Engaging Public Sociology, Fiction and the Sociological Imagination

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Abstract

This thesis explores public sociology, fiction writing and sociological imagination, and presents a sociological fiction novel titled *Into the Sea*. Building from what Mills (1959) calls the promise and cultural meaning of sociology, I address how and why we might engage people in sociological imagination through fiction. I approach this imagination as a lively activity in a creative (Beer, 2014: 12) and arty way (Back, 2012) that builds on contemporary approaches to public sociology (Burawoy, 2005). Bringing together methods of autoethnography, literature analysis and arts-based research fiction writing, using an innovative methodological approach that I term the *methods braiding technique*, I explore how sociological fiction may contribute to the task of ‘assist[ing] the influence of the sociological imagination in society’ (Furedi, 2009: 17). This involves a consideration of creative adaptations of the craft of sociology (Mills, 1959), as well as broader challenges including the ‘deeply antisociological’ ethos and governance regime of neoliberalism (Burawoy, 2005: 7) which public sociology struggles against.

*Into the Sea* is an experiment in sociological imagination. The novel primarily follows Taylor Brown, a twenty-six year old Australian woman, as she lives through work, parties, her relationship, a funeral, a wedding, shopping, and family issues. The fictional story line of Taylor’s everyday life is interwoven with national and international events and issues from the year 2014. The chapters of the novel are not thematically structured however key sociological concepts do orient and drive the narrative. In the novel I explore various social processes and cultural tensions; rather than present a sociological argument about disciplinary concepts, with the novel I aim to float ideas about society and bring sociological imagination to life. With Taylor Brown’s story I consider the promise and cultural meaning of sociology.

Through the novel I explore the everyday processes of relation that link biographies and histories (Mills, 1959), as well as the neoliberal context within which these relations are contemporarily lived through. To think through and challenge the individualistic common sense of the neoliberal imaginary – which is problematic for public sociology, considering that neoliberalism is ‘hostile to the very idea of “society”’ (Burawoy, 2005: 7) – I turn to the relational and affect-centred work of Benedict Spinoza (2005 [1677]). From Spinoza I draw conceptual tools for considering the fundamental and constitutive meaning of ‘social embeddedness’
(Armstrong, 2009: 60), and for exploring the ‘possibilities for autonomy of an individual conceived in a profoundly relational way’ (Armstrong, 2009: 45). I see that these Spinozan concepts may enliven the activity of sociological imagination. To ground and realise the promise of a Spinozist sociology, I consider the temporal and spatial ways that moments and narratives are made meaningful; I focus my attention on forms of Australian cultural meaning, to consider the value of exploring and utilising such cultural meaning for doing affective public sociology that engages people in sociological imagination.

This thesis makes two key contributions to sociology. The first is the novel artefact, which operates as an affective form of public sociology that may engage publics, and specifically a student-public, in sociological imagination. The second contribution is the methodological process for doing arts-based public sociology with which I developed and crafted my sociological fiction novel, which I have termed the methods braiding technique. From my analysis I argue that the value of sociological fiction lies in its ability to affectively affirm society. I argue that centring affect in the project of public sociology is important for progressing conceptual and practical approaches to public engagement.
Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

(Signed) ____________________________________________

Ashleigh Watson
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A number of works were published and presented in the course of this research. No full copies of published or unpublished papers are included in this thesis, however the following works are included in major part.

Published Journal Articles


Unpublished Journal Articles

Methods Braiding: a Technique for Arts-Based and Qualitative Research

Spinoza VS Neoliberal Individualism

Conference Papers


Social Science and Fiction: Fiction Writing as a Method and Analytical Tool. Experimental Approaches to Writing Research, Birmingham City University. Birmingham, UK. 09/06/17.


Fiction as Public Sociology. Public Sociology Lunchtime Seminar Series, Queen Margaret University. Edinburgh, UK. 13/02/17.

E-thnography: Recording the Field with my Smartphone (just like everybody else). Fresh Lines, Griffith University. Gold Coast, Australia. 25/11/16.

Writing a Sociological Novel: a 4D approach to exploring the social world with fiction. Fiction and the Social Imaginary, University of York. York, UK. 14/03/16.

Thinking-Writing Affect: Spinoza, sociological imagination, and Trajectory of Self. Researching and Measuring Emotions and Affect in Contemporary Society, Contemporary Emotions Research Centre and the University of Wollongong. Sydney, Australia. 25/09/15.
Part 1 – Project Overview

Part 1 of this thesis introduces and overviews the project. It is comprised of three chapters – Chapter 1: Introduction, Chapter 2: (Re)Framing Sociological Imagination for Public Sociology, and Chapter 3: Methodology. Chapter 1 provides the background of the project and establishes the central relationship between sociology and fiction, through a public sociology lens. Chapter 1 also outlines the research questions and aims of this thesis. Chapter 2 provides the theoretical framework of the thesis, contextualising this project and establishing the conceptual connects which underlie the novel and the exegesis of Part 3. Chapter 3 overviews the methods used in this project – autoethnography, literature analysis, and the arts-based research method of fiction writing – and introduces the *methods braiding technique*, a methodological design tool which I employed in this project, for doing arts-based and qualitative mixed methods research.
Chapter 1: Introduction

On a grey Tuesday in early January 2017 I was struck by Leonard Cohen’s poem1 ‘S.O.S. 1995.’ It was my first morning in south east London. Standing in the entryway to my new campus library, perusing a popup book sale, this poem rang like a clear bell in my head. My fingers traced the page. Heat from the entryway blasted the back of my neck. People moved around me. The lines read:

....The Devil won’t let me speak,
will only let me hint that you are a slave,
your misery a deliberate policy
of those in whose thrall you suffer,
and you are sustained
by your misfortune.
The atrocities over there,
the interior paralysis over here-
Pleased with the better deal?
You are clamped down...

...So I must say it quickly:
Whoever is in your life,
those who harm you,
those who help you;
those whom you know
and those whom you do not know –
let them off the hook,
help them off the hook.
Recognize the hook.
You are listening to Radio Resistance.

With these lines Cohen coloured for me a task and a party I wanted to be part of: Recognise the hook/You are listening to Radio Resistance; Understand what it is that holds us up and keeps us (and our troubles) apart/there are other ways of doing this.

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For me, Cohen echoes C Wright Mills. The poem connects the personal with the political, our misery with deliberate policy, distant atrocities with our interior paralysis. It recognises that those who harm and those who help us are held up by the same structures – the same hook. This is what I hope that Into the Sea, the sociological fiction novel that I present in this thesis, says in its own way. These personal troubles are more than a feeling, more than a coincidence, more than personal in nature; through them we are connected and implicated and involved.

I came across this poem as I was finishing my novel. I conceived of this project three years earlier, in 2014. Completing honours research in creative writing with a feminist and critical theory focus, I was excited by the new world of sociology that was also opening up before me. My growing excitement however seemed inversely met with unfamiliarity or disinterest. Few people in my life outside the university knew what sociology was, and those that (kind of) did could not see the point of studying society except to provide quantitative population data or connect companies with their target markets. These responses surprised and frustrated me, especially as many came from friends who had been through higher education and were politically inclined; it did not seem that accessibility, literal or intellectual, was what prevented their engagement with sociology. Used to thinking about problems and their solutions as individual in nature – or beyond them, and therefore a matter for government – they did not see the everyday value of thinking in sociological ways about social life.

I came to sociology through creative writing, and got hooked on social theory because it tied in so richly with my literature classes. I found literature and sociology mutually illuminating. I was interested in pursuing a project that would knit these more tightly together; as a writer, I know that fiction has the ability to challenge how people think about the world, move them to see things differently and care about different things. This is not an ability unique to or inherent in fiction but is something that can be actively cultivated in various artistic forms. I felt that novels in particular may be able to help people see why sociology is important, as they may show the world the way that sociologists see it with significant depth and detail, and therefore help people care about the same kinds of things that sociologists do. Likewise, I felt that fiction may be able to help me see why sociology was not more engaging or more meaningful to people. I felt it could help me question the assumptions that I and
others make about sociology in the public sphere, and help me do sociology that cares about the same kinds of things that people who are not sociologists do.

In sum, I undertook this research because I was interested in exploring fiction as a form of sociological work. I wanted to investigate how the sociological imagination could be illustrated in a novel, and how fiction writing could be used to realise what Mills (1959) calls the promise of sociology. I was particularly interested in this from a public sociology perspective. Building from critiques of public sociology as being limited in terms of engagement, I designed this practice-based project to investigate how fiction could advance the project of public sociology and enliven the concept of sociological imagination.

**Public Sociology and Sociological Imagination**

In recent years substantial attention has been directed towards the accessibility and communication of sociological research (see Agger, 2000; Burawoy, 2005; Clawson, 2007; Hanemaayer and Schneider, 2014; Jeffries, 2009). This public turn is particularly vital in the current climate, where the value of the discipline is being questioned and quantified, and emphasis is increasingly placed on the pragmatic ‘utility of research’ (Inglis, 2014: 103). While sociological research is arguably more accessible than ever, sociology is not seen as a leading scholarly discipline and sociological perspective is not prominent in the public sphere; as highlighted by Inglis, we risk losing the view that sociology is ‘an integral part of social criticism’ (2014: 103). Contributing to this is that efforts to make sociology more public involve navigating and often mitigating the miscellany of sociological foci – sociology’s ‘untidy face’ (Willis, 2011: 45).

This ‘untidy face’ is an issue. This is not to say that sociology needs a tidy face to succeed in the public realm. Sociology may just need the opposite: multiple, polyvocal mediums for expressing the multiplicitous nature of sociological research. Burawoy, a major figure in developing sociology’s contemporary public face, noted this in his now-seminal 2004 presidential address to the American Sociological Association. The address generated much discussion and critique of sociology’s structure as a professional academic discipline (see Christensen, 2013; Deflem, 2013; Keith, 2008), as well as sociology’s moral attachments (see Mooney Nickel, 2009; Tittle, 2004). Burawoy also raised two other considerations that I find relevant here: the need to address sociology’s ‘multiple publics’ in ‘multiple ways’ (2005: 7), and
that while there is ‘no shortage of publics’, ‘we do have a lot to learn about engaging them’ (2005: 8).

Issues of engagement have been raised many times with regards to public sociology (Agger, 2000; Burawoy, 2005, 2014a, 2014b; Furedi, 2009; Maryl and Westbrook, 2009). Considering the diverse publics that different sociologies involve, engaging readers on ‘the outside’ is a challenging task. As Furedi states, ‘it is not a question of simply taking sociology to the public’ (2009: 182). Agger contends that ‘sociological writers must write publicly, accessibly, openly’ and must ‘address major public issues’ (2000: 258). Addressing these issues does not mean only focusing on events of the moment or only advocating for political action; cultivating public engagement includes developing an awareness in people of various public issues and, as Mills argues (1959: 8), connecting these to the private troubles that publics themselves see as significant in their own lives. Cultivating public engagement involves cultivating sociological imagination with publics – noting the main concerns, issues, values, rhythms, and ways of living of a particular group. These aspects are already the focus of sociological work, and in combating ‘anti-populist prejudices’ (Furedi, 2009: 182), the content, form and style of engaging public sociology comes into play.

While much focus has remained on increasing access to and improving the impact of research, public sociologists continue to develop Burawoy’s leading challenge to ‘engage multiple publics in multiple ways’ (2005: 1) and pursue a disciplinary ‘common endeavour’ that knits together ‘the common challenges we face in defending society, the very grounds of sociology but also of humanity’ (Burawoy, 2008b: 443). Many have valuably progressed this project in more critical, experimental, feminist, non-American, decolonial and liberation-focused directions (Arribas Lozano, 2017; Creese et al., 2009; Hynes, 2016; Powell, 2013; Sprague, 2008; Yuan, 2008). Rather than these developments moving us away from Burawoy’s vision I see them being central to a unified yet diverse public sociology, that stretches from local through post-national spheres in culturally meaningful ways, while still highlighting the significance of what both Burawoy (2005: 15, 17) and Jeffries (2009b: 21) call a common disciplinary ethos. At the heart of such an ethos Burawoy sees ‘reciprocal interdependence’ or an ‘organic solidarity’ between different sociological labours (2005: 15), to better achieve a ‘defense of civil society’ (2005:}
Jeffries sees a unity of purpose stemming from the discipline’s dual ‘search for the truth’ and ‘search for the good’ (2009b: 21-22). Largely overlooked in the debate thus far is the value of artistic avenues for constructing and employing such an ethos and – notably, considering the extent to which Burawoy’s address has been dissected over the past decade – new methods of engagement. Some scholars, such as Alexander and Bowler (2014), argue that this marginalisation of the arts happens across sociology. Others such as Beer (2014) however do critically consider the value of creative approaches to the discipline and to engagement. I see that creative forms of public sociology may navigate the diversity of both sociology and its publics, encapsulating the discipline’s vast study of society in new and affecting ways. As Abbott (2016: 86) argues, ‘perhaps a want of Wordsworth’s “coloring of imagination” is what has really led to the much discussed decline in influential public sociology… [rather than] our moral timidity and our obsession with professionalism.’ Artistic avenues may operate as more than platforms for delivering sociological knowledge (see Coser, 1972) – creative mediums can act as vehicles for public discussion, involvement, interaction, and imaginative forms of engagement.

Sociological Imagination and Fiction Novels

To explore creative mediums for public sociology I turned to the emerging field of arts-based research. Arts-based research (ABR) is a methodology that involves the creation of art in genres such as music, poetry, creative writing, theatre, and film in order to achieve goals that traditional academic genres and practices often inhibit (see Kara, 2015; Leavy, 2015, 2017; Liamputtong and Rumbold, 2009). Fiction writing is one genre which has gained significant momentum in ABR over the past two decades (Leavy, 2012b), and in innovative ethnographic approaches (Rinehart, 1998). Patricia Leavy, a leader in ABR, argues ‘fiction is engaged’ and a ‘natural extension’ of what many qualitative social researchers already do (2013: 20). As she defines it, arts-based researchers are not so much ‘discovering’ new methodologies but rather are ‘carving’ out new research and communication tools (Leavy, 2015: 3).

Novels are a medium with potential for public sociology, for communicating sociological ideas in an accessible way and illuminating the value of social research through relatable narratives. The labour and analytical processes of novel writing are complementary to the narrativity embedded within much sociological work (Agger, 2000: 1–4, 249; Berger and Quinney, 2005: 3–6, 8–11). Likewise, literary novels have
been recognised for their unique depth of insight into social realities (Becker, 2007: 8, 250; Szakolczai, 2015: 225), both at macro and micro social levels. Novels can provide added accessibility, not only in terms of access but also conceptually: they bridge public readers and academic writers (Leavy, 2012a: 252; 2013: 252) as well as academics and students (see Coser, 1972; Hegtvedt, 1991), and often different publics; popular books commonly act as vehicles for public discussion (Burawoy, 2005: 7). Both fiction and qualitative research aim to ‘generate human understanding’ (Leavy, 2012a: 252). Fiction offers similar analysis to sociological analysis, ‘one that gives more detail of the processes involved, and more access to the day-to-day thinking of the people involved’ (Becker, 2007: 251). Novels ‘can have, in addition to their qualities as literary works, qualities as social analyses’ (Becker, 2007: 250).

There are numerous works discussing the significance of, and actually writing, lyrical and metaphor-employed sociology (see Jacobson and Marshman, 2008; Metcalfe and Game, 2015; Mills, 1959). There are also many instances of novels being used to teach and illustrate sociological theory. Fiction, written by non-sociologists, is effectively paired with more traditional texts in sociology classrooms, giving students the opportunity to ‘clothe the dry bones of social theory’ (Weber, 2010: 353) with and through literature. For example, Laz (1996) teaches introductory concepts including institutions and social control with Margaret Atwood’s The Handmaid’s Tale, and Caroline Weber (2010) recurrently pairs Kurt Vonnegut with Karl Marx. Coser’s book Sociology Through Literature brings this outside the classroom, aiming to help ‘teach modern sociology through illustrative material from literature’, and ‘contribute to the refinement and clarification of the concepts of sociology’ (Coser, 1972: 4–5). In this text, where Coser has curated excerpts of literature and poetry under sociological themes, culture is highlighted through Melville and Fitzgerald, status through Chekhov and Orwell, and anomie through Dickens and Yeats.

Discussing Coser’s text, as well as the wider use of fiction in teaching sociology, Andrew Carlin (2010) raises pertinent points of corpus status and sociological re/presentations or reconstructions. He highlights that the labour of recognition, or the work required to determine sociological relevance within novels, is ‘glossed’ (Carlin, 2010: 224) and underplayed. In doing this, Carlin makes a similar point to Howard Becker: critical reading of fiction still requires doing ‘a lot of work’ (Becker, 2007: 249). Further, Coser himself notes that ‘fiction is not a substitute for
systematically accumulated, certified knowledge’, and ‘literary insight cannot replace scientific and analytical knowledge’ (1972: xvi–xvii). However, fiction and sociology can do more than reciprocally illuminate understandings. Fictional texts can be more than supplementary material for sociological literature within university classrooms. Fiction provides a ‘wealth of sociologically relevant material, with manifold clues and points of departure for sociological theory and research’ (Coser, 1972: xvi). Agger considers ‘sociology as a social act that is above all literary – as writing’ (2000: 2). Game and Metcalfe believe ‘all sociologists write stories’ (1996: 66). Leavy argues that, as a form of social research, fiction can be used for raising critical consciousness, accessing hard-to-get-at dimensions of social life, extending public scholarship, opening up a multiplicity of meanings, building bridges across differences, unsettling stereotypes, and developing empathy and resonance as ways of knowing (2012a: 254).

As an extension of traditional research outputs and work, such as scholarly books and ethnographic methods, sociological fiction novels can help develop, through both practice and outcome, panoramic social worlds that bring sociological imagination to life. A number of sociologists particularly work to achieve this sense of seeing and understanding sociologically through fiction. While what definitively constitutes sociological fiction is difficult to delineate, if a pure line may be drawn at all, a number of fiction texts have been written by sociologists. Gabriel Tarde, a French criminologist and sociologist retrospectively connected with Actor-Network Theory (Latour, 2002: 117), published a science-fiction novel *Fragment d’Histoire Future* (1904), which was translated into English as *Underground Man* (1905). W.E.B. Du Bois, an American sociologist and civil rights activist, published five novels and claimed his novel *Dark Princess: A Romance* (1928) was his favourite work. Zora Neale Hurston, an American anthropologist and writer, published many stories that drew on her ethnographic research including her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). Frank Parkin, a British sociologist concerned with class, published two novels during the 1980s, *Krippendorf’s Tribe* (1986) and *The Mind and Body Shop* (1988). Raymond Williams, a British academic who laid the foundations of cultural studies, published seven novels between 1960 and 1990. Ann Oakley, a prolific

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2See University Press of Mississippi website on *Dark Princess*: http://www.upress.state.ms.us/books/265
feminist sociologist, has published two short story collections and seven novels, the most renowned being *The Men’s Room* (1988). Geoffrey Fox, an American sociologist working on culture and globalisation, has published short fiction and *A Gift for the Sultan* (2010). David Buckingham, a leading British sociologist of youth and media, recently published *On The Cusp* (2015). Patricia Leavy, an American sociologist and independent scholar, has published three novels, *Low-Fat Love* (2011), *American Circumstance* (2013) and *Blue* (2015). Leavy is also the editor of the Social Fictions Series by Sense Publishers, which publishes academic novels, short story collections, poetry, and plays. Angus Bancroft and Ralph Fevre, both British sociologists, co-wrote a sociological fiction “college novel” that directly engages sociological concepts, *Dead White Men and Other Important People* (2016). Another interesting recent work is *Economic Science Fictions* (2018), a collection edited by Will Davies, a British sociologist working on neoliberalism and consumerism, which brings together theory and short stories to explore the intersections of economics and science fiction writing. Many of these authors understand their fiction writing to be intimately linked to their sociological research, and variously describe the writing they do as social fiction, social science fiction, or sociological fiction.

*Aims of the Research*

Undertaking this project I was interested in exploring what fiction writing could bring to the craft and public project of sociology. With my research I aimed to produce a sociological fiction novel that would progress the project of public sociology and serve to engage people in sociological imagination. As overviewed in the following chapter, the project of public sociology concerns the diverse task of translating and connecting publics with research – engaging non-sociologists in the imagination Mills’ (1959) outlined.

With this thesis I aim to contribute to public sociology and to the field of cultural sociology, that is to sociological approaches of studying society which centre cultural phenomena and meaning without reducing these to by-products of social processes. There is a gap in public sociology around the use of creative arts-based mediums, how engagement is understood, and how the concept of the sociological imagination is employed. There are also limited conceptual frameworks for doing public sociology
which centres affect, rather than accessibility and metrics of effectiveness. Within cultural sociology, particularly work that focuses on cultural meaning and neoliberalism, there is a gap around how the concept of society is understood as meaningful (or meaningless). How cultural meaning is researched within the field with arts-based methods can also be progressed.

As such, I aim to contribute to the project of public sociology:

• with my novel artefact, *Into the Sea*
• by outlining a conceptual approach for doing public sociology that engages people in sociological imagination

I aim to contribute to the field of cultural sociology:

• with an analysis of the neoliberal imaginary and the meaning of the concept of society, within a contemporary Australian context
• via my methods braiding technique, a methodological technique for undertaking qualitative and arts-based mixed methods research.

Further, as I have focused on Mills’ sociological imagination (1959), I have noted the widespread use of this concept in introductory curricula and the importance Mills places on both imagination and writing. I see that, as arts-based research complements and may extend the practice of sociology, sociological research may too advance ABR. I also see that *Into the Sea* may operate as a pedagogical tool, complementing introductory sociology curricula by targeting the crucial student-public (see Burawoy, 2005: 9). As such, with this thesis I additionally aim to:

• contribute to arts-based research by progressing how ABR methods are used in social science
• contribute to the teaching of sociology via the novel artefact, *Into the Sea*.

Writing the novel, I have aimed to achieve particular criteria concerning the quality of writing and sociological nature of the narrative. As I discuss throughout the exegesis, I have drawn these from established criteria used to evaluate arts-based and specifically fiction-based research, as well as more traditional sociological approaches
(see Kara, 2015; Leavy, 2017). In order for the novel to be a) suitable for publication and b) effectively ‘sociological,’ I aim to qualitatively fulfil the following criteria:

- Characterisation
- Voice
- Poetics
- Aesthetics
- Verisimilitude.

It is through these literary criteria, and how I have worked to achieve them with my methodological practice and analysis, that Into the Sea may be assessed on its capacity to engage public interest in, and engagement with, sociological thinking and concepts.

**Research Questions**

The central research question I ask in this thesis is:

- How may we engage people in sociological imagination (and why should we)?

I address this question with both the exegesis and the novel artefact. Doing so, I focus on the craft of sociology, as explored by Mills and others, as a process of cultivating sociological imagination. I consider one of the most significant elements of Mills’ concept, the narrative relation between ‘biography and history’ (1959: 4), and note the emphasis Mills places on styles of sociological writing in considering how to craft this imagination (1959: 199, 212, 218). I consider rationales for traditional and public sociology (see Bauman et al., 2014; Burawoy, 2005). I also investigate innovative sociological writing (see Leavy, 2013) and the interrelated histories of sociology and art (Nisbet, 1962), particularly in literature (see Lepenies, 1988). This direction provides the disciplinary context of the research; I consider how sociological fiction, as both the writing process and the sociological novel artefact, may engage sociologists and non-sociologists in sociological imagination.

In addition to my central research question, I also ask:

- How relevant is Mills’ (1959) sociological imagination to contemporary public sociology?
• What problems or issues does public sociology face in relation to public sociological imagination?
• How can fiction writing help us understand sociological imagination and what Mills (1959) calls the craft of sociology?
• To what extent can sociological fiction contribute to public sociology?

In the exegesis and with the novel, I also respond to questions other sociologists have raised about Mills’ (1959) work and about countering contemporary challenges to sociology. In his book *Punk Sociology*, which responds to the discipline’s changing environment with a call to creatively rethink sociological research by drawing on a punk ethos, Beer (2014) asks, ‘how can we deploy the sociological imagination in creative ways?’ and ‘what kind of sociology do we want to do?’ (2014: 12). The punk ethos Beer (2014) outlines, of openness, eclecticism, boldness and inventiveness, and the questions he asks about Mills’ (1959) imagination, drive my creative project and inform how I engage with the sociological imagination throughout.

Doing this I consider relevant problems or challenges that a creative sociology may effectively consider. One relevant challenge repeatedly highlighted is the ‘deeply antisociological’ ethos and governance regime of neoliberalism that public sociology struggles against (Burawoy, 2005: 7). Considering how ‘epistemological and political critiques of classical sociology… frame neoliberal thought at its outset’, Gane (2014b: 1104) calls for neoliberalism to be ‘treated as a serious intellectual project.’ In order to counter this neoliberal thought, he asks, ‘is there a conceptual definition or empirical form of the social that sociologists should seek to (re-)animate or defend?’ (Gane, 2014b: 1105). Rather than return to classical sociological theorists such as Weber and Durkheim, who Gane argues usefully ‘conceive of the social as something more than the economic’ (2014b: 1104), I turn to relational approaches to the social world. In particular I draw on Benedict Spinoza to develop a relational and affect-centred conceptual definition of the social, in response to this ethos of the neoliberal imaginary that is ‘hostile to the very notion of “society”’ (Burawoy, 2005: 7).

I also consider Leavy’s pertinent question, ‘how do you judge, evaluate or assess fiction-based research?’ (Leavy, 2013: 77). Building on evaluative criteria that scholars such as Leavy (2017) offer, I consider this question in relation to the project of public sociology and the value that fiction writing may bring to the task of
‘assist[ing] the influence of the sociological imagination in society’ (Furedi, 2009: 17).

Project Design

I designed this project with the primary goal of producing a sociological fiction novel, in order to research how fiction may contribute to public sociology. This undertaking draws on the long-recognised affinities between scientists and artists (Nisbet, 1962: 70) and the common, if dichotomised, history between art and science that sociology has ‘never settled on one side of’ (Barnwell, 2015: 561-562). However, arts-based research is seldom employed in sociology doctorates. The artefact-exegesis thesis model is rare outside fine arts disciplines. In these, research is fundamentally led by creativity processes, and as such exegeses most commonly aim to unpack the author’s unique creative process rather than outline and justify what other disciplines term methodologies. Conversely, sociology theses clearly outline how and justify why particular methods were used to gather data in order to validate their results. Beyond a methods chapter, sociology theses follow a general structure in order to address the required disciplinary criteria – achieved through sections such as a theoretical framework, findings, and discussion. Creative writing doctorates similarly have disciplinary criteria but these are addressed through the thesis in various ways; the artefact-exegesis thesis model is generally formed of a) an artefact and b) an exegesis, however the function, form, structure and relationship of these elements can significantly differ between submissions (Krauth, 2011). As outlined in the following Thesis Structure section and in Chapter 3, here I have blended these approaches: I employed particular sociological methods in undertaking my research, while my project design ensured that the creative process of fiction writing was central; this thesis largely follows the artefact-exegesis model though is embedded within more traditional thesis chapters including a theoretical framework and methodology.

As outlined in the Methodology chapter in Part 1 and throughout the exegesis in Part 3, I undertook this research using a mixed-methods approach with arts-based research (fiction writing), autoethnography, and literature analysis. The ABR method involved employing a consistent creative writing practice. This took various forms including free writing, character studies, space studies, narrator studies, chronotope configuration studies, and numerous drafts of the novel. My authoethonographic
method involved maintaining a Geertzian ‘thick description’ style recording of my self and everyday life experiences; more than an ethnography of my personal life as a PhD candidate, like the inward-facing focus or ‘self-indulgence’ which autoethnographies can arguably be marked by (Sparkes, 2002), I focused on recording the ways that subjective experience operates in contemporary everyday social processes. I drew this data from my own experience and from others I encountered, which I extensively recorded in a series of handwritten journals and using my iPhone in ways that did not disclose real names or identifying features. My literature analysis method involved an analysis of concepts and texts that are generally agreed upon as forming the ‘sociological canon’. I largely drew these concepts and texts from national and international introductory sociology curricula.

To cultivate the creative process which drives creative writing research, while also refining a sociological methodological approach, I designed this as a mixed-methods research project using what I term the ‘methods braiding technique’ (see Chapter 3 of this thesis). With this technique, I mixed these three methods across a short pilot phase plus three major research phases. That is, I worked to ‘braid’ these methods together both simultaneously and sequentially by using a technique that built in reflexivity and flexibility while continually focusing on the key outcome of this work, the sociological fiction novel. Across and during the research phases, my ABR informed the autoethnography and literature analysis, the autoethnography informed the literature analysis and ABR, and the literature analysis informed the ABR and autoethnography. Methods braiding helped ensure my data collection and sociological analysis was balanced and aligned with the epistemological foundation of the project, as discussed in the following Theoretical Approach chapter, while letting the creative process and novel artefact remain at the centre of the research.

Through this process, I focused on Mills’ concept of the sociological imagination (1959). I was interested in how sociologists understand what this imagination is, and how Mills’ idea of the ‘promise’ of social science was being engaged in contemporary public sociology. This led me to think about what prevents sociological imagination from being publically cultivated and what inhibits a broader realisation of the promise of sociology specifically. To understand this better, I examined the individualistic thinking that dominates in contemporary neoliberal social life, which can be seen as antagonistic to sociological thought; I focused on relationships between individualism, cultural meaning and narrative in my research,
largely within a contemporary Australian context. Early in the project, particularly while reading reflective works by leading sociologists, I also encountered ideas about what makes sociology meaningful and affective for people. This led me to theories of affect and notably to the work of Benedict Spinoza, which has been valuable for producing the novel artefact and for analysing the project of public sociology. The key themes which emerged from this process were sociological imagination in everyday life, the tensions between individualism and relationality, and the significance of cultural meaning to understanding knowledge as affective. Both the novel and the exegesis explore these key themes.

**Thesis Structure**

This thesis is organised in four parts. Part 1 introduces and overviews the project over three chapters – Chapter 1: Introduction; Chapter 2: (Re)Framing Sociological Imagination for Public Sociology; and Chapter 3: Methodology. Chapter 1 establishes the relationship between sociology and fiction writing through the lens of public sociology, and provides the research questions and aims of the thesis. Chapter 2 serves as a theoretical framework, contextualising the project and establishing the conceptual connections that underlie the novel and frame the exegesis. Chapter 3 overviews the methods used in this project and introduces the *methods braiding technique*, a methodological design tool for multi method arts-based and qualitative research.

Part 2 presents the sociological fiction novel, *Into the Sea*. This novel is comprised of nine chapters plus a preface. An overview of the novel follows in the next section.

Part 3 presents the exegesis, a thematic analysis of the novel and its construction process. There are four chapters in Part 3 – Chapter 4: Sociological Imagination, Characterisation and Voice; Chapter 5: The Neoliberal Imaginary and Aesthetic Form; Chapter 6: Spinoza’s *Ethics* and Poetics; and Chapter 7: Verisimilitude, Cultural Meaning and Affectivity. Chapter 4 explores everyday processes of relation that link biographies and histories (Mills, 1959), and highlights how characterisation and narrative voice are used in the novel to illustrate sociological imagination. Chapter 5 considers the neoliberal context within which these relations are contemporarily lived through, and explores how the neoliberal imaginary is normalised and naturalised in the novel-world through its aesthetic form.
In Chapter 6, I turn to the relational and affect-centred work of Benedict Spinoza (2005 [1677]); I consider key concepts of Spinoza’s *Ethics* and, aiming to challenge the neoliberal imaginary in the novel, highlight how Spinoza’s work informs the novel’s poetic. In Chapter 7, to ground this Spinozist sociology, I consider the value of exploring and utilising forms of Australian cultural meaning for doing affective public sociology and engaging people in sociological imagination.

Part 4 consists of Chapter 8: The Value of Sociological Fiction. Chapter 8 outlines the key contributions of the research – namely my sociological fiction novel, and the methods braiding technique – and concludes the thesis. I designed this thesis structure in order to feature the novel artefact and exegesis, as creative writing theses do, while also outlining the key aspects of the research including the methodology and implications of the research, as sociology theses do.

**Novel Overview**

*Into the Sea* primarily follows protagonist Taylor Brown, a twenty-six year old Australian woman, through the year 2014. Taylor is a Primary School teacher who lives in Sydney with her partner Will, a twenty-seven year old Australian man who works in I.T. Taylor and Will have been in a steady, monogamous relationship for three and a half years and have lived together for twelve months. Will, originally from rural Victoria, moved to Sydney to pursue a Masters degree and met Taylor through mutual friends at a party. Taylor’s parents, Liz and David, live in a suburban town on the Central Coast of New South Wales. Also born in Australia, they work in a council library and in local marketing management, respectively. Taylor’s older brother, Brett, also lives in Sydney working as a cabinet maker. Will’s parents live outside Melbourne and his sister lives in England. Taylor and Will have a number of friends in Sydney – they include Dylan, Mike, Jessie, Jack, Stephanie, Katie and Sarah. Settings include Taylor and Will’s rental apartment in the south of Sydney city, Taylor’s parent’s house on the NSW Central Coast, Stephanie and Mike’s apartment north-west of Sydney city, Taylor’s workplace, an IKEA, a beachside town on the northern NSW coast, a wedding in England, and a school camp in the Australian bush.

The novel begins on New Year’s Eve 2013/14, with Taylor and Will attending a small party at their friends’ apartment in Sydney. The first chapter alternates scenes between New Year’s Eve and New Years Day, when Taylor and Will have taken the
train north to visit Taylor’s parents and have a family lunch. At the NYE party the group drink and watch previous years’ ‘highlights reels’, packaged by one of the TV stations. Over lunch at Taylor’s parents’ house they discuss their plans for the year and Taylor makes a new year’s resolution. The second chapter of the novel, set in late January, centres on the sudden death of one of Taylor’s childhood friends – a young man named Sam, whose family was once very close to hers. Taylor travels back to her childhood town for Sam’s funeral with her brother and her parents. In chapter three, set in March, Taylor is back at work and is momentarily settled in her everyday work-life routine with Will. In chapter four, set in April, Taylor and Will travel to London for a brief holiday before attending Will’s sister’s wedding. Will has not seen his sister since she moved to the U.K., to be with her now-husband, and while attending the wedding Taylor considers her own relationship future. Chapter five, back in Australia, is set entirely in an IKEA store. Taylor and Will peruse the store together, and Taylor also visits alone. In chapter six Taylor and Will attend a dinner party at another of their friend’s apartments where an argument ensues between two of their friends who have recently started dating. In chapter seven Taylor accompanies her grade five class on their annual school camp, set west of Sydney in the bush. In chapter eight, set in Sydney city, Taylor’s brother Brett struggles after breaking up with his boyfriend and comes to stay with Taylor and Will. Taylor takes Brett to Manly beach for an afternoon. Chapter nine, the final chapter, is set primarily during the Sydney Siege and the week that follows.

*Into the Sea* is a consideration of the promise of sociological imagination and how this imagination operates; in it I consider how and why we craft characters or subjects and particular narratives from our research, and what makes these depictions sociological. Doing this, the fictional story line of Taylor’s everyday life is interwoven with actual events and issues from that year, both national and international, notably including the Sydney Hostage Crisis or ‘Sydney Siege’ of December 15-16 in the final chapter. Through Taylor’s story, social and cultural tensions are explored; questions about what cultural narratives like ‘The Australian Way of Life’ mean for various peoples are raised, including the fictional notion of ‘ordinary Australians’. The chapters of the novel are not thematically structured, however key sociological concepts do orient and drive the narrative. Leading concepts include social rituals, identity construction, and the continuum between youth and adulthood. Other sociological concepts present in the work include
contemporary family structures and relationships, the mediation of everyday life, the casualisation of workforces, forms of globalisation and glocalisation, consumerism, terrorism, and social change. The aim of the novel is not to present a sociological argument about these concepts. Rather, with the novel I aim to float questions about society and social life, thereby bringing to life sociological thinking. The intended function of the novel is to engage people in sociological imagination.
Chapter 2: (Re)Framing Sociological Imagination for Public Sociology

How we think about society as sociologists versus what frames of mind dominate the public spheres we wish to engage with is an important consideration for public sociology. It has implications for the kinds of projects we design and public engagement strategies we pursue, as well as for more complex theoretical concerns like the ontological foundations of research projects and how we understand the ties between epistemology and the methodology. In this theoretical framework I critically engage with Mills’ (1959) concept of the sociological imagination as a particular kind of live and social imagination, as my central research question considers how and why we might engage people in this imagination. I consider how to productively grasp the relationships between history and biography, as well as the promise of social science as it is relevant to public sociology. I then consider neoliberalism, which is acknowledged in the literature as a significant challenge to public sociology, and focus on the competitive individualisation that the neoliberal imaginary normalises and naturalises. Responding to calls to reconsider the ways that the social is ontologically theorised in sociology, in order to better counter this problematic neoliberal imagination (see Gane, 2014b), I engage the relational ontology of Benedict Spinoza (2005 [1677]) to consider a Spinozist notion of society. I engage Spinozist concepts of relationality, affect, imagination, and conatus, and consider these in relation to epistemological arguments for fiction writing as a vehicle for researching cultural meaning in the social world. In sum, with this theoretical framework I conceptually knit together sociological imagination with the aims of public sociology, the neoliberal imagination, a Spinozist conceptualisation of society, and fiction writing. I engage these concepts in relation to the novel artefact, Into the Sea, in Part 3 of this thesis.

The Promise of Sociological Imagination

Mills (1959) opens The Sociological Imagination with a promise – ‘The Promise’, as the first chapter is titled, of the social sciences and specifically of the quality of mind he terms the sociological imagination. This promise is a potential and an assurance. That is, the sociological imagination has promise and is a promise; it ‘seems most dramatically to promise an understanding of the intimate realities of ourselves in connection with larger social realities,’ and it is ‘the quality of mind whose wider and more adroit use offers the promise that all such sensibilities–and in fact, human
reason itself will come to play a greater role in human affairs’ (Mills, 1959: 15, italics in original).

Mills grounds the promise of this imagination by claiming that our everyday understanding of social life is short-sighted, ‘bounded by the private orbits in which [we] live’ (1959: 3). Because of this, we often feel confined within our ‘close-up scenes of job, family, neighborhood’ and unable to ‘cope with the larger worlds’ we are confronted with, beyond acting as passive ‘spectators’ (Mills, 1959: 3-5). Further, we recognise this problem and can therefore become ‘possessed by a sense of the trap’ (Mills, 1959: 5). This possession stems from the fact that it is not only our understanding which is bounded by our private lives: our ‘powers are limited’ to our ‘close-up-scenes’ too (Mills, 1959: 3). Even if we understand larger social worlds, we feel we can have no wider tangible impact and are only able to act within our familiar milieu. Mills argues the sociological imagination may help us escape these ‘limited orbits’ (1959: 8). This imagination is both ‘what [we] need, and what [we] feel [we] need’ in order to ‘understand [our] own experience’ and ‘gauge [our] own fate’ (Mills, 1959: 5). More than inert analysis, it helps us ‘to use information’ (1959: 5, italics added). The sociological imagination may help us to be more than spectators in larger social life.

Mills emphasises that the task and promise of the sociological imagination is to ‘grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society’ (Mills, 1959: 6). Mills repeatedly highlights the biography-history connection as he understands the individual as a ‘biographical entity’ (Mills, 1959: 8). As modernity is in part marked by an increasing emphasis on personal life as a biography (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 3), we understand our lives as biographies-in-the-making: as live personal narratives with developing trajectories that we ourselves (must) direct and construct.

Shaping these respective biographical and historical narratives are the ‘personal troubles of milieu’ and ‘public issues of social structure’ (Mills, 1959: 8), which sociological imagination also brings into dialogue. Rather than only helping us connect these problems and issues in a static way, the promise of the sociological imagination carries a ‘future intent or potential’ (Gane and Back, 2012: 400). It is this emphasis of the biography-history relationship in particular which, locating personal troubles and social issues within bounded contexts, emphasises progression and
development. The fact that biographies and histories have narrative trajectories can make the sociological imagination a ‘live’ and future-oriented concept (cf. Back, 2012: 36). Sociological imagination may help us consider contemporary troubles and issues as not only having and being part of a history, but as having a future. The sociological imagination therefore is not a concept for capturing and analysing ‘society’ as an inert object; Mills sees that with this imagination ‘the indifference of publics is transformed into involvement with public issues’ (1959: 5). By helping us to see society in this way, sociological imagination connects our live biographies with the live ‘history-making’ in which we take part and contribute to (Mills, 1959: 4, 6). It is a concept for understanding our social worlds and for changing how we live our social lives. This is the promise of sociological imagination.

Many contemporary scholars pointedly engage with Mills’ work, directly assessing the promise of the sociological imagination or aiming to build on his conceptual canon (see Back and Puwar, 2012; Beer, 2014; Fraser, 2009; Fuller, 2006; Gane and Back, 2012; Kemple and Mawani, 2009; Pyyhtinen, 2016; Scott and Nilsen, 2013; Treviño, 2012). Many proponents of public sociology also discuss Mills and ground their work in the sociological imagination (Agger, 2000; Burawoy, 2005; Furedi, 2009). Burawoy (2005: 9) recognises Mills, among others such as W.E.B. Du Bois, as a ‘champion of traditional public sociology’: a kind of public work largely done via popular writing such as in newspapers or nonfiction books as a ‘public intellectual’ (Gane and Back, 2012: 402). In this type of work, ‘the publics being addressed are generally invisible… they do not constitute a movement or organization, and they are usually mainstream’ (Burawoy, 2005: 7). As both Burawoy (2005: 17) and Furedi (2009: 172) note, there are problematic aspects of this kind of work including the danger of ‘speaking down’ to publics as ‘ordinary folk.’ Burawoy (2005) partly tempers this by emphasising the need for dialogue between publics and academics to establish and focus on issues that are contemporarily relevant to publics. Furedi however cautions against a public sociology driven by the ‘very tricky concept’ of relevance (2009: 172). Where Burawoy sees that public sociology may be justified ‘on the basis of its relevance’ (2005: 17), Furedi argues,

One of the most important justifications for public sociology is the contribution it can potentially make to the emergence of a more intellectually oriented public sphere. Such a contribution requires that
sociology evolve through a wider engagement with public life in order to assist the influence of the sociological imagination in society (2009: 17).

Gane and Back (2012: 405) echo Furedi’s point when, summarising Mills, they state that ‘sociology is a navigation device.’ While there is significant benefit in the traditional public sociology of ‘translating’ academic research for public audiences through popular nonfiction writing and media, Furedi makes a pertinent point: ‘one of the main purposes of public sociology has to be its commitment to rising to the challenge of recapturing the sociological imagination’ (2009: 17). This task of recapturing the sociological imagination, with publics and within sociology, is increasingly of consequence; within this ‘neoliberal world which seeks to tear asunder private troubles from public issues’, ‘social uncertainty’ is turned ‘into a personal failure that is divorced from any collective cause or remedy’ (Gane and Back, 2012: 405). As such, the ‘linking of biography and history is a vital part of a sociology that is both politically and publically engaged’ (Gane and Back, 2012: 405).

Many sociologists frame their own approach to research through Mills’ language. This includes Bauman, who states he has ‘tried, for better or worse, to encompass the sociologist’s task, articulated by Mills as one of tying together “biography” and “history”’ (Bauman et al., 2014: 34). Many have employed Mills’ sociological imagination concept in order to question sociological research, such as Uprichard (2012) who critiques the ahistorical casting of digital methods and argues for a return to Mills to better consider temporality in this kind of work. Beer’s *Punk Sociology* is again pertinent. In this, a ‘direct response to calls for a renewed creativity in the deployment of the sociological imagination’ (Beer, 2014: 6), Beer asks ‘how do we reimagine the craft and promise of sociology?’ and ‘how can we deploy the sociological imagination in creative ways?’ (2014: 12). As his title suggests, Beer turns to the punk ethos for thinking through ‘what we want sociology to be’ and for answering ‘what type of sociology do we want to do?’ (2014: 68); he sees that punk sociology, which adopts a ‘DIY ethic’ (2014: 60), may help ‘answer the calls for a renewed engagement with Mills’ “promise” of sociology’ (2014: 69).

Bold, inventive, creative sociology that does seek to publically cultivate sociological imagination also wrestles with neoliberalism (Beer, 2014: 13, 69). The neoliberal imaginary poses a significant challenge to the success of such a sociology, as the
discipline exists within a social world ‘governed by a [neoliberal] regime that is deeply antisociological in its ethos, hostile to the very idea of “society”’ (Burawoy, 2005: 7). The project of public sociology thus not only involves navigating this neoliberal regime by better promoting sociological research, but also involves engaging sociological imagination to combat how the neoliberal imaginary heightens the problematic individualisation of social issues.

The Neoliberal Imaginary

Neoliberalism gained traction in multiple contexts during the 1930s (Gane, 2014a; Plehwe, 2009: 12) including through the Walter Lipmann Colloquium of 1939 (Davies, 2014: 311; Foucault, 2008: 152) and via The Mont Pèlerin Society (Plehwe, 2009: 5). Half a century later British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher infamously championed a central belief of neoliberalism, stating ‘there is no such thing as society’ (Hall, 2017: 283). Since then increasing attention has been directed toward neoliberalism as a concept, policy, process and project (Davies, 2014; 2017). Usefully conceptualised as a transnational ‘thought collective’ (Mirowski, 2009: 428) or an imaginary which moves nation-states to employ market systems as social governance, neoliberalism centres the role of competition and venerates the individual as the primary atom and bottom line of social life. This stems from the liberalism of Locke (Hall, 2011: 709-711; Thorsen, 2010: 191-195), whose socioeconomic arguments conceptualise individuals as morally equal, rational, and independent (Ashcraft, 1994: 250-251). Expressly disputing the monarchy’s Divine Right to absolute power, Locke promotes individual freedom, democracy, and liberty of thought (Laslett, 1988: 68-69). While remaining ‘paradigmatically biopolitical’ (Newheiser 2016: 11), this liberalism multifurcated from the democratic state against absolute monarchy into the possessive individual and freedom of markets from the state. Today the term is arguably most commonly used as a ‘pejorative slogan’ (Davies, 2014: 309), a ‘shorthand for “everything I think is wrong and horrible”’ (Thorsen, 2010: 206). Despite not having an agreed upon definition and the term’s problematic complexity, Hall argues that ‘naming neoliberalism is politically necessary’, to give its resistance ‘content, focus and a cutting edge’ (2011: 706).

Neoliberal governance aims to make marketization possible by intervening in the social conditions of the market’s existence, so the market in turn may regulate the social world via mechanisms of competition. Desired is a ‘society subject to the
dynamic of competition’ (Foucault, 2008: 147). This permeates to the level of individuals. Notions of individuality have progressed through concepts of human development over the past four centuries, and the neoliberal imaginary knits development and individualism together; contemporarily, neoliberalism progresses the vision that individuals are united and made free by engaging in competition-driven market processes. This individualism is a connective tissue of neoliberalisation processes (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: xxi; Bolvi and Petrova, 2007: 119) and the neoliberal imaginary in turn promotes the individualisation of the social world (Lazzarato, 2009: 110-111; Luxton, 2010: 163). Through this imaginary, individuals are compelled to be individually enterprising within their competitive habitats and personally responsible for enriching themselves for the good of human development; neoliberal policy employs competition as an organising principle to motivate individuals into taking control of their ‘interests’ (Lazzarato, 2009: 115). Foucault argues that personal success, once highlighting ‘God’s arbitrary election’, is now ‘the daily sign of the adherence of individuals to the state’ (2008: 85).

Hayek argues for the merits of these neoliberal governmentalities, claiming socioeconomic competition ‘gives the minority a chance to prevail’ (1976 [1949]: 31). This is not because competition is perfect or humans are rational (Gane, 2014b: 1096-1097) but because through competition ‘the multiplication and satisfaction of the needs of the collectivity can happen’ (Lazzarato, 2009: 116). In the Hayekian view, the market brings together individual knowledge in a way that government is incapable of, thereby acting as a superior information metaprocessor (Dean, 2016: 104; Gane, 2014b: 1102). Further, through entrepreneurial casting (Foucault, 2008: 147), what ‘facilitates, drives and justifies competition and competitiveness is found in individual psychological capacities’ (Davies, 2017: 57); competition generates actual cooperation and conceptual cooperative sociality. Though competition requires the production of inequality to function, it paradoxically relies on a sense of ‘a priori equality’ (Davies, 2017: 60). While generating actual inequality, competition also generates the notion that ‘there must be something equal about those whose difference is being measured, proven, justified or criticised’ (Davies, 2017: 57, italics in original).

The competitive individualism of the neoliberal imagination is, argues Gilbert (2014: 30), ‘perhaps the single most important process’ involved in the promotion of ‘the interests of the commercial elite,’ against both other publics and the ‘general
efficacy of democratic practices and institutions.' Immersed in everyday life not as a particular ideological view but as ‘common sense’ (Connell, 2010: 22; Gilbert, 2014: 30; Ronda Varona, 2014: xiii), the neoliberal imaginary is ‘both enabled and enforced by the logic of capitalist social relations… [by] institutional practices… by reality TV shows and by ministers for education… [by] labour-market conditions’ (Gilbert, 2014: 30-31). Understanding this individualising neoliberal imagination is relevant for public sociology. Neoliberalism emerged as ‘a critique of classical sociology’ (Gane, 2014b: 1104) and continues to deny meaningful existence of the ‘social’ (see Hayek, 1976 [1949]: 114-119). The ‘individual’ of the neoliberal imaginary is an ‘ontological, phenomenological and epistemological’ category (Gilbert, 2014: 31) which carries a number of implications, not least of all that ‘social relations are things that happen to individuals rather than things which actually define their identity and the co-ordinates of their existence’ (Gilbert, 2014: 32, italics in original). By focusing on ‘the actions of individuals’ (Gane, 2014b: 1102) and remaining ‘hostile to the very idea of “society”’ (Burawoy, 2005: 7), the neoliberal imaginary challenges the conceptual foundations that sociology is organised upon.

Spinoza and Relationality
Benjamin Spinoza’s Ethics (2005 [1677]) demonstrates a progressive ontological relationality concerning human freedom via community. Spinoza, a lens grinder and philosopher infamously excommunicated from his Jewish community of Amsterdam during the mid 1600s, composed a number of significant intellectual works during his relatively short lifetime including Ethics$^3$ (2005 [1677]). Published upon Spinoza’s death in 1677, the Ethics is a broad philosophical and metaphysical work that does not neatly fit contemporary disciplinary borders. Principally, the text offers a robust ontology which argues the fundamentally relational nature of existence. Many translations and interpretations of Spinoza’s work are engaged with across Spinozan scholarship. In this thesis, I use Curley’s translation of the Ethics; this is the most commonly used and standardised contemporary English translation. My interpretation of this text aligns with the monist and feminist readings of Lord (2010; 2015), Gatens (2009) and Gatens and Lloyd (1999). As Lord does, I see that Spinoza’s work is ‘deeply committed to elucidating our everyday experience,’ that it gives us ‘tools for

$^3$Traditional full title of the text is Ethics, in Geometrical Order (in its original Latin, Ethica, ordine geometrico demonstrata).
understanding ourselves and strategies for living well,’ and aims to help us ‘understand ourselves as being immersed in a world of things that affect each other constantly’ (2015: 1). Potentially yielding ‘new ways of thinking of individuality and sociability’ (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 1), the Ethics ‘allows the modern preoccupation with autonomous individual selfhood to re-connect with ideals of community’ (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 2). While focused on human experience, I too find it valuable to approach Spinoza’s work as a ‘non-humanist humanism’ (Lord, 2015: 1).

The Ethics presents a number of significant ontological arguments. These include a denouncement of theistic Gods (IP15S)4 and claim that God is Nature – that is, that the essence of ‘being’ (read as a verb), which all existence necessarily shares, Spinoza interchangeably calls God5/Nature (IP11; IVPref). Everything which exists does not constitute but rather expresses this divine essence, humans included (IP15; Lord, 2010: 34-35). Mind and body are not separate but are ‘one thing, expressed in different ways’ or modes (IIP7; Lord, 2010: 2) that exist in parallel (Deleuze, 1988: 18; Gatens, 2009: 5), with body not subordinate to mind (Lord, 2010: 9). Central to this existence is the notion of conatus, Latin for endeavour or striving, which may be understood as self-preservation – that a mode ‘strives to persevere in its being’ (IIP6). Ethics also overcomes dominant dichotomies including emotion versus reason and freedom versus necessity (Gatens, 2009: 7), through a theory of affect (IIIID3) and by reframing what it means to be free (IVP67-73). Spinoza’s concept of affect concerns the ‘affections of the body,’ meaning the body’s changing power to act (Lord, 2010: 85) or ‘both affect and be affected in a multiplicity of ways’ (Gatens, 2009: 14). Depending on the context of such affections, this power of acting changes how humans experience affects like joy and sorrow, as well as affects of desire.

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4Throughout I make use of Edwin Curley’s translation of Ethics (2005 [1677]), and reference passages according to the standard referencing guide for this text as outlined in Lord (2010, pp. 12-13). The Part of the text is given in roman numerals (e.g. IV). Sections of a Part are given through abbreviations (e.g. D = Definition, A =Axiom, P = Proposition, C = Corollary, Dem. = Demonstration, S = Scholium, Pref. = Preface, App. = Appendix). Proposition (or other section) numbers are given in Arabic Numerals (e.g. 3). A reference to Part Two, Proposition 44 is given as IIP44.

5Considering the time and context within which Spinoza lived – in seventeenth century Amsterdam, a Jewish descendant of Portuguese conversos in the midst of the Spanish Inquisition, ostracized from his ethnoreligious community for heresy at twenty-four years old – his so-called ‘God-obsession’ may be interpreted as a safe-guarding practice against the very real danger of questioning religious belief (Gatens, 2009: 3). Beth Lord, understanding this terminology is understandably problematic for contemporary readers, states Spinoza ‘thinks we ought to call this substance “God” because what we truly understand by “God” is a substance of infinite attributes. But just as we are not compelled to give the same “square” to a four-sided figure, we are not compelled to give the name “God” to a substance of infinite attributes. If you prefer, you can call it being, substance, power or nature’ (2010: 31). I find the active verb ‘being’ valuable and largely employ this throughout.
These arguments are made via an application of the method of Euclid – an ancient Greek method of geometric proof which underpins mathematics – to religious and philosophical ideas concerning existence. As Euclid applies logic to mathematics, Spinoza applies logic to philosophy.

Notably, and relevant to how I use Spinoza throughout this thesis, Spinoza’s work has seen a significant contemporary reengagement in philosophy and other adjacent fields including cultural studies. A key contributing factor to this is the recent impact of Deleuzian scholarship which, while broad and diverse, has deep roots in Spinoza’s work. Many, if not most, contemporary scholars across sociology and cultural studies who actively draw upon Spinozan concepts do so through Deleuze. While Deleuzian interpretations have influenced my thinking, and I do engage with some of Deleuze’s writings that are explicitly on Spinoza, I found it valuable to engage directly with Spinoza’s work rather than read Spinoza through Deleuze. In his monograph on Spinoza, Deleuze (1988) translates Spinoza’s concepts in alphabetical order rather than employing the structure Spinoza uses; Deleuze’s text does not operate as a translational dictionary of concepts however, as in this and across his other works Deleuze intentionally “re-stages” Spinoza to construct his own transcendental empiricism. As with other philosophers, Deleuze aims to construct a distinct interpretation of Spinoza’s work – he openly approaches his work ‘as a sort of buggery,’ as ‘taking an author from behind and giving him a child that would be his own offspring, yet monstrous’ and seeking unique conceptualisations ‘from all sorts of shifting, slipping, dislocations, and hidden emissions’ (Deleuze, 1995: 6). As I was not focused upon Deleuze’s concepts of, for example, difference, identity and matter – but rather Spinoza’s understandings of affect and epistemology, and how these relate to sociological imagination – I found the readings of scholars like Lord (2010; 2015), Gatens (2009), Armstrong (2009) and Gilbert (2014) to be more useful for my creative project than those which take a more actively Deleuzian or New Materialist approach (cf. Fox and Alldred, 2015). As Lord argues, in Spinoza’s work, 

Imagination has a central role to play, in building true understanding, in representing it, and in limiting and obfuscating it. It is this pursuit of truth through various ways of knowing – rational and imaginative – that keeps Spinoza’s thought open to various disciplines today (2015: 3).
As such, while I acknowledge the large body of Deleuzian scholarship relevant to Spinozan thought, I purposefully engage other interpretations that I see as more akin to creative sociological scholarship and the project of public sociology.

Through Spinozism where humans are part of, not outside or exceptional within, Nature (IIIIPref.), we are one kind of individual: one composite grouping of physical material similar to the groupings found throughout Nature (III1-L7; Deleuze, 1988: 76-78; Lord, 2010: 49-50, 60-64) from an atomic to galactic scale across both time and space. This is not a scientific awareness of the material composition of the universe. This is an ontological framework for understanding existence itself, no matter the scale, as fundamentally relational. We are materially and in-essence connected to an infinite multitude of other individual composite bodies with which we are sustained and dependant – blood, food, sunlight, solar systems et cetera (IIPost1-6; Lord, 2010: 8, 60). This is not via a connection but ‘through the process of relation’ which collapses discrete individuality and ‘calls into question the existence of boundaries between individual things’ (Williams, 2015: 16). We are these relationships, and we share the constitutive essence of existence with all things being ‘affectively part of nature’ (Lord, 2011: 8, italics in original). We exist as a relationship between thought and extension as we are sustained through relationships with the natural world. This includes relationships with humans.

Understanding this relationality is a challenge Spinoza addresses through an epistemology of three different kinds of knowledge (IIP40). The first kind of knowledge is the lowest kind – opinion and imagination that is not rational (IIP40S2). This knowledge is ‘not false or fictional’ but is ‘uncertain, experiential and empirical’ and thus ‘subject to disagreement, doubt and revision’ (Lord, 2010: 69). Believing the world to be flat from viewing the horizon versus calculating the world to be spherical is a simple example of the first and second kinds of knowledge (Lord, 2010: 69). The second kind depends on reason (Lord, 2010: 76); Spinoza calls this ‘adequate knowledge’ (Lord, 2010: 73, 76) of common notions (Donovan, 2009: 175; Lord, 2010: 77-78, 150-151). Common notions, building from the first kind of knowledge, allow us to reason relationality – the ‘unity of composition of all of Nature and the modes of variation of that unity’ (Deleuze, 1988: 57-58) – and understand the reality of Nature (Gatens, 2009: 6), though in ‘ontologically discrete categories’ (Donovan, 2009: 175). Knowledge of the third kind is an ontologically-uniting knowledge of the
‘essence of things’ (IIP40S2) – a monist understanding which develops as we gain ‘rational knowledge’ (Lord, 2010: 150) and proceed from adequate ideas of attributes to the essence of Being (IIP40S2; Lord, 2004: 151). This third kind of knowledge, an intuition of monist Being which develops from imagination and reason (Donovan, 2009: 175l; Gatens, 2009: 6), reveals ‘the correlation of the essence of God and singular essences of real beings (Deleuze, 1988: 57-58); we ‘go beyond Reason… and enter into the intuitive intellect as a system of essential truths’ (Deleuze, 1988: 58) by comprehending the monist substance of God, ourselves, and nature together – the relationality of existence.

Fiction Writing and Cultural Meaning

Fiction writing may open and extend the project of public sociology in both practical and conceptual terms. As summarised by Leavy (2015), a leader in arts-based research, employing creative methodologies is ‘not simply about adding new methods to our arsenal for the sake of “more”, but rather opening up new ways to think about knowledge-building: new ways to see’ (2015: 291). While the forms of art that are considered legitimate and of value in such scholarship and in broader society are not free from problematic power dynamics (see Inglis, 2005), I see that fiction writing is a valuable medium and process through which the nexus between concepts and experiences may be creatively explored. As I have argued (Watson, 2016), sociological fiction may illustrate research and engage publics through styles, forms, and spaces that more traditional scholarly work may not; writing through concepts such as glocality (Watson, 2016: 439), and methodologies like ethnography and arts-based research (Watson, 2016: 441), sociologists may extend their own research practice into the field of fiction and pursue new sites of engagement. Creative narratives may be used, for example, to illustrate the links between personal troubles and public issues (Mills, 1959) and help us examine how we theorise these links. Further, fiction writing allows a scope and nuance that is valuable for crafting the intellectual and panoramic big pictures that sociology in particular arguably requires (see Inglis, 2014: 103; Watson, 2016: 438). In this project I build on research and practice traditions that bring together social theory and research with fiction writing (see Banks and Banks, 1998; Coser, 1972; Leavy, 2013), and Spinozan inquiry with fiction writing (see Calder, 2015; Gatens, 2012; Skolnick, 2014). Through creating a sociological fiction novel I work to understand, reveal, challenge and extend
sociological imagination, the neoliberal imaginary, Spinozan scholarship, and sociological approaches to cultural meaning.

Engaging with these areas I aim to work as a *bricoleur*, drawing lessons from Simmel’s cultural sociology (see Featherstone, 1991: 3; Weinstein and Weinstein, 1991) and Denzin and Lincoln’s (2008: 252) methodological views; I approach my research as an iterative and holistic craft (see Leavy, 2015: 17-18; Mills, 1959) where ‘theory and practice are intertwined’ (Leavy, 2015: ix). Concerning how and why I use fiction writing to address my specific research questions, epistemologically I understand that the arts, much like scientific research, are ‘concerned with the processes of questioning and knowing’ (Barone and Eisner, 2011: 52). Art creates and conveys meaning through ‘expressive qualities of form’ (Barone and Eisner, 2011: xii) which involve ‘multiple ways of knowing’ about the self and others (Gerber et al., 2012: 41). Like the emerging genre of fictocriticism (Nettelbeck, 1998: 7), fiction writing offers new ways of accessing, exploring, interlacing, and progressing ‘familiar fields’ of knowledge in social research. Importantly, fiction and other arts practices can generate multiple meanings, and often intentionally do so – that is, they open up ‘multiplicities in meaning-making instead of pushing authoritative claims’ (Leavy, 2015: 26). As Leavy elaborates, ‘the kind of dialogue that may be stimulated by a piece of art is based on *evoking* meanings, rather than denoting them’ (Leavy, 2015: 26-27, italics in original). Further, as Barone and Eisner (2011: 53) argue, the purpose of creating art ‘is not to arrive at a singular and unchangeable slice of knowledge; it is to generate questions.’ Rather than trying to ‘mirror reality,’ I see the epistemological value of using arts practice in this project in particular is to explore ‘alternative possibilities for society, organizations, and communities’ (Camaro-Borges, 2017: 92). The possibility of raising critical questions about the social world with my sociological fiction novel *Into the Sea* is key to addressing my central research question – how may we engage people in sociological imagination (and why should we)? As Inglis (2014: 103) states, effective sociology drives society’s ‘reflexive consciousness of itself.’ Driving a particularly sociological reflexive consciousness with and within a public, and engaging people in sociological imagination, involves generating critical questions about society or cultivating the generation of such questions.

Rather than using my novel to uncover and denote a particular sociological argument about the social world that my research focused upon, I engaged in this
project using an iterative and creative epistemological framework that was open to the
generation of multiple meanings. I employed this framework in order to generate
reflexive questions about the social world with (imagined) readers as part of engaging
said readers in sociological imagination. As I have argued (Watson, 2016), fiction
writing in particular opens up this process of engagement as fiction can help to “even
the playing field” between scholars and publics or writers and readers; more so than
traditional academic work and non-fictive forms of public sociology, fiction can allow
publics the opportunity to act as interlocutors (cf. Cox, 2014; Puwar and Sharma,
2012) and retain some of the interpretative power they often otherwise lose as ‘the
public.’ As I argue in this thesis, my sociological novel does not only facilitate this
kind of engagement between myself as the sociologist/author and intended readers
but, by centring affectivity, opens up multiplicities of meaning (Becker, 2007: 284)
and the critical activity of sociological imagining which ripples beyond my authorial
position.

Linked to this is the affective potential of fiction, or sympraxis, that texts such as
fiction novels may generate. Sympraxis is a semiotic concept concerning affect that,
as per Rolf Kloepfer’s (1987: 125, 131) perspective, complements the mimetic side of
signs and communication; mimetic communication is logical, representational and
informative, whereas sympractic communication is energetic, emotive, involving, and
creatively engaged. Kloepfer explores communication as a three-fold relationship
between mimesis, discourse, and sympraxis. He understands signs as facilitators of
co-action in the process of communication, and positions sympraxis as causing
as an affect (and effect) is achieved through the ‘increasing sophistication’
of mimesis and discourse, whereby ‘lasting changes in attitude’ and ‘actions in the
real world’ are elicited (Kloepfer, 1987: 136). As such, mimesis and sympraxis are
not discrete kinds of communication but rather are elements of successful active
communication. Kloepfer bases this theory on advertising, arguing that the sympractic
success of various advertisement cases stems from an aesthetic narrative, complex
discourse structure, and exploration of and operation within cultural patterns
(Kloepfer, 1987: 145). Like advertising, novels may operate as a sympractic form of
communication. Novels too are aesthetic narratives, incorporate a complex discourse
structure, and explore and operate within cultural patterns. As I detail throughout my
exegetical chapters, I engage a number of narrative elements and techniques in order to cultivate this sympraxis with Into the Sea. These include voice, characterisation, aesthetics, poetics, and verisimilitude (see Leavy, 2017). I also engage with Bakhtin’s concept of chronotopes (1981), which concerns the spatio-temporal organisation of scenes and action in the novel, and with the idea of stylistic sociological perspective or a disciplinary ‘point of view’ (Brown, 1977: 49). With these techniques and elements I explore the significance of cultural meaning for cultivating this sympraxis or affectivity in sociological fiction.

Taking the cultivation of sociological imagination as an aim of public sociology, I see that Kloepfer’s theory of sympraxis – though formulated based on the aims and functions of advertisements – translates to the project of public sociology. Cultivating sociological imagination means helping people ‘to use information and develop reason’ (Mills, 1959: 5) and ‘experience a transvaluation of values’ (Mills 1959: 8) – or ‘lasting changes in attitude’ (Kloepfer, 1987: 136). This is done to ‘encourage purposeful public activity and the exercise of agency’ (Furedi, 2009: 182) – or elicit ‘action in the real world’ (Kloepfer, 1987: 136). As I have argued (Watson, 2016), I do not intend to suggest that traditional sociological work does not, or cannot, affect its publics. However, novels arguably have an edge that non-fictive scholarly work does not. One significant difference between the aforementioned typical scholarly media and novels, with regards to cultivating sympraxis, is their ‘position’ as cultural texts. These texts are approached differently by publics and often engaged with for different purposes. Without creating a false binary, scholarly texts can be understood as primarily mimetic and novels as purposefully sympractic. Novels are read as a form of entertainment and leisure practice, whereas scholarly texts are consumed for information and often only for professional or academic purposes. Publics approach academic and creative public texts aware of these differences. Indeed, most publics rarely independently approach traditional scholarly media at all because they cannot access them, physically and intellectually. When they do engage, publics can be seen to engage with these texts differently because they, as readers, hold different levels of interpretative power in each space. Power relations are not removed, especially when novels are assigned in classroom settings (Carlin, 2010: 219). However, publics may arguably act as interlocutors more easily when engaged in novel reading, as fiction is more open to reader interpretation. Fiction writing is culturally positioned this way. While, as Becker notes (2007: 249-251), the
representations of social life in novels and other creative mediums still require readers to ‘do a lot of work,’ authors can acknowledge and work with, rather than against, variable reader interpretations. Intended social analysis is not communicated through sympractic mediums via a homogenous osmosis, and the interpretative work that readers necessarily undertake should be, as Becker also highlights (2007: 54-70), roundly considered by the author. I have worked to consider this in writing Into the Sea and throughout the exegetical analysis I present in Section 3, primarily by centring Mills’ (1959) sociological imagination as an active style of imagining and by (re)framing this imagination as central to the project of public sociology. I see that novels are a valuable medium for engaging people in this imagination. Fiction writing is a way of broadening the practice of sociology as well as spaces of sociological engagement.
Chapter 3: Methodology
In this project I employed autoethnography, literature analysis, and the arts-based research method of fiction writing. As this chapter details, arts-based research (ABR) is a creative methodological approach where art forms such as photography and fiction writing are used as research methods, increasingly in multi method projects to complement more traditional social research methods. I employed these three methods during a three-month pilot phase in late 2014 and three major research phases in 2015, 2016 and 2017. Each of these major research phases lasted nine months, separated by review periods lasting two months. This section overviews each of these methods and introduces the technique I used to ‘mix’ these methods, which I term the methods braiding technique. Using methods braiding, I ‘mixed’ my autoethnography, literature analysis and fiction writing both sequentially and simultaneously. This chapter outlines how and why I employed a simultaneous and sequential braiding approach. Chapter 8, in Section 4 of this thesis, restates the value of this methodological design tool for doing creative public sociology as a key contribution of this thesis.

It was determined by the Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee that this project was exempt from formal ethical review, as the research did not involve interviewing participants and the final output of the research is a creative product. The production of the novel was determined to pose no risk to participants, and any participants involved in the autoethnographic research would not be identifiable by third parties in the novel or in the thesis. As such, the chapters in Section 2 do not present any raw autoethnographic data. I do present an analysis of this data, in which no participants are identifiable, and I exegetically engage the practical and methodological aspects of this project design.

Autoethnography
Autoethnography turns the ethnographic lens towards the self. Ethnography and autobiography come together as ‘both a process and a product’ (Ellis et al., 2011: 273), centralising aesthetic literary qualities and bringing subjectivity to the fore of field research. With roots in the 1940s and 1950s Second Chicago School of sociology (Anderson, 2006: 375), autoethnography developed in anthropology in the 1970s as ethnography of one’s ‘own people’ (Hayano, 1979: 99), and diversified throughout the 1980s and 1990s as reflexivity and narrativity were centred in research
and scholarly writing (see Ellis et al., 2011; Reed-Danahay, 2017). In my pilot phase I determined autoethnography to be valuable and appropriate for addressing my research question; with autoethnography I researched the realities of being a ‘biographical entity’ (Mills, 1959: 8), and how the sociological imagination may (and may not) be cultivated through social experience within my personal milieu. I understand autoethnography as a specialised mode of the wider ethnographic method, and employing this method I worked to find a medium between evocative and analytical approaches; I drew together Ellis’ extensive focus on reflexivity and the subjective self (2004; 2009) and Anderson’s theoretical illumination (2006) with Geertz’s renowned ethnographic ‘thick description’ (1973), and built upon other sociological practices including those of Back and Puwar (2012) and from Hobbs and May (1993).

Geertz describes his renowned ethnographic anthropological method as: ‘interviewing informants, observing rituals, eliciting kin terms, tracing property lines, censusing households… writing his journal’ (1973: 10). In the pilot study and first phase of research, my autoethnography adopted these processes and focused the recording on my own life. I did not interview informants but noted and analysed the varying and context-specific conversations I had with different people and groups; I observed rituals which I either witnessed, was directly a part of, or am expected to go through myself such as climbing a career ladder and getting married. I elicited kin terms in the sense that I worked to understand language use and the social relationships I am part of; I noted contemporary and emerging family structures; I consciously discerned the space and place of my everyday. I captured these various observations by keeping a detailed research journal – as Geertz (1973) and Mills (1959) both emphasise, I too wrote everything down. Entries covered personal and identity development goals, everyday routines, the shift of social activities and work routines during late youth/early adulthood, emerging family structures, the ways that relationships are mediated by various technologies, and cultural and political events.

While ethnography can be understood as an attempt to ‘go native’ (Pearson, 1993: viii) within a field while necessarily or inescapably retaining scholarly distance, autoethnography may conversely be a process of “pulling out”; autoethnographic approaches position researchers not only as full participants in a world but as that world. Autoethnography involves cultivating scholarly distance between your academic self and your everyday knowledges. Pearson’s point, that ‘this vital
opposition of authenticity and distance is at the heart of ethnography’ (1993: xi), rings true for autoethnography as well. As such, in the second and third research phases my autoethnography developed from an ethnography of my personal life into an ethnography which focused the way subjective experience operates in everyday social processes. Using Mills’ sociological imagination (1959), my autoethnography recorded the (wo)man in man and society, the self in self and world, and particularly the live relationship between biography and history (see Mills, 1959). I made detailed recordings over my pilot phase and three major research phases with the awareness that I would ‘transcend’ this data (Anderson, 2006: 387-388) in creating the novel. This included of the reproduction of “common sense” knowledges as an insider within my everyday fields, as well as my own crafting of sociological imagination which increasingly distanced and differentiated me within these fields at the same time.

Effectively exploring and crafting sociological imagination involved a development of my autoethnographic approach. Early in the project my autoethnography solely involved handwriting detailed notes often in an evocative and literary style, as Ellis (2004) promotes. As my project developed in the second and third research phases, I also folded in a practice of recording multimodal field notes on my smartphone (see Beddall-Hill et al., 2011; Welsh and France, 2012) as well as detailed handwritten journal keeping. While handwritten journaling often interrupted ‘real life’ situations with an abnormal behaviour, or created significant spatio-temporal distance when I recorded notes after an encounter, collecting field notes on my smartphone opened up new avenues for the closeness and authenticity Pearson discusses (1993) – for capturing ‘fleeting, multi-sensory’ and ‘local’ recordings ‘on the move’ (Büscher and Urry, 2009: 103). This was a valuable vehicle for capturing lively autoethnographic reflections, the form of which ranged from photographs and screenshots to lists and longer evocative notes. Within the milieux of my everyday life smartphone use was prevalent and a constructive, social practice. For this reason, incorporating smartphone recording meant I could more easily capture a live autoethnography through an authentic social practice. I drew this approach from Back’s live sociology: employing techniques that are ‘mobile, sensuous and operate from multiple vantage points’ (2012: 18) which are thus ‘able to attend to the fleeting, distributed, multiple, sensory, emotional and kinaesthetic aspects of sociality’ (2012: 28). Using my smartphone in
this way I was able to become ‘not only attentive to what people say but also to the doing of social life’ (Back and Puwar, 2012: 11), and use how ‘the sensory’ constitutes ‘the social texture of life’ (Back and Puwar, 2012: 11) in crafting Into the Sea.

These multiple recording techniques allowed through my smartphone recording plus journaling did not circumvent epistemological or ethical issues (see Back and Puwar, 2012) concerning framing and authenticity. However, this technique did offer important opportunities for me to cultivate closeness, make aspects of my everyday and sociological reality ‘more real’ (Back, 2012: 34), and act as a live observer in my own life (see Back, 2012: 35-36); to construct and capture my everyday ‘observant participation’ (Wacquant, 2004: 6). This created an immediacy in the data collection process, temporally between my rendering of situations into observations and spatially within field/s, particularly concerning the various process of biographical enactment that smartphone and social media use are contemporarily implicated in (see Richardson and Hessey, 2009). I made these multimodal recordings with the awareness that I would use this data for practical and ‘theoretical illumination’ (Anderson, 2006: 387-388) – that is, that I would use my autoethnography to refine my theoretical understanding of particular social processes and of the craft of sociological imagination, as well as for fictionalisation in the novel, rather than for more strictly illustrative purposes which evocative approaches to this method often take.

Literature Analysis

The second method I employed was literature analysis. Onwuegbuzie et al argue that the literature review is ‘the most important step in the research process’ (2012: 1), yet is rarely ‘considered a methodological process in its own right’ (2012: 3). I employed literature analysis in this project as a method beyond a standard review of relevant literature; I undertook an analysis of the canon of sociological literature as presented by contemporary curricula, of cultural sociological literature which emerged as relevant to the project, and of my sociological novel using an exegetical approach. The cultural sociological literature I engaged with is detailed throughout Section 3 of this thesis, with the exegetical analysis of the novel.

In the pilot phase of research I determined literature analysis to be a valuable method for addressing my central research problem; literature analysis allowed research into the disciplinary concerns that sociology propagates as central to students
and publics, from which I could determine what is lacking in public sociology and how the cultural meaning of the social sciences may be better realised. Doing this I built on content, discourse and narrative analysis methods. Content analysis, understood as a systematic and hybrid method (Prior, 2014: 361), seeks to analyse the composition of texts including their themes (Prior, 2014: 361). Content – or what is deemed to be content – is not only contained within a text however. Ethnographic content analysis foregrounds the ‘reflexive and highly interactive nature’ of the analysis process (Altheide, 1987: 67) and involves the ‘systematic and analytic, but not rigid’ analysis of content as well as consideration of the ‘reflexive movement between concept development, sampling, data collection, data coding, data analysis, and interpretation’ (Altheide, 1987: 68). Discourse analysis, particularly in the critical or Foucauldian genealogical sense (see Holstein and Gubrium, 2011; Wodak and Meyer, 2009), involves the interpretation of institutions through identifying discursive practices in texts. Narrative analysis similarly concerns the thematic and structural construction of ‘stories,’ broadly conceived, including design purpose and intended audiences (Riessman, 2008: 539-540).

I understood ‘the literature’ as texts themselves and as emerging in reading and analysis processes, and I considered the social relevance and situated meanings of the themes and discourses which emerged from this literature throughout the project. In the pilot, first and second phases of research I used literature analysis to explore how and why theories are highlighted as core sociological ideas, and what dominant themes emerge from or shape these. I undertook this analysis from the positions of reader, researcher, and teacher to analyse various texts themselves as well as the creation of significance and meaning-making when these texts are engaged in various ways. I found the most centrally relevant text and concept to analyse was Mills’ *The Sociological Imagination* (1959). Themes of class, race, gender, age, religion, sexuality, employment, and deviance also emerged as central. As these themes are dominantly engaged through the vector of student subjectivity, particularly for pedagogical purposes, in my third phase of research my literature analysis came to focus significantly on everyday personal identity work and on individualism in relation to (or against) the crafting of sociological imagination. Throughout, this literature analysis drew on evaluations from personal and teaching experience, and findings from a separate pedagogical study I undertook on introductory sociology. That is, I worked to ‘make live’ (see Back and Puwar, 2012) my literature analysis
method by working into this analysis an evaluation of how sociological concepts are engaged, and how introductory texts are used within actual classroom settings. I supported this analysis with findings from a separate pedagogical study I completed which focused on teaching and cultivating sociological imagination. I also conducted literature analysis of my novel, *Into the Sea*, using an exegetical approach. I focus on this exegetical analysis throughout Section 3 of this thesis.

*Arts-Based Research Fiction Writing*

Arts-based research (ABR) is a methodology concerning how the creation of art in genres such as music, poetry, theatre, and film may achieve goals that traditional academic genera often inhibit (see Liamputtong and Rumbold, 2009; McNiff, 2008). Rather than being data for research, art is used to do research. Arts practices may be employed variously during ‘data collection, analysis, interpretation and/or dissemination’ of the research (Jones and Leavy, 2014: 1-2). Novel writing is one such genre gaining academic momentum. Leavy argues ‘fiction is engaged’ and a ‘natural extension’ of what many qualitative social researchers already do (2013: 20). As she defines it, arts-based researchers are not ‘discovering’ new methods, but ‘carving’ new research and communication tools (Leavy, 2015: 3). Arts-based research is recognised as important for creating new mediums and spaces academics and publics may use to meet, discuss, and engage in reciprocal or open dialogues (Leavy, 2015: 2, 29).

In this project I employed the arts-based research method of fiction writing to construct a sociological novel which addresses my central research problem and question via practice. I used this fiction writing method to collect data, to do analysis, for interpretation, and for dissemination as public sociology. With this method I researched how sociological work may be made public in a creative way – specifically, how the activity of sociological imagination may be affectively “brought to life” through a fictional narrative. Rather than analysing how other public or non-traditional academic texts construct and disseminate sociological understandings, I researched what doing this kind of public sociological imagination requires conceptually and in practice. Also, while my novel did develop in part from my autoethnographic and literature analysis data, the various draft iterations of the novel were themselves a form of data which I used as evidence of sociological imagination. As the novel developed through each major phase of research I was able to analyse
and demonstrate what sociological imagination is and what the craft of sociological imagination, both as an academic labour and an everyday quality of mind, may require to develop. Further, I interpreted sociological literature and analysed creative possibilities of the craft of sociological imagination through my fiction writing practice. By constructing the novel I could interpret key sociological concepts and themes through the novel’s narrative, thereby reaching an understanding of the intersections and relations between these elements within the fictional narrative’s wider social context. This method was also valuable for conducting research into the under-realised promise of the sociological imagination and potential cultural meaning of sociology (see Mills, 1959) – for understanding what sociology may need to do to be more culturally meaningful for potential or intended publics, including, as I discuss in Chapter 7 of this thesis, for introductory sociology students in an Australian context.

Crucially, the novel is not only a representation or realisation of the research conducted in this project. The final product of the sociological novel, a synthesis of and outcome from my three research methods together, responds to the central research question via practice. With this project I sought to explore how we may engage people in sociological imagination, and why we should strive to. This fiction writing method has contributed understanding of the craft of sociological imagination as it relates to both academics and publics. This methodology helps illuminate why and how sociological imagination may be conceived of as an active form of imagining, through the sociological novel as a research process and as a product.

*The Methods Braiding Technique*

In undertaking my research I found much practical and conceptual scholarship to draw on, particularly concerning fiction writing as a method of inquiry (Leavy, 2012b; Nairn and Panelli, 2009; Richardson and Lockridge, 1998; Vickers, 2010) and on the congruence of literature and sociology (Becker, 2007; Brinkmann, 2009; Coser, 1972; Weber, 2010). Significantly less work has aimed to address broader project design elements for this kind of work; not how qualitative or arts-based methods themselves may be employed and for what ends, but on managing the process of research (see Blumenfeld-Jones, 2016). Intending to produce a sociological fiction novel by engaging with both arts and qualitative methods, I turned to discussions of ‘mixed methods broadly speaking’ (Johnson et al., 2007: 124) that
centre qualitative approaches (see Hesse-Biber, 2010) to consider the practicalities of, for example, ‘methodological eclecticism’ (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2011: 286-289). I found it valuable to approach the project through the ‘somewhat more radical position’ that Denzin highlights (2010: 422-424) of subverting dominant paradigms, pursuing progressive politics, and producing a bricolage that stresses the complex intersections of epistemology, methodology, and inquiry techniques. Further I saw that, as Fielding (2012: 127) states, ‘integration is really the heart of the whole mixed methods exercise’ and thus it is not only when and what is being mixed but ‘how we integrate’ in research.

Many researchers argue that mixed methods approaches uncritically reproduce traditional, or familiar, knowledge hierarchies (Denzin, 2012: 81; Moses and Knutsen, 2012); even in qualitative multi-method research a single method often drives the research, and other methods are used to collect data which add ‘more’ to core findings, yet these methods are not integrated in practical or analytical ways nor is the supposed ‘mixing’ effectively substantiated (see Denzin, 2010; Plano Clark and Creswell, 2008: 367-370). Further issues which are especially relevant to consider when combining qualitative and arts methods include paradigmatic incompatibility (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010: 13-14), ‘incomplete’ project elements (Morse, 2010: 340), quality assessment (O’Cathain, 2010) and validity concerns (Morse and Niehaus, 2009). The conflation of methodology and method, and the overemphasis on research methods at the expense of overall methodological design, are also noted problems (see Gorard, 2013: 3-7; Hesse-Biber, 2010: 456). Acknowledging issues such as these, Denzin’s (2012) employment of the bricoleur offers a hopeful vision for creative research. However, practical advice for researchers wishing to employ a ‘complex,’ ‘reflexive’ and ‘interconnected’ approach (Denzin, 2012:85) can better detail overall project design and process elements – for one valuable discussion see Morse (2010).

I employed the methods of autoethnography, literature analysis and ABR fiction writing using a technique I designed: the ‘methods braiding technique.’ The methods braiding technique is a methodological design tool for qualitative mixed methods research projects, particularly for arts-based projects that also incorporate qualitative methods. Braiding is a visual metaphor. Methods braiding does not only merge data in analysis but actively seeks integration, technically and analytically, for a specific
research outcome. This is not the confusing of different approaches (see Creswell, 2011) but a technique which actively engages the co-influence which multiple method may give rise to, through multiple forms of integration (see Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007). Methods braiding is designed to help researchers to integrate or ‘braid’ their methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation both simultaneously and sequentially.

In this technique, two (or more) methods are employed across a series of major research phases. The length of these research phases depends on the overall lifespan and style of the project, and serve to split the project into appropriate durations of methods employment or data collection. Between each research phase is a review period. These review periods are shorter in length than the research phases but should be long enough for the phase to be effectively reflected upon and assessed. This process design helps facilitate the braiding of methods – particularly the focus and employment technique of each method – as well as the analysis of collected data, and how this data and analysis is interpreted, during and across research phases. To use Creswell and Plano Clark’s (2007) terminology, braiding involves merging and connecting forms of integration. Methods are merged as the data is brought together via analysis and interpretation; the methods and data are collectively analysed during review periods and interpreted through arts practices in following major research phases. Further integration occurs as analysis and interpretation of the methods and data is connected across and during research phases; themes and findings from one method may be connected to those present (and notably not present) in another, and merged analysis and interpretations from review periods may be connected to and intentionally engaged with in later research phases.

Importantly this is done specifically for the production of the project outcomes, arts-based and otherwise. To draw on the metaphor, when a braid is finished there are still recognisably separate strands, however together these strands are literally interwoven to produce a single braid. Mixed methods research may various employ and integrate multiple methods (Creswell, 2014) but the purpose of this braiding approach is to bring the selected methods together, in a single project, with the aim of co-producing research outcomes. As such, methods braiding does not stress particular research questions, rationales or outcomes but aims to centralise the purposeful consideration, justification and articulation of these elements. This may read as a cursory step in project design, however as Bryman (2006) highlights,
rationales are not commonly justified in research outputs and resulting problems suggest that rationales for undertaking this kind of research may not be purposefully considered either.

In this project I worked with the three methods discussed – autoethnography, literature analysis, and ABR fiction writing – and braided these together across a pilot phase plus three major research phases. My fiction writing ABR method involved employing a consistent creative writing practice. This took various forms (see Leavy, 2015 for examples of techniques) including free writing, character studies, space studies, narrator studies, chronotope configuration studies, and numerous drafts of the novel. My authoethonographic method involved maintaining a Geertzian ‘thick description’ (see Bass Jenks, 2002: 172; Geertz, 1973) style recording of my self and everyday life; more than an ethnography of my personal life, I focused on recording the ways that subjective experience operates in contemporary everyday social processes. I drew this data from my own experience and from others I encountered, which I extensively recorded in a series of handwritten journals and using my smartphone. My literature analysis method involved an analysis of concepts and texts that are generally agreed upon as forming the ‘sociological canon’ (see Edling and Rydgren, 2011). I largely drew these concepts and texts from national and international introductory sociology curricula.

These methods were employed using the braiding technique. As well as a minor pilot period and final revisions period, three research phases were built in to the overall research timeline which included three review periods. Each phase lasted approximately eleven months: nine months of ‘method work’ plus two months for project review. Each of the three phases had different aims which built towards addressing the research problems, central research question and achieving the overall project aim. For example, the literature analysis first aimed to engage with Mills’ concept of the sociological imagination. In the second phase the literature analysis sought to engage canonical sociological paradigms which are commonly taught to undergraduate students in introductory-level classes, such as conflict theory, functionalism, and symbolic interactionism. In the third phase the literature analysis returned to these canonical sociological texts, reading them again specifically for their sociological imagination as well as reading this imagination through the sociological
novel draft which, by that stage, had been produced through the arts-based research method.

In the first phase of the arts-based research I aimed to construct the foundations of the sociological novel: characters, settings, and storyline. In the second phase I aimed to construct a complete draft of the sociological novel based on these initial constructions as well as from first-phase literature analysis and autoethnography. In my third phase of arts-based research I sought to develop the novel’s sociological perspective through its literary elements including the pacing, structure and narration.

In the first phase of the autoethnography I aimed to identify commonly ‘unseen’ relationships which the sociological imagination works to make visible: between micro and macro social structures, between history and the present, and between an individual and wider society. In the second phase I sought to highlight the causes of public sociology’s limited successes, and the consequences of this observed lack of sociological imagination in the public sphere. In the third and final phase I aimed to identify how sociological imagination and knowledge, like that drawn from my literature analysis, could be made ‘more public’ and help address these same consequences in everyday ways.

To re-summarise using a phase-based perspective, in the first phase my literature analysis chiefly engaged Mills’ concept of the sociological imagination. My arts-based research constructed the foundations of the sociological novel: characters, settings, and storyline. First phase autoethnography aimed to identify commonly ‘unseen’ relationships in my local field or everyday, which sociological imagination works to make visible: between micro and macro social structures, between history and the present, and between an individual and wider society.

In the second phase I built on this data and initial analysis from each method. My literature analysis sought to engage canonical sociological texts and central themes which are commonly taught to undergraduate students, and which emerged as relevant from first phase data. My ABR aimed to construct a complete draft of the sociological novel, focused conceptually on enlivening sociological imagination. My autoethnography sought to identify potential causes and consequences of an observed lack of public sociological imagination.
In the third phase my literature analysis returned to these canonical sociological texts, and I read their themes in relation to sociological imagination and also read this imagination through my sociological novel. In the third phase of ABR I sought to develop the text’s sociological perspective through its literary elements including the pacing, structure and narration. In the final phase of autoethnography I aimed to identify how sociological imagination may be cultivated or affected in the everyday, specifically within my fields of focus.

Within and across each of the research phases, I work to practically and analytically ‘braid’ these methods together. Each method informed and developed from the others. Autoethnography informed the literature analysis as the patterns, recurrences and silences in my autoethnographic observations steered the literature I engaged with. Literature analysis informed the autoethnography as I internalised and carried the insight, themes and gaps in the literature to the field; the literature influenced how I interacted with my social worlds in conscious and involuntary ways, as highlighted in my autoethnographic observations. Literature analysis informed the arts-based research through the narrative direction of the novel – the plot, scope, and narrative detail in terms, for example, of what the narrator does and does not highlight. Arts-based research informed the autoethnography in a comparable way to the literature analysis; the fiction writing process affected my social behaviour and autoethnographic work in conscious and involuntary ways. Autoethnography significantly shaped the plotline, characters, settings and events of the novel to develop sociological perspective and verisimilitude. The narrative, which developed from the arts-based research process, also steered my literature analysis, including how I synthesised and analysed this literature which is evident in how the sociological ideas came together in the novel narrative in new or innovative ways.

The built-in review periods offered a number of benefits and contributed to a series of significant adaptations during the research. Following the review period of Phase 1, reflections specifically concerning the intended audience of the project outcome, which drew on the arts-based research process and autoethnography of teaching sociology, led to my reworking the age and socio-economic background of the central character in the sociological novel to better suit an audience of first-year Australian undergraduate sociology students. The way I ‘worked in’ scholarly literature to the sociological novel was also significantly revised; an evaluation of the sociological
novel drafts from phase 1, and specifically how the arts-based research and literature analysis were braiding together, led to my decision to remove footnotes and endnotes from the text to avoid overtly signposting the sociological concepts. Similarly, the narration changed from a central character first-person to a narrated third-person perspective with the aim of better developing sociological insight with the reader rather than in the characters themselves. I also constructed a detailed overall plot of the sociological novel through an evaluation of the key themes which developed from this first phase braiding.

In the second research phase review period, the way I collected autoethnographic data changed for the third phase of research based on both the autoethnography and literature analysis of Phase 2. The way the literature analysis and arts-based research came together in the sociological novel was again reworked, and I revised the key texts which I would engage with in the third phase of literature analysis based on key themes which developed from Phase 2. Significantly, my central research question was also slightly revised in the review period of Phase 2 to be more focused and effective.

In the final review period, further detail was worked into the sociological novel based on outcomes of the three braided methods and the research problems were added to and refined. A key outcome of the braiding technique was a developed understanding of the scope, nuance and significance of the initially outlined research problems.

The phase-based element of the braiding technique builds in time for reflexive evaluation (Finlay, 2002), a process which means rationales and research outcomes (both academic and non-academic, arts-based or public) are not only outlined at the commencement of a project and reengaged with when ‘writing up’ the research but are returned to and purposefully re-evaluated multiple times throughout the project lifecycle. In this way the methods braiding technique aims to maximise the benefits of undertaking pilot studies. Sampson (2004), evaluating her own experience undertaking a pilot study in an ethnographic project, highlights a substantial number of benefits which her pilot study offered. These include: testing (and demonstrating) the feasibility of the project; testing research tools for their appropriateness and suitability; establishing access and a network of contacts; developing familiarity with the field and/or with participants; gauging degrees of risk; determining and
establishing required resources; cultivating reflexivity as a researcher as well as potentially with participants through feedback; and not least of all generating useable data (Sampson, 2004). The methods braiding technique, ideally with a pilot study included and through its phase-based approach where review periods are structured into the research calendar, works to cultivate each of these same benefits in a more longitudinal way. The systematic evaluation and refinement of central project elements – research problems, questions, rationales, methods, conceptual frameworks, intended outcomes – are central to this approach.

This extends established approaches by reimagining the employment of multiple methods as a simultaneous and phase-based process – a co-production of research, rather than as a discrete cross-verification or triangulation process (see Flick, 2017: 52-53). This methodological design could be figuratively understood as the union of Morse’s (1991) simultaneous and sequential designs, or a union of convergent parallel mixed methods (Creswell, 2014: 219) and multiphase mixed methods approaches (Creswell, 2014: 228) with a ‘complex, quiltlike’ (Denzin, 2012: 85) intent. I designed and employed this technique in order to centre my fiction writing practice without establishing a knowledge hierarchy, to dynamically engage with issues of paradigmatic compatibility, and to reflexively consider how and why I was integrating my methods and analysis throughout.

Key strengths offered by the methods braiding technique for arts and qualitative projects are reflexive periodic reviews, conceptualising research as a co-productive braiding process, and having centralised research outcomes. The braiding technique emphasises the drawing together of data, analysis and the researcher’s experiences of employing each method, during and between each of the research phases; this technique uses the patterns and gaps which develop to direct the future employment of those same methods and analysis as the project progresses. Further, the methods braiding technique helps ensure that reflexivity is not something conceptually worked into the written analysis after the researcher has finished data collection but is built into the project design in recurring stages. This helps researchers cultivate reflexivity in their research project at multiple levels and use insights from ongoing reflexive analysis to inform the future research phases. Finally, the design of this technique is aimed to centralise important questions about the research outcomes and make concrete the actual products of the research from the commencement of the project.
As well as aiding reflexive, simultaneous and sequential arts-based and qualitative research, the methods braiding technique may best assist researchers in producing non-traditional research outcomes including art in various forms, as these outcomes may be engaged throughout the research process rather than secondarily to traditional academic work.
Part 2 – The Sociological Fiction Novel, Into the Sea

Part 2 of this thesis presents the sociological fiction novel, Into the Sea. This novel is comprised of nine chapters plus a short preface. The novel centres on Taylor Brown, a 27 year old primary school teacher who lives in Sydney with her boyfriend, Will. The story begins on January 1st, 2014, and follows the characters through most of the calendar year. Through their story, their everyday life of work and socialising interweaves with national and international issues and events – questions about cultural narratives such as the ‘Australian way of life’ and the fictional notion of ‘ordinary Australians’ emerge in their cities, backyards, churches, and at the beach. A glocal frame sees contemporary cultural tensions play out through the panoramic dimensions of love and marriage, death and grieving, work and education, leisure and consumption, and fear and moral panic.

Into the Sea is an experiment in sociological imagination. This novel considers the promise of this imagination and how to bring it to life. While the chapters are not thematically structured, key sociological concepts orient the narrative. These include rituals, identity, youth, family, globalisation, consumerism, terrorism, and social change. I do not aim to present a sociological argument about these concepts; rather, with Into the Sea I aim to float critical questions about culture and social life that take a sociological perspective. Into the Sea is a bed for sociologically-imaginative questions to flower in – my aim is for this novel to engage people in sociological imagination.
Notice

Pages 50 to 161 of this thesis, consisting of the manuscript for the novel *Into the Sea*, have been redacted from this document for copyright reasons.

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Please note that Chapter Three of the published novel is an addition to the material redacted from this thesis.
Part 3 – An Exegesis of Into the Sea

This section presents an exegetical analysis of the sociological fiction novel *Into the Sea*. Over four chapters it unpacks how the novel illustrates, contextualises, enlivens, and cultivates sociological imagination. This exegesis shows the process through which I constructed the novel, and highlights the value of this novel for engaging people in the activity of sociological imagining.

The first chapter in this section is Chapter 4: Sociological Imagination, Characterisation and Voice. Chapter 4 explores Mills’ (1959) concept of the sociological imagination as a style of imagining which may be crafted through fiction. This chapter highlights the biography-history relation within this Millsian concept, which is illustrated in the novel via the characters’ lives, in order to highlight the significance of narrative trajectories and future orientation within this relation. It also shows how the narrator works to illustrate the activity of sociological imagination. This chapter argues, via an analysis of voice and characterisation in *Into the Sea*, that the illustration of biography-history relations and sociological imagining itself is important for engaging readers in this imagination. It concludes by highlighting some problems with the concept of sociological imagination in relation to the aim of combating ‘ignorance and impotence’ (Bauman et al., 2014: 11), namely concerning the individualistic “common sense” which efforts at cultivating sociological imagination struggle against.

Chapter 5: The Neoliberal Imaginary and Aesthetic Form explores competitive individualism in response to Gane’s (2014b: 1104) argument that sociologists must treat neoliberalism ‘as a serious intellectual project’ by ‘paying detailed attention not just to its politics but also to its epistemology and to the loop it constructs between the two.’ In this chapter and in *Into the Sea* I take on this task: I pay detailed attention to neoliberalism as an imaginary, and I focus sociological attention on this imaginary via the aesthetic of my novel. I argue that a complex notion of competition, which infers both economic and evolutionary implications, is significant in how this imagination is contemporarily naturalised and legitimised. I unpack how I use the neoliberal imaginary in the aesthetic of the novel in order to highlight how this imaginary is embodied and reproduced; the structural style of the novel-world is shaped by neoliberalism and this neoliberal imaginary informs the
overall aesthetic form of the novel. Through this analysis and with this aesthetic form I work to contextualise the significance of sociological imagination.

Chapter 6: Spinoza’s Ethics and Poetics analyses how Spinozan concepts of relationality, affect, imagination and conatus may enliven sociological imagination. At specific points in the novel, I develop poetic framing devices from Spinoza’s Ethics which allow a more relational conceptualisation of the social world to emerge in the narrative. Using a Spinozan ontological approach, I consider how individualism may be seen as constitutively social; I explore how Into the Sea opens up a relational view of individuality and brings an ontological significance to ‘the social.’ I do not aim to illustrate specific Spinozan concepts with the novel, but rather my interpretation of Spinoza’s work colours the final version of Into the Sea. I use these Spinozan notions to construct the poetic of the novel, and also to challenge the competitive individualism of the neoliberal imaginary via this poetic.

The final chapter in Part 3 is Chapter 7: Verisimilitude, Cultural Meaning, and Affectivity. In this chapter I explore the value of engaging cultural meaning in arts-based public sociology, and the function of the overall novel artefact. I consider the sociology of time and space as well as Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope (1981). Employing this concept I work to enliven cultural sociological concepts by considering varying biographical rhythms and engaging culturally meaningful forms of “Australiana” that my autoethnography highlighted. Through this I explore argue how Into the Sea achieves a quality of verisimilitude. I then explore the role of affect in the novel. Doing this I draw on Kloepfer’s theory of sympraxis (1987), which concerns the emotive and motivating power of communication, or what I call a quality of affectivity. Again I draw on forms of Australiana to tap into the ‘intellectual, imaginative and emotional attitudes’ (Bemong et al., 2010: iii) that are attached to and realised through these cultural forms. I work to employ affect and, through the meaningful relation between particularly affective moments and the rest of the novel, to engage readers in the experiential activity of sociological imagination. Concluding this chapter I raise introductory sociology courses as an intended space for Into the Sea. I show how pedagogical theories inform my approach to affect and sociological imagination, as well as the design of the novel.
Chapter 4: Sociological Imagination, Characterisation and Voice

The concept of a particularly sociological quality of mind concerns reason and human experience and – as C Wright Mills (1959) intentionally emphasises with his phrasing – our ability to think creatively, to imagine. *Into the Sea* is an experiment in sociological imagination. In this chapter I unpack how I explored and employed this imagination while crafting the novel, and I analyse key aspects of sociological imagination that are illustrated in the novel. In particular I focus on what Mills calls ‘the craft’ of sociology (1959: 159), the significance of the relationship between biography and history (1959: 4) and being a ‘biographical entity’ (1959: 8), the ‘bounded orbits’ people live within (1959: 3), and the promise of sociological imagination (1959: 6). With this chapter I address my central research question – that is, how may we engage people in sociological imagination (and why should we?) – by showing how *Into the Sea* illustrates this imagination. I consider what sociological imagination is, how to ‘show’ this imagination in fiction (cf. Watson, 2016: 442), and what sociological imagination might offer people in their moving and dynamic everyday lives (Back, 2015). Three supporting research questions guide this exploration: How relevant is Mills’ (1959) sociological imagination to contemporary public sociology? How can fiction writing help us understand sociological imagination and what Mills (1959) calls the craft of sociology? And, ‘how can we deploy the sociological imagination in creative ways?’ (Beer, 2014: 12).

I explore these questions by focusing on the major plot points of the novel, the characters’ understanding and constructing of their selves, and how *Into the Sea* is narrated. *Into the Sea* primarily follows protagonist Taylor Brown and her close family and friends throughout the year 2014. I narrate the story with an intentionally sociological frame, employing particular narrative and analytic scaffolds including the relationship between biography and history which Mills emphasises (1959) in order to construct a sociological ‘point of view’ (Brown, 1977: 49) or voice. In this chapter I outline how I have understood Mills’ ‘biographical entities’ (Mills, 1959: 8, 161) in the novel. I also analyse how I see this biography-history relation setting up sociological imagination: not as a fixed analytic perspective but as a style of live and social imagining (see Back, 2012). Firstly, taking Mills’ notion of sociology as a craft, I consider how this imagination may be crafted before unpacking how the narrative of *Into the Sea* is itself a consideration of the craft of sociological imagination.
In the appendix to *The Sociological Imagination*, ‘On Intellectual Craftsmanship,’ Mills sets up social science as ‘the practice of a craft’ (1959: 195). This craft involves various techniques which concern the cultivation of good intellectual practices more so than the refinement of methods. He advises to, ‘above all, seek to develop and to use the sociological imagination. Avoid the fetishism of method and technique. Urge the rehabilitation of the unpretentious intellectual craftsman, and try to become such a craftsman yourself’ (1959: 224). Many researchers have applied this Millsian craftsmanship approach, to sociological theory (Weinstein, 2009), to anthropology (Ingold, 2011; 2013), to teaching (Goodwin, 1987), and to reflexivity in arts-based research (Leavy, 2017). Toscano (2012: 64), concerned with ‘the problem of representing social totality today,’ uses Mills’ notion of the craft in considering how ‘critical artistic practices’ have better ‘embodied the “promise” of sociological imagination’ (Toscano, 2012: 80). For Mills, the central practice in this craftsmanship is proactively keeping a research journal, a file of ‘ideas, personal notes, excerpts from books, bibliographic items and outlines of projects’ which change topic and develop over time (Mills, 1959: 198). This writing is significant to the craft – it is predominantly with writing that sociological research is communicated, and through writing that sociological analysis is constructed and realised. Mills argues ‘the sociologist’s need for systematic reflection demands’ this practice (1959: 196), and that by keeping such a file we may develop ‘self-reflective habits’ (Mills, 1959: 197). With this you ‘try to get together what you are doing intellectually and what you are experiencing as a person’ (Mills, 1959: 196). Other techniques include: periodically reviewing and refining a project during its lifecycle; engaging in scholarly discussion with others; playing with language; expanding how you understand relationships between people, issues and concepts; locating your subject historically; and considering seriously the way you structure your ideas and arguments in your work (Mills, 1959: 211-217).

Exploring how (and why) to engage people in sociological imagination, I have been chiefly concerned with ‘stimulating the sociological imagination’ (Mills, 1959: 211) in my own practice and with the novel as a product. Mills’ notion of the craft shapes my overall methodological approach. I play with language through metaphors, similes and phrasing throughout the novel; rather than seeking to illustrate the sociological concepts that my other methods highlighted through plot points and
characters, I used the novel to interrogate my understanding of these concepts and expand how I initially understood the relationships between these concepts, issues and people. Structure was a significant consideration regarding how the novel’s narrative and the thematic progression of the exegesis would work together. I employed the conceptual framing Mills discusses in order to effectively locate my characters historically as well as biographically. My autoethnographic research journals and novel drafts worked like files which I reviewed and rearranged throughout the project. I used these to bring my research and my personal experience together, the former through autoethnographic recordings and the latter with fiction. These Millsian practices were central to my methodology.

As Shilling (2012: 4) highlights in the introduction to Back and Puwar’s (2012) *Live Methods*, Mills’ focus on craftsmanship and imagination is increasingly valuable ‘given the dominance of instrumentalism in the current era.’ I have also found Mills’ imagination and craft valuable, as I highlight at the end of this chapter and throughout the exegesis, for creatively addressing issues of individualism and sociological engagement. As Brinkmann (2012: 65) summarises, rather than ‘using methods mechanically (to live up to demands for efficiency, calculability, predictability and control), Mills believed in the power of the researcher-craftsperson herself to generate insightful research.’ As such, ‘we should never forget that we do qualitative research for purposes of living, and theories and methods are just some of the tools we employ in the process (others… are art and education’) (Brinkmann, 2012: 65). The key methodological tools I used in crafting sociological imagination with *Into the Sea* were autoethnography, literature analysis and arts-based research fiction writing. As introduced in Chapter 3: Methodology, I employed these using what I have termed the methods braiding technique. Methods braiding is a technique for facilitating the simultaneous and sequential ‘braiding’ of qualitative and arts-based methods within a phase-based project. I see that this technique helps the cultivation of reflexivity through periodic process reviews; emphasises the reciprocal influence and co-productive interdependence of methods, analysis, and interpretation within a project; and centralises research outcomes and potential products of the research, which is particularly valuable for arts-based work. Using Mills’ craftsmanship techniques to frame my braiding of autoethnography, literature analysis and fiction writing, I have
worked to embody rather than abstractly theorise this craftsmanship and sociological imagination.

As I also noted in Chapter 3 of this thesis, my autoethnography balanced evocative and analytical approaches; I have drawn together Ellis’ extensive focus on reflexivity and the subjective self (2004; 2009) and Anderson’s theoretical illumination (2006) with Geertz’s renowned ethnographic ‘thick description’ (1973). I have also built upon sociological practices including those of Back and Puwar (2012) and from Hobbs and May (1993). I found Ellis’ (2004; 2009) approach particularly valuable for exploring the activity of sociological imagination in everyday life. However, working with a Spinozan ontology and epistemology – which, centring a relational theory of knowledge and affect, is at once realist and constructivist – I did not reject the analytical epistemological assumptions that Ellis’ evocative approach arguably does (see Anderson, 2006). Anderson states the ‘key goal’ of evocative autoethnography is creating ‘an emotional resonance with the reader’ through ‘compelling description of subjective emotional experiences’ (2006: 377). My project shares congruent – but not entirely equivalent – aims. Like Anderson’s analytic autoethnography, my goal extends beyond ‘simply’ providing an insider perspective, documenting personal experience and evoking ‘emotional resonance’ (2006: 386-387); I employed an autoethnographic method through the methods braiding technique in order to ‘transcend’ autoethnographic data (Anderson, 2006: 387) and construct a sociological narrative which was about more than myself and my personal experience – a narrative process which offered a ‘refinement, elaboration, extension, and revision of theoretical understanding’ (Anderson, 2006: 388) about ‘the inherent liveliness of social life’ by taking the ‘mundane seriously’ (Back, 2015: 821). This is not a positivist approach to evocative autoethnography (Anderson, 2006: 388) but an ethnography which attends to and extends everyday social processes of the self and sociological imagination. As I unpack in the following sections, I employed my methods using a Millsian approach in response to calls for ‘renewed creativity in the deployment of the sociological imagination’ (Beer, 2014: 6). I have used sociological literature on biographical enactment and arts-based research techniques to fictionalise experiences and insights from my autoethnography concerning the biography-history relationship that Mills’ (1959) discusses, through the characterisation in Into the Sea. I have also explored the activity of sociological imagination through the narrator’s voice in the novel, drawing upon my autoethnographic work and other sociological literature.
surrounding a ‘sociological sensibility’ (Gane and Back, 2012) or ‘aesthetic point of view’ (Brown, 1977: 49-76). In these ways, by centring Mills’ craftsmanship in my methods braiding technique, I have crafted sociological imagination through my methods and in Into the Sea.

Denzin, writing 30 years after The Sociological Imagination was published, argues Mills’ ‘version of the sociological imagination’ is ‘unsuited to the problems now confronting sociology’ (1990: 2). This is because, he argues from a postmodernist perspective, ‘Mills lost sight of the problems of biography and experience and the representation of lives in sociological texts’ (Denzin, 1990: 5); Mills’ turn to biography ‘did not go far enough’ (Denzin, 1990: 6). While I am critical of Denzin’s framing of Mills’ text as a ‘hypocritical’ and ‘monological tirade’ ‘with dubious ethics’ (1990: 3-4), and do not share his desire to ‘bury social theory forever’ (1990: 15), I agree that it is in the stories of people’s lived and emotional experiences that ‘the social comes alive’ (1990: 6). I also agree that sociology should seek the ‘existentially problematic experience’ beneath everyday life through the intersection of history, biography and society (1990: 6). As Denzin works towards (1990: 6-7), my novel is not only an illustration of Mills’ concept but also of our capacity as sociologists to imagine the social world in ways attuned to both the stories that people tell about life and our roles as (re)tellers of these stories; Into the Sea is a consideration of the promise of doing sociological imagination.

How I understand sociological imagination, and how I have employed this concept in this chapter and in Into the Sea, is not as a set analytic perspective wedded to Mills but as a style of live imagining (see Back, 2012) with which one becomes attentive to agency and society across temporal, spatial and cultural contexts. The promise of sociology which Mills valuably articulated may be better realised if sociological imagination is conceptually opened (see Beer, 2014). In seeking to open this notion I have intentionally framed my writing of Into the Sea around sociological imagination, and not ‘the’ sociological imagination. The biography-history relation that both Mills and Denzin see as significant is central to reconceptualising sociological imagination in this way, as a style of imagining rather than as ‘the’ analytic perspective of the discipline.
Characterisation in Biography-History Relations

Mills opens *The Sociological Imagination* by outlining what he sees as a significant personal and social issue: that ‘nowadays men (sic) often feel that their private lives are a series of traps’ (1959: 3). This feeling is a result of how people conceptualise their selves and place within wider social life; Mills sees that this phenomenon exists because people ‘do not possess the quality of mind essential to grasp the interplay of man (sic) and society, of biography and history, of self and world’ (Mills, 1959: 4).

Much sociology – including introductory curricula – focuses particularly on the relationships between individual and society and self and world. These two relations, which are more temporally static than the relationship between biography and history, are likely centralised due to the ‘essential tool’ of the imagination which Mills soon after introduces: the distinction between troubles and issues; the ‘personal troubles of milieu’ and the ‘public issues of social structure’ (1959: 8). The relationships between individual and society, and self and world, can be seen as objective and subjective frames for understanding these personal troubles and public issues. It is however the relationship between biography and history which is most emphasised throughout Mills’ text on the whole. I have crafted the novel so that many elements of Mills’ (1959) concept and other sociological themes may be read through the narrative, however I too have primarily focused on this biography-history relationship in *Into the Sea*. This particular relationship gives shape to sociological imagination as it brings to the concept a sense of narrative, trajectory, and a future orientation – all particularly valuable for crafting a novel and developing characterisation.

*Into the Sea* opens over New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day 2013/2014. Taylor Brown, the central character of the novel, starts the year off by making a New Year’s resolution, joining in the festive ritual as each of the other characters have done, both in obligation and solidarity (Chaney, 1994: 152): she decides to keep a journal. She does this despite thinking that the ritual is mostly shallow, just something to do at a party or something people occupy themselves with in those first few weeks of the year. Taylor has ‘given up resolutions before, the same ones it feels like, to her, that other young women write down everywhere: lose eight, learn French, lose weight’
Against these other ideas Taylor decides on journaling, and – in the narrator’s words – this is not ‘for anyone to see, necessarily. It’s more for thinking life through a little more just by pausing to write a bit of it down’ (page 64). The scene of her writing her resolution, using a Sharpie on a big sheet of butcher’s paper at her parents house the night after their own party, is spliced between a midnight scene of the Sydney Harbour fireworks and a hyper-produced telecast (pages 62-65). This ties together the scale and intimacy of the celebrations and rituals used to ring in the New Year. This relationship between scale and intimacy, between micro and macro, between what is commonly called our lives versus our times, marks the rest of the story.

Early in the year, a boy that Taylor grew up with as a close family friend commits suicide (pages 67-68). Taylor, her family, and his family and friends are thrown by the news. Despite feeling relatively knowledgeable and understanding of mental illness – suicide is a significant national issue, and young men from rural areas or areas impacted by unemployment are known to be a particularly affected group (Kõlves, Milner, McKay and De Leo, 2012) – Taylor struggles to make sense of the news or reconcile her feelings. Any solution that would make a real difference is, she thinks, enormous and therefore overwhelming and tiring and more than she or others seem to have the capacity for (see Bauman et al., 2014: 59; Mills, 1959: 3). They work to resolve their personal emotions about Sam’s death (Binkley, 2014; Myers, 2008) while necessarily getting back to their ‘normal lives’ in Sydney.

Other big issues come into focus for them – some through family and friends, as Will’s sister’s wedding approaches and Taylor imagines her own engagement (pages 58, 95, 102-103), and some through the media, as heavy coverage of the missing Malaysian Airlines flight MH370 focuses off the coast of Western Australia (pages 79, 87). Both of these events mark Taylor and Will’s autumn as they prepare to fly to London in the school holiday break. Being involved in the wedding party as a bridesmaid, and seeing how the sanctity of the ritual is pulled together “behind the scenes” (see Lévi-Strauss, 1987: 9), Taylor is both moved and challenged to think about her relationship with Will and the shape of her own life (Inglis and Hughson, 2003: 34, 179-180, 219-222; Mills, 1959: 31). This shape and shaping of her life

\(^6\)I make reference to the novel throughout this exegesis using, for example, ‘page 64,’ rather than ‘: 64’ as per the scholarly references. I make reference to novel chapters using, for example, ‘Chapter Four’ and to thesis chapter using ‘Chapter 4.’
becomes more tangible on their repeat trips to IKEA and at a dinner party with a close group of friends – the characters ‘create their life-worlds through the design of possessions and activities’ (Chaney, 1994: 154), and the curation and display of their lifestyles is central to how they engage in consumer culture (Chaney, 1994: 154; Miller, 2008: 296). They joke about learning to do adult friendships that centre on dinner parties rather than going to nightclubs (page 119) (see Alanen, 2016: 170), and another flight incident, the shooting down of MH17 over Ukraine, is a refrain that again dominates the news and their dinner conversation (pages 122-123, 129) (see Bertelsen and Murphie, 2009). That night and through the following months, Taylor and the other characters work to shape their individual lives while negotiating how they play particular roles which often feel carved out for them long in advance (Simmel, 2002). Taylor joins her class on school camp (page 130), lets her brother sleep on her couch while his anxiety is bad and he goes through a breakup (page 141), and when a hostage situation grips their city in November she and Will enthusiastically jump on a related social media movement7 (pages 157-158).

Throughout Into the Sea, it is the relationship between scale and intimacy – between our lives and times, minor and meaningful moments, troubles and issues, individuals and society, biographies and histories, people and worlds – that shapes the story and is highlighted through the story’s narration. Discussing the interplay of biography and history, Mills highlights that every individual ‘lives out a biography’ ‘in some society’ and ‘within some historical sequence’ (1959: 6). Mills argues that it is within the range of these relationships that ‘the life of the individual and the making of societies occur; and within that range the sociological imagination has its chance to make a difference in the quality of human life in our time’ (1959: 225-226). I developed the key biographical practices in the novel from my autoethnographic reflections – namely, the kinds of changes that are framed as life’s “next chapter,” the reframing of personal troubles or unexpected events as “plot twists,” and particularly being concerned with the future development and upward trajectory of one’s own life and lifestyle through socially sanctioned “achievements” such as marriage and buying a house. I have focused on these practices through the biography-history relationship that Mills (1959) establishes to construct a sociological characterisation of the characters in Into the Sea. This style of characterisation builds on – and against – the

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7See #illridewithyou: support for Muslim Australians takes off following Sydney Siege, ABC News, 16 December 2014.
tradition of modernist writers, such as Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, and the new subjective realism they progress (Parsons, 2007). These modernist novelists, in Parson’s (2007: 53) words, pioneer subjective realism as they exchange
the traditional representation of a character’s social development for the expression of his or her individual psychological being, the external description of the scene for the internal revelation of consciousness, and chronological narrative and dramatic plot for the flux of momentary thoughts and impressions that constitute modern life.

Characterisation in modernist novels repositions ‘the individual in relation to the world around him (sic)’ ‘in light of the pervasive influence of psychological thought at the turn of the century’ (Parsons, 2007: 55); writers worked to portray how the concept of a ‘primarily stable and rational’ self was being ‘exchanged for something far more variable and intangible, subject not only to its particular biases and perspective but also to the more mysterious workings of the mind and the unconscious’ (Parsons, 2007: 56). Where these modernist novelists construct their style of characterisation around what they see as the subjective and dynamic cohering interiority that shapes experience, my style of characterisation emerges from the relations which form the heart of sociological imagination: the ‘interplay’ between individual ‘and society,’ ‘biography and history,’ and ‘self and world’ (Mills, 1959: 4). It is this interplay between these elements (see Mills 1959: 4) that shapes characterisation in Into the Sea. Through this characterisation I aim to highlight how the characters contribute ‘however minutely, to the shaping of this society and the course of this history even as [they are] made by society and by its historical push and shove’ (Mills, 1959: 6).

We are biographical entities (Mills, 1959: 8, 161). Twice Mills emphasises this point when outlining how we may understand and locate individuals within milieux, as well as individuals and milieux within social structures. This framing of individuals as biographical entities is made firstly when Mills discusses personal troubles (1959: 8) and secondly when he considers the limited ways such troubles have been addressed by individualistic social sciences such as psychology and psychoanalytic studies (1959: 157-161). The ‘small-scale setting’ of such studies, where practitioners are ‘tied to the individual patient’ (Mills, 1959: 160), are limited in terms of the
contributions they can make to resolving these troubles because ‘the life of an individual cannot be adequately understood without references to the institutions within which [their] biography is enacted’ (Mills, 1959: 161). Understanding personal troubles in relation to biography is important because

Much of human life consists of playing ... roles within specific institutions. To understand the biography of an individual, we must understand the significance and the meaning of the roles [one] has played and does play; to understand these roles we must understand the institutions of which they are a part (Mills, 1959: 161).

The relevance of this biographical framing emerged strongly in my research. Among other foci including micro social routines and macro cultural events, as highlighted in Chapter 3: Methodology, my pilot and Phase 1 autoethnographic observations focused upon personal and identity development goals which I recognised in myself and people within my milieu. These goals were held by almost all people within my fields of focus to varying degrees, and were wide ranging in a practical sense – from trying radical haircuts to fitness challenges, to educational qualifications and career moves, to new hobbies and travel planning and relationship developments. These practices are, in Giddens’ terms, what constitute the reflexive project of the self – the ongoing individual negotiation of ‘lifestyle choices among a diversity of options’ that becomes ‘increasingly important in the constitution of self-identity and daily activity’ (Giddens, 1991: 5).

In my research, I found that these practices did primarily concern self-identity, were all individually oriented and, when raised during casual in-person conversations or via social media platforms, were actively given narrative contexts. Being either inspired by significant life changes, or sought after in order to instigate such changes, practices routinely coupled with ‘starting a new chapter’ in one’s life. It is through these practices that the self is constructed, and it is this constructed concept of self that ‘forms a trajectory of development from the past to the anticipated future... [this trajectory brings] a coherence that derives from a cognitive awareness of the various phases of the lifespan’ (Giddens, 1991: 75). In my research, the appropriate time and style of these changes were variable but consistently determined in relation to peer members and family members of same and older generations, either in line with or against similar significant changes that others made and/or experienced. These
findings affirmed the emphasis Mills places on individuals as ‘biographical entities’ (1959: 8), and on biography as something which is ‘enacted’ (1959: 161). This biographical enactment also mapped into my arts-based research. This was largely unsurprising, considering my arts-based research method was fiction writing aimed at creating a novel. The ‘liberal humanist tradition of the English novel,’ explains Parsons (2007: 66), centres around ‘the uniqueness of identity and an innate self (however experimentally portrayed).’ As Lukács argues, novels as a form are ‘essentially biographical’ (1971: 77) as they centre on the ‘problematic individual’ (1971: 78). Through my arts-based research in the pilot phase and Phase 1 of my research project, I explored the depth of biography required to create contemporarily realistic characters as well as the processes of this ongoing biographical work such characters may variously engage in, to extend the breadth of the novel’s milieux, propel the plot, and illustrate Mills’ concept of sociological imagination.

**Sociological Voice and the Narrator**

A number of characters in *Into the Sea* engage in this biographical work, including Taylor (throughout), Will (see page 124), Will’s sister Rachel (see page 99), Katie (see page 126), and Brett (see page 148-149). The novel is structured with chapters that highlight these biographical developments, and the characters also conceptualise their own and other people’s lives as biographies that have ‘chapters’ – see Sue discussing her daughter Rosie (pages 56-57), Taylor moving into a career (page 80, 145-146), Taylor reflecting on Rachel’s wedding (pages 102-103), Will and Taylor shopping for home wares (pages 111-112), and Taylor dealing with two of her young students (pages 136-137). One moment which strongly highlights this biographical enactment, as discussed, is when Taylor reads through a list of New Year’s resolutions with her family and partner which were written during a party the previous night. Many of these resolutions are light-hearted, written in the spirit of the party rather than as serious personal development goals. However, how the narrator frames these resolutions and the way they were created opens the scene sociologically. The novel’s narrator takes the position of a sociologist, and narrates the novel as a whole through a sociological frame – that is, with a sociological ‘point of view’ (Brown, 1977: 49). It is through the narrator’s sociological voice that meaningful links are constructed between, for example, the party and the fact that the characters shared together in the start of a New Year – joining in this ‘psychic reorganisation’ practice
brought on by the annual event, that often ‘feels shallow’ but ‘can run deep’ (page 63). In this way the narration style builds on the ‘biographical turn’ in the social sciences (see Wengraf et al., 2002) and particularly youth studies (see Furlong, 2012: 67-68; Thomson, 2007), in that I use the narrator to reflexively ‘link macro and micro levels of analysis’ (Wengraf et al., 2002: 246) and highlight how the characters, as ‘emerging adults’ (see Arnett, 2007), work to ‘make sense’ of their lives ‘through putting together a coherent story’ (Furlong, 2012: 67). The narrator is doing sociological ‘work’ (see Becker, 2007: 249; Watson, 2016).

Into the Sea’s narrator occupies a purposeful presence in the story – the narrator is not literally present like a character in the scenes, but is present via voice and point of view (see Brown, 1977: 49-76), acting as a medium between the characters and the reader. Taking a ‘fly on the wall’ approach as much ethnographic writing does (see Van Maanen, 2011), the narrator operates between an omniscient and involved position, or between an authorial and figural third person (Jahn, 1997: 444), in a way that problematises nonfocalised versus internally focalised binary perspectives (Bal and Lewin, 1983: 236). I crafted this narration style so that it would be through the narrator’s voice that sociological imagination is brought to the story. It is the narrator, rather than the characters themselves, who engages in sociological imagination.

I decided on this stylistic technique after many attempts at making ‘live’ (cf. Back and Puwar, 2012) sociological imagination in the novel in other ways, and after reflecting on Becker’s (2007) analysis of the sociological quality of specific novels. There are many ways that sociological imagination may be enlivened in a novel, such as through specific characters’ perspectives or in the kinds of details that are foregrounded in a scene. As I have discussed (Watson, 2016: 438-439), Patricia Leavy’s 2015 novel Blue develops sociological insight through its key characters, as they individually and cooperatively question their own socialisation and fluctuating agency throughout the story. David Buckingham’s 2015 novel On the Cusp draws out how agency–structure struggles work and are worked out within particular institutions during periods of significant social change (Watson, 2016: 439). Becker illuminates how the literary strategies of three of Georges Perec’s novels overlap ‘more than a little’ (2007: 267) with the kinds of analysis that sociologists work to achieve; through tense and grammar (Becker, 2007: 254-255), through the style of description (Becker, 2007: 256-257), by focusing on material culture and public life rather than an
emotional interiority which many novels focus upon (Becker, 2007: 265), and by drawing attention to ‘particular historical circumstances’ (Becker, 2007: 267), Perec offers an analysis which Becker argues is interestingly comparable ‘to what social scientists do’ (2007: 253). Becker (2007) also considers Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* and Italo Calvino’s *Invisible Cities* as works of social analysis. Becker highlights the ‘point of view’ that Austen brings to her novel through the narrator (2007: 241), and the macro structure of Calvino’s story plus the dialogue between its two key characters (2007: 284), both of which offer ‘clues’ for ‘how to free ourselves from the tyranny of conventional forms’ (2007: 284). I considered the strengths of these fictional texts in terms of developing and conveying sociological perspective as I crafted sociological voice in my own narrator.

The stylistic alternatives I tested, before deciding to use the narrator to bring sociological imagination to my novel, included the story being written in first person by the protagonist Taylor, by taking a more auto-fiction style (see Worthington, 2017) or directly engaging with theories and research (see Bancroft and Fevre, 2016), and also through an end-noting format that removed this direct sociological engagement from within the story but kept it at the end of the novel. While engaging these alternative approaches was beneficial to the overall project in various ways, including helping with character development and plot structure, I felt that they (re)created boundaries between fiction and sociology by positioning these in opposition rather than effectively weaving them together. In an early draft, which I wrote in first-person as Taylor, introducing Mills’ biography-history relation into the story, I explained,

> There are two lines in life. The bigger line, of social trends and political movements and moon landings we all share, and our own smaller line of birthdays and lunchtimes. It’s amusing to see the two blur together, like when looking at a wedding photo of your much-younger Grandmother that still hangs on her wall. The point of the picture hasn’t changed much in three generations but almost everything else has. The fashion, the price, the party, meaning and expectations, the hair…. You can’t understand a person or a history without understanding both. There is an intricate connection between the patterns of our own lives and the course of world history, but it’s hard to see. We think history is one thing and our actual lives are something different. We’re limited in what we can see, and where we feel we have power, so we focus on close-up scenes of the everyday
present. We’re bound in these private orbits. History sits behind us, out of focus, a generic dusty background.

In a later draft, during the funeral scene, again writing in first-person as Taylor, I explained,

No matter how disconcerting religious belief can seem, there’s a shared understanding behind the symbols that really give them meaning. It’s not about a cross or flood or a magic burning bush. Most of everything in Church today wasn’t even for Sam. If Sam had organised the service as a way for us to say goodbye to him—the real him—it would have turned out very different. The rituals we’re going through in memory of him aren’t for him. They’re a periodic reaffirmation of our collectivity—those of us who are left. A reminder that we are a community and not just wandering individuals.

In the final version of the novel I work to imbue these same ideas into the story but in less explanatory ways, and using a distinct narrator rather than Taylor herself. I moved away from writing in first-person as Taylor for a number of reasons. While the early plot came together quickly, I struggled to progress the storyline while writing from her perspective; I could not justify Taylor’s quick development of sociological perspective from her simple list writing practice. Further, Taylor’s panoramic and scholarly internal monologue was unrealistic and at times pretentious, and ineffective for the purposes of cultivating sociological imagination in the story and with readers. In these drafts I had replicated the issues that Burawoy (2008a: 372) highlights, by talking down to a perceived public readership via Taylor’s interior monologue. As Carrigan (2016: 67, italics in original) argues, while discussing academic communication online, the ‘underlying necessity is that public engagement must entail acting with and for publics rather than at them.’ Avoiding talking down to or at a perceived public was a central concern of mine in later drafts.

In the final version of the novel, Taylor’s personal development and biographical enactment is still central but I explore this from a sociological perspective through the narrator rather than through Taylor’s own eyes. She does begin to think more critically about some parts of her life, but this change is not necessarily the development of sociological imagination. For instance, in her journal
Taylor writes a Good list, a Bad list, and a Change list. She designs these, as the narrator frames it, ‘for thinking life through a little more just by pausing to write a bit of it down’ (page 64). Taylor does not discuss her list writing practice explicitly with other characters; later in the novel other people are aware she is doing this, but her motivations are not openly discussed in significant depth. Rather, it is the narrator who frames this practice through a sociological lens at the end of Chapter One. The narrator says, ‘the little life we get stuck in, the routine of traffic and deadlines and meal times can make us feel like maybe we’re missing something, too busy surface-level living to do anything bigger or better or real’ (pages 65). With these lines I intentionally echo the opening of *The Sociological Imagination*. At this early point in the story, Taylor is not someone ‘possessed by a sense of the trap’ (Mills, 1959: 5); she does not reflexively understand her journaling in the same way as the narrator does, and she does not undertake this practice with any explicit or implicit intention of crafting a sociological imagination. I use the narrator to frame her choice with the line ‘the little life we get stuck in’ (page 65) to recreate the sense Mills describes of knowing we are bounded by ‘private orbits’ and otherwise remaining ‘spectators’ (1959: 3). Rewrites of the novel involved significantly reframing scenes such as those highlighted above in order to avoid talking down to a reader. While these sections were written in a literary style I was still approaching the sociological concepts mimetically rather than sympractically⁸ (see Kloepfer, 1987), and as a result early drafts read as narrative rewrites of various sociological theorists. While this approach is not necessarily ineffective (see Bancroft and Fevre, 2016), in this instance I felt it was not the right approach. I developed my approach to better weave these concepts through the story, rather than relying on Taylor’s improbable and portentous embodiment of an undergraduate sociology textbook, by using more developed framing and literary techniques and making the narrator’s insights considerably shorter and more evocative than early drafts of Taylor’s were. Doing this I was able to better illustrate the activity of sociological imagination that the narrator is engaged in against the other characters’ “common sense,” and use the writing process to consider what crafting sociological imagination requires.

⁸I discuss Kloepfer’s (1987) concept of sympraxis, which concerns the affective potential of texts, in detail in Chapter 7.
Abbott (2016: 87), discussing the value of lyricism for sociological writing – albeit against “narrative” as a framing structure – moves the reader to ‘consider a kind of sociology… that is in some profound sense not narrative.’ He explains ‘this doesn’t mean that [a work] can’t contain narrative elements,’ but rather ‘that its ultimate, framing structure should not be the telling of a story – recounting, explaining, comprehending – but rather the use of a single image to communicate a mood, an emotional sense of social reality’ (Abbott, 2016: 87). It may seem counter-intuitive that I value this argument considering that my sociological novel is fundamentally a narrative work. Abbott’s ideas of lyricism over narrative have however informed my crafting of Into the Sea. The significance of particular images in the novel and the way I use these to construct an emotional – or rather, an affective – sense of social reality is central to my project; I focus on this notion in detail in Chapters 6 and 7 of this thesis. Throughout this exegesis and in my thesis conclusion I consider the value of sociological fiction in relation to its capacity to affectively engage publics, not only in the activity of sociological imagination but also with the very idea of society. These two elements of the novel work in tandem – the activity of sociological imagination, and the idea or affective image of society.

The narrator plays a key role in Into the Sea in enlivening sociological imagination and, as I return to in Chapter 7 of this thesis, a quality of affectivity. To achieve this, the narration operates with a lyrical as well as a narrative role. Sociological imagination is brought to the novel by the narrator, however this is not via a structured explanation of how this imagination works and may be developed. Rather, sociological imagination is enlivened through the narrator’s voice. The narrator does not, over the course of the novel, build up a whole sense of Mills’ (1959) concept through a parable-type narrative structure whereby the operation and value of this imagination is illustrated and revealed through character development or the ordering of plot points. Abbott’s arguments for lyricism are made most explicitly against this kind of ‘explanation,’ which he states is ‘narrative’s most familiar avatar in the social sciences’ (2016: 87). Positioning a lyrical sociology against this explanatory narrative form, Abbott considers the stance an author takes towards their subject and their audience, and the mechanics or devices an author uses to construct the text. The literary devices I have employed in constructing Into the Sea are discussed throughout this exegesis: characterisation (this chapter), aesthetic form (Chapter 5), a poetic (Chapter 6), verisimilitude and chronotopes (Chapter 7). Stance,
which is ‘more important’ than such devices in Abbott’s eyes (2016: 88), is encapsulated in what I have discussed in this chapter as the narrator’s sociological voice and point of view. As Becker (2007: 223) highlights in his analysis of *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen ‘created a narrator, a persona who tells the story, and who has some traits and skills of her own.’ It is through Austen’s narrator that we ‘learn about what a sociologist might call the contingencies of a marital career’ (Becker, 2007: 248).

Austen’s skill in describing these contingencies, and the value of the social analysis that her novel presents, lies for Becker in the fact that ‘her book doesn’t present and demonstrate a single hypothesis but rather a complex web of connected observations’ (2007: 242). Of these observations, Austen’s narrator ‘not only provides the data but the analysis too, to a reader alert enough to grasp it’ (Becker, 2007: 250); Austen ‘does not provide neatly labeled conclusions to which she then attaches probative evidence’ (Becker, 2007: 249), but her narrator ‘skillfully deploy[s] an ironic point of view’ (Becker, 2007: 241). The reader sees the story from the narrator’s stance, and it is through the narrator’s voice that potential understandings or analyses are framed. This is not to say that the reader does not bring their own stance or voice to their reading. The narrator does work however to ‘lead us’ (Becker, 2007: 251) in particular directions. In Austen’s case, we are led to see how ‘wealth and social position… affect the chances and results of marriage at many points along the class scale’ (Becker, 2007: 250) *through* the irony with which her narrator delivers key lines, including the well-known opening sentence: ‘it is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife’ (Becker, 2007: 239). Using the narrator in this way, Austen moves the reader to engage in social analysis with her, rather than accept any single argument she presents; as Becker (2007: 250) highlights, ‘attentive readers can use the book as a source for many and varied hypotheses, beyond the ones the book itself proposes… that’s what it means to say that such a book is rich in possibilities for sociological analysis and thinking.’ Becker recognises the same strength in Calvino’s *Invisible Cities*: that ‘literary description trades clarity and unidimensionality for the ability to make multiple analyses of the multiple possibilities contained in one story’ (2007: 284). This interpretative openness is a strength which I have worked to craft through my own narrator in *Into the Sea*. I recognise the value of a lyrical voice in a fictional medium for engaging readers in the activity of sociological imagination. Rather than explain what sociological imagination is through the story, or present a sociological
argument about particular processes in the novel, I use the narrator’s voice to float critical ideas and questions about social life which take a sociological perspective. I use the narrator’s voice to guide readers toward sociological imagination.

In my novel, the narrator engages in sociological imagination as events happen – sociological imagination is made live in the story, as it is with this imagination that the story is narrated. Specific interjections by the narrator work to open scenes, as they unfold, to the kind of questions that sociological imagination helps us raise. For example, concerning the “Australianness” of the novel context that is established in the Preface, the narrator gives the aside that ‘That’s how the anthem goes, anyway’ (page 50); concerning the annual highlight reels which the characters eagerly watch at their New Year’s Eve party, discussing the temporal distance between themselves and the people that they are watching in the old clips, the narrator points out that ‘the screen doesn’t really work to separate’ them (page 64) and thereby suggests that the medium actually connects the party-goers and people on film in a meaningful way. Using this particular framing, which works to highlight the construction and characteristics of the particular society that the characters live within, the narrator creates space in the scene for questions, such as, ‘within [this society], what is the meaning of any particular feature for its continuance and for its change?’ (Mills, 1959: 6) and ‘this period – what are its essential features? How does it differ from other periods? What are its characteristic ways of history-making?’ (Mills, 1959: 7). It is this sociological framing that the narrator brings to the story. What I aim to do with this style of narration is illustrate and stimulate sociological imagination for and with the reader. Interjections like these, in the Preface and during the party, are made at specific moments to knit together the action of the scene with the lively activity of sociological imagining.

**Trajectories and Private Orbits**

This biographical enactment work and the illusory horizon of our biographies as we understand them is ‘bounded by the private orbits’ in which we live (Mills, 1959: 3). This is true for the characters in *Into the Sea*, whose personal goals and imagined future biographies develop directly from their current personal circumstances, and are projected into the future within similar frames. The characters in the novel are not seen by the narrator as imagining radically different futures for themselves, nor of dreaming of overcoming the troublesome conditions of their everyday existence as
lead characters in novels typically do (see Lukács, 1971). My findings indicated that
this kind of imagining was not typically present in my field of research; my
autoethnographic reflections, which informed how the characters in the novel were
constructed, were collected in typically upper-middle class milieux and
predominantly involved White people between 20-35 years and 50-70 years of age, of
first through to fifth generation Australian heritage. While there were exceptions to
these demographics, these exceptions were in the minority within my fields. The
majority of participants were not compelled to struggle against this sociologically-
understood private orbit bind (Mills, 1959: 3-4); their everyday lives, while not
trouble free, were typically marked by upward mobility (see Beller and Hout, 2006;
Corak, 2013; Deeming and Smyth, 2015: 305) and sociocultural privilege (see Forrest
and Dunn, 2006). Significant social issues were identifiable in these milieux, however
for most people happiness was broadly attainable. Success was framed
individualistically through perpetual personal development rather than in relation to
wider social circumstances which, in other instances, may impede this happiness or
success and as such become obstacles needing to be overcome.

With Into the Sea I consider these findings and highlight elements of agency and
individualism. Rather than illustrating how individuals expand their visions beyond
their close-up scenes, the novel considers why individuals do not – or are not
compelled to – understand their private troubles in relation to broader structural
issues. Mills contends that people are ‘seldom aware of the intricate connections
between the patterns of their own lives and the course of world history’ (1959: 3-4),
in part because ‘the very shaping of history now outpaces the ability of men (sic) to
orient themselves in accordance with cherished values’ (1959: 4). As a result people
‘become morally insensible, trying to remain altogether private’ individuals in the
‘defense of selfhood’ (Mills, 1959: 5); in the face of significant and/or increasing
social change, people can turn away from ‘larger social worlds’ and focus their sphere
of concern on themselves and their private orbits (Mills, 1959: 4-5). I understand this
as an increasing individualism which works to protect the self as a coherent nexus of
agency and identity, against increasingly incoherent or complex societal change.

While my story centres on individual characters, I contextualise the
characters’ biographical developments as cultural rather than only individually
specific. Their biographies are bound within a suburbanist cultural context: the
purpose of life is to ‘work hard, have a family, have a backyard with real grass and lie back and enjoy the freedom’ (page 50). I emphasise the everyday private orbits of Taylor and Will in Chapter Three of the novel. Following the end of the second chapter, which finishes with an emotive scene after a funeral, the third chapter intentionally begins with a mundane weekday morning at Taylor and Will’s apartment. The scene includes specific elements which locates it on a particular day, while also emphasising the routine nature of this kind of morning by shifting to a spatially- and temporally-omniscient perspective; opening with their 6:15am alarm (page 78) and ending with Taylor and Will both leaving for work (page 80), the scene includes the news of the missing Malaysian Airlines Flight MH370\(^9\) (page 79) as well as description of how ‘each day they do this hurried dance…. The luckiest of the lucky country with their curtains, coffee, shower steam… The whole city pulsing through its before-work breakfast routine’ (page 79). I made this structural decision, to follow a funeral with a mundane morning which includes both intimate and remote framings, to begin to highlight that while biographies are marked by ‘critical moments’ that can work as vectors for examining one’s life (Thomson et al., 2004), much biographical enactment work is located in the everyday and marked by latent structures of routine (see Jost, 2012: 129). I engage with this idea throughout the novel, including through scenes at a wedding (page 95-101), in the bathroom (page 102), at the shops (pages 111-112), and at a dinner party (pages 117-120). From the Preface of the novel I aim to trouble the notion that all lives and futures are the result of personal choices and hard work (Mendick et al., 2015) or that people ‘get out what they’ve put in’ (page 50).

Importantly, it is not only our imaginations that are bounded by these private orbits; as Mills argues, our powers of acting are also ‘limited to the close-up scenes of job, family, neighbourhood’ (1959: 3). This is why our sense that we cannot individually overcome our personal troubles is, for the most part, correct (Mills, 1959: 3). Taylor feels this, and records these feelings in her journal. She makes Good, Bad, and

\(^9\)Malaysian Airlines flight MH370 was a passenger flight that disappeared on March 8, 2014, after departing from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The flight was scheduled to arrive in Beijing but was lost on both air traffic control and military radars after deviating from its path. The plane was carrying 12 crew members and 227 passengers from 15 countries. A multinational search effort quickly commenced—the largest and most expensive in history. On March 17, Australia took the lead in the search as focus turned to the southern Indian Ocean. While fragments have washed up on the coast of Africa, the bulk of the plane has not been found.
Change lists about a variety of experiences; often her sense of what her personal troubles are as well as how she can overcome these are individualistically framed, as matters of her personal life that can be addressed through her own choices. This includes the tension between her desire to become engaged to Will and her abstract feelings of uneasiness at Rachel’s wedding in Chapter Four. From the first chapter Taylor daydreams of ‘engagement rings’ (page 58), and after attending the wedding she imagines ‘what [Will’s] vows will say, how he’ll wipe a well-timed tear and shake just a little taking the handwritten lines out of his pocket…. Kisses. Dancing. Cake’ (page 103). Yet she writes in her journal, It was just a bit….I don’t even know and It was very *here she is*, *look at her*, *becoming a woman*, *best day of her whole life*/until of course you have kids, and even then…” (page 103). In her Change list Taylor asks herself, ‘Will our wedding be like this?’ (page 103). Her answers concern the style of wedding she personally desires and the different choices she would make: ‘Not the tight ship coordination/or having all the same things that everyone else has had’ (page 103). Except for these stylistic differences, where Taylor ascribes meaning to the individuality displayed via the aesthetic and organisational elements of the wedding, the general uneasiness Taylor shows in her Bad list is not addressed in her short Change list.

Mills argues that, due to the contemporary frame of mind which ‘arbitrarily divorces the individual life from the larger institutions within which that life is enacted’ (1959: 12), an ‘uneasiness and indifference’ may arise (1959: 12, 13). The narrator highlights that Taylor, like many people, understands her own ability to make choices not in relation to but against the backdrop of society; agency is popularly understood as having a general relation to sociocultural elements, which act as a setting or context for the choices we can make, but not as being relative to social structure or culture. Her uneasiness is mostly akin to that Mills describes: as the feeling which arises when people are ‘unaware of any cherished values, but are still very much aware of a threat’ (Mills, 1959: 11). In this instance, Taylor’s ‘private uneasiness’ does remain largely unformulated (Mills, 1959: 11); her immediate journaling of this uneasiness is vague, and throughout the rest of the novel her responses to overcoming this uneasy feeling concern personal – and consumer – choices. Mills argues that one of the key roles of a sociologist is to ‘translate’ ‘uneasiness arising from the “depth” of biography’ into a ‘trouble’ (Mills, 1959: 131) – to articulate vague uneasiness as specific personal troubles.
Taylor does however work to identify this feeling as a future personal trouble that she can overcome; what is significant is that her articulation of this trouble is individualistic. As the narrator illustrates, it is not so much the articulation of uneasiness as a personal trouble that sociological imagination may assist with; rather, with sociological imagination we may reframe how our concerns and resolutions are personally imagined. In this specific instance with Taylor, and more broadly throughout the novel, uneasiness arises when the relative nature of agency and society becomes abstractly felt by the characters. Regarding the value of sociological imagination in remedying such feelings, it is not so much the popular inability to make uneasiness coherent that is important, but rather the individualistic framing within which personal troubles are understood that prevents better conceptualisations of the relationality of agency and society.

*Imagination Against Ignorance and Impotence*

As well as uneasiness, this individualistic framework can give rise to an indifference. Mills argues that indifference is experienced when ‘people are neither aware of any cherished values nor experience any threat’ (1959: 11), which itself results from ‘the very structure of an historical society’ (1959: 131). Mills understands that social issues cannot be imagined or coherently formulated without sociological imagination, and instead people experience ‘the beat feeling that all is somehow not right’ (1959: 11). This indifference is also present throughout the novel. However, again, just as the *Into the Sea* characters are often able to attribute their feelings of uneasiness to personal troubles, this indifference is experienced in relation to specific social issues which the characters themselves identify. These include generational changes of mobility and education (pages 60-61), support for mental health problems (pages 68-72), violence against women (pages 113-114, 128-129), same-sex marriage (pages 125), international conflict (pages 129), and terrorism (Chapter Nine). Many other social issues however are not wrought to consciousness for the characters, notably including indigenous and racial issues, and I work to highlight where these evade the characters’ attention despite often materially intersecting with the ‘white bubble’ of their lives (see Foster, 2013: 7) – for example, I juxtapose the beachside War Memorial that Taylor pauses at (page 71), one of many such places of significance that ‘dot the whole coast of the country’ (page 71), with the sign about the indigenous shell midden on the headland that she walks past without thinking about, because that
route ‘is the way she’s always gone and so that’s the way she does it’ (page 72). The narrator interjects that such places are ‘mostly untouched (she tells herself, we tell ourselves)’ (page 72) to draw attention to this difference with which such spaces are commonly treated.

Mills argues, ‘it is this condition, of uneasiness and indifference, that is the signal feature of our period’ (1959: 12). Further, ‘it is the uneasiness itself that is the trouble; it is the indifference itself that is the issue’ (Mills, 1959: 12). A key idea that I aim to raise with the novel is that, for indifference to be better addressed, the relativity of agency and society must not only be made clear and understandable but made meaningful and affective. I argue that public malaise and indifference does not only arise from a lack of awareness or an ineffective framing of public issues (Mills, 1959: 130-131), but also from their un-affective framing. With *Into the Sea* I explore how illustrating sociological imagination in fiction writing can work to make the connections between intimate realities and larger social life visible and meaningful. I use the narrator to illustrate this uneasiness and indifference through the narrative relationship between biography and history which the characters in the novel enact.

Beyond assisting us to locate the complex connections between troubles and issues, sociological imagination which takes the biography-history relationship as its central frame is also critically attuned to the potential for actionable change. This is because this relationship emphasises progression and development at the level of the individual and of society. The biography-history relationship elevates sociological imagination from a fixed analytic perspective into a style of live and social imagining (see Back and Puwar, 2012). By live I mean that this imagination is realised through human experience, and by social I mean that it concerns this human experience. It is an imagination of social life, in social life. What attunes this imagination to the potential for change is that we contemporarily understand our lives as biographies-in-the-making; as live personal narratives with developing trajectories that we construct and direct. This kind of imagining assists us to consider troubles and issues as having a future which we are intimately connected to as individuals and linked through as a society.

The promise of sociological imagination does not only lie in its use as a disciplinary tool for capturing and analysing the object of ‘the social’; with sociological imagination we are able to connect our live biographies with the ‘history-
making’ which we are part of and contribute to via society (Mills, 1959: 4, 6), not only with implications in the present but for the future. The promise of sociological imagination lies in the capacity it generates for understanding our social worlds and – crucially – for changing how we live our lives and the worlds we live within (see Mills, 1959: 5).

Like Mills’ recognition of the significance of uneasiness and indifference, Bauman contends that, ‘if sociology wants to be of relevance, then it needs to open itself to people… try to help people in their fight against the double plague of ignorance and impotence’ (Bauman et al., 2014: 59). With this focus the value of sociology becomes central. Jacobsen and Tester, introducing their extended interview with Bauman, intentionally echo Mills and purport that it is ‘the job of the sociological imagination to show how personal life and individual biography is intimately connected with historical events and structural processes’ (Bauman et al., 2014: 3-4). Beside their personification of ‘the’ sociological imagination, Jacobsen and Tester raise important points about useful and successful work: useful sociology ‘makes you think’, inspires ‘a leap of recognition which is immediately followed by the broken fall of awareness,’ and is the kind of work where ‘you read about them or us and discover something about I’ (Bauman et al., 2014: 5-6, italics in original). Sociology is useful when it is relevant and transformative; when it adds something to your understanding of the world through ‘narratives that connect epoch with experience’ (Bauman et al., 2014: 6). Sociology is ‘successful when it is taken up by [people] as a tool through and with which they can connect their lives to their times and appreciate how transforming the former means acting upon the latter’ (Bauman et al., 2014: 6, italics in original). This nod to the transformation of understanding being linked to the cultivation of action reflects Bauman’s later point on ignorance and impotence. It is this transformation of understanding and the cultivation of action that sociologists may work for – people, ‘tussling in the void stretching between individuality de jure and individuality de facto’, ‘need our services’ (Bauman et al., 2014: 59, italics in original).

This double bind of ignorance and impotence is, argues Bauman, present in the ‘quietest attitudes’ of people ‘resigned in advance to the impossibility of changing [their lives], and above all convinced of the irrelevance and ineffectiveness of their own actions or their refusal to act’ (Bauman et al., 2014: 11). I recognised that this
attitude was manifestly present in my research fields through my autoethnography, in my participants as well as in myself. That people without formal sociological training experienced this double bind as Bauman defines it was not surprising, considering this bind is specifically formulated against sociological knowledge and that I was especially focused on identifying ‘everyday’ sociological imagination in my research. However, despite working on understanding and developing sociological imagination in a professional capacity, the tensions between my own sociological understandings and my experience of everyday life were routinely wrought to the surface of my autoethnographic reflections. This cemented for me that an individual development of sociological knowledge is not enough to relieve this double bind or sway feelings of resignation concerning action and inaction. Participants and I were keenly engaged in reflexive projects of the self through the perpetual biographical engagement work discussed above, however the wider social relevance and effectiveness of this individual action was rarely signified. While undertaking my research, it was often only upon reflection and through analysis that I recognised the limitations of everyday sociological imagination for raising social implications that can be actioned.

As discussed, sociological imagination is brought to the novel through the narrator, however this imagination is not made live for the characters; the characters themselves are not directly engaged in sociological imagination. The uneasiness they experience, which they do often translate into troubles, is not connected to public issues in tangible or sociological ways. They do not experience ‘a transvaluation of values’ (Mills, 1959: 8) nor is their indifference ‘transformed into involvement’ with these issues (Mills, 1959: 5). The narrator works to bring the scene of analysis and the process of analysis closer together spatially and temporally; the narrator shows how sociological imagination may be engaged there and then, rather than elsewhere and later. However, the narrator – and thus sociological imagination – is also removed from the action in that the narrator acts as a medium between the characters and reader, and is not positioned inside the scenes in the same way as the characters are. While the novel aims to make sociological imagination live for readers, I do not presume that this novel alone will move readers to experience this transvaluation or public involvement. The novel may engage readers in sociological imagination and, through its critical provocations (cf. Levenson, 2011) help readers toward raising critical and societally-oriented questions about social life which transform their thinking. However, the process of writing the novel and the narrative itself highlights
the limitations of this kind of engagement for cultivating action and remedying this impotence – which sociological understanding is often presumed to organically lead to (Glenn, 2009). As Bauman articulates,

Alongside the questioning of the worldview that underpins such ‘quietism’, the sociological variety of conversation aimed at the expansion of individual freedom and the collective potential of humanity pursues the task of revealing and unravelling the features of the world which, however deceptive and misleading they might be, nevertheless supply some grounds for a kind of worldview that sustains and continuously galvanizes the quietest attitudes (Bauman et al., 2014: 11, italics added).

This task and attitude that Bauman discusses – of revealing and unravelling features of the world, which help sustain and galvanize “quietism” – has implications for the aims and approaches of public sociology. The marked rise of public sociology over the past two decades shows many sociologists prioritise the importance of reaching beyond the academy (see Agger, 2000; Bulmer, 1986; Burawoy, 2005; Clawson, 2007; Hanemaayer and Schneider, 2014; Jeffries, 2009a). While the issues of engagement and accessibility that have dominated recent debates are vital, here I take Bauman’s concern as my own: through this project and with Into the Sea I consider the craft of sociological imagination in order to reveal and unravel these features which ground, sustain and galvanize this uneasiness and indifference, this ignorance and impotence. These do not exist because of a simple lack of sociological knowledge but in relation to wider ‘features of the world’ (Bauman et al., 2014: 11) – features which impede agency and the work of public sociology.

Bauman, speaking on the use and value of sociology, argues that the role of a sociologist is to ‘collect the evidence and engage in ongoing dialogue with experience and try to help people in their fight against the double plague of ignorance and impotence’ (Bauman et al., 2014: 59). He states that such a ‘humanistic variation of sociology… [aims at] supplying human beings with ampler knowledge of their situations’ and as such works to enlarge ‘the sphere of their freedom of choice’ (Bauman 1967 in Bauman et al., 2014: ix). Ideas surrounding freedom of choice commonly invoke individualistic conceptualisations of action and agency however; the individuality work we do as biographical entities, particularly within neoliberal social worlds, can frame our lives as a series of agentic choices set against a backdrop
of social structures and issues, rather than bringing structure and agency consciously into everyday relation.

As discussed in this chapter, I have worked to do more than underpin my research with a Millsian ethos. I have critically engaged with sociological imagination as something which can be crafted and illustrated through fiction. I determined that the particular relationship between biography and history is significant for enlivening sociological imagination in a way that takes this concept beyond being a static analytic tool of the discipline; this biography-history relationship can bring a focus on narrative, a focus on change and trajectories (Back, 2012: 36), and a future orientation to sociological imagining. These elements are important for considering how public sociology can make sociological imagination engaging. Further, as biographical entities, this sense of narrative and future orientation is significant for understanding the relationships between private troubles and public issues, central to Mills’ work and to contemporary sociology, in such a way that makes the social constitution of agency and biographies of central concern.

With this biography-history relationship I turned also to the private orbit bind which Mills uses as a foundation when arguing for the sociological imagination. Considering why individuals do not – or are not compelled to – understand their private troubles in relation to public issues, with the novel I aim to highlight that much biographical enactment work is located in the everyday and marked by routine, though biographies are typically marked by critical moments or significant affective events rather than the everyday. What I have aimed to achieve with Into the Sea is not a concise sociological argument delivered via a narrative; the novel works to illustrate sociological imagination in order to show key elements of the concept through the characterisation and show the activity of sociologically imagining through the narrator’s voice. This illustrative function is important for engaging people in sociological imagination via the novel.
Chapter 5: The Neoliberal Imaginary and Aesthetic Form

The characters in *Into the Sea* are (perpetually) becoming individuals. Throughout the story they focus on progressing their biographies-in-the-making and are moved to continually improve, advance, and take control of their lives and futures. This includes control over their happiness and success as well as for personal troubles that arise – health issues, difficulty securing permanent work contracts, ‘escaping’ the rental market. The way that the characters’ see it, the blurry borders of such problems and potential solutions to these are linked to their individual actions; problems are a matter of personal responsibility. Their happiness and their troubles are their own. The world that they live within shapes and continuously reaffirms this understanding. Health issues do *require* individual action; job markets *are* precarious; to buy a house you need a competitive loan and must *beat* other potential buyers. In various ways they can each map, track, quantify and compare their health, success and happiness, which makes controlling their lives and futures ‘simple.’

However, where characters do not or cannot take responsibility for personal troubles themselves, the larger social issues that these troubles are connected to are not seen as controllable or realistically able to be acted upon. How can they prevent suicide, change employment regulations, or make housing more affordable? These issues are too big for any one of the characters to make a real difference. So, their focus turns to how their own reactions to such troubles, ‘setbacks’ on their otherwise upwards trajectories, still remain within reach – inside the realm of the individual. Rather than collectively working to address connected social issues, they focus on improving their immediate worlds and practicing ‘self-care’ (Brown, 2006: 694) so that, through individually managing their own personal troubles, their biographies may be reframed and progressed. The wider world that they live within facilitates this inward turn and continuously reaffirms its value. Troubles become setbacks, plot twists, chapters and life lessons. A neoliberal imaginary dominates. Through this imaginary, social issues are individualised in this way. By progressing a complex rhetoric of competition, the neoliberal imaginary normalises and naturalises this individualisation where agency and responsibility rest with the individual.

This neoliberal imaginary and the competitive individualism it progresses is problematic for sociology. It is particularly problematic for efforts which aim to ‘assist the influence of the sociological imagination in society’ (Furedi, 2009: 17), as
neoliberalism is ‘deeply antisociological in its ethos’ and arguably ‘hostile to the very idea of “society”’ (Burawoy, 2005: 7). Considering the implications of this neoliberal hostility for public sociology, in this chapter I aim to address a disciplinary gap that Gane (2014b) highlights when discussing the divergent threads of sociology and neoliberalism. Gane identifies that the ‘epistemological basis’ of neoliberalism ‘initially developed out of a critique of sociology’ (2014b: 1093), particularly of classical positivistic and interpretive theories like those of Weber, Mises and Comte (Gane, 2014b: 1101-1102). Gane argues that while this is the case, sociologists seemingly have not attempted to ‘defend the classical tradition from the attack of neoliberals such as Hayek, let alone formulate some kind of response’ (2014b: 1103). Further, partly as a result of the ‘dangerous’ general dismissal by sociologists on both its intellectual and epistemological grounds, neoliberalism has developed ‘on its own terms’ and ‘largely evaded sociological attention and critique through its formative years’ (Gane, 2014b: 1103). He concludes that,

It was only in the 1980s, with advent of Thatcherism and Reaganism that the term neoliberalism finally entered the sociological vocabulary (e.g. Laclau and Mouffe, 1985), and even then it tended to be used pejoratively to refer to an ideology of the political right... To analyse and potentially engage with the ways in which neoliberalism organizes its own version of social reality, neoliberalism, first of all, must be treated as a serious intellectual project, and this means paying detailed attention not just to its politics but also to its epistemology and to the loop it constructs between the two (2014b: 1104-1104).

In this chapter and with Into the Sea I take on this task. I pay detailed attention to neoliberalism as an imaginary, and I focus sociological attention on this neoliberal imaginary via the aesthetic form of my novel. In particular, like Simmel (Featherstone, 1991: 7), I consider ‘the limits of individuality in modern society’; I analyse ways that the competitive individualism of the neoliberal imaginary is legitimised, and I detail how I have constructed the aesthetic form of Into the Sea with this analysis. Through this aesthetic form I work to make the reader consciously feel the neoliberal imaginary operating; I use the neoliberal imaginary to style the organisation and structure of the novel-world. Doing this I aim to contextualise the significance of sociological imagination, thereby addressing the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of
my central research question – how can we engage people in sociological imagination (and why should we)? The supporting research question that guides this chapter asks: what problems or issues face public sociology in relation to cultivating public sociological imagination?

I address these questions by firstly focusing on how individualisation and competition are central to the neoliberal imaginary. I consider how this imaginary promotes the competitive individualisation of the social world, particularly through policy and discourse. Following this I explore the meaning of competition in the neoliberal imaginary. I consider how a complex notion of competition that infers both economic and evolutionary implications is significant in how this imaginary is naturalised and legitimised in society. I then consider the implications of this legitimisation for governmental reason and individual responsibility, particularly in relation to the concept of upward mobility. From these discussions I unpack how I have used the neoliberal imaginary to frame the characters’ lives and social world, to consider and highlight how this imaginary is embodied and reproduced. The structural style of the novel-world is shaped by neoliberalism and the neoliberal imaginary informs the overall aesthetic of the novel. The particular key elements of the neoliberal imaginary I use to construct this aesthetic form are: competitive individualisation; competition as economic and evolutionary; and the potential for upward mobility affecting the individual’s responsibility to become competitive. I conclude this chapter by returning to the implications of this neoliberal imaginary for the project of public sociology.

*Individualisation and Competition*

Society is not statically comprised of individuals but shapes us as individuals; we engage in processes of making ourselves individual. Bauman argues that this continuous casting of people as individuals is ‘the trademark of modern society’ (2001: 45). These processes through which we are seen as and made to be individuals today chiefly concern individuality, which Simmel argues is a “‘cosmopolitan” disposition’ extending beyond individual rights to the ‘intensified differentiation of performance’ (1971: 272). The liberal imagination has shifted from centring the commonalities amongst individuals, which emphasised their equal individual rights in the law, to centring the distinctions between them (Simmel, 1971: 272). This
differentiating and performative ‘activity of individualising’ is today ‘a fate, not a choice’ (Bauman, 2001: 45-46).

The compelled activity of self-governed, choice-making individuals (Mirowski, 2009: 437; Newheiser, 2016: 3) is championed within neoliberalism as personal freedom. This is not in the sense of civil liberties and human rights, but rather as the freedom to continue to craft oneself as an individual through personal choice: the freedom to choose. The neoliberal imaginary progresses the idea that the market is the ‘optimum context to achieve human freedom’ (Munck, 2005: 65) and ‘individual freedom of choice is maximised through competition’ (Braedley and Luxton, 2010: 8). People engage in making themselves individuals through processes of choice-making in commercial society (Gilbert, 2014: 31), where both institutions and ‘all spheres of conduct’ are evaluated ‘according to a single economic concept of value’ (Davies, 2017: 22). Through this people become – or are constantly ‘becoming’ (see Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 272-273; Gilbert, 2014: 154-156) – neoliberal subjects (see Chandler and Reid, 2016; Chun, 2016; Foucault, 2008: 270). This compelled activity and style of competitive individualism was a key theme that emerged in my autoethnography, as I discuss in this chapter, and I work to reconstruct this feeling and movement in Into the Sea.

This competitive and individualising activity of choice control, championed through neoliberalism as an essential freedom that is best achieved via capitalist systems (Bell Lara and Luisa López, 2014: 18; Braedley and Luxton, 2010: 7-8; Munck, 2005: 65), is also employed as a governance strategy (Foucault, 2008: 132; Gilbert, 2014: 41-48; Lazzarato, 2009: 129; Newheiser, 2016: 3). Central to this governmentality is the notion of competition. A key shift in the principle of the market was from ‘value and equivalence’ to ‘competition and monopoly’, in order to compel ‘not equivalence but on the contrary inequality’ (Foucault, 2008: 118-119). Neoliberalism applies competition to ‘all aspects of society and culture’ (Gane, 2014b: 1092), and understands competition to be ‘the foundation of all individual cooperation’ (Gane, 2014b: 1102). In this view, what conceptually links people is being made individual through the state and being free to engage with – compete in (Foucault, 2008: 143-144, 303) – the market. This competitive individualisation occurs in various ways through policy as well as through political and public discourse, for example through privatisation (Connell, 2010: 23; Luxton, 2010: 163), the commoditisation of social
services (Dello Buono and Bell Lara, 2014: 3), and the obfuscation of structural social differences (Côté-Boucher, 2010: 43). Through such avenues, ‘competitive pressures’ are strategically introduced ‘into every aspect of national social life’ (Beeson and Firth, 1998: 226).

In both the United Kingdom and United States, ‘public choice theory’ (see Finlayson, 2003: 111) has become particularly dominant within neoliberal policy making, influencing various service spheres including health and education (Gilbert, 2014: 43-45). This is particularly evident, as Gilbert (2014: 44) highlights, in the establishment of American charter schools and British academies which are ‘intentionally mimicking forms of governance and curriculum provision typical of the private-education sector.’ In Australia, proposed reforms to higher education in the late 1980s similarly sought to encourage universities to ‘develop a commercial mentality’ and make degrees ‘more commercially “relevant”’ (Beeson and Firth, 1998: 226). More broadly, since 2005 Australian microeconomic reform has been guided by the National Competition Policy\textsuperscript{10}, which outlines an objective of minimising restrictions on competition in order to assist the country in becoming ‘more innovative and more flexible’ to improve its ‘international competitiveness.’ As Beeson and Firth (1998: 223-224) argue, this represents a ‘more deep-seated transformation of public policy in Australia’; this policy was an attempt to ‘operationalise a neoliberal political rationality’ where competition would be the ‘central mechanism’ realigning the economy and society. Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s neoliberal project also enacted this neoliberal governmental reason. As Hall argues, Thatcher’s British project saw individuals as ‘economic agents’ who may and should be crafted into ‘Entrepreneurial Man’ from their supposedly-natural mix of ‘altruism and competitiveness’ (2017: 283-284). In Halls’ words, by employing a particularly neoliberal discourse Thatcher ‘impelled people towards new, individualised, competitive solutions: “get on your bike”, become self-employed or a share-holder, buy your council house, invest in the property owning democracy’ (Hall 2011: 712).

As well as explicit policy initiatives, the ‘symbolic mutations’ (Salinas Figueredo, 2014: 94) within public and political discourse show how this neoliberal imaginary is socio-culturally bound. The neoliberal strategy of individualisation,
whereby social issues are cast as individual problems, depends on and builds from popular ideas such as responsibility (Luxton, 2010: 172) and meritocracy (Littler, 2018; Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 177). For example, Former Australian Prime Minister John Howard, when discussing an official national apology to Indigenous Australians for the Stolen Generations\(^\text{11}\), positioned the issue not as political or cultural but a ‘matter of “personal distress”’ (Augoustinos et al., 2002: 129-131). Instead of a collective statement ‘in his capacity as Prime Minister,’ that is, on behalf of the nation, Howard offered ‘his personal apology’ (Hage, 2003: 85). This position is centrally concerned with the idea of responsibility (Hage, 2003: 85, 95), and what people can and cannot be responsible for in this individualist imaginary, which as I discuss in the following section is also central to neoliberalism.

Social issues are similarly framed by publics who express belief in the meritocratic individualism such neoliberal discourse manipulates. Discussing policy, systemic inequality and racism towards the indigenous Māori people, Pākehā (white majority) New Zealanders reason that ‘everybody should be treated equally’ and ‘can succeed if they try hard enough’ (see Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 177). Canadians interviewed on familial care responsibilities ‘not only accepted the idea that they were individually responsible for either finding their own care or providing care for others’ but were actively ‘enacting the practices advocated by neoliberalism’ (Luxton, 2010: 179); they expressed the idea that ‘individuals are responsible for themselves and the choices they make determine the outcome of their lives,’ reaffirming ‘the belief that those who failed to do well only had themselves to blame’ (Luxton, 2010: 173). Discussing governmental discourse in Latin America, Salinas Figueredo (2014) argues that individualisation has notably impacted projects of and aspirations for social change; there is an ‘absence of collective and organically rooted political projects that can transform growing frustration or disenchantment,’ and instead possible solutions to social issues ‘remain simply individual or individualistic proposals’ (Salinas Figueredo, 2014: 94). I offer these examples not to reduce ‘discursive formations’ to mere ‘words’ (Lazzarato, 2009: 112-113), but to highlight the individualism central to ‘liberal-egalitarian discourses of rationality’ (Augoustinos

\(^{11}\)The Stolen Generations describes the forcible removal of Indigenous children from their families in Australia, which occurred between 1910 and 1970 as part of institutionalised assimilation policies. Government reports estimate up to 33% of Indigenous children were separated from their families during this time. The intergenerational trauma of these policies continue to impact Indigenous peoples and broader Australian society today.
et al., 2002: 109-110) and to what Foucault terms ‘governmental reason’ (2008: 10). Such discourses and ‘general art of government’ (Foucault, 2008: 131) are central to the ways that neoliberalism is normalised as ‘common sense’ (Connell, 2010: 22; Gilbert, 2014: 30; Rona Varona, 2014: xiii), and how this becomes naturalised and legitimised as a dominant imaginary. As discussed throughout this chapter, I engage with and echo this discourse in the aesthetic form of Into the Sea – that is, through how the traits and styles of the characters and the novel-world make this neoliberal discourse meaningful and ‘common sense.’

Legitimising Competition as Economic and Evolutionary
This central notion of competitive individualism is complex and, argues Davies (2017), paradoxical: while competition works to make individuals conceptually equal in their ability to compete in the market, and via ‘sufficiently fair’ (Davies, 2017: 66) competitiveness in general (Davies, 2017: 72), inequality is at the same time ‘publically and enthusiastically legitimated’ (Davies, 2017: 41). This legitimation eventuates through various socio-cultural processes. Interestingly, and, I argue, linked to these processes of legitimation, two kinds of competition regularly entangle in popular discourse. As well as the economic theory outlined, evolutionary theory also notably positions competition as practically and conceptually linking individual beings (see Gould, 2002: 121-124). I found in my autoethnography that ideas surrounding the freedom to compete in the market, which includes various forms of engagement in capitalist consumption (Gilbert, 2014: 142), were routinely framed by individuals and by companies selling services in relation to development, adaptation and improvement – the same language that is commonly used to discuss human evolution. I found many products and experiences are shaped and marketed using ideas of agentic improvement and survival of the fittest, playing on and linking these two notions of competition. People also regularly justified or explained their motivations for various personal choices, for example deciding to further their education in order to improve their career, using the same rhetoric. While exploring biographical-historical processes in Phase 1 of my autoethnography, as discussed in the previous chapter, I found that this competitive individualism was overtly prominent in the discourses surrounding biographical enactment – that is, in popular media, in the ways that companies market their services to individuals, and how individuals make sense of and explain their engagement with such services and in
biographical practices. As neoliberalism is also a key concern of public sociologists, as discussed, I focused my attention on these neoliberal discourses and processes in research phases 2 and 3. The seemingly significant popular meaning of competitive individualism, and the dually economic and evolutionary discourse that was implicated in its promotion, was a major theme that continued to emerge in my research. Focusing on the ‘aesthetic practices of the everyday’ (Willis, 2005: 76) in order to ‘make meaning of meaning-making’ (Willis, 2005: 82) within this neoliberal imaginary – that is, to analyse how the neoliberal imaginary is made meaningful – I perceived that a dually economic and evolutionary conception of individual competition may be relevant to the endurance of neoliberal reason as ‘common sense’ (see Connell, 2010: 22; Gilbert, 2014: 30; Ronda Varona, 2014: xiii). While other elements are similarly significant to explore and understand the scope of the neoliberal imaginary, here I focus on this dually economic and evolutionary competition because it emerged as prominent in my autoethnography. Once I began working with these themes in my fiction writing, I also found that this was a valuable rhetorical device to explore and employ throughout the aesthetic form of my novel.

Darwin’s theory of evolution (2008 [1859]) employs principles of competition in explaining the natural change and diversity of species via adaptation and fitness across inter- and trans-species levels. Significantly developed since Darwin’s time, evolutionary theory is widely influential (see Beer, 2009) though broadly misinterpreted (Ingold, 2016: 4). Darwin’s ideas have been especially confused when applied to human behaviour (see Varella et al., 2013: 87-91). These common misconceptions include that: environment makes little or no contribution to behaviour; innate behaviours are natural and therefore desirable; what ought to be ‘is,’ and vice versa; individual intention is a cause or requirement of adaptation; behaviours are attributable to specific genes; and evolution has an optimising agenda which would mean that current traits are the most ‘perfect.’ These misconceptions stem from recognised issues, such as that evolutionary theory conflicts with everyday understandings of the world (Heddy and Sinatra, 2013: 724), that the central connotations of Darwin’s work were obscured (Goudge, 1961: 116-118), and Darwin himself struggled with issues of agency (Beer, 2008: xxiv). When applied to humans, evolutionary adaptation is commonly interpreted as agentic improvement in the same sense as social progress and designed development (Beer, 2008: xxi-xxiii). Such ideas
of ‘social evolutionism’ (Ingold, 2016: 4) dominated the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as societies radically changed (Bowler, 1989: 99-100). The inference of progress within the idea of development predated Darwin and, while ‘no virtue or effort is involved’ in natural selection, the idea of improvement ‘haunts’ Darwin’s work (Beer, 2008: xxi). This is especially the case in later editions of his theory, which stylistically emphasise improvement, progress, and competition (Beer, 2008: xxi-xxii). The phrase ‘survival of the fittest,’ taken by Darwin from Herbert Spencer and edited into the fifth edition of On the Origin of Species, effected Victorian readings which then privileged the role of competition in the theory (Beer, 2008: xxii-xxiii; Ingold, 2016: 4). Today Darwin’s entire theory is commonly abridged as survival of the fittest, and this maxim is employed across various spheres of the social world from popular psychology to business models and reality TV’s shows. As discussed in the following sections, I have also critically engaged with this idea throughout Into the Sea.

As Ingold (2016: 4) argues, the ‘most fundamental axiom’ that Darwin’s original theory was built upon was variability, rather than progression. While contemporary scholarly developments of Darwinian theory have largely moved away from a Spencerian reading (Ingold, 2016: 4), popular understandings continue to identify Darwinism ‘with mechanistic theories of biological and sociocultural progress’ (Ingold, 2016: 40). Evolution is popularly interpreted as a ‘direct competitive struggle’ where rivals are eliminated and ‘progressive development’ results (Ingold, 2016: 4). These popular (mis)conceptions of evolutionary development and agency intertwine with individualistic economic notions of competition. In some instances this intertwining is intentional – in the field of evolutionary economics, scholars apply general evolutionary theory principles to economic change and centre the principle of competition in a way that implies both economic and evolutionary functions (see Hunt and Arnett, 2001; Nelson and Winter, 1982). Durkheim also sees social development as a particular form of general biological evolutionary process; his ‘sociological naturalism’ develops from a ‘structural functionalist, organicist and evolutionary ontology’ (Lehmann, 2013: 8). Durkheim’s notions of mechanical and organic solidarity are rooted in the argument that ‘societies literally undergo the same evolution as biological organisms’ (Lehmann, 2013: 18).
Political rhetoric also notably conflates notions of economic competition and social progress as a form of social evolution that may be controlled via individual action. For example, U.S. President Reagan’s 1987 speech on Project Economic Justice\(^{12}\) espoused individual hard work and making ‘correct decisions,’ as ‘the pivotal relationship between freedom and economic progress is becoming ever more apparent.’ Reagan argued that what changes ‘stagnation into upward mobility’ is ‘commitment to human freedom and an understanding of how that relates to the economic progress of mankind.’ This speech was informed by a strategy paper\(^{13}\) which noted in its ideological framework that ‘calling for “Freedom and Democracy” without building structures for “Economic Justice” is naïve… Handouts by themselves do not deliver justice or help create a more just social order… [rather, they] create breeding grounds for Marxist-Leninism.’ In 2014, Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott outlined in a preface to the Government’s *Industry Innovation and Competitiveness Agenda*\(^{14}\) that ‘strengthening’ and ‘improving’ Australia’s competitiveness ‘is the key to our future prosperity’ and central to building ‘a strong, prosperous economy and a safe, secure Australia’ (2014: iii). This Agenda knits competition, productivity and ‘genuine social and environmental goals’ together through a lens of innovation and entrepreneurship (2014: 22-23). It explicitly aims to ‘promote a culture of entrepreneurialism’ that, at its core, centres on the ‘freedoms of business and individuals’ from government ‘overreach’ (2014: 22).

Through my autoethnography I found that a complex lexicon of competition was employed across a number of social spheres. In various media, the idea of competition and agentic improvement was intertwined with notions of evolution in ways that worked to legitimise the services advertised. This was particularly pronounced across industries that employ self-help framing, such as fitness, personal finance and education. I found that in media and advertising this was largely achieved through a juxtaposition of, for example, voiceovers about evolving and adapting one’s body or mind being used for scenes that progress from gyms to corporate environments, or for app-based dating services. This popular discourse of survival of


\(^{13}\)Centre for Economic and Social Justice 2018, *Project Economic Justice: A Beachhead for Regional Infrastructural Reform.*

the fittest works to motivate individuals who engage with it into taking control of their interests – which importantly include their very ability to compete. Notably, I also found that this same lexicon was also employed in social and institutional spaces, particularly where issues of social change were involved, again seemingly in an attempt to legitimise the views being shared. For example, terms such as evolution and progress were interchangeably used by both conservative and progressive politicians, various community organisations, and large commercial businesses when discussing same-sex marriage in Australia in 2017 and the 2018 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. Same-sex marriage was legalised in Australia in November 2017 after the ‘yes’ vote ‘won’ a nation-wide non-compulsory postal survey\textsuperscript{15,16} – a months long process during which competing yes and no voting politicians and citizens lobbied for support in the public sphere, which national and multinational corporations were visibly implicated in. The official theme of the 2018 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, the 40\textsuperscript{th} anniversary parade, was ‘Evolution.’\textsuperscript{17}

When related to matters of individual consumer engagement, personal choice making and what Hamann discusses as ‘subjectivation’ (2009: 38), this neoliberal imaginary compels individuals to improve their ability to compete (Hamann, 2009: 48; Masquelier, 2017: 82). However, when applied to social issues on a society scale, this same discourse can work to conceptually hinder the agentic power people have as collectives (Masquelier, 2017: 71, 199, 203-207). Neoliberal social policies liberalise the economic and personal spheres while dislocating (Laclau, 1990), segmenting and striating (Deleuze and Guattari, 1998) the public domain, inhibiting or repressing any manifestation of collective agency or potential, and undermining any effective democratic institutions or aggregations of interests in the process (Gilbert, 2014: 46).

By framing social change as a matter of human evolution, beyond the scale of individuals but comprised of their individual actions, social change can become seen as something that ‘naturally’ happens (see Sanderson, 1990; Ostrom, 2000: 156) and does not therefore require committed and ongoing collective action (Masquelier, 2017: 239-240). This competitive individualism, which I see as dually invoking

\textsuperscript{17}See Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras 2017, 40 Years of Evolution.
economic and evolutionary notions, emphasises the need for people to individually take control of their interests to such an extent that collective action can be seen as both unnecessary and unimportant (Gilbert, 2014: 45-47). Through the neoliberal imaginary, individuals are responsible for ensuring their ongoing ability to compete, and social progress ‘naturally’ results. This conceptual complexity is central to the naturalisation of the neoliberal imaginary and the legitimisation of neoliberal policies. I work to highlight this complexity throughout Into the Sea, as the social world of the novel is shaped by neoliberalisation and the characters move through and wrestle with this imaginary in their everyday lives.

Upward Mobility and Individual Responsibility

Relevant to how the neoliberal imaginary moves individuals to individually take control of their interests is the idea of social mobility. Calder (2017: 118) argues that today, discussing British Prime Minister Theresa May and the Social Mobility Commission, it seems that the ‘single requirement for a just society is that people end up in different circumstances from those in which they’re born… if social mobility is achieved, it will be as a result of [economic and social] structures being arranged aright.’ Social mobility, or the movement of individuals and familial groups across social strata, concerns socio-economic status and is quantified by comparing this status intra- and inter-generationally (see Beller and Hout, 2006; Corak, 2013; Deeming and Smyth, 2015: 305). Neoliberal policies that aim to generate this socioeconomic mobility develop the idea that ‘ascriptive inequalities associated with socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, and class’ are increasingly insignificant, as in modern society ‘advancement in education and labour markets’ is ‘increasingly merit-based’ (Western et al, 2007: 404). That is, the market is understood to be ‘“blind” to gender, class, ethnicity and socioeconomic status differences,’ and as such through the market ‘equality of opportunity increases’ (Western et al., 207: 404). This notion of increasing opportunity is relevant to how social equality is conceptualised in the neoliberal imaginary. Neoliberal policies that centre the idea of social mobility are concerned with upward mobility, or the improvement of socioeconomic status, and aim to generate the potential for this upward mobility through competitive market mechanisms. This form of liberal marketization is directed towards the actions of individuals rather than social groups (Western et al., 2007: 402); neoliberal policies work to create ‘more equality of opportunity’ within the market rather than ‘fight the
effects of inequality’ in society (Zamora, 2016: 80), as it is seen that through the market, individuals may themselves overcome any such hindrances.

Importantly, not all individuals will achieve this upward mobility. Diametrically opposed to the ‘heavy handed’ governmentality of widespread social services where the state supports collectives of ‘undeserving’ individuals (see Dixon, 2012; Foster, 2016; Winslow, 2015), the purpose of any ‘light’ state intervention in market mechanisms in neoliberalism is to cultivate this ‘blind’ and meritocratic system through which ‘worthy’ individuals prosper (Littler, 2018) – a system designed to ‘help people help themselves’ (Feher, 2009: 38). There are many examples of policy initiatives that operate in this vein: U.S. President Clinton’s welfare reforms and the ‘Third Way’ project of British Prime Minister Blair (Feher, 2009); microcredit programmes for poverty alleviation in Nepal (Rankin, 2010); and in Australia, regional development (Tonts and Haslam-McKenzie, 2005), government and non-government schooling (Cranston et al., 2010), industrial relations (Western et al., 2007) and social welfare (Deeming and Smyth, 2015: 305; Saunders, 2002) policies have all been crafted to cultivate the potential for upward mobility over recent decades. Through this kind of governmentality, individuals become responsible for ensuring their own upward mobility. This reconceptualisation of the role of the state is supported, as Rose (1999: 139) outlines, by an economic rationale that sees other approaches such as that of Keynesianism ‘fuelling inflation’ and ‘sapping incentives to work.’ Instead desired are ‘responsibilized and entrepreneurialized’ autonomous actors who could, within ‘a state-secured framework of law and order,’ ‘govern themselves’ (Rose, 1999: 139). This can be seen quite explicitly in neoliberal political discourse: following her election in 1979, British Prime Minister Thatcher stated that ‘the first principle of this government… is to revive a sense of individual responsibility’ (Rose, 1999: 138). Essentially, by engaging the discussed notions of individualism and competition, the neoliberal imaginary rationalises the argument that the state can never effectively decide upon and produce what is best for individuals within a society and therefore ‘individual economic actors… must be freed to chose according to the natural laws of the free market on one hand and human nature on the other’ (Rose, 1999: 139). As Wrenn (2014: 507) argues, in this way,

Neoliberalism embodies the ideological shift in the purpose of the state from one that has a responsibility to insure full employment and protect its
citizens against the exigencies of the market to one that has a responsibility
to insure individual responsibility and protection of the market itself.

‘The relation of the state and the people’ as such has taken a ‘different form’ than
previously, where now the state maintains ‘the infrastructure of law and order’ and
the people work to ‘promote individual and national well-being by their responsibility
and enterprise’ (Rose, 1999: 139). Not only are economic benefits apparently
cultivated through this neoliberal governmentality, but ‘self-actualization and greater
social cohesion’ result from the ‘dispersion of risk, responsibility and individual
pursuits’ (Carlson and Albright, 2012: 159); the freedom of ‘self-realization’ that is
achieved through ‘individual exertion and hustle’ may be cultivated by ‘less state
intervention’ and technologies which ‘engender entrepreneurialism and responsibility’
(Carlson and Albright, 2012: 160).

Within the neoliberal imaginary, the responsibility for social development is shifted
from the state and society to the individual. The complex interpretation of competition
as economic and evolutionary, and how this relates to individuals and the agency they
have to act against social issues, is not simply an effect of contemporary
neoliberalism. It has been central to neoliberalism’s emergence and endurance. In the
neoliberal imaginary, individuals freely exist within a capitalist-democratic habitat
and are entrepreneurially engaging in their own adaptation-as-improvement or
improvement-as-adaptation. This imaginary naturalises competition as something that
practically, conceptually and meaningfully unites individuals. Competitive
individualism becomes common sense. Neoliberal policies that rest on this
competitive individualism can be seen to normalise inequality, as they position
competition as a natural state of human nature and inequality as something that is
required for successful freedom-generating capitalist-democracy (Munck, 2005: 65).
Through these processes of normalisation and naturalisation, governmental reason
which aims to motivate entrepreneurial subjects to be upwardly mobile is
meaningfully legitimised; it is legitimate that individuals must work to become
upwardly mobile, as through this mobility not only will individual lives improve –
overall society and the human race is progressed (Bowler, 1989: 102-104). The key
characters in Into the Sea, in (perpetually) becoming individuals, also (perpetually)
work to become upwardly mobile.
A Neoliberal Aesthetic

With Into the Sea I explore the everyday ways that the neoliberal imaginary is reproduced and embodied. In particular I focus on ways that key elements of this imaginary, which I have discussed in this chapter, are implicated in these processes. I use these elements to construct the aesthetic form of the novel. Using the term aesthetic in this way I do not equate aesthetics with “art” (Willis, 2005), but rather mean the style of paradigm through which a world and experience becomes understood or made intelligible (see Brown, 1977: 2-3); how a paradigm is expressed through, for instance, appearance or behaviours, and the ‘traits and styles’ of patterns (Miller, 2008: 293) which ‘gives order, balance and harmony to the world’ (Miller, 2008: 287). In this instance, this aesthetic involves the style of neoliberalism. The novel’s aesthetic form draws together the structural elements of the neoliberal imaginary and the style of these elements. That is, with the aesthetic form of the novel I (re)create the “invisible aesthetics” of everyday [neoliberal] life’ (Willis, 2005: 75).

I have built the aesthetic form of the novel from three key elements that my autoethnographic research highlighted as being central to the neoliberal imaginary: competitive individualism as compelled choice making; the rhetoric of competition being both economic and evolutionary; and the potential for upward mobility affecting the individual’s responsibility to become competitive. Through this aesthetic I aim to highlight and analyse how the neoliberal imaginary is normalised and naturalised in everyday life, and how neoliberal reason is legitimated via policies and public discourse in particular socio-cultural contexts.

Choice Making Individuals

Individualism frames the world of the novel from the opening scenes. The characters are compelled towards individuality through a constant process of ‘becoming’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 272-273; Gilbert, 2014: 154-156) via choice making. In Chapter 1,

Taylor leaves some half deflated balloons and turns around to see what Tony’s talking about. He’s reading a large list of New Year’s resolutions they made at the party last night… Lose weight, one says. Smile more, says another. Drink more beer. Tony laughs at that. Go fishing. Save money. Run a marathon (pages 62-63).
Crafting a New Year’s resolutions is a personal process that the characters are joined together in as part of the annual ritual event (Durkheim, 1976: 257), a collective exhibition for aesthetically commemorating time and memory (Cossu, 2010: 38-41) – an ‘annual festivity marking the resurrection of hopes’ (Bauman, 2010: 103). While constructed in a social setting, writing their resolutions mark them as distinct individuals. Reading the list on New Year’s Day they try to guess who wrote which resolution, and Taylor and Will add their own. Through the narration I highlight the individualism framing this social activity, wrapping the scene by moving from a social to an individual perspective. The narrator says,

We try to become new people in January. That’s the psychic reorganisation the New Year brings. A cyclic turning over of the leaf pulling us together to turn ourselves over too. It feels shallow but it can run deep. If nothing else it gives us something to do, and someone to be (pages 63).

My use of ‘we’ and ‘us’ in the first and third line is intentionally universal, to mark New Year’s Eve parties as a cyclic social ritual that brings people together in both a literal and conceptual sense (Bauman, 2010). In the final line of the scene however I intentionally shift the perspective to be more individualistic. The ‘us’ in the final line is not used in a universalising way; being tied to personal action and the idea of being or becoming ‘someone’, in the final line I emphasise the individuality work of the resolutions ritual and highlight how an inward-looking individualism (see Bennett, 2005; Gilbert, 2014) drives the moment.

While the ritual of making New Year’s resolutions engages the characters to imagine their short-term futures as individuals, the experience of buying furniture and home décor in Chapter 5 moves the characters to engage this individualistic imagination on a bigger scale, as a long-term domestic project. In IKEA, the top floor is what the crowds come for. The apartments and little houses. The stylised rooms you don’t just walk through but sit inside, lounge room to lounge room and Mid-Century to Scandi to Art Deco, drawing yourself into each one like trying different jackets before a change room mirror (page 106).
The experience of shopping at IKEA is designed around consumption, personal affective engagement and the construction of familial space – the very ‘fabric of everyday life’ (Bennett, 2005: 48). Many background characters appear to be searching for specific furniture: a couple and a father with a lounge room armchair; a pregnant woman; a man pacing along a rug. Taylor and Will however go to the store for something to do – the leisure experience of going to IKEA is itself the point. They walk around together and ‘try on’ the different rooms, projecting their selves and their relationship into the future through and with the furniture in the store. The narrator highlights how this experience is a tailored one. We are individuals and our spaces reflect our individuality. Further, our spaces make us into certain kinds of individuals (Bennett, 2005). This movement towards meaningful individualism extends beyond the lone individual to the ‘close up scenes’ Mills’ discusses (1959: 3); the characters make decisions and imagine the spaces of IKEA as individuals with individual tastes and lifestyles (Chaney, 1994) but also, importantly, as individuals within ‘private orbits’ (Mills, 1959: 3).

Going to IKEA to do this domestic imaginative work involves being moved towards and engaging in a particular kind of individualism that is primarily constructed through one’s difference, distinction, and in opposition to others (Gilbert, 2014: 31-35; Simmel, 1971: 272). In the end of the chapter I highlight that this individualising consumer experience is, importantly, a social and cultural one (Chaney, 1994: 156-161) – a process not just engaged in by Taylor and Will but shared by the people who visit, in that particular store but also across all of these kinds of stores. This style of process is made meaning through the kind of relations it forms between Taylor and Will against others, and also between Taylor and Will and their particular domestic possessions. The narration in the final scene highlights,

Will puts his arm around Taylor’s shoulder and they head past it all for the checkouts. Most lines are the same length. They take their place behind other people who are also only taking what they can carry without buying a bag. Little icings for their individual housing cakes. Taylor runs her fingers through her new fluffy mat. She thinks of how well it will hang over the back of their office chair and soften the whole feel of their lounge room (page 116).
This is what trips to IKEA are for: routinely gathering ‘little icings for their individual housing cakes’ (page 116), crafting spaces which build up an imagined life that extends and improves one’s current ‘close up scenes’ (Mills, 1959: 3). Through my phrasing here, using the plural ‘cakes’ rather than a singular ‘cake’ and noting that they line up ‘behind other people’ in a specific line rather than any of the suggested many others, I highlight that this experience does not just concern or involve Taylor and Will as individuals – rather, in ending the chapter in this way I aim to highlight that this individualising activity of self-development (see Gilbert, 2014: 127) is tied to “the family” or our private orbits, and is a broader pattern in society.

Speaking directly to the reader, the narrator asks,

Now: do you buy a round or a rectangle dining table? … The most eye-catching table is on the right side of the path. A long, light timber piece with an ashy veneer that’s twice the width of most others. An entertainer. You can imagine the platters lining it and the guests all crowded around the edge, glasses full and the host (you), a delight (page 110).

Here I use the narrator to directly engage the reader, as the rooms in IKEA intend to – actively, in a personal way that other home wares stores do not typically do, because they do not have the ‘stylised rooms you don’t just walk through but sit inside’ (page 106). Similar to how the shopping mall ‘mimics the wider world’ and ‘encapsulates the attractions and facilities of a town centre’ (Chaney, 1994: 169), IKEA mimics the home. When experiencing the IKEA space and trying on each of the different rooms, much of the imaginative work that the characters engage in is not centred on need or practicality in a realistic sense. The narrator highlights that,

It’s less about liking it and more whether it feels right. That’s how this whole thing works. Get inside it. Feel it out. Draw the material into your life, room by room by room (pages 114).

This process is individualistic in that it affectively engages people on a personal level, and it is through this design that the space becomes symbolically significant (Bennett, 2005: 48); questions of space and décor are imbued with meaning and positioned as important personal choices. IKEA moves you to care about the design of your
personal spaces because of what stylistic taste signifies about you as an individual (Bennett, 2005: 87; Chaney, 1996); the home is an ‘engine of consumer culture’ as ‘the sorts of things which the consumer takes pleasure in acquiring, and the taste with which their acquisitions are displayed, become bound in with their identity’ (Chaney, 1994: 160). Everyday stylisation is notably heightened in these domestic spaces; Simmel (1991: 68) sees that it is ‘probably furniture which most consistently carries the cachet of some “style”’ and that ‘the residence, as furnished by the individual in accordance with his (sic) tastes and needs, can by all means have the personal, unmistakeable tone that flows from the special nature of this individual.’ Likewise, Chaney (1994: 160) argues that the ‘appearance of one’s self is grounded in the presentation of the home.’ As such, the continual curation of the home to achieve a ‘synthesis and overall form… of a thoroughly individual nature’ (Simmel, 1991: 69) is socially meaningful. This material curation of domesticity is meaningful because it is inside these domestic spaces that our individual lives find and take on meaning (Chaney, 1994: 160); it is where a meaningful life is lived. IKEA cultivates these layers of meaning in their marketed image and store design, and successfully capitalises on them to sell furniture to a global market.

I intentionally speak directly to the reader in this chapter in an attempt to conceptually engage them through the materiality of this particular process. I build upon the (assumed) familiarity of this process of affective engagement that IKEA stimulates, in order to highlight for the reader the individuality and choice-making that is prized within the neoliberal imaginary. Recreating this compelled activity of choice making and practice of creating a life-world, as part of a life-style (see Chaney, 1994: 160), is one way I use the neoliberal imaginary to style the organisation and structure of the novel-world: to make the reader consciously feel the neoliberal imaginary operating in the story as they read and engage with the style of life within it. The landscape of the novel-world is one of potential and ever-unfolding choices. This individual capacity for choice-making that they are compelled to partake in permeates every aspect of the characters’ lives, including (quite literally) how they each meaningfully use their time and construct the spaces that they live within. In this landscape they are ‘condemned to individualisation’ (Sartre in Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 4).
Working in this way, to create the conditions that shape their imagined future selves, the characters are engaging in what Giddens calls the ‘reflexive project of the self’ (1991) and the cultivation of what Chaney discusses as ‘lifestyles’ (1996). In these imaginative undertakings in *Into the Sea*, the characters are not only concerned with the people they may be; they consider the lives and lifestyles they might have (Bennett, 2005: 55-59). When thinking about what everyday things she would change about her own life, Taylor imagines ‘a full-time contract, being more fit, owning their own place, walking 10 000 steps a day, the right diamond ring and knowing when it’ll come but having perfected a surprised face’ (page 86). She conjures an image of herself not necessarily as a particular identity but through collected moments and things:

A mountain of things to become a better individual, better than before, things that photograph well and keeps the momentum of her life rolling towards the next chapter, any new chapter, a step up in the story she’s living (page 86).

The choice making that Taylor is constantly engaged in is not abstract or arbitrary. It serves an important purpose: to become ‘a better individual, better than before.’ In framing the particular ways that characters work to become better individuals, including their motivations for wanting to be better and the way that they evaluate this process, I draw on the popular discourse of competition where economic and evolutionary notions intertwine. As noted, ideas surrounding freedom of choice were routinely framed in relation to development, adaptation and improvement in my autoethnographic recordings. I found that various services are marketed using ideas of agentic improvement and survival of the fittest, playing on and linking these two notions of competition. People also regularly justified their personal choices using the same economic and evolutionary competitive rhetoric.

I play with this inference in *Into the Sea*, engaging stylistically with processes of evolution and competition throughout the story, including for example when characters are reflecting on their efforts of self improvement. By doing this I work to ‘make live’ the neoliberal imaginary through the particular aesthetic of *Into the Sea*, and enliven the way that this imaginary permeates social life beyond policy and overt discourse. I crafted this aesthetic from the scholarly literature discussed in this chapter.
and my autoethnographic data, drawing on common phrases in conversation, media and advertising. As discussed, this rhetorical entanglement of competition and agentic improvement with the legitimating discourse of human evolution was pronounced in industries that employ or were moving towards models of ‘self help’ – fitness, personal finance, and education were some of these. The juxtaposition of advertised services and industries such as gyms, corporate environments, and dating technologies with language about evolving and adapting one’s self and actions explicitly entangled these evolutionary and economic ideas. Like the design of service industries and various governmental policies, this popular discourse of survival of the fittest works to motivate individuals into entrepreneurially taking control of their interests. Importantly, these interests include a person’s very ability to compete (Hamann, 2009: 48; Masquelier, 2017: 82). I make this kind of competitive and individualistic neoliberalism routinely present through the characters’ choices and desires, and particularly through the style of structure of the world that these characters live within. This includes in Taylor’s precarious work situation where she needs to regularly find short-term teaching contracts in lieu of a full-time position (page 80), that the farmhouse Taylor visits with her class has been preserved as a ‘living museum’ thanks to funding secured through a competitive grant scheme (page 82), Taylor’s reflections on all the things she wants to become ‘better than before’ as she works to improve herself as an individual and ensure her life is moving on an upward trajectory (page 86), and the accelerated production of Rachel’s wedding that hinges on it being ‘hers’ and ‘the best’ (pages 95-100).

Importantly, as this competitive individualism dually invokes economic and evolutionary notions and emphasises the need for people to individually take control of their interests, collective action can be seen as both unnecessary and unimportant (Gilbert, 2014: 45-47). The social issues of the novel-world become individualised as, through the neoliberal imaginary, individuals are responsible for ensuring their ongoing ability to compete so that social progress may ‘naturally’ result. The characters understand that they have individual agency and control over their own choices, and because of the structure of their social world they see that they have a responsibility to exercise that control and be in a position to make choices that better themselves. This is a matter of personal freedom, and of social progress; while their world is not free from social issues and they do not see that they themselves can affect
such issues, they do see that if everyone worked to better address their personal troubles and how they each respond to or learn from these, social issues on a macro scale would be positively affected. The organisational style of their social lives – the aesthetic form of the novel-world – facilitates this agentic action and their focus on the individual. That they each have the capacity to choose and should be able to ‘compete,’ meaning to simply continue to engage in capitalist-democracy, is common sense for the characters; the competitive nature of society is a ‘fact of life.’ This perception – this neoliberal imaginary that they exist with and embody – impacts how the characters understand their own responsibility and what kinds of choices they should be making to achieve both this freedom and progress.

Becoming (Responsibly) Upwardly Mobile

In crafting this aesthetic form I also engage the individual responsibility and the promise of upward mobility that the neoliberal imaginary cultivates. The story is set in these foundations. The Preface reads,

Under this southern sun anyone can have a go at life and get out what they’ve put in. This land is a place to stand on, to climb up from, a steady footing fair-go that makes you and’ll help you make your mark. Work hard, have a family, have a backyard with real grass and lie back and enjoy the freedom (page 50).

I intentionally construct the last sentence of this excerpt to read as both an opportunity and a directive. The reader is not invited to ‘work hard, have a family…’ through any suggestion that they may do this, nor are they explicitly told that they must. The ability to ‘lie back and enjoy the freedom’ is a desirable lifestyle (Chaney, 1994), though by constructing the sentence in this way I aim to move the reader to (imagine themselves to) do this – their attention is drawn to the ‘steady footing fair-go’ or ‘equality of opportunity’ (Western et al., 2007: 404) upon which they can ‘have a go’ and ‘climb up’ the social ladder; the reader is then implicitly compelled to particular forms of cultural action. The vision of Australia as a place where a person can ‘have a backyard with real grass and lie back and enjoy the freedom’ conceptually unites the action of individuals as culture – a vision literally grounded in individual home ownership and private family life – rather than collective action or community.
In this Australian cultural context, notions of meritocracy and egalitarianism dominate (Peeters, 2004: 19). Signalling their meritocratic and individualistic views of society, my characters hold views about personal success and responsibility that align for the most part with those progressed through neoliberalism, via policy and in discourse as discussed in this chapter (see Luxton, 2010: 172; Rose, 1999: 139-140). Dave, Taylor’s father, discusses working hard and not wanting help or ‘handouts’ (pages 60-61). Will and Dylan talk about the value of Masters degrees for getting into a higher salary bracket in order to ‘invest’ in a house and ‘provide’ for their future families (page 124). Sarah undertakes a workout challenge that her friends joke about joining to keep their relationships working (page 126). Taylor takes on extra labour and works on her appearance at work, becoming the ‘right kind of teacher,’ in an attempt to gain another short-term contract (pages 145-146). Will argues that Brett needs to better ‘help himself’ when suffering from anxiety (page 141). These are all ‘responsible’ actions and views that the characters adopt.

In various ways, these responsible actions contribute to what the characters see as an overall project of achieving upward mobility, or ‘doing well’ within their peer cohort and ‘better than’ their parents’ generation (see pages 60-61, 124). This socioeconomic mobility is understood as a merit-based ‘advancement in education and labour markets’ (Western et al., 2007: 404), in either intra- or inter-generational terms (Beller and Hout, 2006; Corak, 2013; Deeming and Smyth, 2015: 305). Where characters do recognise ‘ascriptive inequalities associated with socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, and class’ (Western et al., 2007: 404), they make sense of associated limitations through the neoliberal notion that ‘more equality of opportunity’ within the market is the most effective way to ‘fight the effects of inequality’ (Zamora, 2016: 80). They understand social progress with regards to these inequalities through the neoliberal imaginary, and see that people affected by these inequalities are given the potential to overcome these issues by showing their deservedness in the ‘blind’ market (Dixon, 2012; Feher, 2009).

As well as highlighting the neoliberal imaginary through the novel’s aesthetic, I also work to problematise the naturalisation of this imaginary and the action it normalises. For instance, the above excerpt from the Preface, which I follow with a listing of culturally significant annual events, is embedded within particular phrasing; the sentences immediately preceding and following the excerpt quoted above are
significant in how I employ and frame this Australian neoliberal imaginary. A longer excerpt reads,

These events fold into a collective memory, mixing with the heat and the sand and the smell of rain, the roar of the crowd on grand final day, fashioning a young country and fresh way of life. Under this southern sun anyone can have a go at life and get out what they’ve put in. This land is a place to stand on, to climb up from, a steady footing fair-go that makes you and’ll help you make your mark. Work hard, have a family, have a backyard with real grass and lie back and enjoy the freedom.

That’s how the anthem goes, anyway (page 50).

I purposefully use the term ‘fashioning’ to highlight that the idea of Australia being a ‘young country’ with a particular ‘way of life’ is a construction, (re)produced through both top-down and bottom-up social processes (Hage, 2003: 70-77). This thinking is sewn and cultivated through football games, family life, long summer months and grassy backyards (see Fiske et al., 1988; Johnson, 2000; Stoddart, 1986). The significance and cultural meaning of this thinking is not enforced upon the population, however is variously institutionalised and informs local governmental reason (Dean and Hindess, 1998). It is not a fiction necessarily, but is a powerful narrative. It is ‘how the anthem goes’ (page 50). I also purposefully end the Preface with ‘that’s how the anthem goes, anyway’ (page 50). Using ‘anyway’ here, I aim to open up questions about the homogeneity of this lifestyle and the seemingly ‘natural’ access all Australians have to it (see Gorman-Murray, 2007; Hodge and Mishra, 1991). Chapter 7 of this thesis further explores the significance of this cultural meaning within the novel.

**Neoliberalism’s Limited Society**

The neoliberal imaginary is a central element of the world of *Into the Sea*. In the novel, the characters exist within a capitalist-democratic social habitat. They entrepreneurially engage in their own adaptation-as-improvement as part of developing their biographies-in-the-making. The neoliberal imaginary affects and is affected by processes of biographical enactment as well as how people understand responsible or meaningful social action. Understanding themselves as competitive individuals who are working to become more upwardly mobile, in a way that
centrally concerns their own individuality but also has implications for the wider social world, the characters actively work on developing their biographies by managing their time, space and selves to positively impact their future selves and world. This development is primarily conceptualised through choice making (Gilbert, 2014: 31). The ability that the characters have to craft themselves as individuals through the process of personal choice-making is championed in the neoliberal imaginary as an essential form of self-governance (Mirowski, 2009: 437; Newheiser, 2016: 3) and freedom (Munck, 2005: 65). This freedom of choice is seen to be ‘maximised through competition’ (Braedley and Luxton, 2010: 8) and as such neoliberal projects aim to cultivate a ‘society subject to the dynamic of competition’ (Foucault, 2008: 147). This dynamic of competition permeates the social world of *Into the Sea*.

The neoliberal imaginary champions the competitive and individualising activity of choice control as an essential freedom that is best achieved via capitalist systems (Bell Lara and Luisa López, 2014: 18; Braedley and Luxton, 2010: 7-8; Munck, 2005: 65). Therefore desired is that ‘all spheres of conduct’ become evaluated ‘according to a single economic concept of value’ (Davies, 2017: 22). Through this neoliberal imaginary, the competitive freedom to choose underlies many governance strategies (Foucault, 2008: 132; Gilbert, 2014: 41-48; Lazzarato, 2009: 129; Newheiser, 20016: 3). While this style of governmentality is not made explicit in the story through discussion of policy or institutional structures, I do highlight the landscape through which a neoliberal imaginary affects individuals’ understandings, desires and actions via the aesthetic form of the novel. As discussed in this chapter, in the novel this aesthetic form includes the patterns and style of housing and job markets, education systems, the media, leisure practices, cultural rituals, and issues of health, well-being, and care responsibilities. Living in a social world shaped by the neoliberal imaginary the characters are compelled to entrepreneurially engage in the activity of choice making; neoliberal governmentality whereby competition is employed as an organising principle works to motivate the characters into taking control of their ‘interests’ (Lazzarato, 2009: 115). Further, as the rhetoric of competition conjures both economic and evolutionary implications through popular understandings of, for example, the ‘survival of the fittest,’ these interests include the characters’ social ‘fitness’ or very ability to compete. They see that the various forms
of self-care and entrepreneurialism (Brown, 2006: 694) they engage in are central to achieving upward mobility.

Within this neoliberal imaginary the characters see themselves as having significant freedom of control over their choices, and believe they have a responsibility to exercise that control to better themselves. This is both a matter of personal freedom and social progress. The freedom-generating capitalist-democracy of the novel-world is not free of social issues, but the characters believe that macro social issues are best addressed by people’s individual management of troubles that affect them (see Munck, 2005: 65); that is, they see that how an individual responds to or learns from their own troubles is the key to social change. Existing with and embodying this neoliberal imaginary impacts how the characters understand what kinds of choices they should be making to achieve both this freedom and progress. This means that, as neoliberal subjects (see Chandler and Reid, 2016; Chun, 2016; Foucault, 2008: 270), individuals are compelled to become individually enterprising within their competitive habitats and personally responsible for enriching themselves for the good of human development. By building on other contemporary ‘common sense’ ideas, like individualism and life being a survival of the fittest, neoliberal notions of responsibility (Luxton, 2010: 172) and meritocracy (Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 177) are legitimated; it becomes legitimate that the characters must entrepreneurially work to become upwardly mobile. Further, the broader abstract imperative to be successfully individual is made meaningful in social life, as it is seen that, through this mobility, not only may individual lives improve but in a macro sense overall society and the human race may progresses as a result of their individual efforts (Bowler, 1989: 102-104).

There is tension in how this neoliberal imaginary is made present through the characters’ lives however. This imaginary does not homogenously dominate; their freedoms and powers are not always reduced to a neoliberal notion of freedom of choice control. The moments when characters most explicitly grapple with issues of agency occur when the root of a personal problem extends beyond them in a way that is difficult for them to tangibly conceptualise. This includes in Chapter 2, surrounding Sam’s death, and in Chapter 8, surrounding Brett’s anxiety issues. When one of Taylor’s childhood friends dies from suicide, she and other characters feel stripped of their agency or power to control the situation. Taylor feels she would,
do anything to take it back. She wants to scream and fight and run and

drown and go back three days, twelve months, fifteen years and shake him
and hold him until he knows they would all catch him any time he falls –
every time. And this is the worst part of it. It’s not about falling at all (page

73).

She knows that there is nothing she now can do for Sam. This feeling of helplessness
is amplified because the death is a shock, and does not happen in a way that Taylor
expects or has experienced before. On the way to the funeral she realises,
they never made it to a hospital. There was no preparation. Nothing
medical. There weren’t weeks of waiting, no great reveal in a bleached
room or talk about scan results and tests. The blue gown and rubber gloves
are a black cloak and scythe we now expect. They didn’t get to slowly
consider the cause for this end of life, they had to acknowledge the sudden
sharp fact of it (page 73).

Taylor tries to make sense of Sam’s death by writing in the journal that she has kept
as a New Year’s resolution, a kind of self-help and self-care practice. Importantly,
doing this she prompts herself to think about what could change in a similar scenario.
Thinking of Sam, ‘all she’s got are Bad’s and Change: that black dog, the boy, the

rope, the gravity. The frantic, sluggish fever that burns hot-cold enough to hang a

twenty-seven year old lonely orange tree boy in his parents’ spare bathroom at night’
(page 69). She struggles to conceptualise anything tangible that she has the agency to
affect, either in her own life or on a broader scale. In a way, at this time she is too
close to think about what actions may have had an impact on Sam’s suicide or on
other mental health issues in the future. However, this list writing practice is also
limited in its conceptual scope; Taylor struggles to escape the ‘private orbit bind’ that
sociological imagination may work to break people free from, because she is not
engaged in sociological thinking. She understands her experience individualistically,
couched in the neoliberal imaginary. She is not just ‘too close’ temporally, but with
this self-care practice (Brown, 2006: 694) of journal keeping Taylor does not exercise
the imaginative conceptual distance that allows her to not centre her individual self in
her approach to the issues at hand. As a result, when ‘something like Sam happens’,

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she is ‘trapped between the lines on the page. The personal good bad change lists won’t translate’ (page 86).

Taylor’s emotional response to Sam’s death is not a direct result of neoliberal social policies. However, there are connections between the neoliberal imaginary and the powerlessness that people feel when they are intimately affected by social issues such as suicide. The neoliberal imaginary conceptually hinders the agentic power people have as social collectives (Masquelier, 2017: 71, 99, 203-207). It builds from and achieves this through everyday social processes, operating as a ‘common sense’ imaginary (Connell, 2010: 22; Gilbert, 2014: 30; Ronda Varona, 2014: xiii). That is, the neoliberal imaginary and its central ideas, including the notion of a meritocratic market as well as the need for individuals to compete to succeed for the good of both themselves and social progress, is ‘enabled and enforced by the logic of capitalist social relations’ (Gilbert, 2014: 30). This neoliberal imaginary permeates society through various channels including ‘institutional practices… reality TV shows… ministers for education… [and] labour-market conditions’ (Gilbert, 2014: 30-31). Centring values of individual freedom of choice, which is ‘inevitably tied to capitalism as a system that promotes expansions of wealth and allows people the freedom to pursue wealth, and therefore pursue their desires’ (Braedley and Luxton, 2010: 7), neoliberalism promotes the ‘interests of the commercial elite’ against other publics and the ‘general efficacy of democratic practices and institutions’ (Gilbert, 2014: 30). Doing this the neoliberal imaginary works to dislocate, segment and striate the public sphere (Gilbert, 2014: 46). The neoliberal imaginary inhibits and represses ‘any manifestation of collective agency or potential’ (Gilbert, 2014: 46). As Salinas Figueredo (2014: 94) argues,

The citizen which neoliberalism produces remains devoid of the fabric of solidarity, and is no longer one whose integration occurs based on shared rights, but rather upon their “entrepreneurial” capacity and, ultimately in their aptitudes for acceding to “opportunities” that are at least in theory offered by the market through purchases or credit.

The concept of and conditions for a society that operates as a community, rather than a mass of independent individuals, is limited in this neoliberal imaginary. Society is striated, the social world operates on a principle of competition, individuals see
themselves as existing in opposition to other people, collective agency is repressed, social issues become individualised, and the fabric of meaningful solidarity is lost. The concept of the social is hollowed out.

Understanding this individualising neoliberal imaginary is important for public sociology. Neoliberalism emerged as ‘a critique of classical sociology’ (Gane, 2014b: 1104) and it continues to conceptually deny any meaningful existence of the ‘social’ (see Hayek, 1976 [1949]: 114-119). The ‘individual’ of the neoliberal imaginary is, argues Gilbert (2014: 31) an ‘ontological, phenomenological and epistemological’ category. This carries a number of implications, not least of all that ‘social relations are things that happen to individuals rather than things which actually define their identity and the co-ordinates of their existence’ (Gilbert, 2014: 32). By focusing on ‘the actions of individuals’ (Gane, 2014b: 1102) and remaining ‘hostile to the very idea of “society”’ (Burawoy, 2005: 7), the neoliberal imaginary challenges the conceptual foundations that sociology is founded upon. The social and political implications of this are various. As I introduced in the previous chapter, I am particularly concerned with the implications of what Bauman terms ‘ignorance and indifference’ (Bauman et al., 2014: 59). The neoliberal imaginary can heighten this ignorance and indifference by individualising social issues and notions of responsibility (see Gilbert, 2014: 22). Engaging publics with sociological thought is challenging if the most central concept of the discipline – society – is hollowed in the dominant ‘common sense’ imaginary.

Discussing how sociology may better consider and challenge neoliberal reason, in an argument that I introduced at the start of this chapter, Gane (2014b: 1104) points to the use of Weber and Durkheim for thinking ‘historically and critically about the relation of the economic to the social.’ Following this Gane poses three questions concerning ‘what remains sacred’ and ‘what is left of the social’ in marketized neoliberal society, and, considering this, whether there exists a ‘conceptual definition or empirical form of the social that sociologists should seek to (re-)animate or defend’ (2014b: 1105). I have considered Gane’s preceding point to these questions throughout this chapter, namely that ‘to analyse and potentially engage with’ how neoliberalism (re)produces and naturalises its imaginary as common sense, neoliberalism ‘must be treated as a series intellectual project’ which means ‘paying detailed attention’ to its politics and importantly ‘to its epistemology
and the loop it constructs between the two’ (2014b: 1104). In this chapter I have paid detailed attention to neoliberalism as an imaginary, and focused my sociological attention on this neoliberal imaginary via the aesthetic form of my novel. Having discussed ways that the competitive individualism of the neoliberal imaginary is legitimised, as well as how I constructed the aesthetic form of Into the Sea with this analysis, I now turn to (re)animating a ‘conceptual definition’ of the social that may be valuable for sociological challenges to the common sense of neoliberal imaginary (Gane, 2014b: 1104); I now engage with a relational and affect-centred understanding of the social world that meaningfully contrasts to the individualistic and competitive conceptions that neoliberalism is grounded in.
Chapter 6: Spinoza’s Ethics and Poetics

There has been a considerable reengagement with Spinoza in recent decades. A philosopher who composed a series of vast ranging philosophical treatise on the nature of God, politics and human experience, Benedict Spinoza’s opus the Ethics (2005 [1677]) principally offers a robust argument concerning the fundamentally relational nature of affect and existence. The significance of Spinoza’s work has been recognised by those working across cultural studies (Deleuze, 1988), with literature (Calder, 2015; Gatens, 2012), with affect theory (Massumi, 2002; 2004), in relational approaches to sociology (Gilbert, 2014), and political theory (Williams, 2010). Building on how I engage with the neoliberal imaginary in this thesis, I take Armstrong’s (2009) and Williams’ (2010) points that Spinoza contests ontological assumptions about the independent individual in an intellectually robust and politically-applicable way. Spinoza’s ontological position may usefully contribute to the ways we understand and apply sociological thought, as the Ethics ‘transforms our understanding of social embeddedness… the Spinozist individual is inseparable from her relation with surrounding others (Armstrong, 2009: 60). Through Spinoza’s work we may explore the ‘possibilities for autonomy of an individual conceived in a profoundly relational way’ (Armstrong, 2009: 45), and conceptualise how the ‘individual striving for self-empowerment or autonomy implies and requires the empowerment and increasing autonomy of others’ (Armstrong, 2009: 61). Further, in a way that valuably parallels Mills’ biography-making and history-making notions (1959: 3-6), Spinoza’s work can ‘be seen to suggest both a method of understanding what one is on the basis of one’s past (genealogy) and a knowledge of what one may become on a basis of an increase in the knowledge of one’s powers and capacities (ethology)’ (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 179). The Ethics is valuable for challenging prevailing conceptualisations of the social – Spinoza’s ontological views generate a ‘dissonance,’ being often ‘strikingly and illuminatingly discontinuous’ with ‘dominant assumptions of contemporary Western thought’ (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 1). I use Spinoza’s Ethics here as a ‘point of departure for articulating alternative ways of conceiving of minds and bodies, of individuals and collectives, and of human power, freedom and responsibility’ (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 1), particularly within the sociological tradition and against the neoliberal imaginary.

In this chapter I focus on Spinozan concepts of relationality, affect, imagination and conatus. I consider these, as I have done in previous chapters, from a
public sociology perspective to assess their value for engaging sociological imagination via the novel. Here I address my central research question – how may we engage people in sociological imagination (and why should we?) – by showing how these Spinozan concepts help to enliven this imagination. I consider how to combat the issue that the neoliberal imaginary poses to public sociology, both conceptually and in *Into the Sea* by employing a Spinozan poetic. That is, here I turn to a Spinozan conceptualisation of relationality and community to challenge the competitive individualism of the neoliberal imaginary with the novel. I do this in response to Gane’s (2014b: 1105) question: ‘is there a conceptual definition or empirical form of the social that sociologists should seek to (re-)animate or defend?’

In unpacking the novel’s Spinozan poetic, I focus on moments in *Into the Sea* where I use particular language and framing devices to allow a more relational conceptualisation of the social world to emerge – where I aim for Spinozan notions of social life to connect with (imagined) readers’ visions in tangible or affective ways. In doing this I do not aim to establish a binary relationship between individualism and relationality. Rather, using a Spinozan ontological approach, I consider how individualism may be seen as constitutively social (see Armstrong, 2009) in order to challenge the ontological individualism of the neoliberal imaginary as discussed in the previous chapter; I explore how *Into the Sea* opens up a relational view of individuality and brings an ontological significance to ‘the social.’ Focusing on concepts of relationality, affect, imagination and conatus, this chapter demonstrates how I use a Spinozan poetic in the novel to explore the possibilities for agency and freedom in relation to public sociological imagination within the context of neoliberalism.

My Spinozan approach has at its epicentre a concern for agency and human freedom. From Spinoza, I understand: 1, our existence as individuals is fundamentally, not secondarily, social and relational; 2, there are empirical, rational and intuitive forms of human knowledge which are embodied, social, and dependently linked; 3, by engaging these epistemological processes we may realise the relational nature of existence, including our own existence, and appreciate the complex but changeable
relations involved in ‘Being’; and 4, through this we can increase our capacity for self-determination and social joy, a radical form of societally-constituted and agentic human freedom that may be actively cultivated.

I engage directly with the *Ethics* (2005 [1677]) here, and draw on the congruent interpretations of Armstrong (2009), Gatens (2009), Gatens and Lloyd (1999), Gilbert (2014), Lord (2010; 2015), and Williams (2010; 2015). Direct engagement with Spinoza is valuable because, as Lord summarises (2010: 11), the text ‘aims to engage you in active thinking’ and is an ‘exercise in unfolding the truth… The *Ethics* is philosophy as activity and performance.’ With his particularly ‘difficult’ style, Spinoza aims for the reader to be ‘caught up in a certain movement of thought’ and become ‘displaced’ from their ‘usual position of externality to the text and made to be part of its workings’ (Lord, 2010: 11). As well as his ontological emphasis on relationality, affect and collective well-being, this intended performative and engaging function of the *Ethics* is another reason Spinoza is a meaningful theorist to engage with in the context of this project.

Engaging with Spinoza in this way, I also take inspiration from novelists including George Eliot and Goethe who, scholars have argued (Calder, 2015; Skolnick, 2014), work to understand, reveal and extend Spinoza’s scholarship through fiction writing. Through the process of writing the novel I have used fiction to better understand Spinozan ideas, such as the relational nature of affect, to determine what a Spinozist sociological imagination might look like. I used early drafts of the novel to better comprehend Spinoza’s *Ethics* and assess the value of this particular ontology for doing public sociology aimed at engaging sociological imagination. So, while the novel does not aim to illustrate specific Spinozan concepts, I employ a Spinozan poetic and my interpretation of Spinoza’s work colours the final version of *Into the Sea*. By this I mean I craft a particular vocabulary and use literary devices throughout the novel that draw on Spinozan concepts and language. I use this Spinozan poetic to unsettle and critique the neoliberal imaginary, which as discussed in Chapter 5 I aim to draw attention to through the novel’s aesthetic.

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18 See my discussion of this term in Chapter 2: (Re)Framing Sociological Imagination for Public Sociology.

19 George Eliot completed an English translation of Spinoza’s *Ethics* in 1856, and also worked on translations of Spinoza’s other works throughout her life (Hughes, 1998).

20 In his autobiography *From My Life: Poetry and Truth* (1811-1833) and essays including ‘Study After Spinoza,’ Goethe details how Spinoza was a major influence in his life and his work.
Spinozan Relationality

Four key concepts are central to my Spinozan poetic in the novel: relationality, affect, imagination and conatus. Here I discuss these concepts and in the following section I unpack how I have used them to construct this particular poetic in Into the Sea. As introduced in my theoretical framework, Spinoza sees that humans are part of, not outside or exceptional within, Nature (IIIPref.). We are one kind of individual, or one composite grouping of physical material similar to the groupings found throughout Nature (IIL1-L7; Deleuze, 1988: 76-78; Lord, 2010: 49-50, 60-64), from an atomic to galactic scale, across both time and space. These individual bodies are not independent but always exist as a process of relation and in composite form. This is an important interpretive emphasis: bodies are not engaged in processes of relation but are comprised of these processes. We are in-essence connected to an infinite multitude of other individual composite bodies with which we are sustained and dependant – chemicals, blood, food, sunlight, solar systems et cetera (IIPost1-6; Lord, 2010: 8, 62). This is not via a connection but ‘through the process of relation’ which collapses discrete individuality and ‘calls into question the existence of boundaries between individual things’ (Williams, 2015: 16). We are these relationships and we share the constitutive essence of existence with all things, being ‘affectively part of nature’ (Lord, 2015: 8). We exist as a relationship between thought and material extension (IP1; IP2) – as we have thoughts and we have a body (Lord, 2010: 51) – and this relationship is a parallelism (IP7) rather than casuistic in the Cartesian sense (Lord, 2010: 53-57). Our Being is sustained by this parallel relationship and through our relationships with the natural world. To state these factors is not to restate a modern scientific perspective of the material composition of the universe. What Spinoza outlines in discussing bodies (see Lord, 2010: 61-64), infinite attributes like thought and extension (IP1-11), and the form of relation that exists between these (IP12-14), is an ontological framework for understanding that existence itself, no matter the scale, is fundamentally relational. This includes the nature of our relations with other people (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 28, 66).

Relational approaches within sociology develop similar conceptualisations of the social world. As the variable-centred approach (see Reimann, 2009) – which is a dominant social science approach focusing on interactions between various and variable entities to determine how these interactions give rise to measurable outcomes and entity attributes – relational approaches take a more transactional (see Emirbayer,
1997: 286-287) or processual (Abbott, 2016) view. Rather than focusing on the ‘constituent elements’ of such interactions, the ‘dynamic, unfolding process’ of relation becomes ‘the primary unit of analysis’ (Emirbayer, 1997: 287). Abbott’s (2016: ix) leading processual sociological approach sees that ‘everything in the social world is continuously in the process of making, remaking, and unmaking itself (and other things), instant by instant.’ Against sociology’s ‘distinguished traditions’ (Abbott, 2016: 292), Abbott’s approach centres ‘events’ and the ‘patterns and regularities defined on lineages of successive events’ (2016: ix). An interesting part of Abbott’s overall work on processual sociology, and a valuable part particularly within the context of this project, which I have discussed in Chapter 4 of this thesis, is his concern for lyrical sociology (2016: 77): how poetic styles of sociological writing may capture these making, remaking and unmaking processes. Emirbayer (1997: 282) claims that it is this ‘choice between substantialism and relationism’ in understanding social processes, rather than other dualisms such as ‘material versus ideal’ or ‘structure versus agency,’ that centrally confronts contemporary sociologists.

A focus on relational processes is not new, in sociology or in other disciplines. Marx clearly argues that capital is ‘not a thing, but a social relation’ (1977: 932) and that society is ‘the relations within which’ individuals engage (1978: 47). Contemporarily, Richardson and Jensen (2003: 10) argue that a cultural sociology of space, in line with a ‘dialectical framework,’ must ‘be conceptualised in relational terms.’ Mische (2014: 91), outlining a ‘new relational sociology,’ claims this movement actually ‘returns sociology to its relational and pragmatist roots.’ Perhaps most famously, Einstein, who read and professed an adoration of Spinoza, in proposing a unifying theory of relativity which emerged from ‘Spinozist inspiration’ (Connolly, 2011: 18) radically changed scientific research and modern conceptualisations of what and how the universe ‘is.’ Developing in line with this broader intellectual tradition, contemporary approaches within sociology signal much more than a semantic disciplinary shift. Relationality challenges and opens ‘the central concepts in sociological analysis – for example, power, equality, freedom, and agency’ (Emirbayer, 1997: 291). As well as for these specific concepts, of which I engage freedom and agency in the following sections, relationality impacts our conceptualisation of which relationships we

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21For a discussion and excerpt of the “love poem” which Einstein wrote about Spinoza, see He (2017) Einstein’s (Bad) Love Poem. Dartmouth Undergraduate Journal of Science.
understand as comprising the social world. This is the case as social relations are inextricably embedded within a wider biosocial frame – Spinozan ontology takes a relational more-than-human approach or what Lord calls a ‘non-humanist humanism’ (2015: 1). This different conceptualisation of individuals and relations allows the modern preoccupation with autonomous individual selfhood to re-connect with ideals of community, without thereby collapsing hard-won individuality into an all-encompassing, pre-existing collective identity (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 2).

There are implications of this which I do not engage with in detail here but which are nonetheless important to highlight. As Gilbert (2014: 139-140) draws from the work of Connelly (2011) and Tarde (1999), in discussing an ‘ecology’ of ‘the multitude’ (see Guattari, 2000; Hardt and Negri, 2000: 93-109), such approaches lead to the possibility of ‘understanding sociality as such as no longer restricted to the domain of the human’ (Gilbert, 2014: 140). We can see that ‘the multitude is inseparable from the interdependent ecologies with which it exists in perpetual relations of co-constitution: it both makes and is made by the ecology of material relation which it inhabits’ (Gilbert, 2014: 140).

With regards to my concern with enlivening sociological imagination via the novel, the implications of a specifically Spinozan relationality are significant enough to warrant engaging with this concept directly in the *Ethics* rather than only through modern theorists, like those noted. As highlighted, Lord (2010: 11) sees that direct engagement with Spinoza is valuable, if challenging, because of how the text is designed to actively engage the reader in Spinozist thought – rather than illustrating his ideas, through the form and style of his writing Spinoza works to engage the reader in thinking as he does. Where other theorists work to explain how they have applied and analysed Spinozist concepts, I share a similar aim as Spinoza with the novel, as discussed in the previous chapter; I want to engage the reader in sociological imagination as a form of live and social imagining, rather than illustrate the concept of ‘the’ sociological imagination. Like Spinoza, I hope readers of *Into the Sea* are similarly ‘caught up in a certain movement of thought’ (Lord, 2010: 11). I work to achieve this in a radically different way to Spinoza, however have gained much from the style of the *Ethics* as well as from its conceptual content. In reading the *Ethics* I was engaged in thinking relationally, and in writing *Into the Sea* I have worked to
practice and reconstruct this relational thinking rather than use the novel to explain the concept of relationality. Public sociology, as seeking to engage readers or publics in a style of thinking, as opposed to a practice of explaining to others key concepts within a style of thought, is a key point I return to in the following chapter. Much like the Ethics is, in Lord’s words (2010: 11), ‘philosophy as activity and performance,’ I aim for Into the Sea to embody sociology by performing and engaging readers in the activity of sociological imagination.

**Affect and the Body**

Central to this conception of relationality, to Spinoza’s ontological project as a whole, and to the function and value of Into the Sea, is the notion of affect. Many scholars inform contemporary conceptualisations of this idea: as well as Spinoza, the interpretations of Bergson (1913), Whitehead (1967 [1933]), Deleuze and Guattari (1988), Massumi (2002; 2004), Protevi (2009; 2011), Simondon (2005), Clough and Halley (2007), Thrift (2008), and Ahmed (2010) all dominate different approaches to affect theory. Importantly distinct from ‘emotion’ for many working across social science as well as cultural and political theory (Greco and Stenner, 2008: 10-11), affect is predominantly understood as a dually ‘physical and psychological’ experience (Gilbert, 2014: 145) – not a ‘sentiment’ but an ‘intensity’ (Massumi, 2004: xvii) of ‘what a body can do and what it can undergo’ (Protevi, 2011: 393). When considering humans specifically, the social nature of affect is central to the concept (Gilbert, 2014: 146). As bodies are composite groupings of individuals (Lord, 2010: 62) and affects are ‘becomings’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004), affect in the social world concerns more than the capacity of individuals in the popular sense; individual bodies ‘exist at multiple levels of compositional complexity’ (Lord, 2010: 62-63) and Spinoza sees collective groups of human beings as one such kind of body (Lord, 2010: 63). Importantly then, when discussing affect and ‘the body,’ it is not only the power and capacity of the individual human that is implicated: the collective or social body is implicated as well. In this way Spinoza challenges us ‘to think about affect beyond corporeal embodiment’ (Williams, 2010: 245).

By affect Spinoza understands the ‘affections of the body’: the body’s changing power to act (Lord, 2010: 85), or its ‘transitions to greater or lesser power’ (Lord, 2010: 91), which is brought about either by wanting to act or by being acted upon (IIID3). It is through the ‘relative complexity of the human body’ that ‘the
capacity of the individual to both affect and be affected in a multiplicity of ways’ comes about (Gatens, 2009: 14). This process of affectivity is constant and multiple; depending on the context of these passions or affections, this power of acting changes how humans experience affects like joy and sorrow, as well as affects of desire. Joy, sorrow, and desire are the three prime manifestations of affect in Spinoza’s philosophy (IIIP11S), and he argues all other affects stem from these. Depending on the cause of these affections, affects are ‘passive’ or ‘active’ (IIIP1-3) and variably influence our capacity and power to act. Spinoza argues that positive joyous affects move us towards a ‘greater perfection’ while negative affects like sorrow move us towards a ‘lesser perfection’ (IIIP11S). In discussing this Spinoza notes, ‘by reality and perfection I mean the same thing’ (IID6); Spinoza uses the term perfection without value judgement and to refer to ‘the amount of being a thing has’ (Lord, 210: 91). My understanding of this is that joyful affects, such as happiness and love, increase our power of acting which means we become more able to act in and engage with reality. Through them, our ‘survival is furthered and our well-being increases’ (Lord, 2010: 90).

Unlike other philosophical discourse which sees affects or passions as ‘contrary to reason’ and something needing ‘to be overcome,’ Spinoza sees the affects as ‘part of nature’ (Lord, 2010: 84); he agrees these are not ‘rational’ however ‘pointedly refuses to mock or denigrate’ their value, arguing that we should understand rather than ‘ignore or repress the passions’ (Lord, 2010: 84). In exploring the affects, Spinoza considers ‘how we are determined by our experiences… not on the level of knowledge, but on the level of feeling’ (Lord, 2010: 84). Williams sees that affect is ‘de-subjectifying’ in that it ‘courses through and beyond subjects,’ and argues that Spinoza’s affect is therefore ‘an inherently political concept’ (2010: 246). From this Williams considers how affect works in the political body, being ‘the elemental site of transformation and production,’ to compose and decompose ‘political subjectivity’ (2010: 246). There is value in this argument for engaging with Mills’ ‘uneasiness and indifference’ (1959: 12, 13) and Bauman’s ‘ignorance and impotence’ (Bauman et al., 2016: 59) as affects which work within and through political bodies. I return to Williams’ (2010) arguments concerning affect and bodies at the end of this chapter and in the following chapter.
Imagination and Knowledge

Affects are not ‘located’ in the individual human body as emotions are popularly understood to be (see Denzin, 2009: 105-124; Gilbert, 2014: 145); affects are themselves a process of relation – a transition (IIIDef.Aff.3) – and, as discussed, Spinozan bodies are complex composites which include both ‘individuals’ and collective social bodies (Lord, 2010: 63). How we understand these relations and powers is an issue Spinoza engages with via an epistemological discussion of human knowledge. He outlines three different kinds of knowledge (IIP40): imagination, reason, and intuition. Before delineating these and how I have engaged them in Into the Sea I wish to highlight key points of this epistemology: these kinds of knowledge are inextricably linked, are all embodied and grounded in experience and intellectual labour, and are only qualified in correlation with what Spinoza sees as their capacity to help us know his ontological system. This knowledge, argues Gatens (2009: 6), should ‘not be understood in purely cognitive terms.’ Nor is this knowledge ‘purely epistemological, or cognitive’ – in Spinoza’s view, ‘human knowledge is embodied knowledge and different ways of knowing always imply correlative ways of being’ (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 107). Further, Spinoza does not privilege a religious kind of belief over rationality, nor rationality over common-sense thinking or imagination. He interrogates the capacities for knowledge that human beings have in order to consider how kinds of knowledge may help move us towards a ‘greater perfection’ (see IIIP11S), and increase our individual and collective well-being, agency and freedom.

Spinoza’s ‘first kind’ of knowledge is imagination (IIP40S2). As Lord (2010: 68) elaborates, imagination includes ‘experiencing, reflecting, remembering, anticipating, dreaming, hallucinating, representing, fictionalising and every other activity based on experience.’ So, while discussed as ‘imagination’, this kind of knowledge is not necessarily ‘false or fictional’: Spinoza calls the ‘traces of ideas’ that our experience leaves in our mind ‘images’, and calls the various process of thinking about these traces ‘imagining’ (Lord, 2010: 68). As discussed in the following sections, Spinoza’s first kind of knowledge is central to the poetic of Into the Sea. Importantly, in terms of Spinoza’s overall argument and how I engage Spinoza’s ‘imagination’ in the novel, these images and experiential traces of ideas are linked to the affects. Affect is not the articulated feelings we have about our experiences in the world, but rather are the varying intensities of thinking and acting that we move through circa these
experiences. Our ‘behaviour and actions are determined’ by the affects, which socially circulate (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 68) and ‘arise in experience and are connected to our images of things’ (Lord, 2010: 104). How we imagine these experiences is ‘uncertain, experiential and empirical’ and thus ‘subject to disagreement, doubt and revision’ (Lord, 2010: 69). Spinoza calls this ‘inadequate knowledge’ (see Lord, 2010: 85). It is inadequate in the sense that it is formed via subjective experience and cannot help us properly conceptualise affect as he understands it, the relationship between cause and effect in Nature, nor the ‘common notions’ (Lord, 2010: 86) of things.

The second kind of knowledge that Spinoza outlines is reason. This is a form of ‘adequate knowledge,’ as it is through reason that we adequately understand reality (Gatens, 2009: 6) and the ‘unity of composition of all of Nature and the modes of variation of that unity’ (Deleuze, 1988: 57-58). Seeing the world as flat versus spherical is an example of the first versus second kinds of knowledge (Lord, 2010: 69). Our experiential knowledge, knowledge of the first kind, may always show us these things but we know they are not ‘true’ – nor do we need to each individually calculate the Earth’s curve and the moon’s distance. With reason, we do not understand things ‘in terms of how they happen to appear to our senses’ (Lord, 2010: 150). Our ability to reason, or capacity for knowledge of the second kind, helps us understand common notions, though in ‘ontologically discrete categories’ (Donovan, 2009: 175), as well as our own imagination. Part of understanding this imagination is properly conceptualising the affects (Gatens, 2009: 6; Lord, 2010: 86). Spinoza sees value in understanding the affects as they relate to us because affects impact our capacity to act (Lord, 2010: 84-85); joyous affects increase our power of acting while negative affects decrease this same power. Through reason and working to better understand our own nature, Spinoza argues we may become less passive and subject to negative affects (see Lord, 2010: 104). This is important because our capacity to be active in the world and experience joy is central to our well being and ability to be self-determinate and free.

While we can never be ‘free’ from affect (Gatens, 2009: 4; Lord, 2010: 137), nor would we want to be, we can strive for this affectivity to be active and positive rather than passive, turbulent and negative (Bennett, 1984: 270; Sharp, 2011: 148). Without reason we are enslaved by the affects and are more passive in life, because our ‘lack
of power to moderate and restrain the affects’ (IVPref.) means we routinely do things that are bad for us (Lord, 2010: 104-105). Through reason we can overcome this passivity and instead engage with things that are good for us and move us to actively experience positive affects of joy; this is possible because we better understand our own nature and the nature of affect, and thereby we increase our capacities to act, to be self-determined, and experience freedom (Lord, 2010: 134-140). Imagination and reason however, especially as they concern the affects, are inextricably linked and cannot truly be held in contrast to one another. As Gatens explains, imagination and reason ‘form a single continuum of understanding’ (2009: 4). Therefore, before unpacking this Spinozist conception of freedom and how it links to sociological understandings of agency and the poetic I construct in Into the Sea, I continue on to Spinoza’s third kind of knowledge.

Knowledge of the third kind is what Spinoza calls intuition. He sees that the human mind ‘is capable of intuitive knowledge’ (Lord, 2010: 152), which is ‘the mind’s greatest virtue’ (IIP25) and joy (IIP27). This intuition is an ontologically-uniting knowledge of the ‘essence of things’ (IIP40S2); knowledge of the third kind is a monist understanding whereby we escape thinking through our finite duration (Lord, 2010: 152). This develops as we gain ‘rational knowledge’ (Lord, 2004: 150), moving from forming adequate ideas of attributes to intuiting the eternal essence of Being (IIP40S2; Lord, 2004: 151-152). This third kind of knowledge, developing in a continuum from imagination and reason (Donovan, 2009: 175l; Gatens, 2009: 6), reveals what Deleuze calls ‘the correlation of the essence of God and singular essences of real beings (1988: 57-58). With this third kind of knowledge we ‘go beyond Reason… and enter into the intuitive intellect as a system of essential truths’ (Deleuze, 1988: 58). More than seeing bodies as existing in relation, as ontologically discrete categories, we see bodies as monist in their relationality, or being of the same ontological category. Spinoza’s philosophical system thus loops upon itself: we comprehend his ontological argument through the epistemological labour he outlines, and this ‘third kind’ of knowledge involves coming to an understanding of Spinoza’s monist ontology. We can only interpret this monist and eternal essence of Being through and against our own finite bodies and existence, and cannot ‘grasp’ the third kind of knowledge in the same way we do the second kind (Lord, 2010: 153). As Sharp (2011: 148) argues, the “divine glory” of Being that Spinoza sees may come of this third kind of knowledge is ‘not the liberation from turbulent affect into the calm
of knowledge but rather liberation by way of affect, following from the determinate grasp of one’s constituent dependence on nature.’

This intuition of the ‘divine’ (IP15) essence of Being that connects and is shared by all things gives relationality and affect a more profound meaning that has useful implications for the concept of agency. As Gatens and Lloyd (1999: 4) outline, in exploring ‘the interactions between imagination, emotion and intellect,’ Spinoza ‘insists on the positivity of human desire and endeavour’ (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 4). Spinoza arguably sees that

The body, imagination and affect do not, in themselves, represent limits to reason and knowledge. In fact, they are the proper ‘objects’ of reflection through which we come to develop our powers of reason and increase our knowledge. The crucial distinction in Spinoza’s philosophy is not between mind and body, or reason and emotion, but between activity and passivity. Spinoza, rationalist though he was, had a powerful insight not only into the robust resistance imagination can pose to reason but also into the positive role of imagination in even the highest forms of intellectual life (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 4).

It is this understanding of imagination, and its relation to the body and affect, which is central to the Spinozan poetic I construct in Into the Sea. This Spinozist imagination is valuable for engaging people in the activity of sociological imagination via creative mediums such as my sociological fiction novel.

Agency and Conatus

In Chapter 4 of this thesis I discussed agency in relation to sociological imagination. I focused on how a person’s agency is engaged in processes of biographical enactment and ‘bounded by the private orbits’ in which they live (Mills, 1959: 3). I approached this with concern for the role that public sociology may play in increasing an individuals’ or a publics’ agency. Doing this I drew on Furedi (2009) and Bauman (in Bauman et al., 2016) in particular; they see that public sociology should ‘project a sense of the world that can encourage purposeful public activity and the exercise of agency’ (Furedi, 2009: 151), and that a ‘humanistic variation’ of sociology works to supply ‘human beings with ampler knowledge of their situation’ thereby ‘enlarging the sphere of their freedom of choice’ (Bauman, 1967 in Bauman et al., 2016: ix).
This is a similar kind of concern that Spinoza has for self-determination and freedom. Spinoza’s *Ethics* seeks to not only explain Being but help increase our reason so that we may better understand desire and experience positive affects, thereby becoming more active in life. Spinoza engages these concerns through the connection between a thing’s Being and its essence as ‘conatus’ – the ‘striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being’ (EIIIP7; Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 13). Conatus is a concept that predates Spinoza, used by a number of early modern philosophers including Hobbes to ‘express the notion of a thing’s endeavour for what is advantageous to it’ (Lord, 2010: 88). This notion is still variously engaged with throughout philosophy and other disciplines; introducing Spinoza’s understanding of the concept, Lord (2010: 89) explains that ‘we strive to carry on living and flourishing’ and highlights the work of neurologist Antonio Damasio (2004: 36) who, discussing Spinoza’s work, argues that ‘the aggregate of dispositions laid down in brain circuitry… seek both survival and well-being.’

The concepts of affect, bodies, imagination and knowledge that I have discussed, which are ‘at the core of Spinoza’s understanding of sociability and politics,’ are together grounded in this ‘crucial concept of conatus – the endeavour or struggle to persist in being’ (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 26). As the conatus ‘unifies affects and imagination’ (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 26) and as bodies ‘struggle, of their very nature, to persist in being’ (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 27), we can see that ‘the power to imagine is thus integral to the continued existence and thriving of the individual’ (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 27, italics added). As bodies ‘act and are acted upon,’ or ‘affect and are affected’ in a multiplicity of ways which relate to and impact an individual’s conatus, so too ‘the operations of imagination are caught up in the dynamics of conatus – in the momentum and impetus of the mind in its struggle to enact its nature as a finite individual’ (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 27).

The *Ethics* aims to engage readers with the idea that continuing to fulfil our conatus, or our striving to persevere in being (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 13) is a matter of increasing our power of Being by both living and flourishing (Lord, 2010: 89). Developing our different forms of knowledge and working to understand our own nature, including understanding the affects, as Spinoza outlines, is central to this flourishing in Being. Our self-preservation and what we might think of as a full and dynamic engagement with life is connected to how we imagine and know the world,
ourselves and our experiences, and the relation this has to our capacity to act through and experience positive affects. Spinozist conceptions of self-determination and freedom spring from this unification of imagination, affect and power. As I understand it, this Spinozist conception of knowledges and affects and the role they play in human flourishing usefully correlates with sociological understandings of agency, particularly of the social constitution of agency; this presents a robust challenge to the neoliberal freedom of choice which I outlined in the previous chapter.

As with relational approaches to the social world, Spinoza does not uniquely conceptualise our capacity for action in a social or relational way – sociological approaches to agency see agentic capacity being located in, or at least impacted by, social institutions and relationships (see Giddens, 1979). Taking a ‘non-humanist’ (Lord, 2015: 1) or ‘de-subjectifying’ (Williams, 2010: 246) approach to this concept however, as we can build from Spinoza’s ontology where a body’s capacity to act is tied up in how it imagines and knows its experience and world, both affect and agency are relational social processes which may be honed or controlled (Lord, 2010: 86) and positively increased by an individual human and a collective body. Further, through Spinoza we can see that from an ontological perspective our ability to increase our agentic capacity is much greater as a collective people than as an individual person. Agency is not just increased or hindered by social relationships but is itself relational, constituted in society, and something that we may collectively command greater control over if we understand this concept, and its relation to the affects, in this way. The particular potential that fiction writing offers for realising and affectively engaging readers in sociological imagination, contributing to their understanding of and control over their affective and agentic capacities, is my central focus in the following chapter – in Chapter 7 I consider how a quality of affectivity may be crafted in sociological fiction, and the value of this affective quality for doing creative public sociology and engaging publics in the activity of sociological imagination.

Before (re)turning to Into the Sea, I return specifically to Spinoza’s understanding of bodies (IIL2; II) and the difference that these key concepts – relationality, affect, imagination and conatus – can make to how we conceptualise individualism and

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22Not only in the human sense but as all material things – see Lord (2010: 60-67).
purposive social relationships. Spinoza argues that nothing is more useful to us than other people (IVP18S; IVP35C1), especially those whom agree with our nature. Both as and in result of this, we are enabled and strengthened through community (IVApp.7). Community ‘is more powerful and capable than any number of disconnected individuals’ (Lord, 2010: 118). We are subject to affects (IVP4C) which routinely overpower our reason and virtue (IVP6), we disagree with others and find them contrary (IVP33; IVP34). Despite these affective disagreements, it is in our best interest to not only recognise extensive, vital social ties but – as our existence with others is fundamentally relational – do all we can to cultivate these (IVApp12). By extension, those who truly ‘seek their own advantage’ ‘want nothing for themselves which they do not desire for other men (sic)’ (IVP18S).

From here, Spinoza explicitly argues against processes which produce inequality. Competition not stemming from virtue (IVP36) which may ‘cause injury to another’ (IVP45Schol) is not in agreement with principles of common practice (IVP45Schol) nor guided by reason (IVP71-73). He does not understand all humans as ‘the same’ in terms of capabilities nor argues for normative impositions (West, 2009: 111, 113). Rather, Spinoza highlights the illogicality of perpetuating inequality because, for instance, ‘the care of the poor falls upon society as a whole, and concerns only the general advantage’ (IVApp17). This is because we require many things to flourish in life (IVApp27; Gatens, 2009: 6) which we cannot cultivate without others (IVApp28); self-serving behaviour like the ‘art of making money’ for money’s sake is irrational and a vice (IVApp29). Such excesses limit our capacity to reason (IVP44S), imprison us in presentism (IVApp30), shackle us to affective whims and ‘fortune’ (IVPref), and negatively impacts the very community we depend on by making us burdensome to ourselves and others (IVApp13).

This is not the ‘trickle-down’ good (see Hall, 2011: 705) of increased liberal freedoms and altruism (Hall, 2011: 721), nor the same rationalism supporting the individualisation of the neoliberal imaginary (Hall, 2011: 712). Through this relational Spinozan ontology, we can argue that living according to reason, as opposed to inadequate and largely-selfish imagination, means acting for one’s self and all others (Lord, 2010: 117). This is not the classical rationalism Spinoza is miscast as exemplifying (Lord, 2010: 3-4). Spinoza challenges the supposed

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23This ‘nature’ is more species than personality (IVApp9), through arguably includes both (IVApp7).
naturalism and good of an individualistic individualism. Relevant to the project of public sociology, Spinoza also argues that ‘the good which everyone who seeks virtue wants for himself, he also desires for other men; and this desire is greater as his knowledge of God is greater’ (IVP37). Knowledge of God/Nature is knowledge of shared being (IP11; IP15), and virtue is acting ‘according to reason’ (IVP36) by striving to understand this shared being (IVP36). As such, the more we strive to understand ourselves as fundamentally co-existing in Nature, with Nature, the better we appreciate the ‘divine’ significance of other people and work for common good. This is not because altruism overpowers our selfishness; as Armstrong (2009: 61) argues, this is because ‘Spinoza’s individual is constitutively rather than merely incidentally social that individual striving for self-empowerment must be conceived as a social process.’ Spinoza collapses the dichotomy between individuality and sociability (Armstrong, 2009: 45). This view of individuality is relational. As Armstrong (2009: 45) does, I see that the Ethics concerns the ‘possibilities for autonomy of an individual conceived in a profoundly relational way.’ Further, I see that the ‘individual striving for self-empowerment or autonomy implies and requires the empowerment and increasing autonomy of others’ (Armstrong, 2009: 61). Through Spinoza such possibilities for individual agency and autonomy are firmly located in the social, and can be positioned as a process of societal relations rather than something possessed, something finite, or something that requires the privileging of competition and fitness over community and collectivity.

_A Spinozan Poetic_

How I engage with Spinoza’s work – and particularly how I see the Ethics progressing sociological conceptions of individualism, agency and community – informs the poetic of _Into the Sea_. This also supports the potential that I see in this novel for engaging people in sociological imagination. As outlined in the overview of Section 3 of this thesis, I break down this task of engagement into four different parts: through specific literary techniques I aim to illustrate, contextualise, enliven, and cultivate sociological imagination with the novel. In Chapter 4 I highlighted how I employ techniques of characterisation and voice to illustrate sociological imagination. In chapter 5, I discussed how I work to contextualise sociological imagination and its value by drawing on the neoliberal imaginary to construct a particular aesthetic. Here I highlight how I have drawn on key concepts in Spinoza’s Ethics to construct a
particular Spinozan poetic in *Into the Sea*, with the aim of enlivening sociological imagination against the novel’s neoliberal aesthetic. In the following chapter I turn to how I have worked to achieve verisimilitude by engaging particular cultural meanings throughout the novel, in order to affectively cultivate sociological imagination with a particular imagined reader. My Spinozan poetic sets up this following task.

I work to employ this Spinozan poetic throughout *Into the Sea*, and here reference eight specific scenes to highlight how I construct and achieve this overall poetic. These scenes occur across the novel; from the first New Year’s Eve scene in Chapter One, to the final scene that the novel closes on in Chapter Nine, I employ Spinozist concepts and vocabulary that I have outlined thus far in this chapter – Spinozan notions of relationality, affect, imagination and conatus, as they apply to my characters and their circumstances.

**Social Affects and Images**

In Chapter One, opening the New Year’s Eve party that Taylor and Will attend at their friends’ house in Sydney, I set the scene from 10:30pm:

> Will did the rounds of Steph and Michael’s matchbox-sized half-of-the-bridge-view apartment with a bottle of sparkling wine… Street noise carried up and into the windows. The closer it got to midnight the louder the party racket ballooned (page 54).

In crafting this scene and the social affectivities circulating via the main characters’ own party and through Sydney city, as well as across the nation and world as a global event, I employ a vocabulary of bodies (Lord, 2010: 62-63), multitudes (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 67) and ecologies (Gilbert, 2014: 139-140), intensities (Massumi, 2004: xvii), of affect as something that moves through and beyond bodies (Williams, 2010: 245), and relationality as a connection that bodies are part of but which is larger than them (Lord, 2012: 8, 62). The scene continues:

> Whooping, breaking glass, multitudes all laughing, bodies making their way towards the water or some house party on foot. A karaoke party a few streets away peaked hours too early. Police clopped around on horseback. Ambulances cried. Champagne flutes clinked aboard the yachts. The intensity coursed through and beyond their tiny kitchen, a growing ecology
of parties and gum trees and kisses and wine bottles and taxis and cash and the feeling that this night is something special, and that they were part of it, but ‘it’ was recognisably bigger than them at the same time. Even that far into the Harbour you could feel the pressure build. Sydney, the fizzy city, with an hour and a half left to pop (page 54).

At the funeral, set in Chapter Two, I intentionally oscillate and almost conflate the preaching of the Priest and the voice of the narrator; the Priest, in seeking to comfort the crowd, speaks about ‘how mourning is not just about feeling grief, but is a process we must share and come together in’ (page 74). While the Priest goes on to say that they must do this ‘through the ceremonials of religious tradition’ (page 74), the inference of a Spinozan conception of affect as a social and circulating process (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 26) here is intentional. The scene invokes a Spinozan notion of images and imagination (Lord, 2010: 68):

The song and slideshow change again into a picture of Jesus and a prayer. Sam’s death tangles with the Church. Father Peter tells them about the many rooms in God’s house and how Jesus carries Sam to his kingdom of heaven. Taylor wonders if Sam’s life flashed before his eyes as he tied and re-tied the rope… The Priest has finished speaking and it’s time for Sam to leave. Everyone stands. Music plays. New photographs show on the screen. Sam as a boy. Sam running. Sam playing. Sam swimming at the beach (page 74).

The combination of these words and images in the Church works to stimulate affect:

They cry hard and loudly and collectively. The men carry Sam through the crowd, across the right arm of the transept and outside into the sun. Shirley follows them. Liz holds her. Brett carries the surfboard. Sam waves from the projector screen. Waves crash below them on the beach (page 74).

In Chapter Three, I continue to invoke the processes of affect (Lord, 2010: 91) and the ways that affect is socially circulated (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 68) through the poetic of the novel. Before Taylor and Will go to work, they eat breakfast in their kitchen and listen to the news on the TV – which is loudly playing in their neighbours’ apartment next door.
Through the wall they hear the newsread.

Anti-government protests planned.

A heat wave.

Still no sign of the missing plane.

Taylor and Will share a Look, pausing over their breakfast for half a moment. Disbelief gets deeper the longer there’s no sign of the aircraft… The newsreader explains the current theory: MH370 switched off, lulled its passengers to sleep with a lack of oxygen, and auto-piloted down south. The newsreader emphasises this southern turn. This means it came towards Them – towards Us – perhaps far off the distant west coast but no one else is out there so they’re running with it like the country’s now connected in this. Connected in what exactly isn’t so clear. Connected in feeling maybe, in disbelief and denial and fear and hope. Solemn grey-faced politicians make statements promising to find it, promising as if the plane will be intact and not a wreck (page 79).

In this scene, through the affects they experience – disbelief, denial, fear, hope – I aim to open up a relational view (IIPost1-6) of the social world, for both the characters and with the reader. Images (Lord, 2010: 68) of the plane circulate on the news and in their imaginations (Lord, 2010: 67-69); these images have a circulatory impact (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 68) and keep the affects at a heightened intensity (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 26) through the novel’s society. The scene continues:

When news about the missing plane plays people look to the sky. The news stories circle like it’s still in the air. And in a way, in your mind, it kind of is – flying just out of radar sight, above the clouds and surely, eventually, coming back down into view. A continuing planeload of potential energy until there’s definitive proof of its grounding.

The news cuts to the entertainment presenter for a review of a new superhero film. The city stops holding its breath (page 79).

The affectivity of this particular story keeps the images of the plane and its passengers alive for the characters and for the reader (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 52-53); Taylor’s father implicitly raises the incident when speaking to his daughter via Skype later in the chapter (page 85). In two contrasting lines – where Taylor and Will pause over
their breakfast, and the exhale of relief implied in the excerpt’s final line – I work to invoke the embodied nature of affect (page 79); I actively avoid constructing either imagination or affect ‘in purely cognitive terms’ (Gatens, 2009: 6) and show the discussed connection of imagination to feeling. The characters intentionally remain immobile during the newsread. They do not discuss the issue, or consider what they can do about it – they pause for ‘half a moment’ and ‘share a Look,’ sitting still and passively ‘feeling’ the story. Taylor and Will are not the only ones; when the news about the plane ends, the whole ‘city stops holding its breath.’

During the wedding I actively coalesce a particularly affective scene with the way that various characters have imagined the moment, with the activity of capturing images of the moment via photography, and with the Bride’s embodiment of her own imagined expectations. Just before the procession into the hall for the ceremony, the wedding coordinator silently waves her arms at them like a conductor commanding an orchestra. The car door opens. The processional song starts. The Beatles sing, who knows how long I’ve loved you. Taylor steals a quick glance behind her while one of the planning staff opens the wooden door to the ceremony hall. Rachel smiles at her father as he helps her out of the car. The lead photographer captures the rush of white adrenalin. Her green eyes sparkle through her veil and the long lace gown spills out onto the cobblestone ground around her hidden legs. She half turns, pulling the train of her dress out behind herself and smiles coyly at the camera. She is a vision. Her father beams beside her and Leanne sighs at the top of the stairs. Maddie wells up as she closes the tiny white handbag, and Maya beams as she starts walking forwards in front (page 97).

Multiple images and affects are implicated here, and actively cultivated by the wedding coordinator, the Bride, the Bride’s father, the photographer, and the Bridesmaids. Through these smooth but largely staged interactions, the photographer works to capture a genuine increase in positive affect (Lord, 2010: 90-93). In doing so, Rachel become ‘a vision’ – both in the moment, and as a captured image. Later, after the wedding is over and as she gets into bed with Will, Taylor images her own
wedding day through similar images that tie in with her expectations, experience and memory of the night. She

thinks about that breath-taking first moment – their breaths, seeing her – and what his vows will say, how he’ll wipe a well-timed tear and shake just a little taking the handwritten lines out of his pocket. The perfect spontaneity of the whole event, the kisses, dancing, cake (page 103).

It is through a series of images of herself as a Bride that Taylor is affected, and the affectivity of this imagined experience propels her imaginative daydream of the future. This experience (re)shapes her expectations and how she understands the power she has over her own (future and imagined) bridal experience.

_Affective Imaginations_

In Chapter Five, I work to actively engage the reader in this imaginative activity. Between Taylor and Will walking through the dining room section of the furniture displays, I use the narrator to speak directly to the reader. The narrator asks, ‘Now: do you buy a round or a rectangle dining table? The process is quite complex’ (page 110). The narrator weaves the reader through various options, weighing up how they would be in the real world outside the walls of the store, just as Taylor and Will do with one another. Finally, a positively affective choice manifests:

The most eye-catching table is on the right side of the path. A long, light timber piece with an ashy veneer that’s twice the width of most others. An entertainer. You can imagine the platters lining it and the guests all crowded around the edge, glasses full and the host (you), a delight (page 110).

Using this technique, I work to move the reader to imagine themselves possessing the table, mimicking the intended design of the store and engaging readers in Spinoza’s first kind of knowledge (IIP40S2). From this moment in the book in particular, I work to more actively engage the reader in sociological imagination more regularly and more affectively; engaging the reader in this particular way in this scene is intentional here and sets up the cultivation of sociological imagination that I discuss in Chapter 7 of this thesis.
In this scene I also work to show that affect is both pre-personal and a more-than-human process (see Lord, 2015); it is impacted by biosocial ecologies (Gilbert, 2014: 139-140) and actively crafted in various ways, including by our relation with other people, with food, and with space. For example, when Taylor goes to IKEA alone,

after work on school days when Will is late in the city or on weekends when he’s out with friends, doing the top floor is a different business… When Will is there they hold hands between mouthfuls and laugh at themselves eating here, laugh at how funny it is to eat meatballs and play in houses and how lovely and sweet the day. It’s a close and romantic thing. Without Will there are sticky tables and parents ignoring their children and wooden blocks on the floor and the food is colder and the din echoes, and you notice it. Will is a warm blanket and white noise and the rose tinting on her right-side-of-the-highway glasses (pages 112-113).

Taylor is affected differently in her various trips to IKEA, and she does not properly comprehend the cause or the nature of these passive affections (Lord, 2010: 69, 104); when she visits alone in particular, she feels a frustration and disengagement that is markedly different to when she shops with Will – that is, when the boundaries of her experience and considerations extend to include her partner as well as herself.

In Chapter Six, another plane disaster captivates Taylor and her friends while at a dinner party. Negative affects are moved by, and in turn moved through, images of the plane wreckage that have been circulating on the news. Again, as in Chapter Three, the characters do not actually watch these images on the screen. They all turn towards the TV when discussing the issue, but it is turned off. It draws their attention anyway. They know what's getting played underneath. The song changes in the background, a slow guitar strum to electric drums with a few seconds of heavy nothing between tracks. And they keep looking, for a moment, to the black rectangle like keeping the screen off will stop it from being real and the aircraft will only be there, a smouldering wreck, empty seats in a field, passports and blown open suitcases, if they dare press the button on the remote (page 122).
In Chapter Seven, I again emphasise the social nature of the affects, particularly how they are multiplicitous and changing (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 68, 73), in order to imbue the scene with a Spinozan poetic. At the end of the chapter, which is set on school camp, they hold a talent show. Why these moments are affective in these ways for the characters depends on cultural context, as I discuss in the following chapter. In this scene the changing affects reach a fever-pitch as the show, for these Australian characters, is a joyous ‘riot’:

Eighty percent of it is girls getting out nothing more than fits of contagious laughter… and [another performance] ends with Chase grabbing Mrs Davis’ legs under her chair, ninety children screaming as one in the dark… [the final group of the night] finish with a hand-on-heart delivery of four Peter Allen song lines they know from a Qantas ad that aired before they were born, closing their eyes for New York to Rio and old London town, despite few of them having folks who can afford an overseas holiday, and with no matter how far or how wide I roam, the whole full room double belts the final line, screaming the pitch out the second time. I still call Australia home. I still call Australia home (pages 139-140).

The final example I use here to illustrate this Spinozan poetic is the final scene in the novel, which is set just over a week after the end of Sydney Siege. In the bright sunlight of the afternoon, blue sky as usual with birds and occasional planes passing overhead, Martin Place heaves with people coming to leave flowers and see the flowers. News crews hold their territory. Politicians rotate through. People record it all and each other. Taylor and Will see the photos from home and decide to go tomorrow. Amongst the day, a car pulls up at the end of the street. A couple emerge, he in a sharp black suit and she head to toe in white, lips done and dark hair covered in a white headscarf, delicately adorned and veiled. They walk up the street with their photographer and wedding party. It’s a sight that parts the crowd. She is a vision. The couple pay tribute with all the other pilgrims, and the Bride bends down amongst the sea of flowers to leave her wedding bouquet. People standing in the place applaud collectively as the intensity of it moves them. Cameras capture the moment and there’s a flash of joy, a movement towards something different and
new. The space keeps becoming and bringing more flowers as well as holding bricks, blood, trauma, sirens, news crews, children, strangers, bodies, chocolates, and trains (pages 161).

In this excerpt, I work to enliven the four key concepts of Spinoza’s *Ethics* which I have engaged with in this chapter: relationality, affect, imagination and conatus. The crowd ‘applaud collectively’; there is an ‘intensity’ that ‘moves them,’ a ‘flash of joy’ and an idea of ‘becoming’; the Bride is ‘a vision’ in the crowd and cameras capture the moment; and from these there is a change of capacity, a ‘movement towards being something different and new’ that emerges through the scene.

Throughout these eight scenes and the novel as a whole, by engaging these particular Spinozan concepts and vocabulary I work to create a Spinozan poetic. By doing this I aim to enliven a Spinozist way of thinking in the novel that meaningfully contributes to and helps enliven sociological imagination. Through this poetic, I aim to show how Spinoza’s philosophy – and sociological imagination – is an ‘activity’ (Lord, 2010: 11).

**Spinoza vs. Neoliberalism**

I have explored and applied Spinoza’s *Ethics* in the same spirit as Gatens and Lloyd (1999: 8) throughout this project; in ‘putting Spinoza’s philosophy to work’ I too aim to ‘pay him the tribute of continuing an activity which is in the spirit of his own intellectual conatus – an activity of informed philosophical imagination, at the service of social critique.’ I have developed a Spinozan poetic throughout *Into the Sea* to enliven sociological imagination that may critique and respond to the neoliberal imaginary. As I discussed in the previous chapter, neoliberalism works to dislocate, segment and striate the public sphere (Gilbert, 2014: 46), hindering the agency of social collectives (Gilbert, 2014: 46; Masquelier, 2017: 71, 99, 203-207). Centring individual freedom of choice in such a way that this freedom becomes ‘inevitably tied to capitalism’ (Braedley and Luxton, 2010: 7), competitive individualism is ‘enabled and enforced by the logic of capitalist social relations’ (Gilbert, 2014: 30). The dominant form of neoliberal ‘common sense’ (Connell, 2010: 22; Gilbert, 2014: 30; Ronda Varona, 2014: xiii) sees that the social world is comprised of independent individuals who exist in competition with one another. At Gilbert (2014: 32) argues, this carries a number of implications including that ‘social relations are things that
happen to individuals rather than things which actually define their identity and the co-ordinates of their existence.’ Further, the neoliberal imaginary progresses the notion that social issues may (only) be addressed through individual action; individuals have a responsibility to be fit for competition, or be proactive against personal troubles, and exercise their freedom to advance themselves in the market and thereby entrepreneurially overcome social issues. In this chapter I detailed how I have used the *Ethics* to construct a Spinozan poetic in *Into the Sea*, with which I consider the concept of and conditions for a society that operates through principles of relationality rather than neoliberal notions of individualism and competition.

As discussed, my Spinozan approach centres relationality, affect, imagination, and conatus. I understand individuality and the social world in relational terms, and have focused on the significance of different kinds of embodied knowledge for developing this relational understanding of the social. Spinoza argues that by engaging with these ways of knowing, we may increase our personal and collective capacities for self-determination and well-being. I briefly overview the key concepts I have discussed in this chapter again here before turning to their particular value for ‘articulating alternative ways of conceiving of minds and bodies, of individuals and collectives, and of human power, freedom and responsibility’ (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 1) outside the scope of the novel’s poetic, but within the sociological tradition and against the neoliberal imaginary.

Regarding relationality, Spinoza essentially argues that we do not just have but rather are our relationships. This is in a constitutive sense; we exist as one kind of individual, or one composite grouping of physical material similar to the groupings found throughout Nature (IIL1-L7; Deleuze, 1988: 76-78; Lord, 2010: 49-50, 60-64), and exist with an infinite multitude of other individual composite bodies which we are sustained by and dependant upon, such as chemicals, food, solar systems and other people (IIPost1-6; Lord, 2010: 8, 62). This constitutive ‘process of relation’ which collapses discrete individuality ‘calls into question the existence of boundaries between individual things’ (Williams, 2015: 16). Connected to this is the concept of affect. Spinoza understands affects as the ‘affections of the body’ or the body’s changing power to act (Lord, 2010: 85), which is impacted either by wanting to act or by being acted upon (IIID3). A social, physical and psychological experience (Gilbert, 2014: 145-146), affect is not a ‘sentiment’ but an ‘intensity’ (Massumi,
2004: xvii) concerning ‘what a body can do and what it can undergo’ (Protevi, 2011: 393). The collective or social body (Lord, 2010: 62-63) is central to understanding the power and capacities humans have, and affect therefore extends ‘beyond corporeal embodiment’ (Williams, 2010: 245).

Relationality and affect is linked to how ‘human knowledge is embodied knowledge and different ways of knowing always imply correlative ways of being’ (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 107). Spinoza interrogates the capacities for knowledge that human beings have in order to consider how kinds of knowledge may help increase our individual and collective well-being, power and freedom. In doing this Spinoza outlines three different kinds of knowledge (IIP40) which he terms imagination, reason, and intuition. These are linked and should ‘not be understood in purely cognitive terms’ (Gatens, 2009: 6). Spinoza’s imagination (IIP40S2) includes ‘experiencing, reflecting … representing, fictionalising and every other activity based on experience’ (Lord, 2010: 68). The various processes of thinking about images or traces of experiences is what Spinoza terms imagination (Lord, 2010: 68). This imagination is linked to the affects, as affects are the varying intensities of thinking/feeling and acting that we move through circa our experiences. Spinoza’s reason is a form of ‘adequate knowledge,’ as it is through reason that we adequately understand reality (Gatens, 2009: 6). Whereas imagination shows us the world as we experience it via our senses (Lord, 2010: 150), with reason we construct and understand the common notions of the things we experience and imagine via, for example, mathematics and the sciences. With reason we better understand the relationships between cause and effect outside our sensory imagination of these relations, including of ourselves and the affects (Gatens, 2009: 6). Spinoza’s third kind of knowledge is intuition, an ontologically-uniting understanding of the ‘essence of things’ (IIP40S2); knowledge develops in a complex and relational continuum from imagination and reason (Donovan, 2009: 175; Gatens, 2009: 6) into what Deleuze calls ‘the intuitive intellect’ (1988: 58). More than seeing bodies as existing in relation, as ontologically discrete categories, with intuition we see bodies as monist in their relationality or being of the same ontological category. As such we may comprehend Spinoza’s ontological argument through the epistemological labour he outlines, and this ‘third kind’ of knowledge involves coming to an understanding of Spinoza’s monist ontology, which is ‘the mind’s greatest virtue’ (IIP25) and a source of active joy (IIP27). These knowledges connect to our well-being and power as
through reason and working to better understand our own nature and Being, Spinoza sees that we may become less passive and subject to negative affects (see Lord, 2010: 104).

In the *Ethics*, Spinoza seeks to increase our understanding of our own world and personal desires so we may engage with experiencing positive affects and become more active in life. Spinoza engages his concerns for self-determination and freedom through the connection between a thing’s Being and its essence as ‘conatus’ or the ‘striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being’ (EIIIIP7; Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 13). Affect, bodies, imagination and knowledge are together grounded in this ‘endeavour or struggle to persist in being’ (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 26). The conatus ‘unifies affects and imagination’ (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 26) and bodies ‘struggle, of their very nature, to persist in being’ (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 27). As such, ‘the power to imagine is thus integral to the continued existence and thriving of the individual’ (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 27). Importantly, these epistemological and ontological conceptions of knowledges are not individualistic in nature. In different ways, imagination, reason and intuition are grounded in social relations – these are not independent ways of knowing that individuals alone strive to develop. Spinozan knowledge in each of its kinds is fundamentally social and relational. Further, Spinozist conceptions of self-determination and freedom spring from this unification of knowledge, affect and power. This Spinozist conception usefully correlates with sociological understandings of agency, particularly of the social constitution of agency, and presents a robust challenge to the neoliberal view of freedom which I explored in Chapter 5 of this thesis. An individual’s capacity for self-preservation, and for a full and dynamic engagement with life, is connected to how we imagine and know the social world as well as ourselves and our experiences.

With these key concepts from the *Ethics*, and how I have employed them to construct a Spinozan poetic in *Into the Sea*, I have worked to consider a Spinozan conception of the social that may be valuable for public sociology. As I highlighted in the previous chapter, I have done this in response to key questions that Gane (2014b) raises. Following a discussion of sociology and the development of neoliberalism, he asks,

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24I again use individual here in the Spinozan sense meaning an individual body; the Spinozan body is not restricted to a single human as is common usage but is also conceptually applicable to social bodies as distinct individual composite groupings. A community is an individual composite grouping of multiple humans as a human being is an individual composite grouping of multiple organs, et cetera.
What remains sacred in the face of the on-going marketization of society and culture? What is left of the social in a world in which market forces appear to be triumphant? Is there a conceptual definition or empirical form of the social that sociologists should seek to (re-)animate or defend? (Gane, 2014b: 1105).

In Chapter 5 I analysed ways that the competitive individualism of the neoliberal imaginary is legitimised, as well as how I constructed the aesthetic form of Into the Sea with this analysis. By focusing on ‘the actions of individuals’ (Gane, 2014b: 1102) and remaining ‘hostile to the very idea of “society”’ (Burawoy, 2004: 7), the neoliberal imaginary challenges the conceptual foundations that sociology is founded upon. In this chapter I have worked to enliven a relational and affect-centred understanding of the social world via Spinoza’s work that meaningfully contrasts to the individualistic and competitive conceptions that neoliberalism is grounded in (see Gane, 2014b: 1104). The Ethics provides a progressive and robust ontological and epistemological conception of Being that centres upon the social whilevaluably extending beyond human experience. The relational monism of the Ethics as I see it complements and extends this conceptual foundation of sociology that the neoliberal imaginary challenges.

**Beyond Theory**

I have employed fiction writing to understand and enliven key concepts of the Ethics in my novel, in order to explore what a Spinozist sociological imagination may look like. Drawing on the particular vocabulary of the Ethics and constructing literary devices around the discussed key concepts, I crafted a Spinozan poetic in Into the Sea. This poetic is in tension with the neoliberal aesthetic of the novel. I aim to draw attention to both the everyday workings of the neoliberal imaginary and the conceptual potential of Spinozist thought by variously employing this aesthetic and poetic throughout the story. I have drawn on Spinozist concepts which have implications for how we may theorise ‘the social’ to challenge the competitive individualism of the neoliberal imaginary in the novel, in response to Gane’s (2014b: 1105) question concerning a ‘conceptual definition… of the social that sociologists should seek to (re-)animate or defend.’ Considering how and why to engage people in sociological imagination, I use this poetic to allow a more relational conception of
individuality to emerge through the story and bring an ontological significance to ‘the social.’

This poetic extends the imaginative scope of the novel’s sociology from a primary focus on biography-history relations to also concern relationality, affect, agency and imagination itself. These concepts usefully contribute to the development and application of sociological imagination, especially as Spinoza’s understanding of imagination ties into rethinking ‘the autonomous individual in a way that adequately incorporates recognition of the irreducibly social character of selves’ (Armstrong, 2009: 45). As Armstrong (2009: 60) argues, the Ethics ‘transforms our understanding of social embeddedness… the Spinozist individual is inseparable from her relations with surrounding others.’ By enlivening these Spinozan notions of relationality, affect, imagination and conatus within a wider sociological frame in Into the Sea, I consider how sociological imagination may better grapple with the ways that ‘individual striving for self-empowerment or autonomy implies and requires the empowerment and increasing autonomy of others’ (Armstrong, 2009: 61). Into the Sea is not a narrative rendering of Spinoza’s ontological arguments nor does it deliver arguments concerning empowerment and autonomy via the medium of the novel. I use Into the Sea to consider these concepts and introduce a relational way of thinking, via the novel’s poetic, that challenges the individualistic common sense that dominates the novel-world and social world of the novel’s (imagined) readers. Spinoza’s work ‘contains a powerful alternative to a tradition of “abstract individualism” that has tended to confuse autonomy with atomic isolation’ (Armstrong, 2009: 45). I have used the Ethics in writing the novel to enliven sociological imagination and in service of my critique of the neoliberal imaginary.

F.A. Hayek, a foundational theorist within neoliberal thought, recognises the individual, the family and other groups like ‘linguistic or religious communities’ as ‘legitimate’ social units, however only as these exist in minority status in size or characteristic (1976 [1949]: 41). Hayek notably stops short of recognising larger civic society as a legitimate unit. Thatcher’s infamous claim that society does not exist is reasoned through this Hayekian neoliberal perspective (Hall, 2017: 283). This claim is not necessarily a denial of the existence of social groups or nation-states, but rather is the argument that meaningful connections do not extend for individuals beyond their immediate relationships. In a world ontologically dominated by competitive
individualism, where it can be argued that society does not meaningfully exist, individuals have no responsibilities outside their ‘close-up scenes’ (Mills, 1959: 3). With such a view it is perhaps unsurprising that Hayek feels that it is beside the point whether power is used to cultivate equality or inequality (see 1976 [1949]: 30). Hayek progresses the neoliberal argument about the conditions of competition for individual freedom (see Braedley and Luxton, 2010: 8; Hayek, 1976 [1949]: 30; Munck, 2005: 65), which implies that the successful intertwining of capitalism and democracy requires that the state must not interfere with outcomes of the market, for freedom’s sake. Hayek claims that these conditions are essential not only for functional social success but for achieving greater human freedom and for the universal development of humankind (1976 [1949]: 30-32).

The Ethics (2005 [1677]) presents a different freedom. For Spinoza, freedom is not the opportunity to do or choose as one pleases. This common conception of freedom is individualistic and arguably framed by deist tradition (see Bowler, 1989: 100; Morrison Ravven 2009: 128). Spinoza’s freedom, maturing through his epistemological labour and refutation of moralistic theism and individualism (Gatens, 2009: 7), concerns collectivity and the freedom of active self-determination. Spinoza sees that people have the capacity for reason and intuition, or knowing the relational nature of Being. This is despite the fact that our everyday experiences and actions are shaped by turbulent affects and inadequate ideas. Rather than being active, in Spinoza’s view these kinds of affects and ideas makes people passive in life (IIID2-3). Even though we may be acting and making choices, the cause of this choice-making and action is rooted in affective and imaginative experiences which we are passive actors within, which then lead to further passive or negative affects that diminish our conatus and processes of reasoning and intuition. Passive affects hinder an individual’s movement beyond individualistic and theistic understandings of existence, and thus compels people to behave against personal and common interest. Adequate knowledge of the affects, rather than freedom from them, is ‘the key to active self-determination’ (Armstrong, 2009: 57). For Spinoza, ‘the freedom of individuals is expressed through their ability to understand the causes through which they are determined to act’ (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 117). It is via ‘critical reflection upon the imagination and affects’ that passivity is transformed into activity, and ‘reaction into action,’ and that individuals may ‘become the cause of their own actions’ (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 117). In Armstrong’s (2009: 57) words, ‘we
become more autonomous’ when we better understand the causes ‘of what we do and feel.’ As opposed to the neoliberal ‘freedom of consumer choice’ (Crouch, 2017: 206), which in the Spinozan view can be seen as irrational and passive, as we make these consumer choices affected by images and other bodies, Spinoza’s freedom of self-determination concerns better understanding that which affects us and shapes our imagination (Lord, 2010: 134). As Lord (2010: 134) summarises,

The free person understands rationally and acts virtuously. She is not led to act by the pleasures of the moment (P62) or by fear (P63). When faced with ethical problems, she weighs up goods and evils to determine which is best: she follows the greater of two goods or the lesser of two evils (P65)... The rational person understands that it is better for her to live in a state and abide by its laws than to live in solitude (P73). She strives to increase the rationality of others, so they live according to the command of their own reason, and not according to the forces of superstition (IV App. IX).

Rather than the power to engage in choice-making, Spinoza’s freedom lies in the power to understand and better control what affects us and our choices. This Spinozist freedom of self-determination involves ‘remedying our passivity’ by ‘coming to understand the causes of our emotions and actions’ (Armstrong, 2009: 57); ‘we become more autonomous’ when we understand our own nature and cease acting only in response to externally-affected ‘appetites, motivation, and emotions’ (Armstrong, 2009: 57). Spinoza’s freedom is not market freedom, material freedom, or freedom of consumer choice. Spinozan freedom concerns the self-determination that arises from knowledge of monist relationality, and offers us control over moralistic ignorance. For Spinoza it is rational empowering knowledge and positive active affects, with which we may understand our existence as relational and our selves as self-determining in our experience of Being, that makes us humanly free. With Spinozan freedom we understand our nature and engage with adequate ideas so our lives may be intentionally lived with communities that are actively bounded by affects of joy – not antagonistically, passively, indebtedly, or ignorantly bound. Spinoza affirms this self-determination as human freedom while repudiating the ‘free will’ type freedom of choice (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 2) that is today venerated in the neoliberal imaginary (Crouch, 2017: 206). This approach to freedom conceptually opens ‘the
relations between individual and collective responsibility’ (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 2). Further, it arguably provides foundations for ‘new formulations of egalitarian ideals’ that may be ‘grounded in the recognition of differences between the powers of socialised bodies, rather than the transcendence of difference’ (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 2) – as opposed to the transcendence of social inequalities that the “blind” neoliberal market purportedly offers entrepreneurial individuals the opportunity to achieve.

These conflicting conceptualisations of human freedom may seem beyond the scope of my central research question or beside the point of the central story in the novel. *Into the Sea* is not a tale of Taylor Brown’s grand struggle for freedom. She is not in crisis, existentially or otherwise, nor battling against the odds for more power or control within a system that dramatically hinders her. Ideas of freedom however do lie at the heart of the neoliberal imaginary and Spinoza’s *Ethics*, and Taylor is concerned with both making the “right” choices and better understanding why she feels, acts and exists in certain ways. Her list-writing practice, which I discussed in Chapter 4, also reveals an interior tension that Taylor experiences between the neoliberal imaginary and more relational understandings of the social, which I similarly work to highlight on a larger scale via the aesthetic and poetic of *Into the Sea*. This poetic and aesthetic shapes the lists that Taylor writes. I modelled Taylor’s *Good, Bad and Change* lists on Spinoza’s prime manifestations of affect: joy, sorrow and desire (IIIP11S).

In these lists Taylor writes about a variety of experiences ranging from her desire to become engaged to Will (page 79), dealing with the loss of Sam (page 60), and her brother’s mental health issues (page 135). In these lists Taylor explores her personal troubles; as discussed, these troubles and her imagined solutions to them are consistently framed as individualistic in nature. Taylor embodies the neoliberal imaginary. She conceptually internalises the competitive individualism that neoliberalism works to frame social issues with (Gilbert, 2014: 45-47), and actualises this thinking in her everyday life as she works on self-care and entrepreneurial strategies (Brown, 2006: 694) to overcome personal troubles and positively progress her biography-in-the-making. She often sees that these personal matters may be addressed through her own choices, even when she does identify wider social problems that connect to her own experiences (Mills, 1959: 8).
However, the form that these lists take – being structured around Good or joy, Bad or sorrow, and Change or desire – means that Taylor is in effect not only reflecting upon what is good or bad in her life but also upon her own understanding of these good and bad things; she is working to apply reason to understand what she imagines and affectively experiences. As Spinoza discusses in the Ethics, in doing this Taylor is interrogating her own knowledge and experience in order to increase her individual well-being, power and freedom. Deciding to keep a journal for the year, Taylor thinks about the ‘better woman she might be’ (page 52), though this practice also concerns ‘thinking life through a little more just by pausing to write a bit of it down’ (page 64). Her list writing practice is couched within a neoliberal notion of individual progress and self-development, but at the same time concerns the ‘virtue’ of seeking self-understanding and self-determination that Spinoza is centrally concerned with in the Ethics (Lord, 2010: 139-140). She is at once acting as a neoliberal subject and with Spinoza’s virtue.

I do not aim to suggest with this list-writing practice that Spinozan freedom and neoliberal freedom are ontologically compatible, or that Spinozan virtue may be achieved via competitive individualism. Rather, through the literary device of Taylor’s list-writing practice I explore the tensions between individualistic and relational understandings of the social that arise through an individual’s reflexive engagement in processes of biographical enactment and their conatus – the lived everyday complexities (cf. Back, 2015) of the human efforts ‘by which each thing strives to persevere in its being’ (EIIIP7; Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 13). As such, Taylor’s list-writing practice is one device with which I aim to progress Spinoza’s arguments “beyond theory,” by considering how affect, bodies, imagination and knowledge may be together grounded in ‘the endeavour or struggle to persist in being’ (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 26) as an everyday social practice. Through Taylor I have worked to understand how ‘the power to imagine is thus integral to the continued existence and thriving of the individual’ (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 27), and determine what this means for activities of sociological imagination that concern contemporary frames of mind which lead to ‘uneasiness and indifference’ (Mills 1959: 12-13). While Taylor does not fully or intentionally develop her reason towards intuition, she is applying reason to better understand her own nature and, as Spinoza argues, to become less passive and subject to negative affects (see Lord, 2010: 104).
This passivity and the negative affects that Taylor experiences include the uneasiness and indifference that Mills discusses throughout *The Sociological Imagination* (1959).

Public malaise, uneasiness and indifference may be heightened in the neoliberal imaginary. While Mills (1959: 131) argues that one of the sociologist’s roles is to ‘translate’ vague uneasiness into specific personal troubles, an individual’s understanding of sociological knowledge is arguably not enough to relieve what Bauman calls the double bind of ignorance and impotence (Bauman et al., 2014: 11), nor is it enough to sway feelings of resignation concerning action and inaction with regards to social issues. I aim for *Into the Sea* to engage readers in sociological imagination, and I see that this style of public sociology may help people toward raising critical questions about social life more generally as well as about their own experiences.

Through creating *Into the Sea* however I have also considered the limitations of this kind of engagement for cultivating social action and remedying this problematic impotence, which sociological knowledge can be presumed to lead to (Glenn, 2009: 144-145). I see that sociological imagination is crucial for attending to issues of agency in social ways, however comprehending sociological perspectives is not in itself enough to cultivate the action required to transform indifference into active involvement. Further, engaging with concepts such as Spinozan relationality, affect, imagination and conatus are valuable for extending the scope or focus of sociological imagination, especially when critically countering the ‘dominant assumptions of contemporary Western thought’ (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 1) including the individualistic “common sense” of the neoliberal imaginary. However, these Spinozan concepts also remain abstract outside specific sociocultural contexts. Spinoza’s *Ethics* does usefully contribute to conceptions of ‘social embeddedness’ (Armstrong, 2009: 60), and with this we may better explore how to conceive individual autonomy in relational ways (Armstrong, 2009: 45). Usefully for sociology, with Spinoza we may also better ontologically conceptualise how the ‘individual striving for self-empowerment or autonomy implies and requires the empowerment and increasing autonomy of others’ (Armstrong, 2009: 61). This sociological value is in part because the *Ethics*, as noted, parallels’ Mills biography- and history-making notions: Spinoza’s work can be understood as ‘a method of understanding what one is on the basis of one’s past’ as well as ‘what one may
become on a basis of an increase in the knowledge of one’s powers and capacities’ (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 179).

As I emphasised in this chapter, I see that Spinoza’s notions of relationality, affect, imagination and conatus are valuable for understanding power, agency and freedom in ‘alternative ways’ (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 1) from a sociological perspective. Considering the project of public sociology however, as with Mills’ sociological imagination, engagement with these Spinozan concepts may not cultivate action out of indifference without being embedded within an affectively meaningful context. Removed from cultural context and meaning, such concepts remain abstract and intangible. The affectivity of sociocultural context and cultural meaning is central for connecting the importance of (re)conceptualising the social to the activity of sociological imagination. Building from illustrating, contextualising and enlivening a Spinozan sociological imagination in the novel, against the neoliberal imaginary, from here I consider how the novel may cultivate this kind of imagination with a reader by engaging particular cultural forms of meaning-making and crafting qualities of verisimilitude and affectivity.
Chapter 7: Verisimilitude, Cultural Meaning and Affectivity

*Into the Sea* is a particularly Australian narrative. I intentionally play with kitsch ‘Australiana’ throughout the story: forms of material and non-material culture that are uniquely and stereotypically Australian, often circulated with irony or in an intentionally heightened way that plays on nostalgia and sentimentality (see Khamis, 2003: 122). Gum trees, beaches, youth, masculinity, beer, magpies, domesticity, suburbanism, whiteness, and heat saturate the story. As I discuss in this chapter, I have engaged these cultural forms in *Into the Sea* to consider the role of cultural meaning in approaches to public sociology, especially for creative or arts-based approaches as I have taken in this project. I have also engaged these kitsch, ironic, nostalgic and sentimental forms of Australiana to cultivate verisimilitude and affectivity with the novel. That is, in the novel I employ and exaggerate forms of white, upper-middle class, patriarchal and heteronormative Australiana that were prominent in my autoethnographic research to engage (imagined) readers, position the novel within a wider tradition of nationalistic cultural critique, and open for questioning these forms of cultural meaning in a contemporary context. As I detail throughout this chapter, I have aimed to (re)construct a cultural context in the novel-world which reflects my autoethnographic recordings, while depicting this through a sociological lens that opens these forms to critique.

I employ these tropes of cultural meaning in a way that meshes with the sociological and Spinozan literary elements in *Into the Sea*, thereby creating a stylistic vector through which sociocultural elements may be critically explored in and with the novel. These elements include the neoliberal imaginary, as discussed in Chapter 5, and the forms of Australian culture that I discuss in this chapter. I do this to cultivate sociological imagination with readers, by crafting a moving yet critical realism with the novel that engages readers in the activity of sociological imagination. Regarding my central research question – how may we engage people in sociological imagination (and why should we)? – in this chapter I consider the value of engaging cultural meaning in arts-based public sociology, as well as the function of the overall novel product. I consider the sociology of time and space as well as Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of chronotope, or literary time-space configurations, in relation to cultural meaning. Through this concept I explore the issue of verisimilitude in arts-based research and argue how *Into the Sea* achieves this artistic criteria. Finally, I explore the function of affect in creative public sociology. Doing this I draw on Kloepfer’s
(1987) theory of sympraxis, and I raise introductory sociology courses as an intended space for Into the Sea. I show how pedagogy has informed my approach to affect and sociological imagination, as well as the design of the novel.

Time, Space, and Time Space

Despite arguments that the concept of time has largely been neglected in social theory (see Giddens, 1984), sociologists have explored time in various ways. Focusing on social change, capitalist structures, “traditional” societies, rituals, religions, and the concept of the everyday, the temporal elements of social life permeate much social and cultural research (see Pronovost, 1989: 4-18). Considering the relationship between time and space – in order to focus on cultural meaning through chronotopes in the novel – I see that qualitative frameworks of social- or collective-time, through which the heterogeneity of temporalities may be approached (see Cipriani, 2013; May and Thrift, 2001: 2; Sibeon, 2004: 154), are valuable for understanding cultural forms and structures of cultural meaning. As Hassard (1990: 3) defines it, ‘collective-time is the sum of the temporal procedures which interlock to form the cultural rhythm of a given society.’ Taking a Durkheimian view, Hassard (1990: 3) elaborates that ‘time is derived from social life and becomes the subject of collective representations.’ In Durkheim’s (1976: 69) own words, this concerns how ‘the rhythm of collective life dominates and encompasses the varied rhythms of all the elementary lives from which it results,’ and in turn ‘the time that is expressed dominates and encompasses all particular durations.’ While Durkheim’s conception of social time is grounded in a contested ontological view that draws on Spencerian and Cartesian notions of social evolution, essential dualisms and “primitive” societal species (see Corning, 1982; Lehmann, 1993: 17-19), his ideas shape many sociological approaches to the construction and function of temporalities in the everyday and longue durée (Prasad, 2018: 208-209). The ‘plethora of temporal activities’ (Hassard, 1990: 3) that make up social life is (re)shaped into an overall cultural rhythm (see Pronovost, 1986) through which time is qualified and takes on particular meanings. Sociological approaches to temporality such as these inform how I understand and explore cultural meaning in Into the Sea through Bakhtin’s chronotopes (1981: 84).

Sociological approaches to spatiality are also central to my understanding and application of Bakhtin in the novel. A concern with the ‘material schematism’ of space (Thrift, 2006: 139), or space as the ‘contours of social reality’ (Smith and Katz,
has emerged in various disciplines from critical geography to information theory and across feminist, post-structuralist and post-colonial approaches to the social. Many sociologists, notably including Shields (2003: 1), work to remap and rewrite classic sociological schemas to better consider spatiality. Despite the ‘de-spatialized’ history of the discipline (Shields, 2003: 1), Löw (2016: 4) argues that sociological research ‘cannot do without the concept of space.’ Conceptualising spatiality however involves more than ‘being clear about the locational specificity’ of research or simply ‘recognising that the world is inevitably and irretrievably spatial and that makes a difference’ (Massey, 1999: 11). Valuable recent approaches that do engage with space in the vein that Massey (1999) argues for include Thrift’s (2006) conception of spatiality through ‘being with,’ ‘affecting,’ and ‘organising’ others, Nowak and Bennett’s (2014) work on everyday sound environments that draws together space, time and body, and Law and Urry’s (2004) work on the methodological implications and ontological politics that arise from such (re)conceptualisations of temporal and spatial elements. Löw (2016: 105) sees that research that does not engage with space in this way, and instead renders space ‘immobile and removed from the context of action’ as ‘a fixed, rigid plane on or in front of which moving action takes place,’ is problematic. This is because it largely fails to consider how ‘the development of spaces is itself an aspect of social processes’ (Löw, 2016: 105). This echoes Massey’s (1999: 11) point that, especially in sociology, spatial ‘rhetoric is everywhere; the content is more elusive.’ As Lefebvre (2014: 289) acknowledges however, the notion of space as a social product is analytically difficult due to ‘the real and formal complexity’ that the notion connotes. In the following section, I employ Bakhtin’s (1981) concept of the chronotope to work through this complexity, and bring together these sociological understandings of temporality and spatiality in key scenes of the novel.

An important development in sociological explorations of temporality and spatiality that do grapple with the complexity Lefebvre (2014) discusses is the fusion of time and space, as time-space, in conceptual and material senses. Giddens (1984) notably approached this task in developing structuration theory. Giddens sees that, rather than the ‘experience of the individual actor’ which interpretative sociologies privilege, or the ‘existence of any form of social totality’ that functionalist and structuralist approaches centre, the ‘basic domain of study of the social sciences’ is in fact ‘social
practices ordered across time and space’ (1984: 2). Giddens’ structuration theory centres the ‘situated activities of human agents, reproduced across time and space’ (1984: 25). Doing this, Giddens conceptualises the context of these ordered practices or activities as time-space (1984: 3). He conceives time-space as context in this way to highlight the ‘duality of structure’ and progress the binary dualism of agency-structure debates, emphasising that ‘structure is not “external to individuals”’ (Giddens, 1984: 25). While Giddens does work to ontologically ground his structuration theory in the idea that time-space is ‘constitutive of social practices’ (1984: 3), the particular language Giddens uses to conceive of time-space as the context of social practices does make the work open to Löw’s (2016: 105) critique – Giddens arguably sees social practices as occurring across the immobile planes of time and space, rather than with and through them dynamically.

May and Thrift (2001), in TimeSpace: Geographies of Temporality, a collection that notably drops the hyphen that Giddens uses to bring together (or separate) time and space, critique the way that Giddens and others have ‘generally failed to acknowledge the extent to which time is irrevocably bound up with the spatial constitution of society (and vice versa)’ (2001: 3), despite efforts to achieve otherwise. Seeking to better engage the dynamism and interdependency of time and space as TimeSpace, May and Thrift draw on various concepts including routines (2001: 14-16), compressions (2001: 17-19), rhizomes (2001: 25-26), and rhythm (2001: 30-33). Mike Crang (2001), writing in May and Thrift’s edited collection, takes on this Lefebvrian focus of rhythm in exploring time and space as ‘temporalised space’ (2001: 206) in urban life. He also works to avoid ‘static representations’ of space and time, and opens up more dynamic conceptions through notions of haunting, difference, events, pluralities and ‘fractured virtualities’ (Crang, 2001: 207). Interestingly, in setting up his engagement with these notions Crang explores the ‘differences between lived and represented times’ (2001: 187) while also noting the importance of considering ‘the topology and texture of temporality in the urban fabric, the city as well as its people’ (2001: 188). Concerning the city, Crang speaks to the trope of the “time bind” in science fiction cities and “datascapes” (2001: 188), as well as in sociological accounts of ‘dense urban life’ by theorists like Simmel and Tönnies (Crang, 2001: 188-189). Doing this Crang briefly engages Bakhtin’s concept of chronotope. Crang defines this as a ‘unifying or typifying relationship of time and space in novels’ (2001: 188). Referencing Thrift, Crang considers the ‘long exposure
shot of headlights forming blurred streaking lights’ as ‘the clichéd picture of the city, perhaps its chronotope par excellence’ (2001: 188).

Nick Prior (2011), exploring ways of approaching museums and cities as ‘urban-museological relations’ with reference to time-space and rhythm analysis (2011: 197), also draws on Simmel’s and Tönnies’ work on urban modernity and speed, as well as Bakhtin’s notion of chronotope (Prior, 2001: 199). Prior too sees that space is ‘embedded in social relations’ (2011: 198) and, in a more dynamic way than Giddens, explicitly argues that space is ‘not a neutral backdrop… but is part and parcel of the unfolding of social relations’ (2011: 198-199). Discussing ‘the motif of “speedup”’ in urban studies, Prior applies chronotope to explore how pace operates in conceptions of ‘modernization and its time-space quotient’ (2011: 199). He sees that chronotopical framing may be used to understand ‘how metaphorically saturated conceptions of time and space are shaped in concrete historical settings and transmitted through narrative forms such as writing’ (Prior, 2011: 200). Valuably, Prior also argues that the concept may ‘be addressed to narratives of modernization in which certain places get associated with certain speeds’ (2011: 200); he contrasts how slowness and rapidity are commonly associated with rural villages and the city respectively, to highlight how narratives and imaginaries are also actively shaped through dynamic time-space relations. These understandings of the co-constructive relations of time-space, social relations, imaginaries and narratives inform how I have explored and employed chronotopes throughout Into the Sea.

**Chronotopes and Cultural Meaning**

Bakhtin (1981: 84) progresses the concept of chronotope – ‘literally, “time space”’ – to consider the ‘intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature.’ He draws this from Einstein’s work, which employs the notion of space-time, but borrows the concept ‘almost, but not entirely’ as a metaphor (Bakhtin, 1981: 84). Bakhtin emphasises that ‘what counts’ is that this concept ‘expresses the inseparability of space and time’ (1981: 84). Focusing specifically on the chronotope as a ‘formally constitutive category of literature,’ Bakhtin explains that,

in the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes
charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This
intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic
chronotope (1981: 84).

As Ganser, Pühringer and Rheindorf (2006: 2) summarise,
the chronotope operates on two important levels: first, as the means by
which a text represents history [a particular time space]; and second, as the
relation between images of time and space in the text, out of which any
representation of history must be constructed.

This spatial and temporal fusion is not only bound up within the confines of the novel,
nor the independent artistic working of the author’s imagination. Bakhtin sees that
this way of conceiving time space is not a transcendental abstracted approach
(Bakhtin, 1981: 85; Bemong and Borghart, 2010: 4); the chronotope is not a tool for
conceptually moving beyond how humans distinctly experience time versus space, but
rather concerns the artistic visualisation of immediate realities. Time and space
‘constitute a fundamental unity’ in the novel as well as ‘in the human perception of
everyday reality’ (Bemong and Borghart, 2010: 3). As such, a ‘literary work’s artistic
unity in relationship to an actual reality is defined by its chronotope’ (Bakhtin, 1981:
243). Through this concept Bakhtin shows how ‘literature can help us to appreciate
the fact that, in the course of cultural history, transformations of time concepts and
spatial representations reflect radical changes in cultural attitudes and lived
experience’ (Bemong et al., 2010: iii).

While Bakhtin begins by claiming that ‘in literature the primary category in
the chronotope is time’ (1981: 85), I argue that he does this to emphasise rather than
privilege temporality; Bakhtin repeatedly notes that ‘in literature and art itself,
temporal and spatial determinations are inseparable from one another’ (1981: 243). In
some chronotopes, ‘time takes precedence over space’ and in others ‘space dominates
time’ (Ganser, Pühringer and Rheindorf, 2006: 2); what constitutes a particular
chronotope is the ways that spatial and temporal elements come together and intersect
within a text. Bakhtin presents the concept within a broader consideration of historical
poetics to consider ‘the problem of assimilating historical reality into the poetic
image’ (1981: 251) – reality qualitatively concerning not only space but time – and
the way that narrative and plot are constructed as meaningful in the medium of the
novel. He is concerned with how time and space are dually materialised through literary renderings, and how through the chronotope ‘the knots of narrative are tied and untied’ (Bakhtin, 1981: 250). Chronotopes are ‘the organising centres for the fundamental narrative events of the novel… it can be said without qualification that to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative’ (Bakhtin, 1981: 250). Like the way that May and Thrift (2001), and Giddens (1984) to an arguably less dynamic extent, see that time and space are bound up in the constitution of society and peoples’ social practices, Bakhtin’s use of the chronotope highlights how time space is ‘tantamount to the world construction that is at the base of every narrative text’ (Bemong and Borghart, 2001: 3).

Chronotopes have been diversely explored, with various levels of abstraction (see Bemong and Borghart, 2001: 5-6). This seems in part due to the multiple examples of chronotopic forms that Bakhtin (1981) outlines; the concept is open to interpretation and extrapolation. One element which has prominently emerged in literary theory is Bakhtin’s argument that ‘the chronotope in literature has an intrinsic generic significance,’ in that it is arguably chronotopic forms that define ‘genre and generic distinctions’ (1981: 84-85). This focus may be particularly valuable for exploring sociological fiction as a literary genre. However, as this project overall takes a public sociology approach rather than a literary studies one, I instead focus on how ‘the novel’s abstract elements – philosophical and social generalizations, ideas, analyses of cause and effect’ are realised through particular chronotopes (Bakhtin, 1981: 250), as well as how chronotopes ‘are always coloured by emotions and values’ (Bakhtin, 1981: 243). In line with the theoretical framework I have employed throughout this exegetical analysis, I approach these emotions and values that colour chronotopes as affects and cultural meanings. I have engaged with chronotope in Into the Sea by considering how particular scenes may bring to life the ideas I have discussed in the previous chapters, such as biographical enactment (Chapter 4) and a Spinozan notion of affect (Chapter 6). That is, by actively attending to the chronotopic configuration of particular scenes, I have aimed for certain concepts to ‘take on flesh and blood’ (Bakhtin, 1981: 250) throughout the story – more than illustrate an idea, I work to enliven and make meaningful particular ideas while exploring how this meaning-making occurs (see Spillman, 2002) valuing how this ‘meaning shapes narrative’ (Bakhtin, 1981: 250).
There are many chronotopic configurations throughout the novel, and the novel overall may be seen to develop a sociological-chronotope\textsuperscript{25}, with which I bring together abstracted ideas, affects and meanings in a way that shapes the overall narrative. A key configuration in \textit{Into the Sea} is the biographical-chronotope which concerns Taylor’s (and others’) biographical enactment. Through this chronotope I enliven cultural sociological concepts of rituals and lifestyles by considering the realities of their varying rhythms and engaging forms of Australiana that were highlighted in my autoethnography as culturally meaningful. That is, I pay attention to the difference between ‘writing about a state of affairs and writing about a happening’ (Abbott, 2016: 81). Doing this I aim to craft verisimilitude in the novel – an authenticity or quality of “realness” that narrative writers of fiction and nonfiction alike work to achieve (Becker, 2007: 248; Leavy, 2015: 57). I centre how chronotopes concern ‘the human perception of everyday reality’ (Bemong and Borghart, 2010: 3) and define a ‘literary work’s artistic unity’ though its ‘relationship to an actual reality’ (Bakhtin, 1981: 243) – including ‘historical factors such as attitudes to nature, geography, class, race, and gender’ (Ganser, Pühringer and Rheindorf, 2006: 2).

Doing this I have worked to achieve verisimilitude throughout \textit{Into the Sea} specifically via a biographical-chronotope that draws meaningful cultural imagery – nostalgic and sentimental forms of Australiana – into a glocal frame (cf. Robertson, 1995) in order to effectively set up a quality of realness and affectivity.

\textit{Crafting Verisimilitude}

Verisimilitude is one of the key considerations that Leavy (2015: 66) highlights for using fiction as research practice. As well as thinking about an intended audience and how fiction may ‘illuminate the topic under investigation,’ Leavy prompts readers to ask: ‘How will I create verisimilitude, believability, resonance? How will I portray characters and their situations dimensionally and sensitively?’ (2015: 66). Verisimilitude concerns more than crafting a credible or convincing account of “real” social life, but rather crafting a world that feels like a total reality; many fantasy and sci fi novels, for example, help readers to entirely suspend disbelief and experience

\textsuperscript{25}As noted above, I do not explore the idea of a specific sociological fiction genre in detail in this thesis, nor the related idea of a sociological-chronotope – a literary approach to time space that is particularly sociological; I am concerned here with public sociology and the relationship between cultural meaning and sociological imagination, rather than with a literary studies style analysis of the novel. I do however recognise the value of such an exploration and see this as a potential avenue for future research into sociological fiction more broadly.
the fantastical novel-world as normally as they do their everyday life, because the narrative successfully crafts this dimensional and sensitive quality of realness. As Becker (2007: 248) highlights, stories which have verisimilitude ultimately ‘make sense’ – they ‘acord with our experience of life, with our (conventional, of course) ideas about how people behave.’ This means that ‘the sequences of events, the causal chains, seems like the kind of thing that could happen, that does happen’ (Becker, 2007: 248).

This quality of verisimilitude is not a given product of the novel, delivered uniformly from author to reader however; it is a product of relation. As we read a story, we ‘apply our general knowledge of the world to the story told here and see if it measures up or if, on the other hand, it requires us to accept something we hitherto had not known or believed’ (Becker, 2007: 248). Becker argues, ‘the reader performs an analysis, weighs evidence, assesses alternative understandings, and arrives at a conclusion. That takes work’ (2007: 248). This reading work is a key component to achieving verisimilitude, and has been a significant consideration in my novel; as I have used the narrator to challenge the general knowledge or common sense of the novel-world and of the reader, by bringing sociological imagination to the story, Into the Sea needs to both meet the ‘general test of measuring up to [a reader’s] experience’ (Becker, 2007: 248) while challenging that same experience sociologically. Some fiction ‘tells us things we think we know but manipulates our expectations so as to produce an outcome we had not anticipated, and that’s when we think we have learned something we didn’t know before’ (Becker, 2007: 249). Central to this is how the author understands their readers’ expectations, approaches the interpretative relation between themselves and the reader through the text, and frames or sets up this work that readers do. Readers ‘look to the clues’ they are given in a story ‘and assess likelihoods, develop expectations that may or not be fulfilled’ (Becker, 2007: 249). Further, ‘when attentive readers put that kind of work into something, they are likely to believe the results of their own analysis; their own labor and reasoning attest to the result’s validity’ (Becker, 2007: 249). In crafting Into the Sea, to cultivate sociological imagination with readers, I have worked create a quality of verisimilitude that sets up readers to work through the narrator’s sociological perspective – to be challenged by the narrator in such a way that sociological imagination is not just shown to readers but enlivened in the readers’ own reasoning as they engage with the story.
One way I have worked to achieve verisimilitude in *Into the Sea* is via the biographical-chronotope. I have employed Bakhtin’s notion to the biographical enactment that the characters, and predominantly Taylor, engage in, in order to explore the dually temporal and spatial elements of these biographical practices from a sociological perspective through the narrative. I drew key practices from my autoethnographic data that suggested active engagement in biographical enactment – such as using the ritual of New Year’s resolutions to stimulate a kind of momentum regarding self-development, the notion of pursuing life’s “next chapter” through employment changes or higher education, reframing personal troubles or unexpected trajectories as “plot twists,” and being concerned with the future development and upward trajectory of one’s own life and lifestyle through social rituals like marriage and buying a home. I considered these practices through the biography-history relationship that Mills (1959) establishes, as discussed in Chapter 4, to consider which elements of these practices that a sociological analysis via fiction may best highlight. Aiming to not overtly explain the sociological elements of biographical enactment in the novel but instead craft a quality of realness in the world that surrounds the characters’ various engagements with such practices – to show and not tell (Watson, 2016: 442) how biographies-in-the-making may be seen with sociological imagination – I focused on the chronotopic configuration of particular scenes to highlight how time space shapes such practices.

At the end of the first chapter, three short scenes bring together and enliven Mills’ (1959) biography-history relation. Two of the scenes follow Taylor, Will and Taylor’s family at her parents’ house on New Year’s Day as they consider some New Year’s resolutions. These scenes are separated by another short scene of Taylor, Will and their friends at a New Year’s Eve party that happened the previous night. On New Year’s Day the characters are slightly sluggish – nursing hangovers from parties the previous night – but are otherwise relaxed and upbeat. There is a tension in the air that makes the day feel different, more significant than normal family lunches and summer afternoons. The interweaved New Year’s Eve party scene is more frenetic. The characters are intoxicated, watching a video compilation that flashes short and visually disconnected shots. Opposed to the warm and languid family lunch that runs on a familiar tempo – though with a special timbre – the party is blurred. The rhythm of these two events intentionally contrasts. This rhythm is evident throughout the chapter, but in these final scenes in particular I work to heighten this contrast in order
to emphasise biographical and historical elements of the two events, that draws these biography-history practices into relation as Mills (1959) outlines, and position these practices as meaningful. In the first scene, Tony – one of Taylor’s parents’ friends, calls out to the others while standing in front of a huge sheet of butcher’s paper that’s taped up on the side of the house...

Taylor leaves some half deflated balloons and turns around to see what Tony’s talking about. He’s reading a large list of New Year’s resolutions they made at the party last night, near the side gate where they had people come in so they wouldn’t have to trample through the house. It’s an endless messy black scrawl. *Lose weight,* one says. *Smile more,* says another. *Drink more beer.* Tony laughs at that. *Go fishing. Save money. Run a marathon.*

Dave laughs. ‘I bet there’re some crackers on there.’ He bends the hose in his hands to stop the water running. ‘She’ll want a photo to send to everyone.’

‘Was yours fishing?’ Tony calls back.

‘Nah,’ Dave says, leaning on the pool fence. He points to the top right corner. ‘Mine’s up there.’

*See kids more.*

Taylor smiles.

He calls out again. ‘The beer one’s mine too.’

...

Liz, Will and Sue all come outside with Tony from the kitchen. They read through them, laughing, sighing, agreeing. Liz ducks back inside to grab her phone for a photo. Sue tells them hers was *travel.*

...

Liz takes her photo and she and Sue sit at the back table again.

‘That was such a fun idea,’ Sue says, patting Teddy’s [the dog’s] head (pages 62-63).

In the following short scene, the characters were re-watching the annual “highlight reel” compilation video that aired earlier in the evening. They gathered around a laptop and the screen shows...
Surfers. Pandas. Twins. A landslide. Famous wedding guests. A Hollywood bride. The Pope on the cover of TIME. A wide shot of Earth from space, shot with heavenly perspective. Time lapsed milky way stars from the desert. The winning goal kicked through four posts by a man wearing stripes. A small child swore and fell off her pink bike. They laughed like they did watching it the first time.

... Steph wiped another tear from her eye, moved between laughing, crying and sleep. Jack said something about what this might mean in twenty or thirty years.

Mike cradled his warm beer in both hands. ‘Yeah.’ ‘Mediated meaning.’ Jess smiled at her own insight.

But it’s even closer than that. Despite the muted light, the end-of-the-party time-to-go-home haze, the screen doesn’t really work to separate (page 64).

In the final scene, Taylor has picked a New Years’ resolution of her own. She decides to keep a journal throughout the year – which turns into her Good, Bad, and Change list-writing practice. Taylor writes her resolution on the butcher’s paper with all of the others, participating in the materiality of the social ritual despite being about to take the paper down. She

smiles at her handwriting, wrapping up the resolution and warming herself on the mirage of the better woman she might be. Not that the journaling is for anyone to see, necessarily. It’s more for thinking life through a little more just by pausing to write a bit of it down.

... Taylor tucks some loose strands of short hair behind her ear and takes the paper to the bin, smiling at Teddy as she goes.

Writing things down might help her see it: we are the stories we tell (pages 64-65).

As discussed in Chapter 4, the key point that Mills (1959: 6) makes in discussing the interplay of biography and history is that every individual ‘lives out a biography’ ‘in some society’ and ‘within some historical sequence.’ ‘By the fact of [t]his living’
individuals contribute ‘however minutely, to the shaping of this society and the course of this history even as [they are] made by society and by its historical push and shove’ (Mills, 1959: 6). To enliven this abstract idea (see Bakhtin, 1981: 250) through these scenes, I have crafted particular temporal and spatial dimensions to lead to and make meaningful the final line of the chapter: ‘we are the stories we tell.’ This includes that Liz, Taylor’s mother, takes a photograph of the New Year’s resolutions they have written up on the paper, and the video compilation that Taylor, Will and their friends re-watch at the end of their party. The video is a history-making practice; a compilation of diverse images from momentous and everyday events, serving to package the previous year into a particular narrative that resonates with the characters then and will serve to mark the period in this national place as particular in time. The characters are aware that this practice is a form of history-making (pages 55-56, 63-64). Liz taking a photograph is also a form of history-making on a micro scale, and she and the other characters are similarly aware of this. The photograph serves to mark the place in time, and materially make it a part of a history they can draw on in the future. Liz taking the photo happens at a ‘natural’ everyday pace – she ‘ducks back inside’ the house to get her phone in order to take a picture of the resolutions, while the others continue reading ‘through them, laughing, sighing, agreeing’ (page 63). The normal nature of her action suggests that she often takes photographs, as she does here. In contrast, at the party, the video compilation seems to rush through imagery: ‘Surfers. Pandas. Twins. A landslide. Famous wedding guests. A Hollywood bride. The Pope on the cover of TIME’ (page 64). I employ fragment sentence structures here to achieve this pace through the party time space, which stands out against the longer and more complex sentence structures in the other two scenes. By positioning Liz’s slower, everyday action of taking a photograph – as a normal and repeated practice – against the quick and layered imagery of the video, I aim to highlight how such everyday memory-making practices build up and contribute to processes of history-making; that through their everyday practices, individuals contribute to the ‘shaping of society and the course of this history’ (Mills, 1959: 6).

Another key section of the novel where I worked with this biographical-chronotope is in Chapter Six, when Will and Taylor attend a dinner party at a friend’s apartment. Over the course of the night the characters collectively affirm appropriate biographical enactment practices for moving through late youth and into what they understand as adulthood. It is significant for the group that Katie has organised a
dinner party rather than a more casual kind of gathering (page 100). Taylor jokes about this to her friend, saying ‘look at us, we’re adulting so hard tonight,’ (page 119) when she first arrives at the event, as she puts the salad she made into the fridge and their male partners sit down on the lounge. The couples fall into similar gendered habits that their own parents have, despite being critical of such stereotypes; out of the couples at the party the women organise the food and the men organise the alcohol, and the men move to the lounge when they arrive and the women hang around the kitchen. They joke about sexism later in the night (pages 127-128), however in this domestic event the young couples replicate gendered actions that are familiar to them, which they have been socialised into through rituals of everyday practice and through family and romantic relationships, as individuals and as a collective group. These actions are a shared part of their individual biographical enactment work; this work is socially inscribed and socially constituted, and it is through such shared actions that they move forward into the adulthood chapters of their biographical narratives. This narrative movement is also literally evidenced in Katie and Rob’s apartment. Their developing relationship is displayed on their living room wall in large photographs (page 119), and Katie and Taylor segue from discussing these images to discussing Taylor and Will’s assumed impending engagement (page 120).

Important to this biographical chronotopic configuration is that, in the first example, Liz takes a photograph of their New Year’s resolutions – of their written self-promises with which the characters may work to progress their biographies-in-the-making. The spatiality of the domestic home and the resolutions written on the butcher’s paper is brought into dialogue with the temporality of the ritual function of these resolutions and the significance of the New Year’s Eve event in the annual calendar, through both Liz’s photographing action and through the characters engaging with the video at the party. By constructing the time space of this biographical enactment work – the crafting of annual resolutions – and positioning this in relation to the history-making of the New Year’s Eve “highlight reel” in this way, I work to show, with a dimensional and sensitive quality of realness or verisimilitude, how individuals contribute to ‘the shaping of society’ and ‘the course of history’ (Mills, 1959: 6) in everyday ways. In the second example I purposefully use the domestic dining setting again to show how time space shapes social practices, bringing together the domestic home and meals that the younger characters have cooked that replicate memories of their own parents’ dinner parties with the gendered
patterns of socialising that they fall into and expect of each other. This active making of biographies and histories is again evidenced in the conversations the characters have over dinner and materially via large canvas photographs on the walls of Katie and Rob’s apartment. Through both of these scenes, as well as enlivening these abstract Millsian ideas and the general biographical practices that time space impacts and shapes, I also work to show what is contemporary about this process – how these forms and rhythms of biographical enactment are centred around perpetual choice-making and personal progress, which, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, permeates the characters’ lives including how they meaningfully use their time and construct the spaces that they live within. Employing Bakhtin’s notion of chronotope and cultural sociological ideas such as reflexivity (Finlay, 2002), competitive individualism (Gilbert, 2014), and structures of cultural meaning (see Back et al., 2012: 22-25), in these scenes I work to show how ‘transformations of time concepts and spatial representations reflect radical changes in cultural attitudes and lived experience’ (Bemong et al., 2010: iii).

The Cultural Meaning of Australiana

Forms of cultural life colour this chronotopic configuration and play an important part in how this chronotope helps create a quality of verisimilitude throughout the novel. The time space elements through which I aim to bring to life the biography- and history-making processes that the characters engage in, as discussed, are located within a particular cultural context; I draw and heighten forms of Australian culture that I developed from my autoethnographic data and other research (see Phillips and Smith, 2000) in order to not only ‘portray characters and their situations dimensionally and sensitively’ (Leavy, 2015: 66), but also create a broader believable and resonating quality of realness in the novel-world itself and in the sociological perspective through which the story is told. Ellis and Bochner state autoethnography is an ‘autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural’ (2000: 739). Willis (2014: 23) recognises the value of ethnographic approaches for capturing ways that the problems outlined by social science are ‘lived through’. As ethnographers do, in the novel I work to ‘show the real movement of experience in the concrete world’ (Willis, 2014: 24) and present ‘human experience without minimizing it, and without making it a passive reflex of social structure and social conditions’ (Willis, 2014: 159).
Taylor and Will are young, white, middle-class Australians who wrestle with and knowingly make themselves through the broader contemporary struggles and changes of their social world – higher costs of living, precarious employment, mental health issues, feminism, environmentalism. However, rather than any grand struggle against these social issues, colouring the overall ‘social ambience’ of their lives (Willis, 2014: 51) is Australiana – forms of (white, masculine, heteronormative, suburbanist) material and non-material culture that is unique to and stereotypically Australian. These cultural forms are popularly seen to range from specific identities, personality traits and leisure activities to fashions, songs, stories, architectures, colloquialisms, and iconographies that are identifiably influenced by Australia’s climate, flora and fauna, history of colonisation, and geographic isolation, particularly throughout the 19th and 20th centuries (see Davey and Seal, 1993; Fiske, Hodge and Turner, 1987; Turner, 1993): examples include the song Waltzing Matilda, boomerangs, koalas and kangaroos, wattle trees, life savers, single storey houses with wrap-around verandas, thongs (flip flops), bushrangers, larrikinism, barbecues, the ‘fair go,’ slow time, democratic spirit, diversity of choice, and a ‘no worries’ attitude. Many of these kitsch cultural forms were notable in my autoethnographic reflections. Australiana was variously engaged or (re)employed with a knowing irony, and seemed to operate with nostalgic and sentimental functions. Cultural narratives, including those surrounding a ‘true’ national identity and an Australian way of life, drew in these objects and modes. As Edensor (2002: 115-116) argues, both individual and collective narratives may be organised around the consumption of cultural objects, and a national history in particular may be built up around such resources – shared objects and ways of being that ‘anchor people to place.’ Nostalgia in particular plays a significant part in contemporary (re)engagements with such cultural forms (Edensor, 2002: 116). In Into the Sea, Australiana impacts the style of life that the characters have and the style of cities and suburbs that they live within. This is evident from the opening scene of the novel:

On the first morning of the year the train takes nearly three hours to get from Sydney up to Mareeba, and as it reaches the outskirts of town Taylor Brown gets mango memories. Remembering here is tasting: the sweet dark yellow of her late childhood and teenage years. The city-town on the east coast that’s close enough to the ocean for rain but near enough to the outback that flies are a permanent fixture. The green grass. Brown grass.
Trampolines. Bats and backyard fruit trees. Suburbs designed with plenty of room to breathe (page 51).

I most often highlight this Australiana through shared meals, variously exploring the contemporary ‘Australianness’ of sacred and profane ritual events (cf. Durkheim, 1976: 37-39) from everyday barbecues to wedding dinners, and how these shape and make up an ‘Australian Way of Life’ lifestyle (Phillips and Smith, 2000: 214; Tranter and Donoghue, 2007: 166-167; White, 1979). This Australiana is also particularly prominent in Taylor’s work scenes, from her history lessons to school camp, which I do to highlight the ways that such cultural forms and collective identity resources are actively woven into ‘lessons’ about national history and implicitly position Australian culture as unique.

In Chapter One I use images of gum trees and the brown river from the train windows, dry grass and red dirt as they drive from the train station to Taylor’s parents’ house in their Four-Wheel Drive, the store-bought hot chook (roast chicken) that they eat for lunch outside on the back patio, the half deflated balloons and multicolour party lights, David bending the garden hose in his hands to stop the water running, the men leaning on the pool fence, their use of butcher’s paper in the backyard, the fact that is it Liz who takes the photograph, the Labrador Teddy following the characters around, and Taylor taking the rubbish out to their recycling wheelie bin around the side of the house. The first line of dialogue in the novel is intentionally Will saying, on a humid summer’s day with cicadas filling the air, ‘Shit it’s hot’ (page 52). A similar pastiche of imagery that makes up an ambience of Australiana runs throughout the novel. At the O’Connor’s house, a few days after Sam’s funeral,

People scatter around the back patio on outdoor chairs and their eskies. Liz brought a fruit bun she picked up at the old bakery, the one with the pink coconut icing, and there are biscuits and crackers and cubes of cheddar cheese. A family from down the road turns up with oranges from the orange tree. Shirl’s in the kitchen making a salad. Mick will peel prawns and cook a BBQ later. Right now he’s busy showing off his collection of stubby coolers. There’s the green bikini one from Cairns. The elephant one from Dubbo Zoo. Dave’s using the classic Bondi Beach scene. Mick
makes them pick a new cooler for each can of beer. Taylor opts for a glass of white wine with ice, like the rest of the women. It’s so hot the ice hardly makes a difference (page 75).

Later that afternoon, a storm rolls in and,

Wind whips through the palm trees that guard the back edge of the pool. Rain belts down, roaring on the roof. Shirley, hesitating for half a second, runs back outside to pull the washing off the line... The wind pulls at her hair and the hem of her yellow dress, spinning the Hills Hoist round when she isn’t steadying it (page 76).

Mick, Shirley’s husband, helps her bring the wet washing in but slips on the wet grass as a thunder clap startles him. The washing he is holding flies up into the air and, like a slow motion film scene, falls down again to earth. Blue shirts and suit pants all splash into puddles of mud. Mick reaches out his hand trying to save something, anything. He goes for the catch of the century.

Time seems to freeze. There’s the rest of them, inside and speechless, and there’s Shirley with her wet arms full on the lawn. And there’s Mick, six beers deep, on his back in the rain, muddied and soaked though. He holds Shirley’s old purple sports bra up to the sky like he’s just won the Test Match final for Australia. Shirl stands frozen. Mick turns his head towards her. He gives the bra one more upwards thrust for good measure. Shirley cracks a smile. She laughs. She drops the clothes on the soaking ground and laughs. Mick pulls himself to his feet and, still clutching tight to her bra, moves towards her. They hug and kiss and laugh and cry in their backyard in the rain (pages 76-77).

When Taylor and Will are in the U.K. in Chapter Four, before Kiran references vegemite in his wedding vows (page 98),

Will’s parents Leanne and Andrew had everyone over to the cottage for an Aussie barbeque late on Friday afternoon. They’d spotted a few things at the supermarket, sausages and lamb chops and (tinned, sliced, soaked in sweet vinegar) beetroot, and Leanne made rissoles and lamingtons from
scratch. Kiran’s dad brought a six-pack of Fosters and they laughed about never having tried it before (page 94).

In the dinner party scene in Chapter Six I highlight their red wine and convict-themed beer that they joke about being “masculine Australia” themed (pages 127), the way they prepare and share the food, the style of apartment, the sports and televisions shows they discuss, and the forms of humour and tension that mark their social interactions throughout the night. In Chapter Eight, Taylor and Brett take a classic green and cream ferry from Circular Quay in Sydney to Manly. Before focusing specifically on Taylor and Brett on the boat as they pass the Opera House, the scene at Manly beach is set by the narrator:

The main drag running along the beach heaves on days like this. Before the crack of dawn exercisers sprint sand laps, then lycra-clad brunch buyers squeeze lemon and cracked pepper onto their organic avocado toast and pat their pockets for the coins they know they don’t carry when they pass the strip’s rough sleepers. Over lunchtime it fills with families of sun-screened beach goers and oiled up sun soakers, the briefly lost kids, screaming swimmers ripping off the bluebottles and finding thick welts under the sting, and the afternoon squeezes out walking tourists with their white socks before the exercisers-cum-drinkers roll in again. Day trippers from overseas, interstate, and the other side of the city flocking with the cashed up locals to the beach. Lifeguards controlling the beat (page 146).

During a talent competition at school camp, in Chapter Eight,

The last group run a skit about, as they loosely introduce, Australia. Fourteen of the fifteen potter about stage miming a sausage sizzle, thin white bread arms of one kid wrapped around another who wriggles like a burning rocket, a small herd of sheep bleating on all fours, a cantering bushman who’s top half cracks a whip and the bottom clops along like a horse, and a lifeguard saving people at the beach. One kid, full of cheek, wears a blue singlet (somehow still called a wife-beater) complete with pillow-stuffed beer belly and black rubber thongs on his feet. He staggers around the front of the hall holding a can of coke, a beer can stand-in that he still would have had to beg one of the camp staff for. The corks hanging
off his brown hat knock into one other. He does nothing but swat at mostly unreal bugs, skol the empty can with his head back and pretend to fart, lifting one leg, fanning the air behind his backside. The act is so slick it’s like watching a dog swim out of the deep end of the pool for the first time. An act grown in his bones.

Mr Grange loses it. He slaps his knee and wipes his eyes, hooting louder than the rest of the grade combined.

‘Darl,’ the boy says when he realises his pull. ‘You’ve gone and burnt the snags.’ He points at a sheep and the audience roars. ‘Aw, tell him he’s dreaming.’

The group finish with a hand-on-heart delivery of four Peter Allen song lines they know from a Qantas ad that aired before they were born, closing their eyes for *New York to Rio and old London town*, despite few of them having folks who can afford an overseas holiday, and with *no matter how far or how wide I roam*, the whole full room double belts the final line, screaming the pitch out the second time. *I still call Australia home. I still call Australia home* (pages 139-140).

The employment of this Australiana imagery is not only engaged by the narrator in setting a particularly Australian scene, or by characters themselves for laughs or in making a point about cultural differences. Organisations and institutions engage these curated cultural forms to achieve particular ends throughout the novel as well. At work, in Chapter 3, Taylor (Miss Brown) delivers a history lesson from her set curriculum. She writes *The Colonies* across the whiteboard and the kids take their notebooks from their desks. The back wall is covered in cheery multicolour posters for the unit. Names and dates, blue flags, old maps. Pictures of wooden sailing ships, of campfires and spears.

‘Today we’re looking at life on the land,’ Miss Brown says with a seriousness that quietens the class, just as her Mrs Fish said in 1998 and Mrs Fish’s Miss Middle said in ’63.

Thirty-two blue lined notebooks fill with the same leaden things for the following forty-five minutes. Droughts and floods and bushfires, the extraordinary ingenuities of tough hardy migrant battlers, the back-ache of
work on un-British Crown land. The years between the First Fleet and the First World War bleed together into a thick rush of sheep, gold, guns, hangings, horses, bushrangers, and steam trains (page 81).

The IKEA store in Sydney that Will and Taylor visit, in Chapter Five, has an outdoor furniture section that sells an idea of backyard spaces. These spaces come together with red cushions and rugby balls, basketball hoops, sun lounges, hammocks, and fairy lights. White-lidded blue eskies dot the designs.

It’s an Outdoors beyond fake green and grey, a lifestyle memory tapped into of sunburnt childhoods in stinking floral swimmers with cricket bats and dogs that shake the water out of their fur on the grass. It’s a sacred space, not the side of the house outside where the wheelie bins go. It’s the blooming, lorikeet dotted and kookaburra sound-tracked, Hills-Hoist swinging, sprinkler laughing grass-stained afternoon space flavoured with glasses of red cordial or passionfruit soft drink. A packaged idea accelerating towards a generational memory as apartment blocks rise and this dream land is carved up again in smaller plots (page 115).

I employ Australiana in each of these scenes using a glocal frame; I highlight contemporary cultural forms that signal a tension between increasing cosmopolitan globalisation (Beck, 2006) and a ‘residual culture’ (Williams, 2005: 40-41) of ‘national attachment’ (West, 2015: ix). That is, I do not include these in the novel to build up to an explicit overall critique of contemporary Australianness through kitsch elements of Australiana. Nor however do I employ these (white, masculine, heteronormative, suburbanist) forms and frames of being uncritically. I have used these forms of Australian culture to give context to the social issues that sociological research reveals and theorises, in a way that does not reduce these cultural forms to a by-product of structures and social conditions (Willis, 2014: 159). My use of Australian cultural forms is in service of the novel’s verisimilitude (Leavy, 2015: 66).

I have focused on cultural forms and cultural meanings, which I drew from my autoethnographic reflections, through the concept of the chronotope in order to ‘show the real movement of experience in the concrete world’ (Willis, 2014: 24). As noted, to achieve verisimilitude I focus on crafting a believable and resonating quality of realness (Leavy, 2015: 66). I have worked to develop this believable quality of
realness through the time space configurations, or chronotopes, of the novel; the feeling of deciding and doing particular things is recreated is a tangible way that reflects, rather than tells about, the dually spatial and temporal experience of reality.

Concerning the resonating quality of the novel, it is relevant that I employ a heightened, intentionally sentimental and nostalgic curation of kitsch elements from this contemporary cultural context. I have aimed to construct a novel where the cultural context and meaning of the narrative is not secondary to its other conceptual or thematic elements. In *Into the Sea* the biographical processes (see Chapter 4), neoliberal imaginary (see Chapter 5) and Spinozan concepts (see Chapter 6) are not separate from the novel’s Australian context but rather are realised through, and in turn central to, the Australiana of the novel. To achieve a resonating quality of realness with *Into the Sea* I consider both the cultural forms of novel-world itself and the sociological perspective through which the story is told, and what it means for these to resonate with an (imagined) national and international audience and within a particular literary market. I have critically employed these forms of Australiana in order to connect the novel with a rich public tradition of national cultural critique (see Smith and West, 2003: 640-644).

Throughout my research, debates around Australian identity and the Australian “way of life” were routinely engaged in by politicians and public commentators in the media. These peaked around national days of significance such as Australia Day and ANZAC Day, or in times of crisis and social unrest including the Sydney Siege and refugee crises. As White (1979: 528) claims, during the 1950s in particular the phrase ‘Australian Way of Life’ was commonly ‘used by barbers and academics, by travel writers, politicians and journalists… in the press and on radio, in Gallup polls and social surveys, and, perhaps most of all, in ordinary conversation.’ While not demonstrably absent before the second world war, the term ‘provided a common understanding of what was “at stake” for Australians in an uncertain post-war world’ and ‘represented quite a new idea of what Australia was’ (White, 1979: 528). As well a high standard of living – or common potential for economic advantage, seen to be almost exclusive to Australia throughout the twentieth century (White, 1979: 532-533) – the Australian Way of Life came to invoke particular sociocultural elements such as an ‘Australian point of view’ and unique ‘national heritage’ (White, 1979: 533). Today it continues to invoke certain freedoms, values, and lifestyles which remain difficult to define or materially depict; the concept of a
particularly Australian way of living is ‘vague, amorphous and negative,’ constructed in opposition to external ‘threats’ (White, 1979: 534). In the case of post-war Australia these included migration, communism and increasing Americanisation as the British Empire’s grip declined (White, 1979: 534). As my autoethnography highlighted, contemporary perceived threats to “traditional” (White) Australian culture that dominate national cultural debates variously include multiculturalism, Islam, LGBTQ+ rights, and asylum seekers. In the novel, these threats are rarely articulated or made manifest; rather than using the narrator to overtly identify how these social issues becomes perceived as threats, for the reader, I stylistically permeate the novel with feelings of risk and ‘the experience of uneasiness, of anxiety… the beat feeling that all is somehow not right’ (Mills, 1959: 11) – see the news story of the missing girl, Taylor’s feelings while standing on top of The Shard in London (page 93), the two plane incidents (Chapter Three, Chapter Six), and the hostage crisis (Chapter Nine). While Mills argues that sociological work ‘should include explicit attention to a range of public issues and of personal troubles’ and ‘make clear the values that are really threatened in the troubles and issues involved’ (1959: 130), my aim with the novel is not to explain to the reader how sociological imagination works – or do the analysis for them – but rather engage the reader in this imagination. I heighten the fact that troubles, issues, values, uneasiness and indifference are present in the novel-world but purposefully do not ‘translate’ or ‘explain’ (Mills, 1959: 131) these connections for the reader so that readers may critically consider such “threats” as well as what is bring “threatened.”

There is a strong tradition of kitsch, camp and ironic representations of Australian culture in art, film and literature that built on these cultural debates. Films like Priscilla – Queen of the Desert, Muriel’s Wedding and The Castle, and books like The Lucky Country are celebrated in the public sphere and analysed in the academy specifically for the ways that they question and subvert Australiana (Beilharz, 2009: 229; Siemienowicz, 1999; Smith and West, 2003: 641). Popular representations of Australian culture, including the one I craft with Into the Sea, are often limited however; these largely fail to progress more egalitarian visions of, for example, multiculturalism that effectively challenges colonial power structures or disrupt the dominance of Australian narratives that centre and normalise white, patriarchal and heteronormative experiences in the media (see Hage, 2003; Kaplan, 1997). Such a critique is an important and valid one, which notably reached a national and
international audience following the Opening Ceremony of the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000 where a young white woman came to represent ‘modern, twenty-first century’ Australia against the country’s indigenous history (Bonner, McKay and McKee, 2001: 269). While Into the Sea arguably reinforces this normalisation by similarly centring young, white, middle-class and heterosexual characters, I have aimed to construct a cultural context in the novel that accurately reflects the social world I recorded in my autoethnographic work, while representing this through a sociological lens that effectively opens these cultural forms and realities to critique.

The novel does not explicitly critique these dominant narratives of Australianess. However, I use this Australiana to highlight the dynamic relations between social structures and cultural forms throughout the novel, to draw attention to the constructed and changeable nature of these structures and forms as they are lived into realities, and position the novel within a broader network of existing cultural texts that share this critical aim. I aim to engage readers in sociological imagination by building on this critical cultural tradition – by crafting this Australiana in such a way that readers’ sociological imagination may be focused upon these cultural forms within and beyond the novel, including for example the ways that indigeneity is made absent in discourses and places. As these cultural forms were drawn from my autoethnographic reflections, and my autoethnography involved an engagement with this critical cultural tradition and the ways in which such texts become part of a cultural milieu, I see that my approach to and construction of Australiana throughout Into the Sea may effectively resonate within this existing cultural and literary market. The novel may affectively engage national and international readers who share these cultural experiences or recognise the imagery as being part of a particular cultural narrative. As Taylor Brown does in the opening scene of the novel (page 51), I aim for the novel to resonate with specific readers so that they too “get” ‘mango memories’ – that they affectively experience particular scenes in the novel that tap into a lived or imagined engagement with certain objects, feelings and ways of being, and understand the cultural meaning of this affective experience.

Crafting Affect

A second chronotopic configuration that is key to how I craft affect in and with the novel is the chronotope of the sea. Like Bakhtin’s chronotope of the road (1981: 243-245), which he sees as a dominant chronotope in Western and particularly American
narratives, the chronotope of the sea holds rich potential in novels concerned with Australian culture. The beach and ocean are an ‘integral part of the cultural envelope’ for Australians (Booth, 2001: 1). Three scenes in the novel highlight this; in Chapter Two, Chapter Eight and Chapter Nine I use the chronotopic configuration of particular scenes to bring together the concept of affect with the sea, as a literal landscape and a metaphoric device. The novel’s title, Into the Sea, highlights this.

In a scene in Chapter Two, the first morning that they are in Bonnigong before Sam’s funeral, Taylor and Brett go to the beach after having lunch with Sam’s parents:

Brett is knee deep in the water on the right side of the red and yellow flags. Taylor watches him, his hands on his head looking out to sea. He’s still and the waves crash against him. His shoes and white shirt lay in a pile on the sand where he pulled and kicked them off, barely taking time to stop. He’s heeded their mum’s old advice: you never regret a swim. He drops his head backwards, turning his closed eyes to the grey sky. His hands fall by his side. After a while he looks around the water, surveying the incoming set of waves, and dives forward into the sea before the first wave breaks. He stays underwater until he feels the second wave pass overhead, holding his breath until it burns. He exhales the stale air when he can’t keep it in any longer. The bubbles force their way up. He lifts his feet off the sandy floor and opens his eyes, letting the burning in his chest hang a moment longer. Then he pulls himself upwards, oaring his hands through the water until his forehead breaks the surface and air rushes his lungs again. Taylor nods to herself and keeps walking (page 71).

Taylor heads up to the rocky headland while Brett goes swimming. He dives into the waves and, in the privacy or anonymity of the moment, allows himself to feel the grief of Sam’s death. A wave comes and Brett dives under again, not as deep this time, letting the pull of the wave take him along and turn him over. Water pushes past him above. He lets his knees buckle and the waves take him, dragging him passively backwards towards the beach. No boundary between him and the ocean. Affectively part of the sea. He thunders his breath out into the whitewash until it’s all gone and the emptiness, the collapse and tight pressure in his chest comes

In the second to last chapter of the novel, Chapter Eight, Taylor and Brett go to the beach again, this time at Manly in Sydney. When they arrive they stand on the sand and look out across the beach:

There’s a clear rip in the water. A clean, dark patch without whitewash that tempts those who don’t know right in, flies to the sweet scent, nerves into the calm-looking slice of blue. Two lifeguards have set up in front of it on their buggy, parked near the unread signs, the beach busy enough for personal prevention. Umbrellas and beach tents dot the sand. Over every other white inch sprawl pink towels, green towels, blue and white flag towels the shop up the street sells for three times as much as you should pay. Bare skin soaking in the sun. Babies pat the wet shoreline where the warm water kisses their tiny feet. Dads dig great holes in the sand, pushing together palaces and teaching their kids to drip wet sandy turrets through their fingers. Boogie boards stick on the sand after a screaming ride. Pink zinc slicks faces like war paint. Old, brown skin couples walk up and down the strip like elephants who don’t need any bronze-cemented reminders of the changing tide. Swimmers pack the best place, just after the break where there’s only water under your feet and you can lie, nose to the sky, floating up and over the tide (page 149).

After a while of watching the beach scene, Taylor and Brett lay down their towels on the sand, strip down to their swimmers and walk down towards the water, looking around, not stopping when they get to the edge. The first wave is cool and they turn when the sets hit, letting the water smack into their sides until they’ve walked too close to the breaking point and have to dive under without hesitating. The wave rumbles overhead but the water they’re in is smooth, not pulling. Easy to swim through. Coming up on the other side Taylor slicks her hair back and
Brett flicks the water from his in her direction. She splashes him and they grin, diving under the next wave just in time. The sets roll in quickly but the waves die right off between, the horizon running flat far off in front of them. They paddle out further than they can touch. Brett holds his breath and drops under, seeing how far down the bottom is. He’s not down for long.

‘You can feel the pull,’ Taylor says as he comes back up.

‘What?’ Brett unplugs the water from his ears.

‘Bit of a drag.’

‘Yeah. We’re not far out though.’ He turns back to the beach, checking if they’ve drifted from the middle of the flags. The two red and yellow beacons wrinkle in the wind. They’re in the okay zone. Another wave comes up behind them and they sail over it, Brett with his toes towards the beach (pages 149-150).

In the first scene, from Chapter Two, the narrator highlights how Brett feels that there is no boundary between himself and the ocean as individual bodies; they exist in relation, and he becomes affectively part of the sea. Brett’s imagination conjures up ‘traces’ of Sam, images of them together when Sam was still alive. From these images and from being in the ocean, Brett is affected by a turbulent series of passive affects; he is pulled and pushed both by the ocean and these affectations. Rather than moving through this experience via reason (Lord, 2010: 76), or by controlling or honing his affects (Lord, 2010: 137), Brett’s pain is ‘carried away’ through his affective experience in the sea. In this way, through Brett I work to engage with the value of experiencing the affective ‘oscillations’ between imagination and reason without synthesising or collapsing these, as Calder (2015) argues George Eliot does.

In the second scene I work to again construct a more-than-human relationality via how the characters’ feel their connection to the ocean. Taylor and Brett ‘float for a while longer, melting into the surface of the sea’ (page 150). In this scene I also work to show how the imagination or first kind of knowledge works within the confines of the novel narrative. While in the ocean, Brett is moved to think about the last time he went swimming, which was in Chapter Two, before Sam’s funeral. He acknowledges this with his sister, saying,
‘God, I haven’t been swimming for so long. Not in the surf.’ Brett rolls onto his back, lazily, then pushes himself over into a slow underwater backflip. He comes up again with a mouthful of water and spurs it into the sky. ‘Not since Sam’ (page 150).

These beach trips happen in key moments of crisis in the novel. The first takes place between Sam’s suicide and his funeral, and the second while Brett is struggling with his anxiety and sleeping on Taylor’s couch. The characters go to sea in moments when they are dealing with personal troubles – it provides a refuge, a place to tire the body and quiet the mind, feel the sun, and float in the salt water. The sea takes their weight and in it they let go (page 72), their ‘pain gets carried away’ (page 72); they feel it move them, not always towards safety but in it they feel safe, they are ‘in the okay zone’ (page 150).

The third scene constructed around the theme of the sea is in the final chapter of the novel: the sea of flowers that fills Martin Place in Sydney city following the Sydney Siege, a hostage crisis that took place in a well-known Lindt Chocolate Café in November 2014. The “sea of flowers” dominated media imagery following the crisis. The final scene of the novel draws on this:

At the site of the scene, new safety barriers up for the flocking crowds that fully surround the closed chocolate shop, people bring bouquets for weeks. City workers come in before work, come down on their lunch breaks from their towering offices, and stay back after their workdays have finished. High school kids detour there before getting the bus. Tourists trek in from the Harbour following their paper and electronic maps, even more than typically would. Young couples meet there after work shifts. Parents brings their kids in all weekend. Thousands of plastic-wrapped bunches takeover the pedestrian strip. Chrysanthemums, carnations, gerberas, orchids, roses, lilies. It’s red and yellow, purple, orange, pink, white, and green. A full garden of floral tributes. A harvest. A rainbow sea of flowers (page 160).

In this moment the sea of flowers also becomes a moving refuge – a place that people flock, express and let go of pain through, a symbol not of safety but the potential of a
safer future, another ‘okay zone.’ As highlighted in the previous chapter, in this part of the novel I work to enliven Spinoza’s concept of affect as well as make this scene affective. Doing this I aim to show how Spinoza’s philosophy, and a Spinozan sociological imagination, is an ‘activity’ (Lord, 2010: 11). The chronotopic configuration of this scene makes ‘flesh and blood’ (Bakhtin, 1981: 250) abstract concepts of relationality, affect, imagination and conatus. The space and time of the event take on a malleable quality: large numbers of people move in and out of the area, flowers are left and the otherwise plain brown pedestrian strip blooms, people stand motionless in a way that they would never normally, the composition of the crowd changes constantly yet the crowd itself is a constant. People ‘applaud collectively’ during a particularly poignant moment, as a Bride stops by on her wedding day to leave her bouquet; there is an ‘intensity’ that ‘moves’ people together, and a ‘flash of joy’ that interrupts the otherwise viscous solemnity that tangibly fills spaces during transitory moments of significance. Through this, a ‘movement towards being something different and new’ emerges – there is a ‘becoming’ in the people, in the place, in this period of time, in the culture. More than enlivening these distinct ideas in this scene however, which is reasonably only achievable if the novel is read with more explicit explanations of Spinoza’s concepts, I do this to craft a quality of affectivity in the novel; to make these scenes in particular affective.

Rolf Kloepfer (1987) theorises the emotive and motivating power of communication – what I call a quality of affectivity – as sympraxis. Concerned with attempts to illustrate ‘the “hidden power” of advertising’ (Kloepfer, 1987: 123), Kloepfer constructs sympraxis as a semiotic concept that concerns affect in relation to mimesis in signs and communication. Whereas mimetic elements of communication are logical, representational and informative, sympractic elements are energetic, emotive and involving (Kloepfer, 1987: 125, 131). As introduced in my theoretical framework in Chapter 2 of this thesis, Kloepfer explores the affective potential of communications through a three-fold relationship between mimesis, discourses and sympraxis; he sees signs as facilitators of co-action in communication, and argues that sympraxis is an effect causing emotive or affective ‘modifications of consciousness’ (Kloepfer, 1987: 132-136). This is a rich concept in light of the “hidden power” of advertising, and one Kloepfer (1987: 124-125) connects to a long intellectual tradition in communication in general and art specifically which includes Aristotle, Descartes
and Leibniz. Kloepfer (1987: 125) argues that there is ‘a need for a wider term that will include all modifications of consciousness achieved by the use of signs.’ Considering the ways advertising is ‘becoming less and less mimetic (that is, representational/referential/informative in the narrow sense) and more and more sympractic (that is, involving/sensuous/phatic/creatively engaged).’ He unpacks the multilayered meanings in particular advertisements, noting for example how imagery of clean waves, white sand, and an embodied reference to Venus Anadyomene implicitly connotes freshness, purity, harmony and femininity in order to (very effectively) sell women’s perfume (Kloepfer, 1987: 125).

From this Kloepfer considers the aesthetic or poetic function of communicative forms and argues that advertising satisfies ‘the formula “art is experience”’ (1987: 131). How this affective experiential nature is achieved concerns the relationship between mimesis, discourse and sympraxis; ‘Mimesis calls to mind an actualized image of the world… and sympraxis an action,’ and the union of these ‘occurs in discourse… it is established by texture’ (Kloepfer, 1987: 132). Kloepfer sees that as sympraxis – an involving quality that affects ‘lasting changes in attitude’ and ‘action in the real world’ – is the goal of advertising, mimesis and discourse are employed with ‘increasing sophistication’ so that sympraxis may be generated (1987: 136). Narrative is key to this quality, and it is for this reason that Kloepfer argues ‘advertising is more and more becoming narrative’ (1987: 143). It is through narratives that mimesis and discourse take shape, developing “texture” as implicit and emotive meanings are generated through complex layering of signs; sympraxis is cultivated via an aesthetic narrative, complex discourse structure, and exploration of and operation within cultural patterns (Kloepfer 1987: 145). Through the combination of these elements, a sympractic affect/effect results.

The applicability of this concept extends beyond an analysis of the magic of advertising. Bourdieu recognises this: in concluding his Sketch for a Self-Analysis he explicitly considers why and for whom he has written the text (2007: 111). As well as aiming to provide ‘the information that [he] would have liked to when [he] tried to understand the writers or artists of the past’ (Bourdieu, 2007: 111), he states he has ‘also and perhaps especially written for the youngest of [his] readers’ (Bourdieu, 2007: 112). Bourdieu explains that he hopes such readers ‘will be able to feel, through this evocation of the historical conditions in which [his] work was developed… what
felt each time that succeeded to any degree’ in capturing a slice of the social world in his work (2007: 112). Further, he hopes readers may recognise their own experiences, difficulties, questionings, suffering, and so on, in [his], and to draw from that realistic identification, which is quite the opposite of an exalted projection, some means of doing what they do, and living what they live, a little bit better (Bourdieu, 2007: 113).

Bourdieu uses Kloepfer’s concept in distinguishing this imagined audience and involving effect of his efforts to ‘explain’ and ‘understand’ himself (2007: 3), albeit without reference to Kloepfer; what Bourdieu hopes readers gain from the work, or feel, is ‘the sense of apprehending an oeuvre and a life in the necessary movement of its realization and, in so doing, being able to give myself an active appropriation of it, a *sympraxis* more than a *sympathy*, itself turned towards creation and action’ (Bourdieu, 2007: 112, italics in original). It was this final summation of his intended ‘self socio-analysis’ – which I read before formally commencing this project, while working to establish the value of a sociological auto/ethnography focused around processes of sociological imagination rather than a field, sub-culture or phenomena – that turned me to Kloepfer’s sympraxis, Spinoza’s affect, Bakhtin’s chronotope; I used these to consider the potential of applying to sociology the above maxim: “art is experience.” Through literature, sociological imagination may also be crafted, and taught, as style of experiencing the social world. Like advertising, and perhaps Bourdieu’s narrative self-analysis, novels may operate as a syrpactic form of communication. Novels too are comprised of aesthetic narratives, incorporate a complex discourse structure, and explore and operate within cultural patterns.

As I use the biographical-chronotope to craft a quality of realness or verisimilitude throughout the novel, and I engage forms of Australiana to make the novel resonate or be culturally meaningful, I use the chronotope of the sea to make the novel affective: to craft a quality of affectivity or sympraxis with the narrative. Through the chronotope of the sea I use the imagery of the ocean and of the flowers in Martin Place to explore the affective potential of the abstract ideas I discuss in the previous chapters – sociological imagination, the neoliberal imaginary, and a Spinozan approach to the social. That is, I did not theorise these concepts outside a process of fiction writing and then write these concepts into the novel; I used the process of
fiction writing to explore the ways that literary techniques can be employed to engage particular meanings and concepts, to construct sympraxis. Doing this I recognise Bemong et al’s (2010: iii) point that literature ‘is not merely an ideational phenomenon, but has to be considered as a unique epistemological instrument that concerns intellectual, imaginative and emotional attitudes.’

The way that I construct and describe the events in these three scenes – at the beach in Bonnigong, the beach in Manly, and in the flower-filled Martin Place – I move beyond a quality of verisimilitude and work to cultivate affect. Stylistically, the experiential elements of each of these scenes, whether from the perspective of a particular character or via the omniscient narrator’s perspective, rather than working to (re)create a quality of realness instead draw on more imaginative time space relations to affect a reader; with the chronotope of the sea I work to craft affectivity, rather than verisimilitude. I also build in forms of Australiana and, in the third scene in particular, draw on cultural imagery that appears throughout the rest of the novel. I highlight the life savers, the red and yellow flags, the white sand, people swimming in the surf and families spending their weekend mornings at the beach. In the final scene, I intentionally note the ‘bright sunlight of the afternoon, blue sky as usual,’ the ‘occasional planes passing overhead,’ the news crews and politicians and the fact that the crowd are recording ‘it all and each other’ (page 161). I describe the Bride as a ‘vision’ that ‘parts the crowd’ (page 161), with a photographer and wedding party in tow, to echo the wedding scene in Chapter Four. In Chapter Two, I highlight the flowers that fill the church at Sam’s funeral using similar language to this final scene. I also intentionally position the space of Martin Place as having the capacity to keep ‘becoming,’ as capable of ‘bringing more flowers’ and ‘holding’ its less transitory or unusual materialities: ‘bricks, blood, trauma, sirens, news crews, children, strangers, bodies, chocolates, and trains’ (page 161). I tap into the ‘intellectual, imaginative and emotional attitudes’ (Bemong et al., 2010: iii) that are attached to and realised through these cultural forms, and play on the broader mimesis and discourse structures that run through these scenes in order to make these moments particularly affective – to employ affect through the “texture” of the chronotope of the sea and, through the meaningful relation between these affective moments and the rest of the novel, engage readers in the experiential activity of sociological imagination.
Employing affectivity in this way I draw on Hynes’ (2016) analysis of Marina Abramovic’s work of performance art titled The Artist is Present, and Sharpe et al’s (2014) analysis of Stewart Lee’s stand-up comedy. Analysing Abramovic’s art piece through a Deleuzian/Spinozan notion of affect and building on Massumi, Hynes states that ‘it is the modulations of affect that produce new modes of subjectivity’ (2016: 816). She argues that this work ‘serves as a reminder of the need to look beyond the subjects and objects of our lived sociality, to the processes that give them their liveliness’ (Hynes, 2016: 817). Further, considering the potential of this piece within the context of public sociology, Hynes argues that ‘public sociology does not require a heroic figure who is capable of clarifying the demands of the present in the face of the dialectic of progress. Rather, it requires an openness to social reality in the making’ (2016: 818).

What affectivity refers to here, with regards to not only individually enacting but socially constructing this liveliness and openness, is an intensity and power of feeling/knowing/experiencing. For example, it is through the tense but humorous ‘affective atmosphere’ of Lee’s comedic sets on racial prejudice that audiences are moved to “reflect” more on the ambivalences and complexities of the nature of prejudice’ (Sharpe et al, 2014: 120-121). Importantly, in this scenario it is ‘not so much a conscious or principally cognitive ‘reflection’ as an affective one, a felt discomfort that mimics the felt discomfort involved in much everyday racism’ (Sharpe et al., 2014: 120) that creates the reflective event. Relevant to the crafting of new ways of being or understanding via such reflection, it is arguably ‘the affective form – the uncertainty and discomfort – rather than the content, and any acumen required to “get it”’ that engages and shapes such change (Sharpe et al., 2014: 124). Where Sharpe et al (2014: 123) see that ‘one of humour’s interventions may be to affectively rewire our bodily attentiveness to new potentials of action and thought,’ I see that it may be the time space relation that Lee manipulates during the scenes of his set, rather than a particularly unique style of humour, that cultivates what the authors recognise as a particularly engaged affectivity. Through a particular voice and using particular characters, Lee uses repetition and rhythm in relation to certain spaces and cultural forms to work through and bring to life abstract ideas of prejudice. This enlivens a quality of realness in the constructed social world and, from this, he imaginatively manipulates the time space of the narrative to knot particular (comedic)
meanings and affect an audience – to laugh, to connect themselves to the narrative, to reflect on the ideas that have been made tangible.

My centring of affect here, as introduced at the start of this thesis, is central to the approach I take to public sociology and my concern for engaging people in sociological imagination. As I have argued (Watson, 2016), I am concerned with engaging people in sociological imagination via a creative medium that takes written public sociology beyond accessibility (see Gans, 1989: 6–7), beyond accountability (see Maryl and Westbrook, 2009: 152–154), and beyond immediate relevance or convenience (see Vannini and Milne, 2014: 237). I see that creative and meaningful engagement involves affect, and effective public sociology requires affective sociological narratives. This quality of affectivity is important for doing creative public sociology. I emphasise affect throughout the novel, particularly as discussed where I employ the chronotope of the sea, and including the word ‘sea’ in the novel’s title which highlights these scenes where the reader is affectively moved “into the sea.” Throughout the novel, the chronotope of the sea invokes the concept of affect and affective intensities. The title of the novel emphasises this turn to affect through the metaphor of the sea; with it I hope to highlight the value of a movement into the “sea” of affect in creative public sociology.

Affect, Audience and the Student-Public

Affect is central to how I have crafted the narrative of the novel and understood potential audiences for Into the Sea. The cultural meanings and chronotopic configurations I have discussed in this chapter, in Becker’s (2007: 283) words, ‘do more than set a mood or elicit an emotion; they also provide information that the attentive reader uses to construct an understanding of the nature of the [society] being talked about.’ As well as intending for the novel to be read as a work of popular fiction, targeting an Australian contemporary fiction market, I have also designed the novel around Burawoy’s (2005: 9) notion of the student-public and Back’s (2016: 46) claim that ‘academics should see themselves first as teachers.’ Recognising students as a kind of public is not a new formulation of Burawoy’s, however in his seminal piece on public sociology he raises the question, ‘what does it mean to think of [our students] as a potential public?’ (2005: 7). Burawoy draws attention to the value of actively seeing sociology students as a public within the context of public sociology.
In outlining that ‘there are multiple public sociologies, reflecting different types of publics and multiple ways of accessing them,’ he sees that ‘publics can be destroyed but they can also be created. Some never disappear – our students are our first and captive public’ (Burawoy, 2005: 7). Back echoes this, arguing that ‘students are our first public and often our most important audience’ (2016: 46). Burawoy argues that ‘as teachers we are all potentially public sociologists’ (2005: 9).

The introductory sociology classroom is a rich and well-recognised space for a text like Into the Sea. As noted in the first section of this thesis, fiction can provide a ‘wealth of sociologically relevant material, with manifold clues and points of departure for sociological theory and research’ (Coser, 1972: xvi). Novels are recurrently paired with sociological theory in classrooms (see for example Laz, 1996) in order to give students the opportunity to ‘clothe the dry bones of social theory’ (Weber, 2010: 353). Coser’s (1972) Sociology Through Literature effectively curates excerpts from literature and poetry into sociological themes, in order to help ‘teach modern sociology through illustrative material from literature’, and ‘contribute to the refinement and clarification of the concepts of sociology’ (Coser, 1972: 4–5). Popular books and literary novels have been recognised for the value that their insights into social realities may bring to sociology (Becker, 2007: 8; Szakolczai, 2015: 225), and the ways they bridge readers and writers, and academics and students (Coser, 1972; Hegtvedt, 1991; Leavy, 2012a: 252; Burawoy, 2005: 7). Similar motivations influence social researchers and novelists, too: as Leavy (2012a: 252) argues, both fiction and qualitative research aim to ‘generate human understanding.’

Burawoy’s (2008c) framework of public sociology as teaching centres on dialogic relations. Importantly, he sees that conceiving of students as a public surely does not mean we should treat them as empty vessels into which we pour our mature wine, nor blank slates upon which we inscribe our profound knowledge. Rather we must think of them as carriers of a rich lived experience that we elaborate into a deeper self-understanding of the historical and social contexts that have made them who they are. With the aid of our grand traditions of sociology, we turn their private troubles into public issues (Burawoy, 2005: 9).

This conception aligns with contemporary pedagogical approaches to teaching sociology, and particularly for engaging students with Mills’ (1959) work, that
involve active, experiential, deep learning and the cultivation of reflexivity (see Roberts and Roberts, 2008; Strangfeld, 2013; Windsor and Carroll, 2015). The prior knowledges, social engagements and varying potential futures that students are seen to have are increasingly centred in teaching via classroom and curriculum design. As Burawoy highlights (2005: 9), a key element of the role of the teacher-as-public-sociologist is to turn students’ private troubles into public issues – to recognise students as a public, and then help them see themselves as a public as well. Burawoy’s (2005: 9) language draws on Mills here, as his work often does. Mills’ sociological imagination (1959) is a central element to many, if not most, introductory sociology courses. Sociological imagination is a valuable frame for helping students to think sociologically and thus do sociology.

This potential audience of the student-public has been central to my design of Into the Sea and how I have approached my central research question: how may we engage people in sociological imagination (and why should we)? In the early stages of designing the novel, I aimed to highlight key sociological themes through the narrative, such as gender, class, culture, power, race, families, work and leisure. Like the approach Bancroft and Fevre (2016) take in their sociological novel Dead White Men and Other Important People, I aimed to enliven in a narrative some of the ‘big ideas’ of the discipline. Bancroft and Fevre focus on the student side of the student-public, centring their narrative around a young female student named Mila as she studies sociology. They bring to life, through Mila and her peers, how a sociological imagination may be developed in the intersections between curricula and everyday life. While Dead White Men and Other Important People is a fictional narrative, the authors’ approach to enlivening sociological imagination is a quite literal one – the characters themselves verbalise nuanced understandings of sociological concepts, including reciting detailed quotations from social theorists. The novel ends with Mila and another central character, Arun, passionately discussing Charles Cooley:

As they walked across the courtyard together towards the gatehouse, Mila spoke. ‘Do you remember Charles Horton Cooley?’

‘Yes, he was the guy who went on about how we only relate to each other in our minds.’

‘Good, we will make a sociologist of you yet.’

‘You want everyone to be a sociologist.’
‘And so they should be. Anyway, Cooley said: “What, indeed, would society be, or what would any one of us be, if we associated only with corporeal persons and insisted that no one should enter our company who could not show his power to tip the scales and cast a shadow?”’

‘You mean fictional characters can teach us something after all?’

‘The can teach us anything, even sociology’ (Bancroft and Fevre, 2016: 230).

Designed to help students traverse the same sociological theories and, with Mila, develop their sociological imagination, the novel explicitly brings to life key sociological ideas and what it means to think sociologically. In Into the Sea, rather than replicate a “campus novel” like this, I moved away from aiming to enliven particular sociological themes or concepts and focused specifically on sociological imagination. Rather than using students who were actively engaged in learning sociology, I created characters that were already part of this imaged future, post-university public that pedagogical approaches to teaching sociology aim to centre. My characters are not social scientists, nor did they study sociology majors – they are teachers, nurses, real estate agents, IT specialists, and business professionals. As discussed in Chapter 4, I use the narrator, rather than the characters, to bring sociological imagination to the story. I do not use the narrator to explain what sociological imagination is, or present a sociological argument about particular processes in the novel; I use the narrator’s voice to float critical ideas and questions about social life which take a sociological perspective. It is through the narrator in particular that I consider ‘the difference’ for a reader ‘between getting information out of a text and living in it’ (Back, 2016: 49). I use the narrator’s voice to guide readers toward sociological imagination.

While I did not take the same approach to illustrating other sociological work that Bancroft and Fevre (2016) do, as I moved away from structuring my narrative thematically, my initial aim of highlighting key sociological themes still influences the final product of the novel. Overall, I still aim to complement introductory curricula with the novel in a comparable way to Bancroft and Fevre (2016); by focusing on engaging readers in sociological imagination through the multilayered elements of the novel – its voice, characterisation, aesthetic, poetic, and verisimilitude
– I aim for the novel to effectively and affectively engage a student-public in the activity of sociological imagining.

Concerning affect, I have used *Into the Sea* to consider the value of sociological imagination outside sociology classrooms. I have also used the novel to consider the limitations of such explicitly pedagogical approaches and explore how we, public sociologists, may work to cultivate sociological imagination without ‘teaching’ publics about their own lives. Cultivating sociological imagination means helping people ‘to use information and develop reason’ (Mills, 1959: 5) and ‘experience a transvaluation of values’ (Mills, 1959: 8) by grasping ‘history and biography and the relations between the two within society’ (Mills, 1959: 6), including between ‘personal troubles of milieu’ and ‘public issues of social structure’ (Mills, 1959: 8). This is done with the aim of encouraging ‘purposeful public activity and the exercise of agency’ (Furedi, 2009: 182); Mills sees that with sociological imagination ‘the indifference of publics is transformed into involvement with public issues’ (1959: 5). It is a concept for understanding our social worlds and changing how we live our social lives: this is the promise of sociological imagination (Mills, 1959: 15). This promise, and the ways that Taylor in particular conceptualises and negotiates her agency throughout the story, highlight why engaging people in sociological imagination is a valuable goal of public sociology. Approaches to teaching sociology share Mills’ aims; as noted, sociological imagination is used in introductory courses as it valuably frames thinking sociologically and what it means to *do* sociology. These affective aims mirror the key potential that Kloepfer (1987) sees in advertising and constructs his concept of sympraxis around: affecting ‘lasting changes in attitude’ (Kloepfer, 1987: 136) and eliciting ‘action in the real world’ (Kloepfer, 1987: 136). As such, concerning the ‘how’ of engagement as per my central research question, I see that in pedagogical approaches and in public sociology, a student-public may be engaged in sociological imagination through creative mediums that centre the concept and qualities of affect.

Les Back, describing a discussion with students on the question of whether sociology can change society, states ‘society isn’t changed by sociology or thinking but perhaps we are changing ourselves’ (2016: 167). He argues that what creates changes is not ‘the capacity to translate or transpose the world through sociological revelation or that
which privileges sociological thought as the key to unlock common sense’ (Back, 2016: 168); rather, as well as through ‘thinking together’ and ‘opening out to the social world and having our understandings challenged as a result,’ Back says ‘we are changed by “living in books”’ (2016: 168). Sociological fiction is a valuable medium for affectively cultivating sociological imagination. I have shown throughout this exegetical analysis of Into the Sea, sociological imagination as a sociological style of imagining may be illustrated and stimulated via a narrator’s voice; and the live relations between biography and history, including the ways that personal troubles and public issues shape these relations, may be illustrated through characters’ lives and experiences. The aesthetic form of the novel may contextualise the everyday significance of this imagination, as, for example, the currents of the neoliberal imaginary are rendered visible. The novel’s poetic may unsettle “common sense” ways of thinking and enliven this sociological style of imagining, by, for example, challenging individualistic frames of being with more relational Spinozan ways of conceiving the social. Finally, as I have focused upon in this chapter, verisimilitude may be achieved by heightening forms of cultural meaning via the chronotopic configuration of particular scenes, in such a way that crafts a sympraxis or affectivity and cultivates sociological imagination. Complementary to traditional modes of teaching and projects of public sociology, I see that my sociological fiction novel Into the Sea, through both practice and outcome, develops a panoramic social world that affectively brings sociological imagination to life, makes meaningful a relational conception of the social world, and may actively engage readers in the activity of sociological imagining.
Part 4 – Conclusion

Part 4 presents the final chapter of this thesis, Chapter 8: The Value of Sociological Fiction. Chapter 8 revisits the core arguments of the thesis and outlines the key contributions of the research – namely the sociological fiction novel *Into the Sea*, as a product of affective public sociology, and the methods braiding technique, as a novel process for doing mixed methods research with arts-based and qualitative methods.
Chapter 8: The Value of Sociological Fiction

If there is a key point that I hope a reader may take away from my novel and from this research overall, it is the one that I make at the end of Chapter One in *Into the Sea*: we are the stories we tell. This is not a new idea but one I have worked to make sociologically significant, and significant through sociology. That we are the stories we tell rings true for the discipline and in everyday life – to paraphrase Bakhtin (1981: 250), meanings take shape in narratives and it is with meaning that the knots of narratives become tied and untied. Beyond this story-telling maxim, in this thesis I have presented key ideas regarding sociological imagination, neoliberal individualism, relationality, affect, meaning-making, and fiction. With these ideas I have made interventions in contemporary debates concerning public sociology, sociological engagement, and creative directions for the discipline. I have progressed disciplinary critiques of the neoliberal imaginary, by drawing on Spinozan concepts and the arts-based method of fiction writing. Most centrally, with this project I have considered what Mills (1959) calls the promise and cultural meaning of sociology. As I explained in Part 1, I see that Mills’ promise is both a potential and an assurance. The sociological imagination ‘seems most dramatically to promise an understanding of the intimate realities of ourselves in connection with larger social realities,’ and it is ‘the quality of mind whose wider and more adroit use offers the promise that all such sensibilities – and in fact, human reason itself – will come to play a greater role in human affairs’ (Mills, 1959: 15, italics in original). Mills argues,

> it is by means of the sociological imagination that [individuals] now hope to grasp what is going on in the world, and to understand what is happening in themselves as minute points of the intersections of biography and history within society… By its use [individuals] whose mentalities have swept only a series of limited orbits often come to feel as if suddenly awakened in a house with which they had only supposed themselves to be familiar… Their capacity for astonishment is made lively again. They acquire a new way of thinking, they experience a transvaluation of values; in a word, by their reflection and by their sensibility, they realise the cultural meaning of the social sciences’ (1959: 7-8).

Through considering this promise and cultural meaning I have explored Mills’ (1959) sociological imagination as a lively activity, as a sociological style of imagining. I
have sought to address how and why we might engage people in sociological imagination in a creative (Beer, 2014: 12) and arty way (Back, 2012) that builds on contemporary approaches to public sociology (Burawoy, 2005) and delves into the common, if dichotomised, history between art and science which sociology has ‘never settled on one side of’ (Barnwell, 2015: 561-562).

Bringing together the methods of autoethnography, literature analysis and arts-based research fiction writing, I have explored how sociological fiction may contribute to the task of ‘assist[ing] the influence of the sociological imagination in society’ (Furedi, 2009: 17). This involved considering creative adaptations of the craft of sociology (see Mills, 1959), as well as broader social challenges including the ‘deeply antisociological’ ethos and governance regime of neoliberalism that public sociology struggles against (Burawoy, 2005: 7). I have worked to understand the everyday processes of relation that link biographies and histories (Mills, 1959), as well as the context within which these relations are contemporarily lived through – in this instance, I focused upon the neoliberal imaginary. To think through and challenge the individualistic common sense of this imaginary, which I found to be problematic in light of my aim to engage people in sociological imagination, considering that the ethos of neoliberalism is ‘hostile to the very notion of “society”’ (Burawoy, 2005: 7), I turned to the relational and affect-centred work of Benedict Spinoza (2005 [1677]). From Spinoza I drew conceptual tools for considering the fundamental and constitutive meaning of ‘social embeddedness’ (Armstrong, 2009: 60) and for exploring the ‘possibilities for autonomy of an individual conceived in a profoundly relational way’ (Armstrong, 2009: 45), which I saw could enliven the activity of sociological imagination. To ground and realise the promise of a Spinozist sociology, I then considered the temporal and spatial ways that moments and narratives are made meaningful; I focused my attention on forms of cultural meaning, and the value of this for doing affective public sociology that may cultivate sociological imagination.

I have done these things through and in my sociological fiction novel. This novel throws up and knits together each of these conceptual arguments, bringing them into tension and also resolving them in various ways. Into the Sea is an experiment in sociological imagination. In working through and extending Mills’ sociological imagination, I have striven to orient myself around a cultural sociology of everyday life. As Back (2015) argues, everyday life matters. It matters because public issues ‘are alive in the mundane aspects’ (Back, 2015: 834). Everyday life ‘offers the
opportunity to link the smallest story to the largest social transformation’ (Back, 2015: 834). It is through the small story of Taylor Brown’s everyday life throughout 2014 that I have considered the transformative promise of sociology.

**Summary of Exegesis**

In Chapter 4 I highlighted how I worked to do more than underpin my research with a Millsian ethos; I critically engaged with sociological imagination as something which can be crafted and illustrated through fiction in response to calls for ‘renewed creativity in the deployment of the sociological imagination’ (Beer, 2014: 6). I used sociological literature on biographical enactment and arts-based research techniques to fictionalise experiences and insights from my autoethnography concerning the biography-history relationship that Mills’ (1959) discusses, through the characterisation in *Into the Sea*. I determined that the particular relationship between biography and history is significant for enlivening sociological imagination in a way that takes this concept beyond being a static analytic tool of the discipline; this biography-history relationship can bring a focus on narrative, a focus on change and trajectories (Back, 2012: 36), and a future orientation to sociological imagining.

I also explored the activity of sociological imagination through the narrator’s voice in the novel, drawing upon my autoethnographic work and other sociological literature surrounding what Gane and Back (2012) call the ‘cultivation of a sociological sensibility.’ I focused on key elements of Mills’ sociological imagination (1959), specifically ‘the craft’ of sociology (1959: 159), the lived processes of the relationship between biography and history (1959: 4), the ‘bounded orbits’ people live within (1959: 3), being a ‘biographical entity’ (1959: 8), and the value or potential of sociological imagination for understanding biographical enactment (1959: 161). These elements are important for considering how public sociology can make sociological imagination engaging. What I have aimed to achieve with *Into the Sea* is not a concise sociological argument delivered via a narrative; the novel works to illustrate sociological imagination in order to show key elements of the concept through the characterisation and show the activity of sociologically imagining through the narrator’s voice. This illustrative function is important for engaging people in sociological imagination via the novel.
In Chapter 5 I explored how the neoliberal imaginary normalises and naturalises competitive individualism in response to a disciplinary gap that Gane (2014b) highlights. Gane (2014b: 1104) argues that to ‘analyse and potentially engage with the ways in which neoliberalism organizes its own version of social reality,’ sociologists must treat neoliberalism ‘as a serious intellectual project’ by ‘paying detailed attention not just to its politics but also to its epistemology and to the loop it constructs between the two.’ In both Chapter 4 and in *Into the Sea* I took on this task: I paid detailed attention to neoliberalism as an imaginary, and I focused sociological attention on this neoliberal imaginary via the aesthetic form of my novel. As Featherstone (1991: 7) argues in relation to the approach of Simmel, I worked to consider ‘the limits of individuality in modern society,’ and through this contextualise the significance of sociological imagination.

I focused on how individualism and competition are central to the neoliberal imaginary, including how this imaginary promotes the competitive individualisation of the social world. I then argued that a complex notion of competition, which infers both economic and evolutionary implications, is significant in how this imagination is naturalised and legitimised in society. I then considered the implications of this for governmental reason and individual responsibility, and unpacked how I used the neoliberal imaginary to construct the aesthetic of the novel in order to highlight how this neoliberal imagination is embodied and reproduced. That is, the structural style of the novel-world is shaped by neoliberalism and this neoliberal imaginary informs the overall aesthetic form of the novel. The particular key elements of the neoliberal imaginary I used to construct this aesthetic form are competitive individualisation, competition as economic and evolutionary, and the potential for upward mobility affecting the individual’s responsibility to become competitive.

In Chapter 6 I focused on how Spinozan concepts of relationality, affect, imagination and agency may enliven sociological imagination. I did this to challenge the competitive individualism of the neoliberal imaginary via the novel’s poetic. At specific points in the novel, I developed particular language and framing devices from Spinoza’s *Ethics* which allow a more relational conceptualisation of the social world to emerge in the narrative. Using a Spinozan ontological approach, I considered how individualism may be seen as constitutively social; I explored how *Into the Sea* opens up a relational view of individuality and brings an ontological significance to ‘the
I do not aim to illustrate specific Spinozan concepts with the novel, but rather my interpretation of Spinoza’s work colours the final version of Into the Sea. I use this Spinozan poetic to unsettle and critique the neoliberal imaginary, which as discussed I aim to draw attention to through the novel’s aesthetic.

From Spinoza, I understand that the constitutive ‘process of relation’ collapses discrete individuality and ‘calls into question the existence of boundaries between individual things’ (Williams, 2015: 16). Connected to this is the ‘affections of the body’ or the body’s changing power to act (Lord, 2005: 85), which importantly extends ‘beyond corporeal embodiment’ (Williams, 2010: 245). A social, physical and psychological experience (Gilbert, 2014: 145-146), affect is not a ‘sentiment’ but an ‘intensity’ (Massumi, 2004: xvii). Relationality and affect is linked to the capacities for knowledge (IIP40) that human beings have, and how kinds of knowledge may help increase our individual and collective well-being, power and freedom. Affect, bodies, imagination and knowledge are together grounded in the ‘crucial concept of conatus – the endeavour or struggle to persist in being’ (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 26). The ‘power to imagine is thus integral to the continued existence and thriving of the individual’ (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 27). Importantly, these epistemological and ontological conceptions are not individualistic in nature. In different ways, imagination, reason and intuition are grounded in social relations – these are not independent ways of knowing that individuals alone strive to develop. An individual’s capacity for self-preservation, and for a full and dynamic engagement with life, is connected to how we imagine and know the social world as well as ourselves and our experiences.

In Chapter 7 I considered the value of engaging cultural meaning in arts-based public sociology, as well as the function of the overall novel product. I considered the sociology of time and space as well as Bakhtin’s notion of chronotope (1981). Time and space ‘constitute a fundamental unity’ in the novel and ‘in the human perception of everyday reality’ (Bemong and Borghart, 2010: 3); the chronotope highlights how time space is ‘tantamount to the world construction that is at the base of every narrative text’ (Bemong and Borghart, 2001: 3). A key configuration in the novel is the biographical-chronotope. With this I enlivened cultural sociological concepts by considering varying biographical rhythms and engaging culturally meaningful forms of Australiana that my autoethnography highlighted. I explored the quality of
verisimilitude and argued how *Into the Sea* achieves this artistic criteria, by engaging meaningful cultural imagery through the biographical-chronotope.

I then explored the role of affect in the novel. Doing this I drew on Kloepfer’s theory of sympaxis (1987), which concerns the emotive and motivating power of communication, what I call a quality of affectivity. Again I drew on forms of Australiana to tap into the ‘intellectual, imaginative and emotional attitudes’ (Bemong et al., 2010: iii) that are attached to and realised through these cultural forms; with these I played on the broader mimesis and discourse structures that run through scenes in order to make certain moments in the novel particularly affective. I worked to employ affect through the “texture” of the chronotope of the sea and, through the meaningful relation between these affective moments and the rest of the novel, to thereby engage readers in the experiential activity of sociological imagination. Concluding this chapter I raised introductory sociology courses as an intended space for *Into the Sea*. I showed how pedagogical theories have informed my approach to affect and sociological imagination, as well as the design of the novel. I argued that pedagogical approaches and projects of public sociology like *Into the Sea* that centre the concept and qualities of affect may effectively engage student-publics in sociological imagination.

**Key Contributions**

This thesis makes two key contributions to disciplinary knowledge. The first is the novel product, which operates as an affective form of public sociology that may engage publics, and specifically a student-public, in sociological imagination. The second contribution is the methodological process with which I developed and crafted my sociological fiction novel, which I have termed the methods braiding technique.

**The Novel Product as Affective Public Sociology**

This thesis has presented a creative direction for public sociology in novel writing, via the product of *Into the Sea*. As I have argued (Watson, 2016), I see that novel writing presents sociologists with a process and a medium for doing public, engaging, panoramic and affective sociology. Employing creative mediums such as novels may cultivate a broader, affective engagement with significant academic ideas such as the sociological imagination. Sociological fiction novels may bring the local and global
into dialogue, and help craft the scope and panoramic depth that sociology arguably requires (Inglis, 2014).

Narrative practice does not only concern fiction writing: ‘sociology is itself a story’ (Bauman 2001: 13). The idea that sociologists construct stories about and make coherent narratives of the social world is not new. Weber argued this through the concept of verstehen (see Benton & Craib, 2010: 80; Tucker 1965). Becker, whose style of approach is contemporarily renowned, claims sociologists explore and ‘tell’ about society by making representations (2007). Representations of society are not limited to traditional scholarly mediums nor are they the sole practice of sociologists; Becker discusses fiction, drama, films, photographs, maps, tables, mathematical models, and ethnography as different representative forms (2007: 8-10). Understanding sociological work in this representative way is productive. Becker explains how making representations involves careful consideration of selection, translation, arrangement, and interpretation (2007: 20-26). Becker’s representations approach also brings to the fore important questions of audience communities (2007: 62), believability (2007: 117), aesthetics (2007: 121), and moral judgements (2007: 129).

As I have argued (Watson 2016: 442), focusing specifically on the labour of writing – writing being the principal mode and output of sociological work – sociology involves exercising literary techniques despite being largely restrained to non-fictive reporting. While much sociology aims to retain the ‘quality of lived experience’ (Game & Metcalfe 1996: 94), sociologists ‘tell stories as if they weren’t storytellers’ (Game & Metcalfe 1996: 65). My project has built on Becker’s (2007) idea of making representations to conceptualise how the sociological imagination may also be understood as a narrative practice. In a literal way, all academic works are narratives because they employ narrative structures in order to present coherent arguments. These narratives involve sociological representations of social life. However, conceptualising public sociology as a process of constructing narratives rather than making representations helps centre the valuable notion of narrative reality. Theoretically positioning the much-needed ‘recapturing’ of the sociological imagination (Furedi 2009) as a narrative practice may be especially productive for public sociology as narrative processes are already central to both everyday life and to sociology. Further, focusing on the narrative realities of public sociology and the
stories sociology seeks to tell may help us, as Furedi argues we need (2009: 182), to ‘project a sense of a world that can encourage purposeful public activity and the exercise of agency.’ I see that this encouraging of activity and crafting of sociological imagination as a live activity involves cultivating a quality of affectivity – what, as I have discussed, Kloepfer (1987) calls sympraxis.

Vannini and Milne cogently call for a multimodal public ethnography that counters ‘uni-modal products such as writings’ (2014: 227). However, developing sociological research into fiction is a distinct direction for public cultural sociology. Rather than adapting traditional scholarly work for ‘more convenient’ mediums (Vannini and Milne, 2014: 226), novel writing shifts the emphasis from the representation of sociological work to its intimate and intellectual dynamism. Novels transform the message exchange. Importance shifts from effective to affective communication; from mimesis to sympraxis (Kloepfer, 1987). This is not to suggest that traditional sociological work does not, or cannot, affect its publics. However, novels arguably have an edge that non-fictional scholarly work does not. One significant difference between typical scholarly media and novels, with regards to cultivating sympraxis, is their position as cultural texts. These texts are approached differently by publics and often engaged with for different purposes. Without creating a false binary, scholarly texts can be understood as primarily mimetic and novels as purposefully sympractic. Novels are primarily read as a form of entertainment and leisure practice, whereas scholarly texts are consumed for information and often only for professional or academic purposes. When exploring Pride and Prejudice as a social analysis, Howard Becker points out that novel readers still ‘have to do a lot of work’ (2010: 249–251). However, publics approach academic and creative public texts aware of these differences. Indeed, most publics rarely independently approach scholarly media such as journal articles at all because they cannot access them, physically and intellectually. When they do engage, publics can be seen to engage with these texts differently because they, as readers, hold different levels of power in each space. Power relations are not removed, especially when novels are assigned in classroom settings (Carlin, 2010: 219). However, publics can arguably act as interlocutors more easily when engaged in novel reading, as fiction is more open to reader interpretation. Fiction gives publics the opportunity to act as interlocutors, and to retain some of the power they often otherwise lose in playing the role of ‘the public’ in traditional
scholarly engagements with non-academic audiences. Novels and fiction are culturally positioned this way. Novels can be seen to broaden both the practice of sociology as well as the spaces of sociological consumption.

Public sociology encompasses an array of academic and public labours, motivated by a number of wide-ranging aims. With Into the Sea, I have focused on the aim of engaging publics with the activity of sociological imagination. This novel takes written public sociology beyond accessibility (Gans, 1989: 6–7), accountability (Maryl and Westbrook, 2009: 152–154), and beyond immediate relevance or convenience (Vannini and Milne, 2014: 237). I argue that engagement requires affective sociological narratives. Sociology’s publics must be affected by sociological work in order for the aims of public sociology to be realised and for an ongoing public dialogue to develop. This does not mean the work must be about a specific public readership, but rather means that it must achieve verisimilitude and engage with cultural meaning so that individuals may see themselves inside the world of the novel – come to understand, as interlocutors, that the world of the work and the social world they inhabit are linked. A novel may cultivate this quality of affectivity. As I have shown in this thesis, fiction may be used to illustrate, contextualise, enliven and cultivate sociological imagination in a way that affectively engages readers in the activity of sociological imagination. It is my aim that an Australian student-public in particular may be affected by the narrative and critically engage with the story, within classroom contexts, thereby engaging in a sociological style of imagining.

Sociology at its best drives society’s ‘reflexive consciousness of itself’ (Inglis, 2014: 103). This reflexivity can be cultivated through public sociology, and stimulated through sociological fiction narratives. Sociological narratives help us craft intellectual and panoramic “big pictures,” thanks to the scope and nuance that fiction writing allows. Novel writing offers an imaginative freedom and scope, which lends itself to illustrating the personal–public linkages highlighted by the sociological imagination (Mills, 1959), and opening up the affective activity of sociological imagining. Sociological fiction may make the importance of panoramic and innovative sociological thinking more clear, not just also for those outside of universities, but perhaps also for those on the inside of them too.
The methods braiding technique is a methodological design approach for qualitative mixed methods research projects, particularly for arts-based projects that incorporate qualitative methods. Braiding is a visual metaphor. Methods braiding does not only merge data in analysis but actively seeks integration, technically and analytically, for a specific research outcome. This is not the confusing of different approaches (see Creswell, 2011) but a technique which actively engages the co-influence which multiple methods may give rise to, through multiple forms of integration (see Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007). Methods braiding is designed to help researchers to integrate or ‘braid’ their methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation both simultaneously and sequentially.

In this technique, two (or more) methods are employed across a series of major research phases. The length of these research phases depends on the overall lifespan and style of the project, and serve to split the project into appropriate durations of methods employment or data collection. Between each research phase is a review period. These review periods are shorter in length than the research phases but should be long enough for the phase to be effectively reflected upon and assessed. This process design helps facilitate the braiding of methods – particularly the focus and employment technique of each method – as well as the analysis of collected data, and how this data and analysis is interpreted, during and across research phases. To use Creswell and Plano Clark’s (2007) terminology, braiding involves merging and connecting forms of integration. Methods are merged as the data is brought together via analysis and interpretation; the methods and data are collectively analysed during review periods and interpreted through arts practices in following major research phases. Further integration occurs as analysis and interpretation of the methods and data is connected across and during research phases; themes and findings from one method may be connected to those present (and not present) in another, and merged analysis and interpretations from review periods may be connected to and intentionally engaged with in later research phases.

Importantly this is done specifically for the production of the project outcomes, arts based and otherwise. To draw on the metaphor, when a braid is finished there are still recognisably separate strands, however together these strands are literally interwoven to produce a single braid. Mixed methods research may variously employ and integrate multiple methods (Creswell, 2014) but the purpose of
this braiding approach is to bring the selected methods together, in a single project, with the aim of co-producing research outcomes. As such, methods braiding does not stress particular research questions, rationales or outcomes but aims to centralise the purposeful consideration, justification and articulation of these elements. This may read as a cursory step in project design, however, as Bryman (2006) highlights, rationales are not commonly justified in research outputs and resulting problems suggest that rationales for undertaking this kind of research may not be purposefully considered either.

The phase-based element of the braiding technique builds in time for reflexive evaluation (Finlay, 2002), a process which means research outcomes, rationales, and desired outcomes are not only outlined at the commencement of a project and reengaged with when ‘writing up’ the research but are returned to and purposefully re-evaluated multiple times throughout the project lifecycle. In this way the methods braiding technique aims to maximise the benefits of undertaking pilot studies. Sampson (2004), evaluating her own experience undertaking a pilot study in an ethnographic project, highlights a substantial number of benefits which her pilot study offered. These include: testing (and demonstrating) the feasibility of the project; testing research tools for their appropriateness and suitability; establishing access and a network of contacts; developing familiarity with the field and/or with participants; gauging degrees of risk; determining and establishing required resources; cultivating reflexivity as a researcher as well as potentially with participants through feedback; and not least of all generating useable data (Sampson, 2004). The methods braiding technique, ideally with a pilot study included and through its phase-based approach where review periods are structured into the research calendar, works to cultivate each of these same benefits in a more longitudinal way. The systematic evaluation and refinement of central project elements – research problems, questions, rationales, methods, conceptual frameworks, intended outcomes – are central to this approach.

This extends established approaches by reimagining the employment of multiple methods as a simultaneous and phase-based process – a co-production of research, rather than as a discrete cross-verification or triangulation process (see Flick, 2017: 52-53). This methodological design could be figuratively understood as the union of Morse’s (1991) simultaneous and sequential designs, or a union of convergent parallel mixed methods (Creswell, 2014: 219) and multiphase mixed
methods approaches (Creswell, 2014: 228) with a ‘complex, quiltlike’ (Denzin, 2012: 85) intent. I designed and employed this technique in order to centre my fiction writing practice without establishing a knowledge hierarchy, to dynamically engage with issues of paradigmatic compatibility, and to reflexively consider how and why I was integrating my methods and analysis throughout.

In this project I employed the methods braiding technique to simultaneously and sequentially braid autoethnography, literature analysis and arts-based research fiction writing to construct a sociological fiction novel. Each method informed and developed from the others: my autoethnography informed the literature analysis as patterns and silences in the autoethnographic observations steered the sociological literature I engaged with; literature analysis informed the arts-based research through the narrative direction of the novel and through, for example, what the narrator does and does not highlight; and arts-based research informed the autoethnography in a comparable way to the literature analysis by impacting forms and content of the autoethnographic recordings.

From this, I determined that the key strengths offered by the methods braiding technique for arts and qualitative projects are reflexive periodic reviews, conceptualising research as a co-productive braiding process, and having centralised research outcomes. The braiding technique emphasises the drawing together of data, analysis and the researcher’s experiences of employing each method, during and between each of the research phases; this technique uses the patterns and gaps which develop to direct the future employment of those same methods and analysis as the project progresses. Further, the methods braiding technique helps ensure that reflexivity is not something conceptually worked into the written analysis after the researcher has finished data collection but is built into the project design in recurring stages. This helps researchers cultivate reflexivity in their research project at multiple levels and use insights from ongoing reflexive analysis to inform the future research phases. Finally, the design of this technique is aimed to centralise important questions about the research outcomes and make concrete the actual products of the research from the commencement of the project. As well as aiding reflexive, simultaneous and sequential arts-based and qualitative research, the methods braiding technique may best assist researchers in producing non-traditional research outcomes including art in
various forms, as these outcomes may be engaged throughout the research process rather than secondarily to traditional academic work.

**Aims and Future Avenues**

Undertaking this project I was interested in exploring what fiction writing could bring to the craft and public project of sociology. I aimed to produce a sociological fiction novel that would progress the project of public sociology and serve to engage people in sociological imagination. With the novel I aimed to contribute to public sociology and cultural sociology. I recognised that a gap exists in public sociology around the use of creative arts-based mediums, how engagement is understood, and how the concept of the sociological imagination is employed. There are also limited conceptual frameworks for doing public sociology that centres affect, rather than accessibility and metrics of effectiveness. Within cultural sociology, particularly work that focuses on culture and neoliberalism, there is a gap around how the concept of society is understood as meaningful (or meaningless), and how cultural meaning is researched using arts-based methods.

As noted in my Introduction, I have aimed to contribute to the project of public sociology with my novel artefact, *Into the Sea*, and by outlining a conceptual approach for doing public sociology that engages people in sociological imagination. I have also aimed to contribute to cultural sociology with an analysis of the neoliberal imaginary and the meaning of the concept of society, within a contemporary Australian context, and with my methods braiding technique. I additionally aimed to contribute to pedagogical approaches to engaging the student-public in sociological imagination via the novel, *Into the Sea*. Writing the novel, I aimed to achieve particular qualitative criteria concerning the quality of writing and sociological nature of the narrative so that the novel would be both suitable for publication and, in Becker’s (2007: 250) words, ‘rich in possibilities for sociological analysis and thinking.’

To build on these aims and progress the outcomes of this project, further research and discussion is needed in some key areas. Firstly, further research may assess the potency of other arts-based methodologies for centring affect in public sociology. Fiction writing is one arts-based method of many gaining momentum across social research – in her comprehensive texts, Leavy (2015; 2017) details the processes and
value of many other arts practices such as music, dance, theatre, and photography. In discussing narrative inquiry and fiction writing methods, Leavy specifically notes that ‘when we represent and share our research, our goal is not simply to expose others to it, but to affect those who read our work. The goals of particular projects may vary…but whatever our objective, we aim to affect our readers’ (2015: 45). A desired quality of affectivity has been pointed to in some public social science, in sociology (Back, 2012: 32; Hynes, 2016; Leonard, 209) as well as human geography (Fuller, 2008: 837). However, there are limited projects of public sociology that centre affect in practice. As established in this thesis, I see that cultivating a quality of affectivity is particularly valuable for engaging publics in the activity of sociological imagination. There are many practices which may help centre and cultivate affect in public sociology. Further research which employs arts-based methods may illuminate these.

Further research may also assess the efficacy of the methods braiding technique in other projects, bringing together different social research and arts-based methods. The key strengths which the methods braiding technique helps develop are reflexivity, a co-productive research process, and the centralising of research outcomes. Methods braiding works to facilitate the development of these outcomes; they are not unique to this technique nor dependant on the three methods which I employed in this project. Testing this methodological design in projects using, for example, interviewing or digital ethnography with photography or music may highlight areas for improvement in the technique’s design or other outcomes which developments may also foster.

Further discussions are also needed around sociological conceptions of the social which may effectively challenge the individualising project of the neoliberal imaginary (see Gane, 2014b). Here I have aimed to highlight how direct engagement with Spinoza’s Ethics may meaningfully contribute to such sociological conceptions. I have specifically focused on the value of relationality, affect, imagination and conatus. Further engagement with Spinoza’s work may be valuable for this, as there are many aspects of the Ethics which I have not engaged with here, and many more interpretations and applications of Spinoza’s ontological, epistemological and ethical arguments that may have great value for future sociologies. Engagements with Gane’s (2014b: 1104) assessment of neoliberalism as an intellectual project, and his questions concerning forms of the social that sociologists may ‘(re-)animate or defend’ (2014b:
that do not work with Spinoza are also important for public sociologies working against the ‘hostility’ (Burawoy, 2005) of this neoliberal imaginary.

While I have flagged some potential avenues for further research throughout the thesis, including on the use of smartphones in autoethnography and evaluating sociological fiction as a unique literary genre, I recognise two key future research avenues that may be developed from my project aims. The first future avenue for research involves embedding the novel in a curriculum. I have highlighted the student-public as an intended audience for Into the Sea, particularly within an Australian educational context. That the introductory sociology classroom is a recognised space where fictional texts may pedagogically contribute to the teaching of sociological concepts and how to think sociologically has informed the overall design of my novel. As per other usage, I see that Into the Sea too may provide a ‘wealth of sociologically relevant material, with manifold clues and points of departure for sociological theory and research’ (Coser, 1972: xvi) and help students to ‘clothe the dry bones of social theory’ (Weber, 2010: 353). To realise this, there is great potential in developing learning and teaching activities that use my novel, which draw on existing curricula, for teachers to employ in their classrooms. The Social Fictions Series by Sense Publishers, which Patricia Leavy edits, commonly includes scholarly introductions as well as critical questions and educational activities within their creative texts.

A second future avenue for research involves exploring the possibilities for co-design in sociological fiction specifically, and creative public sociology more broadly. In this project I drew on how Mills (1959) is employed in classrooms and on my own teaching experience to construct key themes, characters and plot points that I thought would resonate, affect and engage a student-public in sociological imagination. There is a rich potential in designing such projects with, rather than for, such an audience. A co-designed project of sociological fiction, or creative public sociology more broadly, would effectively draw on the increasingly rich turn to participatory research in the social sciences and provide a process with which to explore the quality of affectivity that I have argued here is central to sociological engagement.
The Value of Sociological Fiction

A question which I highlighted at the start of this thesis, which has driven and inspired my work throughout, is one raised by Beer (2014: 60) in his *Punk Sociology*: ‘what type of sociology do we want to do?’ Using characterisation and voice to explore and illustrate sociological imagination, aesthetic form with the neoliberal imaginary, a poetic with Spinoza, and verisimilitude through chronotopes that draw from the cultural meaning of Australiana, I have routinely considered both the style of sociology I have worked to craft with *Into the Sea* and the purpose of such a creative public project. In sum, I see that the value of sociological fiction lies in its ability to affectively affirm society. This affective quality is, as I have discussed, rarely achieved in traditional scholarly media, or centred and actively cultivated in public sociology. This affirmative stance is, as I see it, also lacking. Efforts of public sociology commonly centre on a defense of society – Burawoy’s (2004) renowned argument for public sociology is a defensive one. In multiple instances he frames sociology as ‘the defense of civil society’ (4), ‘the defense of the social’ (2005: 24), and ‘the defense of humanity’ (2005: 25) and humanity’s ‘interests’ (2005: 24). He talks of defending sociology’s ‘place in the world of science’ (2005: 17), as well as the various practices that each of the four types of sociology he outlines defend (2005: 13, 17). Through my engagement with sociological imagination, the neoliberal imaginary, Spinoza, and cultural meaning, I conclude that the value of sociological fiction lies in its ability to do “more” than defensively critique those things which impede and harm various forms of community and sociality. This is not to deny the importance of such defensive critiques, but rather highlight the value of an affirmative approach which may be affectively constructed in sociological fiction.

By seeking to affirm the vital nature of human society in our lives, and perhaps better imbue the term society with the feeling that ‘community’ carries, sociology may not only tease out the connective tissues of the neoliberal imaginary but effectively challenge foundational concepts of neoliberalism. We may actively (re)orient public sociologies toward fulfilling Mills’ (1959) promise and realising the cultural meaning he discusses. The process of constructing a fictional narrative that concerns society in a sociological way can help attune us to the meaning society does or can have in the everyday. It can also help us unpack why society does not have everyday meaning by making us reconstruct and show, for example, the affective operation of neoliberal individualism. If we better understand how things are tied and
untied as meaningful in the everyday, we may be able to transform our public sociology from a reactive to an engaging, imaginative and affirmative project.

I see that the role of sociological fiction is not only to make sociological thought more accessible to introductory students and fiction-reading publics, or to illustrate how sociological imagination works, but also to show the workings and vital nature of society; to affirm society, and make society – the focus of sociology – a meaningful concept for such publics in contemporary cultural contexts. Sociological fiction may help publically imbue the vital processes of society with meaning. Sociological fiction has more than product value. The value of my research, beyond the novel itself, is that it offers an approach for crafting affective public sociology and a conceptual terrain which a society-affirming sociology may be built with.
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