apart & a part: a new kind of archive

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Abstract

apart & a part: a new kind of archive

For many individuals who spent time in institutional and out-of-home care as children during the twentieth century in Australia, the experience was marked by longing, loss, and displacement. apart & a part is a visual artwork that was created in collaboration with six Australian care leavers as the outcome of my doctoral research. The project has focused on the legacy of the institutional or out-of-home care experience on the individual and the subsequent need to produce narratives of the self. It has traced the affective dimensions of trauma and memory through a lengthy period of collaborative dialogue with care leavers. Drawing on the notion of trauma as a quotidian experience, apart & a part explores how care leavers navigate everyday encounters with their past.

The artworks featured in the installation create an expanded archive of visual responses and narrative fragments that address the felt experiences often absent from historical or institutional records. The immersive installation blends photography, video, sound, and archival images to communicate the ongoing impacts of institutional thinking on individuals. Drawn from our collaborative dialogues and actions, the works in apart & a part traverse expanded documentary, social practice, and contemporary political art. The project explores the non-linear and sensorial structure of trauma, and advances its potential to represent the affective dimensions of lived experience. The project frames lived experiences as a continuum rather than an event, thereby acknowledging the impact of abuse and trauma but not allowing them to become life-defining.

Accompanying the artwork, this exegesis, apart & a part: a new kind of archive, interrogates the conceptual underpinnings of the creative research. It provides a necessary socio-political and historical context through which to understand the mass removal of children (First Nations and non-First Nations) in Australia during the twentieth century. This leads to an exploration of trauma theory and the limits of the victim–survivor narrative to grasp the complexity of these experiences. The politics of collaboration are discussed through a series of case studies specific to the project, where I argue for a transdisciplinary approach to collaborative practices that privilege story over form. Learning to understand care leavers on their own terms resulted in a long period of collaborative dialogue and conceptualisation. This catalysed the development of a consultative, meaningful, and inclusive framework for participants, with the intention of engaging a secondary audience. The intimate act of performing, recording, and memorialising lived experience transformed these personal experiences into artworks. As such, I draw on the field of reparative aesthetics to navigate shame in apart & a part, and argue for the effectiveness of reparative strategies in collaborative projects that traverse trauma and memory.
Statement of Originality

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

Signed:

Kelly Hussey-Smith
9 August 2017

Publications during candidature


Ethical Clearance

Ethical approval was gained from the office for research at Griffith University (QCA 23/12/HREC) to conduct this research.

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Kelly Hussey-Smith

August 2017
apart & a part
Introduction

Lester had an instinctive understanding of the difference between apart and a part, and knew that the syllabic bridge that somehow made belonging out of be and longing was a linguistic deception that was nonetheless incapable of obliterating the terrifying distance between such puzzling and perilous words.1

Many Australian individuals who spent time in institutional and out-of-home care as children during the twentieth century (i.e., orphanages and children’s Homes2) experienced longing, loss, and displacement. In this exegesis, I refer to these individuals as ‘care leavers’. apart & a part is an artwork featuring photography, archival images, sound, and video work created with six Australian care leavers as the visual outcome of my doctoral research.3 The six care leavers that I collaborated with on this project, and will refer to throughout this exegesis are: Trevor Laird, Leonie Sheedy, Jessie Harlow, Marlene Wilson, Bambi, and Michelle Rose Turnbull.4

The project has focused on the need for narratives of the self, and the legacy of the institutional or out-of-home care experience on the individual. It has traced the affective dimensions of trauma and memory through a lengthy period of collaborative dialogue with care leavers. Drawing on the notion of trauma as a quotidian experience, apart & a part explores how care leavers navigate everyday encounters with their past. These resulting artworks create an expanded archive of visual responses and narrative fragments that address the felt experiences that are often absent from historical or institutional records.

This exegesis outlines the key theoretical and methodological directions of apart & a part, and introduces the works produced as a result of the collaborative process. It critically evaluates the extent to which the project outcomes address the project aims through situating the works as appropriate responses to the political and ethical aspects of apart & a part. This introduction will provide an overview of the project (including relevant exclusions and definitions), personal contexts, and an explanation of the structure of the exegesis.

In this exegesis, ‘institutional and out-of-home care’ refers to the orphanages, children’s Homes, reformatory schools, Magdalene laundries, child mental health facilities, and foster care placements that were in operation during the twentieth century in Australia.

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1 Brad Zellar and Alec Soth, House of Coates (Minnesota: Little Brown Mushroom, 2012), vi.
2 Care leaver and researcher Joanna Penglase suggests that a capital H be used to distinguish between a family home and a children’s Home as they were distinctly different spaces. Joanna Penglase, Orphans of the Living: Growing up in Care in Twentieth-Century Australia (Freemantle: Fremantle Press, 2005), 5.
3 Many other individuals from the care leaver community contributed informally and anecdotally to my understanding of the experience of out-of-home care.
4 Real name withheld at participant’s request—a condition of her participation from the beginning of the project.
Senate inquiries, legal proceedings, history projects, and personal testimonies have established that many (but not all) care leavers were deprived of basic needs (nurturing, affection, education) and experienced physical, sexual, emotional and spiritual abuse while in care.\(^5\) In many cases, the removal of children, or the relinquishing of a child, was influenced (though not always solely caused) by silent gender and class biases.\(^6\) In the case of the Stolen Generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, this removal was primarily racially motivated.\(^7\)

The 2004 Senate inquiry report *Forgotten Australians: A Report of Australians Who Experienced Institutional or Out-of-Home Care as Children* estimated that over 500,000 Australians spent time in out-of-home care during the twentieth century. The report’s executive summary suggested that it is likely that “every Australian either was, is related to, works with, or knows someone who experienced childhood in an institution or out-of-home-care environment.”\(^8\) The term ‘Forgotten Australians’ was adopted as a result of this report in response to an overwhelming number of contributors admitting to feeling forgotten (specifically in relation to familial connections, guardianship, archival presence, lack of state records, historical representation, and lack of acknowledgement and understanding in wider society). The report concluded that abuse (physical, emotional, sexual, spiritual) and neglect (lack of nurturing, education, health support, social inclusion) had taken place on a mass scale in children’s Homes in Australia. In many cases, care leavers continue to experience the impacts of abuse and neglect in adult life (discussed in Chapter 1). When an individual lacks a guardian to the story of their life, the impacts can range from loss and grief to existential insecurity. Therefore, the acts of remembrance and archiving are important in addressing these feelings. Through this project, I came to understand the term Forgotten (in Forgotten Australian) as a verb rather than an adjective—as an act of exclusion rather than a description of it. Implicit in the word forgotten is the presence of a void, or of an ‘unobtainable archive’ (discussed in Chapter 2).

Despite the evocative undertones of the term Forgotten Australian, throughout this exegesis I employ the term care leaver to refer to the estimated 500,000 children who were

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\(^5\) It is important to recognise that not all care leavers experienced abuse and neglect in out-of-home care and that children were also removed from their families because of abuse and neglect in the family home. Commonwealth of Australia, *Forgotten Australians: A Report of Australians Who Experienced Institutional or Out-of-Home Care as Children* (Canberra: Senate Community Affairs Committee Secretariat, 2004) and Penglase, *Orphans of the Living*.


\(^8\) Commonwealth of Australia, *Forgotten Australians*, xv.
placed in church, state, or foster care during the twentieth century. While the term Forgotten Australians was helpful in the early stages of conceptualising this project, it is also contentious because it infers a permanent victim state. Several care leavers (including some participants) did not identify with the term, stating that it undermined the success of care leaver advocacy and they did not want to be identified as ‘forgotten’. The term may also be interpreted as noninclusive, in that it might exclude members of the Stolen Generations or British child migrants who also experienced out-of-home care in Australia.  

It is important to briefly mention that the scope of this paper is not great enough to discuss in appropriate depth the differences and similarities between the Stolen Generations and the Forgotten Australians. Some care leavers identify with the Forgotten Australians narrative in addition to that of the Stolen Generations (e.g., being both a care leaver and a member or descendant of the Stolen Generations). During the course of the project, two participants (sisters) discovered that their mother was a member of the Stolen Generations, giving their narrative an intergenerational complexity that significantly shifted their understanding. In all cases, children who were removed from their families or handed over to the state (due to death, discrimination, moral judgments, racism, poverty, illness, class, gender discrimination, marriage status, safety, lack of support, violence and abuse at home, or a combination thereof) were left disconnected from their heritage. The scope of the project and the exegesis is not great enough to specifically address the important historical (colonisation, attempted genocide), political (racist assimilation policies), social (paternalistic), cultural (loss of heritage, land, culture and language), and personal contexts (lived experience of dislocation) that contributed to the Stolen Generations. As such, my choice of the slightly less evocative but more inclusive term care leaver is an attempt to avoid creating boundaries around participation.

 ARISING FROM A LENGTHY PERIOD OF COLLABORATIVE DIALOGUE, THIS VISUAL RESEARCH AIDS TO LOCATE AND INTERPRET HOW THE INSTITUTIONAL OR ‘CARE’ EXPERIENCE HAS MANIFESTED IN THE LIVES OF

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9 Technically, the term Forgotten Australians is an inclusive term (and includes the estimated 10,000 child migrants from Britain and Malta and the estimated 50,000 members of the Stolen Generations), but it is usually used to refer to non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander care leavers subject to class discrimination. See Adele Chynoweth, “Forgotten or Ignored Australians? The Australian Museum Sector’s Marginalisation of Inside – Life in Children’s Homes and Institutions,” The International Journal of the Inclusive Museum 6 (2014): 171, 175. However, this is extremely complicated territory when individuals identify with more than one narrative. To avoid further exclusion, I use the term care leaver throughout this exegesis.

10 In many cases, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children lived in the same Homes.

care leavers, and how this experience lingers in adult life. Tremendously important initiatives such as the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2013–ongoing) have drawn attention to the explicit, and increasingly well-known, narratives of abuse and neglect that had previously been underreported and silenced. But much like previous senate inquiries and reports, this form of inquiry is focused on the re-telling of trauma in a conventional or un-nuanced form. This research project identifies a gap in the communication of these experiences, specifically the implicit affective dimensions that continue to manifest in daily life. In response, the project attempts to locate and interpret the affective dimensions of trauma, memory, and the unobtainable archive by focusing on quotidian encounters with these affects. In so doing, I seek to contribute to an emerging body of research on the ongoing, affective impacts of these practices and experiences on Australian care leavers, and expand the care leaver archive. Working with care leavers brought to the fore several key issues that shaped the research question and approach, specifically:

- The ongoing lived and trans-generational impacts of out-of-home care;
- How the legacy of the institutional or out-of-home care environment manifests in daily life; and
- How transforming these personal stories and affects into artworks by using inclusive and collaborative methodologies can communicate the process to a secondary audience.

In making the visual research relevant to care leavers, I have adopted a transdisciplinary approach that, as Patricia Leavy suggests, is problem-based (rather than discipline-based) and I employ synergistic and collaborative research methods relevant to participants. This underscored the importance of developing, rather than imposing, a methodology—positioning care leavers as the experts on living through trauma. As new ethnographer Stephen Mueke suggests, employing contingency as a reflexive research method allows researchers to respond to the sensory experience of the research, rather than simply applying pre-conceived methods and assumptions to it.

12 In this exegesis, I use single quotation marks in two different ways. The first use is to indicate when the conventional definition is called into question, or emphasised by its use in this context. The second use is to introduce a key concept. Once these concepts have been introduced I no longer use these marks in text.
13 Legal narratives tend to avoid explicit ambiguity. I explore this further in Chapter 2.
15 Stephen Mueke and Max Pam, Contingency in Madagascar: Photography, Encounters, Writing (Bristol: Intellect, 2012), 32. Although I do not position my practice in ethnography, I have found reflexive ethnographic discourses helpful in navigating the experience of the project.
While I acknowledge the intersection of multiple narrative perspectives in the broader story of institutional care (personal, institutional, collective, bureaucratic, carers, and bystanders), *apart & a part* privileges the perspectives of only a small number of care leavers. I recognise that such a limited sample size does not represent all care leavers—this is not my aim, nor is it my place. Instead, the questions and methods employed explore the potential for intimate relational exchanges that move beyond participatory frameworks to that of shared agency. It is also important to acknowledge that only those who had challenging or harmful (physical and/or psychological) experiences in out-of-home care volunteered for the project. This is more than likely because I met care leavers through advocacy networks and support organisations that are less frequented by care leavers who are happy with or ambivalent or apathetic about their upbringing, or those who do not wish to revisit their past. It is also important to note that all participants are either involved in care leaver advocacy and/or community building practices, or have been active in these practices at some stage in their past.

As I came to understand the absence of personal and familial archives in the lives of care leavers, locating the less tangible but continuing dimensions of each person’s experience became a core collaborative aim. In turn, the acts of performing, recording, and memorialising through the indexical arts became central to the project. In this way, we began to think of the project as contributing to ‘a new kind of archive’—*an archive of feelings*—that did not consider this absence to be deficient, or an emptiness that required ‘filling’, but as knowledge *on its own terms*, as Ann Cvetkovich puts it.16 Cited at the beginning of this introduction is an extract from Brad Zellar and Alec Soth’s text and image collaboration, *House of Coates* (2012). In this book, the main character, Lester B. Morrison, is described as someone who understands “the difference between apart and a part”, positioning Lester as possessing specialist knowledge of this complex liminal state, rather than declaring it as being deficient.17 Implicit in disconnection is knowledge of connection. Therefore, *apart & a part* refers to the liminal sensation of being apart, a part, and somewhere in between.

*apart & a part* has been created in the shadow of the extraordinary achievements of the collective actions of care leavers who have begun the lengthy process of seeking justice in Australia.18 As artist and activist Shahidul Alam argues, the experts on trauma are the

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18 Specifically, I have worked with Care Leavers Australasia Network, Alliance for Forgotten Australians, and Lotus Place.
elders in trauma communities, who often have little, if any, say in how their experiences are represented. As such, in *apart & a part* I have positioned care leavers as experts.

While we all have ongoing impacts from childhood, *apart & a part* aims to locate and translate the quotidian impacts of institutional and out-of-home care from the perspective of six Australian care leavers. Therefore, there are two questions driving this practice-led research: What are the affective dimensions of the legacy of the institutional and out-of-home care experience on a small group of Australian care leavers? And, how might collaborative methods be employed to communicate these dimensions to a secondary audience, and contribute to public discourses around care practices?

**Project Beginnings**

I have always worked in contentious spaces. Although I practice under the broad label of ‘visual artist’, my work sits at the intersection of expanded documentary, political art, and socially engaged art. This project evolved from questions posed in earlier work exploring the impacts that total institutions have on sentient beings. *Bare Life* (2009–11), a series of video works and photographs, explored the way zoos present animals as ‘visible forms’ for viewing audiences (figures 1 and 2).

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This practice-led inquiry evolved into a framework that explored the way zoological gardens reduce the animals in their care to, what Matthew Chrulew calls, “anatomical species traits” and “visible forms”—or “zoological thinking”.21 John Berger describes the presentation of animals in zoos as, “living monument[s] to their own disappearance.”22 The reduction of display animals to a visual form, rather than living beings, denies their sentience and creates what Giorgio Agamben calls, in Homo Sacer, “bare life”—a wounded and excluded life.23 My application of this concept to what Erving Goffman calls the total institution is discussed in Chapter 1.

The project began with a broad historical focus on institutions in Australia. I visited former prisons, asylums, and children’s Homes, including institutions that had since been erased from public view (figures 3 and 4). Being in these spaces presented an opportunity to more carefully consider the gravity of the experiences of those who had lived there. It also alerted me to the general silence around the lived experience of institutionalisation in Australia.24 As such, I began to view the Australian urban landscape as one of “erasure and amnesia”.25 These early visits and visual experiments not only provided physical and

21 Ibid., 142–43.
23 Giorgio Agamben, Homo Sacer, 8. See also Chrulew, “Managing Love and Death at the Zoo,” 142.
24 On a trip to Freemantle in 2012, I repeatedly visited the Freemantle Prison, which was opened in 1855. I was specifically interested in the ways in which the memorialisation of these spaces often commodified and trivialised their pasts (figure 4). Although the scope of Chapter 1 is not great enough to cover the early years of these practices, it is important to acknowledge their influence on twentieth-century penal institutions in Australia.
25 Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, Chicago (Gottengin: SteildMACK, 2006), n.p. Collaborative artists Broomberg and Chanarin use this term to describe forests outside Jerusalem that were “systematically planted on the expropriated land of Arab villages, which were forcibly evacuated and deliberately destroyed in 1948”, n.p.
geographic context for the stories of those who lived in these spaces but also emphasised the challenges Australians face in acknowledging the shame of the past. This narrowed my primary interest to the largely invisible narratives carried by those who had spent time in these spaces, and the affective dimensions of these experiences. This led me to the personal experiences of care leavers.

Personal Contexts
I have been humbled by the support for the project from care leavers, many of whom have been denied the opportunities I have been granted in pursuing higher education. Despite the demands of a doctoral program, this privilege has not been lost on me, as I am also the first member of my family to pursue such an award.

My family history intersects with the broader issues covered in this project in two ways. My paternal grandmother, Kathleen, spent her first six years in out-of-home care, and her granddaughter Lauren (a cousin of mine) was adopted at birth. Despite having a familial connection to the project, I did not initially make this association. This, I suspect, was because I did not connect my familial identity with the explicit testimonies I had witnessed and read. On reflection, this was an astounding oversight, but also a perfect example of the problem. Despite having impacted half a million children, hundreds of thousands of parents, and millions of extended family members, these experiences have largely been removed from familial narratives. Shame no doubt plays a role in this, as does a sense of wanting to forget the past. However, inverting my thinking around the origins of this silence as not only top down but also bottom up, led me to appreciate that silence is also a part of
inheritance. I can no longer recall what triggered the memory, but one day a conversation with Kathleen about her time in care entered my memory. After I wrote to my father to seek validation of this information, he replied:

Hi Kel,

…I know a house in West End where she lived with her sister, Elsie, and I can narrow down to 3 houses in Vulture Street where she worked as a housemaid for no pay. She grew up in Sunnybank on a few acres where they had fruit trees. Figs, I think. That place is now the suburb of Robertson with million dollar homes.

I think she was 1 or nearly 1 when her Mum died. She had tuberculosis when she came here from the UK (called Consumption then) and my guess is that she died as a result of complications with that… I never knew my Grandfather. I’m not sure when he died. Judy [my father’s sister, and my aunt] also has some letters from her to Grandad from before they were married. Hard to read without a few tears… It’s intriguing that you wrote today, as it is her birthday, 5th October. She would have been 99.

Love
Dad

I did not know it was my grandmother’s birthday. Nor did I know (when she was alive) that birthdays can be difficult days for care leavers. She had been born into an English migrant family living on a farm on the outskirts of Brisbane. As indicated in my father’s email, Kathleen’s mother passed away shortly after she was born, and as her father was unable to cope with three children, she was placed in a Home before returning to her family home six or seven years later. She had no memory of her mother. While Kathleen would have been considered fortunate to return to her family, the early years of development (0–3 years) are commonly cited as important years in forming secure attachments that lay the foundations for future life experiences.

When Kathleen returned to the family home at around six or seven years of age, her father had remarried, wedding her mother’s sister, whom Kathleen described as “cruel” and “abusive”. As a result, they never bonded. At the age of fourteen, Kathleen left home and eventually found employment in the city as a domestic for a wealthy family living in Vulture Street, South Brisbane. She received no payment for her labour, only food and lodging. Unsurprisingly, she grew to resent her employers, who were, by her accounts,
exploitative and controlling. After ten years with this family, she met my grandfather Fred, and they married shortly afterwards (at twenty-five, Kathleen was considered an ‘old maid’). After a short period in Brisbane, they relocated to Dauringa, Central Queensland, to run a bake house and start a new life.

Despite only spending a relatively short period of time in care, Kathleen’s lived experience mirrors that of many care leavers. Her upbringing was pragmatic; she received limited education and affection, and this lack of familial connection and support left her with depleted agency in broader society. She experienced both financial and personal dislocation, disconnection, exploitation, and insecurity.

My family knows few details of Kathleen’s story beyond this narrative sketch. When she was alive, I did not ask her enough questions, and when she did offer recollections from early life, I did not listen deeply enough. She provided generously for her family, but she often seemed closed and distant. She did not like to be touched.

My cousin Lauren was adopted out at birth. Her parents, Zona and John, were sixteen years old and unmarried at the time of her birth. My grandfather Fred refused to sign the documents that would have enabled the young couple to keep their child. As an Aboriginal woman, Zona faced both the devastating loss of her child and the (potential) loss of her child’s Aboriginal heritage and identity. Normalised racism and conservative social attitudes, which Shurlee Swain and Renate Howe describe as “punishing” women for “immoral behaviour”, were more than likely responsible for this outcome.30 As an adult, Lauren reconnected with my grandparents, her mother, and seven siblings. One of my most vivid memories of my grandparents’ home in Bundaberg, Queensland, was a personalised Christmas card from Lauren. She was standing on the deck of a boat in exotic North Queensland. It was sunny, she was wearing white, and life looked good. The card took pride of place in my grandparents’ kitchen.

Years later, when my grandfather Fred met my partner Alan, he told him of the hurt he had felt when Kathleen would stiffen up when he tried to cuddle or touch her, particularly in public. My partner joked that it must be genetic because I was the same. I did not think of this conversation again until I was immersed in this project several years later, when I came to understand that many care leavers do not seek to touch or be touched (figure 5).31 This issue of touch, of course, is not universal (nor permanent), but it caught my attention because, strangely, through no direct experience of my own, I could relate.

30 Swain and Howe, Single Mothers and Their Children, 175.
Whether this character trait was passed to me from my grandmother through to my father or it is merely a coincidence, I came to understand something more about Kathleen’s experience through knowing something of the experience of other care leavers.

The house on Vulture Street that claimed my grandmother’s wages still stands; in fact, I walked past it almost every day for nine years during my time as a student and staff member at the Queensland College of Art. This personal perspective broadened my understanding of how an impact is carried through life. It also highlighted the short-sightedness of media representations of abuse narratives as events. Consequently, I have come to see the effects of abuse as ongoing, a continuum of quotidian encounters with the past, rarely privileged as knowledge, and often inter-generational.

Figure 5: Sign from the Methodist Babies’ Home 1929. Collection Museums Victoria, Melbourne.

Structure of the Exegesis
In this exegesis, I explore my praxis in *apart & a part* through four distinct chapters: APART; New Languages of Trauma (Part A and B); A PART—“The Fleshy World of People”: The Ethics and Politics of Collaboration; and Expanded Documentary. The exegesis engages a reflexive voice to navigate the synthesis of theoretical perspectives with personal and critical analysis of the project process. Woven through the document is a discussion of the works produced as a result of six collaborations that constitute *apart & a part*. Rather than presenting the analysis of the creation of the works separately from the perspectives that have informed them, I have connected relevant theoretical and philosophical positions with the ethical, personal, and political challenges underpinning the personal communication with care leavers over a period of six years. Evidence of a lack of physical nurturing in children’s Homes and institutions is evidenced in a sign salvaged from the Methodist Babies Home in South Yarra that states: “Visitors are requested not to touch the babies”.

work. In short, I discuss how the works came to be, rather than how they are or should be received. Likewise, I do not present a separate review of practitioner case studies, but weave the work of other artists throughout the document. Conceived as a single exhibition installation rather than a series of separate responses or projects, the exhibition apart & a part is proposed as the conclusion to my doctoral research.

Chapter 1: APART provides essential historical context. It describes the structural systems of social disadvantage and exclusion that led to the mass institutionalisation of children in Australia in the twentieth century. It provides broad theoretical and historical context relating to the abuse and neglect many children in care encountered, and provides social perspectives on discrimination in relation to gender, class, and race in Australia. In addition to this essential context and analysis, I introduce and engage relevant philosophical and sociological concepts regarding institutionalisation, exclusion, and dehumanisation to shift the conversation to the metaphysical aspects of this experience. Through these theories, I discuss the development of artworks that seek to move beyond the victim–survivor narratives commonly extracted from testimonials. I consider this focus essential in establishing the political and ethical aspects of the project, and in contextualising the following chapters on trauma, narrative, and the ethics of collaboration. While the focus of apart & a part is not a history of ‘care’, this context is essential to establish the scale of the loss and to recognise the significant challenges that many care leavers have faced in adult life. The context also underpins the visual methods employed in apart & a part.

Part A of Chapter 2—New Languages of Trauma, explores the non-linear and sensorial nature of trauma, and advances its potential to represent the affective dimensions of lived experience. The chapter frames lived experiences as a continuum rather than an event, thereby acknowledging abuse and trauma but not concentrating solely on those events as life defining. In applying the idea of trauma as a continuum, I draw on the mundane aspects of everyday experience. I argue that complex narrative understandings can be extrapolated from quotidian experiences, despite the propensity for these associations to be overlooked in trauma representations. I argue for narratives of the self as an “ontological necessity” and apply this directly to the disconnection and disruption experienced by care leavers in regard to their memory archives and narratives of the self.32

Part B of this chapter, draws on Susan Best’s Reparative Aesthetics to navigate shame in apart & a part, and argue for the effectiveness of reparative strategies in collaborative projects that traverse trauma and memory.33 As such, Eve Kosofsky

Sedgwick’s framework of “paranoid” and “reparative” readings is examined within cultures of photography and contemporary photographic art. Building on Ann Cvetkovich’s *An Archive of Feelings*, I demonstrate that traumatic responses can be understood beyond deficit discourses and in terms of the knowledge that trauma cultures produce. I position my work as contributing to an expanded archive of visual responses and narrative fragments that address the felt experiences often absent from historical or institutional records. Finally, the visualisation of trauma through a focus on narrative, performance, and collaboration is discussed through a contextualisation of my work within contemporary practice.

Chapter 3: A PART—“The Fleshy World of People”: The Ethics and Politics of Collaboration, outlines and interrogates the collaborative aspects of the research. It maps the origins of collaborative intent through to questions of shared agency and collaboration. It reflects upon the relational experiences that emerged as a result of the intimate research process, and argues friendship, active listening and contingency as research methods that meet the needs of indeterminate stories. It introduces the shifting contexts of the creative research: the birth of my first child and the increased public exposure to the care leaver narrative through the Royal Commission.36

I review contemporary critical theory on the collaborative and participatory turns in contemporary art, ethnographic art and photography and warn against the ethical relativism that has come to dominate discussions on ethics and aesthetics in contemporary participatory art. Learning to understand care leavers on their own terms resulted in a long period of collaborative dialogue and conceptualisation. This catalysed the development of an ethical and inclusive framework for participants, with the intention of engaging what Claire Bishop calls the secondary audience; namely, those not involved in the collaborative action.37 The intimate acts of performing, recording, and memorialising lived experience transformed these personal experiences into artworks. Thus, the works that constitute *apart & a part* have become as much evidence of our reciprocal investment as they are evidence of the ongoing impacts of out-of-home care. In this way, I propose that the collaboration is implicit in the images rather than emerging through explicit documentation of togetherness or a participatory action. Finally, the politics of my authorship are explored through the term ‘author-ising’—being authorised to author—which I propose as an appropriate description for the process of making in *apart & a part*.

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35 Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*.
36 The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2013–ongoing).
In the final chapter, Chapter 4: Expanded Documentary, I continue my exploration of methodology through the politics of authorship in expanded documentary and the ethnographic turn in contemporary art. I highlight the potential for superficial engagement with ethnographic languages and ideas of reflexivity that fail to incorporate the history and politics of ethnographic practices into their praxis. Here I briefly deviate from the care leaver focus to interrogate the ethics of reflexive practice as a process of knowledge production. I argue that because it has emerged from a sustained period of critique, expanded documentary has embedded mature perspectives on authorship, ethnographic art, and reflexivity into its praxis. In addition, it has incorporated experimental visual approaches, collaboration, and reflexive commentary on representation without losing its relationship to the non-fiction world. From here I return to the project with a series of short stories outlining turning points in each collaboration, and the works made as a result.

To conclude, this introduction has provided an overview of the project, a brief personal context, and an outline of the structure of the exegesis. It has established that *apart & a part* is not focused on the re-telling of abuse; rather, its aim is to address the ontological need for narratives of the self and the legacy of the institutional or out-of-home care experience upon care leavers. The following chapters outline my response to the questions driving my enquiry: What are the affective dimensions of the legacy of the institutional and out-of-home care experience on a small group of Australian care leavers? And, how might collaborative methods be employed to communicate these dimensions to a secondary audience, and contribute to public discourses around care practices?

Ethical approval was gained from the office for research at Griffith University (QCA 23/12/HREC) to conduct this research.
CHAPTER 1: APART

I know we belong, I just don’t know where.¹

This chapter outlines the historical context that surrounds the mass institutionalisation of children in Australia in the twentieth century. It points to the explicit and implicit gender, class, and racial discrimination that led to high numbers of children becoming wards of the state, and engages critical perspectives on the legal and bureaucratic frameworks that allowed such institutions to prosper and to produce “complex organisations” that are difficult to prosecute.² In addressing the psychological pain so often at the crux of the care leaver experience, I engage the work of Giorgio Agamben to establish broader philosophical perspectives on exclusion and dehumanisation as mechanisms of state power that attempt to deny an individual’s political and sentient life. These essential, albeit confronting, contexts establish both the affective dimensions of care leaver experiences, and the complexity of communicating this experience to secondary audiences.

1.1 Historical Context: How Children Arrived in Care

As mentioned in the introduction to this exegesis, the term care leaver refers to the estimated 500,000 individuals who “experienced care in an orphanage, Home, or other form of out-of-home-care during the last [twentieth] century” in Australia.³ The term is also used to describe individuals who spent time in detention centres, reformatory schools, and mental health institutions (or a combination of them). Many individuals identify as being harmed as a result of this care, and continue to experience the impacts of abuse and neglect in their adult lives. Since 1999, a number of national and state inquiries and commissions have compiled reports confirming the widespread abuse and neglect of children in care in Australia in the twentieth century, and the systemic failures to adequately report such behaviours.⁴

As reported in the 1999 Forde Inquiry and the Forgotten Australians Senate report, very few children who experienced institutional care for long periods, or at critical stages of

¹ Jessie Harlow (research project participant), conversation with the author, Brisbane, October 2014.
their development, have escaped detrimental effects in later life. Such effects include but are not limited to the following: low levels of literacy and numeracy due to poor education; high incidences of alcoholism and substance abuse; poor physical and mental health; poverty; and high levels of unemployment, homelessness, imprisonment, and suicide.

Many care leavers suggest the experience of institutionalisation (the mechanisms of authority and control) and loss of heritage (separation, lack of information, disconnection) impacted significantly on their interpersonal relationships in adult life due to having few or no established networks. In turn, many care leavers continue to struggle with concepts of self and self-worth due to the long-term impacts of abuse, disconnection, inconsistent attachments, and sub-standard education. In some cases, care leavers re-entered institutions such as prisons and mental health facilities in later life, with many citing that these spaces were safer and more familiar than the world outside. Of course, many individuals who spent time in care did not experience these impacts, but for those who did experience barriers to full participation in society, the experience has been painful.

It is not difficult to draw raw and emotive testimonies of events that took place through no fault of their own from individuals who grew up in care. There are many reasons why children were placed in care, and a single rationale will never speak to the complexities of the situation, nor is the scope of this project great enough to interrogate such a history. In many cases, the details of why children ended up in institutions or foster homes are unknown or unclear. This may be because of the stigma and shame associated with post-war complexities, family violence, financial hardship, or mental health, or because of class discrimination, inadequate record-keeping, or records that were lost, damaged, or withheld. The gaping holes in record-keeping continue to manifest themselves in the lives of care leavers. As care leaver and researcher Joanna Penglase claims, most children in care were “orphans of the living”.

One of the care leaver participants in this study, Leonie Sheedy, is an activist and co-founder of Care Leavers Australasia Network (CLAN). She argues that understanding the context of class-based discrimination is essential to understanding care leavers and care leaver histories. She states:

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5 In 1999, a report was tabled to the Queensland parliament as part of the Forde Inquiry that confirmed widespread abuse and neglect in children's Homes and institutions in Queensland from 1911 to 1999. The Forde Foundation was established in 2000 in Queensland as a result of the Inquiry.
6 Commonwealth of Australia, Forgotten Australians, 16.
7 Ibid., 153–56.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., 164–65.
11 Commonwealth of Australia, Forgotten Australians, 253–82.
We were the children of the poor and in some ways the state colluded with parents in abandoning their children. There was no supporting parents’ benefit...While the rich paid for nannies or sent their kids to boarding schools, we were the children of the poor and we ended up in homes.\textsuperscript{13}

This class discrimination includes British child migrants who arrived in Australia as ‘orphans’; which did not necessarily mean their parents were deceased, but this was the generic term used to describe underprivileged or so-called ‘illegitimate’ children.\textsuperscript{14}

Historian John Murphy’s oral history project with Victorian care leavers found that, while national and institutional records confirm that children entered care for different reasons (illness, parental death, marital status, poverty, violence), the majority of care leavers he interviewed had early memories of impoverished beginnings.\textsuperscript{15} Murphy states that, although people’s memories of their narrative origins may be distant, fragile, or even painful to recall, his interviews with care leavers suggest early memories and experiences are central to the creation of a “trajectory of the self”.\textsuperscript{16}

Much of the poverty and perceived neglect of children stems from the fact that up until 1973 there was no income support for unmarried mothers (sole parents).\textsuperscript{17} Upon the introduction of such support, the segregation, discrimination, and stigma endured by mothers and their children began to shift.\textsuperscript{18} In addition, the legal status of ‘illegitimacy’ or nullius filius (Latin for a son of nobody) was challenged.\textsuperscript{19} Project participant Michelle Rose Turnbull (formerly Michael Charles) recalls being pushed to the back of photographs because her status in the orphanage as illegitimate apparently made her less attractive to prospective adoptive families. Michelle, of course, had no knowledge she had been born out of wedlock, nor did she have an understanding of the social context surrounding these

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Leonie Sheedy, “Try to Put Yourself in Our Skin: The Experiences of Wards and Homies,” \textit{The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work} 1 (2005): 68.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} John Murphy, “Memory, Identity and Public Narrative: Composing a Life Story after Leaving Institutional Care, Victoria, 1945-83,” \textit{Cultural and Social History} 7, no. 3 (2010): 303.
  \item \textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 304.
\end{itemize}
discriminatory labels, but being pushed to the back remains an acute memory for her (discussed further in Chapter 2).

This class-based discrimination (and, in the case of the Stolen Generations, blatant racial discrimination) underscores the dominant cultural and religious attitudes of the “silent system” of institutionalisation in Australia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.20 Recent media investigations and government inquiries have concluded that between 1950 and 1980, many unmarried mothers were forced, coerced, or left with little choice but to give their children up for adoption, thus dispelling what historian Nell Musgrove calls the widespread “myth of the unwanted child”.21 This was due to the social stigma attached to being unwed, the assumption of immorality, and the widespread belief that such women were unfit for the task of motherhood.22 In many cases, these women were treated as second-class citizens, abused verbally, emotionally, and even physically, and in some cases coerced into signing adoption papers.23 What have become known as forced adoptions have had severe impacts on the parents (specifically the mothers) and children, and have been largely unknown and unrecognised until recently.24 The emotional complexity of this issue—specifically, the guilt, anger, shame, and loss experienced by the parents, children, and subsequent adoptive parents—intersects with the lives of many Australians. While forced adoption is not the focus of this research, it is inextricably linked to the care leaver experience and contributes to a broader understanding of the scale of the loss, and the emotional and social complexity of surviving such practices. Specifically, living through and negotiating these experiences is a much more layered and complex narrative than that of victim–survivor (addressed in section 1.5 of this chapter).

Senate reports and oral histories with care leavers confirm that siblings were regularly and deliberately segregated in care. Furthermore, the Forgotten Australians report found that segregating families led to poorer outcomes for those children who, on being removed from familial connections, experienced confusion, sadness, and existential aloneness, in addition to difficulty re-establishing relationships with siblings in later life.

22 Thomson and Hichens, “Given or Taken?”
23 Exact numbers of forced adoptions have been difficult to locate but conservative estimates of the period between 1965 and 1972 sit at 40,000 babies, with estimates of up to 250,000 babies having been adopted out between when records began and 1984. Commonwealth of Australia, Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2012), 6–10.
24 On 21 March 2013, the then Prime Minister of Australia, Julia Gillard, delivered a national apology to the victims of forced adoptions.
However, many children in care did remember their families, and claim the segregation made the trauma of separation greater. Murphy argues that the segregation of siblings in institutions was a deliberate measure to encourage children to forget their past. He references sociologist Erving Goffman’s work *Asylums* (which I will elaborate on further in this chapter) to describe the stripping of identity and family narratives as an encompassing characteristic of institutional life. Many of the individuals who have informed this research project had no idea their siblings were living in the same institutions or homes and have found this intentional denial of connection difficult to resolve in later life. But even for children who maintained contact with siblings in care, the experience was often complicated.

In *The Scars Remain*, Nell Musgrove discusses the difficult emotional circumstances that arose for (some) children with siblings in care. While being placed with siblings did bring comfort to the children, it could also be emotionally complicated for older siblings who were unable to prevent the suffering or abuse of their younger siblings. She suggests that, like many connections in out-of-home care (for example, with carers, religious staff, or other children), these relationships were often emotionally complex. A desire for affection and love often meant that attachments were (sometimes) formed to people who were responsible for some of the emotional, physical, or sexually abusive behaviours. Care leavers often cite that the complex emotional states of shame and guilt, and feelings of loyalty and responsibility, were often collapsed into experiences of comfort and belonging. As researcher Adele Chynoweth states in her essay “Forgotten or Ignored Australians?”, the history of care leavers “is quantitatively vast, qualitatively complex, and emotionally difficult.”

As I listened to the stories of care leavers over a period of six years, I came to understand the complexity of each individual experience. Trevor Laird, another participant in the project, was told his mother simply “didn’t want him”—three words that he and I know, due to the complexities of the social, political and religious attitudes of the time and the lack of a welfare state, are most likely untrue. Nevertheless, they are devastating for a

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26 Murphy, “Memory, Identity and Public Narrative,” 303.
30 Penglase, *Orphans of the Living*; Musgrove, *The Scars Remain*, 73. In Chapter 2 of this exegesis I elaborate on shame, and in section 1.5 of this chapter I discuss these complex emotional states in more detail.
child to adopt as part of his identity. Later in life, he found out his father was a returned serviceman, and heard whispers of familial violence, but was never told why he and his five siblings were institutionalised, and eventually adopted out. A photograph of Trevor as a baby, pictured with his mother in a suburban backyard in Brisbane, gives no clues to the reasons behind his imminent institutionalisation (figure 6). His government files provided little information, with most pages containing more redacted information than actual content (which arguably is information about the austere and dehumanising characteristics of the institution, but not what Trevor was hoping to access). While the circumstances remain unknown, the gaps in Trevor’s narrative have marked his experience. Trevor’s personal archive exists alongside the void created by the unobtainable archive—that which cannot be accessed (discussed in more detail in Chapter 2).

Figure 6: Trevor Laird with his mother 1963. From the personal collection of Trevor Laird.

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Participant Michelle Rose remembers being handed her files in a government office waiting room and being unable to make sense of the bureaucratic memory embedded in the documents. What was presented in the file was a series of bureaucratic forms purporting to represent twenty-one years of life as a ward of the state. Most of the text had been redacted through a whiting out of information, and on many pages, her name was the only piece of information visible (figure 7). The most informative aspect of her file was details regarding her many visits to the Royal Children’s Hospital in Brisbane. She was often unwell as a child, and fondly remembers these visits, particularly the kindness of the nursing staff. The file demonstrates an institutional refusal to see Michelle’s lived experience as anything other than pragmatic—preserving her life but not her spirit. The unwitting testimony of the void of information, embedded in the pragmatic, clinical, and administrative case file language, is demonstrative of how non-stakeholders document lived experience.

Figure 7: Redacted information from Michelle Rose Turnbull’s state file 2015

Sisters and participants Jessie Harlow and Marlene Wilson have few documents to bind their fractured memories of relocation and dislocation between Homes, reformatory schools, kinship care and domestic work. Their family history has been pieced together through memory, reconnection, imagination, and archival and genealogical research. They have found it easier to find evidence of their third and fourth generation First Nations, Afghan, and Chinese heritage than to find out about their mother. Leonie Sheedy recalls
receiving her case files in the mail when she was seven months pregnant, only to find almost no information about her thirteen years as a ward of the state, with the exception of a series of derogatory comments about her academic capabilities (grossly misjudged by the authoring Sister). Leonie found no evidence of her unique childhood narrative, but plenty of evidence of the low expectations that children in care were routinely subject to, and that impacted on the self-narratives developed by care leavers.33

Many care leavers were given little or no guidance or financial support after leaving the institution or foster home, and as such, were unprepared for the outside world.34 Michelle remembers leaving the institution with a suitcase, no money, and very little understanding of life outside the institution—for example, she had only seen herself in the mirror a handful of times. There was no one to meet her at the orphanage gates, and she has no recollection of where she spent her first night outside.35

Some care leavers have continued to find themselves in vulnerable or abusive situations similar to those experienced in care due to a lack of established and secure social and familial networks, little financial security, depleted self-worth, and initial difficulties adjusting to the social institutions of Australian society.36 Prior to the 1970s, few support services were available to aid these young adults in the complex transition from out-of-home care to an independent life.37 An unpreparedness for the world outside, combined with what Sheedy calls “genealogical bewilderment”, left many individuals feeling angry, vulnerable, and alone.38 This was most acutely experienced in relation to sub-standard educational outcomes, and in negotiating concepts of normativity (for example, family units, values, and ‘socially acceptable behaviour’). This is not only an historical fact, but also a contemporary issue of systemic disadvantage: in 2017, care leavers continue to be among the most at-risk youth in Australia due to experiences pre-care, in care, and after care.39

Sheedy argues that the shared experiences of care leavers created a wardie or homie sub-culture. She states:

35 Michelle Rose Turnbull, personal ongoing communication with the author, 2012–16.
36 Commonwealth of Australia, Forgotten Australians, 145–70.
37 From the 1970s, there was a shift towards kinship care and foster care rather than institutional care.
38 Sheedy quoted in Joanna Penglase, Orphans of the Living, 321. Additionally, it is important to highlight the greater incidence of poverty in the care leaver community due to limited education, poor health sometimes affecting employability, and the lack of inherited wealth and family support.
As I talk with you today I will be reminding myself to look you in the eye. One of the consequences of growing up in a home where people didn’t talk to you as an individual, where instead they simply barked orders at us, is that I don’t use a lot of eye contact…How does it feel to be a state ward? We never felt safe. We came to learn that we were second-class citizens. We still feel shame and stigma from our childhoods. We were told we were rubbish, guttersnipes, high grade mental defects, no-hopers, that we’d end up in jail, or as prostitutes. We learnt to expect the worst from people.40

My experience working in the CLAN office reminded me of the institutionalised context in which I operate as a university-enrolled researcher and artist, and how many of the care leavers I have worked alongside have made attempts to de-institutionalise their lives. In my many visits to the CLAN office, I experienced an inspiring culture of advocacy that pursued social change not through emulating bureaucratic systems but through prioritising community over hierarchy, working collectively and flexibly, and employing direct action over bureaucratic protocol.41

1.2 Institutional Responses and Complex Organisations

In 2009, the then Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd delivered a national apology on behalf of the Australian Parliament to the Forgotten Australians as one of the thirty-nine recommendations of the 2004 Forgotten Australians Senate Committee report. His address stated that, as a nation, “we look back with shame that so many of you were left cold, hungry and alone and with nowhere to hide and with nobody, absolutely nobody, to whom to turn.”42

The report recommended that the government of Australia “issue a formal acknowledgement and expression of regret to former child migrants” and “a broader Commonwealth apology to people who experienced abuse and/or neglect in institutional or out-of-home care as children”.43 It also urged “all State Governments and Churches and agencies…issue formal statements acknowledging their role in the administration of institutional care arrangements; and apologising for the physical, psychological, and social harm caused to the children.”44

Recommendations ranging from financial redress and funding for support services to oral history projects and the inclusion of the Forgotten Australians narrative into school

40 Sheedy, “Try to Put Yourself in Our Skin,” 66.
41 For example, in 2012, one year prior to the announcement of the Royal Commission, CLAN posted up to 10,000 postcards to Julia Gillard’s office with the text “Royal Commission into Child Sexual Abuse” printed on the front.
43 Commonwealth of Australia, Forgotten Australians, xix.
44 Ibid.
curriculums were made to the government.\textsuperscript{45} This apology followed the 2008 apology to the Stolen Generations because non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander care leavers argued they, too, had been orphans of the living: disconnected from their heritage and subject to abuse and neglect as a result of social policy, gender, and class discrimination.

In the book \textit{Politics and the Past: On Repairing Historical Injustices}, John Torpey explores recent global trends in reparative justice, and national attempts to “come to terms with the past”.\textsuperscript{46} He points out that:

\begin{quote}
states can no longer ignore the subterranean histories of the many groups submerged or oppressed in the ‘nation building’ process and who now seek apologies and reparations for their forcible incorporation into the modern world system.\textsuperscript{47}
\end{quote}

He notes that official (state, institutional) apologies are often the focus of repairing past wrongs but the apology phenomenon is only one part of the larger concept of reparation, which he describes as having four states: transitional justice, reparations, apologies, and communicative history (including memory and historical consciousness).\textsuperscript{48} Torpey suggests that apologies are always symbolic even when accompanied by monetary compensation (although financial redress can provide admission to spheres not previously accessible).\textsuperscript{49} While apologies can be culturally illuminating and promote awareness of the impacts of psychological harm and trauma on individuals and communities, he argues they can also promote the message that society should not organise to change but organise to “mourn”.\textsuperscript{50} Thus, while reparations can raise awareness, the gesture does little to eliminate the systemic disadvantage and discrimination present in government and legal institutions.

Legal academic Penny Crofts suggests that focusing on past errors rather than future policy can absolve responsibility through the process of simply ‘accepting responsibility’.\textsuperscript{51}

Researchers Jeffrey Olick and Brenda Coughlin argue that the privileging of shameful histories—the politics of regret—is “appropriate and desirable, [but] like all moral

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., xix–xxvii. Other recommendations included improvements to aged care support, mental health support, and the establishment of Find and Connect services that help care leavers locate living and deceased family members.
\textsuperscript{47} Torpey, “Introduction,” 23.
\textsuperscript{49} Torpey, “Introduction,” 7, 9.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 4, 1.
\textsuperscript{51} Crofts, “Legal Irresponsibility and Institutional Responses to Child Sex Abuse,” 83. This is an important consideration in Australia where incarceration rates are the highest they have ever been and child removal rates continue to rise.
codes and practices, it is socially conditioned."52 They argue that if an apology is not accompanied by structural change to prevent future oppression and violence, it is largely a symbolic social ritual. In this way, they view regret politics as more of an “embedded social product” rather than a “coming into self-consciousness”.53 From the perspective of advocacy organisations such as CLAN, the national apology was part of a larger reparation strategy that included justice and national redress in order to bring about the beginnings of social change and repair.54 In their article “Responding to ‘Forgotten Australians’”, Shurlee Swain, Leonie Sheedy, and Cate O’Neill argue that while national redress remains the central focus of care leaver advocacy groups, the apologies to members of the Stolen Generations, Forgotten Australians, British child migrants, and victims of forced adoptions catalysed greater recognition. They state:

Before the enquiries and the subsequent apologies, Forgotten Australians were confronted by a cultural silence which denied them the language, concepts, and accepted narratives within which to construct and narrate their own experiences. Their stories did not “fit in” with the narratives in the public domain. Their memories were “outside discourse”.55

Complicating Torpey’s theory that state apologies promote mourning rather than change, the reports of many care leavers indicate the apology was meaningful, and resulted in a growth in memberships of advocacy networks and movements around Australia and New Zealand.56 Additionally, as Swain et al. suggest, the apology broke the cultural silence around the high rates of children in out-of-home care and the associated practices of discipline, abuse and neglect. As a result, this situated care leavers within a recognised discourse that assisted non-care leavers in understanding the lived experience of people affected by policies of child-removal and institutionalisation. However, many care leavers expressed in conversation during this project an ambivalence toward or distrust of the apology, particularly because it was designed and delivered by the perpetrators, did not reference justice or national redress, and has not prevented further abuse of children in out-of-home care in Australia.57 As such, the circumstances that led to this systemic abuse

53 Ibid.
54 A national redress scheme is a national compensation scheme administered by the government rather than the abusing organisations.
56 Anecdotal evidence from CLAN, Lotus Place, and the Forgotten Australians Alliance.
require constant revisiting because apologies and royal commissions are only effective if they are accompanied by structural and institutional change.

Although care leaver advocacy and government inquiries have made significant changes in the lives of care leavers (for example, a redress scheme in Queensland, a focus on historical inclusion, and community building), it is important to acknowledge that the systemic nature of class-based discrimination and racial discrimination continues in Australia. Therefore, I take the position that the issue has not been properly dealt with or repaired, and it warrants further discussion and interrogation in the public sphere.

1.3 How It Happened: Complex Organisations

Significant evidence proves that many children in out-of-home care in the twentieth century in Australia were abused (sexually, physically, emotionally, medically, and spiritually), deprived of love, and dehumanised as part of an “administrative machine”. Such evidence suggests that abusive behaviour towards children in out-of-home care was systemic and therefore normalised in the institutions and government departments that cared for children.

In *Institutional Abuse: Perspectives across the Life Course*, Bridget Penhale defines institutional care as “care provided within a home that is not owned by the individual, and where the locus of control lies beyond the individual living in that environment”.

She suggests that responses to institutional abuse have traditionally focused on individual perpetrators rather than the institutional structures that enable abuses to occur. Russell Hawkins and Freda Briggs argue that while individuals perpetrate abuse, it can also be
perpetrated by governments and other institutions regarded as “benefactors of society”.

They argue that “individual rights may be the casualty of any system which relies on authority for control”, particularly those of children, whose rights are easier to abuse.

Findings from the interim report of the Royal Commission confirm “serious long-term failures to prevent and adequately respond to child sexual abuse by institutions”. The terms of reference of the Royal Commission have focused on identifying systemic issues regarding the abuse of children in an attempt to begin to ask how and why widespread abuse occurred. Crofts argues that the justice system (and, I would add, the media) continues to individualise responsibility despite the fact that investigations such as the Royal Commission demonstrate systemic failures (and have been specifically designed to study institutional responses rather than only individual perpetrators).

Crofts describes institutions such as children’s Homes and their organisational affiliates (religious organisations and governments) as complex organisations. She argues that complex organisations are difficult to hold accountable because their large and bureaucratic structures make it hard to locate exactly where responsibility lies. More specifically, while it is not difficult to identify systemic abuse within complex institutions, it is difficult to prosecute them.

Drawing on the work of Scott Veitch, Crofts states that defining legal responsibility in complex organisations is important because, if left undefined, it can lead to a normalisation of legal “irresponsibility”. In complex organisations, “employees are allocated particular roles and tasks” and the “person is judged by the extent to which they have fulfilled the terms of the job, not the effects of their actions”. When this understanding is directly applied to the responsibilities of individuals to report and investigate abuse (and prevent further harm), this “zone of non-responsibility” becomes a difficult legal problem in the pursuit of justice. As such, care leavers often find themselves attempting to navigate and confront complex, bureaucratic, and powerful organisations in

63 Ibid., 42, 53.
64 Ibid., and Commonwealth of Australia, Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse: “Interim Report Volume 1”.
65 Crofts, “Legal Irresponsibility and Institutional Responses to Child Sex Abuse,” 79.
66 Ibid., 82. Government initiatives such as the Royal Commission demonstrate the widespread nature of sexual abuse in institutions in Australia. However, as only sexual abuse is included in the terms of reference, other forms of abuse such as physical, emotional, or spiritual are neglected from the Commission findings and public record.
67 Ibid., 86.
68 Ibid., 86.
69 Ibid. Crofts states, “the more complex an organisation, the less likely it is to be held criminally responsible”. Recent amendments to the Statute of Limitations in Queensland have enabled individual perpetrators to be put on trial for crimes that were previously disqualified from prosecution under this law. Shine Lawyers, “Child Sex Abuse: Statute of Limitations,” Shine Lawyers (blog), posted 7 June 2016, https://www.shine.com.au/blog/abuse-law/child-sex-abuse-statute-limitations/.
71 Crofts, “Legal Irresponsibility and Institutional Responses to Child Sex Abuse,” 86.
their fight for justice or personal information. It is not uncommon for care leavers to be re-traumatised by these experiences, particularly when individuals have to negotiate directly with the institutions where the abuse occurred.

It is important to acknowledge that the Royal Commission covers contemporary instances of institutional responses to abuse (or lack thereof), despite the more general understanding that it is a “thing of the past”. Continuing reports of the abuse of children in out-of-home care was a major motivation for care leavers to engage with this project. The most cited reasons for participation were to highlight the long-term impacts of harmful caring practices and to help break the cycle of the class-based and racially motivated removal of children. Through privileging personal experiences throughout *apart & a part*, I have attempted to address the context of loss outside of the conventions of law, justice, and bureaucracy (discussed further in Chapter 2 and 3 through affective lives, new archives and the quotidian nature of trauma). As such, one of the key questions that *apart & a part* asks is: if your guardian is a system rather than an individual, what are the ongoing impacts of this?

### 1.4 A “Bare Life” in the Total Institution

In the State Library of Queensland collection of archival images on children’s Homes and institutions in Queensland, I came across an image dated 1928 that depicted a group of children from St Vincent’s Home, Nudgee, waiting to be vaccinated (figure 8). The caption read: “Groups of children from Nudgee Orphanage, 600 of whom were immunised against diphtheria with no ill effects. As a result of the favourable report thereon, immunisation against diphtheria was established in Queensland.” I was shocked at the blatant revelation of medical testing on children, and surprised that it was so casually located among many other images made in the style of public relations material. While the revelation of medical testing made in the image caption was shocking enough, it provoked a more devastating realisation: the bodies of children were viewed as accessible to individuals and systems. The ultimate act of dehumanisation.

It is a matter of historical record that clinical trials for experimental vaccines were conducted on children in Homes and orphanages in Australia throughout the twentieth century. They were often conducted without parental consent, and the children were not always informed of the risks involved. This practice continued until the late 1960s, when awareness of the ethical implications of such trials led to changes in legislation and policies.

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72 Ibid., 79. For example, *Protecting Children*, the 2004 report from the Queensland-based Crime and Misconduct Commission’s investigation into foster care in Queensland.

73 Personal communication with participants and non-participant care leavers.

74 I acknowledge the difficulty in assessing exactly if this image depicts what it claims to depict, but further research revealed that this image was listed as evidence of medical testing in the 2004 *Forgotten Australians* report.

The rationale for this was that children in Homes were more at risk of diseases and would therefore benefit from successful trials. A 1997 investigation by The Age newspaper into trials in Victoria found that both the state (as the legal guardian) and the institutions (as the administrative bodies) granted permission for these trials, with results published in reputable medical journals. There was never any record of parents consenting to these trials despite the fact that most children in care were not genuine orphans. Health academics Kathy Ettershank and David Ranson argue that support for these trials was a potential conflict of interest for the state because in addition to providing legal guardianship, the state was also responsible for public-health services. Although the evidence suggests that children were not frequently used for medical testing, and that there was potential for children in Homes and orphanages to benefit from these trials, this callous treatment reduced their bodies to an object or set of anatomical traits over which they had no sovereignty.

Figure 8: Small children waiting to be immunised at Nudgee Orphanage 1928. Collection State Library of Queensland, Brisbane.

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76 Kathy Ettershank and David Ranson, “Vaccine Trials on Orphans Cause Outrage in Australia,” The Lancet, 21 June 1997; Commonwealth of Australia, Forgotten Australians, 115–18.
78 Ettershank and Ranson, “Vaccine Trials on Orphans,” 1817. In 2009, Melbourne University Vice Chancellor, Glyn Davis, issued a formal statement apologising for the testing on orphans conducted by Melbourne University in Australia in the twentieth century.
79 Commonwealth of Australia, Forgotten Australians, 116.
80 Ettershank and Ranson, “Vaccine Trials on Orphans,” 1817.
It was not uncommon for children to be addressed by a number, which is a further indication of the impersonal nature of the institution and the functional language of bureaucracy. Many children in care were forced into domestic work or other manual labour within the Homes or reformatory schools or with families on farms and other businesses. While this work may have allowed individuals to gain skills that could assist them in finding future employment, investigations continue into the exploitation enacted through these schemes, including stolen wages and the substitution of labour for education.

Penhale argues that in institutions where the primary objective is to provide care, deviations from this objective in the form of abuse or harm directly contradict “the institutions’ stated function”. She acknowledges that there can be “few greater responsibilities than taking on the parenting of other people’s children”, but at the very least one would expect a reasonable outcome to be that the children are not harmed.

The use of children’s bodies for personal or social gains resonates with Agamben’s concept of “bare life”. In Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life, Agamben provides foundational arguments for understanding human life as a combination of zoe (bare life, animal life) and bios (political life, agency). He argues that the democratic nation state is founded on a paradoxical position that citizens are subjects, not objects, because of their bios—their political life or agency. Specifically, this paradox lies in the “states of exception” that are exercised by sovereign powers which, by denying the rights associated with citizenship or agency, forcibly reduce individuals to a condition of bare life, or homo sacer. Matthew Chrulew describes bare life as the space created by separating bios and zoe; as such, bare life is not biological life but wounded and excluded life. I draw on Christine Sylvester’s description of homo sacer as life that is “killed or mistreated by sovereign states without public acknowledgement or eulogy”. That is, homo sacer identifies those whose lives are treated as disposable in Western democratic states through what Agamben calls “states of exclusion”—a description that can be applied to (aspects of

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81 Murphy, “Memory, Identity and Public Narrative,” 305.
82 The institutions collected the remuneration for the children’s labour. It was also not uncommon for children to be adopted or fostered out to a family, only to be treated as a domestic servant or labourer rather than a member of the family. As such, many care leavers who were adopted out would have preferred to stay in the institution.
86 Ibid., 1.
87 Ibid., 167. A contemporary example of these states of exception can be understood through the statelessness of refugees (non-citizens) and their inability to access the same rights as ‘citizens’.
the history of) children in out-of-home care in Australia in the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{90} Agamben uses twentieth-century examples such as prison camps and the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers to argue that these categories of exclusion take place in plain sight. I draw on Agamben’s work to explain, in part, the complex psychological states produced by exclusion, and the difficulty many care leavers have had living beyond these states.

Drawing on Michel Foucault’s social theory of biopolitics, which examines the mechanisms through which human life is managed and measured by regimes of power, Agamben argues that the use of biological discourse to describe the experiences of some people reduces them to their physical traits or animal qualities, and in turn enables the paradox of citizens as objects (rather than subjects).\textsuperscript{91} In her analysis of Agamben’s concept of bare life, Ewa Ziarek argues the stripping a person’s genealogy, cultural memory, name and language (bios) reduces them to a state of bare live because it “constitutes him or her as a non-person”.\textsuperscript{92} When legal rights and protections are not applied equally, some lives are rendered \textit{less than}. Children in care who were medically exploited could be considered to have bare life—they were biologically useful, but their lives were not considered to be ethically significant, and were therefore subject to medical testing, servitude and unpaid labour, and abuse. Until recently, there appear to have been few penalties for such behaviours. I argue this is partly because of Crofts’s aforementioned zone of “non-responsibility” in complex organisations that makes it difficult to understand violations as systemic, but also because of the “state of exclusion” that existed around children in out-of-home care. Therefore, thinking about the exploitation of children in out-of-home care as an example of bare life goes some way to bridging the gap between \textit{knowing} that exploitation occurred in children’s Homes and \textit{understanding} the gravity and ongoing nature of its impacts. There is little doubt that the reduction of children to physical forms denied their \textit{bios} and that this exclusion from life was painfully experienced. For some, these wounds linger in adult life.\textsuperscript{93}

\textsuperscript{90} In \textit{Homo Sacer}, Agamben is referring specifically to the contradiction in Western democracies that have traditionally viewed their rule of law as superior and their treatment of all life as equal. See Agamben, \textit{Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life}, 11.

\textsuperscript{91} In \textit{Birth of the Clinic} (1976), Foucault argued that if the prevailing position in medicine was that the body behaved separately from the mind, the medicalisation of the human body was a logical outcome. His institutional critique of medicine focused on the structures of knowledge and power that saw human patients treated as vessels devoid of human experience and meaning, and subject to the all-knowing clinician’s gaze. See Kelly Hussey-Smith, “I Know I’m Not Alone: Women’s Health, Empowerment and the Internet” (Honours dissertation, Griffith University, 2008), 4.


In his well-known series of essays *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*, Goffman wrote about the impact of an institutional life on the self.⁹⁴ Goffman describes the total institution as a place of residence where there is a breakdown of the barriers ordinarily separating sleep, recreation, and work and “where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life.”⁹⁵ As distinct from other social institutions, the total institution refers to the “total bureaucratic responsibility of human needs” of “whole blocks of people” where the separation between inmate and staff is rigorously stratified.⁹⁶ Through “contamination” and “mortification” of the self, the individual becomes easier to control and individual refractions easier to identify and discipline.⁹⁷

In his analysis of Goffman’s *Asylums*, Greg Smith states, “it is our ‘civilian selves’ that come under attack upon entry to the ‘total institution’”.⁹⁸ Enacted through a process of de-identification, total institutions attempt to transform individuals from expressive civilians to homogenous inmates through a re-programming of the self.⁹⁹ This re-programming includes alterations to appearance (haircuts, uniforms), loss of control over personal belongings, removal of any expression of the self (being referred to as a number), and endurance tests (obedience, labour, confinement, punishment).¹⁰⁰ This all results in what Goffman called the diminished self. Although Goffman was writing about his immersion in the asylum, many scholars argue that this definition and many of his observations can be applied to the culture of orphanages and children’s Homes in Australia in the twentieth century.¹⁰¹

Of course, Homes and orphanages were not originally designed to be abusive and neglectful, but rather to provide reasonable outcomes for the children of families experiencing financial hardship, personal hardship, or those individuals that society considered ‘immoral’, or ‘half caste’ due to structural discrimination based on gender, race, and class in Australia. The evidence I have already cited suggests many of these Homes were run as total institutions. Drawing on Goffman, Penglase describes children’s Homes as “‘prison-like’ institutions ‘whose members had broken no laws’”, adding “good intentions

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⁹⁵ Ibid., 17, 11.
⁹⁶ Ibid., 17–19.
⁹⁷ Ibid., 34–46, 18.
⁹⁹ Ibid., 72.
do not cancel out bad outcomes; nor can they be used to excuse cruelty to children.”102 For abuse to occur, a dehumanising environment had to be created—which Penglase argues was the foundation from which all other forms of abuse were enacted.103

In a search of primary documents at the State Library of Queensland, I located a statement in the treasurer’s reports from Queen Alexandria Home (1911–44) that stated, “2. The object of this institution shall be to provide a home for children who need its shelter and provision, and to train them for a career of usefulness.”104 Described with bureaucratic honesty, these reports confirmed the purpose of the institution to provide basic needs and training in being ‘useful’. The absence of any reference to emotional needs (care, support, encouragement) is reflected in the life history narratives and oral histories of care leavers that overwhelmingly recall a childhood of emotional neglect. Care leavers consistently complain of poor educational outcomes, causing many to feel “stupid” and “uneducated”, contributing further to diminished self-worth.105 Additionally, the aim of “a career of usefulness” focused on the functional traits of the individual rather than the emotional and intellectual development of children, which were often compromised by the lasting impacts of abuse, neglect, and trauma. In some cases, these impacts led to poorer health outcomes (such as mental illness and post-traumatic stress disorder) and an initial unpreparedness for life outside the institution.

According to Goffman, a defining feature of a total institution is that the “carer” adopts the role of “supervisor”.106 Through an absence of connection and the introduction of surveillance, the “blocks of people” or “inmates” in the institution became easier to control.107 In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault describes a move away from punishment and discipline of the body to punishment and discipline of the soul. He argues that the loss of the self is an essential component in reshaping an inmate psyche and describes the modern day prison as a complete and austere institution that inscribes power-relations on the self that cause the individual to become “the principle of his own subjection”.108 On theorising the impact of the gaze in the institution, Foucault suggests it is the hierarchy of surveillance within the context of the institution that supports the shift from punishment of the body to punishment on the soul. When individuals surveil the actions of themselves and of others,

103 Ibid., 50.
107 Ibid.
trust between ‘inmates’ can become fractured, isolating individuals from one another.109 Before I understood the mechanisms of control as enacted through surveillance, I was surprised to hear from care leavers that they had formed few memorable friendships in the orphanage. This was a consistent narrative from care leavers. For children who often had little or no connection to their heritage, this lack of interpersonal connection due to the austere and often frightening culture of obedience further isolated the child from social life.

Taking Foucault’s argument that total control occurs when the inmate becomes the “principle of his own subjection”, it is easier to understand why some care leavers continue to experience fear and lack of control despite having left the institution.110 While this may be the case for some care leavers, it is important to mention that the majority of care leavers I have met, and spent time with are far less fearful of authority than non–care leavers.111 This is particularly potent when we remember that the ‘inmates’ were adolescents, children, toddlers, and babies who had no experience of how to contextualise the institution. Project participant Michelle Rose recalls being watched by a nun through an internal window at bedtime, and being physically disciplined if children spoke to one another during meal times.112 Christine Davies notes that many of the features of a total institution are incompatible with many of the social institutions of a Western democracy, and with the structure of family and social life.113 As such, on leaving care, many individuals reported feeling unprepared for the social rituals and institutions encountered in the outside world.114 For example, many care leavers have outlined the challenges of raising their own children due to the denial of role models and lack of love and affection in care or in their family homes.115 Furthermore, as Goffman observes, the difficulty individuals have moving between the two worlds can be “painfully experienced”.116

1.5 The Gray Zone: Complicating the Victim–Survivor Narrative

The complexities of the victim narrative have guided the visual responses and informed the methodology of apart & a part. Over the course of the project, the victim narrative was confronted in three distinct contexts: the methodological challenges of avoiding further victimisation (without creating positive stereotypes that depicted care leavers as ‘morally pure’); acknowledging that being defined a victim in the law (and elsewhere) can be

109 Ibid., 176–77.
111 I acknowledge that this is most likely because I operate in care leaver advocacy networks and community organisations. Nonetheless it is an important observation.
112 Michelle Rose Turnbull, personal correspondence  with the author between July and October 2012.
113 Christie Davies, “Goffman’s Concept of the Total Institution: Criticisms and Revisions,” Human Studies 12, no.1/2 (June 1989): 78.
114 Commonwealth of Australia, Forgotten Australians, 124–125.
115 Ibid., 149–153; see also Penglase, Orphans of the Living, 26–28, 310–316.
116 Goffman, Asylums, 25.
empowering; and the limits of the victim–survivor narrative to adequately express the complexity of living through ‘states of exclusion’.

In legal terms, the label of victim carries with it a determination of innocence. In many cases, being considered a victim may indicate a legal victory. Social historian Shurlee Swain suggests that when care leavers began to connect with support groups and advocacy organisations in the 1990s, a “coming out” culture was created, whereby declaring oneself a victim was not only empowering but also contributed to a larger justice project.  

In her narrative work with women who have experienced child sexual abuse, Erika Bush identifies the complexities of identifying as either victim or survivor, and suggests that individuals can be re-traumatised in the process of negotiating these dual identities, particularly when legal or bureaucratic systems are involved. Stacy Young and Katheryn Maguire, in their study with women who had survived sexual violence, found that the word survivor is generally preferred over the word victim because of its obvious inference to empowered resilience. However, they also reported that the term survivor can also deny opportunities to discuss their experience because they are no longer a victim. While the word victim is often associated with vulnerability and weakness, it can also be associated with innocence, which Young and Maguire suggest can “help alleviate some of the self-blame” associated with violence and abuse. Being known as a survivor, they assert, infers a journey from something else and they observed that participants in the research often used “a journey metaphor” to describe movement from one label or state to the other. One participant in their study stated, “A survivor is something you are until something better comes along and then you move to something better, but we don’t have a name for that.”

Bush argues that because the terms and their surrounding rhetoric have become ideographic, and have highly polarised meanings, they have become reductive narratives for women to adopt as part of their post-abuse identity. She draws on dialectical theory to frame the idea that the terms victim and survivor are interdependent, in that one cannot exist without the other; thus, she uses the term victim-survivor to describe this liminal state.

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119 Stacy L. Young and Katheryn C Maguire, “Talking about Sexual Violence,” *Women and Language* 26, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 43–44. This qualitative research was based on in-depth ethnographic interviews with ten women who had experienced sexual violence.
120 Ibid., 43.
121 Ibid., 42.
122 Ibid., 48.
123 Ibid.
She asserts:

Dialectical tensions refer to the contradiction, process, and interconnection between two seemingly opposing forces. In other words, dialectical theory acknowledges a dynamic tension between these forces, the process of change that occurs when negotiating these tensions, and the interdependence of the tensions making it impossible to consider one without the other. 125

I confronted a similar issue in *apart & a part*. Although I initially thought of care leavers as victims of a failed system, I soon questioned this rhetoric. Shifting to survivor felt better, but as we continued to explore complex and layered narratives, it also felt reductive because it did not reflect the challenges of each experience, just that each person had survived (rather than thrived). I also understood that individuals may not feel as though they ‘fulfilled’ either role adequately and that a more liminal approach to expressing these complex identities would more adequately reference this state. 126

Thinking through identity as a continuum, and drawing on the liminality of identity, I came to interpret these simultaneously experienced ideas of victim, survivor, and something else as central to the project. 127 Specifically, I came to understand the ongoing impacts of experiencing and leaving care not as static facts for presentation, but as fleeting, ethereal, and liminal fragments of lived experience that simultaneously embody multiple states (elaborated in Chapters 2 and 3).

This is addressed by Primo Levi through the concept of the “gray zone” in *The Drowned and the Saved*, where he warns of the limits of oversimplifying individual or collective identities to “victims”, “survivors”, or “perpetrators”. 128 He draws on personal experience to discuss the morally ambiguous states that he and other prisoner collaborators lived through in Auschwitz. 129 He proposes that in Auschwitz, the moral codes and judgements from the outside world were suspended and replaced with self-preservation. Specifically, he references the morally problematic hierarchy in which some prisoners—known as privileged prisoners—were provided with superior conditions. 130 He called this

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127 See also Linda A. Wood and Heather Rennie, “Formulating Rape: The Discursive Construction of Victims and Villains,” *Discourse & Society* 5, no. 1 (1994): 125–48. They argue that victims are not valued in society and often attributed the characteristics of passivity and powerlessness and treated with pity and derision (137).
129 It is not my intention to simply compare life in Auschwitz to life in orphanages and Homes. They were clearly very different operations with different aims and outcomes. Additionally, the punishments and/or abuse that occurred in Homes was more of a subsidiary motivation than a stated aim. The comparison is only useful to describe the complex states that have contributed to the formation of identity in adult life. Holocaust literature has and continues to explore these concepts in depth, and are unavoidable references in researching and thinking through these ideas.
130 Privileged prisoners were prisoners who were given more respect, better living conditions and jobs, and often more food and water. See Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 26—7.
morally ambiguous environment the gray zone, where individuals made decisions based on survival and self-preservation that blurred the boundaries of victim, survivor, and perpetrator. He sought to demonstrate that humans can simultaneously embody these identity states, arguing that it is necessary “to explore the space which separates…the victims from the persecutors”. As such, Levi’s concept of the gray zone destabilises the binaries of good–bad and victim–survivor and may be useful in understanding the confusion (or “morally ambiguous states”) that many individuals experienced in children’s Homes and orphanages when preserving the self in the face of fear, confusion, violence or other forms of abuse.

In Primo Levi: The Identity of a Survivor, Nancy Harrowitz studies the concept of shame in The Drowned and the Saved. She draws on Levi’s description of survivor shame as individual internalised shame that is different from guilt because it is not what one does, but a judgement on who one is. In his essay “The Tortured, Not the Torturers Are Ashamed”, David Shapiro writes that despite not having “done anything wrong”, individuals who have been subject to the shameful actions of others experience the shame of the subjugated. He suggests that subjugation itself is damaging and conjures shameful and complex emotional states. Powerfully, Harrowitz suggests this irrational experience of shame may also stem from a shame that one has become conscious of the existence of evil—the burden of witnessing. She argues that despite not having done anything wrong, a shame affect can arise simply from witnessing human atrocities.

Specifically, Levi was addressing the hierarchies that developed between prisoners, and the sometimes cruel interactions between inmates. He (controversially) argued that these positions were not to be judged with the same moral evaluations as those living outside the camp. Adam Brown, in his work on the oversimplification of moral judgements of atrocities in mainstream documentary, states that Levi does not seek to “confuse” the identities of “victim and perpetrator” but instead to blur these categories of identification. By extrapolating these complex (and taboo) shifts from one identity state to another (victim to perpetrator), or the ability to simultaneously embody two or more

131 Levi, The Drowned and the Saved, 25. While Levi believed that over-simplification of these states was problematic, he also acknowledged that simplification is required to orient ourselves or make sense of our experiences in the world.
135 Ibid.
identities (perpetrator and survivor), Levi asks the reader to suspend judgement towards those who were forced to make what Lawrence Langer has famously called “choiceless choices”. 139

Many care leavers have experienced (and many continue to experience) shame at having spent time in a Home, having fractured (or no) family ties, and having been subject to, or witness to, violence and abuse. Additionally, for children who escaped abuse, some experienced shame at not having had the agency to prevent these dehumanising acts on other children. Many children were faced with morally ambiguous situations, not easily understood in mainstream Australian society. Many care leaver biographies reference the complexity of wanting special time with adults, but realising that this sometimes came with consequences.140 Swain argues that instances of abuse were often slowly integrated into daily life. Therefore, “the progression from the ‘normal’ to the ‘criminal’ was subtle” and it became difficult to pinpoint its origins or easily place blame.141 For those who did encounter abuse, many continue to grapple with the irrationality of shame—what Shapiro alluded to as the shame of the subjugated.142

In his research, Mark Smith explores the over-emphasis and focus on victim narratives. He argues that researchers are susceptible to oversimplifying and overstating the victim narrative in their analyses of the “master narratives” of abuse and neglect in institutional care.143 Because victim narratives are given priority in the (contemporary) recording of previously ‘unknown’ histories, he suggests researchers do not always apply critical methodologies when interpreting emotive abuse testimonies. As a result, he argues, historical abuse victim narratives “rarely move beyond standpointism” and risk descending into “unreflexive solipsism”.144 His main concern lies in the disjunction between care leaver testimonies and carer testimonies, suggesting that the latter are often disregarded in favour of what he considers to be oversimplified, victim-centric narratives.145 He argues that when victim narratives come to represent the collective, this can negatively impact those who do not seek to be labelled as such or who do not identify with such a trajectory. The subjects, he says, become “immune from critical analysis”, and the resulting narratives reduce the care leaver experience to one of victimisation. This prevents analysis of the broader social

140 See Penglase, Orphans of the Living, and Szablicki, Orphanage Boy.
141 Swain, “Giving Voice to Narratives of Institutional Sex Abuse,” 296. This is widely cited as being one of the more complex aspects of child sexual abuse.
142 Paraphrased from Shapiro, “The Tortured, Not the Torturers Are Ashamed.” 1132. My term and emphasis.
143 Mark Smith, “Victim Narratives of Historical Abuse in Residential Child Care: Do We Really Know What We Think We Know?,” Qualitative Social Work, 9 no. 3 (2010): 304.
144 Ibid., 317.
145 Ibid., 304.
conditions that create the circumstances of abuse, and critical perspectives on the collection of this data.  

In *Empathic Vision: Art, Affect and Contemporary Art*, Jill Bennett studies affective responses to trauma in the visual arts, including responses to issues such as child sexual abuse (her work is covered in more depth in Chapter 2). She notes that the duality of this experience is rarely as simple as victim and perpetrator, and that this oversimplified narrative has also assigned victimhood a “moral authority”.  

The rigidity though which the narratives of victim and perpetrator are often presented denies the fluid and surprising ways affect is expressed as a result of such encounters. Bennett refers to “sense memory” to describe the activation of affective, mnemonic responses to art that arouse our emotional memory and allow complex issues to be explored beyond binaries. 

She suggests that the moral panic around child abuse limits the emergence of new contexts and felt experiences relating to abuse. She suggests that because it is politically desirable to be aligned with the victims of oppression rather than the perpetrators, victims are sometimes treated as morally superior because they have been “subject to evil”.  

She suggests that the association of innocence with morality is equally limiting because it reduces the victim to a vessel that something happened to instead of a thinking, flawed, caring, hurting person in the world. She states:

> By coopting the designation “victim” into a narrative of good and evil, we foreclose on the possibility of elaborating a description of traumatic experience that addresses either the moral ambiguities of lived experience or the inherent tension between the experience of sense memory and that of common memory. It is this tension that fundamentally characterizes the struggle to represent or register traumatic experience.  

The critiques by Bennett and Smith raise important considerations for avoiding the ‘simple’ victim, and align with my interest in moving beyond such representations in *apart & a part*.

I would like to briefly return to Smith’s critique of the over-emphasised victim to conclude this chapter. What his critique does not take into consideration is the flood of testimonies that occur as a direct result of the lifting of what Swain et al. called the “cultural silence” that had previously denied care leavers any space to pursue justice.  

Also worth

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146 Ibid., 306.
148 Ibid., 26–31. Bennett writes about the work of Denis Del Favero to discuss the privileging of “feelings, sensations and emotions” that over “moral clarity” (39).
149 Ibid., 26 and 26–27.
150 Ibid., 27.
151 Swain, Sheedy, and O’Neill, “Responding to ‘Forgotten Australians’,” 25. Although Smith is referring to different cases in the United Kingdom, his arguments can easily be applied to an Australian context.
considering is the energy created when a relatively silent history emerges rapidly, and through many voices. What might appear to be an artificial or over-emphasised number of victims may also be a symptom of researchers attending and responding to a previously under-acknowledged issue, rather than blindly becoming aligned with the ‘victim’.

But Smith’s article does raise a crucial point that provides an argument for expanding the victim narrative. Legal collective testimonies (such as those that have been delivered to the Royal Commission and Senate inquiries) create legal victims. When justice, truth, or redress is at stake, individuals provide a careful summary of the details relevant to the case (i.e., they follow a script). Complicating these narratives with ambiguity, guilt, and/or shame, is undesirable because it has the potential to cast doubt over the testimony. As such, the narratives that emerge in this context tend to serve a particular, legal, purpose, and are framed as rigid, logical, and accurate. With so much at stake, legal narratives cannot be expected to serve the extended story. Their role is to testify. However, this becomes limiting—devoid of ambiguity and complexity—when it develops into a public narrative.

To address the more nuanced states of lived experience highlighted by Levi and Bennett, the more expressive practices of visual art, affect, and narrative are particularly well suited to this task. Because these practices value ambiguity and exploratory processes that by nature seek to complicate and extend, they offer a far more open space for a multiplicity of perspectives to exist simultaneously.

I have used Levi’s gray zone to argue that the experiences of care leavers must be understood through a plurality of perspectives that work against a singular, oversimplified, narrative. Levi’s ideas about the complex, ambiguous experience of morality, in situations of forced institutionalisation combined with Bennett’s application of these to the field of aesthetics, art and, affect, align with the intent of apart & a part to explore the ongoing impacts of out-of-home care experiences beyond the boundaries of testimony.

The following chapter explores the dualities and complexities of personal trauma responses, with a focus on the quotidian nature of trauma. Continuing from the discussions in this chapter, on the limits of the victim—survivor continuum, I argue trauma as a continuum rather than an event, that must be understood on its own terms, rather than through mainstream culture or diagnostics. I highlight the impossibility of ever representing traumatic experiences, and suggest that the knowledge produced by trauma cultures often requires new kinds of archives that make space for affective languages and experiences to be communicated.
Chapter 2: New Languages of Trauma

Occasionally, as the light changes at the end of the day, just before sunset, I can still be overcome by the sensation, it’s too late now for anyone to visit us in the Home today.¹

In Chapter 1, the social, historical, and philosophical contexts that impacted care leavers were introduced as a rationale for the visual directions implemented in this project. This chapter outlines relevant trauma and narrative theories, particularly those relating to the ongoing, everyday impacts of traumatic experiences. I draw on Susan Best’s *Reparative Aesthetics: Witnessing in Contemporary Art Photography* to navigate shame in *apart & a part*, and to argue for the effectiveness of reparative strategies in collaborative projects that traverse trauma and memory.² Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s framework of paranoid and reparative readings featured in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* are also examined within cultures of photography and contemporary photographic art.³ Through examples from the collaborative process of *apart & a apart*, I will explain how I came to understand traumatic responses as a continuum rather than an event, and as unique and diverse. Using Ann Cvetkovich’s *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*,⁴ I demonstrate that traumatic responses can be understood beyond deficit discourses (where difference is viewed as deficiency) and in terms of the knowledge that trauma cultures produce.⁵ I examine narrative as an “ontological necessity”, given the significance of disconnection and disruption to care leaver memory archives and narratives of the self.⁶ The resulting artworks create an expanded archive of visual responses and narrative fragments that address the felt experiences often absent from historical or institutional records. Finally, questions surrounding the visualisation of trauma are introduced at the end of the chapter through a contextualisation of my work within contemporary lens-based practice.

⁵ Christopher N. Candlin and Jonathan Crichton, *Discourses of Deficit* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 4. In *Discourses of Deficit*, Christopher N. Candlin and Jonathan Crichton define deficit discourses as “include[ing] a loss of attributes or capacities which diminish in various ways the life chances of persons, as well as invoking understandings of how such attributes and capacities are ‘normalised’ against what is expected or required of persons in given circumstances”.
PART A

2.1 An Archive of Feelings: Trauma on Its Own Terms

Although *apart & a part* does not focus on testimony regarding acute trauma, trauma responses in the care leaver community are nevertheless central to the project. Specifically, *apart & a part* explores the non-linear, sensorial structure of trauma, and advances its potential to represent the affective dimensions of lived experience. Understanding trauma as a quotidian experience, *apart & a part* explores how care leavers navigate everyday encounters with the past. Specifically, I am referring to the micro traumas that care leavers experience in day-to-day life as a direct result of their time in out-of-home care, and the ways in which they respond to these encounters. I do this in line with narrative researchers Charlene Callahan and Catherine Elliot’s recommendation of placing value on the ‘mundane’ aspects of everyday discourse that reveal complex narrative understandings in their simplest forms. Acknowledging the quotidian quality of trauma positions it as a range of experiences organised along a continuum rather than as a single event.

A review of trauma literature, and discussions with psychologists, advocacy workers and most importantly, participants themselves, traces my understanding of both the structure of trauma and varying trauma responses. This initial broad approach was necessary to conceive a meaningful project for participants that avoided, as best as possible, re-traumatisation. In their role as advocates and community leaders, participants were deeply immersed in the personal, contextual, and political aspects of justice and recognition, and were therefore well equipped to engage with the past. I also came to understand that each participant possesses intimate knowledge of their triggers or responses to trauma (if any) and therefore the limits of their participation.

The group’s insistence that I understand care leavers (including my grandmother) on their own terms precipitated a turn to the quotidian aspects of lived experience. Through such practice-led collaboration, locating the micro traumas of everyday encounters challenged the depiction of trauma as a single, life-defining event. This also challenged the positioning of trauma as a deficit discourse that manifested as a set of stereotypical

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9 In their role as advocates and community leaders, participants were deeply immersed in the personal, contextual, and political aspects of the fight for justice and recognition, and were therefore well prepared to engage with their past. Specifically, at the time of making the work, participants were not experiencing acute trauma symptoms. They were active elders in the community and understood and sought public awareness and acceptance of this narrative and history.
10 At the time of making the work, participants were not experiencing acute trauma symptoms.
responses. While there is still a lot of pain and anger in the care leaver community, I was conscious that reducing apart & a part to tropes of abuse and victimhood would do little to advance care leaver advocacy and its associated discourses. Therefore, I identified the need for new kinds of archives that more adequately expressed these states.

In An Archive of Feelings, feminist theorist Ann Cvetkovich argues that institutional archives and clinical diagnostics are deficient expressions of trauma cultures. She proposes that repositories of feelings and emotions from everyday encounters and expressions of culture can help counter reductive narratives. Importantly, these repositories should help to document “the structures of feelings” that brought these cultures into existence. She argues that new kinds of archives are required to express both the psychic pain of trauma and the collective trauma knowledge that evolves from everyday encounters with trauma and memory. Trauma archives, she suggests, can include objects, narratives, and affective expressions of living with and beyond trauma. New archives are particularly important to communities whose public narratives are deficient or absent due to institutional neglect, historical erasure, or discrimination. A scream, an absence, a performative action, a friendship, a funeral, or an artwork may contribute to such archives. Cvetkovich states:

Because trauma can be unspeakable and unrepresentable and because it is marked by forgetting and dissociation, it often seems to leave behind no records at all. Trauma puts pressure on conventional forms of documentation, representation, and commemoration giving rise to new genres of expression, such as testimony, and new forms of monuments, rituals and performances that can call into being collective witnesses and publics. It thus demands an unusual archive, whose materials, in pointing to trauma’s ephemerality, are themselves frequently ephemeral.

By framing trauma as a “social and cultural discourse” that responds to the “psychic consequences of historical events”, Cvetkovich suggests that collective traumas often breed collective responses that are recognised as specific to that group. This approach to cultural inclusion, through affective archives of memory and history, explores the possibility of

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14 Ibid., 12.
15 Ibid., 8.
16 Ibid., 7.
17 Ibid., 18.
rethinking how we archive trauma to represent what is largely unrepresented in traditionally conceptualised archives.\textsuperscript{18}

Since trauma studies regularly intersect with national histories of genocide, colonisation, and migration, Cvetkovich also argues that these “multigenerational legacies require new vocabularies of trauma.”\textsuperscript{19} Trauma, she suggests, does not produce cultures of deficiency, but rather produces new cultures and identities forced to develop reparative strategies to understand and live with the quotidian nature of trauma—what Michel Foucault calls subjugated knowledges of resistance: that is, knowledge that has been overlooked or dismissed as deficient or ill-conceived because it was not produced by dominant cultural groups in the traditional knowledge format.\textsuperscript{20}

Cvetkovich suggests that trauma is an important site of theoretical exploration (beyond clinical diagnosis) because it acts as the “hinge between systemic structures of exploitation and oppression and the felt experience of them.”\textsuperscript{21} Including our affective selves into trauma archives, she suggests, counters “clichéd narratives” and privileges the knowledge developed by alternative cultures to create more representative social narratives.\textsuperscript{22}

While \textit{An Archive of Feelings} looks specifically at lesbian public culture, such arguments can be adopted more broadly to suit cultures and communities who have experienced the psychic pain of trauma, particularly those whose stories intersect with shameful national histories that have resisted integration into traditional archives.\textsuperscript{23} I found resonance with the idea of trauma cultures after observing the powerful networks of allies, advocates, and the support networks in the care leaver community that were largely absent from the public narrative.

After spending an initial period meeting with care leavers, listening to their stories, and getting to know each other, I began to question the appropriateness of data collection methods commonly employed in social research and photographic practice (i.e., structured interviews, typological portraits, testimonies). As an artist, I could see little benefit in

\begin{footnotes}
\item[18] Ibid., 17–19.
\item[19] Ibid., 37.
\item[21] Cvetkovich, \textit{An Archive of Feelings}, 12.
\item[22] Ibid., 11–12.
\item[23] The scope of the exegesis is not great enough to interrogate the history of the archive. I acknowledge Michel Foucault’s seminal work on \textit{The Archeology of Knowledge}, where he argues that traditional archives enact dominant ideological beliefs and cultural norms. Cheryl Simon paraphrases this well: “Key to the relationship between power and knowledge, the archive constitutes a site—more imaginary than real—through which social relations are regulated, enacted by way of the discursive practices of specific institutions. Hence, if the archive represents the historical parameters of specific systems of knowledge, defining what has been said and can be said, it also dictates by, for, and about whom knowledge is exercised.” See Cheryl Simon, “Introduction: Following the Archival Turn,” \textit{Visual Resources}, 18 no. 2 (2002): 102.
\end{footnotes}
asking participants to directly retell their trauma. Over time it became clear that my existing trauma vocabulary was insufficient to the task of describing the complex manifestations of everyday trauma. As these responses were often hidden, nuanced, domestic, banal, and multi-sensorial, they did not align with stereotypical representations of traumatic responses, such as flashbacks or anti-social behaviours. Additionally, many of the responses I observed were active rather than passive, demonstrated through advocacy, self-determination, and de-institutionalised practices. In this way, I also came to understand these trauma responses as key visual cues. Thus, my focus shifted from traumatic events to the lingering impacts of these experiences, and ideas were framed around attempting to ‘archive’ some of the nuanced expressions of this, largely left out of existing care leaver research. I also began to appreciate that feelings are political.

During a video experiment with Michelle at Nudgee Orphanage, we encountered an elderly nun who enquired about our presence. Michelle explained that she had been a resident of the orphanage from the age of four months to twenty-one years, and that we were working on a project about these experiences. Defensively, the woman proceeded to tell us that the media reports were biased, and “it wasn’t that bad” in the orphanage. Michelle defended herself stating that while she understood it “wasn’t all bad”, many people had been harmed and the system had failed. She continued by stating that had she expressed her transgender identity in the orphanage, she would certainly have been transferred to a mental health facility. Taken aback, the nun retorted she was exaggerating. Standing her ground, Michelle told the nun that she was wrong, and deep down she knew it to be true. Forgetting that elderly nuns lived out retirement in a nearby facility, I was unprepared for the encounter, and by the time we reached the car, it was dark. I was worried that the interaction would trigger traumatic memories of authority and control. But Michelle was ecstatic to be given the opportunity to speak directly to her past. I even called her that evening, but she dismissed my concern. This experience caused me to reflect further on the agency of participants in collaborative research. What I initially considered to be an oversight or even an ethical ‘slip up’ had turned out to be an empowering situation for Michelle. This made me question if I was limiting situations through which agency could be expressed by consciously and subconsciously avoiding what I perceived to be potentially re-traumatising scenarios (see also Chapter 3). While trauma responses can include

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24 Better handled through senate inquiries and commissions of inquiry rather than an art project that was not focused on trauma and trauma responses.

25 While some participants have experienced traumatic recollections, these were not experienced during the project, with the exception of one instance that was unrelated to the project, but that I was present for. See Cvetkovich, An Archive of Feelings; Brown, Beyond the Flashback; Cathy Caruth, ed. Trauma: Explorations in Memory (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995); and Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart, “The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma,” in Trauma: Explorations in Memory, 158-182.
dissociation, psychic pain, and confusion, they can just as commonly manifest as resilience and humour, a combination, or nothing at all. Initially, I was relieved that Michelle did not have a ‘trauma response’ until I realised that she did have a response—to turn the encounter into an empowering experience.

In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Cathy Caruth states that trauma is not necessarily acutely experienced at the time of the event, nor is it experienced equally between individuals. The defining feature of trauma, she suggests, is in the “structure of its experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly…to be traumatised is precisely to be possessed by an image or event.” She highlights the challenges of communicating trauma, stating:

> The difficulty of listening and responding to traumatic stories in a way that does not lose their impact, that does not reduce them to clichés or turn them all into versions of the same story, is a problem that remains central to the task of therapists, literary critics, neurobiologists, and filmmakers alike.

She explores the impossibility of ever knowing trauma, and suggests that reading trauma as a mere repression or defense is limited because it fails to understand that “trauma [also] opens up and challenges us to a new kind of listening, the witnessing, precisely, of *impossibility*”. The way in which trauma structures challenge conventional narrative understandings mirrors my attempt to understand trauma on its own terms. This impossibility of knowing traumatic memory is also discussed by trauma researchers Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart, who describe traumatic memory as an “inflexible” and “solitary” experience that is not, by definition, a social experience (as opposed to narrative memory that is flexible, relational, and social). As such, they argue that the structure of traumatic memory is difficult to reconcile with the structure of narrative memory.

In *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma*, Ulrich Baer argues that:

> [traumatic events] exert their grip on memory and on the imagination because they were not consciously experienced at the time of their occurrence. Just as the photograph 'mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially,' as Roland Barthes writes, trauma results from experiences that are registered as 'reality

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28 Ibid., 4–5.

29 Caruth, “Preface,” in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, vii.


imprints’ or, as psychiatrists have phrased it, recorded ‘photographically, without integration into semantic memory’.  

Baer draws attention to the difficulties in locating and understanding traumatic experiences through conventions of realism. He contends that this should not invalidate the realness of traumatic experiences but instead challenge our perception of how trauma and loss imprint on lived experience. Likewise, phenomenologist David Carr argues that fragments of non-linear memory are “permanently present, at the periphery of our consciousness”. But because they are not the dominant form of memory expression, they are associated more with “madness” than narrative expression. Many of the recollections I encountered were non-linear. This was not necessarily due to trauma (although one participant stated that her narrative remembering was directly impacted by traumatic memory) but also the sporadic nature of our conversations and dialogues over time, and my acceptance of Caruth’s “impossibility” of really knowing trauma. Therefore, rather than attempting to fill the gaps of narrative remembering, or fill the voids created by insufficient or absent records, I employed a non-linear and non-temporal approach to the installation to indicate to the viewer the impossibility of knowing. Therefore, apart & a part occupies a position between realist aesthetics and the interpretation of ethereal and unknowable aspects of quotidian traumas.

In *Fragments of Trauma and the Social Production of Suffering*, Marilyn Charles suggests that when implicit affects or experiences cannot be validated through language or collective memory, recollections of these experiences can take on a sense of the uncanny. She argues that these affective memories are often embodied as visual metaphors or vignettes that are capable of encapsulating the complex meanings held within memory structures. Metaphors, she states, “enable us to hold the relationships among the elements in mind, so that we can work at various threads without entirely losing sight of the whole.” As I was not seeking to complete individual narratives through the images in this project, I found that metaphors and visual vignettes rather than mimetic representations of trauma better met the aim of allowing the experiences of care leavers to exist on their own terms.

Van der Kolk suggests that traumatic memory challenges our understanding of memory as continuous, declarative, and unstable over time. These memories can leave sensory imprints that are not always expressible in language, and that can return with clarity.

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33 Ibid., 8–10.
35 Ibid.
37 Ibid., 30.
38 Bessel van der Kolk, “Trauma and Memory,” *Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences* 52, no. 51 (September 1998).
despite the temporal distance from the event. He calls this process the “engraving of trauma”. He argues traumatic memory behaves differently from narrative memory because it is timeless and therefore difficult to integrate into linear narratives. In other words, there are few opportunities to share the experience of traumatic memory because dominant narrative structures cannot comprehend its timelessness.

In translating trauma impacts into visual forms, I found van der Kolk’s description of declarative memory as ‘explicit memory’ (conscious awareness of facts or events) and non-declarative memory as ‘implicit memory’ (traumatic memories, sensory, emotional) helpful in articulating the aims of the work. This approach opened up a range of more sensorial responses. As traumatic memory (implicit) is always accompanied by narrative memory (explicit), this duality was also taken into consideration. For example, I avoided only referencing the non-linear aspects of experience. Rather than attempting to fill in the blanks, I looked for ways to allow the reflexive methodology to guide the aesthetic frame and form of the work.

I have taken visual cues from van der Kolk’s phrases such as the “engraving of trauma” and “timelessness of traumatic memory” in the installation and sequencing of apart & a part. The neutral sets in the images and the video works have been designed for this purpose. By eliminating visual cues to environmental contexts, I have attempted to balance the non-linear and non-temporal aspects with narrative cues. Balancing aesthetic fragments with narrative contexts (texts) emulates how traumatic memory integrates with narrative memory: traumatic memory is simultaneously inflexible and relational, solitary, and social.

In Lost to Worlds (2008), a meditation on the unknown histories of convict women in Tasmania, artist Anne Ferran states that “once something gets left out of the historical record, that absence itself becomes a fact.” These large, reflective, photographic works (figure 9) allude to the impossibility of knowing the experiences of convict women and their children. What cannot be accessed through the empty landscapes in Ferran’s images is precisely what has been discovered: evidence of absence. Describing her images as evidence of absence rather than as an absence of evidence confirms presence in absence. Ferran’s landscapes are not empty, but loaded with her assertion that when historical traumas are not addressed, they never go away (although trauma of course, does not disappear simply because it is addressed). This parallels the way in which traumatic

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39 Ibid., 52.
40 van der Kolk and van der Hart, “The Intrusive Past,” 158.
41 Ibid., 177.
42 van der Kolk, “Trauma and Memory,” 52–64.
44 Anne Ferran cited in Susan Best, “Anne Ferran: Histories of Women and Other Blind Spots.”
memory becomes an invisible presence. Absent from vision, it lingers within the memory structures that contain it. Therefore, I have used the non-linear structure of trauma as a metaphor for articulating part of the lived experience of care leavers. A primary aim, then, has been to avoid the association of absence with deficiency. As Cvetkovich suggests, there is much to learn from trauma cultures.

As my understanding of the theory and of participants’ narratives strengthened, I sought to include this non-linear temporality into the work as a way of giving form to this experience. Specifically, the works in apart & a part have been designed to appear as if floating in space. A series of decontextualised objects dominate the gallery space, eventually leading viewers to other fragments: narratives, memories, portraits, and textures. By separating the objects from their narrative contexts, I encourage what Jill Bennett describes as “engagement with sensation as it is registered in the work” rather than through the direct “emotional identification or sympathy” that is often aroused through photography that deals with testimony or victims.

In Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma and Contemporary Art, Bennett suggests that art that deals with traumatic subjects is often considered to be ‘transactive’: “it often

Figure 9: Anne Ferran from Lost to Worlds 2008, digital print on aluminum, 120 x 120 cm

46 Ibid., 7
touches us, but does not necessarily communicate the ‘secret’ of personal experience.”

She argues that art about trauma differs from trauma testimonials because character identification through linear narrative is not its primary aim. In this way, she suggests, much contemporary trauma art is not communicative in the traditional sense of relaying information or knowledge of a single subject, but provides an affective experience that leads to a conceptual encounter. She describes affect in the trauma art of Doris Salcado and Sandra Johnston as “flowing through bodies and spaces, rather than residing within a single subject.” She draws on the encountered signs of Gilles Deleuze to describe the felt experience of art as “a catalyst for critical inquiry or deep thought”. This resonates with the continuum of trauma and the way that apart & a part has been designed to lead viewers to a conceptual encounter rather than an historical truth. The transactive aspect of the work lies in the distillation of complex plural histories and narratives into single images that provide fragments of lived experience. The works have not been designed to communicate concrete narrative truths or rely on empathic cues. Instead, they seek to acknowledge what Bennett calls the “motility” of affects produced by ongoing, everyday traumas.

I want to briefly address the concept of empathy in apart & a part. I have largely avoided the term in this exegesis, although aspects of my work arguably evoke such feelings. I have come to perceive the definition of empathy as projecting oneself into the other as a rather arrogant assumption. Bennett describes this as “crude empathy”. She states:

Defined as the tendency to abstract from the specific of the life depicted and identify with a single emotion or affect; to respond by thinking, “I wonder what I would be like if that happened to me.” What is wrong with that kind of empathy is, of course, that another’s experience—in this case, a profoundly alienating and fundamentally secret one—is assimilated to the self in the most simplistic and sentimental way; anything beyond the audience’s immediate experience remains beyond comprehension.

In this way, I better understand empathy as a recognition of difference. Bennett describes this in art as “the aesthetic experience of simultaneously feeling for another and becoming aware of a distinction between one’s own perceptions and the experience of the other.”

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48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid., 13. Specifically, Bennett is speaking about the work of Doris Salcedo and Sandra Johnston.
51 Ibid., 7.
52 Ibid., 10.
53 Ibid., 111.
54 Ibid. Bennett attributes the term “crude empathy” to Bertolt Brecht.
55 Dominik LaCapra cited in ibid., 8.
Less focused on the interplay between the self and the other, but on the need for narrative, Cvetkovich suggests cultures that have endured historically silenced trauma often struggle to see themselves reflected in archives. Therefore, memory becomes an important tool in recovering these stories and feelings.\textsuperscript{56} She asserts that traumatic histories are always present, often taking surprising forms that evade existing classifications, so “ephemeral and personal collections of objects stand alongside the documents of the dominant culture in order to offer alternative modes of knowledge”.\textsuperscript{57} In their work on adoption and family narrative, Helen Brookfield, Steven Brown, and Paula Reavey suggest that for children who have experienced displacement, key objects from their past become “spectral objects”.\textsuperscript{58} These objects act as links to memories of subjective histories, and have their own agency, which Brookfield et al. call the “phantom subjectivity” of these objects.\textsuperscript{59}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure10.png}
\caption{Kelly Hussey-Smith \textit{The Sheet from apart & a part} 2017}
\end{figure}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{56} Cvetkovich, \textit{An Archive of Feelings}, 8.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 6, 8.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
Affirming the impact of Cvetkovich’s everyday traumas, images in this project such as The Sheet (figure 10) draw on both the institutional symbols of oppression, dehumanisation, and restraint and the agency of the individual in locating innovative ways to thrive beyond these encounters. The Sheet developed when, after paying several visits to Michelle’s home over a number of years, I suddenly noticed that she did not own white sheets. Senate inquiries and oral history projects have confirmed that bedwetting in many children’s Homes was severely punished, causing shame, fear, and anxiety. These documents also suggest that bedtime was complicated for many children in care: it was both a welcome retreat from the day and an acute reminder of vulnerability and aloneness. The art of trauma seeks a reception beyond clinical illustration, engendering what Bennett calls, “new languages of trauma that proceed from its lived experience”. Given a sense of animation through flight, the sheet hangs in the frame as both a reminder of the legacy of institutional life, and its diminished power in Michelle’s life. A reminder of the unexpected objects that contribute to the care leaver archive.

2.2 Memory and the Unobtainable Archive

Helen Brookfield, Steven Brown, and Paula Reavy state that, “far from being a solitary activity, the memories we hold of our past are collectively formed out of the storytelling practices which we, and significant others, participate in.” For care leavers, the absence of a structure for remembering via significant others means it can be difficult to anchor memories and lineages coherently. The authors use the term “joint remembering” to discuss the process of anchoring memories into a collective bank. Often, it is families and significant others who play a key role in archiving parts of our existence, and bridging the gap between past and present. In his extensive oral history with Australian care leavers, historian John Murphy states that “we do not so much ‘have’ memories as ‘remember’ them, actively re-shaping them in ways that make the past continue to be coherent.” He suggests that missing or inconsistent records catalysed many care leavers to become “archivists of the self”. These gaps in heritage can create what Brookfield et al. call narrative uncertainty, where the act of memory-making is turned into “an exercise in

62 Bennett, Empathic Vision, 24.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
67 Ibid., 302.
merging fiction with bureaucratic fact”. Murphy argues that methodologies such as oral history can play a more dynamic and less passive role in understanding oneself and one’s own narrative, stating that memory is less a repository of events to be recalled than it is a mechanism that helps make sense of conscious experiences. Taking a Foucauldian standpoint on the myth of “stable subjectivity”, he suggests that remembering is important to narrative coherence, not because it reveals singular truths but because it connects the past with the present and reflects our understanding of time. Archival images, care leaver testimonies, and senate inquiries suggest that standardised appearances, clothing, and narratives all contributed to what Murphy calls feeling like “an object in an administrative machine”. In response to the potential for depersonalisation that may occur through methodological standardisation (typology, testimony), my collaborations with participants became more intimate and individualised. Specifically, I employed a slow process that focused on building relationships through active listening and ‘being myself’, with the aim of achieving mutual investment in the project. In employing friendship as a research method, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, I acknowledged the differences in each individual care leaver’s experience. This choice reflects my understanding of Bennett’s suggestion that empathy is recognition and respect for difference rather than a collapsing of oneself into the story. Given photography’s propensity to standardise and depersonalise, I also drew on principles of reciprocity employed in relational ethics, such as mutual respect, engagement, embodied knowledge, and uncertainty, as the foundations of ethical relations. Acknowledging the enduring impacts of institutional life, I shifted to a less serialised visual response (while I was developing an aesthetic frame) where the impacts were presented as varied, and each person’s lived experience and narrative was unique (see Chapter 3).

Sociologist Margaret Somers argues “that social life is itself storied and that narrative is an ontological condition of social life.” She outlines the reframing of narrative

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69 Murphy, “Memory, Identity and Public Narrative,” 300. Here Murphy draws on the work of oral history scholars Allesandro Portelli and Alistair Thomson to introduce the narrative process of oral history.
70 Ibid., 300–301. It is important to acknowledge that this text has been authored in reference to continental philosophical perspective on issues of ontology and how narrative is intrinsic to this. First nations academics, activists, elders, and authors argue that Indigenous cosmologies have complex understandings of ‘ontology’ but have been largely ignored in research around these topics. See Zoe Todd, “An Indigenous Feminist's Take on the Ontological Turn: ‘Ontology’ Is Just Another Word for Colonialism,” Journal of Historical Sociology 29, no. 1 (March 2016).
71 Murphy, “Memory, Identity and Public Narrative,” 305. In many cases, children were referred to by their number rather than their name.
72 Stephen Muecke calls this “earning your right to be there” in Stephen Muecke and Max Pam, Contingency in Madagascar (Bristol: Intellect Ltd., 2012), 25–26. This is discussed further in Chapter 3.
74 Margaret Somers, “The Narrative Construction of Identity,” 614. I was introduced to Somers’s work in Murphy’s
from a relational understanding (contingent on relationships) to an ontological understanding (being is dependent on ‘sense-making’ narratives).\textsuperscript{75} This way of approaching narrative examines how intrinsic narrative is to our being, and, by extension, our sense of self.\textsuperscript{76} In *Time, Narrative and History*, David Carr suggests that maintaining a narrative is a reaction to impending chaos, thus implying that narratives allow us to distil information into coherent pathways that assist us in relating to, and understanding, the world.\textsuperscript{77} Many care leavers have inconsistent or non-existent records of their heritage and early life history. Sequences of events may be missing due to a lack of information, the withholding of information by authorities and institutions, or the impacts of trauma and grief on the individual.\textsuperscript{78} Murphy’s oral history with forty Victorian care leavers found that while most participants had some understanding of their narrative origins, many became “archivists of the self” in order to make sense of their biography.\textsuperscript{79}

The 2004 Senate Committee Report on *The Forgotten Australians* dedicated an entire chapter to “Identity and Records”, outlining the significant obstacles to obtaining personal records that had the potential to unlock and contribute to a narrative of the self.\textsuperscript{80} It detailed cases of the withholding of information; the return of confronting documents without access to counseling or support; a lack of empathy for those trying to access significant documents; absent or lost records; and some care leavers being forced to “grovel for information” at the very institutions where they had been abused.\textsuperscript{81} One contributor to the Report accused care providers of altering records to bury evidence of abuse: “They left us so screwed up, but they covered their tracks.”\textsuperscript{82}

Most of the government files I sighted documented little more than the whereabouts of each child: when a child entered and exited the Home, the hospital, the school, the infirmary, family stays, or work experience (code for labour with no remuneration).\textsuperscript{83} The gaping holes in these archives underscored the absence felt by many care leavers. Consequently, many of them found receiving their files a painful experience.

Contrary to expectations supported by the deficit model of trauma, the lives of care leavers with a sense of self are not characterized by the lack of attention to personal history.\textsuperscript{84} Many care leavers, like Murphy’s participants, found ways to make sense of their own stories through the deliberate acquisition and archiving of their records. This process of self-construction is not without its challenges, however. Many care leavers, especially those with traumatic histories, may find the process of engaging with their records emotionally distressing. In such cases, the provision of appropriate support and counseling is crucial.\textsuperscript{85}

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\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 613.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 606.
\textsuperscript{77} Carr, *Time Narrative and History*, 91. I was introduced to Carr’s work in relation to memory through Murphy’s “Memory, Identity and Public Narrative,” 299.
\textsuperscript{78} Including post-traumatic stress disorder.
\textsuperscript{79} Murphy, “Memory, Identity and Public Narrative,” 304, 302.
\textsuperscript{80} Commonwealth of Australia, *Forgotten Australians*, 253–86.
\textsuperscript{81} David John Mead cited in ibid., 258; see also ibid., 253–82.
\textsuperscript{82} Mary Brownlee cited in Commonwealth of Australia, *Forgotten Australians*, 275. Brownlee’s statement has been widely confirmed through the Royal Commission.\textsuperscript{83} I am specifically referring to official documents produced between 1920 and 1980. Contemporary discourse has identified the need to reform these practices by asking care leavers what should and should not be archived in the personal files of children currently in care in Australia. See Cathy Humphreys and Margaret Kertesz, “Putting the Heart Back into The Record: Personal Records to Support Young People in Care,” *Adoption and Fostering*, 36, no. 1 (2012): 27–39.
leavers have been anything but a void. Intersecting with significant social and national histories, care leavers have been at the forefront of social justice and advocacy movements, challenging institutional thinking and systemic corruption for over twenty years (as outlined in Chapter 1). As I formed more intimate relationships with participants, the ways in which each individual reconciled their difficult pasts through storytelling, community, support, and research guided the development of a foundational set of ethical methods through which to conduct the project. As Carr, Murphy, and Somers suggest, connecting our lived experience to that of others supports our ability to construct narratives of the self and make sense of our lives. When a story lacks a guardian, or when the guardian of a story is institutional, bureaucratic, or detached, these self-narratives can confuse and fracture, rather than illuminate and connect. Because dominant cultural values and narratives associate familial love with ‘wholeness’, the experience of detachment or separation can easily activate deficit discourses. These discourses of abandonment and worthlessness can be internalised through external suggestions of illegitimacy and deviance. As outlined in Chapter 1, avoiding the oversimplification of the victim–survivor narrative was a central aim of this project. Thus, in an effort to avoid playing into the deficit discourse that care leaver researchers Andrew Harvey et al. call “the soft bigotry of low expectations”, I have attempted to balance the established history with a methodology that positions care leavers as the experts on the impacts of growing up in care.

Many care leavers have independently pieced together fragmented pockets of information to make narrative links in the story of their heritage; thus, many are expert researchers. For example, the “unfinished business” of childhood led project participant Bambi, on a 20,000-kilometre journey to locate her family. After travelling from Holland (where she moved with her adoptive parents after spending ten and a half years in Nudgee Orphanage) via Pakistan (where she lived with her husband before separating), Bambi

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84 Carr, Time, Narrative and History; Somers, “The Narrative Construction of Identity”; and Murphy, “Memory, Identity and Public Narrative.”
85 Candlin and Crichton, Discourses of Deficit, 4.
86 Otherwise known as ‘felt stigma’. Graham Scambler and Anthony Hopkins “Being Epileptic: Coming to Terms with Stigma,” Sociology of Health & Illness 8:1 (1986): 33. The scope of this exegesis is not great enough to review the literature around felt stigma. However, an understanding of how stigma can be both enacted and felt has helped form an understanding of participant experiences. Drawing on Goffman’s seminal work on stigma, specifically the relationship between felt stigma and corresponding self-concepts of deviance, Scambler and Hopkins propose the terms “enacted” and “felt” stigma to differentiate the action of stigmatising, from the feeling of being stigmatised (33). They define enacted stigma as the act of stigmatising an individual or group, and felt stigma as the fear of enacted stigma, and the internalised shame that can manifest as a result (33). See also: Erving Goffman, Stigma: Notes On the Management of Spoiled Identity (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1968), 151–174.
returned to Australia to find her family. With no money or networks, but with two small children and a little luck, she engaged archivists, bureaucrats, librarians, and journalists to locate living and deceased relatives (figures 11 and 12). This research reunited her with her brother, sister, and aunt, uncovered her second-generation Indian-Lebanese heritage, and provided her with evidence that her father had tried to contact her before his death. Although Bambi never directly experienced her Indian or Lebanese heritage nor met her father in adult life, this information “took a huge weight off [her] chest”. She told me that “finally, I could stop searching.”

89 Bambi’s experience demonstrates that feelings of chaos and instability appear to be lessened substantially when individuals have access to meaningful information about their heritage. At the crux of our human experience is a desire to belong to people. As Somers suggests, it is part of our ontology—our very being.

If a narrative is a requirement for a coherent ontology and a way of avoiding chaos, then it is not difficult to imagine the confusion and loss that many children who were raised in state, church, or foster care experienced when trying to construct adult narratives of the self.

89 Bambi (real name withheld at participant’s request), personal correspondence with the author, 2014.
In the photobook _____ and Willem: Documentation of a Youth, Willem Popelier revisits his separation from his identical twin brother at age four. Employing evidentiary documentation through imaging objects, documents, photographs, and people, he painstakingly retraces the impacts of the separation. Popelier addresses the idea of narrative confusion by asking the viewer to follow a complex representation of familial relationships represented diagrammatically through a family tree. In doing so, the reader simultaneously experiences confusion and loss through the rapid, often unexplained changes to the tree. Despite the clinical approach employed by Popelier, his family tree simply does not make sense (figure 13).

![Figure 13: Willem Popelier _____ and Willem: Documentation of a Youth 2010, book spread](image)

The absence of a narrative to explain the appearance and disappearance of family perfectly underscores Somers’s commentary on confusion and loss. The final chapter of the book emphasises the irreversibility of separation by including a series of archival family photographs of Willem and ____ participating in childhood rites of passage—birthdays, beach holidays, riding bikes—first together (figure 14), then separately (figure 15). Despite using the language of categorisation (the family tree and case files), Popelier manages to direct the viewer to the unobtainable archive. Through the simple strategy of depicting

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91 Willem Popelier, ____ And Willem: Documentation of a Youth (Rotterdam: Post Editions, 2010). Willem’s twin brother removed consent for his name and image to be used at the end of the book-making process. Therefore, he is referred to throughout the book as ____ and his image is consistently obstructed by a block of colour.
distance, the impacts of their separation are understood as simultaneously being apart from each other, and a part of each other’s story.

Figure 14: Willem Popelier and Willem: Documentation of a Youth 2010, book spread

Figure 15: Willem Popelier and Willem: Documentation of a Youth 2010, book spread
In *A Living Man Declared Dead and Other Chapters*, Taryn Simon presents a genealogy of descendants that stem directly from an event to categorise and visualise the trans-generational impacts of an event/s. Simon suggests a bloodline is an “absolute catalogue” that becomes marked by external forces. The global case studies in Simon’s work are connected, however, not through a single theme but through a visualisation of the fact that every action has a reaction. By extension, she argues the impacts of external factors such as governance, power, institutions, and religion become easier to identify when applied to this catalogue. This effectively broadens the notion of “physical and psychological inheritance”. Simon also suggests that the real knowledge in her work exists in what I have labelled ‘the unobtainable archive’, which are the gaps between the eighteen stories. For many care leavers, it is precisely those experiences left out of files, archives, and childhood records that they urgently seek to know or find evidence of. I have come to understand through care leavers sharing their experiences with me that despite living full and rich lives, many individuals keep a space within themselves to mourn, or perhaps also honour, their unobtainable archive. Participant Leonie Sheedy argues that if we don’t expect someone to ‘get over’ a good childhood, why would we expect them to get over a bad one?

Combining Simon’s understanding of the unobtainable archive with Somers’s argument that a narrative is an ontological necessity led me to consider the need for new kinds of archives that acknowledge both the loss felt by care leavers and the rich lives that unfolded. I have not set out to recover archives or rebuild individual narratives or case files. It is simply not my place. Instead, by drawing on extended dialogue between myself and participants, I have sought to produce something akin to Cvetkovich’s *archive of feelings*, to produce a body of work that documents our collaboration and extends the care leaver narrative. This complex set of aims led me to the field of reparative aesthetics.

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96 Leonie Sheedy, personal email communication with the author, 4 July 2017. As she writes, “We don’t ask people to get over a happy childhood but people ask us to get forget our unhappy childhoods. But you can’t! You learn to live with it.”
PART B

2.3 Reparative Aesthetics

The photographic theory I was exposed to as an undergraduate student in an Australian art college and my extended immersion in the photographic cultures of the art world taught me a few key lessons. The first is that photography has an undesirable character, and not everyone wants to be associated with it (although everyone agrees photography is fascinating). The second lesson is that photographing feeling, beauty, injustice, and pathos is at best sentimental and at worst problematic. The third lesson is that the less the image looks like a photograph, the fewer ethical issues one faces. Specifically, photographing the world is so fraught with ethical and representational problems that the very act of picking up a camera may unwittingly declare one’s ethical hand.

I understand these positions; they are now embedded into my psyche. I have great respect for the postmodern critique of photography that helped transform photography into a more expressive, ethical, and experimental discipline (indeed, I now teach this critique). This rich and influential tradition of work that challenged the social functions of photography and the burden of representation through critical perspectives on power, race, hegemony, and capitalism was widely influential on generations of photographers, students, teachers and critics. Just as photography liberated painting from the burden of representation, the critique liberated photography from its truth-seeking claim. Yet I was still troubled by a great sense of shame. I wanted to make photographs that referenced the world. I respected the ethos of long-term documentary work—specifically, the long-term projects that sought to reveal, through research, a fragment of the world. Worse still, I often defended such work. But my greatest shame (and insight) was that I sought to take as my main subject political questions, moral questions, even topics related to injustice. The tension between valuing the aim of long-term documentary work and appreciating the criticisms levelled at such work by postmodernism is the premise of Susie Linfield’s defence of photography documenting political violence in The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence. In her critique of the postmodern disdain for

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98 Debates about the relationship between the anti-aesthetic and aesthetic in photography dominated postmodern art theory and criticism, particularly in relation to photographs depicting trauma or suffering. In Regarding the Pain of Others (2003), Susan Sontag famously critiqued the use of aesthetics (drama and beauty) in photographs that depicted “hellish events” (23). She argued that these events looked more “authentic” when they did not appear to be composed or lit in a way that indicated authorship (23–24). In fact, she suggested that “less polished” images possess a “special kind of authenticity” because they are less likely to be manipulated (24). See Susan Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

99 Specifically, the critique focused on photo documentary’s tendency to victimise and de-historise complex states of suffering and disadvantage. Theorists such Martha Rosler, Susan Sontag, Allan Sekula, Abagail Solomon-Gordeau, Hal Foster and more recently Derrick Price have taken aim at the danger of photographic representations to oversimplify and naturalise victims through photojournalism, documentary, and Non-Government Organisation advertising. These theorists took aim at the problematic aspects of photographic practice; namely, the victimisation of subjects, unequal power relationships, photography’s “truth claim”, and the problem of providing discursive contexts.
photographs of suffering and political violence, Linfield proposes that many of the seminal critics of photography “don’t really like photographs, or the act of looking at them”, claiming that the critics of photography are unlike critics in other disciplines (such as theatre or literature) simply because they do not love the discipline.\(^{100}\)

In *Reparative Aesthetics*, Susan Best explores the question of how artists use aesthetics to address shameful and difficult histories of colonial and political violence without disarming and alienating the viewer through shame.\(^{101}\) Through careful analysis of the work of four female artists from the Southern Hemisphere (Anne Ferran, Fiona Pardington, Rosângela Rennó, and Milagros de la Torre), Best argues that their work has been under-theorised partly due to the dominance of the anti-aesthetic movement in contemporary art and art theory, in addition to longstanding gender and geographic bias in the art world.\(^{102}\) She states that there is significant value in addressing the legacy of difficult and shameful histories through contemporary art, particularly in light of the decline in funding for investigative projects and journalism.\(^{103}\) She calls this “reparative aesthetics”, adapted from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s seminal essay “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You” in Sedgwick’s book *Touching Feeling*. Here, Sedgwick critiques the paranoid culture that now dominates critical theory.\(^{104}\) Sedgwick proposes the notion of a reparative reading that incorporates the pleasure of not-knowing, risk-taking, and dialogic surprise.\(^{105}\) Sedgwick proposes that contemporary critical theory has become so habitually practised and formulaic that paranoid approaches to theoretical critique proscribe knowledge as static rather than fluid.\(^{106}\) Thus she suggests that the mitigation of risk and surprise associated with paranoid reading diminishes dialogic participation in academic life and renders

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\(^{100}\) Susie Linfield, *The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), xvii, 5. Linfield cites the work of Ariella Azoulay, who, in *The Civil Contract of Photography* argues, “it is our historic responsibility” to produce, witness and interpret photographs of political violence (122). According to Azoulay, photographs do have a dialogic function and are not as limited to the single viewpoint as is commonly cited. She argues that many viewpoints are possible if the viewer *watches* the image rather than looks at the image (ibid., 14). The “contract” between the photographed, the photographer and the viewer is one of ethical responsibility on the part of the viewer—to witness and to contemplate. Linfield describes this as “transforming our relationship to photographs [of political violence] from one of passivity and complaint to one of creativity and collaboration” (Linfield, *The Cruel Radiance*, 60). See Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone, 1998).

\(^{101}\) Best, *Reparative Aesthetics*, 1.


\(^{103}\) Best, *Reparative Aesthetics*, 32.

\(^{104}\) Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*.

\(^{105}\) Ibid., 124–51.

\(^{106}\) Ibid. 124–30 and 137–38; “It is only paranoid knowledge that has so thorough a practice of disavowing its affective motive and force and masquerading as the very stuff of truth” (138).
readings other than paranoid as “naïve, pious, or complaisant.” The contagious paranoid approach therefore dominates how the seeker, knower, or teller interprets and responds to texts.

Drawing on this analysis, Best suggests that the anti-aesthetic trend in conceptual art now embodies similar paranoia. Paranoid art, she argues, “favour[s] critique and the exposure of wrongdoing” over reparative strategies that seek to attenuate shame. She observes that “paranoid art has become almost synonymous with political art”, rendering alternative approaches less visible. Alternatively, Best suggests that reparative strategies open a dialogue about shameful histories and their associated traumas (often intergenerational and ongoing). She warns that a reparative position should not be simplified to positive or negative, but should draw on the ambiguities and strengths of aesthetics to embrace the potential of an ambivalent viewing position. Sedgwick’s methodological critique also considers the absence of pleasure from critical theory. Instead, a reparative position or reading seeks pleasure rather than only attempting to avoid paranoia; thus reparative work does not exist in spite of paranoid work but in addition to it. Best builds on this, suggesting that the women artists she considers to be working reparatively prioritise “pleasure and aesthetic complexity, while also registering the traces of oppression.” Thus, she signals the complexity of Sedgwick’s reparative mode, and its ability to “assimilate the consequences of destruction and violence.”

Central to reparative aesthetics is the recognition that “violence is not foreign or confined to criminals or terrorists; rather it circulates between victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and beneficiaries.” Thus, reparative strategies in contemporary photography often visualise Bennett’s flow of affect and Best’s attenuation of shame as part of their visual structure.

In the early stages of conceptualisation and image making for this project, I sought to balance the pleasure of production with the sensitivities of the story. Aware that this strategy did not align with tendencies in contemporary art that preference the ‘anti-

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107 Ibid., 126.
108 Ibid., 124.
109 Ibid., 4. In Reparative Aesthetics Best suggests that artists such as Jenny Holzer, Taryn Simon, Alfredo Jaar, Santiago Sierra, Martha Rosler, and Allan Sekula are representative of the relationship between the anti-aesthetic turn and paranoid approaches in art (3–4). I note, as James Elkins does in Beyond the Aesthetic and the Anti-Aesthetic, that while the terms aesthetic and anti-aesthetic are helpful in categorising and defining aesthetic trends, discourses and strategies in contemporary art, a firm distinction between the two is contested. Elkins suggests this is: “partly on the grounds that the two are inevitably mixed, and partly because the terms, singly and as a pair, are said to be outdated, ill-formed, or otherwise inapplicable.” I take the position that aesthetic work can be political and political work aesthetic. See James Elkins and Harper Montgomery, eds. Beyond the Aesthetic and the Anti-Aesthetic (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2013), 2.
110 Best, Reparative Aesthetics, 3, 26.
111 Ibid., 2–3.
112 Best, Reparative Aesthetics: Rosangela Renno and Fiona Pardington, ex. cat. (Sydney: The University of Sydney, 2015) 6.
113 Best, Reparative Aesthetics, 3.
114 Ibid., 165.
aesthetic’, I became frustrated by this narrow aesthetic frame that was considered less ‘naïve’ and less ‘problematic’—inherent in this preference was an assumption that emotion or feeling could not be expertly handled. I did not want my aesthetic framework to be a defensive or apologetic response to the potential for critique. Although I had no intention of creating positive stereotypes, it was also important for me, as Sedgwick and Best suggest, to seek pleasure and open dialogue with the viewer. On locating Best’s framework of reparative aesthetics, I began to consider more deeply the role of aesthetics in attenuating shame, and my growing frustration with the anti-aesthetic frame.

I am also working from the position that the reparative motive is not one that presumes to repair past injustices but that values knowledge produced by ambivalent viewing positions about issues that are otherwise difficult to confront. apart & a part embraces both paranoid and reparative modes. While institutional critique is significant in the work, it is not my intent to restate the problems of institutionalisation, but to find ways to expand the critique to include affective dimensions that give permission for viewers to move beyond shame.

In a remarkable resonance with this project, Sedgwick also draws on the work of psychoanalyst Melanie Klein and her work relating to the origins of infant attachment (object relations theory) and the impact of childhood trauma on adult lives. The scope of this paper is not broad enough to thoroughly review Klein’s work, but her theory of reparation, described as a process of mental repair that occurs when an individual moves between different psychological positions, is relevant. Best describes this phase as the tension between damage and repair that is not exclusive of the paranoid state but exists in relation to it. In this way, movement between these states (paranoid-schizoid and depressive) is understood as a normal sense-making activity; indeed, it is part of healthy infant development. Klein’s work is central to Sedgwick’s development of paranoid and reparative readings and to Best’s development of reparative aesthetics.

Sedgwick’s adaptation of the meaning-making process from Klein’s object relations theory to describe trends in critical theory highlights the propensity for theorists to prioritise

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115 In Reparative Aesthetics Best highlights the gender bias in contemporary art that has contributed to this attitude.
116 Ibid., 3.
117 Melanie Klein was seminal in developing ‘Object Relations Theory’, which proposed that infants and young children move through different stages of psyche development. Identified stages include the paranoid schizoid stage and the depressive stage. Inconsistent attachments in early life can (but do not always) cause significant disruptions in later life. Trauma researchers Bessel van der Kolk et al. suggest that when attachments to primary care givers are seriously disrupted, abused or absent, individuals may experience difficulty forming attachments in later life. It is also possible that affected individuals may experience an ongoing sense of neglect depreciated self-worth, or in more severe cases dissociation, cognitive difficulties and challenges recalling memories. The collective narratives that have emerged over the last twenty years have been helpful in validating and explaining certain feelings, actions, and patterns in (some) care leavers’ lives. See Bessel van der Kolk et al., “Attachment, Self-Regulation, and Competency,” Psychiatric Annals 35, no. 5 (May 2005).
118 Sedgwick, Touching Feeling, 128.
119 Best, Reparative Aesthetics, 100.
the paranoid-schizoid state instead of freely moving between “changing and heterogeneous relational stances”. Both Sedgwick and Best identify the strengths of critical ‘paranoid reading’ or ‘paranoid art’, stating “paranoia knows some things well and others poorly.” In Best’s analysis, much contemporary political art rejects traditional aesthetic principles such as beauty, expression, feeling and judgement in favour of an anti-aesthetic institutional critique. Artists such as Taryn Simon and Santiago Sierra exemplify this turn. As a result, art that employs an ‘aesthetic’ approach to shameful politics or histories is often misunderstood or dismissed as being sentimental, with the argument being that its proximity to aesthetics dilutes its ability to function as analysis.

To dismiss works that embrace aesthetics as being sentimental, particularly within the context of addressing difficult or shameful events, can prevent a more open dialogue that avoids victimisation, empowers the subject participant, and allows the viewer to move past a shame affect and towards one of knowing. Ellis Hanson suggests that reparative motives exist because of knowledge of the damage and danger in the world (paranoid knowing) and emerge from a desire to create “more sustaining relation[s] to the objects in our world”—what Robyn Wiegman calls intimacy with the object of the study. Reparative approaches, then, seek to revise the “political meaning and affective environment of the critical act” rather than to restate the critique.

Embedded in my reparative motive is a paranoid approach. Without an in-depth analysis of how institutions impact identity formation, I would not have been able to contextualise why the actions of the institutions and state agencies that cared for children lingered into adult life. Through this analysis, I came to appreciate the deficiency in producing yet another institutional critique that re-stated the social conditions that enabled abuse and neglect. For me as a secondary witness, it was the quotidian experiences of trauma that provided new insights. Drawing on Sedgwick, to perform an institutional critique would have felt mimetic and repetitive, and would have denied the personal aspects of the story (I elaborate on this in Chapter 3). Instead, I have drawn on reparative strategies to attempt to present unique, even surprising perspectives. Additionally, I adopt the position that implicit in the personal accounts of these experiences is an unavoidable institutional critique.

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121 Ibid. 130.
124 Ibid., 7.
2.4 The Double Ontology of Shame in \textit{apart \& a part}

Because shame features prominently in the following discussion of \textit{apart \& a part}, it is worth briefly defining this term within the context of my non-First Nations identity. As a third-generation settler, I am acutely aware that the Australian narrative is played out on stolen land against a backdrop of colonisation. The attempt to destroy cultural and familial lineages through massacres, removal of children, institutionalisation, and ongoing systemic racism is unconscionable and deeply shameful. This, in addition to the mandatory detention of Asylum Seekers, forced adoptions, and the history of children in care, challenge the dominant narrative of Australia as a benevolent, fair, and advanced society. Therefore, it is important to locate \textit{apart \& a part} within the context of broader issues of colonisation, attempted genocide, discrimination, institutionalisation, and subsequent disconnection.

\textit{apart \& a part} deals with shame in two distinct ways. The first is the hope that by attenuating shame, viewers can exercise, as Best suggests, an attentiveness to issues of justice, lived experience, and historical complexity.\footnote{Best, \textit{Reparative Aesthetics}, 7.} The second is recognising the shame and stigma experienced by many care leavers at having spent time in out-of-home care. Avoiding practices that re-shame or trigger feelings of shame was paramount in this project.\footnote{While the aim to avoid shaming participants is a shared aim, I do not seek to give the impression that participants were not able to discuss these lived experiences. Indeed, these experiences were regularly discussed, and participants generously provided extended understandings and demonstrated wisdom in their ability to understand and move through these affects.} Therefore, I acknowledge the aim to lessen shame in both the participant and the viewer as significant in shaping the collaborative working methods and visual outcomes (discussed further in Chapter 3).

Each participant in \textit{apart \& a part} demonstrated an embodied and intellectual understanding of shame as a damaging affect. As adults, they are aware of the role national policies and social attitudes play in discrimination and all were engaged in advocacy or community building prior to our collaboration. Participants demonstrated a thorough understanding of the injustices perpetrated against them, and some knowledge of the personal and social circumstances that led to their time in out-of-home care. Documents such as the \textit{Forgotten Australians} report describe feelings of shame, unworthiness, and inadequacy as a result of aggressive shaming practices in out-of-home care.\footnote{Commonwealth of Australia, \textit{Forgotten Australians}. As discussed in Chapter 1, these practices included telling children they were unwanted, labelling children illegitimate or bastards, telling children they would not amount to anything, unethical labour practices, and the shame experienced in the aftermath of abuse (sexual, spiritual, physical, emotional).} Therefore, my understanding of stigma as trauma with ever-present triggers was essential knowledge, as was my knowledge of the potential of the project to re-shame participants.
Most children in care who experienced shame and stigma as children were ill-equipped to recognise the source of their shame as discriminatory social policies and normative familial representations. Many care leavers therefore internalised this stigma and shame (of feeling unwanted or illegitimate). In *Stigma: Notes of the Management of a Spoiled Identity*, Erving Goffman defines stigma as “the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance.” In *The Mark of Shame: Stigma of Mental Illness and an Agenda for Change*, Stephen Hinshaw states that shame can result in “internalised devaluation”, induced when “one does not live up to social or moral standards.” He labels this process “felt stigma”. He proposes that if individuals who have experienced stigma understand it as discrimination (due to class, race, gender, social circumstances, etc.) rather than a personal flaw, this can alleviate the association to the self, and instead allow the individual to view the shame as caused by a set of external factors that happened to intersect with their lives.

In response to felt stigma, Michelle and I made a work around her deeply affecting experience of shame. A turning point in our collaboration came from Michelle’s recollection of being pushed to the back of a group photograph in the orphanage because her status as an ‘illegitimate’ child made her less attractive to prospective adoptive families. At the time, Michelle had no knowledge she had been born out of wedlock, nor did she have an understanding of the social context surrounding discriminatory labels, but being pushed to the back remained an acute memory. As Swain and Howe argue, sanctions designed to deter sex out of wedlock, resulted in the shaming and exclusion of mothers and their children. Significantly, the photograph triggering this memory is the only image Michelle has seen of herself before the age of twenty-one.

On becoming an adult, Michelle became expert at understanding the insidious nature of discrimination and transformed this shame into advocacy. The work *Stigma* was made in reference to her story. We framed this photograph and cut a small circle out of the Perspex (sitting 2 cm from the image). Under projected light, the shadow of the hole becomes visible. Like stigma, the mark lies dormant until illuminated (figures 16 and 17).

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130 Ibid.
131 Ibid.
132 The scope of this exegesis is not great enough to comprehensively review the literature on stigma. However, Goffman’s seminal work on stigma was helpful in shaping my understanding, as was *Stigma Revisited*, edited by Chris Bruckert and Stacey Hannem, which positions stigma as deeply personal and deeply felt, and experienced in the everyday rather than as an event. Their conclusion that the anticipation of stigma is as bad as the stigma itself was helpful. See Chris Bruckert and Stacey Hannem, *Stigma Revisited* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2012) 1–3, and Goffman, *Stigma*.
Figure 16: Kelly Hussey-Smith *Stigma* from *apart & a part* 2017, framed photograph with Perspex. Installation view, The Hold Artspace, Brisbane.

Figure 17: Kelly Hussey-Smith *Stigma* (detail) from *apart & a part* 2017, framed photograph with Perspex.
But we also made several portraits, where Michelle was able to carefully present her gender identity. On one occasion we even made glamour portraits, enlisting a make-up artist to provide expertise in the artistry of glamour (figure 18). Here she was not only able to participate in her own representation, but also celebrate her transgender identity. Notoriously flamboyant in her personal presentation, she once declared her intention to be “right in the center now [laughs]”.  

Figure 18: Kelly Hussey-Smith Michelle Rose Turnbull 2012–14, visual experiments

While recalling these shame narratives was an inevitable part of the storytelling process, I worked hard to find ways to promote extended dialogue to ensure the inevitable stories of shame did not dominate the narrative. Attempts to lessen their dominance were made through promoting narrative enquiry that moved beyond the ‘solid blocks’ of the story to engage new and extended dialogues. This approach blended collaborative dialogue with intimacy and friendship to uncover less-expected, everyday responses.

Because the public narrative of systemic sexual abuse has come to define representations of children’s Homes, the more nuanced and largely invisible aspects of

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134 Recorded conversation with Michelle Rose Turnbull, 21 September 2012.
135 I discuss this in more depth in Chapter 3.
these experiences are overlooked. In the early stages of the project evidence of systemic abuse in children’s Homes and foster Homes had not been widely reported in the Australian media.\textsuperscript{136} At this time, I found audiences more receptive to engaging with the project concept. This was, in part, because the care leaver narrative was not well known by many Australians, and because I did not focus on abuse. As the public narrative progressively entered mainstream consciousness (through reporting from the Royal Commission, senate inquiries, and national and state apologies), the dynamic with my audience shifted from one of open engagement to one of (understandable) distress and shame. I observed a clear demonstration of what American psychologist Silvan Tomkins calls the circuit-breaker effect of the surprise of shame.\textsuperscript{137} In much the same way that a circuit breaker halts the flow of electrical charge, shame can cause internal or external dialogue and communication to abruptly end due to the highly self-conscious mode through which it is experienced.\textsuperscript{138} In simple terms, if not attenuated or moved through, shame can shut down the reception of information. In “Shame, Empathy and Looking Practices: Lessons from a Disability Studies Classroom”, David Benin and Lisa Cartwright discuss shame as an essential ontological position. They argue that the inward gaze caused by a shameful viewing experience reflects a “private place to decompress and bring into order the new mix of feelings the image elicits.”\textsuperscript{139} Like Best, Benin and Cartwright do not seek to eliminate shame, as they consider it a necessary affect, but they are interested in strategies that attenuate its impact.\textsuperscript{140}

They highlight the relationship between shame and empathy, stating that empathy is a prerequisite for shame because empathic identification is essential before a shame affect can be triggered.\textsuperscript{141} Drawing on Tomkins’s work on shame, they argue that experiencing (and subsequently moving through) the shame affect enlarges our “capacity for social and political connectedness”.\textsuperscript{142} Therefore, according to Benin and Cartwright, shame is a possible extension of an empathic identification, and thus, moving through the shame affect can engender the political and social imagination.

Over the last three years, graphic, detailed testimonies from the Royal Commission have been widely reported in Australian media. Despite having engaged thoroughly with

\textsuperscript{136} Although victims had been reporting this abuse for years, as had journalists and numerous advocacy organisations, it was the focus created by the national apologies and government enquiries that brought the issue into the public sphere.


\textsuperscript{139} Benin and Cartwright, “Shame, Empathy and Looking Practices,” 156.

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., 158.

\textsuperscript{141} Silvan Tomkins cited in ibid., 165.

\textsuperscript{142} Ibid.
this topic, I encountered something akin to Tomkin’s circuit-breaker effect several times, turning the radio off during broadcasts sharing such testimonies because I could no longer bear to listen. As the topic of out-of-home care became synonymous with systemic sexual abuse, I observed a mild reluctance among peers and acquaintances to engage with the project content. Despite making no reference to sexual abuse, and speaking positively about the collaborative aspects of the project, more often than not, I found myself carefully managing these conversations in an attempt to broaden the narrative. The associated dialogue around institutional abuse meant that the project was marked with the shame of abuse. This embodied reaction alerted me to the potential for a circuit-breaker effect to present significant challenges to the reception of apart & a part.143

Best argues that the negative shame affect induced by art that references historical injustice can restrict the viewer’s ability to consider the issue or lived experience at stake, rather than embodying a more empathetic or reparative viewing position.144 Shame, she argues, is a natural response to viewing images of injustice, but can be counter-productive when an artist seeks to expand dialogue around a given situation.145 This shift in context during the project saw my role shift to bring less visibility to the public narrative (which was previously largely unknown) by complicating the victim narrative through sharing elements of the personal narratives of care leavers. One way this has been addressed in the work is to provide unexpected narratives that blend the quotidian with the epic. I have done this visually but also through short narrative texts. For example, a text produced referring to Michelle’s first meeting with her mother focuses on the acute and minute details of lived experience rather than the epic narrative of loss and sadness, which is implicit:

**Mary Angelina**

Michelle can recall the exact time and day she quit smoking—five minutes to four on the fifth of February 1980, on the steps of an Ansett flight from Brisbane to Melbourne—but she can’t remember exactly when she met her mother, or how many times they met. Just that it was significant. When I asked her what her mother was like, she said she was old and liked to smoke, but that she was kind.

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143 I acknowledge that this may also have something to do with how widespread sexual abuse is in Australia and the potential for individuals to associate with their own experiences or the experiences of loved ones. As discussed, it was never my intention to make this the focus of the collaborative dialogue.


Best and Sedgwick also draw on the work of Tomkins, whose affect theory determines shame to be experienced in a highly self-conscious mode. Tomkins argues that the focus on the self rather than the cause of the shame prevents further engagement with the cause of the affect. As shame can be understood as interfering with the transmission of information, this aversion to experiencing feelings of shame can impact the viewing experience. Tomkins argues that shame frequently conjures a heightened self-consciousness, reduces facial communication, silences speech, and causes one to avert their gaze—all undesirable traits in communication fields. Tomkins suggests that “if distress is the affect of suffering, shame is the affect of indignity, of defeat, of transgression and of alienation.” He describes shame as torment and soul sickness and refers to terms such as “naked”, “defeated”, “alienated”, and “lacking in worth” to describe this affect. Shame also has practical applications. It can prompt internal reflection and encourage behavioural limitations as well as deeply impact our ability to function in the world. The concept of self-alienation, described by Silvan as “one part of the self is seen by another part and becomes alienated by it”, is particularly complex when dealing with histories that require the viewer to consider an experience outside of their own.

If, as Tomkins and others suggest, shame causes one to avert their gaze and acts as a silencer and circuit breaker in communication, then it is logical to seek to lessen the experience of shame. When stigma is understood as external rather than internal, individuals can more easily separate shame from the self. I suggest that by complicating the victim narrative through transactive strategies and unexpected personal contexts, I complicate the shame response and hold the viewer’s gaze.

Having the context of the project shift dramatically due to the establishment of the Royal Commission clarified the importance of incorporating the personal and quotidian manifestations of out-of-home care experiences. Instead of focusing on historical context, the work aims to guide audiences beyond the uncomfortable topic of abuse and to focus on

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147 Best, *Reparative Aesthetics*, 1, 7.
148 Tomkins *Affect Imagery Consciousness: The Complete Edition: Two Volumes*, 351–52. Tomkins also describes a common visual characterisation of shame as a literal hanging of the head. He suggests this is “lest one part of the self be seen by another part and become alienated by it” (352).
149 Ibid., 351.
150 Ibid.
153 A single news image may warrant the use of shock and shame to stir the individual’s attention, but for a more extended work, which requires that the viewer’s gaze not be averted, using less sensational, more subtle cues may promote longer engagement.
unexpected narratives and narrative objects that complicate this history.\textsuperscript{154} It is now likely that an Australian viewer will bring knowledge of the shameful practices in out-of-home care to the work.\textsuperscript{155} Instead of restating these narratives, the works attempt to lead audiences to unexpected conceptual encounters. By decontextualising the audience’s pre-visualised understanding, and refusing to reference abuse in the work, I argue that the care leaver narrative is expanded. As Best suggests, the aim of reparative art is not to sanitise the content nor to protect the viewer from discomfort but to create an affective relationship between the work and the viewer. Through implementing aesthetic approaches that operate through shame rather than transmit it, I have sought to “attenuate shame”, as Best puts it.\textsuperscript{156} By drawing on ambiguity, beauty, and narrative, rather than acute suffering and testimony, I have attempted to offer audiences a more reparative space in which to engage with the work.

2.5 Applying a Reparative Position

Efforts to contextualise my lens-based practice led me to the work of artists whom I felt portrayed a similar interest in presenting the affective dimensions of an experience while maintaining a link to confronting oppressive histories. Specifically, I became interested in expanding the reparative position to works of collaboration that sought to move beyond the relational participatory experience between participant and artist, to co-create artworks for what Clare Bishop calls the secondary audience (the viewer of the collaborative or participatory work).\textsuperscript{157}

In Chapter 1, I discussed the concept of a total institution through Goffman’s definition of a total separation from social life. Contemporary photographic art that critically addresses the total institution largely relies on strategies associated with the anti-aesthetic and ethnographic turns. These works often take as their focus bureaucratic and institutional systems and the architecture of containment. Works such as Lucinda Devlin’s \textit{The Omega Suites} (1991-92), a photographic depiction of the institutional spaces of capital punishment (figure 19), employ a detached and evidentiary approach towards these spaces. In \textit{The Maze} (2004), Northern Irish photographer Donovan Wylie documents the machine-

\textsuperscript{154} Nevertheless, I have not made an effort to cover up this history but simply to allow the gaps in the work and the ambiguity of the images to embody these already public narratives.

\textsuperscript{155} I acknowledge that the form and context of \textit{apart & a part} will shift depending on the viewing audience and location.

\textsuperscript{156} Best, \textit{Reparative Aesthetics}, 9.

\textsuperscript{157} In \textit{Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship}, Claire Bishop suggests that the secondary audience of participatory works are those not present for or involved in the collaborative action or event, and the primary audience are the first-hand participants of the work. Bishop describes this distinction as the ‘temporary’ community versus the outside public (19). Claire Bishop, \textit{Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship} (London: Verso, 2012), 9, 19, 108, 284. I will elaborate on Bishop’s position further in this chapter and in Chapter 3.
like design of Northern Ireland’s most infamous political prison, colloquially known as The Maze. Wylie’s large-format works employ a strict typological approach and uses repetition to underscore control. Wylie explains that despite the prison being a site of personal and international trauma, he selected a detached and formal perspective to image the prison as a machine rather than a narrative or memory chamber. The resulting works (figure 20) employ, what David Campany observes in his essay “Safety in Numbness” as a trend in contemporary art photography towards the straight, detached, and de-authored voice. This aligns with the arguments already cited by Best, Sedgwick, and Wiegman that the anti-aesthetic approach (paranoid) has come to dominate the way in which institutional critique is represented.

Figure 19: Lucinda Devlin Electric Chair Greensville Correctional Facility from The Omega Suites 1991-92

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158 Her Majesty’s Maze was a prison for political prisoners during what became known as the Troubles in Northern Ireland (a response by Irish republications to the occupation of Northern Ireland by the British state). It was best known as the site of the hunger strikes that killed many men, including the famous freedom fighter Bobby Sands. See Donovan Wylie, The Maze (London: Granta Books, 2004), 5–7.


The series *The Lost Objects* is comprised of a selection of over twenty objects from the Orphanage Museum in Sydney. The museum is administered and funded by the Care Leavers Australasia Network (CLAN) and consists of objects displayed in a small room in their Bankstown office. It contains over two thousand objects either recovered from Australian orphanages or donated by Australian care leavers. The objects have been collected and managed by Leonie, co-founder of CLAN and project participant. The Museum was initially conceived to provide evidence of the gross exploitation and neglect of children in care in the face of the “erasure and amnesia” of these histories. But it has also become an important memory bank for care leavers, and these objects have been acknowledged in significant national history projects since 2007.

161 The objects were accessed through a long-term collaboration with Care Leavers Australasia Network (CLAN). The National Museum of Australia also holds a collection of care leaver objects, but these are not accessible to the general public. Additionally, CLAN seeks to maintain their own archive rather than hand it over to institutions who, until recently, had not prioritised care leaver histories and personal narratives. The National Museum of Australia included a blog in its 2011 show *Inside: Life in Children’s Homes* that made accessible many photographs and objects from Children’s Homes in Australia in the twentieth century. It can be accessed at http://nma.gov.au/blogs/inside/.

162 Quote from Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, *Chicago*, (Gottingen: SteidlMACK, 2006), n.p., originally used in relation to the forests planted on the site of Palestinian villages on the West Bank. As many of these sites have been demolished and developed the project was one of resisting erasure.

163 Such as in the *Inside: Life in Children’s Homes* exhibition at the National Museum of Australia.
Since personal belongings in children’s Homes were highly regulated or confiscated, it is likely that each of these objects would have held significance beyond their humble material form.\textsuperscript{164} Thus, the objects from the Museum included as photographs in the final installation were selected for their likeliness to have been precious, despite their relative material insignificance. The decontextualisation of the object from its archival context encourages a reading of the object that alludes to its narrative past (figures 21, 22 and 23).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure21.png}
\caption{Kelly Hussey-Smith \textit{Talc from The Lost Objects from apart & a part} 2017}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{164} In adult life some (not all) care leavers have become hoarders. This attachment to objects references both strict childhood protocols and a hesitancy to discard anything, due to projecting feelings of abandonment and worthlessness onto belongings. While this can become a problem for some individuals and their families, it is also a personal preference, and one that makes individuals feel secure and in control. Therefore, while I acknowledge the potential impacts for families and individual care leavers, I also respect the comfort it can bring.
To my knowledge, none of the objects photographed have known owners. In their new context, they become, as Anne Ferran has observed about her own work *Lost to Worlds*, evidence of absence rather than the other way around. In this way, I draw on Ferran’s interest in acknowledging the gaps in historical memory rather than assuming the authority to recreate, fill, or reimagine them. Brazilian artist Rosangela Renno often transforms photographs from prison and historical archives to emphasise to audiences the culture of amnesia surrounding issues of historical injustice. By focusing on the “little stories” that intersect with her Brazilian identity, she argues that it is the “subtle and small aesthetic actions” that draw audiences into these issues. In a similar way, *The Lost Objects* present themselves to the viewer as subtle but animated reminders of what the official record has failed to translate.

![Figure 22: Kelly Hussey-Smith Toy Plane from The Lost Objects from apart & a part 2017](image)

On gaining permission to image these objects, I constructed a small studio inside the Museum. The emerging light references both the literal conditions in which these objects largely exist (in a dark, mostly unattended room) and their significance beyond a state of damage and disrepair. Their unwitting testimony as discarded and recovered objects references broader themes within _apart & a part_, specifically, the often-unremarkable sites of trauma and memory. Best describes this as the temporal liminality between remembering and forgetting.\(^\text{168}\)

\(^{168}\) Best, _Reparative Aesthetics_, 328.
Like Ferran, Renno similarly accepts the impossibility of recovering history, and instead seeks to develop strategies that make visible, and transform, the remaining material traces of these stories. In her work *Immemorial* (1994), she addresses the fatal exploitation of workers and children in building Brazil’s capital, Brazilia. Her work seeks to activate political memory through a decontextualisation of the portraits from their intended purpose of identification, to their new context as evidence of exploitation (figure 24). Best describes this decontextualisation as a reparative reading of institutional portraiture, in which Renno shifts the reception of the image through a process of recontextualisation to produce what Sekula considered to be the “shadow archive” or the unwitting testimony of photographs.

As in Renno’s *Immemorial*, the absence of narrative associated with the objects pictured in the series *The Lost Objects* prompts a closer reading. Each of the objects holds the presence of an unknown owner/s. A worn out, dirt-covered shoe, a toy plane with initials inscribed in black, an engraved tin: the images of the objects embody the contradiction of indicating

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historical significance but providing little evidence it. The Lost Objects simultaneously expresses the rich, affective history of the objects shown and the impossibility of recovering the lost particulars of this history. 171

As I have argued throughout this exegesis, less-expected articulations of care leaver experiences that underscore the continuum of lived experience can disrupt audience assumptions. As I began to understand the lingering impacts of care as communicated by participants, it became conceptually important that the outcomes of my work avoid the conflation of physical representation with visibility. As discussed in Chapter 1, Georgio Agamben and Matthew Chrulew argue that the mere presentation of an individual’s physical form, does not make that individual’s life seen. 172 By translating the personal, I have attempted to make the lived experiences of care leavers seen, rather than only visible. This made the subject of portraiture difficult to negotiate.

Through Allan Sekula’s observation that photographic portraiture is both “honorific and repressive”, I was aware of photography’s role in discrimination and classification through institutionalised documentation of bodies, and the many ways that portraiture continues to be used to promote normative identities and dominant ideologies. 173 Yet, despite these perspectives, most participants wanted to be imaged (and some were ambivalent). And like most people, they wanted control over their representation. Although many of the care leavers who participated in the project shared my view of photographic portraiture as a performance, for some, photographs, particularly portraits, were important because they had no photographic evidence of themselves as children or of family members. 174 As Roland Barthes famously wrote in Camera Lucida, “the photograph does not call up the past” or “restore what has been abolished (by time, by distance) but…attest[s] that what I see has indeed existed”. 175 As such, the portraits became an important thread in apart & a part because of their value to participants as an indexical marker of their time and presence in history. By taking this collaborative process to its most literal photographic conclusion—a portrait—this final gesture, which unashamedly...

171 Best, Reparative Aesthetics, 106.
172 Specifically, Chrulew is referencing the display of visible forms (not sentient life, but visible life) at the zoo, and Agamben is referencing exclusion through a denial of bios—a political life beyond that of merely existing.
173 Sekula, “The Body and the Archive,” 7. Sekula states that while photography democratised representation, it was also widely used in the classification of deviance that led to racial-, gender-, and class-based assumptions (typologies and stereotypes) of criminality and intelligence. The democratisation of photography meant that more people were able to subvert the representation of privilege through the aspirational presentation of the “bourgeois self” (6). Sekula observes that this widespread availability was not mirrored in the political relations of society, which lends photography a position he calls, “the paradoxical status of photography” (3, 6). This paradox is evidenced in the ameliorative function of family photographs that both provided evidence of lineage and connection in the modernist context of migration and displacement, along with evidence of the absence of such ties (8). See also Sontag, On Photography; John Tagg, The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories (Hampshire: Macmillan Education, 1998); and John Berger, Ways of Seeing (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1972).
174 Many care leavers have few or no photographs of themselves as children.
performed Sekula’s honorific style, became a memento of our dialogue and a conclusion to our collaboration.

In *Portraits of Presence*, Camilla Loew describes portraiture as a mode of representation that, when employed as testimony, removes silenced subjects from anonymity. She argues that within the broader framework of visual representation, portraiture is often used as a way to represent and understand the past through the construction of a collective identity. Writing about the text and image work of David Bassa and Jordi Ribo depicting Catalan survivors of the Holocaust, Loew suggests these typological portraits “place their subjects uncomfortably between the singular instance of their exceptional experience, and their attribution as a representative of the collective.” In this way the repetition symbolises a collective experience of trauma, and underscores the presence of the past.

Artist Gregory Halpern, in his article “On Documentary Ethics”, states:

Today, the tradition of photographers making somber, dignified portraits of poor people—the clichéd yet steadfastly popular kind where we are meant to interpret the dignity of these kind but struggling folks through their bright, crisp eyes—needs a reconsideration. Not only is this type of work uninteresting; it is actually offensive. Its aesthetic agenda is to pronounce, in a heavy-handed way, a judgment of goodness on its subject (i.e. “look into the eyes of this kind man; do not judge, for he is poor but good; he is your equal”). Traditionally, this has been a safe, widely condoned documentary strategy, but it is ultimately uninteresting—and unfaithful to the complexity of reality—to wrap people up into such a neat package of comprehensibility. Furthermore, this strategy is founded on two faulty premises—that the photographer knows his/her subject well enough to claim his/her dignity, and that the photographer has the ethical authority/superiority to make a judgment of goodness. If there is any kind of photography that recalls the colonialist-Christian mission, it is this.

Halpern’s critique is a convincing response to photography’s attempt at an honorific language and closely aligns with Jill Bennett’s observation, discussed in Chapter 1, that ‘survivors’ (of sexual abuse) are viewed as inherently ‘good’. As a contemporary photographic artist, I largely agree with Halpern’s blazing critique. But what Halpern fails to address is context, specifically the context in which decisions are made in portraits that are collaborative. I agree with Halpern’s position on the impossibility of single-perspective representation, but I find myself caught once again in the cycle of photographic ‘rules’—

177 Ibid.
178 Ibid., 28.
179 Ibid.
that declare one form of visual representation as more accurate, or more ethical than another, which denies the role that context plays in judging an image as ethical or not, or a stereotype or not (in Chapter 3 this is discussed with reference to cultural and ethical relativism).

Nevertheless, Halpern’s critique is a powerful reminder of the problems of adhering to conventions that establish and assume an aspirational norm that has derived largely from representations of authority figures. These conventions attempt to assimilate the individual into a socially accepted form of public performance, denying the unique cultures that emerge from diverse lived experiences. As I am working with people who have expressed, at length, the shame and humiliation experienced as a result of social exclusion (despite the thriving culture that has grown as a result), it is not my place to judge how people seek representation. The portraits are a result of a highly constructed and mediated performance between the subject of the portrait and me, and our collaborative negotiation of the issues with which the work deals.

This led me to consider how collaborative approaches could be explored through reparative modes that privilege the secondary audience (the viewer). As such, the work of Sophie Calle and Lynette Wallworth became an important consideration. Calle’s work has a complicated, and fascinating relationship to collaboration, as it demonstrates collaborations that are willing, unwilling, and unknown (or all of the above in the case of *The Address Book*, 2012). Two of her lesser-known projects, *The Last Image* (2010) from the series ‘Blind’ and *Voir La Mer* [*See the Sea*] (2010), are examples of collaborative outcomes that give equal weight to the collaboration and the transformation of that experience into an artwork, specifically, a life beyond the collaborative action.

For *The Last Image*, Calle interviewed people living in Istanbul who remember going blind. She asked them “to describe the last thing they saw” and presents an image interpreting that memory, with accompanying text (figure 25). The answers of participants vary: loved ones, a man in a white coat, a cigarette butt. One participant responded that she will always remember her husband as he was at thirty-nine years old—the age he was when she went blind. Such an everyday and reparative observation of a past trauma repositions sight as something beyond optics and loss, and gives insight to the daily negotiations of this lived experience. The work does not focus on the loss of sight, but

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183 Ibid., 84.
attempts to define vision as something beyond sight, constructed through memory and 
imagination.

It was March 14, 2004, at about seven o’clock. After my morning prayer I went out onto the 
balcony of my hospital room to watch the sun rise. I wondered if it would ever rise for me 
ever again. I knew just how critical the operation was because I’d overheard my 
parents talking with the doctor: an 85% chance of not making it, with the remaining 15% 
divided between paralysis, impaired mental functions, loss of eye sight and a complete 
cure. I put blind in second spot. I looked out over the sea, behind the buildings, the sun in 
the clouds, the transition from darkness to light. As if for the last time.

For See the Sea, Calle took fifteen individuals living in Istanbul, a city surrounded 
by water, to see the sea for the first time.\(^{184}\) Participants were instructed to turn to her 
camera after they had spent a long period staring at the ocean (for the first time). She filmed 
participants from behind in order not to interrupt their view of the ocean and asked them to 
turn to her when they were ready (figures 26 and 27). As she states, “I just wanted to see 
their eyes—those eyes that just saw the sea”, and to film and photograph their responses.\(^{185}\)

In See the Sea, Calle consciously avoids reducing the individual to their socio-economic


\(^{185}\) John Preston, “Artist Sophie Calle: Bonkers, in a Good Way,” \textit{The Telegraph}, 8 December 2013, 
contexts; instead, she focuses the viewer’s attention on the act of seeing the sea. Participant reactions vary: the children frolic and refuse the structure of Calle’s artwork; the adults, solemn in their approach, move between stoic tears and delayed delight. The work relies entirely on collaboration. Calle chose not to dwell on the circumstances that may have contributed to the restricted movement of the individual (such as class, poverty, health) and instead granted the audience access to a private, intensely beautiful, yet melancholic action.186

The ever-present absence in much of Calle’s work (the loss of sight, the absence of the sea, the lost address book, the absent lover, etc.) features powerfully in See the Sea. Inherent in the action of seeing the sea for the first time is the absence of this experience—an encrypted loss. See the Sea connects the participant and the viewer by creating a relational and

collaborative experience between Calle and participants, and a translation of this experience for a secondary audience. Since Calle is a privileged European who has not experienced poverty, it could be easy to claim this work is exploitative. I would argue the transparency of her process goes some way to answering these claims. The work does not seek to directly interrogate and critique Turkish (or global) power structures, but instead allows this critique to emerge through a felt experience (which references Best’s claim that reparative work can “assimilate the consequences of destruction and violence”). The presentation of individuals to the camera, in their own time, demonstrates a shared understanding of the significance of the experience. The direct communication between the participant and the viewer as witness is remarkably intimate, creating three distinct gazes: that of the participant to the author, the author to participant, and the external viewer (Bishop’s secondary audience—those of us who did not participate) to the participant. Unlike much participatory art, or documentation of participatory art, See the Sea has been constructed for both a primary (participant) and secondary (viewer) audience. In Artificial Hells, Bishop suggests:

Although the logical conclusion of participatory art is to foreclose a secondary audience (everyone is a producer; the audience no longer exists), for these actions to be meaningful, for the stakes to be high, there need to be ways of communicating these activities to those who succeed the participants.

Thus the secondary audience of See the Sea completes the work by receiving the participant’s gaze. Rather than merely ‘watching’ documentation of a collaboration that has been stripped of Calle’s empathic intention or reparative motive (what Claire Bishop calls the “affective dynamic” of collaborative work), the viewer experiences the affective aspects of what might otherwise be an exclusive collaborative exchange. The viewer then becomes unexpectedly involved in a political statement through what Renno calls the “subtle and small aesthetic actions, which are still extremely political.”

I follow Calle’s process in that my collaborations also do not provide broad sociological context, but rather focus on specific, personal contexts through locating the affective dimensions of disconnection and trauma in everyday life, and by employing Renno’s “small aesthetic actions”. I argue See the Sea as a reparative work because it shifts the viewer’s reading of poverty (and broader issues associated with inequality such as voice, agency and access) from a material loss to an experiential loss, and attenuates the

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187 Best, Reparative Aesthetics, 3.
188 Bishop, Artificial Hells, 9.
189 Ibid., 217.
190 Bishop, Artificial Hells, 5–6.
191 Rosangela Renno quoted in ibid., 118.
192 Ibid.
shame often associated with direct comparisons of inequality (that make reality less complex, and less interesting).\textsuperscript{193} She does this through a collaboration that shares a personal experience—seeing the sea for the first time—rather than through description or critique (figure 28).

![Figure 28: Sophie Calle Voir la mer [See the Sea] 2012, installation view from Rencontres d’Arles](image)

Central to Wallworth’s practice is a sense of connection through shared experiences of trauma, grief, and survival.\textsuperscript{194} Her works often involve direct collaborations with individuals and communities in Australia, and increasingly internationally. In the interactive video works \textit{Evolution of Fearlessness} (2008) and \textit{Invisible by Night} (2004), Wallworth blends non-fiction storytelling with an immersive experience to encourage the viewer, literally, to connect through touch. Wallworth’s installations consistently focus on the temporal: that is, there is often a period of waiting that inevitably makes the viewer more receptive to the work.\textsuperscript{195}

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{195} Ross Gibson cited in Matthew Bate, \textit{Lynette Wallworth: Connected by Light} (Kensington: Plexus Films, 2009), DVD.
\end{itemize}
In the video installation *Invisible by Night*, Wallworth responds to an encounter on a tram with a woman grieving the loss of her mother. This public sharing of private grief inspired a work about the inevitability of grief, and the difficulties in translating the ongoing impacts of these experiences. The work, activated by the viewer’s touch on the screen, reveals a grieving woman who lingers, wipes condensation from the window to reveal her eyes, then disappears (figure 29). As quickly as the connection is made, it is taken away, with the woman exiting the screen. As such, Wallworth describes these video performances as closer to a reveal than a performance because of the viewer’s role in completing the work.\(^{196}\) This focus and concentration on a simple, yet intimate, relational connection allows this embodied affect to be registered through pleasure (in this case, through the surprise felt at connecting with a stranger). I argue that the suspension of familiar temporal and narrative structures in Wallworth’s work creates a space where viewers can express or honour their own experiences of trauma and grief.

*In Evolution of Fearlessness*, a series of short narratives and video portraits, Wallworth collaborated with eleven women who had lived through trauma caused by extreme states of fear. Also activated by the viewer’s touch on the screen, *Evolution of*  

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\(^{196}\) Ibid.
Fearlessness explores loss and its aftermath, survival, and the lives and communities that emerge from these states (figure 30). The video portraits feature women residing in Australia, but originating from countries such as Austria, Afghanistan, Sudan, Iraq and El Salvador, who have lived through wars, survived concentration camps, or experienced extreme acts of violence. After viewing the installation, one participant commented, “you feel your pain and sadness, but usually you don’t see it”. In a documentation of the work at the 2010 Sydney Festival, another participant stated: “the feeling of someone touching your hands, I think that it is the most comfortable feeling I’ve ever had”. Wallworth states:

There was this series of stories. You didn’t know which of these women was representing which story, and nor did it matter to those women or to me. They didn’t need to be the hero, but neither were they the victims of their own stories. They were representing a state which they all had in common.

The aesthetic transformation of these affective dimensions through the properties of light, gesture, motion, and colour contribute to the immersive experience created for the viewer. Many of Wallworth’s touch-based works employ a “gestural mirroring” that relies on a series of slow, steady movements from the viewer to trigger Wallworth’s ‘reveal’. The ephemeral properties of light, presence, and movement assist with visualising that which is unseen. This draws on Cvetkovich’s argument that trauma “demands an unusual archive” and Bennett’s assertion that we need new languages through which to represent trauma cultures. Thus, including our affective selves into trauma archives bypasses the linear narrative expectations of memory and remembering (that do nothing but reinforce their un-achievability in representing trauma), and instead allow the ephemeral documents that understand trauma on its own terms to be included. Finally, these works do not totalise individual identities into deficit discourses, but collaboratively explicate the knowledge produced by trauma cultures.

198 Participant cited in Lynette Wallworth: Connected by Light DVD.
202 Cvetkovich, An Archive of Feelings, 7; Bennett, Empathic Vision, 24.
203 Cvetkovich, An Archive of Feelings, 7, 11–12.
2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have established that thinking about trauma as a continuum rather than as an event more closely mirrored the personal experiences of participant care leavers. That is, that they are constantly reminded of their experiences as children, but these impacts manifest in different ways: coloured sheets, discarded objects, advocacy, and grief. Despite their deviation from expected trauma tropes, these subtle affects and impacts demonstrate trauma’s presence in everyday life. I have argued the collaborative work of Calle and Wallworth as reparative responses to issues of injustice and trauma. Their work is relevant to apart & a part because it directly engages participant collaborators in projects that seek to share ephemeral lived experiences with secondary audiences through embodied gestures and actions. Additionally, these projects seek to attenuate shame through aesthetic actions that do not directly lead to paranoid readings and critiques, but rather build such readings into their structure. I believe Calle’s work does this particularly well, in the way it leads the viewer through a participatory action that has been decontextualised from the visual tropes of inequality that have come to dominate Western media. In doing so, the work frames inequality as something much more individual than a comparison of material wealth. As such, See the Sea attenuates shame through intimate encounters with individuals who, on seeing the sea for the first time, share this with the viewer.

The next chapter, Chapter 3, will address the specific methodological and personal considerations regarding the collaborations in apart & a part.
Chapter 3: APART

“The Fleshy World of People”¹: The Ethics and Politics of Collaboration

It is possible to photograph something other than the spectacle of a fire.²

In Chapter 2, key aspects of trauma theory were discussed in relation to avoiding deficit discourses in apart & a part, and in an attempt to understand care leavers ‘on their own terms’. I argued for the relevance of a new kind of archive through which unexpected narratives, objects, performances, and experiences can emerge to create a more inclusive archive of care leaver experiences.

This chapter examines the ethical and political dimensions of collaborative practice in contemporary art, and more specifically how these positions and methods were applied to apart & a part. I begin by providing a practical account of the parameters of our collaboration, focusing on notions of shared agency and collaborative dialogue. I include personal perspectives on my journey as a non-care leaver, and outline turning points in the project that shifted the dynamics of our collaboration. I argue active listening, intimacy and friendship as suitable research methods for the collaborative aims of apart & a part. I review contemporary critical theory on the collaborative and participatory turns in the visual arts, ethnography and photography and warn against the ethical relativism that has come to dominate discussions on ethics and aesthetics in contemporary and participatory art. As such, I discuss the development of an ethical framework for the collaborations by drawing on reflexive approaches and dialogues in ‘new’ and ‘visual’ ethnography, art theory and contemporary art.

Learning to understand care leavers on their own terms entailed a long period of dialogue and collaborative conceptualisation. This catalysed the development of an inclusive framework for participants, with the intention of engaging what Claire Bishop calls in Artificial Hells the secondary audience; namely, those not involved in the collaborative action.³ As discussed in Chapter 1, the theoretical and socio-political context of disconnection, dehumanisation, and institutionalisation positioned the project outcomes as a series of ethical and political decisions. These decisions were arrived at through a collaborative process with reference to the historical and personal experiences of

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³ Claire Bishop, Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship (London: Verso, 2012), 9. In Artificial Hells, Bishop raises the problem of collaborative or participatory works that exist for a limited number of participants and that fail to translate through their documentation.
participants. In this way, I argue that collaboration is implicit in the images, rather than emerging through an explicit documentation of togetherness or a collaborative action (which has largely been the focus of participatory art and its corresponding literature).\textsuperscript{4} Finally, the politics of my authorship is explored through the term ‘author-ising’—being authorised to author—which I propose as an appropriate description for the process of making in \textit{apart & a part}.

3.1 Collaborative Beginnings

I did not initially seek to work intimately with care leavers, but had instead reached out to Lotus Place to assist in my research on the concealment of institutional abuse in Australia.\textsuperscript{5} During an early visit, as I was waiting to meet the Director, I had the good fortune to be invited to join a conversation with a small group of care leavers. What began as a casual conversation quickly shifted to stark accounts of immeasurable loss, abuses of power, and callous disregard for children in the care of the state. This encounter challenged the reasoning behind my motivation to produce a ‘detached’ project critiquing the institution because it did not appear to respond to the needs or sensitivities of the community. The energy of the collective struggle for justice and recognition seemed as worthy of people’s attention as the historical aspects of institutional abuse did. In addition to this early encounter, I was invited to attend, and eventually run a weekly photography group at Lotus Place that also significantly challenged my reasoning for not working directly \textit{with} care leavers.\textsuperscript{6}

I began to discuss with care leavers the possibility of collaborating with them, despite having no idea what form this work might take. Through subsequent camera group meetings, discussions, events, observations, diary entries, image making, reading, and conversations, I began to form an initial understanding of the scale of their loss (familial, cultural, community, potential), and the impacts of institutional life. Over time, and with appropriate personal and university ethical clearances, I shifted the project from a work


\textsuperscript{5} This was two years before the Royal Commission was announced. At the time of my meeting with Lotus Place, the allegations of concealment of abuse by religious, state, and privately run institutions were starting to surface but had not been widely reported, nor was it widely understood as a systemic issue in the public sphere.

\textsuperscript{6} As mentioned previously, Lotus Place is a government-funded service provider for Forgotten Australians based in Brisbane, Queensland. The group was an informal gathering of between 5-10 care leavers who were interested in learning more about the language and practice of photography. These sessions were already running before I became the facilitator. We ran these sessions (with breaks) for over a year. I gained ethical clearance from Griffith University prior to my involvement as facilitator.
about the concealment of abuse to a much more complex and reparative exploration of the ongoing impacts of these experiences. In short, I entered into what photographer Donald Weber calls “the fleshy world of people”, and, with it, encountered a new set of ethical and aesthetic challenges.⁷

Although I had established a clear research question, the ethical dimensions of the project dominated my progress. Of particular concern was how to image and narrativise trauma, particularly in light of ethnographer Aaron Denham’s suggestion that we need to more closely study the way that historical trauma is narrativised. Too often, it is pathologised as entirely detrimental and disempowering, rather than as knowledge that can promote community and personal resilience, and even create a strong sense of belonging.⁸ Jill Bennett argues that most representations of historical traumatic events strip the experiences of their affective dimensions (all affects, not only negative).⁹ Therefore, while I acknowledge the impossibility of precisely translating or knowing personal affects, I have also drawn on Bennett’s concept of the imprint of ‘sense-memory’ (introduced in Chapter 2) to re-interpret these memories and experiences for a new kind of memory archive.¹⁰

As my methodology matured, it became clear that this expanded archive would not seek to document traumatic lived experience, but rather give aesthetic form to the various ways these traumas linger, and the ways in which they are incorporated into everyday life. In an effort to avoid institutional strategies, such as testimonies and interviews (which, as outlined in Chapter 1, can contribute to further exclusion, dehumanisation, and standardisation), I instead adopted a collaborative and reparative approach. Importantly, I have not sought to ‘fill in the gaps’ in individual archives and life history narratives, but attempted to understand trauma on its own terms. Specifically, I am interested in how ‘soft traumas’ manifest in the everyday.

### 3.2 Transforming Personal Narratives

In response to the institutional context acknowledged throughout this exegesis, the visual works vary in form. Portraits, archival photographs, still-life images, narrative texts, moving images, sound works, and archival objects contribute to this archive of feelings. These visual responses attempt to avoid the standardisation and dehumanisation of institutional thinking, while acknowledging their shameful historical context. As discussed

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⁷ Weber, “War Sand”.
¹⁰ Ibid.
in Chapter 2, central to this project was the desire to attenuate shame through a reparative approach. The following section identifies turning points in my relationships with participants that led me to embrace a broad set of research methods and visual strategies: specifically, intimacy, agency, friendship, and active and performative listening.

Armed with theoretical frameworks on the politics of representation and an emerging interest in the concepts underpinning collaborative and participatory research, I began casually discussing models of collaboration with the group. Despite my vision of a participatory workshop in the lineage of PhotoVoice, very few participants demonstrated an interest in ‘documenting’ their own lives for an extended period of time. Although ‘self-representation’ was important, my interpretation was too literal. One woman teasingly stated she “didn’t want any more work” and asked, “isn’t that your job?”, a response I had not anticipated nor encountered in the socially engaged literature that equated ‘agency’ with ‘authorship’. Given that we met only once a week (and it was a casual commitment at that), the PhotoVoice methodology did not appropriately address the needs of the group. Despite my curiosity about their lives and personal relationships, the group were unenthused, and their energy levels dwindled. In the rush to ‘collaborate’, I had imposed a model that appeared ethical but had limited relevance to the participants’ lives.

The session on experimental lighting revealed the participants’ genuine interest in performing aspects of lived experience for the camera, as realised through the conventions of theatre: removal of context, construction of sets, transformative and experimental lighting, and character development. These sessions were much more energised and resulted in outcomes that better met the needs of the group (figure 31). Additionally, since the group was interested in the complex project of representing the residual affect of memory and lived experience, we comfortably moved away from linear interpretations or expectations of narrative.

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11 There are six official participants in the research, but friendships were established with a number of care leavers who informed my contextual and personal understandings and enriched the research outcomes. These relationships were formed through attendance at numerous meetings, seminars, protests, and community lunches, and through informal conversations at Lotus Place in Brisbane and in the Care Leavers Australasia Network (CLAN) offices in Bankstown and Melbourne.


13 Martha Rosler, Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings, 1975–2001 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 209. Rosler uses the term ‘self-representation’, which is now widely used to describe the process of participants photographing their own lives.

14 Anthony Luvera reflects on his own processes of self-representation in socially engaged photography. While he acknowledges that aspects of this process can be empowering, create meaningful dialogic exchange, and challenge traditional power dynamics, he also states (building on Martha Rosler’s arguments in Decoys and Disruptions) that: “Self-representations will always be framed, directly or indirectly, by the artist or organization facilitating the processes employed to generate and circulate the material. Issues of context, reception, authorship, ownership, commissioning and the historiography of what or who is depicted, may have the effect of reinstating the inequality of the power balance that was removed from the photographic methodology employed to create the image in the first place.” Anthony Luvera, “Residency,” Photographies 3, no. 2 (2010): 238.
As busy advocates and elders, passionately engaged in the much larger project of justice and community building, the group members were happy for me to exercise my independence and knowledge as an artist within the broader collaborative framework. By aligning myself with care leaver advocacy movements (run by care leavers) that critique the charitable ‘us’ and ‘them’ attitudes of government service providers, I became acutely aware of the need to de-institutionalise my approach. Many care leavers suggest these government services act in opposition to the core principles of care leaver advocacy, which has at its core an attempt to genuinely share agency through collaborative practice (which includes direct action, support networks, and volunteer work).  

Through active listening and participation, and by committing to a transdisciplinary approach, we located a foundational aesthetic for the project—one that was theatrical, transformative, and ‘pleasurable’. This responds to Sedgwick’s call for reparative readings (outlined in Chapter 2) that reframe pleasure, seeing it not as a hedonistic pursuit but as one

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15 For example, CLAN send birthday cards to care leavers, offer telephone counselling for those in need, offer support services for care leavers involved in legal testimony, and distributes a quarterly newsletter with news relevant to care leavers.

16 ‘Active listening’ is also referred to as ‘deep listening’ and ‘performative listening’. In a visual arts context, ‘transdisciplinary practice’ is loosely defined by Jill Bennett as a practice knowing no disciplinary or institutional boundaries and that creates spaces outside of disciplinary ‘homes’. See Bennett, *Practical Aesthetics: Events, Affect, and Art after 9/11* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 28–29.
with personal and political effect. In *Performative Listening*, Chris McRae defines performative (active) listening as “a commitment to listening with curiosity, a commitment to listening to and with the body, a commitment to listening for context and location, and a commitment to listening with accountability.” He draws on the field of relational ethics that methodologist Wendy J. Austin describes as “situating ethical action in relationships” and that new ethnographer Carolyn Ellis suggests takes into account “the reality and practice of changing relationships with our research participants over time.” McRae argues that listening must be an act of presence, of humility and of curiosity (including criticality) in order to be dialogic and achieve a plurality of perspectives. He suggests that the relational ethic of performative listening also requires that the researcher “hears the self” in response to issues of power and privilege—something that will be discussed in more detail through reflexivity in Chapter 4. In this way, engagement with the other must be motivated by the pleasure of listening to and engaging (face-to-face) with others rather than approaching listening as a chore. Ethical philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, proposes in *Difficult Freedom* that “in front of the face I always demand more of myself”, which connects with my interest in a documentary ethos that privileges relational experiences with the world, and relates to my use of empathy in this exegesis—a recognition of, and respect for the experience of another as different from my own. This Levinasian approach to ethical relationships with the ‘other’ is not only reliant on being open and present, but also requires a commitment to an exploration of the self through discursive engagements with ‘others’.

After the photography group at Lotus Place had ended, I continued to meet with the members of the group who expressed an interest in continuing our collaboration. These meetings mostly took place in participants’ homes and consisted of informal conversations about our lives, care leaver politics, and personal histories. Initially, I recorded our

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21 Ibid., 52.
22 McRae, *Performative Listening*, 14. McRae also highlights listening as an act central to critical pedagogy and thus suggests that when researchers use active listening, they must be a student to and of others (see McRae, *Performative Listening*, 7).
24 To be clear, when I refer to the ‘other’, I am referring, in Levinasian terms, simply to someone other than the self—not to exotic stereotypes nor to photographic representations of others as ‘less than’.
conversations (with permission and in line with the conditions of my university ethical clearance) until I understood that the experiences I was looking for were not necessarily rooted in ‘official’ life history narrative, but in felt knowledge that transcended traditional narrative practices. Of course, language played a role in the transference of this knowledge, but so did the knowledge formed by comfortable and uncomfortable silences, gestures and daily rituals, discussions about contemporary politics, or the way humour and conflict resonated with the intersubjective experience.26

Unsurprisingly, these weekly to monthly encounters evolved into friendships that I came to identify as a research method.27 Over the period of our collaboration, mutual friends passed away, participants experienced serious medical complications, court battles were won, stalled, and lost, I birthed my first child, the Royal Commission was announced, someone purchased a home, three participants became grandmothers, and hard-fought care leaver advocacy battles were won. While these events strengthened our bonds, they also slowed the project and, from this, a flexible model of participation emerged.

Despite my initial feeling that these life events and complications obstructed the research, further reflection has shown the opposite to be true. Researcher Lisa Tillmann-Healy suggests that friendship as a research method evolves at the same pace and in similar ways that any friendship might evolve.28 Although traditional research analysis or data gathering is also employed when using friendship as a method, it draws on the strengths of “conversation, everyday involvement, compassion, giving, and vulnerability” to establish mutually beneficial outcomes.29 New ethnographer Stephen Muecke describes this as being oneself in the field by engaging in relational exchanges common to daily life.30 Tillmann-Healy states:

With friendship as method, a project’s issues emerge organically, in the ebb and flow of everyday life: leisurely walks, household projects, activist campaigns, separations, reconciliations, losses, recoveries. The unfolding path of the relationships becomes the path of the project.31

26 I do acknowledge the dangers of assuming that research conversations are always collaborative, and that the ontological motivations of researchers and participants are always analogous with the research outcomes. Such an assumption (a constructivist position) does not, perhaps, understand the complex ontological differences between researchers and participants.
28 Ibid., 278.
29 Ibid.
31 Ibid., 279.
Australian artist Christian Thompson, a Bidjara man of the Kunja Nation, suggests that knowledge is often conveyed through acts of intimacy. As such, intimate exchanges are not just comforting experiences, but processes that allow knowledge transfer to occur that may otherwise be inaccessible. Intimacy then, can be a radical act.

### 3.3 The Unfolding Paths

The complexity of character that friendship affords is what initially precipitated an interest in the limits of the victim–survivor narrative (discussed in Chapter 1). These evolving friendships more closely mirrored the shared agency that visual ethnographer Sarah Pink defines as a process beyond “extracting data and giving something back; it is a mutual investment in the project.” In *Contingencies in Madagascar*, Muecke observes that researchers often report back to audiences without describing how they “[earned] the right to participate”. He suggests that relaying a more authentic experience that describes who the researcher spoke to, and how they came to be there, more closely emulates the intersubjective realities of working with other people.

Gaining a visceral understanding of the complexities of birth and parenthood during the project fostered in me a deeply felt response to the challenges (past and present) faced by parents with little to no financial, social, or familial support. The attachment theory (briefly discussed in Chapter 1), initially merely a concept informing the project, became a challenging reality. In particular, I found myself comparing my privileged experience to those of the birth parents of care leavers, and the care leavers themselves who had raised families of their own in adult life. When personal networks are missing or strained, and social support absent, discriminatory, or unable to grasp the complexities of some lived experiences, raising a child is a struggle against, rather than with, society. This experience broadened my understanding of the complex circumstances faced by parents, carers, and guardians, but most importantly, the children themselves.

I had (naively) wondered if my pregnancy would be a negative trigger for participants. But in the months and years after my son’s birth, I was afforded gentle wisdom and support from the group as they witnessed the vulnerability of parenthood, and my attempts to keep the project ‘moving’. Cups of tea and stories of their own journeys as

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34 Muecke and Pam, *Contingencies in Madagascar*, 19
35 Ibid., 23
36 There is not scope in the exegesis to address this more broadly, but arguably this lack of support (the struggle against society rather than the struggle with society) is one reason why so many children continue to be placed in out-of-home care in Australia, rather than redirecting resources and intimate support structures to further meet the needs of women and families.
children and as parents provided me with welcome reassurance, and made me sad for their loss. It was a trigger, but one that catalysed discussion and intimacy, most likely in response to my vulnerability. Despite the sadness shared through stories, the intimate experience was much more than generating data for the project. Because these stories had an immediate, interpersonal context (to reassure me about my parenting), they emerged organically as a process of sharing knowledge. The dialogues during this time generated strength from wisdom, rather than data from testimony. This process felt more reparative, and closer to Pink’s shared agency. Over time, incidental narratives were relayed, and an affective history was revealed that expanded the social and political dimensions of the story.

As discussed above, the decision to stop recording our conversations indicated a deepening of our personal relations and a shift from the language of research to one of relational ethics. Additionally, as the recording device signified ‘official business’; this occasionally sparked value judgements on what was ‘important’ enough to be recorded (partially based on what previous researchers or research projects had expected from participants). As individual life history narratives were sometimes unknown, fractured, or recalled in non-linear fragments, this approach worked against individual ontologies, rather than with them. Specifically, presenting a recording device put pressure on participants to conform to the testimonial model of recall. This aligns with what social practice researchers Marnie Badham and James Oliver call a reflexive collaborative practice—one that interrogates the construction of collaborative knowledge—and how that knowledge represents ‘another’ (rather than simply acknowledging oneself in the research).

As in all personal narratives, implicit impacts—in this case, of familial loss and institutional care—frequently exist between the solid blocks of knowledge we recall to form a life history narrative. When I first met with participant Michelle, many of the stories she shared were well rehearsed. But as we became more comfortable with each other, and developed confidence and trust in one another through the understandings afforded by friendship, our conversations were able to move between the solid blocks of story. This relates to John Murphy’s observations noted in Chapter 2 that refer to memory less as a repository of events to be recalled than a dynamic reshaping and connecting of experiences.

37 Pink, Doing Visual Ethnography, 65.
38 The majority of participants had been part of oral history projects, museum projects, storytelling projects, or had provided direct testimonies to royal commissions, senate inquiries, or other legal proceedings.
40 Ibid.
To extend my narrative curiosity, I incorporated narrative therapist Michael White’s work on “re-authoring” and “re-membering” narrative. He claims that re-authoring conversations about our lives can help include neglected or significant events that, in turn, provide unexpected and alternative storylines and characters that challenge our sense of self. Through understanding narrative as a tool of self-expression that can be interrogated and expanded, the way we remember and interpret our histories can shift, strengthen, and grow. As such, I began to ask questions around the solid blocks of narrative information that participants and I presented. I asked specific questions, such as “How do you think other children viewed you in the orphanage?” and “When was the first time you felt independent after leaving care?” Others were expanding questions, such as “Did you listen to Jimi Hendrix in the 1960s?”, “When was the last time you swam in the ocean?”, and “Who did you live with when you were twenty?” These gentle tools of narrative expansion helped us locate experiences from which to make images.

It is well theorised that explicit traumatic experiences tend to colonise our narratives, while implicit traumatic memories are often felt but less accessible. As noted previously, Denham describes personal trauma as a response to an event rather than the event itself. He argues this difference determines the impact of the experience on an individual, family or community. His work on intergenerational trauma examines how trauma responses are narrativised between generations, and how this narrativisation can empower rather than disempower. Studying the narrativisation of historical trauma within four generations of a Native American family, he observed that the narrative of dispossession and colonisation had been handed down through oral history, song, ritual, and belonging in ways that educated, connected, and even healed subsequent generations. He argues that trauma has largely been pathologised, leaving little room for alternative narratives of resilience and wellness that emerge from traumatic responses. Understanding that trauma responses are varied, unique, or sometimes non-existent prompted me to view resilience, wellness, and advocacy as further trauma responses. In this way, I learned that trauma narratives could be expressed as wisdom that promoted a ‘safe passage’ through a difficult journey, rather than being presented as ‘deficit discourses’.

This re-framing of trauma as a set of everyday responses precipitated image-making that attempted to re-interpret and re-imagine the quotidian nature of trauma objects and

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42 Ibid.
43 Denham, “Rethinking Historical Trauma,” 393.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
narratives. Embedded in the imaging of these objects was a sense of agency and performativity, in addition to past experiences of hardship and loss. In the image *First Desire* (figure 32), Leonie’s dress is imaged in flight. The air brings life to an object that would otherwise be unremarkable. The dress was purchased for her by her husband before they were married. It is transparent from the knee to the thigh, and she remembers this being risqué. She remembers this because it was the first time she had felt desired. For Leonie, the joy of being desired is inseparable from the absence of desire—something I sought to include in the image by highlighting the fray of the hem. The tension created through this simultaneous presence and absence speaks to the ongoing impacts of this experience.

![Figure 32: Kelly Hussey-Smith *First Desire* from apart & a part 2017](image)

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46 In this exegesis, I refer to trauma objects as material objects that represent a quotidian observation of trauma. In many cases, the objects and narratives that I found remarkable were viewed as unremarkable by participants.
3.4 Shared Agency

The unfolding paths of the collaboration blended the personal histories of participants, my own experiences as a new parent, and our shared experiences in day-to-day life. This led me to question what role agency played in our collaborative framework, and how it was shared.

After the birth of my son, I had no choice but to bring him along to meetings and image making sessions. This was not desirable (nor always successful), but it did redefine the boundaries of the project to be inclusive of my responsibilities and vulnerabilities, in addition to those of participants. This shift was both a relief, because I could be myself, and the catalyst for many stories and conversations that would otherwise have been left out of our project. Leaking breasts, fatigue, and infant choking hazards are humbling professional scenarios. Dropping the researcher façade and negotiating an inclusive space brought me closer to participants and made us a group of allies. On reflection, this demonstrates the success of the collaboration. I was not a service provider or community arts facilitator imposing a collaborative model, but a member of the project who, like the other participants, was entitled to respect and empathy as the circumstances required.

Through acknowledging friendship as a method, and accepting the personal investment that follows, the works that constitute apart & a part are as much evidence of our reciprocal investment as they are evidence of the ongoing impacts of out-of-home care. Declarations of shared agency are most often verified from the participant’s perspective. Did they feel included, or did they have a voice? While this is a largely positive aspect of reflective research, it tends to document participation rather than agency. Flipping the evaluative process and considering how my (unexpected) circumstances necessitated that participants acknowledge and accommodate my limitations, felt more genuinely collaborative. I suspect that in a paranoid bid to avoid ethical mishaps, participatory researchers or facilitators sometimes present a slightly dishonest character; uncritical and neutral, existing to ‘serve’ the community, rather than to work together (which includes being critical, and embracing conflicting positions).

3.5 The Politics of Collaboration

Visual artists, photographers, ethnographers, curators, and theorists continue to grapple with the ethical and methodological complexities of collaborating with communities and including subjects more meaningfully in the process of research.47 In thinking through the challenges of collaborative research, I have drawn on literature and practice from the collaborative turn in photography, ethnography, and contemporary art.

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In *The One and the Many*, Grant Kester accounts for the emergence of the collaborative turn through late modernist questions of power relations and authorship, the rise of neoliberalism, and the decline of mainstream cultures of resistance.\(^48\) His lengthy socio-political analysis raises several important questions regarding how collaborative practices have changed our ontological understanding of what constitutes art and the new knowledge generated as a result.\(^49\) In discussing the question of collaboration’s visibility, Kester classifies works as either textual (an aesthetic object, most often not collaborative) or collaborative (process based, participatory, sometimes ephemeral).\(^50\) Textual works, he writes, mirror our predisposition for art objects fully formed by the artist and presented for the viewer, whereas collaborative works incorporate dialogical processes, engage methodologies that enable intersubjective experiences, and employ alternative aesthetic approaches.\(^51\) Kester suggests there is significant value in collaborative artworks that serve and stimulate the communities they engage through collaboration, civic participation, and co-production. As such, in this model of practice, the works are designed to be relevant to their specific contexts, rather than those imposed externally by the art market.\(^52\)

Artist and researcher Gemma-Rose Turnbull highlights the tension between authorship and collaboration in her work, applying socially engaged principles to documentary photography. She argues that the veracity in socially engaged work lies in the acknowledgement of the collaborative process, but highlights the problems associated with adhering to an ‘art world’ aesthetic.\(^53\) She writes that too much focus on the expectations of the art world can encourage “tokenistic collaborations” and that outcomes that focus on the documentation of a process can “lack charismatic agency”.\(^54\) For *apart & a part*, I navigated this tension by listening to the needs of the community (who sought visibility) rather than adhering to a particular collaborative structure. Therefore, while the work is a collaboration, it has also been aimed at a secondary audience.

\(^49\) Ibid., 9–10.
\(^50\) Ibid., 10–11.
\(^51\) Ibid. Basically, Kester is suggesting that textual works tend to take the form of conventional art world aesthetics—what he calls the “aesthetic autonomy” of the artist (although I acknowledge that socially engaged art is now largely embraced by the art world and its commerce). Kester, *The One and the Many*, 9–10.
\(^52\) It must be acknowledged that Claire Bishop has critiqued this position arguing that socially engaged art has largely become absorbed into the broader art market through awards, grants, and acquisitions. See Claire Bishop, “Claire Bishop—Creative Times Lecture,” YouTube video, 1:31:15, uploaded by James Riordan, 14 Sep 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MdKniMT46tg; and Claire Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” *October* 110 (2004) 51–79.
\(^54\) Paul O’Neill and Claire Doherty cited in ibid., 83.
In “The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents”, Bishop claims that artists are increasingly collaborating (with each other and with communities) as a reaction to the alienating conditions of late capitalism, in defiance of the commodified nature of art, and because of the rewarding aspects of collaboration. However, this turn has also seen artistic authorship questioned as the product of elitism and ego. Authorial renunciation is often celebrated, a problem that Bishop perceives as playing into a culture of polite “self-sacrifice” rather than taking us to “darker, more complicated places”.

In a conversation with a peer in the early stages of the project, I mentioned I was providing an aesthetic frame (authoring) for the (collaborative) project. This claim was met with silent disapproval, and what appeared to be a moral concern for participants. What interested me was not my colleague’s judgement, but their assumption (without any knowledge of the project, care leaver politics, or project participants) that there was a more ethical way to proceed with the work.

While working in Guwahati, India, in 2010 as a documentary photographer on a medical mission, I met the founder of the non-profit that I had been contracted by. He had flown in for an important district meeting and, as a part of his visit, had dedicated time to meet with local staff and volunteers. He was shocked at the amount of general waste around the hospital (a sacred space in his view) and proceeded to inspire the student translators to clean up their environment. Roused by his speech, the students immediately began to collect the waste. At the time, the system of waste disposal in Guwahati was open incineration. As such, after collection, toxic smoke filled the maternity and post-operative wards, causing asthma attacks, severe smoke inhalation, and agitation. At the same time, the foreign medical team, dealing with distraught patients and carers, were without translators and communication was shut down.

Obviously, the above story is an example of cultural relativism. But the issues it raises about power and context in collaborative projects have influenced my understanding

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55 Claire Bishop, “The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents”, *Artforum* 44, no. 6 (February 2006), 180. In photography, I suspect this turn is more directly related to long-standing debates around representation (stereotyping and othering) and power structures (victim photography and the media) highlighted in theory and criticism since the 1970s by those such as Susan Sontag, Martha Rosler, Allan Sekula, John Berger, John Tagg, Hal Foster and Abigail Solomon Godeau. Arguably, documentary and art photography have shifted to more collaborative methods since the 1970s. There is not the scope here to review this in any depth, but Wendy Ewald is one well-cited practitioner who has been working for forty years on her collaborative methodology with communities, as is the long-term and intimate collaborative work of Jim Goldberg in *Raised by Wolves* (1995), *Rich and Poor* (1985), and *Open See* (2009).


57 Operation Smile provides free surgery to children in the Majority World who are born with cleft lips and palates. In addition to surgery, the organisation trains local medical professionals and students and establish permanent programs in areas where the incidence is higher. This particular centre was a training hospital for international and local surgeons, doctors and nurses.

58 Cultural relativism is a topic of academic and personal interest. I have experienced first-hand the consequences of ‘aid’ or ‘good intentions’ that are irrelevant to the communities they are designed to serve. This has no doubt
more generally. Specifically, my critical response to anecdotes such as this one and to theories of the politics of collaboration in art led me to question who gets to determine what is ethical and what is not, and how these ethical assumptions are so often practiced through Sedgwick’s paranoid mode.

With the above example in mind, perhaps one could consider my well-meaning peer’s concerned response as an act of ethical relativism (or, as Bishop calls it, an ethical precept).59 There are obvious dangers in assuming that one approach is more ethical than another. Without knowledge of the specific details and contexts of a particular project or collaboration, critics or researchers may find themselves applying ‘solutions’ without ‘problems’ (figure 33). The ethical frameworks in apart & a part—shared agency, collaboration, reflexivity—are not static nor were they proscribed. They have shifted and revealed themselves over time. My research methods—active listening, friendship, dialogue—have placed the highest priority on the collaboratively negotiated aims of the project rather than on a proscribed framework or methodology. They are rigorous methods, but they do not insure me against misstep, nor do they magically place my project outside structural privilege. While the ephemerality of this process can be daunting and difficult to articulate, the greater danger lies in researchers assuming ‘best practice’ without knowing or consulting participants. As the above anecdote demonstrates, what might work in one context can be disastrous in another.

Influenced my skepticism of ‘good intentions’ and catalysed my interest in shared agency. Photographer Peter DiCampo’s Failed Aid project has also informed my understanding around these issues. In Failed Aid, DiCampo (also the founder of the Instagram project @everydayafrica) travelled to Ghana and Malawi to document failed or incomplete aid projects. The images depict the abandoned objects and structures left behind (that likely came at a great cost to the NGO and inconvenience to the recipients of the ‘aid’). With a ‘Photography, Expanded’ fellowship from the Magnum Foundation, DiCampo has worked with designers to create an interactive website that connects the recipients of ‘failed aid’ projects to the NGOs that commissioned the projects, largely via text. This is an attempt to create more accountability around the industry of aid and to give a voice to those directly impacted by these projects. See http://whatwentwrong.foundation/.

59 In Artificial Hells, Bishop argues that the “noble intent” of socially engaged practices and the desire to “dematerialise” outcomes often means that such practices escape art criticism. She suggests that socially engaged practices lie somewhere between “anti-capitalism” and Christian notions of the “good soul” (39–40), which can be problematic because the collaborations can be missionary in intent or produce work that does not communicate, confront, or challenge an audience. She states, “This line of thinking has led to an ethically charged climate in which participatory and socially engaged art has become largely exempt from art criticism: emphasis is continually shifted away from the disruptive specificity of a given practice and onto a generalized set of ethical precepts.” Bishop, Artificial Hells, 23.
Although Kester’s observation that the intersubjective relations afforded by collaborative works might move people closer towards recognising and understanding difference aligns closely with the project aims, *apart & a part* has sought to employ both the dialogue of the collaborative and the transformative aesthetic potential of the textual “object”.60 Because *apart & a part* is an installation in an art gallery, and has been designed for a secondary audience, I consider the textual aspects to be important. Specifically, publicly exhibiting work that intersects with trauma and shame requires thoughtful curation.61 Additionally, as the project intersects with complex histories, the ways in which these contexts are communicated has required significant attention—not only from me and participants, but supervisors, peers, and other stakeholders. A de-authored or experimentally authored account may not meet the core aims of the project, and may not succeed in engaging audiences. Worse, the outcome could be offensive, unclear, or traumatic. Kester

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60 Grant Kester, *The One and the Many*, 185. I acknowledge that Kester is referring to collaborative work dissimilar in form and process to *apart & a part* but I find resonance with the broader arguments around works that can be both collaborative and textual. See also Daniel Palmer, *Photography and Collaboration: From Conceptual Art to Crowd Sourcing* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 19.

suggests that the blend of the collaborative and the textual is sometimes driven by a desire to remain relevant in the art world or adhere to an art world aesthetic. However, this assumes that an art world aesthetic cannot be politically engaged and has nothing to offer in terms of helping us broach difficult subjects such as trauma and abuse. As such, I find myself more closely aligned with Claire Bishop, who, on the final page of *Artificial Hells*, argues that participatory (i.e., collaborative) practices have a double ontological status:

> It is both an event in the world, and at one remove from it. As such, it has the capacity to communicate on two levels—to participants and to spectators—the paradoxes that are repressed in everyday discourse, and to elicit perverse, disturbing, and pleasurable experiences that enlarge our capacity to imagine the world and our relations anew. But to reach the second level requires a mediating third terms—an object, image, story, film, even a spectacle—that permits this experience to have a purchase on the public imaginary.

In their study on collaborations between artists and communities in Australia, Martin Mulligan and Pia Smith concluded that the intrinsic value of aesthetic transformation—which they call the ‘wow’ factor—had greater outcomes and impacts on participants. In short, when artists contribute an aesthetic frame—what might also be called its aesthetic transformation and intrinsic value—this can also be a pleasurable and inspiring process. I have found this to be the case in *apart & a part* and, as such, do not consider my authorship problematic, but an attempt to translate our rich dialogues to the secondary audience.

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62 There is not scope in this exegesis to adequately comment on the commodification of culture in the art world. However, I have drawn on Nato Thompson’s work in *Seeing Power: Art and Activism in the 21st Century* to acknowledge the important role aesthetics play in political art. In particular, I have engaged with Thompson’s common-sense analysis of political art being accessible enough (didactic) to engage an audience in the content and context/s of the work, but also open enough to allow the viewer to experience the open questions inherent in such work. An open experience is more difficult to access at a time of “vast commodification” and is still a potentially powerful encounter for a viewer. Nato Thompson, *Seeing Power: Art and Activism in the 21st Century* (New York: Melville House, 2015). See also, Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance and Froiza Woods with Mathieu Copeland (Dijon: Les presses du reel, 2002); Claire Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” *October* 110 (2004) 51–79.


65 See Marnie Badham, “Legitimation: The Case for ‘Socially Engaged Arts’ Navigating Art History, Cultural Development and Arts Funding Narratives,” *Local-Global: Identity, Security, Community*, (2010): 92. Badham describes “aesthetic enlightenment, communicative processes, and contributions to public sector capacity” as having intrinsic value (84–85). See also Kevin F. McCarthy, Elizabeth H. Ondaatje, Laura Zakaras and Arthur Brooks, *Gifts of the Muse: Reframing the Debate About the Benefits of the Arts* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2005) where they suggest that “intrinsic benefits refer to effects inherent in the arts experience that add value to people’s lives. Obvious examples are the sheer joy one can feel in response to a piece of music or to movements in dance or to a painting. Beyond these immediate effects, there are personal effects that develop with recurrent aesthetic experiences, such as growth in one’s capacity to feel, perceive, and judge for oneself and growth in one’s capacity to participate imaginatively in the lives of others and to empathize with others. And some works go beyond such personal effects, providing a common experience that draws people together and influences the way the community perceives itself, thereby creating intrinsic benefits that accrue to the public.” (37)

Therefore, translating this experience to a secondary audience often requires another layer of conceptualisation, aesthetics, and collaboration—something that photographers know well. Straight documentation of an event, a speech, or a performance often does little to embody the emotional, sensorial, and critical aspects of the moment. In *Artificial Hells*, Claire Bishop refers to this as photography’s inability to capture the “affective dynamic” of participatory interactions and relational exchanges (specifically she is referring to photo documentation of participatory art). These aspects are sometimes unphotographable, and require approaches that deviate from traditional documentary strategies of witnessing. I would argue then, that *apart & a part* has attempted to capture the ‘affective dynamic’ of our intimate collaboration through the production of an aesthetic frame for the work; developed through ongoing relational exchanges with care leaver participants.

### 3.6 Collaboration and Photography

Photography theorist Daniel Palmer discusses a spectrum of collaboration within photographic practice, from grass-roots participatory work to relational portraiture to the collaborative aspects of viewing photographs. He argues photography’s collaborative traits have been under-acknowledged partly due to the fiction of the solo photographer or artist—often male and working in isolation—that fails to include the many individuals involved in the production, processing, and dissemination of images. Thus, he suggests the collaborative labour inherent in photography is a blind spot in photographic history, since the discipline has always had at its core varying degrees of collaboration. According to Palmer, the traditions of long-term social documentary practice, most of which is inherently collaborative, have been under-theorised. Susie Linfield suggests this may be the result of the postmodern “disdain for the traditions, the practice, and the ideals of documentary photography.”

Palmer defines a collaborative work as one where the photographic component privileges meaning making as collaboration. This acknowledgement of the potential for collaborative conceptualisation by people other than those who press the shutter resonates

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68 Over a period of five years.

69 See Daniel Palmer, “A Collaborative Turn in Photography?,” *Photographies* 6, no. 1 (2013): 117; Palmer, *Photography and Collaboration*, 19. In the latter, Palmer suggests there is much to learn from our photographic predecessors that have always had a form of collaboration and community engagement at their core—vernacular photography, citizen journalism and community photography (124).

70 Long-term documentary photography projects have largely been seen as a response to the postmodern critique instead of being theorised on their own terms as thorough research projects. Many of the methods used in long-term documentary projects have been employed in *apart & a part*: immersion, friendship, active listening, creative observation, conversation.

with the process of collaboration employed in *apart & a part*. In theorising what it means to share agency, I have privileged co-conceptualisation over commonly employed strategies that use a more literal aesthetic of collaboration and co-authorship (such as having participants take their own images or write on, or otherwise respond to, images produced). Because mutual investment was paramount to the work, including participants in foundational decisions better met our collaborative aims. This means that while a number of the images were made by me alone, the dialogic process underpinning their production was embedded in the images.

In his analysis of collaborative methodologies in documentary projects, participatory artist Mark Strandquist suggests that image making is a “social performance that has the potential to transform the photographer, the subject, and those around them.”

He refers to the “social aesthetic” of collaboration (the interactions that led to its production, exhibition, distribution) as incorporating the social interaction of collaborative methods and the “socio-political potential behind every creative choice.” While I am largely sympathetic to this proposition, central to *apart & a part* is an interest in providing the audience with a conceptual encounter rather than an overt expression of collaboration. Additionally, I argue that recognition of, or even privileging, the secondary audience does not devalue the collaborative process. In *apart & a part*, the collaborative process is implicit in the willingness of participants to create the artwork (whether this means co-conceptualising, or literally performing) and through the use of aesthetics in engaging both the primary and secondary audience. This relates closely to Palmer’s definition of meaning making as a collaborative act, rather than defining it more literally as sharing the making of the images with a camera.

I do not seek for my work to be exempt from critique (which Bishop observes as a symptom of the ethical turn in art) because of its perceived ethical attributes, but to drive

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72 Palmer, “A Collaborative Turn in Photography?,” 120.
73 In *Photography and Collaboration*, Palmer references this in relation to Nicholas Nixon’s 1991 project *People with AIDS* (110). The work, an intimate yet at times raw document of individuals living with and dying from AIDS, demonstrates an ethical and collaborative project through the access and the sensitivity through which the images have been presented. I also take the position that viewers are sophisticated enough to read process in products without making specific meta references to self-representation (handwriting, shutter releases). These strategies can be very effective, but they don’t necessarily render a work ethical.
75 Mark Strandquist, cited in “Photo-Based Social Practice: A Discussion of Socially Engaged, Transdisciplinary, and Expanded Practices in Contemporary Photography,” *Photography as A Social Practice Broadsheet* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 2, 4. It is difficult to pinpoint the origins of the term “social aesthetic” but Nato Thompson discusses this in relation to work that we now define as relational aesthetics, suggesting that it has a connection to performance, collaboration, and art as an ephemeral experience rather than an object. See Thompson, *Seeing Power*.
questions around representation and collaboration. Palmer argues that the most successful collaborative photographic works made in and with communities are the ones that interrogate the history of representation in social documentary while “questioning the rhetoric of the community itself.” I interpret this as acknowledging the history of the discipline, and the politics of representation while expanding and even challenging existing narratives or understandings. I have called this process being authorised to author—authorisation (discussed through examples in Chapter 4).

Arising from a narrative of exclusions and disconnection, the exhibition of works produced in apart & a part is intended to be a catalyst for further conversations and advocacy—a point of departure rather than an end point. Therefore, while the works were produced through dialogue that privileged the primary audience, in order to engage a greater community, a secondary audience was required. Because many participants are regular contributors to advocacy movements, the work was less about giving voice in a direct way (because many people already had a voice) and more about translating the affective dimensions that are much more difficult to identify, name, and share. This differs significantly from socially engaged projects that may not consider a secondary audience or require tangible outcomes, but instead privilege relational experiences and a process of co-authorship.

In addressing the complex issues of power, representation, and authorship in collaborative photographic works and projects, Palmer notes the trend towards self-representations but supports Martha Rosler’s position that the challenges of overcoming power structures are greater than any one action. There is anxiety in the literature about whether or not the process of collaboration can ever be embedded in the final images. Turnbull and Palmer suggest that, while collaborative processes are not new in photography, there is a distinction between works that explicitly demonstrate a collaborative process (Jim Goldberg’s 1995 Raised By Wolves being a well-cited example) and works that present a more traditional single-author viewpoint. Turnbull asks whether or not we can have both, or if the dichotomous tension between the primary and secondary audience (or the process and the product) is too great to navigate within the context of a collaboration. She suggests that this duality can lead to new methods that may bridge the gap between the competing demands of the art world and the primary audience.

77 Bishop, “The Social Turn,” 180.
78 Palmer, Photography and Collaboration, 17.
79 Ibid., 77–78, and Rosler, Decoys and Disruptions, 227.
80 Turnbull, Surface Tension, 82.
81 Ibid., 79–95.
82 Ibid., 83.
Allan Sekula famously critiqued the “cult of authorship” as it related to social documentary photography as one that denied the broader context of the social conditions in which photographs were made.\(^\text{83}\) In her book *The Civil Contract of Photography*, Ariella Azoulay argues that the collaborative act is implicit in the encounter between photographer and photographed, and that the photographs produced as a result are independent documents of this exchange.\(^\text{84}\) Bishop contends that artists cannot be expected to bear sole responsibility for realising the political project of participation and representation in greater society.\(^\text{85}\) She argues that art is a part of a larger political project of community building and civic participation and should be viewed as “a form of experimental activity overlapping with the world,” rather than providing concrete solutions.\(^\text{86}\) It is also important to recognise that the purpose of these collaborations is not to claim a process that is “ethically pure”. Daily life is full of ethical decisions, and as such, we cannot rely on collaborative researchers or art practitioners to negate the greater structural challenges of inequality.

Wendy Ewald, a commonly cited artist and educator in collaborative lens-based practice, suggests that working collaboratively results in new processes and image outcomes (which she calls layers) that could not have been imagined otherwise.\(^\text{87}\) As such, I propose the term author-isation to describe my own collaborative process that has resulted in an authored outcome via long-term, transparent, and collaborative processes. By incorporating pleasure into the making of the work, I have begun to address some of the complexities of imaging the past. In this way, I argue that I was authorised to author; thus, I have called the process author-ising.

Artist Craigie Horsefield offers a refreshing interpretation of the term ‘collaborative’ as something not only integral to his practice as a whole but also to living in the world. For Horsefield, collaboration, to varying degrees, is essential in any project that seeks to relate to specific communities or audiences. He suggests, that “all art is a conversation” and that recognising and naming this can be powerful in the face of individualism.\(^\text{88}\) In a sense, he is reclaiming the term from the realm of participatory art, and relating it to how we engage with the world.


\(^{85}\) Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 284.

\(^{86}\) Ibid.


His interest in relational experiences is also articulated through his large-format portraits (figure 34) that privilege conversation as a way of articulating relation. He suggests that much is revealed when we give our full attention to conversation, but disagrees with the assertion that conversation is his process, suggesting that it is part of being human, not just an instrument used to realise art. What I appreciate about Horsefield’s use of the term collaborative is the understanding that it is implicit in his work, rather than an explicit demonstration of collaboration or reflexivity, such as we might see in Lucy Levene’s *The Spaghetti Tree* (2013–14) or Broomberg and Chanarin’s *Ghetto* (2003), which both implement strategies that directly alert the viewer to their reflexive status, underscoring the collaborative nature of the work.

Levene’s *The Spaghetti Tree* photographically documents post-war Italian communities of Bedford and Peterborough in England. Levene purposefully exposes the photographic backdrops in her images, emphasising their encounter and underscoring photography’s constructed nature and flawed relationship with representation (figure 35). The work is interesting but covers familiar ground: that photography is constructed, and produces flexible narratives.

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89 Ibid.  
90 Ibid.
Broomberg and Chanarin’s *Ghetto* (specifically, the work made in Rene Vallejo Psychiatric Hospital, Cuba) is an attempt to subvert the power relationships in portraiture by giving the trigger to the subject with the aim for the individual to (theoretically) control the moment of their representation (figure 36). Again, while the decisions made in the positioning of each person do reveal something of the inner life of the individual, the explicitness of the strategy dominates.
Figure 36: Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin Rene Vallejo
Psychiatric Hospital Cuba from the series Ghetto 2003
Artist and educator Anthony Luvera employed a similar strategy of self-representation in *Residency*, where he created assisted self-portraits with young members of the Belfast homeless community (figure 37). Similar to Broomberg and Chanarin, Luvera gave participants the shutter release so they could exercise (some) control over the ‘moment of their representation’. His reflection on the work indicates that in reality, the project of self-representation is much more difficult than an explicit collaborative strategy. He suggests that while methodologies such as self-representation offer participants some agency in “express[ing] their subjectivity it won’t necessarily get the artist or audience any closer to ‘reality’.” Clearly responding to questions of agency and authorship, these works (Broomberg and Chanarin and Luvera) underscore the importance of reflexivity, but I would argue they also demonstrate the propensity for such work to become susceptible to Sedgewick’s paranoid motive in an attempt to avoid critique. If the shutter-release device is taken away from the images, is there still a collaborative process? It raises the question, are viewers so out of touch that they cannot read collaboration and self-representation in images without explicit references?

The collaborative film, installation, and photographic work of Venezuelan-born artist Javier Téllez employs a participatory process of script and character development with

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91 *Assisted Self-Portraits* was only one part of the work, which also included images made by subjects of their lives, and a larger project of establishing an archive of these representations. Prior to this, Luvera worked with homeless communities in the United Kingdom for six years.

92 Luvera, “Residency,” 238.
individuals living in psychiatric facilities, in an attempt to challenge the stereotypical representation of mental illness. He describes this process as, “the unscripted creation of uncontrolled performative situations where the limits of reality and theater are dissolved through catharsis, collective rituals, the spectator’s active involvement, and the carnivalesque.” Téllez is not only facilitating the construction of a film but also providing a framework for its entry into the world as an artwork. In reference to Bishop’s double ontology of collaboration, his outcomes privilege the inter-subjective experience of co-creation as a meaningful exchange that can shift each individual’s positionality in relation to the other. But they are also carefully curated events for public audiences, enlarging, as Bishop suggests, our capacity to relate to the world.

In an interview with Téllez by curator Michèle Faguet and artist Cristóbal Lehyt, he underscores the importance of creating a ‘flexible space’ for the collaborative process:

In my practice I try to create a flexible space where those represented can intervene in their own representation. According to Levinas, ethics is a devotion to the other: “I have to forget myself to access the other.” Ethics has to be understood as a responsibility to difference. For me this responsibility is manifest in the inclusion of the other as an active participant of the work. This participation is capital in the process of production of the work: the patients are the main actors, work on the scripts of the pieces, choose the props, review the footage and comment on it…

This inclusion obviously takes place within a framework that includes the conditions of distribution and reception of the art system. In the end it is about working in collaboration with other people and I never pretend not to be visible in the discourse, but the work is articulated in the dialogue between my subjectivity and their subjectivities.

Faguet suggests that Téllez uses the boundary of normative behaviour as a way of asking the audience to question their categorisation of the binary of sane and insane. The work both critiques the way institutions establish and categorise deviance and suggests that these categories are flexible. Thus, the resulting films and performances are authored by Téllez (figure 38) in collaboration with participants.

95 Bishop, Artificial Hells, 284.
97 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
While the works in *apart & a part* are not similar in form or topic to the work produced by Tellez and his collaborators, the relational outcomes of our works are similar. Specifically, both bodies of work are premised on the belief that lens-based collaborations can shift one’s positionality in respect to an individual or group, and can also potentially shift an audience’s position in relation to the individuals featured in the work. Part of the pleasure of this project has been in devising an aesthetic framework that adequately expresses the rich, exploratory dialogues between participants and myself. As noted above, photography has always had collaborative elements, but these collaborations are not always explicit or visible. In *apart & a part*, the collaborative process is embedded into the images. I have not used explicit collaborative strategies, such as participants’ handwriting on images, testimony, or participants making the images, because I do not view collaboration as an aesthetic to be applied, but a process of relational ethics. Our process of collaborative conceptualisation allowed participants to be involved in anticipating the response of the secondary audience, but did not make them solely responsible for it. I trust, however, that audiences can interpret the implicit collaboration though reading gestures such as participants addressing or performing for the camera, the denial of spectacle or covert observation, the intimacy translated, and what I hope are reparative outcomes.

Therefore, the explicit focus of the works included in *apart & a part* are the personal experiences of care leavers. Implicit in the works is our collaborative process—
which mirrors my research questions identified in the Introduction to this document: what are the affective dimensions of the legacy of care, and how can collaborative conceptualisation communicate this to a secondary audience?

Having always worked on contentious topics (such as colonial prisons, zoos, mining, the politics of labour), I consider myself experienced in evaluating aesthetic approaches against the unique set of ethical questions proposed by each project. I have also come to realise, as is widely acknowledged in Bishop’s work, that artists do not exist in a vacuum, nor can they erode the inequality or ideological dominance of external forces, or their position in the world (whatever that may be). While we should have high expectations of art practitioners working collaboratively, particularly when sensitive issues are being developed and transformed for secondary audiences, we cannot expect these practices to magically eliminate systematic inequality. To suggest otherwise would be dishonest and deny the reality of individual and systemic disadvantage. Worse still, to create a space where the artist/s claim to have challenged or removed structural inequality, suggests that one can live outside oppression through a collaborative artwork.

At the core of my practice has been a commitment to synthesising context, content, and aesthetics in a way that privileges story over style. As most of the participants have been active in the project for five years, we have developed relationships that exceed the technical requirements of a collaboration. Throughout the process, I have come to challenge the assertion that a successful collaboration in photography requires that the subject self-represent or always have a hand in the making of the work. While I have great respect for the principles of socially engaged art, I find the “moral precepts” that “praise authorial renunciation” difficult to reconcile with the kind of collaborative work that I seek to make.99 This, I think, has something to do with working in the contentious discipline of documentary photography, which has (largely) embedded ethical critique in its identity, and which has well-established connections to dialogues in new and visual ethnography. Drawing on Palmer’s position that photography is inherently collaborative, and Broomberg and Chanarin’s position that conceptualisation in photography can be a collaborative act, I argue that my process is one of being authorised to author. This is because collaboration is not only defined as handing over the tools of representation, and authoring is not necessarily ethically problematic, since agency can be shared in other ways.

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99 Bishop, “The Social Turn,” 181.
Chapter 4: Expanded Documentary

The perpetual doubt, the nagging insecurity—whether what we see is ‘true’, ‘real’, ‘factual’ and so on—accompanies contemporary documentary reception like a shadow. Let me suggest that this uncertainty is not some shameful lack, which has to be hidden, but instead constitutes the core quality of contemporary documentary modes as such.¹

A reflexive, independent photography, attentive to its own effects is possible. Photography is as powerful as it is dangerous; it lays traps; we must be wary of it as if it were poisonous...There are things it is powerless to state...It is possible that the interaction of a photography shoot not be a robbery...or a self-portrait. It is possible to photograph something other than the spectacle of a fire.²

This chapter builds on the project’s contexts and theoretical positions presented in Chapter 3. In this chapter I place myself in the emerging field of ‘expanded documentary’ (also called contemporary, conceptual, or new documentary).³ I explore my praxis through the politics of authorship in expanded documentary, and the ethnographic turn in contemporary art. Here I briefly deviate from the explicit focus on care leaver experiences to interrogate the ethics of reflexive practice as a process of knowledge production.⁴ I argue that because expanded documentary has emerged from a sustained period of critique, it has embedded mature perspectives on authorship, ethnography, and reflexivity into its praxis. In addition, it has incorporated experimental visual approaches, collaboration, and reflexive responses to the problems of representation without losing its connection to the non-fiction world.

In section 4.5 of this Chapter, Developing an Aesthetic Frame, I return to the project with a focus on performative and reflexive modes of documentary, and discuss specific

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³ The term ‘expanded documentary’ is borrowed and adapted from the Aperture Foundation’s “Documentary, Expanded” edition of Aperture Magazine, the Magnum Foundation’s annual symposium, “Photography Expanded”, and a conference I attended in 2011 at Auckland University of Technology, called “Expanding Documentary”. I now run a studio at RMIT University called Expanded Documentary that interrogates the question: What are the limits of a document? Other terms used to describe contemporary iterations of documentary practice include new documentary, conceptual documentary and experimental documentary, but as none of these have commonly agreed definitions, they are more or less interchangeable. The most commonly used term is new documentary, sometimes used to describe contemporary shifts in documentary practice. I have not used this term for two reasons. The first, which is largely practical, is because of its historical reference to the new wave of British colour documentary photographers of the 1980s (for example, Martin Parr, Anna Fox, and Paul Graham), and the second is because the word ‘new’ insinuates a ‘new’ form of documentary which is not where I consider myself to practice.
aesthetic decisions. I engage and apply Jacques Rancière’s view that aesthetics can politically engage audiences through translation and storytelling, rather than relying on seduction and spectatorship. I conclude this chapter, and the exegesis, with a synopsis of the turning points in the collaborations between the project participants and I, that led to the production of narrative anchors that developed an aesthetic frame for the project. These turning points also demonstrate how the theoretical concerns have informed the project outcomes, and how the process of active listening continues beyond the conversation. Finally, I propose the exhibition, *apart & a part*, as the conclusion to my doctoral research.

### 4.1 Documentary: A Practice With a Past

The postmodern critique that draws attention to documentary photography’s propensity to victimise, stereotype, and reinforce power relationships has been well-covered in photographic literature and already introduced in Chapter 2 of this exegesis. Despite the proliferation of tertiary educated photographers familiar with the postmodern critique of photography, and the subsequent expanded breadth of aesthetic and methodological strategies in documentary art, contemporary documentary practice remains substantially under-theorised. Of course, writing exists on the social and philosophical aspects of new, contemporary, and conceptual documentary, but less has been published on documentary strategies and methodologies of long-term engagement, in-depth research, and community engagement. Instead, creative researchers in this field tend to look to art theory, visual, new and sensory ethnography, and narrative theory for answers to what Robert Coles calls, questions with moral implications.

I initially hesitated to include this section in the exegesis for two reasons, the first being that positioning oneself in documentary practice is philosophically complex. Claims to practice in the documentary tradition are often met with assumptions of naïve understandings of truth and subjectivity, or as holding patronising views on communities of others. The postmodern critique of photography as inherently violent, exploitative, and generally problematic persists, despite several decades of practice responding to these

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6 I devised the term ‘narrative anchors’ through my documentary teaching practice to demonstrate how key images shape and guide the visual narrative. ‘Aesthetic frame’ refers to a consistent visual approach that helps bind the work together as a series of related images.
7 From Martha Rosler’s observation that photography has to be understood through its history: see Martha Rosler, “In Around and Afterthoughts (on Documentary Photography),” in *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings 1975-2001* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press in association with International Center of Photography, New York, 2004), 303.
problems. As addressed in Chapter 2, while the ethical complexities of documentary practice are central to the discipline, and have been covered at length in photography criticism, little attention has been given to the ways in which documentary has answered these criticisms. Despite widespread acknowledgement in documentary’s community of practice of its position as a pluralistic medium of expression, and the necessity for collaborative, long-term, and research-based approaches, until recently, this has been a theoretical blind spot. Specifically, the ethical discussions promoted by (many) photographic theorists have become analogous with Sedgewick’s paranoid reading (discussed in Chapter 2)—which, ironically, does little to advance methodological discussions on ethics. Thus, political and socially engaged work is rarely viewed through a reparative mode.

In *The Cruel Radiance*, Susie Linfield describes the narrow focus of the postmodern theorists as setting the tone for photographic criticism, thus effectively equating ‘good criticism’ with suspicion and distrust of photography and its practitioners. Similarly, in *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, Rancière argues that the ethical turn in art shifted the political art conversation from the relationship between politics and aesthetics to moral evaluation and judgement (arguably, a paranoid approach). In *The Emancipated Spectator*, he argues that skepticism towards political art “was generated by the disappointed belief in a straight line between perception, affection, comprehension and action.” That is, the expectation of a formulaic response from viewers of political or social artwork in order to measure its effectiveness resulted in a distrust of political art. This is not dissimilar to Claire Bishop’s comments, noted in Chapter 3, on the ethical turn in contemporary art and the “moral precepts” that sometimes become the evaluative focus of socially engaged art, rather than the “disruptive specificity” of the work. This inclination towards (perceived) moral purity can lead to claims that participatory art can overcome structural barriers to equality (through participation)—which is potentially insulting to anyone genuinely impacted by such barriers. My point here is not to discredit certain pockets of socially engaged art but to highlight the often unrealistic expectations required of artists working in the political or social realm. As such, building on Susan Best’s *Reparative Aesthetics*, I suggest that a

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10 Theorists and artists who have addressed this include: Anthony Luvera, Daniel Palmer, Wendy Ewald, Susie Linfield, and Ariella Azoulay.
14 Claire Bishop, “The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents”, *Artforum* 44, no. 6 (February 2006), 181. In “The Social Turn” Bishop raises concern with the evaluative methods of socially engaged art, specifically that its good intentions sometimes render it exempt from serious criticism (180–81).
reparative approach to the analysis and criticism of contemporary documentary work can encourage more complex and realistic discussions of ethics and aesthetics. A reparative approach to the teaching of ethics in photography also has exciting pedagogical applications, which I will remark on in my conclusion to this chapter.

While shifts towards collaborative practices and expanded aesthetic approaches are increasingly common in documentary practice, documents in their most basic forms (evidence, bills, legal documents) are rarely scrutinised. Hito Steyerl and Maria Lind acknowledge this contradiction in *Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art*, suggesting there is a disjuncture between an academic and intellectual insistence on plurality and subjectivity in documentary art and a lack of critical reflection on documents in daily life.\(^{15}\) They suggest this is partly responsible for the documentary turn in the art world, which often takes as its focus the deconstruction of the language of the document.\(^ {16}\) Steyerl argues that while documentary as an art form has endured rigorous critique, the broader, more dangerous, use of the documentary aesthetic in daily life remains largely uncontested.\(^ {17}\) This is interesting when the high ethical expectations of practitioners of contemporary documentary are compared with the role documents play in daily life, or worse, in justifying oppression, war, and violence. As such, I align with Steyerl, who suggests that art criticism is essential, but the interrogation of ethics and power should not only be an intellectual exercise in (photography) criticism, but also applied to the role documents play in our lives.

The second reason I was hesitant to write this section on expanded documentary is because the word ‘documentary’ can sometimes disqualify work from entry into an art world context.\(^ {18}\) Specifically, documentary projects seldom receive funding from arts bodies, and are less likely to be considered for inclusion in contemporary art spaces. In *Documents of Contemporary Art*, Julian Stallabrass calls this the “marginalisation and condemnation” of documentary, because it is often considered to be a “simplistic and lower mode of representation.”\(^ {19}\) As there is much to be gained from the dialogic exchanges offered by public galleries, museums, and other arts spaces and funding bodies, this is not a desirable outcome for work that seeks to operate in the public sphere. For a practice that


\(^{16}\) Steyerl and Lind, *Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art*, 11.

\(^{17}\) Steyerl, “Documentary Uncertainties”.

\(^{18}\) Here I am referring to the Australian context. For example, the Australia Council for the Arts (Australia’s peak arts funding body) states on its website that it does not generally fund documentary works. As such, many individuals working in documentary traditions refrain from using the term in order to be considered eligible for exhibition and funding opportunities. See: http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/funding/grant-faqs/

intersects in such obvious and interesting ways with ethics, aesthetics, and what Best calls “the fact[s] of the world”, there are few dedicated venues to support contemporary approaches to such work. Thus, contemporary documentary survives as an art world chameleon, a publishing stowaway, and a poet in the museum.

Steyerl suggests that documentary’s complexity defines its innovative position in contemporary art:

Instead of denying this [documentary] uncertainty, one should instead acknowledge its productive effects. Perhaps this uncertainty has also made documentary practices one of the most innovative forms of contemporary art. The documentary’s ambivalent nature, hovering between art and non-art, has contributed to creating new zones of entanglement between the aesthetic and the ethic, between artifice and authenticity, between fiction and fact, between documentary power and documentary potential, and between art and its social, political, and economic conditions.

In other words, documentary’s proximity to the world, and its simultaneous abstraction from it, opens familiar windows through which unfamiliar scenes can emerge. On this ambiguity, Jacques Rancière argues in his essay “Documentary Fiction: Marker and the Fiction of Memory” that:

We cannot think of documentary film as the polar opposite of fiction film simply because the former works with images from real daily life and archive documents about events that obviously happened, and the latter with actors who act out an invented story. The real difference isn’t that the documentary sides with the real against the inventions of fiction, it’s just that documentary instead of treating the real as an effect to be produced, treats it as a fact to be understood.

In “Jacques Rancière and the Fictional Capacity of Documentary” Nico Baumbach summarises Rancière’s understanding of the interplay between fiction and non-fiction in documentary as follows:

We need not think of the documentary as constrained by the logic of the real but rather as a mode of ‘fiction’ freed from the logic that demands ‘the imaginary production of verisimilitude’, the real as effect. For the documentary, the real is not an effect, but an aesthetic problem.

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21 Steyerl and Lind, Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art, 16.
22 Jacques Rancière, Film Fables (New York: Berg, 2006), 158.
Therefore, a defining characteristic of documentary is not to reproduce or present the world, but to attempt to understand the world—thus shifting the emphasis from (passive) recording to interpretation (which is, by nature, active). In this exegesis, and in my practice more broadly, I adopt Rancière’s stance that fiction and non-fiction are not mutually exclusive, and that positioning oneself in either tradition presents a unique set of problems and outcomes. Additionally, I support Steyerl’s assertion that the two forms simply engage in different discourses, rather than exist in opposition. As such, I place myself in the field of expanded documentary practice, which I consider to traverse the visual arts, narrative, aspects of visual and sensory ethnography, and traditions of creative observation and authenticity resonant with photo documentary practice.

4.2 Expanded Documentary

Instead of attempting to define the broad field of expanded documentary I will focus on contemporary approaches to documentary that blend the traditions of social justice (witnessing) and community engagement (collaboration) with contemporary political art (distillation and transformation).

Since the 1970s, traditional documentary conventions (for example, witnessing oppression or violence) have been questioned for their role in perpetuating hegemonic power structures through their inability to provide adequate context—most acutely in regard to poverty, conflict, and natural disasters, the location of much photojournalistic practice. These conventions were criticised because they failed to address invisible power structures; individualised systemic issues; decontextualised and de-historicised events, and did not address the unphotographable aspects of human behaviour. In *The Cruel Radiance*, Linfield challenges this paranoid position, proposing that our relationship to photographs of political violence should transform “from one of passivity and complaint to one of creativity and collaboration” if we are to attend to their content. She argues that the photographer messenger is not responsible for human rights violations—which does not suggest they have no ethical responsibilities—but their presence is not a substitute for the responsibility

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25 I will not attempt to redefine expanded documentary. Although this is a worthwhile and much-needed project, the scope of the exegesis is too narrow to encompass the philosophical and epistemological understandings required to broach this contentious area of practice. See Grant Kester, “Toward a New Social Documentary,” *Afterimage* 14, no. 8 (1987), where he describes the “extreme diversity of contexts and approaches” that make it impossible to categorise what he calls “New Documentary” (12).
citizens have to attend to images of injustice and historical abuse. This is also argued by Ariella Azoulay as mentioned in Chapter 2 of this exegesis.

By contrast, most contemporary documentary practices that broach social issues or historical injustice/s tend not to focus on acute suffering, but to explore the limits of realism and indexicality to reframe these issues for audiences—often in reparative ways. This is evidenced in the work of Sophie Calle, Lynette Wallworth, Anne Ferran, and Rosangela Renno (discussed in Chapters 2 and 3). In their work generally, the issue under investigation dictates the aesthetic and conceptual approach rather than what Walker Evans called adherence to a “documentary style”.

In “Documentary Uncertainties”, Hito Steyerl argues that documentary has always confronted audiences with philosophical questions about truth and reality, and that these uncertainties “constitute the core quality of contemporary documentary modes”, and perhaps more accurately represent what it is to live in the world—between fact and fiction, or memory and presence as is the case in apart & a part. All documentary styles or modes raise questions about truth for the viewer, but contemporary documentary privileges these questions in order to expose the construction of reality. In Bending the Frame, Fred Ritchin notes that documentary photographers have always “approach[ed] the world with a touch of both the poet and the social worker, aware of both what is and what might be”. Comparing the shifts in documentary to the literary turn in journalism, he suggests that photographers now “emphasise interpretation over transcription”. While I do not associate my practice with social work, Ritchin’s observation is helpful in understanding documentary’s specific association and history with first-hand community engagement.

Although expanded documentary covers a broad spectrum of practice, my practice draws from the traditions of documentary photography within the convergent discourses of photography, ethnography, and art. I draw on David Goldblatt’s definition of his role as a “self-appointed observer and critic of the society into which I was born”. And I identify

27 Ibid.
30 Hito Steyerl, “Documentary Uncertainties”.
31 Fred Ritchin, Bending the Frame: PhotoJournalism, Documentary and the Citizen (New York: Aperture Foundation, 2013), 152.
32 Ibid., 49. See also Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays (New York: Basic, 1973), 3–30, where Geertz draws on Gilbert Ryle’s term “thick description” to describe new modes of ethnography that offer further context and understanding to move beyond surface interpretations of culture and cultural artefacts in an attempt to expand the meaning of the information.
33 Although there are many parallels with contemporary political art, this history of grass-roots engagement and long-term immersion in (often-marginalised) communities is a specific feature of the history of social documentary photography.
34 David Goldblatt cited in Stallabrass, Documentary: Documents of Contemporary Art, 49.
with Kester’s 1987 suggestion that, while new documentary methodologies are necessary to address issues of voice, power, and representation, documentary should preserve some of the “concrete social struggles that gave it its original character”. Specifically, Kester is suggesting that documentary should review its tropes and focus on victims, but maintain its visceral relationship with the world; in particular, its tradition of working alongside activists and advocates.

Coles argues that an awareness of the history and politics of documentary practice is now built into the discipline itself. He suggests that contemporary documentary work reflexively acknowledges, and contributes to, the dialogues surrounding the politics of representation and aesthetics that underpin the moral implications of such work. Julia Ballerini, a critic of social documentary photography, suggests that “the discrediting of the photograph-as-document that began in the sixties continues today on a critical level and has affected, in one way or another, the practice of almost all those working along documentary lines”. And in Reparative Aesthetics, Best observes that contemporary (art) photographers are as suspicious as critics are of photography’s veracity. What is in dispute, she argues, is the “factual account” of photography, not the “fact of the world”.

In Photography and Its Violations, John Roberts observes this shift as one that has sent documentary to the studio, to photobooks (for context, volume and narrativisation), and to the aftermath of events. This trend towards the aftermath is not only an attempt to supersede photography’s aptitude for temporal witnessing but also an attempt to address the ongoing impacts and experiences of postcolonial and post-conflict societies. This is particularly applicable to apart & a part, which attempts to alert audiences to the social fracturing caused by the institutionalisation of children based on class, gender, and race discrimination in Australia. Here I draw on Rancière’s perspectives in The Emancipated Spectator on imaging “the intolerable”—that is, “that which makes us unable to view an image without experiencing pain and indignation.”

36 Coles, Doing Documentary Work.
37 Ibid., 51.
39 Best, Reparative Aesthetics, 162.
41 Ibid. See also David Campany, who highlights the aftermath trend in photography as told via a straight, detached, and de-authored voice: “Safety in Numbness,” David Campany (website), 2013, http://davidcampany.com/safety-in-numbness/.
42 This fracturing continues today through the demonisation of welfare recipients, high levels of incarceration in Indigenous communities, and a reluctance to acknowledge a treaty with First Nations people.
43 Rancière, The Emancipated Spectator, 83.
that there can be greater political engagement when audiences cannot anticipate what they are seeing.\textsuperscript{44} This “resistance to anticipation”, a commonly used strategy in contemporary documentary, is a reflexive acknowledgement of visual tropes and identity stereotypes that have come to define the documentary style.\textsuperscript{45}

![Figure 39: Sophie Ristelhueber WB # 3 from the series WB 2005, colour silver print mounted on aluminium 120 x 150 cm](image)

I have employed this resistance to anticipation throughout \textit{apart & a part}. Through both the abstraction and decontextualisation of everyday objects (clothing, sheets, ribbons, skies), or through the separation of objects from their custodians, I have attempted to make intolerable actions and stories tolerable. This resistance to anticipation through decontextualisation, and in some cases, abstraction, lead the viewer to a conceptual encounter without producing a shaming affect, which is achieved through presenting everyday objects outside of their usual context. For me, expanded documentary is a practice that incorporates the history and politics of documentary photography into its ontology, and draws on expanded aesthetic, literary, and political strategies to respond to contemporary and historical “fact[s] of the world”.\textsuperscript{46} My background in photography (as a student,

\textsuperscript{44} Rancière, \textit{The Emancipated Spectator}, 103–5. See also Jill Bennett, \textit{Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma and Contemporary Art} (California: Stanford University Press, 2005), 7 where she discusses trauma art as transactive.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 103.

\textsuperscript{46} Best, \textit{Reparative Aesthetics}, 162.
academic, and practicing artist) comes with a visceral—I would argue, embodied—awareness of the issues raised by the postmodern critique, a respect for the traditions of long-term documentary research and social engagement, and an interest in how documentary manifests in the art world (discussed later in The Ethnographic Turn and Reflexivity).

In *apart & a part*, I found the principles of traditional photographic witnessing (meetings with participants) did not encompass the complex social, historical, and personal aspects of each story. I was a witness to the narrativisation of lived experience, contemporary life, and to a relational experience with the other, but I was not a witness to events that could be meaningfully photographed. In response to the inaccessibility of past events, participants and I proposed and devised new events to image (expanded further in this chapter in Developing an Aesthetic Frame). In essence, I consider an expanded documentary practice to privilege the story or concept under investigation (rather than adhere to Evans’s documentary style), and to employ reflexive aesthetic authorship (implicit in the work).  

My relationship to the traditions of social documentary photography and the potential to bring difficult and uncomfortable social issues into public discussion motivates my practice. I too was raised on the critique of traditional documentary work and have always attempted to resist the reductive qualities, victim narratives, and absence of visible power structures in traditional documentary. As such, I identify with the term expanded because it both acknowledges and responds to the history of the discipline (Kester’s concrete social struggle) and challenges and expands the methodological and aesthetic conventions traditionally used to express these concerns.

### 4.3 Documentary Authorship

In his essay written in 1978, “Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary”, Allan Sekula argued that when documentary loses its reference to the world and becomes an authored act of self-expression, it ceases to be documentary.  

I include this not to undermine my own argument—as I largely disagree with Sekula’s claim—but to demonstrate how documentary authorship is and has been contested (more so than that of painting, for example) because of its indexical trace.

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With Ritchin’s analysis of contemporary documentary photography’s privileging of ‘interpretation’ over ‘transcription’ comes more reflexive authorship that, I argue, is a defense against dangerous practices of image commodification, rather than only evidence of the author’s ‘self-expression’. For example, photographic artists Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin use their collaborative practice to raise questions about the relationship between photojournalistic practice and mass media. Their work explores alternative ways to respond to conflict, grief, and trauma that move away from the kind of formulaic tropes and stereotypes that academic Susan Moeller suggests make reality less complex and less interesting. Over a ten-year period, Broomberg and Chanarin’s practice has developed from documentary reportage to critical interrogations of visual representations of conflict. *The Day Nobody Died* (2014) is a work the duo made while in Afghanistan with the British Army to work as embedded photographers (figure 40). When the artists were instructed to

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49 Ritchin, *Bending the Frame*, 49. In *Bending the Frame*, Ritchin observes photography’s shift from a recording device (transcription) to a way of representing an interpretation of a fragment of the world (interpretation). He makes parallels to John Szarkowski’s famous assertion in *Mirrors and Windows* that early photographers were similar to scribes. As cameras have become more ubiquitous, photographers are no longer relied on to record events or provide answers, and instead encourage viewers to search for meaning in images (49–50). John Berger also commented on this: “Every image embodies a way of seeing. Even a photograph. For photographs are not, as is often assumed, a mechanical record.” Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 2008), 10.


photograph a ‘newsworthy event’—for example, a death or a press conference—they denied the representation of these events by exposing light-sensitive photographic paper to the sun.52

The resulting abstract images are devoid of explicit content; they are anti-photographs protesting the highly mediated representations of war produced by embedded journalists. Their work responds to the “pluralities and multiplicities” of the way that histories and narratives are recorded.53 Embedded into their image making is a reflective, reflexive, and theoretical position whereby methodological questions within the discipline become visible in their images. As such, their praxis mirrors that of many contemporary practitioners, blending commentator, ethnographer, researcher, artist, and theorist, rather than recorder of events.

The majority of contemporary approaches to documentary are largely unpublishable in traditional media formats such as newspapers and magazines because their subjective aesthetic interpretations and forms often deny easy readings of the story or concept.54 I consider these aesthetic decisions to be ‘stamps of authorship’ and, conscious or otherwise, an attempt to protect the work from inappropriate re-contextualisation—an extension of Rancière’s “resistance to anticipation”.55 This is as much a response to corporate media practices as it is to the theoretical concerns of the postmodern critique. Writing about these shifts, Roberts acknowledges that the dissemination of documentary work by the media and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) has caused and continues to cause the photographer anxiety. Specifically, Roberts is referring to the fact that (in most cases) photographers have no say in how their work is presented to audiences, or the ideological perspectives that accompany the work. Collaborators, participants, or subjects are even less likely to have an influence on the presentation of photographs. Artist and activist Shahidul Alam argues that it is often the individuals who have lived with the consequences of institutional thinking who have the least say in how they are represented. In exploring this idea through media theory, Alam draws on the power relationships formed when a photographer is sent on assignment:

52 Ibid.
54 Interestingly, Broomberg and Chanarin did approach The Guardian newspaper about publishing the work but the Guardian chose not to publish the camera less photograph.
55 Rancière, The Emancipated Spectator, 103.
The farmer in the paddy field knows the most about the situation. The local photographer knows something about the situation. The person who knows the least is the picture editor in New York. But the photo editor gets the most say, and the farmer has zero say in how the story is told.56

While Alam is referring specifically to the structural inequality of corporate media, this analysis can be extrapolated to describe, more generally, his desire for a flipping of the concept of the expert. Roberts suggests that in documentary, this lack of consultation with the producer and potential collaborators or subjects has influenced a shift away from the temporality of the event to more reflective modes of practice that guarantee notional control over images.57 Thus, expressive authorship in documentary can be understood as a thoughtful reaction to mainstream image practices that promote stereotypical tropes and ideological positions.

The commodification of the image, the burden of representation, and the rapid publishing cycles of news and social media provide few protections for authored works. Images are regularly taken out of context, published with sensational headlines, and sometimes put individuals at risk (and that’s just the good news). Galleries and museums, and the ambiguity of art, create alternative places for documentary work, with opportunities for more reflection and dialogic exchange. These spaces also allow contexts to be integrated, and ambiguity to challenge stereotypes and perspectives.58 Authorship, then, is not only an act of self-expression, as Sekula proposed, or a bid to appear relevant to the art world, but also a decision not to enter the cycle of spectacle.59

While I consider that the works in apart & a part sit comfortably within an expanded documentary practice, other audiences may consider the works too constructed or aestheticised to sit in documentary. As established, an expanded approach differs dramatically from a more traditional approach of witnessing and recording events, ideas, and communities (figure 41). Therefore, the documentary component of the work is not its aesthetic form, nor its recognisable relationship to the world, but in its intent. As editor of YET magazine, Salvatore Vitale writes about new forms of photo documentary:

57 Roberts, Photography and Its Violations, 80–81.
58 Photobooks also do this but there is not scope in this paper to address this in any detail.
59 Documentary art is much more embedded in contemporary art in Europe, Japan, and the United States than it is in Australia. Commonly cited examples are dOCUMENTA 11 curated by Okwui Enwezor in 2002, and the notable inclusion of documentary (and photojournalistic) work in the Whitney Biennials (Alec Soth, Stephanie Sinclair, Nina Berman) and Charles Merewether’s curation of the 2006 Biennale of Sydney. In 2010, Robert Leonard selected my work for Fresh Cut at the IMA and in the same year I won the Churchie National Emerging Art Prize. I was told by curators and gallery assistants that most of the community did not consider my work art, and therefore did not think I was deserving of the attention. Although this is an anecdote, it represents a regularly encountered perspective in Australia towards documentary work in art spaces.
In short, we [sometimes] find ourselves in front of images that don’t actually photograph a scene that is taking place at one precise moment in space and time, but have the same purpose, which is to illustrate, investigate, and introduce a piece of the world to others…at the end, what should matter is the story that is being documented.⁶⁰

Figure 41: Kelly Hussey-Smith *A Question of Justice from apart & a part*, 2017

4.4 The Ethnographic Turn and Reflexivity

The 1990s saw an ‘ethnographic turn’ in art that raised questions around the ethics of employing the language of a discipline without in-depth knowledge of its problematic history or contemporary manifestations of such practices. In *The Return of the Real*, Hal Foster questions this turn to ethnographic looking in contemporary art.⁶¹ He warns that the blending of a historically “oppressive colonial language” with postmodern reflexivity can

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result in images that look like “disguised travelogues from the world art market” that can reinforce stereotypes of the other. He suggests that adopting ethnographic approaches without sufficient knowledge of the history of ethnography and the politics of representation simplify social and political histories and ascribe singular rather than plural meanings.

In “An Ethics of Engagement: Collaborative Art Practices and the Return of the Ethnographer”, Anthony Downey critiques “the emergence of quasi and pseudo-ethnographic rhetoric” in art practice. He calls for a differentiation between projects that use ethnographic research methods, which actively embrace collaborative dialogue with individuals and communities, and those that use what he calls quasi-ethnography: i.e using subjects to fulfil the political and social critiques of the author. Downey argues for further critical dialogue on the ethics of engagement in socially engaged artwork that uses the methodological rhetoric of ethnographic collaboration or participation. Essentially, Downey is calling for greater emphasis on the artist’s process rather than the product, but, as Steven High suggests in “Sharing Authority,” distinguishing between the two is often difficult or impossible.

In “The Art of Ethnography: The Aesthetics or Ethics of Participation?”, Larissa Hjorth and Kristen Sharp also question whether ethnography, as it manifests in the art gallery, has undergone rigorous critique or whether is merely an “aesthetic gesture”.

Hjorth and Sharp argue that the blending of an ethnographic methodology with

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62 Ibid., 180.
64 Downey, “An Ethics of Engagement”, 594. In “The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents”, Claire Bishop argues against such work being judged too harshly, stating that the ethical conditions set by the ethical turn in art criticism are often utopian, or unobtainable, and deny works that may challenge and disrupt an audience or are designed to provoke.
65 Downey questions the way that artist Santiago Sierra employs the mould of dispassionate observer to expose largely invisible power relations in the global economy (“An Ethics of Engagement,” 593–96). In Sierra’s work, the individual has no unique identity or voice but is used as a signifier of economic and class exploitation. In 7 Forms Measuring 600 x 60 x 60cm, Constructed To Be Held Horizontal to a Wall (2010), Sierra employs workers at the minimum wage to bear the weight of a series of beams in a gallery. Audience members take the position of exploiter and are encouraged to position themselves within the exploitative process. The affect of shame in Sierra’s work is carefully designed not to be attenuated. Furthermore, his work has a temporal quality, the longer one stands in the space, the more comfortable and familiar the situation becomes. It is an acute observation of inequality and global practices. Citing Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Susan Best categorises these sharp, confronting works as part of the anti-aesthetic turn in that they favour “critique and the exposure of wrongdoing” to expose traces of oppression or injustice within existing power structures and institutions. Best, Reparative Aesthetics, 3.
contemporary art strategies should privilege a theoretical interrogation of the relationship between the producer and the audience. 68 This underscores the importance of engaging in a reflexive practice of participation that treats each project as unique. Foster likens this to the residency model where an artist enters a community to collaborate, but he warns that a lack of rigour and transparency around these processes can result in “ethnographic self-fashioning”. 69 He states that, “almost naturally the focus wanders from collaborative investigation to ‘ethnographic self-fashioning’ in which the artist is not decentered so much as the other is fashioned in artistic guise.” 70 Hjorth and Sharp suggest that when artists incorporate ethnographic methods into their work, part of this practice should be to engage with contentions and dialogues in the field, in order to develop more reflexive models of collaboration and participation. This, they argue, will assist the artist in moving beyond the “aesthetic gesture,” and for the experience to be a more “embodied part of creative, social, practice”. 71 In this sense, the aesthetic outcomes should incorporate the ethics of the participatory experience. 72

The reflexive practice of visual and sensory ethnography as defined by Sarah Pink in Doing Visual Ethnography and Doing Sensory Ethnography has been useful in exploring the politics of visual ‘data collection’. In particular, Pink’s claim that researchers must examine their own value assumptions before examining and representing those of someone else has guided my approach. 73 For apart & a part, this included an attempt to de-institutionalise my practice. Specifically, I refer to the temptation to rely on government service providers and academic perspectives to shape (or fund) the project, or to pass judgement on how care leavers should feel or act in certain situations. 74 My immersion in grass-roots advocacy, rather than with government service providers, was key to understanding that the experts on leaving care are those who have lived through it. As outlined in Chapters 2 and 3, allowing the project to evolve organically assisted mature

68 Ibid., 129.
70 Foster, “The Artist as Ethnographer?,” 306.
72 To be specific, while I am advocating for rigorous ethical processes that respond to individual participant or project needs (that differ from project to project), I am not arguing that explicit documentation of the process renders the work ‘ethically sound’. Exposing the conditions of production does not necessarily result in ‘more ethical’ work. As always, these strategies do not escape the risk of manipulation or superficial application.
74 Several staff members employed by well-known care leaver service providers repeatedly made comments about care leavers being stuck in the past, and over-emphasising their grief. When I shared this with project participant Leonie from CLAN, she pointed out that if we don’t expect people to get over good childhoods, why should we expect people to get over bad ones?
perspectives on trauma, agency, collaboration, and the limitations of the victim—survivor identity to emerge in response to the project.

Film theorist Bill Nichols highlights the reflexive mode of documentary as one where the negotiation between the maker and the viewer is used to heighten the viewer’s awareness of the tropes of representation. In practice, achieving a reflexive process that interrogates knowledge production in relation to the research outcomes is much more difficult than practitioners like to admit. Interrogating the methods of knowledge production in direct response to the conceptual parameters of apart & a part (avoiding institutionalising and standardising participant responses and narratives) required lengthy periods of conceptualisation and consultation with care leavers. Additionally, as discussed in Chapter 3, building relationships and achieving a depth of knowledge around personal, social, and political contexts was positive for the project outcomes, but did not always neatly align with the set timeframes of the research. As such, two years into the project, I had few visual responses because I was still focused on developing a methodology that responded to the sensitive and complicated historical and personal contexts of the project.

Socially engaged artists and researchers Marnie Badham and James Oliver argue that reflexivity in research with communities needs to move beyond “tokenistic” acknowledgement of personal reflexivity, and grapple more directly with the construction of knowledge; specifically, how the knowledge researchers claim to produce represents others. In short, knowledge produced about others should incorporate the visual and theoretical understandings and perspectives of the community participating in the research. When preconceived ideas are put aside and the conditions of knowledge production reset, new processes and ways of thinking about the ‘data’ developed with project participants can emerge. This unstable, exciting, and unpredictable state has the potential to address potential misrepresentations and avoid simply reproducing cultural assumptions and problematic representations. I was fortunate that this lengthy process of immersion and engagement with a small group of care leavers was suited to many participant’s preference for getting to know and eventually trust, me. I, too, exercised caution in getting to know and trust each participant, as should be the case when agency is shared.

As Pink suggests, I have attempted, as best as possible, to allow care leaver contexts and experiences to form the work—which includes locating a foundational aesthetic through dialogue with participants. Specifically, I have not attempted to “know other minds” or walk in participants’ shoes, but present, through active listening and friendship as

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76 Oliver and Badham, “Re-Presenting the Everyday,” 159. See also Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 11–40.
method, the unique way in which each care leaver participant encounters the past. As such, I argue that it would be impossible to locate and represent these individual experiences without employing a long-term reflexive practice. As I have discovered, employing a more holistic reflexive practice that moves beyond Badham and Oliver’s tokenistic acknowledgement of personal agency is challenging, unstable, and perhaps only ever partially achieved.

4.5 Developing an Aesthetic Frame: Turning Points

In this section, I conclude this exegesis by introducing specific turning points in *apart & a part* that led to the development of key works. Instead of a linear recap of the exegetical findings, I will demonstrate how these findings manifest in, and through the project outcomes—the final exhibition, *apart & a part*.

In so doing, I will demonstrate how the process of *apart & a part* mirrors the collaborative intent discussed in Chapter 3. Specifically, I will discuss how listening is an ongoing and reflexive process; how agency can be shared in long-term collaborative projects; and how collaboration is not an aesthetic to be applied, but a process of relational ethics. I have argued throughout the exegesis that relational encounters can lead to aesthetic concepts that do not explicitly apply what might be considered a collaborative aesthetic through elements like handwriting, self-representation, or documentation of togetherness. Such approaches are popular in lens-based responses to collaboration, but they tend to be used to comment on the politics of the medium, rather than the social aspects of the project. Rather, in *apart & a part*, the work was freed (somewhat) from these expected strategies; and instead the aesthetic approaches emerged through the research, rather than being external to it. As such, the development and negotiation of an aesthetic frame in *apart & a part* has been a reflexive process, and an essential catalyst in cohering the project’s multiple threads. *apart & a part* also aimed to bridge the gap between what Claire Bishop refers to in “The Social Turn” as the divide between the aesthetic aims and social aims of collaborative practices, and between the primary and secondary audiences, which she discusses in *Artificial Hells*.77 I argue that collaborative works that employ strategies of long-term engagement with individuals or communities can develop approaches beyond the purely social or the purely aesthetic.

As previously mentioned, the photography group at Lotus Place, where this project informally commenced, precipitated a shift in my visual language from the documentary style to the performed, embodied, and constructed. As already outlined, following extended

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conversations, I questioned the appropriateness of commonly employed methods of evidentiary data collection quite simply because I could see little benefit in asking participants to relive their trauma.\textsuperscript{78}

As the visual responses evolved in direct response to stories, concepts, and memory fragments, our process more closely mirrored what psychologist and playwright Henry Greenspan (well known for interviews with genocide and Holocaust survivors) calls a journey from “knowing about” to “knowing with” project participants.\textsuperscript{79} Specifically, many of the stories and care leaver perspectives that emerged were a direct result of our dialogue, which I have called our evolving process of authoring (sometimes) new narratives.

Greenspan and Sidney Bolkosky argue that the process of interpreting life history from collaborative dialogue is difficult to theorise because collaborative dialogues and intimate relational exchanges are unpredictable, and not “readily imagined” within theoretical conventions of narrative and data collection.\textsuperscript{80} Thus, the contingent relations that emerge through transcripts, tapes, or ideas are unpredictable, mutual creations.\textsuperscript{81} The dialogues in \textit{apart & a part} embraced contingency through an informal and open-ended collaborative frame. While the conceptualisation of stories and their conversion into images or concepts was collaborative, the nuances of visual problem solving were not so explicitly collaborative. I often solved aesthetic and logistical problems in private, and used this time to digest the multiple layers of the project. These sessions often catalysed new questions, dialogues, and visual understandings. For participants, ample time was provided to process the experience of making the work, and consider or reconsider the project outcomes. The luxury of our process meant that decisions could be pondered and discussed over long periods of time.

Once narrative starting points and aesthetic approaches were established, works were made in appropriate locations: photographic studios, home studios, children’s Homes, film studios, museums, and locations of significance to participants. Few of these first attempts were included in the final exhibition, although many were remade, including the already discussed \textit{The Lost Objects}, which I revisited several times after realising, through studying the photographs, that I had underplayed the way the used quality of the objects suggested the passing of time (figure 42).

\textsuperscript{78} Pink, \textit{Doing Visual Ethnography}.
\textsuperscript{79} Henry Greenspan and Sidney Bolkosky, “When Is an Interview an Interview? Notes from Listening to Holocaust Survivors,” \textit{Poetics Today} 27, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 432.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 433.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 432.
In line with the aesthetic frame developed by the photography group (discussed in Chapter 3 as theatrical and performative), many of the works employed elements of performance and dramatic interpretation. This solution was devised as a way of articulating an embodied experience of presence that moved beyond the intensity of testimony (discussed in Chapter 1). Drama theorist Robert Landy suggests that “dramatized reality is different in space, time, and consequence from everyday reality.” 82 Thus, this dramatic distancing was effective in apart & a part because it drew on the creative energy and anticipation of the performative event and attenuated the raw emotion (often) induced by testimony. Additionally, it created a space for individuals to perform the liminality of their present past—the continuum of trauma (discussed in Chapter 2). The duality of Landy’s dramatic paradox—expressing ‘me’ but performing ‘not me’—more easily renders a traumatic concept or experience into a symbolic (aesthetic) form. 83 The intersubjective experiences of the collaborative process are embedded into each of the performative works, allowing the pleasure in the creation of the works and the duality of performance to distance individuals from (potentially triggering) encounters. This is not to say that certain aspects of the project did not trigger powerful memories and encounters with the past, just that there was also pleasure and anticipation involved in the creation of new memories.

Figure 43: Kelly Hussey-Smith *The Waltz* from *apart & a part* 2015, still from video, 2:24 min

An example of this is found in the video work *The Waltz* (figure 43), where project participant Trevor is filmed dancing with his sister Debbie. After spending time in institutional care, both siblings were fostered out and ultimately adopted by a family living in Gympie (although at slightly different times). Trevor’s adopted mother encouraged him to start ballroom dancing, and he subsequently became a competitive dancer. While he enjoyed the physical sensation of dance and the opportunities it afforded him, his mother’s involvement in his success was both motivating and overpowering. Compared with many other children in out-of-home care, Trevor was given tremendous educational and creative opportunities. He travelled the state attending dance meets and performing in theatre productions. However, on gaining independence as a young adult, he experienced increasing conflict with his (adopted) parents. He eventually moved away to join the army reserve, and without the rituals of family life to maintain communication, their relationship deteriorated. Around this time, he also stopped dancing. When his (adoptive) mother died, Trevor and Debbie inherited $200 each, while the biological children split the estate. Despite Trevor’s relatively fortunate childhood, he still understood the difference between *apart* and *a part*. 
The Waltz, therefore, references the complex and layered experience of Trevor’s adoption, while attempting to reclaim the pleasure of dance. The union of siblings, and the gracefulness of their dance (despite not having danced for years), orients their relationship as one of intimacy. The absence of other dancers, and the decontextualisation of their movements in space and time, focuses attention on the reparative act of performing feeling—that of connection through loss. Applied theatre researcher and practitioner Sarah Woodland, suggests that the process of transforming an internal world (memory and trauma) into an external world (the stage) can externalise and validate “destructive internal narratives” into re-authored interpretations.84 This aligns with Michael White’s previously discussed process of narrative re-authoring; specifically that re-authoring and reconstructing the memories of our narratives can reveal unexpected and alternative storylines and characters, rendering the memory of an event plural and in flux.85

I argue that the distance from a direct recollection of loss, created through the dramatic paradox of ‘me but not me’ performed in The Waltz, was a way of expressing the complexity of the past beyond testimony. Thus, through defining narrative as a tool of self-expression (as I have done throughout this exegesis), that can be interrogated and expanded, The Waltz reflexively responds to the continuum of trauma, and the instability of memory, by bringing the ever-present past into a union with the (now past) present.

This aligns with film theorist Bill Nichol’s definition of performative documentary as primarily affective, privileging embodied knowledge, and applying diverse “expressive techniques that give texture and density to fiction”.86 Academic and filmmaker Desmond Bell argues that the performative mode of documentary is well suited to stories about the past.87 He states:

Performative documentary, on the other hand, offers its viewer neither the objective summation of events promised by the expository mode nor the lived immediacy and voyeuristic thrills of the observational form. Instead the filmmaker [artist] draws on a disparate set of resources—found footage, re-enactment, personal sources and sentiments—and employs a range of creative strategies—experimental collage, use of vernacular voices, visual forms of telling—in order to communicate a much more partial, often emotionally charged and questioning account of an issue or event.88

84 Woodland, “Memoirs of the Forgotten Ones,” 2. Applied theatre, also known as applied drama, is theatre used in and with communities, and in education in therapeutic and community contexts.
88 Ibid.
While I have not explicitly framed *apart & a part* in the performative mode, Bell’s definition highlights the diversity of strategies employed to make contemporary works about past events. Additionally, it suggests that performative documentary is not only about performance but the performative and affective aspects of piecing together a narrative, story, or idea. Thus, the performative mode of documentary can create a visceral link between the past and the present, and embrace languages and approaches that contribute to a plurality of interpretations. Because the affective dimensions of care leaver experiences were not documented, diverse approaches are required to build an archive that responds to the fact of this absence and, the important task of historical inclusion (discussed in Chapters 1 and 2).

Over time, collaborations were developed with each participant, which, for the most part, included a performative element. Despite the largely pleasurable process of making the work, our process of evaluation (although still pleasurable), was more of a direct feedback format. In some cases, participants were pleasantly surprised by the outcomes, while in other cases, the works were remade and renegotiated when the results did not match our expectations or collaborative aims. As part of the ethos of the project, all works were returned to participants for discussion and permission. Our evaluative process focused on how effectively the works might communicate to a secondary audience (non-care leavers). This included how well the work communicated an experience or affect, and how comfortable we were with a plurality of readings and perspectives (i.e., how ambiguous could an image be before it lost its intended meaning?)

Although in the early stages of the project, unique collaborative works were emerging from our process, I became concerned that our divergent approach would not translate to a secondary audience. As such, I began to articulate the need for a more consistent aesthetic to prepare the work for the diverse contexts I hoped it would encounter in the future (exhibitions, edited exhibitions, online dissemination of the work and possibly a book publication). This was not an attempt to remove agency or to dominate discussions, but to ensure a conceptual and aesthetic coherence.

As participants were united on the importance of the secondary audience, we negotiated aesthetic solutions that involved remaking and reconceptualising some of the works in line with the aesthetic frame. I also relayed comments, contentions, and suggestions regarding the works from conversations with peers, supervisors and colleagues, because they were informing and challenging my conception of the work. Additionally, I

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89 There were occasionally long periods of time between making and sharing the image outcomes, but this was due to individual circumstances (ill health, personal travel) and my eventual relocation interstate (which impacted my ability to visit participants as regularly).
felt it was interesting for participants to engage with the perspectives of artists and academics, and with visual arts discourses, rather than to pretend this wasn’t going to be a part of the work’s reception and potential contribution.

One important example of this evaluative process of returning work to participants is the work *The Space Between the Stars* (figures 44 and 45). This work is a portrait of Jessie in a public act of mourning, performing both herself and her twin who died at birth. The facing portraits are separated by an image of the Milky Way. She told me that she had often wondered if, had her twin had survived, she would feel less alone in the world.90 Because Jessie did not have a documented shared experience with her twin, she had never felt entitled to grieve. On sharing early drafts of the work, she commented that she preferred the textured matte paper I had tested over the shinier pearl paper because it gave texture to the gaps between the stars. She had recently learned, through exploring her First Nations heritage (her mother, who did not raise her, was part of the Stolen Generation), that in some First Nations’ belief systems constellations are identified by looking for the spaces between stars, rather than the stars themselves. In this way, the space between was not ‘nothing’ but a guiding path. This was a profound discussion in two ways. Firstly, the inversion of my Eurocentric reading (which emerged through a discussion on paper choice) gave depth to my reading of the work and prompted a reshoot to further emphasise the space in between. The second way this discussion illuminated the project was in prompting me to think about how (large amounts of) black had been used in *apart & a part* to cohere the installation. I had initially conceived of this as the void, or unknowable loss, but as the project progressed, and my understandings matured, I began to see this as what could not be said, and what I did not know. Jessie’s reading of the work expanded my understanding of both the collaborative process and the aesthetic choices that had been made. The black was not a void of information, as I had initially conceived, but a space that held the unsaid, the unknown, and the unacknowledged. And in this project specifically, the black space in the images held what participants did not relay to me, or what I did not relay to viewers—the impossibility of knowing trauma. It was not empty.

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90 Jessie Harlow, Personal communication with the author, February 2016.
I found resonance in the work of creative researcher Deborah Padfield, who describes a process of co-collaboration in her 2003 project *Perceptions of Pain* (where she worked with a group of individuals living with extreme pain). In her work, creative input from participants helped create and shape the works, but she maintained her position as
author of the project. Recognising the obvious contradiction of collaboration and authorship, Padfield describes the process as one of constant negotiation between the idea and its translation into a photograph, citing the unexpected directions that emerged through this negotiation as evidence of her co-creator methodology. Authorship, she suggests, is about recognising the contribution of every individual, including her own time and experience, rather than pretending her presence and experience is not a significant part of the project.

One example of this collaborative negotiation in apart & a part, is the work Trevor’s Archive. Trevor considers himself “one of the lucky ones” because he and his sister Debbie were adopted into the same family. In one of our early conversations, he mentioned losing a significant amount of his personal archive in a small house fire. In line with McRae’s performative listening (discussed in Chapter 3), my attention was immediately drawn to the way Trevor had used the word ‘archive’ to describe his belongings. When I questioned his use of the word, Trevor identified the legacy of the institution on his life as the need to fastidiously archive his achievements in the absence of anyone else to do so.

A week before meeting Trevor, I had thrown out a significant part of my own ‘archive’, including letters, clippings, photographs, and cards of celebration. My encounter with Trevor underscored the privilege of this action; conducted safe in the knowledge that my archive had guardians. As introduced in Chapter 1, Trevor was never told why he ended up in care, just that his “mother didn’t want him”—a devastating response to the burning question of a child. On accessing his files as a twenty-one-year-old, Trevor was disturbed by the inclusion of what he considered to be private details from his adolescence (via carers), and distressed by the amount of redacted text. To his surprise, he was not the audience of his own file. From our evolving dialogue, I came to understand that Trevor’s self-maintained and substantial archive of personal achievements and memories from his childhood and adult life was balanced against the weight of the unobtainable archive; that which was withheld, unreported, or unexperienced. From our shared understanding, we conceptualised two collaborative works, The Waltz as previously discussed in this chapter, and the second work, a document his archive.

To begin the process of documenting Trevor’s archive, we spent an entire weekend archiving the archive by photographing every remaining object in his collection (figure 46).

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92 Ibid.
93 Ibid., 110.
94 Trevor Laird, unrecorded conversation with the author, 7 August 2012.
95 Chris McRae, Performative Listening: Hearing Others in Qualitative Research (New York: Peter Lang, 2015), 37.
Although we did not seek to make this work public, the unexpected process of storytelling that emerged in the studio was something I had not anticipated. When I presented Trevor with the subsequent printed photographic record of his archive, he commented that while it was great to have the evidence, it was even more important to have remembered and relayed the stories. This underscored the inherently collaborative act of storytelling and my unexpected initiation into a fragment of Trevor’s story. However, the images that we made on that day were descriptive and forensic. They were for Trevor, rather than for another audience. On reviewing this, I asked if I could take some of the objects and experiment with different approaches, which Trevor generously agreed to.

Figure 46: Kelly Hussey-Smith Trevor’s Archive #1 2013, visual experiment

From here, after several attempts, we made the work Trevor’s Archive, which celebrates his archival foresight, and addresses the conflict between the constructed archive and the unobtainable archive. The six beautiful dancing ribbons from Trevor’s archive are photographed in flight; in an otherwise empty space; their alluring textures, colours, and folds embody something of the wonderful feeling of achievement, success and recognition the ribbons commemorate (figures 47, 48 and 49). This rich, shared experience, and set of images, sprang from my curiosity of the phrase ‘my archive’, which underscores the absolute centrality of active listening to this project, and gives some insight into the process of negotiation.

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96 Only a small amount of dialogue was recorded on the first day, as the shoot took over twenty hours and was spread out over two days. Trevor was not present for the entire session. On reflection, I would like to have recorded the entire session and gifted this to Trevor as part of his personal archive.
Figure 47: Kelly Hussey-Smith *Trevor’s Archive from apart & a part 2017*
Figure 49: Kelly Hussey-Smith Trevor’s Archive from apart & a part 2017. Installation view, POP Gallery, Brisbane.

As discussed in Chapter 3, throughout the process of making apart & a part, we engaged in a process of co-conceptualisation rather than employing a literal form of self-representation, or applying the language of collaboration. As discussed, my approach is similar to that of Craigie Horsefield, in whose practice the evidence of the collaboration is implicit rather than explicitly addressed in the creative product. To emphasise the defense of the conditions of production in apart & a part could potentially undermine its aims—to focus on care leaver histories—or worse still, use participants to comment on the politics of the medium (something that is not relevant to their day-to-day lives). This relates to Susie Linfield’s observation discussed in this chapter, that diverting attention from the message to the messenger attracts attention away from the social and political issues underpinning the work. This understanding of collaboration, as Daniel Palmer’s very recent work suggests, as inherent to many photographic processes, rather than external to the product, is an important finding in apart & a part.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the work responds to Bishop’s observation that documentation of participatory (i.e., collaborative) works often struggles to translate the experience of participation and, as such, can be dull and impenetrable aesthetic documents for secondary audiences. Our process of co-conceptualisation rather than co-authorship has
privileged story and experience over producing a literal document of our collaboration.\(^97\) While it is increasingly popular to expose the back end of collaborative projects to justify their ethical conduct or the authenticity of the relationships formed (e.g., including pictures of the making of the works, personal correspondence, or evidence of personal relationships), this approach did not meet our collaborative aims. In part, this is because including these layers exposes the day-to-day conduct of life, which is more of a sociological discourse, emulating, perhaps a little too closely, the ways in which institutions document lived experience—something we wanted to avoid. Understanding care leavers on their own terms meant listening deeply to the dialogues that emerged, and the ways in which individuals sought to narrativise their story. To demonstrate the importance of these individual narratives, I will conclude this section with an example of this from my collaboration with participant Marlene.

In early conversations with Marlene, I was struck by the diversity of landscapes included in her storytelling. The living worlds of rainforests, farmlands, coastal communities, deserts, scrubland, and mining towns featured heavily in her recollections of finding solace in her chaotic circumstances. I was transported through multisensorial topographical descriptions. She did not locate herself in a town or city as many people might, but in ecosystems. I enjoyed these stories; they were unashamedly vibrant, almost spiritual. After hearing these stories related, out of order, across several conversations, I recognised that very few people would have knowledge of such diverse Australian terrain. Marlene’s dislocation was implicit in the story, but only those who listened carefully would hear this. By adulthood, she had lived in over fifteen children’s and private Homes in Queensland, been detained in and escaped from a reformatory school for ‘immoral’ young women; and had her first child removed from her care. Her stories, though, were about fishing and landscapes and fresh air, not the events that led her to these landscapes. As such, her adventures in the natural world quietly led me to the transience of her life.

Marlene’s story intersects with two works in *apart & a part*. The first work, *Constellations*, traces Marlene’s movements around the state of Queensland. As an early collaborative gesture, I gave Marlene a pin and a map and asked her to puncture the many places she had lived (figures 50, 51 & 52).

\(^{97}\) Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 19.
Figure 50: Kelly Hussey-Smith *Constellations from apart & a part* 2015, visual experiment, front and back view

Figure 51: Kelly Hussey-Smith *Constellations* (detail) from *apart & a part* 2017. Installation view, POP Gallery, Brisbane.
I imagined we might connect each location to the next with thread, but Marlene was less interested in the connections between the locations than she was in the memories and stories that occupied these places (which were often unexpectedly humorous and imaginative). On reflection, I understood that the times of movement, or the forced journeys, were perhaps not what she preferred to remember. My initial response was to try to connect the dots, rather than understand this aspect of Marlene’s experience on its own terms. As an elder and expert, Marlene was demonstrating how to understand her experience, on her terms. The sense of dislocation was implicit in the method of her storytelling. If the listener wanted to find it, they could. But if they did not listen deeply enough, they were not permitted access. Surrendering the need to connect fragments of her experience catalysed a shift in perspective that generated a dialogue around the idea of drawing more explicitly on Marlene’s hidden wisdom. Hence, we devised a directional sound work that required deep attention from the audience to hear the story offered. The recording of Marlene performing a whispered melody, a song written about her mother, acknowledges the unspeakable through melody and voice. The disembodied voice aligns with Marlene’s holistic approach to narrative as an instrument of healing, imagination, and a way out of darkness.
4.6 Concluding Remarks

It will come as no surprise to the reader that this project has been an affecting one. It will also not be a surprise that devising works for the project that sought to attenuate shame, be loyal to the contexts of the research, and engage in a process of shared agency was a long, complex, and consultative process. Throughout this exegesis, I have demonstrated how different aspects of theory and discourse have informed the project. I am confident that this approach has strengthened the outcomes—both the realisation of the collaborations, influenced by my ability to reflect critically on the social and ethical aspects of the project, and the final works produced as a result.

In the introduction to this exegesis, I introduced my personal connection to the project—my grandmother Kathleen, whom I have come to know better in death than in life. I provided an overview of my practice, demonstrating an ongoing interest in the historical, social and political conditions of contemporary Australian life and, more recently, a focus on institutions and their impacts on individuals.

In Chapter 1, I showed that the historical and social contexts surrounding care leaver histories were critical in forming an understanding of the societal structures, dominant ideologies, belief systems, and government policies that led to such high numbers of children growing up, or spending time in, out-of-home care in Australia in the twentieth century. I engaged the work of Georgio Agamben and Primo Levi to discuss the deeply affecting ontological aspects of this experience, primarily exclusion and dehumanisation. Because these states are often difficult to describe in words, they often escape attention in the retelling of such histories. Locating and communicating the more complicated and surprising aspects of the care leaver experience influenced the desire to move beyond the victim—survivor narrative and beyond associations of victimhood and “moral authority”.

Thus, I argued that care leavers have much to teach non-care leavers about the violence of systems and institutions, and Australian history more broadly—they are the experts. I am confident that the main themes that emerge from this chapter (discrimination, exclusion, and the limits of testimony) have been directly applied to the development of my methodology: collaboration, active listening, and shared agency.

In Chapter 2, Part A, I argued that the ephemeral aspects of trauma are usually not a part of legal testimony or historical records—each of which has a specific aim and set of methods for collecting and validating data. As such, I have applied Ann Cvetkovich’s “archive of feelings” to apart & a part to acknowledge the feelings and insights that exist

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beyond what is traditionally ‘archived’ (photographs, documents, files, testimony). I argue this as a unique contribution to the care leaver narrative, and suggest this framework has scope to be expanded to other projects seeking to recover erased histories and affects. My focus on the quotidian aspects of trauma, a trauma not experienced as an event but as a continuum, evolved directly from time spent with care leavers. I demonstrated how complex narrative understandings can be extrapolated from quotidian experiences, despite the propensity for these associations to be overlooked in trauma representations. By blending indexical representations of trauma with the ephemeral and unknowable aspects of traumatic experience, I have sought to complicate the viewing experience by combining the recognisable and decontextualised, with the unspoken and ephemeral. Thus, the absence of information is not a void, but a way to guide the viewer to a conceptual encounter. To be clear, the aim is not for the viewer to experience these affects, a claim that sits a little too closely to Jill Bennett’s “crude empathy”, but for viewers to recognise similar and different experiences.

In Part B of Chapter 2, I extended Susan Best’s application of reparative aesthetics to contemporary lens-based works dealing with trauma and injustice through collaborative approaches. Reparative readings and approaches offer a range of exciting applications to photography practice, discourse and pedagogy. Specifically, I see potential to reframe ethical discussions in photography education. A reparative approach that incorporates the post-modern critique of photography into a wider discourse that interrogates the intrinsic motivations of documentary practice through relational ethics and perspectives in philosophy, ethnography, pedagogy, social work, art theory and contemporary art may give the discipline a transdisciplinary perspective.

In Chapter 3, I entered “the fleshy world of people”, and argued that the collaborations employed in apart & a part deviate from the model of artist as facilitator, or the shorter-term residencies often employed in participatory art, to one of long-term relationships that developed into shared agency and a process of deep listening. Here I argued that listening to stakeholders and interrogating the production of knowledge is a part of the creative process rather than an intellectual exercise external to it—a necessary framework for collaborative works that seek to communicate to a secondary audience. The contested territory of collaboration in art practice foregrounds this discussion and, as such, I warn against ethical relativism that does not take into consideration structural inequality and ethical difference. My methodology clearly makes the argument that works can be collaborative without employing didactic aesthetic references. This work is not a case study

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to be written up, or a methodology that I have tested on a community to measure effectiveness. It evolved in response to the project, and the work evolved in response to the development of a methodology. The work is the research and the research is the work. I proposed the term *author-ising*, being authorised to author, as a description of the collaborative process undertaken in *apart & a part*, and as a potential framework for the methodology I have developed and employed.

In Chapter 4, I positioned myself in expanded documentary as a way to discuss what I consider to be the undervalued and undertheorised methodologies that have influenced my practice, and that gave rigour to this complex project. I argued that the postmodern critique has been reflexively embedded into contemporary manifestations of documentary, and that the ‘stamp of authorship’ in documentary attempts to protect the work from commodification and misrepresentation. I discussed reflexivity as more than just announcing your presence, but rather attempting to examine the conditions of knowledge production.

The ways in which institutions can harm individuals is greater than sexual abuse, and this project goes some way to addressing this. *apart & a part* has contributed to an ‘archive of feelings’ that speaks to the ephemeral and felt experiences that are not always included in testimonies and government submissions. I am confident that my methodology and work address the questions posed at the beginning of this exegesis, although I acknowledge the challenge in creative research between over-explaining the work (and thus eliminating ambiguity) and being unclear and evasive regarding the research findings. I believe I have achieved this balance.

The purpose of this project has not been to provide an exact list of the affective dimensions of the legacy of out-of-home care (although many of these affects have been explicitly addressed throughout the exegesis), but to encourage the viewer to locate these affects through conceptual and embodied encounters with the works.

This project does not conclude the care leaver experience. I regret that I was not able to engage more broadly with Australian care leavers and include more perspectives. The costs of travel and my commitment to intimacy and to evolving friendships and relationships did not permit this expansion. There is, however, enormous scope to extend the ‘archive of feelings’ as an original and ongoing contribution to this history.

I began this exegesis with broad social, political, and philosophical contexts that contributed to my comprehension of the complexities of care leaver histories, and my own responsibilities as a citizen to acknowledge these shameful histories that are, in fact, living histories. I journeyed through the many ethical and epistemological challenges that historical, relational, and collaborative work alerts us to. I declared my positions in some
areas, and my ambivalence in others. It seems fitting then to have finished this exegesis on the specific, nuanced, ways in which these challenging and confronting concepts and experiences manifested in the project outcomes—the stories of our collaborations, or simply, how the work was made. I therefore consider the final installation, apart & a part as the conclusion to this doctoral project.

This personally transformative journey seeks to contribute to the larger project in Australia of confronting historical injustice from the perspective of individuals who have been excluded from its telling. I recognise that there is a great deal of emotional labour involved in the telling of these histories from people who have lived them, something I have learnt from both the care leaver community and from First Nations activists and artists who regularly undertake the arduous task of educating others about the past. This labour often goes unnoticed and unrecognised, and is always disproportionately delegated. The arts, I think, can (and do) play an important role in presenting these counter narratives in ways that require active listening and viewing, and provide public spaces where reflexive, complex, and challenging topics can be accessed and negotiated. More specifically, reparative strategies, as Best outlines, can help citizens look at themselves, while being distanced, somewhat, from the circuit breaker of shame. Me, but not me.

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100 I also acknowledge that readers of this document will find the content at times difficult to process, and I recognise this is also a kind of emotional labour.
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