Declaration of Originality

I, , January 31, 2018, hereby declare that the thesis here presented is the outcome of the research project undertaken during my candidacy, that I am the sole author unless otherwise indicated, and that I have fully documented the source of ideas, references, quotations and paraphrases attributable to other authors.
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Abstract

My thesis, *Beyond the Immeasurable*, is a biographical exploration of my collective: my ex-husband and three children. My method is based in collecting. The outcomes of my research are works of art developed from material sourced, classified, and collected in my domestic environment.

Over the four years of research, I collected specimens, personal matter, empirical data, and found objects. It ranged from evidence of the body (hair, teeth, food scraps, and saliva), soundscapes from within the home (audio recordings of the collective during interactions), documented performances, and statistical/empirical data of interactions (dates, times, durations). My practice engaged with a number of themes and theories including collecting practices, interpersonal contamination, domestic space, feminist art and craft, and identity as well as contextualising my research amongst artists such as Sophie Calle, Annette Messager, and Louise Bourgeois. In the end, it became the evidence of our lives and experiences. As the project progressed, the research evolved to focus on defining who I was, my role within the collective, and, despite the collective’s demise, ultimately, the project was about love. The research outcomes encompass a collection of sculptural, photographic, performance and video pieces.

I found, in response to my aims, my practice-led research had become a narrative which gave me a sense of self, place, and belonging. These collections and the proceeding works resulted in a demonstration of a metaphorical fusion of identities, establishment of relationships within the collective, consolidation of different personas and facets of my life, and the development and redefinition my visual arts practice. The most surprising discovery, was the redefining of my role as a mother and the acceptance of this expressed through feminine craft with materials I collected from my own domestic space, my home.
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Before we begin, let me set the scene

Fig. 1. The Collective, 2011

Everything I have made since my second year at art school has been about my family, what I call my collective (See Fig. 1). If I were to take them out of my practice I would have nothing. They are the foundation of not only my work but also my life. I love them.

We like to sing really loud in the car while making it rock back and forth at the lights. We dance in the grocery store aisles to the songs in our heads. We watch Star Trek and yell at the T.V. when a character comes on we don’t like. We quote T.V. shows and movies like it’s our bible. We love corn on the cob. We like playing cards and talking trash to each other. We even have the same curve of our cheeks.

My ex-husband, the father of my children, and all round good guy is the head of my family. According to my eldest, my authority is just an illusion he grants me. He’s hard working, unrelenting, and compassionate. He keeps me grounded and reminds me that everything isn’t so bad. His hands go multi-coloured in the cold, bruising’s of purple, blue, and red. They are large and can encompass your face like the alien face hugger. He constantly shakes his legs, bouncing up and down till the couch you share is shaking. Out of nowhere you’ll hear him make weird noises and laugh manically to himself. He cooks dinner for us every night and for the nights he’s not there he’ll make something and freeze it for us.
Our first creature is thoughtful, considerate, and kind. He is empathic and wishes the best for everyone and everything. He’s soft. You can hear him in the dark quoting to himself Bob’s Burgers, our favourite cartoon, it makes me laugh. He wishes he could be rich, he tells me he’d take me to Disneyland and Harry Potter world. He teases me about becoming a doctor of boxes. He pretends to be me and introduces himself “mmm, yes, mmm, I’m Welly, yes, I like collecting, mmm, I like boxes, mmm, yes.” He leaves his dirty clothes on the floor and his room is messy. He takes good care of his brothers and me. He makes a mean pasta bake. When he smiles a light shines from him.

Along came our second creature. He is the very definition of “water off a ducks back”. He isn’t fussed about anything. He is so chilled that he appears to not care about anyone or much. Don’t mistake that for uncaring or being unkind. He is smart, kind, and loving. He gets nervous about anything he hasn’t done before. We went sneaker shopping once and it took us nearly an hour. He needed constant reassurance and instruction to find a pair he liked and how to even put them on. He always forgets to empty the dishwasher or clean his ears. He loves computer games and quotes them constantly depending on what he’s playing at the time. When he played Batman, he’d remind us all he’s Batman or ask the cat, “Where’s Rachael?”

Our last creature is our sunshine. He’s an old, gentle soul and I believe we have been together before, which sounds weird I know. He loves collecting, craft, and playing Minecraft. He carries around his companions, or what we refer to as his ‘people’. His beloved blanket Manky, Struggel, a rainbow coloured soft toy which looks like it would eat your face off at night and my 37 year old teddy bear, Teddy. These are so loved in our family that they have become people in their own right. He has a plastic tub filled with zip lock bags that hold all his collections, divided up using his own personal taxonomy; from rocks, to the pull tabs off soft drink cans, or the cut off dreads from the repairs to his Manky. His collecting urges are so strong we even find rocks in the bottom of the washing machine. He thinks I smell like hot dogs, which I think is terrible, but he claims they are delicious, so it must be good.

My family and all their quirks are what keeps me going. When I started to lose my memory six years ago, I began to forget my boys. They either started to blend into one or were completely forgotten. I panicked when I first started to realise that eventually I wouldn’t remember any of those wonderful things about them. Photos wouldn’t be enough for me, it wouldn’t give me a full picture of who they are or were, the sounds of their voices or the
little things that make them unique. That’s what I endeavour to do in my practice now; collecting them in as many ways possible regardless of the significance. I have my own plastic tub of zip lock bags now. Little baggies of teeth, hair, litmus paper tests, pH indicator in vials, months of conversations recorded and archived, dried and preserved plants grown from our grey water, and photos of our dinners together including our food before and after we ate. These are all labelled and archived with love and care. Eventually I’ll slip away, but I’ll have something to look back and remember them. I’m sure now you are thinking I’m obsessed with my family and maybe even have a strange addiction, maybe I need to seek out a support group……. My name is Welly and I love my family.
Now let’s start

The aim of this research project, Beyond the Immeasurable, was to investigate the process of interpersonal contamination of my possessions and extended self, in particular my collective. My collective is a defined group of individuals which are my immediate family, my ex-husband and children. They are the most significant people in my life. They have shaped who I am, they define my existence, and provide a safe place to belong.

This project is expressed through works of art deriving the materials from a series of collections comprising of found objects, empirical data and personal matter. My focus was on how different forms of contamination, positive or negative, occur within my personal space and how they can be used to accumulate a collection. These collections and proceeding works are intended to demonstrate a metaphorical fusion of identities while establishing the relationships between myself and others and how these contaminates exhibit how I interact with my immediate environment.

Before I began my research, I had a number of questions I intended to answer with my body of work. In particular, how different forms of contamination occur within my personal space? How can these contaminations be used to accumulate a collection that demonstrates my identity? And how can I create collections derived from the processes of interpersonal contamination? As time passed these questions became irrelevant and were superseded by how my collective defined my identity, what the role of the home and family has with defining identity and how the interaction of the two concepts of home and family allowed me to find place.

With the love we share, I believe it fused our identities together, that my sense of self includes the ones I love. I believed that my collective had fused together to become one. The doctoral research I conducted became a narrative developed through the collective’s experiences and interactions. This narrative gave me a sense of self. My identity, traits, and personality include my memories, attributes, which have formed my story. I believe this narrative has allowed me to make sense of who I am and provide a link to my identity from the past, the present, and provide me hope for my future.

The collections I accumulated are derived from the people and things that I love which have a profound influence on who I am and one’s development of sense of self. The collections were sourced from within our home, the domestic space, which is an extension of the collective, in a way a member of the family itself. For me, my home, my domestic
space, held an infinite amount of potential. Our home was a result of how our collective functions and the accumulation of our collective’s emotions and relationships. It was the home that bound us together but also allowed the space for each of us to exist.

During my research, I discovered that the concept I started out with evolved into an ethnographic study of my collective but also a redefinition of who I am, my role within the collective, and ultimately, it was a research project about love. My original contribution to knowledge is the resulting collection of my collective, biographical work using a range of personal matter, specimens, empirical data, and found objects.

Over the four years of research, I collected specimens, personal matter, empirical data, and found objects derived from my collective. It ranged from evidence of the body (hair, teeth, food scraps, and saliva), sound scape from within the home (audio recordings of the collective during interactions), documented performances, and statistical/empirical data of interactions (dates, times, durations). Each collection is a work in itself but also a spark for a body of work which is an extension of it.

To protect my collective privacy, I have used a serial number to represent each one. My personal serial number is considered the zero point, 00.000.001. From there, the minutes were calculated when each collective member entered my timeline. For example, the eldest member of my collective joined my life in February, 1997. At that moment, I had existed for 8,187,480 minutes. It was the significant turning point in my life. Each consequential member has been pinpointed on my timeline, marking their arrival into my life. Resulting in the following serial numbers; 09.459.360, 10.928.160, and 14.307.804. These were calculated as of the start of the research project and will remain static till the end. The remainder of their identities will remain private except for the formed identities I create through the collecting of their samples, empirical data, and interactions.

Upon completion of my research and the development of the body of work, I feel that there isn’t one more important work than the others. Each work was intended to be a piece in a larger puzzle. That each one needed the other, much like how I felt the collective worked. However, a number of pieces are more powerful than the others. They were turning points; even lynch pins, which mirrored the changing dynamic of the collective.

My practice engaged with a number of themes and theories which evolved over time. In the beginning the key theories included collecting and collections, interpersonal contamination, the theory of disgust, and the Laws of Sympathetic Magic. As each theory
no longer was relevant, it dropped away to reveal more important themes. Collecting practices and collections remained a constant, with the additions of the home, domestic space, feminine craft, feminist art, and identity. In similar circumstances, in the beginning, I referenced contemporary examples of art by Christian Boltanski, Tehching Hiesh, and Damien Hirst. However, while refining my work and research, I concentrated upon the works and studio practices of Sophie Calle, Annette Messager, and Louise Bourgeois. This includes an analysis of the differences and similarities; theoretically, conceptually, and aesthetically.

To aid in the understanding, I will clarify a number of terms I will use, providing a definition of how I understand them, use them, and see them. Any additional terms or theories will be clarified and explained as they arise. As already mentioned the collective is defined group of people and includes my immediate family. According to Russell Belk and his colleagues, a collection is defined as the following:

We take collecting to be selective, active, and longitudinal acquisition, possession, and disposition of an interrelated set of differential objects (material things, ideas, beings, or experiences) that contribute to and derive extraordinary meaning from the entity (the collection) that this set is perceived to constitute. ¹

And more simply, the intent of the owner determines what defines a collection. When referring to the home, it is the space my collective occupied and what is also referred to and interchangeable with the term domestic space. The term Place refers to a space or group where I feel I belong. Place evokes feelings of comfort, safety, and being loved.

This paper was written chronologically and in a diaristic manner. It is a direct reflection of my style of note taking, visual tracking, and research due to the symptomatic constraints I experience through my illness. I’ve chosen not to reveal my diagnosis, as it is an evolving issue, however, the driving symptom behind my practice and research is my degenerative memory. Therefore, I ultimately wrote this paper for myself with the hope that others would be able to relate and understand despite being self-centred in my pursuits. Upon further reflection and discovery of Lucy Lippard, I realised just like Lippard, I felt a relief and permission to write for myself. As Lippard writes in From the Centre,

I began to write for myself rather than for some imaginary male audience and by extension, I began to write for women. As the process of consciousness continued, I realised with relief that I no longer had to walk a tightrope and pretend to be what I wasn’t.²

Though my writing liberation came about through the system I created to alleviate the changes to my memory, I feel infinity with Lippard and I hope the imaginary audience I write for will understand.

Within the following exegesis, the four years of research will be explained, analysed and discussed. Each chapter represents a year of research which includes the works made, theoretical research, and critical reflection of the year with the conclusion of the research in the final chapter.

2014: feeling bright eyed and bushy tailed

For me, observing and truly looking is a silent dissection I afflict upon an object. I feel how I look at an object has always been a little bit different than most. Once in my possession, an object takes on a persona or ‘soul’ and I treat it as such. Just as when I first read *Exquisite Pain*, a much loved and very much wanted possession of mine, it exuded a personality and warmth that endeared me to it immediately. Not only had the book become more than an artwork or collection, but it also mirrored how I felt. The author, Sophie Calle, had produced a collection of an emotive quality which documented the lead up and consequences of a relationship break down.

Fig. 2. *Exquisite Pain*, Sophie Calle, Published 2003

Within my hands I held a little grey book with its shiny red print announcing itself elegantly as *Exquisite Pain* (See Fig. 2). The grey linen covered book with an embossed telephone on the front, and its red dipped pages enticed me to open it, to find smooth glossy paper and a red ribbon bookmark awaiting me on the inside. Within the pages I found a story of a journey that ended in heartbreak. This story was divided into two distinct sections, ‘before unhappiness’ and ‘after unhappiness’. The tale starts as bright red pages with white text introducing the start of the countdown to unhappiness.
Calle writes...

In 1984 the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs awarded me a grant for a three-month scholarship to Japan. I left on October 25, unsuspecting that this date would mark the beginning of a 92 day countdown to the end of a love affair. Nothing extraordinary – but to me, at the time, the unhappiest moment of my life, and one for which I blame the trip itself.¹

From there a mixture of photos, travel souvenirs, text, and personal mementos line the pages. A countdown, “… days to unhappiness”, is forcibly stamped across the images of each day (See Fig. 3). This collection represents Calle’s trip: a three month residency including the journey to Japan and her residency. Her travels are highlighted with occasional correspondence between herself and her lover. They swap letters and make arrangements to meet in New Delhi at the end of her three month residency.

Fig. 3. *Exquisite Pain*, pgs. 90-91

However, as the countdown descends to the anticipated reunion, the tension builds and Calle’s anxiety and excitement become apparent (See Fig. 4). Even stating, “This is the happiest moment of my life. You have waited. One more day, then…” accompanied by a picture of Calle smiling unlike previous portraits of herself in Japan.⁴ Calle arrives in New Delhi to a message awaiting her at the hotel. The moment that follows is the discovery that her lover won’t be joining her due to an “accident” (infected finger) and a stay in “hospital” (home) results in the heart breaking realization that he has met someone else and won’t be joining her. The page which follows this discovery is a silent and static image. It’s a generic room with a red telephone resting on the bed. The image forces you to take the position of Calle, as you imagine yourself in her place staring at the telephone on the bed shocked and devastated by the phone call from your now ex-lover. In the bottom left hand corner the event is marked; January 25, 1985, 2 a.m., room 261, Imperial Hotel, New Delhi (See Fig. 5).

⁴ Calle, Exquisite Pain, 194.
The second section begins, ‘after unhappiness’, with an entry explaining the pages which follows...

I got back to France on January 28, 1985. From that moment, whenever people asked me about my trip, I chose to skip the Far East bit and tell them about my suffering instead. In return I started asking both friends and chance encounters: “When did you suffer most?” I decided to continue such exchanges until I had got over my pain by comparing it with other people’s or had worn out my own story through sheer repetition. The method proved radically effective. In three months I had cured myself. Yet, while the exorcism had worked, I still feared a possible relapse, and so I decided not to exploit this experiment artistically. By the time I returned to it, fifteen years had passed.⁵

Sophie Calle is a French photographer, installation artist, sculptor, and writer. She explores identity, memory, and intimacy; themes which interlink with my own.⁶ This collection,

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originally recorded in 1984, is presented not only as a book, but as an exhibition shown at the Pompidou Centre in Paris, France. The collection was packed away, in fear of a relapse of reliving such a painful memory, for close to twenty years before readdressing it as an exhibition and book in 2003.

Many viewers and critics question if the work Calle produces is fabricated, manipulated, or authentic. I believe amongst Calle’s work there is always an underlying truth, regardless if it is embellished or the raw facts. Calle is known for the ability to blur the lines between art and life, which is evident within this work, but Exquisite Pain was a real life changing event for Calle. Which brings you to the question, did she collect and preserve this event for the sole purpose of creating an art work later in life or was it collected for her own personal needs? Calle explains that at the time the collecting was more for therapeutic reasons than for artistic purposes.7 She didn’t plan on using the gathered material for an exhibition or for such public purposes in fear of relapsing. Either way, Calle’s work has the ability to engage the viewer, drawing them in to believe that it couldn’t be anything but true and ultimately collected to ease the pain she felt.

Critics have said that Calle’s work is self-indulgent; I too have been told that my work is a “self-indulgent pity party”8. I believe there is an element of self-indulgence in every artist’s work. However, why does such personal work always feel invalid and preyed upon to be self-help, therapeutic, or cheap therapy. It is suggested though despite the indulgence of Exquisite Pain, the inclusion of the stranger’s recollections of suffering prevents the work from becoming contrived and pretentious.9

As you read the stories shared in the section of ‘after unhappiness’, Calle’s narrative becomes less and less prominent and the memories of her friends and chance encounters outweighs her suffering. Within Exquisite Pain, Calle describes this as the worse moment in her life.

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8 Assessing Lecturer, Third Year Assessment, 2012.
9 Gentleman, “The worse the break up, the better the art work.”
In retrospect and in comparison to the mirrored stories, Calle believes that she didn’t suffer that much and trivialises how she felt.  

“I look back on it now and I realise that I didn’t suffer that much. In a way I feel I was really lucky, when you see how some people carry their sorrow.”  

I feel the balance between her pain and the pain of others is relative. How Calle felt is palpable amongst the pages of *Exquisite Pain* and her suffering is just as important as the pain felt by the others regardless of the event that caused it. As time progresses and Calle begins to heal, the changes in how the text is presented reflect the balance in weight as well. As Calle’s story and pain fades, the strangers re-account remains as crisp and poignant as the first time the acute suffering was felt.

The act of sharing such emotional pain and suffering is a common practice, usually not as public as Calle has produced, but this emotional sharing is thought to be a liberating process. Studies have found it to be beneficial to share emotional pain and suffering with others. Not only was it found that people who shared their pain with others suffered less symptoms of illnesses but also “reported emotional relief and cognitive benefits”. In a life changing event, such as heartbreak or relationship break down, the emotional pain was usually shared close to the event. It was shared repeatedly and with many other people. This sharing is also known to produce other benefits such as strengthening social bonds between the sufferer and confidant.

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10 Gentleman, “The worse the break up, the better the art work.”
11 Ibid.
Upon Calle’s return to France from New Delhi, she repeatedly relived her experience with many people, friends and strangers (See Fig. 6). This method allowed her to process her grief and pain associated with this life-changing event and the suffering she was enduring at the time. This is evident within the visual cues of the book in the section ‘after unhappiness’ as the text shortens and fades for each time she shares her story.

Fig. 6. Exquisite Pain, pgs. 210-211

This act of sharing eroded away the pain she felt (See Fig. 7). However, I was asked, “Why would someone want to parade a moment of humiliation so publicly?” For those who keep emotional pain and suffering a secret are perceived to be ashamed or feel guilt, therefor avoiding the sharing and public “airing” of their feelings.  


Fig. 7. Exquisite Pain, pgs. 268-269
Calle is her most productive in times of loss and sadness.\textsuperscript{17} Calle described it as “seizing” upon those moments of unhappiness which she is reportedly to do so with delight. Calle analyses and studies it until it fades and she can’t re-create it any longer. I feel an affinity with this process as well. Following a time of loss and unhappiness, I believe I produce my best work. How I feel and my intuition guides my practice to create more emotive works than when I am content.

My supervisor once told me that he considered me a conceptual artist, where the idea or concept is considered more important than the final work; ‘Conceptual artist’ is a label that confuses me.\textsuperscript{18} Many have labelled Calle a conceptual artist and \textit{Exquisite Pain} a conceptual piece as well. However, I believe the final outcomes of this work were just as important as the concept. Both Calle and I ensure each detail is considered and laboured over. It is apparent the choices of colour, text, image, or layout for \textit{Exquisite Pain} are all carefully considered.

Calle and I share many traits as practicing artists; our themes, theoretical contexts, and display techniques run parallel. When I look at Calle’s work I can’t help but feel that we are in a way ‘kindred spirits’. The theoretical framework for \textit{Exquisite Pain} is mirrored within my own work; theories such as collecting, possession, and melancholy objects are prominent.

Many artists use the technique of collecting to create art works. Through these collections we can recreate memories and identities, establish “permanent and complete systems against the destruction of time”, and fulfil desires and losses.\textsuperscript{19} Collecting can be a powerful way to permanently forge pathways back, creating an ever present moment, to life changing events such as Calle’s heartbeat and recovery.\textsuperscript{20}

There is an order amongst the chaos of objects that are connected by memories. Objects that seem unrelated are all connected to form a holistic, yet bias, version of these memories and identities. However, collecting to form identities isn’t just about creating a mirror image of oneself but to enhance identity through possessing that rare object,

\textsuperscript{17} Gentleman, “The worse the break up, the better the art work.”
\textsuperscript{20} Eisner and Cardinal, \textit{The Cultures of Collecting}, 50.
knowing intimate knowledge and being an expert on that object. Objects like this have the ability to transport us to the memory and entrenching an identity of a loved one.\textsuperscript{21,22,23}

As a souvenir collector, Calle has followed these principles of collecting. \textit{Exquisite Pain} is a collection that seems unrelated until brought together to recreate an experience and an identity. She has created a mirror of who she was at the time and a biased version of her ex-lover. Maintaining this collection, Calle is able to relive the experiences and heartbreak easily through the details and images brought together within the book regardless of the time which has passed.

For me, there was a realisation that collecting can be a compensation for the sense of loss and incompleteness that accompanies the events and changes in my life. To make collections that I become a part of ameliorates these feeling. Forming these collections is a permanent way to ensure that I never lose the ones I love or had loved. This in turn reduces the melancholy I feel and reinforces, finally, a sense that I belong. Baudrillard, a French theorist, believes that when you collect, you are ultimately collecting yourself and within your collection you are the final piece in the set or series.\textsuperscript{24,25} This placement gives the collector a sense of belonging. It can also be seen in collecting to construct other peoples’ identities, being a part of their lives by having ourselves be the final piece of the collection; reinforcing connections and the relationship we have with other individuals. Calle, through her collection, has created for herself an ability to remain connected to her ex-lover. This connection is a permanent reinforcement of their relationship regardless of its ending and subsequent fallout.

American theorist Russell Belk researches possessions, collecting, museum practices and materialism.\textsuperscript{26} His paper \textit{Possession and the Extended Self} was a turning point in my research. In particular, the ideas about how we can characterise ourselves by the

\begin{itemize}
\item Eisner and Cardinal, \textit{The Cultures of Collecting}, 1.
\item ibid., 1.
\item Margaret Gibson, “Melancholy Objects”, \textit{Mortality}, vol. 9, no. 4 (2004): 285.
\item Baudrillard, \textit{The System of Objects}, 92.
\end{itemize}
possessions we desire, what we own, and how we use those possessions. Ultimately, he theorises that we are the “sum of our possessions”.  

Possessions do not end or begin with things; possessions are also made up of our thoughts, conscience, body and extended self which can include friends, family, people, places and things. Extension of self can occur in several different ways through the control of objects. We imprint our identities on our possessions and vice-versa through physical contact and proximity to it. For a collector, the obsession of accumulating possessions intermixes with where our extended self ends, our objects no longer are just ours, but they are us. Furthermore, the symbolic integration of another person into one’s extended self can occur through these collections.

Calle’s possessions are an extension of who she was, who she is, and perhaps who she’ll be. The interesting aspect of this collection is the integration of other people’s memories into her collection. Within this theory, it would mean the symbolic fusing of their identity with hers, or perhaps the fusing of her pain with others making it easier to bear. While engaging with *Exquisite Pain*, I found myself remembering and contributing a memory of my worse suffering; as I believe many others viewers would have done so as well. Do we then become a part of Calle’s collection? Are we an extension of Calle’s self and now a possession? With the pain prominently displayed and Calle herself exposed in a public manner begins to include the viewer within the collection. I believe we would then become her possession through our voyeurism and contributions.

Sigmund Freud, known as the father of psychoanalysis, has developed many theories which are influential to my work and many others especially his paper, *Mourning and Melancholia*. In 1911 Freud coined the term, Cathexis, a process of psychic charge or emotional transfer to an object creating a melancholic object. Mostly used as an aid in bereavement, these objects can also be infused with memories and identities. These objects are a means of both holding on and letting go. Susan Sontag draws parallels

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27 “Russell W. Belk”, Schulich School of Business.  
29 Belk, “Possession,” 139.  
30 Ibid., 140.  
31 Ibid., 139.  
33 Gibson, “Melancholy Objects”, 287.  
34 Ibid.: 289.
between ‘melancholy objects’ and the photograph. Sontag believes there is a connection between the photograph, sentimentality, and death. Photographs are a common melancholic object. The subject is caught frozen in time as a permanent reminder of how things are or how they use to be. Sontag states;

A photograph is only a fragment, and with the passage of time its moorings come unstuck. It drifts away into soft abstract pastness, open to any kind of reading (or matching to other photographs).

As previously stated and in agreement with Sontag, photographs after time lose their context. They don’t hold enough information and can be open to interruption.

Through Exquisite Pain, Calle readdressing the moment of suffering is her way of letting go as well as holding onto a memory that isn’t as painful as it original once was. Each of the objects she collected is infused with the emotional transfer of her life changing events. As Sontag suggests, there is a sentimentality attached to photographs, that regardless of how painful the memories were for her it is still infused with how Calle felt and preserved within the collection.

I began to make maquettes for my various collections. The first set of maquettes revolved around the collection of hair I had started which came from the haircuts of the collective. A friend had visited the Hobart Museum and sent me a picture of the archiving and preservation techniques for collected moth samples (See Fig. 8).

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Fig. 8. Moth Samples, Hobart Museum

36 Ibid., 71.
The method of sealing the moth within a folded paper triangle with collection details intrigued me. I learnt how to fold similar paper satchels to preserve collected hair samples. To display the collection as a work, I developed a way to display each triangular envelope. I designed drawer like structures to house them like card catalogues of a library or the magic inducing spectacle of Ollivander’s wand shop cabinets. Depending on the sample size within the hair collection, would these drawers form a cabinet or just be one solander box for each person within the collective, protected under a case of Perspex? I began to wonder how presentation affects the collections intentions, translation, and the viewer’s perception.

Despite abandoning the maquettes, the question of intention, translation, and viewer’s perception of a collection remained and I hoped to answer with a group exhibition at the Craft A.C.T. Pod Space. The exhibition, *in vitro/in vivo*, was a group show with fellow A.N.U. Sculpture Workshop Alumni, Dierdre Pearce. The exhibition was an exploration of the language of plant collection, breeding, use and display as a metaphor for human relationships. Dierdre invented devices for carrying plants as personal protection against the threats of the contemporary world drawing on the concepts of the medicinal, physical, and magical properties of particular plants. My contribution to the exhibition was a series, *delexit aquam*, a collection of water gathered while showering which was presented in three different ways from the clinical to the personal.

The development of this body of work began with the concept of interpersonal contamination, in particular the category of excreta, and exploring the processes of contamination through the symbolic integration of a possession into one’s extended self. Interpersonal contamination according to Belk, is not just the literal cross contamination of germs, but also the symbolic involuntary integration of another into one’s self. There are six modes; Violation of one’s personal space, touching and bodily contact, glancing looking and staring, noise pollution, talking to/addressing one and bodily excreta. Bodily excreta includes corporeal excreta (eg. spittle, snot, perspiration, food particles, blood, semen, vomit, urine, and fecal matter and strains of these), odor (eg. flatus, tainted breath, body smells), body heat (eg. toilet seats), and marking left by the body (eg. plate leavings – leftover food). This also touches on the theorist, Julia Kristeva, and her concept of the abject. Kristeva refers to the abject as the reaction we experience when we encounter

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38 Belk, “Possessions”, 151.
what is described to be an interpersonal contamination. In this interaction, the boundary between us and the object of disgust is lost. She refers to the abject as her safeguard. Foster sums up both the ideas of the maternal body and the Kristeva’s idea of the abject as follows;

Here, as often in horror movies and bedtime stories alike, horror means, first and foremost, horror of maternity, of the maternal body made strange, even repulsive, in repression. This body is the primary site of the abject as well, a category of (non) being defined by Julia Kristeva as neither subject nor object, but before one is the first (before full separation from the mother) or after one is the second (as a corpse given over to object hood). In other words, the boundary between what is us, the maternal body, and the object of disgust, the body made strange or repulsive, leads to the body as the primary site of the abject. Foster, in Obscene, Abject, Traumatic, goes on to state the combining of the abject and art, goes in two directions. The first direction is for the artist to relate with the abject, “to approach it – to probe the wound of trauma, to touch the obscene”. The second direction is to “represent the condition of abjection in order to provoke its operation”, in other words, the artist’s work is re-enacting the abjection, even if it induces disgust. In addition, Foster suggest, artist working with the abject is investigating the “repressing of the maternal body” and it is a chance for artist to “exploit the disruptive effects of its materials and metaphorical remainders”.

Mary Kelly, an American conceptual artist, feminist, educator, and writer, created large-scale narrative installations such Post-Partum Document which includes themes of human relationships and the abject. Post-Partum Document is a mixed media installation consisting of six parts, with materials and data collected from 1973-79. The materials and data are documenting the process of the “self-formation of her son”. The six sections,

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40 Ibid., 2.
42 Ibid., 112.
43 Ibid., 116.
44 Ibid., 116.
comprising of 135 pieces, are displayed in Perspex boxes with a scientific aesthetic. Part one, where Kelly documents her son’s transition from breast feeding to solid food is represented by faecal stained nappies. Upon each nappy, Kelly has listed her son’s food and liquid consumption to produce the stain. Part two, documents her son’s development of speech with a personal classification system. Part three, documents her son’s start of nursery school. Part four, documents Kelly’s and her son’s separation anxiety typed out on transitional objects such as fragments of her son’s baby blanket. Part five, consists of animal and plant specimens which were gifted to Kelly by her young son with accompanied text of mother/son dialogue. Part six, documents the beginnings of Kelly’s son learning to read and write. The six parts of Kelly’s installation demonstrates her “attempt to tackle her lived experience as a mother” as well as “manipulate the ready-made discourse on motherhood”.

Similar to my own proposed work, Kelly engages with interpersonal contamination, disgust, and the abject; especially in part one of Post-Partum Document. The inclusion of faecal prints on the used nappies of her son evokes the response of disgust and is one of the categories of interpersonal contamination suggested by Belk. Furthermore, the display of the soiled nappies, within Perspex boxes, reminiscent of scientific or natural museum displays, much like the displays I produce. Wierzchowska suggests, however, that this style of display “creates a sense of distance, emotional detachment and authority, while reproducing image so fragmentary and disjointed functions of maternal subject.” I will be experimenting with methods of presentation to see if my displays evoke the same.

The possessions integrated into one’s self, with either positive or negative aspects, are seen to assimilate with us through physical contact or proximity. Humans have evolved to have the response of disgust to protect us from contamination. The mechanism of disgust is manifested through, that I describe as, the ‘ew’ factor. It’s the screwing up of our noses and the turning away. Our mechanism of disgust acts as the guardians of the body; it is seen as the original defence against infection. Disgust, in response to a contamination, is generally a negative emotion; it’s believed there is no positive emotion when it comes to

47 Wierzchowska, “Narrating Motherhood as Experience and Institution”, 113.
48 Ibid., 116.
49 Ibid., 113.
50 Ibid., 117.
51 Belk, “Possessions”, 140.
Even with the lack of an opposite to the perceived negative contamination, I believe in a positive one – when your child kisses you (slobbers on you), it is a contamination of your space of your being in the purest transaction, however, the relationship you share between the mother and the child doesn’t make the experience negative, the reinforcement of the love shared is there. To complicate things further, according to Bloom, he suggests, “In love, you see the person not as a body, but as a soul.” I too can see that in love, they are more than what you can see, however, the interactions we experience with loved ones are a contamination of our interpersonal space. The established relationship dictates whether it is a positive or negative contamination.

This series is based upon the collection of Grey Water sourced from the showers of my significant others and myself. Through the exploration of this form of contamination and interaction as well as for my practice led investigation, I have developed a number of research questions to address through my body of work, how can I create collections derived from the processes of interpersonal contamination and turn them into beloved objects? With such materials, can I create collections that reinforce and demonstrate my connection/relationship with my possessions/loved ones? How does the viewer perceive the collection through the different presentation methods, clinical to the more personal?

To answer these questions and develop a body of work using the collected materials, I researched key theories and analysed the results with consideration to the viewer and panel feedback. The use of collections within my project creates a significant issue; an actual accumulation of materials, a collection, needs to be available to draw upon before the start of the making of a project. The process of collecting interactions and contaminations of my interpersonal self is an ongoing process, which without a defined start or beginning is ongoing and frustrating.

Upon choosing which interaction/contamination I was going to collect, I began to develop the concept, the theoretical structure, and a way to visually express it. I decided to start with a collection of Grey Water. I felt this would ease me into the program as well as be something easy to collect with large quantities in a short amount of time. With a collection of Grey Water, it was an easy leap to the idea of propagating plants using the sourced

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54 Ibid., 770.
water and extending the idea of contamination through a number of works. However, this sounded easier than it was.

With this project, the inclusion of plants creates an unpredictable element. It is easy enough to collect a sample of Grey Water every day; shower water flowing over the skin of my significant others which is then collected within a bucket, transferred to a vial, sealed and labelled. But, to grow plants from seed in an environment with unpredictable variables including my inability to keep plants alive was going to be tricky. Therefore, the collecting of the water just to propagate the plants began far earlier in the year than the specimen styled collecting for the glass vials.

The seeds were planted in a product, jiffy pots, designed for easy transplanting once the seedling has been established (See Fig. 9). Each individual had six jiffy pots, each planted with mint seeds (scientific name Mentha) in a pot plant saucer, labelled, and watered with their specific water collection (See Fig. 10).

Fig. 9. Collecting bucket for Grey Water and plant tray holding planted seeds in Jiffy Pots

Fig. 10. Jiffy Pots with seeds planted
I chose Mint plants to propagate as they are known to be quick growers, hardy, and have a number of health benefits. Health benefits such as the aid in digestion, a prevention for nausea and headaches, and an aid in relieving symptoms of depression and fatigue; all of which I suffer from. They took a number of weeks to germinate and I began to lose hope of growing plants large enough to harvest. The seedlings were moved to a more controlled environment with a constant heat source and the appropriate sunlight. They grew a lot better in this location; however, I purchased larger plants as a plan B in case the seedlings didn’t survive (See Fig. 11). These seedlings and plants were then supplied with only the collected water from their matching individual and left to grow. The specimen styled samples were collected for a full month every day and sealed within glass vials. I designed labels to reflect museum collection practices. These were printed out and stuck to every vial.

![Mint seedlings, growing with a constant source of heat and appropriate sunlight.](image)

As the plants were growing, I began the testing of my designs and ideas for the first work in the series, *dilexit aquam I*. I made maquettes in various materials and designs for a Perspex cabinet intended to display the glass vials. Once deciding on the appropriate material to match the concept, I finalised the design and out sourced the manufacturing of the display case. The cabinet was designed to hang in free space by a hanging system involving steel rope and specific designed brushed aluminium hangers.

While the first work was being made, the design for the display of the plants and the sourced Grey Water for the second work, *dilext aquam II*, were finalised. The work required a table which would be able to display the five plants potted into one litre chemistry glass beakers while being continuously watered by five glass separation funnels. A table, stands, and stand bases were made to accommodate the plants in the beakers and suspending the separation funnels filled with grey water.
The third work, *dilexit aquam III*, was the most difficult to make. I researched different forms of boxes, ones used within tea ceremonies or to store the paraphernalia of a tea ceremony, then I designed my own version. The box was designed to hold a removable insert which would hold the drying leaves and tea cup. The manufacturing of the tea cup was outsourced to a ceramicist which produced a number of cups; I chose the one which was the most comfortable to hold. To display the tea box I used a previously made table top. The table tops stain was refreshed with Black Japan and a new base and legs were made. These too were treated with Black Japan.

After six weeks of making and five months of collecting, the series, *dilexit aquam I-III*, was completed and ready for exhibition. *Dilexit aquam I-III*, is a collection of Grey Water sourced from the showers of my significant loved ones and I (See Fig. 12).

Through this collection I wanted to explore the idea of a positive or negative interpersonal contamination of myself through an interaction shared amongst my significant others and I. While making and researching this series, I established the interpersonal contamination occurring within my personal space was a positive experience and therefore a positive contamination. This experience of sharing a shower with my loved ones, though continually changing as they grow and become independent, has always been a constant throughout my life.

This series highlights this interaction and how I interact with the work reinforces the positive experience. I hoped the viewer would be able to establish a relationship between...
each of the works as well as the relationships between each individual. The different presentations are an attempt to express the collection through a clinical display to a more personal one. During the showing, my panel attended and conducted a review of the body of work, a number of considerations and improvements needed to be made; including the major readjustment of the third work as well as a potential fourth work to complete the set.

![Fig. 13. dilexit aqaum I](image)

The first work, *dilexit aqaum I*, a collection of samples sourced from the collected Grey Water of each significant loved one and sampled every day for a month (See Fig. 13). The collected water was sealed and labelled within glass vials. The labels supplies the viewer with information such as the serial number of the individual, the description of the liquid enclosed, the longitude and latitude of the location of the collected sample, the vial number, the quantity of the liquid, and the date the sample was collected. These glass vials were then displayed within a Perspex display case. The case housed five shelves with thirty one individual circular embedded holes for the glass vials to sit securely within. The case was hung using steel brackets and steel rope.

Due to the composition of materials, the case appears light and to be floating within space, using the space very differently to the other works in the series. The strongest element within this work is the repetition of the glass vials with their black lids all lined up and
repeated again and again on each shelf. However, the collection behind the protection of the Perspex created a barrier and prevented the viewer from entering the space of the work.

To improve the work, I feel a few changes would need to be made; design of the cabinet, the labels for the vials, and the presentation. A design flaw coupled with the weight of the cabinet warped the top of the cabinet where it was suspended from. The addition of extra screws in strategic places would rectify the flaw. The label require a minor adjustment, these were commercially available and were easily designed online. This was convenient and enabled the label to pass as museum convention; however, they rarely stuck to the glass vial and continuously peeled away. Sourcing a new supply of label that adheres to glass would be more ideal. Finally, the cabinet had the clinical appearance I wanted, as if the samples were being preserved; however, the display was ultimately too sterile. The presentation was doing what I intended but the sterility of the presentation interfered with the viewer being able to engage with the work and see the connections between the collective.

The second, *dilexit aquam II*, a set of five mint plants, each a representation of a significant loved one. Each plant is watered and nutritionally supported by the Grey Water of each individual’s water collection (See Fig. 14). The five plants are potted into one litre glass chemistry beakers which are supported by a timber table. Hovering above the plants are glass separation funnels filled with the collected Grey Water. They are supported with black steel framework. Tied around the neck of the separation funnels are a paper labels with the following information; the serial number of the individual, the description of the
liquid enclosed, and the longitude and latitude of the location of the collected specimen. Amongst the plants is a copper plant tag reflecting similar information; the serial number of the individual and the scientific name of the plant, *Mentha*.

This work was the most successful of the trio and my favourite of the three. The proportions of dripper, the stands, the beakers, and the table were balanced. The continuing repletion of the three is the strongest element, however, throughout the piece the eye flows and isn’t interrupted. The tagging system for this work reflected the information provided in the first work. The information provided related to museum collecting practices and allowed a clue to the viewers as to the relation to the other works. The tagging system for the plants changed from a paper label to a commercially available copper plant label. Using the copper tag allowed me to hand write the information directly onto the tag. Changing how the information was printed from a computer print to handwritten text makes the collection more personal.

One drawback from the work was the table. The legs of the table supporting the plants and drippers were felt to be too “furniture” as opposed to the usual decorative legs used to place the work into a particular era, such as 18\(^\text{th}\) century Victorian museum vitrines or Cabinet of Curiosity. Next time, I would spend more time on the finer details of the table such as the legs; incorporating a decorative element which would enhance the work.

Elements of handwritten information, the inclusion of a living plant to represent a living individual, and each plant taking on the individual’s persona added to the display creating a more personal presentation than the first work. With this work, I intended to add personal elements to experiment with the viewer perception and translation of the collection. This work appeared to be easier to engage with and explore. The viewers spent time reading the tags and information provided, unlike the previous work.
The third work, *dilexit aquam III*, the tea ceremony box, from the outside was a simple box with leather latches and hinges with copper headed clouts (See Fig. 15). Removing the copper pipe handle and undoing the leather latches reveals an internal structure supporting drying mint leaves and a simple white tea cup. The leaves are bound together with twine and labelled with paper cuffs baring a serial number. This work was the least successful of the trio. It was the least liked and elicited quite the discussion. There were a number of issues and improvements needed with this work; the tagging system, the use of twine to hang the drying plants, the style of tea cup, the internal structure, the lack of understanding of some of the elements, missing clues to give a fuller picture, and the overall presentation. Each drawback has been considered and a number of solutions developed, however, I didn’t proceed with the changes as I delegated this work to be supporting material.

Despite this work being the most unsuccessful of the series, it still had some successful elements. The design was different from what I usually make; I pushed the boundaries of my usual aesthetics. I felt that I had become stuck within my making and wanted to expand. It may not have been successful in this particular work but has been encouraging to keep trying different materials and combinations.
The series of works presented well, though there was room for improvements. After the exhibition, review and personal observation, the failure to understand the elements displayed was brought to my attention. Viewers weren’t able to connect and construct a narrative from what was available to them. I found that many viewers didn’t appear to engage with the works long enough or closely enough to catch the more elusive clues. The audience was missing vital clues which connected each work to the other. This leads me to the conclusion I should have spent more time in the final stages of presentation prior to the exhibition. More testing is required beforehand through critiques with my colleagues and peers as well as reapproaching the work with fresh eyes. Furthermore, extending the testing phase for presentation will allow me time to address possible issues such as the debate with plinth versus a table.

Ultimately, I felt the process of making and the final product, *dilexit aquam I-III*, was satisfactory. I feel it placed me in a good position at that point in my program. The process of making was short, a 6 week timeline, but felt comfortable. I tried new designs, aesthetics, and materials. It allowed a place to experiment with different presentation ideas and concepts with the conclusion that the more personal the display, the more the audience can engage and understand the work. I had aimed to try a number of different styled displays, from the clinical to the personal. Each display was successful for its initial intentions but had its draw backs. The clinical and sterile presentation I found to be not effective in supporting the suggestion of a relationship between the individuals or presenting the specimens with the love and intention I wanted. The more personal and accessible the presentation the stronger the ties between the individuals were evident. For the remainder of the project, I will present work with more personal elements and endeavour not to remove the evidence of the maker from the work.

During the development of the work for *in vitro/in vivo*, I had also begun to teach myself to knit and crochet, making my own patterns, how to bake an exceptional apple pie, and started a new collection of Polaroid portraits. I took an image every morning and night while I took my medication for my various ailments. I collected the blister packets of every pill I consumed in preparation of making a body of work the following year.

I also conducted field work interstate at the Australian Museum and various exhibitions, in particular Tehching Hsieh’s exhibition of his one year performances at the Sydney Carriage works. Hsieh’s *One year Performance 1980-81*, was a work that had a profound effect on my research and presentation of my work (See Fig. 16).
Fig. 16. Tehching Hsieh, Exhibition view of One Year Performance 1980-81

This work was the presentation of the documentation of Hsieh’s yearlong performance of punching a time clock, on the hour every hour. The exhibition consisted of each day’s images in vertical rows accompanied with the time cards. There ran a stop motion projection above the time clock with each image one after the other in the darkened space. In the middle of the space was a vitrine with Hsieh’s performance statement, uniform, and photographic evidence of the performance.

Previously, I had not researched Hsieh, however, after viewing his exhibition I became intrigued by his work which he described as the evidence of his existence. I looked into the study of being or existence, Ontology, and admired how Hsieh referenced his performances as “life works”. This study and evidence of his existence is present in every aspect of his work, which was closely tied with mine. The evidence or trace of life I collect is the experiences I have had, therefore I must exist. And to exist with a place, to belong, I imagine would be a homecoming. Hsieh made a declaration of non-art matter (a life) as art, he actively push and pulled his existence into performances of great challenge and endurance. He then claimed his final performance and art work would be his children. Having his world start and end with his children resonated with me in such ways that I had yet to realise.

56 Heathfield and Tehching, Out of Now, 12.
The Australian Museum, Sydney, is a place of love. The bone room is exquisite. The vitrines, cabinets of curiosity, and displays of creatures past are intriguing and tear inducing. Upon my first visit, I burst into tears at the sight of the magnificent whale lowered from the ceiling. Majestic and silent (See Fig. 17).

![Fig. 17. View of Australian Museum’s Bone room from upper level](image)

Apart from the magnificent specimens, I mainly observe the displays and presentations. The vitrines, ornate and decorative embellished with metal work and intricate wood work. With this visit, the discovery room was the most inspirational. The bottled, bagged, and tagged laid out for children to touch and discover on a more tactile platform (See Fig. 18 and 19).
Fig. 18. Displayed bottles at Australian Museum’s Children discovery room

Fig. 19. Displayed bagged specimens at the Australian Museum’s Children Discovery room
I started to imagine my work being accessible and tangible for the viewers. The specimens I collect are just as interesting as the resulting work. How can I take inspiration from the vitrines and cabinets or the bottled and bagged and present that in my own work?

Over the year, a number of questions and considerations became apparent. Through the development and exhibit of one collection and the partial development of another certain questions started to present themselves. How is my work universal when it is so personal? My work at its basic level is about a family and my place within it. I believe many viewers can relate even if they aren’t a parent. On some level, it can be accessible. My collecting maybe the extreme end of the spectrum, but other collectors can relate to the power of an object and the inclusion of a possession into one’s self. The challenge will be keeping it accessible and universal on many levels, as opposed to just being a therapeutic exercise. It also stands to ask, if a viewer can translate and understand my work without my presence? Can my work stand independently? I believe as the project progresses and develops with many more facets to come; the body of research will feel like a more holistic presentation of my collective and world.

The privacy of my collective is important but also almost impossible to keep. As soon as I am identified I feel the collective’s identities are apparent as well, maybe not so much within the first year’s work, but in the research to come. The serial numbers have been questioned and suggested to be depersonalising, devaluing the individual, such as the serial numbers of holocaust victims experienced. The addition of serial numbers was a way to ensure privacy but also to mark them on my life time line. Their arrivals are of such significances that the time should be marked and recorded. Just as many people mark time for future reference, the time your children are born, the time a loved one left your life, or the time when it all fell apart. It’s mark and should be cherished.

The first year was a rollercoaster of emotion, wavering determination, and riddled with self-doubt. With the first half being wasted away, the exhibition of a finalised collection, and the beginnings of more; I felt like I hadn’t made enough ground. In vitro/in vivo was not as well received as I would have liked, not because the work wasn’t exhibition quality, but almost because I feel like I had lost my footing. The work was neither refined nor elegant. It lacked an intervention which elevated it to be art instead of anthropology. My work lacked an “experience” for the viewer.
I tried to make sense of my research and the concept behind practice-led research at the TPR presentation. I summed up my research down to two statements:

I collect and make collections of my possessions and extended self using the contaminations that occur which can elicit the reaction of disgust but through the laws of sympathetic magic can make it a positive because of how we feel about our possessions.

The aim of this research project, beyond the contaminated, is to explore the process of interpersonal contamination of my possessions and extended self.

I began to have doubts of my abilities, as a maker and researcher, to continue the processes of a practice-led doctorate. However, in the end, the realisation that my collective was the reason to push myself, to not disappoint the ones I love the most. The materials and interactions collected are priceless and a never recurring again. How do I do them justice? The value of whom they were, who they are, and who they will be was paramount to the entire process.
2015: maybe the best is yet to come

The start of the second year of my doctorate was marked with the expansion of the materials, techniques and processes within my practice. I began to further build on skills, teaching myself crocheting, knitting, and embroidery. I had an up and coming show, my first solo exhibition, at Manuka Canberra Contemporary Art Space (CCAS). The proposed exhibition, *familiar impurities*, was to explore the process of interpersonal contamination of my possessions and extended self through the assembling of collections assembled from experienced medical intervention.

I intended to use the space to exhibit a series of works which were a combination of sculpture, installation, photography, and video which reflect my relationships and experience of contamination through experienced medical intervention. I proposed to work with experimenting, experiencing, cataloguing, and analysing data from the occurrences of incidental and staged contaminations. This body of work used collected materials from a period of 100 days such as medication blister packets, self-portraits of the consumption of the medication, and my Magnetic Resonance Images (MRI) of my brain and spine (See Fig. 20, 21, and 22). These materials were used in a variety of ways and displayed as floor, hanging, and wall based works.

**Fig. 20. Collected blister packets**
Fig. 21. Collected Polaroid portraits

Fig. 22. Collected MRI scans
Though I have chosen not to disclose my medical condition, due to its ongoing and evolving nature, my practice and life, however, is affected daily by the symptomatic consequences of my condition. After my diagnosis, I withdrew from society, leaving my job at the time, retreating back to my home to deal with the medical consequences that was infecting every aspect of my life. After a period of time, being isolated and unhappy at home, I did a visual arts course to fill time. I found something that despite my condition, I was willing to put up with the negative impact because I loved making so much. It was then that I decided despite the physical, mental, and emotional costs, I was going to pursue a visual arts practice. I gained momentum and drive. German born American sculptor, Eva Hesse, had a simialr situation as myself, albeit, her experience was fast paced and fatal, she became ill and continued to persevere with her practice. As Lippard expresses in her book, *Eva Hesse*;

She completed six more major pieces and many drawings before she dies, overcoming obstacles that would have demolished most people. In a curious way, Hesse gained strenght from her predicament.\(^\text{57}\)

As an artist with an ongoing condition, there is the need to alter how you work, what materials you work with, and what outcomes you create. This may be as simple as doing a technique slightly different to achieve the same results. Hesse relied on the aid of assistances to help fabricate her work, much like myself, for certain tasks I outsource the fabrication to trusted members of my cohort.\(^\text{58}\) I do at times wish that my medical condition did not take a starring role in my practice, I find myself down playing its impact. As stated by Cooper, Hesse didn’t want to “romanticise” her suffering or “become sentimental about it”.

Hesse did not need to romanticise her suffering, nor did she “get sentimental” about it. Quite the contrary, free of self-pity and determined to resist, she was capable of treating the disease with startling, even amused frankness.\(^\text{59}\)


I am frank about my condition and dismissive of its impact. Hesse is reported to have said when she returned to work after her first surgery, that she wanted “not to know what the end is going to be”. I too, do not want to know what the end is going to be; therefore, I ceased all investigative intervention and decided that ‘ignorance was bliss’.

For familiar impurities, concept drawings were developed, ideas dismissed and the possibilities for the show narrowed downed to the following: the reproduction of consumed medication, daily Polaroid portraits, glasses of water, light boxes for MRI images, catalogued daily thoughts, and embroidered representations of my deteriorating brain.

While exploring and experimenting with materials and techniques, I developed a number of concepts which were dismissed after maquette stage. However, many inspired final pieces either through technique or extension of concept. First I made felt depictions of the anatomy of the brain (See Fig. 23).

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60 Fer, Eva Hesse: Studio work, 16.
Using a layered method and embroidered details, I created a life sized felt brain. I particularly like this exploration, but was unsure of its application. I enjoyed the techniques and processes more than the resulting project. The felt brain was too flat. I used a pattern to crochet 3D brains instead (See Fig. 24).

![Crocheted brain](image)

**Fig. 24. Crocheted brain**

The pattern made aesthetically pleasing brains but it was too small; I wanted life sized ones. I used the pattern as a template and up-scaled the pattern to create a larger brain. It took a number of attempts before I decided they would not really look like the brains I wanted. I decided to leave the idea of crochet brains and moved on to develop other works.

The use of embroidery as a technique in the previous experimentation led to using it to recreate the medication I took. I tried embroidering the pills on a variety of materials, paper, felt, and cloth (See Fig. 25 and 26). The various materials didn’t work; the embroidery floss cut through the paper too easily, the felt looked good but was stiff and unpleasant to work with, and cloth too flimsy. I attempted to experiment with the
embroidered medication on cloth, mounting them on blocks with various degrees of padding. Regardless, the embroidered medication didn’t look like pills to anyone but me. Using the felt again, I recreated the look of a Polaroid and embroidered the medication I consumed each day. The colours didn’t work nor was I comfortable with the results after cutting the felt.

Fig. 25. Embroidered pills on calico test

Fig. 26. Embroidered pills on felt test
I have a collection of x-rays and MRI images in relation to my health. During the collecting of my materials for the works for the exhibition, I had an MRI, which I have every two years to track changes in my brain. Using the MRI films, I developed a number of concepts for potential works. First a stop motion film of each image, layer by layer, projected upon my face. I made a light box and photographed each MRI image. It was difficult to line each image up, control the light source, and maintain camera position. I then tested the results of the film, first on my son’s face, to get position and size right; then on my own. It began to turn beautiful images into a horror film (See Fig. 27). A second concept was to create light boxes to show the MRI images, these were more successful and led to a final work for the exhibition.

![MRI image projected onto my face test](image)

**Fig. 27. MRI image projected onto my face test**

In attempts to include the medication I consumed in the research, I tried ways of photographing the pills in various ways. I photographed the pills using a digital camera, printing the images, and retaking the digital print with the Polaroid camera to enlarge the pills to an appropriate size (See Fig. 28). The pills aren’t visible enough and the flash reflects off the digital print. However, this investigation led to the concept to recreate all the medication I consumed using plaster.
After the initial development of several unsuccessful concepts, it made way for the
development of the final pieces which were to be exhibited. Firstly, the collection of daily
Polaroid portraits, images taken morning and night while I took my medication for my
various ailments, was the first work developed. A number of presentations were
experimented with, hung week by week with the appropriate pill packets, horizontal,
vertical, face up or face down (See Fig. 29).
This presentation felt too influenced by Hiesh’s work. The blisters packets really didn’t allude to what they were or that I was consuming the medication. Ultimately, the connection between the packets and the photos were lost. The hanging of the Polaroids in a grid was aesthetically pleasing. I tested the hang using blu-tak, pins, and sticky foam squares. The sticky squares were the most successful and remained in place for an extended period of time. The grid is a recurring function in my work and is used to bring order, as suggested by Rosalind Krauss.\(^61\)

To accompany the Polaroid images, I collected a glass for each portrait, two hundred in total. The glasses resembled the glasses I had used over the 100 day period. I tested the width and length of the plinth for them to run along the floor underneath the Polaroid images (See Fig. 30). The plinths were made with dressed pine and invisible dowel joints for a clean uninterrupted look.

The failure to recognise the embroidered representation of the medication, I decided to recreate the pills in plaster. With the assistance of Nicholas Strank, I made moulds of the various medications I take. Using a plasticine base, to avoid the moisture of clay destroying the pills, I made silicone moulds of the pills (See Fig. 31).

![Fig. 31. Medication embedded in plasticine for mould making process](image)

I counted all the blister packets which were collected and worked out how many pills I would need to recreate the 100 days of consumption, it resulted in 1,382 pills. The plaster was colour matched to the medication using gouache paint. The majority of the pills were a pastel colour which made it easier to colour match, however, I realised that they didn’t need to match perfectly as they were representations of the medication. After producing the medication, each one was scraped down and needed some shaping due to the flashing which occurred during production. In the end, I had more than I needed. I decided to arrange the pills in a grid configuration on a low lying plinth, randomly placed.

One particular work involved light boxes, lit from behind, the films would be illuminated and recordings playing. I developed a maquette of a smaller MRI light box using the images in their original size. Two boxes were made, a Perspex and a wooden one, to compare the materials. I love the MRI images and how the wood goes with the slide, however, they are too small to see the details of the image or add sound. I enlarged the photographed MRI images to a more accessible size, which allowed the light boxes to be larger with enough room for adequate lighting and sound equipment. A test print was made, using Perspex as
the base, at the ANU printing facility. I chose a printing style and finalised the size (See Fig. 32). The light boxes were made to accommodate the size of the prints, using dressed pine with invisible joints. This reflected the plinths for the glass work, creating clean lines. The Perspex print was mounted using a spacer to elevate the print for direct contact with the wood.

![MRI images printed on Perspex](image)

**Fig. 32. MRI images printed on Perspex**

During the 100 days of collecting, I catalogued a thought every day. These thoughts were then typed on a continuous roll of thermal paper on a type writer. The type writer is a favourite of mine and has a beautiful cursive font. The roll was to drape off the plinth and gathered on the floor. During the exhibition, it was to be continual added to daily.

Once works had begun to be finalised, I drew up a scaled map of the Maunka CCAS exhibition space. I was curating the pieces to suit the space as well as to create a dialogue. During this exercise, I realised I didn’t have enough work and had an entire wall left blank. I
returned to discarded concepts and developed a new work based on my enjoyment of embroidery and the reproduction of the anatomically correct brain image. I developed a series of images representing my interpretation of the different stages I experienced of my deteriorating brain.

The embroidered brains represented the different phases I experienced. I researched embroidery stitches and designed three brains which reflected the phases; an intricate and controlled brain, a chaotic brain, and no brain at all. I chose colours for each particular design; colourful strong toned colours for the intricate brain, tones of blue for the chaotic brain, and neutral washed colours for the no brain. The first two designs were done quickly, to represent an embroidery of a brain completely gone presented a difficult task, I used the outline to start the image off, however, the remaining stitches became a netting which I altered during making to have holes and joining in particular spots (See Fig. 33).

![Fig. 33. Work in progress of brain netting](image)

Finally the show was installed with the assistance of Isobel Rayson. It was installed to the plan I had arranged previously (See Fig. 34 and 35). After the opening, my panel attended the show and reviewed my progress. Overall the work was well received and I had many positive comments.
However, a number of questions were presented and issues to consider which I had personally observed as well. One question proposed which affected all the pieces, how can I re-contextualise these works in order to present them in my final examination without affecting the success of the work? I believe each work has the ability to improve through
experimentation of presentation and the finalising of some concerns. To re-exhibit the works in a new configuration with alterations would hopefully be just as successful but also do the works justice again.

The panel asked me to question each piece, does it add or detract from the body of work? If it was to be removed, how would it affect the collection overall? These questions brought to light how to configure an exhibition but also highlighted how I should approach my examinations display as well when it came to choosing what should be displayed or delegated to support material. The panel considered the body of work to be elegant and beautiful. The repetition of the grid repeated throughout the pieces was a strong element. The pieces were refined and fabrication of a high standard. There was a discussion of the analogue technology displayed; the light boxes, typewriter, and Polaroids; and its place within my work. As well as my collections and collecting practices taking over the research.

Realisations from the production of the exhibition, *familiar impurities*, highlighted the changes in my theoretical research. I had begun to look at identity and self-portraits through the lens of collecting practices and collections.

Through a collection, an identity can be forged. These collections I have been accumulating are derived from the people and things that I love which have a profound influence on who I am and one’s development of sense of self. Our most meaningful and loved possessions are considered the ones which strengthen our sense of self, help construct who we are, and ultimately hold the markers that create our identity. These markers are steeped in memory and linked to experiences; they ground us, orientating who we are within our lives. My collective are my identity markers, the collective has created a place for me to belong and feel grounded. It is a space that is safe and protected.

My doctoral research has become a narrative developed through the collective’s experiences and interactions. This narrative is believed to create a sense of self. My identity, traits, and personality include my memories, attributes, which form a story, the narrative within my research. It is believed that this story or narrative allows us to make sense of who we are and provides the ability to link our identity to the past, the present, the present.

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65 Ahuvia, “Beyond the Extended Self,” 172.
and provide inspiration for possible futures. Furthermore, my research has developed an interlinked narrative with the collective. With the kind of love we share, it is believed that it can fuse identities together, that our sense of self begins to include the ones we love. I believe that my collective, though I endeavour to present as individuals, eventually have fused together to become one.

![Fig. 36. Taken twice daily](image)

*Fig. 36. Taken twice daily*  
*Taken twice daily*, a collection of Polaroid portraits taken every morning and night when I consumed my medication (See Fig. 36). Each Polaroid is hung in pairs, morning and night, and labelled with the date and time. When I forgot to take my medication, a black Polaroid is in its place. This work was inspired by my visit to the Tehching Hiesh exhibition at the Carriage works previously mentioned in chapter one. The repetition of the photographs, I choose to present in a block, where Hiesh’s work was arranged in vertical drops. Conceptually, both Hiesh and I are marking time and an evidence of our existence. In addition, I can see connections to works by Christian Boltanski. His use of portraits, blurry and distorted, in grid formations is similar to this work. The portraits I take have a level of distortion due to my choice of camera. The Polaroid camera takes images that are washed out, muted, with a high contrast. Once again, the grid is a prominent element of the work. Krauss suggests that the grid not only creates order, but also allows us to see and focus. I find the grid orders my thoughts, emotional response, and ultimately my image as well.

French artist, Christian Boltanski, memorializes people through melancholic means by using portraiture to create his works. He is known to mix emotion, history, and

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67 Ibid., 171.  
sentimentality. Boltanski captures whole time periods within his work, blurring the boundaries between the individual and collective memory using photographs and objects. The photographic portraits he uses is a fragment, which are repeatedly photographed and enlarged to create a blurry and distorted image, much like the work displayed in the National Gallery of Australia, *Pourim réserve*. In addition, within this piece he uses a rusted metal biscuit tin to represent a presence or identity (See Fig. 37). Similar to my own work, I’ve used objects to become representations of the individuals of my collective.

![Christian Boltanski, Pourim réserve](image)

**Fig. 37. Christian Boltanski, Pourim réserve**

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71 “Arts Curriculum: Christian Boltanski Documentation and Reiteration”.
74 Solomon-Godeau, “Mourning or Melancholia,” 12.
*Drink up, it’s good for you* is a collection of glasses representing the consumption of my pills over the 100 days (See Fig. 38). There is a glass for each time, two hundred in total, partially filled with water. The low lying plinths run the length of the Polaroid images on the wall above it. Each glass is a similar design to the ones I drank from each day. Reflecting upon *Drink up, it’s good for you* presented other considerations and questions. Does the repetition of the glasses symbolize the repetition and the weight of how I feel about the consumption of the medication? Did the viewer experience this in awe or pity? Is this work an independent work or an extension of the portraits or reproduction of the medication? Many viewers were shocked by the quantity, of not just the glasses and water, but also the amount of medication in 1,382. The viewers seemed to express concern and empathy for what I was representing, many could relate, and others didn’t understand the weight of it all. I believe that this work isn’t an independent piece, I think it should always accompany 1,382 and *taken twice daily*. 

*Fig. 38. Drink up, it’s good for you*
1,382 is the result of 100 days of consumed medication (See Fig. 39). The blister packets were collected for the 100 days; each individual pill was tallied and recreated in plaster. Each pill was laid out randomly on a low lying plinth in a grid formation to highlight each individual pill. Considering the earlier considerations, re-contextualisation of 1,382’s display would be reconfigured and photographed for reconsideration, but also the simple relaying of the medication would always be different as each pill was placed randomly. A viewer of this exhibition brought to my attention the artist, Susie Freeman, and her work with family doctor Liz Lee and fellow artist, David Critchley. As the collective, Pharmacopoeia, they make artworks which illustrate medical issues.75

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One particular work, *Cradle to Grave*, is the presentation of two individuals represented with a ‘pill diary’, objects, and personal photographs (See Fig. 40). The ‘pill diary’ is a knitted fabric with individual pockets containing the estimated prescription drugs consumed by the average woman and man in a lifetime for common illnesses. There are a number of similarities in our works such as working with themes of illness and medication consumption, self-portraits through objects and photographs, and the repetition of a grid like presentation. However, *Pharmacopoeia* highlights the consumption of pharmaceuticals, the culture surrounding prescription drugs, and the medicalisation of our future. My work is more internalised and isn’t looking at consumption as an expanding culture of normalising the use of pharmaceuticals. It’s a process I begrudging do to function day to day, however, since then I have ceased any pharmaceutical intervention for my health despite the continuing issues.

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76 “Susie Freeman”.
It’s what’s on the inside that counts, is the reproduction and enlargement of my MRI images displayed on light boxes (See Fig. 41). Each image has sound accompanying it, the sound of white noise. The noise represents what I feel is occurring while I undergo the examination as well the reason why I need to have the MRI performed. Upon reflecting on the piece, it’s what’s on the inside that counts, further improvements needed to be made. The addition of sound didn’t add to the work but furthermore, the white noise started to drive me crazy while gallery sitting. In addition, altering the images further was also a consideration. In its current form, I hadn’t intervened with the piece enough and needed to add another element. This work has visual connections to Christian Boltanski, mentioned previously, the use of portraits in grid formations, but in addition, the use of light boxes and the exposure of electrical cording. Taking inspiration, I decided not to fight or hide the electrical cabling which enabled my work to be lit from behind, instead I wanted to embrace the cables and make them a part of the work.
Once a day, when I remembered, I recorded a thought archived with the date and time; these were intended to be read out for the audio for the previous work mentioned (See Fig. 42). However, I didn’t like the sound of my own voice. Therefore, I reproduce each thought on a continuous roll of paper in my favourite typewriter which I continued to add to throughout the exhibition. This work is considered to be the least successful piece it stuck out the most from the exhibition. It no longer had ties to the other works as its actual intention had been altered at the last moment. I would consider this work to be support material in the future.
*Fig. 43. Not all there I-III*

*Not all there I-III*, is a series of three embroideries visually representing the phases of the changes in my brain; embroidery I – order; embroidery II – Order and Chaos; embroidery III – Nothing being retained (See Fig. 43). Each embroidery had specific colours and stitches chosen to represent the phases. They were hung in a row with the linen cloth left with raw edges. The netting on the last phase was pinned out to show the details of the netting and to represent the disintegration of the brain. This work is the most successful, although a last minute addition, it received the most positive feedback. It was considered to be the quietest work, yet had the loudest voice.

While gallery sitting, I began to research a new artist, Annette Messager, highlighted after the completion of the final work, *Not all there I-III*. This also coincided with the commencement of the course, *Writing about Practice*. Using my new found inspiration, I began to do a comparative study of Messager and I, our studio practice, theoretical framework, our conceptual themes, and our artworks.

Have you ever come across someone that you can’t believe exists, who is a kindred spirit or confirms that you aren’t the only one or crazy? This is how I felt when I read a book about the artist, Annette Messager. All of a sudden the process which I hid from people was not as crazy as I thought. Someone else collected, recorded, and archived the mundane like I do.
My initial reaction to discovering Messager was to compare myself to her practice and work. I wanted to know what made her tick, her process of collecting, how she made her work, and why. I wanted to be placed alongside Messager, to see if what I do and what I make had the same validity which is placed on her practice and body of work. This investigation began with the exploration of her practice through the prism of my own.

Our practices are very similar. How we source our materials, the documenting and archiving process, the conceptual and theoretical standing we employ are quite similar and a reassurance for myself. Despite our similarities, what we ultimately make is very different. It reassures me my collecting and creative endeavours are an original contribution to the body of knowledge and to the field of sculpture.

Most people glaze over when I begin talking about how and where I source my materials for my work. For most, it’s unthinkable to collect grey water, hair, blister packets, or teeth. Despite the reception I receive during these discussions, for me they are the most important materials I could ever collect. I instil a value and significance to these materials while others view them as detritus; Messager has a similar process of investing value in materials and activities many view as worthless.78

What I use and collect from my collective is what I consider interpersonal contaminations; contaminates which pollute our personal spaces. Unlike Messager, her materials are sourced from magazines, newspaper clippings, photographs, and instructional manuals which have worked their way into her life. All reflections of the outside world, however, all sorted, classified, and arranged using personal systems within the confines of her domesticated space; “As she said herself – she finds all her materials close at home”.79 This domestic space was her avenue to become the personas needed to pursue her practice; Annette Messager Collector, Annette Messager Artist, Annette Messager Trickster, and Annette Messager Practical Woman. These personas allowed her to perform using her space akin to a “theatre”, acting out not stories of her life but fabricated identities to support her personas.80

This style of journaling, diary entry, or scrapbooking that Messager engages is ultimately a style of documentation. While this documentation may have elements of fabrication, my documenting verges on a style of inventory; collecting statistical and empirical data. I

gather as much information possible to create a holistic portrait of the identities I’m trying
to capture regardless if it is insignificant or not. I do similar practices as Messager, “...I sort,
gather, organise, sift through, and condense everything into numerous collection Albums”; however, my collecting results take a different form.\textsuperscript{81} I have numerous visual diaries, my “thinking” books, various notebooks, digital archives, and boxed materials labelled and classified into their appropriate phylum.

This extensive process provides me with relief and comfort, knowing that the procedures I have in place will ensure the capture of information. This grab for information is driven by the fear of forgetting the ones I collect. Messager believes that we create collections to protect ourselves, that this form of protection is renewed with every classification and accumulation.\textsuperscript{82} My collections are a form of protection, protection from my degenerative memory.

Annette Messager Practical Woman, documents all that she classifies as important with a personal classification system.\textsuperscript{83} Messager’s system is an “image” system developed as a form of language, I believe I have no personal language and do not add personal thoughts to my materials.\textsuperscript{84} Instead, my personal attachment is expressed through the diligence in which I collect, archive, and store my materials and ultimately in the craftsmanship, attention, and effort I place in the final work.

The objects that we make are “souvenirs” which hold memories.\textsuperscript{85} These objects, infused with the emotion and energy of the owner, are also known as melancholy objects. The process of transference, coined by Sigmund Freud, is Cathexis, previously mentioned in chapter one.\textsuperscript{86} Many of these objects, by anyone other than the owner, are consider insignificant and of little value. Both Messager and I invest value in these discarded and insignificant objects and increase its value through the creation of the work.\textsuperscript{87}

Through our collecting, we ultimately are creating identities, albeit fabricated or authentic, they are the identities of an idealised self. Messager has numerous fictitious identities I feel she is trying to strengthen through her practice.\textsuperscript{88} These fabricated personas appear as

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{81} Marie-Laure Bernadac, \textit{Annette Messager: Word for Word} (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2006), 9.
\item \textsuperscript{82} Bernadac, \textit{Annette Messager: Word for Word}, 385.
\item \textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 14.
\item \textsuperscript{84} Grenier, \textit{Annette Messager}, 80.
\item \textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 43.
\item \textsuperscript{86} Belk, “Possession”, 157.
\item \textsuperscript{87} Grenier, \textit{Annette Messager}, 49.
\item \textsuperscript{88} Bernadac, \textit{Annette Messager: Word for Word}, 385.
\end{itemize}
existing facets, or as a façade to enable Messager to reconcile her identity. The identities expressed through my practices are potentially an idealised self, but yet I feel it lies quite close to who I am and who I collect, but much like Messager, I “wear” different personas during my practice. I have remained separated from my final exhibited work and my practice through the use of my legal and nick name. The use of my legal name, many who would never associate it with me, is a layer of protection from the public. With my current collecting, I am beginning to think I am trying to consolidate my practice with the work I am producing, especially with the collecting involving very intimate relationships. However, in order to protect my collective they are assigned a serial number, but it isn’t fabricated. The moment each individual member joined my timeline is highlighted, the moment we began to exist together. As pointed out by Grenier;

Like the moment when one meets a person for the first time, the point at which one encounters ought to be exceptional...89

Grenier is describing an encounter with a work of art, but it explains how I felt when I first encounter each of my collective.

Though many would believe that what I collect is not very interesting to look at, or maybe that’s my assumptions, but the majority of what I collect is discarded or not even considered as a viable material. Like Messager, we both collect the detritus of our domestic spaces. The direct location of my domestic space isn’t the important aspect of my collecting or produced work; the collective is. Where the collective goes, my practice would go.

The collecting, classifying, and archiving of my collective is also viewed as a way of proving our existence or being as a whole. As my memory degrades, this has become a way to cope with the changes. My practice has allowed me to gather information to create holistic portraits of my collective while I reconcile what is happening to me through what I make. Ultimately this process can be seen as an ethnographic study of my collective.

Through this ethnographic study, the objects I am creating are considered my possessions. If I am ultimately recreating the identities of my collective, then the collective in turn become my possessions and an extension of myself. As mentioned previously, your possessions extend beyond things we own, our possessions are made up of our thoughts,

89 Grenier, Annette Messager, 106.
conscience, body, and extended self which includes friends, family, people, places, and things. Therefore, “we are the sum of our possessions”.  

It is suggested Messenger’s identity is made up of smaller pieces and “fashioned” together similar as we do to our own. The Albums she puts together are the facets of her identity, especially as objects are associated with the reconstruction of identities. I don’t “fashion” my identity, I allow it to be formed alongside my collective. Being a part of the collective allows me to be a part of the set, becoming part of the system within collecting, classifying, and archiving. This process provides me with a sense of belonging, sense of self, and reinforces my relationship with the collective, as many collectors experience through the same practice.

Though both Messager and I have similar processes, the resulting outcomes are very different. My collecting and documenting style is akin to Messager’s final works. However, I elaborate one step further and create works that are derived from the information or is an inspiration for work without directly using the materials.

My next body of work, *Collective Dining*, was developed for a group exhibition, *Small Rituals*, with Sculpture alumni Isobel Rayson and Dierdre Pearce (See Fig. 44 and 45). *Small Rituals* represents our common interest in exploring, mapping and embodied engagement with the ephemeral connections between ourselves, others and the spaces and objects we share. We used a combination of performance and a variety of documentary practices including photography, drawing and physical objects which were exhibited both as evidence of private performance and as agents for an embodied experience for the viewer. The exhibition was another opportunity to have my progress and work reviewed by my doctorate panel. The work was received quite well and I received positive feedback. A number of considerations were raised, however, they were minor and after reflecting on the work, they made sense and have been implemented.

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90 Belk, “Possession”, 139.  
91 Ibid., 139.  
95 Nemeth, “Contemporary Collecting: Examining Passionate Pursuits”, 44.
Fig. 44. *Small Rituals* Exhibition View

Fig. 45. *Small Rituals* Exhibition View
Collective Dining involved the contamination of food in my collective’s personal space through the ritual of the family dinner (See Fig. 46). Each night for a two week period, the time of predesignated menu, we sat down and ate our dinner together while I collected information about each member and how we are as a whole. The information collected included pH levels of our mouths before and after consumption via liquid indicator and indicator strips, photographs of our meals before and after consumption with a digital camera and Polaroid camera, documenting what each person consumed, how long it took to consume, and the conversation we had over the meal. This information was documented into notebooks and the digital information archived. From the results of the contamination through the consumption of our shared meal, I created a body of work which includes practices such as knitting, embroidery, a performance, and book making techniques.

Fig. 46. Dinner Documentation

Considering the process and documentation of the collecting is just as important as the final body of work I am very particular about how thorough the information is and how it is presented. For this collection, I chose a matching set of notebooks. They were organised into days and formatted to accommodate the information I needed (See Fig. 46). The
photography taken during the collecting period makes a family album which is accompanied with captions sourced from the conversations recorded while consuming the meals. For aesthetic value, I used the Polaroid images as well as digital photography. As previously mentioned I prefer using Polaroid photography as they are muted, with a high contrast. The images and captions combined, recreated each collective member’s personality within the album.

After the work was reviewed, it was suggested that the documentation display should be experimented with to improve access and suggest to the viewer the importance of the documentation. I had previously experimented with different presentations, but had settled on not intervening with the notebooks too much. Viewer’s enjoyed reading the details of our meals and engaged with the work. For future presentations, I would like to maintain the access the viewers have with the documentation, however, house the notebooks within a solander box. The boxes would protect the notebooks and imply the importance of the documentation, much like the solander boxes for the work Dinner Specimens, details to follow.

As previously mentioned, the work had been inspired by Annette Messager’s work, in particular, Album Collections (1972-73), consists of 56 albums containing magazine and newspaper clippings, drawings, instructional manuals, photographs, and constructed samples (See Fig. 47 and 48).

Fig. 47. The Boarders, Annette Messager
Each album is a designated subject such as My Knitting Manual, The Men I Love, My Cookbook, Terms Used for Women, My Needle Work, and Collection of My Best Signatures. Each of the collected Albums has been assembled by the persona Annette Messager Collector. The albums are a series of handmade books documenting representations of the various activities Messager engages. The albums are not just considered to be the scrapbooks, but the albums are considered a deconstructed portrait; the facets of Messager’s personas. Messager herself equates the Albums as stories seen by others.

97 Melanie Vasa, “Gender and the Written Word in Recent Art: Language Versus Politics” (paper presented at the Humanities and Sciences Department of the School of Visual Arts Twenty-second Annual National Conference on Liberal Arts and the Education of Artist: Design, the Arts, and the Political, School of Visual Arts, New York City, New York, October 15-17, 2008), 97.
The collecting of the spit samples to test with liquid indicator, before and after the consumption of our meal, led to the work *Dinner Specimens* (See Fig. 49). I made solander boxes lined with high density foam to cradle each specimen. There is a box for each individual. A stand was made to hold the lids open to be able to view the samples, highlighting each individual’s beautiful colour collections.

At review, it was said, that this work required an additional element, a graphic quality added to the solander boxes, such as text or additional information on the inside of the lid. The repetition and the arrangement of the specimens created strength within the work. In addition, my personal observations of the piece, I was concerned serial numbers weren’t implying there were individuals in the collection, the specimens weren’t admired for their beautiful colours, and the stands need modifying. To address these concerns I think the addition of a colour chart within the lid of the solander boxes using watercolours to reproduce the colours created. Separating the direct specimen’s material, saliva, and recreating it using the ethereal aesthetic of watercolours might allow the viewers to appreciate the colour range without feeling the ‘ew’ factor of the saliva and food particles. The serial numbers will also be highlighted in the reproduction of the colours.
With the pH level produced through the use of liquid indicator, I matched the before and after colours to embroidery thread and yarn (See Fig. 50). The embroidery thread is used to recreate a 4” x 6” portrait on linen cloth, using the Bokhara couching embroidery stitch, a patchwork of colours representing each meal. The linen is stretched in an embroidery hoop. The five portraits are then to be hung on the wall similar to decorative plates. The hoops were also arranged in genealogy, parents at the top, each child place below in a straight line, however, not in order of the birth of each child. The smallest child is placed in the middle for the older two to flank and protect.

It was brought to my attention, that I should intervene more with this work, adding more of a personal touch to the embroidery hoops. After considering this feedback, I intend to cast the screw mechanism with the addition of altering the screw. I will be adding a tooth on the end of each screw, one from each individual the embroidered portrait represents. My personal observations have brought forward the concerns that the images don’t imply portraits. Could the addition of the individual’s serial numbers enhance the viewer’s ability to make the connections between the works as well as between the individuals?
Using the after pH levels and the time it took to consume our dinner, I made a scarf for the collective to wear in a performance which was photographed (See Fig. 51). The scarf was made from patches of colour representing the pH levels after dinner and each patch is as long as it took to consume dinner, two centimetres equalling one minute. These were arranged in one continuous scarf which wrapped around each of us in the configuration we sat at the dining table. Documentation of the collective wearing the scarf after consuming dinner in a performance was displayed alongside the scarf. The scarf was hung from the ceiling using steel wire and blocks of dressed pine. The blocks were made to the width of each individual’s shoulder span. The blocks were then hung at the height of individual’s shoulders as they stand in the order that we sit at the dinner table together.
Post consumption was considered the most flawed of all the works, issues such as the hanging of the work, the viewer’s experience, and how to indicate each individual was brought to my attention upon the panels review (See Fig. 52). The scarf was believed to be too frontal and didn’t allow the view to engage with it in the round. The viewer’s experience of the work needed further consideration and to develop a way to entice the viewer to walk around the work. There was the suggestion of additional information added to the scarf, such as text indicators or tags to display details, would engage the viewer further and allude to what they were viewing. However, I feel the addition of tags or text would disrupt the flow of the piece. Perhaps the changes to the presentation of the scarf will eliminate the need for additional information.

Post consumption documentation is my favourite piece in this body of work and is considered my favourite family portrait (See Fig. 51). It captured each personality and the true likeness of each individual of the collective. This image has brought forward concerns of the collective’s privacy and has highlighted my potential need to alter my ethic clearance. In particular, if I’d like to use their images in future works. This image inadvertently drew a likeness to Da Vinci’s Last super, which as detailed in the chapter to follow is a premonition of the collective’s future.
Through my work I’m investigating the portrayal of an identity using the information collected during the contamination of the collective’s personal spaces without using an actual image of the person. While maintaining the identity of the collective, I also highlight the each member as an individual. As written by Grenier about Messager’s work;

Conveying a message, laying out a route that connects separate entities, spotlighting the value of individual objects while relating them to others, and developing from these interconnections a body of knowledge and enjoyment – these are all guidelines typical of museum environments, which she now co-opts for her own ends when setting up a show.  

Within Messager’s displays, she continues to highlight individual objects while simultaneously connecting them through relationships conveyed. I endeavour to do the same. Everything I produce is personal and heavily laden with emotion. They are insights into the collective and are my own personal stories. In the recreation of the identities and personalities of the collective, I’m able to maintain a grasp of what they were like and who we were together.

Previously, my work had minimal text which was not handwritten but stamped into copper plates or cuffs. Over time, I included handwritten text into my work but it was providing collecting information and labelling the works with serial numbers I used for the members of the collective. In the Collective Dining, I have decided to use handwritten captions to add a personal intervention to the materials and work. With the addition of handwritten text, it feels less sterile and brings back to its origins of being a domesticated and private collection.

The inclusion of handwritten text within our work also bears the mark of the artist. My previous work had a limited presence of the artist and was polished to a high degree to remove it. As I make more personal work, the intervention and residual mark from the maker has become more important. I no longer feel the urge to erase myself from the making of the work, which in turn may also be the reconciliation between my two personas, Welly “the maker” and Llewellyn “the artist”.

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98 Grenier, Annette Messager, 126.
While writing about Messager’s work, Grenier suggests that the use of text and language as a mechanism gives her work an air of authenticity.

The handwritten character gives the *Albums* the stamp of authenticity, demonstrating their private nature in a way that is impossible with an isolated element.\(^9\)

Messager’s work includes not only a text based language but an image language as well. Her use of language enables her to communicate meaning and tie the assembled collection together.\(^1\) Both of us use text to organise and arrange our objects, in particular, the text I use to orientate the objects in an order which is consistently used throughout my work.

In the orientation of my work, I am ultimately re-contextualising the objects, a common practice which occurs within collections, in particular museum collections. Museum collections and displays re-contextualise the historical, social, and cultural significance of an object when presented within a new environment or as a part of an idealised hypothetical whole.\(^2\) I de-contextualise materials and re-contextualise them through a newly made object. Messager appropriates her materials from sources which originate from outside her domestic space which have made their way into her life. The material loses its original meaning and giving a new idealised meaning.

It has become apparent that I have two identities within my practice, Welly “the maker” and Llewellyn “the artist”. Through the process of examining Messager’s use of personas I realised that my dual identity was a layer of protection from the public, as my work becomes more personal, I realise that these two identities will ultimately merge.

There were a number of, quite obvious but surprising, realisations following the exhibition, *Small Rituals*. In addition to the other discoveries about my practice led research, I was also researching and discovering family, my family, and my role as a mother. Furthermore, this role as a mother was expressed through feminine craft with materials derived from the domestic space I called home.

The concept of family is a powerful idea and very personal construct. My belief and idealisation of what family means is playing out within the creation of my work. The simple definition of family is two parents and children living as a unit, though this is changing,

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\(^9\) Grenier, *Annette Messager*, 68.
\(^1\) Ibid., 68.
what I believe to be my family fits the definition. The concept of family, described by Susan Pearce, is linked to three ideas.

In persistent sentiment, backed up in reality by the very large percentage of the population who are experiencing or have experienced it, the notion of ‘family’ has three main fou: the interrelated group of blood and sexual kin centring upon the core relationship of mother-father; the home as a spatial dimension of family life; and accumulative shared experience, reaching backwards and forwards beyond a single life, which makes the dimension of family time.\(^{102}\)

Therefore, what defines us as a family is the core relationship of the mother and father, the domestic space, and our shared experience. The domestic space, our home, is an extension of the collective, in a way a member of the family itself. Pearce considers the word ‘Home’ as one of the most emotionally charged words of the English language.\(^{103}\) For me, my home, my domestic space, hold an infinite amount of potential to me. It is the space we have invested with our energy. According to Pearce, the home has the ability to be an entity of its own which I believe we fuel as a family residing in the space.

The home itself is a psychic entity, invested with a new life of its own through the feelings, energies and objects with which it has been endowed, and which then work their own powerful influence upon subsequent emotions and accumulations.\(^{104}\)

Our home is a result of how our collective functions and the accumulation of our collective’s emotions and relationships. The home binds us together but also allows the space for each individual to exist.

It is believed as a female collector within the home; my materials contribute to my identity but also are collected and displayed to create an attractive home.\(^{105}\) I do agree that the collected contribute to my identity, as mentioned previously, and that the collecting is creating a place for me to belong in a domestic setting, however, I don’t think it relates to the making of an attractive family home, at least not in conventional terms. As the woman

\(^{102}\) Pearce, Collecting in Contemporary Practice, 123.
\(^{103}\) Ibid., 101.
\(^{104}\) Ibid., 103.
\(^{105}\) Ibid., 150.
of the family, I am the custodian of the family history according to Women and Craft. Through the use of materials derived from the collective, I am writing my family’s history/living experiences.

There has been a resurgence of feminine based craft such as knitting, embroidery, crochet, and sewing. It has been interlinked with feminist culture and is a part of the reoccurring rise of feminist issues.

The “second wave” of feminism and feminist art began in the 1970’s. Women artists began the public investigation of the women’s experience through their art practices and artistic outcomes. They began to recognise and express the different experiences endured by women in comparison to men. This included the exploration of vaginal imagery, menstrual blood, women posed as goddess figures, autobiographical experiences and domestic life as well as the reclaiming “lower” art techniques such as sewing, embroidery, and ceramics. Writer and theorist, Lucy Lippard, says it best;

If one says, - and one can – that around 1970 women artists introduced an element of real emotion and autobiographical content to performance, body art, video, and artists’ books; or that they have brought over into high art the use of “low” traditional art forms such as embroidery, sewing, and china painting; or that they have changed the face of central imagery and pattern painting, of layering, fragmentation, and collage – someone will inevitably and perhaps justifiably holler names of various male artists. But these are simply surface phenomena. Feminism’s major contribution has been too complex, subversive, and fundamentally political to lend itself to such internecine, hand to hand stylistic combat.

Feminism and feminist art paved the way for women, of the time and future generations, to have the ability to include themselves and their experience in their art practices and art forms as well as define themselves as either feminine or feminist artists. The clarifications

109 Ibid., 163.
of terms, feminine and feminist, as stated by Barrett, are not interchangeable and describe
two different qualities and commitment. Barrett goes on to define feminine as;

Feminine is a term assigned to women, connotes the socially
determined qualities of women, such as delicacy and
gentleness (these qualities are often assumed to be innate and
to transcend historical eras) or inherent qualities such as
generally smaller physiques than those of men.

This assignment and expectation that women are naturally delicate, gentle, and smaller
than men has been a personal underlying inhibitor of accepting those traits of my practice
and of myself. My personal belief was that if one was to be inherently feminine, it was to
be weak and not capable of traditional male orientated activities. In contrast to the term
feminine, Barrett suggests feminism to be a political movement to which one commits to
bringing forth change;

Feminism should be understood as a political commitment to
bring about change in a specific historical moment and to meet
special needs that the lives of women dictate.

As a political movement combined with art, Lippard believed that “feminism is to change
the character of art.” Furthermore, that feminism and art was already a “hybrid” out of
necessity. This hybrid of feminism and art, according to Broude and Garrard in The
Power of Feminist Art, was the goal of feminism.

The goal of feminism, said early spokeswomen, was to change
the nature of art itself, to transform culture in sweeping and
permanent ways by introducing it the heretofore suppressed
perspective of women.

Through this hybrid, I acknowledge the part feminism plays in my life, my practice, and
research. However, Broude and Garrard, suggests that “not all art by women is feminist,

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111 Barrett, Why is That Art?, 165.
112 Ibid., 165.
113 Ibid., 165.
115 Ibid., 362.
not even all art made by women who are feminist is feminist art”. However, despite how I feel in my confusion; I am a feminist, I am an artist, and my work is feminist art.

I can be classified a feminist artist as I include an autobiographical narrative, ritual, and craft-as-art within my research and visual arts practice. In Lippard’s *From the Center*, she states that from the beginning of the second wave, many women were confused, which led them to be unsure of themselves and vulnerable. However, they were far more willing “to open themselves and their work to personal and associative readings on part of the viewer”. Ultimately, they were willing to participate in the sharing of practice, art forms, and personal experience.

As already expressed, in my confusion, I find myself vulnerable, but yet I am more willing to open up and expose my personal story within my art work. I once avoided subjects, materials, and techniques that I classified to be feminine and their inclusion in my research and practice would result in my outcomes to be dismissed, discredited, and undervalued. It’s sad to say, that even in the last four years, I have had that exact experience and my avoidance of such, which actually makes up my practice, was relatable. Lippard writes;

> Another version of the same taboo was made unmistakingly clear at art schools. “Female techniques” like sewing, weaving, knitting, ceramics, even the use of pastel colours (pink!) and delicate lines – all natural elements of art making – were avoided by women.

However, I feel vindicated with the realisation that my experience and practice can be framed and supported by feminist theories; validated and credited.

Due to previous experience, I didn’t place much value on feminine craft and at times was embarrassed to say that I took part in it regularly. That it perpetuated the image of the “Betty Crocker” mum, the fictional all-American homemaker of the 1950’s. Despite the skills, creativity, and artistic ability required to produced feminine orientated craft I still devalued its place and worth. However, over time, I realised the craft I do is a work of art.

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119 Ibid., 5.
120 Ibid., 57.
It is a valued skill and has enabled me to create many of my works in my research so far. My research has become an interesting mix of working from domestic space and producing work using feminine craft, therefore, an extension of a role I have never been comfortable with.

According to *Women and Craft*, for these activities the most productive times concur with emotional troubles or physical incapacity. I find my making flows better during distressing times which are either emotional or physically taxing. I am more productive under duress. This research began after an emotional and physical “disturbance”, which was triggered by the deterioration of my memory and the potential loss of my loved ones.

Feminine craft has been considered women’s work, in particular textiles, they are an extension of femininity and therefore considered house work. This has an air of outdated thought; however, I don’t see the use of these craft practices as an extension of housework, I’m beginning to see it as an extension of my roles as a woman and as a mother. It has also been considered that in the “new wave” of crafting, we are expressing ourselves and connecting with foremothers and even nostalgically connecting with a previous way of life. However, I feel like I’m missing that connection to the female/motherly experience as I have no memory or connection to craft through my foremothers.

I ultimately had become the mother that I had avoided and fought. I had always cringed at the stereotyped mother wearing the apron and cooking from her Betty Crocker cook book. Unbeknown to me, I had over the previous three years documented my development into the domesticated mother I dreaded. I had documented the baking sessions, the craft making, beanie and slipper making, and each interaction with my collective, which is my family. I was the mother that should have been wearing the frilly apron; however, I was the mother that wore steel capped boots. I wasn’t just Welly “the maker” and Llewellyn “the artist”, I am also Welly “the mother”.

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123 Ibid., 33.
2016: it all ended

20th December 2015, it all ended, the collective died. The collection finished and my heart and soul went with it.

In the event of a loss, it is believed parts of your extended self experiences a death. Though the loss I experienced isn’t connected to my personal mortality, I felt my world disintegrate and fall between my fingers. The loss of a possession that defines who you are results in emotional turmoil. The loss of an identity marker is a symbolic death of the self. Not only did I lose my collective, I also lost myself. According to Ferraro et al., the more symbolic the possession the greater the emotional loss and emotional turmoil experienced. My collective was the most important part of my life and the reaction I felt equated to the importance. The whole experience has been traumatic and has changed who I am. According to Burris and Rempel, identity markers are a part of your extended self and when they are lost or destroyed that the part of the self is consequently lost or destroyed as well. A large part of how devastating the loss has been is that it was unintentional and caught me by surprise. Burris and Rempel state that the loss of valued identity markers unintentionally can be emotionally devastating.

Not only have I lost my collective, I lost my home. How will the loss of my home impact my identity, if not only my collective shapes who I am but also my place? How will it affect the dynamic of the collective and my ability to collect the materials for my collections? The loss of my home is the loss of another identity marker. It’s the space that grounded me and gives me place. It is more than a shelter, it protects the collective. All the memories made within its walls have been lost.

According to Belk, other than the grief experienced, an attempt of self-restoration can occur, in particular a creative response. It is an attempt to restore the self to being whole again.

In body and object loss, creation of art, craft, concept, or writing is seen as an attempt to extended the self in new ways that make up for the loss and restore the self to wholeness.

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125 Burris and Rempel, “It’s the end of the World as we know it”, 23.
127 Ibid., 170.
128 Burris and Rempel, “It’s the end of the World as we know it”, 23.
129 Ibid., 23.
130 Belk, “Possession”, 143.
The remainder of my research and body of work to follow will be an attempt of self-restoration. The loss and grieving process I am experiencing as the family dynamic changes is leading to the creative responses in my work. As I make new work, my emotions, love, and care for the collective is invested in the work, an investment of “psychic energy” into the work, acting as a way to process my grief.\textsuperscript{132}

Despite the ability to theorise my grief and loss, I still can’t make sense of what I am doing or what I am to do next. I’ve lost my identity markers. I’ve lost my place. I’ve lost my collective. The devastation I feel is so overwhelming, it’s actually hard to comprehend it. There are no words, no syllables I can form to describe the emptiness, the desolation, and hopelessness I feel. There is nothing but a deafening silence where the love I felt, which burned, once resided in my chest. To redefine myself amongst the ruins only presents a path of unhappiness and despair.

\textsuperscript{131} Belk, “Possession”, 143.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 144.
2017: pick yourself up and dust yourself off

Following the devastation I experienced, I became ill and was unable to work in the studio for a year. In that time, I read, renovated my home, sold it, and moved out into a new house.

In the final stretch of my practice led research, I’m looking to complete one more piece and altering art works previously mentioned. The final piece is made from a collection accumulated prior to the breakdown of the collective. This work has taken on the role of finishing my research, completing the collection, and giving the project and myself closure.

The final piece, They were sunshine, is intended to be a knitted blanket of wool twinned with the inclusion of hair. For three years, the hair left over from the haircuts of the collective was collected, bagged and tagged, and archived for future use (See Fig. 53).

Fig. 53. Collection of hair specimens
The concept to use the hair has evolved to be a documented performance piece, *We were sunshine Documentation*, with the evidence to be presented. As a collective, we would share blankets while we watched television together. These couch blankets and the time we spent together were some of my happier moments. The couch blanket I am to create will include the hair from their haircuts, the collective will be recorded interacting with the blanket and then leaving one by one until it is just an empty couch with the blanket remaining.

This blanket will represent the loss and the now absence of the collective. According to Edward and Mart, hair is one of the lasting remnants of the body; it is a cherished memento and therefore a memorial. Within the hair blanket, there is a tension between the loss and absence of a person versus the tangible evidence of their existence mixed with the palpable representation through the presence of the living specimen. There is a history of using hair as a melancholy object, infused with an emotion, and memorialising individuals. In the past, locks of hair were taken and preserved, at times, they took two locks from different individuals entwining them together symbolising friendship and love. In addition, Edward and Mart state, that hair could signify love or death and simultaneously refer to past and present. Through the creation of the blanket, the conjoining of the samples create an unbroken bond representing the past of the collective and the immortal bond we have despite the change of the familial dynamic. Through the act of the performance, interacting and touching the blanket, I hope to enforce the bond. It is believed that interacting with pieces, such as this, you solidify the bond through the act of touch. There is an importance in having direct contact with the object.

French born American artist, Louise Bourgeois, is a sculptor, installation artist, painter, and printmaker. Best known for her spider like sculptures, Bourgeois was a major figure of postmodernism and a pioneer of feminism. Much like my own practice, Bourgeois used techniques such as sewing and weaving within her work as well as themes of family, motherhood, domestic life, and trauma. Much of her techniques were a direct reflection of the actions she was trying to portray. Through her sewing and weaving it was, for

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134 Ibid., “Ere the Substance Fade” 38.
135 Ibid., 38.
136 Ibid., 38.
Bourgeois, “an attempt to keep things together and make things whole” as she had a fear of being abandoned, separated from her family and the fear fragmented her.\(^{138}\) This is reflected in *We were sunshine*.

The fore mentioned spider sculptures of the 1990’s, were made in memory of Bourgeois’ mother, a weaver herself, like the spider. In this body of work, Bourgeois is stated to have returned to past memories;

> In this body of work, the artist has returned to her past. The clothes have memories attached to them, marking relationships, places, and time. The fabric works constitute another form of dairy. The psychological need to sew and bind is Bourgeois’ attempt to deal with the fear of separation and abandonment.\(^{139}\)

Instead of clothing, I’ve chosen to use the hair of the collective to mark our relationship, our place, and our time. Bourgeois’ use of soft materials repeats throughout her work, not just clothing but blankets, towels, and sheets which are all personal possessions.\(^{140}\) The materials are considered to be “evocative of the body and akin to early transitional objects”, in comparison to *We were sunshine*, the blanket represents the collective as a whole, with a bodily representation in the hair samples. The actions forming the blanket are reflected in the techniques Bourgeois uses, “joining, binding, and stitching”; actions that have bodily and visceral response.\(^{141}\)

In retelling the story, the final story of the collective, I hope to evoke feelings of closure and reconcile the old with the new. Bourgeois claims, “… that art is her form of psychoanalysis, for psychoanalysis likewise aims to heal and to bring the unconsciousness through telling the story of one’s life”.\(^{142}\) She believed in the story telling there was an act of healing. However, in the story telling Bourgeois believed she would “rid herself of the past”.\(^{143}\) Recreating the events of the past enable it to become tangible;

> She claimed her works were reconstructions of past events, and that the past had become tangible in them – while also working to

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139 Ibid., 203.
140 Ibid., 204.
141 Ibid., 204.
142 Ibid., 204.
defeat the past: “My sculpture allows me to re-experience the
dread, to give it a physicality so I am able to hack away at it.”

This frequent engagement with the past references nostalgia, the longing and yearning for
what once was. There is a combination of making the collective tangible once more,
within *We were sunshine*, and the ability to relive it repeatedly through engaging with the
blanket which over time will enable me to, as Bourgeois says, hack away at it.

With the hair samples collected from the hair cut of the collective, I originally used a
process of twinning to combine the specimens and roving wool to create yarn (See Fig. 54).
The process of twinning enabled me to use the different length samples of hair as well as
produce a workable yarn of an acceptable thickness. The blanket was created using the
stockinet stitch to minimise the use of the yarn and reduce the need for additional length.

*Fig. 54. Twinning of hair specimens and roving wool*

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145 Lippard, *From the Center: Feminist Essay’s on Women’s Art*, 239.
However, over time, this process became soul destroying, tedious, and produced a blanket that was overwhelmingly heavy, busy, and unappealing (See Fig. 55). The making of the yarn became a performance in itself.

Fig. 55. Knitted hair yarn

I started to brainstorm a way to create a blanket that appeared knitted but didn’t involve a process of twinning. I purchased a small lap sized loom to try a new method I found online, weaving roving wool using the technique, soumak. It produces an appearance with
resembles the stockinet knitting stitch. Combining the roving wool with an expendable specimen, usually my own, I made a test piece. It produced the aesthetic I was after; clean, simple, and light weight (See Fig. 56).

Fig. 56. Learning the weaving technique, soumak, on lap loom

To upscale my loom, from a lap one, I used the dimensions of the intended final piece and added room to move, creating it from dressed pine. The specimens were arranged in chronological order, working with the oldest samples first to the most recent specimens. As you examine the blanket, the changes in hair samples, colour, thickness, and length is apparent. During the weaving phase of the work, I wore identical clothing during the making. Once the clothing became unwearable, due to the hair shedding, the clothing becoming itchy, and becoming uncomfortable, the outfit was bagged, tagged, and preserved for documentation purposes. The preciousness of the materials prevented me from washing the clothing. I keep the clothing and weaving paraphernalia as documentation.

The performance of the collective interacting with the blanket, arriving one by one to join me and then leaving as they came, was recorded photographically to create a stop motion video. I believe using stop motion to create the documentation highlights and reinforces how I feel during the performance and the concept of the hair blanket as a whole. In
In addition, choosing an older styled form of video adds an air of nostalgia and touches on the feelings of loss and yearning for the past.

The number of consecutive shots allowed the capturing of our expressions when greeting each other and how each individual of the collective felt while interacting with the blanket, which at times did produce a reaction of disgust. As previously mentioned, humans have evolved to have the response of disgust to protect us from contamination. How we manifest disgust is through the ‘ew’ factor. It’s the screwing up of our noses and the turning away. Our mechanism of disgust acts as the guardians of the body; it is seen as the original defence against infection.¹⁴⁶ Disgust, in response to a contamination, is generally a negative emotion; however, I believe the collective overcame that emotion because of the love we share.

As the collective individuals leave one by one, the stop motion captures their body language and expressions, but more importantly my own (See Fig. 57). As each member leaves, it symbolises the disintegration of the collective and the distress, pain, and utter despair I felt about the breakdown of the collective. As I lose each member, it’s evident in my body language and facial expressions. I wished to become smaller and the tears begin to roll down my face. As I am left after the last member leaves, I sit in the pain and despair I feel, and then I too finally leave the blanket by itself on the couch we once owned and occupied.

Fig. 57. *We were sunshine*

Bag that up to go

The four years of research has come to end. The collective has changed dynamic, losing a member, but gaining new ones. The re-establishing of my place, sense of self, and a new form of identity is already underway. The despair and emotional turmoil I experienced has begun to fade and is almost something I can reflect on again without the suffering, just like in Calle’s *Exquisite Pain*. The amount of times I have had to recollect the experience of this doctoral research has enabled me to move forward and onto the new evolution of my practice. However, it is time to reflect one more time on the results, the surprises, and heart ache to tie up those lose ends.

Within my practice-led research there were a number of discoveries; from establishing what my actual research was, the potential for my work, skill building and experimentation, establishing and validating my life roles and sense of place, and a unique contribution to the body of knowledge.

From when I began my research to the conclusion of it, what I thought I was researching and what I actually was became apparent. I had started with the aim of research positive contamination of my possessions and extended self using Belk’s research of the six modes of contamination as a guide for the accumulations of my collections. The collections were to be sourced from my collective and used as the basis for a series of works to demonstrate the relationships between the collective and the metaphorical fusion of our identities. Though some of that remained but in a more diluted form, my research changed direction after the conclusion of each body of work. Each time, new themes, methodologies, concepts, and aesthetics were highlighted.

My practice-led research became a narrative developed through the collective’s experiences and interactions. This narrative gave me a sense of self, place, and belonging. The love we shared, fused our identities together, that our sense of self included the ones we loved. Through my collecting I had created an identity for the collective, through our objects, personal specimens, and data. It was of course biased and my personal perception of who I thought we were, however, I was able to enhance my connection and our identities through the possession of my collective, knowing intimate knowledge of them, and entrenching them into my memory and objects enabling me to remember. Ultimately, the collecting became a compensation for my sense of loss and incompleteness that I felt during the events and changes in my life.
The evolution of these collecting practices and collections led to my research emulating an ethnographic study of my collective. Through the use of the materials and experiences I derived from the collective, I have been writing my family’s history or better yet our living experiences.

The identities expressed through my practice were of an idealised self, but yet I feel it lies quite close to who I am and who I collect. However, after researching artists such as Annette Messager, I realised I “wear” different personas during my practice. In the past I have remained separated from my final exhibited work and my practice through the use of my legal name. The use of this name allowed me anonymity as many people never associate it with me. It was a layer of protection from the public. It became a way to distance myself as a form of protection in case my work or I was judged harshly. Over the four years, I have consolidated my personas with the work I am producing, especially with the collecting involving very intimate relationships, and my practice. In addition, my previous work had a limited presence of the artist and was polished to a high degree to remove it. As I make more personal work, the intervention and residual mark from the maker has become more important. I no longer feel the urge to erase myself from the making of the work, which is a reconciliation between my two personas, Welly “the maker” and Llewellyn “the artist”.

The biggest surprise and a turning point in my research was following the exhibition, *Small Rituals*. I realised I was researching and discovering family, my family, and my role as a mother. Furthermore, that the role as a mother was expressed through feminine craft with materials derived from the domestic space I called home. Our home was the result of how our collective functioned and the accumulation of our collective’s emotions and relationships. It was the home bound us together but also allows the space for each individual to exist. The home itself was an extension of my sense of self. It was a place for me to belong and feel grounded. It was a space that was safe and protected.

After exhibiting the work made during my doctoral research, I realised there were changes needed to be made to my processes, concepts, and presentation but also the potential my work held. I exhibited in a number of exhibitions which were always followed by a review of the work by my doctoral panel. Through this process I was able to improve and alter my work for the better. I found that my work was better if it had a personal touch to it. Displays that were too sterile prevented the viewers from seeing the connection between
the collective and didn’t engage with the work. Improvements such as added handwriting as opposed to computer printed elements aided in adding personal touches.

I also realised closer attention needed to be paid to how an exhibition was curated. During my research, I aimed to try a number of differ styled displays, from clinical to personal. I found the more personal and accessible the presentation the stronger the ties between the individuals were evident. In the past viewers weren’t able to connect and construct a narrative from what was available to them or how the work was presented. Upon observation while gallery sitting, many visitors didn’t follow predicted paths or view works in particular order. I have always favoured a grid like presentation, but realise that arranging a body of work within a new space, requires trial and error. With the curation of my final examination, I will take into account these observations and arrange my show with the hopes of being able to achieve a holistic presentation of my collective.

I found that regardless of how personal my work was, it still remained accessible and universal. At a basic level, my work was about family, identity, and place; all topics I think the viewer can relate to. The challenge for my work was to remain universal and accessible as opposed to just being a therapeutic exercise. As Saarnivaara states in Art as Inquiry;

My aim is to bring the reader as close as possible to the lived situation, trying to create the same emotional and corporeal experiences as I had myself.147

I have aimed to bring the viewer as close as possible to my “lived experience” through my research and work which was achieved. Furthermore, the work as a whole can be exhibited and understood by the viewer without my personal presence. As all the different facets of the work come together; they have provided a more holistic presentation of my collective and self. Allowing the viewer to see the body of work as a whole, instead of just a fraction, allows for a greater understanding of my research.

During my research, I experimented and learnt a number of new skills; building on my experience. I experimented with new materials, moving away from wood based mediums to more soft sculptural techniques and aesthetics. With experimentation with new materials come new processes, techniques, and consequences. I taught myself to crochet, knit, and embroider. I learnt how to read patterns as well as make my own. I learnt new

ways to exhibit and hang different styles of work with the consideration of how the viewer interacts and engages with the work. In the end, I have expanded my practice and set myself a new path which includes sculptural textiles, dyeing techniques, and different performance documentation methods.

Through this whole process of I have ultimately become the mother that I had avoided and fought. Unbeknown to me, I have spent the past four years documenting my evolution of turning into the domesticated mother I dreaded. Throughout my supporting material and work, I documented the baking sessions, the craft making, beanie and slipper making, and each interaction with my collective, which is my family. I was the mother that should have been wearing the frilly apron; however, I was the mother that wore steel capped boots. I am no longer just Welly “the maker” nor Llewellyn “the artist”, I am also Welly “the mother”.

This acceptance of the role, mother, has extended to the valuing and validating of my skills, creativity, and artistic ability which is required to produced feminine orientated work. With a new understanding of feminism, feminist art, and the feminine, I have appreciation and an understanding of the historical, conceptual, and aesthetic qualities associated with the movement. In the past I didn’t place much value on feminine craft and have been embarrassed to say I took part of it. My practice has become an eclectic mix of work, derived from my domestic space and produced using feminine craft related techniques. I am now proud to say that not only am I a mother, of incredible beings, but also a domesticated maker.

Other than all these discoveries, the point of practice-led research is to make a unique contribution to the body of knowledge. At first I wasn’t clear if I ever would, however, I have a number of contributions to make. Firstly, despite sharing similarities in concepts, theoretical, or aesthetics with a number of different artists, including Mary Kelly, Sophie Calle, Annette Messager, and Louise Bourgeois. With these artists, I imagine a Venn diagram, overlapping circles which include these four women; and I am the greyed area in the centre is my practice. I have drawn on and combined interpersonal contamination, mother/son relationships, collecting and collections, possessions, melancholy objects, the abject, memory, illness, identity, feminine craft, feminism, feminist art, home, family, and love. With this combination, ultimately, I haven’t found a visual arts practice which is the same as my practice.
Secondly, I have combined theoretical and historical research to create a unique combination which includes collections, collecting practices, interpersonal contamination, possession, feminism, feminist art, feminine craft, domestic space, and motherly love.

Thirdly, my research and body of work is a unique contribution to the body of knowledge as the entire foundation of my practice-led research was my collective; a completely unique and unrepeatable combination of my ex-husband, my three children, and I. Furthermore, it will remain so as the collective’s dynamic has changed and no longer exists.

Finally, despite the redirection of my research, I have established that it is possible to contaminate your possessions and self positively. Generally, the response to contamination is a negative emotion, disgust, and it’s believed to have no positive connotations. However, when we interact with our loved ones, our children or partner, we don’t turn away with our noses screwed up after being kissed or shown physical affection. It is of the purest experiences in life. It fulfils us and makes us feel loved. The relationship between loved ones enables us to override those negative feelings of disgust and leaves us feeling warm and safe.
That’s it

The aim of this research project, *Beyond the Immeasurable*, was to investigate the process of interpersonal contamination of my possessions and extended self. This was to be expressed through works of art deriving the materials from a series of collections comprising of found objects, empirical data and personal matter. My focus was on how different forms of contamination, positive or negative, occur within my personal space and how they can be used to accumulate a collection. These collections and proceeding works were intended to demonstrate a metaphorical fusion of identities while establishing the relationships between myself and others and how these contaminates exhibit how I interact with my immediate environment. During my research, the aim of my project evolved into an ethnographic study of my collective. I had begun to focus on defining who I was, my role within the collective, and, despite the collective’s demise, the project was about love.

The collections were to be sourced directly from my defined collective and used as materials for my series of works as well as a work unto themselves. As I progress through my research, my work evolved to include new theoretical research, methodologies, concepts, and aesthetics. Through exhibitions and reviews, my path was altered and improved for the better.

Over the duration of my research project, I made a number of sculptural works which included the mediums of photography, performance, and video; which I had the opportunity to exhibit several times. I collected specimens, personal matter, empirical data, and found objects from my collective and used those as material to make the body of work. The material, I see as evidence of our lives and experience included hair, teeth, food scraps, saliva, sound scapes from within the home, documented performances, and statistical data. Though some works are only intended as supporting material, the body of work as a whole, creates a holistic perception of my collective.

In the first year of research, I was a part of the group exhibition, *in vitro/in vivo*. My contribution to the exhibition was a series of three works experimenting with presentation, from the clinical to the personal. The three pieces, made with collected grey water, presented well and each presentation style operated as intended. However, there was a failure to understand the elements displayed, viewers were unable to connect or
construct the intended narrative. The clues I left were too elusive and viewers were missing these vital hints.

Two exhibitions, familiar impurities and Small Rituals, in the second year of my research were the catalysts for the redirection in my research. For the exhibition, familiar impurities, I exhibited a series of works which were a combination of sculpture, installation, and photography which reflected my experience of medical contamination. I used collected materials from a period of 100 days such as medication blister packets, self-portraits of the consumption of the medication, and my Magnetic Resonance Images (MRI) of my brain and spine. Overall the work was well received and I had many positive comments.

The following body of work, Collective Dining, was developed for a group exhibition, Small Rituals. Collective Dining involved the contamination of food in my collective’s personal space through the ritual of the family dinner. Each night for a two week period, the time of predesignated menu, we sat down and ate our dinner together while I collected information about each member and how we are as a whole. From the results of the contamination through the consumption of our shared meal, a body of work was created which included practices such as knitting, embroidery, and a performance. The work was received quite well and I received positive feedback. A number of considerations were raised, however, they were minor and after reflecting on the work, they made sense and have been implemented.

In the final year of my research, one more piece was made. This work took on the role of finishing my research, completing the collection, and, hopefully, closure for the project and myself. The blanket of wool with the inclusion of hair evolved to include a performance. The blanket represents the loss and now absent collective. Through the creation of the blanket, the conjoining of the samples create an unbroken bond representing the past of the collective and the immortal bond we have despite the change of the familial dynamic. Through the act of the performance, interacting and touching the blanket, this bond was reinforced.

I found, in response to my aims, that my practice-led research had become a narrative developed through the collective’s interactions and experiences within our home. This narrative gave me a sense of self, place, and belonging. As a collective, bound by the love we shared, had fused our identities together. I was further able to enhance our
connections through the practice of collecting, creating a holistic perception of who I believed we were. The collecting had become a way to compensate and provide comfort during the changes in my life.

As mentioned previously, what I set out to do and what I ended up with were two very different things. However, I have always felt that my practice was connected to a deeper intention than I was unaware of. Through this research, I needed to reconcile the number of personas I had been hiding behind. I realised that I was distancing myself from my practice and work due to the fear of my work and myself as an artist being judged too harshly. In using my legal name, as opposed to my nick name which is far more familiar, allowed myself anonymity and protection. It has allowed me to step forward proudly in front of my work. It has allowed me the pleasure of leaving the mark of the artist upon the work instead of polishing it to a high degree to remove it. There is no longer the urge to erase myself from my work and present myself as both Welly “the maker and artist”.

There were a number of discoveries while conducting my research project personally as well as for my visual arts practice. After exhibiting a number of works during my research, I realised improvements to certain techniques, concepts, and presentations would make a large difference to how the work is perceived, engaged with, and understood. Adding more personal touches and not removing the mark of the artist enabled viewers to engage more with the work. If the work was too sterile, viewers couldn’t relate or see a connection between the collective. In the curation of an exhibition, particular attention is needed to ensure that the audience can engage, understand, and follow the narrative I am trying to create. In addition, despite how personal my work is and previous concerns, it still remains universally accessible. At a basic level, most of the audience can relate to the concepts of family, identity, place, and love.

The biggest, which also resulted in being a turning point, was the realisation I was researching and discovering my family and my role within that family as a mother. The biggest surprise being that expressing that role through feminine craft with materials I collected from my own domestic space, my home. The home was an extension of our collective as well as myself, however, I had ever attached connotations of domesticity to those concepts. Since I first became a mother more than nineteen years ago, I desperately tried to avoid and fought the role of the stereotypical mother. Unwittingly, I spent the past four years documenting my evolution of turning into the domesticated mother I dreaded. Throughout my project, I documented the baking sessions, the stick and paste sessions,
making a beanie and pair of slippers for each family member, and an aspect of each interaction and experience with my family, the collective. I am now Welly “the mother, the maker, and the artist”.

Other than the discoveries already listed, in addition, I added a unique contribution to the body of knowledge. Firstly, I have contributed a practice-led research project unlike any I have found. Despite similarities already mentioned with artist such as Mary Kelly, Sophie Calle, Annette Messager and Louise Bourgeois, my practice still remains a unique combination of theoretical research, conceptual development, and aesthetic qualities. Secondly, I have combined theoretical and historical research to create a unique combination including collections, collecting practices, interpersonal contamination, possession, feminism, feminist art, feminine craft, domestic space, and motherly love. Thirdly, due to the autobiographical nature of my project, my research and body of work is a unique contribution as the members of my collective are a unique combination of individuals, not included in any other practice. Furthermore, it will remain so due to the demise of the collective. And finally, the confirmation of a positive interpersonal contamination of one’s possessions and extended self due to the relationship and love shared between the individual’s overriding the typical negative emotion of disgust associated with an interpersonal contamination interaction. With all these contributions combined, I have contributed to the field of sculpture with research outcomes including sculpture, photography, performance, and video pieces.

As said, everything I have made since the second year of my Bachelor degree has been about my family, and I think it will always remain to do so. The collective may have changed dynamic, I may have been decimated in this entire practice-led research, dare I say, it has been the hardest four years of my life. I will still make work about my family. They will still be the singers in the back seat of my car. They will still be the people who yell at the television. They will still quote movies and television shows like it’s our own personal bible. We will still eat corn, play cards, and trash talk each other. And when I look in the mirror, I will still reflect the same curve of our cheek that is reflected in each and every one of them.

Even though I lost myself, my loves, and my collective during this research project, experiencing the highs and very lows of my collective, ultimately I am grateful for the opportunity once be a part of something, that something which I have no words for except, they were sunshine.
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Further reading


