

## **Postcards from the ‘Bondi Badlands’: Meditations on the scene of the crime**

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### **Introduction**

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 re-enactment turns out to be part of a fresh investigation, Operation Taradale, into the deaths and disappearances of gay men in the Bondi/Tamarama region in Sydney, New South Wales, 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, ‘Operation Taradale’, headed by Detective Stephen Page, was established to examine links between the suspicious deaths – originally dismissed as suicides, accident or one-off attacks – and Sydney gay hate gangs which existed at the time. The taskforce examined numerous cases including the disappearances of Gilles Mattaini and Ross Warren and the suspicious deaths of Kritchikorn Rattanjurathaporn and John Russell. Following the investigation, a coronial inquest was staged and numerous recommendations proposed.

A newspaper photographer catches an image of the flying body, graphically suspending it in mid air. 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.

This photographic image strikes me as both 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 article, the 'gay gang murders' embody the feeling and experience that Nicholas 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.

I find myself haunted by the photocopied image above my desk – the mannequin hurtling through the air. 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*, 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 Rattanjurathaporn, 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 ‘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 Badlands.

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. John Russell’s body is conveyed by

government contractors to the nearest hospital, St Vincent's, where life is pronounced extinct. A certificate is issued, then Russell's body is transported to the central Sydney morgue in the inner-city suburb of Glebe.

Fast-forward to July 1990.

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

In this paper, I place myself – as a writer and researcher – within the discursive and geographical frame of the crime scene location by meditating on this location. Form-wise, this article 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 early 2008 where I physically re-traced the steps of both victims and perpetrators along the Bondi-Tamarama walkway to Marks Park. Hence, in this article, I use ficto-criticism and auto-ethnography to produce 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 reflective analysis of the crime scene photographs, then I make explicit my own role in the process as a researcher and writer.

### **Crime scene photographs**

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, 19070, 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; Gibson, 2000; Wollen, 1997). 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 1950's Sydney crime scene images 'scream, or more exactly flare or ignite, *during* the viewing; they flare like a struck match, and then some of them glare almost hurtfully for a time before dimming down either to luminance or banality' (2009, 20-21).

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 'the viewer really does feel something scorching, a burning surge of anxious energy plus a kind of glandular scald. The flare ignites on the surface of the image but radiates in the viewer's nervous system' (2009, 21). 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 Stephen 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 Callaghan's true-crime book, *Bondi Badlands* (2007, 120). One of these images, taken at the spot where 'gay gang murder' victim Kritchikorn Rattanjurathaporn is believed to have slipped or been pushed to his death, depicts a grim-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 innocuous 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.

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

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 as part of my Doctoral research.

I turn now to the contents of the envelope '23/11/89', the Russell crime scene. In these images, space is organised 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 realise 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' (Caleb, 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, 2007, 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' (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, accessed November 2005).

### **The Bondi Badlands**

My second response concerned the incongruity of the murder scene with its Bondi backdrop. Bondi, as a counter-site or heterotopias, juxtaposes in one single

geographical location 'several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible' (Foucault, 1967, 5). The 'legitimate' uses of Marks Park – as a picnic site, wedding backdrop, scenic lookout, exhibition venue and a site of historical interest – sit neatly within dominant discourses of mainstream tourism and leisure (Davis, 2007a, 1). However, this 'postcard perfect', safe, public face of Bondi has an illegitimate, dangerous and queered Other, exemplified both in Mark's Park's role as a beat or gay cruising site and also in the 'gay gang murders' themselves (Davis, 2007a, 1). The gangs of poofster-bashers, as much as the beat users, operate as physical and symbolic sites which embody the very incompatibility of the Marks Park site itself (Davis 2007a, 2).

Publicity on the 'gay gang murders' makes explicit the tensions embodied in dominant constructions of Bondi as a tourist mecca and national icon. In Greg Callaghan's book *Bondi Badlands* (2007), for example, the story of the gay hate gangs and their victims is presented as a standard badlands narrative. According to Callaghan, local residents dubbed their neighbourhood the Bondi badlands because of the screams that echoed well into the early morning and the blood stains they frequently found splattered along the concrete walkway (2007, 5).

In framing Bondi as a badlands, it is crucial to recognize the mythical nature of badlands. As Ross Gibson defines them:

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 popular and densely populated coastal suburb. It is certainly not an uninhabited 'quarantine zone'. Yet the badlands trail can be mapped onto this mythic site and in doing so make explicit the tensions between the safe, day-time public face of Bondi and its more dangerous, sinister night-time Other. Like Callaghan, I make use of the term 'Bondi Badlands' as a short-hand descriptor of the Marks Park violence but I also extend my usage of the term to critically examine the under-currents evident in popular readings of Bondi. Thus in framing Bondi as a badlands site, I am able to draw out some of the cultural ambivalences held towards this treasured Australian icon.

### **Walking the walk**

When I first glance over the crime scene photographs, it *looks* like a classic '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, that of Bondi's underbelly of violence: the Badlands.

It is this incongruity that also strikes me when I take a trip to Sydney with my partner (in crime) and re/visit the crime scene: the Bondi-Tamarama walkway and Marks Park. We cross Campbell Parade and begin the walk. It's unsettling 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, 2007, 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*, 29/07/1989, 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 Rattanjurathaporn'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 his companion 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 Rattanajurathaporn'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 Rattanajurathaporn's killers, but also his. On the night of his death, Rattanajurathaporn, 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 is 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).

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 article, 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 characterised 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 armchair 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.

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 Adelaide, Wanda beach in Sydney, and Port Arthur in Tasmania, Bondi's status as a multiple and vast historical crime scene is rarely publicly acknowledged or widely known with the dominant sanitized tourist friendly and family friendly images of Bondi violently expelling the queer bodies from the domain of (hetero)normativity.

By using a ficto-critical and auto-ethnographic approach, I have positioned myself within the discursive and geographical frame of the crime scene location. In doing so, I have transformed the Bondi crime scene from a (potential) scene of meaningless into a heterotopia or counter-site framed as a *Badlands* and over-laid with layers of uncanniness and liminality which operate to destabilize more traditional and 'legitimate' renderings of the place.

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