims'

A 'hate crime' can be characterised as a form of violence that is motivated by prejudice, bias or hostility towards a particular social group of which the victim is presumed to be a member (Cuneen, Fraser and Tomsen, 1997; Mason, 1993). During the past two decades, the 'hate crime' definition and concept has been institutionalised in American social, political, legal and criminological discourses, and to a lesser degree in other Western countries, for example, Canada and Australia. Before addressing some of the problems of the 'hate crime' notion, I will briefly outline a few of the advantages. It has been argued that the 'hate crime' term has been useful in increasing public awareness and institutional interest in relation to crimes, such as gay-bashing, which have previously been sidelined or ignored within the criminal justice system. As Stephen Tomsen has argued, there are political advantages for gays and lesbians in claiming the status of legitimate crime victims, particularly in regard to changing state and police policies and in advancing legal reforms such as anti-vilification legislation (1997:109). It can also be argued that the heightened media, police and legal interest in these cases disrupts the traditional positioning of gay men as deserving victims, not worthy of official resources.

Since the 'hate crime' concept has been institutionalised, there have also been attendant critical assessments of its definition, concept and usage. In the United States, particularly, there has been an increased uneasiness with the direction of policy, legislation and resources towards so-called 'bias motivated' or 'hate motivated' violent crimes. James Jacobs and Kimberley Potter, for example, argue that it is impossible to accurately define a 'hate crime' because of 'the ambiguous, subjective, and contentious concept of prejudice' and the difficulty of reliably determining the motivation of the perpetrator(s) (1998:146). The term has also been problematized for the individualistic and pathological notions of crime that seem to be inscribed in it (Van de Meer, 2003; Tomsen, 2001; Cuneen et al, 1997). Whilst Tomsen admits that 'categorizing perpetrators and victims as distinct groups of dangerous heterosexuals and vulnerable 'sexual minorities' is a politically seductive position in the media, public bureaucracies and criminal justice systems of contemporary liberal states' (2006:389), it is also fraught with problems.

The uneasy polarization between homosexual and heterosexual groups 'appears to be reinforced by new statuses as either real or potential victims and perpetrators' (Tomsen, 2006:389). This divide between victims and perpetrators pays no attention to the complexity of this violence and the variety of relationships and exchanges between the individuals in question. To begin with, there is the difficulty of categorizing a particular homicide as a 'gay hate' killing. Secondly, there is the problem with classifying the sexuality of the victims. The 'fixed' identities produced in this paradigm – firstly, 'gay' and 'straight' and secondly, 'gay victim' and 'straight perpetrator' – are decidedly more fluid than they may first appear. The very category 'gay' – which describes a fixed and stable identity as opposed to an individual's sexual practices and behaviours – has been critiqued as essentialist (for example, Jagose, 1996; Berry & Jagose, 1996). There is also the irony that during the same period in which academics, researchers and AIDS-activists argued that widespread same-sex practices and behaviours were not automatically linked to specific identities, legal and activist discourses that have been shaped by the 'hate crimes' model have veered further towards a sexual and cultural essentialism.

In his analysis of anti-gay homicides in New South Wales during 1980-2000, Tomsen argued that many of the victims may not have identified as gay, and that many had marginal or no obvious links to Sydney's gay subculture (2002:20). What fails to be taken into account in the essentialist 'hate crime' model is the frequency and significance of same-sex practices which are not accompanied by a 'gay' label, identity, or affiliation with a 'gay community'. The slippery nature of the term 'gay', and the way it can be attached to individuals who have not adopted that identity, is evident in the media and legal narratives produced around the murder of Kritchikorn Rattanajaturathaporn.

Rattanajaturathaporn's murder was narrated as a 'gay hate crime' from the start, despite the fact there is no evidence that he publicly identified in this way. The repeated comments made by officials regarding Rattanajaturathaporn's sexuality – specifically statements that his sexuality was unknown – could perhaps indicate that family members, for example, may have been offended by the suggestion that he was gay. Police and judicial sources were extremely

hesitant to classify Rattanjaturathaporn as a gay man. Detective Sergeant Steve McCann, for example, admitted that the police were unaware of Rattanjaturathaporn's sexuality, 'We are not sure whether the murder victim was gay – there was nothing to suggest he was' (Nance, 1990:26). This view was echoed by the presiding judge, Justice Wood, who said that even though Rattanjaturathaporn was at a recognized beat during the night, he had no idea whether or not he was gay (cited in Waller, 1992:13). While I cannot make any assumptions about Rattanjaturathaporn's sexual identity, his assailants clearly *perceived* him as gay. One of the perpetrators, Matthew Davis, boasted to his former girlfriend, 'We bashed a faggot last night' (cited in Curtin, 1991:4). When an acquaintance quizzed Davis about the blood stains on his shoes, Davis allegedly said that they were from 'some faggot Chinaman's head' (cited in Curtin, 1991:6). The lengthy sentences and strong judicial warnings about anti-gay hate crimes given to the perpetrators also positioned this case as a 'gay hate homicide'.

Assumptions about the sexuality of the other three Bondi cliffs victims meant that eventually they were also designated as 'gay hate' homicides. However, in these cases, it appears that categorizations regarding the homosexuality of the victims were based on fact and not conjecture. In both of the books on these cases, namely, *The Beat* (2006) and *Bondi Badlands* (2007a), family members, friends, and ex-partners of Warren, Russell and Mattaini all attest to their gay identities. Ironically, in contrast to Rattanjaturathaporn's case, which was designated a 'gay hate' homicide in a very short space of time, it took years for the other victims to be classified in this way despite suspicions from family members and close friends that their loved ones' deaths and disappearances may have been related to their sexuality.

At the time of the Marks Park murders, the legitimacy of the 'gay' victim was consistently undermined, particularly within 'the law'. During this period the problematic status of 'gay' men as victims was regularly and explicitly played out in Australian courts and mainstream media sites in relation to the so-called Homosexual Advance Defence (HAD)⁹⁸. The 'Homosexual Advance Defence' is

⁹⁸ Strictly speaking, Homosexual Advance Defence (HAD) refers to a legal phenomenon and tactic, not a legally recognized defence.

used to describe cases in which an accused person alleges that he or she acted either in self defence or under provocation in response to a homosexual advance made by another person⁹⁹ (Attorney General's Department, New South Wales, 1998:10). In Australia during the 1980s and 1990s, a number of individuals charged with murder, who claimed at trial that they had killed in response to an unwanted homosexual advance by the deceased, were either acquitted outright, using the defence of self defence, or found not guilty of murder but guilty of manslaughter, employing the partial defence of provocation (Attorney General's Department, New South Wales, 1998).

One popular courtroom strategy used in New South Wales, and other Australian states, was 'to draw the actions of the victim into the trial, constructing him as a predatory homosexual' (George, 1995:31). Such notions buy into a long-standing discursive tradition where gay men are characterized as predatory and dangerous, both to 'national security' (for example, Davison, 2005; Edelman, 1992) and to individuals. Produced as a member of a population of threatening and 'dangerous individuals' who present a risk to the wider social body (Foucault, 1977, 1978, 1988), their very status as victims is intensely fraught. In this essentialist binary, the victim is cast as a sexual predator with the defendant as his prey (Sewell, 2001:58). This potential to construct the victim as a predator is amplified in murder trials where the victim is not physically there to present their version of events or to provide information that would contradict that offered by the defendant¹⁰⁰.

The production of the victim as predator and villain – 'undeserving of sympathy or the protection of the law' (Sewell, 2001:48) – is contrasted 'against the construction of the accused's heterosexuality, youthfulness and 'sexual innocence' as more valuable and deserving of protection' (Sewell, 2001:48). Thus, perpetrators have often benefited from these fixed categories – 'gay' (predator) and 'straight' (victim) – by relying on widespread negative community

⁹⁹ Another term that is often used interchangeably with HAD is Homosexual Panic Defence (HPD). Originating in the United States, HPD is premised on the accused having a latent homosexual tendency which causes 'an excessive and uncontrollably violent response when confronted with a homosexual proposition' (Attorney General's Department, New South Wales, 1998:10).

¹⁰⁰ This problem has been alleviated somewhat with the abolition of unsworn dock statements – see *Crimes Legislation (Unsworn Statements) Amendment Act 1994* (NSW).

attitudes towards gay men. The increased essentialism has also produced 'unexpected negative outcomes for victims without a gay sexual identity' (Tomsen, 2000:389) in that they can be constructed as social misfits and predators, belonging to neither the 'straight' nor 'gay' world.

Yet, just as the 'gay victim' identity can be problematized, so too can the figure of the 'straight perpetrator'. In the 'gay hate' paradigm, the perpetrators' sexual practices are also similarly fixed – as heterosexual – although this may not always be the case. In a number of New South Wales 'gay hate' cases which relied on HAD as a defence, many of the victims and perpetrators in these assaults and murders, had taken part in same-sex activity that had not been categorized or described as 'gay' or 'homosexual'. In Tomsen's study of NSW-based 'gay hate' cases, he found that at least fifteen of the killings had involved an arranged meeting or 'pick up' in a bar, sex shop, beat or via a telephone sex-line which suggests that male to male sexual activity had been hinted at or was expected by one or both parties (2002:37).

I will briefly outline two Sydney-based examples. In the 1999 murder of Sydney gay man, Brendan McGovern, for example, the perpetrator, G, contacted McGovern after receiving his details from the 'Hot Gossip Chat Line'. G told McGovern that he was inexperienced but interested in trying sexual activity with other men. The men met, went to a secluded park for sex, where according to G, McGovern insisted on receptive oral sex, and after a serious fight and a chase, G strangled McGovern to supposedly protect himself from a violent sexual advance.

Likewise, in the 1990 murder of Sydney man, Wayne Tonks, a Cleveland High School teacher, one of the perpetrators, 16 year old Ben Andrew, was said to have come into contact with Tonks after finding his name and phone number in a public toilet. Staff at Andrew's school described Andrew as gay, but whether or not he identified in this way is unclear. As he was being teased about being gay, Andrew claimed he only wanted to get some 'advice' from Tonks on the subject. Andrew went to Tonk's apartment where they drank alcohol and watched a pornographic video. As with the McGovern case, it appears that there was a strong possibility that sexual activity had gone on between the

victim and perpetrator. Andrew, however, later alleged that he was raped by Tonks, a claim which Tonks' friends, colleagues and investigating police found hard to accept. A fortnight after the initial meeting, Andrew, and a friend, Peter Kane, returned to Tonk's flat and killed him, each alleging that they had been raped by Tonks, and both blaming the other for the murder¹⁰¹.

As well as producing 'gay' men as the devalued Other in courtroom discourses (Sewell, 2001:48), essentialist constructions also implicitly transform the victims into both perpetrator *and* criminal. In the recent media coverage on the Bondi cliffs deaths, the transformation of the subjects from victim to perpetrator was played out linguistically in the abbreviated tag 'gay gang murders'. This term which appeared in a number of articles reveals an interesting slippage, via the erasure of the word 'hate', whereby the 'gays' who are actually the victims of the 'gangs' become semantically a member of the gang, and hence a perpetrator. Such a 'slip' positions the homosexual body in ways it has traditionally been marked, that is, as threatening and predatory – a perpetrator as opposed to a victim. At the linguistic level, then, the media's retelling of the 'gay gang murders' narrative continues to reproduce hegemonic and heteronormative classifications whereby gays are constructed as objects of fear, rather than as the subject of deadly crimes.

Not only does the category 'gay hate' victim unwittingly buy into negative community responses to individuals with non-normative sexualities, then, but the 'gay hate' paradigm is also constructed around the notion of 'straight perpetrators' who are automatically 'gay haters'. The perpetrators are thus uniformly constructed as individuals who are consumed by and with 'gay hate'. Once again the notion of the straight 'gay hating' perpetrator not only denies the permeability and extent of male same-sex relations, but also puts the onus of 'gay hate' onto a specific, and aberrant, individual. This takes the focus off the wider social body and its endemic and entrenched homophobia.

¹⁰¹ Andrews and Kane were both prosecuted for murder. The jury found Peter Kane guilty of murder and Benjamin Andrew guilty of manslaughter by reason of provocation.

Preoccupation with sexuality of victims

Whilst the extensive reporting and 'positive', sympathetic representations of the victims could be read as a sign that gay people are legitimized and affirmed within contemporary Australian society, the marked fascination with the victim's sexuality undermines such a thesis. Admittedly, the recent coverage is not tainted with the sense of 'moral panic' that characterized the earlier, sensational reportage. Yet the constant emphasis on the presumed homosexuality of the victims continues to be what drives the narrative. Using the psychoanalytic notion of over-determination, I demonstrate how the cultural meanings generated in mainstream media and legal discourses on the Bondi cliffs cases '... are not so much determined as *overdetermined*, produced by multiple associative paths fortuitously converging on the same points' (Garber, 2000:11). Despite repeated, public claims to the contrary, this preoccupation with Otherness suggests that the victims' (homo)sexuality remains a source of considerable cultural anxiety. In the following section I will support this claim by providing examples of how the fixation with the 'gayness' of the victim group (re)surfaces repeatedly in media and legal discursive constructions.

When I read the media reports recounting the activities the victims were involved in prior to their respective disappearances and deaths, a sense of familiarity was evoked. Sharing pizza with a friend, drinking beer with a friend, jogging along the Bondi-Tamarama walkway, sitting overlooking the ocean – these were all activities I had engaged in when I lived in Sydney. These were 'everyday' activities that probably many Sydney-siders, in particular, could relate to. However, on a closer reading, I discovered that what was 'newsworthy' about these 'ordinary' activities was that they were undertaken by '(un)ordinary' – read gay – men. Even in the midst of such apparently 'positive' portrayals of the victims' lives, their sexuality was under scrutiny. As if to ward off dominant negative stereotypes about homosexuality, the 'normalcy' of the victims was highlighted. 'News' selected for publication involved, for example, John Russell's father describing his son as 'a regular type of bloke. If he was sitting here now you'd never spot him for being gay' (Callaghan, 2003:22). Likewise, the *Sydney Morning Herald* described Gilles Mattaini as 'shy and not promiscuous' (Lamont, 2003:13) as if one precludes the other.

These examples attempt to resurrect both Russell and Mattaini as 'Good Gays' – 'regular blokes', 'non promiscuous' types. As Michael Warner puts it in *The Trouble With Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*, 'Good Gays' are 'the kind who would not challenge the norms of straight culture, who would not flaunt sexuality, and who would not insist on living differently from ordinary folk' (1999:113). In discursive constructions of the victims the worth of these men, their relations, and their ways of life, are constructed around 'the yardstick of normalcy' (Warner, 1999:59). Russell, for example, is presented as so 'normal' that he'd be able to pass as heterosexual with his father characterizing him as 'a regular kind of bloke who enjoyed fishing, footy and weekends away' (cited in Callaghan, 2007a:87). Likewise, Mattaini's apparent 'normalcy' is emphasized in *Bondi Badlands* where Callaghan reports that 'Gilles had never been sexually promiscuous ... only went to bars with Jacques and friends and never frequented beats' (2007a:175-176). Thus, he is constructed as an 'everyday' person, certainly not a 'sexually promiscuous' gay man who may have sought out casual sexual encounters at beats. Despite making social contact with a gay man, Jeffrey Sullivan, at a recognized Bondi beat, Callaghan claims that Rattanjathuraporn was wary of beats. According to Callaghan this cautiousness produced marked physical and emotional responses in Rattanjathuraporn's body: 'As he crossed into the darkness of the [Bondi-Tamarama] pathway, [Rattanjathuraporn's] pulse began to quicken; sexually charged situations like these made him feel apprehensive and nervous' (2007a:71). In this sentence Callaghan is, once again, drawing upon novelistic strategies to drive the narrative as he could not possibly know what Rattanjathuraporn was thinking or feeling as he headed to the Marks Park beat. Therefore we have no idea of the accuracy of Callaghan's statement concerning Rattanjathuraporn's anxiety about beats.

In contrast to representations of Mattaini as never frequenting beats and Rattanjathuraporn as being wary of them, Ross Warren's relationship to beat locations is somewhat more complex. At various times during his life Ross was known to have frequented beats, including being arrested in a toilet block with another man for 'lewd behaviour' (Callaghan, 2007a:21). Interestingly, Callaghan describes the Mackenzies Point lookout at the Marks Park beat as

Ross's 'favourite romantic spot in Sydney' where he had come with his former boyfriend Greg to 'snuggle up under the sandstone overhang with a bottle of wine or a couple of beers and spend an hour or so talking while gazing out to sea' (2007a:20). According to Greg, Ross never mentioned that the site was a beat, in fact he had made a point of telling Greg how much he hated beats (Callaghan, 2007a:21). Callaghan frames Ross's 'pull' to beat locations in terms of addiction describing his 'sexual hunger' as being the 'powerful thing' (2007a:21) which always drew him back. Despite details of Ross's beat usage being presented in *Bondi Badlands*, earlier mainstream media accounts do not seem to have picked up on, or run, with this angle. Instead, in the initial mainstream media coverage on Ross's disappearance, his 'discretion' is emphasized with a former colleague asserting, 'He always kept to himself, he was a very private individual' (*Illawarra Mercury*, 26 July 1989, p. 3). The repeated descriptions of Ross as a 'young man' and a 'fresh-faced boy' (for example, *Illawarra Mercury*, 26 July 1989, p. 1,3) also operate to ward off in advance the popular stereotype of the older, sexually predatory, homosexual.

This (over)emphasis on the victims' 'regular', 'non-promiscuous', 'discreet' nature, not only constructs them as 'Good Gays', but also distinguishes them from other non-gay victims, for whom such qualifiers would be totally unnecessary. Would, for example, a male heterosexual murder victim be described as a 'regular' guy whom you'd never spot for being straight? There is also the irony that although the victims are referred to in terms of their sexual identity, their sex is actually edited out. Presenting these men as 'not promiscuous' and able to pass as heterosexual, cleans up their image through separating their (gay) identity from sexual acts and practices which remain unknown and un-talked about. Emphasizing the normalcy of the victims may strengthen the 'Good Gay' stereotype, yet as Warner argues, 'the image of the Good Gay is never invoked without its shadow in mind – the Bad Queer, the kind who has sex, who talks about it, and who builds with other queers a way of life that ordinary folk do not understand or control' (1999:114). This is enacted most effectively in the early coverage of the Warren case when, after his sexuality is publicly disclosed, he shifts from being a 'young man' and a 'fresh faced boy' to being a contaminated and contagious AIDS carrier. One letter-writer to the *Mercury* claimed, for example, that newspaper articles had given

her the impression Warren was 'either alive and hiding out because he had AIDS, or ended it all because he had AIDS' (letter from Laine Newton, *Illawarra Mercury*, 18 August 1989, p. 10). Another letter-writer explicitly linked homosexuality with disease through tracing the history of the word 'pathos' as the 'lust [and] inordinate affection' that 'homosexuals feel for one another' to the word 'disease'. In making this link, she notes that 'the English words pathogenesis and pathogeny come from this Greek word [pathos]. Their definition: "the origin and development of disease"' (Wendy Blake, *Illawarra Mercury*, 18 August 1989, p. 10).

Tensions in constructions of the victims were also evident in legal discourses pertaining to the crimes. In her closing remarks at the Coronial Inquest, Senior Deputy State Coroner Jacqueline Milledge asserted, 'It's important we do the very best for these men for they were loved and decent men' (cited in Callaghan, 2003:22). Such sentiments were echoed in a feature article on the murders where underneath photographs of the four victims was the haunting headline, 'Justice for their ghosts', followed by Milledge's closing remarks in bold red print (Callaghan, 2003:22). Throughout the Coronial Inquest Milledge was single-minded in her commitment to producing 'justice' for the victims, albeit in death. I do not want to undermine Milledge's role in the inquiry as I believe she was genuinely committed to finding out the 'truth' about the men's deaths so as to provide some level of closure for their families. Her comment, 'It's important we do the very best for these men for they were loved and decent men' *is* sympathetic and does help to humanize the victims.

However, the fact that Milledge, speaking as a representative of the legal institution, has to state that the victims were 'loved and decent men' suggests that there is a degree of resistance to that very notion from within the legal profession and the wider community. Similar sentiments are conveyed in the preface to *Bondi Badlands* where Callaghan gives thanks to family members and friends of the victims for 'their kindness and time' insisting that 'it is a measure of the men who lost their lives at the Bondi cliff tops that they have such loving and loyal family and friends' (2007a:preface). On the one hand, then, Milledge's and Callaghan's comments demonstrate support for the victim group by resurrecting them as 'decent' citizens who are 'loved' and loyally

supported by family and friends. On the other, they also draw attention to the very fact that one should have to make such comments in the first place. If they were not members of a stigmatized group, there would be no need to describe them in this way. I believe such qualifiers are used because there is still a certain amount of resistance to such ideas, especially within both legal and mainstream media discourses.

The Spectacle of the Marks Park murders

In my final problematization of the discursive constructions of the victims in both periods of time, I argue that the crimes have been turned into 'media' and 'hate crime' spectacles which work to distance the 'hate' and the 'crime' from the rest of the community. By rendering the violence as a dramatic eruption of 'gay hate violence', many of the social and institutional factors that contributed to such violence are concealed. Thus, the violence 'performed' on the victims is characterized as (extra)ordinary as opposed to 'everyday' violence reflecting prevalent and well-established societal homophobia.

Before demonstrating how these crimes have been spectacularized, I will briefly examine Guy Debord's notion of spectacle, Douglas Kellner's concept of 'media spectacle', and Shana Agid's recent work on the 'hate crime spectacle'. Writing in 1967, the French Situationist, Guy Debord defined spectacle as not merely a 'collection of images' but a 'social relationship between people that is mediated by images' (1995:12). Debord argued that Western capitalist culture had become a 'society of the spectacle' in which individuals were captivated by the production and consumption of images, commodities and the play of media events (Debord, 1995).

In his book *Media Spectacle* (2003) Douglas Kellner develops and updates many of Debord's ideas on spectacle, arguing that 'although Debord's concepts of the 'society of the spectacle' and the 'integrated spectacle' (1990) tended to present a picture of a quasi-totalitarian nexus of domination, it is preferable to perceive a plurality and heterogeneity of contending spectacles in the contemporary movement and to see spectacle itself as a contested terrain'

(2003:11). Building on Debord's work on spectacle, Kellner puts forward the notion of a 'media spectacle' – 'those phenomena of media culture that embody contemporary society's basic values, serve to initiate individuals into its way of life, and dramatize its controversies and struggles, as well as its modes of conflict resolution' (2003:2).

In her analysis of four high profile American 'hate crime' murders – Brandon Teena, James Byrd Jnr, Matthew Shepard, and Gwen Araujo – Shana Agid also uses Debord's notion of spectacle to argue that media discourses produce both a spectacle of hate crime and also a specific spectator. Agid asserts that it is through media discourses – and their 'parade of repetition: repeated themes, repeated phrasing, repeated description, and repeated imagery' (2005:18) – that the spectacle of hate crime (in the United States) is produced. Agid defines it as follows:

The notion of the spectacle raises the possibility for the spectator – and the role of spectatorship – in making meaning of "hate crime". As media discourses produce a spectacle of hate crime, so does it produce the spectator through prescribing, proposing, or making possible roles for the nation and individuals to take up in relationship to the concerns and issues raised by specific incidents of violence and the attendant political and social concerns of race, racism, sexuality, homophobia, geography, etc (2005:19).

There are a number of ways in which the Bondi cliffs cases can be situated as 'media' and 'hate crime' spectacles. Firstly, representing the crimes as 'gay hate crimes', which is the hallmark of the more recent coverage, constructs them as something alien, even incomprehensible, to the rest of the community who are neither the targets nor the victims of such crimes. Indeed it could be argued that if 'hate crimes' relate to certain sections of the population, those outside these groupings may consider themselves to be living in a hate-free (or perhaps post-hate) environment. Transposing the 'hate crimes' model onto the victims, perpetrators, and the violence creates various distancing effects. The victims are set apart by their 'gay' identity, the perpetrators by their construction as criminalized 'gay haters', and the violence is also distanced via its construction as spectacular violence because it's considered so unusual. Whilst the victims do appear in public discourses, it is at the expense of institutional critiques of the violence itself, and the prevalent community attitudes that accompany and

fuel it. Such constructions serve to reinforce the distance between 'gay hate violence' and that experienced by victims of 'non hate' crime.

At the time of the men's disappearances and deaths, there was a distinct lack of interest in the cases, particularly in terms of media coverage, except in the blitz coverage on Warren's disappearance. A year later, however, there was the unprecedented coverage of the Sydney 'gay hate wave' in 1990-1991 which included Johnson's and Rattanjurathaporn's murders. From December 2001 onwards, there has been extensive publicity, specifically concerning the 'gay gang murders', in the mainstream and gay press, and also on commercial and public radio and television. Why were this particular set of crimes at this particular time singled out for media attention? Why did the mainstream media situate these crimes as a prime spectacle of Australian 'hate crime'? What is the significance of this widespread and unprecedented media attention on what were essentially a set of 'cold cases'?

The spectacularization of the Marks Park murders began with a spectacular media event – the dramatic crime scene re-enactment against the Bondi-Tamarama cliffs in December 2001. The mannequin's 'body', adorned in clothes similar to those John Russell had worn on the night of his disappearance, was thrown down the Bondi cliffs as crowds of curious bystanders and media crews looked on. It was this media spectacle which drew the attention, not only of those walking past or recording the scene, but also the viewers who watched those captivating images on the nightly news. In the words of Marcus O'Donnell, the former editor of the *Sydney Star Observer*, 'the bodies from the cliff' was 'pure gift in terms of media story ... fantastic stuff!' (Personal Interview, November 2004). The iconic and idyllic setting – the panoramic walkway and the world famous beach – fuelled this sense of spectacle. The juxtaposition of this picturesque stretch of Australian coastline as a major crime scene only added to the 'unreality' of the event.

Indeed, it was to counteract this very 'unreality' that the re-enactment was necessary. For the general public needed their scopophilic desires met – their need to 'know' via seeing. In watching the dummy fall repeatedly, they were able to imagine for themselves exactly how the men died. The re-enactment

thus served the dual purpose of determining that Russell had been murdered, rather than having accidentally fallen from the cliff, and ignited public interest through a realistic and somewhat gratuitous display which, by association, gave the audience a picture of the manner of all the men's deaths.

Speaking from his role as an editor, O'Donnell identified further reasons as to why the cases suddenly attracted the attention they did. Firstly, O'Donnell attributed some of the public interest to 'the general shift in gay news is hot news [which is] up there in terms of news values at the top of the news agenda' (Personal Interview, November 2004). He also credited the interest to the 'gay gang murders' status as a crime story, 'It's a combination of those traditional news values around crime and then the fact that it's a gay crime. Once it would have led to sensational coverage, now ... because there's a new narrative around the way the media covers gay material, it's covered in that perspective of justice rather than sensation' (Personal Interview, November 2004). Whilst O'Donnell believes part of the 'new narrative' around gay issues is from a justice-based approach, sensation is still clearly intrinsic to the media interest. 'Gay' news may be 'at the top of the news agenda', but the theatrical re-enactment was evidently vital in kindling publicity. Furthermore, the fact that these cases are, officially, 'cold' only adds to the fascination, as O'Donnell claims: 'There's something intrinsically interesting from the media's point of view in terms of a 14 year old case suddenly being reopened. It's very Agatha Christie!' (Personal Interview, November 2004).

The serial nature of the case – the fact that there were a number of victims over different time periods – and that perhaps a 'serial killer' (or killers) were responsible – also spectacularized the crimes. Rather than crimes that were committed on one occasion by one individual, the crimes were represented as occurring over a lengthy period of time and possibly being perpetrated by not one, but perhaps several different 'gay hate gangs'. The 'spectacular' nature of the crimes is evident in the language that Fenn uses to describe them when he refers to the cases as 'a horrifying saga of multiple murders' and 'an ugly story about ugly people committing ugly crimes' (2006: back cover). Popular mythologies on juvenile crime and youth gangs only served to sensationalize this case further. The aberrant gang members, such as Sean Cushman –

presented as the face of 'gay hate' – were played off against images of the Good Gay victims, exemplified by studio shots of the squeaky-clean celebrity victim, Ross Warren, the former WIN television anchor.

The production of the Marks Park murders as a set of spectacular 'gay hate crimes', committed by aberrant 'gang members' pumped up with 'hate', is much more than a newsworthy story. Whilst I do not disagree that such media attention humanizes and legitimizes the victims – as opposed to sensationalizing and neglecting them – such media coverage can also be read as a predominantly symbolic gesture which fails to take into account many of the socio-cultural and institutional factors that created such acts of violence in the first place. As Agid describes it:

The relationship built between the spectacle [of hate crimes] and the spectator is mutually reassuring – so long as we bear witness through these themes, so long as we represent and recognize the violence and its perpetrators and victims – we have done what we must do to address the incident, condemn the violence, and commit to building (nation, citizenship, morality) anew (2005:26).

However, in this Sydney-based 'hate crime' spectacle whipped up around the Bondi cliffs murders, the humanizing of the victims and the punishing of the perpetrators is little more than a symbolic indicator that refuses to address the specificities of homophobic violence that are entrenched within the larger community. 'Gay' news may be receiving more serious and extensive media treatment than ever before, but it still relies on the sensational to trigger such interest in the first place.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have examined the media coverage of the victims of the 'gay gang murders' and canvassed the varied responses, from media neglect, titillation and sensationalism to the more 'serious' or sympathetic attention. I have argued that there have been some positive discursive shifts in the ways in which the victims have been constructed. However, such a claim does not take into account various complexities for even in the most seemingly

positive of coverage, the victims – through a process of over-determination – remain symbolically Othered. Likewise, the socio-cultural factors which contributed to the violence are still, largely, ignored or side-lined in favour of attention being given to the more sensational aspects of the crimes.

In analysing and critiquing the media coverage of the victims from the 1980s to the current day, I have identified a number of problematic issues. The mainstream media's constructions of the victims as 'gay hate victims' is, for example, more contentious than it may initially appear. Although the hate crimes model satisfies particular political and symbolic functions (Jacobs & Potter, 1997), the definition of 'hate crime' and usage of this model is deeply problematic. At the most basic level, framing the Bondi cliffs victims as victims of 'gay hate' fixes them as 'gay', and by implication the perpetrators as 'straight'. Given the critiques of singular and unified gay, lesbian *and* heterosexual identities that have appeared in the last two decades (for example, Jagose, 1996; Sedgwick, 1990), the usage of such categories is somewhat outdated and simplistic as it moves towards a sexual and cultural essentialism (Tomsen, 2006) that is not always accurate nor intended. In other words, constructing a division between the two groups ('gay victims' and 'straight perpetrators') can ignore the fluidities of individual's sexual practices and lock them into fixed and stable identities which may not accurately reflect their own affiliations and behaviours. As well as the danger of inaccuracy, such fixed identities are also hierarchically structured which means they carry a range of different types of material implications.

Secondly, I have argued that dominant constructions of the victims as 'gay' victims exhibit a preoccupation with the (presumed) homosexuality of the victim group which suggests, despite rhetoric to the contrary, that their sexuality is not only Other to the broader population but remains a source of considerable cultural anxiety. As I argued in the previous chapter, 'The Gay Hate Gang: The all-Australian 'Bondi Boys'', the focus on the victims' (homo)sexuality is in direct contrast to the sexuality of the perpetrators which remains largely unmarked, unnamed and unseen.

Thirdly, by rendering the violence as a dramatic eruption of 'gay hate violence', many of the social, political and institutional factors that contributed to such violence are obscured. In other words, the violence that is enacted on the victims is characterized as (extra)ordinary or *spectacular* 'hate' violence as opposed to 'everyday' violence reflecting endemic and entrenched societal homophobia. This suggests that the discursive shifts I have charted in relation to the victims are predominantly symbolic gestures that fail to take into account social, structural and institutional factors which produce such acts of homophobic violence in the first place. This echoes the situation identified in the previous chapter, namely, that despite the perpetrators' violence being, on occasion, socially legitimated, their construction as 'gay hate gang members' who have committed an exceptional kind of crime, only distances them further from mainstream society and the wider social and cultural institutions which have, arguably, created the conditions that led to such acts of violence.

In the following chapter, 'Trace Evidence: The ordinary objects (not) left behind', I will examine *things* – the mundane traces and ordinary objects left behind by the men in the wake of their vanishings. Here I will focus on the iconic and mysterious status of these objects, these emblems of trauma, and in doing so explore how such objects operate as a synecdoche or stand-in for the person who is no longer with us.

Appendix 1 – Background to Attorney General's Department Working Party

Chaired by Megan Latham, QC, the Working Party comprised division staff, crown prosecutors, public defenders, academics, New South Wales police, and gay and lesbian community representatives. The Working Party examined homicide cases dealt with in the New South Wales Supreme Court during the period 1993-1998, producing a 'Final Report' in September 1998¹⁰². In this report the Working Party demonstrated the popularity of Homosexual Advance Defence (HAD) as the basis of a claim of self-defence or as part of a plea in mitigation, raised legitimate concerns about its usage, and proposed a number

¹⁰² The 'Final Report of the 'Homosexual Advance Defence' Working Party is available online at: <http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/clrd>. Go to this address, and click on "Papers and Reports".

of recommendations, including reforms in criminal law and procedure, the establishment of a monitoring committee to monitor and review HAD cases, police training, abolishing the defence of provocation, and funding community, educational and marketing campaigns to target public behaviour and attitudes. The Working Party concluded that 'if Australia is to profess to have a civilised criminal justice system, then it must be a standard of the law that claims of non-violent homosexual advances can neither excuse fatal violence nor mitigate any offence of violence' (Attorney General's Department, New South Wales, 1998:40).

Chapter Six – Trace Evidence: The ordinary objects (not) left behind

Introduction

An abandoned vehicle. A set of car keys. Some scattered coins. A spray-jacket and head-set. An empty Coke bottle and a soft pack of *Peter Stuyvesant* cigarettes. These are the mundane objects (not) left behind by the victims of the 'gay gang murders', the traces of those who are gone. These ordinary objects are forced to function as a synecdoche for the person, a stand-in for the Real, for they are the signs of trauma, the symbols of loss. Our ordinariness is never more apparent than in the small things we leave behind; the only remnants left of our personhood, our individuality, and our very existence. These objects stand in for our fleeting, momentary understandings of subjectivity.

In the three cases I'm examining in this chapter – that of John Russell, Ross Warren and Gilles Mattaini – the 'found' objects function on multiple meta-levels. In Russell's case, the objects left behind pertain to the property and clothing found on his body and in its vicinity. In Warren's case, the objects are those located within his abandoned car and on the nearby cliff-ledge. In the case of Mattaini, the objects I refer to are missing, items which have never been located but which he is assumed to have had with him at the time of his disappearance, namely, his spray-jacket, walkman, and house keys.

Unlike other chapters in this PhD, 'Trace Evidence: The ordinary objects (not) left behind' does not present a critical discourse analysis of police, legal or media representations pertaining to the Bondi cliffs deaths. Instead, in integrating psychoanalytic theory and 'thing theory' with Ficto-Critical reflections on the objects left at the crime scene locations, it could be said to exceed the discursive frame. In many ways, then, it could also be positioned as a stand-alone chapter: a philosophical analysis of the 'trace evidence' pertinent to this set of crimes. However, what this chapter does share with other chapters is a sense of the uncanny and liminal. In previous chapters I have examined the liminal nature of the actual crimes, the crime scene locations and the Ficto-Critical form of this research. In this chapter I will focus specifically on the

uncanny objects left at the crime scene. I began this thesis with a description of the uncanny image that had initially piqued my interest in this case – the flying body suspended in mid air during the cliff-top re-enactment. When I started to analyze the material objects left at the crime scenes I experienced a similar feeling of uncertainty, suspense, Otherworldliness even. This time it was not an image of a body in mid-air that haunted but rather a set of everyday objects – cars, keys, coins, clothes, bottles, cigarettes – which demanded some form of theoretical and Ficto-Critical engagement.

Hence, in this chapter, I have chosen to write about *things*: about objects left at the scene of the crime, potential trace evidence, material ties that bind. It is through analyzing the itemized catalogues and descriptions of these objects that I have been able to reconstruct imaginings of the crimes and of the men, the victims of these crimes. As I will demonstrate throughout this chapter making sense of these ordinary objects is not a straightforward task. These found objects are both *meaningful* in that they provide 'evidence' of an event which we can only ever imagine and never really know. Yet they are also *meaningless*, in themselves merely remnants, symbolising nothing. In this sense, they can be read as the epitome of terror, the materialisation of the impossible.

In writing about things, I'm going to unavoidably write about my/self, perhaps even our/selves; in particular about how we keep our 'selves' anchored to the ground through the very things we are most attached to, yet not inevitably conscious of. It is these very things that will be mythologized and imbued with added significance in the event of our untimely disappearance or death.

(Someone close to you dies. You learn about it via an early morning STD call, a dedication in a book, a text message: 'another 1 bites the dust'. You carry their photograph about in your wallet tucked safely behind the passport photograph of your eight year old son. You cut out their death notice from the Obituary columns. Days, months, years pass. Then *out of the blue*, you chance upon something that once belonged to them – a stained coffee-

cup, a florescent hair tie, a favourite worn out t-shirt, a Swatch watch that no longer ticks. The battery is long dead. You hold that fragment of their life in your fingers. You caress it. Smell it. Hold it. Look at it. It promises to bring them back to you, if only momentarily, if only fleetingly, and with this promise it undoes you. Your fragile acceptance of their death is fractured, weakened, threatened. Your loss is now more real than you ever wanted, more palpable than you ever imagined.)

John Russell

'Report of Death to Coroner.

24 November 1989, Bondi Police Station.

Property and clothing found on and with the deceased:

1 X red sloppy joe
 1 X faded blue jeans
 1 X pair of boxer shorts
 1 X pair of white sox
 1 X pair of black gym boots
 \$4.60 in loose coins
 1 X red credit card holder.'

(Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 2003-2005).

You scan the crime scene photographs. Near the body you see a crushed soft pack of *Peter Stuyvesant*, fourteen cigarettes left inside, and a green disposable lighter. On the top of a nearby rock there's an empty Coca Cola bottle. Coins are scattered all over the rocks: a two dollar coin, a one dollar coin, two fifty cent coins, and three twenty cent coins. If you scrutinize the photos some

more you will find a small clump of blonde hair wedged behind John's index finger on his left hand.

These everyday objects, these mundane traces – cigarettes, coins, a lighter, a soft-drink bottle, hair strands – are forced to operate as a synecdoche for the person, a stand-in for John Russell. These are the items Detective Stephen Page will return to again and again. Page will show the crime scene photos to John's brother, Peter Russell, and direct him to these tangential items. Peter will tell Page that, yes, John did smoke *Peter Stuyvesant* 'soft packs'. He will confirm that the lighter also probably belonged to John. But the Coke bottle, Peter will insist, is an anomaly. John may have drunk Coke the following morning as a hangover cure but after a night of heavy drinking would never touch the stuff. Later Page would surmise that whomever the soft drink bottle belonged to was probably the same person who had pushed Russell off the cliff top.

Only weeks after John's funeral, police handed his family a brown paper bag containing John's freshly laundered clothes including the red sloppy-joe with the coloured motif, the denim jeans, the gym shoes, the white shoes and \$4.60 made up of loose change. His brother, Peter, later commented: 'We had lived together all our lives. That was what I was left with. If I had known back then that they didn't even send them off for forensic analysis, I would have thrown 'em back in their faces' (cited in Callaghan, 2003:22). John's father, Ted, took the bag back to his Wollombi farm and locked it in a cupboard for safe-keeping, hoping that one day the items may be used as forensic evidence. The clothes remained there untouched for more than eleven years. When Detective Page began his investigation into John's death, Ted remarked bitterly that not only had the clothes been washed but they had also been used to dress a police mannequin. The dummy, which was positioned at the Bondi police station shortly after John's death, bore a sign asking for anyone with information on the suspicious death to come forward. The clothes, then, are not only indexical of John Russell, and the loss of Russell, but they also function as a symbol of institutional failure to solve the crime. The decision by investigating police to launder the clothes, and then use them to dress up a mannequin, meant that

any possible DNA and forensic evidence harboured in the clothes would have been destroyed in the process.

Throughout this chapter I will investigate the significance of trace items in the 'gay gang murders' by examining the way in which they evoke the everyday, as well as their concomitant and terrifying function as sublime objects: in the Lacanian sense, as positive, material objects elevated to the status of the impossible Thing (Zizek, 1989:71). For, in looking at the objects left at the scene of the crime and in the domestic spaces of the missing, I 'gain an insight into the forbidden domain, into a space that should be left unseen' (Zizek, 1989:71). Any meaning I assign to these objects serves only to further obscure the impact of their presence. These discarded objects become the Real: 'the rock against which every attempt at symbolization stumbles, the hard core which remains the same in all possible worlds (symbolic universes); but at the same time ... is thoroughly precarious; ... persist[ing] only as failed, missed, in a shadow, and dissolv[ing] as soon as we try to grasp its positive nature' (Zizek, 1989:169). For, as Zizek claims, this Real is precisely what defines the nature of the traumatic event, producing both a plethora and a lack of symbolization, constructed backwards from its effects, remaining forever a 'fantasy-construct' (1989:169) defying knowledge and belying the certainty of things.

Ross Warren

175cm tall

medium build

fair complexion

short brown hair

green to hazel eyes

Caucasian appearance

When last seen he was wearing:

Black shoes

Blue jeans

A white turtle neck shirt

A black sports coat

Friday 21st July 1989.

Ross Warren spends the night with a friend, Phillip Rossini, at Darlinghurst bars:

The Oxford Hotel

Gilligan's Cocktail Bar

The Vault nightclub in the basement of the Exchange Hotel

The Midnight Shift

Saturday 22 July 1989, 2:15 am.

Ross and Phillip say goodbye to each other at Taylor Square.

As Phillip waits for the lights to change he watches Ross drive east along Oxford Street in the Bondi direction instead of taking a right turn and heading south down Bourke Street to Redfern where he was staying.

According to Phillip, Ross was in a good frame of mind. They'd arranged to meet up the following evening at a dance party at the Horden Pavilion.

No, he was not depressed.

Sunday 23 July 1989.

Ross's friends, Craig Ellis and Paul Saucis, report him missing to the Paddington Police Station. A report is logged. Craig and Paul drive down to South Bondi to conduct their own search. At the corner of Kenneth Street and Marks Lane they discover Ross's car parked on the ocean side of the street.

A brown coloured Nissan Pulsar.

Registration number NZC-783.

The car is locked.

There is no sign of any damage to the car.

Police suggest there's nothing unusual about an abandoned car or its location near a gay beat.

Detective Kenneth Bowditch asserts: 'There [is] no suggestion of foul play' (cited in Treasure, 1989:3).

Sunday 23 July 1989.

Ross's mother, Kay Warren, waits up for her son's regular Sunday night call. It never comes.

When interviewed she responds:

I spoke to Ross last week on the 16th July.

There was nothing out of the ordinary.

'He seemed his usual self' (cited in Callaghan, 2007a:54).

He didn't jump.

Monday 24 July 1989.

The following day Ross's friends return to the area and continue their search. In a cliff face recess, not far from the water's edge, Craig discovers the Pulsar's car keys. There are eight keys in total circling around on a distinctive brass key ring. According to Craig they looked as if they'd been 'placed' on the ledge rather than fallen.

More than a decade later, on a police walk-through video, Craig admits he was too scared to touch the keys. When he found them tucked away on the cliff ledge, he knew then 'something bad' had happened to Ross.

The list of investigative flaws grows:

Photographs recording the car's positioning and location are never taken.

The keys are also not recorded in photographs.

The car is never tested for fingerprints.

Nor are the keys 'dusted'.

Detective Bowditch claims that this was 'due to the fact the keys were ... believed to be wet and wet metal did not provide fingerprints' (cited in Farrar, 2003).

When police eventually search the car they find on the front seat assorted crumpled MacDonalld's wrappers and Ross's wallet. It contains \$70, his driver's license, an ANZ Visa card, library cards, video-store cards and personal papers. In the glove box they find an unopened condom packet. They also discover a handwritten note on a slip of paper: 'Derrick 91 Ruthven St. Bondi Jnct. 3876730'.

If we vanish, these everyday items – a wallet, a brass keyring with a set of keys, discarded fast-food wrappers, a name and address scribbled on a piece of paper – assume an importance far beyond their usual capacity to evoke our memory in those who cared for us. They become iconic, embodying a mystery of their own whilst evoking a haunting quality which insists on their own substantive reality even as it suggests the extraordinarily complete lack of the person who owned and used them. The individual is desired yet lost. The object is found yet essentially unwanted.

When one chances upon the object possessed by someone who has disappeared, the loss is both felt and not felt simultaneously in that the item forces us to acknowledge that the person is no longer with us, yet it fails to completely negate the tantalizing possibility of a miraculous return. Thus the things owned by the disappeared are different to all other objects, invoking the peculiar cruelty of the not-known, the forever uncertain: *What happened to Ross's body?*

In this chapter, I will investigate the dual significance of these items through their evocation of the everyday, and through their elevation to the status of the sublime object. I will use these things that mean both *nothing* and *everything* at the same time, to attempt to unpack the conundrum at the heart of the Real, to show how the ordinary can also be a manifestation of the impossible and the

unsymbolizable. The very nature of these things, as objects discarded or lost during a disappearance, lends them greater significance than items left behind due to known and grieved death. For much more is expected of these things. The demand that they somehow tell a story of the inexplicable is insistent. Their inability to mask the void of the Real, the traumatic horror of a vanishing, is more evident than at any other time in the life of any other thing.

When someone dies, even if they died tragically and unexpectedly, their things are not placed in the position of the final witnesses to a completely inexplicable event. They may help to reconstruct the story of how someone died, but they aren't asked to do the impossible and tell us how the person left, nor if there is any possibility that they might come home. This is the horror the items left by the vanished must face; their inability to provide any certainty is the horror the searchers for the missing must inevitably confront. Things can't suture the rent in communal consciousness that occurs when someone simply disappears, all they can do is to be inadequate stand-ins for the person, mute witnesses burdened with more significance than should ever be due them.

In *Technology As Symptom and Dream* Robert Romanayshyn observed that our identities are inextricably linked to the things we own, as we trust them implicitly to 'function as extensions of ourselves, reflections and echoes of who we are, were, and will become' (1989:193). Lost things are troubling to us for more reason than simple inconvenience. For things, according to Romanayshyn, are 'witnesses and reflections and producers of our continuing identity' (1989:193). The loss of our things is tragic because it intensifies our relation to death. Displaced or lost things haunt us and as symptoms of our own selfhood they remind us of a life which has lost touch with the world (Romanayshyn, 1989:194). Of course, not all things necessarily provoke this reaction of fear within us. Instead it is the things that matter, that can explain us, rather than those which have a higher economic price, that are the important, self-reflecting things. Without these things, those little traces of material culture in our possession, we are not our 'selves', and therefore cannot maintain the pretence of selfhood.

It is hard enough for others to encompass the loss of self evident in items abandoned due to death. Yet it is even more difficult to consider these vacant articles when someone simply disappears or vanishes, so it appears, into *thin air*. For in these cases, these precious things that comfort the bereaved, are denied the family and friends of the missing. The contents of Ross Warren's wallet, for example, reside with other holdings in the Information and Intelligence Centre in the Sydney suburb of Strawberry Hills. Such holdings become 'evidence', untouchable, non-reclaimable, police property, even when the case remains officially 'open' but has grown 'cold'. A cold case can be worse than a confirmed death, however, because cold cases mean that the disappearance itself is now as abandoned as the things shelved in boxes in warehouses; things that used to be important, related to the missing person search, vital as identifiers should that person be located. Cold cases frequently mean no-one is going to be found, and even if they were to be located, their precious belongings at the time of the search would no longer be of any use to them. Then even their status as evidence is revoked. For that person has indeed vanished, grown up, moved on, and may not even remember or recognise the little keepsakes kept for years in police vaults, sometimes released finally, and far too late, to the family and friends who will inevitably claim them.

The abandoned things of the disappeared are, then, terrifying objects. For they suggest that either the person has had the markers of their identity, the symptoms of their selfhood, involuntarily removed, or they have deliberately removed them themselves. In either case, this sloughing off of the self indicates its all too easy removal of such in ourselves. If their very persons can so easily become our 'lost objects', then how easily might we become the same to others. Keeping our things about us is vital to keep this fear at bay, and to remembering who we are and who they were, but who they can never continue to be.

Much has been written about the importance of things. Bill Brown has coined the phrase 'thing theory' to describe these various jottings (2001:22). In much 'thing theory' things are considered as one of two vehicles for cultural meaning. They are either gifts or commodities, and these two categories are often positioned at either ends of a continuum. As a 'gift', a thing usually has more

sentimental value, although it may be of practical use too, and it often symbolizes close ties between the giver and the receiver. Commodities, on the other hand, are impersonal, and there is a distance, frequently a great distance, between the buyer or receiver of the commodity and its seller or provider. According to some theorists, a commodity has monetary value, whereas a gift may or may not have economic worth (Komter, 2005:3). So, it might be surmised, then, that things are indicative of social relationships; either between kin and friendship networks, or the more impersonal kind found in the broader community.

The things I write of in this chapter, however, have no such status. They can't fit into the neat gift – commodity continuum proposed by the likes of Bronislaw Malinowski or Lewis Hyde. For these things are both discarded, dropped, shed, forgotten, and yet at the same time, they are items of evidence, vital pieces in a heartless puzzle. They acquire that which Arjun Appadurai has called a 'cultural biography' (cited in Komter, 2005:4) which has nothing to do with whether or not they were ever gifts or commodities or something in between. They gain a life of their own. Their trajectory through life, the experiences they gather, gives them meaning. They have endured hardship, separation, connection, sentimental significance, and even at times, economic worth, although this is not a prerequisite for a thing to gain a cultural biography. The thing that becomes a marker of a person manages to surpass its ordinary 'thing' status, its own innate nothingness, to transcend itself as evidence of love, selfhood, disappearance. These things are not inert pieces of metal or plastic or wood, they become vehicles of meaning, like words they create an 'informational communication system' (Appadurai cited in Komter, 2005:15).

In the case of the disappeared, such things become uncanny, revealing our hidden fears, showing the emptiness behind all our pretences at wholeness, at selfhood. Their cultural biography speaks of pain, of loss, of disconnection in a way that no amount of words, regardless of who speaks them, ever could. The clothes on the deceased, the scattered coins and Coke bottle, the abandoned car and discarded keys, the missing sprayjacket and walkman, tell us so much more of the truncated lives of these people than expressions of grief, or sympathy, or revenge. For they testify, in their muteness, their dumb existence,

to the person that was, who once owned and was in some way defined by them. Yet, at the same time, they still remain stubbornly material: the clothes are still just clothes, the keys still just keys. They may be used to signify the person who owned them, but they also keep their own silent counsel, reminding us that we can place too much importance on things, and especially on things belonging to the vanished. They can only ever give us a momentary glance at the uncanny, at selfhood itself, before they once again hide in the very substance of their being at all.

These fragments are forced to take the place of the individualised, singular person who has vanished. Instead of misplaced things, so easy to replace in general, we now have misplaced people whose things are not easy to replace, which indeed cannot be replaced, because they must function as evidence of the last moments, indeed the very life itself, of the one who previously, obviously, owned them. They in effect become the person, or at least a synecdoche for that person; a tiny piece now forced to represent the whole.

Ross's keys lodged in a cliff ledge tell us of his fall onto the rocks, into the sea, while continuing to indicate his possession of a now suddenly vacant apartment, complete with his empty clothes, his redundant taste in music, furnishings, art. These keys are swamped with life, while his missing body cannot even tell us of his death. We hang on to these 'effects' as objects that are out of time, out of communal understanding, out of any continuum commonly belonging to things. We can't let them go – there is nowhere to bury them, to put their owners to rest. Yet we know that although they are the epitome of presence, they are also the quintessence of absence; of loss never to be resolved.

Gilles Jaques Mattaini

170 cm tall

Clean-shaven

Between 55-60 kgs

Collar length brown hair

White/European appearance.

This sense of loss is amplified even further in the case of Gilles Mattaini whose personal effects can not be hung on to because they, like Gilles, remain missing. Following Gilles disappearance, his long term partner, Jacques Musy, rifles through Gilles' flat searching for clues, for answers, for evidence. The flat exhibits no sign of either forced entry or a suicide note. Gilles' valuables are all there: his passport, wallet and recently acquired duty-free watch. When Jacques searches the wardrobe, however, he notices that Gilles' spray-jacket, sweatshirt, track-pants and sneakers are gone. Gilles' Walkman is also nowhere to be seen. On the calendar which hangs from the kitchen wall the dates of Gilles' work shifts are all circled with the starting times penned hastily beside them. The entries for the dates after Monday 16th September 1985 are all blank.

In the course of the police investigation and Coronial Inquest, Gilles' walkman comes to stand in for Gilles. It operates as a symbol for Gilles' presence at, and enjoyment of, the cliff top walkway. Gilles' friends and ex-partner all testify to this effect. As Jacques reflected: 'He would walk with music ... he would never walk outside without a walkman. He would stroll around the seaside and look at the ocean and dream away. He was a dreamer' (Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 2003-2005). Mark Hubert, a close friend of Gilles, also remembers his love of the beach, 'I remember that often he would walk around the walk with his headset and just sit on the rocks and watch the beach. He used to enjoy that very much' (Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 2003-2005).

The absence of Gilles' distinctive spray-jacket is also cause for concern. As Jacques said, 'I couldn't understand why his yellow spray-jacket was not found because it was made of rubber and would float and was really bright yellow' (Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 2003- 2005)

A walkman.

A bright yellow spray-jacket.

Sweatpants.

Sweatshirt.

Track-shoes.

These are the everyday objects that are missing along with Gilles Mattaini. It is highly likely that these items no longer exist in a physical or material sense, that they have been thoroughly corroded by the elements, yet they continue to define and characterize Gilles. *He was a dreamer.* He would walk along the headland for hours listening to French pop songs on his Walkman. The celebrated Françoise Hardy was one of his favourites. The distinctive spray jacket and the treasured Walkman – it is these items, Jacques insists, that Gilles would take with him when he went off on his strolls along the coastline.

These are not the only material objects to have disappeared into the Bondi cliffs mundus. Along with these everyday items, official reports are also missing. Gilles' missing person's report, lodged by his friend, Vincent Ottaviani, to the Bondi police station has been lost. So has the original missing person's report and paperwork relating to Ross Warren's disappearance. So too the transcripts from Russell's first inquest. And the clump of hair strands found in Russell's fingers.

Hairstrands.

Found in a dead man's hand, then lost. Gone

Carkeys.

Found on a cliff ledge. Then lost. Gone.

'Reams and reams' of paperwork, inquest transcripts, missing persons' reports. Gone.

Hairstrands, carkeys, paperwork, evidence, men – too many men – slipped, jumped, vanished into thin air.

Yet although these official reports and potential pieces of trace evidence, are physically missing, having been symbolically devoured in the mundus-like void, they still exist discursively precisely because of their absence. Like the missing men, they too exert an uncanny and ghostly presence in this narrative.

These things I have been looking at throughout this chapter – this set of keys, abandoned car, spray-jacket, walkman, laundered clothes – can be considered sublime objects in the Lacanian sense. In looking at these things, we 'gain an

insight into the forbidden domain, into a space that should be left unseen' (Zizek, 1989:71). Yet, the objects are not in and of themselves 'sublime'. On their own they do not necessarily indicate the forbidden, the hidden. Rather, they are everyday things, elevated, due to our recognition of their structural position, to the level of the 'impossible-real object of desire' (Zizek, 1989:194). For these things are not indicative of some other order of objects, beneath which we might unearth the 'truth' behind the disappearance and murder cases in which they function. Rather, they, as Lacanian sublime objects, mask only a void, an emptiness we are all unable to face. They both cover up, and uncover, the terrifying moment of a vanishing or suspicious death. They are the only witnesses to an inexplicable event; one we both can't imagine because it is so cleverly masked; and yet, one we can imagine only too well through crime scene photographs, through abandoned cars, and discarded keys.

These things left behind – whether they are material or discursive – force us to witness the incredible. They both provide too much meaning and not enough. They can tell us something of what has happened, yet at the same time, reveal nothing. For, as Zizek explains, one cannot get too close to a sublime object. If one does, it becomes only an ordinary vulgar piece of merchandise; which, of course, is all it is, and yet that which it must not be. Any meaning we manage to assign these remnants serves only to obscure further the impact of their presence, which must persist 'only in an interspace, in an intermediate state' (Zizek, 1989:170). If we demand to see them in any other setting than 'from a certain perspective, half seen' (Zizek, 1989:170), they dissipate themselves, precisely because they are nothing at all (Zizek, 1989:170). The more we look, examine, take apart, reassemble, the less likely we are to find what we seek. Regardless of what *Crime Scene Investigators* and other such television programs may show, lost keys and abandoned cars, don't, by themselves, solve disappearance cases. They merely reach out to us, as presages of the unavoidable eruption of the Real we are forced to contemplate, but they do so only as chimera.

Symbolization is rent through traumatic events such as the disappearances and deaths considered here. There is no real possibility they can ever be 'read' through the few things, the 'clues', left behind. For trauma automatically

indicates a failure to adequately symbolize or to 'speak' the event; any traumatic event must be constituted backwards from its effects (Zizek, 1989:169). The trauma itself remains unspeakable; only the evidence of its impact, on both persons and things, is really available for analysis. Yet even the impacts are 'fantasy constructs', developed afterwards. As Cathy Caruth explains: 'The traumatized [like the things discarded at the sites of these crimes] ... carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess.' (1995:5).

As the bereaved and traumatized partner left behind in the wake of Gilles' disappearance, Jacques is explicit about its impact:

I would say it's a wound which has never healed and I have been changed forever ... it's like having sort of confronted it and not being able to see a body, the corpse, and that's – it's extremely difficult to stop grieving and I've totally changed forever because of that (Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 2003-2005).

In other words, the trauma victim is both repeatedly drawn to the intense 'reality' of the event, often including an obsession with the things that pertain to that event, remaining both unable to shrug it off, yet unable to live with it.

Jacques succinctly captures this sense of being shadowed, even haunted, by the trauma of Gilles' disappearance:

I have myself seen people in the street thinking, oh that's Gilles and I realize that's not him so I mean that's something which occurs when somebody disappeared ... you try to forget but there are sorts of figures and movement, or body movement, which makes you think *oh* and then *no it's not* (Coronial Inquest Transcripts, 2003-2005).

To say that the trauma victim is both repeatedly drawn to the trauma and simultaneously unable to live with it, does not mean that traumatic events cannot be spoken of at all. Rather, as in Gilles Mattaini's, Ross Warren's and John Russell's cases, a story can be told, however, the actual trauma itself, the sheer horror, the feelings that underlie the neat story structure, cannot be adequately rendered to suit either legal or media narratives. The base elements of the tale – who did what, or said what, and when, and to whom – may be able

to be recorded, but this in no way accesses the fear, the hopelessness, nor the cruelty of nagging hope, lingering always beneath. Trauma both provides us with the greatest opportunity we will ever have to face the Real directly, yet perforce demands total numbing, wherein 'immediacy ... may take the form of belatedness' (Caruth, 1995:6). This is largely due to the idea that when people are exposed to traumatic events, they literally experience 'speechless terror' whereby their experience cannot be conveyed in words and symbols (Van der Kolk and Van der Hart, 1995:177). The memory, then, becomes somehow timeless, trapped in an everlasting present with no possibility of a tomorrow. Those who attempt to speak trauma become wordless, even when they are most willing to 'tell their stories', because they know that 'their most complicated recollections are unrelated to time' and thus can not be told in classic 'story' formation, with a neat, chronological beginning, middle and end (Van der Kolk and Van der Hart, 1995:177). Instead, the constant immediacy of the trauma invokes the numbed belatedness of its telling, leaving only a void in the psyche which can never be adequately expressed (Cohen & Kingston cited in Caruth, 1995:6). We can't approach the Real directly, indeed it seems even 'reality' is beyond our grasp.

Like psyches, the things left behind are unreliable witnesses. For, in their obstinate existence they are both unable to entirely mask the horrible void of meaninglessness and impossibility, and yet are forced, as sublime objects, to appear to do so. In this way, the conundrum of the Real is allowed to mercifully recede taking both its positivity and its precariousness with it (Zizek, 1989:169). The trace evidence, epitomized by these discarded objects, is thus emblematic of a Real upon whose 'rock' any of our pathetic attempts at symbolization are dashed. It reminds us again of the hard kernel at the heart of the Real against which we hammer in search of 'truth' or 'meaning', but whose incapacity to mean anything defies all our best efforts. Yet, these disappearance cases, these moments of horrific lucidity, also demonstrate the precariousness of the Real, which we have always already failed to catch, which we have 'missed, in a shadow; and which 'dissolves itself as soon as we try to grasp it in its positive nature' (Zizek, 1989:169). We may see, but we cannot 'know'. We may collect 'evidence', but it will show us only lack. We may honour the forgotten relic, but it will only increase our desire for the lost object. The Real retains its place as a

'fantasy construct', then, after which we both pine in our quest for certainty, even while we are keenly aware of the cruelty of its whimsy.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have examined the objects left behind in the wake of John Russell's death and the disappearances of Gilles Mattaini and Ross Warren. I have analyzed these objects in an effort to make sense of them as everyday objects and potential trace evidence as well as to make sense of the crimes themselves. The few things left behind might well give us a glimmer of the materiality so desperately craved, yet so impossible, particularly in disappearance cases, but they nevertheless retain a haunting quality which simultaneously insists on their own physical reality, even as they embody our overwhelming desire for the one who is lost. They both preserve their sanctity as the things the vanished person last touched, last held; and they provide incontrovertible evidence of the extraordinarily complete lack of that person, reminding us forever of our 'lost object of desire' indicating both the missing person and our naïve faith in continuity.

Conclusion

When I first read about the Bondi Cliffs murders, they struck me as an extraordinary set of cases. Whilst the violence itself – homophobic violence – is relatively common-place and entrenched within the broader Australian community, there were a number of features which marked these cases as exceptional. Firstly, most of these gay-bashings were in fact also murders, or at the least, attempted murders. Secondly, the serial nature of the crimes suggested that they had taken place over a lengthy period of time and by groups of 'gay bashers' believed to be loosely linked to each other. Thirdly, by the turn of the century, the investigation and inquest into these events were examining what was by now a set of 'cold cases'. The other interesting aspect for me was that the homophobic angle – whether implicitly or explicitly – appeared to run through every thread of this case. Societal attitudes at the time of the deaths and disappearances, for example, frequently collapsed gay identities and sexual practices with the HIV/AIDS virus. Such widely held attitudes may well have contributed to Bondi locals not intervening or reporting the violence they witnessed in the Marks Park area during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Likewise, dominant perceptions about beat locations and male-to-male sexual practices deemed such sites to be unsavoury locations and therefore any violence that may have occurred there was not considered to constitute violence. Finally, mainstream media and police responses to the crimes themselves, at the times they occurred, ranged from sheer incompetence and neglect to outright sensationalism.

In many ways, then, these cases can be read as exemplary cases – as an example of a series of homophobic crimes which can be used as a case study to illustrate general societal trends and values. What also interested me was that although the 'gay gang murders' occurred within a fixed time frame during the mid 1980s to early 1990s, the police investigations, Coronial Inquest, and the mainstream and gay publicity on the cases, produced in the early years of this century, enabled me to chart societal shifts that have occurred in a period spanning almost twenty five years. What I discovered through the course of this PhD was that the victims had moved from occupying a symbolic site of having no, or little, social value attached to them – in their role as 'non-bodies' – to

being granted some societal status as 'bodies that matter'; bodies worthy of official judicial investigation and mainstream media attention.

By far one of the most useful pieces of evidence in helping me to tease out the societal and cultural shifts occurring in the two decades since the men's deaths is Jacqueline M. Milledge's 'Findings and Recommendations' from the Coronial Inquest (State Coroner's Findings and Recommendations, 9 March 2005). Unfortunately on re-reading this document, my main feeling is a sense of despondency because most of Milledge's recommendations do not appear to have been carried out. At the close of the Coronial Inquest, Milledge made a number of hard-hitting and timely recommendations. Some concerned the procedures that needed to be adhered to in the investigations of Missing Persons cases, whilst others called for a review of procedures in relation to the collection and retention of physical evidence and exhibits. Amongst her recommendations were some that specifically focussed on the gay community, in particular, Milledge called for the reintroduction of the GLLO (Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officer) in-service training programme, and made specific recommendations in relation to safety at beats. As mentioned previously in this thesis, Milledge was highly critical of the police inaction in the Bondi deaths investigations. She sought to prevent similar situations by proposing a number of reviews of procedures and suggesting crime prevention strategies for the New South Wales Police Service to adopt.

It would be heartening to conclude this thesis by presenting evidence of these recommendations being implemented, particularly those proposals relating to the New South Wales Police Service response to the gay community. Such 'evidence' would have revealed not only real change within the New South Wales Police Service in relation to homophobic hate attacks, but it may also have signalled a decrease in the number and severity of such attacks. However, even the most cursory look at a range of Sydney gay and mainstream media sources (for example, *Sydney Star Observer*, *SX*, *Sydney Morning Herald*) suggest otherwise. Instead, what I discover as I search through on-line media sites, from late 2007 through to early 2009, is verification of a strong culture of

Sydney-based gay-bashings continuing¹⁰³. What I find particularly alarming in a number of these reports are the criticisms of the 'inaction' of law enforcement agencies, in particular the Surry Hills Local Area Command (LAC), to respond in a timely and effective manner to these crimes.

Given my emphasis on the earlier crimes, I do not intend to go into further depth about all the gay hate crimes that have taken place in Sydney since the 'gay gang murders'. I will briefly canvas here, however, the reported rise in homophobic attacks in Sydney over the past two years from 2007-2009 (Welch and Gibson, 2008) and the official responses to these crimes. The most highly publicized of these attacks was the December 2007 assault of Craig Gee and Shane Brennen.

Early December 2007. 1:30 a.m.

After leaving gay nightclub *Arg* near Taylor Square, Darlinghurst, Craig Gee and his partner, Shane Brennen, walk along, hand in hand, down Crown Street. A few blocks away from Oxford Street, a group of four young men surround them, one of them chanting, 'give us your money you fucking faggot'. Brennen is wrestled to the ground by one of the men but manages to get away. After freeing himself, Brennen turns around and looks for Gee. He sees him lying flat, knocked out, on the tarmac. Brennen watches one of the men lean over Gee and pull his wallet out from his jeans' pocket. He watches the same man, rise his leg high up into the air, then stomp his foot down on Gee's face.

Slam.

Slam.

Slam.

The foot treads heavily up and down on Gee's face.

¹⁰³ A cursory glance at the gay and mainstream media newspaper headlines alone indicate this trend. See, for example, 'Oxford Street bashing victim in a coma', *Sydney Star Observer*, 21 September 2008; 'Other victims come forward', *Sydney Star Observer*, 17 January 2008; 'Rally planned in Sydney gay neighbourhood after spate of anti-gay attacks', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 January 2008; 'Hundreds protest against Sydney gay-bashings', *ABC News*, 27 January 2008.

For a few moments, Brennan thinks that Gee is dead.

Gee survives, but at a cost: a broken leg, a fractured jaw, an eye socket smashed into three pieces and a partially shattered skull – some of it reduced to powder. Gee requires a number of operations including facial reconstruction surgery. Weeks after the assault, Gee complains of nightmares, headaches, blurred vision and memory loss. He is terrified of going out alone.

Gee and Brennan reported the attack to the Surry Hills police who they allege were not only reluctant to act but repeatedly turned them away from the police station claiming a reporting officer was not available (Dennett, 2008d). According to Brennan, the responding officer rejected his attempts to provide a statement, stating, '[we] get 15-20 cases of this a night and don't usually get a result', adding, 'we don't have the resources' (Dennett, 2008d). Although police officers did attend the crime scene, Gee and Brennan felt that their case was not being taken seriously. As Gee put it, 'We felt like we were doing the investigation and they were giving us excuses' (O'Neill & Moran, 2008).

A number of possible lines of inquiry were not investigated for what appeared to be unnecessarily lengthy periods of time. The Surry Hills LAC initially refused Gee and Brennan's request to review footage from closed-circuit television tapes (CCTV) shot at around the time and location of the assault. A month after the attack, after prolonged pressure from the Sydney gay and lesbian community, footage of the men using Gee's stolen credit cards was finally released. It appeared on gay media sites, for example, the *Sydney Star Observer*¹⁰⁴ and *GenQ*¹⁰⁵. There was, however, some dispute as to whether the men accessing the credit cards on the CCTV footage were the same men responsible for the assault (Fox, 2008). Another possible line of inquiry involved Gee's credit cards which had been used to pay for two taxis shortly after the assault. Once again, it took police a month before they started canvassing Sydney taxi drivers who may have picked up the assailants on the night of the

¹⁰⁴ <http://www.ssonet.com.au/display.asp?articleID=7599> accessed 26 February 2008

¹⁰⁵ 'Sydney Gay Bashers Caught on Film', <http://www.generationq.net/news/australia/sydney-gay-bashers-caught-on-film-1018.shtml> accessed 9 March 2009

crime. The third line of inquiry involved Gee's mobile phone which had been stolen during the attack. The phone was later used to send threatening phone and text messages to Gee's family and friends including one to his mother saying: 'We killed your faggot son' (Dennett, 2008d). Police officers advised the couple to cancel the mobile service to avoid extra charges but were unable to tell the men if the mobile service could be used to locate the assailants.

The Surry Hills LAC was critical of the damning media coverage concerning their treatment of Gee and Brennen arguing that reports produced around the case were 'totally incorrect' (Fox, 2008). The LAC also hit back at reports in gay media sites that they refused to record gay hate crimes by claiming that there were frequently difficulties with ascertaining whether a violent crime was motivated by homophobia or other factors (Fox, 2008). Equally defensive was the then Central Metropolitan Regional Commander, Paul Carey, who blamed intoxication, not homophobia, for the spate of gay bashings in the Oxford Street vicinity (Dennett, 2008b).

The brutality of the attack on Craig Gee, and the unhelpful response from the Surry Hills police station to Gee and Brennen, led to unprecedented developments including extensive media attention on the issue of Sydney-based homophobic violence. In December 2007, for example, the New South Wales Police minister, David Campbell, held an emergency meeting to find ways to combat the increase in Sydney's homophobic violence (Davis, 2007). The emergency forum was held following reports raised in parliament and in the gay media about increasing incidents of homophobic violence in inner-city suburbs such as Oxford Street, Darlinghurst, and King Street, Newtown (Davis, 2007). In January 2008 the Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project (AVP) reported that reports of homophobic violence had doubled over the past two months with twenty-two reports being made in the past six weeks, compared to thirty over the previous five months (Dennet & Davis, 2008).

As well as general publicity on increasing levels of homophobic violence, Gee and Brennen continued to publicize their attack, and the poor response they felt they had received from the Surry Hills LAC, in both the mainstream and gay media. Graphic colour photographs of Gee's battered and bruised face were

reproduced so frequently in gay media sites that they were eventually described as 'iconic' (Dennett, 2008e). A documentary about the bashing, which followed the reactions of the gay and lesbian community and the response by police, was produced and screened on the one-year anniversary of the assault (Dennett, 2008e).

Numerous public individuals and institutions also responded to the Gee and Brennen case in a variety of ways. After hearing of how the Surry Hills police officers had dealt with the couple's complaint, the gay-friendly Lord Mayor of Sydney, Clover Moore, contacted the New South Wales Police Minister, David Campbell, asking for a review of the police officers handling the case. Moore also questioned the Minister as to why there were no Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officers (GLLO's) available on the night of the crime. Moore also joined forces with ACON in writing to the New South Wales Ombudsman, Bruce Barbour, asking for the Surry Hills Police Command to be investigated and action taken. After more than two years of claims that officers had refused to record acts of homophobic violence or investigate some gay bashings, the New South Wales Police Professional Standards Command confirmed that it would investigate the Surry Hills police command and their complaints system (Welch and Gibson, 2008).

A month after police began the internal investigation into the Surry Hills LAC for its handling of homophobic violence, there was a command change which involved two of its highest ranking officers moving to other roles and being replaced by new staff. These moves came after the Central Metropolitan Region Commander Assistant Commissioner, Catherine Burn, assumed control of the region. In her first month in the new role Burn strengthened a number of relationships between the New South Wales Police Service, Clover Moore, ACON and the AVP. This involved a meeting in February 2008 between senior New South Wales police staff and representatives of ACON and the AVP in relation to the tensions between the Surry Hills police and the Sydney gay and lesbian community over the levels of violence in and around the Oxford Street 'pink precinct'. Following these discussions Burn oversaw a range of strategies to address the pressing issues and restore community confidence in the police. Such strategies included an increase in the visibility of local policing, more

active policing of problematic licensed premises, speedier responses to reports of homophobic violence, effective follow-ups and improved communication between police and the gay and lesbian community¹⁰⁶. A particularly important initiative to emerge from these discussions was a commitment to review the state-wide GLLO program, including the stationing of a full-time GLLO at the Surry Hills police station to focus specifically on homophobic violence at the local level¹⁰⁷.

Partly fuelled by publicity on the Gee and Brennen case, and other reports of Sydney-based 'gay hate crimes', almost a thousand Sydney-siders attended a 'Reclaim the Right' rally in January 2008. The rally was staged in support of Gee, Brennen and other victims of homophobic violence. During the vigil, which was held at Harmony Park, Sydney, the crowd collectively joined hands and held them high in the air to protest their right to hold hands in public without attracting violence. After the rally about 400 people marched to Taylor Square waving pink Australian flags donated by the New Mardi Gras and blowing whistles donated by the City of Sydney to the applause of patrons at Oxford Street cafés and bars.

In March 2008, Gee and Brennen were invited to join the lead float of the 30th anniversary parade of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. With the issue of violence against gays and lesbians on the Mardi Gras political agenda for 2008, the float honoured Gee and Brennen and all other past victims of homophobic violence. The two men walked the parade route hand in hand in an open defiance of the gay bashers who had attacked them in that area a few months before. In a sign of the détente between Sydney's gay and lesbian community and the New South Wales Police Service, the recently appointed commander of the Surry Hills LAC, Superintendent Donna Adney, also marched in the parade with thirty GLLO's and the New South Wales police band (Pollard & Welch, 2008). Having such a high-ranking representative from the Surry Hills

¹⁰⁶ 'NSW Police and ACON set to work together to reduce Oxford St violence', 6 February 2008. <http://www.acon.org.au/about-acon/Newsroom/Media-Releases/2008/05> accessed 9 March 2009

¹⁰⁷ 'NSW Police and ACON set to work together to reduce Oxford St violence', 6 February 2008. <http://www.acon.org.au/about-acon/Newsroom/Media-Releases/2008/05> accessed 9 March 2009

LAC participating in the parade was welcomed by the Sydney gay and lesbian community.

In many ways the publicity surrounding the assault on Gee and Brennan, and the response they received from the Surry Hills LAC, echoed the publicity generated by the Coronial Inquest into the 'gay gang murders'. Both 'events' highlighted the frequency and extent of homophobic violence in Australia. They also drew attention to the often fraught relationship between the Sydney gay and lesbian community and official law enforcement bodies such as the New South Wales Police Service. Both inquiries specifically highlighted the need for a thorough review of policing procedures and strategies in relation to Sydney-based homophobic violence, in particular, the need for a revitalisation of the GLLO program.

Despite experiencing a strong sense of *deja vu* when I read reports of the 'inaction' of the Surry Hills LAC, other aspects of the responses to the Gee / Brennan case differed markedly to that of the Bondi cliffs cases. In particular, the speedy instigation of an internal investigation, followed by the change of command, at the Surry Hills police station, was a positive change, which has helped to enhance relationships between local police and the Sydney gay and lesbian community. Likewise, the renewal of GLLO training, initiated by Regional Commander, Catherine Burn, is also to be commended. Finally, the willingness of gay and lesbian community organizations, such as ACON and the AVP, to work in partnership with a wide range of governmental bodies (for example, Sydney city councillors, politicians, and representatives from the New South Wales Police Service) to identify and implement strategies to target homophobic violence is another positive shift. Such partnerships assist in repairing the frequently troubled relationship that the Sydney gay and lesbian community has had with official bodies and institutions, particularly those pertaining to law enforcement and the judiciary. My personal hope is that such relationships will continue to improve and that some 'real' changes towards preventing and appropriately responding to acts of homophobic violence will occur.

This project began with my fascination regarding the haunting and liminal nature of the 'gay gang murder' cases, encapsulated in the newspaper image of the mannequin of John Russell being toppled over the iconic cliffs. Throughout the writing of this PhD, and all the research it has entailed, the haunting nature of the case has never subsided. For me, the ghostly presence that the Bondi cliffs victims bring to the crime scene locations – the Bondi-Tamarama walkway and Marks Park – still remains. I find myself unable to adopt the guise of 'tourist' and 'do' the cliff-top walkway without feeling haunted by the victims, without identifying the locations where they are believed to have been murdered, and lastly, without replaying in my imagination the presumed circumstances of their untimely deaths.

The victims may have shifted, in the Australian public consciousness, from a symbolic space as 'non-bodies' – disposable bodies, illegitimate victims – to being situated as 'bodies that matter' – but, for the most part, these crimes remain unsolved. Despite the fresh investigation and the Coronial Inquest, there is still little closure for the family, friends and ex-partners of John Russell, Ross Warren and Gilles Mattaini. No arrests have been made in these three cases or are likely to be. Whilst the victims' faces may have graced feature articles, books, and an episode of *Crime Investigation Australia*¹⁰⁸, for me, the men remain where I initially discovered them – on the thresholds of liminality, in a zone of in/between-ness and indeterminacy, hovering around the cliff-top beats they (presumably) frequented. The ghostly, uncanniness of the victims is echoed in the uncanny nature of the crime scene. The intensely familiar site of Bondi is rendered both illegitimate and unfamiliar by the murders which occurred there and the nature of the crimes themselves.

¹⁰⁸ An episode of *Crime Investigation Australia* is due to be screened on Foxtel television (Australia's pay television channel) in late March 2009. Unfortunately, owing to PhD submission dates, I am unable to provide an analysis of this show.

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