



MONASH University

Private Practice

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ABSTRACT

In pursuit of a personal and private creative practice, I record a ritualised weekly dinner with my family (comprised of my partner, parents, brothers and their families). I compile these recordings to form an archive that is available exclusively to the family. Restricting access to the archive divides the audience between family members and ‘everyone else’. The artwork incorporates the recordings, the archive and any conversations about them. I establish Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s minor theory as the foundation of my methodology that promotes withholding the artwork as a generative force. Components of minor theory inform the motivation, production, exposure and reception of this artwork. A central tension of this research, surfaces between my position of resistance as a minor artist and my ambition to make an artwork that feels real to all participants and audiences. This thesis details: my evolution as a minor artist; the conditions of production that facilitate the creation of a conceptual artwork that is discursive in content and form; the complications that arise from the personal and subjective nature of the research; and the audiences’ relationship to an artwork which is conditionally unavailable.

DECLARATION

This thesis is an original work of my research and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Kati Rule

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INTRODUCTION

Each week, my family gather for dinner in my parent's lounge room. The large room is considered "the good room" and it features a fireplace, piano, framed family photographs and artworks on the wall. Everything in this room stays in the same place, except during Christmas when the Jacobean lounge suite is pushed into a temporary formation to accommodate the tree, and in late Summer when the sun streams through the west facing windows and the dining table is moved to avoid the glare while we're eating. It is in this room we share meals, celebrate big and little events and discuss life in general. The atmosphere during dinner is relaxed, and while we natter, laugh and tease each other, a range of peripheral noises – birds chirping and squawking outside, dogs moving around, the sound of television from another room, phones ringing and buzzing intermittently – can also be heard.

While we're seated at the table our conversations often overlap, while at other times, we are all focussed on a single speaker or topic. We make announcements and we reminisce; telling stories about each other, or from our personal histories which then remind us of other tales, remembered and retold with enthusiasm. Sometimes a detail of a story is questioned, and facts and memories are presented until a new general consensus is agreed upon – or not. During these dinners, we are unaware of the new memories we create, and which stories or interactions might be perceived as important or noteworthy in the future. Sometimes though, a story resonates through this general hum. For example, recently at dinner, my mother detailed the connection between a Facebook post and comment that reminded her of a song, which she now sings to herself each night to get to sleep. As she began to sing the song at the table, my father, brother and I sang along in harmony for a little while, before trailing off to resume eating. In many ways this was an unremarkable moment, yet one that has re-surfaced as significant, as it emphasised my mother's mortality alongside notions of familial care and support. However, knowing the specific elements of that story are not relevant to the success of the artwork produced for this

research. By concealing the personal connections and associations of the familial material, the privacy of the participants and the sanctity of the experiences are protected, in addition to allowing a gap for the audiences to engage with the project. It is in this space – of not knowing the specifics of the family’s dialogue – where the audience can imagine the content of the recorded conversations or superimpose the scenario onto a personal context relevant to them. This process of activation becomes a central facet of the audience engagement with the artwork.

This strategy is repeated throughout the research, as a generative device that promotes the audience to perceive or imagine the content within the artwork. Therefore, throughout the process of this research I have minimised any public exposure of the project. On the occasions when I chose to reveal a soundbite from a recording or an image of the site, in each instance, the content was revealed to fulfill the University’s research program requirements and were not published or distributed. As I continue to protect the private nature of the project from broad distribution, I am mindful of providing enough information to activate the readers imagination. In order to do this without compromising the project, when inserting images that reveal any aspect or object in the family home, I have altered them, so that a suggestion of the scene is offered without disclosing the full character of the space. Again, this is a tactical decision to create a gap in exposure, which can operate as a generative space.

When I began this research I sought to create something that could be a portrait of us – my parents and siblings, our partners and their children – an artwork that would reflect the character of our relationships, how we value and prioritise coming together, and the nature of that space. To begin, I considered focussing on the family singing, as I had previously in a 2002 artwork, or alternatively, I thought to record the specific stories we tell. I wanted to make something that drew on our collective culture and traditions, when I realised – as the above description of our dinners illustrates – there was a forum already in place which would enable me

to capture all of these components at once.¹ In our family, for the last twenty-seven years, there has been an open invitation to attend dinner at my parent's house every Wednesday night and this event forms the basis for my work.

For this research, I decided to make audio recordings of our Wednesday Night Dinners and collate them into a private artwork, in the form of an archive, which will be made available exclusively to the family, at the completion of my candidature.² Outside of the primary, familial audience, exposure to the artwork/archive occurs primarily through one-on-one conversations with people, referred to throughout this thesis as the broader, additional or secondary audience. It is these three elements – the recordings, archive and discussions surrounding this project – that, combined, comprise the artwork. Throughout this thesis, I explore the developments of my artistic self that inform a minor practice, and review the factors which influence and promote engagement, between the artist, artwork and audience when an artwork is made for a limited audience.

This work is driven by concepts of the minor, developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in the 1970s, in which the philosophers positioned minor theory to be a critical resistance of the major.³ The major, or majoritarian, is encapsulated by dominant political, cultural or economical, systems of control, coercion and authority, such as the state or cisgender-white-heterosexual-men. While theoretical considerations of the minor have taken place across the humanities, the philosophers' emphasis on subversive approaches has resonated widely with artists and philosophers. A minor artist is any creative practitioner, who through their

¹ Kati Rule, *I'm A Lover Not A Dancer*, 2002.

² My use of the term private within this research refers to an action which involves or is directed at a particular person or group of people and not for people in general or for others to know about. Specifically, the archive is private and only available for listening to the family present in the recordings it contains. While access to the archive is limited to the family, it is important to note, that it is not a secret.

³ For this research, I specifically review: Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, "1730: Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible..." In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Athlone Press, 1988; reprint, 1992); Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, "What is a Minor Literature," In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, vol. 30 (U of Minnesota Press, 1986). *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* was translated by Dana Polan and originally published as *Kafka: Pour une Littérature mineure* in Paris in 1975. *What Is a Minor Literature* was written between *Anti-Oedipus*, written in 1972 and *A Thousand Plateaus* was originally published in French as *Mille Plateaux*, volume 2 of *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie* in 1980 in Paris, the translation and foreword was written by Brian Massumi in 1987.

methodology and artworks, disrupts or unsettles the standard modes of creative production, display, commodification and exposure, which subsequently creates something new. I position the family centred content of Belgian filmmaker and artist Chantal Akerman, American artist Laurie Parsons' focus on authentic audience engagement, and New Zealand artist Kimberley McAlevey's covert practice within this stream. Recognising them as minor artists occurs through self-identification or connection to a specific Deleuze and Guattari idea. Despite emerging almost fifty years ago, minor theory continues to exert relevance. In relation to artistic production, the concept of minor literature is usefully extended upon in the writing of Simon O'Sullivan, and philosophically and theoretically through the research and literature of Elizabeth Grosz.⁴

It was through my initial engagement with minor theory while writing my Masters, I formed the foundation of my artistic methodology as one of strategic and generative acts of withdrawal.⁵ In this research, I build on that groundwork to expand my understanding and application of the minor, while further incorporating family into my practice – which as an artist, researcher and gallerist – is located among several Melbourne contemporary art communities. Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of *the sorcerer* and *the nomad* encourage movement, inclusivity and autonomy between the multiple groups I work with.⁶ The philosophers' ideas of *a becoming*, *minor literature*, *deterritorialisation* and *minor language* introduce the concept of the collective and political, to the production of an artwork that is emotionally intense and deeply personal.⁷ Beyond connecting the personal to the political, I align the production of a minor artwork with feminist

⁴ Simon O'Sullivan, "Notes Towards a Minor Art Practice", *Drain: Journal of Contemporary Art and Culture* 05, no. Syncretism (2005), accessed January 2020, http://www.drainmag.com/content/NOVEMBER/RELATED_ESSAYS/Notes_Towards_Minor_Practice.htm; Henriette Gunkel, Chrysanthi Nigianni, and Fanny Söderbäck, *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

⁵ Kati Rule, "Site Unseen: Towards an Immateriality", (MFA, Monash University, 2015), <http://arrow.monash.edu.au/hdl/1959.1/1217217> Monash University Research Repository.

⁶ Deleuze, and Guattari, "1730: Becoming-Intense," in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

⁷ Deleuze, and Guattari, "What is a Minor Literature," in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* was translated by Dana Polan and originally published as *Kafka: Pour une Littérature mineure* in Paris in 1975. *What Is a Minor Literature* was written between *Anti-Oedipus*, written in 1972 and *A Thousand Plateaus* was originally published in French as *Mille Plateaux*, volume 2 of *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie* in 1980 in Paris, the translation and foreword was written by Brian Massumi in 1987.

theories, including Rosi Braidotti's assertion of the minor presenting as a process of continuous transformation.⁸ Informed by my approach as a minor artist, additional conceptual and theoretical elements including *the real*, *conversation*, and *the archive*; each stimulate engagement with the artwork and the project.

While there are traces of my family in the artworks I've made throughout my career, it was a challenge for me to recognise the value of the relationship between my family and art practice. It was through my desire to produce an artwork that would feel earnest, authentic and of value to me and the family, that I underwent a gradual process of realisation in which concepts of *the real* emerged as significant to my methodology. This enquiry was encouraged by Elizabeth Grosz's reading of the real, in the context of Deleuze and Guattari's minor theory.⁹ I follow in the path of artists Chantal Akerman, and American auto-fiction writer Kate Zambreno, whose feminist informed artworks also reference the complex emotional relationships surrounding creative production and family.

The tension that surfaces from withholding content (withholding the art from the public, from the family), is another generative strategy that stimulates engagement with my artwork. The actions of give and take, are most evident while discussing the project with people in which the layers of concealment and differing levels of access are exposed. *Conversation* is thus both content and medium of this discursive artwork. Dialogical artforms evolved from the durational and performative art movements of the 1960s and 70s, before surfacing as a genre of socially engaged practices that came to prominence in the 1990s. Reminiscent of the minor, conversational art often takes place outside of the expected and commodified realms of artistic production and exhibiting. Art historian Grant Kester writes extensively about socially engaged

⁸ Rosi Braidotti, "Becoming Woman: Or Sexual Difference Revisited", *Theory, Culture & Society* 20, no. 3 (2003)

⁹ Elizabeth Grosz, "The Future of Feminist Theory: Dreams for New Knowledges" Feminist Theory Workshop, Duke Women Studies, 2007, accessed 20.05.2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mwHoswjw5yo&feature=emb_title. Elizabeth Grosz, "The Future of Feminist Theory: Dreams for New Knowledges," In *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*, ed. Henriette Gunkel, Chrysanthi Nigianni, and Fanny Dr Soderback (New York: New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). I am aware of Jacques Lacan's extensive consideration of the Real, but explore it instead through the lens of minor theory. In the text, *Deleuze and the Lacanian Real*, Slavoj Zizek has connected Deleuze to Lacan's theory (although not to the minor), which can be accessed here: <https://www.lacan.com/zizrealac.htm>

artistic practices and broadens the scope of discursive artworks by linking the artform to a particular aspect of educational feminist theory which posits dialogue as an exchange amounting to connected forms of knowledge.¹⁰

Also emerging during this period were concepts of *the archive*, as artists translated the term in order to re-create, manipulate, and mimic its form in the name of art. When examining the archive, it is useful to delineate its creative adaptations from the traditionally recognised application of the term. According to the online Oxford Learner's Dictionary an archive is "a collection of historical documents or records of a government, a family, a place or an organization; the place where these records are stored".¹¹ Many artists have artistically interpreted the functional aesthetic of an archive to lend shape to an event, lifestyle or custom and importantly, to reflect on notions of time and memory. It is in this capacity, that Jacques Derrida describes the significance of the archive as a structure which supports symbolic and literal enquiry, a notion reinforced by Hal Foster and made evident in a number of seminal exhibition catalogues and publications foregrounding creative archives.¹²

This exegesis is divided into six chapters that each include sections and subsections. I utilise this structure to meander through the threads of knowledge, lines of reasoning, and trains of thought, as they developed through the research process. This process both reflects the unravelling of a narrative from my practice, while simultaneously building a new narrative – the story of this research. As such, the writing shifts between time periods, often referencing past events from my personal history as a means to comprehend and inform my methodology while echoing the disruptive nature of both feminist and minor theory.

¹⁰ This line of enquiry is supported by the following texts: Grant H Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2004). <https://sounds.bl.uk/Arts-literature-and-performance/ICA-talks/024M-C0095X0661XX-0100V0#>; Mary Field Belenky et al., *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1986); David Bohm, *On Dialogue*, ed. Lee Nichol (London, New York: Routledge, 1996); Gunkel, Nigianni, and Söderbäck, *Undutiful Daughters*.

¹¹ https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/archive_1

¹² Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Hal Foster, "An ARCHIVAL IMPULSE", *October* 110 (2004); The following two texts are important examples of the research and literature surrounding archival practice; Okwui Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*, 1st ed. ed., *Uses of the document in contemporary art*, ed. Photography International Center of (New York, N.Y.: International Center of Photography, Göttingen : Steidl Publishers, 2008).

In Chapter One, I trace my discovery of minor theory and describe how this revelation prompted a review of earlier artworks. It was through this process I was inadvertently able to identify the significant elements that informed my artistic self, leading to a synthesis of minor theory with my family and art practice. This combination, led me to establish my minor methodology, which was the tactical use of withholding as a generative creative strategy, informed by Deleuze and Guattari's writing in the tenth Plateau, "Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible..." and, "What Is a Minor Literature?".¹³

Chapter Two follows three lines of enquiry which form the theoretical jumping off points for my practice; balancing creative work with family, the multiple roles of an artist, and developing the minor as a methodology. First, I review the balance of making art with family in the context of filmmaker and artist Chantal Akerman's career. I explore how Akerman's relationship with her family, especially her mother, motivated and informed her output, while considering the influence of family on my practice, and the role my mother plays within our family culture (as explored in this research through our Wednesday Night Dinner). Second, through a minor lens I survey the tensions that arise between the multiple roles I hold as an artist, researcher, arts administrator, family member, friend, and student, as productive pressures and tensions. Third, I assert that *the sorcerer* and *the nomad*, are components of minor theory which support a faceted approach to artistic production, and study Akerman's film *No Home Movie* as evidence of this.¹⁴ When combined, minor theory, family and practice, are mechanisms that enable artistic production that is intimate, transformative, intuitive and progressive.

As a minor artist, the development of the studio component of the research can only be understood retrospectively, and it is in Chapter Three, that I review and distinguish the events

¹³ Rule, "Site Unseen"; Deleuze, and Guattari, "1730: Becoming-Intense," in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*; Deleuze, and Guattari, "What is a Minor Literature," in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* was translated by Dana Polan and originally published as *Kafka: Pour une Littérature mineure* in Paris in 1975. *What Is a Minor Literature* was written between *Anti-Oedipus*, written in 1972 and *A Thousand Plateaus* was originally published in French as *Mille Plateaux*, volume 2 of *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie* in 1980 in Paris, the translation and foreword was written by Brian Massumi in 1987.

¹⁴ Deleuze, and Guattari, "1730: Becoming-Intense," in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*; Chantal Akerman, dir. 2015, *No Home Movie* Brooklyn, NY: Icarus Films, DVD, 115 mins. DVD.

and conditions that determined the character of this artwork. This is a process which highlights my personal investment in the research, complicated and enhanced by working with my family, and their being both participants in its production, and the primary audience for the work. Aiming to make an artwork that feels real to us all, overlaps with Elizabeth Grosz's theorising on the *real*, as a sensation and physical matter that minor theory should aspire to. This perspective informs my use of the concepts, *a becoming*, *minor literature*, *detritorialisation* and *minor language*, to articulate the flexible, relational and intense emotional heart of the project, and how each element translates into a discursive artwork.¹⁵

In Chapter Four, I consider the dialogical nature of this artwork – being both content and form – as a site for ethical, transformative and generative interactions. Recording familial conversations as the core of an artwork and limiting access to them, is a disruptive tactic which resonates with feminist theory. This research recognises conversations as interactions which can foster connections and knowledge production, while utilising subjectivity and difference to expose the real.¹⁶ In each interaction that occurs as a result of this research, a strategic and intuitive response is aroused, which in turn creates space for potentialities to emerge – an essential function of the discursive artwork – making space for the stimulation of new thoughts and ideas. The discursive nature and personal content of Kate Zambreno's, *Book of Mutter*, *Appendix Project* and *Drifts*, reflects a conversational, feminist and minor approach to writing. Undertaking a close examination of these texts, enables me to address the challenges and tensions which guide, influence and determine the structure and form of the artwork and this exegesis.¹⁷

¹⁵ Deleuze, and Guattari, "What is a Minor Literature," in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*.

¹⁶ This line of enquiry is supported by the following texts: Kester, *Conversation Pieces*; Belenky et al., *Women's Ways*; Bohm, *On Dialogue*; Gunkel, Nigianni, and Söderbäck, *Undutiful Daughters*.

¹⁷ Kate Zambreno, *Book of Mutter* (South Pasadena, CA, Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Semiotext(e); Distributed by The MIT Press., 2017).; Kate Zambreno, *Appendix Project: Talks and Essays, Semiotexte(e)/ Native Agents* (South Pasadena, CA, Cambridge, Mass.: Semiotext(e), The MIT Press, 2019).; Kate Zambreno, *DRIFTS* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2020).

In Chapter Five, I decipher a form for the artwork which compliments my initial motivation to record family conversations. I find the archive as outlined by Jacques Derrida in *Archive Fever* is a structure which encapsulates this form, as it unites the breakdown of memory with the desire to record, and fosters activity that may result from an irrational or compulsive search for perceived content.¹⁸ Hal Foster claims the archive is a form that stirs curiosity and encourages enquiry within an audience, as it can represent a body of material, without revealing its subject.¹⁹ When I withhold the content of the archive from the broader audience, it prompts them to reflect, often self-reflexively, on its potential. Whereas for the family, the archive is a literal and metaphorical vessel, they may be compelled to explore.²⁰

In Chapter Six, I focus on the broader audience and analyse their autonomy and authority to interpret the artwork they have limited access to. I examine Marcel Duchamp's studio inactivity after he retired from making art, and Laurie Parsons' desire for authentic audience encounters, to illuminate the dynamic of the audience and artwork relationship as motivators for production. This research locates artist Kimberley McAlevey as an example of a contemporary artist working with obfuscation and a purposefully small audience. My discovery of McAlevey's practice wielded significant influence on this research, as my understanding of the audience, artwork and artist relationship, emerged from my astonishing experience of her work as an audience member.

In conclusion, I reflect on the methods in which artistic engagement is stimulated for the artist and audience, when the practice sits outside of the predictable matrix of contemporary artistic conventions, and when making art that is sincere, heartfelt, and conceptually rigorous, with and for a family. The artwork produced in this research is discursive in content and form. It situates conversations and dialogue as interactions that are *real* experiences for all participants,

¹⁸ Derrida, *Archive Fever*.

¹⁹ Foster, "An ARCHIVAL IMPULSE", 3.

²⁰ A search reflective of Roland Barthes' impassioned quest to find a photograph of his mother after her death, which captured her essence. As described in his book *Camera Lucida* Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).

which can expand and produce new knowledge of and about the artwork. For the familial audience, an important tension arises between their memories of our weekly dinners and the question of what is recorded. A similar tension exists for the broader audience when in conversation, it is revealed that the archives content is private and thus unavailable to them. This process is a strategic act of withholding employed to trigger intuitive responses, generate thinking or imagining from each audience, and compel them to engage further with the work. For the family, this engagement will initiate accessing the recordings, and for the interested broader audience, asking more questions about the project will increase their understanding, and inform their internal picture of the work. Each encounter exposes the levels of awareness and scaled acts of attention which support and sustains the practice. It is through considerations of attention that relate to the artworks production, function, presentation and exposure, alongside an exploration of the minor as an artistic and critical strategy, where the potential research questions at the heart of this project are developed.

1 CHAPTER ONE: BEGINNINGS

Identifying as a minor artist was a personal revelation that prompted a re-evaluation of the artworks I had made throughout my career. When I reviewed my practice through a minor lens, I was able to detect elements of the methodology in my artworks and actions as an artist, from the time I left art school. In this chapter, I trace the developments and evolution of my practice which led me to enlist withdrawal as a generative force and to explore my work through the minor. Encountering Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's theory of the minor, crystallised the variable components of my artistic production, and unearthed the foundations of my practice. It remains a significant discovery that provided a framework through which to describe my artistic approach, empower me to confidently continue in this artistic direction, and establish the minor as the methodological basis of my practice.

1.1 Discovering the Minor

I first encountered the minor as a concept, when I read the Brandon Joseph book, *Beyond the Dream Syndicate* (2008) about American conceptual sound artist Tony Conrad.¹ In this text, Joseph establishes Conrad as a minor artist articulated through the writings of artist Mike Kelley, and philosophers Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. The most influential aspects of this text on my research at the time, more so than Deleuze and Guattari's minor theory were two quotes from Conrad and Kelley. The first of these was Conrad's personal description of his career:

¹ Brandon Wayne Joseph, *Beyond the Dream Syndicate: Tony Conrad and the Arts After Cage (A "Minor" History)* (New York; Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books ; Distributed by The MIT Press, 2008).

I tend to fear at times for the world's perception of my own work: though I find my own oeuvre impeccably consistent and directed, its diversity (I realize) obscures the plane of this consistency from any but the most careful analyst.²

The second was Kelley's theory of the minor and its relationship to the major:

Minor histories are ones that have yet found no need to be written. Thus they must find their way into history via forms that already exist, forms that are considered worthy of consideration. Thus minor histories are at first construed to be parasitic.³

Identifying with Conrad's statement, I began to review the works I had made throughout my career. In light of Kelley's statement of the minor being dependent on the major, I began to recognise subtle and overt actions of refusal within many of my artworks, in addition to being able to identify the dominant conceptual and thematic streams of my practice.

1.2 Early Work

Post art school (in 1998), I maintained a studio for just over a year. Although, I found the studio valuable as a social space, I also felt vulnerable and exposed making art there. Consequently, my productivity was low, which made it difficult to justify the expense. I interpreted my unease at making in the studio as a failing on my part, and although I was worried that if I gave up the studio I wouldn't feel like an artist, with some hesitation, I finally did, surmising that perhaps I was not suited to be an artist. Afterward, although I was heavily involved in the contemporary art scene in Melbourne, for a period of four years I made very few artworks, and these I made almost in secret. However, from this period, out of the handful of artworks I did make, there are two that emerge retrospectively as being significant to my current practice.

² Tony Conrad, letter to Gerald O'Grady, October 23, 1975, p.4, copy located in Conrad's archive. Quoted in Branden Wayne Joseph, *Beyond the Dream Syndicate: Tony Conrad and the arts after Cage (a minor history)* (New York: Zone Books ; Distributed by The MIT Press, 2008), 53.

³ Mike Kelley, "Introduction to an essay which is in the form of Liner Notes for a CD Reissue Box Set", 1996, accessed September 1, 2012, <http://www.mikekelley.com/poeticintro.html>.

In the summer of 1998/99, I had been out of art school for just over a year and a few friends were starting a new gallery in what had been a window-fronted shop in the Port Phillip arcade in Melbourne's central business district.⁴ Prior to the gallery opening, while the shop was dormant, my friends agreed to let me employ a sign writer to paint directly onto the windows. There was to be no artists name, title, materials or duration listed and no opening event scheduled. It was my wish that the words and title of the artwork *LOVE FOR SALE* (see fig. 1), appear on the shop front with as little fanfare as possible, which it did, before disappearing without a trace. At that time, my discomfort with public attention was a trait I believed I would need to tame by exhibiting more, nonetheless I enjoyed the relative anonymity of this experience and felt invigorated by the process overall.

Almost three years after the sign writing artwork and in my fourth year of not-making, I secretly started to learn over a period of six months, the dance moves to the extended version of Michael Jackson's song *Thriller* (see fig. 2).⁵ During this time, I experienced the breakdown of a long-term relationship, a life-changing event that motivated me to film the dance and arrange to exhibit it. In order to resolve the work, I started to reflect on ways to represent the care and support I had received over that period that made the artwork possible. To symbolise this care, I settled on making audio recordings of friends and family, thirteen people in total, singing along to the song's chorus. I recorded each person individually and layered their voices on top of each other, to create a single track, a personal choir of encouragement.

⁴ The two years prior to this point the shopfront had been running as the artist run space Grey Area and it was about to become the first iteration of TCB ARI, established by Thomas Deveral, Sharon Goodwin and Blair Trethowan.

⁵ Michael Jackson, *Thriller*, 1983, 13min, Directed by John Landy.



Figure 1. Kati Rule, *LOVE FOR SALE*, 1999. Installation view at Port Phillip Arcade.



Figure 2. Kati Rule, *I'm a Lover Not a Dancer*, 2002, video still.

With the benefit of hindsight, I understand the sign writing artwork to be the first artistic act of withdrawal I executed. Although it had a public outcome, the lack of information available on the artwork's creation enabled me an anonymity I enjoyed, and any information on the work was disseminated verbally. The chorus component of the short film was both my first creative audio recording and attempt to represent notions of support and family. Each artwork is a noteworthy point of reference for the important ongoing themes of my practice.

I felt inspired by the combination of Conrad's perspective and Kelley's contextual understanding of the minor, to re-consider my practice as one that was conceptual and relational while also purposefully meandering, elusive and adjacent to the contemporary Melbourne art scene.⁶ This shift occurred at the same time my family home was being demolished. Two years before this event, my parents had moved from the house they had lived in for almost forty years, to the next-door neighbour's house. Once settled into the new house, they began to ask me about placing artworks around the house, in a way they had never done in the family home. In response to my parent's new sense of pride in their home, a desire developed in me to provide more art for them. I felt strongly that it was my role as a family member and an artist to provide this service for my parents and over time, I mentally compiled a number of ideas for artworks to make for them.

I had begun a Master of Fine Art (MFA), just prior to the family home being demolished, and around this time, I attended the National Gallery of Victoria to view the Gustave Moreau exhibition *The Eternal Feminine*. While there, I paused to watch a small-screen video tour of the Moreau Museum, established in his home and studio in Paris. While the film surveyed what had previously been Moreau's bedroom, I caught sight of a framed pair of photographic portraits. The two people in the portraits were Moreau and his mother, they were

⁶ The term relational is used here in the dictionary sense; existing or considered in relation to something else. It is specifically in reference to the inter-personal relationships that the conversational aspects of this research require. I don't consider this as a direct reference to the text *Relational Aesthetics*, written by the French curator Nicolas Bourriaud in 1996, focussing on the artform by the same name. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (France: Les presses du réel, 2002).

separate prints, framed to appear to be facing each other. That glimpse resonated with me strongly as I felt the portraits exposed a considerable concern of Moreau's; his relationship to his mother. I have since viewed them in person in the Gustave Moreau House Museum, and while there is little information available on these portraits, they stood out as a conceptual gesture made by Moreau, reminiscent of a relational artwork.⁷

The combination of encountering the Moreau photographs, reading about a minor artist, and the change in my parents housing, culminated in a significant development in my practice. At the point where the three events converged, I could see a clear path forward for both the research and studio practice that could accommodate the multiple roles I held as an artist, family member, and researcher. The route that presented itself culminated in my MFA research, *Site Unseen: Towards an Immateriality*.⁸

1.3 Site Unseen

The abstract for *Site Unseen* reads:

Site Unseen is a personal yet thorough exploration of the theoretical foundations of my artistic methodology, focusing on concepts of the minor and the fifth site in addition to examining the function of a consistently non-linear practice and the practical considerations of being an artist. Fundamentally this research is concerned with the act of withholding content as a strategic action, and the metonymic capabilities of an object or image are explored, uncovered and utilised in the production of bespoke artworks for display in a private residence, largely removed from the influence of standard institutional frameworks for exhibition. The engagement of the limited audience for these artworks is discussed in relation to the structures that support and signify an art object, which enable the audience an expansive and emancipatory system of learning. The notion of expansiveness again is utilised when referencing the confines of the audience, which is established through the multiple tiers of exposure to this research. Site-specificity is a fundamental aspect of this research and informs both the private nature of the exegesis and its production within the institution.⁹

⁷ The Gustave Moreau museum is located in the 9th arrondissement of Paris at 14, rue de la Rochefoucauld, Paris, France. It was established by the artist in 1895, in what was the site of his family home. The artist carefully curated the space.

⁸ Rule, "Site Unseen".

⁹ Rule, "Site Unseen".

For that research, I made a body of artworks with and for my family that is permanently installed at my parent's house. Access to the artworks can only be obtained by being an invited guest into the family home, otherwise only my MFA supervisor, and the assessors were permitted to visit the home and view the artworks in situ. I did not reproduce images of the artworks in the thesis, although I did provide basic descriptions of each piece, outlining their origins and how they function within the house and research. For example:

Untitled (with WFR), 2014
coloured pencil on watercolour paper
68.5cm x 50cm

The decision to make a hand drawn replica of a long play vinyl record in my mother's collection came initially from my respect for it as an object. It is a well-worn object that invokes a sentimentality of its own, and I responded to it, as it reflects an interest in music prevalent in our family. Although it has been a long time since an album held my mother's attention in the way this one clearly did – the album's condition is a testament to the fact that music was important to her – at one point in her life. Drawing the object by hand will elicit a reverence for the craftsmanship from my parents, therefore earning a respect for the drawing as an artwork. By adding the personal relationship my mother has with the object itself, a memory that is fading for her, she will be endeared to it regardless.¹⁰

It was my intention that any information on my artworks in the house, would be communicated conversationally, and operate not unlike a myth or anecdote.¹¹ This dialogical outcome has evolved into a significant component of this research and created an opportunity to extend my understanding of the minor.

For this research, I extend upon Joseph's reading of the theory and undertake a close examination of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's philosophies relating to the minor primarily through the plateau (chapter) "1730: Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-

¹⁰ Rule, "Site Unseen", 35.

¹¹ Information on this project has continued to be delivered primarily through dialogue, challenged by Lisa Radford to find a way to represent the project visually, I expanded the methods of exposure and had a suite of vector drawings of a few rooms where the artworks were installed produced. The resulting images are a comfortable compromise, as they do not portray specifics of the artwork, and suggest the environment, without being too revealing. These were reproduced in the catalogue for the exhibition titled *Support material, soft furnishings*, curated by Lisa Radford and Liang Luscombe, alongside a brief description of the project written by Kate Daw who was one of the MFA examiners (see Appendix A). *Support material, soft furnishings*, RMIT Project Space/ Spare Room, 12 February to 24 March 2016.

Imperceptible...” in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.¹² Additionally, formative to my application of the minor is the text “What Is a Minor Literature?”, as it appears in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*.¹³ A close reading of “Becoming...” and “What Is a Minor Literature” is critical to a thorough comprehension of the important terms and concepts surrounding the minor and how they influence my own understanding and use of minor theory in this research. For this chapter I establish five crucial terms; the minor, a becoming, the sorcerer and the war machine, minor literature, and deterritorialisation, that collectively embody Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy in relation to my research.

1.4 A Minor Development

That the minor enables the possibility of something other than what is expressed by the masters/majority is an essential aspect of its understanding. Deleuze and Guattari define the majority as “referring not to a greater relative quantity but to the determination of a state or standard”.¹⁴ In this research, the minor is evident in the abandonment of expected (major) standards of exhibiting and exposure, a disruption that also contributes to and influences the audiences’ perception of the work. The depth of the audience engagement relies on their innate levels of curiosity, and whether this intrigue is harnessed, will determine their receptivity to the discursive project. When Deleuze and Guattari state, “You don’t deviate from the majority unless there is a little detail that starts to swell and carries you off”, they describe the minor prompting a becoming–becoming and for me, potentially, the audience response to this artwork.¹⁵ The minor is the underlying force of all becomings and being-minor/minoritarian is the mobilisation of thought and resistance to a major or dominant discourse. The minor is

¹² Deleuze, and Guattari, “1730: Becoming-Intense,” in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

¹³ Deleuze, and Guattari, “What is a Minor Literature,” in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* was translated by Dana Polan and originally published as *Kafka: Pour une Littérature mineure* in Paris in 1975. What Is a Minor Literature was written between *Anti-Oedipus*, written in 1972 and *A Thousand Plateaus* was originally published in French as *Mille Plateaux*, volume 2 of *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie* in 1980 in Paris, the translation and foreword was written by Brian Massumi in 1987.

¹⁴ Deleuze, and Guattari, “1730: Becoming-Intense,” in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 291.

¹⁵ Deleuze, and Guattari, “1730: Becoming-Intense,” in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 292.

present at each stage of becoming and results in deterritorialisation. Deterritorialisation is the objective of a becoming, and an intense expression of sense. It is employed throughout this research to move between my roles as family member, researcher and artist, and by the concentration of emotional familial material contained in the artwork.

A becoming-minoritarian is also demonstrated in Rosi Braidotti's essay "Becoming Woman: or Sexual Difference Revisited". Here Braidotti cross-references the philosophy of difference developed by Luce Irigaray with Deleuze's theory of nomadology.¹⁶ Braidotti gives examples of possible nomadic subjects that are the result of becoming-minoritarian, listing individuals or groups that are dominated, oppressed and unrecognised (including an "artist without gallery or portfolio"), by a prevalent majority.¹⁷ The aforementioned phrase identifies the minoritarian through a condition of lack, which I apply directly onto my research with the inclusion of; audience without (access to) artwork or artist. To be "without" is a form of absence and to be "without access to" is an act of denial. This understanding re-enforces the application of the minor in my practice as a form of resistance when limiting the access to an artwork. The limitation of access in this research is not a single path, rather it occurs in numerous directions as a form of becoming. The social and professional audiences are limited by the lack of access to the exact content of and conditions under which the artworks are made with my family. My family are not excluded from the professional aspect of my research, but they are not exposed to the material that I re-present outwardly from the family to the social and professional audiences. Suppressing access to the artworks is a tactical act of conflict, one supported by Deleuze and Guattari when they state, "To hide is not shameful...to camouflage oneself, is a warrior function".¹⁸

¹⁶ Braidotti, "Becoming Woman".

¹⁷ Braidotti, "Becoming Woman", 52.

¹⁸ Deleuze, and Guattari, "1730: Becoming-Intense," in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 277. The warrior function indicates a liberating transformation within an infinite line of flight. This relates to the position of concealment I am strategically imposing on the accessibility of the artwork.

Understanding the real to be the aspect of existence that is the experience of duration, momentum and intensities, provides the essential components of this artwork. During a rigorous reading of the plateau “Becoming...” I outline by what means a becoming is a mode of exchange with experience, which occurs on continuous planes or lines of flight, using only intuition as a guide. In Elizabeth Grosz’s essay “Bergson, Deleuze and the Becoming of Unbecoming”, she explores Deleuze’s thinking in relation to Henri Bergson’s theory of difference, through key concepts such as duration and becoming.¹⁹ According to Grosz, Bergson’s consideration of “the continuities and connection” is what enables philosophy to explore what the sciences cannot, which is the expression of twin forces, such as, the past and the present, the collective and the individual.²⁰ She examines how Bergson’s ideas have informed Deleuze’s theory of philosophy being “the invention and exploration of concepts produced through an encounter with the force of the real”.²¹ This theory can also be directly applied to the process I undertook of researching artistic practitioners with inconsistent or unusual career paths, which contributed to me identifying the minor as a primary methodology for my practice.

Returning to Deleuze and Guattari, it is under the subheading “Memories and Becomings, Points and Blocks,” that the conceptual expansion of the minoritarian as a “becoming or process” is established.²² Everything can undergo a becoming except Man, with the heterosexual white man being the ultimate representation of the major or majoritarian. For Deleuze and Guattari, becomings “imply two simultaneous movements, one by which a term (the subject) is withdrawn from the majority, and another by which a term (the medium or agent) rises from the minority”.²³ Importantly this twin function of a becoming specifically addresses the multi-directional position I hold in this research and articulates the subtle shift that occurs in each of the constituents’ (myself as the Artist, my family, my social and professional peers) status

¹⁹ Elizabeth Grosz, “Bergson, Deleuze and the Becoming of Unbecoming”, *Parallax* 11, no. 2 (2005)

²⁰ Grosz, “Bergson, Deleuze and the Becoming of Unbecoming”, 4.

²¹ Grosz, “Bergson, Deleuze and the Becoming of Unbecoming”, 4., 4.

²² Deleuze, and Guattari, “1730: Becoming-Intense,” in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 291.

²³ Deleuze, and Guattari, “1730: Becoming-Intense,” in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 291., 291.

depending on which generative action of withdrawing or arising is underway. For example, as the artist I am the subject when I withdraw from the majority (university), or the medium or agent when I arise from the minority (family).

The layers of exposure and access to the artworks that the familial, social and professional audiences have to the research is an initiation of a series of becomings; becoming-artwork, becoming-audience and becoming-artist. For Deleuze and Guattari, all becomings pass through a becoming-woman. As Braidotti explains “The reference to ‘woman’ in the process of ‘becoming-woman’, does not refer to empirical females, but rather to socio-symbolic constructions...it affirms positive forces and levels of nomadic, rhizomatic consciousness”.²⁴ The importance of Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptualisation of becoming-woman is in its allowing for a pluralism within the individual identifying, singularly and collectively with the process of becoming: a pluralism that is employed when I make artworks for my family as an affiliate, and when I make artworks as an individual with my family.

Braidotti also reflects on the power imbalance not directly addressed in Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy, stating that an actual minority will initially reject the constant transformation of a becoming. Instead, a minority will experience a “phase of identity politics [claiming to know who you are] to be in a position to give up something you never had”.²⁵ The fixed position that Braidotti describes is necessary as a platform from which to become, with deterritorialisation being the ultimate goal. However, as Braidotti insists, the aim of becoming is a method of transformation that intrinsically defies definition, therefore, rejecting oppositional binaries.²⁶ This research tests whether Braidotti’s assertion that a becoming is a process of continual change when applied to the presentation of an artwork in a fixed form such as the archive. Questioning if this containment ends the transformative potential of the material in the archive, or does the artworks discursive nature permit and promote continual evolution?

²⁴ Braidotti, “Becoming Woman”, 49.

²⁵ Braidotti, “Becoming Woman”, 53.

²⁶ Braidotti, “Becoming Woman”, 53.

2 CHAPTER TWO: FAMILY TIES

In this chapter, I progress the research by once again, looking back, to plot the emergence of my artistic self, through a series of developments inextricably tied to or informed by my family. I specifically explore my family's relationship and attitudes toward contemporary art and the incorporation of them into my practice, while assessing how these engagements are re-enforced by minor theory. Reviewing this history, assists in understanding the motivations and tensions present within the artwork made during this research.

Offering valuable insight into the balance of making art with family is the praxis of filmmaker and artist Chantal Akerman. Over the course of her forty-five-year career, Akerman crafted feature films and film-based artworks focussing on interpersonal relationships, the passage of time and the character and significance of places. I consider how the relationships between Akerman, her mother and her practice, informs her output and motivations for creative expression. While my focus in this research is the family as a whole unit, it would be remiss for me not to acknowledge the central role my mother performs within this research, as the instigator of *Wednesday Night Dinner*. I assess the independent forces inherent to a minor practice and come to understand this tension as a principal source of activation between the separate communities I operate within. An essential migration is produced by the motivation to address these communities, experienced as an energetic pull toward or push away between the two movements or moments. Expanding on the minor as a methodology, to transform my creative expression, I encountered a three phased strategy extracted from Deleuze and Guattari's philosophies. First, I employ the position of the sorcerer, as it enables me to produce artwork in distinct but associated positions. Secondly in the role of the nomad, a nimble responsiveness instigates movement between each community without hesitation. The fundamental agency of my methodology is a creative process of positive refusal, which enables me to confidently involve my family with/within my art practice, to create an archive of family conversations.

Engaging the war machine causes a lifting of the veil, so to speak, and the resulting artwork is the primary product of this process. I analyse Akerman's last film, *No Home Movie* and expose its essential nature as the product of a minor practice.

2.1 Developing Creatively

Growing up, my working-class family included my mother, father, two older brothers and me. What my parents lacked in monetary wealth they made up for in stability and care, and as children we felt safe and loved. We lived on the outskirts of Melbourne in a ramshackle house that was filled with friends, animals, singing, sport, laughter and not much "fine art".¹ The only original artworks my parents owned were two landscape paintings, one made by my grand uncle, one by a family friend, and an etching made by my aunt. Other than these three examples, there were mounted posters, family photos, stickers, a badly framed photocopy of the text ascribed to American Indian Chief Seattle titled "This Earth is Precious" (the authenticity of this letter has been widely disputed), and an A3 laminated copy of the *Desiderata*.² Overall, my parents predominantly enjoyed aspects of popular culture such as music, film and television and they regarded contemporary art with a cautious and distanced respect.

I grew up understanding that paid work was an exchange of time for money, in order to survive. In our household, your job did not define you, rather one was defined by the things work enabled, which was primarily time spent with loved ones, through activities such as dinners, watching or playing sport, and occasional holidays. These pastimes were not hobbies, rather they were treated like passions, the things you thought about doing or seeing when at work; the things that gave life meaning. As a result, when I became interested in art, my family considered it an idiosyncratic passion. Once they saw I intended to follow art as an occupation, they did express concern about my ability to earn a living from it, however they trusted that at

¹ I use the term 'fine art' here to indicate an original work of art, made as a unique piece or part of an editioned series.

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chief_Seattle%27s_speech; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Desiderata>

the very least, I would work to support myself as an artist. My father worked as a night-shift truck driver, and my mother worked for the council providing services such as home help and respite, and while they respected contemporary art, it wasn't a community they encountered often. Importantly for me, an exciting component of becoming an artist, was the sense of reaching outside the comfort zone of my family, a liberation accompanied by a suspicion that I didn't belong. At that time, I felt that the artworld appeared to foster well educated, creatively cultured people with disposable time and income. My family worked constantly, and seldom spent money on anything that wasn't considered a necessity which, at that point of our lives, meant rarely on cultural experiences and never on artworks.

When I began to consider art as a serious interest late into high school, with my family's support, I decided to complete my secondary schooling at a technical college in order to focus primarily on art. As desired, I experienced a year of concentrated art education, including for the first time, visiting contemporary art exhibitions across Melbourne. This was an extremely valuable formative year for me, and I recall how intrigued and confused I was by much of the art I saw and felt like I was in an entirely new world. I remember distinctly the first time I experienced an installation, that I felt I understood intuitively. A comprehension which induced wonder and excitement in the potential of what contemporary conceptual art could contain for the artist and audience alike. The artwork was titled *DAY IN DAY OUT*, made by Australian artist Aleks Danko at the gallery Deutscher Brunswick Street in Fitzroy.³ This room scaled installation was set in a darkened space, where Danko set sixty-four houses, appearing in an archetypal form and cast in aluminium, directly on the floor in an eight-by-eight grid. A large freestanding theatre light was directed onto the houses, with a disk attached that rotates slowly in front of the globe. The disk has five circles cut out of it and as it continuously spins it replicates the light cycle of day to night over the sculptures.

³ Aleks Danko, *DAY IN DAY OUT* (1991). To view an interview with Aleks Danko where he discusses this artwork, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1FRDIM9cyW8>

I now know this artwork evolved from a conversation between the artist and his father, in which the latter described the monotony of life as a pensioner, and how each twenty-four hours brought him closer to death. A sentiment clearly evident in the austere and simple composition of the artwork, the uniformity of the houses and the monotony of the light rotating, making time visible, and replicating how days drift into months and years. However, I also interpreted the artwork as a celebration of life, of the people who were not just passing time, but filling it. The people for whom the consistency of working life, while relentless, was a point of vital security and pride. I related it directly to the enduring nature of a blue-collar working life, recognising two facets to Danko's miniature suburb, as oppressive milieu or dignified and nurturing shelter.

This was the first time I experienced a contemporary artwork I could relate directly to my life – a life I considered separate to the artworld – and it broadened my perception of what contemporary art could be. Encountering *DAY IN DAY OUT*, ignited my interest in art that engaged critically with the experience of living.⁴ At that time, while I appreciated the artwork and it made a lasting impression, I was unable to comprehend how essential the concepts of the family home and the passing of time, would become in my practice. The attraction to becoming a contemporary artist, was for me, not a rebellion against a life that involved working weeks and social weekends, instead it presented an avenue to participate in a conscious enquiry of life. I confess with embarrassing earnestness, that as a young artist, I wanted to make important art about important things. For me, that resulted in questioning contemporary art and its role or relationship to the world, and to my life, a process of existential questioning which ultimately fuelled the integration of family into my practice.

As I continued my art education, I understood implicitly that the choices I made relating to my schooling had not been available to my parents at the same age. Consequently, I felt an

⁴ Danko, *DAY IN DAY OUT*.

unconscious level of accountability to the family not to impose or educate, but rather a will to share my creative life with them. Throughout my career, this resolve had various manifestations. In 2009, I made a wall drawing that featured a stylised version of the family home I had grown up in, and which my parents were in the process of moving out of, titled, *Life is Like...* (see fig. 3).⁵ Although I had previously made and exhibited artworks that were about us as a family (which they had been hesitant to engage with), the wall drawing was the first time I made an artwork my family could relate to.

Despite those earlier works being about us, the fact they were referred to as contemporary art, meant that for my family, the intention or sensibility of the works were somehow abstracted. Their reaction to *Life Is Like...* was akin to my experience of Danko's *DAY IN DAY OUT*, in so far as they could read and relate to the work, without being told what it was about. I believe this was because it was a work about our life, the part we share together, triggering an immediate association from them to the artwork, eliciting their trust to understand the piece. As the artist, this reaction from the family felt like a successful outcome, and it was at this point, I began to understand that throughout my career I had been engaged in a creative exploration of myself as an artist, and a family member. As such, a consideration of the convergence of my familial and artistic lives presented itself as the logical evolution of my practice.

⁵ Kati Rule, *Life is Like...* (2009, coloured pencil and watercolour, 250 x 400cm). The title was a play on a well-known phrase from the 1994 film, *Forrest Gump* and the concept of a chocolate box art. Chocolate box painting is a reference to artworks that are aesthetically sentimental and overtly nostalgic. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chocolate_box_art.



Figure 3. Kati Rule, *Life is like...*, 2009, coloured pencil and watercolour, 250 x 400cm. Wall drawing at RMIT Project Space.

2.2 'People You Know': Artist in Family and Vice Versa

There are many contemporary international and Australian artists that produce artworks with and about their families that incorporate different methodological and content-based approaches. While I have been interested in these practitioners, I found their artworks questionable on various levels, this doubt informed my methodological choices for this research. Among these examples, are the following artworks. Mary Kelly's six-part project, beginning in 1973 and ending in 1979, *Post-Partum Document*, in which the artist obsessively details her experience of motherhood; demonstrating how a conceptual methodology also operates as a veil or abstraction for extremely personal content.⁶ English artist Richard Billingham's photobook, *Ray's a Laugh*, features candid photographs of his parents at home. While the rawness of each image is compelling, as an audience member I found looking at them uncomfortable, as I sensed I was being voyeuristic.⁷ Domenico de Clario's 2004 installation *A Second Simplicity*, featured a to-scale re-creation (frame and floor only) of his family's apartment in Trieste, Italy, which they lived in prior to immigrating to Melbourne in 1956.⁸ Every day for the first two weeks of the exhibition, de Clario invited a guest to visit the installation, where the artist, his sister and parents would collectively cook and eat lunch with the visitor and the encounter could be heard throughout the exhibition. De Clario's immersion of family history is resonant with my own, however claiming space for this within the gallery felt disconnected and theatrical. Perhaps the closest artwork from a sound perspective is French audio artist Domonique Petitgand's compositions, including his 1996, *10 Petites Compositions Familiales*.⁹ This work features recordings of his family in conversation, woven in with musical elements and other noises. The sounds together with the edited dialogue are constructed as dreamscapes or theatrical landscapes, prescribing or manipulating the sentiment. Listening to the edited recordings, a hierarchy is

⁶ Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document* (Installation: A six part artwork that documented the artist experience of being a mother and the first five years of her son's life, 1973-79).

⁷ Richard Billingham, *Ray's a laugh* (Munich: Scalo, 1990).

⁸ Domenico de Clario, *A Second Simplicity* (Australian Centre for Contemporary Art 2007).

⁹ Dominique Petitgand, *10 Petites Compositions Familiales* (France: METAMKINE, 1996, 1996).

implicitly understood in the material. I began to identify the frameworks raised by these artistic examples of conceptual shields, exposure, authenticity, and hierarchy, as methodological problems.

I felt identifying an artwork or artist that was parallel to my methodological concerns, was of benefit to this research as it can operate as a surrogate for my own work, facilitating a distanced perspective from the material, a feat which is difficult to achieve when making artworks entwined with one's personal life. While I could locate examples from artists that connected aspects of their output to mine (as I did above), it proved challenging to locate anyone whose practice broadly reflected my creative ethos. I was not looking for material or aesthetic overlap, rather I was searching for an artist whose creative principles and methodologies were congruent with my own. Ultimately, filmmaker and artist Chantal Akerman presented as a like-minded practitioner albeit with a very different career.

Chantal Akerman was born in Brussels in 1950 and died in Paris in 2015. After briefly attending film school in Belgium, Akerman left to pursue cinema on her own terms, making her first short film *Saute Ma Ville* in 1968. Moving to New York in 1971, Akerman was exposed to the films of Jonas Mekas and Michael Snow and became involved with the experimental film scene. Over her career Akerman made feature films, experimental films, documentaries and installations; at the age of twenty-five, she released the film *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*, which is regarded as a cinematic masterpiece. A review of Akerman's career exposes three primary characteristics that are in accordance with my own: resistance to categorisation; intuitive working methods; and the role of family as inspiration for and subject of her films, videos and artworks. For me, this combination of factors produced a clear resonance between the filmmaker and my working methodologies, and evaluating components of Akerman's output, enabled a heightened awareness of my practice in these terms.

2.2.1 The Minor

The elements I define as integral to Akerman's career – intuition, resistance and family – collectively reveal a minor practice. Akerman employed spontaneous methods of production, followed instinctual paths and favoured intuitive understanding over the application of strategised systems of knowledge and progression. In the book, *Nothing Happens: Chantal Akerman's Hyperrealist Everyday*, author Ivone Margulies assigns Akerman as a minor artist, noting that Akerman sites Deleuze and Guattari's *Kafka: Toward a minor literature* as a key text to understand her cinema.¹⁰ Illuminating how the minor presents in the early stages of creating a film, Akerman remarks, "when I make a documentary, I want to begin with no ideas, without knowing anything...If you start with no ideas, something happens, something subtle, less black and white and more open to the world, something particularly evocative."¹¹ Reiterating this approach as foundational to her practice, Akerman says "the word career is inappropriate to my life, because when you have a career you have a plan and I always did what I liked and what interested me."¹² Decision making based on trust and chance, and methods of organisation and production that Akerman utilised throughout her career, are tantamount to a minor practice. In contrast, these senses are perceived by the major, as unreliable and unproductive.

Early in her career Akerman made a political decision to resist prescriptive definitions of her identity based on gender, sexuality or politics. By refusing categorisation as a feminist, lesbian, filmmaker, writer, artist, daughter, sister and storyteller, Akerman was self-determining her capacity to exist beyond a neat stereotype. In an equally political gesture made during this same period, Akerman committed to "representing the underrepresented" by telling the stories of her female family members.¹³ This approach overlaps with a characteristic of minor language *that everything individual connects to the political*, as determined by Deleuze and Guattari, a

¹⁰ Ivone Margulies, *Nothing Happens: Chantal Akerman's Hyperrealist Everyday* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 193.

¹¹ Marianne Lambert, dir. 2015, *I Don't Belong Anywhere: The Cinema of Chantal Akerman* Brooklyn New York: Icarus Films DVD, 67 minutes. DVD.

¹² Lambert, *I Don't Belong Anywhere*.

¹³ Ivone Margulies, *nothing Happens: Chantal Akerman's Hyperrealist Everyday* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 12.

combination which leads Margulies to assert that Akerman's minor practice has a distinctive feminist perspective.¹⁴ Margulies view can be extended onto all minor practice, and is affirmed by Deleuze and Guattari's statement that all becomings pass through a becoming-woman. The filmmaker discusses the letters narrated in *News From Home*: "When you see the letters of a mother, like those by my mother, who is not a writer, who is not an intellectual, it is a subculture...there is no place within artistic things for this kind of expression."¹⁵ Identifying her mother as a subculture and providing a platform for her words in *News From Home*, Akerman represents a minor language, literally, in the major setting of the film and contemporary art worlds. In this action Akerman is also reflecting the minor into the audience, creating an opportunity for them to identify themselves, to feel seen.

2.2.2 The People You know

In 1992, at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London, Akerman participated in a public discussion about her career with the Institute's then Director of Film, Simon Field.¹⁶ Throughout the forum, Akerman establishes that, whether narrative or abstract, her films are cinematic exercises in time and space, created to produce physical experiences from the audience. While providing specific details of various of her films during the talk, the filmmaker also offered candid insight into her conceptual processes and motivations that lie at the core of her practice:

I don't come from an intellectual background, and the role my mother played in my life, is very important, like in every life, you know, for every mother. But, to come from that background, where my father was mending clothes and my mother was working with him or just being at home, and to make films was such a big difference, that a lot of what I was interested to talk about came from that. And it's the same in *News From Home*, the shock between my mother what

¹⁴ Margulies, *Nothing Happens*, 12.

¹⁵ Margulies, *Nothing Happens*, 15.

¹⁶ Chantal Akerman, and Simon Field, "The Guardian Talks", *ICA Talks*, recorded 1990-12-12, British Library: Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, England, UK, 1990, Sound.

she was doing and what I was doing was so big, that I had to talk about her, you know, it was necessary for me.¹⁷

Akerman describes the impulse to make art with and about her family as a necessity born from the differences in their life experiences. It is important to note Akerman's point – 'it was necessary for me' – as it elucidates a valuable point. The qualification, *for me*, reveals her understanding of the family's relationship to her practice, that her compulsion to create is not shared by the family, but is hers alone as an artist.¹⁸

During the ICA discussions, Field asks Akerman to explain why she focuses on certain female characters across several of her feature films, and she wavers before responding "you probably always talk about the people you know".¹⁹ I would not have registered this answer as significant were it not for Akerman's audible hesitation, for it is precisely her pause which led me to question, who are "the people you know" and what does "you know" mean in this context? For Akerman cinema has been a platform to examine and tell the stories of the intimate and durational experiences of women and their relationships to the domestic environments they occupy. By making a space for their stories, Akerman enacted a reflexive criticality and elevated their narratives to the status of art. In this sense, I assess that for the filmmaker, the repeated characters, or the people *you know*, indicates an emotional understanding, based on intuitive observation, of the relatives and friends that she spent significant, formative time with, specifically her mother Nelly Akerman. Her films are testament to the impossibility of knowing another person's private inner life, regardless of how closely you observe them, how much you love them and how desperately you'd like to understand them. For Akerman, this gap in knowledge, is a site of productivity, a space to try and make sense of their life and hers. A site to articulate in film that which cannot be expressed in words alone.

¹⁷ Akerman, and Field, "The Guardian Talks".

¹⁸ I will discuss this further in chapter five, but if the Akerman family were anything like mine are now, their relationship to the artworks created is one of trust and respectful bemusement. My family are interested to a point and compliant to requests but there is no great desire to see or any *need* for the artworks I make to exist. This project is an attempt to subtly transform my family's relationship to the artwork made from that of a detached observer to invested participants.

¹⁹ Akerman, and Field, "The Guardian Talks".

2.2.3 Mothers

Throughout her career Akerman discussed the role her mother played in her practice in varying degrees. This is most obviously demonstrated in the documentary film made between her mother's death and her own suicide fourteen months later, where her entire career is reviewed through the lens of a grieving daughter. Titled, *I Don't Belong Anywhere*, Akerman shares with the film's director Marianne Lambert and her editor and long-time collaborator Claire Atherton, the origins and trajectory of her cinematic career.²⁰ It is during this film that Akerman articulates the extent of her mother's impact, reflecting on *News From Home* as the moment when, "I realised that deep down my mother was the heart of my work".²¹ An influence not to be underestimated, as Akerman proceeds to articulate the anxiety she is experiencing regarding her creative expression after her mother's death, "because now that my mother is no longer there...will I still have something to say?"²²

Akerman's parents were both Jewish, born in Poland, and lived through the second world war. Akerman's father spent the war in hiding, while her mother, Nellie Akerman, spent several years in the Nazi concentration camp Auschwitz, where her parents were killed. This fact, was a considerable source of motivation for Akerman, which she also addresses in the discussion with Field:

...the fact that she was in concentration camp, you know, and she was a survivor, I felt that those kind of person [sic] need to be seen, with all their problems. You know those were the people who were, who had no space in art. They were not interesting enough, you know? And I felt that it was my, not my duty because I knew it was just a necessity for myself but, to give them a place, you know...²³

²⁰ Lambert, *I Don't Belong Anywhere*.

²¹ Lambert, *I Don't Belong Anywhere*.

²² Lambert, *I Don't Belong Anywhere*.

²³ Akerman, and Field, "The Guardian Talks". "Chantal Akerman, the Guardian Talks". This text has been transcribed verbatim.

Akerman's reference to making space and representing her mother and cultural heritage in art, is intriguing when considered in light of her mother's reluctance to discuss her experiences during the war. Akerman was frustrated by the stubborn muteness her mother demonstrated on the topic of her time in the camp. Proving a fruitful irritation, when reflecting on her career Akerman stated "...many things that I created...related to what happened to her, [that] she never spoke about it...".²⁴

Although my mother's childhood was not at all similar to Nellie Akerman's, she too has a significant period of her life that is also a mystery. Jeanie Campbell gave birth to my mother Wendy on April 16, 1945, in Sydney. At some point the pair moved to Melbourne, and when Wendy was ten years old, living in the suburb of Richmond, a strange woman came to her home, collected her, and drove her into the city. My mother remembers being driven through a set of large gates leading to a big building. Sitting around a table in the kitchen of that building, was a couple in their late fifties (which at the time seemed very old to my mum). The woman who drove her there, then announced that the couple were her new parents and she would be living with them from now on. Mum has very few memories of her life before that age, and it is impossible to know if that is a product of a traumatic childhood, or if the rupture of her adoption at a mature age is the cause.²⁵

Her new parents, Mr. and Mrs. Monaghan had three adult children when they adopted my mother. Mr Monaghan had served in the First World War and my mother considered him one of the kindest people she had ever met. On the flipside, my mother describes Mrs Monaghan as being troubled, a heavy drinker and mean. Mr Monaghan purchased a house in the suburbs for Mrs Monaghan and mum to live in and planned to join them when he retired from his caretaker position at the city building, in a few years. Mum recalls living in the house and being convinced that life would improve for her once Mr Monaghan came to live with them full

²⁴ Lambert, *I Don't Belong Anywhere*.

²⁵ This was a legal adoption authorised by the government, but when discussing this, my mother believes there was a financial incentive offered to her biological mother to give her up.

time. However, on his sixtieth birthday, the day he retired, Mr Monaghan suffered a massive heart attack and died three days later. The already troubled Mrs Monaghan decided she could not cope with mum and sent her to live in a children's home, Stanhope, run by the charity Legacy.²⁶ My mother lived there until she was seventeen, when she left school and gained full time employment as a chemist assistant. Within six months of her husband dying, Mrs Monaghan died from alcohol related disease.

As an adult and parent my mother is emotionally stable, kind, generous, forgiving and reliable. She practices unconditional love, deep empathy and respect for all. It is not surprising that she always wanted to be a mother, and that having a family was of primary importance to her, and I believe that the daily routine and security of domestic life has been empowering for her. She is without doubt the centre of our family, and as the instigator of our Wednesday Night Dinners, at the core of this research.

2.3 Activation: The Benefit of the Doubt

For me, the essential nature of working with family encapsulates an artistic inclination initiated through an engagement with contemporary art, and the resulting desire to reflect a critical enquiry of life that I foresaw through Aleks Danko's artwork, *DAY IN DAY OUT*. A major component of this enquiry, was a sustained evaluation of the role of art within life and life within art. As my practice evolved, I found myself routinely questioning several aspects of the art making and exhibiting processes. I would doubt why a work should exist and if I had the right to demand an audience for it; I would question whose story I'm telling and why it needs to be told? In her article "La Chambre Akerman: The Captive as Creator", Margulies states that in Akerman's films, her obsessive characters stage "a peculiar form of creativity – the revisitation of the everyday as doubt". I consider this *revisitation* (whether performed or directed by Akerman),

²⁶ Legacy was a charitable organisation that cared for families of injured and deceased ex-servicemen. They operated Stanhope between 1945-1982 in the Melbourne suburb of Kew.

to be an outward-facing presentation of the artists internal, habitual questioning of life and art. In other words, it is an expression of uncertainty, similar to the driving inquiring behind my practice.²⁷ At this point, I would like to draw a connection between my own, internal feelings of doubt, and their outward presentation in artistic production. When I question the importance or value of art and its role in my life, it often results in new artwork ideas. Within this process, these doubts are re-directed into a quest to make artworks that feel real (as mentioned earlier in this chapter). This search works as a balm for the internal doubts of existential thinking. This doubt can operate as fuel for creativity, and I consider it a positive force overall within my practice.

2.3.1 Dissent and Affirmation

As my creative focus shifts between family and art, a simultaneous pressure emerges which is experienced as an energetic push or pull between the two, a cyclical force fuelled by doubt. Contributing to the idea of competing tensions is Simon O'Sullivan's 2005 essay, "Notes Towards a Minor Art Practice", in which the author asserts that a dual strategy of affirmation and dissent is a primary component of a minor art practice.²⁸ In this text, O'Sullivan discusses Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the minor, specifically in relation to contemporary art. Reflecting a minor text, O'Sullivan penned this short essay in note form, to report on the three principles of a minor literature: language as an intense expression of sense; everything is political; and everything is collective. He identifies a minor art practice as demonstrating at least one of the following five elements: a practice that operates in defiance or resistance of the canon; any practice that is overlooked or undervalued by the major; any practice which operates outside of the expected classifications of art; any practice which seeks to avoid or disrupt the commodity form; and a practice that must be "understood as always in process".²⁹ In this text, O'Sullivan

²⁷ Ivone Margulies, "La Chambre Akerman: The Creative as Captor", *Rouge* 10 (Decemeber 2006): 7-8, Images between Images Symposium on Chantal Akerman, Princeton University <http://www.rouge.com.au/10/akerman.html>

²⁸ O'Sullivan, "Notes..."

²⁹ O'Sullivan, "Notes...", 4.

clarifies an aspect of Deleuze and Guattari's minor theory that informs my application of it in this research:

It is then as if there must be two moments, or movements, to a minor practice: one of dissent (either a strategic withdrawal as a form of engagement, or strategic engagement itself), and one of creativity, (the production of new forms). Art is a name for each of these strategies.³⁰

Dissent and affirmation can be identified as critical components present in the conceptual, methodological and theoretical phases of this research. O'Sullivan's assessment of the forces is predicated on *moments, or movements*, and articulates key actions that inform the gravitational influence felt when I produced artwork separately with my family and artistic communities.³¹ These motions are instigated by an instinctive response, or feeling, that is directed by unconscious intuition, *toward* or *away* from an experience, interaction or event.

2.3.2 Moments and Movements

The driving force behind the productive doubt cycle is also witnessed in the equally compelling forces which influence Akerman's work as discussed above. In an essay on Akerman, Mateus Araujo discusses aspects of Akerman's cinema as a medium for the filmmaker to draw her mother closer, as a replacement for home, while also desiring separation or independence from both.³² The author draws our attention to the competing *moments* or *movements* of leaving and returning, that emanate from Akerman's 1977 film, *News From Home*:

Akerman's work seemed to express an oscillation between, on the one hand, a movement of leaving in the world of the family, (which is indistinguishable from her discovery of film) and, on the other, an opposite and recurrent movement of returning to it, in the form of reminiscence, a certain nostalgia, or even a quest for her cultural identity...Polarizing this oscillation is, often, the figure of her mother...with whom her work has pursued a long, imaginary dialogue.³³

³⁰ O'Sullivan, "Notes...", 6.

³¹ Additionally, these forces also influence the relationship between the private artwork and the various audiences, which I address in Chapter Six.

³² Mateus Araujo, and Mark Cohen, "Chantal Akerman, Between the Mother and the World", *Film Quarterly* 70, no. 1 (2016)

³³ Araujo, and Cohen, "Chantal Akerman, Between the Mother and the World", 32.

News From Home features a series of long set or slow-moving shots of scenes in New York with Akerman narrating her mother's correspondence from home over the images.

Although they were created on different continents and fifteen years apart, Akerman's *News From Home* and Danko's *Day In Day Out*, could operate as inverse aesthetic representations on the broader themes of escaping from domesticity or attachment to daily routine. In the 2015 documentary about Akerman's career *I Don't Belong Anywhere*, the film maker recalls the series of thoughts which synthesised into this artwork:

I was on the plane and about to land in New York, I could see New York and this hugeness and the letters describing sickness and my little sister, who had or hadn't passed her exams, my father who was worried about his business and so on. This small little life, a life like any other. And at the same time, I would see New York, and in one second I had the idea of making a film about New York with the letters as voice overs... Sometimes the scenes drowned out the voice over but what did it drown out? The life everybody already knew!³⁴

For me, the footage of New York City in the 1970s, demonstrates the excitement of the daughter travelling through the world, and experiencing life independently from her parents. The letters from the mother, read aloud by the daughter conveys awareness of the parent's love and hopes for her child, and is evidence of how the daughter carries this care with her, as a generous gift and an inescapable weight. This sensation reflects the emotional dynamic that informs my engagement of art with family, that of experiencing of the world through a lens of gratitude and an anticipatory form of grief. I am not presenting this as a form of emotional hardship, if anything it's the opposite – a fortunate position to be in.

2.3.3 Push and Pull

In this research, the interrogation between multiple elements: art and family; family and the world; my family and artistic networks, are experienced as push and pull actions. A dynamic reflected in O'Sullivan's theory of movement, of dissent and affirmation. In relation to the

³⁴ Lambert, *I Don't Belong Anywhere*.

minor, this action can be expressed specifically as a push, propelling me away from the family (major) and into the world alone (minor). Or, a shift in perspective reverses this dynamic, to push from the world (major) to the family (minor), either way, every movement, whether going toward or leaving behind, presents as a refusal of the major in search of the minor.

2.4 Mechanisms of a Minor Practice

Prior to starting the MFA in 2011, I hadn't established a clear methodology for my practice, although I regularly engaged family, friends, and colleagues in the production of artworks.³⁵ Examples of collaborative artworks, include a suite of drawings from 2005, that focussed on our family's physical similarities and defining features, drawing each family members hairstyles onto my face and vice versa. In 2006, I made a series of small black ink self-portraits and asked my family, friends and colleagues to add to or alter the image in any way they liked. When making these works and others, I felt self-conscious about making art with my family and as a result, would frame their involvement as part of an exploration into identity, popular culture, and authorship. Although I didn't speak of these works in terms of representations of family, I did recognise that when I made artworks that involved the family directly, the outcomes somehow felt more successful to me.

The private nature of the artwork and the separation of the audience established during the MFA, has been continued throughout the course of my PhD candidature. Conceptually, the artwork has undergone a series of transitions to enable a deeper exploration of a reduced field, reflecting a sentient filtering process, resulting in recording family conversations to form an archive. The final state of the artwork includes the archive and the discursive content surrounding it. It is an intense representation of my family, evolving from a conscious engagement with the transformative process of creative enlightenment as a minor artist.

³⁵ Rule, "Site Unseen".

My exploration of Deleuze and Guattari's minor theory, resonates with the development of my practice. While practicing as a minor artist (albeit unconsciously), I also worked in a commercial gallery for 18 years, engaging in educational institutions (BA, MFA, PhD research), renting several studios in large shared spaces, and showing in artist-run, commercial and institutional galleries throughout Australia and abroad. These experiences, culminated in the development of an extensive personal and professional network, and while I am personally known within these communities, my art is less so. Viewing this lack of exposure in a positive light, led me to establish the parasitic nature of my practice in *Site Unseen*. I unpack the mechanisms that sustain this minor practice and to this end, uncover Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of the sorcerer, nomad and war machine, to be synonymous with the actions of a minor artist producing minor artworks.

2.4.1 The Sorcerer

Deleuze and Guattari introduce the sorcerer as living on the social and geographical threshold of the village and define this site as bordering: "Sorcerers have always held the anomalous position, at the edge of the fields or woods. They haunt the fringes. They are at the borderline of the village, or *between* villages."³⁶ The sorcerer is against the major and filiation, and as a result lives between places and communities. They are aligned with the pack, which is a threshold of intensity, and for Deleuze, operate as a line of flight and a multiplicity.³⁷ Essential to the sorcerers' position is the formation of alliances, forging bonds and connections that empower and strengthen their position as an outsider, making influence possible.

As an artist, embodying the sorcerer has enabled me to include all the roles I occupy, as family member, gallerist and researcher in the production of artworks.³⁸ Each role has an

³⁶ Deleuze, and Guattari, "1730: Becoming-Intense," in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 246.

³⁷ See "1914: One or Several Wolves?" in: Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, ed. Félix Guattari and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

³⁸ In a comparative manner, American artist Adrian Piper considers herself to be comprised of three different but essential elements: art, philosophy and yoga. In her 1996 text, *On Wearing Three Hats*, Piper answers questions relating to her position on

associated sector that significantly informs this research in varying ways. As an artist, I interact and casually discuss the project with my peers and receive feedback on artists or artworks that could be considered minor. Working in a commercial art gallery has made me acutely aware of the complexities of a business-related practice. In relation to my artwork, I consciously resist aspects of the industry that include exposure of self; commercialisation of an artwork; and the accumulation of stock.³⁹ As a researcher, I grapple with the milestones, public discussions and presentations required by the University, yet appreciate that this context provides an informed and attentive audience. I am often questioned on the logistical aspects of the project by family members wanting to know how to listen to the recordings, and despite their presence at the time, if certain stories are captured. Once I acknowledged my position as a sorcerer, I was able to accept the many roles I inhabit and was emboldened to further the direction of this position, for this research.

2.4.2 The Nomad

It might seem paradoxical to attach the term nomad to research project that has at its core an artwork, which is made in a domestic home on a weekly basis, with the same people, but I employ it here to articulate and expand the position of the sorcerer in alignment with Deleuze and Guattari's theory. The philosophers state that the nomad transcends the sorcerer by bringing "furor" to bear against the State and is therefore identified as a revolutionary figure of transformation.⁴⁰ A similar metamorphosis took place when I shifted from working on the fringe of one community in sorcerer mode, to working with multiple communities, in nomad mode. Within my research the nomad represents the tendency toward affiliations, and the impulse to move between the roles of gallerist, family member, researcher, or artist. As the artist, the

the essential nature of these, the external perceptions of these and the influence and interconnectedness of each activity.; <http://www.adrianpiper.com/docs/WebsiteNGBK3Hats.pdf>

³⁹ This is not a judgement on commercially successful artists, only that I made the choice to avoid the commerce aspect of making art.

⁴⁰ Deleuze, and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 410.

interchanges that occur between these roles, are often spontaneously instigated as protective or edifying measures. On occasion, when I am discussing my artwork, I perform a strategic move to guard the privacy and integrity of the work by changing the subject, through a sudden shift of roles. At other times, I divulge features of the research, to facilitate awareness of the work and expand the potential for the project to exist outside of the family.

2.4.3 The War Machine

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari describe the war machine as “a pure form of exteriority”, used in resistance to control and questions authority in all its manifestations.⁴¹ In a domestic situation, the nomadic subject remains defiant as society fosters the entrenchment of life through state-run and familial systems of domination, and it is the cogent uprising of the subject – the nomad – that activates the war machine. The direction of the nomad’s movement, toward or away from two communities, points or *articulations*, is an instinctively navigated, generative space.⁴²

As I embodied the role of the nomad, it became apparent that the division I thought existed between my family and art life, was less oppositional and more “relative”, than I had previously judged.⁴³ These elements appeared to shift from duelling components to independent communities that “function as a pair, in alternation”, and which are “at once antithetical and complementary, necessary to one another and consequently without hostility”.⁴⁴ That I could create an artwork which would respectfully connect the communities I had previously considered separate, my family *and* art life, to articulate anew the specificity of that unique relationship, was a revelation. Finding the artwork in this instance, underwent a process similar

⁴¹ Deleuze, and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 412.

⁴² Deleuze, and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 410.

⁴³ Deleuze, and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 410.

⁴⁴ Deleuze, and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 410.

to Deleuze and Guattari's description of locating the war machine, and requiring me to trust that the artwork would be identifiable when "it proclaims its own irreducibility".⁴⁵

That the sorcerer, nomad and war machine all equate to artistic production, concurs with O'Sullivan's view that a minor practice must result in the production of something new:

To refuse, or somehow negate the existing language (and thus the existing major forms) is important, but a minor art must do more than this. It must also involve invention and creation. It is also this that gives the stuttering and stammering of a minor practice such an inspirational, we might even say hopeful tenor. Put simply, a minor art is involved in the production of new subjectivities as well as turning away from those already in place.⁴⁶

O'Sullivan views any refusal of the major, as a productive space which enables new artworks to emerge from a minor practice. This perspective is re-iterated by Margulies in *Nothing Happens*, in reference to Akerman's cinema. In that text, Margulies states that Akerman's "...work exhibits not only the formal qualities they [Deleuze and Guattari] find in Kafka but the same sense that formal concerns are indissociable from the articulation of a new content".⁴⁷ I find the formal and generative qualities of a minor artwork apparent throughout Akerman's last film *No Home Movie*. In this fresh, discursive, experimental and intimate film, Akerman invokes the minor by demonstrating intuitive production techniques, and shifting between her roles as daughter and film maker, subject and audience.

2.4.4 Methodologies of the Minor: *No Home Movie*

As is evident in *News From Home*, Akerman identified the vital role her mother played in her practice early in her career.⁴⁸ However, it was only after her mother's death, that the

⁴⁵ Deleuze, and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 413. I will examine at length this process of making the work in Chapters Three and Four.

⁴⁶ O'Sullivan, "Notes...", 5.

⁴⁷ Margulies, *Nothing Happens*, 16. The formal qualities Margulies is referring to here, are the three characteristics of a minor language.

⁴⁸ Chantal Akerman, dir. 1977, *News From Home* Unité 3, I.N.A., and Paradise Films, DVD, 1 videocassette (VHS) (90 minutes): sound, colour; 1/2 in. DVD.

filmmaker was able to create a movie that depicted – for the first time – the pair sharing unscripted private interactions.⁴⁹

Made in 2015, *No Home Movie* is composed of video footage filmed predominantly in the Brussels apartment of Akerman's mother, interjected with recordings of the artist communicating with her mother while travelling, occasional desert landscapes and garden scenes. The opening scene, featuring a tree being thrashed by howling wind in the desert, appears in stark contrast to the interiority we witness architecturally and emotionally throughout the majority of the film. Margulies explores the film in "Everyday Akerman: Inside and Outside No Home Movie", describing that the "intimate filmmaking" employed in *No Home Movie* as "Akerman's deepest way of confronting belonging and uprootedness".⁵⁰ The title *No Home Movie* "defiantly declares the film's significance as more than a record of family gatherings", although the lo-fi production qualities of the video footage, abrupt changes in scenery, and the unassuming yet undeniably personal content, lends gravitas to the amateur genre.⁵¹ Throughout the film, the long sparingly edited scenes, portray moments shared between a daughter and her mother at the end of the latter's life. We witness the pair, writing lists, sharing meals, attending to one another, and negotiating the distance between them, whether together or apart. The tree in the desert scenes offer an uncomfortable image of resilience, and the green gardens, a calm circuit breaker to the intense mother/ daughter relationship, and to the grieving process that the film subversively encapsulates. It is with this awareness that the title also denotes, that sadly without her mother, Akerman has no home.

At the preview screening of *No Home Movie* at the *Cinémathèque Française*, Akerman's long term collaborator and editor, Clair Atherton, delivered a tribute to Akerman.⁵² Atherton provides the most insightful understanding of Akerman's working methodology, which supports

⁴⁹ Akerman, *No Home Movie*.

⁵⁰ Ivone Margulies, "Elemental Akerman: Inside and Outside No Home Movie", *Film Quarterly* lxx, no. 1 (2016): 66

⁵¹ Margulies, "Elemental Akerman: Inside and Outside No Home Movie", 65.

⁵² Claire Atherton, "Tribute to Chantal Akerman", recorded 2015, Brooklyn, New York, USA: Icarus Films Home Video, 2015.

Margulies' evaluation of Akerman as a minor artist. Although Atherton does not use minor terminology to describe Akerman, she expresses the deep extent that systems of intuitive knowledge are embedded into Akerman's practice. In her tribute, Atherton shared Akerman's own words to describe *No Home Movie*:

It's been years now that I have started to film all over the place, as soon as I sensed a shot. Without purpose really, but with the feeling that one day these images would make a film or an installation.

I was letting myself go, by desire and by instinct.

Without a script, without a conscious project.

From these images were born three installations which were shown all over the place.

This spring, with Claire Atherton and Clémence Carré, I put together some twenty hours of images and sounds still without knowing where I was going.

And we started to sculpt the material.

These twenty hours became eight, then six, and then after a certain amount of time, two.

And there, we saw, we saw a film and I told myself: of course it is this film that I wanted to make.

Without admitting it to myself.

And as one says, the red thread of this film is a character, a woman born in Poland, who arrives in Belgium in 1938 to flee the pogroms and the horror.

This woman is my mother.

Within and solely within her apartment in Brussels.⁵³

The method of intuitive production Akerman details here, is reflective of a minor practice in multiple ways. To begin, Akerman describes creative activity that is guided by trust, chance and intuition, and *not* knowing, as a generative space. The progression of the artwork occurs through a constant adjustment of perspectives, until it reveals itself, a distillation that is concurrent with O'Sullivan's assertion that a minor practice conditionally engages with a process of generative dissent, which consequently results in the creation of something new. On the surface, *No Home Movie* enables the audience to immerse themselves in the daily routines of Akerman's mother. However, what emerges as most important is not the specificities of each

⁵³ Atherton, "Tribute to Chantal Akerman".

interaction, rather it's the account of how they spent time together, the intensity of their relationship and present and anticipatory grief, that overshadows the film. If a film is a sequence of representations, Akerman's *No Home Movie*, expresses the nature of familial bonds, heartache and resilience. To show us this material in such an uncompromising manner, with the thinnest shroud to conceal the raw emotion of the project is to demonstrate facets of the minor. The emotional intensity between Akerman and her mother, is evidence of a prevailing minor language. I understand these exchanges to be evidence of the nomad's uprising, as they were documented and made possible by the constant transformation of Akerman's role from filmmaker to daughter and vice versa.

Embodying the properties of the war machine, *No Home Movie* is a movie made between a mother and daughter, life and death. It is liminal, exigent, and breathtaking. The film brings together the overlapping theoretical concerns described by Margulies, O'Sullivan, and Deleuze and Guattari, that affirms the minor as a methodology that supports creative production that is personal, fluid, intuitive, and intense.

3 CHAPTER THREE: EVERY WEDNESDAY NIGHT

A significant challenge of this research is its intimate nature. Being the artist and author of the work, while also forming part of the ‘subject’ alongside the family, means that the emotion involved in the practical aspects becomes almost inseparable from the theoretical. This leads me to consider where the emotion begins and ends and ask the same of the theoretical? Are they separate at all? Do they inform each other? The material I am working with is so deeply personal that it compels me to address the complexity of this position. During various moments while making this work, I have been overwhelmed with feelings of affection, bemusement, frustration, disappointment, anger, and a grief that borders on despair. The power of these emotions has rendered the research process at times, unbearably personal, although I also recognise that this vulnerability is the project’s vital strength.

The development of the artwork from this research occurred over a fourteen-month period, revealing itself over/through the process. As I explored ways to capture the essence of our family in audio recordings, the concept for the artwork emerged, and it felt like a discovery, reflective of artist Chantal Akerman’s description of making *No Home Movie*. Like Akerman recognising that it was the film she must make, all of a sudden, I was able to see how our weekly family dinners contained the substance I had been looking for. When I realised that our Wednesday Night Dinners would form the core of this artwork, I too thought “of course”.¹ In this chapter I outline the development of the studio component of this research, which includes establishing Wednesday Night Dinner as the base material for the recordings. The desire to make an artwork that felt ‘authentic’ and of value to me and my family, spurred an investigation into notions of ‘the real’, primarily through the work of Elizabeth Grosz and her reading of Deleuze and Guattari.² Understanding this artwork as a forms of communication, is facilitated through

¹ Claire Atherton, “Tribute to Chantal Akerman”, 2015, Brooklyn, New York, USA: Icarus Films Home Video, 2015.

² Grosz, “The Future of Feminist Theory (Keynote address)”, Grosz, “The Future of Feminist Theory: Dreams for New Knowledges,” in *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*.

further exploration of the minor as a methodology. I establish a becoming as a mode of exchange; minor literature as the site of minor language. A minor language is where sense is the primary expression and leads to deterritorialisation, which is an intense expression of sense. It is through these terms that I further articulate the emotional, generative and flexible nature of the work.

3.1 Locating the Work

At times, I have noted that my family have suffered the gift of an art object out of a sense of obligation. As a result, I decided to make artworks that they did not have to manage and could easily ignore, with that in mind, I decided to make an audio-based artwork. Initially, I tried several methods of approaching my parents, to capture or define their life experiences on record. It soon became evident that it was difficult to engage my family with this method of art making and I discovered that they are somewhat distrustful, guarded and private about recording their information in a one-on-one situation. When I attempted to construct a scenario for dialogue or exchange, the discourse that followed felt forced and uncomfortable for both parties. I hoped to expose some material that could reflect us as a family, that I could subsequently use in the production of artworks for them. I was frustrated by the elusiveness of this matter and decided to re-focus my approach in order to analyse modes of communication.

3.1.1 Talking Art

At this point of my candidature, I believed I had settled on three separate audiences for my research which were the familial, social, and professional. I considered examining my use of language in relation to each audience sector as a means to understand the awkward conversations I had recorded with my family. To do this, I initiated a conversation with a person from each audience and rather than ask pre-formulated questions I let the direction of the discussions develop naturally. For me, these conversations were an experiment in communication and form,

which exposed a missing link between the research and the art making. Significantly, the overall symposium process of presenting recordings publicly, enabled an important learning period, in regard to the production of the artworks as a sound piece. I enjoyed reviewing the exchanges of the initial conversations, the adaption of the recordings into text, editing the texts and recordings, and the public airing of the recordings at the Research Methods Symposium.³ It was following this experience, I was able to identify the kind of material I wanted to gather, initiating a significant conceptual shift in my approach to making the artwork in this research.

These three conversations which changed the shape of my research were held informally in various locations around Melbourne; each interview recorded and lasting longer than forty-five minutes. The first conversation was with a representative of my professional audience, New Zealand writer and curator Justin Paton. The second conversation was with Australian artist and friend, Sharon Goodwin, that I selected to represent the social audience. Representing the familial audience and final conversation was with my father Bob Rule, and it was this conversation that proved to be the most pivotal to the studio component of this research and which I focus on here.⁴ The interview process was uncomfortable for us both, and later when I listened to us speak in the public space of the Symposium, I felt self-conscious of the anxiety in my father's tone of voice, however, to the rest of the audience, these clues to his unease were not apparent.

The symposium was held in the University auditorium, a building far from the environment of my family home. As mentioned above, when I listened to my father and I talk in that auditorium in front of my professional peers, it felt too personal and revealing and re-

³ The symposium formed part of the Monash curriculum. It was an opportunity for the 2016 postgraduate intake of Fine Arts, Art History & Theory and Curatorial Practice candidates to present their burgeoning research to a broader audience.

⁴ While these first two audiences are less relevant to my argument here, they were instructive for my research. Amongst other things Justin and I discussed the influence of passions and perspectives on opinions of artworks, the revelation of the history of an object or event that is generous and generative, the codified language of art world discussions and the ability of artistic production to reach into the systems and structures that we're all bound up in, to alter them a little in order to produce an odd kind of knowledge. I spoke with Sharon about how she spoke to her family in relation to her art practice, which includes her solo career, working as part of Zilverster in collaboration with Irene Hanenbergh and in the collaborative art group DAMP. We also spoke about the interdependency of the terms exclusion and inclusion, podcasts, education, class, willingness to learn, feeling safe, experimental video and the potential of any artistic group to have the appearance of a cult.

iterated the importance of the position I had taken: to separate the audiences within the research from the artwork. The private, intimate content I heard, the sighs, coughs and fidgeting my father made during that recording, the things that occur outside of language; this was the content I was attracted to as *material*, and which I would later come to understand as minor language where sense is the primary expression.

3.1.2 Propping up the Conversation

While I was contemplating the Symposium presentation, and the reception of the three conversations I played publicly, I was asked to participate in a one-night exhibition in a temporary gallery space.⁵ As described above, after the various attempts at recording conversation with family members, I understood that asking them direct questions regarding life or art, invoked self-conscious and guarded responses. I then wondered if asking them to help with the production of an artwork might be a useful point of focus for my family – almost a distraction – while providing the opportunity to converse about or consider an artwork.

My father is a collector of sorts, and my resistance to creating three-dimensional artworks is, in a small way, fuelled by an aversion to his hoarding of things that he believes might be useful someday.⁶ For the exhibition, I wanted to engage with an element of my father's accumulated belongings, and decided to present his rope, which are bits and pieces that he has collected over a lifetime. My father was immediately open to the idea of his rope becoming an artwork and wanted to know the specifics of my request, such as how much and how long the rope would be needed. The next time I visited their house, after dinner the whole family joined us to search for rope. Accompanying the hunt, is a constant chatter about the quality, value and use of the rope. The following is a fieldnote I made about the artwork:

⁵ This exhibition was organised by Lane Cormick, in a studio space I had previously occupied, the title of the exhibition was *Michael Douglas*.

⁶ Other than rope, other things my father has in abundance are, lanyards, payslips, vehicles, machinery, nuts and bolts, pieces of wood, fifty cent coins and aeroplane ashtrays.

I called my father to ask him if I could borrow his rope, after answering “no problem,” he launches immediately into the logistics of how much I need, when I need it before finally asking “what for?” When I say it is for an exhibition, he says, “huh, ok, sure.” I tell him the dates of the show and the next time I’m at the house for Wednesday night dinner, everybody helps to look for rope. There is a lot of conversation about what is good rope and what isn’t. “Shit rope is the nylon stuff,” says Dad and my indifference to the quality is a sign of my lack of education in all things rope. We make a pile of what we find in the foot well of his Ute. My mother and sister-in-law have particularly keen eyes for rope, my father and brothers are less interested in the small pieces than the longer lengths. At one point, my father asks, “will I get this back” to which my brother replied, “Dad, it’s art now, you’re going to have to buy it back, and it could be expensive,” and they laugh. Dad continues to tell me that he has a lot more rope elsewhere. The next week when I arrive, he has the rope in two milk crates, which I put into a cheap large shopping bag and take to the studios and place on the gallery floor. I title it, *Work In Progress*, 2017 (see fig 4.). After the show, I return the milk crates with the rope to my dad's study and he thanks me and I thank him, and he asks how it went, and I show him some photos and tell him it was good.⁷

It was after this experience I realised the creation of the art object can function as a prop to promote dialogue with my family about art. That my family prefer spontaneous discussions and for the focus to not be on them individually, seems integral to their openness. When my family can assist or help me achieve an outcome, it makes them feel that they are contributing to something that is important to me, but not something they have to think about beyond that process. When I directly involve my family to help me make artworks, a critical review of the relationships, dynamics, and history we share is enabled, as is an opportunity to explore the intersection of the differences in our perceptions, experiences, and knowledge of artistic creation. Asking my family for help to make an artwork, is an activity that gently challenges them to connect with contemporary conceptual art and this process has become a fundamental tool of my practice.

⁷ Kati Rule, Fieldnotes, 2017.



Figure 4. Kati Rule, *Work In Progress*, 2017, found shopping bag, milk crates and rope, 300 x 600cm.

3.1.3 Working with the Dynamic

Critically searching for a methodology that suited both my subject matter and my audience(s), I realised that the personal nature of the family material would determine the dynamic of artwork to be made. In comparison to the attempts at recording dialogue, gathering of information, and the awkwardness of interviewing my father (then publicly hearing our discussion at the Symposium), the process of engaging the family via enlisting their help for me to achieve an artwork was effortless. The ease in which my family spoke to the composition, production, and value of an artwork revealed to me that it was, in fact, the dynamic of this exchange that was an essential element of the artworks I wanted to make with and for the family. These insights gathered from attempting to make an artwork with family, helped me to decipher the next step of the research, that the form of the artwork would be comprised of impromptu conversations. So began the Wednesday Night Dinner (WND) recordings.

3.2 Wednesday Night Dinner

For the last twenty-five years, there has been an open invitation for our family to attend dinner at my parents' house on a Wednesday night. Currently our family is comprised of thirteen people in total. These are my parents, my partner and I, my brothers and their children. On average there are between ten and twelve of us in attendance, although on occasion it can be as few as four. One Wednesday evening, I recorded over two hours of pre-dinner table banter and activity. The recording readily revealed the dynamic of the subject, that I experienced when we looked for the rope together. I realised immediately the potential for these recordings to capture not just memories but also the moments we share and witness with each other, without inducing suspicion and self-censorship from the family. In the first recording, you can hear my father sharing stories with my nieces about the traumas and joys of his childhood, the sound of my mum feeding the dogs, of our greetings, our jokes and the birds squawking outside. Each sound brimmed with potency and potential that required further exploration. It was through this

recording and the process of listening back that I realised I could collate this material, to provide a sense of our experience as a family for our family. I then approached my family and requested their permission to record our conversations, which they all gave.⁸

I do not record every week but if I am recording, shortly after I arrive at my parents' house, I turn on the zoom microphone and do not turn it off until I leave. Often the recordings begin with an hour or so of only a few people pottering around or talking, and as the rest of the family arrive, the voices become more animated, textural and loud. At this point it becomes harder to hear the individual conversations, but one is able to grasp snippets and the recording is a realistic depiction of how the room sounds to any one person. Later when we are having dinner at the table, we are slightly more formal, with one person talking at a time, making the dialogue easier to decipher.

3.2.1 Encountering Complexities: Establishing Ethics

When I began the recordings for what would become the archive, I annotated each one in full, to create a description of the content and to facilitate access and use of the material in the future. I believed I would return to this and compile an artwork of sound bites from the recordings that could include a conversation, a historical or emotional detail revealed over several encounters. I was in the process of listening back to the recordings, when I started to feel uncomfortable about my access to the material. I realised by listening to these past conversations, I experienced a sense of separation from my family in relation to the material. The process had begun to feel more like an anthropological study that I was performing on my

⁸ I was required by Monash University to apply for Research Ethics and Compliance application. Part of this process required me to verbally and in written form, re-enforce the conditions of the research to each participant, including what would be required of each person emotionally, physically and ethically. I had to tailor the vocabulary used to ensure each participant understood what was being required of them. I had to read it to each of them and then give them the letter to read and a separate form to sign, (and another form for the guardian of any minors being asked. As part of this process, I stipulated that the recorded material would not be made available to anyone outside of the family, ensuring their privacy. This was a lengthy process, as it should be, but it also complicated the research for me as it introduced a speculative criticality into the scenario. At the time, I recall describing it to others as having a coffee with a friend, then making them sign a form to say they couldn't sue you for anything that occurred during your meeting.

family, and less like a resource full of potential for all of us to re-animate familial interactions and experiences that I had imagined.

On a number of occasions, while I was annotating the recordings, I heard discussions that were private to the people having them. I felt uncomfortable hearing them, even though they were often conducted in a familiar shorthand that rendered the content vague and ambiguous. Despite the fact that the recordings will only be available for the family to hear, this experience made aspects of our relationships visible, or audible, that I had not previously considered. As I deliberated the potential admissions, I appreciated that our greetings, stories, and laughter are all important and valuable components of our time together, but our tensions and insecurities are just as vital and descriptive of us as a family and would contribute to the long term value of the archive. I had not considered that the recordings would contain any secrets but given there were often multiple simultaneous conversations being had, there was already a considerable amount of content that was not generally known by all family members. While annotating the recordings I unwillingly experienced hearing information that I hadn't previously known.

The experience of overhearing a private conversation, reiterated the separation I experienced from the family as I annotated the recordings. As a result, I made the decision to stop annotating, and I immediately felt my position to the recorded material re-align with the family's. Without re-listening to the conversations, I could, like my family, speculate on what has been recorded, creating the desire to search for perceived content or to discover a previously unregistered conversation. At this time, I also made the decision that I would not break down or edit the material in any form as that process would establish a hierarchy of the content in the conversations, which would undoubtedly limit our engagement in the material. By leaving the recordings unedited, I hope that each family member can establish their own connection to the content, when, and if, they would like to listen to them.

3.2.2 Us and Everyone Else

At this point I have established that the artwork includes the recordings made at Wednesday Night Dinner (WND), *and* any conversations surrounding the project. Having decided these parameters generated new understandings in relation to the audience and their experience of the work. The process of recording the conversations and the decisions relating to the editing and transcription, impacted my understanding of the audience for the work, down from three to two distinct groups. The familial remains the primary audience, however the second group is now a combination of the social and professional circles, let's say that audience is now, everyone else. While both audiences try to conceive what the recording contains, for the secondary audience, this is the only option, to imagine what the familial or acoustic dynamics might reflect and to visualise the routine of weekly conversations. When discussing the project with people from the secondary audience, I experience a conceptual reflex from them, in which they reflect on what a recording of their own family conversations may sound like or contain.

For my family, the primary audience, I have decided to withhold the recordings until the PhD process is complete, therefore the idea of the archive induces generative imaginings with marginally more agency for them, than it does for the secondary audience. Although the family is present when the recordings are made, they often forget that the recorder is on, and the routine of our dinners makes deciphering one night from another challenging, as such, they are not always confident of what is on record, (see fig. 5). In the future, unless they dis-engage from the archive, when the family speculate on what might be recorded, it could prompt a search for a particular conversation or content.



Figure 5. Kati Rule, *Illustration of recorder in pre-dinner position*, 2021. (Vector drawing by Jack A Halls).

3.3 Feeling Real

At the core of this research, is the need for me to make an artwork that feels real and important to me and to my family. An artwork that attempts to reflect with honesty and sincerity, who we are and how we interact as a family and be of value to us. To adequately do so, I have imposed little structure onto the recorded material, so it can remain in a form as close to the original as possible and established that the recordings only be available for the family to hear, although not until the summation of the PhD process. Consequently, for the family, despite not having heard them, they perceive the recordings to be authentic, unique and special, in other words they feel ‘real’.

In the following section I turn to theory, and the literature from Grosz, and Deleuze and Guattari to review the principles of minor theory, how they interact with intuitive forces that equal the real. The concepts discussed by the philosophers, provide insight into the complex emotional space of the studio component of the research, the work with the family.

3.3.1 Thinking Real

Informing my reading of the real is the definition provided by Elizabeth Grosz on the subject. Grosz addresses the real in a lecture delivered at Duke University in 2007, *The Future of Feminist Theory: Dreams for New Knowledges*, and in a chapter with the same title, appearing in the 2012 book, *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*.¹ My wish for the artworks to feel real, pre-dated my exposure to Grosz’s lecture and text. Up until that point, what I meant when I said *real*, was an intuitive force closer in appearance to an unformed feeling than a specific theory. It was through Grosz’s thinking I was able to dissect the intention behind my desire, producing a theoretical crystallisation.

¹ Grosz, “The Future of Feminist Theory (Keynote address)”; Gunkel, Nigianni, and Söderbäck, *Undutiful Daughters*.

Grosz imagines future possibilities for feminist theory, and first determines what *theory* is according to the Deleuze text *What is Philosophy?*.² She interprets the philosopher's text to establish both theories and concepts as “strategies, struggling among themselves with forces and effects that make a difference, that are significant beyond themselves insofar as they become techniques by which we address the real”.³ Concepts are strategies for dealing with events. Like the *real, events* can be understood as unexpected forces which occur outside of the self's historical experience of existence and whose effect cannot be prepared for. A concept is “[a] way of addressing and opening up the real, new types of subjectivity”.⁴ They are strategies for living with problems, not solutions, as these do not exist for most problems.

The discursive nature of a conversational artwork fosters potentiality. The personal content and emotionally rich exchanges that surround the project, creates space which can facilitate experiences of the real for any participant. Potentiality is the agency within the work, facilitating reflection on, and association with, the artwork. Each participant, regardless of distance from the recordings is empowered/charged with engaging conceptually with the work, importantly, on their own terms.

The real, as Grosz defines it, and as I utilise it within this research, is “a force that infuses existence”, an elemental energy which existed before theory, before text.⁵ Grosz undertakes a Deleuzian reading of Darwin's theory of life and equates the real with organic processes defined by methods of survival, or growth. These biological events retain memory in order to sustain existence, and to this end, incorporate the past into the present. The unconscious preservation and recovery of information is a force that creates life, and “brings potential to the materiality of chaos”.⁶ Due to Grosz's exploration of the real as a feminist strategy through Deleuzian philosophy, perhaps inevitably, I return to consider aspects of the minor in relation to language

² Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

³ Gunkel, Nigianni, and Söderbäck, *Undutiful Daughters*, 13.

⁴ Gunkel, Nigianni, and Söderbäck, *Undutiful Daughters*, 17.

⁵ Grosz, “The Future of Feminist Theory (Keynote address)”.

⁶ Grosz, “The Future of Feminist Theory (Keynote address)”.

and experiences. However, it is also this concept of potential materiality, that relates to minor, and which I will connect to in (that relates to minor theory and its generative potentialities or forms).

3.4 Becoming

Resulting from a rigorous reading of the plateau “Becoming...” I outline by what means becomings are a mode of experiential exchange. The Deleuze and Guattari plateau “Becoming...” is divided into fifteen subheadings. Also referred to by the philosophers as a “line of flight”, and a “plane of consistency”, a becoming implies a channel or passage, to pass through. These routes are not sequential or predictable, and they are navigated by “criteria”.⁷ Criteria is a knowledge system that I equate to intuition as it triggers effort, and unconsciously prompts action, facilitating and encouraging movement/progression in any direction.

Although elements of the minor are evident throughout this entire thesis, it is under the subheading “Memories and Becomings, Points and Blocks,” that a crucial conceptual expansion of the minor correlates with my methodology.⁸ For Deleuze and Guattari, a becoming indicates movements of ascension and dissent, it is a necessary (for anyone other than a white cisgender hetero sexual male), generative process of change.⁹ Importantly this twin function reflects the multi-directional position I hold in this research. It can account for the shifts that occur between myself as the artist, my family, my social and professional peers, depending on which generative action of withdrawing or arising is underway. For example, as the artist I am the subject when I withdraw from the majority (university or family), or the medium or agent when I arise from the minority (family). The designation of a major or minor status, is also fluid, (apart from the exception of the white man mentioned prior). Within this research, I often situate the family as minoritarian for multiple reasons. Primarily this dynamic relates to making a private artwork with

⁷ Deleuze, and Guattari, “1730: Becoming-Intense,” in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 251.

⁸ Deleuze, and Guattari, “1730: Becoming-Intense,” in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 291.

⁹ Deleuze, and Guattari, “1730: Becoming-Intense,” in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 291.

family as a minor action in context of the research occurring in a university (major), while the recordings of our Wednesday Night Dinner conversations also expose the minor language of our family. However, this position can change when I, as an individual subject (minor), move away from or resist the family unit (major).¹⁰

3.4.1 Minor Literature

In the text “What Is a Minor Literature”, Deleuze and Guattari establish the three essential characteristics of minor literature, the first being that: “language is affected with a high coefficient deterritorialisation”; the second is that “everything takes on a collective value”; and the third specifies the inseparability of the personal from the political.¹¹ To simultaneously address the individual and the collective is a strategic action of the minor, as “what each author says individually already constitutes a common action, and what he or she says or does is necessarily political”.¹² This artwork reflects these elements of minor literature through three strategic actions: 1) The artwork is conversational in content and form, it stores, presents and creates intimate and emotionally intense interactions. 2) Discussing the project with the broader audience, induces a collective response. While conversing with an audience member, they instinctively translate and interpret the project onto their family dynamic, generating new thoughts and imaginings. 3) Designating the recordings as private and withholding the content, within the expectation of production and exposure associated with post-graduate research, is a disruptive and political gesture. This withholding also generates intrigue and enquiry across the audiences.

¹⁰ Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (New York: Viking Press, 1977). Deleuze and Guattari explore at length, the influence of family on the individual in, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, and consider the family unit and familial binds as repressive structures that restrict an individual’s movement, subsequently limiting the potential for change.

¹¹ Deleuze, and Guattari, “What is a Minor Literature,” in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, 16. Deterritorialisation is also an objective of the rhizome, another of Deleuze & Guattari’s concepts. I am limiting my discussion of deterritorialisation here to its role within the concepts of “becoming...”.

¹² Deleuze, and Guattari, “What is a Minor Literature,” in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. 17.

3.4.2 Deterritorialisation

A deterritorialisation is the objective of a becoming that occurs along a line of flight, it is a process navigated by intuition, and is a venue for the intense expression of sense, that is resistant, transformative *and* generative. A simple description of deterritorialisation can be found in the *Dictionary of Deleuze*, in which Adrian Parr suggests that deterritorialisation “can best be understood as a movement producing change.”¹³ Change and transformation is inherent to deterritorialisation as it exists in relation to, and not in opposition of, re-territorialisation. This generative movement can be associated with the instinctual, disruptive and create acts that form the basis of my methodology and permeate this research. Informing my understanding of deterritorialisation is Parr’s idea of movement, a concept which expands upon Simon O’Sullivan’s description of its role within contemporary art. Corresponding with Parr, O’Sullivan describes deterritorialisation as a continual process or movement, that occurs not in opposition to, but within the major. The major is indicated by dominant western art traditions and conditions, such as modernism, painting, and the commodification of the art world. Disrupting or challenging the authority of these traditions is for O’Sullivan, the “determining characteristics” of deterritorialisation and of minor art.¹⁴

Deterritorialisation is represented in my practice, through the myriad of ways in which this project disrupts the expected and standard modes of artistic production, display and exposure. This includes using familial conversations as the basis for a conceptual artwork and disseminating information about the work conversationally. Concealing the content of the work from the broader audience interrupts the perception that all aspects of an artwork should be available to the audience. The privacy of the artwork and the practice overall, operates independently of the art market, refusing to be traded or commodified.

¹³ Adrian Parr, *The Deleuze Dictionary*, Rev. ed. (Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 69.

¹⁴ O’Sullivan, “Notes...”.

To de-territorialise is to liberate order of its edifices and create something new in its place. In this sense, deterritorialisation is a reactive force, not unlike the force of the real, each operating as a site of transformative production. Described as a process that re-instates sense as the primary experience, Deleuze and Guattari assign deterritorialised language to be the instrument of sense; “it is sense, as a correct sense, that presides over the designation of sounds (the thing or the state of things that the word designates).”¹⁵ Considering all of these elements, deterritorialisation represents multiplicity, it accommodates the cycle, movement and transformations performed by a minor practice, while engaging with the heart of a minor language, and in relation to this project, accounts for the persistent quest for a sense of the real.

3.4.3 Minor Language

In his essay, “Minor Writing and Minor Literature”, Ronald Bogue implies that conversations are an event of sense, through his observation that Deleuze “regards meaning (sens) as the incorporeal surface between two bodies and words, the “expressed” of words whose “expression” is the event.”¹⁶ If the sense or intensity of language is not explicitly expressed does it function in the same way as a secret? In the conversations surrounding this research, the gap in expression – the area between intention and perception – is a generative space where new understandings are formed. Reflecting a becoming, this gap is a passage navigated by intuition, and it is from within this space that minor language and intense expressions of sense emerge, and shared knowledge develops.

The sense that Deleuze and Guattari define above, is a function of minor language, that exposes the emotional value of an interaction and permits the inclusion of non-language expression and communication, such as sighs and laughter. I anticipate minor language will be a significant element of the subject matter that my family and I perceive when we listen to the

¹⁵ Deleuze, and Guattari, “What is a Minor Literature,” in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, 20.

¹⁶ Ronald Bogue, “Minor Writing and Minor Literature”, *sympleke* 5, no. 1 (2005): 102

archive. Not only will we hear the words spoken, but we will feel the intense expression of those words including our excitements, indifferences and disappointments.

Rosi Braidotti, in “Becoming Woman: Or Sexual Difference Revisited”, describes the first characteristic of the minor through Franz Kafka's “linguistic dispossession”. This experience for Kafka, was generated by a sense of displacement in being a Jewish person in Prague (minority), speaking in German language (majority) at the cost of his Czech (minority) heritage.¹⁷ It is Kafka's cultural, emotional, and geographical *dispossession* that Braidotti identifies, that for Deleuze and Guattari promotes his literature to the status of the minor, indicating “a minor language” as “that which a minority constructs within a major language.”¹⁸ Intuition (*criteria*) is activated when one harnesses the senses to feel, rather than know. For Deleuze and Guattari, the point where the concepts of criteria and sense collapse is recognised in their Kafka related observation that “one can understand Yiddish only by ‘feeling it’ in the heart”.¹⁹

Minor language is a powerful expression of sense, which surfaces in the inexplicable space between two people or words. In the future, when the family listen back to the recordings, the time passed will provide a reflexive distance that will enable us to identify both the expressions and sense of our communications. This will illuminate what we hear, our greetings and words, the language-less sounds, such as movement, tone and resonances, and enrich the artwork, made from within and for the family, and we will feel it in our hearts.

¹⁷ Braidotti, “Becoming Woman”, 105.

¹⁸ Deleuze, and Guattari, “What is a Minor Literature,” in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, 16.

¹⁹ Deleuze, and Guattari, “What is a Minor Literature,” in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, 25.

4 CHAPTER FOUR: TALKING POTENTIAL STRATEGIES

Conversation as a dialogical artform, is explored at length by Grant Kester in the book, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*.¹ Via Kester's text, I highlight the historical lineage of contemporary art, culminating in experiential, durational and performative artistic genres; artforms that also accommodates this research. Throughout this book, Kester outlines artists and theorists who advocate for intuitive, open and vulnerable interactions to be perceived as artistic forms. The annexing of familial conversations as an artwork, is informed by Deleuze and Guattari's theories of minor language and is re-enforced by Kester's promotion of the dialogical as a site of ethical and transformative experiences. I continue to explore Kester's text and his assessment of the generative potential within dialogue-based exchanges, leading to what he defines as feminist connected knowledge. I broaden the idea of dialogue as a feminist and collaborative site of production, through the following texts: David Bohm's book *On Dialogue*, and *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of the Self, Voice and Mind* co-written by Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger and Jill Mattuck Tarule.² Considering conversation is both the content and form of the artwork, exploring the capacity for dialogue to foster collaborative and generative potential is a key understanding of this research.

Continuing to interrogate the personal and individual nature of this research, I undertake an exploration into subjectivity, enacted through a focussed framework of theoretical references. Elevating domestic interactions and unplanned conversations to the status of an artwork, is a feminist strategy I repeat throughout this research. Inserting feminist principles among the minor methodologies I employ, reflects other minor practices such as Chantal Akerman, as observed by Ivone Margulies.³ Historical and contemporary feminisms, have sought to make the

¹ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*.

² Bohm, *On Dialogue*; Belenky et al., *Women's Ways*.

³ Margulies, *Nothing Happens*. To clarify Margulies understands Akerman as a feminist, despite Akerman not identifying as such.

realms of women visible and valued – and resulted in knowledge production that purposefully or obliquely seeks to challenge systems of authority and oppression, to which this thesis also contributes.⁴ The conversational mode of this artwork facilitates this contribution, as it conjures both feminist strategies and the minor. Collectively, the two theories represent the conflicting aspirations of this research, as it seeks to create space for an artwork that is about family, while also avoiding exposure. To do this, I apply feminist, and minor, systems and strategies of disruption and transformation, to develop the potential and generative qualities of the work.

Relating back to minor theory, and building on my argument in the previous section, I extract from Deleuze and Guattari's concept of a becoming to highlight the conditions in which subjectivity and differentiation are interlinked. I then assess how these processes, interact with theories of subjectivity, representation, difference and the real, discussed by M.F. Simone Roberts and, Elizabeth Grosz.⁵ This is in no way intended to be an exhaustive account of perspectives on the self within feminist thought, rather these examples offer distinct views on topics specific to this research and minor theory.⁶

In the context of feminist theory and strategies as explored by Roberts and Grosz, alongside Deleuze and Guattari's minor theory, I review the work of American writer Kate Zambreno and reflect on the shared themes present between Zambreno's and my production. I address Zambreno's books: *Book of Mutter*, *Appendix Project* and *Drifts*, as examples of a parallel practice, as a substitute for my own reflective practice, as a means of gaining perspective between myself and the content of my work.⁷ If Chantal Akerman's oeuvre offers this research an insight into artistic production made with family, then Zambreno's intimate writing style addresses the complications of a form that writes about daily life and creative production, as the

⁴ Including but not limited to racial, class, gender, sexuality, religious, economic and institutionalised systems of oppression.

⁵ Belenky et al., *Women's Ways*.

⁶ For an extensive introduction to the topic of subjectivity within Feminism, including a comprehensive bibliography, the following reference is a useful starting point: Ellen Anderson, Cynthia Willett, and Diana Meyers, *Feminist Perspectives on the Self*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2020 ed., *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* ([\url{https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/feminism-self/}](https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/feminism-self/): Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2020).

⁷ Zambreno, *Book of Mutter*; Zambreno, *Appendix Project: Talks and Essays*; Zambreno, *Drifts*.

means of production. The nature and content of Zambreno's books are examples of contemporary feminist literature, and as such, offer valuable insights into the complexities of making artworks with family, including the personal challenges and tensions which guide and determine the structure and form of the final work. It is the form in particular, that relates directly to my challenges with form of the archive and the thesis produced for this research.

4.1 Conversation

The artwork made in this research, exists across different sites which are each based in discourse: the recordings of unscripted family conversations; and the principal distribution of information about these recordings, the project and the research, also occur via conversation. It would be negligent to consider conversation as an artwork without referring to academic and writer, Grant Kester's book, *Conversation Pieces*.⁸ Published in 2004, this text outlines the emergence of "collaborative, socially engaged art practice" during the 1990s, and the historical art movements that dialogical artforms evolved from.⁹ His definition of dialogical artists include people who are "parting from the traditions of object making", and adopting a "performative, process-based approach". Kester notes that artists working within this form, operate as "context providers" rather than "content providers", and provides examples of artworks produced outside of traditional gallery and museum settings, throughout Asia, Europe, United States and the United Kingdom.¹⁰

Kester traces the evolution of dialogical artforms starting with Immanuel Kant, who in the eighteenth century, associated communication with aesthetic experience.¹¹ This notion of the aesthetic arose in Europe during the Enlightenment challenge to the Divine Right, which gave rise to secularism and the increasingly upwardly mobile middle classes. Kant's aesthetic

⁸ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*.

⁹ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 1.

¹⁰ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*.

¹¹ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 26.

represents abstract systems of meaning imposed to maintain exclusivity, as it was considered that Art or rather High Art, should be elevated from everyday experience; a view, which is consequently responsible for what is now commonly referred to as the avant-garde.

Kester describes that during the mid-twentieth century the modernist avant-garde developed alongside attitudes which believed that “authentic art” should shock and disturb the audience.¹² Dialogical and Relational art emerged from the artistic movements which followed this period, movements which invited and relied upon direct viewer involvement including pop art; conceptualism; happenings; performance art; and institutional critique.¹³ A more “complex and reflective” form of collaboration then developed in the 1970s, when the dialogical and durational artworks made by artists such as Adrian Piper, Hans Haacke, and Mierle Laderman Ukeles, increased audience participation to the status of co-author.¹⁴

In his book, Kester supports the consideration of dialogical and socially engaged projects that address areas or issues of social and economic inequality as art. The examples he explores, all occur under the banner of artistic interventions and political activism or social work. Kester’s view of these socially engaged practices, asserts that concrete interventions made by artists, produces change in a community that has experienced some level of discord.¹⁵ The socio-political atmosphere Kester highlights is not specifically reflected in the context of this research. However, his definition of “a process of intersubjective exchange that is responsive to the specific situation of both the artist and his or her collaborators”, closely reflects my work.¹⁶ The terms, ‘intersubjectivity’, ‘exchange’, and ‘collaboration’, describe the conditions of artistic production that are enacted with this research. This is explored further in Kester’s ideas specifically relating artworks or projects that amount to acts of speaking and listening:

¹² Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 26.

¹³ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 53.

¹⁴ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 61.

¹⁵ While I am not working within this exact field there has been a lot of debate surrounding socially engaged art, questioning the moral and ethical boundaries of this form of practice. For further articulation on this issue see: <https://www.artpractical.com/column/we-need-to-talk-about-social-practice/>

¹⁶ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 70-1.

These projects all share a concern with the creative facilitation of dialogue and exchange. While it is common for a work of art to provoke dialogue among viewers, this typically occurs in response to a finished object. In these projects, on the other hand, conversation becomes an integral part of the work itself. It is reframed as an active, generative process.¹⁷

Provoking dialogue with, and broadening my family's perception of, an artwork from 'object' to 'conversation', was simpler than I had anticipated, as my MFA *Site Unseen* had primed the family to be receptive to ideas of contemporary art they had not previously considered.¹⁸ The family's initial response to the idea of recording conversations is hard to describe. It was almost like I had paid them a compliment they were wary to accept but simultaneously were receptive to; at the very least because they could identify it conceptually as an oral history service.¹⁹ The adults in the family conceptually appreciated the value of having our conversations recorded for the younger generations, a benefit which outweighed any personal reservations they had about the process.

Re-enforcing Kester's assertion that the artwork provokes dialogue, the conversations prompted by the recordings quickly surpassed my initial expectations. The family regularly address the recorder, sometimes with suspicion, or as a verifiable witness. Often, as we change rooms to eat, a family member will remind me to move the microphone (see fig. 6) demonstrating a sense of responsibility for the recordings – or at the very least – a respect for the process. The family also discuss the content of the recordings and ask if specific events or stories have been captured, regardless of being present when it is in use.

When making a conversational artwork, it is one of the questions asked by Kester that requires addressing, is “how can indeterminateness, or resistance to fixity and definition, become a “definition” or a determinate condition of art”.²⁰ He addresses this by acknowledging the performative nature of a conversation as content and form of an artwork, approaches the

¹⁷ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 8.

¹⁸ Rule, “Site Unseen”. See Chapter One for description of this project.

¹⁹ Oral histories are informal or structured accounts of an event or period of time witnessed by the storyteller that have been audio recorded.

²⁰ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 89.

conditions of production and display that are similar to theatre. He also notes importantly, while a conversational artwork creates situational encounters between the audience and artist, it is not subsumed by the same traditions as theatre and therefore, is not dependant on the artist to be the centre of the performance.²¹ Within this research, it is the intimate performative nature of a conversation that as an event, functions as a transformative encounter.

²¹ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 90.

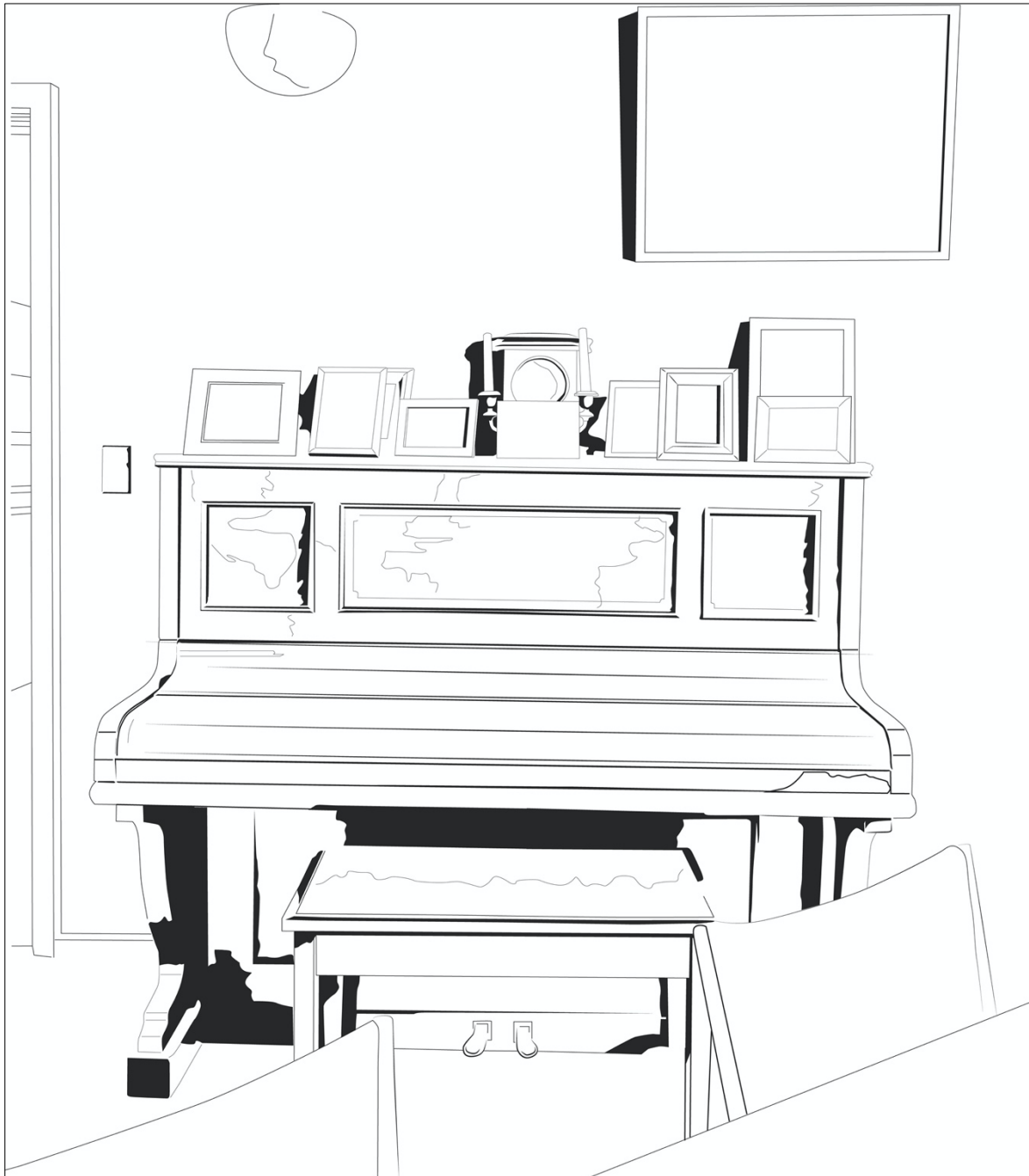


Figure 6. Kati Rule, *Illustration of where recorder is placed during dinner*, 2021. (Vector drawing by Jack A Halls).

4.2 Connected Knowledge

During a conversation, if each participant is attentive to the joint process of comprehension, a new, shared knowledge can emerge. While Kester articulates a theory of the dialogical through Jürgen Habermas, he also expands on his hypothesis to include feminist theory as a way of addressing the demonstrative context of the dialogical. Kester observes the development of a “contextually grounded ‘connected knowledge’ (based on heightened capacity for empathetic identification)”, primarily through the writing of feminist performance artist Adrian Piper.²² Piper establishes that the production of a shared experience, such as a conversation, is based on each participants receptiveness to the transformative effect of others.²³ It is via this process, that Kester further articulates the complexities of fostering connected knowledge, stating that:

Reason does not have to involve the arrogant imposition of fixed concepts on the infinitely complex and changeable world; it can allow us, instead, to transcend the simplistic opposition between self and other. But how can we presume to “know” what another person is feeling? How can we determine the relative accuracy of an empathetic response? Piper admits that we cannot, since we have no way of comparing our own first-person experiences... we determine the relationship between our interpretation of another’s state of mind or condition and his or her actual inner state through a performative interaction, an empathetic feedback loop in which we observe the other’s responses to our statements and actions (and modify our own subsequent actions accordingly).²⁴

Through Piper’s writing, Kester describes an intellectual problem: the impossibility of a unanimous, singular understanding between two people in a conversation, and the response employed to overcome gaps in comprehension. This reaction is a refined system of empathic and intuitive behavioural adaptations. These gut, or instinctive responses operate as activations fundamental to this research.

²² Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 14.

²³ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 77.

²⁴ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 77.

Further support for the concept of connected knowledge can be located in a number of texts, which also encourage reading conversations as collaborative and feminist forms of knowledge building. These texts include; *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of the Self, Voice and Mind*, co-written in 1986 by Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger and Jill Mattuck Tarule; and David Bohm's 1996 text *On Dialogue*.²⁵ Prior to collaborating on *Women's Ways of Knowing*, the four writers had each been developmental psychologists with a specific interest in intellectual and ethical development. Together, they interviewed women from varied backgrounds, to discuss their histories and intellectual developments. The resulting text aims to support tertiary education institutions to better support student's needs throughout the university learning process. *On Dialogue*, features a compilation of essays, lectures and notes on the theme of dialogue, written between 1970 and 1992.²⁶ While the style of these texts may have dated, the concepts of collaborative knowledge creation they advocate for alongside Kester, continue to assert relevance in relation to contemporary art production. American artist Adrian Piper's recent 2015 Venice Biennale artwork, *The Probable Trust Registry*, is a current example of an artist producing feminist dialogical artworks which present conversations as constructive creative exchanges.²⁷ As is Australian artist Jacqui Shelton, who's methodology includes storytelling, vocal actions and documentation as creative devices for production. Shelton formally recognises conversations within a work – which historically have played an integral role in the informal verbal documentation of an artwork – by listing any discussion surrounding it, as part of it.²⁸

In both *Women's Ways of Knowing* and *On Dialogue*, the writers tend to prefer the term dialogue as an appropriate elucidation of the collaborative nature of verbal exchanges. Bohm describes dialogue as a process that explores a “wide range of human experience: our close-held

²⁵ Belenky et al., *Women's Ways of Knowing*; Bohm, *On Dialogue*.

²⁶ Bohm, *On Dialogue*.

²⁷ <http://www.adrianpiper.com/art/biennale/index.shtml>

²⁸ <https://www.jacquishelton.com/images-are-struggling-in-the-corners-of-this-room>

values; the nature and intensity of emotions; the patterns of our thought processes; the function of memory; the import of inherited cultural myths; and the manner in which our neurophysiology structures moment-to-moment experience”.²⁹ In an interview with Mary Field Belenky about *Women’s Ways of Knowing...*, the co-author prefers the description of the relationship between researchers and subjects as a dialogue, as it fosters genuine participation over clinical research.³⁰ These definitions of dialogue collectively inform my positioning of conversations as shared and transformative events that occur as part of this research, between the artist, audience and artwork.

Bohm likens conversational exchange to scientific research, describing when a scientist has a scientific proposition their idea is tested against observations and resulting variations from the original speculation drive the research further. Furthering this point, the author also likens the process to artistic creation claiming that, when an artist has an idea, they attempt to produce it, and any difference between the concept and the outcome, propels the studio practice forward. It is this logic, which Bohm also applies to dialogue, ascertaining that each participant condition’s their replies in accordance to the similarities and differences they hear between their intentions and what is comprehended. It is together, through this process that they “create something in common, something that takes shape in their mutual discussions and actions.”³¹ The facility of dialogue to foster deeper understanding between two parties, is also described by Belenky in an educational setting:

A teacher always wants to start from where students are and then move along with them...If you're wrong and you operate for a while on a perspective that turns out to be inaccurate, the student corrects you..."So what I hear you saying is_" And, correcting you, the student says, "No, that's not what I'm thinking." And you hear it and you adjust.³²

²⁹ Bohm, *On Dialogue*, vii.

³⁰ Evelyn Ashton-Jones, and Dene Kay Thomas, “Composition, Collaboration, and Women's Ways of Knowing: A Conversation with Mary Belenky”, *Journal of advanced composition* 10, no. 2 (1990): 279

³¹ Bohm, *On Dialogue*, 3.

³² Ashton-Jones, and Thomas, “Composition, Collaboration, and Women's Ways of Knowing: A Conversation with Mary Belenky”, 286.

Further outlining how collaborative research and learning lends itself to women's systems of learning and enquiry, Belenky describes, how academic environments tended to favour men, subsequently diminishing the process for all participants but most significantly women.³³ For Belenky et al, researching female knowledge production, created an awareness of empathic and intuitive feedback systems similar to Piper's views, and promoting dialogue driven systems of knowledge production was an attempt to rectify the gender imbalance of participation.

I intend to foster intuition, curiosity and empathy when discussing the artwork with people beyond the familial audience, as these conversations facilitate the perpetuation of the work and enable it to continue in the imaginations of others. This imaginative space in turn generates new awareness of the artwork, although this process will not replicate the artwork exactly, it is fertile ground for the work to continue conceptually. Conversations are interactions which brim with promise and potential. When the family consider the conversations in the archive, intrigue is imbued with their awareness, hopes and fears of what might be on record. For the broader audience, who experience the work via a conversation about conversations they are not able to hear, it is a complex and unpredictable collaborative interaction, in which imaginative thinking and intuitive responses, lead to unexpected yet welcome communications.

4.3 Subjectively Speaking

As my artwork is about family and perhaps even more broadly about love, I commit to this position as a feminist strategy and defend it against potential criticisms, which might consider the work to be unserious or indulgent. Consequently, in the following sections I will explore the ways in which memory, subjectivity and shared experiences are associated closely

³³ Ashton-Jones, and Thomas, "Composition, Collaboration, and Women's Ways of Knowing: A Conversation with Mary Belenky". The 1980's was the period in which this research was performed and while significant improvements have been made to the structural biases of the tertiary education system since then, unfortunately, gender inequality in that environment, remains a significant issue.

with feminist and minor theories. To begin, I'd like to shift the discussion from the generative space of a conversation and reflect on how these exchanges are guided by each participant's subjectivity. Deleuze and Guattari incorporate the notion of subjectivity into minor theory via the plateau "1730: Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible...". This plateau is divided into 15 subheadings, that mostly begin with the words "Memories of a...".³⁴ For Deleuze and Guattari a *memory* also represents a *becoming* and is an operation of differentiation. What supports a process of differentiation is made clear in the plateau, "Memories of a Moviegoer," as it begins with a description of a film, written with the caveat "my memory of it is not necessarily accurate".³⁵ This clause allows the reader to speculate on the version of the story we are reading, and encourages them to question the subjectivities present in the text and in what ways these might influence the tale we are being told. For the reader, this tactic is a method of empowerment that can initiate a becoming; a movement or questioning, which promotes further differentiation. The concept of memory is significant to several aspects of this research. Not only as a way of highlighting the subject and invoking awareness of the self and others, as Deleuze and Guattari have employed it, but also in direct relation to the archive I have created of the Wednesday Night Dinner recordings.

4.3.1 Strategies: Feminist Theory

My speculation on the concept of subjectivity is grounded in Deleuze and Guattari's concept of a memory, in addition to distinct views on the topic from Elizabeth Grosz and American scholar, poet and activist, M.F Simone Roberts.³⁶ In the chapter, "The Future of Feminist Theory: Dreams for New Knowledges", Grosz speculates through a Deleuzian theory of a *concept*, on feminist theory's current capabilities and restrictions, and what she hopes it will

³⁴ Deleuze, and Guattari, "1730: Becoming-Intense," in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 233.

³⁵ Deleuze, and Guattari, "1730: Becoming-Intense," in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 233.

³⁶ Deleuze, and Guattari, "1730: Becoming-Intense," in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

include and achieve in the future.³⁷ The chapter written by Roberts titled, “Écriture Futuriste”, is a text which asserts that any writing that through its structure, disrupts or disturbs the reader, is evidence of feminine literature.³⁸

Grosz specifically describes feminism as “the production of concepts relevant to understanding women, femininity, and social subordination more generally”, that is optimally concerned with the “invention of new practices, positions, projects, techniques, and values.”³⁹ To rephrase this statement, feminist theory is a way of thinking differently that is generative. The Deleuzian idea of a concept is proclaimed by Grosz, as a crucial strategy to deal with the material and immaterial forces of the real. For the philosopher, *concepts* are the means by which we transform the present, investing it with potentials and latencies, which consequently create space for “the promise of a future different from the present.”⁴⁰ When considering strategies, Roberts steers away from using the word feminist, preferring the term *feminine* to indicate a style which can be employed by any gender as a tactic to disrupt literary traditions.

While Roberts and Grosz each differ on their view of feminist subjectivity and its current usefulness, they both illuminate Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of memory, as the beginning of, or a process which, evokes subjectivity and leads to a realisation of difference. For Roberts, subjectivity is exposed through the choices we make about our lives and in the myriad of ways a person contributes to the creation of culture.⁴¹ Decisions relating to what we consume, our online presence, our search histories, the fashion and lifestyle choices we make, all symbolise, according to Roberts, “the architecture and expression of the subject”.⁴² Robert’s subsequently considers literature to be a product of subjectivity, and describes how it is often categorised into

³⁷ Grosz, “The Future of Feminist Theory: Dreams for New Knowledges,” in *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*.

³⁸ M.F. Simone Roberts, “Écriture Feministe,” In *ibid.* | Cited Pages | . ed. Henriette Gunkel, Chrysanthi Nigianni, and Fanny Dr Söderback (New York: New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). Écriture is the French language word for writing.

³⁹ Grosz, “The Future of Feminist Theory: Dreams for New Knowledges,” in *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*, 16-17.

⁴⁰ Grosz, “The Future of Feminist Theory: Dreams for New Knowledges,” in *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*, 14.

⁴¹ Roberts, “Écriture Feministe,” in *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*, 50.

⁴² Roberts, “Écriture Feministe,” in *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*, 50.

feminine or masculine examples.⁴³ Instead of denying the gendered differences these writing categorisations denote, Roberts argues that regardless of gender, “within any one subject’s personality” a spectrum of masculine and feminine attributes are demonstrated.⁴⁴ Therefore, it is the recognition of differences, that allows for the “reciprocal alter-subjectivities” of both genders to be considered.⁴⁵ To clarify, “reciprocal alter-subjectivities” describes a process of acknowledgment, makes visible the varied qualities (or subjectivities) of being, not the qualities themselves, but the variations between these qualities, which can be experienced equally by all. Roberts’ proposed solution to this gendered separation is not an integration or equalising of masculine and feminine writing styles. Instead, she supports the concept of an expanded literacy, one in which “the écritures produced by feminine writing subjects (men and women) need to be taught, read, and published as legitimate textural practices and as critical methodologies”.⁴⁶ The premise of this educational approach would, Roberts believes, enable new subjectivities to develop, ones that are “feminist, complex, swerved enough to inhabit this complex world”.⁴⁷

Grosz on the other hand, takes issue with the way subjectivity and the politics of representation are currently prioritised in feminism, and encourages a somewhat radical shift in content away from the proliferation of recent theory concerned with:

...questions of the subject’s identity, experiences, feelings, affects, agency, and energies. The multiplication of the subject positions; the opening up of the subject to all the vagaries of a hyphenated existence as class, race, gender, and sexually specific being; the proliferation of memoirs; the overwhelming emphasis on the personal; the anecdotal; the narrational – while

⁴³ Roberts, “Écriture Feministe,” in *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*, 50.

⁴⁴ Roberts, “Écriture Feministe,” in *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*, 50.

⁴⁵ Roberts, “Écriture Feministe,” in *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*, 50.

⁴⁶ Roberts, “Écriture Feministe,” in *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*, 52. This is not an essentialist viewpoint for Roberts, but one which acknowledges the different contexts in which men and women have experienced the public and private spheres of society.

⁴⁷ Roberts, “Écriture Feministe,” in *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*, 59. Roberts borrowed the term “swerve” from the work of American poet Joan Retallack, as used in her 2004 book *The Poethical Wager*. Retallack defines “swerve” as partially consisting of: antiromantic modernisms; the civil rights movement; feminism; and postcolonial critiques.

important for a long period of feminism's existence, they have now shown us the limit of feminist theory.⁴⁸

Grosz is suggesting that the amount of attention given to the subject, as the *principle subject*, restricts feminist theory from pursuing its potential, considering the subject's perspectives are limited by the boundaries of their experiences and knowledge base. In this, she is not arguing *against* the value of the aforementioned ideas to feminism historically (nor into the future), rather she is suggesting they have been overly prioritised and are operating as distractions. Grosz's answer to this predicament echoes Roberts' concept of "reciprocal alter-subjectivities".⁴⁹ The philosopher argues that steering feminist dialogue away from the self, is not to "ignore the very real differences between subjects and their social positions, only to suggest that these differences, and not the subjectivities between which these differences are distributed, are the vehicles for invention of the new".⁵⁰ In other words, difference is a force which makes any identity possible.⁵¹

Roberts and Grosz's assessment of the relationship between subjectivity and difference, is contrasting and akin. While one rejects use of the principle subject and the other supports its proliferation, yet they both agree that expressions of subjectivity are where differences emerge (in degrees) and is therefore a generative and transformative space full of potential. Subsequently, for the participants within the conversations that occur as part of my artwork, identifying differences, between comprehension and subjectivity, elicits intrigue and empathy, facilitating further communication and increasing the potential for information about the artwork to be expanded or shared.

⁴⁸ Grosz, "The Future of Feminist Theory: Dreams for New Knowledges," in *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*, 17-18.

⁴⁹ Roberts, "Écriture Feministe," in *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*, 50.

⁵⁰ Grosz, "The Future of Feminist Theory: Dreams for New Knowledges," in *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*, 18. There is an emotional disconnect in Grosz's assessment of the forces of the real. While the philosopher advocates for the real to be incorporated into feminist theory. Describing the real as a force that enables us to deal with events. Our responses to *events*, or *forces* are undoubtedly informed by our experiences, therefore our *concepts* are structured by our subjectivities.

⁵¹ In relation to difference, Grosz also uses the phrase "inhuman work of difference", not as an indication of cruel or inhumane behaviour, rather in reference to all matter that is not human.

4.4 More Real

Surfacing again throughout these discussions of subjectivity are notions of the real, and its position within minor literature. Both Roberts and Grosz determine that exposure to the real occurs through the recognition of differentiation. However, for Roberts, it is only after reciprocal alter-subjectivities are recognised through masculine and feminine literatures being taught and critiqued in equal measure, that new literatures “closer to realism, to truth/s” can form.⁵² It is therefore in the action of aiming toward, or of moving closer to a feeling, that subjectivity is transformed, and finds direction. In contrast, Grosz’s belief that the focus on identity in feminist theory to date, results in unproductive expressions of self-obsession, that has diminished feminist theory’s ability to address non-human aspects of experience. Grosz’ solution for this is to “reconceptualise the real as forces, energies, events”, and to questions these forces, as a means of creating new subjectivities, understandings and ways of being.⁵³ In each example, both writers explicitly associate the real with movement, either as a force or the direction of a force. Combined, this concept of the real represents an intuitive action of intense expression, linking it directly to Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of deterritorialisation. As such, I employ it throughout my methodology and incorporate the *real* into the lexicon of a minor language.

In alignment with both Roberts and Grosz’ application of the term *real*, as a goal to work towards, experienced only through force. I became aware of a force of my own making, a self-imposed pressure, to further articulate the application of the real within this research. My pursuit of this line of enquiry is an intuitive one, led by a feeling that the real is primary to what I want to uncover in the artwork, thesis, and within my methodology for being an artist. Therefore, it is both urgent and necessary for me to again interrogate these actions, which I suspect, are empowered by a sense of the real.

⁵² Roberts, “Écriture Feministe,” in *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*, 50.

⁵³ Grosz, “The Future of Feminist Theory: Dreams for New Knowledges,” in *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*, 20.

Throughout this research I discuss the real in two senses, as a force and a feeling. The ability to reflect the complexities and fluidity of a solid state like matter, *and* a feeling, makes the real, a term manifold and flexible enough to apply broadly. I am not alone in this habit, as Grosz also discusses the real in multiple ways: non-human matter in the world; as an event; and an elemental force (a biological force which supports life).⁵⁴ It is through Grosz's thinking on the real, I feel I am able to gather a more complete understanding of what the real represents within this research and my practice overall. Grosz's biological association describing the real as a life force, encouraged me to also consider the real through science, and specifically the field of physics. If the real is a force, then in the context of physics, force is evident in the push toward or pull away from an object that is caused by an interaction. Scientifically, all forces occur under two categories. One category is contact forces, which are: normal; resistance; applied; spring; frictional; and tensional. The second category is represented by action-at-a-distance forces, which are: gravitational; electrical; and magnetic.⁵⁵ Reassigning these from scientific into social forces, provides further definition to the movements of dissent and affirmation associated with minor practice, as discussed in Chapter Two, while also representing the – push and pull – tension evident in the emotional forces that have guided this research throughout my candidature. Furthermore, this notion of force, transforms this project (and its potential impact) beyond the personal or local, toward the collective and world more broadly.

Surveying the modes of dialogue that surround this research, I consider all the conversations generated between family members; the family and the archive; myself as the artist within the family; myself with the archive; myself as a family member with the university and with the broader audience. Each of these exchanges represents an interaction, that exposes a force. This force is the real. In response to the real emerging, intuition is triggered, generating a movement and propelling me – as the artist – toward or away from an aesthetic, emotional or

⁵⁴ Grosz is not suggesting that humans aren't real, rather she is objecting to the dominance of the human perspective of the world.

⁵⁵ <https://www.physicsclassroom.com/about> accessed December 2020.

conceptual context, decision or proposition. This movement holds within its momentum a promise, which is the potential to create, a changed, different or new, thing.

4.5 Taking Space

At this juncture of the thesis, I evaluate the reductive and expansive operations of subjectivity specifically in relation to feminist literature, as a method of reviewing the exposure of my practice and the development of the artwork and thesis.

Grosz's criticism of subjectivity comes from a belief that it has exhausted its use within feminist theory and states that rather than operating as an advocate for the equality and autonomy of difference, it now fosters narcissism and confinement instead. It is Grosz's belief that feminist theory has become too fixated on ideas of self and subjectivity, and that the focus on identity and representation of the self has made dialogue surrounding these topics defensive rather than generative, thus limiting potential. In order to broaden feminist theory, Grosz first suggests eschewing subjectivity, and subsequently applying the Deleuzian *concept* as a strategy to deal with the real world, and its forces.

While this artwork actively resists representations of identity, there is a caveat I would like to add to Grosz's proposition, which is, even when feminist theory demonstrates rigid definitions of identity and traits of self-absorption, that it might still provide opportunities for discovery or revelation from the audience? All the more so, if that experience is the realisation that you don't like or agree with the style or content of the work. To this end, I assert that literature and artworks focussed on the self, should not be discouraged, as it risks re-affirming generalisations of identity rather than expanding dialogue and understanding between two parties.

While this thesis and artwork is not about publishing, the following description from Roberts offers a valuable analogy of how feminist or experimental works of art are often marginalised and what effect this might have on the reception of the work. In, *Écriture Futuriste*

Roberts observes that experimental literature and feminist theory are almost exclusively published by smaller publishing houses, which are referred to as both literary and independent.⁵⁶ When publishing a book, an assumed status is imposed onto the material that is informed by the scale and reputation of the publisher, which in turn informs the interpretation of the editions produced as subgenres or niche texts. While it is a lamentable fact that important and radical texts compete for support and exposure within a comparatively small industry, if there is to be a silver lining to this state of production, it is that various forms of literature are, at the very least, being published.⁵⁷ A similar situation can be found in the artworld, where artists that have no gallery affiliations (and even those that do), compete regularly for the limited resources that are available to them. More often than not, artists create their own opportunities in order for their works to be seen at all. Roberts unpacks this motivation in her text, when she outlines how the publishing of experimental or feminist theory, in any context, provides an occasion for the discourses to be read, and results in opportunities to “disrupt other social contracts by showing us that we can think and be differently.”⁵⁸ The importance of this process cannot be overstated, as it reflects the spirit in which I embarked on this research, as I take up space as a future strategy to encourage others to do the same.

For someone who has a private and personal art practice that resists exposure, the public aspects of postgraduate education, the presentations and submissions, were concessions I was willing to make, in an effort to represent a different – minor – approach to contemporary art. It is important to me that alternative modes of making art, and being an artist, are seen and considered, as examples for others. I am not trying to *lead* by example but *be* by example. This thesis and the conversations surrounding the artwork, are offerings toward that. However, this position has not been without complications. When an artwork is as emotionally and materially

⁵⁶ Roberts, “Écriture Feministe,” in *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*.

⁵⁷ The independent publishing industry is small in comparison to the commercial publishing of popular fiction and non-fiction.

⁵⁸ Roberts, “Écriture Feministe,” in *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*, 52.

charged, as this one feels to me, the ensuing wrestle with the written component of the research, as a site to fulfill the expected scholastic requirements, while also expressing the personal feelings and ambitions I have for the material, has been confronting.

I found a parallel example of the struggles with both the form of the artwork and thesis in the work of American writer, Kate Zambreno. Zambreno's prose is often described as feminist literature that approaches memoir through the foregrounding of feminine subjectivities. This question of form refers both to the material and dimensional components, and importantly to the conceptual structures surrounding and supporting it. Zambreno employs a fragmentary style of writing, jumping between long passages of text and sentences that appear as fleeting thoughts or notes. The author utilises this style of writing, in an effort to "keep gesturing to its incompleteness and ongoingness [sic]."⁵⁹ The author also speaks of her compulsion "to write toward it", that is the book, a thought, or feeling. Her reflection on this action of writing toward it, is instigated through failure, suggesting that it is a book's limitations and omissions, which drives her to continue writing.⁶⁰ I believe the action of *writing toward*, that Zambreno discusses is resonant with the desire for engaging with the real within my own practice. Unsurprisingly, criticisms of Zambreno's work describe her style as handwringing, while also suggesting that her methods are not radical or highbrow, as if this was her intention.⁶¹ For me, her texts read as honest admissions. I believe the value in Zambreno's style of writing is that it produces awareness of the multiple ways and conditions under which creative production can be made. A way of taking up space, to create space, for future work.

⁵⁹ Zambreno, *Appendix Project: Talks and Essays*, 66.

⁶⁰ Zambreno, *Appendix Project: Talks and Essays*; I consider this form of generative failure to be a minor act.

⁶¹ This review of *Drifts* written by Rumaan Alam in BOOKFORUM, also asserts that the book "exhausts the goodwill of the reader". <https://www.bookforum.com/print/2703/kate-zambreno-s-recursive-new-novel-24164>

4.5.1 Zambreno's Containers

Throughout this research I have asked myself, how do I make an artwork about my family, write a thesis about this research that is respectful of their privacy, and do justice to all of the big and complex emotions and themes that interweave and intersect with each other? Through Zambreno's writing, I found articulations of this challenging process within her three texts, *Book of Mutter*, *Appendix Project* and *Drifts*.⁶²

Book of Mutter was written over a period of thirteen years following the death of the author's mother.⁶³ It is a collection of reflections, memories, and musings, that Zambreno attempts to collate in a form that mimics the artist Louise Bourgeois' *Cell* artworks.⁶⁴ Drawing heavily on the writings of Roland Barthes throughout the book, Zambreno mixes the personal with theoretical, and embraces the subjective voice in a profound manner. Following *Book of Mutter* is *Appendix Project*, and as the title suggests, this book features a collection of talks and essays Zambreno wrote to account theoretically for *Book of Mutter*.⁶⁵ Collectively, these books reflect on themes of family and familial knowledge, and as Zambreno observes, "the conflicting desire of the writer, to be both private and public, which is also the conflicting desires of grief."⁶⁶ Despite the public outcome of Zambreno's writing, their overall nature resonates directly with the archive I have created.

Zambreno's 2020 autobiographical novel, *Drifts*, is collection of notes, essays and thoughts, on the conditions and processes involved in writing the book.⁶⁷ Detailing the challenges of her practice, Zambreno directs her failures, distractions, and despairs into the text. By acknowledging the emotional, physical, and financial conditions from this period of her life, Zambreno highlights the influence these contexts – ones that are commonly ignored or denied –

⁶² Zambreno, *Book of Mutter*; Zambreno, *Appendix Project: Talks and Essays*; Zambreno, *Drifts*.

⁶³ Zambreno, *Book of Mutter*.

⁶⁴ Bourgeois created her 60 Cell artworks between 1989 and 2008. These sculptural installations are representations of literal and emotional containment and experiences of interiority and observation.

⁶⁵ Zambreno, *Appendix Project: Talks and Essays*.

⁶⁶ Zambreno, *Appendix Project: Talks and Essays*, 66.

⁶⁷ Zambreno, *Drifts*.

have on her writing process. In closely monitoring and documenting her research processes, the watching, thinking, and feeling, Zambreno declares it all to be writing/practice. In many ways this thesis mirrors the process Zambreno demonstrates in *Drifts*, as I too detail the emotional, conceptual, and practical challenges of undertaking the research and writing the thesis.

Zambreno's writing style within these books demonstrates a purposefully disruptive form, jumping from thought to thought, and collating multiple references, an approach reminiscent of the varied and intuitively pathways that arise within casual conversations. I believe this format is a feminist and minoritarian tactic – an experimental style of writing which leaves room for subjective readings, enabling if not outright encouraging, interpretation from the audience. Zambreno builds potential into her structure and material and is careful to make room or leave space for the audience to draw their own associations and discover meaning, for the development of connected knowledge. As so much of Zambreno's content speaks to the emotion of an experience, I am compelled to again recognise these as events as exposure to the real. As such, I begin to comprehend how Zambreno's writing is full of forces, movements toward and away from her fears, needs, expectations, passions and choices.

5 CHAPTER FIVE: THE ARCHIVE

For this research I am collecting recordings of family conversations as a private artwork, an act which presents two lines of inquiry. The first line of inquiry is a review of the interaction between my roles as family member and artist, and the second is an examination of the spectrum of exposure implicated in the production of private artworks on the audience.

Once I established that I would be working with a body of recorded conversations, I began a search to determine a form that would accommodate this material in practice and theory. It was during this search that I revisited Jacques Derrida's text *Archive Fever*, and began to review the archive as a possible platform for the artwork.¹ Out of the many theoretical texts on the archive, Derrida's *Archive Fever* conveyed the impression of being in direct conversation with my research, and as such, it is a theoretical exchange between the archive I employ and *Archive Fever* that I undertake here.

Initially, "Archive Fever" was a lecture given by Derrida at the Freud Museum in London in 1994. The book, originally titled, *Mal d'Archive: une impression freudienne*, was published in 1995 and is in six parts. In the section titled "Notes", Derrida reflects on the origins of the word, concept and function of the archive. Throughout the "Exergue", he discusses Sigmund Freud, psychoanalysis, Freud's death drive, technology, printing and inscription. Derrida explains in the "Preamble" the different associations he has with the word impression in relation to this specific piece of writing. The "Foreword" speculates on establishing a discipline of the archive that includes psychoanalysis and the biological archive. Derrida also examines Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's "Monologue with Freud" (a monologue in the form of a letter), appearing as the last chapter of Yerushalmi's book, *Freud's Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable*.² Derrida follows with the chapter "Thesis", in which he discusses the method in which Yerushalmi

¹ Derrida, *Archive Fever*.

² Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Freud's Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable*, ed. Sigmund Freud (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

conjures Freud's ghost, by addressing the monologue to the deceased psychoanalyst. To endorse the suggestion of phantoms and apparitions, Derrida connects Wilhelm Jensen's, *Gradiva: A Pompeiian Fancy*, to Freud's assertion that there is "a grain of truth in every delusion".³ In "Postscript", Derrida reveals when he is Naples (every year for twenty years), he also thinks of Jensen's *Gradiva* and reflects on the multiple impressions that this fictional character, the Ghost of *Gradiva* has made. Throughout the entire text, Derrida exposes the power structure of the archive via an unpacking of the language used to convey its authority throughout history. Derrida labels this process of interrogation a *deconstruction* and uses it to question the laws and classifications of the archive. For Derrida, a deconstruction is an essential review of the archives politics that destabilises its authority and triggers the potentially infinite forward momentum of the death drive.

5.1 Finding Form

A desire for an earnest engagement between my art career and my private life motivates me to make art with my family (my partner, parents, brothers and their families). Engaging my family in the production of conceptual artworks enables the analysis and comparison of my roles within the family and the local contemporary creative community (which is predominantly Melbourne, Australia). The intimate nature of this research is its most significant challenge, and its inherent strength. Working with my family can feel frustrating and claustrophobic, but it is also an illuminating and compelling process that drives the research. Over the period of my candidature, my family's reservations and scepticisms, soften towards the idea of our conversations becoming an artwork.

While the recordings operate akin to an overheard discussion, and collectively shape a family portrait of sorts, how to present this material as a whole eluded me. Settling on a form

³ Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, Anna Freud, and Angela Richards (London: Hogarth Press, 1953); Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 87.

was complicated by the restrictions of exposure I imposed on the artwork concerning its multiple audiences, and the conflicting public requirements of the research institution. In order to accommodate these complexities, I decided on implementing incremental shifts in exposure, a process highlighted by the degrees of exposure Derrida formulates when he describes the passage from secret to non-secret as being different from the passage between private to public.⁴

Although secrecy and privacy are not the same thing, they are both slightly different actions of limiting access to a thing, an idea, a document or an object. Derrida discusses the transformation between private and public in relation to Freud's house in London, which was transformed into a museum in Freud's name. Derrida acknowledges that this transformation is limiting and does not grant him, or anyone, full access to Freud's secret or *nonsecret* personal and professional papers. Derrida feels this refusal is directed from Freud himself, as prior to his death, Freud had the material he considered private or confidential burnt. The basic levels of exposure within my research can be broken down to this; while the content of the recorded conversations (the artwork) is private, the concept of the artwork (the archive) is discussed and presented publicly. These divergent aims reveal a not-public or not-private, grey area or border within which the archive resides.

5.1.1 The Death Drive

It is the sense of construction, in the "institutive and conservative" nature of the archive that leads to "archival violence" that is the archive fever/death drive, which operates as "an irrepressible desire to return to the origin".⁵ Derrida examines the notion of the death drive and develops it as an extension of Freud's Pleasure Principle in the book *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, written in 1920. Freud later expanded this theory to include the death instinct and the destructive instinct. However, it is through Freud's text, "A Note Upon the Mystic Writing-Pad", that

⁴ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 2.

⁵ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 91.

Derrida connects Freud's death drive to the archive and the repetitive act of recording, scribing and impressing. As the archive occurs "at the place of originary and structural breakdown of...memory," these repetitive acts do not aid the formation of memory, instead, they perform as protection against forgetting.⁶ The archiving process in which identification of a thing is undertaken to conserve it, is the moment it becomes external, transforming the thing (whatever it is), from its original state. The death drive renders us as complicit yet unaware "of putting to death the very thing, whatever its name" we are trying to preserve.⁷ The archive signifies the inherent loss that Freud's death drive perpetrates. Although Derrida discusses this drive as a destructive force, I reconsider the death drive through his use of the words "promise" and "future".⁸ As each of these words can also signify potential, I interpret Derrida's use of them as generative actions, and subsequently connect them to minor theory.

5.2 Why the Archive?

In the process of locating the site of the artwork, I was reminded of Briony Fer's writing on Eva Hesse's *Studiowork*.⁹ After Hesse's death, the sculptural detritus from her studio was packed up and stored before a significant proportion of it was gifted to the Berkeley Art Museum.¹⁰ It is at this point Fer feels these objects form a collection of sorts, and she undertakes a conflicting obligation to explain the pieces without assigning a status to each item, such as, artwork, studio work, or nothing. Fer informs the readers of the material components and the proportions of each object before she continues to describe her emotional and intellectual response them. With an aspiration that is reflective of Kate Zambreno's for her books, Fer insists that the character of the sculptural detritus remain "fundamentally provisional and open", in a celebration of the question mark left over each object, as a result of Hesse's absence.¹¹

⁶ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 11.

⁷ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 79.

⁸ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 91.

⁹ Briony Fer, *Eva Hesse – Studiowork* (Edinburgh: The Fruitmarket Gallery, 2009).

¹⁰ Fer, *Eva Hesse – Studiowork*, 14.

¹¹ Fer, *Eva Hesse – Studiowork*, 16.

With this openness in mind, Fer describes one object as “big in the imagination”. In this statement, Fer articulates how a single object can incite excitement and inspire thought, a process comparative to Deleuze and Guattari’s description of how one’s attention on a small detail, can intensify and transport you elsewhere.¹² A contributing factor to Fer’s experience was the objects undetermined status, as this encouraged speculation and permitted Fer to intuit each piece autonomously.¹³ I, like Fer, celebrate the question mark as an opportunity to unearth meaning and connection. As I sought a structure for the recordings that enables the openness of Fer’s question mark allowed in Hesse’s artworks, several of Derrida’s writing on the archive offered this potential. Two examples of this are: Derrida’s view of the archive existing as an “impression of an impression”, and the archive operating as an “unstable feeling of a shifting figure, of a schema, or of an in-finite or indefinite process.”¹⁴ Consequently, I selected the archive as the form of my artwork for three reasons.

First, my archive operates as a vessel, which infers its interior and exterior simultaneously. This duality informs the site of the archive. The archive is produced at my parent’s house, which implies a geographical location, however this is not as important as the contextual boundary which is the family in conversation. Establishing the limits and borders of the content, exposure, and audience is fundamental to my use of the archive. Second, the archive is suitable as a structure that supports interaction but does not require it. It is possible that the primary audience, my family, may choose not to interact with the archive. Despite this, the presence of the archive is resonant, as each family member is conceptually aware of it and it is discussed in our conversations, recorded at WND. The broader audience do not hear the

¹² Deleuze, and Guattari, “1730: Becoming-Intense,” in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 292. (See Chapter Two, section 2.4).

¹³ The idea that Fer’s impression of the objects was free from influence may be misguided. To begin, Fer had researched Hesse’s practice extensively, and the scenario of the museum being donated the work, was engaging in a speculation of the objects, infers stakeholders, and signifies value. The museum had gone to considerable length to have the material assessed. Sol Le Witt, a close friend of Hesse’s had been asked to assess the objects, the account of which reads as abrupt as it is generous. The gift was in the end, not accepted by the museum, instead requesting a drawing to complement their collection. This process the museum engaged in, asking authorities (Le Witt and Fer) to evaluate material, also reflects the traditional role of an archivist.

¹⁴ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 24.; Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 29.

recordings, however, through conversation, their awareness of the archive and the context of its production is explained, which they are then able to speculate on, or imagine, what would be the content contained in the archive. Third, my archive is a fluid structure that also functions as a conceptual artwork, that is responsive to, but not restrictive of, the material it includes. For example, if I change the form of the material I record in response to an event, sound or conversation, the flexibility of the archive, permits change without undermining its foundation.

5.2.1 The Archive as Site

When Derrida discusses the etymology of the word archive, he specifies its origins as coming “from the Greek *arkheion*: initially a house, a domicile, an address,” tracing the archive back historically to the act of collecting, recording, filing and storing.¹⁵ Derrida claims the house containing the archive represents the “institutional passage” between private and public, demonstrated by the transformation of Freud's home into a museum.¹⁶ As I locate my practice in my parent's house (an incidental archive of its own) and choose to record the family only in that location, I encourage the transmission of knowledge and experience between us as a family. However, the research and the creative processes I impose shift these interactions from the purely private along a passage of private to nonprivate.

Derrida writes of the historically privileged role that an archivist holds within the selection, storage, and translation of material for the archive and that they must be a “publicly recognised authority” entrusted with a “hermeneutic right and competence.”¹⁷ As the only artist in our family, I hold this position with a level of authority, not dissimilar to Derrida's archivist. My family place a significant amount of trust in me, when I interpret or analyse our lives in part, or whole for artistic purposes.¹⁸ This trust is significant, although I am also aware of the

¹⁵ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 2.

¹⁶ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 2.

¹⁷ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 1-2.

¹⁸ A version of the artist's role within a family is poetically told not long into the opening passage of the 2014 documentary drama *20,000 Days on Earth* featuring musician and artist, Nick Cave. “Mostly I feel like a cannibal, you know a cartoon one with the big lips and the funny hair and the bone through its nose. Always looking for someone to cook in a pot. You can ask my wife

probability that my family are permitting of my practice and this research, not only because they trust me but because they too are fulfilling a role as a supportive family member.¹⁹

5.2.2 The Archive as Artwork

I broaden my theoretical references here to include Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi and Hal Foster, as their writing on the archive informs my use of it as an artwork. In his chapter, “Series Z: An Archival Fantasy”, Yerushalmi outlines his view on the relationship between memory and the archive.²⁰ and how “memory is not an archive, nor is an archive a memory bank. The documents in an archive are not part of memory; if they were, we should have no need to retrieve them; once retrieved, they are often at odds with memory.”²¹ Yerushalmi’s view that the archive and memory are not the same thing, affirms the concept of archiving as a process of inevitable transformation, not of the physical material archived but the memory of the material archived.

To expand on this gap between archived material and its memory, I refer to Hal Foster’s text *An Archival Impulse*.²² In this text, Foster claims an “idiosyncratic probing”, combined with the presence of archival procedures and aesthetics has emerged in contemporary art practices, to the point of developing into a distinct art movement of itself.²³ He reports on “the nature of all archival materials as found yet constructed, factual yet fictive, public yet private,” and addresses the potentiality of the material archived to accommodate the varied perspectives of its public.²⁴ Foster is advocating for the archives capacity to arouse the agency of the audience and it is in

Suzie, she’ll tell you, because she’s usually the one that’s getting cooked. ‘Cause there is an understanding between us, a pact, where every secret, sacred moment that exists between a husband and a wife is cannibalised, and ground up and spat out the other side in the form of a song.” Iain Forsyth, Jane Pollard, and Nick Cave, “20,000 Days on Earth (Movie 2014)”, United Kingdom: : Corniche Pictures; BFI; Film4; Pulse Films, 2014.

¹⁹ I do not mean to suggest that we as a family fulfil these roles *only* through a sense of obligation but as a genuine desire to participate in each other’s lives as a family.

²⁰ Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, “Series Z: An Archival Fantasy,” In *The Faith of Fallen Jews: Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi and the Writing of Jewish History*, ed. David N. Meyers and Alexander Kaye (USA: Brandeis University Press, 2014).

²¹ Yerushalmi, “An Archival Fantasy,” in *The Faith of Fallen Jews: Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi and the Writing of Jewish History*.

²² Foster, “An ARCHIVAL IMPULSE”.

²³ Foster, “An ARCHIVAL IMPULSE”, 3.

²⁴ Foster, “An ARCHIVAL IMPULSE”, 5.

this promising space, the gap between the object and the perception of the object, where meaning is formed for the individual. In the archive, a component of content generation occurs in this gap for my family, as it is here that we each have the capacity to seek meaning, or value, in the artwork for ourselves. This generative potential is pursued beyond the archives public (my family, a private audience) to the broader audience. Within the broader audience (the public), the awareness of an archive consisting of compiled family conversations facilitates a private construction (rendering it provisionally fictional), of the conversational content.

The momentum behind the gathering and accumulation of the conversations is in part, to attain material that could become the answer to, as yet unknown, future questions for my family. Derrida describes the archives ability to engage every tense at the same time, examining the present as a “movement of the promise and of the future no less than of recording the past.”²⁵ As Derrida reflects on the finality of Freud destroying a portion of his papers before his death, he speculates, “We will always wonder, sharing with compassion in this archive fever, what may have burned of his secret passions, of his correspondence, or of his ‘life’.”²⁶ I also wonder what we will regard as missing from the archive I create. Perhaps we will be searching for a particular story or tale about a family member that may no longer be alive, or maybe it will be a sound or an exchange we are hoping to find. Potentially, we will just be content to hear ourselves, together, at a time and place that is no longer available to us. It is impossible that this archive will be a complete dossier of family history and information, but crucially what the format of the archive does offer is the perception that certain content may be available, and the opportunity to look for it.

²⁵ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 29.

²⁶ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 101.

5.2.3 The Archive as Medium

I am confident that in the future the archive will release unexpected recollections for the family and will appear “big in the imagination.”²⁷ Despite accepting it as such, my family remains somewhat sceptical of the concept of an archive being an artwork, as it does not conform to their perception of artistic practice. However, the notion of a creative repository of our stories and history is something my family does like the idea of (again it is their trust in me – as an artist – that enables their participation).

As a family member, not only do I enjoy the archive but when Derrida reveals that the “archivization produces as much as it records the event”, I appreciate it as a medium.²⁸ In the case of my research the production of the archive generates questions from my family concerning the concepts and parameters of the research, and a humorous speculation of the legitimacy and accuracy of their portrayal on record. As such, the archive generates observations and identification of the subtle differences in our experience as a family of creating the archive, of making the artwork, of my role as an artist within the family, and my family’s relationship to art.

5.3 The Minor As a Method/Deconstruction

As an artist that does not have a traditional studio-based practice (one that involves artmaking in a specific medium and expected format in a designated space), it can at times be challenging to easily describe what kind of art I make. However, over the years I have embraced this form of making and formalised my thinking on the topic, which has established my methodology as belonging to a minor practice. To have a minor practice is not to have a lessor or diminished creative output, rather the minor as I identify with and refer to here is a form of

²⁷ Fer, *Eva Hesse – Studio work*, 20.

²⁸ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 17.

resistance to the major. In today's contemporary cultural communities, the defining elements of the major includes the public display, promotion, and commercialisation of artworks and artists.

There is an affinity in Derrida's description of *deconstruction* with the minor. While the minor is a form of resistance, it is a parasitic one that only survives in the shadow of a visible role within the contemporary creative community. Derrida's deconstruction operates via the questioning of the "limits and borders" of an institution such as the archive, the family, the law, systems of order, or any structure that imposes categorisation. Both the minor and deconstruction are fundamentally political in their opposition to authority and the promotion of different (not major, not with authority), understandings and methods of operation.

5.4 Barthes Wound

If the death drive accounts for the urge to record my family conversations, and the archive is a site where I preserve the recordings, and this process of archiving, necessarily changes the status, value and substance, then what of the scenario when we return to the archive, looking for what we believe is recorded? If, according to Freud and Derrida the death drive leaves no trace, what about the feeling of discord that arises, when we attempt to retrieve an item and it seems lacking or not quite right? Roland Barthes demonstrates this sense of dissatisfaction (an affect of the death drive) in the book *Camera Lucida*.²⁹

In the second section of *Camera Lucida*, Barthes describes how shortly after his mother dies, he begins to sort through her photographs to find an elusive image that he states, "accords with both my mother's being and my grief at her death."³⁰

The search Barthes undertakes reflects the frustration and determination of the death drive, when he unpacks, literally and metaphorically the photographs of his mother, to find an

²⁹ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*. In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes discusses the photograph as containing two essential elements to the viewer – *studium* or *punctum*. Barthes considered *studium* to be the formal attributes of the image, composition, tone, subject, etc. and *punctum* to be a phenomenological response to the image. *Punctum* is the puncture or wound in your viewing, the precise thing that arrests your mind and engages you beyond simple observation. *Punctum* could also describe the trigger for curiosity and emotion, which may be attributed to any artwork, image or object by the viewer.

³⁰ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 70.

image that acknowledges both her emotional and physical essence to him. Barthes is looking for an image that is idiomatic to how he feels about his mother at that time. After what Barthes describes as processing the photographs, “sorting through them, but none seemed...right”, he did eventually find an image of his mother, which he felt encapsulated her being and his grief.³¹ Barthes searches backward through time to the images of his mother as a young girl, and it is there in his mother’s past that he finds the image that completes his search.

Derrida’s perspective, that “[n]o desire, no passion, no drive, no compulsion, indeed no repetition compulsion, no ‘*mal-de*’ can arise for a person who is not already, in one way or another, *en mal d’archive*” is demonstrated by Barthes search for the image of his mother in *Camera Lucida*.³² Each search undertaken in a state of *mal-de* is a subjective route and what Barthes finds in “The Winter Garden Photograph” is an intuitive and private reading that symbolises the emotional experience of the son, who nursed his mother, until her death.³³ Barthes establishes the authority of his personal connection to the photograph and guards this position by withholding it from the reader. Barthes defends the action of withholding by claiming the photograph of his mother exists only for him, asserting that no one else could experience the “wound” that he does in the image.³⁴

The *mal-de* that I act on exists as a compulsion as a family member and an artist to make art that feels real to us all. This sense of responsibility is a generating force that I know for me as an artist, does not go away, therefore it is a *mal-de*, a fever, that I continuously, probably infinitely, will attempt to break. Each fever is, as Barthes demonstrates in *Camera Lucida*, an opportunity for a rewarding discovery.

³¹ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 63-64.

³² Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 91.

³³ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 70. Barthes encounter with the Winter Garden Photograph, recalls Fer experience of Hesse’s object as “big in the imagination”, (see section 5.2).

³⁴ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 73.

6 CHAPTER SIX: A HOPEFUL AUDIENCE

In this chapter, I address the audience's autonomy and authority to interpret the artwork, comprised of the archive and our conversations, and reveal how this process stimulates their private associations to the material. There are two tiers to the audience for this research. One is my family – the primary participants – and the second tier are the people outside of my family. I refer to this second tier as the 'additional' or 'broader audience', and they include my supervisors, research peers, assessors and anyone else who becomes aware of the artwork. Separating the audience into two parts does not indicate a hierarchical structure, rather it denotes the relationship to the recorded material. Discussing the archive with the additional audience, while denying them access to the recordings, is an exchange that involves both revelation and negation – a central facet of this research. The resulting exchanges are navigated intuitively further reinforcing conversation as the primary medium and vehicle, of this multi-layered artwork.

In this chapter I identify creative acts undertaken by artists Marcel Duchamp, Laurie Parsons and Kimberley McAlevey, that serve to illuminate a vital aspect of the dynamic audience and artwork relationship that is integral to my methodology. Specifically, I examine the production of Duchamp's artwork *Étant donnés: 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage . . .* (*Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas . . .*), 1946-66.¹ I compare Duchamp's denial of his visual practice while making *Étant donnés* (...), to the barrier I establish between the audience and the recorded conversations. To further this exploration of artistic withholding, I turn to Martin Herbert's concise book *Tell Them I Said No*, 2016, which discusses acts of creative refusal in contemporary art practice.² From this text, I reflect on American artist Laurie Parsons' desire to create sincere interactions between the audience and her artworks. Parsons often achieved this

¹ Marcel Duchamp, *Étant donnés: 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage . . .* (*Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas . . .*), vol. 7 feet 11 1/2 inches × 70 inches × 49 inches (242.6 × 177.8 × 124.5 cm) (1946-1966).

² Martin Herbert, *Tell Them I Said No* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016). In addition to Laurie Parsons, this book features texts on the artists Lutz Bacher, Stanley Brouwn, Christopher D'Arcangelo, Trisha Donnelly, David Hammons, Agnes Martin, Cady Noland, Charlotte Posenenske and Albert York.

by disrupting the expected systems of artistic production and presentation, including exhibiting an empty commercial art gallery, or taking over a museum during a residency and living in it as a home.³ In a gesture resembling Parsons, I unsettle the audience and artwork relationship by restricting access to the artwork, in order to promote engagement. In search of a contemporary example of an artist that demonstrates non-commercial, non-public creative production, I encountered New Zealand artist Kimberley McAlevey. Seeking information on her restricted art practice, I discovered evidence of writing rituals, systematic administrative processes and other surreptitious artworks. While my understanding of McAlevey's practice is informed by my reading of Duchamp and Parsons, this research is most significantly influenced by my experience of her work as an audience member. Understanding the value of the interdependent audience and artwork relationship to this research, is informed by notions of attention explored through the writing of Yves Citton.

6.1 Secret Practice

When initially researching artists that engage with secrecy, I was reminded of Marcel Duchamp's artwork *Étant donnés (...)*. An installation viewed through two small holes in a large wooden door, revealing a plaster cast of a naked female figure, lying in a field with a gas lantern in her left hand and a waterfall in the distant landscape. This now renowned artwork was made in a secret room, next to Duchamp's Greenwich Village studio in New York City, throughout the last twenty years of the artist's life. Author Elena Filipovic suggests in her book, *The Apparently Marginal Activities of Marcel Duchamp*, that only the artist and his wife knew of the work while it was in production; their friends and associates believing the artist's claim – made in 1923 – that he had given up making art for pastimes such as playing chess and “breathing”.⁴ Following Duchamp's wishes, in 1968 the artwork was revealed posthumously and the following year it was

³ A time line of Parsons' creative output can be located in; Bob Nickas, “Whatever Happened to Dematerial Girl”, *Artforum* (U.S.A.) 41, no. 8 (2003)

⁴ Elena Filipovic, *The Apparently Marginal Activities of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016), 278.

sold and permanently installed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.⁵ Throughout this book, Filipovic interrogates every detail of Duchamp's production and final presentation of *Étant donnés (...)*. She questions the perception of the artwork as the product of a man with outdated aesthetics and politics, and instead advocates for it to be reviewed within the process driven artistic periods it was completed among.⁶ Her support for Duchamp's exhaustive note-taking and documentation of the artwork, to be considered an artwork in and of itself, is convincing. However, the same compelling argument cannot be made, for the aesthetics of the artwork. Rather, it is challenging to understand how Filipovic would defend this diorama featuring a headless, hairless female figure with her legs spread uncomfortably wide, as a contemporary gesture. Appearing cumbersome and crude, materially, compositionally and in content, it feels unfair to compare *Étant donnés (...)*, against other sophisticated artworks from Duchamp's oeuvre, such as *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*, and *Fountain*.⁷ Consequently, it is easy to reflect on Duchamp's ability to make the large-scale installation, and put in place the necessary steps to ensure the exact location and installation of it within the museum – in complete secrecy – as the most remarkable aspect of this work.⁸ Illustrating the machinations behind this covert production, Filipovic reveals aspects of this process which inform my research and highlight Duchamp's tactical interactions with his audience:

How did he manage to conceal the installation and his years of labor from the world? Hiding such a massive project from nearly all of his friends and family, avoiding mention of it in conversations and interviews, and evading any suspicions about what he was actually doing can have been no small undertaking. As we now know, he managed this feat by keeping two studios. The first studio was a decoy-another exhibition of sorts – so that the second could be secreted, hiding his labor. Let us return to them for a moment: in one studio he was building his awkward nude and her broken brick house, while in the other he sat around, receiving friends, guests,

⁵ Filipovic, *The apparently marginal activities...*, 209.

⁶ Filipovic, *The apparently marginal activities...*, 159.

⁷ Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*, vol. 9 feet 1 1/4 inches × 70 inches × 3 3/8 inches (277.5 × 177.8 × 8.6 cm) (1915-1923).; Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 16 ed., vol. Unconfirmed: 360 × 480 × 610 mm (1917/1964). <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/duchamp-fountain-t07573>.

⁸ I have only experienced *Étant donnés (...)* in reproduction and have formed my view base on this limited experience of the artwork.

groupies, chess mates. He gave interviews there. He told anyone who came around that he was doing nothing.⁹

There is a resemblance between Duchamp's performance of inactivity while making *Étant donnés* (...) as described by Filipovic, and my own performance of activity within this research. In both scenarios – Duchamp's artless studio, or my artwork concealed from all but thirteen people – the audience is expected to accept the word of the artist as truth, or at the very least, as plausible. Essential to Duchamp's act was the "decoy" studio, utilised as a tool by the artist to aid the audience's perception of inactivity. In my research, describing the artwork as an archive, assists the audience to visualise a structure that contains the audio recordings, and empowers the archive to function as a symbolic vessel of the private material it holds. In contrast to Duchamp's studio, my archive operates akin to a lure.

For the primary audience, it is the potential of what the archive might contain, that draws them to participate and, inspires dialogue around the artwork. And potentially, when they listen to the recordings, speculation and doubt will arise between what is recorded and what is remembered. When the broader audience enquire after my art practice, I reply that I record unscripted family conversations to be kept in a private archive. Recognising the artwork as unavailable, generates interest, and promotes reflection, within this audience. As a result, for each audience, an inherent condition of the artwork is an absent or missing element, which inversely can be viewed as an opening where questions can surface. When each of these audiences ask questions directly about the artwork, I understand this to be a demonstration of hope.¹⁰ A question asked is the desire for, or anticipation of, knowledge and understanding, and in relation to this artwork, this curiosity is a productive space for new thoughts, memories, or imaginings from the audience.

⁹ Filipovic, *The apparently marginal activities...*, 278.

¹⁰ Hope is also mentioned by Simon O'Sullivan as the sense of a minor practice, see Chapter Three, section 3.4.3.

6.2 Another Real

In Martin Herbert's book, *Tell Them I Said No*, he outlines a number of artists who have resisted audience expectations or artistic recognition in the production, presentation or reception of their artworks.¹¹ In the chapter "A Realer Real", Herbert explores American artist Laurie Parsons' resolute and sincere desire to create artworks that are "encounters with the real".¹² Parsons' studio and exhibiting practice encompasses the use of found objects and interventions, and her interactive arrangements pre-dates socially engaged art practices by almost ten years.¹³ Similarly to Filipovic's claim for Duchamp, Parsons determines administrative tasks as artworks. However, unlike Duchamp, Parsons would perform these tasks in full view of the visiting public and gallery staff. Such tasks: working as a gallery assistant, living in the museum, inviting the public into the gallery, carrying out social work in the community, brought a critical awareness to the political contexts and labour values of the systems within which she was operating. Over time Parsons' artistic gestures became less identifiable, she began to remove her name from exhibition invitations, and presented artworks anonymously. Despite accomplishing a profound conceptual art practice, in 1994, after exhibiting for seven years, Parsons left the artworld to dedicate herself to full time social work.¹⁴

In 2019, Parsons' *A Body of Work, 1987*, was re-staged as an exhibition at the Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach, in Germany.¹⁵ Art historian Sarah James' review in *Frieze* magazine of the exhibition, included the following description:

Over the duration of a year, 1987, she collected and then exhibited a group of 29 found objects from the neighbourhood surrounding her studio in New Jersey. These included a delicate tree trunk with telephone wire twisted around its slender body, carefully planted upright in a dry

¹¹ This resistance was achieved through various means such as: self-imposed isolation; destruction of artworks or evidence of career; extreme control applied to the presentation of artworks no longer in their possession; and processes of dematerialisation, often resulting in the artist leaving the art world altogether. The artists represented in Herbert's text have worked predominantly in the United States of America and Europe, throughout the last sixty years.

¹² Herbert, *Tell them I said no*, 95.

¹³ Herbert, *Tell them I said no*, 95.

¹⁴ Herbert, *Tell them I said no*, 96.

¹⁵ Sarah James, "What Art Can Be: Laurie Parsons's Quiet Exit from Art", *Frieze*, no. 202 (2019)

patch of dirt; red pottery pieces in an old plastic waste bin; three metal hanging racks balanced together and wrapped at the centre with some crumpled silver foil; an old bicycle seat hanging flat, like a mask, at head height; a large bunch of dried dogwood flowers tied together with twine; a faded green leather chair cushion – almost aged into petrol blue – propped square against the wall; and a yellow rope with frayed ends, loosely looped and knotted on the ground. Parsons described the collection as ‘a body of work’ but didn’t title it. All equally weathered, worn and makeshift, the objects were installed with precise instructions and slides provided by the artist after they were first shown at Lorence-Monk Gallery in 1988 (and then at Galerie Rolf Ricke in Cologne in 1989).

On the certificate that accompanied the objects thereafter, Parsons made clear that they should be installed in one, non-artificially lit room and carefully placed ‘naturally and sensibly’ around the four walls of the space. The artist added attentive and personal instructions for their reinstallation and care, such as ‘can be lightly dusted or blown with air (by mouth only); as well as their individual transportation and display. These were often as detailed as they were brilliantly pragmatic: ‘Small pieces of lint or string are part of the piece’; ‘If this piece is then packed in a box with white foam “spaghetti” and kept upright *it should be all right*.’¹⁶

James expresses how her awareness of Parsons’ final shift away from artistic practice into social work lends the twenty-nine found objects in the exhibition a poignant significance. James establishes the ethics of Parsons’ practice in terms of presence and attention. She describes Parsons’ artistic interactions, including her seemingly clear rebuff of the artworld, and considers her departure, not as a rejection of that world but as an optimistic movement toward something else.¹⁷ Collectively, reviewing Parsons’ audience-motivated actions and Duchamp’s relationship to audience while making *Étant donnés* (...), offers valuable insights into the contingent relationship shared between my artwork and its audiences within this research.

6.3 Searching For a Good Life

Shifting focus from historical to contemporary examples of creative acts of secrecy and withdrawal, I attempted to locate artists with mysterious or non-commercial practices working in the present-day. In what seemed like an exercise in futility, I began typing terms, such as secret

¹⁶ James, “What Art Can Be”, 35.

¹⁷ James, “What Art Can Be”, 35.

art practice and unknown contemporary artist, into search engines on my computer. I cannot recall (and have not been able to replicate) the exact search terms I entered, when I came across an article on New Zealand artist Kimberley McAlevey titled, “Me myself and I – the public notice that uncovered an art project viewed by no-one”.¹⁸ I accessed this article originally featured in the Sunday Star Times and written by Dunedin journalist Hamish McNeilly, less than a month after it had been published (see fig. 7.).

The inherent challenges of establishing details on an artist that has intentionally avoided exposure, and or documentation of their career are significant, and in McAlevey’s case, the available information on her practice is limited and bewildering. Consequently, compiling an account of her career is made possible, only with what Herbert refers to as “hypothesis...with a certain amount of evidential propulsion”.¹⁹ Accordingly, I have developed a biography for McAlevey that is composed with a blend of fact and conjecture. The following details have been sourced from the aforementioned news article, two exhibition responses, and data gleaned from segments of her MVA completion exhibition titled, *mva.kim*, featuring a series of temporary websites created by McAlevey under the name Mia Stefano.²⁰

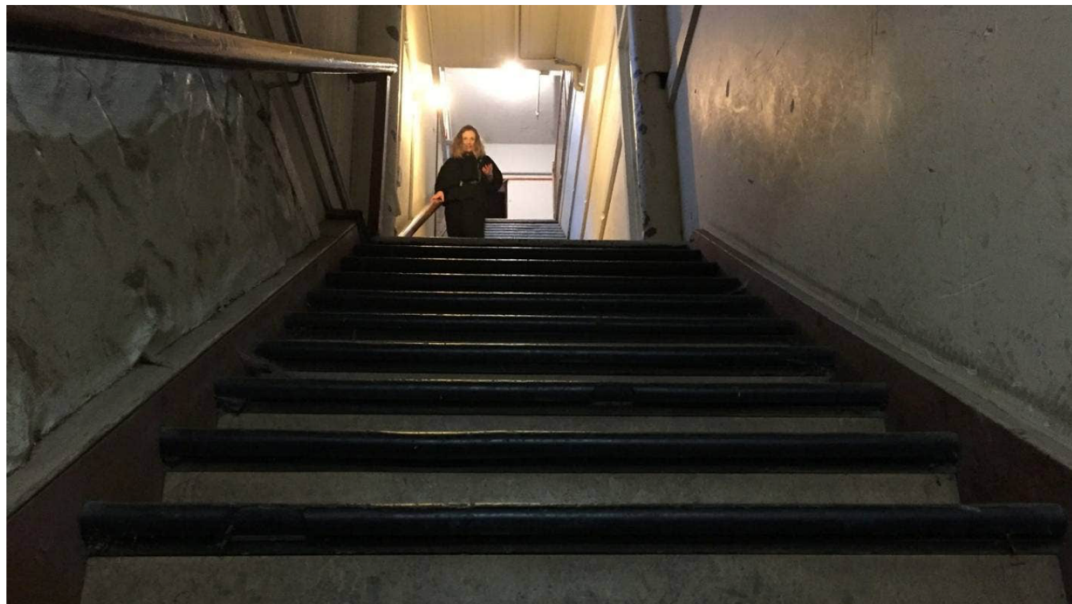
¹⁸ Hamish McNeilly, “Me, Myself and I – The Public Notice That Uncovered an Art Project Viewed By No-One,” *Sunday Star Times* (New Zealand), 14 May, 2017, accessed May 2017. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/entertainment/arts/92231697/me-myself-and-i--the-public-notice-that-uncovered-an-art-project-viewed-by-noone>

¹⁹ Herbert, *Tell them I said no*, 55.

²⁰ Mia Stefano, *mva.kim* (Dunedin School of Art Gallery: Otago Polytechnic, 2019). Exhibition dates 29 July – 1 August 2019.

Me, myself and I – the public notice that uncovered an art project viewed by no-one

HAMISH McNEILLY · 05:00, May 14 2017



HAMISH McNEILLY/FAIRFAX NZ

A cheeky snap of camera-shy Dunedin artist Kimberley McAlevey.

Figure 7. Screen shot of Newspaper article *Me, myself and I – the public notice that uncovered an art project viewed by no-one*, written by Hamish McNeilly, printed in the Sunday Star Times, 14 May 2017. Image credit: Kati Rule.

6.3.1 Kimberley Anne McAlevey: A Biography, Maybe

Born Kimberley Anne McAlevey in Dunedin in 1987, the artist has legally changed her name on a number of occasions, to anagrams based on unique phrases including Olga Fiedo: a good life; Dr Tait Charteris-Rite: the artist criteria; and Mia Stefano: a manifesto. McAlevey's practice is realised through a series of smaller sub-projects, which seek to explore, and at times blur, the grey area between art and life. Her work hovers between process performance and conceptual art; employing documentation, and wordplay, while often utilising outmoded services such as the postal system and print media. In recent years, McAlevey has performed a ritualised series of literary tasks that she describes as a constrained writing practice.²¹ For this, McAlevey engaged a micro public of one person who agreed to participate in the role, in this case is her MVA supervisor. For a ten-year period prior to completing her Master of Visual Art in July 2019, the artist created artworks while being enrolled in a number of educational courses. During this time, as a student at the Dunedin School of Art, Central Otago Polytechnic in Dunedin, New Zealand, in addition to an MVA, McAlevey also completed a Master of Fine Art, a post-graduate certificate and a diploma.²²

As I searched online for evidence of McAlevey's artwork, I slowly mapped my discoveries, and formed an accumulative (albeit speculative) understanding of her practice. The following is an excerpt from my field notes articulating my experience of researching McAlevey:

After my initial discovery of McAlevey's practice, I frequently and patiently seek out new information on her work and I study the material exhaustively, looking for overlooked or changed details and hints to her methodology. I am motivated by cryptic clues and excited by minor details. I enter her aliases into search engines and social media pages. I have emailed

²¹ McAlevey refers to her constrained writing practice in "Google drive. Mp3. #1". McAlevey's constrained writing activity included; Monday: write a letter, in any form; Tuesday: write 300 words; Wednesday: write with found text. Use found text to make assemblages; Thursday: acrostic piece using the subject matter as the last line; and Friday: removed text piece woven through an article from a newspaper.

²² K.A. McAlevey, "Google drive. mp3. #1", recorded 27 March, with Kimberley McAlevey, Google drive: Olga Fiedo, 2019, mp3 This audio recording was included as part of her online MVA completion exhibition. It is a pre-recorded monologue in which the artist describes her process and reads from her constrained writing practice and was originally made by McAlevey to fulfil a requirement set by the university.

people she corresponded with to find out more information. I find her word use poetic and I search between the lines for meaning I know may not be there or may never be revealed.²³

6.3.2 *some text missing*

McAlevey's elusive practice purposefully resists accumulating information, and it is as a frustrated spectator I experience restricted access to her artworks. When I requested and received her MFA thesis titled **some text missing** as an inter-library loan, I discovered she had bound the text with perforated pages (see fig. 8).²⁴ As I opened the thesis, I found the abstract, title page and index intact, only to discover that each page, which would conventionally feature the written text, had been removed and only the perforated stubs remained, and pages that featured a sticker and two rubber stamps, presenting with the air of bureaucratic authority (see fig. 9, 10, 11, 12). On another occasion, while randomly searching her aliases online, I encountered the university announcement for Mia Stefano's MVA completion exhibition, *mva.kim*, that was to occur in five days.

²³ Kati Rule, Fieldnotes, 2017.

²⁴ K.A. McAlevey, **some text missing*: A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the MASTER OF FINE ARTS Degree at the Dunedin School of Art, Otago Polytechnic, New Zealand* (Otago Polytechnic, 2013). <https://books.google.com.au/books?id=RRO5ngEACAAJ>.

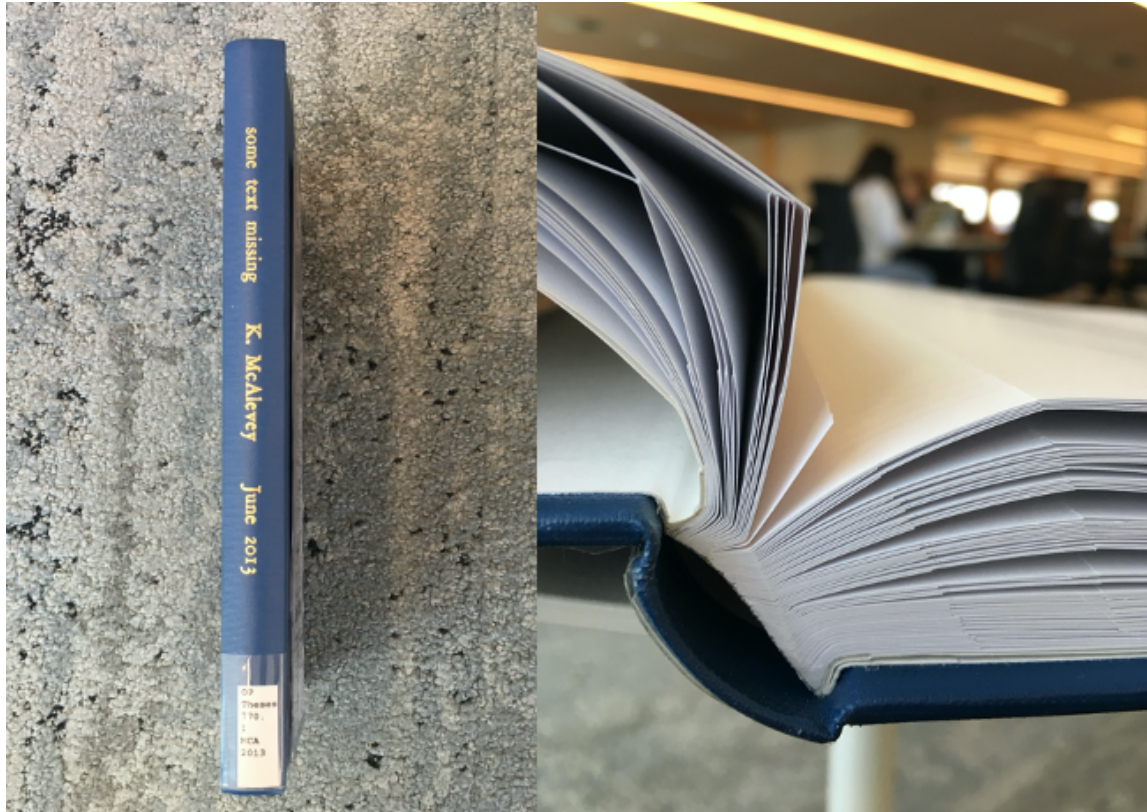


Figure 8. View of spine and perforation detail from Kimberley McAlevey MFA Thesis, **some text missing**. Image credit: Kati Rule.

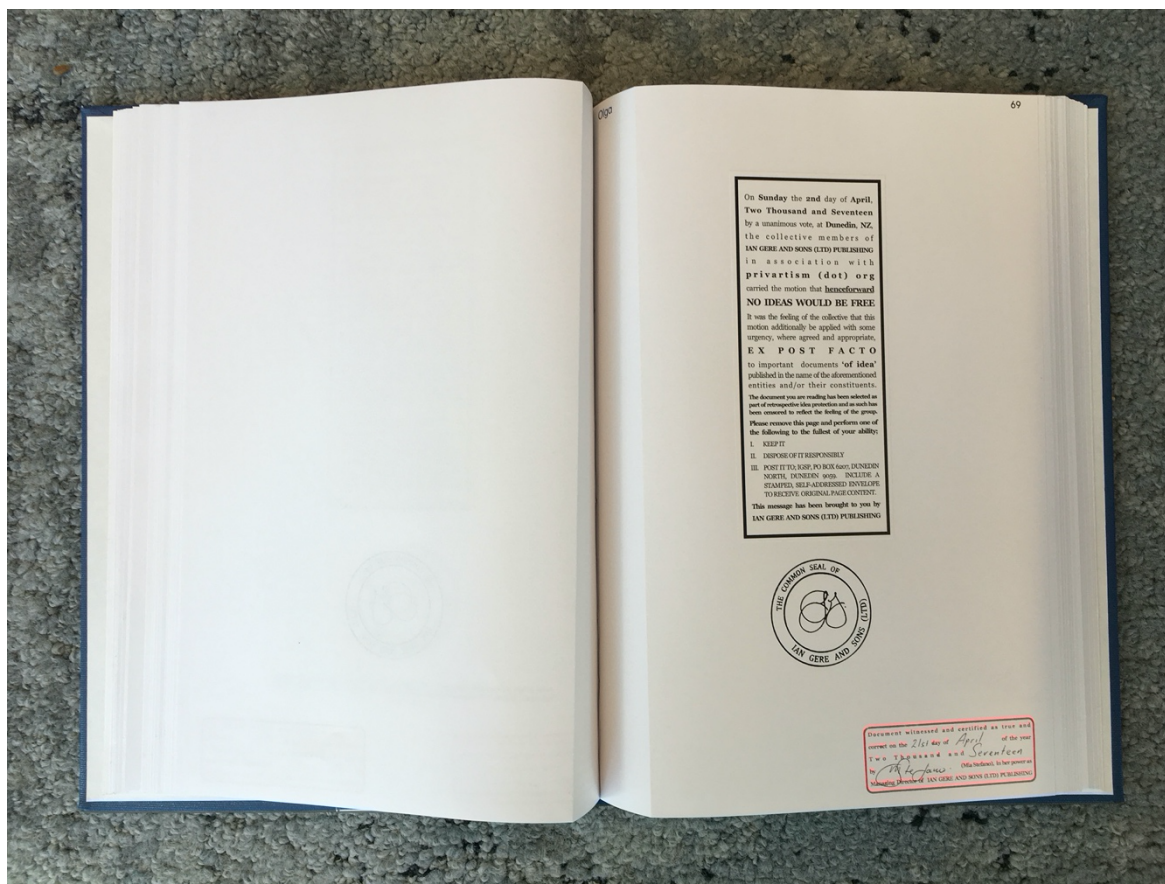


Figure 9. View of double page spread in Kimberley McAlevey MFA Thesis, **some text missing**.
Image credit: Kati Rule.

On **Sunday** the **2nd** day of **April**,
Two Thousand and Seventeen
by a unanimous vote, at **Dunedin, NZ**,
the collective members of
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privartism (dot) org
carried the motion that **henceforward**
NO IDEAS WOULD BE FREE

It was the feeling of the collective that this
motion additionally be applied with some
urgency, where agreed and appropriate,

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to important documents '**of idea**'
published in the name of the aforementioned
entities and/or their constituents.

**The document you are reading has been selected as
part of retrospective idea protection and as such has
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**Please remove this page and perform one of
the following to the fullest of your ability;**

- I. KEEP IT
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Figure 10. Detail of page in Kimberley McAlevey MFA Thesis, **some text missing**. Image credit: Kati Rule.

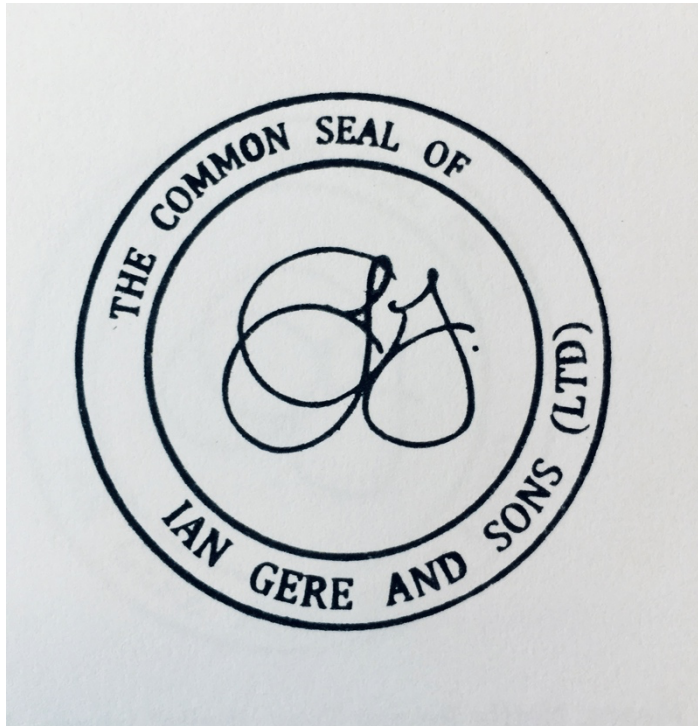


Figure 11. Detail of page in Kimberley McAlevey MFA Thesis, **some text missing**. Image credit: Kati Rule.

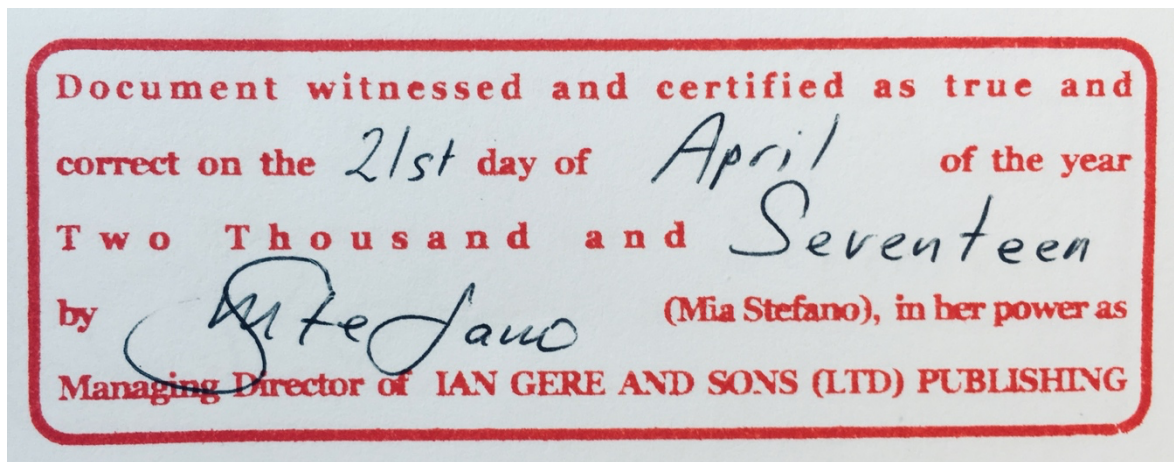


Figure 12. Detail of page in Kimberley McAlevey MFA Thesis, **some text missing**. Image credit: Kati Rule.

I contemplated flying to Dunedin for the show but was unable to organise it at such short notice. Instead, I thought to approach someone to see the exhibition on my behalf. I considered using Airtasker and asked an old friend, Vita Cochran (whom I met in Dunedin over 20 years ago), if she thought people used that kind of platform there. She thought it unlikely and asked what I wanted done. I explained briefly what I was looking for someone to visit Kimberley McAlevey's exhibition on my behalf, and that I was offering a single payment of \$150 for the task an amount I considered just enough to encourage someone to commit the time and attention to a job for a stranger). Vita offered to ask a few people that she considered may be available and willing to help. In the course of our discussions, it became clear that she knew several staff members at Dunedin School of Art, including McAlevey's supervisors. I was adamant that she didn't approach anyone from the school, and if possible, to ask someone that she thought would have no prior experience or knowledge of McAlevey's practice. Vita then approached one friend, and when she didn't receive a reply, asked another if she was willing to participate, and she agreed. Her name is Emma Neale, and she is a novelist and creative writing teacher based in Dunedin. Emma had not heard of McAlevey and was curious about the work enough to commit to the task.

I asked Emma to visit the exhibition and describe and document the show for me. While operating as a proxy audience member for me, Emma incidentally, became an audience member herself. Communicating how she encountered two small, framed works on paper in the unlit student gallery, and as she searched for more artworks felt herself begin to critically evaluate other objects or details, in and around the room. She described a sense of heightened awareness as she left the building and how this infiltrated her afternoon well after leaving the exhibition. When Emma viewed the online component of the exhibition, indicated only by the web address title *mva.kim*, she expressed that she felt manipulated rather than intrigued by the sequence of

nine webpages McAlevey had created.²⁵ She was not drawn to the digital material, in the way she experienced her visit to the gallery, instead describing it as “detritus” (see fig 13, 14).²⁶

²⁵ After a period of time observing the websites, I noticed small changes that indicated new live links to other pages. Changes to the pages occurred regularly over the course of a year, and at its largest included over 40 webpages, and is now reduced to one remaining page.

²⁶ Emma Neale, Commentary, 31.07.2019. This is the email correspondence featuring the commentary from an exhibition that the writer agreed to visit and describe for me. To read the full account, see Appendix B.

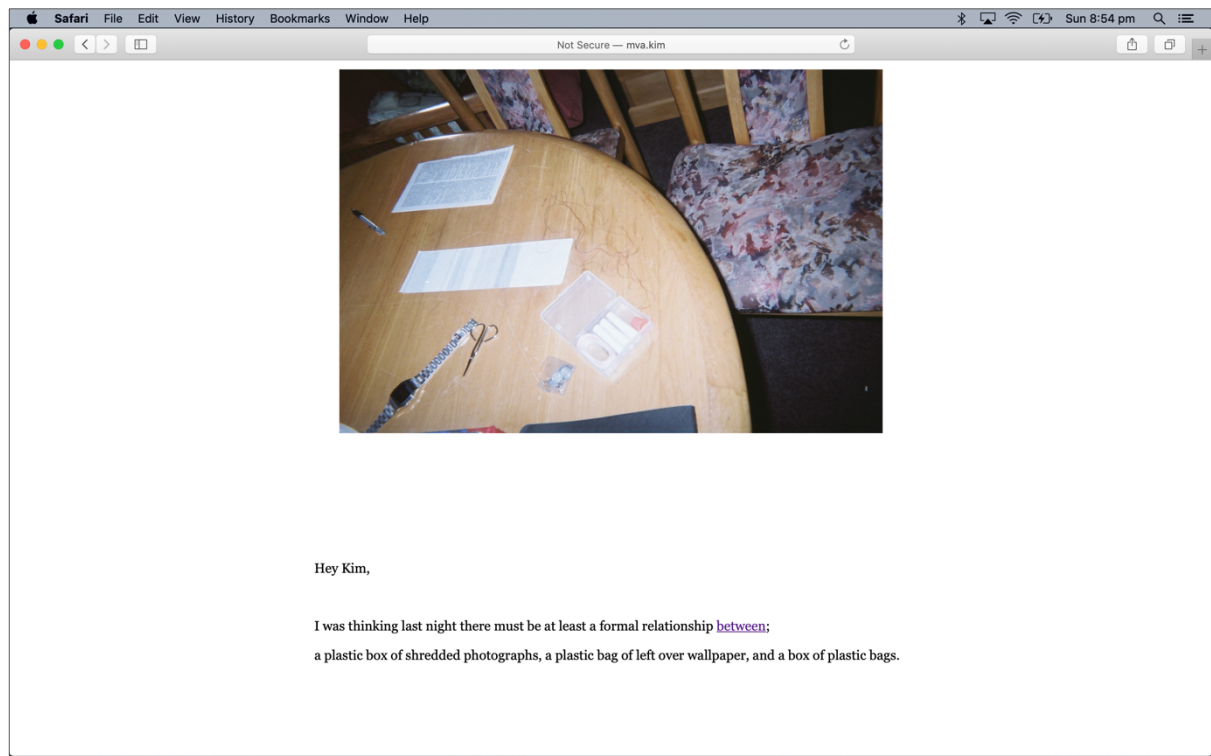


Figure 13. Screenshot of landing page for Kimberley McAlevey's MVA Website sequence/ exhibition/ artwork. Titled, *mva.kim*, 2019/20. Image credit: Kati Rule.



Figure 14. Screenshot of remaining page for Kimberley McAlevey's MVA Website sequence/ exhibition/ artwork. Titled, *mva.kim*, 2020-ongoing. Image credit: Kati Rule.

6.4 Becoming Aware

While tracking McAlevey's practice, I became aware that the process delivered a unique opportunity to interrogate the position I place my broader audience in. That is, I myself became the participant held at arms-length from the artwork, being forced to guess the meaning of creative gestures and decisions. A fundamental understanding of my approach to audience interaction emerged from this experience; the revelation that my methodology supports and aspires to audience engagement occurring on a one-to-one basis. I began to comprehend how this personal and interactive dynamic is propelled by questions, viewed as variously scaled acts of attention, generated in the casual conversations surrounding the artwork and the practice.

Although the conditions of access McAlevey and I impose on our respective practices might deter wide-ranging audience engagement, they also encourage the intimate audience relationships that provide each practice with a focus. Reflecting on the challenges of negotiating a micro-audience while making a constrained writing piece, McAlevey comments:

It was one of those wonderful things, where I could see, in a very small collection of words, none of them mine, that the problem I was having, that I was watching you, watching me make work. And what needed to happen is for neither of us to be watching each other's still lives unfold, but rather for us to negotiate some common ground.²⁷

The above description highlights a significant shift in McAlevey's studio methodology, which indicates her new-found understanding of the role of the artwork within her practice. This move sees McAlevey re-evaluate the artwork from operating autonomously and become an interdependent facilitator between the artist and the audience. The "common ground" between her and her audience, becomes a joint site of production, an action re-enforced when McAlevey addresses the audience directly in the artwork. This is most evident, in the first line of the found text piece McAlevey discusses in the above quote, that begins, "At the heart of our museum",

²⁷ McAlevey, "Google drive. mp3. #1".

the “our” being not an ambiguous other, but her single audience member, her supervisor.²⁸ As I research and impart information on McAlevey’s practice, I demonstrate the potential for her audience to increase, beyond her selected audience member, and I appreciate my audience may expand under similar circumstances.

When considering the relationship McAlevey and I share with our respective audiences, I am reminded again of Chantal Akerman. In her films, Akerman intentionally draws out cinematic moments, to bring awareness to the character and the viewer, and asserts that she wants the audience to experience time and to be aware of every moment. In a talk she participated in at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London in 1990, Akerman discussed the role of narrative in her films and the idea that the audience loses itself within the narrative function of movies. Akerman states, “with me it’s like a face to face correlation, like a confrontation ...In a way it puts the spectator in relation of being, of existing”.²⁹ She adds, “if there is one... specificity of my work it is really that...and you cannot lose yourself in it”.³⁰ In this way Akerman enacts a process of *differentiation*, by making you, the viewer, feel time, you become aware of yourself and in turn – what is not you.

While the audiences for Akerman’s films might largely be unknown to her, in contrast McAlevey and I, have designated audience members which are in direct contact with us as the artists, and/or with the artworks. A shared awareness between the artist and the audience, *is* the dynamic that sustains the practice; not in spite of the limited audience, but because of it. In my artwork, the congenial intimacy of the audience relationship supports inquiry. As discussion of the artwork occurs through casual conversation, it often leads to further probing from the audience. It is via these questions, often small acts of attention, that for both McAlevey and I, the artwork prevails.

²⁸ To read McAlevey’s constrained found text writing piece see Appendix C.

²⁹ Akerman, and Field, “The Guardian Talks” 27:34. 27:34.

³⁰ Akerman, and Field, “The Guardian Talks”. 28:08.

In the 2014 book *The Ecology of Attention*, cultural theorist Yves Citton critically speculates on the commercialisation of our attention and suggests methods in which to resist this commodifying process.³¹ Establishing the difference between the economy of material and cultural goods, Citton asserts that material goods are those which are “traded on the basis of money and survival” and cultural goods are “traded on the basis of attention and reputation.”³² Recognising that the two economies are commonly entwined, he outlines how investments of time and attention contribute to the creation of value. It is this point, that value is created *through* the investment of time and attention which sustains both my minor practice and the artwork in this research. When I make artworks for my family, I, like McAlevey, create a focus for a cycle of attention which can be fuelled by care, curiosity and doubt. Using the artwork as a device to connect to without converging with the audience, is a productive process. Beyond the familial audience, the restrictive conditions of my minor practice ensure that this artwork does not compete for a person’s attention, instead it relies on the individual’s interests and agency to generate voluntary acts of attention.³³ Once the audience is aware of the archive, expanded understandings of the artwork are formed through continued dialogue which in turn increases the perception of potential content in the work. This is a process of transformation that the artwork enables, it is a strategy that tailors the work to any interested party, for once attention is given, our experience of the perceived object or scenario is filtered through and informed by our subjectivities.³⁴

Citton proposes that conscious acts of attention are productive and mutually beneficial activities that offer an opportunity to create a shared experience:

Each of us can learn to ‘manage’ our attentional resources better, so as to become more ‘efficient’ and more ‘competitive’... Or, we can learn to make ourselves more attentive to one

³¹Yves Citton, *Pour une écologie de l’attention* [The Ecology of Attention], trans. Barnaby Norman, English edition. ed. (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2017).

³² Citton, *Pour une écologie de l’attention*, 1.

³³ Citton, *Pour une écologie de l’attention*, 40.

³⁴ Citton, *Pour une écologie de l’attention*, 15.

another, and to the relationships from which our communal lives are woven. Depending on the directions in which we turn to look and listen, depending on the beings and the problems that we notice, depending on the devices and programmes that we plug into our senses – we will continue towards a consumerist growth that draws each of us in like moths to a flame. Or we will manage to build together the shared conditions of a life that is more tenable and more desirable, which is more attentive to the quality of what surrounds it than to the quantity of its finances.³⁵

Cultivating the “shared conditions of life” is more comfortable for McAlevey and I when we make artworks with and for a designated and agreed audience. However, as my research of McAlevey’s practice verifies, an audience can develop outside of these parties. An audience that invests time and attention into the practice, increasing the awareness and value of the work while also creating new knowledge. What remains clear is that any engagement will only occur when undertaken by an audience member with a propensity to look, listen and think with resolve.

³⁵ Citton, *Pour une écologie de l’attention*, x.

CONCLUSION

It is on reflection that I can see (as the artist), the major challenge for me during this research has also been its greatest reward. The intense experience of making art with and for my family – producing and reviewing material that is *real* – was confronting, overwhelming and theoretically challenging. Still, it produced a useful awareness in my practice of the self and family and the complexity of capturing this dynamic in place and time. I have also been aware of the many moments of good humour, revelation and gratitude the research process has created. When beginning this research, my methodology as a minor artist included the notion of withdrawal as a generative strategy. I expand its use here to inform and empower the research's momentum, tensions, and emotionally rich nature. In this context, the minor is against the major and is a mechanism that unsettles and disrupts expected modes of artistic exhibiting and production. It accounts for the heart of my practice, as it supports the experience of intensities and engages with the real as a force. Minor theory enables creative production that is intuitive, transformative and generative, facilitating an artwork that is conversational in form and content; and the creation of connected knowledge.

This research has helped me unpack how the educational and social conditions of my upbringing informed my development as a minor artist, and to understand a fundamental component of my practice as the desire to make art that feels *real*. Deciphering what I meant by *real*, was a clarifying process that established my need to create something of value to me *and* the people most important to me, my family. Understanding the real as a sensation, force or matter, is an interpretation informed by an overlap between the feminist and minor theories of Elizabeth Grosz and Deleuze and Guattari. Making an archive of family conversations recorded at a weekly dinner certainly achieved this goal. This accomplishment was achieved by withholding the recordings from anyone outside the family, to protect the content.

To retain the integrity of the recorded material, it must remain private, establishing the central tension of this research to be balancing gestures of exposure, between revealing and concealing the artwork's content. The research context contributed significantly to this tension as the limited exposure of my minor practice and restricted access to the private artwork appeared to be in direct conflict with the PhD program's visible or public requirements. Therefore, finding the right balance between withholding and disclosing material, impacted this exegesis' theoretical explorations, and informed the artwork and audience interactions. The broader value of the work does not arise from concealing the archives explicit content. Instead, it is developed by protecting the recordings as private material and generating personal responses.

On reflection, a significant moment in the research occurred when I played the edited recording of me and my father talking publicly at the symposium. Through this experience of exposure, I realised a review of both the methodology and presentation of my work was necessary. My attempt to make content public had resulted in a contrived scenario – a planned and edited conversation. This result was not an accurate indication of our interactions, and it did not reflect reality in any way. Throughout the conversation, my father carried himself well. Still, I could hear traits of his inner discomfort, and at that moment, I knew that any artwork I made, which included the family, would have to remain private.

As shifts occurred for my family as participants in this research, they also resonated in the study. As the work progressed, I became aware that assigning a weekly family dinner as the central, albeit concealed, focus of this research altered or formalised our – the family's – perspective of the event. The act of recording gave my family agency to reflect and comment, sometimes performatively, on the process. While the project didn't overtly raise the idea of mortality and change, the recording device made us more conscious of our interactions. It compelled us to consider what might be in the archive, or what content we might want to remember and why.

When I annotated the recordings, I was surprised by how much content I had missed in person. I would often find myself laughing, weeping, or being taken aback by what I heard. At first, I believed that annotating would assist the artworks functionality in the archive and for the family. Although, I soon felt uneasy about the process and sensed that listening back to the recordings altered my relationship to our time together. I felt troubled that I had taken an event about love and care and transformed it into work and theory only. I needed to find a balance where I could be both family member and researcher. Reviewing the conversations was emotionally intense, and once I stopped annotating the recordings, the burdened feeling I was experiencing lifted immediately. I felt myself being more present and experiencing Wednesday Night Dinner more on the same level as the rest of the family. I was also able to re-join them in anticipating what the recordings might contain, speculating on them and the archive as a whole, as a container for potential content.

Although I had established the tiers of audience exposure to the artwork, it was the experience myself as an audience member of Kimberley McAleve's practice that offered a revelatory moment and further informed my engagement with the notion of 'audience'. What I observed in McAleve's approach was also evident in my own. We both assigned a specific audience for our artworks (for her, a supervisor, for me, my family). This engagement created an intimate audience relationship that resulted in the shared production of a body of work. It is the limited, allotted audience that sustains the practice and propagates the work. As engagement outside of the familial audience occurs through one-on-one conversations, the notion of attention is re-enforced as an active agent of the artwork. When the broader audience enquires after the artwork, project or research, it initiates an interaction which is an encounter with the real. For an interested audience member – someone who is open to or curious about minor practices – a small detail revealed during a conversation creates a *real* experience. This engagement is the result of an instinctive and collaborative mode of production that generates awareness of the archive in the audience while expanding and informing their perceptions of the

artwork. While the fixed component of this artwork is the archive containing the Wednesday Night Dinner audio recordings, its strength lies in the materials absentia. Essentially it is the awareness of family conversations recorded over a weekly dinner, not the knowledge of their content which, prompts intuitive responses, and generates potential content, meaning and understandings.

This research's numerous successful outcomes include making an artwork that reflects on the complex emotional themes of family, love, care, mortality, and relationships, which operates conceptually and exists digitally, has a small physical footprint and is big in the imagination. This artwork contains the gestures and movements toward and away, the telling and not telling, the intuitive responses and ways of knowing, without imposing heavily on any participant other than myself. As such, the work can mean a little or a lot, for me or the audience, at our discretion. At the culmination of this research, I understand that the practice and its outcomes are propelled by scaled acts of self-generated attention, executed by artist and audience alike. By refusing to seek attention from broad applications of exposure in favour of specific, incidental, and intimate acts of attention, empathy and curiosity are fostered, enabling exchanges where attention and awareness of the project are created.

A potential hazard of being a minor artist that is removed from the usual cycle of exhibiting and who avoids methods of distribution and exposure, is for the practice to slip away from the artistic community altogether. A significant outcome of this research is the identification of scaled acts of attention and awareness as the methods and means in which a minor practice is propelled and sustained. Designating the family as the primary focus of the artwork, creates an environment where time and attention is focussed on the artwork by both audience and artist. This investment provided a foundation of support for and value in the artwork. Extending this theory of attention and value beyond the familial audience, is informed by minor strategies, as engagement occurs via voluntary acts of attention, generated through incidental conversations with interested people. While it is possible that my family may never

access the recordings, I trust that at some point one family member will have a desire to seek out a sound or story and, irrespective of whether they find what they thought they were after, be rewarded by the content they encounter. Regardless, the family's exposure to this research process has expanded their understanding of what an artwork can be, and the resulting conceptual artwork feels intimate, intense and real, to them, to us. The shared method of production this research presents is based in care, driven by curiosity and questioning, and creates heartfelt connections between the artist, artwork and audience.

While it may seem antithetical to create such a large document to present a practice that avoids audience accumulation, publicity and commodification, this kind of – minor – practice must be recorded for future generations. I committed to the research process as a way of taking up room on record and to encourage other artists with unassuming, or quiet practices to do the same. How this methodology continues without the structure and support of the University is an important future research question. Without the framework of exposure required by the University, will the desire to withdraw be as powerful as it has been throughout this process, or will my artistic production seek a less obscure path?

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Support material, soft furnishings

ELIZABETH NEWMAN, ANGELA BRENNAN, ALEK O. [ITA], KOJI RYUI, KATHERINE HATTAM,
NATASHA MADDEN, HOWARD ARKLEY, PAT FOSTER & JEN BEREAN, SPIROS PANIGIRAKIS,
TONY SCHWENSEN, KATI RULE, SANJA PAHOKI, KATE DAW, LIANG LUSCOMBE,
and LISA RADFORD

Support material, soft furnishings has evolved through conversation stemming from an interest in artists whose work can be located in a space between Art and furniture and/or Art and dwelling. Instead of picturing the domestic or describing the use-value of art/design objects, *Support material, soft furnishings* will attempt to collect, arrange and re-arrange a selection of works that create a tension between surface and function—be that the inane, socio-political, psychological or experiential.

Friday 12 February to Thursday 24 March 2016
OPENING Thursday 25 February 5–7PM



PROJECT SPACE/SPARE ROOM

RMIT Building 94: 23–27 Cardigan Street, Carlton, VIC, 3053 MANAGED BY RMIT School of Art
COORDINATOR Andrew Tetzlaff ADMINISTRATOR Verity Hayward GRAPHIC DESIGN Gracia Haby & Louise Jennison
TECHNICIAN Dylan Hammond EMAIL schoolofartgalleries@rmit.edu.au
WEB schoolofartgalleries.dsc.rmit.edu.au TELEPHONE +61 3 9925 4971
OPENING HOURS Mon and Tues by appointment, Wed and Fri 10AM–5PM, Thu 10AM–8PM, Sat 12–4PM



Site Unseen; The Enigmatic Work of Kati Rule

It's a beautiful day, sunny, no wind. Late Summer. Mid-morning. While driving to the house, I keep looking at the meter flipping over and am feeling weird about how much the cab charge is going to cost the University paying the bill. It's a long journey to somewhere I've never been before, not just northern suburban, but that part of the outer city where it feels as though you've reached the country; almost rural, native bush, lots of hills and gullies and big, loose gumtrees hanging over the side of the roads. It's as though I've crossed invisible borders of all kinds and could be anywhere.

When we eventually pull up outside the house, I am met by X. He hands me a key and tells me he will wait outside. Take as long as you like, he urges me. Here's a map. It's all quite straightforward and simple. You do need to look at all of the work. If you have any problems, come and find me and I can help you.

Just as he walks away, a small car pulls out of the driveway. A woman, with two large dogs in the back seat, waves cheerfully and also disappears, down the long driveway winding through to the main road.

That particular silence when the suburbs empty out mid-morning descends like a blanket. The garden slopes away and the birds are very loud. I look for X and I can't see him. I approach the front door (not mine, not familiar) and try the key.

The door opens and I enter the house.

To enter a new home takes a type of courage. The experience confronts you in a highly personalised way. All that you know and understand to be true is challenged in that electrifying initial moment of crossing the threshold. In encountering all that is entirely new and different, our consciousness absorbs and adapts instantly to a profusion of new objects, arrangements, smells, atmospheres and histories. Every subsequent view is a new shock of un-recognition (I am thinking here of those first

visits to friends' houses as a child. Usually in the same street, they may have as well been on a different planet).

As I pass through the passageways, kitchen, lounge, living spaces, and (oh god) the bedrooms and bathrooms, the actual experience can be likened to theatre in its 'in the moment' intensity. The tennis is on the TV near the kitchen. Women are playing, dark silhouetted bodies against that particular aquatic blue of the Australian Open courts. It all looks unusual, almost heightened in some way – why? Everything is normal, but not. I have a strong urge to run outside and I am fighting to stay composed. I can't focus on any one thing. Is it wrong to use the toilet?

Site Unseen is set against the framework of the institution (this project is Kati's MFA presentation) giving this viewing experience an extra layer of complexity and contrast. In fact, it quietly upturns most things we accept about looking at art in a total, all-encompassing manner. From the site of the home as a type of museum to the origins of the work (for and by her parents and other relatives), Kati deftly breaks every art institution rule in the book.

Kati states that her decision to limit exposure to her project (by showing it in a largely inaccessible context) is done so to 'ensure that if or when the project is discussed within the creative industry it is done so in the form of an anecdote or tale'. This means the work can only ever exist in the minds of others. The conduit has to be verbal, communicative and inherently social. Human.

New York based art critic Jerry Saltz said (on his vibrant Instagram account) a few days ago, "...a lot of our new huge painting is too big for people, for living with. It's mainly made for institutions or really rich people with huge homes...It made me understand something I'd been feeling for a while: I am more and more drawn to 'humanscaled' things."

Clearly there's a lot to talk about. This is a beginning.
Kate Daw January, 2016

Fig.1
Kati Rule
Untitled (with WFR), 2014
coloured pencil on watercolour paper
68.5cm x 50cm

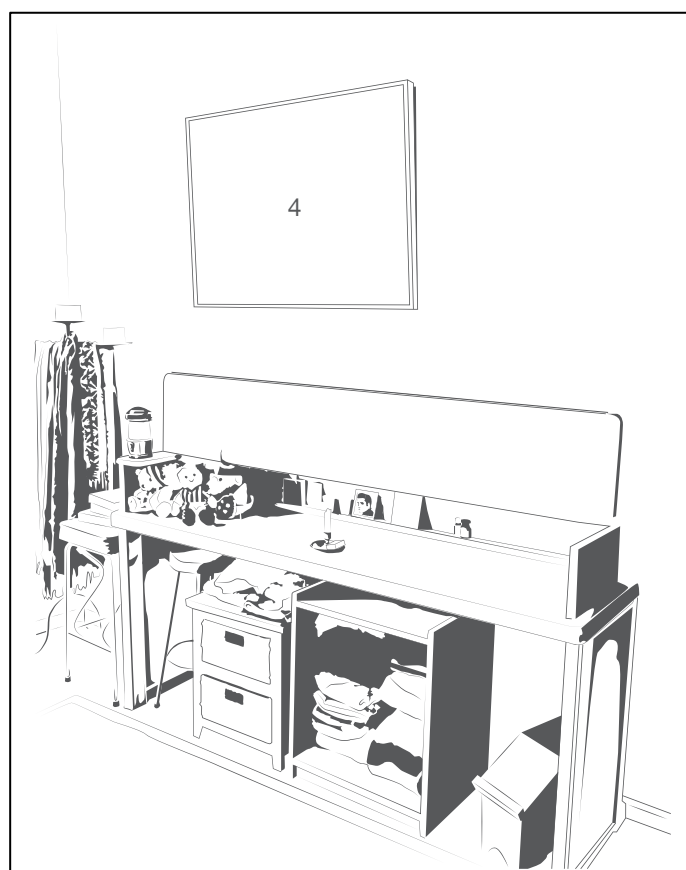
Fig. 2
Kati Rule
Untitled (with LCC), 2014
found materials
34 cm x 33.5 cm x 27.5cm

Fig.3
Kati Rule
Untitled (with TRR), 2014
paper, elastic bands, mixed media
34 cm x 33.5 cm x 27.5cm

Fig. 4
Kati Rule
26-32 Quamby Rd, 2014
coloured pencil and watercolour on board
70cm x 100cm

Fig. 5
Kati Rule
Untitled (with GM), 2014
black and white medium format photographs
three parts
dimensions variable





APPENDIX B

This is the full description of Kimberley McAlevey's MVA completion exhibition, *mva.kim*, which I received via email on 31 July 2019, written by Emma Neale.

Wed, 31 July, 1:54pm

Hi again Kati - and hi Vita - I thought I would cc you in the commentary in case you are curious!!

An art school staff member happened to greet me as I arrived and when I asked about the exhibition she said, 'It's mainly an online exhibition, but you can go into the large room on the right - the doors are wide open.'

I went in to a large, unlit exhibition space. The only images inside were on either side of the main doors. It was the kind of exhibition that makes you look at the wall sockets, the exit signs, the alarm system box, more closely. I checked the floor and the ceiling. No art works there. It is the kind of display that makes you feel very self-conscious for looking. You imagine what you must look like, looking. You are suddenly outside yourself, acting 'looking', and taking notes in the second person. It brings both a defamiliarisation and a sharpened awareness of the process of visiting an exhibition. Perhaps whispering to yourself as you look: 'Anything there? Anything here? Anywhere else?' Feeling goofy, feeling you're foolish to look. But then, looking even harder at what there is on display. Hence, the photos of the four corners of the second work. In the photo that displays the bottom right hand corner of what seems to be something like an empty invitation card, the second art work in the room, there seems to be a tiny fake yellow gem ... I didn't notice it until I looked at the photos at home. I thought it was something on my phone screen first of all. I'd be curious to know whether B noticed that too.

As I left the room, and swung left to walk out of the building, I saw the shrine to Lennon and McCartney, which includes a jaunty gnome carrying an axe, with a twisted pinkish copper wire heart, photos on the concrete pillar draped with unlit fairy lights, and the potentially alarming sound of water trickling through institutional pipes. (Would they burst? So loud!) I had a moment or two of wondering whether the shrine was connected

to the display ... I imagine not, but then perhaps a more perceptive viewer could see links to some of the photos on the website loop.

As I left the exhibition, I felt a strange heightened awareness of physical things - perhaps in the absence of bright, ordered, visual transport away from the body ... the niggle in my right knee, the dampness of my polypro gloves and black jeans, wet with the rain, a fiercely cold raindrop that gave a single hammer strike on the left side of my nose ... and then the oddness of physical objects lying around in the gutter as I walked away from the art school. A rusty star-shaped hair clip. A bright spill of red paint. A rotting carrot. There were odd events that I wanted to link to the oddness of the exhibition. Three young men saying vigorous hellos to me, several minutes apart each, though they were all strangers. I thought to myself, 'Do I have art on my face?' One man in a store, after I'd paid for some groceries, said, 'Thanks, Buddy.' As if I was his 12-year-old brother, me in my floral silk scarf, purple-rimmed spectacles, multicoloured felt hair tie, purple eyeshadow, fifty-something corporeal container.

When I looked at the online component, I thought - it's like chancing on someone else's cellphone, or seeing someone else's social media thread, and all the language makes a sort of self-contained sense, but it's stripped of context, so it's both mysterious and yet also feels like detritus; or at least, it allows you to discard it, because it doesn't seem to cohere into a narrative, even with its suggestions of a full (invented?) life underneath it. Although individual snippets of the text have poetic texture, I suppose the fragmented nature and the circularity of the disparate links made me feel manipulated rather than intrigued. I felt as if the artist was sending us off on a fake goose chase - not something that would render up surprise connections, meanings.

Perhaps for someone immersed in theory, though, the sense of being manipulated wouldn't be there - and the links in the loops would be richer...

I hope some of this is useful to you, Kati! If there is anything else you want to know, please ask....

Warmest wishes

APPENDIX C

The following is the full version of Kimberley McAleve's found text, constrained writing piece:

At the heart of our museum.

The very unapologetic idea of exactness.

In the clearing what remains silent is its obsessions

A reality upon reality

The author and her reader

A quiet corner has fallen

He is playing himself with concealed suspicion and she likes the ongoing divisions

Her being inhibited by images of his family dressed up as Gods

Something like a French sensibility disconnected from elsewhere

Involved in the idea of one who loves, one who is trapped, one who is gasping for fresh air in the painted assemblage

A complete vision is broken unapologetic actors wither away and are bound by a remote experience, both withdrawn authors

It can help to undress if you want everything

You meet your appraiser consumed by their eye not often found in this world

You imagine ways of being together elsewhere. He is the tide lines across the work

A reflection of her making her own home

A still life

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