ABOUT FACE:
RENEGOTIATING THE SELF AND THE FAMILY
THROUGH GRIEVING

BY

JILLIAN McCALMAN

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS BY RESEARCH (EXHIBITION AND EXEGESIS)

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
FACULTY OF ARTS
ST ALBANS

February 2001

232871461

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for any other degree in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this material contains no material previously published or written by any other person, except where due reference is given in the text.

Signed:

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

ABSTRACT

This Master of Arts takes the form of artworks for exhibition, and exegesis. The project involved an investigation of the relationship between the grieving process and the art making process. This has been a highly personal journey of reclamation and reconciliation with the aim of understanding and healing painful and unresolved areas in my life related to the deaths of my parents at a time when I was too young to understand the emotional and intellectual consequences. The project has therefore been concerned with my going back over these events, gaining a fuller understanding of them and responding to them through my art practice.

Becoming aware of what the grieving process entails has informed the work to a large degree, as has my subsequent engagement in this process. Extensive research into bereavement theory has therefore been essential and has guided much of the artmaking. The project also involved a reassessment of how I had interpreted the events in my life, so as to break old and inappropriate models of thought. Readings on philosophical hermeneutics has provided this intellectual framework within which I could transform ideas into artwork. A study of contemporary artists was valuable in helping me contextualise my practice and expand my conversations in relation to art and grieving.

A different approach to my art practice was essential for this new psychological terrain. I was impelled to extend and expand my studio practice by experimenting in a variety of media, and then applying the photocopy and computer processes to these. This resulted in a body of work quite different from any I had made hitherto.

This work aims to renegotiate my personal history and reassess notions of identity. Accordingly, I have used portraiture as a vehicle for dialoguing with my history. This takes the form of both self-portraits and portraits of my family, which serve as connecting agents for my memory and emotions.

The exhibition work consists of an installation of large silk fabric panels, and a selection of collage works on paper. The exhibition is a commemorative act—the work serving as a memorial to my parents and my family. The making of the work is for me a 'laying of the dead to rest', according them their rightful place, and thereby allowing myself the opportunity to make peace with a difficult and burdensome past.

i . Detail—'Jill'

INTRODUCTION

'Give sorrow words', says Malcolm to Macduff. 'The grief that does not speak, whispers the o'er-fraught heart and bids it break.' (Shakespeare, Macbeth)

This project has been concerned with exploring the relationship between grieving and the art process. Through my art practice I have looked back to specific events and reflected upon how they have shaped my life and my sense of identity. The particular events are the deaths of my parents. My father died when I was 10 and my mother six years later, and consequently my knowledge of them is limited. The level of family denial surrounding these deaths was extreme, and this meant that I was unable to express my grief and find the necessary emotional and intellectual resolution through the mourning process. Denial is an avoidance strategy where the pain of facing losses appears too hard to bear and is therefore not engaged in (Worden 1991). This aspect of unresolved grieving has provided the focus for much of the research and is expressed through the artwork itself.

The sense of not knowing my own parents has been growing more insistent rather than abating with the passage of time. Through the art process I have hoped to bring them back into my life and to restore and maintain a connection. This work has given me the chance to acknowledge the gaps in my life that resulted from their early deaths. There were no opportunities to say our goodbyes, and no parents to witness my life, develop relationships with, or teach me how to grow up. The need to address the difficult growing up that I had and how this affected me subsequently, are areas I have worked through in the research.

In order to make art work to address this highly personal and difficult terrain, it was necessary to research particular areas. Chapter one deals with locating this research. An investigation into bereavement theory has provided a vital context for my own understanding of the process of grieving and mourning, and has allowed me to expand my experience of it. In the course of this research I have identified my personal responses and coping strategies relating to the losses and how these losses affected my family. Through my research into bereavement, I learned that the expression of grief and acknowledgment of the losses incurred is crucial for healing the pain (Davidson 1984). The art process has allowed me to express my grief, to transform it and abstract its meaning, and so, making it acceptable.

The area of philosophical hermeneutics acquainted me with the notion that the 'life story' is necessarily

a construction and furthermore, one which can be rewritten again and again. This line of thinking opened up new possibilities for how I could reconsider my life. The research reflects a process of digging around in my past, finding fragments of information, reinterpreting these and presenting them in the new context of my artwork.

The research also considered the diverse ways in which other artists approach the themes of identity, death and loss, in order to contextualise my own practice. These themes are discussed in relation to a number of contemporary artists.

Chapter two explains the methodology, documenting the different approaches and media I have employed throughout the project. The project combined the text-based research with the practical work and all parts of the process were dependent on each other for information and impetus. This was a self reflective cycle, where the artmaking unfolded as I dealt with long buried emotional issues, and while this was an intuitive process which could not be forced or even planned with much accuracy, it was guided by the text-based research.

Grief counselling sessions were engaged in to keep some emotional perspective on the process, and also to provide important information to bring back to the studio. In conjunction with this I used a personal journal to record my thoughts on particularly private or difficult material, somewhat haphazardly, but always when important issues needed to be worked through. The collection of family photographs was used as direct resource material for part of the practical work, and analogue drawings were used in other parts of the work. The combinations of media and techniques varied throughout the project from drawing and painting, to sewing, photocopying and digital imaging.

Chapter three documents the outcomes in detail. A large amount of work was made throughout the project, much of which will not be exhibited, but, as it was necessary for the evolution of the final body of work, will therefore be discussed. Much of the work was in the form of self-portraiture, as notions of identity are central to the work. Here I am both the 'subject' and the 'object' of my inquiry, and place my self centrally in the discourse. This was a difficult position to rationalise, as the work was very much an intuitive process particularly where I depended on memory and feelings for information. In chapter four I draw some conclusions about the positive outcomes of the project and look at possible new directions for my work.

1 LOCATING THE RESEARCH

'There are surprisingly few occasions or rituals in which people are expected or invited to tell the story of their lives from wherever they think the beginning is; or to tell the even odder story that is their dream.' (Phillips 1995, p. 75)

The axis on which this project turned was my exploration of the grieving process. This required researching the process quite deeply, with extensive reading in the area of bereavement theory. The importance of understanding the mourning process cannot be understated particularly in relation to making the art work. As I became more aware of how I had not been able to express my grief, I realised the negative ramifications of this. This prompted me to engage in 'grief work' which uncovered long-buried emotions and helped me to form a better understanding of myself in relation to my losses. This process while being fairly unpredictable, was interdependent on the art work; sometimes the art work appeared to be leading the research and other times the theory was the vital structure.

1.1 The bereavement process.

It was Freud in 1917 who first used the term 'grief work', as the process that has to be gone through in mourning: facing up to the reality of the loss and then moving on (Leik & Davidson–Nielson 1991). This requires time and effort to get through the painful process, at a time when the bereaved is emotionally and physically weak. There can be resistance to this work, and avoiding the intense distress and pain that has to be engaged in is only natural. However if the grief is not resolved, it can develop pathologically and result in psychological problems and illness (Bowlby 1991). I found that these unresolved losses continued to cause pain and anxiety, and that the research gave me the opportunity to resolve them.

The psychologists John Bowlby (1991), Colin Murray Parkes (1986), Alice Miller (1983) and William Worden (1991) all argue that certain tasks or steps have to be taken to allow the grief to do its job of breaking the bond with the deceased. Basically, these steps are: accepting the loss intellectually, accepting the loss emotionally, readjusting to life, and then establishing new relationships. More recently, theorists have stressed the importance of renegotiating an ongoing relationship with the deceased, and forming a 'new sense of self' as an important part of moving on (Attig 1996). 'Memorialising, remembering, knowing the person who has died, and allowing them to influence the present are active processes that seem to continue throughout the survivor's

life' (Silverman, Klass & Nickman 1996, p. 17). They go on to suggest 'a process of adaptation and change in the post-death relationship and the construction and reconstruction of new connections' (1996, p. 18). This is an ongoing and changeable process, where the meaning of the loss is renegotiated over time, and this is the notion I have subscribed to in the art work. The exhibition is the way I have chosen to memorialise and remember my parents and reinstate them in my life.

Many writers similarly try to find ways of having ongoing connections with their deceased parents after lengthy time periods. The English writer Martin Amis in discussing his memoir talks about the difficult process of writing autobiography, and particularly in relation to his late father, of being constantly overwhelmed 'with filial love and loss'. While he found this an exhausting and debilitating process, he also described it as 'therapeutic concentrated mourning'. (*The Age*, June 3rd 2000). My experience of uncovering my past and bringing my parents back into my life, has felt like this 'concentrated therapeutic mourning'. Although it has been extremely difficult to navigate it has also delivered the positive outcome of a fuller and more sympathetic understanding of myself.

While previously I have felt a sense of failure at not expressing my feelings adequately, I am now aware that people come to their grief work usually when they are emotionally ready and feel they have the support they need, or conversely quite often through a crisis (Kaplan 1996). This can take months or years, and for me it has taken till mid-life. Understanding the complexity of these past events and being able to re-contextualise and renegotiate them as an adult has been an intellectual breakthrough which has informed my studio practice. The concept of renegotiation provided a framework for working through the unresolved grieving, and for forming a new sense of self. The artmaking process assisted me in articulating the magnitude of my losses and the actual work served as concrete evidence of these.

Gaining an historical context was vital for understanding why we, as a family, responded to our parent's deaths in the manner that we did. It is evident that attitudes to death in the mid 1960s and early '70s, the time when my parents died, were somewhat different from those of today. What I distinctly remember is how, overnight, we were viewed differently by the extended family, friends and acquaintances. We were avoided or pitied, and there were very few genuine offers of help. We were not church-goers, so the only respite was the family doctor who dispensed drugs, as a way of dealing with the pain. Germaine Greer reinforces this feeling of shame and helplessness in a paper she wrote in the early 1970s, noting; 'This is a terrible time to die. Death has never been so mysterious, so obscene or shameful an occupation as it is in our time. The dying are at a loss how to behave themselves, and

their families are even more confused about the meaning of what is happening and the proper decorum for the proceeding' (Greer 1986, p. 146). Furthermore the fact that my father died of lung cancer was in itself shocking, as this was something repellent and unspeakably awful. Cancer was a disease, as Susan Sontag proposes, that was in no way romantic: 'Cancer was never viewed other than as a scourge; it was metaphorically the barbarian within' (Sontag 1978, p. 61).

Not only did we not know how to behave with the event of death, we then could not mourn, as this signified weakness. Parkes states, 'Mourning is treated as if it were a weakness, a self–indulgence, a reprehensible bad habit instead of a psychological necessity' (Parkes 1986, p160). It is no wonder, in hindsight, that we were not willing to engage in any of this 'self-indulgence', and were at pains not to talk about the fact that our parents had died. I remember particularly how hard it was to return to school in sixth grade after my father had died, and then in fifth form after my mother had died, feeling like an alien with this 'handicap' of dead parents. I cannot remember that anything was said at primary school, I just felt ostracised for being different, while at secondary school I was given a talking to by a senior teacher about 'not wallowing', and 'pulling my socks up'. It felt like the greatest failure and I was ashamed of having come from this kind of family. Was it the shame of not dealing well with this, or that we had parents who had effectively abandoned us? Fromm (1962) ventured that loneliness is the greatest cause of shame—to not be loved or lose someone's love.

Coming to terms with the feelings of guilt, anger, and shame that surrounded my parent's deaths has involved recounting what actually happened and developing an appropriate perspective on these events. In hindsight, what I see as being the most obstructive aspect of dealing with my loss was the complicit denial by society, that other people in general were not willing to engage with me about this. Research shows this is not an unusual occurrence as people generally find themselves at a loss of how to be helpful and find the emotional terrain too difficult (Littlewood 1992). However, not talking about the parents I had lost meant that I did not retain memories and was not able to keep them alive in stories. I could not tell anyone what was happening to me, lacking the 'cognitive and psychological capacities required', and this became more problematic as I got older, and as I became accustomed to not articulating my feelings (Silverman, Klass & Nickman 1996). According to some theorists, the most important aspect of dealing with grief is telling the 'story' of the pain and loss (Edelman 1994) (Kubler-Ross 1972). Throughout this project I have used my memories as a base to build up a narrative which is more substantial, if still fragmentary.

The literature on bereavement suggests certain rituals are important for working through grief,

though they are not necessarily going to work for everyone (Littlewood 1992). The rituals of the funeral, the wake and cemetery visits are familiar and basic opportunities for sharing grief (Lendrum & Syme 1992). I did not attend the funerals of my parents, and now feel that I missed an important opportunity to engage in grief work. The fact that I did not see either corpse consequently gave me no real proof that my parents had died. Researchers have found that seeing the body and making the funeral arrangements gives people a means to connect with what has happened and to have some control over it (Leik & Davidson-Nielson 1991). Being faced with the dead body makes it hard not to be convinced of the reality of death and be forced to start grieving.

As a consequence of this research work I have finally visited the graves of my parents. I was anticipating some sort of cathartic experience, however this was not to be the case. It took quite a long time to find the actual graves because there were no markers. This was somewhat confronting and deflating, as it revealed the extent of the complicit family denial of these deaths. I could only wonder why my mother was not able to mark her husband's grave, and again why there was no-one who could do so for my mother. A stone grave marker or plaque with the name and date of death inscribed on it, is hard evidence that someone is dead. An important aspect of the art work is that it acts as a metaphor for the grave markers, the markers that were never placed on either of my parents' graves. This is essential for me to gain a sense of closure over their deaths.

While the usual rituals have not been available for me to engage in the grieving process, I have found other, less formal avenues to be invaluable. Letter writing has been a most effective way of expressing 'hard to move' feelings, and can be done whenever necessary. It seems most people can write extremely moving and direct letters to someone whom they have lost as a way of saying sorry, being angry and setting the record straight (Leik & Davidson-Nielson 1991). This was a revealing and cathartic process to engage in, as it showed me what I had needed to say to my father since his death 30 years ago. It was a form of dialoguing which gave plenty of room for me to express myself without fear, to get in touch with my feelings, and understand the deeper meanings of death and loss.

Similarly, experiencing the unconscious through my dreams has been an important source for getting in touch with feelings and generating the subsequent art work. Because of their overt symbolic nature, dreams are interesting to work with, and provide a scenario that can be played around with and deciphered metaphorically (O'Connor 1992). The feelings which come up in my dreams are very powerful, and this is where the dream work is most valuable. Some time ago I had a most vivid and moving dream about my father, in which I was able to express my loving feelings

towards him, gaining a strong sense of his acceptance and forgiveness, and this did more to reconcile me with him than anything else had. In dreams I can look into areas that would be impossible in my waking reality, and this is one place where I see my 'shadow', or other side more clearly (Rycroft 1991). The concept of the shadow and how it is represented in dreams can be explained thus: 'The shadow is the sum of all the rejected aspects of reality which people cannot or will not see within themselves and of which they are therefore un-conscious ' (Dethlefsen & Dahlke 1990, p. 37). This shadow side is an area for investigation in my artwork, in relation to repressed emotions pertaining to my losses, and in the influence of this on my personality.

Personal objects and mementoes have been useful in the search for my self and sense of family, particularly in their ability to stimulate memory. They often have great symbolic significance reminding us of what was precious about those whom we have lost, and being something tangible to hold on to (Abrams 1995). After my mother died, my sister and her family moved in with my brother and me. In order to accommodate our new larger family, much of the original family furnishings and belongings were removed. The loss of my parents was compounded by the loss of the objects that represented them and I think this further complicated the grieving process as I became overwhelmed with a sense of loss (Lee 1994). To make matters more difficult, I could not ask to keep any belongings thinking that I could have been seen to be weak or unnaturally morbid. While I have not used actual objects in the art work I have made copies of documents and photographs. It has been important to see how little remaining evidence there is of my parents, that they were almost obliterated from my life. The artwork functions as some tangible evidence that they lived and were with me for a time, and to reinstate them as important parts of my life.

1.2 A hermeneutic approach to the life story.
A great deal of insight was gained from reflecting on what meaning I had been giving to the important events of my life. In her book on autobiography, Jill Ker Conway (1998) examines this process of questioning the past. She maintains that it takes courage to look at one's life, as there are always parts that we are not proud of or find too confronting or devastating to deal with. She believes that our life stories are very important and that we should be attentive to them, constantly reassessing and revising them; 'keeping our eyes on the philosophical implications of the changes we make' (Ker Conway 1998, p. 177). This suggested to me that there must be a willingness to live consciously in the present in order to understand the past and be responsible for one's own life. This project has allowed me to engage in this very process of reassessment and change in the present, and gain scope on the past.

The importance of the life story can not be underestimated as a powerful way of understanding who we are. Guy Widdershoven explains this concept; 'In stories we aim to make clear and intelligible what life is about. In telling stories we try to make sense of life like we try to make sense of a text when we interpret it' (Josselson & Lieblich 1993, p. 9). I must emphasise the importance of reviewing my 'life story' at this point in time, as the process allowed me to reappraise past events and consider a more appropriate and current response. Mark Freeman further explains this idea; 'this very process, in addition to being an interpretive one through and through, is also a *recollective* one, in which we survey and explore our own histories, toward the end of making and remaking sense of who and what we are' (Freeman 1993, p. 6). However, this process was for me not so much about finding definitive answers, but allowing an exploration of a formerly forbidden area with the benefit of hindsight.

1.3 Contemporary artists

The research involved locating appropriate artists whose practices related to my own through similar areas of investigation. Many artists have been concerned with the themes of identity, death and loss, and indeed the visual medium is suited to such difficult and abstract ideas, where symbols and narratives can be employed to speak more broadly. The relationship that society has had with these issues has changed enormously over the centuries, and the responses of artists reflects this in more ways than can be addressed here.

Perhaps the most relevant contemporary response to death and loss by artists, has been in relation to the many deaths from AIDS. Probably this is where more artists have joined in creatively expressing their feelings of grief about particular people dying, in contrast to more conceptual approaches, than in any other time. The exhibition 'Don't Leave Me This Way: Art In The Age Of AIDS' (Gott 1994) at the National Gallery of Australia honoured these artists with a huge show dealing specifically with this issue of grief and death. However, exhibitions directly addressing this issue are generally infrequent, and as the curators of the 1993 show 'Death' at The University Of NSW Gallery say in the catalogue, 'representational narratives about the conclusion of ordinary human lives have never warranted sustained curatorial attention. Like eroticism, death is a recurring theme for many artists, holding a similarly tacit fascination for audiences granted occasional viewings' (Fenner & Loxley 1993).

I have found several contemporary artists who have been particularly valuable for informing my practice through their ideas on death, loss, identity and their methods of working. It is essential to

have these connections with the work of other artists in order to contextualise my own practice.

Christian Boltanski is a French installation artist who uses themes of loss, life's transient nature and the inevitability of death. Boltanski's work is an eloquent reminder of the fragility of human life, and the work not only reflects death but also talks about 'relics and traces of lives lived.' (Semin, Garb & Kuspit 1997). In 'Reserves: The Purim Holiday' ,1989 (Illustration 1) Boltanski uses groups of close—up photographs of anonymous children, each with an electric light globe dangling in front of the closely cropped face. Rather than illuminating, these lights are so bright that they obscure and bleach out the already blurry images. The work speaks about death as the great and indiscriminate leveller: we are all going to be relics of the past at some stage, but how will we be remembered and what will remain? Underneath one set of portraits, Boltanski placed a large pile of old fashioned biscuit tins, and under another set neat piles of obviously old or used clothing. These are simple, recognisable things and the installations are minimal and spare in appearance. The tins are reminiscent of document storage boxes, and contain fragments of cloth further reminding us of the reliquary aspect. He thinks of his works as monuments and memorials, and this is effectively reflected in the way he installs the work. The configurations of the photos into cross and alter shapes and the use of the light bulbs suggesting candles emphasise a shrine-like aspect. However the notion of commemoration is counteracted by one of absence, as it is impossible to feel any individual connections with any of these children portrayed (Woodall 1997).

The overwhelming feeling Boltanki's work leaves is one of absence, of people who are gone and perhaps not remembered. The photographs possess a powerful sense of sadness, and a reverence for human vulnerability. In my own work I have entered into a dialogue with loss—what does it mean to lose someone I love? How can it be possible to remember the dead? I have included copies of personal family documents, small remnants of the past which are now important evidence for reinstating my parents. The images I make are about the personal rather than the impersonal, and they embody a sense of personal loss and at the same time a sense of familiarity. The family imagery I have used will not be unfamiliar to many people, in fact some will look very much like the photos they have in their own albums. So, while the work is a memorial to my family and embodies a sense of my personal loss, it is a message which can be universalised.

Anne McDonald is a Australian photographer and one of the few artists I have found who has made work directly about the loss of a parent. She uses the symbols of flowers and funerary objects to express her feelings about death and mourning. In one particular series she recalls her mother's
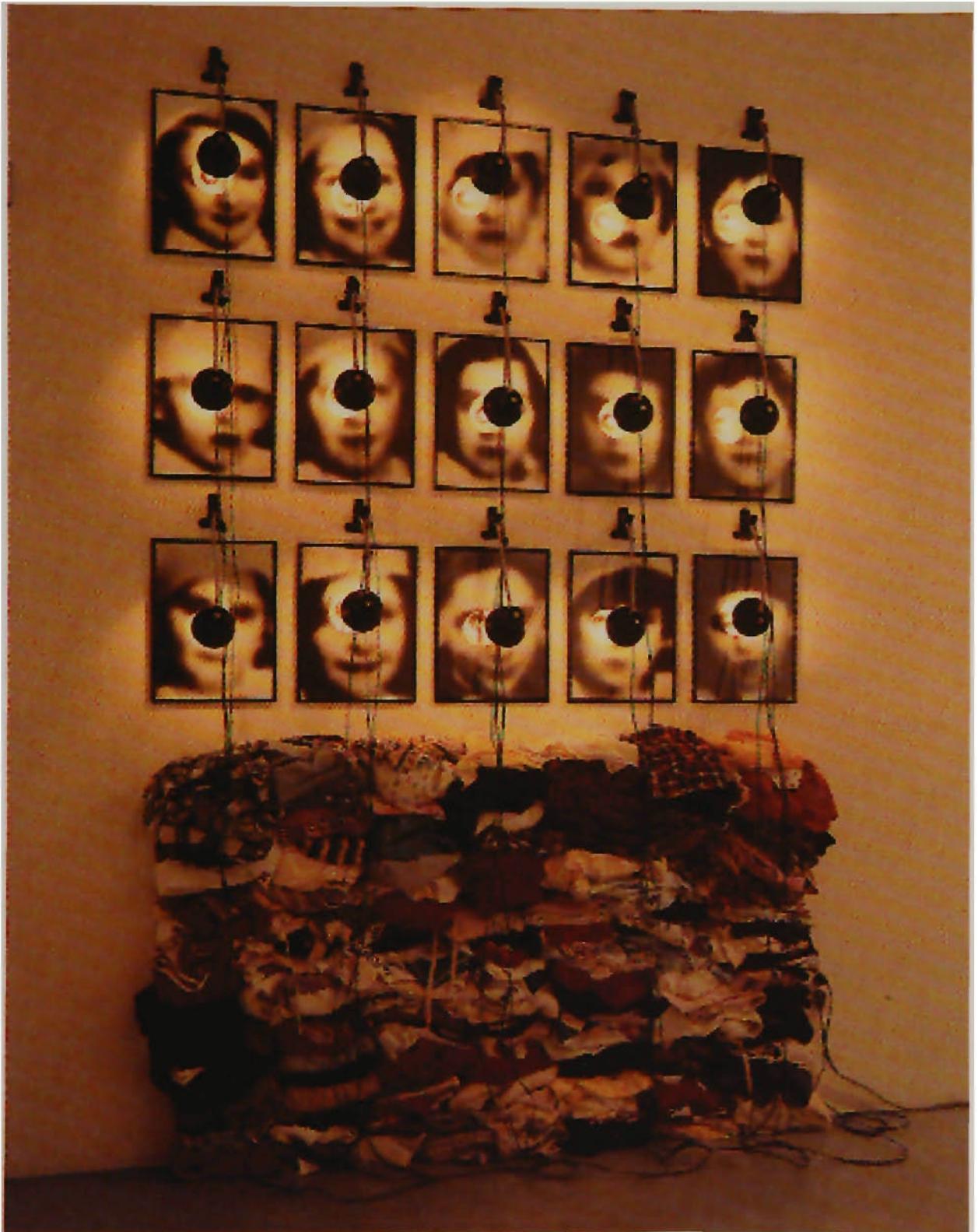
Illustration 1. 'Reserves: The Purim Holiday' 1989. Christian Boltanski.

funeral and how 'flowers were transformed for me into potent symbols of love and loss' (Anna Voigt 1996, p170). In her 'Untitled No.1' from the installation 'Ophelia' 1993 (Illustration 2), she used a big bunch of white lilies, gladioli, irises and roses set against a velvety black background. The flowers are very clear, but by casting the image overall in a deep blue, the artist establishes a dark and sombre quality. The addition of a heavy black frame enhances the funereal appearance of the image. I can almost smell the slightly sickly scent of the flowers when I look at these photographs. They are evocative of the pain of lost love, and are also very feminine. As the artist states, particularly in reference to the flower imagery; 'My work is imbued with the traditionally feminine qualities of beauty, fragility, suffering and sentimentality' (Anna Voigt 1996, p. 174).

McDonald's overt expression of 'sentimentality' highlights what is taboo and repressed: the expression of grief in our society. I could never allow myself to be sentimental about my losses, in fact I have barely ever admitted just how much I have missed my parents over the years. I can still feel the tension of old conditioning about being 'over emotional' and somehow leaving myself open to ridicule and rejection. This project has given me the opportunity to express my own truth about the pain of my losses. It has also given me the power to reinstate my parents into my life, to reconfigure the relationships in a more positive and clear light, without the burden of guilt.

The self-portrait is the focus for another Australian photographer Lucille Martin. She takes photographs of different parts of her face and body to make her installation work. 'Metaphors For Memory—A Paradox Of Ordering' 1992 is a set of four installations of photographs in which she explores issues of identity through social and cultural constructs. She says, 'I work specifically with self-portrait as a practice of resolving, healing and growth. The choice to work with self-portraiture also assisted the development of the communication process with the imagery.' (Anna Voigt 1996, p. 179) It is a kind of dialoguing with the psyche, a way of bringing unconscious and conscious together. She also uses the colour red in her work to symbolise 'heat and fire, femininity and sexuality' and as a element to bring all the other components of the work together (Anna Voigt 1996).

I find great resonance with Martin's reading of self-portraiture, and I too, use it as a tool for exploring my identity and for resolving and healing painful areas of my life. My art practice provides both the vehicle and the expression for the exploration of fundamental issues such as death, in fact the loss of the most important people in my life. Who I have become, what constitutes my self is in some part defined by what I have lost, particularly when the ability to express that loss

Illustration 2. 'Untitled No. 1' from the installation 'Ophelia' 1993. Anne McDonald.

has been stifled. This formative aspect of 'dammed-up sorrow' (Styron 1992) is what I hope is seen through my self-portrait practice. While most of my work is in black and white, I have used the colour red as a symbol of anguish; specifically for lung and heart motifs representing the diseases my parents died from, and also in the symbol representing the distillation of my anger.

American photographer Cindy Sherman is renowned for her long engagement with self-portraiture. She has portrayed herself in many different contexts and guises, from 1950s film stills, erotica, fashion, and fairy tales to historical portraits. While exploring the stereotyping of women, her work mainly questions notions of identity. At no time does one get any clues to who Sherman 'really is'. Art critic Norman Bryson writes; 'Sherman convinces the viewer that her various images are indeed different presences, but that "behind" those there stands no central core of identity. The sense of identity—of each image as bodying forth a different presence—becomes manifestly a production of a manipulation of the complex social codes of appearance, a pure surface' (Krauss 1993, p. 218). Sherman's work is interesting in that it shows characters who are completely contrived but also readily recognisable. The work I find particularly compelling is that which suggests the darker and suppressed side of the personality.

A number of photographs from the series 'Disasters and Fairytales' strongly suggested to me an investigation of the 'shadow' side of the personality. For example, 'Untitled # 141' 1985 (Illustration 3) presents a rather menacing figure wearing a check workman-style shirt standing rigidly with clenched fists. The face is gruesome with silver teeth and a patch over one eye—it is hard to tell if it is male of female. This is an unpleasant image which conjures up unwanted and even unmanageable aspects of the self, the parts that have been concealed and suffocated, the damaged, one-eyed, demented creature, completely lacking compassion. This figure looks like the embodiment of suppressed rage, and as such, crystallised my thoughts on my own suppressed feelings of guilt, rage and sorrow. When these feelings are denied they find other outlets in nightmares, pathological behaviour, depression, anxiety and even illness (Leik & Davidson-Nielson 1991). For many years I have had a recurring nightmare which combines the feelings of a powerful rage with those of helplessness and complete annihilation. While this has been indecipherable in the past I can now read the meaning metaphorically: the suppression of negative feelings has a suffocating and deadening effect, stopping me from expressing myself the way I need to. I have attempted to acknowledge these feelings in some of the artwork, as a way of rendering them more
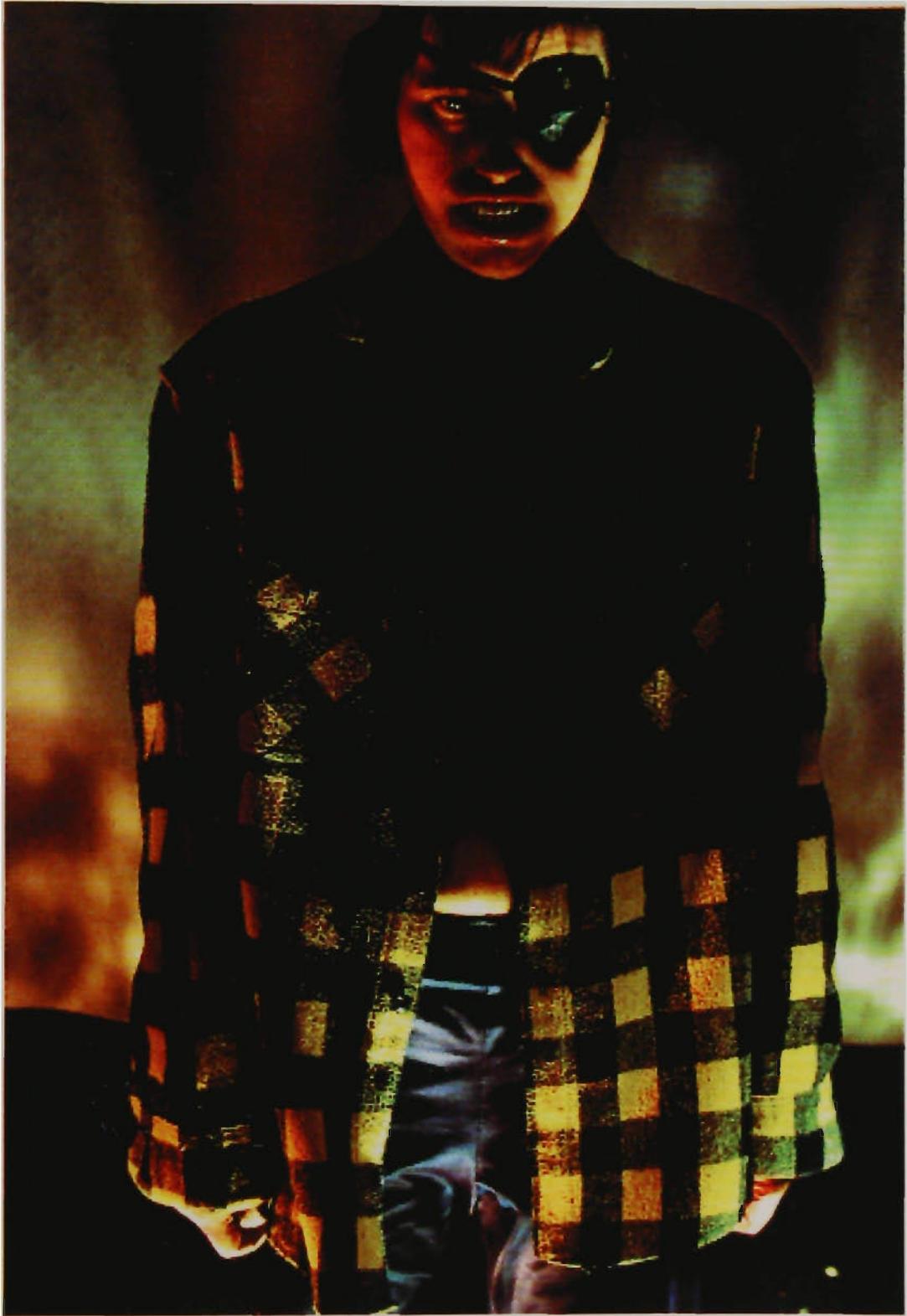
Illustration 3. 'Untitled # 141' 1985. Cindy Sherman.

manageable.

Mike Parr is an Australian artist whose practice has concentrated on the self-portrait, and throughout the 1980s and '90s he has created around 1000 self-portraits in media including painting, drawing, photography, performance and video. He has constructed works under the main title 'The Self-Portrait Series,' most often using reproduction techniques such as photocopy and etching. His work evolves from analogue drawings which are then worked with in a number of ways; he photocopies them many times so that they gradually change, losing definition, taking on more blackness and achieving more random qualities. The etching process allowed Parr to draw a portrait onto the metal plate, print it, then draw another portrait over the top and print again obtaining a layered effect. These methods explored the notion of the 'multiple self', highlighting the changeable aspect of the self undergone through the passage of time These processes of reproduction suggests a constantly changing self, a self that is so changeable as to not have a sense of a complete self or personality. The works are dark and messy and there is a distinct feeling of lack of control: 'While the drawing of self-portrait over self-portrait suggests the "erosion" of static identity by an overlaying of memory traces, the chaotic, automatic marks evoke another unconscious force, the powerful and overwhelming energies of the libido' (Smith 1994, p. 53).

Parr's work gets to grips with the difficult business of pinning down the self through a self-portrait practice. I have found it difficult to take an objective stance when the process of self inquiry is highly subjective, particularly where memory is concerned. What is powerful about Parr's work is that it captures the messy and changeable aspects of the self, and reflects the anxious states of mind that accompany the search for self. His liberal use of the photocopier allowing him to make copious copies, does nothing to dim the expressive quality of these works, in fact it further adds to the sense that the self is transient in nature and hard to capture.

I have combined my analogue drawings with the photocopy process, which has produced an alternative reading of the self-portrait, allowing me a greater psychological representation of myself. These images are expressive of what I have regarded as darker or negative emotions; grief, depression, sadness and anger. Seeing these images has clarified this classification, and invited the possibility of reassessment—that these 'negative' emotions are part of the full complement of human emotions.

Melbourne artist Dena Lester made work dealing specifically with the unexpected death of her

husband. In her exhibition in 1998 at Gallery 101 Collins Street, there was an unusual mix of photography, collage, painting and installation. A greater proportion of the work was self-portraiture, and these took the form of large roughly cut and torn photo collages which appeared to have been scored all over with a sharp instrument. These were not easy images, in fact they were difficult to be with, reflecting the emotional confusion that results from losing a loved one. As Lester says in the catalogue; 'I attempt to portray the myriad of psychological processes: conscious and unconscious... the sadness, the silence and the emptiness as well as the hidden reactions—the urge for renewal and intimacy and the rising groundswell of hope and new beginnings (Lester 1998).

I understand Lester's description of the difficult path that has to be traversed, and her work held an uneasy energy that spoke of this. It is not easy to embrace the grieving process, but I see Lester's work as actively engaging in this. The images are rough and awkward, and so is dealing with the pain of loss. However the works are poignant reminders of the courage needed to bring these strong emotions into a public place. An important aspect of my own work is that it functions as a public statement about my losses, and is acknowledged in this way.

2 METHODOLOGY

'We all return to memories and dreams like this, again and again; the story we tell of our own life is reshaped around them. But the point doesn't lie there, back in the past, back in the lost time when they happened; the only point lies in the interpretation.' (Betterton 1996, p. 172)

Art, particularly drawing and painting, is often used as a way of literally drawing people into articulating their grief, by symbolically showing how the person is feeling and thinking about the situation. This kind of process has been formalised into a therapy over the last 100 years by practitioners such as Jung (1959) and Kubler-Ross (1975). The process of art can be a direct and spontaneous means of communication between the conscious and the unconscious. The artwork can be used as a way of safely expressing difficult emotions, such as those that arise in grieving, and these can then be understood (Simon 1992). I have found the art process to be the only way I could deal with the complex and enigmatic material that makes up my life. Particularly in regard to long suppressed grief, the physical aspect of making art had a complementary ritual aspect. Physically moving the art elements and materials around, correspondingly activated suppressed thoughts and emotions resulting in symbols and images which could be then reflected upon and assimilated.

2.1 Grief work and the self reflective cycle.

The starting point for the project was the realisation that I had to come to terms with my losses, spell them out for myself so I could understand their meaning. This involved a close relationship between the theoretical components and the practical activities, each being dependent on the other for information and impetus, plus time for reflection. Reading about bereavement, engaging in the grief work, collecting family data from the photo collection, making art work at various locations, reading about other artists and going to counselling were activities which were dependent on each other for progress. I worked on the fabric pieces at home, preferring the clean, quiet, domestic setting for this activity. The collages and paintings were executed in the studio, while the photocopying and computer generated images were made in commercial bureaus.

A challenging aspect of the work was that my 'autobiographical memory', on which I depended for so much information, was unreliable and at best, fragmentary (Schacter 1996). While I thought I could recall some things very clearly, most probably the meanings I presently conferred on them— which had accumulated over the years—were not those of the original time. It was even more

perplexing when I have asked other members of the family about certain events and they have quite different stories again. This discrepancy has led me away from other people's stories or versions of the truth, as it resulted in too much conflicting information. The way I proceeded was to connect with the feelings I had about my past and make of them what I could.

Feelings of sadness and depression, which were a direct consequence of my grieving, have accompanied much of the inquiry. This often resulted in my getting emotionally bogged down and consequently work would cease until I found a positive impetus. In order to counteract these blocked states, I engaged in formal grief counselling sessions which shed light on the grieving process and helped me articulate and understand my feelings. The counsellor showed me that there are different ways of interpreting how I had responded to my parent's deaths and gave me some new and positive viewpoints. Approaching the studio practice intuitively was also helpful in moving through these mental blockages, as it was a good physical parallel to move the art media around and get it to flow onto the paper.

A personal reflective journal was employed as another way of working through my emotions. The use of a journal can be a way of safely expressing strong and difficult grief emotions. The writer C.S.Lewis in 'A Grief Observed' (1966) articulated what it felt like to intensely grieve for his wife. The effort to understand and express his feelings allowed him to progress through the loss to find life meaningful again. In the same way I used the journal as a repository for all my thoughts, memories, dreams and subsequent ideas for my art work. The journal links the text and image-based research, by joining the different strands of information and then reworking them into concepts for the art work; a form of intra-personal dialoguing.

2.2 The Image-Based Research—The family archive.

The collection of family photographs and documents was the main reference point for gathering information and renegotiating the family history. It was never an organised history, as the photographs were kept in cardboard boxes, with very few having any written information. When I was a child there was an enjoyable family ritual of looking through the photographs with my mother and listening to the related stories. Unfortunately I do not remember what these stories were, and so looking back on these photos now is a mysterious occupation.

There was a large amount of material to be researched in order to find out more about my parents, and I needed a structured approach to deal with this. After a series of siftings through the

collection, it became clear that there were some obvious absences such as wedding photos of my parents, and family portraits with all of us present. It also became clear that certain time periods particularly the mid '60s to early '70s, the time I was most interested in, were almost completely unrepresented. The strategy I adopted was to classify the images into groups representing each member of the family, and group family portraits, in order to build up a more detailed picture of each person and the family dynamics. Such an approach is consistent with that offered by 'photo-therapist' Jo Spence. She suggests this process as away of working with the family album in order to get some clarity, and she believed in the concept of 'readjusting' history by making new family portraits about the past that are more appropriate for the present (Spence 1995).

After grouping the images, it was a matter of analysing them and choosing the most 'essential' images, essential in the way that they showed something typical about the person. I wanted these pictures to reveal some undeniable truths, to give me something concrete to assure myself with. Roland Barthes (1981) describes a similar compunction when looking at photos of his mother after she died, where not only was he trying to find the 'essential' her, but also trying to 'recognise' her. This was the sense I had when looking at my family photos, and even photos of myself where I was trying to find what was recognisable or authentic. However, the images often became more enigmatic the more I contemplated them. What was quite striking was how little of our 'real' lives were revealed. These pictures did not really provide me with any details about what was happening underneath the surface, yet I know that there were all sorts of emotional issues and struggles we were dealing with.

2.3 The portrait.

I have been drawing portraits since I was a child, and portraiture, in particular self-portraiture, has been a substantial part of my art practice over a 20 year period. I have assiduously drawn myself and other women in my family, and in these representations there are resemblances that strongly reflect the physical heritage that we share. In this way I have explored aspects of family likeness, a commonality between all of us, and there are many things we share. In my current work the self-portrait acts as the vehicle for integrating the fragments of memory, and connecting with emotions to produce a more 'interior view', a 'psychological' portrait (Burne 1995). The portraits of family members have been appropriated directly from photographs, and they are also adding to the portrayal of myself being the people I grew up with, and who so affected how I identify myself.

2.4 Collage.

Collage is a technique used extensively throughout the project, and it is a very immediate way of working where pieces of paper or fabric are selected and cut accordingly, and then moved around till the appropriate placement is found and then adhered. It is an intuitive and random method, and affords a degree of lateral thinking not available in other more fixed techniques such as painting and drawing. As elements can be freely juxtaposed the images can reveal unexpected and enlightening results. The technique also made it possible for me to simultaneously work on multiple images, affording a good flow of ideas.

The method lends itself to different media, and I have used it in my analogue (non-digital) work and to cut and paste images together digitally. With this technique I have amalgamated images I had already constructed in different media and styles; the sgraffito symbols, abstract paper collages, and analogue drawings. Collage offers me a way of working that is in itself a direct metaphor for my negotiating and renegotiating relationships. I can move around the different images and symbols allowing new feelings, ideas, and insights which in turn form a new 'story'.

2.5 Sgraffito drawing.

This technique involved firstly drawing on paper with coloured oil pastel, then covering this with black paint. When the paint dries the surface can be scratched back with a sharp instrument to reveal the colourful, patterned underlayer. This technique parallels the idea of uncovering my past, finding the intricate pattern of my life that is beneath the dark exterior of my negative and obscuring emotions.

I used sgraffito specifically to draw the mandala symbols. The circle is a constant source of inspiration for me and it has been an important symbol for working through emotional turbulence and confusion. Jung explains the restorative powers of working with this archetypal symbol of wholeness in his book 'Man And His Symbols', regarding the circle as a symbol of the self; 'It expresses the totality of the psyche in all its aspects, including the relationship between man and the whole of nature'(Jung 1964, p.266). In Tibet and India, the mandala, a Hindi word meaning 'magic circle', is a familiar symbol in artworks made for the purpose of meditation. The circle reflects the shape of the earth and a sense of balance and perfection within the universe. In this regard I have used the circle in the artwork as a symbolic tool for restoring some emotional balance through understanding the holistic nature of life with death being an integral part of that.

2.6 Textiles and sewing.

The use of textiles and sewing forms a substantial part of the image-based research, and is a practice I have engaged in for most of my life. I learned to sew samplers and clothes at school, and liked the whole process of garment construction. After my mother died, sewing was one of the many 'caretaking' tasks I took on to deal with the loss. By becoming a surrogate mother, I could suppress my painful feelings, and be accepted and appreciated for all the good work I was doing, even though I did not get the comfort or nurturing I needed. I now know that this is a typical coping strategy adopted by adolescent girls when they lose a significant person (Lendrum & Syme 1992). I took on the task of sewing and repairing clothes for the family, and spent a lot of time doing what I called 'invisible mending' where I would attempt to make mends that could not be noticed. Accordingly, I see sewing as a relevant way of expressing my creativity in this project as well as reflecting my past 'coping strategies'. As the Australian artist Heather Dorrough says about her own textile art work; 'The material is a collaborator. Fabric—material, and thread are infinitely familiar' (Meskimmon 1996, p.160).

There are various familiar sewing techniques which I use to embellish, repair or strengthen the fabric and in this way they become a metaphor for my family research. Threads can hold things tenuously together, like a family history, and I am looking for the common threads which link the family together, and at the same time wanting to repair damage done in the past. Embroidery and sewing have a long tradition of being used to commemorate the dead, in the form of mourning handkerchiefs, table cloths and decorative pieces of fabric, and quilts (Parker 1996). The Australian Memorial AIDS Quilt Project which started in 1988 and is ongoing, is an example of this. Made by friends, family and those facing their deaths, the quilt comprises of thousands of panels sewn and embroidered with names, pictures and symbols to honour the dead. These quilts provided a means for engaging in shared grief work, and function as a ritual for commemorating the dead (Gott 1994). I see my textile work functioning as mourning cloths, which I have laboured over while thinking of my lost loved ones.

2.7 The Photocopier and computer.

The photocopy process has allowed me to reproduce drawings and photographs many times onto both paper and fabric. The printing ink alters the original drawing qualities and can make images look very different, with effects ranging from very pale to all black. Being able to easily increase or decrease the size of the image, or part thereof, is another way of working the image with great flexibility. After images have been copied a number of times following reworking, it becomes

difficult to see how they have been constructed, analogous to the way a personality can become enigmatically constructed. I depended heavily on this technique throughout the project, as it directly mirrored my process of reworking my self and my past, trying a number of different ways to read my self and my history.

The computer offered a range of art software packages with which I was able to manipulate my collaged images and also to edit and rework the family photographs. I used programs such as 'Painter 5' and 'Photoshop' as very sophisticated extensions of the collage process where I cut, pasted, resized, layered and changed images in an infinite number of ways. Both the photocopy process and digital imaging process have been applied like a camera—re-taking photos and reframing faces and bodies.

The digital scanner allowed me to 're-see' the photographs of my family and in a way let me re-see my past. For example, many of the photographs were old and fragile, and some very small in size, making it hard to see any detail. The scanner had the ability to enlarge the images with great clarity (assuming there was already sharp focus) and I have been able to see family resemblances as never before. It is an interesting compulsion to have to find some hard evidence in this way. I have always been curious when people who knew my parents well exclaimed how like them I was. Being able to now see my parent's faces close-up, and particularly when they were younger, I can recognise similar physical family traits in myself. With this process I am copying and storing the images on discs which is itself a direct way for reclaiming and valuing my own history.

3 THE OUTCOMES.

'Consider finally that one will no doubt be weaving these meanings into a whole pattern, a narrative, perhaps with a plot, designed to make sense of the fabric of the past'.
(Freeman 1993, p. 8)

The art work was delivered after a long process of experimentation with a variety of media. The work is grouped into five main areas according to the way it evolved chronologically and also to the media used. The first group consisted of a set of self-portraits where I employed primarily a collage-photocopy method, choosing particular analogue drawings, copying them many times and reconfiguring them using a collage technique. In the second group I substituted fabric for paper as a ground. I collected some fine cotton muslins and chiffons and drew directly onto them, stained them with paint, tore, sewed and embroidered them, again in a collage method. The third group involved some larger scale abstract paintings on paper and canvas. The fourth group were constructed on heavy weight paper with painted backgrounds and collaged motifs pasted over in patterns. The fifth group consists of large silk organza panels printed with images mainly sourced from photographs, and using printing, collage and sewing techniques. These groups will now be discussed in detail.

3.1 The Initial Portraits

This original set of works was the catalyst for the entire project. I immersed myself in a process of experimentation with various media in a primarily collage technique. This was a very free and intuitive method where I worked quickly and let the images form themselves without getting caught up in too many conscious decisions. I did however consciously select the particular motifs that I thought were relevant to the inquiry. These were mainly my own analogue work; drawings in pencil of a self-portrait and of magnolias, sgraffito mandalas, combinations of collage and sgraffito mandalas, and a spiral pattern print. The only imagery that was appropriated was that of Tapa cloth patterns which were used for backgrounds. These motifs were all photocopied many times and then combined in various configurations. All this work was copied in black and white at A3 size, which shows the head at about life size. This was a manageable format and appropriate because I felt overwhelmed with what looked like the huge task of unravelling the past.

In these first images the face or particular facial features, are covered by the motifs, either the flower or the mandala. The mandalas symbolise a holistic view of life which includes death—a view

which I could not grasp. By placing these symbols over my face they represent a blockage or inability to understand and articulate my experience. The hidden or obscured faces showed my fearful response to the complexity of my situation. I could not face up to my losses as it seemed to be too demanding and confusing. [Illustration 4]. This aspect of loss—of losing the ability to share my hurt emotional self, in fact of having lost a part of myself, has been recognised through these self-portraits. The placement of a magnolia flower, just opening, over my entire face acknowledges that I nonetheless did grow up, that I did want an unfolding of my life which had positive and enjoyable aspects [Illustration 5], while dealing with painful emotions. This first set of 8 collages were each recopied to create another set that could be reworked with different media such as pastel, pencil, paints and inks. In this way I maintained a great deal of flexibility to work through my ideas, providing more and more copies to experiment with while keeping each 'original' copy.

The process of reworking and recopying continued with the additional variations of tonal qualities from the photocopier. [Illustration 6] In this image the facial features have been obliterated by applying black ink directly to the image, and using the darkest setting on the photocopier, thereby rendering the head a silhouette. The background spiral pattern is very apparent and suggests the positive idea of regeneration as a possible and desirable complement to the negative sense of losing myself in the darkness of fearful emotions. The spiral is an archetypal symbol, and I use it to represent life evolving and the promise of new growth, which underscores the difficult business of uncovering the past and then moving into new territory.

The backgrounds I use represent different aspects of myself and family. I chose to photocopy Polynesian Tapa cloth design for some of the images being aware of its social and cultural significance. In Polynesia these traditional handmade and highly valued cloths have played an integral part of life, where no significant event can take place without their exchange. The metaphors of 'weaving life patterns' and understanding 'the fabric of life' has resonance for me. This project has shown me how through our emotional responses we fabricate our lives into what can be seen later as patterns.

The manifestations of our family patterns and inheritances are 'stamped all over us' through physical resemblances, character traits, emotional tendencies and even illnesses. This sense of being imprinted genetically is evident in [Illustration 7]. The swirling pattern over my face looks a

Illustration 4. Face with mandala—30 x 52 cm
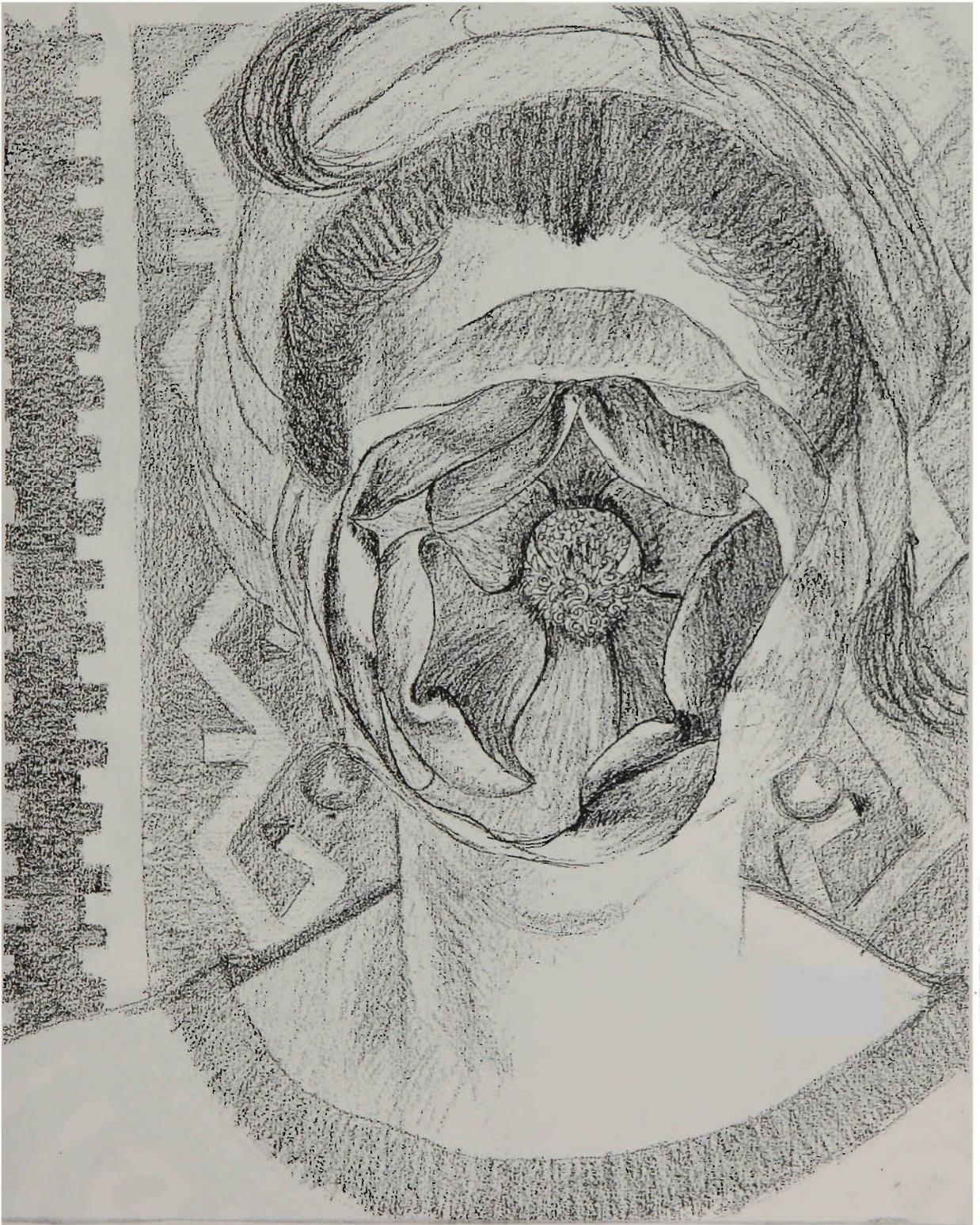
Illustration 5. Face with flower—30 x 52 cm.

Illustration 6. Silhouette head—30 x 52 cm.

Illustration 7. Pattern face—30 x 52 cm.

little like a Maori tattoo, though not intentionally. This portrait has the look of something not quite civilised, a forlorn creature unable to speak a recognisable language, something out of my unconscious.

Nearly all the work so far had concentrated on the head image only, and the reason for this was that I had in the past tried to think my way out of my grief, as a way of not allowing myself to feel the emotional pain. However in two portraits I experimented with some body imagery. The mandala symbols were moved down into where the body would be, [Illustration 8] and the head had been reverse printed in white and black so that the face has a ghostly, brittle appearance. By bringing the imagery into the body, I draw attention to mind and body connections. The body areas are covered with dark transparent fabric: one has small lungs embroidered into it and the other a heart, referring directly to the diseases my parents died from, and the possible relationship between family patterns and inherited illness. The use of transparent dark fabric references an obscured and complex view of the mysterious relationship between the mind and the body, emotions and illness.

The initial series of portraits provided an indication of my position emotionally and intellectually with the inquiry. This series of around 50 pieces when viewed together installed on the wall, had a dark and depressing character. The work looked fairly rough, presented on A3 photocopy paper. Some of the images were not straight or not properly aligned, there were dog eared corners and great variations between the quality of the copying. Most of the works were in black and white, with only a few pieces having red or silver added. For me it represented an engagement at gut level, reflecting some rough truths about myself and my past—that I had suffered traumatic losses and lived through them the best way I could. This was a powerful message which had to be attended to and brought forward in a different way, with different media.

3.2 Small textile works

I had already introduced fabric elements and felt that the personal nature of cloth, related to clothing, bedding, shrouds, and curtains which in turn related to domesticity and femininity, would be an appropriate medium to continue with. I drew my portrait directly onto grey chiffon fabric. This allowed me to then literally fold up and unfold the image, an action corresponding with my thought processes of rethinking my past. This was quite a potent idea—to be able to unpack some

Illustration 8. Face and body symbol—16 x 36 cm.
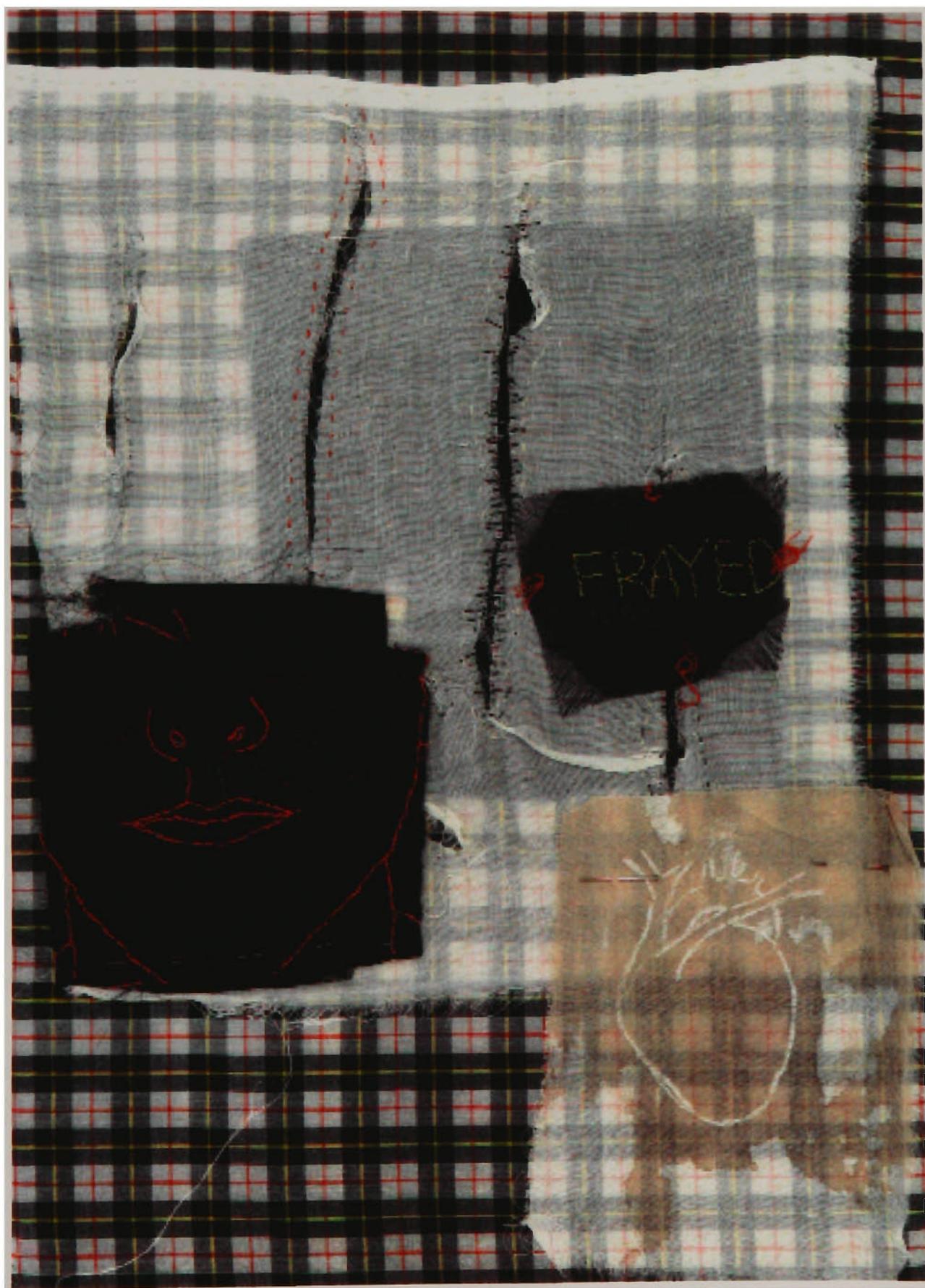
Illustration 9. Small textile piece—30 x 52 cm.

of the emotional baggage and then be able to fold it all away, rather than being overwhelmed by it. Rather than feeling I had to work everything out, it became an ongoing process, that I could see would change over time. The motif of my folded-up self is used in this series of four pieces which have various backgrounds that were of plaid pattern, or torn, sewn, stained and layered fabric. [Illustration 9] The plaid pattern was a reference to my background, to the way I was brought up in a rather rigid traditionally Anglo-Australian mode of behaviour. The torn background is sewn over to keep the tears together and make them untearable again, indicating the extent to which I felt that I was continually in damage control. The folded face also represents a reduced view, the way I dealt with my life which was too difficult at the time, which needed to be kept to small manageable areas. These works were not much larger than A3-size.

3.3 Abstract paintings

The next stage of the work involved two large-format paintings on paper and a smaller one canvas. The switch to painting was a necessary strategy to keep the artmaking progressing. I had reached a point where I was lost with the research and feeling overwhelmed with trying to rationalise a process that in itself was intuitive. These paintings acted as a conduit, directly getting in touch with and expressing my feelings about the research. I did feel depressed, sad and lost and I needed to see an image of this in order to render these feelings coherent. This turned out to be a way of keeping my creative ideas flowing. These paintings were very dark; mainly black, brown and grey. The paint was thick and blobby, and alternatively thin and washy—unappealing works— but it was important to create something that showed me what I was dealing with, something ugly and unacknowledged. Through this investigatory painting I discovered a particular new bright red motif, looking like a cross between a skein of thread and a messy DNA spiral [Illustration 10]. This symbol connected me to my feelings of suffocated anger. Once again this was a clarifying image of how I had always contained my anger, and still do. This led onto a realisation that anger was not shown or dealt with well by the women in our family, in fact, quite the reverse. The need to express my feelings symbolically in order to understand them was again apparent in the painting process. I broke away from the small format I had been using and expressed my self in a larger physical sense and at the same time gained more confidence in the process.

Illustration 10. Abstract painting—150 x 150 cm.

3.4 Wallpaper pattern collages

Psychotherapists have identified the way in which patterns are repeated through people's lives. These patterns are emotional ways of being, and if not recognised for what they are can condemn people to recreate situations where these emotions are revisited (Rowe 1989). Being unable to accept and deal with loss has been evident in subsequent events throughout my life, and I now think that the network of behavioural patterns which I constructed in order to protect myself was a closed system, with the same issues and feelings repeating without any particular resolution. Through the series of wall paper collages I have attempted to demonstrate this notion.

This work emerged as a combination of painting and collage with pattern as a dominant theme. They looked like a kind of 'wallpaper' and this was an appropriate environmental signifier for conjuring up associations with the old houses I grew up in with their old fashioned Regency wallpapers and curtains and carved Wilton carpets. This group consisted of a number of large and small works on paper, all with backgrounds painted roughly in greys and blacks, with a regular pattern of heads and symbols pasted over, and the addition, in some, of the anger motif. They exude a mournful quality [Illustration 11] and reflect the feeling of being lost emotionally. A selection of these works will be in the exhibition.

3.5 Organza panels

The final body of works were executed in silk organza. The fine and nearly transparent organza panels, varying slightly in pale colours, are approximately one metre wide and two metres long. The final installation reflects the magnitude of my loss, the fragmentary nature of memory, and conveys the respect I have for my family and history. The images have either been transferred directly onto the fabric, or transferred onto smaller pieces which were then pinned on. The attachment of some of the images with pins meant that I could 're-move' the images around, which corresponded to notions of revising my history. The silk works hang in space rather than on the wall, which allows the viewer to move between the works and view the panels through each other, suggesting no particular time frame but rather an overlapping of time and experience. The viewer can metaphorically walk through my memories. The work hangs on fine threads, suspended in mid air and this corresponds to how I felt when my parents had died, that my life was no longer on firm ground. As a contrast to this ethereal work in the central space, are the dark and sombre wallpaper collages which are on the walls. As the viewer looks between the pale silk panels a glimpse of strong

Illustration 11. Wallpaper pattern collage—70 x 100 cm.

dark and definite images can be seen. The wallpaper works anchor the fabric works to a concrete set of imagery, signifying the real feelings of a real person dealing with a grieving process. Through each silk panel I explore aspects of my relationship with each family member. Each panel is named and will now be discussed.

3.6 'Dad'.

I had not expected my father's death even though he was obviously ill—no-one had explained that he was actually going to die. I was not very affectionate to him, so when he died I saw myself as in some way culpable: I had not loved him enough and so he had died. Psychologists call this 'magical thinking' (Edelman 1994) where children make simple misguided connections between cause and effect. This was a terrible guilt to carry around but I was too ashamed to talk about it to anyone. I think that this fear and guilt I harboured over my father's death did not allow me to grieve for him. I can now forgive myself and feel the sadness I have been suppressing.

Considering how little I knew of my father, it was difficult to know how to represent him. Since I was in the process of reconstructing him for myself in my mind, the idea which naturally came forward was to make a life-sized reconstruction. The image for this was sourced from a very small photo, the origin of which is a mystery. It is a full body shot and he is posed very casually, smiling for the camera—I am guessing he is around 20 years old. There were very few photos of my father that were useable and even fewer where he was smiling. The evidence suggests he did not like getting his photo taken, something we share. This original image was photocopied to a size of one by two metres, then cut into pieces which were recopied onto transfer photocopy paper, and the final image pieced together and transferred onto the grey silk. I chose grey specifically to reflect a sense of detachment and embody a faded quality, like my memory of him which has also faded. There are some burn holes to the body area as a reminder that he was a heavy smoker, and that there were often small burn marks in his clothes. Attached to the bottom of the image are two small pieces of fabric: one has a pair of embroidered lungs referring to his cause of death, and the other is a copy of his death certificate. These act as a metaphorical grave stone.

Other evidence of his life in the form of various certificates and documents hangs behind on another panel. I cannot remember anything he said or any opinions he had on anything, but I can make some conclusions having heard the 'stories' about him during my life. While I was not very close to my father, I think I may have been his favourite and he was probably kinder to me than to my siblings. It has been vital for my sense of wellbeing to spend time thinking about my father and

recognise that he did care for me, but that he also had his limitations which I can now better understand. I actually miss him more in my life as I grow older and I recognise all the things we have not been able to share.

3.7 'Mum and dad'.

I cannot remember anything significantly intimate about my parents, for example, expressions of affection or even arguments. The portraits at the top of the panel show them both at around 20 years of age. Once again, there were few images to choose from and not even photos of their wedding. The only documentation of this event is the congratulatory telegram from a relative, which is placed in the centre of the panel. However, their honeymoon spent at Buchan with some friends, was recorded by a few small photos with curious messages on the back in my mother's handwriting. These enigmatic messages are pinned along the bottom of the panel, adding some more hard yet inconclusive evidence. More well documented were family outings, of which there were many, where my parents are pictured with various members of the extended family, here represented by two small pictures. In one of these images my parents are captured together as they usually appear in these family snaps; my mother always looks happy and my father looks grim, which probably is a good indicator of their relationship dynamic. My mother always made the best of things and went along with my father, who made the rules.

3.8 'Revised family portrait'.

As there was no family portrait in the collection, I wanted to make a group portrait to reflect the family I have lost and longed for. The head shots descend in a line down the middle of the panel reflecting the traditional family structure we adhered to, with my father at the top as head of the household, breadwinner and to a large extent emotionally unreachable. My mother is directly underneath being the disciplinarian and main organiser, and the one on whom we were dependent for love and intimacy. The siblings follow in descending order of age; Joan was the first born and had high expectations placed on her from both parents; James as the only son was expected to follow in my father's footsteps and eventually take over the engineering business; and I was the youngest and the one who had the least expected of her. The exception is Sofia, who was our foster child for four years, and who is placed to one side. Prior to living with us she lived with another branch of the family. I remember thinking she was different but I liked her very much and accepted her as part of our family. She left us when I was six, under circumstances which I could not understand and can only guess at today. On the other side, forming a cross configuration is the image of a black cat. Pets were a very important part of the family and there were always a number

of cats and dogs to be attended to. The animals provided some alternatives for expressing emotions, and I remember finding solace with them many times. The images are sourced from three different photographs.

The following four panels, 'Mum', 'Joan', 'James' and 'Jill' all share a similar format with a central image that has been lifted from a photo taken at my mother's 50th birthday. The striking thing about this picture is the closed body language where each person is in their own space with arms folded. To make this clear I have cut portions of each body highlighting the self-contained aspect and sense of separation. Each panel has a keyhole-type image at the top as further indicator to the character of that person.

3.9 'Mum'.

My mother was devastated by my father's death and never recovered. She always 'put on a brave face', but I knew she was desperately unhappy and inconsolable. She did not talk about my father or visit his grave to my knowledge. I can see now that her behaviour provided my model for grieving and mourning: that death can only be a devastating event and putting on a brave face is all you can do. In engaging in this work I have had the opportunity to reassess my beliefs about my own grieving and how this is related to the family culture of being stoic rather than expressive in the face of loss. In the keyhole image my mother is only about 20 and looks very wistful. This is an enigmatic picture with the text on the back in her handwriting saying, 'Couldn't be sadder, Sis'. She did suffer from depression, and I have wondered whether it was an affliction she had from early on. The central motif shows her wearing her usual attire. The drawings of magnolias underneath are a reminder of her keen interest in gardening and flower arranging, and that they were pleasures we shared together. At the bottom of the piece is a death certificate and an embroidered heart in a similar configuration to what appears on 'Dad', once again as a metaphor for a gravestone.

I absolutely adored my mother, and after she died I was utterly bereft, and lost faith in the world to provide a meaningful existence for me. What made matters worse was that I felt so ashamed that the most important person in my life had died. There was just no way of articulating this, particularly when everyone else seemed to have normal families (Edelman 1994). The only way I could deal with this was to put up and shut up. I rarely talked about my parents, in fact not for many years, and people rarely asked. It has been difficult to acknowledge the depth of the loss I feel for my mother. I now think that there are aspects of loss which I will not ever 'get over', but I

can find ways of living with it. This research work has helped in this regard and has allowed me to redress the imbalance of my lack of grieving.

3.10 'Joan'.

My sister was always grown-up to me, being 15 years older. She had a big influence on me as I was growing up, and I perceived her as the model adult: attractive, well dressed, professional, cultured and generous. The biggest family event before my parents died was her marriage. The keyhole image is of my sister on her wedding day in what was then a very chic gown. In the central image she is a few months pregnant with her first child. The birth of this child was very exciting for me. My sister had two children, the second being born just a few months before our mother died. It was a frightful time for all of us, being grief-stricken and unable to comfort each other. My sister and I got on with the job of running the household and this was the way we coped. I cannot remember her ever showing any signs of grieving, but it must have been terrible for her to lose her mother such a short time after giving birth, as well as inheriting two teenagers, an assortment of pets and a big dilapidated house. Her husband resented having to move in and 'look after us' and was very difficult to get on with. It has been important for me to acknowledge through the work the traumatic time we shared and that we did get through it the best way we could.

3.11 'James'.

My brother had a particularly hard time after our father died. He was surly and argumentative and trying hard to assert himself as teenage boys are wont to do. We did not converse much at all, but I imagine he was lost and lonely and suffering from not knowing how to place himself in a restructured family. The keyhole image is of him as a small child, good natured and happy. The central image as a 16 year old epitomises his teenage disdain for us, being under sufferance to be in this photo. It was very difficult for him to go through adolescence without a father and even more difficult when my sister's husband took over as head of the household. His way of dealing with this difficult situation was to physically withdraw to his room for long periods of time and play music. As a result we had little chance of being friends.

3.12 'Jill'.

The keyhole shows me at five years old in a party dress. Dad chose a new dress for me every year, and that was a special connection we had. I remember being a very insecure child and was very clingy. The central square presents me in my best dress, which this time Mum and I had chosen. I am 12. This was a rather traumatic time, as on one level I was still a child, but what was all

pervasive was the stressful relationship that I was developing with my mother. I found her grieving overwhelming at times and it was frightening because it made her weak when I wanted her to be strong. Her emotional neediness was something I couldn't handle, as I felt I had no way of making up for the loss of my father and therefore did not know how to respond. I did not want to deal with this, which in turn made me feel guilty and unworthy, and so I tried harder to be good. I got some relief when I was sick, which was a regular occurrence, and was my way of getting looked after and redressing the imbalance of care.

The two layered portrait at the bottom, has a skein of anger embroidered on the top layer, to reflect the suffocating emotions I was dealing with. Through the research into mourning I am now able to see how difficult facing up to my losses has been, and that under the circumstances it is not surprising that I could not deal with them. This research work and subsequent understanding gained has allowed me to be more sympathetic with myself and the others in my family, instead of berating our behaviour.

3.13 'The letter'.

During my mother's decline after my father died, there were times when she needed respite care at sanatoriums. These were anxious times for me making life seem even more haphazard and out of control. On one of these occasions my mother sent me a letter probably to reassure me that she would be back soon, but mainly containing chit chat and trying to make light of her situation. This is the only letter I have from her, the only precious little piece of evidence showing that she cared for me. As such it has been an important conduit for remembering my past feelings of longing and loneliness, and again connecting with my grief. The particular letter has been recopied at a much larger size and printed onto pink fabric. The edges of the fabric have been decorated with beads signifying the special, almost reliquary aspect of this letter. This piece hangs between the panels representing my mother and me as a connection between us.

3.14 'Patterns 1 & 2'.

These two pieces have repeating patterns of heads and mandala symbols. They refer directly to the wallpaper collages and act as a connection between the two groups of work. They share the same themes of inherited family traits, habitual behaviours and the closed nature of these. They represent notions about the constructed nature of our lives and how we build meaning through patterns of behaviour.

4 CONCLUSION

'Through inhabiting our own history, which is also the history of our class or group, and becoming aware of it in everyday life, we can begin to make visible that which has been 'overlooked' or is too painful to acknowledge and to develop a historical imagination about past, present and future'. (Spence 1995, p. 221)

In this project I have developed my art practice and built up a body of imagery by directly engaging in the grieving process. I have done this by conducting considerable research into both text and image-based areas of relevance to my inquiry. Bereavement theory provided the framework for me to think about death and to engage in grief work; to assess my losses and find practical ways of acknowledging them, thereby rendering them less mysterious and more manageable. My reading of theory on philosophical hermeneutics showed me very clearly how the interpretation of our life stories is critical to what meaning we make of our lives. This text-based research provided greater room to mentally move about with the original version of my life story and enabled me to make the necessary adjustments to an updated story that fits who I am now.

By engaging in grief work I have been able to extended my art practice considerably. The image-based research involved working in a variety of media and techniques in both intuitive and planned procedures. The technique which was most common to all parts of the art work was collage, which best suited the mixture of media and the content. With the inclusion of the photocopier as a valuable and frequently used tool I was able to produce a body of self-portraits which were a complete departure from previous work. I copied my self- portrait repeatedly, making as many versions as I liked and playing with the notion of the self as being multi faceted. This photocopy process also made it possible to create a selection of photographic images that could then be transferred onto fabric, and again produced work in a new direction.

Using the family photographs as resource material for this project was a strange experience, being on the one hand very familiar and then on the other, after some contemplation, quite enigmatic and obscure. Using my memory as a resource for the work was likewise a new phenomenon. In the past I have been an observational drawer, or made abstract works, neither of which has relied specifically on recollection. However, in this case my memory was the director, finding the painful areas and absences in the past that needed addressing, and then making an art response.

Looking at how other artists have expressed grief, and struggled to find meaning in their lives has been helpful in many ways. Seeing others investigating these areas has given me a positive context for my own work, and I now know that these fundamental issues I have been exploring are important not only to me but to other people as well.

I recognise that this project is in fact both a beginning and a completion in itself. The research has raised a number of issues for further inquiry, particularly in the area of suppressed emotions and the related negative physical and psychological side effects. I would like to investigate further how the art process can be utilised in this area therapeutically. Furthermore, the project has taken my self-portrait practice to another level which I am keen to keep developing.

While I still do not know much more, factually, about my parents, I know a lot more about what I think of them, and where they are in my life now. I have so much more sympathy for them and the difficult hurdles they had to face, and this has made them more 'present'. I can now see that there are more common things we share, from physical to character traits, that link us together. I also have gained more sympathy for myself, realising that the experience of death is not an easy one and that grieving is hard but necessary and rewarding work.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abrams, R. 1995, *When Parents Die: Learning To Live With The Loss Of A Parent*, Harper Collins, UK.

Amis, M. 2000, 'Mourning becomes Memoir', *The Age*, 3 June, Books 7.

Attig, T. 1996, *How We Grieve: Relearning the World*, Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford.

Barthes, R. 1981, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans R. Howard, Hill and Wang, New York.

Betterton, R. 1996, *An Intimate Distance: Women Artists and the Body*, Routledge, London.

Bowlby, J. 1991, *Attachment and Loss, vol 3*, Penguin, London.

Burne, P. 1995, 'Portraiture and Technology', *Artlink*, vol. 15, no. 2 & 3, p 43.

Davidson, G. 1984, *Understanding Mourning: A Guide for Those who Grieve*, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis.

Dethlefsen, T. & Dahlke, R. 1990, *The Healing Power of Illness*, Element Books, London.

Edelman, H. 1994, *Motherless Daughters*, Hodder & Stoughton, Sydney.

Fenner, F. & Loxley, A. (eds.) 1993, *Death*, exhibition catalogue, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, The University of New South Wales, Sydney.

Freeman, M. 1993, *Rewriting The Self: History, Memory, Narrative*, Routledge, London, New York.

Fromm, E. 1962, *The Art of Loving*, Unwin, London.

Gott, T. 1994, *Don't Leave Me This Way: Art In The Age Of AIDS*, exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

Greer, G. 1986, *The Madwoman's Underclothes: Essays and Occasional Writings 1968-85*, Picador, London.

Josselson, R. & Lieblich, A. (eds.) 1993, *The Narrative Study of Lives*, Sage Publications, California.

Jung, C. 1964, (ed.) *Man and his Symbols*, Pan Books, London.

Jung, C. (trans) Hull, R. F. 1959, *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung, vol 9 part 1*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.

Kaplan, L. 1996, *No Voice is Ever Wholly Lost: An Exploration of the Everlasting Attachment Between Parent and Child*, Touchstone, New York.

Ker Conway, J. 1998, *When Memory Speaks: Reflections on Autobiography*, Alfred A Knopf, New York.

Krauss, R.1993, *Cindy Sherman 1975-1993*, Rizzoli International Publications, New York.

Kubler-Ross, E. 1972, *On Death and Dying*, Routledge, London.

Kubler-Ross, E. 1975, *Death The Final Stage*, Simon & Schuster, New York.

Lee, C. 1994, *Good Grief: Experiencing Loss*, Fourth Estate, London.

Leik, N. & Davidson-Nielson, M. 1991, *Healing Pain: Attachment, Loss and Grief Therapy*, Routledge, London.

Lendrum, S. & Syme, G. 1992, *A Gift of Tears: A Practical Approach to Loss and Bereavement Counselling*, Routledge, London.

Lester, D. 1998, *Recent Photographs and Installations*, Gallery 101 Melbourne, exhibition catalogue.

Lewis, C.S. 1966, *A Grief Observed*, Faber, London.

Littlewood, J. 1992, *Aspects of Grief: Bereavement in Adult Life*, Routledge, London.

Meskimmon, M. 1996, *The Art of Reflection: Women Artists' Self-Portraiture In The Twentieth Century*, Colombia University Press, New York.

Miller, A. 1983, *The Drama of Being a Child*, Virago, London.

O'Connor, P. 1992, *Dreams and the Search for Meaning*, Mandarin, Melbourne.

Parker, R. 1996, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*, The Women's Press, London.

Parkes, C. 1986, *Studies of Grief in Adult Life*, Pelican Books, UK.

Phillips, A. 1995, *On Flirtation*, Faber & Faber, London.

Rowe, D. 1989, *The Construction of Life and Death: Discovering Meaning in a World of Uncertainty*, Fontana Collins, UK.

Rycroft, C. 1991, *The Innocence of Dreams*, Hogarth Press London.

Schacter, D. 1996, *Searching for Memory: The Brain, the Mind, and the Past*, Basic Books, New York.

Semin, D., Garb, T. & Kuspit, D. 1997, *Christian Boltanski*, Phaidon Press, London.

Silverman, P. R., Klass, D. & Nickman, S .L. 1996, *Continuing Bonds: New Understanding of Grief*, Taylor & Francis, Washington DC.

Shakespeare, W. 1937, *The Works of William Shakespeare*, Black's Readers Service Company, Roslyn, New York, p. 1121.

Simon, R. M. 1992, *The Symbolism of Style: Art as Therapy*, Routledge, London.

Smith, G. 1994, *Mike Parr: The Self-Portrait Project*, Schwartz City, Melbourne.

Sontag, S. 1978, *Illness as Metaphor*, Penguin Books, London.

Spence, J. 1995, *Cultural Sniping: The Art of Transgression*, Routledge, London, New York.

Styron, W. 1992, *Darkness Visible*, Picador, London.

Voigt, A. 1996, *New Visions, New Perspectives: Voices of Contemporary Australian Women Artists*, Craftsman House, Sydney.

Woodall, J. (ed.) 1997, *Portraiture: Facing The Subject*, Manchester University Press, UK.

Worden, J. 1991, *Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner*, Springer Publishing Company, New York.

GENERAL REFERENCES

Beauvoir, S, de. (trans) O'Brian, P. 1969, *A Very Easy Death*, Penguin, UK.

Biddulph, S. 1994 *Manhood*, Finch Publishing, Sydney.

Bindman, D. 1977, *Blake As An Artist*, Phaidon, Oxford.

Borzano, F. 1998, *Seeing Ourselves: Women's Self-Portraits*, Thames and Hudson, London.

Chadwick, W. 1994, *Women, Art and Society*, Thames and Hudson, London.

Chadwick, W. 1998, *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self Representation*, The MIT Press, Massachusetts.

Cooper, H. 1992, *Eva Hesse: A Retrospective*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London.

Demetriades, D. 1997, *Fatherless Daughters: The Shadow of Loss*, Harper Collins, New Zealand.

From The Self-Same Well, Proceedings of the Sixth National Conference. The National Association for Loss and Grief Melbourne. September 1989. University of Melbourne.

Freud, S. (edit) Rickman, J. 1953, *A General Selection from the Works of Sigmund Freud*, Hogarth Press, London.

Gordon, M. 1996, *The Shadow Man: A Daughter's Search For Her Father*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London.

Goodwin, S. 1988, Kitsch and Culture: *The Dance of Death in 19th Century Literature and Graphic Arts*, Garland Publishing, New York, London.

Glimcher, M. 1992, *The Art of Mark Rothko: Into an Unknown World*, Barrie and Jenkins, London.

Heller, J. 1998, 'Now the final Catch-22', *The Age*, 28 November, Features 6.

Hilton, T. 1970, *The Pre-Raphaelites*, Abrams, New York.

Hirsch, J. 1981, *Family Photographs: Content, Meaning and Effect*, Oxford University Press, New York.

Hughes, R. 1980, *The Shock of the New: Art and the Century of Change*, British Broadcasting Corporation, London.

Isaak, J. 1996, *Feminism and Contemporary Art: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter*, Routledge, London.

Jackson, B. & Seear, L. 1995, *Christine Turner: Two essays on the work to date of the artist*, exhibition catalogue, Greenaway Art Gallery, Adelaide.

Kissane, D., Bloch, S., Onghera, P., McKenzie, D., et al. 1996, 'The Melbourne Family Grief Study, II: Psychosocial morbidity and grief in bereaved families', *American Journal of Psychiatry*, vol. 153, no. 5, pp. 659-666.

Mandle, J. & Rothschild, D. 1992, *Sites of Recollection: Four Altars and a Rap Opera*, Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, Massachussets.

Murray Cree, L. 1996, *Wendy Stavrianos*, Craftsman House, Sydney.

Peter Kennedy: Requiem for Ghosts, 1998, exhibition catalogue, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne.

Pettle, S., & Britten, C. 1995, 'Talking with children about death and dying', *Child Care Health and Development*, vol. 21, no. 6, pp. 395-404.

Smith, J. 1998, *Rosslyn Piggott: Suspended Breath*, exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

Waldman, D. 1994, *Collage, Assemblage and the Found Object*, Phaidon, London.

Ward, B. 1993, *Healing Grief: A Guide to Loss and Recovery*, Vermillion, London.

Williamson, J. & Shneidman, E. 1995, *Death: Current Perspectives*, Mayfield Publishing Company, California.

Wood, C. 1976, *Victorian Panorama: Paintings of Victorian Life*, Faber & Faber, London.

Worden, J. & Silverman, P. 1996, 'Parental death and the adjustment of school age children,' *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying*, vol. 33, no. 2, pp. 91-102.

JILL MCCALMAN CURRICULUM VITAE

Home Address
3 Charles Street St Kilda VIC 3182
Phone: 9534 2690 Facsimile: 9534 1998
E-mail jillmccalman@hotmail.com

Qualifications
1979-81   Diploma of Fine Art and Design,
               Chisholm Institute of Technology.
1983   Diploma of Education, Art and Craft,
               Melbourne College of Advanced Education.

Employment
1984-87   Teaching at Melbourne Post Primary Schools.
1988-89   Studio retreat in country NSW.
1990-96   Freelance art and design work, writing, and teaching.
1997-01   Lecturing at Victoria University, (B.Ed) in Art Education.

Group Exhibitions
1988-89   "3 Local Artists". AJ's Gallery, Narooma.
1991   New Enterprise Incentive Scheme Graduates' show. The Butter Factory, Clunes.
1993   "Made in Paper". Gallery Handmade, Prahran.
               "The Doll in Art". Maker's Gallery, Sandringham.
1994   Annual Castlemaine Drawing Prize, Castlemaine.
               Group show. Gallery without Pier, Sandringham.
               Group show. Libby Edwards Gallery, South Yarra.
1997   Art In Windows. Exhibition, St Kilda.

One Person Exhibitions
1991   "The Collages of Jill McCalman". Spencer Reef Panorama Gallery, Cairns.
1992   "Collages in Paper—Jill McCalman". Maker's Gallery, Sandringham.
1993   "Triangles of Life"- collages and pastel drawings. Gallery Handmade, Prahran.

Exhibitions at The Nicholas Building Studio, Swanston Street, Melbourne
1994   "Gateway Series", collages and mixed media.
1995   "Other Faces", charcoal drawings.
               "Mandalas", collages and oil pastel sgraffito drawings.